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*“A spectacle which would make a hundred  
painters drop their brushes in astonishment”:  
In the Hamam with Lady Mary Wortley  
Montagu, Edmondo de Amicis, Jean-Auguste  
Dominique Ingres, and Daniel Chodowiecki*

**Abstract:** Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a British aristocrat sojourning across Europe in the 18th century, continues to captivate generations of readers and scholars alike. At once an emblem of the British imperial and colonial apparatus at the height of its powers, and an antithesis of the ideals and convictions of her times, with her *Turkish Embassy Letters* she has earned herself a secured place both within the tradition of travel writing, and in the broader realm of intercultural encounters.

In the present article I offer a reading of Lady Mary’s Turkish exploits from the perspective of a dialogue *inter artes*. Through investigations of literary and artistic works by Edmondo de Amicis, Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, and Daniel Chodowiecki, I intend to bring to light a range of responses to Lady Mary, explicit and indirect, in which her *Turkish Embassy Letters* functions as a reference point, and she herself assumes the role of a “ghostly” presence tangible in the fabrics of the analysed texts of culture. Employing a backward movement, or reverse chronology, in the exploration of the selected works, I endeavour to explore the instances of peculiar dialogues enacted between various texts, regardless of temporal, spatial or social spaces separating them, with the view to unravelling the projections and conjectures at work in the gradual construction of the mutual self-image of West vis-à-vis East and vice versa.

**Keywords:** travel narratives, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Edmondo de Amicis, Ottoman empire, Orientalist painting

Strong-minded, self-confident, assertive, determined — these are just a few among the list of character traits with which to describe Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She could also easily be characterized as an “eccentric,” with her strong opinions, brisk temper and unabashed spirit; finally, she was British and representative of the upper classes of her times, embodiment and expression, too, of the then political and

cultural climes and agendas. Travelling in the 18th century, she could well be seen as portraying the role of women in the British imperial and colonial apparatus at its prime. At the same time, however, she could also come across as an antithesis of the ideals and convictions of her times. Nevertheless, she struck a colourful figure born and bred in the England of the Enlightenment who, curious and perceptive, has proven influential and inspirational for representatives of generations to come, female and male alike.

It is worthwhile to consider Lady Mary and her heritage specifically in the context of dialogue *inter artes*. Since its publication around 1763, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* — apart from sparking continuous interest among temporally-dispersed readers of various motivations, agendas, and purposes — has also proven its significance in initiating the sort of inter-disciplinary dialogue mentioned above. By focusing on a selection of literary works and artistic pieces — in the present paper I endeavour to explore the particular junctions within the web of cross-dependent texts of culture at which Lady Mary Wortley Montagu might be seen as assuming the role of a pulsating “beacon” irradiating the investigated material, and a “ghostly” presence at the same time, haunting the imaginary spaces of each of the texts under scrutiny, being at once tangible yet transparent, eloquent yet unobtrusive.

The article will aim to unravel a range of references to Lady Mary, both explicit and direct, with the main objective being to illuminate and explore patterns through which various texts of culture enter complex dialogues with one another, regardless of spatial, temporal and social distances between them.

Although inter- and metatextuality have gained the greatest popularity only with the dawning of the postmodern era, when experiments with form and structure have encouraged artists to seek for and pursue innovative solutions in their works, cross-referencing and metafictionalizing have long been employed in creative acts of various proveniences, and for various purposes. When it comes to travel writing, “intertextuality” in many cases proves inevitable, especially once certain destinations become particularly “fashionable” and in demand. Turkey has experienced continuous waves of popularity, owing at least part of the attention to the long-standing traditions of Orientalist discourses and various “fashions” for all things *Turque*; with some unavoidable ebbs and flows it has remained a land of special interest to travellers as well as artists writers, and musicians, all desirous of capturing the “perfect” moment, scene, landscape. Naturally, of a particularly high value were the descriptions of that very first impression imprinted in the visitor’s mind upon such memorable occasions as entering the city of Constantinople/Stamboul/Istanbul — for Lady Mary on April 1, 1717, it meant entering “a new world” (Wortley Montagu 2012: 57) which offered a new sensation with every turn of the corner, an experience in many respects still valid today, and which foreshadowed the dawn of probably one of the most important periods in her life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Although today, thanks to the benefits granted by retrospective vision, it appears safe to assert that the passion for “all things Turkish,” even if these were built predominantly on imaginations

Surely the occasion yielded similar emotions for Edmondo De Amicis arriving in Constantinople in 1874, some 150 years after Lady Mary’s sojourn, fully aware of the challenges posed by attempting to share what he saw and felt at the moment, at the same time quite confident in the power of the display:

Kings, princes, potentates, all you who are blessed with wealth and good fortune, how I pitied you: at that moment my place on the ship’s deck was worth all your treasures put together. I wouldn’t have sold the view I saw for an empire ... Here is the city of Constantinople! Endless, sublime, superb! The glory of creation and of the human race! So such beauty had not been a dream after all! (De Amicis 2013: 12)

Power of display notwithstanding, Amicis was soon confronted with yet another daunting task:

And now, poor wretch, try to describe, to profane with your words that divine vision! Who would dare to describe Constantinople? Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Gautier — all mere stammering! And yet images and words rush to my mind and flow from my pen. I see, I speak, I write, all at once, with no hope of success but in a drunken haze of delight. (De Amicis, 12)

Despite his own display — that of modesty, he definitely rose to the challenge and produced a powerful illustration of his first sighting of Constantinople. Still, the truly “high stakes” were involved in yet another task, the advanced standards of which had been introduced by Lady Mary herself — dispensing the “unbiased” knowledge on such nearly “mythical” creatures as the Turkish women that Amicis had set his designs on. It is also at this junction in his account of Constantinople that he makes an explicit reference to Lady Mary and her expertise on the issue of Turkish women. A casual enough gesture — a writer acknowledging the work and know-how of a fellow crafts(wo)man — it does bear quite significant implications. That Amicis makes this gesture in the first place signals that he deemed Lady Mary important enough to include her in his own account; moreover, his neutral tone in making the reference suggests that he might actually have held her in higher esteem than he did the “giants” of French literature and politics, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Gautier, whose *oeuvre* he dismisses swiftly with a flippant, to say the least, remark — “mere stammering!” (De Amicis, 12). This is, however, as far as he would go with the already rather reluctant praise of Lady Mary — despite the acknowledgement, Amicis ultimately proceeds to undermine her observations, not to say — compromise them altogether in that he takes issue with her opinion on the extremity of Turkish women’s freedom, as if “reverting to type” and belittling Lady Mary’s capacities of critical examination — was she not, after all, a woman bound to err in her judgements? The result of the entire exertion seems to be saying that, though good enough for a starting point to an investigation, Lady Mary and her views only provide the material to be explored, and a material in need

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and stereotypes was by no means a singular phenomenon in 18th-century Europe. For an exhaustive study of European fascinations with Turkish culture, the reader might wish to refer to Haydn Williams’s 2014 work *Turquerie: An Eighteenth-Century European Fantasy*.

of a “corrigendum” supplied by Amicis aplenty in the ensuing polemics which, interestingly, does not really clarify the nature of Lady Mary’s inaccuracy in her observations:

They are free; it is a truth which is obvious to the visitor almost as soon as he arrives. It is an exaggeration to say, like Lady Montagu, that they are freer than European women, but whoever has been in Constantinople will laugh when he hears them spoken of as “slaves” ... To see a Turk in the streets of Constantinople in the company ... of a woman — not arm in arm, but just walking by her side or stopping to talk to her — even if they carried placards round their necks declaring they were man and wife, would seem to everyone the most unheard-of thing, an act of unbelievable impudence ... In this sense, Turkish women enjoy greater freedom than their European counterparts, and their delight in their liberty is indescribable; they rush into noise, crowds, light, open air with wild excitement, while in their homes they only ever see one man, and live behind grated windows and in cloistered gardens. They run about the city with the joy of a liberated prisoner. It is amusing to follow one of them from a distance to see how she manages to eke out and refine the pleasures of gadding about. (De Amicis, 140)

The aspects of Turkish women’s freedom that are greater than among their European counterparts, in Amicis’ observations, consist in being relieved of their husbands when out “gadding about.” Moreover, this “gadding about” is so unimportant and silly that, really, no wonder the men do not wish to be bothered with the duty of accompanying their wives while they pursue their insubstantial fancies, Amicis seems to be saying, through this managing, too, to denigrate the Turkish ladies, supposedly to the advantage of European women, but in consequence succeeding in compromising the female sex altogether, depicting its representatives as creatures driven by emotions solely, with no rational mind to come to their aid. The informed reader, however, familiar with Lady Mary and her *Letters*, would surely become alerted here to the sweeping oversimplifications and reductionisms that he indulges in. Amicis’ rather patronising views on women as well as on the very culture and the peoples of the country which had filled him with such awe, resurface at several points in his account, to the effect, perhaps, of revealing Amicis himself to be deeply implicated in the commonly accepted notions and ideas of the times.

In fact, he admits the presence of at least some vicariousness in a passage illustrating the dress of Turkish women which, despite all its vivacity and colourfulness, is strewn with verbs such as “imagine” or “picture.” The readers are thus invited to follow the author in what might actually be a flight of fancy inspired by the *imagined* vision of the beauty and originality of Turkish women’s fashion, further problematised by the circumstances of its re/creator in this instance — white European male of notable background, careful upbringing and distinguished manners. His wonder and admiration at Turkish mores and wonders is continually seasoned with at times quite severe criticism which, however, is not of the type that could be dismissed out of hand, as would be the only right approach had it stemmed from a narrowness of the mind or an incapacity to fathom difference when confronted with it. Certain aspects of Amicis’ critique actually resemble the beliefs professed by Western first-wave feminists — commenting on the Turkish social system and

marital law and the actual position of women within this machinery, he observes with mounting indignation:

Her children's interests are injured, her own self-respect is wounded ... It may be said that Turkish women know that the same things happen to European women: true, but they also know that a European woman is not obliged by civil and religious law to respect and live in amity with the woman who poisons her life, and that she has at least the consolation of being regarded as a victim, as well as having many ways of vindicating and alleviating her position, without her husband being able to say, like the Turk: "I have the right to love a hundred women, but it is your duty to love me alone." (De Amicis, 148)

It is here that Amicis eventually gives full force to his polemics with Lady Mary on the issue of women's freedom, and — it has to be admitted — he does so with accuracy and tactfulness. The passage develops cleverly, relying more on the knowledge that was actually available to Amicis — i.e. about the liberties and privileges of Turkish men — which he then swiftly applies to a characteristics of the women's status and their resultant predicament, arranging the entire repartee, as it were, in a series of hypotheses and counter-arguments to them, exposing, too, a certain naïveté of Lady Mary's perhaps a bit too happy-go-lucky reading of harem life. His survey and assessment of the situation of a harem woman remains quite radical throughout but, despite the stigmatizing tone with which he frequently speaks of the women, it is not at them that he directs his criticism. Rather, he attacks the men-introduced and men-operated social system that produces them, without sparing but a sparsest thought to questions of women's education, or proper diversions to occupy them. The comparison ultimately venerates and favours European laws and outlooks, and the sort of "moral spine" developed in consequence: "Finally what right have these men who are the most addicted on earth to the *nefanda voluptas* to preach to us of morality?" (De Amicis, 150).

It is one thing, however, to persecute the overindulgence in the "unspeakable pleasures;" it is quite another to denounce them altogether, though. Since the pleasures might be indulged in vicariously, too, Amicis evidently saw no reason to vilify them. Because vicarious indeed must have been his involvement with the famed Turkish baths, a mythologised sanctuary of beauty, frivolity, languor and lasciviousness — the bathing halls, just as the harem quarters, were the ultimate forbidden ground for male trespassers. Here at least Amicis does not aspire to eyewitness knowledge and admits he renders the *hamam* scenes "according to the testimony of European ladies who've been there" (De Amicis, 162). Again, reference to Lady Mary appears to have been inevitable — by all means, her testimony of the visit to the baths is scrupulous to the tiniest detail, recorded in a characteristic, slightly ironic tone, not devoid of humour. Her observations accentuate the extreme kindness and sincerity with which the women had received her, and provide perhaps the most imagination-stirring descriptions to be found in her *Letters*:

I was in my travelling habit ... and certainly appeared very extraordinary to them. Yet there was not one of them that showed the least surprise or impertinent curiosity, but received me with all the obliging civility possible... The sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets, on which sat the ladies ... without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature ... stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them ... So many fine women naked, in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves ... were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty manners ... I was at last forced to open my shirt, and show them my stays, which satisfied them very well, for I saw they believed I was so locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband. (Wortley Montagu, 58–60)

This faithful illustration by an 18th-century English lady indeed caused a bit of a stir among quite a substantial number of prominent Western male artists, some of whom it took over two decades to find their own voice with which to respond to the scene portrayed by Lady Mary.

Remarking upon the nature of the experience of the baths, Edmondo de Amicis noted exuberantly that it was “a spectacle which would make a hundred painters drop their brushes in astonishment” (De Amicis, 162). Whether the number was indeed a hundred remains a question as yet unsolved; what the facts corroborate is that for one particular painter not even so much as the ‘spectacle’ but already the mere imagination of it was enough to drop his brush somewhat helplessly and seek Lady Mary’s guidance. Despite finding the required assistance it still took him nearly thirty years to ‘digest’ artistically Lady Mary’s vision and respond to it with the means granted him by his talent.

It has to be admitted that Amicis too seems to have found it hard to keep to his polished and journalistic style with some aspirations to objectivity when proceeding to share his impressions of the *hamam*:

There, in those dimly lit marble halls, round the fountains, sometimes more than two hundred women gather, naked as nymphs, or semi-naked ... Here the snow-white *hanım* can be seen next to the ebony-black slave; the buxom matron who represents the old-fashioned Turkish ideal of beauty; slender brides hardly out of girlhood with short curly hair, looking like boys; fair-haired Circassians with long golden tresses falling to their knees, and Turkish women with their thick black hair hanging loose over breasts and shoulders, or in a frizzled tangle like an enormous wig ... half-savages with tattooed arms, and fashionable ladies whose waists and ankles are still red from their corsets and boots ... A hundred different elegant or unusual poses and groupings can be seen. Some are stretched out smoking upon their mats, some are having their hair combed by their slave-women, other are embroidering or singing; they laugh, splash and chase each other, shrieking in the showers, or sit in a circle eating and drinking. (De Amicis, 162–163)

There can be no denying that the Oriental bath scenes lend themselves particularly gracefully to appropriations and interpretations through art. Already the descriptions by Lady Mary and Amicis reveal enough to make one’s heart race; should they be supplemented with visual representations, the effect would, in all probability, prove even more sensual. However, for Jean-Auguste Dominique



Ingres it was not recreating the sensuality that caused him the most trouble and a helpless droop of his brush; rather, with the decision to render the Turkish harem scenes, the painter found himself a victim of a peculiar obsession having to do with a pursuit of a license for fantasizing — not, as would perhaps be more rational, with a search for a credible source of inspiration which could ultimately authenticate his vision.

Between 1862 and 1863, Ingres added final strokes of the brush to *Le bain turc*, concluding work on the painting with his unmistakable signature. He initiated the endeavour, though, nearly thirty years earlier when he copied two excerpts from Lady Mary’s *Letters* to his notebook. The project was then abandoned by the artist, but, as Ruth Yeazell notes, after a lapse of over two decades the passages re-emerged in his preparatory sketches for *Le bain turc* (Yeazell Bernard 2000: 36). As observed by Yeazell, what Ingres had in mind was not a simple visual transcription of the *Letters*, but rather their “transformative adaptation” (Yeazell Bernard, 36). The first of the two passages Ingres adapted came from Lady Mary’s letter to an unnamed countess, written in Constantinople and dated May, 1718. At first glance, the painting and the fragments do not bear much actual resemblance, except for the overall atmosphere of the scene and the specific decorum it observed. In technical terms, it appears that the passage could not present an invaluable asset to Ingres — he could well portray the beauty of the nude female body without the aid of any description. Rather, what he found in the fragment was the legitimization for his imaginative rendering of the scene through Lady Mary’s allusions to classical texts. Theocritus’ poems to which Lady Mary compared the wedding ceremony she had witnessed might have assured Ingres of the apparent “timelessness” of the Orient which, along with the common Western belief that travels to the East were indeed essentially about going back in time, provided the painter with the license to indulge in his own dream of gazing upon and admiring the origins of Western civilization, exactly through the East’s supposed state of being “frozen” in time, or located outside time altogether. With the means available to him, Ingres offers a painstaking response to and elaboration on Lady Mary’s recollections of the wedding:

I was three days ago at one of the finest [bath houses] in town and had the opportunity of seeing a Turkish bride received there and all the ceremonies used on that occasion, which made me recollect the epithalamium of Helen by Theocritus, and it seems to me that the same customs have continued ever since. (Wortley Montagu, 134)

The other fragment Ingres copies — from Lady Mary’s letter to an unnamed lady, sent from Adrianople on April 1, 1717, seems to resonate more substantially with *Le bain turc*. Lady Mary proceeds to depict carefully the variety of Turkish women in terms of their physiques, remarking on their “fine skins ... [and] ... delicate shapes... proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by Guido or Titian” (Wortley Montagu, 59). Although there appears to be no explicit trace of the two painters in *Le bain turc*, it is important enough that the theme, introduced by Lady Mary, is undertaken by one of their fellow craftsmen. The ladies, in turn, with

their preoccupations and diversions, feature in the painting in all their abundance, and the somewhat sleepy, dreamy atmosphere of their congregation quite closely matches Lady Mary's depiction:

I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that if it was the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed. I perceived that the ladies with finest skins and most delicate shapes had the greatest share of my attention, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions... so many fine women naked, in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty manners. In short, 'tis the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented etc. They generally take this diversion once a week, and stay there at least four or five hours, without getting cold by immediate coming out of the hot bath into the cold room. (Wortley Montagu, 59)

Importantly, Lady Mary actually interacted with the women, and this involvement extended well beyond the customary airs and graces or the exchange of pleasantries:

The lady that seemed the most considerable amongst them entreated me to sit by her side and would fain have undressed me for the bath. I excused myself with some difficulty, they being however all so earnest in persuading me, I was at last forced to open my skirt, and show them my stays, which satisfied them very well, for I saw they believed I was so locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband. (Wortley Montagu, 59–60)

Lady Mary not only *observes* but *is observed*, too, with apparently just as much curiosity as she invests in looking upon the women. She goes even further, and deepens the exchange from word and gaze to touch, thus stressing the universal “communion” of women, especially once the “ignominious” practices of her husband become revealed. Significantly, Ingres does not in any way refer to that interaction, eliminating Lady Mary's presence from his painting altogether. This erasure is one of the fundamental changes effected by Ingres on Lady Mary's original, and will be returned to and discussed in more depth further. The other vital difference between what Lady Mary saw and what Ingres painted consists in the character of the space each of them represented. Ruth Yeazell aptly remarks that the scene recorded by Lady Mary took place at public baths, and as such belonged to the sphere of “civic spaces, in which women from different households could come temporarily together” (Yeazell Bernard, 40). Elaborating on her observation, Yeazell stipulates that in his radical intervention of converting a public occasion into intimate, private scenes Ingres might have still been too deeply implicated in the machinery of the Western male fantasizing about the Orient which, backed up with what she benignly calls “wishful ignorance” (Yeazell Bernard, 41) mis/led him into assuming that any gathering of more than two “Oriental” women could only have taken place within the sheltering interiors of the harem (Yeazell Bernard, 41).

The explanation Yeazell offers could also account for the “buzz” over one particular gesture captured by Ingres, hinted at by Lady Mary herself, albeit



never explicitly. Seeing that the intimate and languid shelter provided by the harem might have indeed created a mood of general negligence, enhanced by the sensuality inherent in the presence of a number of nude women, some contemporary critics have stipulated on the elusive yet palpable homoerotic current in Lady Mary's *Letters*. Naturally, lesbianism among the haremmites was already a compulsory motif in the travellers' tales of the time, but, for obvious reasons, it had to be consigned to the realm of suspicion, as the male voyagers had no access to direct experience of what went on within the harem walls. Lady Mary pried the door slightly open, first and foremost through her descriptions, but also through some, unintended perhaps, hints on her part regarding her own proclivities. Her professed reluctance towards any "passion" but that for travel, which she expressed in one of the early letters exchanged with Wortley; her longing for an autonomous, women-only space within which she could engage in a *tete-a-tete* with Sappho; her youthful dreams of going to a convent where she could enjoy solely the presence of other women; finally, her own enthusiastic and exultant admiration for women's beauty — all have led some critics to assume a potential homoerotic attraction experienced by Lady Mary, albeit in all likelihood not (fully) realized by her. If Ingres, reading Lady Mary's *Letters*, had given these "suspicions" some credit, then indeed the mysterious hand cupping the breast of another woman in the foreground of *Le bain turc* might be read as an unobtrusive manifestation of his "insider's knowledge." However, perhaps in order to maintain the sense of elusiveness espoused by Lady Mary in this particular matter, he paints the hand at the breast in such a way that the "salient gesture" (Yeazell Bernard, 41) might very well be but an illusion, especially since, as Yeazell remarks, Ingres' "preliminary sketches for the painting identify it as her own" (Yeazell Bernard, 41). In this way, the hand remains mysterious, preserving the original indeterminacy and avoiding the pitfalls of excess explicitness.

The dubious case of the hand on the breast has also inspired a contemporary artist who in his rendering of the painting directly refers to the ambiguous scene. Richard Frost's 1970 poem "Jean Ingres' *Le Bain Turc*" (Frost 1969: 160–161) constitutes a meticulous description of the painting and the circumstances of its creation, rendered in free verse, adding yet another voice to the peculiar artistic conversation between Lady Mary and Jean Ingres which then becomes a polyphony, linking individuals across and despite different times and distant locations. On the issue of the hand, Frost speaks as follows:

Over on the right, wearing a ruby necklace,  
 is a sleepy redhead with her forearms behind her neck  
 in that timeless pose, and she partly obscures  
 two others so that you can't tell whether one of them  
 is fondling her own breast or the other is doing it.  
 Except that when you look at their faces, you know which one.  
 (Frost, 160)

Also Frost seems to stop just one sentence before saying too much, before being too explicit, and still manages to send the sensuous message across. The entire poem gives off such a tantalizing impression, rich in descriptive detail, that it could well serve as an elaborate museum label explaining the painting. Apart from depicting what *Le bain turc* presents, the poem also in a way guides the reactions of the potential viewer of the painting, first expressing a sense of certainty on a given issue, only to disavow it a couple lines further, thus testifying, too, to Frost's own knowledge of this particular painting and its creator, as well as Ingres' other works:

You feel sure that Ingres knew exactly what he was doing.  
Ingres must have posed twenty-four live models and set to work busily.  
You feel sure of this until you notice that the woman with the mandolin  
is exactly as he painted her fifty-five years before  
by herself sitting on a bed.

(Frost, 160–161)

The fragment adds yet another piece of information about how Ingres actually painted *Le bain turc* — Lady Mary's *Letters* were not his sole reference for this piece; for the centrally placed figure of the woman with the mandolin sitting with her back to the viewer Ingres returned to his 1807–1808 painting of *The Valpinçon Bather* and faithfully transcribed her into *Le bain turc*. Whereas with Lady Mary's *Letters* he aimed at creative transformation, with *The Bather* he obviously was after a literal and accurate adaptation.

The characteristic posture, headscarf, lines of the back arrive at a total resemblance to the bathing odalisque from *Le bain turc*, effect today achieved either through advanced Photoshop manipulation or the plain “copy-and-paste” operation. In a way, Ingres here can also be seen as citing himself, an interesting and quite “post-modern” strategy in a 19th-century classicist painter.<sup>2</sup>

With this self-referential gesture, the dialogue *inter artes* has tied another knot but still leaves space for further negotiation.

The choices and decisions made by Ingres in *Le bain turc* merit considerably from a comparison to yet another “*hamam* work.” In 1781, nearly a hundred years before Ingres, Daniel Chodowiecki, painter and printmaker, made an engraving inspired by Lady Mary's visit to the baths. In this case, the reference was deliberate and purposeful. At the time, Chodowiecki lived and worked in Berlin, and the engraving could very well have been the result of a contract with the Berlin publisher August Mylius — the image appeared as the frontispiece to Mylius' 1790 edition of Lady Mary's *Letters*. Whether Daniel Chodowiecki himself was familiar with

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<sup>2</sup> Whereas scholars today seem to accept Lady Mary's influence on Ingres's *Le bain turc*, there exist also other potential instances of intertextual relations between the painter's work and Lady Mary's experiences recorded in her letters. In her article “Dress and Undress: Clothing and Eroticism in Nineteenth-Century Visual Representations of the Harem” Joan del Plato offers a convincing suggestion that also in painting *Le grande odalisque* Ingres might have fallen back on Lady Mary's descriptions.

Lady Mary and her work could not be determined within the scope of the present study; the facts are that in 1762, the year that Lady Mary died, Chodowiecki was still an aspiring artist of 36, and he did the engraving two decades later. The web of connections, nevertheless, continues to grow thicker — Chodowiecki and his work might have very well been familiar to Ingres who, having seen the engraving on the subject he himself had been so engrossed in, could have — after due consideration of the work's merits and of his own notebooks with excerpts from Lady Mary's *Letters* — reached a long sought-after solution as to how, in technical terms, he should work on *Le bain turc*. In the end, Ingres went for adaptation, both in the case of the letters and of Chodowiecki's engraving, which, as Ruth Yeazell observes, "is less instructive as a possible influence on *Le bain turc* than as an alternative" (Yeazell Bernard, 42).

How Chodowiecki's vision differs from that of Ingres' is discernible at first glance: each painter makes an entirely different use of space. In Chodowiecki's work, the high walls, the floor, and in particular the rooftop dome seem to occupy roughly two-thirds of the engraving, with the dome likely being the most arresting. Probably made of glass, its main function must have been to let in as much light as possible — many traditional Turkish baths have relied on natural light solely. The overall impression of the interior is one of breathable spaciousness, as opposed to the sweltering crowdedness of *Le bain turc*, and much more in agreement with Lady Mary's description: "I went to the bagnio around 10 o'clock ... It is built of stone in the shape of a dome, with no windows but in the roof which gives light enough" (Wortley Montagu, 58). The nude bathers are of course there, "negligently lying on their cushions" (Wortley Montagu, 59), but Chodowiecki moves them from the foreground to the rear of the picture. Finally, perhaps the most significant difference between Chodowiecki and Ingres is placed strategically in the very first plan of the image — Chodowiecki introduces a fully clad European lady to the baths who, with her back to potential viewers, is received and presumably shown around the *hamam* by one of the naked bathers. Again, this echoes distinctly Lady Mary's account of the visit — Chodowiecki's European woman may easily pass for Lady Mary in her "riding habit" and the solicitous bather for "the lady that seemed the most considerable amongst them [who] entreated me to sit by her" (Wortley Montagu, 59). In contrast, Ingres eliminates all traces whatsoever of the presence of Western observers of — or participants in — the scene, an act which, according to Linda Nochlin, is "one of the defining features of Orientalist painting" (Nochlin 1989: 36). A further comparison of the two images allows to discern even more qualities symptomatic of the practice of "Orientalizing" in Ingres — as has been mentioned earlier, his bathers appear to be entirely outside of history so that the scene could well depict ancient nymphs; in Chodowiecki's engraving, the episode could be relatively accurately traced back to a particular moment in history, first due to the characteristic fashion of the European lady's outfit, but also thanks to the architecture of the place. The gathered women, though certainly relishing each

other's company, appear alert to the presence of a foreign woman and her gaze resting upon them. However, this is a reciprocal gaze — the eyes of all the *hamam* ladies are fixed on the European, and it is she who is the ultimate “other” in the scene, the trespasser. This again directly relates to Lady Mary's experience of the strangeness of the scene which for her, however, was checked by the awareness that she must have “appeared very extraordinary to them” (Wortley Montagu, 58). Thus, “a relativity of viewpoint” (Yeazell Bernard, 43) is introduced because, as Yeazell observes, “the rules of undress governing the occasion so thoroughly reverse the customary standards of propriety” (Yeazell Bernard, 43). In this light, Chodowiecki's image might be read as a record of an inter-cultural encounter, with the representatives of the two cultures experiencing exactly the same emotions as their counterparts — curiosity, wonder, self-consciousness, perhaps a bit of shame and the awareness of their own foreignness.<sup>3</sup> Chodowiecki manages to capture a moment which is unique and unrepeatable in that it is subject to the relentless forward motion of time, in stark contrast to Ingres who, by choosing the dreamy, de-realized timelessness, is interested not so much in telling a particular story as in showing the erotically-loaded abandon of his protagonists who could exist like this totally indifferent to the sensuality of their appeal to the viewer. That is not to say that Chodowiecki's engraving is not appealing or attractive; it is indeed, though it stirs rather the curiosity of the viewers, not their senses. The eroticism of the scene, rather inflated in Ingres, in Chodowiecki becomes significantly diminished so that the scene, despite the presence of so many naked women, might actually come across as de-erotized altogether. The appetite that is being whetted is ultimately the curiosity about what sort of story is being told, or is going to be told, which also proves the accuracy of the choice of this image for the frontispiece of the *Letters* — a reasonably efficient marketing strategy.

There is, however, one particular point over which Amicis, Ingres, even Chodowiecki and Lady Mary alike seem to be in agreement — the undeniable grace of Turkish women, to Amicis especially manifest in what, following his awe, could be dubbed “the art of sitting.” Even a quick glance at any of the paintings discussed here is enough to make the viewer notice the variety of poses, head-neck-arms constellations, bows and crossings of long and smooth legs. It proves difficult not to agree with Amicis that

The gracefulness of Turkish women is all in repose, and in the art of displaying the soft lines and curves of their reclining forms, with the head thrown back, the hair tumbling loose, and the arms hanging limp — this is the art which extracts gold and jewellery from her husband and drives her eunuchs wild. (De Amicis, 153)

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<sup>3</sup> For a further discussion of the complexities of interactions between “Oriental” and European women, in the times of Lady Mary and later, the reader might wish to consult Meyda Yegenoglu's work *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, in which the author uses Lady Mary's *hamam* encounters as a springboard for a painstaking analysis of the rhetoric of similitude and differentiation applied to that sort of cultural interchanges.

Whether the eunuchs were actually moved by the women they had in their custody might be debatable — after all, eunuchs were eunuchs exactly for their nearly mythical immunity to such an abundance of grace; still, there can be no denying that Lady Mary, Ingres, Amicis and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Chodowiecki, all fell prey to the spell of the odalisque. It does not matter really whether each of them experienced the charm first-hand; the graceful dialogue of eyewitness, written report, and visual medium had all it took to legitimize and validate their dreams and fantasies, and colour their quotidian.<sup>4</sup>

These mutual inspirations and influences, not to say infatuations, have certainly contributed, too, to the Orientalist discourses, with the Orient continuing to function as an infinite-seeming repository of viable, exoticism-coloured cultural and artistic scenarios. As the above-presented cases of broadly understood intertextuality have attempted to show, it is frequently the Western obsession with the "alluring Orient" that constitutes the basic thread from which to weave the complex web of connection and convergences, spanning across genres, materials as well as places, spaces, times and socio-political moods. The backward motion employed throughout the present analyses has served the purpose of rendering comprehensible the projections and conjectures at work in the gradual construction of the mutual self-image of West vis-à-vis East and vice versa. Significantly, the knowledge yielded by such, often purely imaginary, encounters contributes mostly to the formation — or expansion — of Western identity and the Westerners' perception and understanding of their relationship to the "rest" of the world. In some instances, fortunately, thus acquired "wisdom" manages to pry open some windows on those "others," too. How successful such attempts actually prove remains a contested question though.

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<sup>4</sup> The present article, for reasons of practical, spatial limitations, naturally does not exhaust the issue of Western representations of the "Oriental woman." An interesting survey might be found in Issue 10, Volume II, 1996, of the *Cornucopia* magazine in which John Carswell, apart from works by Ingres, considers also paintings by Charles Jervis, Degas, and Le Comte du Nouy. Other explorations of the theme particularly worth mentioning include Mary Roberts' monograph *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art And Travel Literature*, or Dorota Kołodziejczyk's article "Uwiedzeni Orientem — europejskie fantazje o haremie".

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