



Jervas, Charles, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762)," oil on canvas, Chawton House



Humphry, Ozias, "Elizabeth, Countess of Craven, Later Margravine of Anspach," c. 1780-3, oil on canvas, Tate

TRAVELLING MOTHERS: MOTHERHOOD IN LADY MARY  
MONTAGU'S AND LADY ELIZABETH CRAVEN'S TRAVEL  
LETTERS

Emma David

s1060674

BA Thesis English Literature

Supervisor: Dr S. Kleij

Second Supervisor: Dr C.J.J. Louttit

15 June 2023

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr Sonja Kleij

Title of document: Travelling Mothers: Motherhood in Lady Mary

Montagu's and Lady Elizabeth Craven's Travel Letters

Name of course: BA Thesis English Literature

Date of submission: 15 June 2023

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned,  
who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

Name of student: Emma David

Student number: s1060674

## Abstract

Travel and subsequently, travel writing, became more popular in the eighteenth century. Lady Mary Montagu and Lady Elizabeth Craven both travelled through Europe and Turkey and wrote about their experiences in their epistolary travelogues which became quite popular after publication. Both women were also mothers, and this part of their identity has influenced their lives and writings. The change in the notion of motherhood during the eighteenth century is noticeable in the lives and writings of Montagu and Craven. The women have different experiences with travel combined with motherhood. This thesis investigates the influence of motherhood on their travel writing and how motherhood is expressed regarding marriage, children, and politics. Marriage gave Montagu and Craven the opportunity to travel which in turn gave them the opportunity to criticise their own cultural norms. Montagu and Craven express their maternal affection towards their children in their travel letters. Different encounters with other cultures and practices can be linked to the expression of their maternal duties. Montagu and Craven also mention motherhood in a more abstract and political manner. By analysing the historical context regarding womanhood in the eighteenth century and a close reading of Montagu's *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and Craven's *A Journey Through the Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters*, this thesis demonstrates that motherhood greatly influences the travel experiences and writings of Montagu and Craven.

**Key words:** motherhood, travel writing, eighteenth century, Elizabeth Craven, Mary Montagu

Word count: 8899

## Contents

Introduction.....	5
Travelling Wives: Eighteenth-century Marriage and Travel.....	14
Travelling Mothers: Children and Travel .....	19
Political Motherhood .....	26
Conclusion .....	31
Bibliography .....	34

## Introduction

The eighteenth century saw a rise in secular female travel.<sup>1</sup> During this century, two aristocratic English women, Lady Mary Montagu and Lady Elizabeth Craven, travelled through parts of Europe and Turkey. These women recorded their respective travels in letters, which were later published. The epistolary travelogues of Montagu and Craven were popular during their time. Even though Montagu and Craven share a couple of similarities, they differ in their experience of motherhood. Montagu travelled with her family and even gave birth to a daughter during her journey, whilst Craven was forced to leave her children behind when she travelled. The eighteenth century saw a change in the notion of motherhood. This can be seen in, for instance, female representations in literature, marriage ages and birth rates. As Montagu and Craven also lived and travelled during different periods of the century, this change is noticeable in their experiences. Because British women had to adhere to strict gender norms, also regarding motherhood, it would be interesting to look at how this manifests outside of the home, when women are travelling and encounter other cultures. By writing about their experiences and comparing cultural customs, women were able to critique their own culture. As analysing travel writing can be a useful form of cultural analysis, this thesis will analyse Montagu's and Craven's letters to investigate the influence of motherhood on their lives and writing.

Montagu travelled with her husband and son, and later with their new-born daughter through parts of Europe and Turkey from 1716 until 1718. She was the first woman to write a secular work about the Muslim Orient.<sup>2</sup> During her travel she wrote letters to her sister, friends, Alexander Pope, the Italian writer Abbé Conti, the princess of Wales, and others. The topics of these letters were concerned with the cultural phenomena, situations, and people she encountered. *The Turkish Embassy Letters* were not the only accounts that Montagu had written about her travels as she also kept a journal which was unfortunately later burned by her daughter.<sup>3</sup> Although

---

<sup>1</sup> Katrina O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1

<sup>2</sup> Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: English women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: sexuality, religion and work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 59.

Montagu repeatedly stresses that ‘nothing seems to me so agreeable as truth,’<sup>4</sup> the form of the letters is somewhat fictional.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Craven claims in her letters that Montagu herself ‘never wrote a line of them.’<sup>6</sup> Montagu initially intended her letters to be published, thus the letters were edited and polished. Afterwards, she thought the letters to be unfitting for a person of nobility like herself and the letters were first published posthumously in 1862.<sup>7</sup> Initially published with a longer title, the letters became mostly known as *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. It was a very popular work and influenced other women to travel and write about their experiences too.<sup>8</sup> This thesis looks at Montagu’s life and letters because she was a model for many women who came after her.

Craven also travelled through parts of Europe and Turkey like Montagu, but Craven also visited Russia, which was not often done by other eighteenth-century travellers.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, she was the first female travel writer to visit Athens.<sup>10</sup> Craven travelled with her lover, Henry Vernon. She only mentions him occasionally in her letters.<sup>11</sup> In the beginning of her travels, Craven also travelled with her youngest son but eventually she has to travel without him. The letters she wrote that make up *A Journey Through The Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters* span from 1785 until 1786. The letters were published in 1789. Unlike Montagu, Craven addresses her letters to one correspondent, the margrave of Anspach. Craven was separated from her first husband after instances of infidelity from both sides and had to leave Britain and her children behind. Because of this Craven had the reputation of an adulteress who abandoned her children.<sup>12</sup> Craven aims to change the public's

---

<sup>4</sup> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>5</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 161.

<sup>7</sup> Anita Desai, “Introduction” in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (London: Virago Press, 1994), xxv.

<sup>8</sup> O’Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 48-49.

<sup>10</sup> Efterpi Mitsi, “Lady Elizabeth Craven’s Letters from Athens and the Female Picturesque,” in *Women Writing Greece: Essays on Hellenism, Orientalism and Travel* ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Efterpi Mitsi (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Julia Gasper, *Elizabeth Craven: Writer, Feminist and European* (Vernon Press, 2017), xxviii.

<sup>12</sup> Elisabetta Marino, “Constructing the Other, Reconstructing Herself: A Journey Through the Crimea to Constantinople by Lady Elizabeth Craven,” in *The West in*

opinion of her with the publication of her letters in which she highlights her maternal feelings and duties. Thus, Craven mentions children and motherhood often in her letters. This thesis focusses on Craven because she uses her writing to change the public's perception of her regarding motherhood.

During the seventy years between Montagu's and Craven's respective travels, the notion of womanhood changed. This is noticeable in the literature, where more promiscuous women were featured in the beginning of the century, in contrast to the latter half of the century where more female characters were portrayed as chaste and maternal.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the average marriage age for women lowered and the average birth rate increased during the century.<sup>14</sup> The literature of the latter half of the century emphasised the 'natural' duty of motherhood in the domestic sphere.<sup>15</sup> The role of women was to stay at home and reproduce. Female sensibility was the reason given for their 'natural' duty of motherhood. Some women could temporarily escape this 'cult of domesticity' by travelling. However, even outside of the domestic sphere, the Enlightened notion of motherhood affected women.<sup>16</sup> Mothers were responsible for the upbringing of the next generation of sensible, rational, and 'civilised' white Christian men and women who would uphold the British empire and her ideals. Additionally, the Western idea of motherhood was used to claim superiority over other parts of the world that were deemed to be uncivilised.<sup>17</sup>

Travel writing was a popular genre during the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The epistolary travelogue, like those of Montagu and Craven, was a favoured narrative

---

*Asia and Asia in the West: Essays on Transnational Interactions* ed. Elisabetta Marino and Tanfer Emin Tunc (McFarland, 2015), 36.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen Pollak, "Introduction: Women Daring to Know in the Age of Enlightenment," in *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* ed. Ellen Pollak. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Susan S. Lanser, "Bodies and Sexuality: Sex, Gender, and the Limits of Enlightenment," in *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* ed. Ellen Pollak (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Zold, "Expanding the domestic sphere: mothers who travelled in the eighteenth century," *Studies in Travel Writing* 19, no. 4 (2015): 325, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2015.1108723>.

<sup>16</sup> Zold, 326.

<sup>17</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, "The Life Cycle: Motherhood during the Enlightenment," in *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* ed. Ellen Pollak (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 42-43.

<sup>18</sup> O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*, 4.

form as it ‘moves between private and public spaces of personal life.’<sup>19</sup> The representations of other cultures was seen as authentic as the writers claimed to directly experience them. And unlike male eighteenth-century travel writers, female writers could write about their personal experiences and accounts of private domestic places they could visit because they were women, such as Turkish baths and harems.<sup>20</sup> This thesis compares Montagu’s and Craven’s lives because they share some similarities, but they also differ in ages and travel circumstances. Additionally, their letters were popular after publication. Montagu became a literary model for many women who came after her. Efterpi Mitsi claims that Craven was Montagu’s literary rival.<sup>21</sup> The letters where both Montagu and Craven write about Turkish women and cultural customs are often compared. This thesis will also briefly focus on that but will mainly look at how these writers express motherhood in their letters.

Motherhood is important part of Montagu’s and Craven’s identities. They mention their children and maternity affected their travel experiences. Therefore, the influence of motherhood on travel writing is interesting to examine. Additionally, as women were ideally expected to stay in the domestic sphere to raise their children, looking at how these women experience motherhood outside of their homes can give another perspective on the female experience in the eighteenth century.

Montagu is one of the most researched female travel writers of the eighteenth century. *The Turkish Embassy Letters* have therefore been analysed through multiple lenses. Scholarship often focusses on whether or not Montagu utilises orientalist tropes when she writes about the Middle East.<sup>22</sup> Billie Melman argues that Montagu is tolerant because she neither eroticises the harem, nor makes it into a fantastical place.<sup>23</sup> Contrastingly, Nicole Pohl argues that Montagu makes the harem into a ‘feminotopia,’ where she projects her ‘fantasies of female autonomy onto the East.’<sup>24</sup> Srinivas Aravamudan states that Montagu’s letters can be read as ‘proto-feminist or

---

<sup>19</sup> O’Loughlin, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Mitsi, “Lady Elizabeth Craven’s Letters from Athens and the Female Picturesque,” 21.

<sup>21</sup> Mitsi, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Jordan Hall, Anna K. Sagal, and Elizabeth Zold. “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the *Turkish Embassy Letters*: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism,” *Literature Compass* 14, no. 10 (2017): 3-6, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12405>.

<sup>23</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 97.

<sup>24</sup> Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 125 & 138.

proto-orientalist by different readers.<sup>25</sup> A more feminist reading, like Elizabeth Bohls's, claims that Montagu counters previous orientalist 'eroticized fabrications' of Turkish women written by men by appreciating the aesthetic of these women in the Turkish baths.<sup>26</sup> Countering these feminists readings, Meyda Yegenoglu demonstrates that Montagu's stance against her male counterparts in her depictions of Turkish women does not automatically make her writing non-orientalist.<sup>27</sup> Whether Montagu uses or defies orientalist tropes remains ambiguous, concludes Teresa Heffernan.<sup>28</sup>

Craven's work has received less critical interest than Montagu's. Nevertheless, Craven's letters have also been analysed through a postcolonial lens. Montagu's writing is often classified as Neoclassical whereas Craven writes more about the picturesque as she wrote about domestic and private spaces.<sup>29</sup> Melman compares the writings of Montagu and Craven about female bodies and concludes that Craven's writing shows the shift from Montagu's more 'moral-free representation' to an early Victorian attitude where the representations of bodies are 'charged with morality and middle-class ideology.'<sup>30</sup> Additionally, there seems to be no scholarly debate on whether Craven utilises orientalist tropes. Craven uses the orientalist stereotypes of the 'idle, uncivilized, emasculated men, and repulsive, grotesque women,' Elisabetta Marino notes.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Marino argues that Craven has a 'patronizing, almost imperialistic attitude towards the Other.'<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Zold demonstrates that Craven uses her family to justify her travels.<sup>33</sup> Zold also examines how Craven argues for British imperialism with her writing about families. In other words, there seems to be a general understanding that Craven uses orientalist tropes in her writing.

---

<sup>25</sup> Srinivas Aravamudan, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Hammam*: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization," *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030261>.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>27</sup> Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81.

<sup>28</sup> Teresa Heffernan, "Feminism Against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's "Turkish Embassy Letters"," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 213, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053682>.

<sup>29</sup> Mitsi, "Lady Elizabeth Craven's Letters from Athens and the Female Picturesque," 22.

<sup>30</sup> Melman, *Women's Orient*, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Marino, "Constructing the Other, Reconstructing Herself," 35.

<sup>32</sup> Marino, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Zold, "Expanding the domestic sphere," 327.

Zold has written on Craven's writing in relation to motherhood and how she tries to rectify her reputation as an inadequate mother.<sup>34</sup> However, according to Hall et al., there is a research gap regarding Montagu's motherhood and how that affected her writing as most of research focusses on her orientalism.<sup>35</sup> And even though Montagu and Craven are often compared in their depictions of Turkish women in regards to orientalism, there is also a research gap comparing these women in regards to their identity as mothers.

This thesis aims to investigate the question 'How does motherhood influence the experiences of Lady Mary Montagu and Lady Elizabeth Craven as female travel writers in the eighteenth century and how is motherhood expressed in their writings about marriage, children, and politics?' Comparing the experiences of Montagu and Craven will give an insight in the difference of experience when travelling as a mother with or without children in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, this thesis will investigate how the maternal expectations for women manifest outside the domestic sphere.

In order to analyse *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *A Journey Through The Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters*, a theoretical framework needs to be established. Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism* provides the basis for the postcolonial analysis in this thesis. He states that 'the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.'<sup>36</sup> He argues that the Orient is Europe's 'cultural contestant and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.'<sup>37</sup> Orientalism made the West and Europe to be each other's 'contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.'<sup>38</sup> Said argues that Western writings on the Orient are more representations than factual depictions.<sup>39</sup> Taking Said's notion into account, I will analyse how Montagu and Craven describe Turkish marriage customs and what that reveals about themselves rather than seeing those descriptions as factual. Additionally, Said argues that orientalism has 'the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all

---

<sup>34</sup> Zold, 327.

<sup>35</sup> Hall et al., "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the *Turkish Embassy Letters*," 9.

<sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Said, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Said, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Said, 21.

the non-European peoples.<sup>40</sup> This notion of Western superiority will be taken into account with Craven who claims Britain is superior to Greece and Turkey regarding commerce, morals, and coastlines.

Various critics have noted that the initial discourse on orientalism omitted the issue of gender. Melman's work *Women's Orient* focusses on how gender and class influence the writings of orientalists. She builds upon Said's work and argues that the study of orientalism originally 'wrote out gender and class.'<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Melman notes that feminist scholars on imperialism 'assign women a passive role.'<sup>42</sup> Yegenoglu's *Colonial Fantasies* also states that gender is an important aspect in orientalism. She looks at the 'specific nature of Western women's relationships to the Orient and Oriental women.'<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Yegenoglu demonstrates that feminism and orientalism are not separate entities and that '(Western) feminism has been complicit in the project of imperialism.'<sup>44</sup> Melman's and Yegenoglu's intersectional approach will be used to look at the role gender plays in the writings of Montagu and Craven about veiling. Gender also needs to be taken into account when looking at how motherhood influences the lives of Montagu and Craven, especially the decisions they have to make in regard to travelling with or without children. Montagu and Craven's decisions and writings are influenced by the patriarchal society they not only come from, but also reside in during their travels.

The cultural and historical context of the eighteenth century regarding motherhood will also be analysed, as this thesis aims to investigate the influence of motherhood on female travel writing. Even though the letters of both Montagu and Craven have fictitious elements, it is a fact that they did undergo their travels. Consequently, their writing cannot be analysed without context. In order to gain a better insight in Montagu's and Craven's texts, I will also examine biographical information about Montagu and Craven. Robert Halsband's biography on Montagu was influential in gaining more critical interest in her writing.<sup>45</sup> Craven has an entry in

---

<sup>40</sup> Said, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Melman, *Women's Orient*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Melman, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Yegenoglu, 86.

<sup>45</sup> Hall et al., "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the *Turkish Embassy Letters*," 1.

the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.<sup>46</sup> These works, together with biographical information mentioned in various scholarly works, give an insight in Montagu's and Craven's personal circumstances which give context to their writing. Kathleen Brown and Susan Lanser provide historical context about the experiences of women in the age of Enlightenment.<sup>47</sup> They investigate the societal notions of maternity and female sexuality. I will look at how these gender expectations are present in Montagu's and Craven's letters. Ruth Perry has also analysed how the ideas surrounding motherhood and female sexuality changed during the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup> These differences in the idea of womanhood are also noticeable when the lives and writing of Montagu and Craven are compared. Women used travel writing to discuss their encounters with other cultures but in turn also discussed their own. This makes travel writing, as Katrina O'Loughlin notes, a useful form of cultural analysis.<sup>49</sup>

To better analyse the writings of Montagu and Craven, the historical time they live in must also be analysed. New historicism 'sees literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical context.'<sup>50</sup> Therefore, a new historicist approach will be utilised in order to analyse the role of maternity in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *A Journey Through The Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters*.

I will compare Montagu's and Craven's travel experiences and writing thematically. Montagu's and Craven's letters are compared by numerous scholars because their travels, style of writing, and subject matter are quite similar. I will compare these women because of the interesting dynamic between their similarities and differences. There are seventy years between their respective travels in which the

---

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Turner, "Elizabeth [*née* Lady Elizabeth Berkeley], margravine of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Bayreuth [*other married name* Elizabeth Craven, Lady Craven]," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2010), accessed 20 May, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/576>.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, "The Life Cycle."; Susan S. Lanser, "Bodies and Sexuality: Sex, Gender, and the Limits of Enlightenment," in *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* ed. Ellen Pollak (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2, special issue, part 1: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe (1991): 204-234, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3704034>.

<sup>49</sup> O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 155.

notion of motherhood changed. How this change is noticeable in their letters will be discussed. Additionally, the fact that Montagu travelled with her children and Craven without, greatly influences their writing about certain maternal themes.

The first chapter will investigate the influence of Montagu's and Craven's marriages. Both women got the opportunity to travel due to their husbands. Montagu followed her husband on his embassy to the Ottoman empire with their children. Craven was forced to leave Britain and had to travel because of her separation with her husband. Both women were unsatisfied in their marriages, and this biographical knowledge will be used to analyse their writings about Turkish women and their marriages. Claiming Turkish women enjoy more liberties than other women because they veil, reveals their own desire for more liberty in their own marriages. And thus, their comparisons demonstrate Montagu's and Craven's critique on their own societal expectation regarding marriage.

In the second chapter I will examine how the notion of womanhood changed during the eighteenth century and how that affected the experience of motherhood. I will analyse how this change can be noticed when comparing Montagu's and Craven's writing and experiences. This difference in experiences indicate the changed notion of motherhood. Furthermore, the influence of the expectation of 'natural' maternal duty will be examined in this chapter. Montagu's interest in smallpox inoculation could be seen as her maternal duty of protecting her children against the disease, which potentially fatal outcome Montagu was familiar with. As Craven aims to change the public's perception of her being an adulteress who abandoned her children, she mentions her children and her maternal duties often.

The third chapter will look at the idea of political motherhood. Whereas the previous chapters mainly looked at the personal experiences with motherhood of Montagu and Craven, this chapter will investigate how Montagu and Craven discuss more philosophical and political subjects with the use of abstract motherhood. Montagu discusses Turkish customs regarding motherhood in order to have a philosophical debate about religion. Craven argues that British families should move to the East to teach about commerce and morals. Thus, Craven uses the image of the family to advocate for the British imperial expansion.

## Travelling Wives: Eighteenth-century Marriage and Travel

Lady Montagu and Lady Craven were two aristocratic women with unhappy first marriages. This chapter looks at the expectations of women regarding marriage and sexuality in the eighteenth century. Female sexuality and its expectations changed during this century. Looking at how Montagu and Craven describe their marriages combined with the biographical knowledge about their marriages can reveal what role marriage played in their travels and how they were influenced by societal expectations regarding their marriage. Marriage and motherhood were strongly connected during the eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Their marriages gave them the opportunity to travel and so it is important to examine their marriages. Montagu and Craven compare the cultural norms of Turkish women and their marriages with their own, and thus indicate their own dissatisfaction with their own British cultural norms. By comparing customs of the countries they visited with their own culture, female travel writers could not only develop an understanding of their own social conditions but even criticise it.<sup>52</sup>

Montagu married the Whig politician Edward Wortley Montagu in 1712. Their marriage was not one filled with love and affection for each other.<sup>53</sup> This can be seen in Montagu's letters to her husband which appear to be impersonal and quite distant. The couple mostly discuss Wortley's political affairs and when Montagu mentions their children, she writes, 'Your son is very well; I cannot forbear telling you so, though you do not so much ask after him.'<sup>54</sup> Halsband notes that these letters indicate 'the disparity of their temperaments.'<sup>55</sup> Aristocratic marriage in the eighteenth century is often described as a means to 'confirm or improve a family connection.'<sup>56</sup> This did not necessarily require the presence of love or affection.

During the eighteenth century, the average marriage age for women lowered.<sup>57</sup> This can be seen in the marriage ages of Montagu and Craven. Montagu married her

---

<sup>51</sup> Perry, "Colonizing the Breast," 208-09.

<sup>52</sup> Marino, "Constructing the Other, Reconstructing Herself," 34.

<sup>53</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> H. G. Koeningsberger, *Early Modern Europe 1500-1789* (London and New York: Longman, 1987), 225.

<sup>57</sup> Lanser, "Bodies and Sexuality," 55.

first husband at the age of twenty-three, whereas Craven was married to her husband at only sixteen.<sup>58</sup> Craven married William Craven, the sixth earl of Craven, in 1767. Their marriage was also an unhappy one and both William and Elizabeth had multiple affairs.<sup>59</sup>

Montagu's and Craven's travels are connected to their marriages. Melman categorises Montagu as an 'auxiliary traveller'<sup>60</sup>; she is able to travel because she accompanied her husband on his embassy to the Ottoman empire. Thus, Lady Montagu travelled out of wifely duties. She writes, 'while Mr Wortley is determined to proceed in his design, I am determined to follow him.'<sup>61</sup> However, Melman also notes that even though Montagu initially supported her husband, her writing about their travels made her more memorable than him.<sup>62</sup> Of course Montagu's talent for writing caused her to be known today, but she got the opportunity to write and travel to places where no other female writer had gone before – just because she was married to a politician with an embassy. Similar to Montagu, Craven also travelled out of necessity associated with her marriage. Her infidelity became a public scandal, and she was forced to leave the country after her legal separation with her husband, also because she had financial troubles.<sup>63</sup> Craven states in her letters, 'you will be much more surprised when I tell you I hate travelling; but you know why I travel.'<sup>64</sup> Craven's letters were aimed to change the public's perception of herself. However, it was not necessarily her infidelity that the public criticised but rather that she left her children behind.<sup>65</sup> Still, the fact that Craven was forced to travel, and her husband could remain in England even though they both were unfaithful does show the double standards of men and women in their marriages that were present at the time. Men's adultery was largely ignored whilst women's instances of adultery were condemned

---

<sup>58</sup> Turner, "Elizabeth [*née* Lady Elizabeth Berkeley]."

<sup>59</sup> Turner, "Elizabeth [*née* Lady Elizabeth Berkeley]."

<sup>60</sup> Melman, *Women's Orient*, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Melman, *Women's Orient*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Zold, "Expanding the domestic sphere," 331; Mitsi, "Lady Elizabeth Craven's Letters from Athens and the Female Picturesque," 20.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters from the Right Honourable Elizabeth Lady Craven, to His Serene Highness the Margrave of Brandenburg, Anspach, and Bareith* (Legare Street Press [Vienna: R. Sammer, 1800]), 289.

<sup>65</sup> Zold, "Expanding the domestic sphere," 331.

like Craven was.<sup>66</sup> Even though Craven claims to ‘hate travelling,’ she was able – or rather forced – to do so because of her marriage. Thus, in both Montagu and Craven’s case, their marriages were responsible for their travels and subsequently their travel writing.

Their unhappy marriages and the English expectations of married women caused Montagu and Craven to express a desire for more sexual freedom in their travel writing. As stated before, female writers criticise the West by comparing Western and Eastern culture.<sup>67</sup> The Turkish cultural customs regarding marriage and female agency are discussed in both *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters*. Montagu and Craven describe and judge Oriental women differently; for example, Montagu admires their beauty<sup>68</sup> whereas Craven describes their appearance ill-favourably.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, they both claim that Turkish women enjoy liberty. Montagu writes, ‘This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery [...] Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire.’<sup>70</sup> Montagu argues that Turkish women enjoy sexual freedom because their affairs remain private due to their veils. Craven states, ‘I think no women have so much liberty, safe from apprehension, as the Turkish – and I think them, in their manner of living, capable of being the happiest creatures breathing.’<sup>71</sup> Thus, whilst, according to Melman, Montagu is a ‘Turkophile’ and Craven a ‘Turkophobe,’<sup>72</sup> they both are of the opinion that Turkish women enjoy liberty, certainly more than other women. These depictions of free Turkish women are, like Said notes, ‘representations, not as “natural” depictions of the Orient.’<sup>73</sup> However, Melman remarks that it is interesting that Craven also depicts Turkish women as free, and is overall positive about their circumstances, as she is a ‘Turkophobe’ and normally does not shy away from criticising the East.<sup>74</sup> Craven even writes that ‘the

---

<sup>66</sup> Lanser, “Bodies and Sexuality,” 55.

<sup>67</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 62.

<sup>68</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 70.

<sup>69</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 332.

<sup>70</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 71-72.

<sup>71</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 342.

<sup>72</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 87.

Turks in their conduct towards our sex are an example to all other nations.’<sup>75</sup> Even though Montagu’s and Craven’s representations are positive, they are still orientalist. Yegenoglu notes that orientalist tropes are not inherently negative images and can also be positive, as is the case with Montagu’s and Craven’s assumptions.<sup>76</sup> Orientalism is powerful because it is a “distortion” of the “reality” of the Orient,’ not because its representations are always negative.<sup>77</sup> In other words, Montagu and Craven present their assumptions of the autonomy of Turkish women as factual, but their writing can better be seen as a projected orientalist fantasy.<sup>78</sup> Not only do Turkish women enjoy sexual liberties with their veils according to Craven, she also mentions that they also retain their belongings after a divorce.<sup>79</sup> It is interesting that Craven notes this because one of the reasons why she had to travel were her financial troubles after her separation with her husband.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, as both Montagu and Craven describe Turkish women to be free, they reveal their own desire for liberty. By describing the assumed liberty the Turkish women have, Montagu and Craven reveal that they do not enjoy these liberties. Furthermore, by stating that Turkey is an ‘example to all other nations,’ their desire for the same liberty is revealed. Felicity Nussbaum also notes that ‘both Western women envy the sexual liberty that veiling brings.’<sup>81</sup> Additionally, Montagu is also fascinated with polygamous customs of Viennese women when she travelled through Europe.<sup>82</sup> This fascination together with a desire for more sexual freedom indicates that Montagu was favourable towards polygamy rather than the Western Christian ideal of a monogamous marriage.<sup>83</sup> Montagu’s desire for more sexual freedom without society knowing can be understood when her own unromantic and passionless marriage with Wortley is taken into account. Craven’s envy for the sexual liberty that veiling supposedly brings, can also be linked to her own marriage. Craven was punished for her affairs by the public

---

<sup>75</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 341.

<sup>76</sup> Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 89.

<sup>77</sup> Yegenoglu, 89.

<sup>78</sup> Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia*, 138.

<sup>79</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 342; Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia*, 142.

<sup>80</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 48.

<sup>81</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 138.

<sup>82</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 96.

which is one of the reasons why she is travelling but also had to abandon her children. And thus, if she had lived in a polygamous society so different from her own, Craven's life would arguably look very different. Thus, with their representations of Turkish women and the sexual liberty they possess, Montagu and Craven criticise their own patriarchal society where women can be trapped in their monogamous marriage.

### Travelling Mothers: Children and Travel

Felicity Nussbaum states that ‘the English nation came to represent its eighteenth-century woman as happier than women of the past, happier than the “savage,” and happiest as a mother.’<sup>84</sup> The Enlightenment took place during the eighteenth century. During this time ideas about motherhood changed in Europe and therefore also in Britain. During the first half of the century, promiscuous female protagonists were featured in literature. This changed after the mid-century when more chaste and maternal protagonists were featured in literature.<sup>85</sup> The literature of the latter half of the century emphasised the ‘natural’ duty of motherhood in the domestic sphere.<sup>86</sup> The role of women was to stay at home and reproduce. The division of the public and domestic sphere was of course not completely rigid. Pohl points out that the ‘public and private spheres co-existed, overlapped and were continuously redefined.’<sup>87</sup> However, according to this ideology, women were thought to belong at home in the ‘ideal social mapping of space.’<sup>88</sup> The Enlightenment promoted the idea of the Enlightened mother; a mother who would nurture her children in an educated and rational manner.<sup>89</sup> Female sensibility was the reason given for their ‘natural’ duty of motherhood. Mothers were responsible for the upbringing of the next generation of sensible, rational, and ‘civilised’ white Christian men and women who would uphold the British empire and her ideals. Additionally, the Western idea of motherhood was used to claim superiority over other parts of the world.<sup>90</sup> Thus, even if the mothers were ideally confined to the domestic sphere, motherhood itself also affected life outside of the home.<sup>91</sup> This chapter will analyse how this changed notion of motherhood is present in Montagu's and Craven's travelogues. Furthermore, the manner in which maternal duty is experienced by Montagu and Craven and expressed in their letters will be compared. Craven could not fulfil her maternal duty because they live apart, whereas Montagu wants to protect

---

<sup>84</sup> Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Pollak, “Introduction,” 10.

<sup>86</sup> Zold, “Expanding the domestic sphere,” 325.

<sup>87</sup> Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia*, 2.

<sup>88</sup> Pohl, 141.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, “The Life Cycle,” 37-38.

<sup>90</sup> Brown, 42-43.

<sup>91</sup> Zold, “Expanding the domestic sphere,” 326.

her children from smallpox which led to her influential involvement in the popularisation of smallpox inoculation. How Montagu and Craven express their maternal feelings towards their children will also be discussed.

The changed notion of womanhood, and the increased focus on ‘natural’ maternity which manifested in, for instance, higher fertility is noticeable in the lives of Montagu and Craven.<sup>92</sup> Montagu gave birth to her son Edward Wortley Montagu Junior in 1713, and thus she travelled with her three-year-old toddler through Europe and Turkey.<sup>93</sup> Montagu and Wortley did not have any more children until 1718 when she writes ‘my head [is] being filled with the preparations necessary for the increase of my family, which I expect every day.’<sup>94</sup> Montagu is pregnant with her second child, a daughter. Later she writes humorously, ‘Idleness is the mother of vices, [...], and having nothing better to do, I have produced a daughter.’<sup>95</sup> She explains that it is expected of a Turkish women to bear as many children as possible, because ‘the creation of woman is to increase and multiply, and she is only properly employed in the works of her calling when she is bringing children or taking care of them.’<sup>96</sup> Even though they are not Turkish, Montagu and the French Ambassadress are ‘forced to comply with this fashion.’<sup>97</sup> Montagu thus also complies with the Turkish idea of maternal duty because ‘people looked at [her] with a great air of contempt.’<sup>98</sup> The judgement of others is the reason for the birth of her daughter. This indicates that Montagu does not only describe Eastern customs, but she also adheres to them. This also happens when she tries their local dress and face creams, but now she also complies to their notion of womanhood, albeit in her own way by only birthing one child. This expectation of women to reproduce was, of course, also present in England and not only in Turkey. However, it is interesting that Montagu does not mention this in her letters. She states that the reason she wishes to return to England as soon as possible is ‘because I am absolutely obliged to lie in every year as long as I remain here.’<sup>99</sup> This indicates that this is not expected of her in England. Thus, Montagu

---

<sup>92</sup> Lanser, “Bodies and Sexuality,” 55.

<sup>93</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 33.

<sup>94</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 107.

<sup>95</sup> Montagu, 132.

<sup>96</sup> Montagu, 100.

<sup>97</sup> Montagu, 107.

<sup>98</sup> Montagu, 132.

<sup>99</sup> Montagu, 132.

experiences the maternal duty in England differently than in Turkey. Additionally, it shows that this expectation of higher fertility is not yet present as much in England as it would be in the later part of the century. Montagu's experience with motherhood differs from Craven's. Instead of two children born five years apart, Craven gave birth to seven children in the span of thirteen years of marriage to her first husband.<sup>100</sup> Even though this idea of 'natural' maternity was mostly a bourgeois ideal,<sup>101</sup> the fact that Craven had seven children does indicate that this ideal was also prevalent in the upper-class. Maternity was more associated with higher fertility during Craven's youth than Montagu's which explains why Craven gave birth to seven children at a young age. Enlightened mothers were also responsible for the upbringing of the next generation of English citizens.<sup>102</sup> And more of these English children would later mean more imperial power as these people would later work to increase England's imperial power.<sup>103</sup>

The late eighteenth-century idea of 'natural' motherhood also comes with the notion of maternal duty. Mothers should be devoted to their children and if this natural devotion was absent, the women were deemed to be abnormal.<sup>104</sup> Craven wrote about her travels following her separation from her husband. With the publication of her letters, Craven aims to change her public image because she had to leave her children behind.<sup>105</sup> In her dedication Craven mentions that the public can read her letters, 'as I expose them to the malice of my enemies.'<sup>106</sup> She was already experiencing and expecting judgement regarding her travels.<sup>107</sup> And thus with these letters she aims to change this perception of her as a non-caring, absent mother. If a woman did not confirm to her 'natural' maternal duties, the woman was supposed to be 'capable of heinous acts that threaten lineage and even civilisation itself.'<sup>108</sup> Thus, the idea of Craven having abandoned her children for the sake of affairs and travels affected her public image greatly. The idea of 'natural' motherhood stems from the fact that it is the woman who carries the baby and thus is naturally linked to her child

---

<sup>100</sup> Gasper, *Elizabeth Craven*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Pollak, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, "The Life Cycle," 42-43.

<sup>103</sup> Perry, "Colonizing the Breast," 206.

<sup>104</sup> Perry, 214-15.

<sup>105</sup> Zold, "Expanding the domestic sphere," 331.

<sup>106</sup> Craven. *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Zold, "Expanding the domestic sphere," 331.

<sup>108</sup> Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, 48.

in a way that a man is not.<sup>109</sup> Contrastingly, it was believed in the eighteenth century that motherhood was not an innate state of women but a duty.<sup>110</sup> This duty cannot be fulfilled by Craven because her husband had custody of her children. Even though children were ‘naturally’ linked with their mothers, fathers had custody rights of children under the age of seven in the eighteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Craven states in her letters, ‘you will be much more surprised when I tell you I hate travelling; but you know why I travel.’<sup>112</sup> This indicates that she did not travel out of her own free will, and more importantly that she did not leave her children voluntarily. Thus, she indicates that she did not choose to abandon her maternal duty.

As before mentioned, the idea of ‘natural’ motherhood stems from the late eighteenth century. In the beginning of the century, motherhood was not yet seen as ‘a woman’s ultimate fulfilment.’<sup>113</sup> This sentiment can be seen when Montagu describes her decision to have another child; she had ‘nothing better to do.’<sup>114</sup> Thus Montagu, who was a travelling mother in the beginning of the century has a different sense of maternal duty than Craven. She also does not have to convince her correspondents that she adheres to her maternal duties. However, Montagu’s active involvement with advocating for smallpox inoculation could be linked to her motherhood. Montagu was aware of the dangers of the disease. Her brother died because of smallpox in 1713 and Montagu herself caught the disease two years later.<sup>115</sup> She recovered but wrote in a poem that her ‘beauty is no more!’<sup>116</sup> Montagu’s skin was permanently scarred as a result of smallpox. As she encounters the method of engrafting smallpox in the skin in Adrianople and sees the positive outcomes of this method, Montagu states that she ‘intends to try it on my dear little son.’<sup>117</sup> Halsband notes that Montagu is ‘more than selfish’ as she is also ‘patriot enough to take pains to bring this useful invention into fashion in England.’<sup>118</sup> Selfish might not be the right word to describe her wanting to

---

<sup>109</sup> Nussbaum, 49.

<sup>110</sup> Nussbaum, 52.

<sup>111</sup> Nussbaum 49-50.

<sup>112</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 289.

<sup>113</sup> Perry, “Colonizing the Breast,” 213.

<sup>114</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 132.

<sup>115</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 35 and 51.

<sup>116</sup> Montagu, “Town Eclogues: Saturday; The Small-Pox,” Poetry Foundation, accessed May 11, 2023. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44766/town-eclogues-saturday-the-small-pox>.

<sup>117</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 81.

<sup>118</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 71; Montagu, 81.

protect her child from effects of smallpox. But Montagu's influential contribution to the popularisation of inoculation, which according to Halsband made her a 'medical saviour,'<sup>119</sup> could be explained by her motherhood. Protecting her children can then be seen as her maternal duty. The engrafting of her son was successful.<sup>120</sup>

Additionally, his smallpox spots disappeared and he did not end up scarred like his mother.<sup>121</sup> The fact that an 'aristocratic English mother had endorsed it' helped the British people to trust the method.<sup>122</sup> Lisa Forman Cody attributes Montagu's involvement in inoculation to a 'modern enthusiasm for experimentation.'<sup>123</sup> But her initial reasoning for her involvement can also be more personal. She had suffered and seen the consequences of the disease herself and wanted to save her own children initially, but also later the general public, from the same fate.

Craven was 'travelling with my sweet child,' her youngest son Keppel, at the beginning of her journey.<sup>124</sup> Craven travels further without him and writes affectionately, 'I am at this moment above a hundred miles distant from the most affectionate, the most engaging, and the most beautiful child that ever mother had - and for the first time I have ever left him.'<sup>125</sup> Craven emphasises her motherly affections to show that despite her travels, she still cares for her children even though she cannot traditionally fulfil her motherly duties. When she has to travel without her son, Craven uses other children who remind her of her own children to showcase her motherly affections. Craven states, 'the word *enfant* always strikes to my heart,' when she encounters a French orphaned boy.<sup>126</sup> She helps the child by giving him money and her recommendation. Even though she cannot fulfil her own maternal duties, Craven uses encounters with other children to show her maternal abilities. Similarly, when Craven is in Athens she meets a child that reminds her of her own: 'A sweet little Greek, a girl of five years old, [...] came and sat on my lap, and went to sleep in my arms - she was something like my Keppel, and her little caresses gave me more

---

<sup>119</sup> Halsband, 114.

<sup>120</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 123-25.

<sup>121</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 81.

<sup>122</sup> Lisa Forman Cody, "Medicine and Disease: Women, Practice, and Print in the Enlightenment Medical Marketplace," in *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* ed. Ellen Pollak (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 102.

<sup>123</sup> Cody, 102.

<sup>124</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 7.

<sup>125</sup> Craven 14-15.

<sup>126</sup> Craven 14.

pleasure than all the languid figures of the dancers before my eyes.’<sup>127</sup> A cuddly child that reminds her of her own is more enjoyable than the Greek entertainment to Craven, further indicating that maternal feelings are important to her. This emphasises her aim to showcase her motherly affections. Even though she encounters different cultures and beautiful sights during her travels, she keeps mentioning her children. This also happens when Craven describes paintings depicting scenes of the plague in a museum in Marseilles. She writes, ‘I saw several dying figures [...] looking their last anxious kind and wishful prayer on their sick infants, that made the tears flow down my cheeks.’<sup>128</sup> This further emphasises the image she tries to portray of the empathetic mother. Zold argues that Craven uses art to convince her readers that ‘the physical distance between herself and her children did not engender emotional distance’ despite that being thought in the eighteenth century.<sup>129</sup> Craven describes her looking at a statue, ‘I looked at the face with delight; for about the nose and upper lip it put me in mind of my dear son William – who, probably, is now nearly as tall.’<sup>130</sup> She ties the images of her children to the things she sees around her.<sup>131</sup> The word ‘probably’ emphasises the distance between her and her children, as it indicates that she cannot even know what her children look like. This passage about art opposes the idea that Craven distanced herself from her family because she wanted to travel as it shows that she associates the beautiful things she encounters during her travels with her children.<sup>132</sup> She states afterwards that ‘it is lucky for my friends that I have that son and some other; for in the humour I am in, I could almost be tempted to remain a prisoner for life’ in the ‘company’ of ‘the heavenly inanimate figures.’<sup>133</sup> It is emphasised again how her children are connected to beauty in her mind and the thought of her children is what ‘tether her to her homeland.’<sup>134</sup> This might even evoke empathy from her readers, which can be seen as her aim with the publication of the letters.

---

<sup>127</sup> Craven, 384.

<sup>128</sup> Craven, 54.

<sup>129</sup> Zold, “Expanding the domestic sphere,” 332.

<sup>130</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 127.

<sup>131</sup> Zold, “Expanding the domestic sphere,” 332.

<sup>132</sup> Zold, 332.

<sup>133</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 128.

<sup>134</sup> Zold, “Expanding the domestic sphere,” 332.

Montagu's maternal feelings are represented differently than Craven's. Montagu travels with her children and thus does not have to 'prove' her maternal feelings. Nevertheless, her affection for her children does appear in her writing. Montagu writes, 'when I think of the fatigue my poor infant must suffer, I have all a mother's fondness in my eyes, and all her tender passions in my heart.'<sup>135</sup> The previous passage indicates that the route the family is planning on taking to Hungary can be quite dangerous. She writes anxiously, 'if I survive my journey' and 'if I live.'<sup>136</sup> This indicates that she might fear for her own life, but it is especially her son she worries about. It is interesting that she writes 'all a mother's fondness' and 'her tender passions' as if she normally does not associate those feelings with herself. *The Turkish Embassy Letters* contain three short letters from Montagu to her husband when he was away from the rest of the family. The letters are quite impersonal and when she mentions their children, Montagu writes, 'the boy', 'the girl' or 'your son' and 'your daughter.'<sup>137</sup> She usually refers to her son as 'my son,' but also 'my poor infant,' and 'my dear little son.'<sup>138</sup> The detached manner in which she refers to her children to her husband indicates their own detachment to each other, rather than any detachment she might have towards her children. Thus, whilst Montagu is not overly concerned with representing herself as a devoted mother like Craven is, her words do show that she holds affectionate feelings towards her children especially when she is confronted with the dangerous sides of travelling.

---

<sup>135</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 43-44.

<sup>136</sup> Montagu, 43-44.

<sup>137</sup> Montagu, 123-25.

<sup>138</sup> Montagu, 55; 44; 81.

## Political Motherhood

This chapter will look at a more abstract idea of motherhood, namely political motherhood. Instead of their personal experiences of motherhood, this chapter will discuss how Montagu and Craven express their political opinion by discussing motherhood. O'Loughlin mentions that 'travel and travel writing constitute key practices through which women writers could participate in contemporary discussion and debate, and a field in which the politics of gender might be examined.'<sup>139</sup> Montagu and Craven also participate in these 'powerful contemporary discourses' in their letters.<sup>140</sup> The experiences and cultures these women encountered on their journey influenced their writing. Discussing what they encountered and connecting it to already existing debates made them active participants in these political discussions. Even though both women use the idea of motherhood in their arguments, the topic of the political debates differ. Montagu, married to a Whig politician and a Whig herself, describes the expectations of Turkish women regarding procreation to express her aversion to Catholicism in her letters to the Catholic Abbé Conti. Craven, on the other hand, promotes the idea that British colonist families can bring civilisation to the East which would in turn bring prosperity to the British Empire.

Montagu's letters written to her female correspondents are different narratively than the ones she wrote to her male correspondents, like Alexander Pope and Abbé Conti. Whereas she is more of a storyteller in her letters to women, Montagu adapts a more philosophical tone in her letters to men.<sup>141</sup> She criticises not only the British but also the Christian notions of womanhood in these letters. In a letter written to the Italian writer Abbé Conti, Montagu describes the aforementioned notion that it is the duty of Turkish women to bear children. She writes:

The virgins who die virgins and the widows who marry not again, dying in mortal sin, are excluded out of paradise. For women, says he, not being 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 has entrusted them with an office which is not less honourable, even that of multiplying the human race. And such as, out of malice or laziness do not make it their business to bear or to breed children fulfil not the duty of their vocation and rebel against the commands of God. Here are maxims for you, prodigiously contrary to

---

<sup>139</sup> O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*, 13.

<sup>140</sup> O'Loughlin, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Melman, *Women's Orient*, 92.

those of your convents. What will become of your saints Catherines, your saints Therasas, your saints Claras and the whole bead roll of your holy virgins and widows, who if they are to be judged by this system of virtue will be found to have been infamous creatures that passed their whole lives in a most abominable libertinism.<sup>142</sup>

Montagu argues that ‘chastity for women is not a universal notion’ and ‘nor should it be particularly commended.’<sup>143</sup> She indicates that the three Saints, who are also celebrated because of their virginity in Catholicism, would actually be judged for their virginity in Islam. Additionally, Montagu repeats ‘your’ when she discusses the saints which further indicates her distance from Catholicism. It again demonstrates that chastity for women is not a universal virtuous notion; they are not just saints, they are ‘your’ saints. Melman mentions that ‘praise of the tolerance of the Turks was a stick which Protestants – well before the Enlightenment – used to beat with Catholic intolerance.’<sup>144</sup> Montagu is later described by her granddaughter as a ‘Whig to the teeth.’<sup>145</sup> Thus, her anti-Catholic stance present in her letters align with her political views.

Montagu is quite philosophical as she describes this notion of Turkish motherhood in her letter to Conti. This differs from her letters about this duty to other women where she expresses her disapproval as she herself has to carry out this duty of procreation. In her letter to Anne Thistlethwayte, written a month before the letter to Conti, Montagu mentions her pregnancy which resulted from the pressure of complying with this Turkish notion of womanhood. She states, ‘you won’t know what to make of this speech, but in this country it is more despicable to be married and not fruitful than it is with us to be fruitful before marriage.’<sup>146</sup> Here, Montagu also discusses the notion of chastity in Christianity like in her letter to Conti. However, Montagu writes ‘with us’ which is notably different than the aforementioned repeated ‘your.’ Chastity in Christianity is shown as something that belongs to Montagu and Thistlethwayte’s Christian culture whereas with Conti it is seen as something that especially belongs to Catholicism in particular. This indicates that Montagu writes differently according to whom she writes and with what aim. Montagu describes her

---

<sup>142</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 110.

<sup>143</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 93-94.

<sup>144</sup> Melman, 94.

<sup>145</sup> O’Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*, 32.

<sup>146</sup> Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 107.

personal circumstances and her social environment in her letter to Thistlethwayte, but in her letter to Conti she shows her philosophical stance. Thus, how she discusses the notion of womanhood but also motherhood changes according to her correspondents. In her letter to Thistlethwayte, motherhood is a more personal experience but also used to compare different cultural customs. Contrastingly, motherhood is used as an argument against Catholicism in a philosophical debate with Conti and thus used in a more distant and impersonal manner.

Craven also writes about motherhood, or rather families, in a more political manner. Instead of using the idea of family in a religious philosophical debate, Craven discusses the idea of a family in a colonial setting. As stated before, British mothers were responsible for the upbringing of the next generation of sensible, rational, and ‘civilised’ white Christian men and women who would uphold the British empire and her ideals.<sup>147</sup> British writers were familiar and aware of the idea of empire and often incorporated their views on imperialism in their writing.<sup>148</sup> Craven’s awareness of empire is especially noticeable in a passage she writes in Crimea. Craven states:

I wish to see a colony of honest English families here; establishing manufactures, such as England produces, and returning the produce of this country to ours – establishing a fair and free trade from hence, and teaching industry and honesty to the insidious but oppressed Greeks, in their islands - waking the indolent Turk from his gilded slumbers, and carrying fair Liberty in her swelling sails as she passes through the Archipelago and the Mediterranean, to our dangerous (happily to us our dangerous) coast. – – This is no visionary of poetical figure – it is the honest wish of one who considers all mankind as one family.<sup>149</sup>

Here, Craven advocates for English families to colonise the East. Zold argues that ‘like a dutiful mother, Craven envisions bringing the English domestic space abroad in order to facilitate the expansion of trade and support the growth of the English nation.’<sup>150</sup> As Craven cannot fulfil her own duty of raising the next generation of British colonists, she uses the idea of a colonial family to justify imperialism. Interestingly, Craven states that families, not just male merchants, should ‘teach’ about trading, which highlights this idea of a colonist family that brings further

---

<sup>147</sup> Brown, “The Life Cycle,” 42-43.

<sup>148</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 14.

<sup>149</sup> Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, 281.

<sup>150</sup> Zold, “Expanding the domestic sphere,” 333.

prosperity to the British Empire.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, ‘mankind as one family’ implies ‘the familial duty to “share” resources with one another.’<sup>152</sup> This repeated emphasis on the family further highlights her role as a mother. As a mother, Craven has the duty to care for her children but also the Empire. Because she cannot fulfil her role as a mother in the traditional and personal sense when she is travelling, Craven turns to a more abstract view of motherhood. This view still aligns with the notion of the time that Enlightenment mothers were ‘the reproduces of race, class and civilization in the world Europeans believed to be filled with yet to be civilised peoples.’<sup>153</sup> According to Craven it is the English families’ duty to bring civilisation to the Greeks and Turks, not only for their benefit but also for the benefit of the British Empire as it would bring trade to ‘our dangerous coast.’ The fact that Britain is an island surrounded by a dangerous coast, makes it difficult to invade or colonise. Thus, with writing ‘happily for us,’ Craven observes how the geographical situation of Britain is beneficial for the British Empire.

Similar to how Craven aims to evoke the image of a dutiful mother when she describes children, Craven also uses her imperialistic encouragement as a strategy for changing her reputation. With this passage, Craven gives the impression of being a ‘staunch patriot.’<sup>154</sup> Said states that orientalists attribute certain contrasting characteristics to Westerners and Orientals. Orientals are indolent, dishonest, and simple, whereas Westerners are the opposite and thus rational and logical.<sup>155</sup> And with the attribution of these characteristics, the West claims its superiority over the East. Here, Craven demonstrates her orientalist attitude towards the Other, who is seen as inferior. She states that the English families are ‘honest’ in contrast to the ‘insidious’ Greeks and the ‘indolent’ Turks. The English families should ‘teach’ and civilise the Greeks and Turks according to Craven. This attitude also shows why Melman states that Craven, unlike Montagu, can be described as a ‘Turkophobe.’<sup>156</sup> This passage aims to encourage imperialism, but it also shows the primary aim of the letter’s publication, namely, to influence Craven’s reputation in England. Together with her more personal anecdotes of her interactions with children that remind her of

---

<sup>151</sup> Zold, 332-33.

<sup>152</sup> Zold, 333.

<sup>153</sup> Brown, “The Life Cycle,” 42-43.

<sup>154</sup> Marino, “Constructing the Other, Reconstructing Herself,” 36.

<sup>155</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 38 and 49.

<sup>156</sup> Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 87.

her own, this passage about the family bringing prosperity to the Empire, aims to evoke the image of Craven as a dutiful Enlightened mother and patriot, instead of her reputation of an adulteress and neglectful mother.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the question ‘How does motherhood influence the experiences of Lady Mary Montagu and Lady Elizabeth Craven as female travel writers in the eighteenth century and how is motherhood expressed in their writings about marriage, children, and politics?’ In order to do so, the cultural context of ideas about femininity and maternity from the eighteenth century have been analysed in conjunction with a close reading of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and *A Journey Through The Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters*.

Montagu and Craven were unfortunate in their marriages to the fathers of their children. However, their marriages, or in Craven’s case her separation, made it possible for them to travel. Still, the passages where Montagu and Craven are both of the opinion that Turkish women enjoy great liberty because of the habit of veiling, indicates their own desire for more sexual liberty that monogamous marriages, which were socially preferred, could not offer.

Montagu and Craven both mention their children frequently. Montagu writes about how travelling and encountering Turkish ideas around motherhood has directly influenced her to have another child as she gave in to societal pressure. Additionally, Montagu’s active involvement in the smallpox inoculation could also be seen as an act of maternal duty. She wanted to protect her children from the consequences of the disease, like scarring. Montagu’s medical influence was great, but her involvement can be seen as her maternal ‘duty’ together with the enlightened interest in medical experiments. Craven writes about her children in order to change the public’s perspective of her as a mother. The art she encounters whilst travelling reminds her of her own children, as do encounters with other children. Their writing and different experiences surrounding motherhood also show how the Western idea of motherhood changed during the eighteenth century.

In addition to writing about their personal experiences with motherhood, Montagu and Craven write about motherhood in a more political manner. Montagu engages in a philosophical debate where she uses the Turkish notion of motherhood as an argument that the Christian idea of chastity as a virtue is not universal. She does this to critique Catholicism which aligns with her personal beliefs as a protestant Whig. Further research could delve into Montagu’s religious beliefs and the influence of her Protestantism on her writing. Craven imagines British families settling in the

East to teach about commerce and morals in order to strengthen the British Empire. With her imperialist dreams, Craven creates the image of herself being patriotic but also a dutiful mother because Enlightened mothers were also responsible for the upbringing of the future generation of imperialists who would bring prosperity to Britain. These passages in Montagu's and Craven's travelogues indicate that women were active in philosophical and political debates during their travels. Travelogues are an interesting source to investigate how women engaged with topics such as religion and empire which they encountered on their travels.

There are limitations to this research as only the travel letters of Montagu and Craven are compared. Comparing Montagu's and Craven's travel writing with their later writing about marriage and motherhood would give an even broader understanding of how maternity influenced their lives and how they expressed it in their writing. Furthermore, this thesis only focussed on two aristocratic mothers. Middle class women also travelled in the eighteenth century and comparing their experiences with motherhood could be valuable.

This thesis has demonstrated that motherhood has influenced not only the lives and travels, but also the writings of Montagu and Craven. Both writers mention their children and express their maternal duties and affections in their letters. Additionally, their travels also influenced their experiences with motherhood. Montagu's encounter with the Turkish idea of maternity pressures her to have another child and her encounters with smallpox inoculation in Turkey saved her children, and consequently other people when she advocated for the method back in Britain. Craven's travel physically and emotionally removes her from her children and her encounters with other cultures and art reminds her of her children. Hall et al. mention that the current debate around Montagu is mostly about orientalism.<sup>157</sup> Whilst that is important, her status as a mother is also interesting to research as proves to be influential to her writing. Craven's position as a mother has been researched more because her motherhood is directly tied to her travels and writing. This thesis indicates that Craven is constantly aware of her reputation of an inadequate mother and aims to change society's opinion of her. Thus, motherhood is an important aspect to research in travel writing, especially because travel was usually a rare opportunity for mothers. Additionally, this thesis has added more to the research in female travel writing in the

---

<sup>157</sup> Hall et al., "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, 3-6.

eighteenth century. Epistolary travelogues were a popular genre in the eighteenth century and investigating the contribution that women made to the genre gives more insight in their lives outside the domestic sphere. This thesis has demonstrated that motherhood was still influential outside of the traditional domestic sphere. Even when they are travelling, Montagu and Craven of course still remain mothers. This part of their identity presents itself differently in their letters, but still remained influential in their writings.

## Bibliography

- Aravamudan, Srinivas. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Hamam*: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization." *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 69-104.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030261>.
- Ballaster, Ros. *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Berens, Hans. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Bohls, Elizabeth A. *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Brown, Kathleen M. "The Life Cycle: Motherhood during the Enlightenment." In *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* edited by Ellen Pollak, 29-43. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Cody, Lisa Forman. "Medicine and Disease: Women, Practice, and Print in the Enlightenment Medical Marketplace. In *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* edited by Ellen Pollak, 99-120. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Craven, Elizabeth. *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople: in a Series of Letters from the Right Honourable Elizabeth Lady Craven, to His Serene Highness the Margrave of Brandenburg, Anspach, and Bareith*. Legare Street Press [Vienna: R. Sammer, 1800].
- Gasper, Julia. *Elizabeth Craven: Writer, Feminist and European*. Vernon Press, 2017.
- Hall, Jordan, Anna K. Sagal, and Elizabeth Zold. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the *Turkish Embassy Letters*: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism." *Literature Compass* 14, no. 10 (2017): 1-11.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12405>.
- Halsband, Robert. *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Heffernan, Teresa. "Feminism Against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's "Turkish Embassy Letters"." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 201-215.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053682>.
- Koenigsberger, H. G. *Early Modern Europe 1500-1789*. London and New York: Longman, 1987.
- Lanser, Susan S. "Bodies and Sexuality: Sex, Gender, and the Limits of Enlightenment." In *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* edited by Ellen Pollak, 45-69. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

- Marino, Elisabetta. "Constructing the Other, Reconstructing Herself: A Journey Through the Crimea to Constantinople by Lady Elizabeth Craven." In *The West in Asia and Asia in the West: Essays on Transnational Interactions* edited by Elisabetta Marino & Tanfer Emin Tunc, 34-45. McFarland, 2015.
- Melman, Billie. *Women's Orient: English women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: sexuality, religion and work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995.
- Mitsi, Efterpi. "Lady Elizabeth Craven's Letters from Athens and the Female Picturesque." In *Women Writing Greece: Essays on Hellenism, Orientalism and Travel* edited by Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Efterpi Mitsi, 19-37. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008.
- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley. *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. London: Virago Press, 1994.
- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley. "Town Eclogues: Saturday; The Small-Pox." Poetry Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2023. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44766/town-eclogues-saturday-the-small-pox>.
- Nussbaum, Felicity A. *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- O'Loughlin, Katrina. *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Perry, Ruth. "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2, Special Issue, part 1: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe (1991): 204-234. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3704034>.
- Pohl, Nicole. *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006.
- Pollak, Ellen. "Introduction: Women Daring to Know in the Age of Enlightenment." In *A Cultural History of Women: In the Age of Enlightenment* ed. Ellen Pollak, 1-28. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Turner, Katherine. "Elizabeth [*née* Lady Elizabeth Berkeley], margravine of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Bayreuth [*other married name* Elizabeth Craven, Lady Craven]." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2010. Accessed 20 May, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/576>.
- Yegenoglu, Meyda. *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Zold, Elizabeth. "Expanding the domestic sphere: mothers who travelled in the eighteenth century." *Studies in Travel Writing* 19, no. 4 (2015): 324-39.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2015.1108723>.