

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Manuscript Publication and the Vanity of Popular Applause

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In 1752 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote to Lady Bute, her daughter, “I hope you have not so ill opinion of me to think I am turning Author in my old age.”¹ These are curious words coming from a woman who had published her own political newspaper, who had entered into public poetical warfare with Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and whose poetry, essays and letters had been printed, passed around, and discussed for thirty-five years.

Montagu’s opinions on authorship and publishing have often been taken as a basically-consistent statement of aristocratic disdain; and her actions have been interpreted in the light of this reading of her letters.² This misinterpretation has been facilitated by the misinterpretation of Montagu’s publishing activities, particularly the circulation of her works in manuscript. Triumphalist models of book history have encouraged literary critics to see scribal publication as “an inferior mode of distribution” to print, as “coterie writing” that may or may not “progress” into, or “achieve,” print.³ Writers such as Montagu accepted no such dichotomy: she used scribal or print publication as it suited her needs. As long as the scribal distribution of Montagu’s work continues to be seen as an amateur affair it is likely that she will continue to be misunderstood and misrepresented.

In this essay I examine Montagu’s letters to her daughter and explain how these may reflect her attitudes to authorship, writing and publishing. I also examine the evidence for Montagu’s publishing activities in manuscript and in print, and consider why it may be that Montagu’s words and actions have been so often misunderstood.



¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965–67), 3.19: to Lady Bute, 1 October 1752.

² Isobel Grundy, “Introduction,” in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Romance Writings*, ed. Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), ix, refers to Montagu’s “internal conflict between class pride and literary ambition.”

³ George Justice, “Introduction,” in *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800*, ed. George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5–11, esp. 5, 6. Justice has in mind both Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin’s *L’Apparition du livre* (1958) and Elizabeth Eisenstein’s *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979). Grundy uses the term “coterie writing” twice in her contribution to this volume and describes “the slow progress towards publication of Montagu’s Embassy Letters.” See Isobel Grundy, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her Daughter: The Changing Use of Manuscripts,” in *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas*, 182, 184, 194.

Given Montagu's public profile, her comments to her daughter seem all but absurd, yet there are other examples in her letters. Having referred to Samuel Richardson's parody of her as "Miss Barnevelt," to his use of a famous aphorism by her, and to a fabricated series of letters attributed to her, Montagu writes:

I have need of all my Philosophy on these occasions, thô they happen so often I ought to be accustom'd to them. When I print, I submit to be answer'd and criticis'd, but as I never did, 'tis hard to be abus'd for other people's Follys. A light thing said in Gay Company should not be call'd upon for a serious Defence.⁴

Montagu makes a similar statement when relating an incident that occurred on 9 October 1753. Montagu was asked by a representative of her friend Cardinal Querini for copies of her works, so that they could be placed in a public library attached to a college he had recently founded:

When I recover'd my vexatious surprize (foreseeing the Consequence) I made answer, I was highly sensible of the Honor design'd me, but upon my word I had never printed a single line in my Life. I was answer'd in a cold tone, his Em[inence] could send for them to England but they would be a long time coming and with some hazard ... [He] went away with the air of one that thought he had reason to be offended ... and [so] I shall pass in his opinion for a monster of Ingratitude ... I realy could cry for vexation.

Sure no body ever had such various provocations to print as my selfe. I have seen things I have wrote so mangle'd and falsify'd I have scarce known them. I have seen Poems I never read publish'd with my Name at length, and others that were truly and singly wrote by me, printed under the names of others. I have made my selfe easy under all these mortifications by the reflection I did not deserve them, having never aim'd at the Vanity of Popular Applause; but I own my Philosophy is not proof against losing a Freind.⁵

The exact wording of these two denials is significant. Montagu does not deny writing: she has "seen things I have wrote," and refers to her poems as "truly and singly wrote by me." Evidently, she is being careful to distinguish the activity of writing from printing, and to deny any involvement in the latter. It is clear also that her denial of "Authorship," in the first quote, is a denial of professional authorship, of writing for the press, for money, or for the "Vanity of Popular Applause." It is obvious that Montagu considered authorship and printing, rather than writing and printing, to be nearly synonymous. Furthermore, when she writes "I hope you have not so ill opinion of me to think I am turning Author" she passes over the undeniable fact of her writing, to deny any involvement in printing. This elision has its parallel in the statement "When I print, I submit to be answer'd and criticis'd, but as I never

⁴ *The Complete Letters*, 3.95: to Lady Bute, 20 October 1755.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.38–39: to Lady Bute, 10 October 1753.

did ...,” where Montagu’s attempt to cover up an admission of printing creates a logical disjunction in the sentence.⁶

There are three reasons why Montagu may have wanted to make these denials and elisions. The first is that she often expressed and seems to have accepted, to some extent, an aristocratic disdain of “professionalism,” of writing for money. When referring to the novels of her second cousin, Sarah Fielding, she says: “I ... heartily pity her, constrain’d by her Circumstances to seek her bread by a method I do not doubt she despises.”⁷ In the same letter Montagu comments on Sarah’s brother: “[Henry] was to be pity’d at his first entrance into the World, having no choice (as he said himselfe) but to be a Hackney Writer or a Hackney Coachman.”

To understand how lightly Montagu wore her class prejudices, however, it is instructive to look at the comments that she made concerning Lord Cornbury. On 23 July 1753, Montagu explained to her daughter:

I had lost his favour sometime before I left England, on a pleasant account. He comes to me one morning with a Hat full of paper, which he desir’d me to peruse and tell him my sincere opinion. I tremble’d at the proposition, foreseeing the inevitable Consequence of this confidence. However, I was not so barbarous to tell him that his verses were extreme stupid (as, God knows, they were) and that he was no more inspir’d with the Spirit of Poetry than that of Prophecy. I contented my selfe with representing to him (in the mildest terms) that it was not the busyness of a Man of Quality to turn Author, and that he should confine himselfe to the Applause of his Friends and by no means venture on the press. He seem’d to take this advice with good Humour, promis’d to follow it, and we parted without any dispute; but alas, he could not help showing his performance to better judges, who with their usual Candor and good Nature earnestly exhorted him to oblige the World with this instructive piece, which was soon after publish’d and had the Success I expected from it; and Pope persuaded him (poor Soul!) that my declaiming against it occasion’d the ill reception it met with.⁸

The statement “it was not the busyness of a Man of Quality to turn Author” has often been taken out of context, and at face value, to represent Montagu’s final thoughts on the subject.⁹ Though it is true that these comments were made when

⁶ It is possible that by “When I print ...” Montagu meant “If I were to print,” or “If one were to print,” but Halsband clearly takes it otherwise when he comments on this passage that “here [Montagu] was bravely inconsistent.” Grundy quotes the first part of this passage in the peroration of her 1996 “Introduction,” omitting “but as I never did ...” etc., and thereby suggesting that Montagu both “printed” the letters attributed to her and submitted “to be answer’d and criticis’d.” See Robert Halsband, “Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Lady of Letters in the Eighteenth Century: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, January 18, 1969* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1969), 37; Grundy, “Introduction,” xxvi.

⁷ *The Complete Letters*, 3.67: to Lady Bute, 23 July 1754.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.36–37: to Lady Bute, 23 July 1753.

⁹ Dervla Murphy for example, after quoting this passage, comments “‘Snobbery’ is too feeble a word

Montagu was over sixty, when her social arteries were hardening, it ought to be absolutely clear from the mocking irony in this “pleasant account” that she was not committed to this opinion.¹⁰

The second—and most important—reason for Montagu’s denials of authorship and printing is that they were contained in letters written to her daughter, someone who has been aptly described as “a proto-Victorian of impeccable respectability.”¹¹ Lady Bute’s distaste for her mother’s literary activities is obvious. It is, for example, clearly reflected in her attitude to her youngest, and most intelligent, daughter:

Lady Louisa [Stuart] was scolded for reading books, and accused of wanting to be like her grandmother: “It was this reproach that first informed I had ever had a grandmother, and I am sure I heartily hated her name. Whatever I wanted to learn, everybody was up in arms to oppose it and represented that if I indulged in it I should become such a pedant that nobody would be able to bear me.”¹²

Her outspoken and unconventional behaviour and writings were enough for Montagu to be regarded as “deeply eccentric and embarrassing by [her] contemporaries.”¹³ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that her literary feuds, and in particular the decade of satiric attacks by Pope and the continual muddying of her name by anonymous pamphleteers in the pamphlet war that accompanied it, made Montagu’s conservative daughter almost morbidly sensitive to any appearance of her mother in print. After Montagu’s death it became apparent that she was prepared to go to extreme lengths to suppress her mother’s writings. Horace Walpole commented that the manuscripts that had made it to Bute “will not see the light of day in haste,” and that “her family are in terrors” lest the one manuscript that they didn’t get—but, which they soon secured for the hefty sum of £500—should be published.¹⁴

Geographically and emotionally isolated as she was by her Continental retirement, Montagu was prepared “to accommodate herself to the notions of her beloved child.”¹⁵ When Bute asked for her mother’s “sentiments” on the education of her granddaughters, Montagu responded enthusiastically with a plan for an extensive course of study and with a feminist attack on the “unjust custom [that] prevails of

for the ageing [Montagu’s] class prejudice.” Dervla Murphy, “Introduction,” in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Embassy to Constantinople: The Travels of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Christopher Pick (London: Century, 1988), 29.

¹⁰ “Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

¹² Robert Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 280.

¹³ Janet Todd, “Introduction,” in *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660–1800*, ed. Janet Todd (Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1985), 2.

¹⁴ Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis et al., 48 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937–83), 22.84: to Horace Mann, 3 October 1762.

¹⁵ “Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” 35.

debaring our Sex from the advantages of Learning.”¹⁶ Bute’s reply to Montagu’s two long letters on this subject does not survive; however, the tone of the following paragraph by Montagu clearly indicates the type of response that she had received:

You see I was not mistaken in supposing we should have disputes concerning your Daughters if we were together, since we can differ even at this distance. The sort of Learning that I recommended is not so expensive, either of Time or Money, as dancing, and in my opinion likely to be of much more use ... However, every one has a right to educate their children after their own way, and I shall speak no more on the subject.¹⁷

Montagu’s frequent remarks on her isolation (“[I] who live the life of Robinson Crusoe”), and on her pleasure in receiving news from home (“every thing from England is interesting to me”), make her willingness to forgo the anticipated pleasure of writing to her granddaughter, and of directing her education, understandable.¹⁸ In her very next letter Montagu, expressing her fear that she has offended her daughter, explains that she is anxious to “establish the most intimate Freindship ... and I am sure no prooffe of it shall be wanting on my Side.”¹⁹

Montagu was also anxious to maintain her character as a woman of leisure, content in her European retirement. Montagu’s “Italian Memoir” suggests that this was, for a considerable period, a complete fiction. During her time in Italy, between 1746 and 1756, she was fleeced by the “thirty-year-old heir of an impoverished Brescian family.”²⁰ As Isobel Grundy writes:

Publicly, she expresses her content with the retirement which gives her leisure to distil the wisdom of a lifetime ... Privately, her retrospective account, compiled with the intention of suing Count Ugolino Palazzi for fraud and theft of money, relates a survivor’s story of long-continued and reluctantly recognized persecution: a whole series of depredations both overt and covert, escalating to veiled threats of violence.²¹

The third reason that Montagu made her denials may be that she was trying to escape the criticism that all women writers of her time were exposed to.²² In 1679 Rochester had written that “Whore is scarce a more reproachfull name, / Than

¹⁶ The two letters are those to Lady Bute of 28 January 1753 and 6 March 1753, *The Complete Letters*, 3.20–28; the quote is from the latter (*ibid.*, 26).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.31: to Lady Bute, 3 June 1753.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.50: to Lady Bute, 28 April 1754.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.36: to Lady Bute, 23 July 1753.

²⁰ *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 236.

²¹ Grundy, “Introduction,” xix.

²² This is not to suggest that Montagu published in manuscript solely “as a direct and simple result of social prohibitions placed upon women writers,” as I explain below. See Justice, “Introduction,” 5.

Poetesse: . . .,”²³ and by 1713, when Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, published the following (famous) lines, the situation had scarcely altered:

Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,
The fault, can by no vertue be redeem'd.²⁴

For Lady Mary Wortley Montagu there was a slightly different range of freedoms and restrictions that accompanied her social status. She, at least, had the financial freedom to have printed anything she wished, when she wished; and she had access to cultural resources, in terms of books and people, that less privileged women lacked. Montagu, however, had been forced to educate herself, and, as the Countess of Winchilsea's words suggest, noblewomen were far from free.

Throughout her life, Montagu considered a “reputation for learning [to be] a misfortune to a woman.”²⁵ In her unwelcome letter on the education of her granddaughters, and on the unjust debarring of women from the advantages of education, Montagu had warned that it is “most absolutely necessary . . . to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness.”²⁶ On another occasion Montagu records how, because she was known to spend seven hours a day in reading and writing, she had been forced to suffer the sneers and insolent advice of a group of fools.²⁷ The group in question “fell into a good-natured discourse of the ill consequences of too much application, and remembered how many apoplexies, gouts and dropsies had happened amongst the hard students of their acquaintance.” Montagu was provoked by these and other similar remarks to comment to Bute: “As I never studied anything in my life, and have always (at least from 15) thought the reputation of learning a misfortune to a woman, I was resolve[d] to believe these stories were not meant for me.”²⁸ This passage is significant: it indicates Montagu's awareness that only by not “studying,” or appearing to study, or admitting to study, could a woman avoid being sneered at.

²³ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, “A Letter from Artemiza in the Towne to Chloe in the Countrey,” in *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 64, ll. 26–27.

²⁴ Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, quoted in “The Introduction,” in *Anthology of British Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, ed. Dale Spender and Janet Todd (London: Pandora, 1990), 155.

²⁵ *The Complete Letters*, 3.217–18: to Sir James Steuart, 19 July 1759. Grundy discusses what seems to have been Montagu's adolescent experience of “being detected in writing and ordered to desist.” See Grundy, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her Daughter,” 187–88.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.22: to Lady Bute, 28 January 1753.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.217–18: to Sir James Steuart, 19 July 1759.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.217: to Sir James Steuart, 19 July 1759.

Montagu's desire to please her daughter, her aristocratic disdain of "professionalism," and her care to avoid the obloquy that faced woman writers, help to show why she would want to be careful to distinguish the activity of writing from printing, to play down her involvement in the former, and to eschew the latter; but it does not explain all of her actions. Indeed, Montagu's denials and elisions seem to have another motivation, or, at least, another function: to conceal the fact that she was a writer who took her literary activities seriously. For, as we shall see, Montagu circulated her writings widely in manuscript, was responsible for having some of her work printed, and was keen to be properly credited for all of her writings.



Patricia Crawford notes that, although writing for print publication was not a socially approved activity, women *did* write and found ways to justify their transgression by exploiting inconsistencies in the ideology that was designed to contain them.²⁹ Crawford outlines several ways in which women justified defying the conventions of their society. Some published anonymously "in order that their words might be taken seriously."³⁰ Some claimed that, because they wrote only for other women, they were beyond the range of male criticism. Others offered the defence that the subject they were treating was one suited to their sex, and one that only their sex could write about, such as maternity, advice to daughters, and so forth. Still others used religion as a justification to write, citing the parable of the talents, or, irrefutably, claiming that they were compelled "by the irresistible command of God."³¹

Because Crawford's focus is exclusively on print publication she does not include in her list another—and, perhaps, a more important—way in which women writers circumvented the restrictions placed on them: that is, manuscript publication. Manuscript publication was an extremely important way in which women could publish without seeming to defy the dictates of their society. Halsband notes:

A lady ambitious for literary reputation within her social circle could allow her writings to be passed around among her friends ... Such "publication" was proper; it brought the author neither vulgar applause nor money but the admiration of her social peers.³²

Harold Love, in his study of scribal publication in seventeenth-century England, defines manuscript publication as occurring when copyists wrote in order to be read

²⁹ Patricia Crawford, "Women's Published Writings 1600–1700," in *Women in English Society: 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London: Methuen, 1985), 211.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 219–20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 219–24.

³² "Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century," 39.

by others, rather than to provide themselves with a simple personal record.³³ The public that a manuscript has been made available to may be general or specific, but, provided that the work concerned is finished to the satisfaction of the author, and a copy has been made available for copying, then it has been published in this sense.³⁴ Furthermore, “while the survival of a text in a large number of manuscript copies is certainly evidence of its having been published, the fact that it only survives in two or three does not mean that it has not made the crucial transition from private status.”³⁵

The three types of publication that Love defines are: authorial publication, which takes place when “copies are produced personally by, or under the supervision of, the author”; entrepreneurial publication, which takes place when copies are made by specialist scribes for gain; and user publication, which, as the name suggests, occurs when individuals make copies of a text for themselves, or allow a copy to be made from their exemplar.³⁶ As we shall see, Montagu engaged in authorial, and encouraged user, publication.

Love gives a mass of evidence that shows how widespread authorial and user publication was among male writers. At the close of the seventeenth century, he explains, “it was still possible for a writer to publish work through the scribal medium in preference to the typographical without any sense that this was second best—overall its prestige was probably higher.”³⁷ Authors such as John Donne, Thomas Carew and Sir John Suckling “gained a considerable reputation during their lifetimes without ever issuing a printed collection of their verse.”³⁸

In the early eighteenth century this form of publication had begun to decline in popularity among male writers. Love observes that the career of Swift (ca. 1690–1740) “spans the exact period in which the scribal medium ceased to be a central vehicle for ideological debate within the governing class and was reduced to a marginal function.”³⁹ In the first decade of the century Pope had circulated his *Windsor Forest* and his three-canto version of the *Pastorals* in professionally-penned manuscripts to over a dozen readers, an action that suggests to Love that he saw

³³ Harold Love, “Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 9 (1987): 130.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 137, 138, 142, 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 131. To this list of poets who preferred manuscript circulation we may add John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and Andrew Marvell, as well as Elizabethan poets such as Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Walter Raleigh, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. See J. W. Saunders, “The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry,” *Essays in Criticism* 1 (1951): 139.

³⁹ Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 297.

“scribal transmission as having its own integrity, independent of print publishing.”⁴⁰ By the end of the “lamentable year” 1716, however, Pope had learned that the idea his satires might pass from hand to hand privately was a “sad error” and so curtailed this activity.⁴¹

Lord Cornbury’s decision to “oblige the World with his instructive piece” in 1737 (against the advice of Montagu) indicates that it was beginning to be acceptable for male aristocrats to print their writings, and by mid-century Thomas Gray, who had circulated much of his early poetry in manuscript, displayed his gentlemanly reluctance, not to having his poetry printed, but to receiving money for it.⁴² By 1777 Sheridan was satirising the reluctance to publish in print in *The School for Scandal*, where he has Sir Benjamin Backbite declare: “To say truth, ma’am, ’tis very vulgar to print; and as my little productions are mostly satires and lampoons on particular people, I find that they circulate more by giving copies in confidence to the friends of the parties.”⁴³

This change in sensibilities among men was not exactly paralleled among women. The circulation of one’s works in manuscript had many advantages for women writers, and so it seems to have continued longer amongst them. Elaine Hobby’s discussion of Katherine Philips (1632–64), known to her contemporaries as Orinda, makes this first point very clearly. The *Letters to Poliarchus* seems to contain evidence of Philips’s “blushing horror at the thought of her works and name becoming public property.”⁴⁴ Hobby warns:

The *Letters to Poliarchus* have been read as if they give straight-forward access to “the real Katherine Philips,” her personal doubts and fears, and that they can therefore tell us the “truth” about her identity as an author. Such a reading discounts the fact that all writing is governed by specific conventions, and that in the case of a mid-seventeenth-century woman these conventions included the requirement that she apologise for daring to take up the pen.⁴⁵

Constructing “Orinda” in this way makes it possible for Philips to write and gain wide public acclaim while disavowing any desire to do either. The continued acceptance of traditional ideals of womanly and ladylike behaviour has encouraged male critics

⁴⁰ “Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England,” 135, 150; *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England*, 37 n5.

⁴¹ George Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 184.

⁴² Like Lord Byron, Gray eventually overcame his reluctance. Frank Arthur Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1930; revised ed., London: Jonathan Cape, 1949), 171–72.

⁴³ “Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” 40.

⁴⁴ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women’s Writing 1646–1688* (London: Virago, 1988), 130.

⁴⁵ *Virtue of Necessity*, 130; Hobby cites (ibid., 221) Philip Souers, *The Matchless Orinda* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931) as an example of this sort of surface reading of the *Letters to Poliarchus*.

to see Philips in the gendered terms that were created for her and to look at the mask “Orinda,” rather than the writer Philips. To see Philips’s writing as

a secret and private affair, her poems passed around only in manuscript form to a few trusted friends ... is an anachronistic distortion of the method of “publication” that she used ... Any assessment of Philips’ writing that suggests that she was of a shy and retiring spirit, forced into the public eye ... against her strongest inclinations, is choosing to ignore her involvement with this then more traditional form of public recognition. The “public” that she was interested in reaching was the coterie of court and leading poets, not the wider world.⁴⁶

That manuscript publication continued longer amongst women is suggested by the fact that this account of Philips could be applied, almost *verbatim*, to Montagu. Women who published in manuscript did not have to be so apologetic about their activities because it was ceasing to be—for males—a central vehicle of intellectual exchange. As such, manuscript circulation would have represented even less of a threat to established ideals of womanly behaviour than it did when Philips was writing.



In their writing, circulation and printing, Montagu’s *Eclogues* offer the best-documented example of the manuscript publication of her poetry. The series was written between mid-1715 and mid-1716. Like Gay’s *Shepherd’s Week*, these mock-pastoral satires made up, when complete, a cycle of six poems, one for each day from Monday to Saturday. The poem “Monday. Roxana; or, the Drawing-room,” the most controversial of the series, is the first of which there is any record.

Robert Halsband follows Montagu’s friend the Countess of Loudun in believing that the release of “Monday” came about against the wishes of Montagu.⁴⁷ The Countess wrote in a letter to her husband in Scotland, on 3 January 1716:

L[ad]y Mary is now very well, I do not think she was ever in danger, but the Town said she would die, tow days together[;]⁴⁸ upon which a frind of hers, (I do not know who it was) show’d a Poem that she had intrusted them with writ upon the Court[.] I have not yet seen it but I’m told it is very prity and not a little wicked, I’m promised it in a day or tow; the princess has seen it, poor Lady Mary will not know how to come to Court again[;] this wold put a body with a good asurance out of countenance.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Virtue of Necessity*, 129.

⁴⁷ Robert Halsband, “Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems,” *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America* 68 (1953): 244.

⁴⁸ Montagu had small-pox.

⁴⁹ “Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems,” 244.

Having obtained a copy a few days later, she passed it on to her husband with the following note:

I send you a poem of L[ad]y: M[ary] W[ortley]: to entertain you; it is very ill write, but my head is so bad I could not do it better and it is a secret at present so I could not employ anyone else to do it, tho I dare say the whol [town] will have it in a day or tow.⁵⁰

The belief that Montagu would find herself in difficulty as a result of the unauthorised release of “Monday” was unwarranted. Halsband recognises that neither Montagu nor her husband lost favour at court; on the contrary, Montagu continued her visits to the Princess, and it was not long after this incident that her husband was awarded the lucrative ambassadorship of Turkey.⁵¹ That Montagu would have liked to suppress this poem and was angry at its release, seems, likewise, an unwarranted belief. Undoubtedly, the poem is “not a little wicked,” and several important persons are satirised in it, but the Duchess is the only person to suggest that Montagu wished it to remain a secret. The fact is, she continued to circulate the poem, and to write more poems, after her recovery from small-pox, something we can hardly suppose to have been done in the face of royal displeasure, or to have been done by someone who wanted to keep their poems a secret.

A contemporary notice of the free circulation of some other poems from this series appears in the letters of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon. Brydges was a close friend of Dr. Arbuthnot and was connected through him with the circle of Pope and Montagu. On 26 January he wrote to Colonel Martin Bladen asking him:

Have you seen [Montagu’s] verses on y^e Dutchess of Roxburgh [= “Monday”] & her comparison by way of Eclogue between y^e pleasure of Basset & Love [= “Thursday. The Bassette Table”]. If you have not I’ll send them you, for they are very entertaining.⁵²

Brydges sent one of the poems to General Cadogan three weeks later; then on 20 February he sent the pair to Bladen with the comment: “I know you have but little time for such curiosities, but they are entertaining enough, & their being wrote by a Lady, renders them no less agreeable.”

By 26 March three of the poems (“Monday,” “Thursday,” and “Friday. The Toilette”) had circulated so widely that they fell into the hands of “the unspeakable” Edmund Curll, an opportunistic publisher who immediately printed the poems under the title *Court Poems*. Curll later explained that at some point in the preced-

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 247.

⁵² This, and the following quotation, are from *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, 204.

ing month Joseph Jacobs had obtained a copy of the three poems, which had been “at that time handed about.”⁵³ Jacobs, in turn, had passed them on to John Oldmixon, who, for a share in the profits of the sale, passed them on to be printed by Curll and two others.⁵⁴ The preface of this unauthorised edition attributes the poems, in a thinly disguised fashion, to either “a Lady of Quality,” Alexander Pope or John Gay.

Pope took it upon himself to revenge himself and his friends, on Curll, for this publication. He arranged a meeting at a tavern, whereat he slipped Curll an emetic, and then he went home to write *A Full and True Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison on the Body of Edmund Curll, Bookseller* (1716). Curll’s response to his purging was, from 5 April onward, to always print the *Court Poems* as a part of the works of Pope.⁵⁵ To further antagonise Pope—and Montagu—he expanded this edition with verse falsely attributed to either one or the other, or both, of them.⁵⁶ This meant that three of Montagu’s *Eclogues*, though ascribed to Pope and mixed with spurious verse, were almost continually in print during her lifetime.⁵⁷

What Montagu thought about this first, unauthorised, printing of her poems can only be surmised from the words and actions of others, as she was silent on the subject. In the *Full and True Account* Pope explains that, by attributing the *Court Poems* to a “Lady of Quality, Mr. Pope, or Mr. Gay,” Curll “escaped one Revenge [but] there were still two behind in reserve.”⁵⁸ What he means is that, by not printing Montagu’s name in full, Curll had escaped being punished on her behalf but he was still in danger of revenge from Pope and Gay. In the past it has been suggested that since the poems were written by Montagu, and since Pope was enamoured of her, then “his personal encounter with Curll [must have been] due to a chivalrous desire to protect the lady.”⁵⁹

Clearly, it is possible that Pope acted on Montagu’s behalf and that his statement was a lie, designed to protect her from any further publicity: but this is unlikely. Halsband dismisses this suggestion that Montagu’s anger was the moving force behind Pope’s action and ascribes it instead to Pope’s desire to protect Gay.

⁵³ Edmund Curll, from *The Curliad* (1729); quoted in Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling*, 156.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 156–57.

⁵⁵ The account of Curll’s response is taken, in part, from Norman Ault, “Introduction,” in *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, vol. 1, *The Earlier Works, 1711–1720*, ed. Norman Ault (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1936), xciv–cix.

⁵⁶ On 15 September was published “Court Poems. Part II.” Joint authorship is ascribed to one of the poems, *The Ramble*. The footnote was expanded in the edition of 6 August 1717 to read: “a fam’d Female Wit (the Lady W—y M—gue) assisted in the Translation.” Needless to say, Montagu did no such thing. Quoted in Ault, “Introduction,” ciii.

⁵⁷ See the notes to the editions in Reginald Harvey Griffith, *Alexander Pope: A Bibliography* (1922–27; repr. London: The Holland Press, 1962), referred to by the editor(s) in the section on “The Basset Table” in Alexander Pope, *Minor Poems*, ed. Norman Ault, completed by John Butt, The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope 6 (London: Methuen & Co., 1964), 416.

⁵⁸ “Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems,” 246.

⁵⁹ Ault, “Introduction,” xcvi.

His grounds for doing so are, in part, that Montagu was relatively unknown and was obviously in no danger at court, for, as mentioned above, the Princess had seen the poems long before Curll printed them and Montagu had suffered no ill consequences.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the publishing of these pieces endangered Gay's interest at court, as Pope stated at the time, and it was Gay who was in the greatest need of protection.⁶¹ The idea that the printing of these pieces angered Montagu cannot therefore be based on Pope's actions; and, in the absence of any other evidence, the belief that she was angered at all remains unfounded.

In the succeeding months, before Montagu left for the Continent, she completed the cycle of six poems and allowed Pope to copy them. Pope makes a passing reference to his transcript of the poems in November and again, but more specifically, in the following October (1716). He writes: "None but my own [eyes] have beheld these sacred Remains of yourself, and I should think it as great a wickedness to divulge them, as to Scatter abroad the Ashes of my Ancestors."⁶² By 1720, one and a half years after Montagu had returned, the situation had obviously changed, and we find that this same copy was being circulated among friends and acquaintances. From Pope's letter of 16 March it is apparent that Montagu had asked Lord Bathurst to return the manuscript of the *Eclogues* to him so that Pope could return it to her.⁶³ Pope was unable to carry out her behest, as he explains in his letter, though Montagu did, evidently, get the manuscript back.⁶⁴

The next that is heard of the *Eclogues* is in 1740. Montagu had just begun her twenty-two-year sojourn on the Continent when she met two young men on The Grand Tour: Horace Walpole and Joseph Spence. By this stage, it is evident, she had made out a fair-copy manuscript of all of the poetry that she was prepared to acknowledge as her own. From this transcript Walpole copied out the *Eclogues* and two other poems. On 2 October 1740 he mentions in a letter to West that he had "been reading her works, which she lends out in manuscript";⁶⁵ and later he noted that it was at this time that Montagu "allowed me to transcribe from a Volume of

⁶⁰ "Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems," 247.

⁶¹ Reported by Curll, see *Publishing and Bookselling*, 157.

⁶² Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1.439: to Montagu, mid-October 1717.

⁶³ Pope, *Correspondence*, 2.39: to Montagu, 16 March 1719/20.

⁶⁴ The manuscript remained with Montagu's family until 1935; it is now in the Arents Collection of the New York Public Library. "Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems," 240.

⁶⁵ Walpole, *Correspondence*, 13.234: to Richard West, 2 October 1740. Montagu's preparation of a fair-copy transcript of her poetry shows a strong desire to have this collection printed; certainly, the manuscript seems to contain all of the poetry she acknowledged. All of her more successful poems are present in this volume, and the few noticeable exceptions (namely, her attacks on Pope, Swift and others) appear to have been excluded "for reasons of prudence." See "Introduction," in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems and "Simplicity," a Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 172; for the owned and disowned poem on Griselda Murray see Robert Halsband, "Virtue in Danger: The Case of Griselda Murray," *History Today* 17 (1967): 700.

her poems in MS.”⁶⁶ Some months later, Spence copied some twenty-two of the poems from this manuscript, which could well represent all but two of the poems that it then contained;⁶⁷ and he mentioned in a letter to his mother that he had been looking at “papers written by her ladyship.”⁶⁸

Seven years after Walpole had made his transcript of the *Eclogues*, and without the knowledge of Montagu, he had them printed as “SIX TOWN ECLOGUES. With some other POEMS. By the Rt. Hon. L. M. W. M.”⁶⁹ In the following year the poems were reprinted in Robert Dodsley’s *Collection of Poems ... By Several Hands*, and thereafter they “were universally accessible” in this frequently reprinted and “definitive” anthology.⁷⁰

From this account it is clear that Montagu was quite willing to pass around, and allow copies to be made of, her verse. The number of manuscript copies of the *Eclogues* known to exist, or that we can reasonably suppose to have existed, amounts to an (approximate) total of sixteen (counting Montagu’s own copies).⁷¹ If we allow for the fact that something in the order of 75 per cent of all transcripts will have been lost,⁷² then the total number of copies made could have been as high as fifty. If we consider also that such transcripts were usually passed around a good deal, as the above quotations indicate, then the number of people who read the *Eclogues* in manuscript could well have totalled over one hundred.



⁶⁶ Annotation in Dodsley’s *Collection of Poems ... By Several Hands*, 1.84 [British Library, C.117.aa.16], quoted in Robert Halsband, “Walpole versus Lady Mary,” in *Horace Walpole, Writer, Politician, and Connoisseur*, ed. Warren Hunting Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 223.

⁶⁷ On comparing Spence’s manuscript with Montagu’s, Isobel Grundy concluded that, when Spence saw Montagu’s manuscript, only the first fifty-two pages had been filled and that Spence passed over only one poem of which he did not already possess a copy. Grundy does not explicitly state either the evidence or the assumptions that lie behind her argument, but they are easily established. By comparing Margaret Smith’s entries in the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* with the headnotes to the poems throughout Montagu, *Essays and Poems*, it is apparent that Grundy is wrong. There is a second poem, overlooked by Grundy, that Spence did not copy from the first fifty-two pages of Montagu’s manuscript, and there are a further nine poems that *may* have been written before Spence’s visit. The two poems that Spence passes over are: “Constantinople to —,” and “Epistle from Mrs Y[ounge] to her husband 1724.” See Margaret M. Smith, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, vol. 3, 1700–1800, part 2, *John Gay–Ambrose Philips* (London: Mansell, 1989), 187–233; Isobel Grundy, “Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce: An Unpublished Poem by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,” *Review of English Studies*, n. s., 23 (1972): “27” (actually, page 417).

⁶⁸ Joseph Spence, *Letters from the Grand Tour*, ed. Slava Klima (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1975), 361: to Mrs. Spence, 11 March 1741.

⁶⁹ *Six Town Eclogues. With some other Poems.* By the Rt. Hon. L. M. W. M. (London: M. Cooper, 1747).

⁷⁰ R. W. Chapman, “Dodsley’s Collection of Poems by Several Hands,” *Oxford Bibliographical Society: Proceedings and Papers* 3 (1933): 269.

⁷¹ Presumably one of Montagu’s fair-copy manuscripts (the manuscript by Pope or Sandon Hall, Harrowby MS 256) replaced the various copies that she had of her own poems: these copies I count as a single manuscript.

⁷² Harold Love suggested this attrition rate in conversation, June 1993.

Although no other example of the manuscript publication of Montagu's verse is as well documented as that of the *Eclogues*, there is sufficient evidence in Margaret Smith's entry for Montagu in the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (1989) to show that the free circulation of her poetry was common. Smith records the location of twelve transcripts of Montagu's poem "Written ex tempore on the Death of Mrs Bowes," two of which are autograph manuscripts, one in the hand of her daughter, Lady Bute; and there are a further nine copies in unidentified hands, one of which was copied for Spence, and two of which are taken from printed versions of the poem.⁷³ Similarly, Smith records ten transcripts of "Written ex tempore in Company in a Glass Window the first year I was marry'd" (two autograph, and eight others); nine of "An answer to a Lady Advising me to retirement" (four autograph, one by Lady Bute, and four others); and eight of the "Song, Why will Delia thus retire" (three autograph, and five others). Once again, these numbers need to be multiplied many times over if they are to represent the full circulation of each poem.

Margaret Ezell observes that fair-copy manuscripts are produced with the aim of preservation and with an audience in mind.⁷⁴ It is clear that Montagu allowed Spence, Walpole and others to take extensive transcripts of her poetry out of a desire to transmit her work to a wide audience. There is ample testimony to the effectiveness of this manuscript circulation in developing Montagu's reputation as a public poet. In 1728 only two poems that were known to be by Montagu, beside the three "Eclogues" above mentioned, had been printed;⁷⁵ and yet an anonymous writer described Montagu as "Renown'd for Wit, Beauty, and Politeness, long admir'd at Court; author of many pretty Poems scatter'd abroad in Manuscript; a Patroness of Men of Wit and Genius."⁷⁶ The "renown" that the anonymous writer refers to, we must assume, was spread through the "scattering abroad of manuscripts" and the public readings that accompanied it. It ought to be no surprise then to find that, when Joseph Spence asked Lady Walpole if she had a copy of Montagu's poem "A Lover," she replied that she did not but went on to pass an opinion on it anyway, despite the fact that the poem had not been printed and was not to be printed for another seven years.⁷⁷ That this should take place in Florence, with someone who had been resident there for some years, pushes home the point that manuscript circulation was a sufficient form of publication to build, as Love states, a considerable reputation.⁷⁸

⁷³ *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, 221.

⁷⁴ See Margaret J. M. Ezell, "The Myth of Judith Shakespeare: Creating the Canon of Women's Literature," *New Literary History* 21 (1990): 588.

⁷⁵ A further two had been anonymously printed but were not widely known to be by Montagu.

⁷⁶ From *Characters of the Times* (29 August 1728), quoted by Halsband, see *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 130.

⁷⁷ Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men: Collected from Conversation*, ed. J. M. Osborn. 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1.583 (\$1560).

⁷⁸ Margret Rolle, Lady Walpole, had been on the Continent since 1734 according to Osborn. See *Observations*, 2.582.

Many of the poems that circulated among Montagu's friends were copied and passed around to such an extent that it is no surprise that they found their way into print. The print publication of some other pieces was, however, no accident.



Montagu's most famous prose work, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, was circulated in manuscript and was copied, much in the manner of her poetry. However, unlike the poems in the preceding account, Montagu made clear efforts to have the *Embassy Letters* printed after her death. The fifty-two letters that make up this collection are loosely based on the actual letters that Montagu sent during the two years that she accompanied her husband on his embassy to Turkey.⁷⁹ Montagu kept copies of some of these letters and summaries of others, and it was from these, and the detailed journal that she kept while abroad, that she compiled the pseudo-letters that make up her travel-memoir. Having redistributed the topics, to avoid repetition, and removed the personal and homely aspects of the originals, Montagu shaped the collection to make it suitable for a wider public.⁸⁰ Further to this end, she continued to make autograph revisions to the fair-copy manuscript; and in 1724 Mary Astell provided her with an enthusiastic address "To the Reader," in which Astell refers to the future publication, and future readers, of the letters. She writes, in part:

The noble Author had the goodness to lend me her M.S. to satisfy my Curiosity in some enquirys I made concerning her Travels. And when I had it in my hands, how was it possible to part with it! I once had the Vanity to hope I might acquaint the Public that it ow'd this invaluable Treasure to my Importunities. But alas! The most Ingenious Author has condemn'd it to obscurity during her Life, and Conviction, as well as Deference, obliges me to yield to her Reasons. However, if these *Letters* appear hereafter, when I am in my Grave, let *this* attend them in testimony to Posterity, that among her contemporaries *one Woman*, at least, was just to her Merit.⁸¹

This manuscript of the *Embassy Letters* was obviously circulating among Montagu's

⁷⁹ This, and the following account, is based on Isobel Grundy, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," in *British Prose Writers, 1660–1800: First Series*, ed. Donald T. Sierbert (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1991), 243–45; Robert Halsband, "Introduction," in *The Complete Letters*, 1.xiv–xvii; Halsband, "Introduction," in *The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. R. Halsband (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 12.

⁸⁰ *The Complete Letters*, 1.xiv–xv; "Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century," 43–44.

⁸¹ "Appendix III: Mary Astell's Preface to the Embassy Letters," in *The Complete Letters*, 1.466–67. Astell explains how Montagu "had the goodness to lend me her M.S. to satisfy my Curiosity in some enquirys I made concerning her Travels"; and we must assume that the difficulty she expresses in bringing herself to part with the manuscript is reflected in the space between the dates she attached to the two parts of the address "To the Reader": "Dec. 18th 1724" and "May 31. 1725." See *ibid.*, 1.467, 468.

friends, and copies of this lengthy work were made.⁸² From the two letters that Mary Pembroke wrote on behalf of her husband Thomas, the eighth Earl of Pembroke, it is obvious that he had seen the manuscript of the *Embassy Letters* at about the same time as Astell.⁸³ The Earl, through his wife's letter, praises Montagu's "ingenious descriptions" and, being a collector of classical statues and medals, explains that he is particularly interested in her copy of a Greek inscription. Mary Pembroke writes: "my lord desires that your ladyship will be pleased to send him [the manuscript] again by the bearer, that he may better understand it [the inscription] than by the one [copy?] he has; care will be taken to return it safe again."⁸⁴ In the next letter it is obvious that the manuscript has been passed on, as requested, and further communication has taken place; so that we find the Pembrokes asking permission to wait on Montagu to discuss the inscription further.

Two other transcripts of the *Embassy Letters* survive. One of these, known as the "Molesworth copy," is referred to in 1803 by James Dallaway in the Memoir he attached to his edition of Montagu's *Works*.⁸⁵ He mentions that a transcript, not autograph, had been given to Mr. Molesworth by Montagu but that it was "now" in the possession of the Marquis of Bute.⁸⁶ The inscription on this transcript states that it is "Faithfully transcribed from her original Copy, at her Ladyship's desire."⁸⁷ Why Montagu asked for the transcript to be made, and whether—as R. Brimley Johnson claims—this copy "was given to Mr. Molesworth for circulation among his private friends," is unclear, because there is little reliable evidence and commentators are generally uninterested in the matter.⁸⁸ The other transcript, which was used as the printer's copy for the first edition, will be discussed below.⁸⁹

Montagu consistently expressed her desire to have the *Embassy Letters* printed but for them to be printed *after* her death. Astell refers to this determination to "condemn the letters to obscurity during her Life"; and in 1726, at about the same time that both Astell and Pembroke had borrowed the manuscript of the *Embassy Letters*, Montagu shows, in a letter to her sister, that the thought of publication was on her mind:

⁸² *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, 225: MoM 292; Sandon Hall, Harrowby MSS 253–54.

⁸³ The letters are printed in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Lord Wharnccliffe, 2nd ed., revised, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), 2.146–49, dated by Halsband as "1725?" See *The Complete Letters*, 1.418 n3.

⁸⁴ *The Letters and Works*, 2.146–47.

⁸⁵ *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, 196; Sandon Hall, Harrowby MS 259.

⁸⁶ [James Dallaway], "Memoir," in *The Letters and Works*, 1.xx.

⁸⁷ Quoted by Smith, see *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, 196.

⁸⁸ R. Brimley Johnson, "Introduction," in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Letters from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. R. Brimley Johnson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1906), xii. This statement, as with the rest of Johnson's Introduction, seems to be based on the work of Moy Thomas, editor of the 1861 edition of the *Letters and Works* of Montagu.

⁸⁹ *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, 225: MoM 293; Swiss Cottage Library, Camden.

The last pleasure that fell in my way was Madam Sevigny's Letters; very pretty they are, but I assert without the least vanity that mine will be full as entertaining 40 years hence. I advise you therefore to put none of 'em to the use of Waste paper.⁹⁰

Walpole reports, in a letter to Horace Mann, that "at her death [Montagu] expressed great anxiety to have them [the *Embassy Letters*] published";⁹¹ and this is consistent with her decision to leave her autograph copy in the hands of Benjamin Sowden, minister of the English Church in Rotterdam, before returning to England: a gift that, according to Montagu's granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, clearly "showed that it was her wish that they should eventually be published."⁹²

There can be little doubt that the reason why Montagu left this manuscript with Sowden was to ensure that it was printed. If she had wanted her daughter to inherit the *Embassy Letters*, along with the rest of her possessions, she would not have given them to Sowden in this way.⁹³ She obviously knew the extent of her daughter's conservatism well enough to fear that the *Embassy Letters* would never be printed if she did not see to it herself, a fear that was, unfortunately, justified by the fate that her life-long journal suffered in the hands of her daughter: incineration.⁹⁴ The inscription on the manuscript blandly states that: "These 2 Volumes are given to the R[everen]d Benjamin Sowden, minister at Rotterdam, to be dispos'd of as he thinks proper. This is the will and design of M. Wortley Montagu, Dec. 11, 1761."⁹⁵ That there was a verbal agreement to have the two volumes printed is clear, both from Montagu's previously stated wishes and from this cautious man's stated intention of publishing the *Embassy Letters* after Montagu's death.⁹⁶

The origin of the transcript that was used as the printer's copy for the first edition is obscure. The story Dallaway gives, and which George Ashby supports, is that the transcript was taken from Sowden's manuscript, by stealth. He explains that two "gentlemen" came to look at the *Embassy Letters* and, having managed to have Sowden called out of the room, disappeared with the manuscript. The men returned with the manuscript the next day, made their apologies, and departed, having apparently copied it overnight at top speed.⁹⁷ Sowden's daughter dismisses this story as "an idle fabrication, as void of foundation, as of probability." She claims

⁹⁰ *The Complete Letters*, 2.66: to Lady Mar, June 1726. "Does not her ladyship seem to anticipate publication in this extract?" comments James Dallaway in a footnote that includes this quote. "Memoir," in *The Letters and Works*, 1.lx.

⁹¹ Walpole, *Correspondence*, 22.84: to Horace Mann, 3 October 1762.

⁹² Lady Louisa Stuart, "Biographical Anecdotes of Lady M. W. Montagu," in *Essays and Poems*, 33.

⁹³ "Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century," 49.

⁹⁴ "Biographical Anecdotes," 18.

⁹⁵ Halsband, "Introduction," in *The Complete Letters*, 1.xvii.

⁹⁶ Hannah Sowden, "Statement of Facts Respecting the First Publication of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Letters," *The Edinburgh Review* 7 (1804), 254–56.

⁹⁷ "Memoir," in *The Letters and Works*, 1.xix–xx; [George Ashby], *Gentleman's Magazine* 79 (1809): "212" (actually, page 204).

that it had been a perpetual mystery to her father how the *Embassy Letters* came to be printed and relates how she had heard that the printer's transcript had been taken by stealth after the manuscript was in the hands of Lady Bute.⁹⁸

Interesting as it is, the controversy over the way in which the *Letters* came to be printed, and how the printer's transcript was taken, is less important than the facts already stated: namely, that the *Embassy Letters* manuscript was a fair-copy transcript, edited and prepared for publication; that for almost forty years it was Montagu's stated desire to have the letters printed; and that she left the manuscript with Sowden for this purpose.



Montagu did not just orchestrate the posthumous publication of her poetry and prose, but was actively involved in the print publication of some of her works while she was living in England. Though the evidence for it is scarcer than that for manuscript publication, and despite the fact that Montagu consistently denied ever having had any of her work printed, it is clear that she was directly responsible for the printing of her own political magazine, and a number of major poems.

In March 1733 Montagu entered, anonymously, into public poetic warfare with Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift.⁹⁹ In the first instance she wrote, in collaboration with Lord Hervey, *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* (1733). This poem, written, as the title suggests, in response to Pope's *First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated* (1733), appeared in two near-identical editions only three weeks after Pope's satire. In the second instance Montagu wrote, in reply to Swift's "The Lady's Dressing-Room," "The Dean's Provocation for Writing the Lady's Dressing-Room"; however, this poem did not appear until two years after Swift's. The story behind these two poems is worth investigating.

As Halsband notes, no documentary evidence survives that can prove that Montagu had any part in the *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of ... Horace*, yet it is likely that she was responsible for it. The edition of this poem printed by Anne Dodd was subscribed "By a Lady," and "few readers," Halsband writes, "could have been ignorant of the lady's identity."¹⁰⁰ The poem was immediately, and universally, ascribed to Montagu, and editors of the works of both Hervey and Montagu have consistently decided in her favour on stylistic grounds.¹⁰¹ The denial that Montagu

⁹⁸ "Statement of Facts," 255–56.

⁹⁹ The poems were published on 8 March 1733 and in February 1734. See *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 142; Robert Halsband, "The Lady's Dressing Room' Explicated by a Contemporary," in *The Augustan Milieu: Essays Presented to Louis A. Landa*, ed. Henry K. Miller et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 226.

¹⁰⁰ "Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century," 42.

¹⁰¹ A paraphrase of Halsband, see *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 143; Isobel Grundy, "'Verses

sent in a letter to John Arbuthnot, but intended for Pope, can safely be ignored, according to Grundy, “as a desperate defensive stroke in her mortal combat with Pope”;¹⁰² indeed, “a not-so-desperate offensive stroke” seems to better describe the keen, polished and cutting comments that precede her “denial,” but the point remains that the denial is not to be taken at face value.

Commentators on this poem commonly ascribe the authorial role to Montagu and suggest that Hervey was more involved in the satire’s publication than its composition,¹⁰³ but Montagu appears to have an equally strong claim to be the print publisher of the *Verses*. Hervey’s draft of a new title page and of an address “To the Reader,” as well as his revisions for the text for a never-to-appear second edition, all survive. This, and the indications that he had played a minor role in the writing of the poem, is the basis of his claim to be the publisher of it. The Dodd edition of the poem, however, shows evidence of revision by Montagu;¹⁰⁴ and the fact that the edition that shows signs of authorial revision is the one that all but identifies Montagu as the author also suggests that she was directly involved in organising the printing of it. Moreover, the edition that was actually printed is the one with which Montagu is connected, while Hervey’s edition remained in manuscript.

Although Grundy considers the possibility that the *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of ... Horace* “got printed through the unreliability of someone who saw them in manuscript”—and four manuscripts survive—Halsband’s belief that the poem was intentionally printed is more convincing.¹⁰⁵ The evidence of revision by Montagu seems to rule out the possibility that this poem was an accidental printing; and Hervey’s actions are more consistent with the idea of intentional publishing. Furthermore, although the exact circumstances of publication of both “The Dean’s Provocation for Writing the Lady’s Dressing-Room” and the *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of ... Horace* are unknown, to Halsband it seems probable that Montagu arranged for it: “For,” he writes, “unlike the other replies, which are wretchedly printed in flimsy little pamphlets, hers is a stately folio set in handsome type,” and this suggests that the printing of the poems was well paid for.¹⁰⁶

The most unambiguous example of Montagu’s involvement in print publishing is the case of her magazine *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* (1737–38). Conducted anonymously, this political periodical was designed to be an answer to the anti-

Address’d to the Imitator of Horace’: A Skirmish between Pope and Some Persons of Rank and Fortune,” *Studies in Bibliography* 30 (1977): 96–119. James McLaverty has argued—unconvincingly, I believe—that Pope was responsible for the publication. See James McLaverty, “Of which being publick the publick judge’: Pope and the Publication of *Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace*,” *Studies in Bibliography* 51 (1998): 96–119.

¹⁰² “Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace,” 98.

¹⁰³ Carol Barrash, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,” in *Eighteenth Century British Poets: First Series*, ed. John Sitter (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1990), 152.

¹⁰⁴ “Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace,” 104.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰⁶ “The Lady’s Dressing Room’ Explicated by a Contemporary,” 227.

Walpole paper *Common-Sense* (1737), though Montagu claimed that its purpose was not partisan; rather, it was to expose social evils wherever they were, and in its pages Montagu freely introduced her own general political concerns.

In the fifth number of the paper Montagu wrote a semi-fictitious narrative of the difficulties she encountered in having the paper printed, her dealings with different printers, their dissatisfaction at the lack of defamatory comments in her essays, and how she had to blot out the printer's bawdy additions in "the few Copys I sent to my Friends."¹⁰⁷ The extent of the fiction in this narrative is difficult to determine. Montagu claims to have changed printers three times, but all issues were printed by James Roberts. She complains of the changes made to her essays, and this complaint is justified by the differences between her drafts and the printed copies; and she tells us that she sent blotted copies to her friends, and we find that there is some evidence that Montagu distributed copies in this way.¹⁰⁸ Clearly, then, there is *some* truth in her story, and the narrative certainly gives the impression of being based on first-hand experience.

Montagu wanted to keep her responsibility for the paper a secret, and she was so successful in doing so that her authorship was not recognised until 1947.¹⁰⁹ Her success in concealing this excursion into the popular media may be due to her adoption of a male persona or to the mildness of her polemic and the shortness of the paper's existence, any of which may have limited public curiosity.¹¹⁰ Whatever the cause, the paper was reasonably successful, a third of its essays being reprinted in other periodicals, and Montagu was obviously not ashamed of her journalism: not only did she keep her autograph drafts of six of the essays, but she twice identifies herself as the author on the printed copies that she retained. The separate copy of her essay on feminism, the sixth number, she marked "Wrote by me. M.W.M.," and on a batch of the printed issues she wrote "All these wrote by me M.W.M."



Brought together like this, the scattered evidence of Montagu's actions clearly indicates a cohesive interest in what we may call self-publishing. In producing copies of her works for others (authorial publication), in making her works available for others to copy (user publication), in orchestrating the printing of some works, and supervising the printing of others, Montagu has shown, despite her apparent denials and elisions, her serious involvement in publishing in print and manuscript. As Hobby's comments on Katherine Philips suggest, it would be a mistake to accept the public image projected by women writers such as Montagu, an image that is

¹⁰⁷ Montagu, *The Nonsense of Common-Sense*, no. 5, in *Essays and Poems*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ In a note addressed to her printer she calls for half a dozen copies of the paper to be sent to her, along with the originals. *The Complete Letters*, 2.114: to James Roberts, ca. 14 December 1737.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* See also the headnote to *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* in *Essays and Poems*, 105.

¹¹⁰ These, and the following details, are from *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 165 and 171.

the product of a particular set of restraints that women faced in a particular period. The ambivalent comments that Montagu made in her letters to her daughter on writing, printing and publishing must be balanced against the wealth of evidence for Montagu's publishing activities in manuscript and print.

Nevertheless, feminist literary critics have represented Montagu's activities as a private affair, à la "The Matchless Orinda."¹¹¹ Spender comments on *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* that Montagu "found that producing a *public* political periodical is a considerably different activity from writing verse and letters to be circulated *privately* among one's friends."¹¹² Elizabeth Joyce writes that Montagu's "compositions took the form of verses and essays inscribed in private notebooks, and responses to topical events, for all of which the proposed audience consisted of close associates."¹¹³ Katherine Rogers claims that Montagu wrote "primarily for herself and her friends," meaning thereby intimate friends; and elsewhere she writes that, motivated by a desire for self-expression, Montagu wrote only in "personal, private genres."¹¹⁴ Even Isobel Grundy, the most important Montagu scholar of recent decades, dismisses her *Romance Writings* as having been written "with no prospect of an audience."¹¹⁵

Margaret Ezell's study of the "anthologising" of women writers makes it clear that Virginia Woolf's representation of early women writers in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is largely responsible for this misrepresentation among feminist scholars. Woolf dismissed the unpaid writing of women as "frivolous" and insignificant in comparison to paid writing and offered, instead, an encomium on Aphra Behn as the first professional woman writer.¹¹⁶ By posing such questions as "why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature, when every other man, it seemed, was capable of a song or a sonnet,"¹¹⁷ she focused the attention of feminist critics on the "means of repression" rather than the "modes of production."¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Justice, "Introduction," 5–6.

¹¹² Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 53; the emphasis is Spender's.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Joyce, "Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley," in *A Dictionary of British Women Writers*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Routledge, 1989), 479.

¹¹⁴ Katherine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 93, 85.

¹¹⁵ Grundy, "Introduction," xiii, contradicting her earlier discussion of the audience for the surviving fictions (ibid., x–xi: the "readers must have included [names four readers] and others with whom Lady Mary was only a few years later exchanging literary comment, books and unpublished manuscripts").

¹¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949), 98.

¹¹⁷ *A Room of One's Own*, 62. Though Woolf is here referring to Elizabethan times, this comment captures the spirit of her argument as a whole.

¹¹⁸ "Thus, to summarize the position on early women writers as presented in the existing anthologies, women, having 'neither the experience of public life nor the expectation of an audience that would foster creativity,' were effectively, if not totally silenced, then left isolated from those 'literary communities comparable to the loosely organized groups of male writers who supported and encouraged the works of artists like Marlowe.' The question, therefore, which the scholar and student alike are invited to

The print-orientation of Woolf and her followers is largely responsible for the view of early women writers “as having been historically defined through silence or absence.”¹¹⁹ Ezell argues that

the emphasis on [print] publication in the context of the history of English literature is neither profitable nor accurate in determining the canon of women’s literature. The anachronistic sense of the importance of *print* ignores the fact that well through the Restoration and early eighteenth century, manuscript circulation, *not* print, was the standard, traditional form of intellectual exchange for men *and* women. The twentieth century’s attitudes towards manuscript works has resulted in a “tradition” of English literature by women which is distorting and which marginalizes a significant portion of women’s literary lives in earlier periods.¹²⁰

Ezell explains that the traditional dismissal of these works in manuscript is based on the assumption that they are incomplete or unfinished, that they are private, or that they are written—as Woolf has it—by “solitary great ladies . . . without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone.”¹²¹ Ezell answers the traditional objections by arguing that these works were highly finished pieces written for a definite, if not general, public, and that they were circulated for the entertainment, admiration and criticism of this public.

The relevance of these arguments to the case of Montagu is clear. Montagu’s concern for the textual purity of her work and the pride she took in her writing both argue that she considered her writings to be finished. On one occasion, when she showed Pope a copy of some of her verses and he wished to make alterations, she stopped him with these words: “No, Pope, no touching! for then, whatever is good for any thing will pass for yours, and the rest for mine.”¹²² The inscription on the cover of her volume of poetry and prose shows a similar pride: “all the verses & Prose in this Book were wrote by me, without ye assistance of one Line from any other.”¹²³ Montagu’s comments on the “mortification” of seeing things that she wrote “mangle’d and falsify’d,” or printed under the names of others, have already been quoted.¹²⁴ When she encountered some of her “mangle’d” poetry in Dodsley’s *A Collection of Poems* she annotated the text in many places, correcting the textual corruptions in her poems to bring them into line with her manuscript readings.¹²⁵

solve is *why*, and the answers focus on the means of repression, not the modes of production.” “The Myth of Judith Shakespeare,” 582.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 587.

¹²¹ Ibid.; *A Room of One’s Own*, 95.

¹²² This anecdote is reported by Pope’s friend Richardson the younger in Alexander Pope, *Works*, ed. Joseph Warton (London, 1797), 2.332, quoted in “Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems,” 241.

¹²³ Quoted by Smith, see *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, 195.

¹²⁴ *The Complete Letters*, 3.38–39: to Lady Bute, 10 October 1753.

¹²⁵ Isobel Grundy, “The Politics of Female Authorship,” *The Book Collector* 31 (1982): 19–37, esp. 32.

The manuscripts that Montagu published are in no sense incomplete or unfinished. The poetry that Montagu showed Pope, Walpole, Spence and others and *The Turkish Embassy Letters* that she showed Astell and the Pembrokes and that she gave to Sowden were fair-copy manuscripts. The copy of the *Eclogues* that Pope made, and that was circulated among his and Montagu's friends, was written with preservation in mind. Pope describes the poems as lying "inclosed in a monument of Red Turkey, written in my fairest hand; the gilded leaves are opened with no less veneration than the pages of the Sybils."¹²⁶ Even Montagu's juvenilia—described by Grundy as "family coterie writing"¹²⁷—was carefully transcribed by her into a leather-bound volume, corrected, and presented for print, with a title page, imprint and preface.¹²⁸ Ezell's statement, that fair-copy manuscripts are produced with an audience or public in mind, is obviously applicable to these manuscripts.¹²⁹

Much of Montagu's verse is by its very nature public: it deals with public figures and with public events. Also, the forms in which Montagu wrote—satires, ballads and essays—are all public forms. As Grundy observes, "Some of her best verse grew out of the need to preach or to confute."¹³⁰ When Montagu wrote her *Eclogues* she "shared a community of clever, paradoxical, wit" with Pope and Gay, and it was partly as a result of their pastime of "casual versifying" that this cycle of poems was written.¹³¹ Furthermore, as we have seen, Montagu displayed little reluctance to show her work to others, and she developed a wide public reputation through the circulation of her manuscripts.

Love comments on user publication that this apparently structureless activity tends to reveal patterns of copying which coincide with, and help to define, social groupings or "scribal communities."¹³² A glance at the contents list of Montagu's commonplace books gives some indication of the scribal community that she was a part of. Poems by Astell, Pope, Gay, Henry Fielding, Anne Finch, Edward Young, Matthew Prior, Congreve, and Abbé Conti feature in her collection, along with pieces by about fifty others. Not listed, but also among Montagu's readers, were

¹²⁶ Pope, *Correspondence*, 1.439: to Montagu, mid-October 1717.

¹²⁷ "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her Daughter," 184. Grundy invokes the secluded "great ladies" that Woolf sees as a "dead end for the growth of women's writing" in the following paragraph (*ibid.*).

¹²⁸ Grundy, "Introduction," x, xii, contradicting the blanket statement she makes in her "Textual Note" that Montagu "would have relied on a printer to polish or supply punctuation. Printers produced authorized versions." Grundy, "Textual Note," in *Romance Writings*, xxvii. Clearly, Montagu was here producing her own "authorized version" (that is, a fair-copy manuscript). The article by Thomas E. Kinsella that Grundy cites to support her claim establishes only that James Boswell expected his printer to turn his rough and cramped manuscript copy into clean printed proofs, which Boswell then carefully—if inconsistently—punctuated as necessary. See Thomas E. Kinsella, "The Conventions of Authenticity: Boswell's Revision of Dialogue in *The Life of Johnson*," *The Age of Johnson* 6 (1994): 249–52, esp. 252, where Boswell is quoted: "it is *my duty* to point." The emphasis is Boswell's.

¹²⁹ "The Myth of Judith Shakespeare," 588.

¹³⁰ "Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce," 422.

¹³¹ "Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems," 240–41.

¹³² "Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England," 146.

Addison, Arbuthnot, Lord Bathurst, Walpole, Spence and others. It was through just such a community that Montagu sought “public” recognition, for, like Philips, “The ‘public’ that she was interested in reaching was the coterie of court and leading poets, not the wider world.”¹³³ With readers of this calibre, including the period’s leading *literati*, the manuscript publications of Montagu cannot be dismissed as being either private or unpolished, without “evidence or criticism.”

When writing to Sir James Steuart, Montagu describes herself in terms that reinforce this image of her as a public, published, writer. At one time, after apologising to Lady Frances Steuart for her long letter, she writes: “As to you, Sir, I make no excuses; you are bound to have indulgence from me as a sister of the quill. I have heard Mr. Addison say he always listened to poets with patience, to keep up the dignity of the fraternity.”¹³⁴ A month later she writes: “I will not ask pardon for this [Latin] quotation; it is God’s mercy I did not put it into English: when one is haunted (as I am) by the Dæmon of Poesie, it must come out in one shape or another.”¹³⁵ Another month later and Montagu is joking about the fact that she has been dispossessed “of the real Devils who haunted me; I mean the 9 Muses.”¹³⁶

The care that Montagu took to define and defend her actions to her conservative daughter, in terms of *writing* versus *authorship*, gives some indication of how careful women of her period needed to be in order to avoid the appearance of intruding on the “rights of men.” Montagu’s response to the restrictions placed on the public utterances of women was to adopt the pose of a dilettante, to circulate her writings freely, but to pretend that this was a harmless, if frivolous, amusement for herself and her friends. By publishing her work in this way she avoided the criticism that she would have otherwise incurred, and yet she achieved a wide circulation for her writings and developed a considerable reputation.

By concentrating on professional print publication as a mark of achievement, Woolf and her followers have contributed to the misconception that manuscript circulation is an essentially private affair. That the “pecuniary bias” of such a view is anachronistic is established by the writings of Hobby, Ezell, Love, and Halsband. Furthermore, this view undervalues the importance of manuscript publication as a “mode of production” for women writers, and it undervalues the seriousness with which women such as Montagu took these writings. As Halsband writes, “[Montagu] did not write for money, but neither did she write ‘without audience or criticism.’ She applied herself to the writer’s craft with an intensity and dedication that should have won Mrs. Woolf’s admiration.”¹³⁷

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¹³³ *Virtue of Necessity*, 129.

¹³⁴ Montagu, *The Complete Letters*, 3.173: to Sir James Steuart, 5 September 1758.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.183: to Sir James Steuart, 18 October 1758.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.190: to Sir James Steuart, 27 November 1758.

¹³⁷ “Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” 33, 34.