

INTRODUCTION

“The Commerce of Life”: Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800)

Nicole Pohl

There is a much higher character than that of a wit or a poet, or a savant, which is that of a rational and sociable being, willing to carry on the commerce of life with all the sweetness and condescension decency and virtue will permit.¹

❧ JOHN DORAN’S CHARACTERIZATION of Elizabeth Montagu aptly reflects her multifaceted and versatile role in eighteenth-century society. Montagu was and still is known as a prominent author, critic, patron, businesswoman, and *salonnière*. Through birth, friendship, and marriage she was part of and, at times, the center of important political, literary, and social crosscutting networks that connected the public sphere and the court. She corresponded extensively with leaders of British Enlightenment coteries, such as Edmund Burke, Gilbert West, David Garrick, and Horace Walpole, as well as the Bluestocking inner circle—Elizabeth Carter, Sarah Scott, Hannah More, Hester Thrale Piozzi, Frances Burney, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Vesey, and Frances Boscawen. Her vast correspondence (ca. 8,000 extant letters) is now collected in various archives and private collections across the U.K. and the United States; only a few of these have been printed, often in heavily edited versions.² With such wealth of epistolary material, it is not surprising that her letters

1. John Doran, *A Lady of the Last Century (Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu)* (London, 1873), 146.

2. A number of letters are housed at the British Library, London, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, university libraries at Aberdeen, Manchester, Nottingham, the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University, Cornell University, the Houghton Library at Harvard, and at Princeton, with some letters in private archives, such as the Longleat archive, Warminster. The vast majority of the manuscripts, however, are held at the Huntington Library, California (see the description of those papers by Mary L. Robertson and Vanessa Wilkie in this issue). Selections of Montagu’s letters are printed in Doran, *A Lady of the Last Century; Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, vol. 1 of *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738–1785*, gen. ed. Gary

have been described by Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg as “among the most important surviving collections from the eighteenth century”³ and that Elizabeth Eger’s forthcoming biography is entitled *Elizabeth Montagu: A Life in Letters*.

Doran accentuated Montagu’s participation in “the commerce of life” of eighteenth-century polite society with, indeed, “decency and virtue.” The meaning of *commerce* is undeniably multilayered, ranging in the eighteenth century from conversation to “exchange of one thing for another; interchange of any thing” and, of course, to economic trade, according to Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755).⁴ In this sense, and as the philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith argued, sociability and conversation, virtue and sympathy were not necessarily seen in contradiction to, but rather helped to embed (and in some ways, justify), commercial activities and pursuit of self-interest for the purpose of the public good. Thus, Montagu elegantly spanned all rubrics of eighteenth-century *commerce* that Johnson identified; to trade, to correspond and to exchange ideas as a literary critic and essayist, to be a businesswoman, a patron of the arts, and a literary hostess. These economic but, more importantly, social activities produced, according to eighteenth-century political philosophy, civility and refinement of manners, morals, and the arts: “doux commerce.”⁵ It was predominantly the *douceur* of women that appointed them to exert civilizing influence through mixed-gender sociability in polite society. Montagu exceeded this gender-limited role. While her patriotic and public sociability, particularly in her Bluestocking assemblies, was admired by contemporaries and exemplary, she also sought to influence and correct through her active participation in business, poli-

Kelly (London, 1999); Marjorie Hanson, “Elizabeth Montagu: A Biographical Sketch and a Critical Edition of Her Writings” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1982); Ada M. Ingpen, *Women as Letter-Writers: A Collection of Letters* (New York, 1910); *Bluestocking Letters*, ed. Reginald Brimley Johnson (London, 1926); James E. May, “An Unpublished Letter from Edward Young to Mrs Montagu, 7 July 1761,” *Notes and Queries* 39, no. 1 (March 1992): 54–56; Elizabeth Montagu, *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with Some of the Letters of Her Correspondents, Published by Matthew Montagu*, 4 vols. (London, 1809–13); Elizabeth Montagu, *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Blue-Stockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761 by . . . Emily J. Climençon*, 2 vols. (New York, 1906); Elizabeth Montagu, *Mrs. Montagu, “Queen of the Blues”: Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*, ed. Reginald Blunt, 2 vols. (London, 1923); Elizabeth Carter, *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu between the Years 1755 and 1800*, ed. Montagu Pennington, 3 vols. (London, 1817); Richard Wendorf and Charles Ryskamp, “A Blue-Stocking Friendship: The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu and Frances Reynolds in the Princeton Collection,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 41 (1980): 173–207; and *The Collected Letters of Sarah Scott*, ed. Nicole Pohl (London, 2013).

3. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB], s.v. “Montagu [née Robinson], Elizabeth,” by Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, last modified April 21, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19014>.

4. *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition of the 1755 Classic by Samuel Johnson*, ed. Brandi Besalke, s.v. “commerce (noun),” last modified February 7, 2012, <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/commerce-noun>.

5. A term coined by the political economist Samuel Ricard, quoted in Albert Hirschman, *Rival Views of Market Society and Other Essays* (New York, 1986), 107–8.

tics, and the arts.⁶ In a letter to her husband, Montagu enthusiastically praises the benefits to humankind of his coal business, which, after his death, she took over and expanded successfully:

Riches drawn from the bowels of the earth, or gained by commerce, where exchange is still a mutual benefit, present agreeable views of the arts and policy of mankind. Though the coldness of our climate may set coals in a favourable light, I shall be glad to see as many of them turned to the precious metal as possible. I have not enough of the miser, to love treasures hidden and buried. Money is convertible to credit and pleasure; useful in the hands of the prudent; noble in the hands of the generous; pernicious with the bad; ridiculous with the prodigal, and contemptible with the miser.⁷

Montagu was aware that commerce in the business sense, the transaction of money and the management of industry, shaped civic virtue and moral responsibility as much as her conversations and assemblies civilized the nation.

This special issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* addresses Elizabeth Montagu's complex and innovative position in eighteenth-century polite society and complements "Reconsidering the Bluestockings" (2002), edited by Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, also published as a special number of the *HLQ*. While "Reconsidering the Bluestockings" sought to capture the many diverse yet related aspects of the Bluestockings and their activities under the umbrella of "Bluestocking feminism" and "Bluestocking sociability," it also probed the meaning and implications of these comprehensive labels.⁸ Emma Major and Deborah Heller both have elsewhere queried the homogeneity of the Bluestockings, whose activities and influences, even if

6. On the patriotic and public sociability of Elizabeth Montagu, see Emma Major, "The Politics of Sociability: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium," in "Reconsidering the Bluestockings," ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, special issue, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 (2002): 175–92; and Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712–1812* (Oxford, 2012). A note on capitalization is in order here. In the general sense of a learned or intellectual woman, the term *bluestocking* is most correctly spelled with a lowercase *b*, whereas the historically specific sense and grouping is indicated by capitalization.

7. Elizabeth Montagu to Edward Montagu, August 30, 1751, *Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. M. Montagu, 3:164–65.

8. The temptation to seek similarities more than differences possibly lies in the fact that the term *Bluestocking* became, after the initial emergence of the polite circles around Elizabeth Montagu, Frances Boscawen, and Elizabeth Vesey, a synonym for "learned ladies" in general, a sense that persisted into the modern age. See, for example, Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911–16* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2007). On the historiography of the Bluestockings, see Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, "Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography," in "Reconsidering the Bluestockings," ed. Pohl and Schellenberg, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 (2002): 1–20.

we divide them up into a first and a second generation, were heterogeneous.⁹ Scholars have increasingly recognized the unreliability of simplistic accounts of the Bluestockings and the shortcomings of the heavily edited nineteenth-century collections of letters by Montagu and the Bluestockings.¹⁰

In this vein, recent scholarship has further demonstrated that Elizabeth Montagu not only played a central role in the Bluestocking circles but also was a figure of wider importance to the intellectual and cultural history of the eighteenth century. She was a businesswoman and landowner, literary critic, patron of architecture and the arts, interior designer, and center of a range of overlapping social circles, including patronage alliances and kinship ties that also provided the basis for some of the voluntary transnational networks that Montagu enjoyed and nurtured. These two levels of alliances, as was the case with the Bluestockings, were linked with one another and with an increasingly international commercial society. Indeed, from her teens until her eighties, Montagu devoted part of every day to maintaining these diverse ties, writing business letters to the managers of her coal mines and estates and to the architects and landscape and interior designers of her mansions; witty epistles to fellow female intellectuals and authors she patronized; and missives pursuing her political and religious interests within powerful dynastic circles.

This issue will underscore Elizabeth Montagu's historical place as a pioneering literary critic, successful businesswoman, patron, and friend. Grounded in close study of her life and letters, these essays present new contributions to key debates in eighteenth-century studies concerning social networking, social mobility, literary circles, and women's engagement in business and politics. The contributors highlight the specific roles that Elizabeth Montagu adopted and have demonstrated how Montagu handled these roles in a variety of crosscutting social and familial networks. K. D. Reynolds, Harriet Guest, and Anna Clark have interrogated what Clark has called a "neo-Whiggish chronology of ever-increasing opportunities for women" in the eighteenth century and called for us to be mindful of the determining factor of rank and the difference between women's public presence and their power to influence (political) events, between women's authority and their political and cultural presence.¹¹ Elizabeth Montagu is a significant example, certainly for genteel women, as she attempted—quite ambitiously and consciously—to progress beyond her origins to enter the intersecting social circles of the public and the court. Mon-

9. Major, *Madam Britannia; Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, ed. Deborah Heller (Farnham, U.K., 2015).

10. On the Bluestockings as a social network, see particularly Deborah Heller and Steven Heller, "A Copernican Shift; or, Remapping the Bluestocking Heavens," in *Bluestockings Now!*, ed. Heller, 55–70.

11. Anna Clark, "Gender and Politics in the Long Eighteenth Century," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 48 (Autumn 1999): 252–57 at 252. See also Clark, "Women in Eighteenth-Century Politics," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke, U.K., 2005), 570–86.

tagu created and consumed cultural capital.¹² What the example of Elizabeth Montagu demonstrates, however, is not necessarily a "consistent mode of perceiving and behaving" but one that propelled her in different ways into the public sphere, as her contemporary Hester Thrale observed: "Brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgement, critical in talk."¹³

☞ A Brief Biography of Elizabeth Montagu

Montagu's biography documents a life of seized opportunities. As a girl, she eagerly engaged with the educational connections and intellectual commerce possible in her family's circle. Elizabeth Robinson Montagu (1718–1800) was the oldest daughter of Matthew Robinson (1694–1778) and Elizabeth Drake (ca. 1693–1746).¹⁴ When Elizabeth was born, the family lived at West Layton Manor, Yorkshire, an estate acquired from the Layton family, who had owned it since the Middle Ages. Matthew Robinson's direct relatives were heirs of the estates of West Layton and Kirby Hall, North Yorkshire (see the Robinson family tree appended to Sophie Coulombe's essay in this issue).¹⁵

Elizabeth Drake, Montagu's mother, was the daughter of the barrister and recorder of Cambridge, Robert Drake, and Sarah Morris (daughter of Thomas Morris of Mount Morris, Kent). After Robert Drake's death, Montagu's grandmother Sarah married Dr. Conyers Middleton (1683–1750), the famous Cambridge scholar and clergyman, in 1710. Elizabeth Drake enjoyed a thorough education and made the education of her children a paramount concern in turn, taking advantage of Dr. Middleton's services several times a year at Cambridge. His popular *Life of Cicero* (1741) "emphasized the fact that Cicero developed and deployed his rhetorical art not only through practicing public oratory and studying ancient theories of rhetoric, but through reading, letter-writing, informal conversation."¹⁶ Conyers Middleton was particularly instrumental in teaching Elizabeth and her only sister, Sarah, what became a lifelong practice of book recommendation, exchange, critical commentary, and eloquent conversation.

12. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

13. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), 2; Hester Thrale Piozzi to Frances Burney, February 7, 1781, *The Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, ed. Charlotte Barrett and Austin Dobson, 6 vols. (London, 1904), 1:460.

14. ODNB, s.v. "Montagu [*née* Robinson], Elizabeth," by Schnorrenberg. Elizabeth Eger's forthcoming volume will be the first book-length biography of Montagu.

15. Educated at Cambridge, Matthew Robinson was a skilled amateur artist and sat for Gawen Hamilton's group portrait, *A Conversation of Virtuosis* (1735), National Portrait Gallery, London, Primary Collection, NPG 1384, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00352>.

16. Tania Smith, "Elizabeth Montagu's Study of Cicero's *Life*: The Formation of an Eighteenth-Century Woman's Rhetorical Identity," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 165–87 at 183.

We know that Elizabeth read the *Life*, and she engaged with Cicero's work and ethos throughout her life. By 1741, she had also read George Lyttelton's *Observations on the Life of Cicero*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and *The Life of Atticus*, and corresponded with her friends the Duchess of Portland and Anne Donnellan about her grandfather's work. Indeed, as Tania Smith argues, for the Robinson sisters, "the academies of private reading, sociable conversation and letter-writing" replaced formal education and interaction with preceptors and schoolmates.¹⁷ The sisters' epistolary exchanges as well as Elizabeth's correspondences with other writers shaped their minds for literary criticism and authorship (see Michael Franklin's essay in this issue).¹⁸ Their discussions show attentiveness to the writing styles and self-presentations of authors as well as a wide-ranging interest in contemporary novels, histories, and poetry (see Markman Ellis's essay in this issue).

In the 1730s, the Robinsons relocated to the maternal estate of Monk's Horton (or Mount Morris) in Kent and resided there until 1746. After their mother's death in 1746, the estate passed to Elizabeth's brother Matthew Robinson, second Baron Rokeby (1712–1800), who took on the additional name of Morris. Despite having respectable neighbors, family, and friends in Kent, such as the Knatchbulls of Mersham Hatch, the Scotts of Scot's Hall in Smeeth,¹⁹ and the Brockmans of Beachborough Park, and taking annual extended visits to London, Elizabeth felt socially isolated. In March 1741, she complains to Anne Donnellan that she would "vanish to the Shades of Kent."²⁰ The regular visits to Dr. Middleton in Cambridge were a welcome distraction. On a visit to Cambridge and Wimpole Hall,²¹ she met Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, later Duchess of Portland (1715–1785), in about 1731–32. The friendship between Elizabeth and the duchess brought an enormous change in lifestyle to the former and catapulted her from the rural isolation of Kent into polite society. After Lady Margaret married William Bentinck, second Duke of Portland, in

17. Smith, "Elizabeth Montagu's Study of Cicero's *Life*," 183. See also Jon Mee, who argues that correspondence groups of the eighteenth century went so far as to construct "conversable worlds" with their own characteristic rhetorical qualities; *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford, 2011).

18. Betty S. Schellenberg, "Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures, 1744–1785," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750–1830*, ed. Jacqueline Labbé (London, 2010), 95–97; Schellenberg, "The Bluestockings and the Genealogy of the Modern Novel," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2010): 1023–34.

19. For more on the Scotts, see James R. Scott, "The Scott Monuments in Brabourne Church," *Archaeologia Cantiana* 10 (1876): 259–68, <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Pub/ArchCant/010%20-%201876/010-21.pdf>; and James Renat Scott, *Memorials of the Family of Scott, of Scot's-Hall, in the County of Kent, with an Appendix of Illustrative Documents* (London, 1876), <https://archive.org/details/memorialsoffamiliooscot>.

20. Montagu to Donnellan, January 1, 1740/1, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu papers, 1688–1800, MO 813, Huntington Library. The Montagu papers at the Huntington are cited henceforward with the abbreviation MO.

21. At the time Lady Margaret grew up in Wimpole Hall, it was the seat of the second Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer.

1734, Elizabeth regularly visited them in London and at the duchess's country seat at Welbeck Abbey. The introduction into polite society and particularly the intellectual conversation by men and women that Elizabeth witnessed at Wimpole and Welbeck inspired her to launch her own literary salon later in life.

On August 5, 1742, Elizabeth Robinson married Edward Montagu (1692–1775) (see the Montagu family tree appended to Coulombeau's essay in this issue). Sylvia Myers has pointed to Elizabeth's ambivalence toward marriage as a possible explanation for her reticence and discretion.²² In a letter to George Lyttelton written twenty-one years later, Elizabeth expresses regret at her haste in marrying Montagu (November 22, 1763, MO 1428). Montagu was a much older, fifty-year-old bachelor, a grandson of Edward Montagu, first Earl of Sandwich, the owner of coal mines and estates in Northumberland, Yorkshire, and Berkshire. He was a member of Parliament for Huntingdon, a family seat, from 1734 to 1768. In 1744, the Montagus' son John ("Punch") was born, but he died unexpectedly on August 17, 1744, of an infection. In this decade, Elizabeth and her family were to suffer three other tragedies in the family. Her mother, Elizabeth Robinson, passed away in 1746 of cancer; her brother Thomas died in 1747; and John Robinson (b. 1729), her youngest brother, developed a mental illness in about 1749.

From 1750, the Montagus lived in their London house in Hill Street, Mayfair, with regular visits to the estate of Sandleford, near Newbury, in the spring and summer. Edward Montagu regularly traveled to Yorkshire and Northumberland to his collieries and estates in Denton, outside of Newcastle. Elizabeth Montagu accompanied him on some of these visits and, after her husband's death, competently took over the colliery business (see Les Turnbull's essay in this issue).

In the 1750s, Elizabeth Montagu, Frances Boscawen, and Elizabeth Vesey started regular social assemblies, which continued well into the 1780s, inspiring a second generation of hostesses and societies in London, Dublin, and the provinces. These informal gatherings in the London homes of Montagu (Hill Street), Boscawen (South Audley Street), and Vesey (Clarges Street) united men and women primarily of the gentry and upper classes, along with a number of more middle-class professionals, in the pursuit of intellectual improvement, progress, polite sociability, the refinement of the arts through patronage, and national stability through philanthropy and conversation.²³ Montagu fostered important friendships with men and

22. Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1990), 96; for a different position, see Bridget Hill, "The Course of the Marriage of Elizabeth Montagu: An Ambitious and Talented Woman without Means," *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 1 (2001): 3–17.

23. On conversation, see Alison E. Hurley, "A Conversation of Their Own: Watering-Place Correspondence among the Bluestockings," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 1–21; Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds*. See also Moyra Haslett, "Bluestockings: Contextualising Hannah More's *The Bas Bleu*," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 1 (March 2010): 89–114. On progress, see JoEllen DeLucia, "Ossianic History and Bluestocking Femi-

women outside of the immediate Bluestocking network, such as William Pulteney, first Earl of Bath; George Lyttelton (see Elizabeth S. Bennett's essay in this issue); James Beattie (see Caroline Franklin's essay in this issue); and Gilbert West.²⁴ Thus, as Heller and Heller have argued, the Bluestocking circles cut across other networks linked by cultural and social interests. They were thus "cultural brokers and cultural innovators."²⁵ The success of these networks attracted many famous names: Samuel Johnson; Sir Joshua Reynolds, who painted Montagu's portrait; Edmund Burke; David Garrick; and Horace Walpole could be seen at Montagu's house at 23 (now 31) Hill Street, London, during the 1760s and 1770s, and Queen Charlotte and her daughters came to view Montagu's famous feather panels in the home she moved to in Portman Square in 1781.²⁶

Montagu was particularly proactive as a patron to scholars and writers. James Beattie, Hannah More, Frances Burney, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Sarah Fielding, Hester Mulso Chapone, and Anna Williams were recipients of Montagu's generosity. Chapone dedicated her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773) to Montagu and thanked her for her support:

I believe, you are persuaded that I never entertained a thought of appearing in public . . . perhaps it was the partiality of friendship, which so far biased your judgement, as to make you think them capable of being more extensively useful, and warmly to recommend the publication of them.²⁷

nism," in *A Feminine Enlightenment: British Women Writers and the Philosophy of Progress, 1759–1820* (Edinburgh, 2005).

24. Anni Sairio, *Language and Letters of the Bluestocking Network: Sociolinguistic Issues in Eighteenth-Century Epistolary English* (Helsinki, 2009); Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Queen of the Blues, the Bluestocking Queen, and Bluestocking Masculinity," in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge, 2013), 233–53; Susanna M. Riordan, *Bluestocking Philosophy: Aspects of Female Aristocratic Thought in Eighteenth-Century England* (PhD diss., Cambridge, 1995). See also Steven Kale, "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 115–48; Dena Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory* 31, no. 1 (February 1992): 1–20; and Sarah Maza, "Women, the Bourgeoisie, and the Public Sphere: Response to Daniel Gordon and David Bell," *French Historical Studies* 17, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 935–50. Christa Diemel confirms the complex overlap of the court, academies, and literary salons in her study *Adelige Frauen im bürgerlichen Jahrhundert: Hofdamen, Stiftsdamen, Salondamen 1800–1870* (Frankfurt, 1998).

25. Heller and Heller, "A Copernican Shift," 43.

26. The Bluestockings were not, however, spared satirical attacks; see Moyra Haslett, "Bluestocking Feminism Revisited: The Satirical Figure of the Bluestocking," *Women's Writing* 17, no. 3 (2010): 432–51. On 23 (now 31) Hill Street, see David Pullins, "Reassessing Elizabeth Montagu's Architectural Patronage at 23 Hill Street, London," *The Burlington Magazine* 150, no. 1263 (2008): 400–404; R. Baird, "The Queen of the Bluestockings: Mrs Montagu's House at 23 Hill Street Rediscovered," *Apollo* (August 2003): 43–49.

27. Hester Mulso Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (London, 1773), iii–iv.

Elizabeth Carter's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762) were published with the help and encouragement of Montagu and George Lyttelton. Fanny Burney, though often critical of Montagu, profited from the social network, as Montagu and the Blue-stockings, through subscription, supported her publication of *Camilla* (1796).

Patronage is of course a double-edged sword, juxtaposing social networking and economic support with social control.²⁸ Elizabeth Eger has argued that Montagu and the Bluestockings "admitted members into their circle on merit alone."²⁹ However, Montagu and Hannah More also expected gratitude, and as the famous cases of Ann Yearsley and James Woodhouse have shown, acknowledgment of lower rank.³⁰ Thus, Montagu complained bitterly to Hannah More in 1784:

It sometimes happened to me, that, by an endeavour to encourage talents . . . by driving from them the terrifying spectre of pale poverty, I have introduced a legion of little demons: vanity, luxury, idleness and pride, have entered the cottage the moment poverty vanished.³¹

A similar fate struck Montagu's companion Dorothea Gregory, daughter of Dr. John Gregory, whom Montagu took in as her ward and companion in 1772. Through Montagu, Gregory was introduced to polite society, and treated almost as her daughter. Montagu's aspiration was that Gregory would ultimately marry her nephew Matthew Robinson, fourth Baron Rokeby (1762–1831), whom Montagu adopted (see Sophie Coulombe's essay in this issue). However, Gregory fell in love with and became engaged to Archibald Alison, a Scottish Episcopalian priest and essayist who was penniless. After her marriage in 1782, Montagu scorned Gregory and the two women were partially reconciled only several years later.

Montagu was socially ambitious and domineering not only with her protégés and companions but also when it came to her family. When Montagu's sister, Sarah, married George Lewis Scott, sub-preceptor to the Prince of Wales, in 1751, against the wishes of the family, Montagu intervened and orchestrated a separation. This tendency to exercise paternalistic control also manifested itself in Montagu's rigid style of hosting her assemblies. Fanny Burney observed the invariable structure of her arrangements:

28. Allan Silver, "Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Modern Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 6 (May 1990): 1474–1504; see also Catherine M. S. Alexander, "Elizabeth Montagu: A Philanthropic Ornament," *English: Journal of the English Association* 64, no. 245 (Summer 2015): 139–56.

29. Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2010), 67.

30. Kerri Andrews, *Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, Patronage and Poetry: The Story of a Literary Relationship* (London, 2013). See also Dustin H. Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650–1800* (Cambridge, 2006).

31. *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, ed. William Roberts, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (New York, 1835), 1:368–69.

At Mrs. Montagu's, the semi-circle that faced the fire retained during the whole evening its unbroken form, with a precision that made it seem described by a Brobdignagian compass. The lady of the castle commonly placed herself at the upper end of the room, near the commencement of the curve, so as to be courteously visible to all her guests; having the person of the highest rank, or consequence, properly, on one side, and the person the most eminent for talents, sagaciously, on the other; or as near to her chair, and her converse, as her favouring eye, and a complacent bow of the head, could invite him to that distinction.³²

Particularly after the death of Edward Montagu, Montagu became a very wealthy woman and did not shy away from displaying her wealth. In her house in Hill Street, Montagu used her luxurious chinoiserie, brought back by her brother Robert in the hold of his East Indiaman, together with more newly acquired objects to impress her guests in the Chinese Room. In 1777, she contracted James "Athenian" Stuart to build a new and spectacularly opulent house in Portman Square that was finally finished in 1781; she continued to host assemblies there. The salon was lavishly decorated with feather panels covered with thousands of feathers sewn into colorful floral wreaths and garlands.³³ John Macpherson, later governor-general of Bengal, credits Montagu's salon with civilizing effects:

I sincerely hope the dark gloom of politicks which deaden'd ingenious and Elegant life in London in the years 69 & 70 has vanished before now. George the third does not know how much he is indebted to the chearful and Classic Assemblies of your Chinese Room. You gave that sweetness and refinement to the thoughts of our Statesmen which could alone counteract the acid and gloom of their Dispositions. Even Lyt[elton] would have been more violent, had he not been soothed in his visits with you. Lady Shelburne never left you without being more pleased with the World; — Her friend received the good humour she brought away . . . indeed, Madam, we are all indebted to you. . . you . . . have thus humanized our Manners. (October 15, 1772, MO 1506)

32. Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from His Own Manuscripts, from Family Papers and from Personal Collections*, 3 vols. (London, 1832), 2:270–71.

33. See Stacey Sloboda, "Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation: Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room," in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. Meredith S. Martin and Denise Amy Baxter (Burlington, Vt., 2010), 129–48; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2005), 40. See also Ruth Scobie, "'To Dress a Room for Montagu': Pacific Cosmopolitanism and Elizabeth Montagu's Feather Hangings," *Lumen: Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / Lumen: Travaux choisis de la Société canadienne d'étude du dix-huitième siècle* 33 (2014): 123–37.

The refinement Montagu produced was based not only on polite sociability and conversation but indeed on trade and money made through commerce (in the case of Montagu, coal).³⁴ Indeed, while it was trade and fashion that turned Montagu into, in her own words, a "citizen of the world," eighteenth-century globalization also could distract: Montagu observes to Donnellan, "How necessary sometimes to withdraw ourselves to the distance from whence we can truly judge of the worth and importance of things!"³⁵ The "patriotic and public sociability" that Montagu promoted in her salons sought to "humanize" and "soothe" the distracted and weary consumer through "doux commerce."³⁶

Given Montagu's diverse alliances in the public sphere and at court, it is not surprising that her connections and reputation made her known and welcome abroad, too.³⁷ Indeed, as Prendergast has argued, the Bluestocking network was a binational network with meeting places in London, Bath, Lucan, and Dublin and hosts and guests from Ireland and England alike.³⁸ The Bluestockings facilitated and participated significantly in the cultural transfer between Ireland and England.³⁹

Montagu was equally well connected in France. Hailed by Wraxall as the "Madame du Deffand of the English Capital,"⁴⁰ Montagu welcomed such visitors to her London salons as Jacques and Suzanne Necker, the latter one of the most influential *salonnières* of the ancien régime in Paris; the diplomat Louis-Jules Barbon Mancini-Mazarini, duc de Nevers (1716–1798); the naturalist Jacques-Christophe Valmont de Bomare (1731–1807); and Anne-Marie Fiquet du Boccage (1710–1802). When Montagu visited Paris in 1775, she was received by fellow *salonnières*, such as Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin (1699–1777) and Marie Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise du Deffand (1697–1780), the close friend of Horace Walpole.

Her visit not only documented the social connections that she had fostered in London and Paris through personal visits and extensive correspondences but also acknowledged her as a celebrated author. In 1760 George Lyttelton, first Baron Lyttelton (1709–1773), Montagu's friend and correspondent, published *Dialogues of the Dead*. Montagu contributed three dialogues (nos. 26, 27, and 28) anonymously to

34. See Major, "The Politics of Sociability."

35. Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, December 30, 1750, *Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. M. Montagu, 3:140.

36. Major, "The Politics of Sociability," 175.

37. Nicole Pohl, "Cosmopolitan Bluestockings," in *Bluestockings Now!*, ed. Heller, 71–89; Amy Prendergast, *Literary Salons across Britain and Ireland in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2015); Emma Major, "Femininity and National Identity: Elizabeth Montagu's Trip to France," *ELH* 72 (2005): 901–18.

38. Prendergast, *Literary Salons across Britain and Ireland*, 79.

39. On British–German cultural transfer and the role of the Bluestockings in this, see Alessa Johns, *Bluestocking Feminism and British–German Cultural Transfer, 1750–1837* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2014); Hilary Brown, "The Reception of the Bluestockings by Eighteenth-Century German Women Writers," *Women in German Yearbook* 18 (2002): 111–32.

40. Nathaniel Wraxall, *Historical Memoirs of My Own Time*, 2 vols. (London, 1815), 1:140.

the volume. Edmund Burke transcribed Montagu's manuscript so her handwriting would not be recognized. In 1769, Montagu published *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769) anonymously, written at the urging of Elizabeth Carter.⁴¹ The *Essay* defended Shakespeare against the attacks of critics such as Voltaire, praising him as a "dramatic genius" and a national icon (Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, October 21, 1766, MO 3187). Another target of Montagu's *Essay* was Samuel Johnson, whose *Preface to Shakespeare* had appeared in 1765. Montagu particularly criticized Johnson for focusing on mere "verbal criticism" and historical context and thus throwing "obscurity over the genius of the great tragedian" (Montagu to Sarah Scott, [January] 11, [1766], MO 5836). Despite Montagu's fears that "the Learned would reject my opinions, the unlearned yawn over my pages," the *Essay* was praised by a number of reviewers and translated into French and Italian, but on a personal level, it permanently injured her friendship with Johnson (Montagu to Matthew Robinson, [September?] 10, 1769, MO 4767).

While Montagu's literary and social reputation flourished in the 1760s, her private life turned less fortunate. By the late 1760s, Edward Montagu was in very poor health and Elizabeth started spending more time caring for him:

I teach myself to endure to hear without replying to it whatever he pleases to utter, just considering it as the hail and hoar frosts engendered by unkindly climates which fall equally on the bountifull field the beautifull garden or the desert. . . . Fortitude makes a good Martyr, but Patience is the only Saint.⁴²

Edward Montagu died in London on May 12, 1775. His death propelled Elizabeth Montagu into a most favorable position possible for a woman in the eighteenth century. She was an extremely wealthy widow with commercial property and estates in London, Berkshire, and Northumberland.⁴³ She was interested in the coal business and fashioned herself with ease into a "captain of industry": "The mechanisms of the enginges & their operations in the Coal pitts are well worth observation, & before I leave this country I design to make myself acquainted with them" (Montagu to Thomas Lyttleton, August 27, [1758], MO 1498). Montagu managed her business affairs with considerable success, did her own bookkeeping, and increasingly employed her nephew Matthew to help her supervise the collieries. She visited the Northumberland and Yorkshire properties regularly, paid close attention to the economic circumstances of the coal industry, and stayed in constant correspondence

41. See Elizabeth Eger, "The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare," in "Reconsidering the Bluestockings," ed. Pohl and Schellenberg, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 (2002): 127–52.

42. "Queen of the Blues," ed. Blunt, 1:297–98.

43. See J. V. Beckett, "Elizabeth Montagu: Bluestocking Turned Landlady," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 149–64.

with her managers to expand and make profitable the businesses. In her letter to Lyttleton, she also observes:

[t]here is now an offer made me from the Tenants of a Neighbouring Colliery, to hire of me a Way leave in our language but in short a passage through my estate to the River Tyne & Staithes on my Ground in the River Tyne; as they will pay a Rent for these privileges which with other conveniences to my Collieries promises an advantage of 500£ a year at least.

Montagu was aware of her social responsibility and hosted regular charity events.⁴⁴ On July 23, 1787, Elizabeth Carter congratulates Montagu on her charity toward Sunday school children, whom she had invited for a feast at Portman Square.⁴⁵ She did the same for the children of her coal workers and for the chimney sweeps in London. (From around 1773, May 1 was "Sweeps' Day," a day of festivities and dance by the myriads of chimney sweeps.) Montagu also adopted the practice of hosting a charity dinner with roast beef and plum pudding every year on the lawns of her house at Portman Square. In her letter of August 10, 1788, she writes to Sarah Scott:

I had about 4 score boys of ye Sunday schools to dine here last Friday. Lord Porchester gave the day before some prizes to be run for by Girls, & for Men, who were to play at Backsword, and Men running in Sacks, of all which as it was on a Hill opposite to us I might have watched if an accident had not befallen my Reflecting Telescope. . . . I think his Lordship should not have given this entertainment in ye middle of harvest, for such diversions, & ye drunkenness they occasion, makes ye poor people idle for some days. (MO 6171)

Montagu managed her estates as efficiently as her collieries and in her correspondence with Lord Kames, she showed a particular interest in agricultural reform. In her letter to Sarah Scott of October 6, 1774, Montagu characteristically observes from Sandleford, "Last night finish'd our harvest for two days the men & horses had work till they were very weary" (MO 5963).⁴⁶

44. Edith Sedgewick Larson, "A Measure of Power: The Personal Charity of Elizabeth Montagu," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 16 (1986): 197–210; Edith Sedgewick Larson, "Mary Morgan's Tour to Milford Haven and Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*: Representations of Female Charity and the Example of Elizabeth Montagu," *Eighteenth-Century Women* 3 (2003): 199–224.

45. *Letters from . . . Carter to . . . Montagu*, ed. Pennington, 3:273.

46. On the relationship of Elizabeth Montagu to land, see Stephen Bending, "Mrs. Montagu's Contemplative Bench: Bluestocking Gardens and Female Retirement," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2006): 555–80, and his chapter "Bluestocking Gardens: Elizabeth Montagu at Sandleford," chap. 3 in *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge, 2013), 135–72; Nicolle Jordan, "From Pastoral to Georgic: Modes of Negoti-

During the 1790s, Montagu and her family were concerned about the increasing political instability in France and offered help to the French émigrés flooding to England. Both Montagu and Scott agreed with the pamphlets written in aid of the émigrés, such as Frances Burney's *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793). However, Montagu was also an entrepreneur and worried about social instability in England ignited by the French Revolution. Matthew Robinson, who managed his aunt's coal mines, not only feared an invasion of Northumberland, which was rumored in 1794, but also a radicalization of the miners and pitmen resulting in potential riots.

Montagu lived to the proud age of eighty-one years and died in 1800. Her memorial stone at the family grave in Winchester Cathedral concluded that she,

Possessing the united advantages of Beauty, Wit, Reputation, and
Riches and employing her talents most uniformly for the benefit of
Mankind, might be justly deem'd an ornament to her Sex and Country.

The Essays

Debates not only about taste and literature but also about the ethics of commerce dominated the salon assemblies, private conversations, and correspondence of the Bluestockings.⁴⁷ Arguably, such spoken and written conversation bridged the imaginary border between the private and familial realm and the public sphere. A model of public life that incorporates the intellectual, the commercial, the artistic, and the sociable underlies these connections.⁴⁸

The two parts to this special issue, "Friendship and Sociability" and "Art and Commerce," focus on Montagu's various roles as cultural broker; reader, writer, and critic; friend and socialite; benefactor and industrialist. Although the essays are clustered under these two themes, contributors have emphasized the interconnections between different spheres of cultural and economic activities, which ultimately were reflected in Montagu's membership in a range of crosscutting intellectual, social, political, and cultural networks. Studies of Montagu's life and letters such as this one will hopefully build awareness of Montagu's importance to intellectual history more broadly, demonstrating that her life and thought were truly embedded in the "commerce of life."

ating Social Mobility in Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence," *Eighteenth-Century Women* 6 (September 2011): 103–30.

47. See also Betty A. Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture, 1740–1790* (Cambridge, 2016).

48. Implicit in this work is an engagement with Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962)—a work that has dominated, if not unchallenged, eighteenth-century studies since its translation into English in 1989.

Friendship and Sociability

Her vast collection of manuscript letters indicates that Montagu was part, and at times the center, of diverse social networks. This part follows the cue of Deborah and Steven Heller, who have sought, with the help of social network analysis, to reexamine the Bluestocking circle as one "wider than Montagu's personal friendship group" at court and in the public sphere. The Bluestockings were, after all, only one part of Montagu's social circle. "As bridger and broker," Montagu reached out to many social circles in politics, culture, business, and the court, "cutting across many other dimensions, including class, status, gender, religion, and nationality."⁴⁹ These circles were linked directly and indirectly, but some of the more important connections were forged through friendship.

Elizabeth Montagu's friendships with both women and men modeled the idea of "higher friendship"—unselfish friendship shared by virtuous partners—in public and in private. In this issue, Deborah Heller, Caroline Franklin, and Elizabeth S. Bennett present detailed studies of such relationships. Heller focuses particularly on Montagu's friendships with Anne Pitt and Elizabeth Carter, arguing that the failure of the former and the success of the latter reveal Montagu's understanding of true friendship as virtue-based and rational, a model stemming from the ethics of Aristotle. Virtue friendship, argues Heller, increasingly replaced affiliations based on rank or status as a "higher friendship" during the eighteenth century and underpinned the Bluestocking project with ethical values and authenticity.⁵⁰

Bennett assesses the political dimensions of Montagu's friendships with George, Lord Lyttelton, and William Pulteney, Lord Bath, between the years 1742 and 1763. While the Bluestocking assemblies were committed to a model of civil society defined by egalitarian sociability, conversation, and the advancement of civic and nationalist virtue, their political influence seemed to be implicit and indirect. Campbell Orr has argued that, while it is true that Montagu's "potential as a political networker had . . . been curtailed for various familial, political and circumstantial reasons," her engagement with public life has been underestimated and understudied.⁵¹ Bennett continues Orr's argument, showing that in her correspondence with Lyttelton and Bath, Montagu explicitly commented on public affairs, creating a political identity and imagining herself part of the political nation.

Montagu's idea of "higher friendship" existed at the intersection of practical Christianity, commerce, and public service. This multifacetedness is exemplified in the friendship between Montagu and James Beattie. Using hitherto-unpublished letters between Montagu and Beattie, published in the online version of this issue, Caroline Franklin argues that Montagu's role as Beattie's patron enabled her indirectly to

49. Heller and Heller, "A Copernican Shift," 31, 35.

50. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London, 2005). The idea of "higher friendship" is a reference to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

51. Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Queen of the Blues," 238.

support the Scottish Common Sense school in its attack on the skepticism of David Hume. Such skepticism, Montagu feared, might weaken the state Churches of England and Scotland and the social stability of the two nations.

Another facet of the complex nexus between friendship and patronage is discussed in Sophie Coulombe's essay. Montagu's acute awareness of the social and political circles of her time, and of the importance of patronage for literary success and social standing, did not always produce the desired results. As indicated in the short biographical sketch above, Dorothea Gregory and Montagu's own sister, Sarah Scott, suffered Montagu's problematic mentoring with grave consequences.⁵² In her essay, Coulombe focuses on Montagu's "cultivation" of another family member, her nephew Matthew Robinson (1762–1831), the second son of her brother Morris Robinson, as an ideal heir to pass on her name and values to posterity. More broadly, the essay provides a detailed case study of the ways in which eighteenth-century women could exert a familial and political authority that had significant ramifications for the construction of masculinity.

Art and Commerce

Each of the above essays looks anew at Montagu's writings, challenging the categorization of her achievements as predominantly domestic, sentimental, and literary by pointing to their implicit ethical, political, and ideological valences. Whereas those essays add nuance to conventional views of Montagu and the Bluestockings, the essays in the second part use her correspondences as windows onto broader aesthetic, cultural, and economic trends, using an impressively diverse range of methods and sources.

Michael J. Franklin's essay reveals Montagu's keen critical aptitude for literary trends. Franklin argues that Montagu's interest in Oriental cultures and literatures stems from Montagu's acquaintance with the Armenian adventurer Joseph Emin's "Asiatick fire & figure," whose impassioned heroism impressed English polite society in the 1750s. Long before Romantic writers experimented with Orientalist tropes, Montagu read and engaged in her role as a literary critic with Orientalist writings.

Markman Ellis's essay considers how the Montagu Papers now at the Huntington provide us with a case study in archival practices in the eighteenth century and today. It examines internal evidence in the collection for how received letters, copies of letters sent, and sent letters returned were organized within Montagu's household and by a series of subsequent editors such as Doran, Blunt, Climensson, and Matthew Montagu. Ellis pays particular attention to the large number of multiples of the same letter in the Montagu Papers, both drafts and copies made by aman-

52. Betty Rizzo's work on the more regressive friendships between genteel but impoverished women and their benefactors, lovers, or employers shows how these abusive and exploitative relations disenfranchised women by reproducing patriarchal relationships. See Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens, Ga., 1994).

uenses and copyists, and the sociable practice of extra-circulation with particular case studies. Drawing on concepts from Derrida's essay "Archive Fever" (1995), Ellis investigates these organizing systems alongside other evidence of eighteenth-century filing technologies and the practices of modern libraries.

Anni Sairio applies a different lens (corpus analysis) to Montagu's manuscript letters to explore changes in language use in her time. A sociolinguistic analysis of Montagu's private correspondence from the 1730s to the 1770s indicates that there are complex links between identity, status, and gender and language use in the eighteenth century. Montagu's letters of the late 1750s and 1760s, taken as a case study for Sairio's essay, document considerable linguistic changes that possibly reflected Montagu's increasing social influence and thus linguistic adaptation, and her ventures into authorship and literary criticism. Underlying these changes was the increasingly prescriptive tradition of grammars and letter-writing manuals.

Of course, Montagu was engaged not only with the interchange of words and ideas but also with literal commerce, and here her archive, alongside other documentation, provides insight into a key industry of the day. Les Turnbull's essay focuses on Montagu's management of the East Denton Colliery, still known as "The Monty" on Tyneside. Using principally the hitherto-unexplored records of the mining engineers, this essay charts the development of the mine under Edward and Elizabeth Montagu; in so doing, it provides a detailed study of the coal industry on Tyneside at this period. Turnbull assesses in particular the uniqueness of Elizabeth Montagu, arguing that while she certainly developed considerable expertise and influence in coal mining, she was one among several women who played prominent roles in the industry.

In sum, the work presented in this issue, through its own associations and investigations, offers a new understanding of how Montagu carried on "the commerce of life" in friendship and politics, in business and the arts, not only in the name of "benevolence & public spirit" but also in service of her desire to shine in the public sphere.⁵³ In consistently trespassing and reshaping the (gendered) binaries we have used to understand the eighteenth century—private/public, intellectual/emotional, financial/domestic, commerce/morality—Montagu puts a spotlight on how imbricated these were in practice.

The Project

Montagu left about 8,000 letters that are housed in various English and American libraries (see note 2), the Huntington Library most prominent among them, with nearly 7,000 letters. Editions of her letters to date have only reproduced a small portion of these. Her nephew and executor Matthew Montagu published a selection of her letters down to 1761 in the early nineteenth century. In 1899, the letters passed into the hands of Matthew Montagu's granddaughter Emily J. Climenson, who was

53. Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, March 20, [1790], MO 5463; see also Emma Major, "The Politics of Sociability."

just then publishing extracts from another eighteenth-century manuscript source: *Passages from the Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys . . . A.D. 1756 to 1808* (1899). She brought out another two volumes of Montagu extracts, taking the memoir up to 1761. Her death in 1921 left it to Climençon's friend Mr. Reginald Blunt, a historian of Chelsea, to complete the task in 1923, covering the years 1762 through 1800, once again arranged in a chronological order based on conjecture from internal evidence. Other family papers from 1761 to the end of Montagu's life were used by John Doran, an experienced biographer and editor, to provide a further selection of correspondence, which he printed with remarks of his own in biographical form, in 1873, under the title *A Lady of the Last Century (Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu): Illustrated in Her Unpublished Letters*. He also published an extra-illustrated twelve volume edition of it the same year. The aim of these editors was to construct a chronological biographical account piecing together extracts of anecdotes of upper-class life. They were cavalier in using manuscript sources. Occasionally they would splice together extracts from different letters or censor them. Even Doran acknowledged in his dedication of *A Lady of the Last Century* that he had compiled a "bit of mosaic." Crucially, though, they refrained from destroying the letters as each selection saw print.

In order to widen access to this crucial collection and at the same time, make sure that the letters are preserved for posterity, the Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online (EMCO) was set up in 2017 as a charitable incorporated organization to digitize the extant letters of Elizabeth Montagu at the Huntington Library as well as other archives in the United States and the U.K. Its aim is to publish a scholarly digital edition of her letters, including a complete inventory. EMCO developed out of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Elizabeth Montagu Letters Project,⁵⁴ which hosted a number of workshops and conferences which prepared this vast undertaking and brought together dedicated editorial and advisory boards with renowned experts in the field.

I serve as the editor-in-chief of EMCO, with Caroline Franklin, Michael Franklin, and Elizabeth Eger as general editors and advisory editors. Caroline Joanna Barker, a philanthropic donor and private scholar working on eighteenth-century women's writing, is funding the digitization of the Montagu letters held at the Huntington. The project has received further funding from the Foyle Foundation. Swansea University, under the guidance of their Digital Humanities Manager Alexander Roberts, will design, build and—crucially—maintain a platform specifically for this freely accessible digital edition. This edition will constitute a major new resource for researchers specializing in literature, history, art and architecture, theater, philosophy, economics, politics, and women's history to encounter, in the words of Montagu, "the wisest, the best, and the most celebrated men of our Times, and . . . some of the best, most accomplished, most learned Women of any times" (Montagu to Elizabeth Vesey, September 21, 1781, MO 6566).

54. <http://www.elizabethmontagunetwork.co.uk>.

The Portrait

Alongside this fresh scholarly assessment of Elizabeth Montagu, we are thrilled to reproduce a newly identified portrait of Montagu, painted by Frances Reynolds, sister of Joshua Reynolds, in 1778, on the cover of this special issue and opposite (fig. 1).⁵⁵

Letters, friendships, art, and commerce all aptly play roles in the story of this portrait's rediscovery. In May 2017, an English art dealer bought a painting at auction that he hoped might represent one of his ancestors, Lady Henrietta Williams Wynn. It was described as having been painted by someone in the circle of Sir Joshua Reynolds. He subsequently consulted a Reynolds expert, who suggested that the painting was a long-lost portrait of Elizabeth Montagu, although not one by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Sir Joshua did indeed paint Montagu in 1775, although the canvas has not been seen for well over a century and is only known to us today through a 1776 mezzotint by John Raphael Smith. But that mezzotint does not match the portrait acquired in 2017. Could it instead be the portrait referred to in a letter from Montagu to Frances Reynolds, dated March 1778, which mentions Frances Reynolds's request that Montagu sit for her?

Miss Gregory informed [me] you are still enclined to make [me] once again pleased with my face. I have not liked it for these twenty or 30 years, but for the time to come may be as fond of it as in ye very meridian of female vanity, I have therefore wish'd every day to bring you my countenance to be renewed, but want of health, & want of time have prevented me, but if you & Sr Joshua wd dine with me on Saturday, we wd fix a day for my waiting on you for a scheme which does me so much honour.⁵⁶

Boswell witnessed the occasion. During the sitting, Boswell reported that Montagu remarked to Frances Reynolds, "Very good old woman. Don't make me fifteen." To which Boswell replied: "All your friends, Ma'am, would wish she could."⁵⁷ There is no further reference in the correspondence to this portrait, but we know that the engraver Charles Townley copied it, and copies of his engraving have survived. Montagu quite liked the print, and asked for two copies in a letter to Frances Reynolds of July 28, 1783:

55. For further information from the dealer, see www.mileswynncato.co.uk.

56. Elizabeth Montagu to Frances Reynolds, [March 1778], Collected Correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu, box 2, folder 37, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; see also Wendorf and Ryskamp, "A Blue-Stocking Friendship," 194.

57. James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Norman Hill and L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1934), 2:362, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, <http://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198702177.book.1>.

There is not any thing that could make me proud to shew an old face to the public but its appearing in the character of your friend. I desire Mr Townley to save 2 prints of Mr Harris & two of your humble Servant for me.⁵⁸

The painting by Frances Reynolds, and any reference to it, then disappeared for 350 years. The art dealer investigated the history of Montagu portraits and found five sales in the nineteenth century that included a portrait of Montagu; in each of these, the portrait was identified as by Sir Joshua Reynolds but seemed more likely to have been the one painted by his sister. The painting he had acquired had previously been sold in 1965, at which point the sitter was described merely as a woman wearing a white dress and white shawl.

The clinching evidence for Montagu as the subject of the portrait and Frances Reynolds as its painter was provided with the assistance of Elizabeth Eger (co-curator of the 2008 exhibition *Brilliant Women* at the National Portrait Gallery and trustee of Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online). With the help of the specialist curator at the National Portrait Gallery, London, Eger compared the portrait to Charles Townley's engraving, and the identification was unmistakable. The long-lost portrait has now been acquired by an admirer of Montagu.

I thank Caroline Franklin, Michael Franklin, Elizabeth Eger, and Sara K. Austin for advice and help with this introduction and this special issue. "'The Commerce of Life': Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800)" launches the Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online (EMCO) digital edition after a lengthy but nevertheless intellectually stimulating preparatory period. Therefore, I want to thank all those who organized and participated in the conferences and workshops hosted by the Elizabeth Montagu Letters Project; the AHRC, for funding the pilot project; the University Library, King's College, Aberdeen; the Huntington Library and Susan Green of the *Huntington Library Quarterly*; and finally the contributors to this issue. The editorial team of EMCO is most grateful to Joanna Barker, whose true "benevolence & public spirit" have made the digitization of Elizabeth Montagu's letters housed at the Huntington Library possible, facilitating the continuation of the Elizabeth Montagu Letters Project as EMCO. I particularly would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Eger for her faithful support and invaluable work on Elizabeth Montagu.

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58. Montagu to Frances Reynolds, July 28, 1783, Collected Correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu, box 2, folder 37, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.



FIGURE 1. Frances Reynolds, *Elizabeth Montagu*, 1778, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. Image courtesy of Joanna Barker.