

Handbook of the British Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century

Handbooks of English and American Studies



Edited by
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Volume 16

Handbook of the British Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century



Edited by
Katrin Berndt and Alessa Johns

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Editors' Preface

This De Gruyter handbook series has been designed to offer students and researchers a compact means of orientation in their study of Anglophone literary texts. Each volume – involving a particular historical or theoretical focus – introduces readers to current concepts and methodologies, as well as academic debates by combining theory with text analysis and contextual anchoring. It is this bridging between abstract survey and concrete analysis which is the central aim and defining feature of this series, bringing together general literary history and concrete interpretation, theory and text. At a time when students of English and American literary studies have to deal with an overwhelming amount of highly specialized research literature, as well as cope with the demands of the new BA and MA programs, such a handbook series is indispensable. Nevertheless, this series is not exclusively targeted to the needs of BA and MA students, but also caters to the requirements of scholars who wish to keep up with the current state of various fields within their discipline.

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- knowledge of cultural and historical contexts;
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Internationally renowned colleagues have agreed to collaborate on this series and take on the editorship of individual volumes. Thanks to the expertise of the volume editors responsible for the concept and structure of their volumes, as well as for the selection of suitable authors, HEAS not only summarizes the current state of knowledge in the field of Anglophone literary and cultural studies, but also offers new insights and recent research results on the most current topics, thus launching new academic debates.

We would like to thank all colleagues collaborating in this project as well as Dr. Ulrike Krauss at De Gruyter without whose unflagging support this series would not have taken off.

Martin Middeke
Gabriele Rippl
Hubert Zapf
July 2022

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16 Sarah Scott, *Millenium Hall* (1762)

Abstract: Best known as the foremost utopian novel of the eighteenth century, Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) also represents what Gary Kelly has termed the "Bluestocking programme," a fictional representation of real reforms desired by a network of female intellectuals including Scott, Scott's sister Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, and others. This chapter will focus on Bluestocking politics as represented in the novel, as well as on emotional and economic themes depicted through female friendship, feminism, contractualism, philanthropy, education, and estate management.

Keywords: Utopia, novel of sensibility, bluestockings, historiography, Mary Astell

1 Context, Oeuvre, Moment

Sarah Scott, née Robinson (1721–1795) was the youngest daughter of Matthew Robinson (1694–1778) and Elizabeth Drake (c.1693–1746). Her older sister, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu (1718–1800), was the famous Bluestocking patron and business woman.

Sarah was baptized on 5 September 1721 at Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, in York. Her mother, Elizabeth Drake was the daughter of Councillor Robert Drake of Cambridge. After his death, her mother, Sarah's grandmother, married Dr Conyers Middleton (1683–1750), the famous Cambridge scholar and clergyman, in 1710. Elizabeth Drake enjoyed a thorough education at the hands of Bathshua Makin, and made the education of her own children a paramount concern in turn.

The Robinsons lived on and off at the maternal estate of Monk's Horton (or Mount Morris, as it was also called), in Kent, and from the 1730s until 1746 resided there continuously. Sarah was closest to her sister, Elizabeth. In 1742, Elizabeth married Edward Montagu (1692–1776), the grandson of the Earl of Sandwich and a coal magnate who was almost thirty years her senior – a marriage which took Elizabeth Montagu away from Kent and her sister.

In 1746 Scott's mother died, leaving Sarah virtually homeless, as Mount Morris passed to the eldest brother, Matthew, and their father decided to move to London. In December 1747, Sarah went to Bath, where she met Lady Barbara Montagu (c.1719–1765), the daughter of George Montagu, Earl of Halifax, with whom Sarah shared an intimate and life-long friendship.

On 15 June 1751, Sarah married George Lewis Scott (1708–1780). He was the eldest son of George Scott of Bristo, in Scotland, and Marion Stewart, daughter of Sir James Stewart of Coltness, Lord Advocate of Scotland. Scott's father had been

envoy-extraordinary to Augustus II the Strong, King of Poland, in 1712, and was also a close friend of George I. George Lewis Scott was therefore a well-connected man, and he was also a Fellow of the Royal Society, a musician, and an accomplished mathematician.

Whilst the couple probably had already met in 1743, they could not marry because of Scott's lack of income until he became sub-preceptor to the Prince of Wales in 1751. It was an office he kept until 1756, when the Prince of Wales came of age. Sarah meanwhile, in order to generate income, published her first book with Andrew Millar, who was an influential London printer and bookseller who also published the works of James Thomson, Henry Fielding and Samuel Johnson. *The History of Cornelia* was published on 19 April 1750, with an edition printed in Dublin in the same year. While the work was sentimental and conventional, it already addressed issues that Scott would develop in her later fiction: the conflicting demands of patriarchal authority, filial duty and self-determination. Furthermore, the novel in some ways anticipated the fiction of Ann Radcliffe (↗ 23 Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*), Mary Brunton and Frances Burney (↗ 21 Burney, *Evelina*).

The marriage between Sarah and George Scott did not last long and the reasons for this are still unknown. In April 1752 Matthew Robinson and his sons formally removed Sarah from Leicester Fields (now Leicester Square), the abode of the Prince of Wales, where she was residing with Scott. George Scott refunded half of Sarah's dowry to her father but continued to support her with £150 per annum (Climenson 1906, II. 7). Obtaining a legally valid divorce was extremely difficult. A suit for judicial separation could be pursued only on the grounds of adultery or cruelty (or a combination of the two), while parliamentary divorce involved complex public processes, which were expensive (Bailey 2003, 49).

Thus, Sarah Scott returned to Bath to set up a household with Lady Barbara Montagu. Both women became part of a Bath community that was different from the fashionable society that they had previously known. They were preoccupied with reform, philanthropy and the critique of patriarchal authority, themes echoed in Scott's fiction. Scott and Montagu lived first in Bath and then later in Batheaston, only to return to Bath for the health of "Lady Bab." In Batheaston, the pair took care of impoverished women and children, teaching them craft skills to support themselves financially by means of cottage industry.

Scott continued to translate and write in order to earn money, experimenting with a range of genres ranging from translation, history writing to novels. In her novels, she tapped into topics that were explored also by Richardson, Sarah Fielding, Burney, and later Maria Edgeworth (↗ 28 Edgeworth, *Ormond*). Sarah Scott was particularly concerned with the issue of female education and independence (economic and social), female friendship as a viable and respectable alternative to marriage, and Practical Christianity as a basis for social reform. On the issue of education she followed the footsteps of Mary Astell, whose *Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (Part I and II, 1694,

1697) promoted an all-female college to educate women intellectually and spiritually. Astell echoed Descartes and the Cartesian François Poullain de la Barre in her premise that women are as intellectually capable as men, a point that Mary Wollstonecraft (↗ 25 Wollstonecraft, *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*) famously explored about 100 years later. Scott also had this proposal in mind when she devised a fictional all-female, self-sufficient community in her novel *Millenium Hall*. Developing her ideas on social reform Scott

endorsed and adjusted civic humanist and jurisprudential discourses; [. . .] echoed notions of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and the Scottish moral sense philosophers (especially Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith). They drew simultaneously on ideas of contractual reciprocity and the language of charity and responsibility. In the process, they [Scott, Fielding and Astell] rerouted the conceptions of social contract, laissez-faire, and the division of labor to turn trade into benevolent exchange, individualism into community, and nationalism into internationalism. (Johns 2003, 19–20)

The influence of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson resulted in Scott's novels working with the idea of sympathy and benevolence as the basis for a just but not socially equal society. The literary mode of sensibility suited her reformist concerns the most, yet Scott did not subscribe to the idealisation of female domesticity or in fact to a concept of constricted femininity. *The History of Cornelia* sees the heroine travel on her own to France to evade the advances of her uncle/guardian. *Millenium Hall* celebrates the economic self-sufficiency of middling class and gentry women who run a country estate much more successfully than their male neighbour. Scott refashioned the novel of sensibility to appropriate social responsibility, sympathy and benevolence not as a feminine value, but as a Christian duty [↗ 2 The Novel and Sense(s)]. Furthermore, the plot lines move away from the depiction of marriage and family to the celebration of female friendship and female community (↗ 3 The Novel and Intimacy).

Again, in *Agreeable Ugliness* (1754) Scott examines the tensions between filial obedience, filial love and self-determination. *Agreeable Ugliness: or The Triumph of the Graces, exemplified in the real life and fortunes of a young lady of some distinction* was published by Robert Dodsley, anonymously. It was a literal translation of *La Laideur Aimable; ou Les Dangers de la Beauté* (1752) by Pierre Antoine de la Place, himself a translator of the works of Sarah and Henry Fielding, William Congreve and Thomas Otway. The book's subject matter reflected Scott's struggles at the time – her complex relationship with her father, the conflict between filial obedience and filial love, and her concerns about disfigurement as a result of smallpox.

In 1759, *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House* was published by Rivington and Dodsley, anonymously. The authorship has frequently been attributed to either Barbara Montagu or Sarah Scott, though the biographers of Samuel Richardson suggest that the novel was written by one of Barbara Montagu's charges (Batchelor and Hiatt 2006; Eaves and Kimpel 1971, 464). Whilst *The Histories* and *Millenium Hall* clearly overlap in their concerns with social reform

and philanthropy, no evidence has yet been found to confirm Scott's authorship. When no willing publisher could be found, Lady Barbara funded the printing of *The Histories* and Richardson took care of the practical details. The book was successful and repaid their investment. The theme of filial duty is negotiated again in Scott's later novels, not only *Millenium Hall* (1762), but also its sequel, *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), and *The Test of Filial Duty* (1772).

If her novels showed Scott's pre-occupations with proto-feminist topics in literary form and content, her historical works were implicit commentaries on political leadership and the public sphere. *The History of Gustavus Ericson, King of Sweden* (1760), published under the pen name Henry Raymond, echoed Bolingbroke's *Idea of a Patriot King* (1749) as well as the historiographies of Scott's step-grandfather Conyers Middleton (see also Smith 2008). *The History of Mecklenburg, from the First Settlement of the Vandals in that Country to the Present Time* (1761) was aptly published in the same year that Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz wed George III. Scott used the historical biography to promote her idea of political virtue, responsibility, and Anglican values. Her deliberate anonymity as writer of these historiographies indicates that Scott was very mindful of the precarious position of women writers writing, in particular, history (Looser 2010). The underlying conjecture of Scott's exemplary historiographies is "an assumed constancy of human nature" (Koselleck 2004, 22). Thus, historical *exempla* were deemed useful and relevant to instruct but also to comment on contemporary historical and political events.

After the death of Lady Barbara Montagu in 1765, Scott embarked in 1767 on a venture to establish another communal household. With her sister Elizabeth Montagu, her widowed cousin Grace Freind and Mrs Cutts, and later Mary Arnold, Scott rented an estate in Hitcham, in Buckinghamshire, which was owned by Freind's son Robert. Each member was to invest £50 in this project, which was closely modelled on *Millenium Hall*. Apart from the main house, the estate was to include a school and other charitable institutions for the impoverished community. Despite the successful debut, financial difficulties, ill health and quarrels between the members of the community led to the eventual dissolution of this real-life Millenium Hall.

In 1772, Scott published two very different books: a historical biography of another Protestant figure, the Huguenot poet and chronicler Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552–1630), and *The Test of Filial duty, in a series of letters between Miss Emilia Leonard, and Miss Charlotte Arlington*, a novel that continued to explore Scott's concern with the conflict between filial duty and affective individualism, favouring emotional attachment as the basis of marriage over dynastic unions.

In 1785 Scott moved to Catton, Norwich. Whilst she did not publish further works during the last decade of her life, her interest and literary imagination were ignited by the French Revolution and the Terror as her correspondence documents. She wrote to her sister: "I begin to think I am alike Dr. Young, & love a horror, for tho' the accounts from France chill my blood, & make it boil alternately, yet I never before felt so much impatience for newspapers. The horrible events they relate keep

my mind in a ferment, & almost entirely possess it” (Letter of Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 September [1792] Elizabeth Montagu Collection, Huntington Library, MO 5489). Though Scott advocated principles of Practical Christianity and female education, she did not embrace social or gender equality, as her outrage about the involvement of women in the French Revolution confirms:

We must indeed be the maddest of all people to aim at innovations; yet there are numbers who are extravagant in their praises of the conduct of the French. Some even Women, who I suppose envy the glory of the Poissardes. They make me wicked, for I wish to send them all to Paris, tho’ I think it must be rather a worse place than les Enfers. That sounds less offensive to polite ears than the English name, by being less familiar to us. (Letter of Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, 4 October [1792] Elizabeth Montagu Collection, Huntington Library, MO 5490)

Whilst Sarah Scott socialised on the fringes of the famous Bluestocking assemblies hosted by her sister Elizabeth Montagu, her writings nevertheless fed into an understanding of Bluestocking proto-feminism. The Bluestockings came together in the 1750s around Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey, Hester Piozzi, and Frances Boscawen and continued to meet well into the 1790s with a second generation of hostesses and societies in London and the provinces. Montagu, Vesey, Boscawen, and Elizabeth Carter were all close friends and eager correspondents who were united in the “blue stocking doctrine” of “rational conversation” [Letter of Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 17 (August 1765), Elizabeth Montagu Collection, Huntington Library, MO 3151]. These informal gatherings united men and women primarily of the gentry and upper classes, with the participation of a number of more middle-class professionals, in the pursuit of intellectual improvement, polite sociability, the refinement of the arts through patronage, and national stability through philanthropy. Scott, however, was much more driven by Practical Christianity than her sister, and dedicated her life and writing to the amelioration of the lives of labouring poor women by empowering them with work and income.

Sarah Scott died on 30 November 1795. Her executor, Mary Arnold, destroyed most of her papers and letters. In her last will, of 10 September 1794, she asked to be buried at Charlcombe, Somerset, next to Lady Barbara Montagu, “in consequence of a promise formerly made to her” (*National Archives*, prob 11/1270). Though prolific and part of a surge of women writers in the mid-century, and still read today, Scott never saw herself as a “professional” writer (Schellenberg 2005, 76–93).

2 Narrative and Aesthetic Strategies

In 1762 Scott published her now best-known novel, *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants and such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections as May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments*

of *Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue by A Gentleman on his Travels*. By 1778, it had gone through four editions. Among Scott's work, it is perhaps the best reflection of the ideals of Practical Christianity, social capital and benevolent exchange that were so important to her. Though Scott is critical of the "dull" presentation of topics in Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, the two novels share an interest in social responsibility, principles of property and patronage, and a suggestion of a system of "vertical friendship" that unites the household, tenants, the wider family and village as a hierarchical but stable social unit. *Millenium Hall's* sequel, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, which was published by Millar in April 1766, continues the exploration and promotion of these themes.

Millenium Hall is a fictional account of a group of wealthy women, who, disillusioned with society, establish a quasi-separatist retreat in the tradition of eighteenth-century secular convents. The community itself consists of two main country houses where women from the upper middling classes and aristocracy live according to principles of Practical Christianity. Closely connected to the main houses are cottages for poor and disabled people, a carpet and rug workshop as well as a forest and farmland.

The narrative structure of the novel is intricate (Wandless 2008). Kelly highlights "the novel's complex of plots, including imbedded plots, implied plot, main plot, and subplot" (Kelly 1995, 29). The novel does not enhance what Ian Watt identified as the new and experimental "formal realism" of the eighteenth-century novel, which included verisimilitude of character and location that were supposed to represent human experience in the particular. The characters, particularly the female characters in the embedded narratives of *Millenium Hall*, are universal emblems of females' cultural and socio-economic disenfranchisement – "the 'gothic' nature of every day female experience" (Haggerty 1992, 114).

The frame narrative consists of an epistolary travel account by Sir George Ellison to a male friend, a publisher. Although the traveller remains anonymous in *Millenium Hall* itself, *The History of Sir George Ellison* reveals his identity and provides some further background information on the "Gentleman on his travels." Sir George Ellison and his fellow traveller, Mr Lamont, tour through England to restore Ellison's health. Suffering the "ill effects" of an extended stay in Jamaica, he had been "advised by an eminent physician to make a very extensive tour through the western part of this kingdom, in order, by frequent change in air" (Scott 1995, 54).

They stumble upon the estate of Millenium Hall quite by accident:

When we walked about half a mile in a scene truly pastoral, we began to think ourselves in the days of Theocritus, so sweetly did the sound of a flute come wafted through the air. Never did pastoral swain make sweeter melody on his oaten reed. (Scott 1995, 56)

The men call the "earthly paradise" Millenium Hall – a reference to the *Book of Revelation* that promises the ascent of the righteous and virtuous. The narrator describes in great detail the estate, the women who run it and the poor and destitute

people living in a secluded area, and the history of the establishment of Millenium Hall and its economy. Interspersed are the Socratic dialogues between the narrator and the founders of the Hall – a literary form that is commonly used in early modern utopias (Houston 2014). These are complemented by “virtue in distress” narratives – stock elements of the novel of sensibility – by Miss Mancel, Miss Selwyn, Miss Trentham, Mrs Morgan and Lady Mary Jones, all related by Mrs Maynard who turns out to be a distant cousin of Sir George Ellison (Brissenden 1974). Scott echoes her exemplary historiography in *Millenium Hall* by portraying the women’s stories of distress, (sexual) abuse and mistreatment as universal female experiences (Barker-Benfield 1992, 219). As Berndt argues, “[t]he universal validity of the ladies’ histories is underlined discursively by the fact that they are revealed by the only character whose past experiences are not elaborated on in the text, Mrs Maynard, rather than by the individual women themselves” (2019, 105). They tell stories of misogynist abuse, abandonment, financial coercion and marginalisation in the form of “miniature sentimental novels” (Elliott 1995, 538). What becomes apparent is that the women created and perhaps even had to create a space where women transcended their own alienation, be it social, economic or cultural and determined their own fates by sharing resources, work and friendship. Dunne identifies these subplots as anti-marriage (Dunne 1994). So, for example, the founders of Millenium Hall, Miss Melvyn (Mrs Morgan) and Miss Mancel had been united by friendship since childhood. Their stories trace how they both survived being orphaned, experiencing disastrous and abusive marriages, and suffering sexual assaults by guardians. Through unexpected inheritances, the women reunite in their endeavour to found a community of women. The other inhabitants of Millenium Hall share a similar fate of forced marriages, sexual advances and abuse but again often are liberated by miraculous and very convenient inheritances. Miss Selwyn’s story stands out somewhat as it lacks the violence and abuse that the other stories depict. As a young woman, Miss Selwyn becomes the companion to her friend Lady Emilia Reynolds and lives happily and contentedly with her, without seeing the need to marry. On Lady Reynolds’s deathbed, she learns that Lady Reynolds is indeed her real mother. In a plot point familiar to us by now, Miss Selwyn inherits a considerable amount of money from her mother and is able to join the community at Millenium Hall.

In *Millenium Hall*, Scott transfers the responsibilities that were traditionally allocated to estate owners, such as benevolence, hospitality, and social responsibility, to the community of women. She also advocates the Protestant principles of introspection, self-discipline and self-help but is not politically radical. The charity work in *Millenium Hall* does keep every member of the estate in their place, but helps the poor and disadvantaged to provide for themselves. The women in the alms-houses, for instance, sew, spin, and cook for the benefit of the whole community with the understanding that everyone contributes as best as they can. The genteel women of the main house manage and teach to the best of their knowledge and

abilities. The community's economic strategy is long-term investment in land and social capital.

Mrs Maynard's account to the male travellers about these principles and successes of Millenium Hall is effective. The subplot, which is carried over to *The History of Sir George Ellison*, is the gradual enlightenment and reform of the main narrator and his companion. Though already a benevolent slave owner in Jamaica, as we learn in *The History*, Sir George Ellison acquires an estate in Dorset after visiting Millenium Hall, and sets up similar charitable projects (Oakleaf 2015). Betty Rizzo sees this "history" matching Scott's historical texts as an exemplary tale. The model is however, neither military hero, king nor political leader; "Great generals or wise statesmen are rather objects of wonder than imitation to the common rank of men" (Scott 1996, 3). The exemplary nature of Scott's reformist tale was used by an American abridged pirate version, *The Man of Real Sensibility* (1774), which gained popularity in the colonies as an intervention in the abolitionist movement and was therefore re-issued three times. The text significantly cuts the English plot of the novel and focuses instead on Ellison's amelioration of the condition of slaves on his Jamaican plantations (Bannet 2010).

3 Reception and Theoretical Perspectives

The anonymously authored *Millenium Hall* went through four editions between 1762 and the end of the century and then fell into obscurity before feminist scholars revived it in the second half of the twentieth century. As Ellis has shown, *Millenium Hall* was considered by contemporary reviewers "in terms of its success or failure as 'moral fiction'" (Ellis 1996, 45–8). The *Critical Review* thus wrote: "His [the author's] are monsters of excellence; his scene absurdly unnatural; his narrative perfectly cold and tasteless; his precepts trite; and his very title unmeaningly and ridiculously pedantic" [*Critical Review*, 14 (1763), 463–464]. In a letter to Elizabeth Montagu, Scott wrote disappointedly about this review, "I never saw so much virulence spent on any thing. I imagine Newberry & they have quarrelled, for if they did not like it, at least it was not worth while to be in such a rage" [Letter by Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu (31 January 1763), Elizabeth Montagu Collection, Huntington Library, MO 5300].

Scott's sister, Elizabeth Montagu, did her best to promote the book though she did not approve of Scott's generic choice of a seemingly frivolous novel (Major 2011, 154–155). Montagu wrote to friends such as Elizabeth Carter and William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, commending her sister as one who "has talents above her subject, & I hope she will employ them on something of a higher rank in les belles lettres than novel writing" [Letter from Elizabeth Montagu to William Pulteney, Earl of Bath (1762), Elizabeth Montagu Collection, Huntington Library, MO 4554]. Sarah Scott wrote for money as she needed to generate some income, particularly after the separation from

her husband. The novel as a primarily commercial literary enterprise did not fit in with Elizabeth Montagu's and indeed her Bluestocking circle's commitment to intellectual improvement, polite sociability, the refinement of the arts through patronage, and national stability through philanthropy. Nevertheless, despite the general success of the novel, Sarah Scott did not profit financially from its publication as much as she wanted (↗ 5 The Novel and the Literary Marketplace).

Dale Spender's influential *Mothers of the Novel* (1986) brought the novel back to the attention of modern readers. It was republished in 1986 by Virago, introduced by Jane Spencer. A more extended and annotated edition was published in 1995 by Broadview Press, edited by Gary Kelly.

Scholarship has focussed on different aspects of Scott's novel. Main *foci* are the novel's inherent utopian qualities and visions (Schnorrenberg 1982; Johns 2003; Pohl 2006; Nardin 2011; Acosta 2007; Carretta 1992), the representation of the body in the novel (Nussbaum 1997; Reeves 2015), female friendship and female community (Rizzo 2008; O'Driscoll 2003; Haggerty 1992), its Bluestocking context and the illustration of what Gary Kelly calls "Bluestocking feminism" (Kelly 1995; Guest 2002), Anglican practical piety (Major 2011) and abolitionist reform (Jordan 2011; Oakley 2015).

In a review of Gary Kelly's edition of *Millenium Hall* (1995), Alessa Johns wrote that "Sarah Scott may well be the most innovative writer of Utopian narrative in eighteenth-century Britain" during a period of utopian writing which, at the point of publication of the review, still remained neglected (Johns 1998, 314). Johns' book-length study on eighteenth-century women's utopias took her cue from previous scholarship that, to her mind, focused only on the feminising of classical republicanism, reformism, and the separation of the gendered spheres of commercial capitalism and benevolent and charitable domesticity. Instead, Johns argued that Scott's utopian project was much more political; in *Millenium Hall*, Scott presented a reformed social contract that reimagined the gendered idea of family and in turn created "new communities based on emotional, educational, and moral ties rather than legal or biological ones" (Johns 2003, 93).

Both Johns and Nussbaum use the term "feminotopia," coined by Mary Louise Pratt, to identify the "idealized worlds of female autonomy, empowerment, and pleasure" that Sarah Scott depicts (Nussbaum 1997, 161). According to Nussbaum, feminotopias are "quests for self-realization and fantasies of social harmony" (Nussbaum 1997, 161). In this vein, *Millenium Hall* adapts "the political and the marital" to Scott's own values and quest for self-realization not only as a woman but also as a Christian (Johns 2003, 109).

Part of the self-realization is to develop an emotional autonomy away from the confines of the gendered spheres. This aspect is explored further in O'Driscoll (2003), Haggerty (1992), and Moore (1997), to read *Millenium Hall*'s isolated location not only as proto-feminist but indeed as queer – updating what Lilian Faderman coined as a platonic Romantic Friendship (Faderman 1981) (↗ 3 The Novel and Intimacy).

If Nussbaum identifies *Millenium Hall* as a feminotopia that contests “masculine versions of experience, even though they are often confined to the domestic sphere,” then Scott’s novel reaches beyond the confines of the domestic (Nussbaum 1997, 161). As I have argued elsewhere, *Millenium Hall* must be read in the context of the literary/cultural country house ethos that underpins seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English literature of retirement and retreat. By establishing a separatist community on a working estate, Scott extends the traditional role of women on country estates (Pohl 1996). Instead of being just wives, hostesses and genteel women in retirement, the women of *Millenium Hall* are responsible landowners and proto-industrialists, promoting a classical and humanist understanding of economy and society. Indeed, as Lisa Moore has argued:

The women of Millenium Hall [. . .] enjoy their privilege only to the extent that they are willing to serve a hierarchized ideology in which they are inferior to the men who visit them from the foreign realms beyond the domestic sphere. Thus their efforts to extend their privilege cannot take the form of challenging that hierarchy; rather they must attempt to extend the domestic sphere themselves. (Moore 1997, 31)

The estate of Millenium Hall is a metonymic re-inscription of the country estate as a socio-economically and emotionally empowered all-female space. However, the novel also re-inscribes the ancient symbolic paradigm of representing the “Other” – in this case, women and the disabled (and slaves, see below) (↗ 4 The Novel and Cultural Encounters). Both groups are “dis-abled” from participating fully in eighteenth-century society – thus, a different society, a different space has to be created:

A dwarf invited us to enter, to rest ourselves after our walk; they were all passing backwards and forwards, and thus gave us full view of them, which would have been a shocking sight, but for the reflexions we could not avoid making on their happy condition, and the very extraordinary humanity of the ladies to whom they owed it; so that instead of feeling the pain one might naturally receive from seeing the human form so disgraced, we were filled with admiration of the human mind, when so nobly exalted by virtue, as it is in the patronesses of these poor creatures, who wore an air of cheerfulness, which shewed they thought the churlishness wherewith they had been treated by nature sufficiently compensated. (Scott 1995, 74)

As Nussbaum argues, “Millenium Hall plays on the structural kinship between domestic femininity and the perverse, the monstrous, and the deformed. For Scott, such so-called deformity may be both liberating and debilitating” (1997, 161). The Othering of women in the novel is symbolised in the othering of the “monstrous and deformed.” The women in the community empathise with the disabled, not only because of their humanitarian impulse to empathise but because they too are the Othred, excluded and abused.

Gary Kelly consequently identifies *Millenium Hall* as “the fullest literary expression of the first wave of ‘bluestocking feminism’” (1995, 11). He evokes here Scott’s participation, albeit peripheral, in the literary circle of the Bluestockings that was presided over, amongst others, by Scott’s sister, Elizabeth Montagu. According to Kelly, the first

generation of bluestockings was committed to a “progressive-aristocratic” programme that sought to amend traditional cultures of court libertinism and paternalism based on patronage and property. Scott certainly targeted “the social injustice that results from the dominant upper-class system of courtly culture and agrarian capitalism” in her novel by strengthening the bond between property and social obligation and social capital (Kelly 1995, 30) (↗ 1 The Novel and Liberty).

Scott’s increasing interest in social reform, together with her own charitable lifestyle that, in opposition to Montagu’s idea of charity, was infused with the ideal of Practical Christianity, in some ways compensated for her inferior social and material status. Major identifies *Millenium Hall* as “a specifically English fictional sermon on Anglican femininity” and practical piety to, as the subtitle hoped, “excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue” (Major 2011, 55). The novel teaches by example, not only instructing Sir George Ellison and Lamont but also the reader. Teaching by example indeed “is the social glue of the community, vital to the serene preservation of the providential social order in *Millenium Hall*” (Major 2011, 156).

Postcolonial readings of *Millenium Hall* (Oakleaf 2015; Jordan 2011) identify the limits of Scott’s utopia. Whilst Sir George Ellison becomes a reformed slave owner, there “is no escape from creole contagion, for England derived its prosperity from its Caribbean slave plantations. Scott can build her pragmatically idealistic female community on no other foundation than tainted money” (Oakleaf 2015, 128). Indeed, Ellison arrives in ill health, apparently corrupted by the practices of slave ownership and colonial exploitation, only to be “cleansed” by the women of *Millenium Hall*. But the women of the Hall are equally bound up in these practices and have profited from wealth derived in the colonies. Furthermore, whilst they seek to liberate and care for the monstrous and deformed on their estate and provide a safe haven for them, they leave intact the hierarchy between the genteel women of the house and the dependants. Indeed, Jordan argues that this social order echoes a master/slave relationship (2011, 65). Sarah Scott’s “narrative obliquity vividly expresses as a formal device her insight into an inescapable constituent of female experience, the inability to communicate what must be endured” (Oakleaf 2015, 137) – the limits of utopia in the hand of women.

Scott’s range of writing was diverse and quietly experimental in content and form, determined by a strong sense of pragmatism and Practical Christianity. She was neither illustrious nor influential as her famous Bluestocking sister, nor did she strive to be a prominent literary writer as many of her Bluestocking companions. Nevertheless, she was one of the most published authors from the first generation of Bluestockings and it is particularly her utopian fiction that stood the test of time (Scott 1995, 18).

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