Reading and Sociability in the Correspondence Networks of Elizabeth Montagu and Friends

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Abstract

This thesis and accompanying digital edition 'Reading and Sociability in the Correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu and Friends' published through *Electronic Enlightenment*, address the relationships between correspondence network formation and reading practices in the letters of the Bluestocking female intellectuals Catherine Talbot (1721-1770), Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), and Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800). This study investigates the ways in which the letters they wrote constituted spaces of creative freedom in which they could transform the dominant discourses in their cultural context. Chapter one explores the ways in which the Bluestocking reading of the letters of the French salonniere Madame de Sévigné (1626-1696) both diverged from conventional readings in contemporary print culture, and provided a framework for conceptualizing essential principles of Bluestocking identity, such as rational female creativity, and spiritualized community. Chapter two examines the ways in which the Bluestockings developed and altered aristocratic neoclassical discourses on citizenship and public morality which marginalized and excluded women as political subjects within their letters and print sphere texts like *Dialogues of the Dead* (1759) and translation of Epictetus (1758), in order to create a language of classical public virtue for bourgeois women. Chapter three begins by examining the correlation between interpretation and coterie power in Montagu's relationship with two beneficiaries of her patronage, the poet James Woodhouse (1735-1820) and the classicist and clergyman Robert Potter (1721-1804). In both of these relationships Potter and Woodhouse fashion their identities and interpretative principles to respond to Montagu's interests. The second half of the chapter addresses Montagu's correspondence with Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, Lord Kames (1696-1782). Here Montagu's attempts to generate an intellectually generative debate are rebuffed by Kames, as he attempts to define their exchange as merely light enjoyment, culminating in his editing of an 'Essay on Ornament' Montagu sent him from a historical-anthropological tract into a guide on interior design.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

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Contents

Note on the Text and Translation

Throughout the thesis and edition I address a wide range of primary sources, both in English and French. In the selection of these texts I have opted to favour the first edition of the text unless I have reason to believe that my subject is referring to another edition in particular. These cases are always indicated within the text, and contain references to particular appendices, notes, or explicit references to a particular edition. The only other reason I occasionally depart from editions contemporaneous with my subjects, drawn from *Google Books, JISC Historical Texts*, and *The Hathi Trust Digital Library*, is if I have occasion to refer to annotation or commentary which only exists in a contemporary edition. Translations from the French have been kindly provided by the Swansea University French department MA programme, revised by Dr Maria Fernandezparra. These translations have been applied to all extensive French quotations in chapter 1, apart from occasions on which the text of the eighteenth-century English translation is the explicit subject of my analysis.

Citation practices are based on MHRA formatting standards, with an adaptation made for the sake of consistency in letter citations. Letter references will be represented in the following format, 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 1 January 1741' followed by details of print, digital, or manuscript location. Abbreviations of commonly cited print editions and Manuscript locations are as follows:

- ed. Pennington - *A Series of Letters between Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot, 1741–1770, with letters from Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Vesey,* ed. by Montagu Pennington, 4 vols, (London: Printed for F.C & J. Rivington, 1809)
- ed. Montagu - *The Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu, with some of the Letters of her Correspondents,* ed. by Matthew Montagu, 4 vols, (London: F.C & J. Rivington, 1809-1813)
- Carter 1817 – *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu, Between the Years 1755 and 1800*, ed. by Montagu Pennington, 3 vols (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1817).
- GD24 – Papers of Henry Home, Lord Kames, National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- MO – Elizabeth Montagu Papers, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- MS 30 – James Beattie Papers, University of Aberdeen Special Collections, Aberdeen

Introduction: 'Our Shared History'

> L^{dy} Carpenter tells me she hears poor Old Rollin had finished his Roman History before he died. I shall be glad if it's true: - but are not you very sorry for Him? I have been used to love & esteem him so long, & he has given me so much Entertainment, that I assure you I am. Besides I have another Obligation to him far superior to all the Others: for to him I owe the Happiness of the greatest part of my Life, since He in a manner began our acquaintance. Had it not been for Rollin, we should perhaps never have known enough of each other to enjoy the pleasures of Friendship, but might hafve been just so much acquainted as to Curtsy cross a Room. have each Others name down in a long List of Visits instead of at the Bottom of a Hundred Letters, & think Ourselves obliged to leave those names at each Other's Door once or twice a Winter; but if we ever had the Misfortune of being let in, stay five Minutes, be very happy in that singular piece of Good-Luck, - & wish One another half-Hang'd[1]

Jemima Yorke, Marchioness Grey (1723-1797) wrote the above to her long-term friend and correspondent, the bluestocking essayist Catherine Talbot (1721-1770), celebrating their shared reading of Charles Rollin's *Ancient History* (1730-38), one text among the hundreds which are referred to across their correspondence. Jemima's praise of their collaborative response here presents, in microcosm, the elements that make up the subject of this thesis. Grey presents their engagement with Rollin as constitutive of 'the pleasures of friendship', a friendship which manifests itself in the writing of 'a Hundred Letters'. This relationship is identified as contrary to a more insipid form of sociability associated with conventional, polite conversation. Comprised of 'Visits' and meetings 'once or twice a Winter', it only provokes resentment and disdain in Jemima. Her emphatic attack on this form of sociability is conveyed by her inversion of the image of community, that they might consider it 'a singular piece of Good Luck' to spend only 'five Minutes' together. She gives this sentiment a violently humorous sting by imagining the two of them wishing one another 'Half Hang'd', throwing into sharp relief the resentment present in 'Visits'. Jemima's championing of intellectual companionship, and shared appreciation of a text over brief polite visits in person go beyond the conceit of epistolary correspondence as presenting an 'illusion of physical presence' as a surrogate for physical intimacy, asserting that epistolary community is more desirable than the regulated and structured space of conventional female sociability, to use Bruce

[1] 'Jemima Grey to Catherine Talbot, September 1741', Bedfordshire and Luton Archives, Lucas Papers, L30/9a/3, f. 7.Papers, L30/9a/3, f. 7.

Redford's term.[2] The mental community which Grey and Talbot are able to share in reading and letter writing is championed as a space in which intellectual friendship is able to flourish over time, whilst real-world engagements are brief and lead to false impressions. Thus, in this letter, we can see the familiar tropes of discussions of eighteenth-century femininity, domestic sociability, conversation, sensibility, and the construction of one's identity in relation to literature all evaluated and reconfigured in relation to an intellectual communal identity based on a shared reading experience. The conception of epistolary space as a locus for the enactment and theorisation of community is extended on to the virtual space of a shared text, and through a reassessment of the text's meaning and significance its readers can constitute a communal understanding. For Catherine Talbot, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu, and their correspondents this group identity was only the beginning; all go on to produce letters and literary works, which, I will argue, have their cores in these shared reading practices.

The Construction and Rationale of Reading and Sociability in the Correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu and Friends – A shared Reading of Letters in a born-digital mini-edition

This thesis exists as a complement to *Reading and sociability in the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu and friends — a shared reading of letters in a born-digital mini-edition*, a digital edition of 25 letters by and to Elizabeth Montagu and members of her circle, published through *Electronic Enlightenment* (*EE*). This edition is compiled from unpublished manuscript letters from The British Library [Montagu Papers], London; The John Rylands Library, Manchester; King's College Aberdeen Library Special Collections, Aberdeen; Nottingham University Library, Nottingham; Dr Johnson's House, London, & Bedfordshire & Luton Archives, Bedford. This collection forms a microcosm of the social and creative functions of epistolary discussions of reading across the eighteenth century. The edition starts in the early 1740s, as represented by early letters from Montagu to figures like singer and socialite, Anne Donnellan (1702-1762), clergyman

[2] Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 7

William Freind (1715-1766) and Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland (1715-1785), and a letter from Catherine Talbot to Jemima Grey. The letters continue through the 1750s and 1760s, with the collection of manuscript letters to and from Montagu found at D[r] Johnson's House in London reproduced in its entirety. This collection includes letters from William Pulteney, 1st earl of Bath (1684-1764) and George Lyttelton, 1[st] Baron Lyttelton, as well as a letter from Montagu to her sister Sarah Scott (1723-1795) from 1766, discussing Montagu's nascent *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (1769). The letters of the 1770s introduce Montagu's patronage relationship with the Scottish philosopher and poet, James Beattie (1735-1803), and similar connections with the clergyman and classical translator Robert Potter (1721-1804) and the poet Anna Williams (1706-1783). Finally two letters in the 1790s from Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806) to Montagu round off the collection.

This edition was constructed as both a showcase of the technical potential of a digital edition of Elizabeth Montagu's letters, particularly when integrated into a broader trans-disciplinary database like *EE*, or a wider community of linked digital editions, such as the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). This edition exists between these two systems, as its coding, style, and editorial framework is all defined according to the *EE* model, but it also acts as a pilot edition for the Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence Online project, a TEI-based digital edition of Montagu's complete letters, led by Professors Nicole Pohl and Caroline Franklin, in which I am also participating.[3] The editorial framework deployed in the digital edition is conducive to scholarly openness. The link-data-based construction of the *EE* database converts each aspect of a scholarly edition of a letter into a discrete but linked item, with its own digital signifier and web of linked items. A letter itself; its date; its sender; its recipient; editorial notes; textual notes; glossary notes; geographical locations of senders and recipients; all of these are potential points of connection within the 80,000+ interlinked letters by over 10,000 correspondents within *EE*. On a practical level this means that the edition must anticipate a potential reader who is approaching the text and its annotations through a wide variety of different interpretative lenses, often passing from the note to the text rather than the other way

[3] For the full details and editorial principles of the *Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence Online* (EMCO) project, see Caroline Franklin & Nicole Pohl, "'An Editor's duty is indeed that of most danger": the Rationale for A Digital Edition of Elizabeth Montagu's letters', in *Editing Women's Writing, 1670–1840,* ed. by Amy Culley and Anna Fitzer, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 172-191.

around. It also facilitates data mining, enabled by a rigid formula when it comes to the structuring of the annotation. The Montagu letters represent a perfect crucible for this multi-disciplinary approach as, even within the tiny fractional sample represented here, the letters themselves, and their concomitant annotation, encompass a wide range of themes. This include microscopic science, political intrigue, naval and military history, as well as contemporary historiographical, literary and linguistic philosophies and the nature of eighteenth and nineteenth century charitable approaches to visual impairment. For this reason, the notes are all grammatically and structurally self-sustaining – linking out to other annotations through hyperlinks where necessary, but always retaining a textual structure that remains dependent only on its parent letter. It contains, in short, no references to 'see note above'.

This editorial predisposition towards openness is also reflected in the extensively hyperlinked nature of the annotations, there are very few notes which do not contain at least one link, either internally within *EE* or externally, to both primary and secondary material. These hyperlinks also, where possible, provide links to Open Access sources for primary texts, as well as, when available, the most authoritative version of the text. Authority is given to either a first edition or the particular edition referred to in Montagu's letters – as in the cases of the multiple, widely varying, editions of James Beattie's *Essay on Truth* (1770), and Henry Home, Lord Kames' *Elements of Criticism* (1762). This hyperlinking aims to produce a reader-friendly text, with a level of interconnectivity between various digital projects, including *The Perseus Library of Classical Texts, JISC Historical Texts*, *Google Books, Hathi Trust Digital Library* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which has not been seen before in flagship digital editorial projects like Cambridge University's *Darwin Correspondence Project*, the Vincent Van Gogh Museum's *Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, or the recent and celebrated *Pulter Project* at Northwestern University.[4] A hyperlinked editorial style is more difficult to maintain in institutionally-funded projects as, when the funding for such projects is inevitably concluded, the maintenance for such links ceases to be cost-effective, and the links are allowed to become obsolete. The subscription-based publication model of *EE* allows for

[4] James A. Secord and Alison Pearl, *The Darwin Project,* (1974-) <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk> [accessed 10 January 2019]; Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker, *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh,* (1994-) <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/> [accessed 10 January 2019]; Wendy Wall and Leah Knight, *The Pulter Project,* (2015-) <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu> [accessed 10 January 2019];.

consistent upkeep, and as part of their updating process for adding new material to the overall collection, dead links are traced and updated. In addition to a more seamless and open reader experience, this editorial style resonates with one of the fundamental principles of digital editing, that of textual fluidity and relationality. The ever-evolving nature of both text and commentary in digital editorial projects has been recognised for as long as digital humanities scholars have been theorising digital editions. An encapsulation of the 'media shift' from print fixity to digital fluidity is given by Krista Rasumussen as follows:

> A scholarly edition in print, one might say, is a complete and singular object in the world: the results of scholarly effort are locked in a printed edition that can be conceived of as completed and closed. The publisher or editors have completed a scholarly effort whose outcome can be accessed using the edition, which is frozen in time (the date of publication) and space (the physical edition)…Digital scholarly editions are seemingly incomplete, ambiguous objects…they are open to alteration in a much easier way than printed editions. To describe the difference between the two, Gabler distinguishes between information sites, which are composed of serially arranged collections in books, and knowledge sites, which are 'relational' and express 'creatively participatory intelligence'.[5]

I composed my born-digital edition in with this consideration in mind. By treating each component of the edition as a discrete element, my edition not only facilitates future development and correction of my own analysis and discussion, but will remain responsive to infrastructural and content developments in all the projects to which it links. If, for example, *JISC Historical Texts* updates its metadata on a text, or the *Perseus* library adds a new layer of critical commentary to their framework, these developments will also benefit my edition, where a static citation will only be able to encapsulate the text at a single stage of its development.

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[5] Krista Stinne Greve Rasmussen, 'Reading or Using a Digital Edition? Reader Roles in Scholarly Editions', in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices,* ed. by James Matthew Driscoll & Elena Pierazzo, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), pp. 119-136, (p. 124). For Rasmussen's theoretical predecessors in discussing the instability of digital texts and the 'media shift', see Hans Walter Gabler, 'Thoughts on Scholarly Editing, (Review of: Paul Eggert, Securing the Past. Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009)', *JLTonline,* (2011), pp. 1–16 (p. 12), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0222-001542> [accessed 28 February 2019]; and John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002)

This fluidity and 'relationality' is built into the thematic preoccupations of the edition as well. It is extremely selective and compact relative to its potential body of material, 25 letters out of 8,000 amounting to 0.31% of the whole. Even if one confines one's attention to letters in U.K archives, as was the case when the edition was constructed, my edition still encompasses only 2.5% of the c.1,000 potential letters. Within this minute fraction I was left with two possible approaches. The first was to build a thematically constructed edition, with letters all addressing a particular theme. Caroline Franklin's digital edition offered as a supplement to the online version of the recent *Huntington Library Quarterly* special edition*,* 'The Commerce of Life: Elizabeth Montagu', is an example of how this type of approach may function, focussing as it does on a particular relationship, Beattie and Montagu's friendship, and utilising material from a discrete archive, the Beattie Collection in the Aberdeen University Library Special Collections.[6] I chose to take a second approach, of producing an edition with an in-built diversity of correspondents, location of archival material, and thematic resonances, all loosely constructed around the relationship between the letters, the relationships they implied, and the texts implicitly or explicitly referred to within them. My aim with the edition was not to construct a narrative out of the sample of letters available to me, but to provide a thematic hub through my editorial commentary, from which further editorial projects can develop.

An example of such a project is this thesis itself. The leitmotifs which emerged from the construction of the edition, on display both within individual letters and across the collection as a whole, have formed the basis for this study. It also reflects my conception of the edition as anticipatory of the larger scale work of the *EMCO* project and *EE*. Where the edition highlights the variety of connections and concepts surrounding Montagu's correspondence by bringing a range of hitherto unseen manuscript material under critical scrutiny, the three chapters of the thesis offer three critical frameworks through which the reading practices of Montagu and her circle can be addressed.

[6] Caroline Franklin, 'Selected Letters between James Beattie and Elizabeth Montagu (1758–ca. 1799), University of Aberdeen: http://doi.org/10. 1353/hlq. 2018.0029', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 81.4, (2018)

Thesis Outline

The three primary themes which emerged from the edition, and which I discuss in more detail in the introduction appended to it, are: a) the use of text in conceptualising relationships, b) the use of shared reading to interrogate cultural discourse, c) the relationship between discussion of texts and the exercise of social power and authority. The thesis addresses each one of these concepts in an attempt to explore some of the ways in which epistolary discussions of reading informed the Bluestocking practices of cultivating intellectual community, informing public morality, and exercising patronage and coterie identities.

The first chapter is based on a close reading of the engagements of Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Catherine Talbot, with the published correspondence of the seventeenth century French salonniere Marie de Rabutin Chantal, marquise de Sévigné (1626-1696), and addressing the question 'to what extent does the Bluestocking reading of published letters inform their sense of epistolary community and emotional expression?' Sévigné's letters to her daughter provide the Bluestockings with a model of female sociability, female authorship, and epistolary intimacy. As they approach her letters they simultaneously confront the problems of her emotional excess, associated in British culture with French intemperateness, and her Jansenist Catholicism, about which Carter and Talbot debate extensively. After comparing the Bluestocking method of interpreting letters with the discourses surrounding epistolarity adopted by their contemporaries, this chapter enters into detailed close readings of the Bluestocking engagement with Sévigné's legacy in terms of the affective potential of correspondence and female literature in general. These readings are compared with those of their contemporaries in eighteenth century print, most notably Horace Walpole, an ardent Sévignist whose reading nevertheless departs significantly from the Bluestocking's own. The chapter closes with a look at the Bluestocking reception of Sévigné's moral philosophy, and the way it both informs, and jars, with epistolary intimacy as manifested within their letters. This chapter explores the correspondence surrounding a discrete text and genre, the letters of Madame de Sévigné, as a means of assessing the link between discussions of reading and affective community.

The second chapter broadens the scope of the analysis. Rather than engaging with the reading of a single text, this chapter focuses on the way in which Bluestocking interpretive communities provided a framework through which they could articulate their roles as commentators on public morality by creatively responding to prevailing cultural discourse. Montagu's centrality to nascent discourses of politeness, female intellectuality, conservative Anglican religion, and the cult of bardolatry, all provide a wealth of discursive frameworks on which to centre my discussion. Jon Mee, Elizabeth Eger, Emma Major, Karen O Brien, Fiona Ritchie and others have all addressed these in recent critical works, as will be discussed below. Instead of focusing on one of these discourses, I have opted to address the relationship between Bluestocking identity and eighteenth-century neoclassicism and engagement with classical literature, as they influence the definitions of citizenship and polite conduct and their relationship with masculine and feminine gender roles in an evolving bourgeois society. After introducing the discourse in question, this chapter will trace the correlation between gender and public morality through the Bluestocking discussions of the classical historians Thucydides and Tacitus, and the later neoclassical co-opting of classical republican masculinity by Adam Ferguson, and the way in which the Bluestockings build a model of feminised public morality out of them. It will then shift focus to assess the ways in which this cultural critique manifested in Montagu's most distinctly neoclassical print publication, her contributions to Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead* (1759). It will then explore the critique of aristocratic misappropriation of classical models persists in the discussion of Carter's *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758) and Montagu's role in the commission of James Beattie's 'Remarks on the Utility of Classical Learning' (1776), close readings of the epistolary background of which, I will argue, reveal them to be a self-conscious answer to the threat of libertine misrepresentation of Stoic philosophy in the early eighteenth century. Between them the Bluestocking approaches to these various forms of classical and neoclassical discourses represent a series of methods by which they are able to both critique the social order, and its dangerous historical and philosophical revisionism, as well as position themselves as ideally placed to make these observations. This chapter offers a second model for a close-reading based discussion of epistolary reading practices, that of constructing analysis around a unified theme, as it manifests and shifts across time and correspondence.

The third chapter focuses on the interplay of social power and interpretative authority within epistolary discussions of reading. It postulates that Elizabeth Montagu's relationships with James Woodhouse (1735-1800), Robert Potter (1721-1804), and Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782) represent zones of discursive conflict over interpretative control. Within these relationships issues of class, gender, and social status bleed into discussions of literary texts to problematize the free exchange of ideas within coterie networks and patronage relationships. The first section juxtaposes James Woodhouse's early letters to Montagu, replete with gestures of self-deprecation and expressions of intimacy, with Woodhouse' later conception of his relationship with her as revealed in his *Life of Crispinus Scriblerus* (1896). Alongside Woodhouse's charges of Montagu's abuse of power and refusal to let him practice his poetic vocation, he accuses her of attempting to control his intellectual development. I argue that this claim of what amounts essentially to 'brainwashing' attests to the interplay between Montagu's social power and her ability to control the meaning of the texts discussed within her circle. The second patronage relationship this chapter will address is that between Montagu and the classical translator Robert Potter. This relationship, whilst less fraught than the one she had with Woodhouse, is no less indicative of the relationship between social power and interpretative authority. The chapter traces the various techniques by which Potter attempted to court Montagu's favour through constructing the critical apparatus of his translation of Aeschylus (1779) in part according to her academic interests and preoccupations, and then coming to the defence of her conception of public and private identity in his *Inquiry into…Johnson's Life of Gray* (1783). Potter's attempts to represent himself as, variously, a public moralist, an active member of Montagu's own coterie and a subject of sentimental empathy, across both print and manuscript, play the game of interpretative power in the opposite direction from that of Woodhouse. Where Woodhouse was forced to let social power dictate his interpretative framework, Potter manipulates his readings in order to translate them into a friendship with his patroness. The final case study, that of Montagu's relationship with Lord Kames, reverses the power of the relationship, placing Montagu on the back-foot as she tries to establish a relationship of intellectual parity with the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher. The philosophical and political sympathies between the two, and between the Bluestocking project of intellectual self-development and Kames' own investment in women's education, has been recently discussed by JoEllen Delucia and Karen O'Brien. Delucia, in particular, uses the fact that Kames asked Montagu to contribute to the fourth edition

of his *Elements of Criticism* (1769), as evidence of the sympathy between the Bluestocking project and the Scottish Enlightenment.[7] I would contend that a close reading of this very contribution, an 'Essay on Ornament', combined with in-depth attention to both sides of the Montagu-Kames correspondence, actually reveals a constant power-struggle over the terms of the discussion, with Kames consistently rejecting Montagu's attempts to participate in literary or philosophical discussions with the same depth that she asks of him. Montagu therefore employs a series of re-interpretations of the framework of the letter, Kame's own texts and career, and the assignment he gives her, in order to bring the correspondence under her control.

Between them these three chapters offer a microcosm of the types of analysis which may be practised on epistolary discussions of reading in the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu and her companions, and provide avenues into some of the material which is currently being digitised and edited. In selecting these modes of analysis I have opted, as far as possible, to focus primarily on the letters, meaning that where print texts are discussed, such as the *Dialogues of the Dead* and *Epictetus* in chapter 2, they appear as subordinate to their own epistolary background and contexts. It is for this reason that *The Essay on Shakespeare* does not appear as prominently as one might expect in a study on the topic of Montagu's interpretative practice. The *Essay* and its interpretative framework has been thoroughly discussed recently in the works of Fiona Ritchie, Peter Sabor, and Elizabeth Eger, and whilst I do plan to produce a piece on the epistolary pre-history of the *Essay*, it is a project which cannot be reasonably accomplished with the space available to me here. The relationship between Montagu's *Essay* and her interest in the Ossian Controversy is also an angle which I have decided to reserve for a future piece, beyond the degree to which it appears in the edition, as I did not want to detract from my discussion of the Kames-Montagu relationship, which was my primary focus in discussing Montagu and the Scottish Enlightenment.

At this stage it is also important to clarify my use of the term 'Bluestocking'. At a historiographical level I do engage with criticism on the Bluestockings as a wider movement, as defined in *Bluestockings Now,* for example, and recognise the fallacy embodied in artificial constructions of Bluestocking uniformity like Richard Samuel's 'regimented…unifying, even coercive' interpretation in *The Nine Living Muses* (1778) with

[7] JoEllen Delucia, *A Feminine Enlightenment: British Women Writers and the Philosophy of Progress, 1759-1820,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 64

its attempt to place the conservative Carter and Montagu within the same political and religious framework as the Dissenter Anna Laetitia Barbauld and radical republican Catharine Macaulay.[8] That being said, throughout this thesis I will employ 'Bluestocking' as a short-hand for Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu, Catherine Talbot, and their interlocutors, unless those interlocutors are identified as deliberate outsiders, such as James Woodhouse, Robert Potter, and Lord Kames in the third chapter. This is done primarily to avoid the necessity of repeatedly spelling out the names of the correspondents, and to unite the arguments of the thesis around a central, conservative bluestocking ideology which I believe can be concretised in Montagu's immediate circle. It should not be taken, however, as extending to the second generation of Bluestockings represented by Barbauld or Hester Thrale.

Literature Review

Feminist Historiographies of Manuscript and Print

On a textual level this work is indebted to the work of scholars such as Melanie Bigold, Betty Schellenberg, and the various contributors to the essay collection *Reconsidering the Bluestockings,* (2002) all of whom have worked to build on the reassessment of literary and canonical value of manuscript sources begun by scholars such as Harold Love, Margaret Ezell, Arthur F. Marotti and H.R Woudhuysen. Their work in the 1990s and early 2000s began to reconstitute the conventional view of the canon grounded solely in print sources, and assert that manuscript texts were not only necessary for historical study, but that approaching them could open whole new vistas of the relationship between author, text, and audience. The nineties saw a series of monographs which opened a whole new sphere of manuscript and network analysis: Harold Love's *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth Century England* (1993), Arthur Marotti's *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric* (1994), and H.R. Woudhuysen's *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558-1640* (1996). Between them these works challenged the teleological

[8] Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5.

understanding that the advent of print destroyed the manuscript, and instead argued that manuscript circulation remained as an active form of circulating texts, and that a consideration of coterie manuscript circulation in the early modern period was necessary for a complete understanding of the ways in which texts were received and circulated. In 2000 Marotti and Michael D. Bristol characterised the fluidity of meaning inherent in both its material form, and in the manner in which it was received by its audience:

> Manuscript communication, which as scholars have pointed out is close to the world of orality, exploits the connection between what Harold Love has called 'chirography and presence' to create an intimate, and interactive bond between writer and reader. The world of manuscript communication… is one in which the roles of reader and producer are fused…it is…participatory – a system in which…texts…are modified and supplemented by those who receive them in the lines of transmission, the whole environment being one in which texts are malleable and social rather than fixed and possessively individualistic. Early modern print culture fostered processes of abstraction and textual fixity.[9]

This understanding of the cumulative manner in which a coterie text's meaning is established and developed, implicitly drawn from postmodernism's language of the 'death of the author', highlighted the value of historicising the status of the text, as much as its content. In exploring the semiotics of manuscript, these works can also be seen as proponents of the integration of textual and material history which represents one of the strongest trends in modern scholarship of the Early Modern and Enlightenment periods. Such a trend can be seen from such examples as the 2014 Special Issue of *Women's Writing* on the Material Culture of Women's Writing and a strong material bias at the 2015 BSECS Conference, for example Murray Pittock's plenary lecture was on the language of Jacobitism and anti-Jacobitism in interior decoration, clothing and decorative objects, and Adriana Craciun's ASECS-BSECS lecture was based on a discussion of the material and historical bibliographical records of Hudson Bay Company employees in the eighteenth century, considered beyond their

[9] Arthur F Marotti & Michael D Bristol, 'Introduction' *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England,* ed. by Arthur F Marotti & Michael D Bristol, (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2000), pp. 1-32, (p. 5), Marotti and Bristol are quoting Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth Century England,* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1993), p. 141-8.

purely textual nature.[10] The relationship between the material status of a text and its reception may be considered as the initial blurring of the boundary between material and textual history. Such a reassessment of critical frameworks is represented by the manuscript studies of familiar authors mentioned above. This developed into the modern practice of material cultural history, in which not only has the lexicon of extra-textual expression in the case of manuscripts and letters been expanded, but the definition of 'text' has been broadened to include many objects which would previously have been considered a-textual material artefacts, such as the early American ladies' samplers and wallpapers discussed as 'material texts' in Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly's *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship & Culture in the Transatlantic World,*.[11] The greatest legacy of the work of manuscript historians such as Marotti and Love has been the potential for a reconsideration of the concepts of authorship, readership, and intellectual community to expand the canon of texts, and ultimately to build a culture in which the notion of a 'text' itself is sufficiently fluid to allow constant reassessments in pursuit of subtlety and accuracy. The canonical primacy of the printed text is long gone.

But to return to the 1980s and 90s, it was not only on a textual level that the canon was undergoing critical scrutiny. The second wave of feminism, emerging from the intense political radicalism of the 70s and 80s, was in the process of consolidating its gains and assessing its status. This critical moment is marked by broad ideological reflections on the history of patriarchy, theoretical defences of radical feminist criticism, feminist critiques of canonical authors, and works of textual recovery and transmission dedicated to locating historical women authors within established standards of textual

[10] Murray Pittock, 'Conduits of Treason: Objects, Weapons, Conflict and Memory in the State, 1688-1760', unpublished paper delivered at the British Society of Eighteenth Century Studies Annual Conference 2015, St Hugh's College, Oxford, 6 Jan 2015; Adriana Craciun, 'Exploring the Arctic in the Eighteenth Century', unpublished paper delivered at the British Society of Eighteenth Century Studies Annual Conference 2015, St Hugh's College, Oxford, 7 Jan 2015.

[11] *Reading Women: Literacy, Culture and Authorship in the Transatlantic World, 1500-1800,* ed. by Heidi Brayman Hackel, & Catherine E Kelly, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), esp. Caroline Winterer, 'The Female World of Classical Reading in Eighteenth Century America', (pp. 105-23) and Catherine E Kelly, 'Reading and the Problem of Accomplishment', (pp. 124-44)

value.[12] It is a text within the last of these categories which constitutes the origins of the next phase of feminist scholarship, and provokes the ideological intersection of the material reconstitution practised by the manuscript scholars discussed above with the feminist academic movement. The publication of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English* (1985) edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, implied that the work of the first stage of creating a women's canon had been finished, and, as Norton Anthology editors, made the statement that not only was the women's canon complete and quantifiable, but it was in a position to be presented to college students alongside Norton's other codifications of canon, such as *Norton Anthology of Poetry* (1970) and the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (1979). While salutary and progressive in its intent to create a generation of students who would be as familiar with Kate Chopin as they were with T.S Eliot, Gilbert and Gubar's collection raised troubling issues within the feminist and women's history community over the status of the collection. Were there 'traditions in English' to be anthologized, given the anti-canonicity of feminist critiques up to this point? What did it mean to have a feminist canon? And, most significantly for my purposes here, given the long acknowledged differences between men and women's relationships towards print culture, could an accurate history of women's writing be written without a reassessment of the value of alternative non-print forms of text? Gilbert and Gubar's anthology provoked immediate critique across the academic community, the most significant of which was from Margaret J.M Ezell.

Ezell's 1990 essay 'The Myth of Judith Shakespeare: Creating the Canon of Women's Literature' takes issue with the construction of Gilbert and Gubar's anthology, citing Virginia Woolf's description of the canon of women's literary history as 'having been historically defined through silence or absence':[13]

> The NALW [*Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*] is simply the most eloquent and complete statement of Woolf's assertions about early women writers; they confirm Woolf by starting the tradition in the eighteenth century with "the

[12] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Writings of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983); *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse,* ed. by Germaine Greer et al, (New York, Noonday Press, 1988)

[13] Margaret J.M. Ezell, 'The Myth of Judith Shakespeare: Creating a Canon of Women's Literature', *New Literary History,* 21.3 (1990), pp. 579-92, (p. 582)

> emergence of productive, publishing women, who began to form a unique tradition of their own."[14]

This vision of women's literary history, Ezell argues, is inherently flawed by its adoption of 'the definition of literary hierarchies found in the male canon-poetry, drama, fiction, and belles lettres.'[15] The primacy of print is asserted by the fact that 'the majority of twentieth-century feminist literary historians….see the transition from a system of patronage to that of the paid professional writer as the turning point in women's literary history.[16] Ultimately the only way to even consider women's literary history is through a reassessment of generic hierarchy:

> My contention is that the emphasis on publication in the context of the history of English literature is neither profitable nor accurate in determining the canon of women's literature. The anachronistic sense of the importance of print ignores the fact that well through the Restoration and early eighteenth century, manuscript circulation, not print, was the standard, traditional form of intellectual exchange for men and women. The twentieth century's attitudes towards manuscript works has resulted in a "tradition" of English literature by women which is distorting and which marginalizes a significant portion of women's literary lives in earlier periods.[17]

Ezell's description anticipates the works of Marotti and Love, and draws together the ideological imperatives of feminist scholarship with the evolving approach to the materiality of texts and the historicity of reading practices. Her monographs and essays have built on this re-evaluation of manuscript materials and theoretically assert their value as well as addressing underestimated manuscript genres themselves.[18] Her fullest treatment of the theme lies in her monograph *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*

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[14] Ezell, 1990, p. 582; Ezell quotes *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*, ed. by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 1

[15] Ezell, 1990, p. 582

[16] Ibid, p. 585

[17] Ibid, p. 587

[18] For Ezell's initial foray into this material, see Margaret J.M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). See also Margaret J.M. Ezell, "'To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen': The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 51.4 (1988), pp. 281–296, for Ezell's discussion of mid-seventeenth century female coterie poetry; and Margaret J.M. Ezell, "Elizabeth Isham's Books of Remembrance and Forgetting." *Modern Philology*, 109.1 (2011), pp. 71–8, for a discussion of spiritual autobiographies and memoirs.

(1999), in which she proposes that an ahistorical projection of modern conceptions of commercial, print authorship has been imposed onto our representation of literary history, leading us to be 'positively flummoxed by the writer who had no desire to see his or her work in print or to play our games of authorship.'[19] This inability to perceive authorship as functioning outside of the print sphere both propagates and was inspired by non-constructive binaries surrounding the print 'revolution':

> In this story about authorship, print publication takes on the heroic role of the revolutionary force, usually represented by male writers eager to seize new opportunities, while manuscript culture has the role of the villain – the elitist, the snobby aristocrat, very often a woman, clinging to long outmoded forms in a futile attempt to retain control and power.[20]

By casting off the preconceptions of the centrality of print to authorial and creative identity, which she links (somewhat presciently) to the present anxieties around the relationship between textual circulation and digital technology, Ezell claims that modern scholarship can benefit in many neglected areas. The centrality of print has led to a marginalisation of writers who circulated their works away from the centres of print, such as London.[21] Reconsidering the primacy of print will, as Ezell argues, enable a broader national literary culture. Her case resonates with contemporary discussions of 'archipelagic' historical analysis including not only neglected regional centres in England, but also the marginalised local literary cultures of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.[22] In addition to this, and most significantly for this study, Ezell also proposes the ways in which a reassessment of coterie circulation can enhance studies of reader-response and what she refers to as '"hidden" female participation'.[23] Though Ezell denies Harold Love's assertion that 'the stigma of print bore particularly hard on women writers', sardonically paraphrasing '(they would have chosen print if they dared),' she does admit that 'we have little or no sense of the actual scale of women's literary participation in manuscript culture apart from a few celebrated examples.' In her response to Harold

[19] Margaret J.M Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print,* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 19
[20] Ibid, p. 11
[21] Ibid, p. 18
[22] See for example Nick Groom, *The Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag* (London: Atlantic, 2006), and Nick Groom, 'Gothic and Celtic Revivals: Antiquity and the Archipelago.' in *The Blackwell Companion to British Literature*, ed. by Robert DeMaria, Jr. et al, 4 vols, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), III, pp. 361-79.
[23] Ezell, 1999, p. 11

Love, Ezell concretises the field of scribal study, identifying 'scribal publication' as maintaining a sense of the primacy of print, representing the former textual form imitating the latter, as opposed to the intentional pursuit of scribal circulation that she is discussing.[24] She also presents her work as a development from that of Marotti and Woudhuysen (among others) in that she wants to address the lacunae in attention towards scribal circulation in the Restoration and Augustan periods, where previous studies have been limited to the early seventeenth-century, particularly the period of the English Civil War.[25] Between her essay in 1990 and the monograph in 1999, Margaret J.M Ezell laid out the parameters for a reassessment of the canon, and of the preconceptions with which we approach historical texts of the scribal-print hinterland. She also brought the study up to the early eighteenth-century, raising the possibility of its being extended still further

A significant recent text in the historiography of manuscript circulation in the eighteenth century, and the text which brings the discipline in chronological alignment with my own work, is Melanie Bigold's *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century* (2012). Consciously aligning her work on Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Catharine Trotter Cockburn and Elizabeth Carter with that done by Ezell on early modern women's manuscript coteries, Bigold chronologically extends her study of scribal circulation through the eighteenth-century. She utilises Ezell's theories on scribal circulation to explore the disparate identities created by authors who wrote in both print and manuscript, recognising the difference between the two whilst asserting the primacy of neither:

> [Rowe, Cockburn and Carter] show an acute awareness of the demands of [print] and willingly engage in those parameters. Indeed, though they sometimes distance themselves from their youthful publications, they never disown their print ambitions. At the same time, they clearly privilege an older form of literary exchange that is limited, sometimes personal, but always carefully constructed for literary effect or intellectual improvement.[26]

Like Ezell, Bigold asserts that manuscript circulation was an active decision undertaken by women writers in order to participate in a different form of literary community from

[24] Ezell, 1999*,* pp. 22-23, 17
[25] Ibid, p. 25
[26] Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters: Manuscript Circulation & Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 11

that associated with print. Unlike Ezell, whose works are dedicated to the polemic carving-out of the new ground for scribal historiography, and were written before or contemporaneously with the explosion of interest in eighteenth century writers restored by the great feminist recovery movement, such as Elizabeth Singer Rowe herself, Bigold is able to draw on a generation of scholarship on women's writing in the eighteenth century.[27] While the studies of the 2000s, with the exception of George Justice and Nathan Tinker's *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550-1800* (2002), have not primarily focused on manuscript circulation, there has been much interest in the comparable practice of epistolarity. It is to the literary critical engagement with letters which this study will now turn.

Epistolarity and Letter Criticism

Scholarship on eighteenth-century epistolarity in the 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century has been marked by an engagement with the letter as a literary document, rather than just a historical source material, and a concomitant interest in the modes of manuscript and collaborative literary production which the letter entails. Prior to this, studies of eighteenth-century epistolarity had centred either on the epistolary novel; the relationship between letters and sociability and politeness; or on letters as support for biographical and literary studies of established authors.[28] The increased study of letters, along with other genres that still required much archival research to uncover, led to an increased understanding of women's literary engagement in the eighteenth century. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, one of the few writers of the eighteenth-century, or indeed any period, to be recognised solely for her published letters, had long been a source for much of the discussion of sociability in the familiar letter, so it should have come as no surprise to see the uncovering and diversifying of women's literary history running in tandem with the increased interest in letters. Two books of the turn of the 21st century illustrated the potential of the study of letter-writers as subjects of historical interest in and of themselves. Rebecca Earle's *Epistolary Selves* (1999) and James Daybell's *Women's Letter-Writing in Early Modern England* (2001). Both of these essay collections revealed the value of drawing together disparate case-

[27] Bigold, p. 6
[28] See for example, Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, Ohio University Press, 1982) and Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986)

studies of letters written for different purposes and during different periods in order to highlight continuities and variants in the construction of 'letter' as a genre with its own distinctive qualities. As its title denotes, Earle's collection is primarily concerned with the self-fashioning in which letter writers engaged. Carolyn Steedman's essay 'A Woman Writing a Letter', for example, highlights the value of considering the relationship between the letter as an ego document and the development of protestant individualism.[29] Toby L. Ditz's 'Formative Ventures', highlights what I consider to be a fundamental theme of epistolary creativity in his discussion of letters by eighteenth-century Dutch venture capitalists. In his engagement with of letters these sailors sent home describing their commercial transactions, and the ways in which these descriptions become crystallised into the language of Dutch commerce as a whole, he asserts that these letters 'trace the micro-politics of norm production', and represent sites of 'emergent meaning'.[30] Daybell's essay collection outlined the essential dialogues that must be considered in approaching literary texts of the pre-modern period. In his introduction, he outlined the ways in which letters, previously considered private documents, may in fact have been read collectively in family groups. He also delineates the purposes to which letters are put, the reasons for a letter being written by the author or by an amanuensis; and, most valuably for my study connecting reading and letters, outlines the problems inherent in the use of advice literature and manuals in ascertaining epistolary standards for letter writers.[31] Both of these collections served to highlight, above all, the value of the essay collection in bringing together disparate archival work, providing simultaneously methodological and theoretical models to be extended into the discipline of epistolary study.

More recent works on epistolarity, such as Clare Brant's *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (2006), and Eve Tavor Bannet's *Empire of Letters* (2005), have emphasised the variety and pervasiveness of epistolarity in the eighteenth-century. Bannet's work, which introduces an Anglo-American context to the discussion, asserts that the popularity of letter-manuals is evidence for reconsidering the way in which eighteenth-century letters are approached, placing her thesis in dialogue with Daybell's

[29] Carolyn Steedman, 'A Woman Writing a Letter', in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945,* ed. by Rebecca Earle, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 111-133.
[30] Toby L. Ditz, 'Formative Ventures: Eighteenth-Century Commercial Letters and the Articulation of Experience', in Earle, pp. 59-78 (p. 63)
[31] James Daybell, 'Introduction' in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700,* ed. by James Daybell, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 1-16

earlier cautions over the influence of letter manuals and models. Both Brant and Bannet also address another theme which is now central to considerations of eighteenth-century epistolarity. They assert that the relationship between the 'familiar' letter, and the conventional divisions of 'public' and 'private', inherited from feminist scholarship on the nineteenth century and often associated with Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1966), is a conflicted one.[32] In discussing this issue Brant chooses the term 'personal', asserting that '"personal" is useful in that it recognises the significance of letters to individuals and relationships.'[33] Bannet, on the other hand, draws an analogy between spoken performance and letter-writing, an analogy which is strongly supported by eighteenth-century writers themselves:

> Letters were not constructed by eighteenth-century letter manuals, or indeed by writing masters, as a primarily private, or closeted genre; when they spoke of reading, they meant reading aloud. The letter, which was conceived as issuing from speech or returning to speech at the point of oral delivery, was a shape changer. It reconfigured itself through a variety of media, manuscript, print and voice – as it travelled across space and time.[34]

While Bannet and Brant's arguments are both constructive in problematizing the traditionally private view of the letter as a form, and participate in the destabilisation of the 'separate spheres' model of eighteenth-century society which is a significant aspect of contemporary historiography, their defamiliarisation of the privacy of letters may be more rigid than in fact necessary.[35] Both Bannet and Brant are addressing published letters as their primary sources, hence Brant's casual reference to familiar letters 'frequently [finding] their way into print' and Bannet's inclusion of 'print' as one of the media letters passed through. While the printed letter did indeed have a wide currency in the eighteenth-century, as Brant's study demonstrates, it would be a mistake to assume

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[32] See Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36.2 (1993), pp. 383-414.

[33] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters and British Culture,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 5

[34] Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.xviii

[35] See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation, 1712-1812,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

the natural association of print with epistolarity that Brant and Bannet imply.[36] The salient point is stated as follows by Betty Rizzo in her essay in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (2002), a text that will be discussed further shortly:

> Truly distinguished letter savers…must have…I think, a strong sense of the significance of their own existence…Those with a more acute sense of privacy burn their personal papers….Their lives- even an edited version of them – unlike the lives of letter savers, are not for consumption…Discrimination in selecting letters for retention is indeed a method of editing one's life – even, we should be aware, a way of presenting and maintaining fictions.[37]

Rizzo's is calling for scholars to address letter writers individually and remember that saving (or indeed publication) is reflective of individual and cultural context as much as content. An analogy can usefully be drawn here to the debates discussed above over manuscript circulation. Discussions of epistolary culture need to take into account both 'familiar letters' as in the letters circulated within a limited circle, and the public manifestations of those letters in print as two different types of text within different circulatory cultures. Margaret Ezell's critique that 'scribal publication' represents an overly simplistic conflation of print and manuscript modes of textual dissemination applies just as strongly to the conflation of print and manuscript letters. Both risk losing nuances of the private elements of the texts in question. As noted above, a printed letter will have passed through some form of editorial process, either by the author or a later editor, thus distancing them from the original thoughts and experiences which motivated the letter. Manuscript letters also retain errata and marginalia which are often standardised in a published edition, giving a false impression of clarity or certainty, when in fact the letter itself is conflicted, and final lexical decisions are made only after much internal debate. The physical appearance of the letter can also convey meaning lost to a

[36] Brant, p. 5
[37] Betty Rizzo, 'Two Versions of Community: Montagu and Scott', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 193-214, (p. 193)

print edition, such as paper choice, franks and stamps, handwriting.[38] The carefully orchestrated mise-en-page of a formal letter can also carry meaning.[39]

The most influential recent study of epistolarity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which reveals the potential of what may be gained by study of manuscript letters and extensive archival research, is Susan Whyman's *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers: 1660-1800* (2009). The calls for inclusiveness and the broadening of the scope of historical literary study associated with the manuscript revolution and the early forays into epistolary history are answered in her analysis of thousands of manuscript letters from across English culture, including those by children, manual labourers, working class women, and provincial correspondents, to create a picture of letter-writing as experienced by 'ordinary people'.[40] Whyman's greatest contribution to the field of epistolary study has been her introduction to the concept of 'epistolary literacy'.[41] Like Eve Tavor Bannet, with her concept of 'letteracy', Whyman is introducing a language for discussion of the skills of letter writing which characterises them as different from simple literacy, the most basic component of which is being able to sign one's name. [42] The difference in their definitions lie in the fact that where Bannet sees 'letteracy' as merely the 'set of skills, values, and kinds of knowledge beyond mere literacy that were involved in achieving competency in the writing, reading

[38] See for example 'Joseph Wright of Derby to James Beattie, 18 January 1778', MS 30.2.300. Wright's elaborate handwriting and abundance of flourishes indicate the care undertaken in writing to Beattie, whom he does not know, to request the right to produce a painting based on Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771).

[39] For an example of a letter for which the mise-en-page is central to its meaning see Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 25 June 1782', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017) < http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0160075a1c >, [accessed 20 March 2019], f. 1 recto, which elaborates Potter's hardship and need for support, concludes with 'the next page shall have no complaint' and f. 1 verso opens with a paragraph discussing his recent achievement in finishing his translation of Euripides. The structure of the transition from appeal for patronage, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3, and an explanation of why that patronage is deserved, is created through the physical act of opening the letter. This nuance would be lost in a print edition of the letter. See Stephen Clarke, 'The Amiable Clergyman and the Forgetful Patron: Robert Potter Writes to Elizabeth Montagu', unpublished paper delivered at the British Society of Eighteenth Century Studies Annual Conference 2015, St Hugh's College, Oxford, 8 January 2015.

[40] Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 4

[41] Ibid, pp. 9-11

[42] Bannet, p.xvii

and interpreting of letters', Whyman's definition leaves open the continuum between epistolary skill and a broader definition of a creative literary voice.[43] In her discussion of epistolary literacy in its most developed form, Whyman asserts that it 'offers a narrative template to lay over random events, giving order and, sometimes, meaning, to life.'[44] Epistolary literacy allows for a command of this 'narrative template' on the writer's own terms and therefore the reconfiguration of the meaning of a text as well as a life-event through the imposition of an epistolary template. Whyman's example of the development of a distinctly literary epistolary literacy in her chapter on the mid-century 'unlettered' clergyman's wife Jane Johnson provides a model for the tracing of creative reader response through a series of letters. Whyman traces Johnson's reading, early use of metaphor, 'Clarissa' narrative and ultimately a poem combining 'references to Newton [and] John Hughes *Ode to Ecstasy*,' with a 'depict[ion] of her inner self'.[45] Whyman's study provides a methodological model for observing the systematic development of a reader becoming a creative writer. Whyman's conclusion that for Johnson 'letter-writing offered…a training ground for composing other types of literature'represents a clear understanding of the continuum between epistolary literacy and literary construction. [46] This forms a central concern of my own research on the relationships between Talbot, Carter and Montagu's creative letters and their published and unpublished literary works.

The most recent major study of eighteenth century female epistolary, Leonie Hannan's *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (2016), sets a precedent for future large-scale studies of epistolary culture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century by being grounded almost entirely on unpublished correspondence. The most salient feature which this thesis inherits from Hannan is an attention to spaces, both conceptual and actual, in the lives of eighteenth century female intellectual correspondents. Hannan conceives of the letter as a site which 'acted…as a space to perform, discuss and negotiate the contested identity of the learned woman. In so doing, the act of letter-writing both explored and constructed the

[43] Bannet, p.xvii
[44] Whyman, p. 10
[45] Ibid. pp. 161-190, (p. 177, 186)
[46] Ibid. p. 188.

life of the mind"[47] and that 'correspondence networks could connect distant individuals and facilitate exchange, generating alternative spaces within which women could operate'.[48] This premise that both individual letters and correspondences themselves represent virtual spaces is absolutely essential to the conceptualisation of epistolary acts of creative interpretation throughout this thesis. The spatial component of Hannan's study does differ from my own, being primarily framed around the juxtaposition of spaces of physical confinement, such as Anne Dormer's abusive home of the 1680s, or Jemima Grey's household following the birth of her daughter Amabel in 1751, with the relative free sites of individual self-fashioning within their letters. Such issues of physical confinement are not subjects for my discussion here, however, the use of a spatial framework for conceiving the value of a letter as a document of creative interpretation, and the reading of politically or socially oppressive discourses as a form of confinement, as well as literal references to space and proximity, will be hugely resonant throughout the thesis.

Theoretical Contexts: Reader Response Theory

The concept of the letter as a space in which individual identities are constituted and consolidated, as in the works of Hannan and Ditz, represents one central function of the Bluestocking letters under discussion here. The epistolary discussion of reading acts consistently provides my subjects with a means for them to construct their own intellectual identities in response to the prevalent discourses and to one another, from Carter's self-conscious crafting of a philosophical mode of affective intimacy against Sévigné's sentimentalised one in the first chapter, to Woodhouse and Potter's embittered struggles to simultaneously express their own identities through textual consumption, whilst adapting their intellectual labour to the perceived intentions of Montagu's own in the third. Alongside these self-constructions, however, the letters also act on the texts being consumed. The negotiations of the meaning of texts as they are

[47] Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 70. For a fuller discussion of *Women of Letters,* see my own forthcoming review in *The Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies.*

[48] Leonie Hannan, 'Making Space: English women, letter writing, and the life of the mind, c.1650–1750', *Women's History Review,* 21.4, pp. 589-604, (p. 598)

being read produce a range of new responses and interpretations that can be best conceptualised through the field of reader response theory.

The first key concept within reader response theory on which I will be drawing here, and one of its foundational tenets, is the theory of *Rezeptionsasthetik* [Reception aesthetic], as put forward by Hans Robert Jauss, one of the pioneers of the field from the University of Constance. In a critique of conventional literary theory for it's diminution of the role of the reader in the production of meaning, Jauss argued the following:

> The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience. For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience in a continuity in which the continual change occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognised aesthetic norms to a new production which surpasses them.[49]

Whilst Jauss' primary focus, as with all the major figures in the history of Reader Response theory, is on the way in which reader responses act on the construction of the literary texts themselves, his theory introduces two components central to this thesis. Firstly there is the conception of textual interpretation as being in a continuous state of historically contingent flux, and secondly there is the emphasis on an evolving reading community in the production of new meanings and interpretations. This community, the *Erwartungzhorizon* (horizon of expectation) is defined by Robert Holub as 'an intersubjective structure of expectations… [a] social construct… [consisting] not only of norms and values, but also of desires and aspirations' causing a literary text to become 'not a mere reflection of some other part of the social order' but a mechanism for 'calling into question and altering social conventions.'[50] From Jauss therefore we can see the now-standard approaches of later historians of ideas, and the origins of the modern historical critical method of reader-interpretation. Wolfgang Iser, Jauss's fellow Constance scholar, offers a similarly strong assertion of readerly authority:

> [Iser, in 'Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response' (1970)'] contends that meaning is not contained in the text itself, but rather is generated during the

[49] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', trans. Elizabeth Benzinger, *New Literary History*, 2.1, (1970), pp. 7-37, (p. 8)
[50] Robert Holub, 'Reception Theory, School of Constance' in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism,* ed. by Raman Selden, 9 vols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), VIII, pp. 319-46, (p. 326)

> reading process. It is neither purely textual nor wholly subjective (in the sense of being constructed solely by the reader) but the result of an interaction between the two. Secondly, he maintains that literary texts are constructed in such a fashion that a certain latitude for realisation is allowed. The reader, by filling gaps or indeterminacies in an already given structure, completes the literary work and merely participates in the production of meaning.[51]

This assertion of the reader's creative role bears strong parallels with Roland Barthes' negotiation of structuralism and deconstruction in 'The Death of the Author' (1967), where he claims that 'the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.'[52] Both of these ideas will be influential on the complete abnegation of authorial (and readerly) identity in the New Historicist maxim that 'every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices.'[53] If one construes reading to be a creative act like Barthes and Iser, then its material context becomes just as significant as the material conditions of authorship as articulated by the manuscript theorists with which we started this discussion.

The radicalism of Iser's figuration of reader creativity is hampered, however, by his critical reluctance to 'deal…with real or empirical readers', choosing instead to cultivate an ideal 'implied reader' constituted by the text itself.[54] In doing this, Iser embodied traditional literary critical 'resistan[ce] if not hostil[ity], to sociological impulses.'[55] The major innovation of New Historicism is the overturning of this dichotomy. The purely hypothetical-reader critics such as Stanley Fish's early incarnation as a proponent of 'affective stylistics' and Kenneth Burke have left little more to current criticism than the obligatory checklist of terminology to be dismissed in their introductions.[56] Umberto Eco and Wayne Booth's notion of 'control' exerted by an

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[51] Holub, p. 327
[52] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 148
[53] Harold Veeser, *The New Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. xi
[54] Holub, 'Reception Theory', p. 331
[55] Peter J. Rabinowitz, 'Other Reader Oriented Theories' in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, pp.375-403, (p. 382)
[56] James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor, 'Introduction' in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 1-21, (p. 3); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 4-5

author on their reader's interpretation is, however, applicable to a modern empirically based study.[57] If one considers, for example, the closing chapters of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela,* which present the moral meaning attached to each character -and thus appear to reduce the preceding narrative to a blunt allegory- it is apparent that a critical lexicon of authorial control and readerly resistance is useful. Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader* (1979) takes a feminist stance against masculine bias of the 'implied reader' of American canonical fiction. The 'resisting reader' which Fetterley conceptualises as a model for both feminist critics and historical female readers provides a model for articulating the interaction between Bluestocking 'feminist consciousness' and their reading experience: 'While women obviously cannot rewrite literary works so that they become ours by virtue of reflecting our reality, we can accurately name the reality they do reflect and change literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue.'[58] This mode of analysis will be seen in the discussion of Jacqueline Pearson below, and for considering the institutional self-scrutiny lacking in previous reader-response models.[59]

Iser's final legacy, and the final legacy this study will address from the pre-'interpretative communities' school of reader response criticism, is the tentative suggestion that reading also constitutes the self-identity as well as the text's meaning:

> Reading temporarily eliminates the traditional subject-object dichotomy. At the same time the subject is compelled to split into two parts, one which undertakes the concretisation [completion of the text's meaning] and another which merges with the author (or at least the constructed image of the author). Ultimately the reading process involves a dialectal process of self-realisation and change: by filling in the gaps in the text, we simultaneously constitute ourselves.[60]

This is an aspect of reading which, while it remains apparent in modern critical analyses of reading, faded into the background for the golden age of the reader-response school, and is totally absent from the empirical studies of Bleich and Holland.[61]

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[57] Rabinowitz, p. 385

[58] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: a Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. xxiii

[59] Rabinowitz, p. 386

[60] Holub, p. 332

[61] Rabinowitz, pp. 386-95

We now come to Stanley Fish's later development of 'interpretative communities', which combines the Barthesian death of the author with the Derridean belief that 'Reading is transformational…[but] requires protocols of reading.'[62] Fish's theory postulates that '[while] there are no facts prior to interpretations…we do not create *ex nihilo* interpretative strategies for constituting the world.' Instead, Fish argues, our ability to perceive meaning is defined by 'our situation', and the 'communities of people who share interpretative strategies', to which we belong.[63] This theory, in rejecting the need for the hypothetical reader, and asserting a theory based instead on social and historical context, laid the foundations for modern studies of reader-reception. This thesis both draws on the Fishian concept of interpretative communities throughout, with the formulations of Bluestocking epistolary affectivity, neoclassicism, and public morality conceptualised as constitutive elements of their emergent interpretative communities. Bringing such reader response theory together with the destabilisation of the concept of text by the incorporation of epistolarity and manuscript study as discussed above also offers a hint as to the new horizons for reception theory itself. As the ever-expanding canon of individualised reader-responses expands, both on a case-by-case basis as in *EMCO* and *Electronic Enlightenment,* and wholesale, as in the *UK Reader Experience Database*, the concept of digitally conceivable maps of entire interpretative communities built of individual response becomes more possible. This thesis, and particularly its first chapter, is also a step towards looking at how a study of this form of analysis could proceed.

Theoretical Contexts: Reader Response Practice

The most significant methodological precedents that this thesis has at present, however, is in a range of studies of readership, which respond to the post-New Historicist interest in combining social and material history into literary analysis.[64] Current work on eighteenth century readers themselves offer a range of potential strategies. There is the historical bibliographical or material model, the anecdotal one, and the survey of

[62] Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 63
[63] Rabinowitz, p. 396
[64] Veeser, p.xi

community defining texts to create a picture of one's prescribed reading environment, by addressing conduct literature and novelistic representations of readers. Filling a similar mid-nineties theoretical and methodological niche to that which Earle's *Epistolary Selves* filled for the study of letters. *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (1996) edited by James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor collected various forms of reader-analysis, including three essays analysing an individual reader, one analysis of the psychology of reading according to contemporary theory, two studies centred on responses to individual texts and genres, one on the role of the editor, and a further essay on library circulation. It also incorporated provincial, female and lower class readerships in addition to canonical authors, employing the same expanded field as epistolary scholarship.

The three essays most pertinent to my thesis within this collection represent three divergent fields of enquiry into eighteenth-century reading. James Raven's own 'From promotion to proscription: arrangements for reading and eighteenth-century libraries', employs a combination of a book-historical model and one based on interpretative-community forming literature.[65] Raven analyses the construction of eighteenth-century private and circulating libraries, and connects them with the polemical proscriptions against unregulated reading, especially of novels, such as the pamphlet *Virtue in Distress* (1772).[66] By utilising library's own productions and advertisements, and contemporary images of them, Raven maps a tension between the celebration of the availability of literature and the anxiety as to the pernicious negative effects that unregulated reading was deemed to cause. This approach represents a combination of material and discourse analysis that continues to have a lasting impact. Naomi Tadmor's 'In the even my wife read to me': Women, Reading and Household Life in the Eighteenth-Century', presents a micro-historical anecdotal analysis of two households, those of the Turners and the Richardson's.[67] Tadmor's discussion is based on the central drive to refute the claim, made by eighteenth century polemicists and historians such as Lawrence Stone that novel reading made women unsuitable for

[65] James Raven, 'From promotion to proscription: arrangements for reading and eighteenth-century libraries' in *Practice and Representation of Reading,* pp. 175-202
[66] Ibid, p. 179
[67] Naomi Tadmor, 'In the even my wife read to me': women, reading and household life in the eighteenth century' in *Practice and Representation of Reading,* pp. 162-172

household management.[68] To do this she scours Thomas Turner's diaries and Richardson's published correspondence and produces evidence of their religiously inflected reading, the relationship between reading and daily routine in the lives of Peggy and Thomas Turner and of Peggy reading to Thomas whilst he worked.[69] For the Richardson household, Tadmor identifies reading as sociable and pedagogical with Mrs Richardson reading from the bible and the children reading their lessons.[70] Tadmor combines manuscript and print resources to create an empirical anecdotal picture of her readers by using Richardson's published correspondence and Thomas Turner's manuscript diaries.[71] However, the limited scope of Tadmor's conclusions, confined as she is to the practicalities of reading as a physical action in the household, identify her focus as a historical or sociological one. For my purposes, and the integration of epistolary creativity and readerly authority which I am proposing with my thesis, the 'perceiving consciousness' must retain a key role, even though it has been over 30 years since it was the guiding principle of reader-response scholarship. Tadmor's model has since been developed by Abigail Williams in *The Social Life of Books* (2016). Williams foregrounds the social experience of texts, through fields such as practices of reading aloud, material cultural resonances of popular texts, and familial textual consumption.[72]

Before turning to John Brewer's essay in *Practice and Representation*, which I believe does provide a model for ideal reader-response analysis; I will address the two other basic approaches. The first, that of historical bibliographical analysis of print and publication history, has its strongest recent claim in William St Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004), while the second, that of analysing conduct books and imaginative representations of reading, is used in Jacqueline Pearson's *Women's Reading in Britain: 1750-1835* (1999), which also ties in directly with my thesis. St Clair's thesis is that the majority of readers in Britain throughout the early modern period were limited

[68] Tadmor, pp. 163-5
[69] Ibid, pp. 165-70
[70] Ibid, p. 171
[71] An edition of Turner's diaries was published in 1985, but exclude the majority of material Tadmor addresses, so she is working from the Turner papers at the Yale University archives.
[72] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), for my full review of *The Social Life of Books*, see Jack Orchard, 'Review of: *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* by Abigail Williams', *Modern Language Review,* 113.4 (2018), pp. 861-863.

in their access to what is now considered canonical literature of the period. The illusion of a reading public gaining access to the texts of the Enlightenment as they were produced through the eighteenth-century is revealed as false. A cartel of elite London publishers controlled the release of cutting-edge political, philosophical and religious texts, releasing them in lucrative expensive editions which effectively barred them from the majority of readers. It was only with the passing of a parliamentary act in 1774, declaring unlawful the perpetual copyright the London publishers had enjoyed, that the texts became available in an affordable edition, and the reading matter of the nation began to be in accordance with what conventional historians of the period imagined they had been reading decades, if not centuries, earlier.[73] This brief account of St Clair's case identifies his methodological focus on the histories of the book and printing industries. St Clair's motivation for a 'systems approach' is based on his anxieties over the non-empirical and misleading approaches to reader history which he perceives traditional canonical and discourse analysis models, text-based hypothetical reader studies and anecdotal scribal reception study as offering.[74] However, St Clair's analogy of identifying readers in book history with identifying investors in economic history contains in itself a declaration of what I see as insufficient in his approach. [75] As with the focus on domestic practical details in Tadmor's essay described above, a purely economic understanding of book purchasers marginalises the 'perceiving consciousness' entirely, and though analysing subjective reader response in the broad scale survey St Clair has undertaken is impossible, it is a goal that should be kept in mind rather than rejected as too fragmentary to be pursued at all.

This same print-textual approach forms the basis of Jacqueline Pearson's *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835,* although in her case it suffers less from the charge of blunt canonical adherence in the fact that its subjects, eighteenth-century women writers and polemicists of women's status, though they do exist in print, still need far more public exposure than they currently receive. Pearson's work argues for 'the ubiquity of the woman reader' in the cultural output of the eighteenth century.[76] She explores the ways in which 'all genres of reading, however apparently safe, upset some

[73] St Clair, passim; p. 89
[74] Ibid, pp. 3-6, (p.6)
[75] St Clair, p. 6
[76] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 219

commentator in this period…almost all genres, however apparently harmless, could be read rebelliously and resistingly rather than compliantly.'[77]

My major theoretical interest in Pearson's work lies in her incorporation of Judith Fetterly's concept of the 'resisting reader' into her analyses of women's self-representation as readers in published letter collections, such as those between Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot. Catherine Talbot appears in Pearson's work as an example of a resistant reader, arguing against the conservative interpretation of history reading as 'training in compliance to a male-dominated culture and its discursive practices'.[78] Talbot finds reading the lives of great men 'a dangerous study', since they appear to celebrate 'ambition and revenge…cruelty and deceit'… [and she] castigated Thucydides for his erasure of women.[79] This approach to reading represents the potential for, as Pearson represents 'a [Rousseauian] intensely 'personal' engagement between reader and writer [which] was often considered dangerous for women.[80] Talbot does not absorb the text wholesale, but in her scepticism reflects an engagement with it on an intellectual level that turns a potentially reductive and prescriptive text into a means of exploring her own gendered identity. Another concept which is interlinked with the notion of the 'resistant reader' is the period's binaries between 'good' and 'bad' readers, Pearson's conclusion outlines the paradoxical nature of seditious and virtuous reading within the same text:

> The good girl reads books with 'pleasure', yet pleasure is deeply problematic; reading may be seductive or protect from seduction; it is a means of emotional maturation or perpetual juvenility; informative reading constructs a virtuous subjectivity or encourages vanity and folly, reading fosters or compromises good domestic relations.[81]

This anxious system of binaries which Pearson identifies as central to eighteenth century approaches to female readership is expressed in the didactic literature that she assesses throughout the book, authored by figures such as Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, Dr John Gregory, and others on both sides of the political spectrum. Throughout these conservative works, there is a constant emphasis the primacy of controlling women's

[77] Pearson, p. 43
[78] Ibid, p. 50
[79] Ibid, p. 54
[80] Ibid, p. 74
[81] Ibid, p. 219

reading as a means of exercising ideological and intellectual power over them. They also, Pearson argues, offer the potential for non-domestic, intellectually aspirate, 'unwomanly' sedition. Like St Clair's historical bibliographical appendices and overall thesis, Pearson's work on the culture of eighteenth-century reading provides a useful backdrop against which to consider the responses of my subjects, but equally, her reliance on print sources makes the intricacies of her work unsuitable for grounding arguments on without further archival work.

This brings us to the final model of reader-response study, and the one to which I intend to subscribe methodologically; that of the engaged, literary critical anecdotal study. The representative text I have addressed for this genre of micro-historical analysis of reader responses, particularly as they relate to eighteenth-century female readership is John Brewer's 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent's Reading'. Brewer's analysis of the way in which Anna Larpent's reading reflects the capacities of readers to 'create meaning and significance from texts [and]… construct… their own identity'[82] is supported by a close reading of her responses to novels, religious works and scientific texts as expressed in her journals and diaries from 1773 to 1828.[83] Brewer's analysis of the diaries highlights the contradictions between self-representation and actual experience in Larpent's reading and recounting of that reading, For example, she approves of women who have works published, such as Hannah More and Charlotte Smith, but expresses disapproval of the abstract notion of venturing into print, and represents her passionate emotive responses to imaginative literature as necessarily based on moral development.[84] Larpent's reading practices, within the advisory framework given to women readers by texts like Joseph Robertson's *Essay on the Education of Young Ladies* (1798), is defined by a gendered conception of the act of reading itself. As Brewer puts it, 'reading, even reading fiction …becomes purposive, disciplined, a means of overcoming, rather than encouraging, female frivolity.'[85] Brewer's reading goes beyond Larpent's responses to novels, however, and takes into account not just other types of text, but other modes of reading in Larpent's reading life. In her readings of other types of text, histories, biographies and works of

[82] John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent's Reading' in *Practice and Representation of Reading,* pp. 226-45, (pp. 244-5)
[83] Brewer, pp. 228-9
[84] Ibid, pp. 231-2
[85] Ibid, pp. 234-5, 235

science, Larpent was more reserved in her responses, seeing 'herself more as a passive recipient or receptacle of information than as an active critic.'[86] In terms of reading style, '[Larpent] made a distinction between reading "in a followed manner" and the more superficial perusal of a text.'[87] Brewer's essay can be seen as a manifesto for the value of archival anecdotal study, the layers of self-representation and actual experience in Larpent's diaries highlight the layers of distortion which St Clair would identify as an Achilles' heel of anecdotal study, but they don't diminish Brewer's conclusions, they give depth. The differences between her responses to different kinds of text, and different types of reading openly acknowledge the 'changes in states of mind' between reading experiences, and it is by exploring the consistent elements between these states of mind that one can draw out the character of reader, just as Brewer does. Beyond providing a defence of the anecdotal approach to reader-response, Brewer identifies Anna Larpent's creative approach to reading, in a manner similar to Susan Whyman's discussion of Jane Johnson. Larpent, after reading Lord Monboddo's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-1792) and being repulsed by its conclusion that apes could be taught to speak, wrote a response in the persona of a learned gentleman, 'a witty riposte which trounced male philosophy with female fiction.'[88] This form of creative reading, only detectable through anecdotal analysis and archival work is central theme to my research, and, like letters and manuscript productions, another realm of creative expression which is necessary for a complete understanding of the ways in which historical women engaged in literary production.

Theoretical Contexts: Power and Discourse

The final framework which this thesis brings to bear on Carter, Talbot and Montagu's discussions of reading, and on the nature of their coterie identities in general, is that of Foucauldian discourse analysis. Latent throughout the discussions of reader-response above there has been a preoccupation with interpretative control, in the *ertwartungshorizon* and 'horizon of expectation', for example, and with resistance to that control, as in Fetterly and Pearson's 'resisting reader'. The overlap between the notion of

[86] Brewer, pp. 236-7
[87] Ibid, pp. 240
[88] Ibid, pp. 237-9, 239

interpretative power which underlies these theories, and the Foucaudian principle of discursive power outlined in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) make the latter an organic framework for the conceptualisation of public and coterie moral-critical discourse throughout the thesis. The political imperative of moral interpretative authority in chapter 2, and the intimate relationship between social power and discursive control in chapter 3 are strongly grounded on Foucauldian principles. The central component of Foucauldian discourse analysis active in this thesis is, to use the summary offered by Julian Henriques et al, the premise that 'discourses delimit what can be said, while providing the spaces - the concepts, metaphors, models, analogies, for making new statements within any specific discourse.'[89] This analytical premise provides a preferable model of Bluestocking interpretation to that of acceptance or resistance, because it does not allow for an engagement with discursive actors who fluctuate between relative positions of power, such as Elizabeth Montagu, but can support analysis of discursive acts which participate in multiple systems of power simultaneously, such as the public-moral/coterie interplay of Montagu's literary discussions with Potter. Such multiplicity is written into Foucault's initial conception of discourse:

> [I]t is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come to play in various strategies.[90]

This multi-directional aspect of power relationships can be seen, for example, in the Montagu-Kames correspondence in chapter 3, in which the two correspondents clash over the discursive framework of their conversation – control of which discourse is invoked more important than dominance in any given framework.

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[89] *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, ed. by Julian Henriques et al, (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 104-5; as quoted in Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, *Using Foucault's Methods,* (SAGE: Thousand Oaks: CA, 1999), p. 41.
[90] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols, (London: Penguin, 1998), I, p. 100.

The Bluestockings I: 1800-1930: from Pennington & Montagu to Climenson & Blunt

The historiography of the Bluestockings began during their own lifetimes, with artistic representations newspapers and pamphlets all creating images, both popular and private, which would pass on into subsequent historical representations of them.[91] These self-representations were followed by the first generation of editors in the early nineteenth century, whose compilation of letter collections, editions, and biographical sketches continued to form much of the discussion of bluestocking letters until the recent resurgence of interest in the original letter manuscripts in the twenty-first century. The key figures in transmitting the legacies of Carter, Talbot and Montagu at this time were Montagu Pennington and Matthew Robinson Montagu, nephews of Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Montagu respectively. Pennington's editorial practises may be criticised for presenting a misleading image based too much on contemporary prejudice, but no one could fault his diligence.[92] In the early years of the nineteenth century he published the two-volume *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, with a New Edition of her Poems* (1807), *The Works of the Late Miss Catherine Talbot* (1809) which included a short biography of Talbot, as well as *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot* (1809) in four volumes and *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu* (1817) in three. He also re-issued her *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758) in 1807.

Matthew Montagu, between 1809 and 1813, published a four-volume edition of his aunt's letters originally written prior to the coronation of George III in 1761. Both Montagu and Pennington were concerned to establish the propriety of their relatives'

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[91] For discussions of images of the Bluestockings, see Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women: 18th Century Bluestockings,* (New Haven, Yale University Press: 2008), Eger, 2010, and *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830,* ed. by Elizabeth Eger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

[92] For discussions of the obstacles Pennington's editorial practices raise for discussions of Carter, see Bigold, p. 207-12; Elizabeth Carter, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle,* ed. by Gary Kelly & Judith Hawley, 6 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), II, p. x-xi, and Gwen Hampshire, 'An Edition of Some Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Carter, 1717 to 1806', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1971), p. xxxiii-xxxix.

identities as learned women, against the backlash against female intellectuals which occurred during the Napoleonic wars which Gary Kelly has identified as 'the remasculinisation of culture that characterised the Romantic movement.'[93] This movement, identified by Harriet Guest as being characterised by texts such as Richard Polwhele's *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), was characterised by a suspicion of the repercussions of perceived masculine behaviour by women. Men like Polwhele were responding to the radicalism of Mary Wollstonecraft, the classical republicanism of Catharine Macaulay, and the figure of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who combined political and religious dissidence.[94] All this was capped with incoming horror-stories from France, such as those of rioting Parisian fishwives.[95] In response to the masculine anxieties which characterised the Romantic period, Pennington and Montagu 'locate[d] the [Bluestocking] circle…firmly within the domestic sphere, and they stressed the circle's involvement in the feminised realms of domesticity and education.[96] In the case of Elizabeth Carter this tendency is seen most strongly in Pennington's 'Memoir' of his aunt, which repeatedly asserts her homely virtue and reticence from literary fame, a paradigmatic example of this occurs when Carter delays work on the introduction to her *Epictetus* because she had '*a dozen shirts to make*':[97]

> Nothing can shew her character in a higher or more amiable point of view, than the consideration of such conduct. Attached to her studies as she was, caressed and flattered by the great and the learned, she never allowed herself to shrink from those familiar but less pleasing engagements, which she considered as a

[93] Gary Kelly, 'Bluestocking Feminism' in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, *1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 163-180, (p. 177)
[94] Guest, pp. 160-164; For further details on the radicalism of Catharine Macaulay, see Karen O' Brien, 'Catharine Macaulay's Histories of England: A Female Perspective on the History of Liberty' in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, pp. 523-537. For a discussion of the conservative reaction to Macaulay, see Eger and Peltz*,* pp. 99-113. For an analysis the political dissidence of Barbauld and its reception, see Elizabeth Eger's discussion of Barbauld's 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven', Eger 2010, p. 195-202; for her politico-religious dissidence see Emma Major's discussions of Barbauld's Dissenting education and responses to the Corporation and Test Acts in Major, 2012, p. 215-231.
[95] For a discussion of the French 'Poissardes', see Major, 2012, p. 261-65.
[96] Nicole Pohl & Betty Schellenberg, 'Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 1-19, (p. 7)
[97] Montagu Pennington, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter: With a New Edition of her Poems,* 2 vols, (London: Printed for F.C. and J. Rivington, 1807), I, p. 126, emphasis Pennington's.

> duty to her father, though their burden was not lessened by praise, nor their performance attended by éclat.[98]

As for Carter's religious devotion, and that of Catherine Talbot, Pennington's invocations of it permeate both his biography of Carter and the biography appended to his edition of Talbot's *Works*. In both cases Pennington's description of their rational Anglicanism is carefully couched in terms of duty and practice, avoiding the dreaded concept of 'enthusiasm', and with it the hints of dissent that had circulated since the Methodist revivals of the mid-eighteenth century. Pennington asserts that Carter possessed 'the very piety of the Gospel, shewn not by enthusiasm…but by a calm, rational, and constant devotion, and the most unwearied attention to acquire the temper, and practise the duties of a Christian life'.[99] Talbot, similarly, is presented as one who 'ought not to be considered by posterity merely as an author', but rather presented almost as a protestant saint, whose 'chearfulness' on her death-bed stemmed from a 'piety [which] was regular, constant, fervent, but not enthusiastic…[and] charity, including the whole meaning of the word in its apostolical sense…extended to all her acquaintance'.[100]

While Matthew Montagu's direct treatment of his aunt is considerably less extensive, being limited to a very short introductory note to his edition of her letters, and limited footnotes to the letters themselves, it also presents a vague moralising narrative. He twice makes reference to Montagu's 'sallies of humour', 'lively sallies' and 'a propensity to satire' being considered potentially inappropriate by 'grave' readers.[101] In response to this he presents Elizabeth Montagu's moral life as a narrative developed through her improving friendships:

> Mrs. Montagu, in her early education, did not receive those strong impressions of the truth of divine revelation, which she acquired at a later period, from her intimacy with Gilbert West and Lord Lyttelton. It was reserved for the influence of steady principles of Christianity, to correct the exuberant spirit of her genius, and to give the last touches of improvement to her character.[102]

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[98] Pennington, 1807, p. 126.
[99] Ibid, p.13
[100] Catherine Talbot, *The Works of the Late Miss Catherine Talbot*, ed. by Montagu Pennington, (London: Printed for F.C. & J. Rivington, 1809), p.xx; xxx.
[101] Elizabeth Montagu, *The Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu,* ed. by Matthew Montagu, 4 vols, (London: F.C & J. Rivington, 1813), I, p. 5, 8
[102] Ibid, p. 6

The first volume of Matthew Montagu's collection was published in 1809, the same year as Pennington's edition of Talbot's *Works,* and only two years after the biography and edition of Carter's poems discussed above. These factors may explain the strangely apologetic tone of Montagu's preface. In publishing early letters by his aunt, he is aware that he will not be presenting her in the same pious light as Pennington had been able to do with Carter and Talbot, but he still wants to present her as a moral exemplar, hence his decision to apply a narrative of reformation onto what any modern reader would understand as mere youthful playfulness. The fact that he is motivated to do this strongly suggests the way in which the early nineteenth century audiences expected their first generation bluestocking literature to be presented, their identities as domestic, moral exemplars were expected to be confirmed by the insights offered by their letters and new editions of their works.

The next major phase of scholarship on Carter and Montagu, following a critical and biographical silence only broken by John Doran's *A Lady of the Last Century* (1873), an edition of Montagu's letters which centred on material now held at the British Library, rather than the monolithic collection now in California, took place in the early twentieth century when Emily Climenson, Montagu's great grand-niece, published her two-volume collection of Montagu's letters from 1720 to 1761 in 1906. This 'correspondence', which is essentially a biography framed around selections from letters to and from Montagu, represents the fullest biographical account of Montagu's early life (until the forthcoming critical biography by Elizabeth Eger), but bears many similar issues of selective editing and egotistical excerpting to those experienced in Pennington & Matthew Montagu. Climenson's editorial policy is different from that of Matthew Montagu, she even appears to insert a corrective to his narrative by stating that 'from her earliest days, when at the height of her *joie de vivre,* the religious sentiment was existent', nevertheless the sheer volume of material lead her into just as limited a selection: [103]

> In order to consult the varied tastes of the general reader, I have endeavoured to pick out the most interesting portions of her letters, such as relate to customs, fashions in dress, price of food, habits, but have often groaned in spirit at having

[103] Emily Climenson, *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761,* 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1906), I, p. ix

> to leave out much that was noble in sentiment, or long comments upon contemporary books and events.[104]

This editorial policy, along with Climenson's practice of excerpting passages from longer letters rather than quoting selected letters in full, meant that while Elizabeth Montagu's biography was filled out, and the major events and friendships of her life were elucidated for 'the general reader', the letters as documents were reduced to mere conveyances of biographical detail. 1906 also saw the publication of Alice C.C. Gaussen's *Elizabeth Carter: A Woman of Wit and Wisdom.* In a similar model to Climenson's celebration of Montagu's life and friendships outside of the pious framework of Matthew Montagu, Gaussen, aided in her efforts by Robert Brudenell Carter, Elizabeth Carter's great-grand nephew, sought to do the same for Carter. [105] In her preface, Gaussen celebrates Carter's eccentricity and 'genius for friendship'.[106] As with Climenson, however, the main focus of the biography is on Carter's relationships, both she and Gaussen using the family connections they either possess or have access to in order to essentially justify the repackaging of material already in print for a century.

The 1920s saw another spate of Bluestocking texts alongside the first wave of feminism in Britain. In 1926 R. Brimley Johnson published *Bluestocking Letters,* an anthology of letters by Montagu, Vesey, Boscawen, Chapone and Carter, part of a series published by John Lane which included *The Letters of Hannah More* and *The Letters of Jane Austen,* and Brimley Johnson explicitly aligns the Bluestockings with a wider tradition of literature by women, by placing them on the cusp of a change in women's social role:

> [In] so far as we may call the Bluestockings pioneers, their successors appeared to have been chiefly influenced by Fanny Burney's invention of 'polite' fiction. No longer afraid of authorship or ashamed of work, the newly freed woman won and held man's unwilling respect and admiration, by cleansing, shaping and vitalising the Novel; from Miss Edgeworth's 'nationals,' through the Brontes' passion, to Jane Austen's fine art: boldly feminine in expression, truthful in characterisation, original in thought: for all time vindicating the sex from Mrs. Montagu's sweeping judgement upon an earlier generation that 'the generality of women who have excelled in wit have failed in chastity.[107]

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[104] Climenson, p. viii-ix
[105] Alice C.C Gaussen, *Elizabeth Carter: A Woman of Wit and Wisdom,* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1906), p.xii
[106] Ibid. p.viii
[107] *Bluestocking Letters,* ed. by R. Brimley Johnson, (London: John Lane, 1926), p. 18

This assessment of the historical value of the Bluestockings is worth quoting in full because it identifies two trends which later criticism on the Bluestockings has had to address. Firstly, though this is an anthology of letters that excludes those of Fanny Burney, she is identified as the only progressive bluestocking. Even Johnson's Burney is only progressive in so far as she altered the form of the novel, implying the same neglect of the form of the letter itself in *Bluestocking Letters* as we have seen in Climenson's approach. Secondly, Montagu is identified as the spokeswoman for bluestocking conservatism in her 'sweeping judgement', in contrast to the later generations 'boldly feminine expression'. Montagu's conservatism, placed in a starker position because of her authority within the bluestocking circle, is an aspect of her identity which recent generations of critics have had to confront.

The last text that must be addressed before turning to recent criticism is the 1926 publication of another edition-biography, this time based on Montagu's correspondence from 1761 onwards, published by Reginald Blunt, a friend of Emily Climenson's. His edition followed the same pseudo-biography, pseudo-correspondence collection format as Climenson. Also, like Climenson, he deliberately effaces the epistolary nature of the letters he is publishing. In response to a critique of Montagu's letters by Walter Scott in 1813, which he sees mirrored in comments of 'biographers of some of Mrs. Montagu's feminine contemporaries', he deliberately excises Montagu's 'epistolary fireworks…sententious reflections, and…learned disquisitions' leaving 'the references to well-known people and stirring events rather than the witticisms and reflections of their chronicler.'[108] Thus we can see the second generation of Bluestocking letter compilers both reacting to the conservatism of the first generation, and marginalising the generic considerations of the letter form itself, a marginalisation which has only recently come to be reassessed.

[108] Reginald Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu: The Queen of the Blues*, *Her Letters and Friendships: 1761-1800*, 2 vols, (London: Constable, 1923), I, pp. 5-7, 8

The Bluestockings II: 1930-1999: Myers' recovery to *Bluestocking Feminism*

The third phase of Bluestocking scholarship, which has persisted with varying levels of consistency from its inception in the late 1980s and early 90s to the present moment, had its strongest early representative in the figure of Sylvia Harcstark-Myers, whose *The Bluestocking Circle* (1990) still remains a central reference work in Bluestocking scholarship. When the relatively late arrival of feminist scholarship on the Bluestockings is placed in the context of the second wave of feminism in the 70s and 80s, the anxiety of Brimley Johnson in the 1920s over Montagu's conservatism appears all the more prescient. If one compares the bibliographical state of Bluestockings with their contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft during the third wave of feminism, the hesitancy of feminist scholarship to embrace the Bluestockings is all too apparent. Between 1970 and 1980 every single one of Wollstonecraft's major works was reissued, in the cases of *Maria* (1798) and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) multiple times as different publishers sought to produce authoritative editions. An edition of her collected letters was also published in 1979, and no fewer than five biographies between '70 and '75.[109] In contrast to this the primary Bluestocking figures to be given significant attention in this decade were those whose works either focused on figures of broader interest, such as Hester Piozzi, whose *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786) was published in a collection of memoirs of Johnson edited by Arthur Sherbo in 1974, or who were in some way atypical.[110] Fanny Burney was given consistent editorial attention, with an edition of her *Journals and Letters* being published steadily in twelve volumes between 1972 and '84.[111] Catharine Macaulay was republished as well, although only her *Letters on Education* (1790), in 1974 alongside Clara Reeve's *Plans of Education* (1792), both edited by

[109] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Man,* ed. by Janet Todd, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993), pp.xxxii-xxxiii
[110] Janice Blathwayt, 'A Bluestocking Bibliography', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 39-57, (p. 44)
[111] Frances Burney, *Journals and Letters,* ed. by Peter Sabor, (London: Penguin, 2001), p.xxiii.

Gina Luria.[112] The 'conservative, Anglican ideological project' that constituted mainstream bluestocking feminism did not lend itself as easily to the assertive politics of early third wave feminists as Wollstonecraft's radicalism.[113]

The theoretical groundwork had to be laid for the feminist potential of figures such as Carter and Montagu to be realised. A major contribution to this theoretical reconceptualization of feminism was made by Gerda Lerner, in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), a work to which Myers directly refers in her chapter '"Feminist Consciousness" and the Bluestockings'. Lerner defines feminist consciousness as follows:

> I define feminist consciousness as the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternate vision of societal organisation in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination.[114]

Myers' thesis throughout *The Bluestocking Circle* is based on her understanding of the Bluestockings as just such a 'supportive structure'.[115] Beyond the wealth of biographical detail which Myers provided, and the overarching narrative she identified through the Bluestockings as a whole, including both Talbot and Jemima Campbell, Marchioness Grey, Myers' strongest bequest to future generations of Bluestocking scholars was the concept that just by being an intellectual female network they were enacting feminist ideas, regardless of what constituted the espoused political and social ideology behind the movement. Her discussion of the Bluestockings is predominantly biographical, with even the sections on the writers' works reflecting a strong impulse towards biographical reading, and a tendency to focus in greater detail on the ways in which the texts discussed respond to events in the lives of their authors rather than to an ideological or

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[112] Blathwayt, p. 43-44. An illuminating synecdoche of the critical fortunes of the central Bluestocking figures is the fact that Gwen Hampshire's 'An Edition of Some Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Carter, 1717 to 1806' was completed as a doctoral thesis in 1971, see Blathwayt, p. 49, but was not published until 34 years later, see Gwen Hampshire, *Elizabeth Carter, 1717-1806: An Edition of Some Unpublished Letters,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005)

[113] Pohl & Schellenberg, p. 2

[114] Lerner, p. 19

[115] Sylvia Harcstark-Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 153

theoretical basis. That being said, her discussion of the intellectual relationships that the Bluestockings had with their female literary forebears, and with one another as well as the wider literary community does provide a strong grounding for Bluestocking scholarship in the broader context of the eighteenth century. She discusses not only the connection of the first generation Bluestockings to women writers who precede them, such as Mary Astell and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, but also looks at the relationship between Susanna Highmore and Samuel Richardson and the friendship of Sarah Scott and Lady Barbara Montagu.[116] In discussing these applications of 'feminist consciousness' to the Bluestockings and associated figures, Myers' accounts are clear and aligned directly to her theme, elsewhere she suffers from an unhelpful biographical imperative, a trend which continues in popular works on the Bluestockings up to the present day.[117] This thesis remains indebted to her work, however, in the degree to which her concept of the Bluestocking friendship as a feminist support structure underpins the conceit behind this thesis, that the correspondence between the members of the Bluestocking circle constitutes a space in which women's role in historical scholarship, public morality, and national identity, are dissected and reformed by collaborative female scholarship.

While the early 1990s did not see an explosion of Bluestocking scholarship, they remained a presence through the decade's important development and consolidation of the compiling work of the previous decades, embodied in works such as Roger Lonsdale's anthology *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989), Vivien Jones' collection of extracts, *Women in the Eighteenth Century* (1990), and Margaret Ezell's *Writing Women's Literary History* (1993).[118] Within the field of eighteenth century women's studies, however, the mid 90s saw two books which would provide thought-provoking and influential frameworks to influence future study. These were Betty Rizzo's *Companions Without Vows* (1994) and the reissue and translation of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1996).[119] The former, while several of its claims have

[116] Myers, pp. 48-9; 121-2; 140-2; 137-8.
[117] See, for example, Norma Clarke, *Dr Johnson's Women,* (London: Random House, 2000)
[118] The notable exception to the relative silence of Bluestockings in the critical eye at this stage was Hannah More, who appears in Mary Waldron's *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996)
[119] Blathwayt, p. 47, 56, 49

been called into question by more recent scholarship, remains a totem of creative and sympathetic engagement with epistolary source material. Working from the premise of the culturally constrained nature of female companionship, ' Rizzo was able to provide a far more nuanced narrative to the bluestocking relationships she addresses, including the emotional blackmail committed by Piozzi in order to keep Burney close, and the tension Burney experienced between friendship and formal 'companionship', and the 'patriarchal' authority Rizzo claims Montagu exercised through her relationship with Dorothea Gregory.[120]

Habermas' concept of the 'public sphere' has long been influential in its direct repercussions for analysing political discourse in the eighteenth century, it constituted an extra institutional forum for socio-political discussion, embodied in loci such as coffee-houses, where the terms of British party politics and social constitution are negotiated by intellectuals and bourgeoisie. The bluestocking assemblies may be elucidated by this concept, being a feminine organised 'public sphere' space. Understanding Bluestocking assemblies in this context has proved a useful practice in the recent historiographical critique of the second-wave feminist iterations of 'separate spheres'. While these ideas remain influential, it is the fluid boundary of these spheres which has become have been a mainstay of discussions of the Bluestockings, and indeed of any discussion of women's social status in the eighteenth century, from the 90's onward. Several recent texts have taken central themes from addressing Habermas. Linda Colley's *Britons* (1993) explores various ways in which women transgressed the boundaries of the domestic sphere and asserts that the very abundance of advice literature promoting the 'separate spheres' ideology implies that it was not being enacted in real life. Another more recent text to take its conceit from Habermas was Harriet Guest's *Small Change* (2000). Guest's narrative, of the contemporary rhetoric connecting female conversation with politics, consumption with labour, sentiment and female learning with patriotism, among other areas, draws its central argument from an exploration of feminist application of Habermas' theory of the public sphere. Given the correlation between Habermas' legacy and the particular themes of chapter 2, we will return in more detail to this theory at the start of the chapter.

[120] Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women,* (Atlanta, University of Georgia Press, 1994)

The Bluestockings III: 1999-2018: Consolidation and Extension

The next phase of Bluestocking research can be dated from 1999 to 2002. Firstly there is the six-volume *Bluestocking Feminism,* (1999) under the general editorship of Gary Kelly, which still contains the most recent editions of Montagu's *Essay on Shakespeare,* in Volume 1, edited by Elizabeth Eger, and Carter's *Epictetus*, in Volume 2, edited by Judith Hawley. Volume 3, on Chapone and Talbot, also usefully collects most of the published and unpublished works by Catherine Talbot. The biographical imperative and neglect of epistolary form in earlier bluestocking criticism is to a certain extent counterbalanced by the fact that the first 4 volumes include letter selections in addition to literary works, implicitly suggesting parallels between the two. The general introduction to the series, defining the socio-economic position of the Bluestockings, remains an effective summary of the key aspects of modern bluestocking research. The primary issue of the *Bluestocking Feminism* collection is one which this survey has encountered before, those of premature representation, and selection. Like *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, Bluestocking Feminism* was an implicit declaration of canonicity for the figures to whom it dedicated volumes. While the bluestocking canon is clearly more closed than that of 'literature by women', there is still a wide-range of editorial choices to be made in selecting who is to be included. The major omissions from the *Bluestocking Feminism* collection are Hester Thrale Piozzi, and Hannah More, both of whom remain without modern editions of their works (beyond Cambridge Library Collection reprints), to this day, but both of whom produced works in a variety of genres, which would definitely benefit from the efforts of a modern editor.

Bluestocking Feminism may be considered a companion piece to *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (2002), the special issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* produced in 2002 under the editorship of Nicole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg, not only in that they share two key contributors, Gary Kelly and Elizabeth Eger, but also in the sense that between them they offer a vivid portrait of the ways in which analysis of the Bluestockings necessitates manuscript, epistolary research alongside print scholarship. The diversity of themes addressed in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* indicates the potential which the

Montagu collection at the Huntington Library has for research. In addition to Kelly, Eger, Rizzo and Guest, the other key names in current Bluestocking scholarship all appear in *Reconsidering,* Nicole Pohl, Betty Schellenberg, Deborah Heller and Emma Major are all major figures in the body of work which constitutes current bluestocking research. For the purposes of my research three essays in particular are prominent. Susan Staves' 'Church of England Clergy and Women Writers' illustrates the complexities of the relationship between Carter, Talbot and the clerics around them, Dr Carter, Thomas Secker and Montagu Pennington. Staves analyses the ways in which Carter's and Talbot's lives and identities were both constructive of, and constructed by, contemporary Anglican ideology. Talbot, for example, has Secker's response to the practice of charity to thank for her residence in his household, utilises her *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) to polemicize against contemporary 'enthusiasm', i.e. Methodists and Evangelicals, and ultimately her life story is constructed into further Anglican propaganda by Pennington (see the above discussion of Montagu Pennington).[121] Staves' linking of the educational role embraced not only by Talbot and Carter but also by figures such as Hannah More with the 'Protestant turn away from clerical intermediaries and toward a new emphasis on the responsibility of [female] parents for the religious education of members of their households' also highlights the degree to which the Bluestockings' literary and intellectual identities were in themselves religious constructions.[122] Emma Major's 'The Politics of Sociability' assesses Bluestocking sociability as an intersection of nationalist, religious, and polite discourses. Major presents a thesis that by combining these discourses in semi-public conversation the Bluestockings constitute their own utopian vision of national identity:

[121]Susan Staves, 'Church of England Clergy and Women Writers', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 81-103, (p. 85, 92)
[122] Ibid, p. 86

> The social…is the crucible in which private feeling may be transformed into public spirit, where an epistolary exchange can transform Vesey's 'mille fleurs' of national and quotidian fears into an assertion of her membership in a national community.[123]

The last essay from *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* I wish to highlight is Deborah Heller's 'Subjectivity Unbound: Elizabeth Vesey as the Sylph in Bluestocking Correspondence', because, as with Staves and Major, it explores the ways in which particular discourses are manipulated within the epistolary format, and how the manipulation of these discourses assist in the constitution of the identities of the author and recipient. In exploring the fluid identity of the eccentric and mysterious Vesey across the correspondence, Heller draws the conclusion that her identity as the Sylph represents a figure of pure abstraction, an invitation to the more imaginative of the Bluestockings to unencumbered flights of fancy. This made her also a source of tension for her correspondents, particularly Carter, with her concern (shared with Talbot) for rational, non-'enthusiastic' piety. Heller characterises the tension between sylphic escapism and rational self-control as central to the bluestocking conception of freedom:

> Sylphic subjectivity, after all, consisted of pure self-relation and, as such, offered a resource for resistance against certain constraints of convention...On the other hand, Carter and Montagu also believed that their regimens of rational self-regulation could help secure liberation on other fronts – liberation from mental perturbation and unfreedom.[124]

In this way *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* as a whole, and particularly in the three essays referred to here, present the reader with the potential which is offered by tracing contemporary discourses through an epistolary corpus, in this case the languages of religion, politics, and subjectivity. The value of this work, and particularly of Deborah Heller's essay, is its sensitivity to the creation and self-conscious manipulation of extant

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[123] Emma Major, 'The Politics of Sociability: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 175-192, (p. 191); for a further discussion of the intersection of Bluestocking identity and polite sociability, see *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830,* ed. by Elizabeth Eger et al, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-women, *The Spectator* and the public sphere in the early eighteenth century', pp. 27-53. See also Elizabeth Eger, "The noblest commerce of mankind' Conversation and Community in the Bluestocking Circle', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 288-305; and Major, 2012, esp. Ch. 2 & 5.

[124] Deborah Heller, 'Subjectivity Unbound: Elizabeth Vesey as the Sylph in Bluestocking Correspondence', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 215-34, (p. 234)

discourse in the bluestocking letters, as opposed to merely tracing it through the letters. It is this creative response to language and meaning that is of central interest to my own study.

The next phase of interest in the Bluestockings, from 2008's *Brilliant Women* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery onwards, incorporates a diversity of output that attests to the newfound importance of the Bluestockings to eighteenth century history. Elizabeth Eger's *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (2010), and *Bluestockings Displayed* (2013), parallel and update the earlier phase of Bluestocking research, utilising the formats of the survey monograph and essay collection to explore the breadth and diversity of Bluestocking interest. Eger's innovation in both of these works, and in *Brilliant Women,* is to turn the focus outward, onto the cultural constructions of the Bluestockings as national figures, particularly in connection with Montagu, Lennox and Griffith's contributions to the cult of Shakespeare in *Bluestockings.*[125] *Bluestockings Displayed* combines an extension of Eger's investigation of bluestocking representation, in the essays by Clare Barlow and E.J Clery, with explorations of discourse and group identity, in the essays of Felicity Nussbaum and Shearer West.

The most prominent essay in the collection for my purposes, however, is Markman Ellis' 'Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu's epistolary network of the 1750s'. Ellis takes a quantitative approach to Montagu's reading practices. He identifies '108 letters that include discussions of books and reading, [which] mention 194 texts and authors, of which 33 are noted in more than one letter (135 distinct texts)', and proceeds to organise them in terms of correspondents with whom Montagu discusses books and the topics of the books discussed.[126] Ellis proceeds to analyse his findings in terms of 'social practices of collaborative commentary and recommendation, and of lending and gift giving.'[127] By exploring the sharing of commentary and the diversity of genres discussed, Ellis hypothesises that 'the critical judgements of the Montagu circle have an integrative function within their friendship circle, alongside their enquiries about the health of family and friends, as well as an intellectual function within a debate

[125] Eger, 2010*,* esp. ch. 3; see also Elizabeth Eger, 'Out rushed a female to protect the Bard': The Bluestocking Defence of Shakespeare' in *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 127-151
[126] Markman Ellis, 'Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu's epistolary network of the 1750s', in *Bluestockings Displayed,* pp. 213-232, (pp. 214-218)
[127] Ibid, p. 213

on cultural products'[128]. These discussions Ellis categorises in terms of asserting critical and intellectual authority:

> [Montagu and her correspondents engage in] extended assessments of writers, assessing both their biography and their characteristic style, not[ing] a writer's social status and wealth, their birth and family, their education and training and their adherence to any particular religious or political interest…[in order to] assess the right of the writer to speak, establishing the authority of the author…such investigations suggested multiple routes to authorship…This correspondence reiterated the cultural value of critical debate and the authority of women to speak on [literary] subjects…encouraged certain collective critical practices, and taught the letter-writers a critical and social *modus operandi* for which they were collectively responsible.[129]

Essentially, Ellis is identifying in Montagu's circle the development of shared critical reading practices and the connection between these reading practises and Montagu's *Essay on Shakespear*. Ellis' work constitutes a useful point of departure for my own research, as I intend to utilise a close-reading, reader-response based analysis of the literary features of Montagu, Carter and Talbot's letters to explore the same phenomenon he addresses using quantitative, social network methods. I intend to explore the ways in which the constitution of a critical voice take place within the correspondents unique responses to individual texts, whether Talbot, Carter, and Montagu's development of these critical voices manifest themselves in the same way, and to look at this phenomenon across a broader time-frame than that addressed by Ellis.

Another central bluestocking scholar whose work thematically influences with my own is Anni Sairio, whose sociolinguistic approach to the Bluestocking letters, particularly those of Elizabeth Montagu, represents an alternative method to locate a linguistically constituted creative identity. Sairio's 2013 essay, 'Language and Identity in Letters' co-authored with Minna Nevala and Minna Palander-Collin, outlines the various strategies by which one can linguistically assert one's self-identity and presence within communities and social circles. Such strategies include two factors which condition the language of a personal letter, and are powerfully evocative of the theorists of creative reading addressed above. The first, is the 'psychobiography' of the author, 'which includes the letter writer's individual traits and background like education, which affects

[128] Ellis, p. 223
[129] Ibid, p. 225-6, 232

the linguistic repertoire of the writer and shows in the kind of language he or she can write.'[130] The second is the consideration of a letter as a '*situated activity* where a letter is written for a specific recipient and purpose…the language of which is thus linked to the *social settings*, values and norms.'[131] Both of these factors parallel the concepts of *erwartungshorizon* and 'interpretative communities'. These similarities highlight the conditioned nature of private language in all cases, whether reading is being discussed or not, suggesting that linguistics provides an opportunity for quantifying and assessing the difficult category of moment-by-moment self-hood, through a careful assessment of nuanced meaning in the context of *psychobiography*. Sairio goes on, in her discussion of the Bluestocking Corpus, to assess the roles of irony and literary allusion in Montagu's letters, after quantifying the panoply of allusions in her sample series of letters, Sairio concludes the following:

> Elizabeth's letters are performances that through literary allusions and verbal irony shape her identity as a witty and rational thinker and a merciless jester. Her language can be interpreted as assertive undermining of the authoritativeness of the social norms that control the use of more formal language features.'[132]

This function of self-creation through knowing allusion ties in significantly with my intended project. The difference between my approach and that of Sairio lies both in methodology and the type of conclusion we seek to draw from Montagu's allusions. Where Sairio's comments on Montagu's allusions consist for the most part of lists, or basic details such as noting a reference to Hippolito with 'John Dryden's and William D'Avenant's seventeenth-century adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, to which they added the character of Hyppolito who had never seen a woman',[133] her primary interest is in the function which the allusion, considered as a sociolinguistic device, serves within the letter: 'The recipient is expected to understand these allusions, otherwise the writer's attempt to amuse and impress fails.'[134] My interest in references to texts within letters is more based on an analysis of the reading processes which lead up to a particular understanding of a text between two correspondents, rather than on the form of

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[130] Anni Sairio et al, 'Language and Identity in Letters' in *Ex Philologia Lux: Essays in Honour of Leena Kahlas-Tarkka.* ed. by J Tyrkkö, O Timofeeva, and M Salenius, (Helsinki: Modern Language Society, 2013) p. 289-311, (p. 291)
[131] Ibid, p. 291
[132] Ibid, p. 305
[133] Ibid, p. 304
[134] Ibid

allusion itself. For this reason I am much more interested in longer discussions rather than brief allusions such as that which Sairio discusses, but am strongly indebted to Sairio's work for providing a model for how I might assimilate my particular literary critical conclusions with the wider study of Bluestocking self-identification.[135] Applying Sairio's conceptual framework for her analysis of historical sociolinguistic network structures also provides a parallel for the reader-response theorists' concept of interpretative communities. In 'Language and Letters of the Bluestocking Network', Sairio in fact draws on the concept of 'discourse community' when conceptualising the Bluestocking network as a 'community of practice'. Sairio's use of 'Discourse community' is defined by the following terms: 'a) a communality of interest, b) participatory mechanisms, c) information exchange, d) genre-specific discoursal expectations, e) a dynamic towards specialized language, and f) a critical mass of expertize.'[136] Whilst there is not a direct parallel to be drawn, the concepts of specialised language and communality of interest also resonate with the reader response theorists discussed above. The parameters of the specialised discourse become the boundaries of the horizon of expectation when one extends the framework from linguistics to interpretative experience more generally.

In seeking to extend the parameters of the Bluestocking circle, particularly backwards into the earlier eighteenth century with Talbot's Bedfordshire connections, my work will be complementing the current tendencies in Bluestocking scholarship, as manifested in the intentions behind the new anthology of essays *Bluestockings Now!* (2015). As Deborah Heller puts it in her introduction, 'the Bluestocking phenomenon (compared with the vagaries of the name) appears to be a much broader and longer historical movement, one that exceeds and outlives the [traditional boundaries of the] Montagu-Vesey-Boscawen circle.'[137] While Heller's avowed aim is the extension of the

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[135] For Sairio's assessment of Montagu's use of contractions in her letters, and their relationship to her authoritative voice after the publication of the *Essay on Shakespeare,* see 'On the Weights and Measures of eighteenth-century Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 81.4 (2018), pp.633-656; and for her most extensive assessment of Montagu's letters, see *Language and Letters of the Bluestocking Network: Sociolinguistic Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Epistolary English: Memoires de la Societie Neophilologique de Helsinki, Tome LXXV* (Helsinki: Societie Neophilologique, 2009)

[136] Sairio, 2009, p.32.

[137] Deborah Heller, 'Introduction' in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role,* ed. by Deborah Heller, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), (pp. 1-14), p. 1

Bluestockings up to the present day, and mine involves a less radical shift of focus, the techniques she is proposing for extending the canon perfectly tie in with my intentions for new analysis of Montagu, Talbot and Carter's reading practices. Heller proposes that 'the Bluestockings, were….setting in train a remodelling of alternate and adjusted female identities that culminated in the group concept of "women" characteristic of organized feminism… perform[ing] their function…as "producers, evaluators, and diffusers of cultural innovation."'[138] While Heller is exploring this phenomenon through social network theory, it is the psychological processes behind the 'remodelling' which she discusses which fundamentally concern my own research. I am interested in the ways in which this remodelling takes place at the level of language, and therefore can clearly see my research working alongside this current trend in Bluestocking scholarship.

The other dominant analytical strand relevant to my own work stems from a further central figure in Bluestocking scholarship, and the voice credited with the 'mock-militant'[139] title *Bluestockings Now!,* Gary Kelly. Kelly's case for 'careful historicization of the…discourses [of 'work' and 'learning']…is concerned with demonstrating the interplay between class and gender on one hand, and the multiplex meanings of "work" and "learning" current in the eighteenth century on the other.'[140] Heller's concern with the active reconfiguration of discourse, and Kelly's interest in the cultural standardisation of that discourse between them present the Bluestockings as figures whose primary interest (and defining characteristic) is one of semantic and cultural change. This is an interest shared by Emma Major, whose *Madam Britannia* (2012) extensively discusses the way in which the Bluestockings, particularly Elizabeth Montagu and Catherine Talbot, respond to prevailing discourses of nationalism and religion, alongside other aspects of eighteenth century British discourse which celebrate femininity as an embodiment of British identity, such as the figure of Britannia, and the feminised images of the Church of England. Her discussion of the ways in which 'narratives of faith, national identity, and civilisation allowed some women to see themselves as active agents in the shaping of the nation' has a strong influence on my conception of the Bluestocking conception of public moral duty, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3, as does Major's interest in the intersection of classical culture and

[138] Heller, 2015, p. 3
[139] Ibid, p. 2
[140] Ibid, p. 4

eighteenth-century politeness.[141] The strongest legacy which I have taken from *Madam Britannia,* however, which guides much of my analysis of both the Bluestocking letters and the terms of their cultural commentary, is that of the '*via media*' or 'golden mean', the principle of moderation between extremes, which defined British feminine propriety, Anglican religion, and English nationalism:

> The via media of the Church of England, the 'middle way' that characterised its negotiation of Puritanism and Roman Catholicism and which continues to be invoked in discussions of Anglican identity, drew on Aristotle's golden mean. Influentially described by Aristotle and later by Horace as a social practice, the golden mean underpins many key eighteenth-century debates about politeness and nationhood, such as those about the country and the city, or barbarism and civilisation…The golden mean brings the classical and religious claims of the nation together in a polite Protestant culture.[142]

I will be drawing extensively on Major's conception throughout my discussions of the intersection of the Bluestocking correspondence with the stereotypes of excess surrounding French letters in chapter 1, and the relationship between politeness and classicism in chapter 2. My thesis diverts from that of Major to the extent that it is influenced by that of Heller and Kelly, Major's methodological concern is with the ways in which the Bluestockings acted to construct themselves within prevailing discourses of gender and nationalism. By treating this discourses as 'horizons of expectation' which, as we have seen in the account of the reader response theorists discussed above, are by definition being eroded by readers as soon as they are established, my analysis, whilst it walks the same lines of nationalism, classicism, and politeness, is just as concerned with the Bluestocking deviation from these discourses as it is with their embracing of them.

The final critical precursors which bear on my thesis, and which can be seen as the first indications of the next generation of Bluestocking scholarship heralded by *Bluestockings Now!* are Betty Schellenberg's monograph *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (2016) and 'The Commerce of Life: Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800)', the 2018 special edition of *Huntington Library Quarterly* and sequel to *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*. 'The Commerce of Life' is indicative of the interdisciplinary potential of engagement with a single Bluestocking figure, as well as her value as a hub for hitherto under-explored relationships. The piece by mining historian Les Turnbull, and Markman

[141] Major, 2012, p. 1
[142] Ibid, p. 16.

Ellis's analysis of the Huntington Montagu collection as an entity in itself in an archival historical approach the collection from economic and archival historical standpoints, while Sophie Coulombeau, Caroline Franklin, and Michael Franklin explore three of Montagu's less-well represented relationships, her guardianship of Matthew Montagu, her patronage-friendship with James Beattie, and her simultaneous fascination with, and support for, Joseph Emin. This publication, which is anticipatory of the Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence Online (EMCO) project to produce an Open Access scholarly edition of the complete letters of Elizabeth Montagu, shares with this thesis the intention of establishing the scope of the Montagu collection as an academic resource.

The final text which bears on my thesis, and which combines discussion of the Bluestockings most extensively with both social network theory and manuscript studies, is Betty Schellenberg's *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (2016), which takes as two of its case studies the Montagu-Lyttelton core circle of Bluestockings, and the Talbot-Grey circle. Schellenberg's overall thesis, building on the conclusions discussed above of Ezell, Love, and others, is that the sharing and communal production of literary works in manuscript, or 'scribal publication', was a practice that persisted throughout the eighteenth century and created a set of practices and associations which engaged in a subtle interplay with print forms:

> Scribal Culture, with its appeals of intimacy and authenticity, was not in fact gone; a more accurate description, from the perspective of the mid-eighteenth century person of letters, would have been that this was a culture in which the media of script and print, with their distinctive practices and priorities, were nevertheless in close conversation, sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually antagonistic, but between them offering a rich array of options for literary expression, exchange and preservation.[143]

This conception of scribal publication is not only reflective of the current status of manuscript historiography and its relationship to the literary canon, but is also the definition with which this thesis is working, as will be seen in particular in its discussions of Carter's *Epictetus* and the works of Robert Potter. The other core component of

[143] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740–1790,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 2

Schellenberg's analysis on which this thesis draws is her definition of literary coteries, as being defined by discursive distinction from prevailing social conditions:

> Social conditions external to any particular network...codes invoked in communications between members of different status groups, or the rules known to govern manuscript exchange between members of any coterie – create a climate of expectation within that network. What becomes interesting in this light is how an individual group might negotiate and refine those expectations, or reject them altogether. [144]

This aspect of coterie network formulation is latent throughout the thesis, but will be particularly strong in the discussion of public morality and neoclassicism in the second chapter. *Literary Coteries* also, though Schellenberg does not directly employ the same Foucauldian framework as I will, conceptualises the relationship between social and creative authority, manifested in the coterie structure. Her conception of the role of Philip Yorke in the Grey Circle, for example, is as 'chief patron…set[ting] tasks and propos[ing] literary projects to the other members', translating his aristocratic status into discursive authority within the group.[145] Samuel Richardson is also shown to parlay discursive and social authority into one another, using the central status his literary success had won him in his own network of admirers to police the conversation between its members. When a minor sonnet-feud between Thomas Edwards and John Duncombe threatens the unity of the group, Richardson refuses to share Duncombe's work with the rest of the group, telling Duncombe he will explain why in person. As Schellenberg puts it, Richardson is 'not only blocking the channels of exchange, but also…taking the communications of the coterie "offline," so to speak – that is, out of the medium of script altogether.'[146] The dark side of coterie creativity is the discursive authority it gives those who gain positions of power within the group, and who have the ability to include or exclude individuals from it. Schellenberg finds Carter and Talbot free from these constraints, the former 'command[ing] the respect of a literary equal' in the Grey circle, and the latter's marginal status in the Richardson coterie prevents him from being able to exert control over her.[147] The book's chapter on Montagu centres on her and Johnson's conflict over the right of the general reader to access the private lives of public figures, as inspired by Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets,* which will be

[144] Schellenberg, p. 16-17.
[145] Ibid, p. 20
[146] Ibid, p. 54
[147] Ibid, p. 32, 52-3

discussed in detail in chapter 3. In this chapter Montagu appears as authoritative in her circle, marshalling a collection of authors and supporters against Johnson's 'Life of Lyttelton.' chapter 3 of the current study will extend the discussion of Montagu's coterie authority in the conflict with Johnson, and explore the same dynamics in her role as a patron, and her own peripheral connection to the Scottish Enlightenment.

By applying the theories of reader response criticism and epistolary network analysis through a series of microcosmic close readings of a range of epistolary materials, known and new, in print and in manuscript, this thesis extends the terms of current Bluestocking discussion by dissecting the processes of ideological change and discursive transformation at work within the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu and Friends. Between them the edition and these analytical chapters offer a toolkit for how future researchers will be able to map the dominant themes at large in Bluestocking discourse on a text-by-text and relationship-by-relationship basis, as the work of *EMCO* and *Electronic Enlightenment* builds and expand.

Chapter I: French Letters: Madame de Sévigné's Correspondence & Bluestocking Epistolary Community

This chapter will address the ways in which interpretation and discussion of letters as a literary genre facilitated the cultivation of bonds of empathic and affective intimacy between members of the Bluestocking circle, and the ways in which the interpretative frameworks brought to bear on the genre of letters itself came to help define their collective identity. The case study chosen to indicate this, that of the seventeenth century salonniere, Madame de Sévigné, was selected because she is not only an author whose letters were discussed consistently by the Bluestockings, as has been noted by Markman Ellis, but on whom they formed a judgement which can be evocatively paralleled with a broader cultural reading which I have termed 'British Sevignism'.[1] The traits which problematize and complicate Sévigné as an epistolary model for the Bluestockings, namely her Frenchness and interest in Jansenist philosophy, also provide opportunities for demarcating and defining the form of community which Montagu, Carter, and Talbot are concerned with cultivating. The stereotypes of French emotional expressiveness, and the Jansenist anxieties over worldliness, provide crucibles for distilling Bluestocking epistolary identities opposing them, and the conceit of a community grounded in rational, spiritualised empathic connection emerges.

Style and Character – Learning Epistolary Literacy

The pathways to achieving epistolary literacy for women of the Bluestockings' class and educational status were numerous, and have been well documented in recent critical assessments of epistolary culture.[2] The letter manual, or 'Secretary' is a ubiquitous presence in scholarship on epistolary culture, due to its apparently enormous readership — the most famous manual of the period, *The Complete Letter-Writer* (London & Salisbury:

[1] Markman Ellis, 'Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu's epistolary network of the 1750s', in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 213-232, (p. 220)
[2] See, most notably, Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); & Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009),

Printed for S.Crowder & B.C. Collins, 1755) boasted nineteen editions and a panoply of supplements, imitations, pirate printings, translations, and reprints in Ireland, Scotland, and the United States, between its initial 1755 publication and its 1792 nineteenth edition, the last accounted for by the *ESTC*.[3] It was far from alone on the market, with imitations minutely distinguished from one another emerging throughout the century. 1763 saw *The Ladies Compleat Letter-Writer* and *The Instructive Letter-Writer and Entertaining Companion* published alongside each other. In a blunt effort to demarcate the *Entertaining Companion* from the *Complete Letter Writer* by identifying a discrete demographic in the same way as the *Ladies'* had, its publisher, William Nicoll altered its title page from the second edition (1765) onwards, to claim that it promoted 'Noble and Manly Sentiments'.[4] Such a reliable sale was the letter manual, that it even has a significant showing in original products and reprints from provincial presses in Berwick, Glasgow, Gloucester and Whitehaven, as well as the American presses, putting them on a par with newspapers and school textbooks as provincial staples across the century.[5]

The other reason why letter manuals continue to excite such contemporary critical attention is that - often drawing on actual letters by historical correspondents of note - they appear to represent self-contained accounts, of the ideology and function behind eighteenth-century epistolary literacy. It is primarily on the basis of letter manuals that scholars like Clare Brant and Eve Tavor Bannet draw their critical conclusions on

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[3] *English Short Title Catalogue* online, <http://estc.bl.uk>, [accessed 10 January 2018]; the presence, or at least suspicion of, pirate collections capitalising on the *Complete Letter-Writer* brand, is attested to by the fact that the 1800 reprint of the 1792 nineteenth edition includes the following disclaimer on its title page: 'The great credit and sale of this book having given rise to many mutilated piracies thereof, the public are desired to note, that none is genuine unless printed for James Scatcherd, London; and B. C. Collins, Salisbury.' The nineteenth was the first edition printed after the new partnership of James Satcherd and B.C. Collins, after the death of Collin's original partner, Stanley Crowder (fl. 1742-d. 1798), and Scatcherd was clearly anxious that the change of name should not lead customers to reject it as another imitator.

[4] George Seymour, *The Instructive Letter-writer, and Entertaining Companion,* (London: Printed for W. Nicoll, 1765),

[5] *The Entertaining Correspondent,* (Berwick: Printed for R. Taylor, 1759); *The Letter Writers Complete Instructor,* (Glasgow: Printed by James Knox, 1763); *The New Letter Writer,* (Whitehaven: Printed for John Dunn, 1775); for the ubiquity of newspapers and school textbooks in the provincial book trade, see John Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 17–28; 33—35. For an overview of the American letter-manual trade, see Eve Tavor Bannet, 'Printed Epistolary Manuals and the Transatlantic Rescripting of Manuscript Culture', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 36 (2007), pp. 13-32, (pp. 13-14.)

the form and function of eighteenth-century epistolary style, both asserting the primacy of the letter manual in the formation of polite English literature. Both scholars perceive the letter manual as indicative of modern social preoccupations. Brant places them within the paradigm of enlightenment politeness, with the 'uncertainties about class' reflected in the manuals indicative of the possibilities politeness offered for transcending one's class through performance of social codes. She combines this with an awareness of their conservative nature, finding that the consolidation of British polite epistolary discourse also 'contributed to xenophobic certainties', of which we will discuss the particular example of French hyper-expressiveness later in this chapter.[6] Bannet focuses on the role of epistolary skill in relation to the eighteenth-century mercantile sphere, conceptualising it as a type of professional accomplishment, necessary for engagement in the colonial sphere which is central to her study.[7] However, for critics writing in the wake of Susan Whyman, the letter manual is as notable for its potential to mislead contemporary critics as it is for its saturation of the eighteenth-century print market. Whilst Whyman engages in a similar discussion of the letter manual's relationship to class and nationalism to those of her predecessors, she is brought up short by the fact that, at no point in her analysis of manuscript letters does she encounter 'letters…that resembled those in published guides' or 'references to using manuals in real letters.' [8] The reality, as Whyman and Bannet both discuss, is that letter manuals were not used directly as self-educational tools in the construction of familiar letters. The stock, formulaic language that is central to the functional letters within collections like *The Complete Letter Writer* does resonate with the accepted thesis of eighteenth-century theorists of politeness attempting to carve out a new language of accepted discourse. However, it also renders them inadequate as models upon which to base one's individual epistolary style. Such inadequacies are made explicit

[6] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters and British Culture,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 37-9 (p. 39),

[7] Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. x

[8] Whyman, p. 28; Whyman's conclusion is borne out by the further evidence from Electronic Enlightenment, which contains only one editorially-identified reference to any major epistolary manual, a 75-year old Jeremy Bentham's sarcastic reflection that 'Not being worth a copy of 'The Compleat Letter Writer' I dont know how to write to a Lady I never saw', in a letter to the 18 year old David Urquhart. 'Jeremy Bentham to David Urquhart: Thursday, 7 August 1823', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, Vers. 3.0, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. (2017). <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/bentjeOU0110277a1c > [accessed 10 Jan 2018].

in a letter that Sarah Scott sent to Elizabeth Montagu in 1768, the sole allusion to epistolary manuals that I have found in the Montagu-Scott correspondence:

> You have no Mercy on the stile of my letters, I complained of being always obliged to say the same thing, & now you reduce me again to the same necessity. I wish I had my great Uncles little book by me where he gave so many beginnings & endings to Letters, perhaps I might therein find a variety of thanks which might enable me to give pretty turns to the continual thanks I have to return, but you wou'd wear {deleted} most ingenious in phrases, & I [would] be reduced to repetitions.[9]

Scott's hyperbolic expression of gratitude uses the recognisable trope of the letter manual as a means of flattering Montagu's epistolary skill at the same time as she praises her generosity. The implication is that if Scott consults the letter manual 'my great Uncles little book' then she will at least be able to find enough expressions of gratitude to encompass her sister's kindnesses, but acknowledging that such borrowings will cost her in sincerity, what they gain her in 'pretty turns'. Such recourse will ultimately be rendered moot by Montagu's skill in 'ingenious…phrases'. Her epistolary skill, which does not rely on the stock phrases of a manual, will always exceed what they can offer due to the genuine talent behind them.

The value of such collections, therefore, can be seen to lie not in the self-consciously pedagogic 'Letter from a young Person of Business to a Gentleman, desiring leave to wait on his Daughter' or 'From a Daughter to her Mother, by Way of Excuse for having neglected to write to her', in *The Complete Letter Writer*'s second edition, but in the section at the end, which received the most extension in later editions, that of exemplary instances of well-written letters, such as 'Mr Pope, to Lady —— on Witty and Serious Letters'.[10] By far the most significant drive towards epistolary literacy in its most

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[9] 'Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, ? May 1768', *The Letters of Sarah Scott*, ed. by Nicole Pohl, 2 vols, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), II, p. 79. For a comparable reflection on the superiority of the extemporary letter over the stylistic model, see 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Vesey, Feb 9, 1774'; '[Vesey's Letters] come out of her hand sprinkled with attic salt, which will preserve them undecay'd, but they have not only a permanent form, but act with a living agency on the heart of her friends, & are as superior in their energy to studied formal letters, as Mr Garrick on ye stage is to the Puppet that by meer mechanism assumes the gestures of the Hero or the Lover', MO 6437.

[10] *The Complete Letter Writer,* (London & Salisbury: Printed for S. Crowder & B.C. Collins, 1755), later editions advertise themselves as including newly acquired letters from literary celebrities, with Sterne and Chesterfield named on the title page.

developed form, as displayed in the Bluestocking correspondences, was the ubiquity of letters and letter extracts in the everyday reading of aspirant men and women of letters. Montagu, Carter, and Talbot's letters are no exception, with discussions of the most famous correspondents of the decade, often the same figures who appeared in collections like *The Complete Letter Writer,* recurring throughout their epistolary lives. Take for example, this reflection by Elizabeth Montagu on William Melmoth's (1710–1799) translation of the *Epistulae* of Pliny the Younger, *The Letters of Pliny the Consul* (1746) in a letter to Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Portland:

> I must recommend to you Mr. Melmoth's translation of Pliny's letters; I think they will please your Grace; you will find sentiments of friendship and generosity that will touch a heart like yours: they are not in the epistolary style of modern letters, nor abound with turns of wit like French writers; but noble and elevated sentiments, and dignity of expression, will make up for the absence of little ornaments and embellishments. [11]

Montagu's critique of Melmoth's Pliny is based on the juxtaposition between fine style and genuine expression, to which she adds a moral component. The language in which Melmoth's Pliny speaks does not merely present a point of access to a world of neoclassical idealism for his eighteenth-century consumers, but his language itself becomes a synecdoche of the noble simplicity and dignity of manner associated with ancient Rome. Such language is explicitly contrasted with the 'epistolary style' of 'modern' and 'turns of wit' of 'French' letters, which are associated with 'ornaments and embellishments'. It is interesting to note that 'epistolary style' and 'turns of wit', two traits which reflect a literary conception of the letter genre, both serve to hinder the expression of meaning rather than facilitate it. Montagu's relationship with neoclassicism will be discussed in detail later in this study, but it is sufficient here to observe that 'modern', in her personal lexicon, is a negative concept, bearing associations with mercantilism and excess, often twinned with 'foppery' and 'luxury', as in a 1755 discussion of the decoration in Sir John Evelyn's library, or used to reflect sarcastically on the pomposity of modern intellectuals in comparing themselves to the classics, as she does in a 1758 letter to Thomas Lyttelton, directly comparing the two groups.[12] As for the French letter comment, it attests to the degree to which even Montagu, without having apparently engaged directly with letter manuals in evolving her own conception of

[11]'Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, 1747', ed. Montagu, III, p.46.
[12] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Mary Anstey, 28 August 1755', ed. Montagu, III, p. 324; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Thomas Lyttelton, [1758?]', ed. Montagu, IV: 88.

literary form, is reflecting the same identification of national character with epistolary convention which critics such as Brant and Bannet have identified in them. A useful gloss on French letters specifically may be found in Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* 152, reflecting conventional mid-eighteenth-century attitudes both towards French letters in particular, and epistolary convention as a whole:

> A slight perusal of the innumerable letters by which the wits of France have signalized their names, will prove that other nations need not be discouraged from the like attempts by the consciousness of inability; for surely it is not very difficult to aggravate trifling misfortunes, to magnify familiar incidents, repeat adulatory professions, accumulate servile hyperboles, and produce all that can be found in the despicable remains of Voiture and Scarron.[13]

As with Scott's anxieties about the risks of using her great uncle's letter book, and Montagu's praise of 'dignity and expression' over ornament, the epistolary features which damage its capacity to function as a letter are those which foreground the textuality of the document, and distance it from its oral equivalent, conversation. As Janet Altman has argued, letters as a genre are defined by their ambiguity between being textual productions and performative acts in the biography of the correspondent.[14] What the literary features of the epistolary form do is gesture towards the former of these categories, while the extemporary effusions of passion, and expressions of relationality gesture towards the latter. In short, the ideal letter, for Elizabeth Montagu, is defined as the unmitigated expression of a virtuous character. Markman Ellis has observed, in relation to Elizabeth Montagu's broader reading practices of the 1750s, that Montagu and her coterie practiced a form of biographical analysis:

> [They engaged in] extended assessments of writers, assessing both their biography and their characteristic style…not[ing] a writer's social status and wealth, their birth and family, their education and training and their adherence to any particular religious or political interest…to assess the right of the writer to speak, establishing the authority of the author. [15]

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[13] 'Rambler 152', in Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht Strauss, 23 vols, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1969), V, p. 44.
[14] Janet G. Altman, 'Postscript: Epistolary Acts and Literary Careers in the Eighteenth-Century, Permutations of Public Sphere and Private Persona among Writers', in *Sent as a Gift: Eight Correspondences from the Eighteenth-century,* ed. by A.T Mackenzie, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993), pp. 201-28, (p. 203)
[15] Ellis, pp. 225–6; For a further discussion of Montagu's biographically-inflected reading practices, and their relationship to the eighteenth-century genre of 'Character', see Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740–1790,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 167–172 (esp. 169–170)

This assessment rings doubly true for the Bluestockings' reactions to published letters, and bespeaks a general tendency towards biographical assessments of texts as indications of character. This mode of epistolary consumption was aptly summarised in strikingly voyeuristic terms by the late eighteenth-century schoolmaster and cultural critic, Vicesimus Knox (1752–1821), in the opening to an essay on reading the letters of established writers in his *Essays, Moral and Literary* (1782):

> Beautiful minds, like beautiful bodies, appear graceful in an undress. The awe which they inspire, when surrounded with all their dignity, is sometimes more striking than pleasing; but we feel ourselves relieved when admitted to their familiarity. We love to retire behind the scenes, and to observe the undisguised appearance of those who please us, when industriously decorated for public exhibition.[16]

Literary criticism, or the dissection of the aspects of a literary work which provoke 'awe' and are 'striking', gives way to the eroticised intimacy of the familiar letter. Montagu's epistolary critical practice shares this conceit of unfiltered access to a true self in letters, but diverges subtly from Knox, in that she does not seek to find an alternative 'undressed' figure behind the literary work, but wants to see the perceived literary and moral virtue of the authors' public identity confirmed in their letters. Her reading of Melmoth reflects such a reading, not once, but twice, encompassing first Pliny himself, and then William Melmoth:

> Your Grace will see how a great man was employed in the service of his country, and how engaged in domestic duties; his desire to acquire fame was not greater than his endeavour to deserve it; he gained the favour of his prince without flattery, and used that favour to the advantage of his friends, and did not turn it to the uses of pride, avarice, or luxury. I had before read a French translation of these letters, but, I think, Mr. Melmoth's preferable to it: and I was pleased to see the noble Roman in a good English habit. The generality of our English translators work merely for bread, and bring a great writer down to their homely rank; Mr. Melmoth is a gentleman; he was bred to the law, but was too much an admirer of the Muses and polite letters, and left an honourable and gainful profession to retire into the country. But, I suppose, that the world might not think it was done merely through a principle of idleness, he has given them a proof that he has been conversing with the fine geniuses of antiquity.[17]

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[16] Vicesimus Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary*, 2 vols, (London: Printed for Charles Dilly, 1782), II, p.351. Ironically, in the case of Pliny's letters in particular, Montagu and Knox could not disagree more, Knox finding Pliny's letters to be 'studied, and bear the appearance of study'.

[17] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret Cavendish, 1747', ed. Montagu, III, p. 46–7.

Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter's reflections on Melmoth's translation are in accordance with Montagu's reading, with Talbot emphasising the 'public spirit the most void of ostentation' of Melmoth in providing the translation to the 'illiterate' of his 'native country'.[18] Carter's reading also resonates with Montagu's parallelism between Pliny's Rome and modern Britain in her praise of Pliny 'in English dress'.[19] The virtues of selfless community and honesty of expression that the Bluestockings find in Pliny's epistolary style are the same traits that she finds exemplified in his biography, between them aligning him with the ideal English gentleman of the period. Pliny the Younger developed a personal relationship and correspondence with the emperor Trajan on his accession from Nerva in 98 A.D, which Pliny would maintain until his death, and which would be instrumental in his successive appointments to the Consulship in 100, Trajan's judicial council in 104–107 and finally Governorship of Bythnia–Pontus in 110. The selflessness to which Montagu refers emerges in Pliny's readiness to call in imperial favours from the emperor, even early in their correspondence, on behalf of his political clients. For example, Letter III of Book X of the *Epistulae,* in Melmoth's edition, consists of Pliny's appeal to Trajan on behalf of a friend of his, Voconius Romanus, who is looking for a seat on the Senate, and trying to claim some outstanding debts from his mother.[20] Though she does not make the case explicitly here, it is easy to see the young Elizabeth Montagu's valorisation of the roman *Clientela* system as anticipating the sense of moral and social duty she would bring to her own philanthropic and patronage relationships in later life. Her reflections on William Melmoth are reflective not only of a moral-biographical reading, but employing it in defence of the same intellectual-cultural milieu in which Montagu and Cavendish are corresponding. Melmoth's skill as a translator derives from his privileged status as a gentleman writer. This places him in a position of which Montagu and Talbot were acutely aware, he faced what Betty Schellenberg calls 'a crisis of uselessness':

> [Mid-century men and women of leisure experienced] lives squeezed between, on the one hand, a belief in human potential cultivated by education and called to action by contemporary theologies of practical Christianity, and, on the other, a

[18] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 9 February 1747', ed. Pennington, I, p. 190.
[19] 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 20 March 1747', ed. Pennington, I, p. 195.
[20] Pliny the Younger, *The Letters of Pliny the Consul: with Occasional Remarks,* trans. by William Melmoth, 2 vols, (London: printed for R. Dodsley, 1747), II, p. 580–1; for more information on Voconius Romanus, see Pliny the Younger, *The Complete Letters,* trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 289.

> lack of meaningful occupational opportunities due to the social and financial constraints placed upon the genteel of limited means.[21]

Catherine Talbot endeavoured to address the problem by educating those suffering from this malaise in essays like her *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) or 'On the Employment of Time' and 'On the Employment of Wealth' from *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772). Montagu's response was far more extreme. Having made a financially expedient marriage to Edward Montagu in 1742, in spite of her own suspicions over matrimony in general, Elizabeth began a lifelong campaign to counteract 'uselessness' through her management of their Northumberland Collieries and activities as a salonniere.[22] Not only did she convert her financial means into public philanthropy through her hosting of feasts and foundation of religious and technical schools for the children of her coal miners, answering the demands of Christianity, but through her celebration and encouragement of scribal culture, provided a framework for productive escapism from indolence.[23]

Montagu's discussion of Melmoth's Pliny shows her predilection for the biographical reading of stylistic elements in letters, and the reading of letters as cyphers for the moral character of their author. This recurs throughout not only Montagu's discussions of noted correspondents like Pope and Swift, in which she finds 'great marks of friendship, goodness, and affection, between these people whom the world think too wise to be honest, and too witty to be affectionate', but also presents a dominant strain in the letters of Carter and Talbot.[24] Carter's reflection on Lord Chesterfield's (1694-1773) *Letters to his Son* (1774), for example, identifies them as defined by duplicity and misdirection, 'A system founded neither on principles of virtue, nor sentiments of heart,

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[21] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 92; 94.
[22] Barbara Schnorrenberg, 'Montagu [née Robinson], Elizabeth (1718–1800), author and literary hostess', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (2004), < http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19014> [accessed 25 October, 2018].
[23] For discussions of Montagu's management of the coal mines and Sunday schools, see Elizabeth Childs, 'Elizabeth Montagu: Bluestocking Businesswoman', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 153–173 & Les Turnbull, 'Elizabeth Montagu: A "Critick, a Coal Owner, a Land Steward, a Sociable Creature"', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 81.4, (2018), pp. 657-686. In 1775 Montagu was also apparently planning to establish at Sandleford 'a spinning knitting & sewing school for y^{e} Girls'; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Mary Robinson, 10 July 1775', Correspondence of M^{rs} Elizabeth Montagu, British Library, London, BL Add MS 40663, f. 50-54.
[24] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Sarah Scott, 1740[?]', ed. Montagu, I, p. 128

but upon those selfish motives, which aim at nothing higher than mere bienséance', while Talbot offers a affective moral reading of the letters of the philosopher-poet, Catherine Trotter Cockburn (1679-1749) as indicative of 'a fair-dealing kind of affectionateness, ready to encourage and acknowledge its liking of all amiable people'.[25]

Between the pre-occupation with epistolary sincerity as a generic trait, in their sceptical response to the letter-manuals, and the collocation of letter style with personal moral character, we can see the way in which the Bluestockings recognise epistolary space as a site of true emotional openness, in which empathy may be created with those who are distant or deceased. With this in mind we will turn to our central case study of Madame de Sévigné, whose epistolary legacy is defined by the interplay of emotional expression, and expectations of female creativity. As we will see, the unique features of Sévigné's epistolary corpus constituted a distinctive framework for the Bluestockings to interrogate their own affective epistolary language.

Madame de Sévigne's Correspondence

Before looking at the myriad interpretations of Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné (1626- 1696) in eighteenth-century English discourse, and the relationship they have with the Bluestocking interpretation, it is worth pausing over the historical condition of Sévigné and her letters, as they invite consideration by her later readers. Sévigné was an aristocrat and *precieuse* who moved between the elite salons of mid-seventeenth-century Paris, and the court of Louis XIV at Versailles. These circles brought Sévigné into contact with a wide circle of influential figures in both court and city, from Madames de La Fayette and l'Enclos in the salons, to Madame de Maintenon and Sévigné's cousin, Roger de Rabutin, Count de Bussy-Rabutin, in the world of the court. In 1669 Sévigné's daughter, Francoise-Marguerite (1646–1705) married François Adhémar de Monteil, comte de Grignan (1632–1714), and the two of them left Paris for Provence in the same year, as Grignan was appointed lieutenant general for the region. Sévigné was already a gifted and charismatic letter-writer, from her epistolary tutelage under Bussy-Rabutin, and through her own readings of Balzac and Voiture, but the separation from Francoise would provoke the most significant epistolary exercise of her

[25]'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Vesey, 29 July 1774', ed. Pennington, IV, p. 116; 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 27 September 1751', ed. Pennington, II, p. 53

life.[26] Starting in 1671, and continuing until her death, Sévigné wrote to her daughter almost continuously over two decades. Sévigné's letters to her daughter cover a vast array of topics and subject matter, forming a self-contained showcase of the various aspects and functions of the epistolary form. She writes journalistic accounts of her contemporaries, such as the salacious story of the Marquise de Brinvilliers (1630-1676) who poisoned her husband and attempted to poison her father, before being arrested and executed in 1676. Sévigné documents the Brinvilliers trial in detail, and provides a ghoulish epitaph on the murderess:

> La Brinvilliers est en l'air. Son pauvre petit corps a été jeté, après l'exécution, dans un fort grand feu, et les cendres au vent, de sorte que nous la respirerons, et par la communication des petits esprits, il nous prendra quelque humeur empoissonnante dont nous serons tous étonnés.
>
> [Brinvilliers is in the air. Her poor little body was thrown into a great fire, after the execution, and her ashes dispersed by the wind, so that whenever we breathe, we shall draw in some particles of her, and by the communication of the minute spirits, we may be all infected with an itch for poisoning, much to their surprise.][27]

This quote attests to Madame de Sévigné's capacity for ironic play with pseudo-journalistic detachment. Her modern editor, Roger Duchêne, puts it as follows:

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[26] For a discussion of Sévigné's pre-Grignan correspondence and relationship with Bussy-Rabutin, see Michele Longino Farrell, *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991), pp. 57–82, and for Farrell's discussion of the influence of Voiture and Balzac on Sévigné, see pp. 45-56.

[27] 'Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Grignan, 17 July 1676", *Correspondance,* ed. by Roger Duchêne, 3 vols, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1974), II, p. 342–3; English translation from *Letters from the Marchioness de Sévigné, to her daughter the Countess de Grignan. Translated from the French of the last Paris edition,* trans. anon., 10 vols, (London, 1763-8), V, p. 55, hereafter 'Sévigné 1763'. For a fuller account of the Brinvilliers case, as well as an example of the 20th century use of Sévigné's letters as historical sources, see Lynn Wood Mollenauer, 'The politics of poison: Courtiers and criminals in the Affair of the Poisons, 1679—1682' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Northwestern University, 1999); for the most recent English translation of Sévigné's letters on the Foucquet trial, see Madame de Sévigné, *Selected Letters,* trans. Leonard Tancock, (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 30-54; The fullest and most recent account of the Fouquet trial itself can be found in Vincent J. Pitts' *Embezzlement and High Treason in Louis XIV's France: The Trial of Louis Fouquet* (Baltimore, MD: John's Hopkins University Press, 2015); and for a discussion of the relationship between Sévigné's epistolary accounts, contemporary journalism, and historical narrative, see H. T. Barnwell, "'Il Faut que je vous conte ...": Fact into Fiction in the Letters of Madame de Sévigné', *Seventeenth Century French Studies,* 19.1 (1997), pp. 109-124 (pp. 116-7) and Michael Hawcroft, 'Historical Evidence and Literature: Madame de Sévigné's Letters on the Fall of Fouquet,' *The Seventeenth Century,* 9.1 (1994), pp. 57-75.

> 'D'ou la distance de que la marquise prend par rapport aux faits et sa bonne conscience pour en tirer le sujet d'un récit divertissant.' [The marquise distances herself from her conscience and the facts of the case, to tell an interesting story][28]

One of the mechanisms by which Sévigné does this is the conversion of the story of Brinvillier's execution into a playful thought experiment on the nature of *petits esprits*, ['minute spirits' in the 1763 translation]: identified by Duchêne, Barnwell, and Farrell with the 'esprits d'animaux' [animal spirits] which are the physical agents by which the incorporeal mind can influence the material body in Cartesian physiology.[29] Sévigné's casual invocation of Descartes implies an ease with the philosophical controversies of her day. Her use of Cartesian philosophy here both enlivens her account, and plays into an ongoing debate with her daughter on the value of his thought. The implication of her discussion of the *petits esprits* here is that Descartes' mechanistic philosophies advocate moral relativism and the collapse of the individual self – if all it takes to drive good society ladies to poisoning is the inhalation of the material remains of a poisoner, then how sacred or robust can their identities and moral characters really be? Farrell suggests that Sévigné's argument with her daughter over Cartesianism derives from a fundamental conflict over Sévigné's conviction that social duty should be the highest moral concern, while her daughter favoured the more individualistic sense of personal morality associated with the Cartesian *cogito*. This anecdote is a microcosm, as we will see, of what both attracted and scandalised the Bluestockings about Sévigné's correspondence. Her interest in, and critique of, contemporary philosophy, particularly when framed as an assertion of the primacy of empathic relationships, anticipates Montagu, Carter, and Talbot's own practice of enlightened rational intimacy. At the same time, however, the ghoulish journalistic detachment and cultivated lack of conscience, this anecdote foregrounds the same artifice and conscious literariness of the letter form, which we have seen the Bluestockings fighting against. As this chapter unfolds we will see how this is just one aspect of the way in which the Bluestocking response to the problems and

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[28] Duchêne, II, p. 1257, n. 1

[29] Ibid; Barnwell, pp. 116–7; Farrell, p. 100, see also p. 260, for a discussion of Sévigné's literal inversion of the *cogito*. Ever the linguistic trickster, however, even the term 'petits esprits' is a possible double entendre on Sévigné's part, given its potential alternative meaning of 'petty mind'; for the Cartesian definition as given in his Fifth Objection to the Meditations on First Philosophy, see Rene Descartes, *Meditations and Other Philosophical Writings,* trans. Desmond M. Clarke (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 95-6, p. 208, n. 55.

potentials raised by Sévigné is a synecdoche for their response to the opportunities of the letter form itself.

Sévigné's playfully macabre journalism represents only one strand of engagement with contemporary philosophy, which constitutes the second dominant strand of her interest for contemporary critics.[30] Alongside her critique of Descartes and status as a chronicler of contemporary philosophical debate, Sévigné also participated in the religious conflict between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, falling aggressively on the side of the neo-Augustinian Jansenists Pascal and Nicole, against the perceived libertinism of the Jesuits and Cartesians. We will go into greater depth on the relationship between Sévigné and Pascal shortly, when exploring it through Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot's own negotiation of the *Pensées*, but it is significant to note that Sévigné's moral philosophy is defined by a neo-Augustinian surrender of the self to divine will, and passive acceptance of suffering as central to the human experience. While this naturally appears to lend itself to a Stoic conception of the world, John D Lyons is quick to observe the way in which Sévigné innovates on her neo-classical and Augustinian predecessors to produce a pragmatically relational alternative to Stoic detachment:

> For the Stoics, everything that can be taken away from us is mere appearance, not reality. In their view, if a loved one dies, we have lost nothing. Sévigné turns this doctrine upside down. She practiced and taught the humble lesson that we are creatures made to be attached by love, need, and desire to other creatures; this world we share with them is the only reality we will know in life.[31]

The ultimate turn to relationality as the end of Sévignéan philosophy constitutes the final strand of her correspondence to receive significant critical attention. The intensity of Sévigné's expressions of love for her daughter, and the skilful employment of *negligence* in so doing, give the illusion of open and sincere expressions of pure love from the heart of the author. This has led to extensive critical analysis of her enactment of the maternal

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[30] Farrell, p. 261; For excellent overviews of Sévigné as a philosopher, see John J. Conley, 'Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné (1626—1696)', *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2018)<http://www.iep.utm.edu/sevigne>, [accessed 29 January 2018]; and John D. Lyons, 'The Marquise de Sévigné: Philosophe' in *Teaching Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. by Faith Beasely, (New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America, 2011), p. 178-187, which argues not only for the presence of philosophical themes in Sévigné's letters, but for the degree to which their epistolary form itself constitutes an aspect of its relational argument.

[31] Lyons, pp. 185–6.

role, both within the enlightenment cult of sentiment, and in terms of the relationship between language and emotion more generally. This essentially domestic and sentimental focus made her more appealing to the Bluestockings than other contemporary correspondents. Francoise D'Aubigne, Madame de Maintenon (1635-1719), for example, produced a comparable body of letters within the sphere of seventeenth century French court life. However, her public role was associated with the scandal of her perceived pursuit of public office through her role as second wife to Louis XIV, and her legacy was shaped by an unsympathetic biography and correspondence edition which implicated her in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, leading to the persecution of the Huguenots.[32] The Bluestocking reaction to Maintenon's letters encapsulates the moral danger they saw in her perceived rejection of the domestic in favour of the masculine sphere of political power. Whilst they praise Maintenon's letters, and read her extensively, as Markman Ellis has observed, their response is always shaped by a sense of impropriety. [33] Grey claims bluntly that 'Vanity, Ambition & a Desire of being remarkable…made her submit the greater part of her Life to Things & Persons that both her Reason & her Virtue condemned'; and Carter more sympathetically argues that 'having chose to place herself in [an] uneasy and dangerous situation, she seems to have behaved nobly in it.'[34] All three bear an awareness of the displacement of Maintenon in the spheres of courtly politics. Even Montagu, who is the strongest supporter of Maintenon within the group, links her praise to Maintenon's displacement, but where the others condemn Maintenon for it, Montagu praises her 'as the greatest pattern of prudence, which is certainly the queen of female virtues; the men will not allow us to be wise, it is not worth while to take much pains to be charming.'[35] Whether she is praised or condemned, Maintenon is always associated with a lack of conventional femininity. This means that, while no less a major correspondent and documentarian of *ancient regime* France than Sévigné, she does not have the same place in the Bluestocking construction of their own epistolary selves.

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[32] Charlotte Haldane, *Madame de Maintenon: Uncrowned Queen of France* (London: Constable, 1970), p. 284.
[33] Ellis, p. 221.
[34] 'Jemima Grey to Catherine Talbot, 15 May 1756', Bedford, Bedfordshire & Luton County Archives, Lucas Papers, L30/9a/7, f. 114.
[35] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Sarah Scott, [1755]', ed. Montagu, IV, p. 18-19.

The opening from this letter of 6 February 1671, very early in the Sévigné – Grignan correspondence, represents a fairly typical example of the form of Sévignéan sentimentality which appealed to her English Bluestocking audience:

> Ma douleur serait bien médiocre si je pouvais vous la dépeindre; je ne l'entreprendrai pas aussi, J'ai beau chercher ma chère fille, je ne la trouve plus, et tous les pas qu'elle fait l'éloignent de moi. Je m'en allai donc á Sainte-Marie, toujours pleurant et toujours mourant. Il me semblant qu'on arrachait le coeur et l'âme, et en effet, quelle rude séparation!
>
> [My affliction must be much lighter than it is, were I capable of giving you a description of it. I shall therefore not attempt it. In vain I search every where for my dear child, I see her no more! and every step she takes carries her yet farther from me! I returned to Saint Mary's half dead, and weeping all the way; I thought my heart and soul had been torn from me: Good God! how cruel a separation is this!][36]

This passage is glossed by Farrell as indicative of the degree to which Sévigné 'uses concrete images and actual fact to illuminate the void', employing the ontologically uncertain space of the letter to turn biographical events, here her journey back to Sainte Marie, into an expression of emotion, a device that we will see recurring again and again throughout the Bluestocking correspondence.[37] Farrell identifies a strongly performative component in Sévigné's grief on separation, a synecdoche of the fundamentally performative nature of Sévigné's maternal identity overall. The performance of maternal instinct, and the finer feelings associated with it, is further facilitated in this quote by its conversational tone. Sévigné's colloquial style gives it the illusion of being a genuine expression of emotion, unmediated by the formalities of the letter form discussed earlier. It is this perceived sincerity of emotion that grounds Sévigné's literary celebrity in the eighteenth-century.

Before looking specifically at the Sevignist cult in the British eighteenth-century, it is worth pausing briefly over the various translations and typographical renderings of this passage, to see how the 1763 text, the most extensive and widely circulated English translation, foregrounded Sévigné's *negligence*.[38] Sévigné describes herself as 'toujours pleurant et toujours mourant' on her journey to Sainte-Marie. The anonymous 1763

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[36] 'Madame de Sévigné to the Comtesse de Grignan, 6 February 1671', ed. Duchêne, I, p. 149. Translation from Sévigné 1763, I, p. 30–1.
[37] Farrell, pp. 90-1
[38] For a discussion of Sévigné's own gloss on her epistolary style as un-studied, see Farrell, p. 65.

translation renders this as 'half-dead and weeping all the way', Leonard Tancock's modern translation presents it as 'still weeping, still lifeless', and Farrell gives 'still crying and still dying'.[39] Obviously Farrell's translation bears the subtext of wanting to emphasise the performativity of Sévigné's epistolary style, so she chooses to emphasise the rhyming suffixes as well as repetition of 'toujours', but it is interesting to note that both Tancock and the 1763 translator choose to ignore what appears to be an obvious display of stylistic prose. It is also worth noting that the 1782 *Models of Letters in French and English*, by Mr Porny, which utilizes this letter as a translation exercise, giving this extract first in French and then English, retains the same 'crying/dying' rhyme that Farrell observes. This reflects the degree to which Sévigné's language, when detached from the broader context of the letter as a whole, may be read as more stylistically ornate, than when her letters are considered as complete documents.[40] For Tancock and the 1763 translator it is more important that Sévigné should appear unstudied and organic, with the more obviously literary aspects of the letter sacrificed to the illusion of immediacy. The punctuation of the passage is even more significant. Duchêne's edition, which punctuates this passage in broadly the same manner as the *Recueil des lettres de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme la comtesse de Grignan* (1754), the acknowledged source of the 1763 English translation, contains only one exclamation mark, after 'séparation'.[41] Whilst Tancock and Farrell clearly follow Duchêne, and cannot therefore be seen as independent witnesses, they also use the singular exclamation mark. The printers of the 1763 translation, however, not only add three exclamation marks, emphasising 'farther from me!', 'I see her no more!' and 'Good God!', but replace several semi-colons or commas in the original with full-stops, rendering the entire passage more fractured, emphatic, and breathless. In the Duchêne edition 'Ma douleur…de moi' is all technically one sentence, while in the 1763 translation it is three, capped with an exclamation mark. The most significant difference between the 1763 English rendition of this passage and all the other instances, English or French, is the addition of 'Good God!' in the final sentence. This has no equivalent in the Duchêne or 1754 source text, and appears to be entirely an invention of the translator. Not content with re-punctuating the passage to

[39] Sévigné 1763, I, p. 130; Sévigné trans. Tancock, p. 67; Farrell, p. 91

[40] 'Mr Porny', *Models of letters in French and English, ... To which are annexed accurate directions with regard to the proper form of writing to superiors*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for C. Nourse, 1782), p. 230–2;

[41] *Recueil des lettres de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme la comtesse de Grignan* (Paris: Rollin, 1754) is 'the last Paris edition' alluded to on the title page of *Letters from the Marchioness de Sévigné.*

give the impression of impassioned extemporaneity, either the anonymous translator or Coote, the publisher, chose to splice in an expletive, an unmistakable signal of the fact that Sévigné writes her emotions as she feels them, and that her pen merely reflects her mind, with no artistry of her own.

Between the work of Sévigné's translators and editors, and the work of contemporary critics in engaging with the subtleties of her literary style, a bifurcated portrait of the salonniere emerges. On the one hand she is the archetypal woman of letters, for whom the generic freedom of the epistolary form allows for a free negotiation of contemporary philosophy and current affairs and the cultivation of a rational defence of community and affectivity as essential moral principles against the threat of Cartesian solipsism. On the other she represents the emotional extremity which her gender, her chosen genre and, as we will see, her nationality, make inescapable to an eighteenth-century British audience. It is this paradoxical binary which looms over the concept of female creativity and the epistolary genre as the Bluestockings were cutting their teeth as correspondents in the 1740s, and this chapter will go on to explore the ways in which Bluestocking conceptions of epistolary community drew on Sévigné's philosophical sense of community and acute sensibility, but sought methods to pull back from the most extreme aspects of her sentimentality. Before entering into a close reading of the Bluestocking letters on Sévigné themselves, and the vision of rational feminine affectivity they sought to carve out in her wake, we will look at the cultural context of the British Sévigné cult more broadly, and see the ways in which preconceptions of gender and nationality are read into her letters, out of which the Bluestockings articulated their own version of her.

British Popular Sevignism – Print Legacies

The ubiquity of Madame de Sévigné's letters in eighteenth-century Britain cannot be overstated. There were three separate translations of her letters published in English between 1720 and 1800, often hot on the heels of the Parisian French editions on which

they were based, new letters being added as the known Sévigné corpus expanded.[42] The consumption of these editions is attested to by the 241 library catalogues listed in ECCO that list one or other of these texts among their contents.[43] An enthusiasm for Sévigné's undeniable epistolary skill permeates eighteenth-century print culture, manifested in part in the degree to which her letters are either directly cited or alluded to in letter manuals, as well as being excerpted in grammars of the French language as examples of fine writing.[44] Sévigné even appears in contemporary poetry, as a byword for epistolary skill and sincerity, such as in Edward Jerningham's (1737–1812) *Lines written in an Album*

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[42] *Letters of Madame de Rabutin Chantal, Marchioness de Sévigné, to the Comtess [sic] de Grignan, her daughter, in Two Volumes, Translated from the French*, trans. anon, 2 vols, (London: Printed for N. Blandford, 1727), based on the 1726 French edition; *Court secrets: or, the lady's chronicle historical and gallant….Extracted from the letters of Madam de Sévigné,* trans. Edmund Curll, (London, 1727); *Letters of Madame de Rabutin Chantal, Marchioness de Sévigné, to the Comtess [sic] de Grignan, her daughter, in Two Volumes, Translated from the French*, trans. anon, 2 vols, (London: Printed for J. Hinton, 1745), reprint of Blandford 1727 edition, 2nd edition 1759; *Letters from the Marchioness de Sévigné, to her daughter the Countess de Grignan. Translated from the French of the last Paris edition.* trans. anon, 10 vols, (London: Printed for J. Coote, 1763-8), based on the 1754 Rollin edition.

[43] By 'library catalogue', I am referring to the lists of the contents of private libraries published by auction houses to advertise the sale. Although they can only give a very rough estimate of reader figures, being limited only to the libraries of the extremely affluent or genteel, they can provide some useful contextual data in large datasets like the ECCO collection. By way of example, the first catalogue to appear in ECCO which contains a reference to Sévigné's letters is *A catalogue of the collection of pictures, drawings, prints, and valuable library of books, of the Right Honourable Thomas Coke* (1728), published in advance of the sale of the library of the M.P and courtier, Thomas Coke (1674–1727) following his death the preceding year. This collection, which contains over 1000 volumes' and attests to Coke's lifetime of coterie poetics, pamphlet exchange, and personal and professional interests in theatre and music, includes a copy of the 1726 French edition of Sévigné's letters. (p. 21); for more information on Thomas Coke's literary pursuits, see R. Bucholz. 'Coke, Thomas (bap. 1674, d. 1727)', politician and court official, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2008), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63012> [accessed 30 Jan 2018]

[44] John Newbery, *Letters on the most common, as well as important occasions in life. By Cicero, Pliny, ... Rome, Sevigne, and other writers,* 6th edn, (London: printed for J. Newbery, 1764), pp. 262–7. First published in 1756, each successive edition of Newbury's work added new letters, which were advertised on the title page, the first to include Sévigné was the 1764 sixth edition which includes a text which is strikingly similar to Sévigné 1763, II, p. 42-5. The two texts are identical, with near-identical footnotes, and only differ slightly in punctuation, suggesting a thinly disguised lifting by Newbery; *The ladies complete letter-writer; teaching the art of inditing letters* (London: T. Lowndes, 1763), p. 2; Henry Evans Holder, *A system of French syntax, intended as an illustration, correction, and improvement of the principles laid down by Chambaud,* (London: Printed for Charles Dilly, 1783); Abel Boyer, *The complete French master. Containing, I. A new methodical French grammar. ... XII. A collection of letters, by Madam de Sévigné,* (Dublin: Printed for John Exshaw, 1783), pp. 408–22.

(1786), which cites Sévigné as an immortal figure of fine feeling, with the acme of his elegy on his wife Mary (d.1785), being an appeal to posterity to 'With brilliant Sevigné inwreathe her name'. The legend of Sévigné was also employed as a gloss on sentimental themes, as in the anonymous *Coxheath Camp: A Novel* (1779) by 'a Lady', in which Sévigné's characterisation of depression – 'thoughts in the evening are dusky grey; at midnight they are quite black' – is employed as an authoritative metaphor for the despair of a soldier on the death of his mother.[45] Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) similarly praises Sévignéan creativity with an awareness of the potential immoderation with which she could be associated. Harriet Byron praises Miss Clement as 'a perfect Sévigné to her correspondents…[b]ut She has not, I find, suffered her pen to run away with her needle; nor her reading to interfere with that houfewifry which the best judges hold so indispensable in the character of a good woman.'[46] This careful balance between domestic and intellectual activity resonates with the Bluestocking desire to embrace Sévigné whilst keeping her within the bounds of propriety. This resonance is made all the more significant by the fact that Carter and Talbot are both recognised to have had a role in the creation of Harriet Byron's character.[47] One of the traits Talbot particularly wanted to emphasise was her unstudied expressiveness, 'She is honest and obedient, open and undisguised', hence the appeal of the Sévigné model of correspondence.[48] A model less amenable to the Bluestockings was Lord Chesterfield, who also alluded to Sévigné's letters in his *Letters to his Son* (1774). The use to which he put them, however, was unlikely to counteract Carter's accusations of insincerity. Epitomising the correlation of femininity with epistolarity discussed above, Chesterfield offers his son a reading list of correspondents famed for 'gay and amusing letters, for *enjouement* and *badinage*', preparatory to writing a letter to his mother 'because, I

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[45] Edward Jerningham, *Lines written in the album, at Cossey-Hall, Norfolk, the seat of Sir William Jerningham, Bart. August 4th, 1786,* ([Norwich]: Printed for the Author, 1786), p. 7; *Coxheath Camp: A Novel, in series of letters, by a Lady,* 2 vols, (London: Printed for Fielding & Walker, 1779), I, pp. 9–10.

[46] Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison,* 6 vols, (London: Printed for S. Richardson, 1753), I, p. 150.

[47] Schellenberg, p. 86. For Talbot and Carter's influence on *Grandison* see Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 26; Gerard A. Barker, *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), pp. 22-3.

[48] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 16 March 1754', ed. Pennington, II, p. 160.

presume…you are not yet used to write to Ladies'.[49] This treatment of filial affectivity as a mode to be adopted, rather than an expression of genuine feeling is indicative of the focus on etiquette that we saw Carter chastising above..

British Popular Sevignism – Sévigné and Nationalism

Before criticising Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son* for their insincerity, Carter describes them as comprising 'the most complete system of French morality that ever disgraced the English language'.[50] We will go into more detail on the Bluestocking anxieties over the influence of French philosophy in chapter 2, but here it is worth observing that the Bluestocking response to Madame de Sévigné emerged out of a culture of Francophobic stereotyping. Sévigné's letters became conflated with the French language, and French letters, to the point that she was seen as an epistolary avatar for the nation. John Boyle, Earl of Orrery, (1707–1762), for example, includes a poignant digression in his *Remarks on the life and writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (1752), in which he claims a superiority for French Letters over English, claiming that they 'improve…us by a successive flow of phrases that are peculiar to that nation', citing 'MADAME DE SEVIGNE', whose letters 'contain nothing, except different scenes of maternal fondness, yet, like a classic, the oftener they are read, the more they are relished."[51] This is re-enforced by the panoply of references that present the conventional triad of Voiture, Balzac, and Sévigné as the crowning glories of French letters, as appears in Chesterfield, Hugh Blair, and in 'An Essay on Epistolary Writing', by the anonymous 'T.W', which appeared in *The British Magazine* in October of 1761. This essay, which also parallels Montagu in its celebration of Pliny as the greatest writer of 'easy and familiar...eloquence', characterises Sévigné as the crowning glory of her national epistolary pantheon is couched in the language of unstudied ease:

> There is not a thought in Voiture that seems to come from the heart, nor a period in Balzac that does not smell of the lamp. Madame Sevigne greatly surpasses them both, as her stile is altogether easy and natural, and her thoughts seem to flow from her, without premeditation.

[49] 'Philip Dormer Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield to Philip Stanhope, 20 July 1747', *Letters written by the late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to his son, Philip Stanhope,* 2 vols, (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1774), I, p. 267.
[50] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Vesey, 29 July 1774', ed. Pennington, IV, p. 116.
[51] John Boyle, Earl of Orrery, *Remarks on the life and writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, in a series of letters from John Earl of Orrery to his son,* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1752), pp. 259–60.

The essay goes on to juxtapose the familiar ease of French correspondents, with the perceived reserve of English letter writers, whom the author identifies as 'not of so ostentatious a temper, as to think their private letters worth the notice of the public'. [52] The implicit argument being made here, that British taciturnity in their letters conveys a degree of emotional self-control, speaks to the association of the French, and particularly French conversation and modes of politeness, with female manners. As Michele Cohen puts it, 'French esprit and social brilliance, essential in France to the "male intellectual persona", and conversation, were now derogated as "incogitative loquacity" and mere flexibility of the tongue, traits associated with fops and women' while conversational reserve was 'evidence of the strength of mind and manly restraint' associated with Britishness.[53] As we will see, this association of Frenchness and femininity with emotional oversharing will come back to haunt British Sevignism. The conception of Sévigné in all of these texts, as conveying something fundamental about French identity through her letters bore therefore this negative connotation, even as they purported to praise her.

One of the most highly circulated Sévignean fragments retains the same suspicion of Frenchness through an alternative method, praising Sévigné as a female writer and embodiment of femininity, without extending that praise to French women in general. Tobias Smollett's 'field of hemp' metaphor in his *Travels through France and Italy* (1766) was excerpted and re-circulated in the decades following its initial publication. Following a three-page diatribe about the moral bankruptcy of French ladies' fixation on fashion, Smollett gives the reader this:

> I know that France has produced a Maintenon, a Sevigne, a Scuderi, a Dacier, and a Chatelet; but I would no more deduce the general character of the French ladies from these examples, than I would call a field of hemp a flower-garden,

[52] T.W, 'An Essay on Epistolary Writing', in *The British Magazine*, October 1761, ed. by Tobias Smollett (London: Printed for H. Payne, 1761), p. 583-4.
[53] Michele Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy, and the French', in *English Masculinities,* ed. by Michele Cohen and Tim Hitchcock, (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 44-62, (pp. 56–7)

> because there might be in it a few lilies or ranunculas planted by the hand of accident.[54]

Whilst Smollett's primary intention is clearly to remind his readership that the elevated moral and aesthetic tastes of Sévigné, Dacier and Maintenon are not indicative of French femininity overall, the fact remains that he feels it necessary to make this caveat at all. So shining are these examples in the popular imagination, that he cannot even attempt to undermine them. Smollett instead chooses to write against the popular conflation of Sévigné with France as a whole, by juxtaposing her, alongside Dacier and Maintenon, to the commonalty of French womanhood, more concerned with 'her taudry robes of silk and gauze, frilled and furbelowed, with...false locks and…false jewels' than anything of substance or meaning.[55] Smollett's jingoistic and misogynist passage, even while it attempts to undermine the conflation of Sévigné with the French national character, is still reflective of a political-cultural environment in which femininity and female intellectuality are seen as an index of national superiority. We will now turn to some of the other writers who apply the same framework to Madame de Sévigné, and look at the way this frame is later re-applied to the Bluestockings themselves.

Smollett's discussion here can be seen as the realisation of the blunt misogyny often veiled behind the 'women worthies' tradition of nationalist celebration of female intellectuals as discussed by figures like Philip Hicks and Margaret Ezell.[56] This tradition, which highlighted the achievements of a limited group of successful female rulers or intellectuals as evidence of the overall success of the women in a nation, and by extension, of the nation itself, was epitomised at mid-century by texts like George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), which boasted in its preface that

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[54] Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy. Containing observations on Character, Customs, Religion, Government, Police, Commerce, Arts, and Antiquities,* 2 vols, (London: Printed for R Baldwin, 1766), I, p. 78. Smollett's description of the French character would be circulated again in *The London magazine. Or, Gentleman's monthly intelligencer.* (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1747-1783), Issue 35, (1766), p. 246. The passage was also revived for circulation in the United States at the turn of the century, in the New England periodical, *The Emerald, or Miscellany of Literature,* 3 vols, (Boston, MA: Belcher and Armstrong, 1806–1808), II, p. 498.

[55] Smollett 1766*,* I, p. 105.

[56] Philip Hicks, 'Women Worthies and Feminist Argument in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Women's History Review*, 24.2 (2015), pp. 174-190 (p. 180); Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History,* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 84–9.

'it is pretty certain, that England hath produced more women famous for literary accomplishments, than any other nation in Europe', and John Duncombe's *Feminiad* (1754), with its catalogue of notable female intellectuals which includes Elizabeth Carter, who is presented as 'challeng[ing] all the blooming boughs of famed Italia', in another representation of British female triumph over Europe.[57] Scholars such as Harriet Guest, Elizabeth Eger and Melanie Bigold have addressed the nationalistic celebration of Bluestocking intellectual achievement in depth. Eger addresses the pictorial panegyrics in *Bluestockings Displayed* (2013) and *Brilliant Women* (2008) and engages with Samuel's *Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (1779) and the nationalistic overtones of Montagu's participation in Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee in *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (2010).[58] Guest and Bigold have both addressed the relationship between the Bluestocking national cult and their own sense of their intellectual vocation, through the lens of Elizabeth Carter's own self-image.[59] Bigold and Guest's findings both offer hints of the way in which the Bluestocking construction of their image as learned ladies, particularly in the case of Carter herself, was consciously distanced from the model of nationalised sentimentality, even as they were expressing admiration for Sévigné's adoption of this position. Discussing an exchange between Montagu and Carter in 1782, in which Montagu encourages Carter to remain unmarried for the sake of her scholarship, Guest argues that Carter's learning constituted a form of 'free hold', a license to public fame and civic participation, distinctly separate from her domestic ties. As Guest puts it 'Montagu represents Carter as though she aspired to gentlemanly independence of fortune, as though her learning were the "free hold estate" in which her identity is based'.[60] This reading of Carter's public role, with which Montagu was sympathetic as well, is sharply distinct from that of Sévigné. Carter's public role is presented as antithetical to, rather than dependent on, domestic sensibility. The artistic cost of the valorisation of Sevignean domestic sensibility, and its concomitant devaluation of women's letters as a whole can be seen most distinctly when one looks in

[57] George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, (Oxford: Printed for the Author, 1752), p. iv; John Duncombe, *The Feminiad,* (London: Printed for M. Cooper, 1754), p. 22.
[58] Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1-21, 129-131.
[59] Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters: Manuscript Circulation & Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 169-212; Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810,* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), pp. 111-133.
[60] Guest, p. 125.

detail at the most prominent and prolific of British male Sevignists, Horace Walpole. Before close reading the Bluestocking discussions of Sévigné in detail, we will pause over Walpole's engagement with her, as an evocative and indicative contrast with the Bluestockings' own reading.

Walpole's most extensive discussion of Sévigné's letters outside of his own correspondence takes place in the mid-century periodical, *The World* (1753–6) under the pseudonym Adam Fitz-Adam. Walpole's discussion of Sévigné's letters is testimony to the ultimately conservative nature of the cult of Sévignism:

> I own, if there is any species of writing of which I am not perfect master, it is the epistolary. My deficience in this particular is happily common to me with the greatest men: I can even go farther, and declare that it is the Fair part of the creation which excels in that province. Ease without affectation, the polite expression, the happiest art of telling news or trifles, the most engaging turns of sentiment or passion, are frequently found in letters from women, who have lived in a sphere at all above the vulgar; while on the other side, orators write affectedly, ministers obscurely, poets floridly, learned men pedantically, and soldiers tolerably when they can spell...The amiable madame de Sevigne is the standard of easy engaging writing: to call her the pattern of eloquent writing will not be thought an exaggeration, when I refer my readers to her accounts of the death of marshal Turenne...If this Fair One's epistles are liable to any censure, it is for a fault in which she is not likely to be often imitated the excess of tenderness for her daughter.[61]

What Chesterfield, Walpole, and all of the other figures cited so far as admirers of Sévigné have in common is a preconception of an inherent epistolary skill which women possess by virtue of their natural tendency towards sensibility and politeness. As Clare Brant puts it, the correlation between women and epistolarity was defined by 'a trope of charms artistically displayed' which made 'parallels between texts and bodies'.[62] This conceit is clearly in evidence in Walpole's account, her value is defined by her capacity

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[61] *The World, for the year seventeen-hundred and fifty-three,* 6 vols, ed. by Edward Moore, (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1755–7), I, pp. 80-1.This passage is excerpted and circulated also in Horace Walpole, *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose* (London: Strawberry Hill Press, 1758), pp. 106–7, as well as *The beauties of all the magazines selected. ... Including the several original comic pieces. To be continued the middle of every month,* 3 vols, (London: Printed for T. Waller, 1764), III, p. 88, Curiously, the copy-text for *The Beauties* is identified not as *The World* but as Tobias Smollett's *British Magazine* (1760), suggesting that it appeared there as well, but I have not been able to track down which volume of Smollett' s periodical contains it.

[62] Brant, p. 40.

for 'happiness', 'ease', and above all, 'politeness'. Ultimately the defining trope of female letters that Sevigne embodies, is subservience. In Walpole's reading, all of the conversational features of her letter style are directed towards the pleasure of the letter-reader, rather than the expression of the letter-writer. The inherent femininity of the epistolary form is hinted at, by the way in which the male letter writers who fail to conform to these tropes do so through expressions of their masculine individuality. Men write as extensions of their professions. The affectation, pedantry, and floridness of the orator, clergyman, scholar, and poet all act to distance themselves from others, by elevating themselves above others, putting them beyond the reach of ordinary conversation. They sacrifice their ability to write letters, choosing instead to form the political, religious, academic, and cultural life of the nation instead. A further subtext to *The World's* 'praise' of Sévigné is Walpole's obvious discomfort at the intensity of Sévigné's expressions of affection towards her daughter, which he rejects as 'excess[ive]' and 'subject to censure'. Rejecting the expressions of maternal devotion which would become so central to modern Sévigné scholarship, her eighteenth-century British commentators suspected that the depth of her devotion towards her daughter evinced an excessive and indecorous passion, and that her writing on this subject, being merely the unfiltered expression of her heart, became inappropriate as letter forms.

The critical disdain for epistolary emotional openness, combined with the association between artistic character and literary nationalism, however, represented an interesting opportunity for later Bluestocking scholarship. Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay on Shakespeare* (1769) associated Shakespeare's genius as an author with a super-human empathic capability, claiming that 'Shakespear seems to have the art of the Dervise in the Arabian tales, who could throw his soul into the body of another man, and be at once possessed of his sentiments'.[63] It is his empathic ability that gives him the ability to tap into, and express, universal truths. His ability to perform this feat is conventionally coupled with a perceived disregard of Classical dramatic form, as in Johnson's famous image of Shakespeare's writings as an overgrown forest:

> The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes

[63] Elizabeth Montagu, An *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1769), p. 37.

> giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity.[64]

The juxtaposition between Shakespeare and 'correct and regular' alternatives was given a nationalist slant when Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay on Shakespear,* answering Voltaire's charge that Shakespeare 'had not so much as a single Spark of good Taste, or knew one Rule of the Drama' and challenging his preference for the French neoclassical dramatists Corneille and Racine, argued against the 'artificial dialect' of French theatre. Montagu asserted that Shakespeare's works 'perform what no rules can teach', and, like 'the prodigious structures of Stone-Henge', they constitute 'the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature' in the 'proud irregularity of their greatness'. [65] As Fiona Ritchie puts it, Montagu 'stresses [Shakespeare's] native purity in the face of French extravagance and ornamentation' defining 'English national identity…as natural, honest, and unaffected'.[66] Whilst this comment, like Montagu's reflection on Carter's professional independence discussed above, dates from a later period in the development of her concepts of authorship, the fact that national identity and creative genius are conceptualised through the same tropes of sincerity and artificiality resonates with Walpole's approach to Sévigné. Montagu's placement of Shakespeare within such an affective frame is a central part of her project of cultivating a feminised mode of literary criticism. Eger identifies the *Essay on Shakespeare* as 'one particular female tradition of writing that used the idea of feminine "candour" and "talent", and a certain "unlearnedness", to lay claim to a previously masculine arena of critical judgement.'[67] The critical disdain for affective expression offered by *The World*, and the insincere artfulness of Chesterfield, offer a critical landscape in which 'candour' and 'unlearnedness', particularly when associated with national literary character, are sorely lacking. Whilst it would be erroneous to claim a direct connection between Montagu's Shakespeare scholarship and engagement with the Sevignist epistolary criticism in the 1740s and '50s, it is worth noting the fact that her articulation of a feminine literary critical approach

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[64] William Shakespeare, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Samuel Johnson, 8 vols, (London: Printed for J & R Tonson, 1765), I, p. xxxvi.
[65] Montagu, 1769*,* p. 3, 11.
[66] Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth-century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 68; see also Kathryn Prince, 'Shakespeare and English Nationalism' in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth-century,* ed. by Fiona Ritche and Peter Sabor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 277–294, (pp. 279–280)
[67] Eger 2010, p. 147; See also Ritchie, p. 68-9.

employs the same techniques as a discussion of epistolary sincerity, even as it reassesses the gendered conceptions of these discussions.

Through the Popular Sevignist canon we have seen the image of a sentimentalist Sévigné, whose emotional intensity is both an expression of sincerity and an example of stereotypically excessive French femininity. We have seen the Bluestockings constructing their public literary characters and intellectual identities in response to the problems and opportunities laid down by these aspects of the Sévigné cult. Now, however, we will turn to the readings of Sévigné by the Bluestockings themselves, and explore the ways in which they incorporate these abstract concepts of epistolary community and affect into their own friendships.

Bluestocking Sévignism I: Affective Identification

Carter, Talbot, and Montagu's engagement with the letters of Madame de Sévigné bears many similarities with that of Horace Walpole. They kept each other abreast of the developments of editions of her works, cultivated an empathic relationship with the projected image of their author, and, in the case of Carter and Talbot, engaged in a critical discussion of her philosophy and status as a paragon of sensibility. Their simultaneous embrace of, and superstition towards, their epistolary forebear is indicative of their respective approaches to the affective potential of the familiar letter. By exploring the ways in which all three incorporate Sévignéan tropes of epistolary intimacy, particularly the imagined presence of the correspondent, we will see how Montagu's suspicion falls on the artificiality of Sévignéan style, while Carter and Talbot, engaging more deeply, find the moral philosophy of Jansenism, which underpins Sévigné's declarations of affectivity, ultimately hollow.

Catherine Talbot, the first of our trio to encounter Madame de Sévigné's letters, most likely first read her in 1744, when Jemima Grey writes to Talbot, excitedly thanking her for recommending that Grey should read the letters in the first place:

> I am very glad you are so much pleased with Sévigné's Letters, you know how fond I am of them. You first taught me to like them, & I have since outdone you in it, & have read all the Six Volumes with great Pleasure[68]

The reference to 'Six Volumes' identifies the text they were reading as the 1737-8 Paris edition, well within their linguistic abilities, given their ease with the language across their letters, and in Talbot's case, the use of French in her Journal.[69] What this reference also shows is the degree to which the letters of Sévigné, from the very start, were incorporated into the community reading project in which Talbot and Grey participated. In his study of the reading practices of Elizabeth Montagu's coterie in the 1750s, Markman Ellis details the twin functions which book recommendations could hold within a coterie, the 'teacherly' function of providing a 'list of approved volumes' for a less central or socially inferior member of the group, or that of 'indicating [or cultivating] intimacy with powerful allies'.[70] I would contend that the Sévigné recommendation alluded to in this discussion constitutes a subtle blending and extension of the two. Both of Ellis' scenarios are based on the creation of a new network bridge or type of bridge between two of the nodes in Montagu's coterie. What Talbot and Grey's discussion of Sévigné signifies is the intensification of a bridge, fostering a mutual acknowledgement of emotional intelligence through shared reading.[71] Sévigné acts as a synecdoche for pure sensibility for the members of the Grey Circle, and proper appreciation of her is a necessary component of the type of elevated sentiment that Grey and Talbot like to identify and discuss with one another. This community validation is intensified by the physical intimacy which Grey goes on to invoke, drawing Talbot into the physical space of her reading practice, whilst simultaneously reiterating her praise of Sévigné:

> I am now reading Bussy's Letters they amuse me, but don't please me like Hers: they employ my mind agreably enough for half an Hour but the Others really engage my Heart, & I was eager to know everything that could relate to the

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[68] 'Jemima Grey to Catherine Talbot, 1744', LP, L30/9a/4, f. 108.
[69] Catherine Talbot, 'Journal entry 9 October 1752', Berkeley Papers, Vol III, British Library, London BL Add MS 46,690. Talbot kept her journal in a combination of English and French on alternating days, presumably as a method of practising the language.
[70] Ellis, p. 223.
[71] Network terminology and framework based on that adopted by Betty Schellenberg, in *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture*, p. 16, and Anni Sairio, 'Cordials and Sharp Satyrs – Stance and Self Fashioning in Eighteenth-Century Letters' in *Touching the Past. Studies in the historical socio-linguistics of ego-documents,* ed. by Marijke van der Wal and Gijsbert Rutten, (Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2013), pp. 183–200.

> Persons. Bussi does extreamly well for a Garden Companion which is the Use I have put him to; nor is he alone so favor'd, for if the Weather tempts me to spend some Hours in the Garden (which it often has) I generally carry Variety of Company with me.[72]

Through her playful metaphor of reading as physical companionship, Grey deftly articulates a vision of female community that resonates with Sylvia Harcstark Myers' argument that the centrally defining aspect of Bluestocking female community lay in the act of intellectual women choosing their companions as an act of will. Bussy-Rabutin and Sévigné's letters are imagined as two social groups, one frivolous and amusing, but emotionally empty, the other based on true empathic connection. Grey's choice of Sévigné's letters, which, through their implicit alignment with Talbot, act as a textual and material stand-in for her friend, becomes a declaration of allegiance to emotionally intelligent reading and social intimacy. This female companionship is contrasted with a more flippant coquettish type of community, aligned with the male Bussy which, being grounded on nothing more than amusement, is aligned with a coquettish flitting from partner to partner, as Grey characterises her garden reading.[73] This approach to Sévigné, reconceptualising her sentimental relationality into a synecdoche of rational female community, is shared by Talbot, who literalises this image into a vision of Sévigné as an immediate presence:

> There are some real Authors whom I cannot help looking upon as still living, Mme Sevigne, Marcus Antoninus, fifty More of my Favourites I can think of as those who from time to time are to spend or a week or a fortnight with me, & can look upon many little incidents with a kind of reference to them, as if we were to talk them over & make our reflections upon them together.[74]

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[72] 'Jemima Grey to Catherine Talbot, 1744,' LP, L30/9a/4, f. 108–9.

[73] Not only does this assertion of companionate reading hark strongly back to Grey's discussion of she and Talbot's 'Shared History', but it also bears a strong resemblance to Hannah More's famous articulation of her Bluestocking manifesto, in the 'Advertisement' to her 'Bas Bleu: or Conversation': '[Bluestocking assemblies] were composed of persons distinguished, in general, for their rank, talents, or respectable character, who met frequently at Mrs. *Vesey*'s and at a few other houses, for the sole purpose of conversation, and were different in no respect from other parties, but that the company did not play at cards.' Hannah More, *Poems,* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1816), p. 66.

[74] 'Catherine Talbot to Jemima Grey, 15 November, 1744', LP, L30/9a (1), 70

Talbot's empathic engagement with Sévigné has extended to the point of conflating their identities into one another. If we take into account Dror Wahrman's conception of early modern selfhood as 'a set of positions' which are 'relational' and 'collective rather than individual', then we can see Talbot's ventriloquism of Sévigné's thoughts as a literal image of identity formation, she collapses Sévigné's mind into her own, adding a new strand to her own sense of self.[75] The parallel that this letter invites between Marcus Aurelius and Madame de Sévigné is indicative of the function that Talbot sees Sévigné as fulfilling in terms of her identity construction. Aurelius' *Meditations*, by virtue of their first person perspective and Stoic philosophical argument, invite self-reflection and engagement. Talbot's reading of Aurelius, likely in the 1742 translation of Francis Hutcheson, given her comment in a letter to Carter on the same day, 'I envy you the pleasure of reading Antoninus in his own words; nobody ever made more reasonable observations than him,' reflected the same tendency to philosophical self analysis which permeates Talbot's journals and reaches its fullest extent in Carter's *All the Works of Epictetus*, with its advocacy of Stoic self-analysis, which will be discussed in the following chapter, and Talbot's own *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*.[76] Talbot's affective identification bears a marked similarity to comparable gestures of intimacy which all three of my subjects employ in their letters, and elevates the reading of Sévigné to something analogous to corresponding with her, and experiencing the same 'self-affirm[ation]' which Leonie Hannan identifies as one of the central functions of correspondence for early modern women.[77] A particularly striking example of this, which

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[75] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 168. The collapse of female selfhood into an affective identification with fictional characters was a danger eighteenth-century conservatives did not fail to observe, as discussed in Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books*. However, as she also notes, reading memoirs or accounts of real historical figures could be seen as mitigating this danger. Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 210–11, 257.

[76] See, for example, Catherine Talbot, 'Journal Entry for December 1752 to June 1753' when, after interrogating her feelings following her rejection of the proposal 'That Providence will guide me through Life in the way it sees fittest for me I Cheerfully trust Enjoy my present Freedom & Prosperity, & look forward to the melancholy & Solitary Scenes of Life without fear or dejection', Berkeley Papers, Volume II, British Library, London, BL Add MS 46689, f. 77; 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 15 November, 1744', ed. Pennington, I, p.79; for a fuller engagement with Talbot's engagement with, and critique of, Roman Stoicism, see 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, [1755]', Montagu Pennington, *Memoirs of Miss Elizabeth Carter,* 2 vols, (London: Printed for F.C. & J. Rivington, 1807), I, pp. 129-133.

[77] Hannan, p. 64.

closely parallels Talbot's discussion of Sévigné, is Carter's initial description of her feelings towards Talbot herself. In the letter which opens Montagu Pennington's edition of his aunt's letters to Talbot, a 1741 letter to the mathematician and astronomer Thomas Wright, who had initially introduced Carter to Talbot, she rhapsodizes over her new friend:

> I think of her all day, dream of her all night, and one way or other introduce her into every subject I talk of…Pray make her a thousand compliments and apologies for my haunting her in the manner I have done.[78]

As with Talbot's relationship with Sévigné, one of the two figurative tropes used to articulate Carter's absorption of Talbot into herself is through the replacement of Carter's thoughts with those of her friend. Though the function, and intensity, of this letter differs from Talbot's reflection on Sévigné (I have no doubt that Wright was expected to show this letter to Talbot), the conceit of an affective intimacy grounded in mental amalgamation remains the same. This is accompanied by the strange image of Carter 'haunting' Talbot with her thoughts about her. We will go into these images of 'astral projection' in more detail when exploring the Montagu-Kames correspondence, but suffice to say that the intense, and arguably eroticised, image of total bodily obliteration inherent in Carter's fantasy of haunting Talbot becomes a vehicle for the expression of the same form of cognitive and emotional conflation Talbot finds in her reading of Sévigné.

Susan Lanser, invoking Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian,* argues for the inherent queerness of Carter's spectral imagery; 'In the Bluestocking letters, spectral metaphors become a strategy for *realizing* the desire for intimacy by projecting it into imaginary space or time.' Whilst I would agree with Lanser's assessment that there is a 'utopic' and undeniably eroticised aspect to Carter's hauntological fantasies, they can be better glossed as expressions of annihilated self-hood at the moment of ecstatic co-option of another self, rather than expressions of a fundamentally inexpressible bodily desire.[79] This moment of self-annihilation is key to Talbot and Carter's conceptualisation of epistolary friendship. The fact that Talbot applies it to Sévigné attests to the degree to which Talbot embraces the same conceit of unfiltered access to Sévigné's character

[78] 'Elizabeth Carter to Thomas Wright, 28 Jan 1741', ed. Pennington, I, pp. 1-2.
[79] Susan S. Lanser, 'Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 257-275, (p. 268)

through her letters which we have seen in other British Sévignists. Where they saw it as potentially destabilising, however, Talbot sees it as an opportunity for sentimental engagement with an intellectual predecessor.

Montagu, however, utilises the trope of letters from beyond the grave to opposite effect. Rather than transforming the imagined death of the body into an opportunity for greater intimacy, she uses death as a device to separate the familiar letter, with its sentimental intimacy, from the abstract universality of the posthumous public letter edition. In so doing she unintentionally parodies Talbot and Carter's own use of the post-mortem communication motif:

> Send me a better letter, yes, I say a better letter; do you think I care for your wit and your wisdom, when you won't tell me how you do? Direct your next to Madame Sevigné, in the shades, or to Madame Maintenon's spirit in the cloisters of St. Cyr, they will admire your language, they will approve your sentiments, and being no longer of earth's mould, will feel none of the fears, the cares, that haunt a mortal woman for a mortal friend.[80]

Far from facilitating true empathic engagement, Montagu employs the spectres of Sévigné and Maintenon as stand-ins for an epistolary excellence of the kind that appeared in the above mentioned letter manuals, well-crafted as documents, but paradoxically lacking in intimacy. Montagu, writing here with the myth of Sévigné and Maintenon's letters as much in view as the actual correspondences, is issuing a playful warning *against* the belief that a fine, sentimental epistolary style constitutes the most successful vehicle for reflecting intimacy. Conventional national hierarchies also come into play in this discussion. The association of French letter-writing with insincerity, seen in Carter's discussion of Chesterfield, and the xenophobic critique of Sévigné in general, implicit in the figures which Montagu chooses to highlight. Carter's fallacy, according to Montagu, is attempting to write a 'better letter" with fine 'language' and 'sentiments', rather than speaking for herself in less exalted language. In an inversion of Grey's celebratory elision of Sévigné and Talbot, as twin paradigms of female companionship,

[80] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 7 June 1759', ed. Montagu, IV, pp. 188-9.

Montagu elides Sévigné and Maintenon into Carter, as paradigms of fine, but artificial, epistolary discourse.[81]

In these examples, we can see the way in which the Bluestockings conceived of epistolary intimacy in part through their engagement with Madame de Sévigné. They also, in the case of Elizabeth Montagu, reveal one mode of distinct separation that cuts to the core of Sévigné's legacy by questioning the value of her epistolary sensibility for a contemporary British readership, given the distance produced by reading her in print. Montagu believes in the ideals of epistolary intimacy and openness of expression associated with Sévigné's letters, but doubts her French predecessor's capacity to display them. We will now move, with Carter and Talbot, deeper into Sévigné's Jansenist moral philosophy, and identify their ultimate critique of her as a model of empathic identification.

Bluestocking Sevignism II: Jansenism & Sensibility

Now that we can see our three protagonists divided over the model of epistolary selfhood which Sévigné represents as a figure of transcendent sensibility it is time to turn to Talbot and Carter's assessment of Sévigné's philosophy as a mid seventeenth century French thinker. In so doing we can see the degree to which their initial enthusiasm for her sentimental performance becomes undermined by the ultimate inability of Sévigné's Jansenism to prioritise the concepts of spiritual community and heavenly friendship so central to Carter and Talbot's own moral philosophy. At the same time that Talbot was sharing in a playful affective identification with Sévigné in her correspondence with Grey in 1744, she and Carter engage in a sober, more critical assessment. As with her later instigation of Carter's career-defining work on Epictetus, Talbot's initial reference to Sévigné's letters appears to be a fairly unsubtle hint that Carter should write an English translation of them:

> There are six volumes in French, two only of which are very prettily translated by an ingenious man who is since dead; and who took them from a spurious and

[81] This conception of Montagu's anxiety over the fragility of selfhood runs parallel with Dror Wahrman's discussion of Elizabeth Montagu in *The Making of the Modern Self*. Citing her observation that 'no one ever thinks of sustaining a certain character, unless it is one they have assumed in a masquerade" in a letter to Hannah More, Wahrman presents Montagu as paradigmatic of the modern state of "individual" identity as opposed to "collective". Warhman, pp. 211-12.

> imperfect edition. I wonder nobody has ever undertaken these, though they would require a good many notes, and a very elegant turn of expression.[82]

Before proceeding to Carter and Talbot's discussion, it is worth pausing over the depth of bibliographical knowledge on extant Sévigné editions and translations conveyed by this brief statement. The texts to which Talbot is referring are as follows; the 'prettily translated' two volume English edition is the *Letters of Madame de Rabutin Chantal, Marchioness de Sévigné, to the Comtess [sic] de Grignan, her daughter, in Two Volumes, Translated from the French*, trans. Anon., 2 vols, (London: Printed for N. Blandford, 1727). Who the anonymous translator is, and how Talbot knows this, remains unclear. The 'spurious and imperfect edition' on which this translation is based is the *Lettres choisies de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme de Grignan, sa fille, qui contiennent beaucoup de particularitez de l'histoire de Louis XIV* (1725). Roger Duchêne suggests that this is the first published edition, and also identifies it as 'subreptice.'[83] Finally, the 'six volumes in French' refers to the *Recueil des Lettres de Madame la Marquise de Sévigné à Madame la Comtesse de Grignan, sa fille. Nouvelle edition*, D.M de Perrin ed., 6 vols, (Paris, 1737-8). The degree to which Grey and Montagu also kept abreast of the status of Sévigné editions in circulation is also readily apparent. A 1754 letter from Talbot to Grey excitedly asks 'a propos of Madame Sévigné, what pray?', following closely on the 1754 publication of the second Paris edition of the *Recueil des lettres de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme la comtesse de Grignan*, indicating, presumably, that Grey has acquired the collection and Talbot is eager to find out what she has read.[84] The Grey family's continued interest in Sévigné after Talbot's death is attested to by the fact that, in 1773, Philip Yorke (1720–90), Jemima's husband, wrote to Horace Walpole, asking for a historical account of the Sévigné family, which Walpole, leading Sévignist in Britain, was happy to send him, accompanying his genealogical digest by keeping Yorke abreast of the current state of the Sévigné editons: 'I must not omit to tell your Lordship that they are going to publish at Paris a dozen or twenty new letters of Madame de Sevigne'.[85] This information packet was not confined to Philip himself, however, as two

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[82] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 7 Sept 1744', ed. Pennington, I, p. 70.
[83] Duchêne, I, p. xxx.
[84] 'Catherine Talbot to Jemima Grey, 21 October 1754', LP, L30/9a (1), 333; *Recueil des lettres de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille,* 8 vols*,* ed. by D.M. de Perrin, (Paris: Rollin, 1751), 2nd edition 1754.
[85] 'Horace Walpole to Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, 10 August 1773', *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence,* ed. by W.S. Lewis, 48 vols, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–1983)*,* XLI, pp. 257–9, (p. 259)

weeks after they received the letter, Jemima sent it on to her daughter Amabel: 'Another Extract I enclose you may wonder to see, but I suppose you must continue your Love for Mme. Sevigne & be interested about the Family.'[86] Carter and Montagu were also not without their own Sévignist contacts, at one point even beating Walpole to the latest scoop. On June 30 1788 Montagu received a letter from Carter, asking her whether she'd heard of Frances Boscawen's discovery of "above five hundred of Madame de Sevigné's letters, which were lately found in repairing the Chateau de la Garde…[which] had every mark of authenticity."[87] Whilst this lead does appear to have been a red herring, given the absence of any further discussion of this collection by Montagu or Walpole, it is worth noting that Walpole's own report of this rumour, in a letter to Hannah More, does not appear until August.[88]

With this attentiveness to detail, and focus on a complete and comprehensive account of Sévigné's letters and identity, Talbot's implied request for a complete translation of her correspondence in her letter to Carter represents a significant vote of confidence in her friend's abilities. Unlike the later case of Epictetus, however, Carter rejects the prospect that Sévigné is truly translatable. Ironically, this claim that Sévigné would be untranslatable is written in French:

> Pour les lettres de Madame de Sévigné elles m'ont toujours charmées. On y trouve tout ce qu'il y a de poli, et de spirituel dans la langue Françoise. Il me semble aussi qu'elles donnent aussi un portrait très naturel du coeur de l'auteur, qui à vrai dire, à quelques égards vaut mieux que sa tête, sur tout quand elle parle de la religion dont elle se forme des ideés assez ridicules. Etes vous, Mademoiselle, du sentiment de ces gens, qui s'ennuyent tant de cette affection outré qu'elle témoigne pour sa fille, ou croyez vous avec moi, que c'est à (74) cette seule circonstance que l'on doit la plus part des beautés de son esprit? C'est dommage qu'on n'ait pas conservé les réponses de Madame Grignan. La vivacité de la mêre auroit fait un contraste fort agréable avec la froideur de la fille. Pour la traduction de ces lettres, je crois qu'on y réussiroit fort mal. Il y a un infinité de tours d'expression qui dependent entierement du genre de la langue Françoise et feroit une fort mauvaise figure dans la nôtre.[89]
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> [As for Madame de Sévigné's letters, I have always found them charming. Within them, one reads everything that is polite and witty about the French language. It seems to me they also paint a very natural image of the author's heart which, if

[86] 'Jemima Grey to Amabel Hume-Campbell, 25 August 1773', LP, L30/11/122/45.
[87] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 30 June 1788', ed. Pennington, III, p. 295.
[88] 'Horace Walpole to Hannah More, 17 August 1788', ed. Lewis, pp. 276-9, (p. 277)
[89] 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 9 Oct 1744', ed. Pennington, I, p. 73. English translation by students in the Translation Work Experience module from the Dept. of Modern Languages, Translation and Interpreting, Swansea University, 2018

> truth be told, is worth more than intellect in some respects, especially when she talks about religion, about which she has some quite preposterous ideas. Do you think the same as these people, Mademoiselle, the people who get bored with this exaggerated affection which she expresses for her daughter, or do you think, like me, that the greater part of the beauties of her spirit emanate from this one circumstance? It is a shame that Madame Grignan's replies have not been preserved. The mother's intensity would have pleasantly contrasted with the coldness of the daughter. As for the translation of these letters, I am unsure of any success. There are an infinite number of turns of phrase which depend entirely on the nature of the French language and which would appear poorly in our language.]

Like Talbot, Carter displays an acute consciousness of the various critical discourses through which the Sévigné correspondence may be approached. Considering her as the paradigm of 'tout ce qu'il y a de poli, et de spirituel dans la langue Françoise', Carter openly acknowledges the nationalistic conception of Sévigné implicit in the comparisons made by figures like Boyle and Smollett, identifying Sévigné's letters as embodying all of the 'spiritual' and 'polite' virtues of the French language. The fundamental integration of the French language into the meaning of the letters and the uniqueness of their style renders any translation impossible. This celebration of Sévignéan style, and Carter's embrace of the conceit that Sévigné's letters represent an accurate and unfiltered expression of their author's feelings, resonate uncomplicatedly with the tropes of English Sévignism as we have seen it so far in this chapter. Carter's reading deviates from the standard in her rejection of the British Sévignist suspicion of Sévigné's maternal sentiments, and in the distinction between 'spiritual' and 'religion', which Carter's analysis implies. The 'religion of which [Sévigné] forms rather ridiculous ideas', to which Carter refers, can be loosely defined as a conservative, aristocratic mode of Catholicism, which nevertheless bears a strong affinity with the seventeenth century neo-Augustinian movement known as Jansenism, epitomised by Pierre Nicole's *Port Royal Logic* (1662) & the works of Blaise Pascal.[90] While Carter does not address her issues with Sévigné's philosophy in detail directly, she and Talbot do exchange a correspondence on Pascal himself, in July and August 1748, which sheds some light on the Bluestocking critique of Sévigné's faith.

One of the central tenets of Pascal's austere Jansenism lay in the absolute rejection of earthly interests, in favour of a total concern for the afterlife. In her letter of

[90] Conley, section 3.b.

July 26 1748, Talbot quotes a passage from Pascal's *Pensees* (1648), which encapsulates this theme:

> Il est injuste qu'on s'attache, quoi qu'on le fasse avec plaisir, et volontairement: je tromperois ceux en qui je ferai naître ce desir, car je ne suis la fin de personne, et n'ai de quoi le satisfaire. Ne suis je pas prête à mourir? et ainsi l'objet de leur attachemont mourra donc?[91]
>
> [It is not fair that we form attachments, even though they are done happily and willingly: I would mislead those in whom I generate this desire, as I am not the be-all and end-all for anyone, and I am not capable of satisfying it. Am I not about to die? and thus the object of their attachment will die?]

Where Talbot is initially seduced by Pascal's argument, calling him a 'saint' and a 'genius', for his admirable disdain of the material world, she does find the intensity of his asceticism to be dangerously severe, identifying its troubling inhumanity with 'popery':

> To shut one's eyes on all the fair beauties of this world, was the way to raise our love, and gratitude to the beneficent author! Yet this is the comfortless horrid doctrine of strict popery, and those good hearts that have been awed by it into error and wretchedness, deserve equal compassion and esteem.[92]

This rejection jars with Carter and Talbot's Christianisation of Roman Stoicism in *All the Works of Epictetus* paid to the studied disdain of worldly interests., Among the letters which Montagu Pennington includes in his *Memoirs of M^rs^ Elizabeth Carter* (1807) as background to the publication of *Epictetus*, there is a letter from Talbot to Carter which includes the following encapsulation of the pitfalls of Epictetus' Stoic doctrine: 'He bids us by our own strength root out every passion and feeling implanted in our nature. Christianity teaches us how to obtain that Divine assistance by which we may regulate and surmount them all.' Implicit within this philosophy is the Stoic rejection of metaphysical, spiritual reality, and the perfectibility of nature. As Talbot goes on to sum up: 'Epictetus treats us like perfect creatures, Christianity like fallen and redeemed ones,

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[91] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 26 July 1748', ed. Pennington, I, p. 281-2. This passage is excerpted from Fragment 14 of Pascal's *Pensées*, an electronic variorum edition of which may be found at 'Fragment 14', *Pensées de Pascal Online,* ed. by D. Descotes & G. Proust, (2011), <http://www.penseesdepascal.fr/I/I14-moderne.php> [accessed 25 February 2018.] English transl. by students in the Translation Work Experience module from the Dept. of Modern Languages, Translation and Interpreting, Swansea University, 2018.

[92] Ibid, p. 282

and teaches us at once our disease and our remedy." [93] Carter closely responds to Talbot's concern in her 'Preface' to *Epictetus*, acknowledging that Stoic materialism is 'flattering Man with false and presumptuous Ideas of his own Power and Excellence', and arguing that its virtue lies solely in its 'Excellent rules of Self-government, and of social behaviour, of a noble Reliance on the Aid and Protection of Heaven, and of a perfect Resignation and Submission to the divine Will.'[94] Carter and Talbot's collaboration in the production of *Epictetus,* in short, presents an argument that Christian spirituality provides the answers to the emotional and moral crises which are raised by Stoic material self analysis.

This interest in anti-material spiritualism does not extend to Pascal's Jansenism, however. Carter is even more critically inclined against the French philosopher's argument than Talbot had been. In a lengthy critique levelled at Pascal's discussion of attachment, Carter argues in 'Mr Pascal['s]…own language' that there is no inherent conflict between material disdain and virtuous sociability:

> Mais ils ne content pas que c'est a cette même nature humaine tout miserable, et chétife qu'elle soit, qu'on est obligé pour toutes ces belles speculations qu'on tourne contre elle. La meilleure representation que nous pouvons nous faire des perfections morales de Dieu, se tire de leur images dans l'esprit de l'homme -- "Mais il est injuste que l'on s'attache, par ce que nous mourrons!" -- cela se repond fort naturellement par -- nous revivrons. Ne faut il pas jouir de ses amis, pendant qu'ils sont avec nous, parce qu'il peut arriver que l'on soit obligé de faire un voyage, et se séparer pour quelque tems d'eux. Un attachement qui ne porteroit pas ses vues plus loin que le tombeau, seroit indigne d'un être immortel.[95]
>
> [But, they do not recount that it is to this same human nature, however miserable and wretched it might be, that we owe all of these beautiful speculations that we turn against her. The best representation that we can make for ourselves of God's moral perfections, is drawn from the way the spirit of man depicts them – "But it is unfair that we form attachments, as we will die!" – a natural response to which is – we will be reborn. Should we not enjoy our friends while they are here, for one day it may happen that we will be obliged to make a journey and part from them for some time. An attachment can look no further than death, would be unworthy of an immortal being.]

[93] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, [1755]', Pennington, 1807*,* I, p. 132.
[94] *All the Works of Epictetus, which are now Extant,* trans. by Elizabeth Carter (London: Printed by S. Richardson, 1758), p. ii, xxvi.
[95] 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 5 August 1748', ed. Pennington, I, p. 286-7. English transl. by students in the Translation Work Experience module from the Dept. of Modern Languages, Translation and Interpreting, Swansea University, 2018.

In her repudiation of Pascal's Jansenism, Carter postulates a spiritualised vision of sociability, in which the worldly concerns of emotional affect and community are validated by the ultimately spiritual concern of true friendship. This vision of morally elevating community, and the correlation between virtuous character and sociability pervades both Carter and Talbot's published works, particularly their respective essays in Samuel Johnson's *Rambler,* 44 and 30 respectively, and forms the basis of many of Talbot's essays and miscellaneous writings, particularly 'Essay XXIV: On the Happiness derived from Society' and 'Letters to a Friend on a Future State'.[96] The former of these offers an apt encapsulation of Talbot's thesis. Following a discussion of the emotional and moral error inherent in the Catholic tradition of monastic cloistered isolation, Talbot presents a radical vision of sociability as something akin to a sacrament in itself:

> But far, far better than the cloistered rules of man's foolish and arbitrary invention, the life of society, with all its self-denials, is the appointment of the Almighty. Every individual, of human society, is ennobled and endeared by its relation to him. For the meanest of these, Christ died. Our love to each other, is the proof required of our being his disciples.[97]

Whilst the exact relationship of this essay to the Sévigné and Pascal discussions is difficult to determine, due to the lack of manuscript evidence which may corroborate the assignation of a date to 'Essay XXIV' in particular, it offers something of a gloss on the concept of a divine sanction of human community.[98] Ultimately, Sévigné forms a perfect case study in Carter's examination of the tension between the ultra-rational Stoicism which formed her primary academic focus, and her own personal affect-centred sense of moral sentiment 'informed by her belief in the importance and efficacy of social ties' which, as Melanie Bigold argues, has strong affinities with Smithian 'sympathy'.[99] The austere Jansenism which Sévigné proclaimed always failed to entirely damn her in the Bluestockings' eyes because of the virtuous sociability constantly displayed in her letters to her daughter. This assessment is borne out by Talbot's subsequent reflection on

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[96] Catherine Talbot, *Essays on Various Subjects,* (London: Printed for F.C & J. Rivington, 1772), pp. 181–188; Talbot 1809, pp. 259–274.
[97] Talbot, 1772, p. 185
[98] I discuss the composition of *Essays on Various Subjects*, and offer some conclusions as to dating in Jack Orchard, 'Essays on Various Subjects'. *The Literary Encyclopedia.* (2017), <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=38747> [accessed 26 February 2018.]
[99] Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters,* pp. 215-217.

Sévignéan sensibility as failing to acknowledge the spiritual foundations of true earthly community. She articulates this in another letter of 1744, which also served as an opportunity for her to practise her French:

> Mais je trouve aussi qu'elle en faisoit trop absolument le bonheur et le malheur de sa vie; que son attachement étoit trop vive pour un monde aussi passager que celui ci, que ses momens etoient trop occupés par des tendres souvenirs, et des regrets vains et inutiles; mais dans tout celà même il y a une beauté inimitable.[100]
>
> [But I also think she made it too much the absolute happiness and sadness of her life, that her attachment was too intense for a world as transient as this one, that her time was too occupied with loving memories, and vain and useless regrets, but in all that, there is an inimitable beauty.]

Embracing Carter's critique, Talbot responds by re-emphasising the worldly nature of Sévigné's sensibility. Talbot's Pascal had fallen into the trap of excessive rejection of worldly concerns, becoming an avatar for the superstitious, anxiety-ridden religion that Talbot personifies in her *Rambler* 30. She is 'covered…with a habit of mourning' and appears as 'a perfect Bugbear to children', and Carter, in her own *Rambler* article, represents her as 'one of the most shocking figures imagination can frame…[with] Looks…filled with Terror and unrelenting Severity'.[101] As we can see, Sévigné's lack of engagement with the spiritual underpinnings of true community pushes her into the other caricature of religious misdirection, stripping away the spiritual from the communal. This leaves only 'dance and play' in the place of 'nobler entertainments', as Talbot puts it, or 'a Round of everlasting Racketting' in which 'all serious thoughts, but particularly that of Hereafter, will be banished out of the World…as it is so very clear a Case that no Body ever dies,' in Carter's chilling satirical formulation in *Rambler* 44.[102]

Both formulations recognise the interrelationship of affect and spirituality in the development of paradisiac companionship, but highlight the way in which the balance of the two is fundamental. In their reflections on the influence of Pascal on Sévigné, Carter

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[100] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 15 November 1744', *Letters between Carter and Talbot,* I, p. 78. English transl. by students in the Translation Work Experience module from the Dept. of Modern Languages, Translation and Interpreting, Swansea University, 2018.

[101] Catherine Talbot, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle,* ed. by Gary Kelly & Rhoda Zuk, 6 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), III, p. 41; Elizabeth Carter, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle,* ed. by Gary Kelly & Judith Hawley, 6 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), II, p. 411.

[102] Talbot, 1998, III, p. 40; Carter, 1999, II, p. 417.

and Talbot conclude that Jansenism, despite its appealing critique of worldliness in general, resonant with Carter's own interest in Stoicism, is ultimately insufficient as a framework for articulating true friendship. Where Sévigné's sentimental bonds with her daughter exist outside a framework of philosophical sympathy (as indeed they have to, given the disagreement between the two on Jansenism and Cartesianism), Carter and Talbot, true to the principles of rational and spiritual friendship, reframe expressions of epistolary intimacy through a language of divine companionship. We will now look in more detail at the manifestations of this concept across Carter and Talbot's works, before returning to their ultimate verdict on Sévigné as a figure whose sentimental potential makes her incapability of pursuing true, philosophically-grounded, affective connection, all the more tragic.

The trope of ineffability, another central aspect of paradisiac companionship, is key to its conception as qualitatively transcending ordinary human sympathy to the point that it cannot be truly understood. This idea recurs throughout Montagu's letters, as well as Carter and Talbot's writings. The characterisation of Elizabeth Vesey as the 'Sylph' in Carter and Montagu's letters, which has been extensively discussed by Deborah Heller and Judith Hawley, is often linked, like the astral projections mentioned above, to a sense of mysterious transcendent intimacy.[103] The presiding conceit of divine universal truths as the epitome and source of earthly knowledge within the Bluestocking letters and poems takes place in a neoplatonically-inflected framework. This framework combines their reading of Sévigné with the influence of texts like Elizabeth Singer Rowe's *Friendship in Death* (1728) and which would later manifest itself in Montagu and Lyttelton's own *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760). Such a conceit can be seen in Carter's early *Gentleman's Magazine* poem 'While clear the Night' (1738). This poem was written as a tribute to the astronomer Thomas Wright, (1711-1786) Jemima Grey's tutor who would go on to facilitate the initial connection between Carter and Talbot in 1741, represented

[103] Deborah Heller, 'Subjectivity Unbound: Elizabeth Vesey as the Sylph in the Bluestocking Correspondence', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 215-234; Judith Hawley, 'Elizabeth Carter and Modes of Knowledge' in *Woman To Woman: Female Negotiations in the Long Eighteenth-Century*, ed. by Carolyn D. Williams, Angela Escott and Louise Duckling, (Newark, University of Delaware Press: 2010), pp. 157–72. (pp. 166–7)

in the text by the figure of Endymion.[104] The poem offers a providentialist reading of the movements of the planets as evidence of divine order:

> Where clouded truth darts her heav'nly Ray,
> Or on the Earth or in th'aetherial Road,
> Survey the Footsteps of a ruling GOD:
> Sole LORD of Nature's universal Frame,
> Thro endless years unchangeably the same:[105]

Divine perfection is seen to lie not only in the divine ordering of the universe, but in the continuity of this structure, the doubly emphatic 'unchangeably the same', articulates the eternal repetition of heavenly motion, antithesis to worldly distraction and variability. As Carter goes on to describe these movements in more detail, she peppers her scientific description with a moralistic semantic field which hints at the ethical lessons to be drawn from their progress:

> His single Fiat form'd th' amazing Whole,
> And taught the new-born Planets where to roll:
> With wise Direction curv'd their steady Course
> Imprest the central and projectile Force,
> Lest in one Mass their Orbs confus'd should run,
> Drawn by th'attractive Virtue of the Sun,
> Or quit the harmonious Round…[106]

Alongside the technical language of astrophysics, in terms like 'projectile Force' and 'Mass', Carter imagines God's cultivation of the universal order in the formation of a heavenly community. The reference to God teaching the planets 'wise Direction', associates the planetary movements with virtuous sociability, of the type associated with female conversation by figures like Hume, as I will discuss in chapter 2, and concretised through the Bluestocking assemblies. The reference to 'the harmonious Round', with its play on the word 'round', with its potential contemporary associations with dancing and poitical assembly, as well as referring literally to the planetary orbits.[107] Carter closes the poem by making the associations between astronomy, figured as the articulation of divine order, and sociability explicit in an address to Thomas Wright:

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[104] For a more extensive discussion of Carter's relationship with Thomas Wright, see Bigold, p. 177-8.
[105] Carter, 1999, II, p. 348
[106] Ibid.
[107] "round, n. 1." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (2018), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/167938> [accessed 21 February 2019]

But let the Muse indulge a gentler Theme,
While pleas'd she tells thy more engaging Part
Thy social Temper and diffusive Heart.
Unless these Charms their soft'ning Aid bestow
Science turns Pride, and Wit a common foe.[108]

Returning to the social context in which the poem originated, Carter presents its overall function as one of translating the scientific insights of Wright's astronomical work into the 'softer' form of poetry. Not only, therefore, does Carter emphasise the moral value of the Neoplatonic conceit of divine universal order to polite society, but she also makes the poem itself an expression of social harmony, by both grounding it in her friendship with Wright and celebrating their relationship as an act of harmonious union between science and art. This poem reflect an early engagement with the temptations of Neoplatonic transcendence which, like Sévigné's own unsustainable sentimentality, does not possess sufficient grounding in human connection to be a viable mode of worldly engagement. As Melanie Bigold has observed, Montagu Pennington includes a response to 'While clear…' in his memoir of Carter, in a letter from an unidentified family member, which 'accuses her of forgetting her mortal friends in favour of the stars'.[109] This correspondent, missing Carter's framework entirely, writes that she has 'so lately been taken up with your honest friends, the stars, that you forget there are such beings as poor mortals here on earth.'[110] Whilst it would be too much to say that this could have had a direct influence on Carter's later preference for directly pedagogical philosophical works such as *Epictetus* and *Remarks on the Athanasian Creed* (1752), it is reflective of the same concerns about the primacy of communicating a moral lesson which motivated this transition. Jennifer Wallace's observation, that Carter's self-conscious movement from classical lyric poetry to philosophical translations was motivated by a desire to 'transform…the classics into a series of moral and pious texts in order to negotiate the ambivalent expectations placed upon the intellectual female writer', could equally apply to her movement away from abstract Neoplatonic imagery towards more direct

[108] Carter, 1999, II, p. 349
[109] Bigold, p. 178.
[110] Pennington, 1807, I, p. 16.

expressions of her moral philosophy.[111] Through intellectual exercises like her critique of Sévigné and authorship of her *Rambler* article, Carter converts her anti-worldly enthusiasm, not dissimilar to that of Sévigné herself, into a coherent and sustainable theory of divinely-inflected community which can be taught as well as maintained in her own relationships. This also reflects Carter's desire to establish her public identity on pedagogical rather than sentimental grounds discussed above. Unlike Montagu who, as we discussed above, incorporated conceits of textual intimacy drawn from the feminised world of correspondence into her participation in the public sphere as a literary critic, Carter exploited the underlying principles of her philosophy of affectivity, but adopted a more self-consciously masculine genre and style.

Catherine Talbot's 'Letters to a Friend on a Future State' represents her attempt to articulate the concept of paradisiac community in a brief series of three epistolary essays which combine endlessly repeated reminders of divine ineffability, 'Let not the speculations of eternity encroach on the duties of time' or 'attempt not contemplations beyond your little strength', with a vision of community in paradise:

> But where, you ask, are those companions of your former years, whose time of trial is over…Why equally in the divine presence as yourself — recollect you not the time, in former days of fancy, when you fondly delighted to contemplate the moon because a favourite distant friend might possibly at the same time be gazing on the same bright object? This fancy seemed to cancel distance, and bring you near together. Think then that not the waning moon but the source of glory shines on them with the same gracious beam, that in mercy extend even to you.[112]

God, in Talbot's theology, actualises the imaginative projection inherent in familiar correspondence.[113] When she describes Sévigné's feeling as 'too lively for [this] world', she is identifying it with the paradisiac affection that is capable of actualising the beloved into true intimacy. However, as Talbot's bittersweet remark indicates, this divine intimacy was waylaid by Sévigné's inescapable worldliness. In the balancing act between Stoic

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[111] Jennifer Wallace, 'Confined and Exposed: Elizabeth Carter's Classical Translations', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22.2 (2003), pp. 315-334, (p. 323)

[112] Talbot, 1809, p. 266, 'Letters to a Friend on a Future State' is unusual among Talbot's collected writings in that it does not appear in either *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770), nor in her *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772), it first appears in Montagu Pennington's 1809 edition of Talbot's *Works*, suggesting that Carter chose not to publish it herself, but Pennington, receiving it with the rest of Talbot's papers on Carter's death, added it to the collection.

[113] The same conceit occurs in her 'Essay XVIII: On True Friendship', Talbot, 1772, p. 145–6.

detachment and virtuous community, Sévigné was doomed to tragedy whichever way she turned. Her heavenly sympathy might have been tempered into a moral philosophy as well, had she benefitted from a community like that of Carter and Talbot. Instead it falls foul on two counts, firstly there is her inability to distinguish between divinely mandated friendship of the Bluestockings and the dangerous sociability of material distraction, and secondly, the absence of reasoned restraint causes Sévigné to become lost in her mortal experience. Carter's ultimate verdict on Sévigné in her discussion with Talbot is therefore one of tragically missed opportunity:

> The natural turn of her temper does not seem to have met with any restraint from a regular education, and without some particular advantage it is extremely difficult for such very lively people to keep themselves in some instance or other from running mad. The very best dispositions of heart are no defence against this evil; for where the object is innocent, and the affection itself carries a moral appearance, a quick imagination is too much engaged by the first pleasing view to look any further, or consider the ill effects that often arise from a too great attention to even the best particular attachments. This vivacity is scarcely to be corrected, unless by a very early habit of thinking, an advantage which very few have the happiness to possess.[114]

In a gesture which anticipates Mary Wollstonecraft's argument that the insubstantiality of women's education leads to them becoming incapable of philosophical discernment and moral consciousness, Carter lays the blame for Sévigné's inability to bind her affectivity to a coherent moral system on the lack of 'a regular education'.[115] Carter's conclusion is also shared by one of the more sympathetic British Sévignists, an obscure gentleman named William Freeman. In his *Letters on Several Occasions* (1757), Freeman claims that women's education is to blame for the rarity of figures of literary distinction like Sévigné, whilst he does not go to the critical lengths of Carter or Wollstonecraft, he shares the latters bitterness at the primacy of 'engagement' as an ideal feminine trait:

> We ought to attribute the little fame [women] have acquired in the literary world to the disadvantages of their education, by which they are destined to

[114] 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 4 December 1744', ed. Pennington, I, p. 81-2.

[115] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects,* 2 vols, (London, Printed for J. Johnson, 1792), passim, esp. I, p. 113–5, 129–30

> employments or accomplishments which can only render them more engaging without cultivating or improving their talents.[116]

An education which escapes from this form of error would give Sévigné, in Carter's mind, would be the tools of rational philosophical reflection, which would allow her to exercise her moral judgement, in order to avoid falling into the trap of immoral worldly attachment. [117]

In their differing responses to Sévigné's legacy, we can see the ways in which Montagu, Carter, and Talbot, reflect their differing pre-occupations with their predecessor. As a by-word for epistolary sentimentality, and the moral and cultural authority which can be wielded through the textual performance of affectivity, Madame de Sévigné's letters strongly anticipate the Bluestocking community project. In our exploration of the Bluestocking response to the genre of the familiar letter overall, we saw the ways in which their pre-occupations with the genre; expression of moral and philosophical character, textual cultivation of intimacy, and conceptualisation of a mode of feminine creative expression, are all writ large in her epistolary corpus. As we saw through Sévigné's letters themselves and recent critical interpretations, they display a highly self-conscious artistry and play with the limitations and possibilities of the form, to which the Bluestockings respond. The most dominant thematic strain of Sévigné criticism in eighteenth-century Britain, permeating the context from which the Bluestocking readings emerge, however, is that of sentimentality. The perceived hyper-sentimentality of Sévigné's letters, bolstered as it was as it by the stereotypical images of Frenchness and femininity, was ubiquitous among her readers, both those who praised and those who criticised her. The Bluestocking response to her conveys the ambiguities and tensions inherent in both Sévigné's own text and her British reception. As we have

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[116] William Freeman, *Letters on Several Occasions,* (London: Printed for R. Manby, 1757), pp. 250–1, (p. 250)

[117] I am basing my definitions of 'Generalisation' (by which I am referring to the accumulation of 'Impressions' into composite 'Ideas') and 'Attention', two key tenets of Enlightenment empiricism, on David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature,* 3 vols, (London: Printed for John Noon, 1739-40), I, p. 11-21; & John Locke, *An Essay concerning Humane Understanding*, (London: Printed for Eliza Holt by Thomas Basset, 1690), p. 65-7. for a general discussion of the philosophical category of 'Attention' see Christopher Mole, 'Attention', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/attention/> [accessed 27 February 2018].

seen, Montagu's reading of her forms part of a broader project for cultivating a definition of artistic creativity which foregrounds the expressions of intimacy and affectivity, but Montagu remains ultimately suspicious of the value of Sévigné's legacy, concerned that her canonisation as an epistolary icon obscures the sincere expressiveness of her letters. Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter take their engagement with Sévigné further. Carter's personal critique lies in the disparity between the model of sentimental celebrity enjoyed by Sévigné and her own preferred model of female intellectuality while her letters with Talbot highlight the ultimate irreconcilability of Sévignéan Jansenism with the Bluestocking conceit of ideal community as an imitation of heavenly unity.

Ultimately, therefore, the Bluestocking response to Sevignism provides just one example of the ways in which fundamental themes of Bluestocking identity and concepts of moral community emerge in defiance of cultural norms. Tracing the readings of a single text through a range of responses, both Bluestocking and otherwise, allows us to identify the ways in which general concepts like affective identification, and moral community are translated into components of the Bluestocking horizon of expectation. The next chapter will extend this analysis to explore the way in which their interpretative creativity acts on a cultural theme, and informs both their epistolary discussions and public sphere dissemination of discourse on it. Enlightenment ceoclassicism, and engagement with the classical world, is a theme which emerges throughout the Bluestocking letters and public sphere texts and, by exploring these texts, the next chapter will extend its discussion of the ways in which Bluestocking interpretation responds to contemporary controversies over gender, public morality, nationhood, and class dynamics

Chapter II: Neoclassicism, Gender and Public Virtue in the Correspondence of Carter, Talbot, and Montagu

In the first wave of twenty first century Bluestocking criticism, characterised by the 1999 *Bluestocking Feminism* collection, and *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (2002), Gary Kelly defined the Bluestocking political project with a clearly defined model of middle-class bourgeois nationalist conservative feminism, in pursuit of a clearly defined identity around which to centre the movement.[1] In the current wave, revolving around Elizabeth Eger's *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (2010), *Bluestockings Displayed* (2013), *Bluestockings Now!* (2016) and 'The Commerce of Life' (2018), the focus has shifted away from consolidation towards differentiation with all three expanding and problematizing the homogeneity of the Bluestocking project, by considering its public image, extending its temporal framework, and re-assessing its core tenets. In *Bluestockings Now!* Deborah Heller glosses the volume's title, by referring to an extempore speech by Gary Kelly at the American Society of Eighteenth Century Studies Annual Conference 2010, which could be seen as a manifesto for the contemporary Bluestocking moment. He claimed that scholars must 'appropriate the transformative potential of Bluestocking practice', seeing their defining characteristic as 'ordinary people [who] seek to remake themselves and their world daily with the materials available to them, guided by imagination and desire, in repeated acts of creativity.'[2] In short, Kelly's definition of Bluestocking moves from a set of eighteenth-century political and philosophical preoccupations to an ahistorical mode of critical engagement with one's cultural climate.

This chapter will address the correlations between eighteenth-century neoclassical discourses on public duty and civic participation, as they manifested in the Bluestocking readings of, and responses to, a range of texts which respond to the political and cultural legacies of ancient Greece and Rome. For the purposes of this discussion, I am following Caroline Winterer's definition of classicism as 'a concern

[1] Elizabeth Montagu, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle,* ed. by Gary Kelly & Elizabeth Eger, 6 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), p. xlv; & Gary Kelly, 'Bluestocking Feminism' in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 163-180, (pp. 167–8)

[2] Deborah Heller, 'Introduction' in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 1-15, (p. 2)

with the ancient Mediterranean that is put into the service of modern needs.'[3] This definition allows for a generic openness of scope, enabling the consideration of the letters themselves as neoclassical documents, and foregrounds the process of change and co-opting which is central to the Bluestocking conception of classicism as a concept. After outlining the broad contexts into which Bluestocking cultural criticism intervenes, namely the eighteenth century 'feminisation debate' and the relationship between neoclassical models of civic participation and the Habermassian public sphere, this chapter will explore the way in which Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Catherine Talbot embrace, critique, and re-define neoclassicism through their letters and collaborative print works. By exploring the way in which three of the core elements constitutive of Bluestocking public morality, namely rational community, bourgeois self-affirmation, and intellectual femininity, resonate through their readings of classical and neoclassical texts, this chapter builds on the definitions of virtuous feminine rational community laid down in the previous chapter as central to their interpretative community. I will then juxtapose these definitions with contemporary discourses on public virtue. Building on existing scholarship by Harriet Guest, Elizabeth Eger, and other scholars who have addressed the relationship between Bluestocking self-identification and the ubiquity of neoclassicism in Enlightenment conversations over civic responsibility, this chapter hopes to build a more nuanced picture of the relationship between Bluestocking public morality and their readings of classical and neoclassical texts. As with the previous chapter, it only represents one small strand of the many which may be within the framework of a discussion of Bluestocking public morality based on the Bluestocking epistolary corpus, but it represents a model for tracing a particular discourse through a series of close readings of letters and their relationship with several key coterie texts.

[3] Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900*, (Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 1-2; quoted in Penelope Wilson, 'Women Writers and the Classics' in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature,* ed. by, David Hopkins & Charles Martindale, 4 vols, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), III, pp. 495–518, (p. 496)

'An Exalted Sphere of Knowledge and Virtue': Bluestockings and the Feminised Public Sphere

It is indicative of the discursive freedom offered by the familiar letter between intimate and interested friends that it is within the closed circle of a shared reading of Tacitus between Carter and Montagu between June and September 1765 that Montagu delivers her most innovative vision of the role of politeness.[4] The correspondence is, for the most part, reflective of the conventional eighteenth-century veneration of his historiographical talents, and discussion of his famed iconoclasm.[5] Montagu praises the historian as 'that excellent guide through a crooked path', and particular focus being laid on Tacitus' carefully balanced critique of individual despotism in favour of balanced government. On 21 June 1765, for example, Carter writes to Montagu with her characteristically sceptical academic eye (of which more below), that 'I have always honored Tacitus, for throwing a cloud over the blaze of false glory in the character of Augustus, and for counteracting that fatal principle, which separates admiration from esteem' in his description of the reign of Tiberius. Montagu offers a contrary reading of the same material two days later.[6] Preferring the romanticised image of the roman emperor, she wishes that Tacitus 'had not thrown such a black cloud over the setting sun of Augustus'.[7] As she playfully explains in her next letter, he is a manifestation of the potential of 'grace' and 'power' even as she recognises that he is a pre-christian 'vain

[4] The series of letters from Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter discussing Tacitus in 1765 is as follows: 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 30 June 1765', MO 3146; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 7 July 1765', MO 3147; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 16 July 1765', MO 3148; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 3 August 1765', MO 3149; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 10 August 1765', MO 3151; Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 12 August 1765', MO 3152; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 17 August 1765', MO 3153; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 22 September 1765', MO 3154. Elizabeth Carter's responses can be found in 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 June 1765', Carter 1817, I, pp. 265-267; 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 9 August 1765', Ibid, pp. 268-272; 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 16 September 1765', Ibid, pp. 272-276.

[5] For an overview of eighteenth-century responses to Tacitus, and the Tacitean model of political accommodation, see Howard D. Weinbrot, 'Politics, Taste and National Identity: Some Uses of Tacitism in the Eighteenth Century', in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition,* ed. by Luce Torrey James and Anthony John Woodman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 168-184.

[6] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 June 1765', Carter 1817, I, p. 267.

[7] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 23 June 1765', MO 3145.

idol'.[8] In the middle of this discussion, however, Montagu's critique takes a much sharper turn when she writes a letter comparing the representation of women in Tacitus with that of Joseph Addison, combining an extemporary reaction against the classical historian with what reads as a manifesto for the value of mixed conversation:

> As you have not begun yr course of Tacitus I will lye upon my oars for a while & wait for you. I left Agrippina blubbering for a Husband as the only comfort for an honest Woman. I am sure the whole passage is purely Tacitus's invention. I am glad you are so delighted with Mr Addison, the Christian virtues & the classical graces united to make him a perfectly fine writer...The women have infinite obligation to him; before his time, they used to nickname Gods Creatures, & make their ignorance their pride as Hamlet says. Mr Addison has shown them, ignorance, false delicacy, affectation, & childish fears, are disgraces to a female character, which should be soft not weak, gentle, but not timorous. He does all he can to cure our sex of their feminalities without making them Masculine.[9]

In Addisonian polite discourse, Montagu sees a model for mixed conversation as a mechanism for female participation in the public sphere, which she conceives through a model of 'classical grace' that defies both the sentimentalized neoclassical image of the roman matron, and the threat of 'feminization', which conservative cultural commentators associated with female participation in the public sphere. The Addisonian text to which Carter and Montagu are responding is the initial manifesto in Issue 10 of *The Spectator*, announcing his desire to communicate with a 'female world' defined by an 'elevated Life and Conversation' and 'an exalted Sphere of Knowledge and Virtue', which combines 'all the Beauties of the Mind to the Ornaments of Dress', and which he explicitly contrasts with 'the State of ordinary Women' in which 'The Toilet is their great Scene of Business, and the right adjusting of their Hair the principal Employment of their Lives. The sorting of a Suit of Ribbons is reckoned a very good Morning's Work.'[10] This championing of female conversation as a modern, urban development resonates with the modernizing mission of contemporary theorists of politeness, including David Hume and Lord Kames in addition to Addison himself. Hume famously claimed that '[There is no] better school for manners, than the company of virtuous women', and Lord Kames stated, in *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), that 'the gentle and

[8] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter', 30 June 1765', MO 3146.
[9] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 16 July 1765', MO 3148
[10] Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, 'No. 10, March 12, 1711', *The Spectator,* 8 vols, (London: printed for S. Buckley; and J. Tonson, 1713-15), I, p. 38-9.

insinuating manners of the female sex tend to soften the roughness of the other sex; and where-ever women are indulged with any freedom, they polish sooner than men.'[11] Kames' fellow Scottish Enlightenment historian, William Alexander, in his *History of Women* (1779), made the association between mixed company and modern civilization even more explicit, by yoking his overall thesis that 'the rank and condition of women in any country, mark out to us with the greatest precision, the exact point in the scale of civil society, to which the people of such country have arrived', to the argument that men 'become civilized' in order to 'regard the qualities of [a woman's] mind'.[12] Barbara Taylor summarizes this approach to modernity as follows:

> Modernity as conceived by British enlighteners had at its heart a character type – the polite or civilised personality – most of whose key attributes (peaceability, sensibility, sympathy, sociability) belonged on the feminine side of the gender axis. As the innately refined sex, women set the standard for cultivated humanity, their delicate responsiveness to others ('social sympathy') the *sine qua non* of true civility.[13]

The sympathy between the Bluestocking project of public morality and this concept of the 'feminised' public sphere has long been a staple of critical assessments of Bluestocking scholarship. Elizabeth Eger has argued for Hannah More's poem *The Bas Bleu, or Conversation* (1786) as a manifesto for 'a particular mission to improve, self-consciously advertising social and intellectual equality for women, of overcoming the

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[11] David Hume, *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Kincaid, 1742), II, p. 93; Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Six Sketches on the History of Man,* 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Creech, 1774), II, p. 169. Montagu's sympathy with Kames' argument may be attested by her comment in a 1774 letter on the *Sketches,* 'I am much pleased with what you have said of the fair sex, you have spoken the sentiments of a Friend, & not the language of flattery or scorn.', 'Elizabeth Montagu to Lord Kames, 12 September 1774', GD24/1/573/f.61v.

[12] William Alexander, *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time*, 2 vols, (London: Printed for W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1779), I, p. 103, 29; see also Karen O' Brien's skeptical engagement with Alexander's *History*, and proposition that it misses the interrelationship of economic and political discourse with gender identity so central to the conjectural histories of figures like Ferguson, see Karen O' Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth Century Britain,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp, 104-5. For more on the Scottish Enlightenment's engagement with women's history, and Alexander's approach in particular, see Jane Rendall 'Clio, Mars and Minerva - the Scottish Enlightenment, and the Writing of Women's History', in *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: New Perspectives*, ed. by Tom Devine, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), pp. 134-151.

[13] Barbara Taylor, 'Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment,* ed. by Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.30-52, (p.40)

restrictions of aristocratic decorum through a new form of sociability'.[14] The most influential framework through which contemporary scholarship on the Addisonian public sphere and the Bluestocking participation within it is understood is that of the concepts of public and private as conceptualized by Jurgen Habermas. As mentioned above, he grounded the 'bourgeois public sphere' in sites like coffee houses and salons, spaces of free exchange in which private individuals could congregate and contribute to political discourse. Such spaces were 'centers of criticism, literary at first, then also Political, in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain parity of the educated.'[15] Such parity was created, in Habermas' terms, by the evolution of a bourgeois private sphere, in which the correlation between property ownership and political participation was broken down in favour of a model in which economic participation, and public sphere conversation, became all that was required to participate in political discourse:

> The fully developed bourgeois public sphere was based on the fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by privatized individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human beings pure and simple.[16]

As Elizabeth Eger, Markman Ellis, and others have demonstrated, Habermas' articulation of the public sphere was less idyllic or radical than it initially appears. He often, as the editors of *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere* (2001) put it, 'emphasis[es] the role of the male property owner' in the cultivation of the commercial class, and 'omitting women altogether from it', essentially undermining his entire programme.[17] This being said, the opportunities inherent in Habermass' model for the articulation of a

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[14] Elizabeth Eger, 'The noblest commerce of mankind' Conversation and Community in the Bluestocking Circle', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, pp. 288-305.
[15] Jurgen Habermass, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 32.
[16] Ibid, p. 56, emphasis Habermas'
[17] Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Penny Warburton, Clíona Ó Gallchoir, 'Introduction: Women, Writing and Representation', *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed by Elizabeth Eger et al, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-26, (p. 8); For discussion of the presence of women within Habermas' masculine-encoded public sphere, see Markman Ellis, 'The Coffee-Women, The Spectator and the Public Sphere in the Early Eighteenth Century' in *Women Writing and the Public Sphere,* pp. 27- 52; and Brian Cowan, 'What was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffee-House Milieu in Post-Restoration England', *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001), pp. 127-57, which also includes a summary of the debates over Habermas across the 1990s.

continuum between polite society and political discourse, have lead Bluestocking scholars to push the feminist potential of his theory further than its originator. As Harriet Guest has argued in *Small Change,* these categories of conspicuous consumption and bourgeois conversation lend themselves organically to conceptions of femininity in the eighteenth-century.[18] The intersection between the bluestocking salons and eighteenth century political discourse is characterized, in Guest's formulation, by the conscious exploitation of the interpenetration of political and private selves. Extracting politicians and influencers of public discourse from self-consciously public sites of debate and engaging with them as private citizens creates a dynamic whereby private conversation can become the 'center of…criticism' Habermas identifies. Elizabeth Eger and Deborah and Steven Heller have extended Guest's thesis. Eger includes the direct participation of Bluestocking figures in the sphere of public debate through their print works as an extension of this strategy.[19] The Hellers revisit Habermas' original definition to push the feminist implications of Guest's thesis further than her predecessors by arguing that the Bluestocking project of network formation creates not only a venue for female participation in public discourse, but raises the prospect of inhabiting a category of 'human, plain and simple' which not only collapses the binary of public and private selves, but offers an opportunity to transcend the 'essentialist notion of women as complementary to – because radically different from – men'.[20]

The most significant engagement with Habermas by Bluestocking scholars for the purposes of the present study comes from the work of Harriet Guest, who follows Keith Michael Baker's proposition of a tension between the discourses of the bourgeois public sphere and 'classical republicanism' when it comes to the feminist readings of the eighteenth century body politic. Against the concept of a public sphere defined by the public performance of private identities and, as we have seen, the private interplay of public discourse, 'classical republicanism' offered, in Baker's words, a political body comprised of 'independent citizens participat[ing] in the common exercise of a sovereign, political will', in pursuit of a political model based on the warrior-citizen of

[18] Guest, pp. 1-21, esp. p. 6
[19] Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 62.
[20] Deborah Heller and Steven Heller, 'A Copernican Shift; or, Remapping the Bluestocking Heavens', in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role,* ed. by Deborah Heller, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 17-54, (p. 37)

"the ancient polis."[21] 'Classical Republicanism', and its companion code of behavior, 'Civic Humanism', favoured as they were by the classically educated elite, provided the most powerful counterpoint to the bourgeois public sphere by locating all political power in property ownership and nobility.[22] Harriet Guest and Vera Nunnings have both commented on the exclusivity of this definition of citizenship, Guest arguing that it 'articulates an unambiguously masculinist concept of virtue limited to a small political elite which excludes most people all of the time and includes its independent citizens only some of the time', and Nunnings recognizing its economic exclusivity as well 'the basic prerequisite for political autonomy, economic independence, excluded both the lower classes and (married) women from the political arena'.[23] Barbara Taylor's conception of Shaftesbury's attitude seen as a synecdoche for the ideology in general: 'Looking back nostalgically to ancient Greece's exclusion of women from male company, Shaftesbury bewailed women's predominance in 'modern conversation' which, depriving men of 'masculine helps of learning and sound reason', rendered them 'effeminate'.[24] Emma Major and Karen O' Brien have also addressed the correlation between masculinity and civic virtue, the former by exploring the 'effeminisation' of elite masculinity in the figure of Sir Charles Grandison, and the other by addressing the way conservatives like Thomas Blackwell and Oliver Goldsmith mapped the decline of masculinity onto Enlightenment discussions of the fall of Rome.[25] E.J. Clery, most

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[21] Keith Michael Baker, 'Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. by Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 181–211, (p. 187); for the canonical articulation of the theory of civic humanism in the eighteenth century, see J.G.A. Pocock 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian' in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* ed. by G.W Bowerstock and John Clive (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 103–4.

[22] For more information about the association between 'civic humanism', and economic independence, see Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 85–7.

[23] Guest, p. 6; For an overview of the patriarchal ideological frameworks surrounding eighteenth century constructions of masculinity, and their appeal to Greco-Roman precedents, see Carolyn D. Williams, *Pope, Homer, and Manliness: Some Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Learning,* (London: Routledge, 1992), passim, esp. pp. 9-26; Vera Nunnings, 'Changes in the Representation of Men and Women in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', in *Metamorphosis: Structures of Cultural Transformations,* ed. by Jurgen Schlaeger, (Tubingen: Gunter Narr, 2005), pp. 183-203 (p. 191)

[24] Taylor, p. 34.

[25] Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation: 1712-1812,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 104-109; O' Brien, p. 115.

notably, has argued that enlightenment civic humanism intensified its political misogyny by re-constituting manliness as not only the active element in civic participation but, in effect, the only form of rational being capable of constituting a social body, constantly defined against femininity: 'The core civic humanist value of manliness, which represented the highest state of humanity, could be upheld only through a constant labour of differentiation with the non-human, the immature and, above all, the non-male.'[26]

Two scholars who have explicitly addressed the Bluestocking interventions into the debate between the classical and modern modes of civic virtue are Elizabeth Eger and Jon Mee. For Mee, the conflict between the commercial civic discourse embodied by Addison and the Platonic conversational dynamic epitomized by the earl of Shaftesbury is manifest most significantly in their opposed attitudes towards gender and conversational exclusivity. Whilst, as Mee notes, both Addison and Shaftesbury employ classical subjects such as Augustus, Horace, or Cicero, *The Spectator* is invested in projecting these figures into contemporary commercial discourse, as we will see Talbot doing later in this chapter, whilst Shaftesbury's 'narrowly aristocratic' model takes the Platonic archetype more directly 'transcending questions of time and space', and creating an 'assertively masculine' sphere antithetical to the debate and public criticism of the Habermassian public sphere.[27] A confrontation between Montagu and the elite Dilletanti Society in 1762 provides Mee with an opportunity to place her firmly in the Addisonian camp. Outraged at a proposal for a monument in Green Park showcasing the antiquarian casts collected by the members, Montagu writes to Carter arguing that such a monument would become a haven for foreign fashions, and "alienate the public hearts". Mee identifies her rejection of this classically exclusive model as socially divisive as a broader critique of civic humanism:

> The vaunted "independence" of civic humanism is no more than self-indulgence, the breeding ground of political faction inimical to the national interest, an affront to the Christianized idea of improvement at the heart of Montagu's own project.[28]

For Eger, the relationship between the Bluestocking project and the Socratic model of

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[26] E.J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Literature, Commerce, and Luxury,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 8.
[27] . Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community, 1762-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 43-44; 46.
[28] Ibid, pp. 86-7.

conversation is more nuanced. The majority of her discussions of the intersection between the Bluestocking public persona and Enlightenment neoclassical discourse has focused on the co-opting of the image of the learned lady into an 'emblem…of Britain's cultural status…suggestive of the emergence of a new female and feminine republic of letters'. This is enacted through a range of classical archetypes; muses, in the painting of Richard Samuels, the goddess Minerva in the paintings of Montagu and Carter by James Barry and John Fayram respectively, and the roman matron, embodying republican motherhood, applied to a range of figures from Carter and Montagu to Catharine Macaulay and Anna Laetitia Barbauld.[29] The most significant piece of Eger's analysis for the present study, however, is her identification of the way in which the Bluestocking's own self-cultivated image incorporated 'allu[sions] to classical models'.[30] Eger's definition of 'Bluestocking' is wider than that employed here, incorporating the overt radical republicanism and dissenting religion of Catharine Macaulay and Anna Laetitia Barbauld. However, her reflection on the Socratic resonances of Hannah More's *Bas Bleu,* with its invocation of Aspasia as an ancient proto-Bluestocking and Carter and Montagu's ideal of conversation highlights a continuum between the 'classical' public sphere and the 'bourgeois' model as the Bluestockings identified it, and is a key touchstone for the present study:

> As the correspondence between Carter and Montagu shows, the ideals of rational virtue and good sense, cemented by the bonds of friendship, were held to be paramount in creating the bluestocking community. Women viewed conversation as an improving art, and in promoting this they also referred to the classical, Socratic model.[31]

As this chapter intends to show, the investment of the Bluestockings in the classical model of 'improving conversation' necessitated a series of strategies for drawing classical and neoclassical scholarship, with its barriers of gender and aristocratic exclusivity, into the feminized public sphere. This chapter will argue that the creation of an alternative classical lineage, as in the invocation of Aspasia represents only one way

[29] Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 31-47, (43); For discussions of the portraits of Elizbeth Carter and Macaulay, see Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women: Eighteenth Century Bluestockings,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 74-5; & Clare Barlow, 'Virtue, Patriotism and female scholarship in Bluestocking portraiture', in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 50-80.
[30] Eger 2010, p. 101.
[31] Ibid, pp. 101-2;

in which the Bluestockings read the concept of feminine social improvement through a horizon of expectation bracketed by classical and neoclassical standards.[32] In addition to this mode of historical counter-narrative, which I will extend into discussions of Montagu, Carter and Talbot's readings of classical history, I would like to argue that Montagu, Carter, and Talbot were all engaged in a process of extracting the classical discourse of civic virtue from the elite, masculine, aristocratic sphere, and repurposing it for their bourgeois, feminine one.

With this project in mind, let us return to Elizabeth Montagu's reading of *The Spectator,* Issue 10. Addison's careful alignment of women's commercial practice with that of intellectual community, in the image of a community of women who 'join all the Beauties of the Mind to the Ornaments of Dress', locates *The Spectator* squarely within Habermas' concept of political criticism in the public sphere, and offers, in its bluntest form, a defense of female participation within that sphere, at least in the case of women who participate in rational conversation, like the Bluestockings themselves. By reading Addison through and in comparison with Tacitus, however, we can see Montagu re-appraising Addison as an ideal neoclassical figure, whose address to intellectual women bridges modernity and classicism by drawing together the hitherto entirely masculine classical citizen with the rational modern woman. Montagu's iconoclastic conception of Tacitus, to which we will return later in the chapter, identifies him with a regressive model of female civic participation, in which women's sole mode of exercising political power was through sentimentality and manipulation. The episode of Tacitus' *Annals* which Montagu glosses as 'Agrippina blubbering for a husband as the only comfort for an honest Woman', is an incident in A.D 4 or 5 when Agrippina the Elder begs the emperor Tiberius to allow her marriage to his nephew and newly adopted heir Germanicus in a bid to dissuade rumors of her sexual immorality, and tie her bloodline into the direct imperial lineage. In the 1728 English translation that represents Montagu's most likely source text here, Agrippina's 'invidious expostulations' and 'many tears' are juxtaposed with Tiberius' response. Aware of the 'mighty power in the state',

[32] Catherine Talbot also proposes an idealised version of Athenian politeness, with the Hellenistic Stoic philosopher Cleanthes making 'every body around him pleased and easy', whilst acknowledging that his ability to do so was contingent on his 'living in an age of more real accomplishments', Catherine Talbot, *Works of the Late Miss Catherine Talbot,* ed, by Montagu Pennington, (London: Printed for F.C. & J. Rivington, 1809), p. 75.

which Agrippina is trying to acquire, Tiberius leaves her 'without an answer…not betray[ing] any tokens of fear or resentment.'[33] Femininity is coded as emotional and ineffectual, whilst masculinity is articulated through a stoic placement of political stability over one's own emotion. Montagu's justifiably cynical refusal to take Agrippina's word that she is looking to become 'an honest Woman' reflects her awareness of the *realpolitik* behind the episode even as she dismisses it. Rather than blame Agrippina directly, Montagu attacks the misogyny of Tacitus himself, and picking up on the ancient historian's reference to the episode being 'not related by the authors of our *Annals*' as evidence that he must have constructed it himself, out of his own misogynistic conventions.[34] Against this reading of a masculine political sphere juxtaposed against a feminine domestic sphere in which insincere expression of false emotion represents the only means of exercising power, Montagu places the Addisonian model of rational femininity. But rather than reject Tacitus entirely, and embrace the modernizing Addison, Montagu instead defines Addison's project as combining the modern 'Christian virtues' with '*classical* graces', creating a type of modern femininity in which the irrational emotionality of Tacitus' archetypal Agrippina, associated with 'ignorance, false delicacy, affectation, & childish fears', is rejected. The new femininity is defined by being 'soft not weak, gentle, but not timorous', creating a distance between stereotypical femininity and the women of her own generation. Her boldest act of redemptive reinterpretation, however, is in her argument that Addison 'does all he can to cure our sex of their feminalities without making them Masculine.'[35] What Montagu does with her 'feminalities', for which she is the earliest source in the *OED* by almost 30 years, is exploit this linguistic instability to enact the detachment of 'feminine' from 'feminisation', which develops throughout her correspondence.[36] By defining the conventional tropes of female irrationality as a cultural construct, collected under the term 'feminalities', she detaches it from true femininity. By paradoxically representing Addison's public sphere as 'classical', Montagu opens the world of political discourse to

[33] Cornelius Tacitus, *The Works of Tacitus, Containing The Annals. To which are prefixed, Political Discourses Upon that Author*, 2 vols, (London: printed for Thomas Woodward and John Peele, 1728-31), I, p. 191.
[34] Tacitus, p. 191
[35] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 16 July 1765', MO 3148.
[36] See definition 2, for "feminality, n." *OED Online*, (2018), [accessed 27 September 2018]; Sylvia Harcstark Myers has also commented on this letter as evidence of the influence of Addison's *Spectator* on Montagu in Sylvia Harcstark-Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Britain,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 124.

a 'modern' form of femininity which has transcended the archetypes which barred women from participation in the public sphere in the classical world, allowing for a more subtle renegotiation of the relationships between classical discourse and the role of women in discussions of public morality.

I will now go on to trace these renegotiations through the three avenues suggested by Montagu's juxtaposition of Tacitus and Addison. Firstly, by placing Montagu's critique of Tacitus' misogynistic representation of Roman domestic politics in the broader context of the discussions which she, Carter, and Talbot had about the correlation between female participation in the public sphere, the nature of classical historiography itself, and the relative characters of the Greek and Roman states, we can see an emergent critique of the value of classical models of citizenship as an ideal for Enlightenment Britain. In the second section we will explore the concept of Montagu's distinction between femininity and 'feminalities' as it enters the public sphere directly in her own work of neoclassical satire in her contributions to Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760) and their epistolary epilogue. This series of short texts combine the suspicion of a wholly masculine public sphere from the Bluestocking critique of the ancient historians with a brutal indictment of 'feminalities' in the figure of 'M^{rs} Modish'. The third and final section will address the bourgeois element of Montagu's engagement with Addison, by exploring Carter and Talbot's collaborative work on *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758) and Montagu's endorsement of James Beattie's 'Remarks on the Utility of Classical Learning' (1776) as acts of reclamation of the Stoic legacy from the threat of aristocratic, Francophile, atheists, epitomized in the figure of the Earl of Shaftesbury.

Savagery and Society: The Bluestocking Critique of Classical History

Before looking at Carter, Talbot, and Montagu's engagement with the classical histories of Thucydides and Tacitus, it is worth giving a quick overview of the unique positions they were in when it came to accessing and engaging with these texts at all. As Jacqueline Pearson and Penelope Wilson have both observed, women's reading of classical texts across the first half of the eighteenth century was accompanied with a variety of prejudices and expectations. Whilst reading in Latin and Greek represented 'the core of male scholastic upbringing', in Wilson's words, it continued to be 'discouraged rather than encouraged throughout [the eighteenth century] for most

women'.[37] Women who ploughed on and learnt the classical languages anyway, or read the texts in English translation, were confronted with a field of scholarship from which they were automatically alienated, whether by 'its predilection for martial heroism and indulgence to paganism', or by the fact that in doing so they 'risk[ed] criticism for vanity and pedantry'.[38] Pearson and Pam Perkins have both identified a softening towards women's classical reading, particularly as it informs polite intellectual conversation and offers a moral counter to the pernicious sentimentality of the novel, in texts like Hannah More's *Strictures on Female Education* (1799) and Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773).[39] However, both of these women were Bluestockings themselves and, as Perkins observes in the case of More, they profited from the familiarization with classical literature on display in the letters currently under discussion.[40] In the first half of the century, before the Bluestocking phenomenon had itself carved out an acceptable space for the female classical scholar, Carter, Montagu, and Talbot were not able to benefit from the association of classicism with polite conversation.[41] This being said, Carter, Talbot, and Montagu all benefitted from early educations under supportive tutors who encouraged their acquisition of languages, dead and living. Catherine Talbot was raised in the house of Thomas Secker, (1693-1768), rector of St James's, Westminster (1733-5), later Bishop of Bristol (1735-8), Bishop of Oxford (1738-50) and subsequently Archbishop of Canterbury (1750-68), and had access to his libraries at Cuddesden and Lambeth, as well as his support and encouragement.[42] Elizabeth Carter, too, received a classical education from her father, Nicolas Carter (1688-1774), perpetual curate of Deal in Kent. Despite a slow start, by

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[37] Wilson, p. 496.

[38] Ibid, p. 497; Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 69; See also Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home,* (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 258-9.

[39] Pearson, pp. 70-71; Pam Perkins, '"Too Classical for a Female Pen"? Late Eighteenth-Century Women Reading and Writing Classical History', *Clio*, 33.3, pp. 241-265, (pp. 245-6)

[40] Perkins, p. 246

[41] For discussions of Carter's conscious articulation of her identity as a female classicist, see Eger 2010, p. 101; Bigold, p. 194; and pictorial distancing of herself from the label of pedant, see Barlow, pp. 71-75 (esp. p. 71)

[42] Sylvia Harcstark-Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in Eighteneth Centruy England,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 63-4; For more information on the role of Secker, Carter, and Anglican clergymen generally in the development of Bluestocking ideology, see Susan Staves, 'Church of England Clergy and Women Writers', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65.½, (2002), pp. 81-103.

age 17 Carter was fluent enough in Greek to submit classical translations to the *Gentleman's Magazine,* and by her early 20s was starting to provide a classical education to her step-siblings preparatory to Cambridge University degrees.[43] As for Elizabeth Montagu, her classical education is the most salient for our purposes here. Under the guidance of her godfather Conyers Middleton (1683–1760), author of the *Life of Cicero* (1741), Montagu imbibed a distinctly classical education, having read (or at least claimed familiarity with) canonical Greek and Roman thinkers like Cicero, Ovid, Livy, Horace, Homer and Plutarch before she was 25 years old.[44] The example of Conyers Middleton, Tania Smith argues, may have inspired Montagu's own vision of intellectual coterie sociability. Accounts of Cicero's 'tak[ing] some friends with him into the country; where instead of amusing themselves with idle sports or feasts their diversions were wholly speculative; tending to improve the mind, and enlarge the understanding', bear strong parallels with the 'philosophical Blue stocking Doctrine' of 'rational conversation', to borrow Montagu's own terms from a 1765 letter to Carter. Montagu's engagement with Middleton's Cicero 'reinforced in her mind the philosophical and educational significance of conversation among intellectuals' and, more specifically, provided a prototype for her literary salons as spaces of communal intellectual production. As Smith puts it: 'Elizabeth's letters frequently praise domestic retirement and literary reflection, yet her letters idealize not the strict separation of public/political and private/literary spheres, but the fairly frequent alternation and overlap between them.'[45] This correlation between Montagu's classical education and subsequent project of moral community is one that, as we will see, persists throughout her response to the classical world.

In a series of letters in the 1770s, Carter and Montagu engage in an extensive historiographical debate, in which a number of central aspects of the Bluestocking co-option and reassessment of the classical world emerge. Comparing Thucydides' *History*

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[43] Judith Hawley, 'Carter, Elizabeth (1717–1806)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2009), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4782> [accessed 20 March 2019]; Bigold, pp. 172-3.

[44] 'Elizabeth Montagu to William Freind, 29 December [1741]', ed. Montagu, I, pp. 36-40; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Sarah Scott, [1741], Ibid, p. 124; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 20 April 1741', Ibid, p. 158; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 2 August 1741', Ibid, pp. 261-2.

[45] Tania Smith, 'Elizabeth Montagu's Study of Cicero's Life: The Formation of an Eighteenth-Century Woman's Rhetorical Identity', *Rhetorica*, 26.2 (2008), pp. 165–187, (p. 175, 185)

of the Peloponnesian War with David Hume's *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (1759–62), Carter offers the following assessment of Greek 'civilization', in which 'polish', the trapping of polite society, is sarcastically engulfed by an image of savage barbarism:

> Modern compilers give us a fine picture of the manners of heathen antiquity; but their own historians are more honest, and from them one discovers as high instances of barbarity even among the polished and enlightened Greeks as could be practised by the most savage parties of scalping Indians.[46]

As for the Romans, Carter was even more blunt in her assessment, offering a rebuttal to Montagu's reflection on Agrippina with which we started this chapter by reflecting that Agrippina's resort to emotional manipulation was only to be expected in a culture as regressive as Imperial Rome:[47]

> In reading the History of the Romans, considered as a people, can one help reflecting on that retributive justice of heaven, by which those who had been so remarkably distinguished by a general invasion of the liberty of mankind, at last sunk into such a deplorable condition of slavery to tyrants of their own raising; a slavery perhaps the most disgraceful that ever was suffered by any people under heaven, as it was endured with the most unmanly dejection, and encouraged by the vilest and most abject flattery that ever idolized the cruel and capricious demon of despotic power.[48]

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[46] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 20 August', 1774, Carter 1817*,* I, p. 267. Carter's discussion of scalping may be inspired by recent newspaper reports from the Colony of Virginia, describing, sometimes in graphic detail, the scalping of white colonists, including accounts of the murders of women and children. See, for example, the letter, published in the *Public Ledger* newspaper on the 11th of August, nine days prior to Carter's letter, describes with cold precision 'several massacres…on Saturday, the 4th instant, were killed and scalped by [Indians], one Benjamin Spear, his wife, and six children, on Duncaid-Creek', 'Extract of a Letter from Fort Pitt', *Public Ledger,* Issue 4566, 11 August, 1774, and the description of the mutilation of Lieutenant Grant, in the 'Extract of a Letter from Charles-Town, South Carolina,' *General Evening Post*, Issue 6132, 2 April, 1774 – 5 April, 1774, both accessed via *Burney Collections of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century British Newspapers*, <http://find.galegroup.com/bncn/dispBasicSearch.do?prodId=BBCN&userGroupName=uows> [accessed 15 March 2019]. For more information on the representation of native American violence in the 1760s and 70s, particularly in relation to Tobias Smollett's *History of Canada* (1760-2), see Sebastian Mitchell, *Visions of Britain: Anglo-Scottish Writing and Representation,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)*,* pp. 77-9.

[47] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 16 July 1765', MO 3148

[48] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 9 August 1765', Carter 1817, I, pp. 268-9.

From Carter's provocative declarations we can infer three of the major themes of the anti-Classical historiography which she establishes in her familiar letters to Montagu and Talbot. Firstly, and most simply, there is the essential assumption that the modern British state possesses a higher degree of civic and individual virtue even than that of ancient Greece. Secondly, there is the historiographical interest in the bleeding of state immorality, 'savage[ry]' or 'slavery', into the characteristics of the individuals within that society, as in Edward Gibbon's narrative of military, intellectual and social decline in Rome prior to the Gothic invasion in Chapter 2 of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The professionalization of soldiers translates into 'the languid indifference of private life', the decentralisation of cultural authority from Greece to Rome led to 'the corruption of taste' and, borrowing an image from Longinus, Gibbon describes the Romans as 'a race of pygmies', with 'tender minds, fettered by the prejudices and habits of a just servitude.'[49] Identifiable infrastructural and cultural changes blur into private corruption and moral decline. J.G.A Pocock describes this trope as 'corruption of the republic…entail[ing] the corruption of the individual'.[50] Thirdly, there is the conviction that the histories being canonised and celebrated do not represent the complete narrative, as in Montagu's reflection that contemporary laconophilia is the product of ancient Athenian propaganda and Carter's reflection that contemporary historians as a group misrepresent the ancient Greeks to suit their own agenda. This misinformation raises the possibility of alternative narratives in which either new philosophical systems, such as the 'manners' and politeness that are the focus of this chapter, or new demographics, become central to the story.

A letter from Elizabeth Carter to Montagu in 1773, during her second period of deep critical engagement with Thucydides, Herodotus and Xenophon, following the exchange with Talbot in the 1740s, articulates a theory of Greek manners which she must have been cultivating for some time:

> Contemplating the last setting glories of the Athenian State. Indeed it always appears wonderful to me that it could have subsisted so long, where there seemed to be no regular system of government; but all was hurried on by the rash impluse of a giddy populace, which irreparably gave decisions in one day, for which they were often ready to hang themselves the next; and yet were never warned against the same fatal precipitation on any future occasion. Plato and

[49] Edward Gibbon, *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols, (London: Printed for W. Strahan, 1776), I, pp. 58-9.
[50] Pocock, p. 103.

> Xenophon must have been deeply imprest by a sense of the miseries flowing from this wild democracy, to lead them to such a strange admiration of the Spartan government, which they seem to have considered merely in the single point of opposition to the inconveniences of their own; without reflecting that the general system was a contradiction to the natural laws of humanity.[51]

Literalising the metaphor of national character as personal morality, Carter explores the way in which an irrational populace, comprised of violently impassioned individuals, deforms its own apparatus of state. The need to acquire universal consent for political action within the Athenian democracy not only forms the basis of Carter's critique, but makes it the most informative case study for the investigation of national emotional character. The two divergent models of the Greek *polis* offer Carter the opportunity to negotiate an implicit *via media* of good governance, in which the moral sense of the inhabitants is cultivated most strongly, and the balance of power between the individual and the collective is most readily preserved.[52] Athens offers a hedonistic model, in which the state bends to the whims of its capricious citizenry, while Sparta, with its draconian system of social control, in 'contradiction to all the laws of humanity', offers a model in which human nature is subjected to the state. The former does not allow for the development of rational sociability, while the latter supresses the citizen's sense of individuality, and therefore capacity to evolve a private moral sense at all.[53] Carter places

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[51] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 20 August, 1774', Carter 1817*,* II, pp. 237–8.
[52] For Carter's similarly critical assessment of ancient manners in the case of imperial Rome, see her assertion that Seneca's pedantry as a writer is more excusable than that of Edward Young, because 'Rome was sunk into slavery, and the natural consequence of slavery, is affectation and false wit', 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 27 July 1778', Carter 1817*,* III, p. 80
[53] Implicit in Carter's charge of inhumanity against the Spartan state is an attack on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ardent laconism, mentioned above. See, for example, his claim in *Emile* (1762) that Spartan women produced the healthiest offspring, and his praise of the Spartan education system, in his 'Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences' (1750). Carter and Montagu both loathed Rousseau, and he is the target of some of Carter's most venomous invective, particularly for his perceived primitivism, an attitude to which, as will be seen, both Carter and Montagu were not averse when approached within a different context. Their correspondence is littered with diatribes against Rousseau, but most characteristic is Carter's 1774 claim that Rousseau should practice what he preaches:

> It is a pity he does not pursue his own favorite scheme, of running wild, and grazing among the animals, whose morals would be in no danger of being relaxed by his stories.

this binary of excessive individualism in Athens compared to systematic self-suppression in Sparta in explicit terms three years later, following another period of sustained classical reading: 'I have no other partiality for the Athenians than that it appears, I think, that their faults were more from sudden impulse, and less upon principle, than those of the Lacedemonians.'[54] Later in the same letter, while reflecting on the abundance of named Athenian figures in the history of the Peloponnesian War, compared with the scarcity of Spartan ones, Carter extends her analysis:

> [It is] a necessary consequence, I suppose, of the difference between mere institution, and a natural exertion of the powers of the mind. Sparta was a single machine, wound up arid regulated by clock-work springs. Athens was all alive, and running into various directions by voluntary motion.[55]

Behind this binary there exists the principle of the golden mean, the political, religious, and social maxim which governed much of the Bluestockings' sense of their roles within these various fields.[56] Just as the Bluestockings steer the middle way between the world and the court, and the perfect conversation steers the middle course between pedantry and insipidity, so the perfect state steers between individualism and social accountability. It is the irreconcilability of individual emotion and civil discipline which always tainted the classical world for the Bluestockings. Even Montagu's more positive approach, juxtaposing Greek 'Uncorrupted virtue, unsoftened valour, untainted innocence' with 'prosperity and the politeness of the Augustan age', is forced to concede that the two were never brought together: 'If one would show how great a creature man is, one must exhibit some of the individuals of Greece; if one shews how great men grow in communities and their united force, one must set forth the commonwealth of Rome.'[57] The force that is missing from the classical historical sources is mixed conversation, and a public sphere of open exchange in which this can take place, and the role taken by women in public morality that this entails. The link between women's domestic freedom

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'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 20 August 1774', Carter 1817*,* II, p. 268, see also 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 19 Oct 1789', MS 30.2.604.

[54] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 20 July 1777', Carter 1817*,* III, p. 25.

[55] Ibid, p. 28.

[56] For a definition of the 'golden mean', see Major, 2012, p. 214. For a comparable expression of the means by which a balance of authority and individualism yield social, spiritual and cultural benefits, employing classical analogies to support its case, see *The Spectator,* 'No. 287, Tuesday 29 January 1712' in Addison and Steele, VIII, pp. 204–210.

[57] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 20 October 1758', ed. Montagu*,* IV, pp. 104-5.

and role in the 'civilising' process would be encapsulated by William Alexander in his aforementioned *History of Women*:

> [I]n Greece, modest women were all so strictly confined, that none were allowed to see or converse with them but their nearest relations; and from this confinement it naturally followed, that they were uncultivated, and ignorant of learning, and of almost every thing that was transacting in the world; they were, therefore, but ill qualified to entertain or amuse the men with their conversation.[58]

A similar reading emerges when Talbot addresses the lack of interaction between men and women in the public sphere in the classical world directly, specifically looking at Thucydidean Athens. Talbot came to read Thomas Hobbes' 1629 translation of Thucydides in early November, 1744, reporting her initial discomfort with the text to Jemima Grey. After complaining about the uselessness of an uncritical classical education, in a less-than-subtle dig at Jemima's husband Philip, Talbot writes the following:

> To show that I make a better use of Mr Hobbes learning I will tell you that I was mightily interested last night in Thucydides, especially in the Dialogue between the Melians & Athenians. But I am vastly scandalised to find such Modern Morals & Politicks, such contempt of all principle & profligacy of manners among my beloved Grecians.… Do not expect me to undertake blanching the K. of Prussia yet, for I find I have a Twelvemonths work upon my Hands amongst the Athenians. I think Cleon may have his Face washed a little if one was Charitable enough to undertake it.[59]

Talbot's emotionally charged response is readily apparent, as is the difficulty with which she is able to articulate a nascent critique of ancient Greece, in spite of the evidence presented to her by the text. The dialogue between the erstwhile allies of the small island of Melos and the Athenian city-state to which she alludes, takes place in the fifth book of Hobbes' *Thucydides*, and encapsulates a brutally pessimistic vision of ancient Greek *realpolitik,* in which brute force truly does equate to political ascendancy. One of the most evocative exchanges, which entered into eighteenth century historiography as a synecdoche for the barbarism of pre-christian morality, was the Athenian claim that the Melians must submit to their dominion, or be destroyed utterly:

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[58] Alexander, I, p. 241.

[59] 'Catherine Talbot to Jemima Grey, November 8 1744', Bedfordshire & Luton County Archives, Lucas Papers, L30/9a (1), Letter 93.

> *Mel.* But how can it be profitable for us to serve, though it be so for you to command?
>
> *Ath.* Because you by obeying shall save your selves from Extremity; and we not destroying you, shall reap Profit by you.[60]

Talbot's initial response, which will be revised as she reads and discusses Thucydides further, is to perceive the failure of her 'beloved Grecians' to conform to her expectations. Talbot couches her critique in the language of modern sociability. The discourse in which Thucydides is engaged, is one of political and military history, and the discussion between the Melians and Athenians in particular, takes place within a strange hinterland between historical narrative and philosophical allegory. Thucydides anthropomorphises the states and uses them to reflect differing political archetypes which, when translated through Enlightenment reflections on philosophical 'manners', allows for the ready translation of politics into social mores. Within this correspondence a critique emerges in which the male-dominated sphere of ancient Athens, with all the rationalism and enlightenment attributed to it by figures like Shaftesbury, is in fact at the mercy of emotional excess and irrationality.

The other major theme to emerge from Talbot's initial response to Thucydides, and one that resonates with Elizabeth Carter's response to Hume, is the presumption of a historiographical duty incumbent on the modern historian to misrepresent the classical world in pursuit of their own socio-political agenda. Talbot jokingly claims that she cannot start to 'blanche' Frederick the Great, who was in the middle of the disastrous attempt to conquer Bohemia at the time, until she has finished doing so for the Athenians. Talbot shares this conception of popular historical whitewashing with Carter who, as we have seen, sarcastically took issue with the celebratory neoclassicism of her contemporaries. As she put it in her discussion of Hume; 'Modern compilers give us a fine picture of the manners of heathen antiquity, but their own historians are more honest'. She also, in a letter of the 29th of October 1747, voices her doubts over the

[60] Thucydides, *The history of the Grecian War: in eight books,* trans. Thomas Hobbes, 2 vols, (London: printed by B. Motte, 1723), II, p.481. For examples of eighteenth century assessments of this passage, see Kames 1774, II, p. 325, which treats the dialogue as symptomatic of the corruption of pre-Christian morality, or the staunchly Whig Sir William Meredith's (1724–1790), *Historical remarks on the taxation of free states* (London: printed for the author, 1778), pp. 66–7, which applies the Melos episode to the conflict between Britain and the colonies, aligning the tyranny of the Athenians/British with excess and luxury leading to moral bankruptcy.

veracity of the popular heroic image of Cyrus the great, on the basis of her father's sceptical influence; 'my father has almost persuaded me to believe Xenophon's history a mere fiction; if so, by all other accounts he is just like other conquerors, and Thomyris did mighty well, and has my free leave to cut off his head.'[61] Talbot and Carter parody the 'submissive' reading of history advocated by eighteenth century conduct literature, based as it was on the engagement with history as a succession of models of appropriate behaviour. They instead postulate this conceit of standard historiographical whitewashing as a means of exploring the potential for alternative, dissident historical narratives to emerge. Talbot's most defiantly critical approach to Thucydides and, through him, ancient Athens itself emerges through such a dissident narrative. In January of 1745, having finished the text, but still dwelling on the difficulties it has given her, Talbot writes to Carter, applying both the themes of counter-narrative, and comparative history of manners to bear on a particularly difficult-to-justify portion of Thucydides' text, Pericles' famously dismissive speech to the wives of Athens:

> In my poor opinion, who am so prudent that I would fain make Pericles and Thucydides speak civilly to me, and to do them justice, have courage enough to oppose the sentiment of this venerable pedant, and a very just one. Gentleness and reserve are such becoming qualities, that it is perhaps no inconsiderable privilege of our sex to be placed amongst *fair Virtue's silent train.* The well-bred Pericles did not mean to say, Go mind your spinning and hold your tongues – but what he did mean to say I will leave it to you to tell me.[62]

As before, Talbot's incredulity at Pericles' dismissive tone towards the Athenian wives is represented as the product of a lack of mixed company, leading to a failure of manners. The moral failure of the Athenian state is encapsulated in the inability of individuals within it to display the appropriate behaviours towards one another which constitute a morally developed state like modern Britain. Pericles' rudeness and status as a 'venerable pedant', who fails to 'speak civilly' to her, are more than mere social *faux pas*; they signify an empathic failure indicative of a failed society. The inverse of Montagu's celebratory vision of modern friendship, Pope also emerges as a gloss on what Talbot sees as the failure of Athenian sociability. Talbot's allusion to Alexander Pope's 1714

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[61] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 29 October 1747', ed. Pennington, I, pp. 232-3
[62] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 5 January 1745', ed. Pennington, I, pp. 86–7; For Pericles's speech itself, see Thucydides, II, p. 106; For a comparable critique of the style of Thucydides, see 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot 5 December 1744', ed. Pennington, I, p. 80.

Temple of Fame 'Fair Virtue's Silent Train' intensifies her critique by applying it to ancient Greece as a whole. Pope's poem applies this term to Socrates, as an unostentatious figure of quiet heroism. Talbot deftly aligns the silencing of the Athenian women with the execution of Socrates, aligning the modern social failure of Pericles' 'rudeness' with the ancient national tragedy of the death of Socrates. Book III of Pope's *Essay on Man* also circulates in the background of Talbot's critique here, as a quotation from it, the lines 'Thus God and nature link'd the general Frame,/ And had self-love, and social be the same' forms the conclusion of Talbot's 'Essay X: On Self Love'. The essay itself argues along clear humanist lines of the alignment of moral sense and sociability:

> It is surely one of the greatest marks of infinite wisdom, that what, at first sight, may seem only to regard ourselves, is one of the strongest ties to social virtue: and that the very attention to others, which should seem most contrary to our first notions of self-love, is indeed, the truest support, and most rational pursuit of it.[63]

If we return to her analysis of Pericles' speech, with its dismissive dehumanisation and alienating tone, then we can see what initially appears a tongue-in-cheek piece of contrarian anti-classicism as, in fact, a diagnosis of moral bankruptcy akin to that which put Socrates to death. Though Talbot maintains the pose of disbelief, claiming to want Carter to explain away the more troubling implications of Pericles' words, here more than ever it appears more as a satirical gesture towards the pose of passive mimetic interpretation, than a genuine doubt of her own interpretative skill. Between them Carter, and Talbot systematically trouble the waters of the certainty which underpins contemporary co-opting of classical ideals, by arguing that the realities of the ancient world were far from the utopian ideal on which its eighteenth-century legacy depends.

In the Bluestocking approach to Thucydidean Athens, we can see the terms of a gendered critique of neoclassicism emerge. The classical state is detached from its illusory roots in rational transcendence and revealed to be subject to the same irrational tendencies that characterize femininity in the language of contemporary reactionaries against 'feminisation'. This irrationality is caused by a model of civic participation which bars women from the political sphere. By reading against the grain of the historians themselves, Carter and Talbot in particular are able not only to recognize the dangers inherent in contemporary neoclassicism, but also to recognize the canonization of

[63] Talbot 1809, p. 122

historical narratives by those in command of discourse itself, a strain of critique which Montagu took even further in her correspondence and published works.

Elizabeth Montagu, in a 1767 letter to Lord Kames, builds on this historiographical critique and addresses the gendered rhetoric of neoclassical veneration directly. As part of a generally laudatory review of *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) by Adam Ferguson, she couches her conception of nationalist virtue in a similar language of the 'warrior' ethics, even as she is problematizing the straightforwardness of this narrative:

> I approve extreamly of Mr Ferguson in the preference he gives to the magnanimous virtues above the effeminate & luxurious arts of modern life, & wish he could infuse into us, some of that Spartan Spirit he admires so justly. at the same time, if he learnt the practice of virtue at Sparta, it was at athens he was taught to make it doctrine, a Lacedaemonian might have said, when he swallowed his black broth, as alexander did in his rash enterprise, what do I suffer that the Athenians may praise me! had not they perpetuated its memory, their temperance like their broth, had diffused its salubrious effects only through a few individuals & as few ~~Centurys~~ Centuries. What had remaind of Spartan Patriotism for an example to other Countries, other ages, if the same system had prevail'd all over Greece? It was happy for them, that Xenophon & Plato the wisest & best of men, were not their fellow Citizens. It is happy for the World they were not so, & is that State upon a perfectly right foundation where wisdom & virtue are mortal? However, as we are in much more danger of becoming Sibarite, than Lacedaemonians, it is very meritorious in Mr Ferguson, to endeavour to prescribe the native fire of courage & magnanimity in the human breast; for In these piping times of peace, like Gunpowder at the conclusion of a War, being no longer necessary to combat our enemies with, it is wasted in idle fireworks & childish festivity.[64]

The guiding principle of Ferguson's essay is economic. Rather than fantasizing about a citizenry of independent men guided by a fascistic 'warrior spirit' [*ardeur guerriére*], as Rousseau would do, or its essential balance of power between the nobles and the

[64] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 24 March 1767', GD24/1/573/f.9-12. Current critical consensus on this letter follows Ferguson's own reaction to the letter, which was to take offence at its apparent irony, writing to David Hume that 'if I were to plead the cause of Sparta against her I must appeal somewhere else' in 'Adam Ferguson to David Hume, 17 April 1767', *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, ed. by Vincenzo Merolle, 2 vols, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), I, pp. 75–6. Ferguson's most recent editors, Merolle & Heath, follow this response, referring to Montagu's letter as displaying 'feigned admiration'; Eugene Heath & Vincenzo Merolle, *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society,* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), p.50. Karen O' Brien also briefly glosses this letter as evidence that Montagu believed Ferguson was 'too favourable to the ancient world'. O' Brien, p. 91, fn. 76.

citizen-body, like his early modern fellow admirer of the Spartans, Macchiavelli, Ferguson primarily grounds his endorsement of Sparta in the well known state practice of banning looting and wealth accumulation, thus preventing wealth disparity from emerging and leading to 'ambition and vanity'.[65] Nevertheless his celebratory description of the state in his chapter 'On Civil Liberty' is just as heartfelt, with a quotation from Xenophon strongly implying that he perceived the economic equality of the Lacedaemonians as leading to a near-utopian state of civic virtue:'As one man excels another…so the Spartans should exceed every nation, being the only state in which virtue is studied as the object of government'.[66] While Ferguson merely treats Xenophon's account as an unquestionable source of historical data, Montagu pushes this analysis into a reflection on the nature of the historical record. In this letter she argues that, while Spartan civil society is superior to that of Athens, it is to the Athenian chroniclers and laconophiles like Xenophon himself, that history owes its veneration of the of the Lacedaemonian system: 'It was happy for them, that Xenophon & Plato the wisest & best of men, were not their fellow Citizens'.

Montagu's interpretation can be seen as a subtle but meaningful development on Ferguson's argument. For him, the Athenian literati represent a social order defined by economic inequality, one step towards the decadent modern states to which he refers

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[65] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes,* (Dresde: M.M Rey, 1755), p.x; M.N.S. Sellers, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: Republicanism, Liberalism and the Law* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p.47; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society,* (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Millar & T. Cadell, 1767), p. 245; for an overview of the practice of Laconism in eighteenth century political philosophy in Britain, see Stephen Bygrave, *Uses of Education: Readings in Enlightenment Theory in England,* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2009), pp. 123–145.

[66] Ferguson, p. 244; translated from Xenophon's *Constitution of The Lacedaemonians* 10 paragraph 4; curiously, the 1925 translation of this text, by Marchant and Bowerstock, makes the discussion of modern civic virtue even more explicit, by translating 'ἀρετῇ', Ferguson's 'virtue', as 'gentlemanly conduct'. See Xenophon, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, trans. E. C. Marchant, G. W. Bowersock, 7 vols, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), *Perseus Library of Classical Texts,* <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0032.tlg010.perseus-eng1> [accessed 20 September 2018], (chapter 10, para. 4); Montagu's conception of Spartan artistic silence is one which persisted through her later correspondence, see her juxtaposition of 'Epic poets' with 'a poor Spartan, unassisted, uneloquent, unadorned', in 'Elizabeth Montagu to Lord Lyttelton, 23 December 1769', Correspondence of M[rs] Elizabeth Montagu, British Library, London, BL Add MS 40663, f. 9.

as 'Polished Nations'.[67] However, their existence as chroniclers of civic history, whilst inferior to the practice of martial republican masculinity in defence of the polis has, for her, a role in the practice of a patriotic, civic humanist constitution. The fact that Montagu provides a space for such 'Polished' characteristics is all the more significant given the fact that Montagu, like Talbot, retains a strict gender binary, particularly in relation to periods of national crisis. She, too, attacks the 'effeminate and luxurious arts of modern life'.[68] This is an idea which underpins her educational philosophy as well, in a 1769 letter to Benjamin Stillingfleet, she presents Classical education as a masculinizing corrective to innate modern effeminacy; 'I would willing sacrifice much Greek & Latin to preserve the Child's innocence, but if he is weak & effeminate he will be a prey to the temptations of idleness, luxury, & vanity, when he becomes a man, & be perhaps among the meanest liveried slaves of a Court, or the Duke of a gaming table.'[69] However, Montagu's critique of 'effeminacy' acts to distance the connotations of luxury and indolence from the true public role of modern women of her class, rather than a self-hating attack on femininity itself. Ferguson, like Shaftesbury, sees politeness itself as evidence of the degeneration into effeminate luxury:

> When men, being relieved from the pressure of great occasions, bestow their attention on trifles; and having carried what they are pleased to call *sensibility* and *delicacy*…have recourse to *affectation*, in order to enhance the pretended demands, and accumulate the anxieties, of a sickly fancy, and enfeebled mind. In this condition, mankind generally flatter their own imbecility under the name of *politeness*.[70]

This passage is clearly in Montagu's mind when she writes to Kames, given the

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[67] See the following, for example, in his discussion of the urban poor voting under an Athenian democracy, evocative of the same anxieties brought about by popular demagogues in the 21st century:
"Sunk under the sense of their personal disparity and weakness, they were ready to resign themselves entirely to the influence of some popular leader, who flattered their passions, and wrought on their fears". Ferguson, p. 287.

[68] Montagu's participation in such crisis-moment 'gender panics' is on full display in her discussion of the Parisian *poissardes* following the Women's March on Versaille in 1789. As Emma Major argues in *Madam Britannia,* 'The supposed masculinity of French revolutionary women troubled and fascinated Montagu and her circle', Major 2012, p. 254; for examples of their discussions of the fishwives, see 'Elizabeth Montagu to Matthew Montagu, 11 Oct 1789', MO 3924; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 25 Oct 1789', MO 3663; & 'Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, October 1789', *The Letters of Sarah Scott,* ed. by Nicole Pohl, 2 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), II, p. 320.

[69] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Benjamin Stillingfleet, 27 September 1769', MO 5132.

[70] Ferguson, pp. 393–4, emphasis Fergusons.

resonances between mankind 'deprived of great occasions' in Ferguson, and 'piping times of peace' in her letter. I would contend, however, that Montagu's letter, by its very existence, is acting to undercut Ferguson's association between politeness and effeminate luxury, by instead aligning polite mixed conversation (of the type embodied literally in the letter she is in the process of writing) with the acts of the Athenian scribes, transforming the brutal, warlike invective of Ferguson's social critique into the measured, detached stance of the cultural commentator, the role she inhabits throughout her letters to Kames. Montagu's analysis can be seen as the discursive extension of the discussions of Thucydides discussed above. Like Carter, Montagu identifies the hyper-masculine political sphere of ancient Sparta as essentially irrational and lacking in true civilization. Like Talbot, she aligns the civilizing process on a national scale, through artistic work and historical recording, with the process of cultivating relationships on an individual scale, in the manner which Emma Major identifies with the 'Bluestocking Millennium': 'The mapping of the public onto the private' represents, as Major argues, 'a fundamental shift in language that not only signals a sense of community but also constructs that community in such a way as to protect it'.[71] By translating the body politic into a private community, the Bluestockings are able to conceptualise a place for themselves, and their ancient foremothers, as public moralists. This is a radical development in itself, drawing ancient women, like the Agrippina with whom we started this chapter, out of the domestic sphere into public discourse. With this articulation of the correlation between critique of the public sphere and the transmission of the classical legacy in mind, let us now explore Montagu's teasing out of 'femininity' from 'feminalities' as it entered the public discourse itself, through Montagu and Lord Lyttelton's collaborative production, *Dialogues of the Dead.*

"I wish an honest muse would lash the genteel vice": Montagu's Fashionable Satire

The composition of George Lyttelton and Elizabeth Montagu's collaborative neoclassical satire *Dialogues of the Dead* (1759) has been critically recognized as a material

[71] Emma Major, 'The Politics of Sociability: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 175-192. (p. 183)

reflection of the twin strands of Bluestocking cultural critique and community expression. Elizabeth Eger links it with Hannah More's poem *The Bas Bleu* as an examples of a 'conversational' texts which 'bridge[s]' 'the boundary between private and public spheres' and 'can be seen as analogous to the unique ability of conversation not only to bridge and connect the two realms, but also to open a new intellectual space for Enlightenment women.'[72] I would argue that the analogies between *The Bas Bleu* and Montagu's contributions to *Dialogues of the Dead* can be extended to account for the ways in which they utilise classical models to develop this 'new intellectual space'. *Dialogues of the Dead*, as I will argue, represents not only a demarcation of the 'feminine' from 'feminalities', building on Montagu's responses to Tacitus and Ferguson, but it also participates in a re-conceptualisation of the threat of feminisation into that of gender violation. The image of a masculinised woman is presented as a parallel to the feminised male associated with the *Bon ton,* drawing the gendered critique of the anti-feminization reactionaries into the service of enlightened femininity itself. Of the six dialogues which Montagu wrote, her decisions as to which to see through into publication and which to maintain in coterie circulation only attest to her sense of the public nature of this project. As Eger observes, she may have withheld a dialogue between Cleopatra and Berenice, which represents Cleopatra as cynically wielding sentimental power over the more idealistic Berenice 'due to its potentially negative moral message'.[73] Whilst the themes of this dialogue are reflective of the same anxieties about power dynamics in the ancient world as we saw in Montagu's reading of Tacitus, Montagu chooses not to contribute them to public discourse, preferring to couch her specifically gendered critique in the public facing image of M[rs] Modish in a particularly comical stab at the Beau Monde in Dialogue XXVII: 'Mercury & a Modern Fine Lady'.[74] Where dialogues XXVII and XXVIII are satirical attacks on modern indolence and reading practices respectively, XXVI initially appears out of place, in that it contains far fewer overt references to the modern world. Where Mrs Modish name-drops Vauxhall and Ranelagh, and dialogue XXVIII ends with a cumbersome re-iteration of the notion that

[72] Eger 2006, p. 301; see also Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740–1790*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 78 for a discussion of the text's coterie origins.
[73] Elizabeth Montagu, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle,* ed. by Gary Kelly & Elizabeth Eger, 6 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), I, p.133.
[74] See, for example, the praises Elizabeth Carter lavishes on Montagu's character in 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 19 May 1760', Carter 1817, I, p. 83 and Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 23 May 1760'. Carter 1817, I, pp. 87–88.

Richardson (appropriately given who printed the text of *Dialogues*) and Fielding are the only novelists worth reading, the closest XXVI comes to a contemporary reference is a possible allusion to Isaac Newton, and other 'Philosophers [who] have entered so far into divine wisdom as to explain…the dimensions, distances, and causes of the revolutions of the planets.'[75] Instead, the dialogue offers a dichotomy between two visions of virtuous masculinity. Hercules, naturally, represents the martial, military heroism of the Homeric age, while Cadmus, founder of Thebes, is the embodiment of scholarly sophistication and learning. While the debate centres on the conventional humanist debate of action against *otium*, the language of the interlocutors reflects the feminised vision of civic responsibility that underpins its thesis, and which we saw reflected in Montagu's letter to Kames. Cadmus' case for his establishment of Theban law as a greater feat than Hercules' monster slaying, for example, evokes a modern politics of sensibility:

> By Wisdom, by Art, by the united strength of civil community, men have been enabled to subdue the whole race of Lions, Bears and Serpents, and what is more, to bind in Laws and wholesome regulations the ferocious Violence and dangerous Treachery of the human disposition…The writings of Sages point out a private path of Virtue, and shew that the best empire is self-government, and subduing our passions the noblest of conquests.[76]

Society, conceived as a civil community of mutually beneficial individuals, acts as a corrective against the bestial inclinations of its dissident members. Into this environment, intellectuals like Cadmus are positioned in the role given to women in Humean conversational philosophy, providing an emotional and sentimental corrective to the violent passions of the militaristic populace, the same role which she would give to the Athenian intellectuals seven years later when juxtaposing them with the Spartans.[77] As Montagu puts it 'Letters keep a frugal, temperate nation from growing ferocious.' The implicitly feminine nature of the intellectuals Cadmus is invoking is offset by the Shaftesburian masculinity of Hercules, who asks 'But do not Arts and Sciences render men effeminate, luxurious and inactive[?]'[78]

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[75]George Lyttelton, *Dialogues of the Dead,* (London: printed by Samuel Richardson for W. Sandby: 1759), p. 296
[76] Ibid, p. 292; 298.
[77] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 24 March 1767', GD24/1/573/f.9-12
[78] Lyttelton, p. 299; 298

While Montagu stops short of advocating female intellectuals directly, just as she does in her discussion of Ferguson, she does exploit the feminine persona of Virtue to her fullest extent in her description of the good works of the male intellectuals who serve her 'and celebrate the noble choice of those, who…preferred her to Pleasure'.[79] By reminding the reader twice in this short dialogue, of the story of Hercules' decision to follow Virtue rather than Pleasure, Montagu retains the image of a feminine allegorical Virtue throughout the text. This defangs the patriarchal case of the Shaftesburian Hercules, making the ultimate goal of social virtue rest in a female figure after all.

Montagu's subtle conflation of patriarchal arguments into anti-intellectualism is maintained in her third dialogue, XXVIII, between Plutarch, puzzled by the contemporary neglect of his *Lives,* replete as they are with exempla for virtuous behaviour, and a modern Bookseller, eager to tout *The Lives of the Highwaymen* and dissolute modern novels instead. Their discussion, which revolves around a critique of novels as a genre, and the value of moral examples in the correction of modern manners, contains a digression on chivalric literature, which serves as a vehicle for the same conflation of abstract virtue with femininity seen in Dialogue XXVI:

> Monsieur Scuderi tells me [Romances] were written in the times of Vigour and Spirit, in the Evening of the gallant days of Chivalry, which though then declining had left in the hearts of Men a warm glow of Courage and Heroism; and they were to be called to Books as to Battle by the sound of the Trumpet: he says too, that, if the writers had not accommodated themselves to the Prejudices of the age, and written of bloody battles and desperate encounters, their works would have been esteemed too effeminate an amusement for Gentlemen.[80]

Chivalry, like Hercules' antiquated martial virtue, is once again set against the abstracted intellectuality which it dismisses as 'effeminate'. As before this masculinity is tacitly aligned with a chaotic lack of control over the passions. Where in the previous dialogue it was associated with violence and bestial behaviour, here it is aligned with the barbaric impulses towards violence which are, in spite of whatever moralising is subsequently attached to them, the subject matter of such stories. There is an additional joke, in the fact that 'Monsieur Scuderi', the author of chivalric romances like *Artamene, ou le Grand*

[79] Lyttelton, p. 299.
[80] Lyttelton, p. 314; For a discussion of this passage in relation to Montagu and Lyttelton's conceptions of chivalry within the mid-eighteenth century revival of interest in the chivalric to which they are responding, see O' Brien, pp. 140–1.

Cyrus (1648–53) and *Ibrahim, ou l'illustre Bassa* (1641), is actually Madeleine de Scudery (1607-1701), the salonniere and advocate of female education in treatises like *Les Femmes Illustres* (1642). Extending the feminisation of learning, Montagu literally places the definition of ideal masculinity in the mind of a learned lady.

This brings us to the most celebrated dialogue in Montagu's set, though also the most problematic one, Dialogue XXVII. The characterisation of Mrs Modish is a fairly conventional representation of the empty-headed and superficial socialite, capable of nothing but cards and gatherings, in the mould of 'fair Agnes' from Manley's *New Atlantis,* or her namesakes in *Spectator* 254 (1711) and Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband* (1704), both of which serve as potential models for Montagu's caricature. Beyond these satirical echoes however, Montagu's theme is the far more sensitive concern over the danger, which the empty language of the luxurious *bon ton* holds for the domestic sphere.[81] Modish describes the primary goal of her existence as fashionable 'Diversion', empty socialising at the pleasure gardens and card-assemblies, to the extent that she abandons her family: 'I did not mean to insist on any engagement *with my husband and children*; I never thought myself engaged to them.'[82] When pressed on this by Mercury, she admits that pleasure was not her primary goal: 'as to Pleasure I have enjoyed none since the novelty of my Amusements was gone off.' She even goes so far as to express a hope that she will be able to drink at the waters of Lethe, and obliterate her memories of such a life. When pressed again, Modish admits that she doesn't really know why she acted as she did. She was influenced by society as a whole 'my friends always told me diversions were necessary', and by authority figures external to the home 'my Doctor assured me dissipation was good for my spirits', but ultimately these figures and herself were subordinated to the '*bon-ton'*.[83] Beyond the obvious dig at French fashions in particular (emphasised later in the references to French music- and dancing-masters), the negatively defined, almost satanic, concept of *Bon-ton* is an epistemological void which stands in the space of true societal bonds:

> It is one of the privileges of the *Bon ton* never to define, or to be defined. It is the child and the Parent of Jargon. It is – I can never tell you what it is: but I will

[81] Delariviere Manley, *Secret memoirs and manners of several persons of quality of both sexes. From the new Atalantis, an island in the Mediterranean,* 3 vols, (London: Printed for John Morphew, 1720), III, pp. 51–2
[82] Lyttelton, p. 301
[83] Lyttelton, p. 302

> try to tell you what it is not. In conversation it is not Wit; in manners it is not Politeness; in behaviour it is not Address; but it is a little like them all.[84]

Through the language of epistemological chaos Montagu articulates an anxiety over the absence of empathic ties, or rationally conceived moral bonds, the building blocks of civilised society.[85] The degree to which Montagu's argument that the *Bon ton* represents a moral and social threat is read through the classical frameworks discussed at the beginning of the chapter is thrown into sharp relief when we consider her epistolary use of the comparable term, the Italophobe 'Maccaroni', used to describe Italian-influenced effeminate men. In a 1766 letter to David Garrick, Montagu defines the Maccaroni it as 'something between annihilation and brute existence…to be a Maccaroni is – to be and not to be', almost verbatim echoing her definition of the *Bon Ton* here.[86] This self-negation is extended almost 20 years later when Montagu writes to James Beattie, expressing relief at the lack of effeminacy in her godson and namesake, Montagu Beattie (b.1778): 'His preference of fencing to dancing shows he will not be a Maccaroni. I am apt to believe, that the Dancing Master rather teaches certain institutions of motion & gesture agreable to certain opinions of the age & Country, than universal gracefulness.'[87] Though framed through the esoteric framework of dancing itself, Montagu's juxtaposition of fashionable distractions with universal aesthetic principles distinctly

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[84] Lyttelton, p. 303

[85] Montagu's conceit of the term 'bon-ton' itself as a symbol of epistemological meaninglessness was picked up on by her later readers, including Amabel Yorke, who, in discussing the word 'Paddy Noddy' in a 1769 letter to Talbot, admits to not knowing what it means, then postulating 'Unless it be in some such way as Mrs Montagu defines (a mightily different thing,) the Bon ton. Something whose privilege it is, never to define nor be defined, something – in short I saw like her, it is easier to say what it is not, than what it is.', 'Amabel Yorke to Catherine Talbot, 1769', Bedfordshire & Luton County Archives, Lucas Papers, L30/21/2/12. The playwrights George Colman and Robert Hitchcock both saw potential in this interpretation as well, with Colman employing a catalogue of fashionable vices in an attempt to answer the question 'What is the Bon Ton?' in the prologue to David Garrick's comedy *Bon Ton, or, High Life above Stairs* (London: Printed for T. Becket, 1775), and the epilogue to Hitchcock's *Macaroni* ironically parallels the 'genius of the Bon Ton' with 'Newton's system.' Robert Hitchcock, *The Macaroni, A Comedy,* (York: Printed by A. Ward, 1773)

[86] 'Elizabeth Montagu to David Garrick, 1766', Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, Forster Collection, Forster 48.E/20/55.

[87] 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 28 August 1782', MS 30/2/385; For a more thorough survey of the representation of the Maccaroni in eighteenth century Britain, see Peter McNeil, *Pretty Gentleman: Macaroni Men and the Eighteenth-Century Fashion World* (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2018)

echoes the Platonic grounding of social morality associated with figures like Shaftesbury, evincing a reluctance to abandon the neoclassical resonances of his conception of improving conversation, even as she undermines its central conflation of masculinity with rationality. The particularly gendered nature of this societal collapse is indicated in the Mercury's tragic final speech, when he claims that Mrs Modish will raise her daughters to be (and is implicitly herself one of these) 'wives without conjugal affection, and mothers without maternal care'.[88] The insidious emptiness of the broken society of the *Bon-ton* infiltrates the domestic sphere, and renders its participants insufficient wives and mothers. This failure to fulfil conventional gender-roles, the ubiquitous trope of neoclassical misogynist satire, is here re-cast as a failure of social connection. Like men transformed into women in Shaftesbury's critical vision of politeness, or the effeminate aristocratic fops associated with the importing of French and Italian fashions, women become masculinised by the *bon-ton*.[89] The domestic sphere is merely the sharpest reflection of the broader empathic failure these masculine women have experienced.

There is a troubling epistolary epilogue to *Dialogues of the Dead* which offers the strongest indication of Montagu's sense of public moral obligation in publishing the dialogues that she did. At four o-clock on the eighteenth of January, 1760, Lawrence Shirley, fourth Earl Ferrers, suffering from one of his frequent and unpredictable bouts of paranoia, in which he would contort his face and claim plots and intrigues against him, shot his steward John Johnson in cold blood. He was brought to trial on the 16th of April, found guilty of premeditated murder, and subsequently executed on the 5th of May, hanged at Tyburn having forfeited his right to an execution at the more genteel Tower-Hill due to the heinousness of his crime.[90] The sensationalism of the case, and

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[88] Lyttelton, p. 305

[89]For a discussion of gender in neoclassical satire, see Felicity Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660–1750,* (Lexington KY: Kentucky University Press, 1984), particularly her discussion of infanticide and spousal murder in Dryden's translation of Juvenal's Sixth Satire, p. 83; and for comparable discussions of the failure of eighteenth century society to produce women capable of being good mothers, see Damaris Masham, *Occasional Thoughts in reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* (London: Printed for A. and J. Churchill, 1705), p. 196 and Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1792), passim, esp. pp. 101-103.

[90] For details on the Ferrers case, see Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Shirley, Laurence, fourth Earl Ferrers (1720–1760)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2008), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25432> [accessed 30 March 2017]. For the court proceedings of the case, see *The Trial of Lawrence Earl Ferrers for the Murder of John Johnson,* (London: Printed for S. Billingsley, 1760)

the socially elevated status of the accused, led to the trial of Ferrers becoming a peculiarly theatrical affair, with the cream of London high society mingling with those enterprising or morbid enough to buy tickets to witness the event, being sold by touts at the venue for as much as twenty guineas apiece. A contemporary report on the trial in the *Whitehall Evening Post* reads more like an account of a social gathering at Ranelagh than a description of judicial procedure:

> His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, and the greatest Number of Peers ever known on such an Occasion, attended, most magnificently dress'd and array'd in their Robes… The whole Assembly, when seated, formed the most superb Appearance that the Imagination can paint. The Ladies were all magnificently dressed, and adorned with Jewels.[91]

It is this last detail which appears to have caught the eye of Elizabeth Montagu, either in this account itself, or from first hand accounts of those present. While the crowd which surrounded the courthouse trying to buy their way in appears to have been commonplace, the presence of so many genteel women, pursuing the same thrill of anticipating an execution, led Montagu to fictively add to their number:

> Can one wonder that mistaken piety can make people spectators of ye horrors of an auto de Fe, when ye love of Spectacles can carry Women to see a Murderer receive sentence! If I had been one of his Judges I should have submitted to ye pain of passing sentence; but if justice does not call one to a scene of punishment what could induce one to be present at it? You will believe Mrs Modish was there, tho she does not mention it.[92]

As Mrs Modish is projected into the real world, and placed alongside the ladies of the *Bon ton* witnessing the trial of Ferrers, the terms of her empathic malformation are extended as well. The shattering of domestic ties becomes merely a synecdoche for the greater collapse in empathic connection between individuals, allowing for the barbarous relish these ostensibly polite women are able to enjoy at the sight of a murderer.

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[91] 'London Intelligence', *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer*, Issue 2197, April 15, 1760 - April 17, 1760, *Burney Collections of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century British Newspapers*, [accessed 15 March 2019]. Among these peers, incidentally, was the ubiquitous Horace Walpole, who also describes the event in 'Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 19 April 1760', *Yale Edition of Walpole's Correspondence,* ed. by W.S. Lewis, 47 vols, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), IX, p. 279

[92] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, May 1760', MO 3034.

Montagu's projection of Modish into this scenario also adds another charge against the *Bon ton,* in addition to collapsing gender binaries by stripping women of natural motherhood, it also collapses class binaries by bringing together the actions of the bloodthirsty mob with those of the upper crust ladies. Here again we see the implicit blurring of gender boundaries associated with the gender panics discussed above.

Carter's reply to Montagu's letter was written on the 23rd of May, after the details of Ferrer's hanging were published in horrific detail by the *Whitehall Evening Post,* among others. The executioner did not move the stool far enough from Ferrer's feet, meaning that he was able to partially support himself, prolonging his strangulation.[93] Carter's response succinctly reflects on the empathic failure Montagu has been discussing, 'You very justly censure those fine ladies who, with such a thoughtless gaiety, could crowd to a sight, which must strike every feeling heart with compassion and horror,' before taking Montagu's critique a step further, and offering her solution, appropriately evocative as it is of the language of neoclassical moral improvement:

> I really think the character of Mrs. Modish, may make many a fine lady heartily ashamed, yet how long that salutary effect may last, I know not, or whether she may not content herself with displacing one absurdity to make room for another. Merely to pluck up the weeds of vice and folly as they rise, is an endless task. There will be a constant succession perpetually springing up in vacant ground, and the only way of preventing their growth, is by sowing the mind with principles of duty.[94]

Where John Mee identifies the *Dialogues of the Dead* with an uncomplicatedly Addisonian project of moral improvement in which 'masculine letters [are] softened by feminine politeness', I would argue the nature of the moral improvement which Carter identifies in Montagu's representation of Modish, along with the appeal to universality in Montagu's conception of the *Bon ton* in fact resonate more strongly with a more directly Socratic mode of social improvement, associated with challenge and confrontation.[95] The account of Mrs Modish in particular, maintains the Humean conceit

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[93] 'Postscript. London', *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer*, Issue 2205, May 3, 1760 - May 6, 1760, *Burney Collections of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century British Newspapers*, [accessed 15 March 2019].

[94] 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 23 May 1760', Carter 1817*,* I, p. 88. For a comparable metaphor of the satirist as gardener pulling immoral weeds from the soil of luxuriant society, which also supports the suggestion that Cibber's Betty Modish is a source for Montagu's Mrs Modish, see Colley Cibber, *The Careless Husband* (London: Printed for T. Johnson, 1721), p. 8.

[95] Mee, p. 108.

of feminine social improvement, but disconnects it from the concept of 'softening'. In the Bluestocking reading of classical history, and neoclassical critique of the contemporary limitations on female participation in the public sphere, we can see Montagu, Carter, and Talbot utilizing the same misogynistic frameworks justified through classical scholarship to carve out a place for women as public moralists. Through *Dialogues of the Dead,* we have explored the tensions between their self-consciously neoclassical discourse and the language of 'softening' and commerce associated with bourgeois public sphere, and identified the moral threat which Montagu locates in the figure of the woman who lacks a rational conception of civic participation. In the final section, we will look at the way in which Talbot, Carter and Montagu leveled the classics against figures like Shaftesbury himself, in their reclamation of classical philosophy from what they saw as a cadre of dangerously Francophile, libertine, aristocratic skeptics.

Fashionable Paganism: The Bluestockings vs. The Sceptics

It is a peculiar historical irony that Elizabeth Carter, the Bluestocking writer with the closest acquaintance with classical literature, recognised by her contemporaries as the chief English classicist and answer to the French Madame Dacier, artistically portrayed as both Minerva and a roman matron, and described unflinchingly by modern critics as 'the most prominent English female classicist of the eighteenth century', should be the one of our central three figures to level the sharpest criticism against the classical world.[96] While Carter was as invested in classical scholarship as her public reputation represented her, translating *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758) over the course of almost a decade, and translating and imitating classical poems by Horace, Virgil, Anacreon, and

[96] The comparison with Dacier was very common, being made not only by Talbot, 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 29 July 1745', ed. Pennington, I, p. 101, but also by Thomas Birch, in his review of Carter's translation of Algarotti, as quoted in Melanie Bigold, p. 169, and by Andrew Kippis, *The library or, Moral and Critical Magazine, for the year MDCCLXII*, 2 vols, (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, 1762), II, p. 94. Her status as a renowned classicist was celebrated in both John Duncombe, *Feminiad* (London, Printed for M. Cooper, 1754), pp .22-3, and Elizabeth Benger's *Female Geniad,* (London: Printed for T.Hookham, 1791), p. 37; perhaps strangest of all, Eliza Berkeley, fellow friend and correspondent of Catherine Talbot, referred to Carter in the biographical 'Preface' to the poems of her deceased son George Monck Berkeley, as simply 'Mrs. Epictetus Carter', *Poems of George Monck Berkeley,* (London: Printed for J. Nichols, 1797), p.cci. The paintings referred to are John Fayram, *Elizabeth Carter as Minerva* (c.1735-41) and Katherine Read, *Elizabeth Carter,* (1765). Wilson, p. 509.

many others, she never allowed this artistic respect to transform into an uncritical veneration of Greek and Roman society. Whilst in both cases she is exaggerating for iconoclastic effect, Carter's representation of the national character of the classical Greeks and Romans reflects her suspicion of the 'idealised pictures of heathen antiquity' in her contemporary Enlightenment historians.[97] Her investment in historical accuracy led her to reject scholars whom she saw as attempting to twist classical scholarship into their own purposes. Carter's letters reveal that often this was fairly light-hearted, as in her amused characterisation of Catharine Macaulay's radical republicanism as harmless eccentricity; 'between the Spartan laws, the Roman politics, the philosophy of Epicurus, and the wit of St. Evremond, she seems to have formed a most extraordinary system'; or her incredulous reaction towards Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-6), 'my old friends of Greece and Rome, for any thing they have yet been to me, might as well have been delivered up to the secular arm of Dr. Bryant.'[98] Bryant's speculative mythology was an academic curiosity, engaged with little outside of his own circle of religious syncretist theologians, of whom we will see more in chapter 3 when Montagu takes an interest.[99] Catharine Macaulay, however, was a rival to the Bluestockings in her status as a public female intellectual, her *History of England* (1763-1783) is the definitive radical dissenting whig answer to David Hume's *History of England*. Like Elizabeth Carter herself, Macaulay was painted as a Roman matron to symbolise her reintroduction of ancient virtues to Britain, but where Carter was celebrated for disseminating ancient philosophy, as we saw, Macaulay brought a radical conception of classical republicanism.[100] Carter's casual dismissal of her as a laughably eccentric revisionist comparable to Bryant is a deliberate exclusion of the question of republicanism from the bourgeois public sphere into which Carter is placing her own classical scholarship.

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[97] Wilson, p. 510.

[98] 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 27 August 1757', ed. Pennington, II, p. 260. For Carter's fuller assessment of Bryant's *Analysis* as evidence of the fact that 'When one is professedly invited into the regions of fiction, the further one travels the better. Imagination has a natural right to take the lead, and reason very quietly falls asleep and never interferes in the progress', see 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Vesey, 4 May 1774', Ibid, IV, p. 109. See also 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 June 1774', Carter 1817, II, p. 243.

[99] See Dennis R. Dean, 'Bryant, Jacob (bap. 1717, d. 1804), antiquary and classical scholar,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3795> [accessed 18 Dec. 2018].

[100] For more information on Catharine Macaulay's radical *History*, see Karen O' Brien, 'Catharine Macaulay's Histories of England: A Female Perspective on the History of Liberty' in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, pp.523-537.

The narrative of the construction of Carter's *Epictetus,* according to Montagu Pennington's biased and selective *Memoirs of the Life of Elizabeth Carter*, is one of a private academic project between friends evolving into a revisionist neoclassical manifesto under the pressure of an external moral threat in the form of an imagined plot to undermine the Church of England through deism. Talbot initially proposed the project in 1743, with the casual hint that 'there is no translation' of Epictetus*' Discourses* (the *Enchiridion* had existed in English translation since at least 1567's anonymous *Manuell of Epictetus*) and that she is 'vastly curious' to see it.[101] The fact that Epictetus is identified in this letter as one of Talbot's 'morning books' places this discussion in the intimate context of the shared reading discussed in chapter 1, which could not be further from the public moral mission into which the project evolved. Once the project commences in earnest, however, and Carter is systematically sending the completed pages to Talbot and Secker in the mid 1750s, her friend replies with an anxious warning against the danger of publishing a translation of Epictetus in 'this infidel age', when reflecting on her own role in the conception of the work:[102]

> But this thought of its having been at first my own suggestion, has made me consider it the more attentively, and will, I own, give me very great and very lasting uneasiness, if this excellent translation, when it appears in the world, is not guarded in such a manner with proper notes and animadversions, as may prevent its spreading a mischief that I tremble to think of. The strict morality of it the infidel will throw aside for impracticable nonsense, but be perfectly satisfied that while it deprives him of the encouragements of the Gospel, it frees him from its terrors; and when such a life as he likes is no longer worth living, Epictetus himself will recommend the pistol[103]

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[101] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 11 November 1743', ed. Pennington*,* I, p. 42.
[102] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, March 1755', Montagu Pennington, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs Elizabeth Carter, With a New Edition of Her Poems,* 2 vols, (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1807), I:127.
[103] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 1755', Pennington 1807*,* I, p. 131. This letter can be tentatively dated as the 29th of November, 1755, according to Gwen Hampshire, 'An Edition of Some Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Carter, 1717 to 1806', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1971), p. 225. However, as Hampshire also notes, the letter as given in Pennington's text is an amalgamation of two separate letters from Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, with the second half clearly consisting of a response to the letter from Carter which follows it in the *Memoirs*, and which Hampshire dates on 22 December 1755, meaning that the second half of Talbot's letter remains without a specific date, although late 1755 or early 1756 seems most likely.

The 'infidel' which Talbot has in mind is none other than Shaftesbury himself, and those practitioners of popular stoicism whom she refers to in a later letter as 'Shaftesburian heathens'.[104] As Betty Schellenberg has argued, Talbot's role in the construction of *Epictetus* was 'strongly orientated towards potential ameliorative effects on the translations prospective readership among the fashionable elites', as part of a wider project of the reform of aristocratic manners.[105] Her anxiety, that an insufficiently 'guarded' edition of Epictetus could provide a justification for aristocratic libertinism, seems to have been founded primarily on her 1754 engagement with the *Essays on the Characteristics* (1754) by the Anglican clergyman John Brown (1715-1766). A philosophical refutation of Shaftesbury's own *Characteristics* (1714), Brown's *Essays* explicitly attacked both Shaftesburian libertinage, and took his philosophy to task for its Stoic materialism. On the charge of libertinism, for example, Brown quotes Shaftesbury's claim that 'the Nature of the liberal, polish'd, and refin'd part of Mankind [are] so far…from the mere Simplicity of Babes and Sucklings; that, instead 'of applying the Notion of a future Reward or Punishment to their immediate Behaviour in Society, they are apt [to] look on the pious Narrations to be indeed no better than Children's Tales, or the Amusement of the mere Vulgar' before sarcastically concluding that 'this Philosopher and Patriot' is 'assigning the Reason why Men of Sense should stand clear of the Fears of a Futurity'.[106] In response to the specifically Stoic aspects of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, Brown dedicates an entire chapter to 'The Errors of the Stoic and Epicurean Parties; and the most probable Foundation of these Errors', which attacks Stoicism and Epicureanism as essentially two sides of the same hedonistic materialist multiplicity: 'The Stoic Party dwell altogether on the social or public, the Epicurean no less on the private or selfish Affections…both forgetting, what is unquestionably the Truth, that these social and private Affections are blended in an endless Variety of Degrees.' Brown juxtaposes this with the universal simplicity of the

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[104] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 1755/6', Pennington 1807, I, p. 132; Whilst Stoicism does underpin much of Shaftesbury's personal philosophy, his explicit discussion of the movement takes place primarily in the *Askemata,* or notebook, which remained unpublished until 1900; See John Sellars, 'Shaftesbury, Stoicism, and Philosophy as a Way of Life', *Sophia,* 55.3 (2016), pp.395–408, (p.395)

[105] Betty Schellenberg, 'Catherine Talbot Translates Samuel Richardson: Bridging Social Networks and Media Cultures in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth Century Fiction,* 29.2 (2016), pp. 201–220, (p. 218)

[106] Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* 3 vols, (London: Printed for John Darby, 1714–15), III, pp. 177-8; John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics,* (London: Printed for C. Davis, 1754), pp. 273-4.

'religious principle', which 'aris[es] from such passions as are common to the whole Species'.[107] Talbot's engagement with the *Characteristics* and John Brown's essay in 1754 anticipate her anxieties over Shaftesbury's use of the Stoics:

> I have only looked into the first volume, [of the *Characteristics*] to compare it as I went on with Mr. Browne's very ingenious and elegant answer, but I have met with so many things that offend me excessively as to leave me little inclination to look further. Arrogance, bitterness, prejudice, and obscurity, the falsest reasoning, the absurdest pride, the vilest ingratitude, the most offensive levity, disgrace whatever there was of elegant, and fair, and honest in some of the ideas, and whatever is easy and genteel in some parts of his style.[108]

Not only does Talbot repeat the charges of arrogance and immortality which she draws from Brown, but she also draws out a particular aspect of the Shaftesburian threat that Carter is anxious to combat with her *Epictetus,* the libertine seductiveness of his 'elegant' and 'fair' style. The letter Carter writes in response to Talbot's anxieties combines incredulity with reassurance. While Carter has no time for the proposition tentatively floated by Talbot that 'Epictetus had been acquainted with the writings of the Evangelists', she is unperturbed by the elision of libertinism and Stoic heathenism: 'For my own part, I never had the least apprehension that an author who enjoins so strict a morality, who censures even the fashionable vices which fine gentlemen at present consider as mere trifles, and who discovers so deep a sense of religion, could be studied by bad people'.[109]

Nevertheless, responding to her friend's concerns, Carter adopted two strategies to address the dangers of libertine misinterpretations of Epictetus. Firstly there was the careful reminder in her preface that those 'who profess to admire *Epictetus,* unless they pursue that severely virtuous Conduct which he every-where prescribes, will find themselves treated by him, with the utmost Degree of Scorn and Contempt, directly

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[107] Brown, pp. 167–187; 171; 230; Evidently Thomas Secker was also among Brown's readers at this stage, as his advice to Carter, to remember that 'the heathen morality must be estimated by the notions received amongst their moralists: there being no standard, as amongst Christians, of superior authority' indicates the same critique of Hellenistic materialism. 'Thomas Secker to Elizabeth Carter', Letter No. 1, Egerton Brydges, *Censura Literaria,* 10 vols, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1805), IX, pp. 306-7.

[108] 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 26 November 1754', ed. Pennington, II, p. 187.

[109] 'Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 22 December 1755', Penningon 1807, I, p. 135.

combatting the assumption that the absence of the divine was a license to hedonism.[110] Secondly, and more famously, she 'devoted much of her introduction to a detailed and judicious demonstration of the superior merits of Christianity.'[111] See, for example, her comment in the Introduction that 'the several Sects of Heathen Philosophy serve, as so many striking Instances of the Imperfection of human Wisdom; and of the extreme Need of a divine Assistance, to rectify the mistakes of depraved reason and replace natural Religion on its true Foundation.' Through reflections like this, and her reminder to the reader that 'about the Generality of Mankind, the Stoics do not appear to have given themselves any kind of Trouble', Carter invokes the aristocratic exclusivity of her libertine opponents by using the rhetoric of universality she finds in Brown and Secker.[112] Scholars such as Betty Schellenberg and Jennifer Wallace postulate a clear division between Talbot's concern with moral amelioration and Carter's 'intellectual exercise of the accurate transmission of Epictetus' ideas'. However, I would contest that, for Carter, the two are intertwined.[113]

The skill set Carter displays may be the more overtly academic, but the end goal is still the extraction of an ethical corrective to the idea that moral development takes place within a closed circle of classically educated gentlemen, as proposed by figures like Shaftesbury. Carter's critical apparatus continues this trend, alternating between comments that assert the superiority of scripture over Epictetus' heathen morality, and those that see Epictetus as a pale anticipation of Scriptural morality. An example of the former is her reflection on Epictetus' famous doctrine that one should not mourn for a dead child; 'Stoicism carries Truth into Absurdity; while Christian Philosophy makes all Truths coincide, uniting Fortitude with Tenderness and Compassion'.[114] Her footnote for Epictetus' reflection that 'a Cynic…must be beat like an Ass, and when he is beat, must love all those who beat him' represents a typical example of the latter:

> Compare this with the Christian Precepts, of Forbearance and Love to Enemies, *Matth. V. 39–44*. The Reason will observe, that Christ specifies higher Injuries

[110] Epictetus, *All the Works of Epictetus, which are Now Extant,* trans. Elizabeth Carter, (London: Printed by S. Richardson, 1758), p.xxvi–xxvii.
[111] Gillian Wright, 'Women Reading Epictetus', *Women's Writing,* 14.2 (2007), pp.321–337, (p.333)
[112] Epictetus, p. xxv; xv.
[113] Schellenberg, 'Catherine Talbot Translates Samuel Richardson', p. 218; Jennifer Wallace, 'Confined and Exposed: Elizabeth Carter's Classical Translations', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* 22.2 (2003), pp.315-334, (p.327)
[114] Epictetus, p.448, n. (m)

> and Provisions than Epictetus doth; and requires of all his Followers, Epictetus describes only as the Duty of one or two *extraordinary* Persons, as such.[115]

In both cases, the fundamental distinction comes down to universality once again, with the Stoic doctrine limited to a material epistemology, which is not capable of recognising universal truths of 'Tenderness' and 'Compassion', and a social exclusivity, in which truth is accessible only to the Stoic sage and his inner circle. Whilst this language of universality and materiality is characteristic of Hellenic philosophy in general, I would contend that it bears a more radical tone. When this universality is placed alongside Carter's focus on 'plain' speech throughout the process of translating Epictetus, as in her note to Thomas Secker that 'the Enchiridion is merely plain common sense' and avowing her intention to 'make [Epictetus speak such a language as will make him appear natural and easy to those with whom he is taught to converse', her translation takes on a subversive aspect.[116]

In Carter's *Epictetus*, we can see the most public face of her Classical revisionism. It represents another case of establishing the terms of Bluestocking participation in the cultivation of public virtue, and asserting their place within the public sphere. Where the implicit targets of Montagu and Talbot's engagement with neoclassical discourse are the figures associated with conspicuous consumption, the fops and coquettes of the *bon-ton*, the antithesis to the genteel civic humanist. Both Wallace and Wilson have identified a pragmatism in Carter's *Epictetus* and its apparatus, with regards to the value of Roman Stoicism for an imagined female readership. Wilson finds in it 'a conveniently conservative model of support for women, encouraging them to collude with, as well as assisting them in facing, the limitations of their opportunities', and Wallace places it in the broader context of Carter's 'own distinct classical heritage', which she sees as defined by the same concepts of 'resignation and patent suffering'.[117] Whilst these concepts have a bearing on Carter's *Epictetus,* and on the horizons of expectation which she brings to bear on her engagement with the classical world in general, I would argue that the epistolary background to *Epictetus* suggests that, consciously at least, Carter and Talbot were also invested in cultivating roles of female moral and social reformers

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[115] Epictetus, p. 293, n. (o)
[116] 'Elizabeth Carter to Thomas Secker, [1748]', Pennington 1807*,* I, pp. 112-3.
[117] Wilson, p. 510; Wallace, p. 323.

against the threat of Francophile libertinism.[118]

Though Montagu does not go the lengths of Carter in directly challenging Stoic skepticism on its own philosophical turf, she does have an indirect hand in the evolution of the most dominant counter-skeptical school of philosophy to evolve in the second half of the eighteenth century, that of Common Sense, with its leading figure one of the most famous beneficiaries of Montagu's patronage, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and poet James Beattie. Whilst Montagu and Beattie's relationship would be consolidated and developed through her interest in his poem *The Minstrel, or the Progress of Genius* (1771), and an exchange of letters spanning almost three decades, it was a mutual anxiety over the rise of skepticism which brought them initially together and inspired their other major collaboration in the form of Beattie's collected *Essays.* As Caroline Franklin puts it; 'The alliance between the leading English Bluestocking and the popularizer of Scottish Enlightenment Common Sense philosophy came about because both saw combating religious skepticism as a patriotic and chivalric duty to be staged in the arena of the republic of letters.'[119] Beattie's 1777 *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* explicitly identifies libertine moral relativism as his target in its introduction:

> The aim of some of our celebrated moral systems is, to divest the mind of every principle, and of all conviction; and, consequently, to disqualify man for action, and to render him useless, and wretched. In a word, SCEPTICISM is now the profession of our fashionable inquirers into human nature; a scepticism that is not confined to points of mere speculation, but has been extended to practical truths of the highest importance, even to those of morality and religion.[120]

While Beattie's direct targets are sceptical deists like David Hume, and rational Dissenters like Joseph Priestley, it is possible to see parallels between the terms of Beattie's manifesto, and Carter's philosophical mission in the introduction to *Epictetus.*[121]

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[118] For more on the uneasy class-balance maintained by the Bluestockings as a whole, see Gary Kelly's introduction to the *Bluestocking Feminism* collection, *Bluestocking Feminism,* I, p. xiii.

[119] Caroline Franklin, 'Elizabeth Montagu: A "Critick, a Coal Owner, a Land Steward, a Sociable Creature"', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 81.4, (2018), pp. 497-512

[120] James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism,* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Creech, 1770), p.7

[121] Ibid, p.407

Montagu shared her own conviction on the danger of sceptical materialism with Beattie in the early 1770s, entering into a sarcastic tirade in one of her letters to him in 1772, in the wake of Joseph Priestley's *Free Address to Dissenters* series of tracts (1768-70): First of all she attacks his arrogance, "What sort of a Christian a man is who denies the Divinity of Christ & the truth of the Gospel History. I do not understand if Christ lived & died, & the Evangelists wrote to effect what was imperfect till Dr Priestley came into the World, it is very strange." Then she goes on to offer a grotesque vision of a materialist world with no immortal soul, by offering up a fantasy of Priestley's death: 'had his Mother tumbled down the Kitchen stairs when she was with child of him, had the midwife unskilfully pressd hard on his pericranium, had his nurse slept too sound & snored loud, & overlain him, had a wanton boy in playing with him crackd his skull or broken his back the light of nations, the salvation of mankind had been lost"; Before finally, and most significantly, placing him in an unholy trinity of materialist sceptics: "the Gates of Hell cannot prevail against Christianity, tho they sometimes let forth the Giant spirit of a Bolingbroke, or the keen genius of a Voltaire"[122]

Bolingbroke, like Shaftesbury, is another aristocratic civic theorist, primarily known as the author of *Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism* (1752) and *Reflections concerning Innate Moral Principles* (1752). After waiting expectantly for the posthumous publication of the *Reflections*, Elizabeth Montagu wrote, in a letter to Gilbert West, that she anticipates that it will contain 'a great deal more than we may expect from Lord Bolingbroke, who, I hear, will leave behind him a new system of morality, which is to comprehend all speculative and practical things.' Montagu was appalled when the book was published in 1754 to find that 'He laughs at the faith of Abraham, and I should do so too if Abraham had disputed God's veracity, and then trusted to his promises. I never read such a heap of inconsistencies and contradictions, such a vain ostentation of learning, and if I dared, I would say it, all that can shew, "the trifling head or the corrupted heart. "'[123] The arrogant assumption of inherent moral authority, which Bolingbroke shares with Voltaire and Priestley, is implicitly aligned with the libertinism associated with Shaftesbury. It is also given a tinge of gender panic by the incorporation

[122] 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 14 September 1774.' *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, Vers. 3.0, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. (2017), [accessed 20 September 2018]
< https://doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0010079a1c >.
[123] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, 17 December 1751', ed. Montagu, III, p. 179; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, 14 November 1754', Ibid, p. 280.

of the quote from Pope's attack on 'Sporus', Lord Hervey, in *The Epistle to D^r Arbuthnot,* 'the trifling head or the corrupted heart'. This description appears in a catalogue of flattery and bodily instability, alongside the satanic image of Sporus as the 'familiar toad' who spits 'half froth, half venom'. Pope presents disingenuous pandering as leading to gender instability: 'Now high, now low, now master up, now miss', and, famously, claims that Sporus 'Now trips a lady, and now struts a Lord'.[124] Beattie, too, attacks Shaftesbury's sophistry, presenting Shaftesbury as a misguided classicist in a letter to Montagu in 1774, in which he reflects ironically that 'Plato was one of the first who introduced the fashion of giving us fine words instead of good sense; in this, as in his other faults, he has been successfully imitated by Shaftesbury.'[125]

The end result of this is that by 1776, when Beattie comes to produce the quarto subscription edition of his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth,* his agreement with Montagu's anxieties over libertine scepticism is readily apparent. This brings us to Beattie's contribution to the correspondence between neoclassical discourse, gender, and civic participation, 'Remarks on the Utility of Classical Learning', first published as an addition to the 1776 quarto edition of his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*. As Beattie states in the 'Advertisement' to the text; this edition was published by subscription at the urging of 'some persons of distinction in England, who had honoured me with their friendship, were pleased to express a desire, that the Essay on Truth should be printed in a more splendid form than that in which it had hitherto appeared.'[126] Chief among these 'persons of distinction' was, naturally, Elizabeth Montagu herself. In an attempt to justify the republication to himself and his audience, however, Beattie decided to supplement the core essay on truth with three additional essays, firstly, 'On Poetry and Music' (1762), which compounds the 'common sense' theory of morality Beattie enforces in the *Essay on Truth* by adopting a fundamentally Sentimental aesthetic position. Secondly, there is 'On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition' (1764), which develops this through an assertion of the relationship between incongruity and humour, allying laughter with responses to

[124] Alexander Pope, *The Works of M^r Alexander Pope*, 2 vols, (London: Printed for J. Wright, 1735), II, p. 73.
[125] 'James Beattie to Elizabeth Montagu, 3 May 1774', MS 30.1.74.
[126] James Beattie, *Essays. On the nature and immutability of truth, ... On poetry and music, ... On laughter, and ludicrous composition. On the utility of classical learning,* (Edinburgh: printed for W. Creech, 1776), 'Advertisement', n.p. [p. 2]

phenomena which transgress the established standards of the 'common sense'.[127] The third of these additions is the 'Remarks on the Utility of Classical Learning' (1769), which comes under the closest scrutiny of Montagu, and articulates a theory of neoclassical civic morality based on the broad knowledge base of a classically educated individual compared to modern concerns with technical specialisation. On the 24th of March, 1775, Elizabeth Montagu writes a letter to Beattie, discussing the nascent Essay, and pushing a defence of classical learning into a far more radical discursive territory than Beattie's own document:

> I am glad you have enlarged your Essay on the advantage of Classical Learning, the more it is recommended the better, Perfectly polite manners cannot be learnt by conversing with mechanicks or with farmers: much useful knowledge may be got of them, but whoever keeps only such company will have a contracted mind, neither polish'd nor enlarged enough to speak with information or act with graces in all occasions. a man who is conversant only with modern authors will have (if I may be allowed the expression) a Technical character. He may in some art or science make a tolerable figure but he will never be an universal man. In Greece & in Rome, men were men. In modern life, they are Lawyers, or Physicians, or Divines, they are enlisted under some banner or incorporated into some body. The general talents cultivated by a man who was at one time employ'd at ye head of an army & at ye return from the Campaign presiding in a Senate, or as a Legislator making laws, cannot be found amongst our Writers. It is from this full knowledge of all that relates to human society that the perfect author is form'd, By reflection from all sorts of subjects we receive a pure untinctured light. I am conscious to get my sweet little nephew Classically educated, but the Classics are best learn'd at the great schools, & nothing can be more contrary to the Roman & athenian spirit than ye manners & morals of great schools.[128]

This letter perfectly blends the principles of neoclassical conceptions of public morality and social engagement which we have seen throughout this chapter, with the principles of unity, both abstract and pragmatic, drawn from Carter and Talbot's defence of Epictetus and her own fashionable satire. Her discussion is laced with the familiar tenets of classical politeness, such as her reflection that 'in Greece and Rome, men were men'. 'Perfectly polite manners' become not only the goal of the ideal gentleman, but the solution to the problem of 'universal manhood'. Conversation and the (feminine coded)

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[127] For more information on Beattie's 'Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition' in relation to contemporary theories of humour, see Lydia B. Amir, *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), pp.310–11, n.41.

[128] 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 19 Oct 1789', MS 30.2.225.

affective bonds that these imply, become the means by which the young man can reach the level of intellectual and moral unity achieved by the ancients. In short, classical perfection, or 'classical grace' to borrow Montagu's earlier term, is achieved through mixed company, rather than in spite of it. However, this mixed company is represented through a framework which avoids a reading based on the Addisonian conception of a bourgeois public sphere grounded in economic participation. Whilst Montagu's explicit points of reference are 'farmers' and 'mechanicks', who would be excluded from the bourgeois public sphere anyway, she goes on to reject the premise that 'useful knowledge' as sufficient basis for civic responsibility, leaving the individual 'neither polish'd nor enlarged enough to speak with information or act with graces in all occasions'. Instead Montagu's 'perfect author' and 'universal man' are identified as appealing to a neoplatonic image of abstract unity: 'By reflection from all sorts of subjects we receive a pure untinctured light.' Moral and social development is defined not by practical application, as in the Addisonian model, but by development towards an overarching universal goodness, as in Shaftesburian classicism. This worldview is explicitly rejected too, however, by the reference to 'the manners and morals of the great schools', which Montagu casts aside as being antithetical to 'the Roman and Athenian spirit' which, as she has just established, is based on universal communication rather than the closed spheres of classically educated gentlemen's clubs. In the most direct amalgamation of neoclassical conceptions of civic virtue with the open political participation of the Addisonian public sphere, Montagu argues that the type of masculine, rational, Socratic personal development associated with the civic humanist subject can only be achieved through conversation with an open and diverse public sphere.

By tracing the Bluestocking responses to classical history, and the neoclassical co-opting of the models of sociability and civic virtue which appealed to an idealised version of the classical world, this chapter has aimed to explore the ways in which Carter, Talbot and Montagu's conception of public morality was both constrained and liberated by their engagement with classical and neoclassical discourse. This chapter aimed to problematize the simple correlation between the Bluestocking programme of conversation as moral improvement and the code of politeness associated with the 'modern', bourgeois public sphere. By recognizing elements of traditional neoclassical discourse, such as Socratic conceits of moral improvement or Platonic moral absolutism

within Montagu, Carter and Talbot's letters and print texts I have highlighted the degree to which they were limited by horizons of expectation which coded civic virtue as aristocratic and masculine. I have also shown how their acts of reading and interpretation cut against these categories by replacing femininity with gender fluidity as the central threat to rationality, identifying the aristocratic co-opting of classical philosophy as immoral and unpatriotic, and finally by re-orientating the project of rational self-development from a closed, homogeneous community into the body politic as a whole.

These acts of redefinition and re-alignment represent a microcosm of the broader bluestocking project for conceptualising rational English femininity, but they are indicative of the potential merit in tracing a particular theme or discourse through a range of texts and correspondences. We may construct a fuller and subtler picture of the strategies by which creative correspondents engage with the dominant cultural discourses in which they find themselves. The final chapter will continue this pattern of tracing discourse from epistolary documents into print and vice-versa, but now it will be located within a set of discrete correspondences, and will be centred on the correlations between interpretation and network function, uniting the theme of sociability from chapter 1, with the interest in discursive transformation from chapter 2.

Chapter III: Space & Control: Discursive Power in Montagu's Patronage Relationships

Chapter 1 addressed the ways in which discourses surrounding affectivity and empathy were instrumental in the cultivation of intimacy in Bluestocking epistolary networks. Chapter 2 has focussed on the acts of creative 're-making' which constituted their method of re-conceptualising historiographical discourses on gender. Chapter 3 will draw the two together by exploring the ways in which Elizabeth Montagu converted discursive authority into social power through her patronage and coterie relationships. Re-assessing the Foucauldian dynamic of discourse and power within correspondence networks will allow for a cohesive engagement with the interplay between ideology and personal relationships which are central to Montagu's creative and literary critical activities. Whilst these power dynamics are latent throughout Montagu's correspondence as a whole, I have chosen to explore them where they appear in their starkest and most defined forms. Montagu's longer patronage relationships, such as those with Elizabeth Carter, whose *Epictetus* she helped to promote, or James Beattie, evolved into a state of intimacy where they read more like friendships, and the class and status distinctions sink into familiarity. This chapter instead will look at two relationships in which Montagu's power and status places her in an irreconcilable role of discursive authority: those she had with James Woodhouse between 1763 and 1788, and Robert Potter between 1778 and 1790, and one in which her interlocutor attempts to wield class and gender authority over Montagu herself, her correspondence with Lord Kames between 1766 and 1782.

On a social-historical level, these three case studies serve to both illustrate and develop the essential parallels which may be drawn between the intertwined modes of mid-eighteenth-century textual dissemination represented by Woodhouse, Potter, and Kames, those of patronage, subscription, and coterie publications. Patronage and coterie publications have their own recognised systems of control. In the case of patron-client structures, Dustin Griffin's *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* highlights the 'control of culture', implicit in a system by which those with financial and social power dictated the productions of their dependents.[1] In the case of coterie structures, this study follows Schellenberg in uniting Trolander and Tenger's conception that 'literary activity functions

[1] Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 267-9, 42-3.

internally to "create and build social bonds,'" with the interplay of internal and external discursive influences she draws from network theory, as discussed in my introduction:

> Social conditions external to any particular network...codes invoked in communications between members of different status groups, or the rules known to govern manuscript exchange between members of any coterie – create a climate of expectation within that network. What becomes interesting in this light is how an individual group might negotiate and refine those expectations, or reject them altogether.[2]

Where this study will build on this thesis, is in its assertion that subscription publication, at least as understood by some of its practitioners, like Robert Potter, reflects the same dynamics of cultural control, and internally defined 'climates of expectation', as those which constitute patronage and coterie networks. Subscription publication has a unique status for coteries like the Bluestockings. It facilitates the evolution and promotion of a form of literature which can simultaneously promote the values of niche or idiosyncratic interest, elite culture, and sociability from the world of scribal circulation, whilst simultaneously looking out to the broad-church, accessible, commercial sphere of popular print.[3] This duality of focus was even capitalised on by publishers such as Robert Dodsley (1704–1764). He exploited the coterie origins of the poems of William Shenstone, another of his clients, in the 'Advertisement' attached to his *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1748-82) as a means of demonstrating their literary and cultural value; in Schellenberg's words, '[by] marshalling the cultural authority associated with scribal

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[2] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740–1790,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 16-17; For examples of Elizabeth Montagu herself wielding this power over community membership, see Deborah Heller and Stephen Heller, 'A Copernican Shift: Mapping the Bluestocking Heavens' in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role,* ed. by Deborah Heller, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 17-54 (pp.34-35)

[3] Kelly discusses the centrality of subscription publication to the articulation of Bluestocking literary practices and ideology, Gary Kelly, 'Women's Provi(de)nce: Religion and Bluestocking Feminism in Sarah Scott's Millenium Hall (1762)', in *Female Communities: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities, 1600-1800*, ed. by Nicole Pohl and Rebecca D'Monte, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 156-182, (p. 157); Daniel Woolf, in his discussion of the influence of Bluestocking culture on Enlightenment historiography, cites subscription publication as one of the means by which female interest groups could influence production and dissemination of particular niche historical narratives. Daniel Woolf, 'A most indefatigable love of history': Carter, Montagu, and female discussions of history, 1740–1790', *Women's History Review*, 20.5 (2011), pp.689-718, (p.690)

culture, Dodsley's project…put that culture on display.'[4] We will see this pull between public and private interests at play throughout the chapter, but at it is most fraught in the discussion of Potter's subscription publication. Let us begin, however, by exploring the interpretative stakes of a more clear-cut relationship of patron and beneficiary, in the letters of James Woodhouse written in the 1760s.

Brainwashing James Woodhouse: Reading and Interpretation in the Montagu-Woodhouse Correspondence

Elizabeth Montagu's extant correspondence with James Woodhouse, the 'Poetical Shoemaker', consists of twelve letters written between 1763 and 1769, during the period in which their personal and professional relationship was at its strongest. She had taken him under her patronage from 1763, and installed him as land bailiff at Sandleford in 1766, the same year that she saw the second edition of his *Poems on Sundry Occasions* (1764) published by subscription as *Poems on Several Occasions* by pulling in her London coterie contacts.[5] In letter to Sarah Scott in 1765, Montagu describes the process of introducing 'my poetical shoemaker' into polite society;

> I never saw so much humility & gentleness. He is perfect simplicity without awkwardness, His voice is remarkably musical, his language unaffected but elegant. I had him at dinner with the great & the learned (I mean only such as desired to see him) he was very silent never spoke but when addressd to, he answerd with so much good sense & frankness as greatly pleased every body.[6]

In this brief anecdote Montagu articulates not only her investment in Woodhouse's 'unlettered genius' through the references to his 'musical' voice and 'perfect simplicity', associating him with the affective artistic honesty we saw in the discussion of Sévigné in

[4] Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries,* p. 117; for the full account of Dodsley and Shenstone's collaboration, see Ibid, pp. 115–8.
[5] James Woodhouse, *Poems on Several Occasions,* (London: Printed for the Author, 1766), the lists of Subscribers and Benefactors which open this edition do include a wide range of Montagu's London connections, including her aristocratic allies Lord Lyttelton (to whom the edition is dedicated) and Lord Bath, but also familiar Bluestockings and Bluestocking-affiliates like Scott, Carter, Talbot, Hester and Henry Thrale, Edmund Burke and John Duncombe.
[6] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Sarah Scott, 21 January 1765', MO 5818.

chapter 1, and which famously informs the *Essay on Shakespear,* but also offers a sense of how she sees her role as his patron in his case. In contrast to Woodhouse's 'good natured' conversation with the household servants which Montagu describes later in the same letter, Woodhouse's silence in the face of polite society turns Montagu's role into one of literally activating his poetic voice. Through her custodianship of her poet, ensuring only those who 'desired to see him', were admitted, Montagu imagines herself creating a space in which the natural poetry of Woodhouse's voice can be expressed, the social parallel to her work soliciting subscriptions for him. Woodhouse would remain in Montagu's service for 15 years, before a rift in between Montagu's elite, conservative Anglicanism and Woodhouse's labouring-class radical Methodism, combined with their mutual suspicion of each other as arrogant abusers of their station.[7] Woodhouse himself famously documented the break between them at length, in *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*, Woodhouse's verse autobiography that was composed through the 1790s, but remained unpublished until long after the deaths of all concerned. In 1814 and 1816 fragments were released to the press, but the full text did not appear until 1896's *Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse.*[8]

Previous critical assessments of the *Lucubrations* have stressed Woodhouse's resentment at Montagu's 'vanity' and refusal to acknowledge his creative autonomy. Betty Rizzo argues that Montagu's patronage of Woodhouse was part of her wider project, manifest also in the *Essay on Shakespear,* to 'defend such geniuses as herself' by proposing a form of natural genius that transcended classical education, and that their ultimate break came down to Woodhouse's 'withholding of praises that Montagu had anticipated' and 'assert[ed]…his own moral integrity (superiority) and right to make his own choices.'[9] More recently, Steve van Hagen has further emphasised Woodhouse's grievances against his patron's bracketing of his identity. Van Hagen reads the text autobiographically as an attempt to reconstitute a unified self by deliberately exploiting the fragmented identities created by the marginality of his identity as a labourer-poet, whilst Bridget Keegan finds Woodhouse leaning into his identification with nature, and

[7] William Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830,* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 184-5.

[8] William Christmas, 'Woodhouse, James (bap. 1735, d. 1820), poet', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29924>, [accessed 17 December 2018].

[9] Betty Rizzo, 'The Patron as Poet Maker: The Politics of Benefaction', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 20 (1991), pp. 241-266, (p. 258)

framing Montagu's abuses as destructive attempts to artificialize the natural world.[10] I would like to extend these conceptions of Woodhouse's disempowerment and fragmentation, and look at the charge he makes against Montagu of creative suppression. This is both literal, in the fact that Woodhouse published nothing new between the 1766 poetry collection and his final departure from Sandleford, and figurative, in the corruption of his poetic voice:

> Could he have quench'd his Mind's religious light,
> And stopt right Reason's true remarks, he might,
> In spite of Heav'n---in spite of Christian Men,
> He might have brandish'd, bold, the Poet's pen---
> Have gain'd his Patronesses proud regard,
> Have borne the honour, still, of household Bard;
> Transform'd into a Lyre his rustic Reed,
> And merited far more than Laureat's meed---
> But he must then have modelled Mind anew,
> And turn'd his Heart from all things right and true.[11]

This passage, combined with the fact that Woodhouse's personal faith seems to have become more intensely Methodist during the period of his employment under the Montagus, suggests the intense relationship which existed for him between freedom of conscience, poetic creativity, and class status.[12] The combined moral and epistemological threat, that of being 'modelled' and 'transformed', betray Woodhouse's anxieties that, throughout their relationship, Montagu was trying to corrupt him. I would like to contend, however, that this particular anxiety is reflective of Woodhouse's own sense of guilt, at the degree to which, in pursuit of creative and social intimacy with Montagu herself, he allowed her influence to enter the private spaces of his reading and religious existence.

With the acrimonious end to Montagu and Woodhouse's relationship in mind, this section will focus on the way in which these power dynamics played out in one of the first letters of their correspondence, when all these tensions appeared surmountable. On the 17th of April 1765, Woodhouse wrote to Montagu, ostensibly to discuss the recent death on the 5th of April of Edward Young (1683–1765), Woodhouse also used it

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[10] Steve van Hagen, 'The Life, Works and Reception of an Evangelical Radical: James Woodhouse (1735–1820), the 'Poetical Shoemaker', *Literature Compass,* 6.2 (2009), pp. 384-406.; Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730–1837,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 57-62.
[11] James Woodhouse, *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, 2 vols, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1896), II, p. 122.
[12] Christmas 2001, p. 203.

as an opportunity to inform his patroness of his daily habits of reading and devotion. The cobbler poet's letter is a virtuosic performance in deferential rhetoric, which illustrates several of the key dynamics of Montagu's patronage role. The initial rhetorical gesture is one of simple deferential sycophancy, when Woodhouse claims that he is in agreement with Montagu in her assessment of death in general:

> I was very ^much^ charm'd with your Reflections on the Death of D[r] Young, as I am indeed with all you write; more especially as your Thoughts on that Subject exactly tally with my own; & it gives One peculiar Satisfactions to find One's own Judgment correspond with that of a Person of such distinguish'd, I might say unparalleled, abilities, as Mrs Montagu...Should Death ever approach you without Warning, I could boldly give him the Challenge that he does not find you unprepar'd for the attack, tho' your Thoughts should not be immediately intent upon the Arch-Enemy. Who that is arm'd like a Christian, in those invulnerable accouterments which the apostle describes, may not walk safe thro' the Business of Life, & taste all its' innocent Pleasures, without any Danger of a Surprise?[13]

Woodhouse goes on to claim that he will physically threaten the figure of death, should the grim reaper seek to sneak up on an unsuspecting Montagu. Woodhouse now adopts a rhetoric of chivalric masculinity, in which he becomes her champion. Even this, however, is of course riddled with self-contradiction, as he acknowledges Montagu's 'armour' even as he places himself in the role of protector. This impression is emphasized later in the same letter when he characterizes himself as 'a Knight-errant' and 'Hero' in the service of Virtue.[14] As Adam Bridgen argues, Woodhouse was concerned to 'reconfigur[e] patronage as a moral relationship' in which the obvious divisions of class and status could be elided into pure intellectual and moral intimacy.[15] By adopting the role of the chivalric knight, Woodhouse is able to place himself into a role of submissive equality in both the intellectual and moral spheres. Bridgen asserts that Woodhouse employs such tactics of intimacy in order to 'pursu[e] a moralized critique of the forms of inequality persisting in British society', and I would agree that in the broader scope of his

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[13] 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 April 1765', MO 6783.

[14] A peculiar coda to Woodhouse's language of martial heroism in this letter is the fact that, later on this same year, Woodhouse would find himself embroiled in a fist-fight with Captain Turnpenny, at Leasowes, William Shenstone's former estate. In describing this encounter to Montagu, in a letter of August 18, 1765, Lord Lyttelton adopts a language of martial masculinity, even describing Woodhouse as a 'Hero'. For a full account of this incident, along with a facsimile of Lyttelton's letter, see Adam Bridgen, 'Patronage, Punch-Ups and Polite Correspondence: The Radical Background of James Woodhouse's Early Poetry', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 80.1 (2017), pp. 99–134, (pp. 108–114)

[15] Bridgen, p. 133

self-formation as a poet this is distinctly the case. Here it also represents a pursuit of direct intellectual intimacy with Montagu, and is not distinct in character from similar techniques adopted by Potter or Beattie.[16]

The most distinctive component of this letter is the catalogue which Woodhouse offers, of the minutiae of his daily habits and reading practices, as evidence of the way in which he 'practice[s] virtue…passively'. As with the interplay between a self-empowering intimacy grounded on intellectual and moral equivalence in the rhetorical strategies described above, Woodhouse's 'Sketch of [his] conduct' vacillates between images of power and submission.[17]

> I generally rise about Six, ~~&~~ ^but^ sometimes not till Seven. After I have prostrated myself before the Creator & Preserver of the Universe, I make Daphne a Fire, I then set out for a Morning Walk; which generally extends about a Mile, or nearly Two sometimes, about my native Hills. at my Return I find Daphne & my Babes by the Fire, I sit me down to read till Breakfast, which is generally Water gruel, or till I am interrupted with the Scholars. At dinner I either take a Turn among my Village Friends, or sit down to read. at Evening I write to you, or M^r^ Bridgen; or transcribe, or correct some of my potential Trifles; or read, or take a Walk with Daphne; or visit my Friends: & sometimes all these. at Night I sup on Water gruel with Milk; and after I have again repeated the pious Office of the Morning, go to Bed… This is the ^general^ Tenour of my Conduct; & whenever Providence casts an Opportunity for the Exercise of Ritual Virtue, I seldom shun it.[18]

Placing himself in the role of a lower-class beneficiary, he carefully alternates between simple institutional piety, which plays into Montagu's concept of upper class Christian philanthropic duty, and social and affective equivalence, emphasising the emotional parallels between him and his correspondent.[19]

The religious observances that are central to Woodhouse's daily routine are described in distinctly ritualistic and performative terms. This forms a contrast with the

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[16] Bridgen, p. 134.
[17] 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 April 1765', MO 6783.
[18] Ibid.
[19] For discussions of Elizabeth Montagu's practice of institutional philanthropy, see Betty Rizzo, 'Two Versions of Community: Montagu and Scott', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 193-214 and Elizabeth Childs, 'Elizabeth Montagu: Bluestocking Businesswoman', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 65.½, (2002), pp. 153–178. It is the example of Montagu's treatment of Woodhouse on which Dustin Griffin draws to illustrate both the patronage practice of 'strategic distribution of small portions of their symbolic and material capital' and the hypocrisy inherent in this practice; Griffin, p. 43.

introspective mode of daily piety which forms the centre of Montagu's own devotion, and which is advocated by figures like Catherine Talbot in her *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770). Woodhouse presents an image of himself prostrating before God twice a day: an image of simplistic humility actualised through physical performance, rather than philosophical reflection. This conceit of an unstudied pietistic humility, which resonated with the upper class Bluestocking philanthropic project, was epitomised in practices such as Montagu's establishment of Sunday schools for the children of her Northumberland miners, and Hannah More's later publication of the *Cheap Repository Tracts*. The fundamental preconceptions of such projects were an ignorant populace, capable of simple piety, only in need of appropriately framed moral education.[20] Having already placed Montagu into a pedagogical role through her primacy in the discussion of Young's death, Woodhouse is essentially declaring his adoption of such a position. The verisimilitude of such a pose is, of course, belied by the fact that Woodhouse, in the discussion of physically confronting death, cited above, included an explicit allusion to the 'whole armour of God' alluded to in Ephesians 6:10–6:14.[21] Beyond simply presenting the trope of a subservient client, making obeisance to a superior patron, Woodhouse creates a subtle intertextual network of the Bible, Romance literature, and his projection of his own identity through the narrative of the letter itself. This creates a moral and intellectual intimacy with Montagu, which nevertheless maintains propriety of form and position.

We can see the same tension present in what is missing from Woodhouse's account of his daily life. Given the self-consciously labouring class pose of his description, it is strange that Woodhouse omits any description of his actual labour from

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[20] See Childs, p. 168 & Les Turnbull, 'Elizabeth Montagu: A "Critick, a Coal Owner, a Land Steward, a Sociable Creature"', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 81.4, (2018), pp. 657-686; S.J Skedd, 'More, Hannah (1745–1833), writer and philanthropist.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (2014), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19179>, [accessed 31 March 2018]; and Jack Orchard, "Hannah More [née More] (born 1745–died 1833), English writer, novelist, philanthropist, abolitionist, educationalist," *Electronic Enlightenment Biographical Dictionary*. ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:bio/morehanna0025343 >, [accessed 31 March 2018].

[21]'Ephesians Chapter 6' [King James Version], *Bible Hub,* <http://biblehub.com/ephesians/6.html>, [accessed 31 March 2018]; At the risk of over-emphasising the subtlety of Woodhouse's allusion, it may also be significant that the verse immediately preceding this discussion, Ephesians 6:9, contains Paul's exhortation that masters should treat their slaves well. Such an allusion would definitely resonate with Adam Bridgen's analysis of Woodhouse's nascent radicalism already manifest at this early stage in his poetic career.

this account, leaving the description of his day, from rising early, followed by a walk, then domestic affairs and polite sociability through letters and conversation. Woodhouse's self-projection as a kind of male working-class facsimile of the Bluestocking socialite, reflects not only an emulative mode of class education, the trickle-down social practice fantasy of figures like Catherine Talbot and Hannah More, but also acts to establish the letter as a uniquely intimate document.[22] This intimacy persists throughout Woodhouse's letters to Montagu in the 1760s, with his letter of May 30th 1766 when, following a visit to London with her, he described her as 'truly parental' to him, placing himself into her household in a parallel gesture to the epistolary invitation into his home here.[23] Once again Woodhouse retains the deferential pose, but alters the framework in which it exists, to paradoxically empower himself, it is he who grants Montagu a space in his coterie, not the other way around.

With this intricate intellectual, moral, and sociable role-playing in mind, let us turn to the account of his reading practices which Woodhouse offers as part of this narrative of self-projection. First Montagu is presented with an appropriate collection of improving literature: 'I have since my Return from Town read a Part of [Henry] More's Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity; Part of the Pilgrim. Hudson's Poems. Ray on the Creation. Part of Milton.'[24] Of the five books referred to here, three, Henry More's *A Modest Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity* (1659), Simon Patrick's *The Parable of the Pilgrim* (1664), and John Ray's *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691), are all representative of the seventeenth Century school of theology known as Cambridge Platonism, which was of deep interest to the Bluestockings, particularly Carter and Montagu, and which was antithetical to Calvinism, which anticipated Woodhouse's own Methodism.[25] Patrick's *Parable of the Pilgrim,* for example, has been described as a 'light-

[22] See for example, Essays I, V, VI, XIV and XXII in Catherine Talbot's *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772), which all discuss the imperative of moral exemplarity in the rich, for the positive effect it can have on the poor and dependent, and Chapter 1 of Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 5th edn., (London: Printed for Cadell & Davies, 1799), esp. p. 37.
[23] 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 30 May 1766', MO 6784.
[24] 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 April 1765', MO 6783.
[25] Henry More (1614–1687) was an influence on the latitudinarian Anglican movement central to proto-Bluestockings like Thomas Secker, Nicolas Carter, and Conyers Middleton, and Simon Patrick's (1626-1707) *Parable of the Pilgrim* (1664), will have most likely been recommended by Montagu after she read it in 1764, and also recommended it to Carter. See 'Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu. 1 June 1764' in Carter 1817, I, p. 219.

footed' Arminian counterpoint to John Bunyan's Puritan *Pilgrims Progress*.[26] These texts jar so distinctly with Woodhouse's later religious sensibilities as to raise the possibility that he was prompted to read them by Montagu herself. Woodhouse's pride in sharing his intellectual exercises with Montagu is clear. His reading of Milton, for example, represents a genuine shared interest between the two.[27] Woodhouse then moves onto texts even more directly prompted by his patrons; 'Reviews, Mag^{s}. & the London Papers which my good L^{d} Lyttelton. has honour'd me with'. The final textual reading which Woodhouse presents to his patroness, that of the 'Two Vols of Pamela', combines these themes of deference and moral obligation with an acute sensibility which parallels the sentimental discourse of chapter 1:

> Pamela has given me great Pleasure, for I love to read any Thing that excites weeping; I love to weep, upon such Occasions. The Lineaments of Pamela have often refresh'd my Mind with the dear Remembrance of that inimitable Lady & best of Friends, M^{rs} Montagu. I have often thought that M^{r} Richardson must have seen or known her Character; for either she must have sat to him for Pamela's moral Portrait, whence their Situation in Life would bear a Similitude, or his Pamela must be entirely ideal.[28]

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[26] Johannes van den Berg, 'The Synod of Dort in the Balance', in Johannes van den Berg, *Religious Currents and Cross-Currents: Essays on Early Modern Protestantism and the Protestant Enlightenment*, ed. by Jan de Bruijn, Pieter Holtrop, Ernestine van der Wall, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 1-18 (p.7)

[27] Implicit and explicit references to Milton, often in the form of quotations from his lyrics 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' occur on countless occasions across Montagu, Carter, and Talbot's published correspondence, with over 80 examples apparent in the small corpus encompassing Carter & Talbot's published letters, and Anni Sairio's corpus of digitised material from the Huntington Library's Montagu Collection: *The Bluestocking Corpus: Private Correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu, 1730s-1780s*. ed. by Anni Sairio, XML encoding by Ville Marttila, (2017), <http://Bluestocking.ling.helsinki.fi/>, [accessed 30 March 2018]; See, for example, 'Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 3 November 1760', ed. Pennington, II, p. 354, in which Talbot deploys a Milton quote to gloss her feelings of detachment from polite society, when in retirement at Lambeth; See also 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 28 July 1768', MO 3221, in which Montagu, soliloquizing to an imagined shade of Shakespeare, characterises her *Essay on Shakespeare* as a 'smoaked glass' through which her 'Countrymen' may view his 'beauties' which would otherwise be too 'bright ^to suit the sense of mortal sight^' in a paraphrase of 'Il Penseroso', l.13-14. Woodhouse himself would go on to extensively quote Adam and Eve's first description of Eden from *Paradise Lost* Book V in a poetic description of the grounds at Leasowes in 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 7 November 1766', MO 6786.

[28] 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 April 1765', MO 6783.

Through the sentimental image of weeping, Woodhouse further cultivates an affective intimacy between himself and Montagu. Exploiting the commonplace identification of tears with openness and moral sincerity, as discussed by critics such as Philip Carter and Janet Todd, he seeks to bind the moral and intellectual intimacy gestured at throughout the letter to a sentimental tie, with literary texts, once again, providing the vehicle for this gesture.[29] Janet Todd identifies the image of the eighteenth-century weeping man with a type of 'affective androgyny', in which the male sentimentalist abandons the ideal stoic self-control to inhabit a feminized position of emotional vulnerability. Montagu's letter to Scott referred to above also attests to this dynamic in the relationship. When Montagu tells him about the £15 she will contribute to *Poems on Several Occasions* she tells Scott that 'the tears started', and Woodhouse gives a sentimental description of he and Daphne's 'one room' residence and schoolhouse, prompting Montagu to muse on his 'sweetness, sense and bashfulness', Woodhouse responding directly to Montagu's financial power with a moral and affective appeal like that we have been discussing. Woodhouse's calculated displays of sensibility can be seen to invert the gender divide between himself and Montagu. The identification of Montagu with Samuel Richardson's Pamela is a final twist on this narrative, in that Pamela's journey, from humble but pious family to a noble marriage, can be read as a moral fable on the classlessness of moral and social virtue. Richardson himself, in the moralizing summation to the 1740 edition of his text, identifies Pamela as displaying this through 'Her obliging Behaviour to her Equals, before her Exaltation; her Kindness to them afterwards'.[30]

As discussed at the beginning of this section, however, no amount of combined chivalric submission, social intercourse, intellectual parity, or affective identification, was able to sustain Montagu and Woodhouse's relationship. As the *Lucubrations* make apparent, freedom of interpretation, be it sentimental, theological, or moral, is at the heart of the crisis. With this breakdown in mind, it is worth pausing, before we move on to Montagu's other fractured relationships, over one of the later letters from the small corpus of surviving letters from Woodhouse to Montagu. His letter of the 28th

[29] Philip Carter, 'Tears and the Man', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. by Barbara Taylor & Sarah Knott, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 156–173, (159-160); For a discussion of the trope of sensitive souls weeping at sentimental texts, see also Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 214-15.
[30] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela,* Thomas Keymer & Alice Wakeley, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.502.

November 1768, takes the subject of reading as its central topic: 'I could write a Dissertation on the Use of Reading; what is most adapted to the Gentleman, & what to the Plebeian'. Woodhouse then goes on to present a series of juxtapositions between the types of reading which Montagu recommends to him, followed by explanations of their failure to resonate with his experience. First Woodhouse asks 'you prescribe to me History…Will it teach me how to till the ground?...Or will it lead the readiest & easiest Way to Heaven?' and answers himself 'It is true it will..set different Examples before One's View to imitate or eschew…[&]enable the Mind to predict what may in future happen. But in my contracted Sphere it loses its use.' He then moves on to philosophy; 'Why should I study Physics or Metaphysicks? The language of either is barbarous to all with whom I have to do,' and finally poetry, 'If I study Poetry or Eloquence I shall never be Laureat, or a Member of either House.'[31] Woodhouse's despairing litany essentially reads as a catalogue of failed connections between his intellectual life and that of his patroness. The space that he inhabits, of practicality and day-to-day existence, has an entirely different epistemology from Montagu's own. The bathos-ridden coda to this list is Woodhouse's return to chivalric self-sacrifice with his claim 'But I will study any thing you desire, because it will give you Pleasure.' This is followed by a fulsome celebration of Elizabeth Carter's *Epictetus* for being 'translat[ed] into the only language that poor, unlearned Woodhouse can understand', playing at class deference and coterie inveigling again.[32] The reality, however, is that Woodhouse's passing reference to the fact that 'I could not restrain myself from indulging in other Studies even if you did not desire it,' is the most significant part of the letter, and sows the seeds of their disconnection almost as soon as their relationship started. Through this series of failed connections we see Montagu and Woodhouse's early relationship defined by the interplay of interpretation, reading practices, morality, and affect. These themes will preside over all of her relationships with her clients, with reading and interpretation often acting as devices for ingratiation or separation.

[31] 'James Woodhouse to Elizabeth Montagu, 28 November 1768', MO 6792.
[32] Ibid.

Proximity and Distance: The Literary Critic as Public Moralist

As we have seen in the discussion of Woodhouse, and briefly in the account of Beattie's *Essay on the Utility of Classical Learning* in chapter 2, the beneficiaries of Elizabeth Montagu's patronage were subject to intense anxieties over their social status as recipients of financial aid, but also in relation to their fellow clients. Woodhouse, as part of the recognised canon of labouring-class poets, was able to draw on a repertoire of vocational tropes in his self-definition, while Beattie, though also from a poor family, having been university educated, appeals to the gentlemanly category of 'civic humanism', collapsing his recognised academic status into a declaration of coterie kinship. Beattie was freed from financial dependence after the acquisition of a £200 royal pension with Montagu's support, and the successful sales of *The Minstrel* and *Essay on Truth*.[33] For Robert Potter (1721-1804), the Norfolk clergyman, schoolteacher and classicist, his claim to Montagu's attention was more amorphous. His financial need was just as significant as Woodhouse or Beattie, but his social position and education barred him from the role of a deferential dependent, while his peripheral status, both in terms of physical location and coterie membership, prevented him from falling into comfortable academic institutions like Aberdeen University or the Scottish Enlightenment group, as Montagu-correspondents James Beattie and D[r] John Gregory were able to do.[34] As

[33] Robert Robinson, 'Beattie, James (1735–1803), poet and philosopher', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2006), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1831>, [accessed 10 Jan. 2019]. For a discussion of 'work' as a means of self-categorisation in Christmas, pp. 22-3.

[34] Potter offers a succinct summary of the reasons for his financial concern, as well as the extent of his dependence on patronage in a biographical fragment likely produced between 1762, the death of Thomas Hayter, bishop of Norwich and Potter's first patron, and the meeting with Montagu in 1779. This brief fragment, written in the third person, and consisting primarily of genealogy rather than straight biography, contains only one major authorial revision, indicative of the desire Potter has that his imagined readers should fully understand the severity of his financial condition, which occurs in Potter's description of his family at the period of writing this biography:

> He was…married to his Philoclea, and had five children, the whole of his income not amounting to ~~little more than~~ 30 £ a year; he had afterwards 4 children more; by the death of Dr Hayter he lost his Patron, & his hopes; but he never lost "the sweet peace that virtue bosoms ever"

David Stoker, Potter's most recent biographer puts it, 'The various ways in which literary patronage operated, and on occasions failed to operate, in the later years of the eighteenth century are well illustrated by the career of Robert Potter'.[35] These tensions loom large over the publication of Potter's classical translations; *The Works of Aesychlus, Translated* (1777), its accompanying *Notes* (1778), *The Tragedies of Euripides. Translated* (1781–1783) and *Tragedies of Sophocles* (1788) as well as having a bearing on Potter's anti-Johnsonian screeds of the 1780s, *An inquiry into some passages in Dr. Johnson's Lives of the poets: particularly his observations on lyric poetry, and the odes of Gray* (1783) and *The Art of Criticism* (1789). The first and last of these texts fall outside of the period of Montagu's direct patronage, and it is not until the second edition of *Aeschylus* in 1779 which incorporates the *Notes* of the previous year that we see Potter's strongest print tribute to Montagu, in his extensive prefatory note and dedication. However, the period of 1778 to 1790 does bracket the entirety of the known Montagu-Potter correspondence, with the 25 letters Potter sent his patroness conveying the ebbs and flows of his vocational and social anxiety from her initial commissioning of his notes on Aeschylus in 1778, through the lacklustre reception of *Euripides,* to Potter's triumphant *Inquiry into…Dr Johnson's Lives* (1783). Whilst none of Montagu's replies to Potter's letters survive, his letters to her offer tantalising hints as to her practices as a patron. If we compare her discussions of similar topics in letters to other coterie companions we may infer some of the terms of her indirect creative practices as a patron.

The most noticeable feature of Potter's conflicted authorial identity is the way in which he disdains print culture within his letters, yet cannot escape the necessity of appeasing it in his literary productions. Central to this conflict is the first of Potter's works that came under Montagu's aegis, the second edition of *Aesychlus,* published through subscription in 1779, by Strahan & Cadell. Potter appears to have believed in the inherent superiority of scribal culture over that of print, and attempted to conceive of his relationship with his patroness in terms of coterie equality. He treated Montagu, and sometimes the subscribers she encouraged to subsidize the publication of his works as an

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Robert Potter, 'Biographical Notes by Robert Potter', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Miscellaneous papers including genealogical notes on the descendants of [the Reverend] Hugh Williams, D.D, NLW MS 12502E/22.

[35] David Stoker, 'Greek Tragedy with a Happy Ending: The Publication of Robert Potter's Translations of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles', *Studies in Bibliography*, 46 (1993), pp. 282-302, (pp. 282)

inner circle, separate from the general reading public. The latter body he identifies with harsh and petty criticism, misinterpretation, and fickleness. Ultimately Potter seems to have viewed Montagu, and his other elite contacts not merely his patrons and supporters, but as guardians against a potentially hostile readership.

This strange dynamic appears to have been established from Potter's earliest solicitation of Montagu's patronage. His *Aeschylus* bears a lengthy and scholarly prefatory letter addressed 'To Mrs Montagu', which is the only instance of Potter's print acknowledgement of Montagu as his patron. This letter far exceeds Potter's subsequent patron dedications in his non-subscription *Euripides*, to Elizabeth Somerset, Dowager Duchess of Beaufort (1713-1799), and *Sophocles,* to Georgiana Spencer, Dowager Duchess of Devonshire (1737–1814).[36] The purpose of the essay is ostensibly to explain the presence of the explanatory apparatus Montagu has requested. The essay reads like Beattie's 'Advertisement' in his *Essays,* and it opens with a flattery-ridden account of her commissioning of this critical apparatus:

> When you first expressed to me your desire, that notes explanatory of the ancient mythology, history, and customs, might be added to the translation of Aeschylus, it surprised me that you, who certainly want notes as little as any person alive, should be the first to ask for them; and I wished to be excused from the task, as conscious to myself that, though I might be so happy as to entertain the Public, I could have no pretensions to instruct it, not presuming to think, that I know more than every one knows, or at least ought to know: your politeness would not admit my plea, but you persevered in your request; I might more properly call it your command, for as such I shall always receive even an hint from Mrs Montagu.[37]

Here we can already start to see the interplay between elite and popular culture emerge in Potter's self-representation. The notes become testimony not to Potter's own public interest, but to the outward facing 'politeness' of Montagu herself, a means by which the public may be invited into the type of knowledge held by the elite and intellectual. Montagu's agenda resonates not only with the expansion of the classical readership we already saw in the case of Elizabeth Carter, but places Potter's translations at the heart of a new genre, that of the English-language scholarly classical translation.

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[36] Euripides, *The Works of Euripides Translated*, trans. Robert Potter, 2 vols, (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1781-3); Sophocles, *The Tragedies of Sophocles Translated*, trans. Robert Potter, (London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1788)

[37] Aeschylus, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus, Translated,* trans. Robert Potter, 2nd edn, 2 vols, (London: printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1779), I, p. xl.

Penelope Wilson argues that the 1770s witnessed a transition from a traditional humanist classical readership, who needed neither commentary nor translation, through a French tradition of vernacular translation with scholarly commentary and the demands of a wider reading public, to a canon of English scholarly translations.[38] Elizabeth Montagu, with her established investment in vernacular literary tradition, disdain for French neoclassicism, and proximity to the hugely successful *Epictetus* translation, will have likely seen the encouragement of Potter's translation as an opportunity to enact the same types of public moral-aesthetic education which permeated her own *Essay on Shakespear*. This linguistic opening is rhetorically paralleled by the opening of the coterie, in a gesture that amounts, essentially, to the same appeal made by Dodsley in his *Collection.*

Potter follows this claim with a foray into contemporary antiquarian debate, which unexpectedly deviates both from the standard rhetoric of a prefatory dedication, and from the proclaimed intellectual democratisation at which the above statement hinted. Within the same letter, Potter writes a mythographic exploration of the evolution of religion from its earliest manifestations, when primitive humans 'looked up to the Heavens, and [,] struck with admiration of the nature of the universe, supposed the Sun and Moon to be the eternal and first Gods'[39] through to the complex interpretative frameworks surrounding figures like Prometheus and Osiris. Throughout his preface Potter derisively cites two of his antiquarian contemporaries, Jacob Bryant (1715-1804) and Antoine Court de Gebelin (1719-1784). These figures are both central to the late eighteenth-century fad for 'speculative mythology' or 'mythological syncretism', of which Jacob Bryant's *A New System, or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-6) was the most well known. [40] Bryant's *A New System* postulated that all ancient religions stemmed from the same primeval divine truth, which he identified with the God of the Jews, while de Gebelin's *Monde Primitif* (1772-1783) identified a set of core cross-cultural allegories, on

[38] Penelope Wilson, 'Classical Poetry and the Eighteenth-Century Reader', in *Eighteenth-Century Books and their Readers,* ed. by Isabel Rivers, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 69-96, (pp. 83-90)
[39] Aeschylus, I, p. xlv
[40] For an overview of this movement, see R.J. Arnold, '"Learned Lumber": the Unlikely Survival of Sacred History in the Eighteenth Century', *The English Historical Review,* 125.516 (2010), pp. 1139-1172.

which Egyptian and Greek mythological systems drew.[41] Potter has no patience with these analyses, drily asking of Prometheus: 'Where in history sacred or profane, where in religion or in nature shall we find this worthy? Shall we draw him out of Noah's Ark? Shall we yoke him to the plough in Egypt [?]' before ultimately postulating a naïve readiness in the antiquarian community to 'pronounce him an emblem of the Divine Providence in the formation of man'.[42] Rather than offering a definitive refutation of Bryant's arguments, however, Potter instead concludes his discussion by citing the example of Socrates in the *Phaedrus,* who dismisses the interest in mythology displayed by the eponymous young man, and claims that 'they are the inquiries of a studious, laborious man, and of one not perfectly happy', as they distract one from appropriate interest in one's own moral nature, and mislead discussion into a collection of pointless and ineffable questions, such as the bodily formation of Centaurs or Pegasi.[43] Potter closes this discussion by referring back to Montagu herself, and re-casting the juxtaposition of labour and happiness from the *Phaedrus* into a figuration of their relationship:

> Socrates tells us, that these inquiries are not the task of a very happy man: the Athenian philosopher had his reasons for saying this, but they affect not us: I should be very happy if my inquiries could produce any thing worthy your attention, the study and the labour I should think well employed.[44]

Potter, in effect, disavows everything he has just written, justifying it not through its academic or intellectual content, but through the interest it may inspire in Montagu. Through the use of the word 'happy', Potter combines the sentimental language of polite sociability and friendship, with the Socratic absolute virtue of *eudaimonia,* to give the illusion of an existence which is defined and constituted by the experience of intellectual conversation with Montagu. This intimacy, by being facilitated through a play on Greek and English words, embodies the duality of a subscription publication, publicly

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[41] Arnold, p. 1169; David Allen Harvey, "The Rise of Modern Paganism? French Enlightenment Perspectives on Polytheism and the History of Religions", *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, 40.2, (2014), pp. 34-55 (pp. 46-7)
[42] Aeschylus, I, p. lviii-lix.
[43] Ibid, p. lviii-lvix; For a modern translation of the same discussion, see 'Phaedrus', trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in Plato*, Complete Works,* ed. by John M. Cooper & D.S Hutchinson, (Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis, 1997), pp. 506-556, (p.510)
[44] Aeschylus, I, p. lxv

acknowledging the patron's largesse, whilst simultaneously incorporating a coded account of the depth of their intimacy.

The apparatus itself bears out the promises and issues of the prefatory note; it takes, against Potter's own academic expertise, trans-cultural comparative mythology as its primary subject. Taking Potter's text of *Prometheus Chain'd* as a case study reveals that, of the 42 substantive footnotes to the text, half concern themselves with mythological context, mostly comprised of glosses or direct quotes from figures like Richard Paul Jodrell (1745-1831), Cornelius de Pauw (1739-1799), and George Sandys (1577-1644), or drawing on classical sources like Ovid and Hesiod; the remaining notes address linguistic disputes between various preceding translations and address non-mythological historical contexts.[45] The continuum between the preface and commentary can be encapsulated in one of the very few citations of an author who themselves appears in the preface. When glossing a reference to 'the swan-like forms/ of Phorcys' daughters' in Prometheus' prophecy to Io, Potter cites Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-6) on the African historical and symbolic roots of the three sisters with a single eye, but not without the peculiar coda that 'there is something so very ingenious in M^{r} Bryant's analysis of these daughters of Phorcys, that the most rigid extractors of historical proof will not be offended to see it here laid before the reader.'[46] The faint praise with which Bryant's historical credibility is damned is easy to discern. A final observation to note before we move on to *Aeschylus'* epistolary prehistory is that Potter's evident discomfort in his annotations did not go unnoticed by his immediate audience. Penelope Wilson discusses a review by the dramatist George Colman (1762-1836) of Potter's *Notes on the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (1778). After praising of Montagu for her insight in recognising that 'some illustrations of the original author were absolutely requisite for the English reader', and commending her 'liberality' in bankrolling the project, he goes on to identify the very same tension we have been exploring throughout this section:

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[45] For a representative example of Potter's mythological annotation, see his discussion of the theogony of Chaos in Hesiod in Aesychlus, p. 7, n. (a); for an example of his linguistic criticism see his note to 'rivers springing from fresh founts' in Prometheus' appeal to nature, which juxtaposes his English translation with the Latin of Thomas Stanley (1664), and the commentary of Pauw. Ibid, p. 15, n. (d); For an example of 'historical' contextualizing, see the unreferenced note to the savagery of the Chalybes, Ibid, p. 56, n. (b)

[46] Aeschylus, I, p. 63, n. (h); for the relevant passage in Bryant, see Jacob Bryant, *A New System, or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology,* 3 vols, (London: Printed for T. Payne, 1774), I, p. 380.

> The Commentator…seems to have submitted to the task with some degree of reluctance, and while he has in general, discharged it rather too drily and stiffly, has at the same time contrived occasionally, to debase his style with low expressions, and to interlard it with familiar French phrases.[47]

Wilson connects this review to her thesis on the tensions around the changing readership of classical texts discussed above.[48] I would not deny that the conflict in Potter's text is representative of such a conflict, but would go even further to say that the conflict between coterie and public readerships which lies at the heart of Potter's anxiety is redoubled by the inherent instability of the evolving genre of English scholarly classical translation.

The greatest irony of Potter's apparatus, and particularly his dedication, however, is the degree to which Potter's protestations of his reluctance are no mere rhetorical gesture. Montagu appears to have held from the outset very clear ideas of the type of analysis that she wanted from her client. The first extant letter from Potter to Montagu makes clear her guiding hand:

> When I had the honour of waiting on you in town you expressed a desire that notes explanatory of the antient mythology, history, customs &c might be added to the english Æschylus. Tho' I think that every body knows, or ought to know, whatever I know, and I am certain that you want notes the least of any person alive, yet in deference to your judgement a Second edition is preparing with notes: these, I fear, will not be Such as you expect, certainly not Such as will inform you; they may be of use to common readers; virginibus, puerisque must be their highest Motto.[49]

Whilst the specifics of this conversation are lost to history, Potter's fear that the notes 'will not be Such as you expect', is a strong indication that Montagu had a purpose in mind for the Aeschylus' commentary.

Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1781) provided Potter with another opportunity to combine his own academic interests with a display of loyalty to his patroness and the mode of sociable criticism she embodied. Johnson's *Lives* is well-known for its extensive critiques of several canonical figures, including Milton, against whom Johnson was seen to have a politically grounded grudge, and Thomas Gray, whom

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[47] 'Art. 14, Notes on the Tragedies of Aeschylus', *The Monthly Review,* 76 vols*,* (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, 1778), LIX, p. 466.
[48] Wilson, pp. 83-4.
[49] 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 4 April 1778', MO 4155

Johnson accused of pretentiousness, obscurantism, and, most significantly, incoherence.[50] For example, in his analysis of Gray's Pindaric ode *The Progress of Poesy,* he enters into a tirade against the juxtaposition of images in the first stanza:

> Gray seems in his rapture to confound the images of "spreading sound" and "running water." A "stream of musick" may be allowed; but where does "musick," however "smooth and strong," after having visited the "verdant vales, rowl down the steep amain," so as that "rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar"? If this be said of musick, it is nonsense; if it be said of water, it is nothing to the purpose.[51]

Robert Potter, who had written poetic translations of Pindar himself in collaboration with Hans Stanley (1721-1780) in 1779, rose to Gray's defence, publishing *An inquiry into some passages in Dr. Johnson's Lives of the poets* in 1783. The *Inquiry* took as its central thesis Johnson's perceived disdain towards lyric poetry in general, and Gray's Odes in particular, as lacking in coherence and inspiration. Potter directly quotes Johnson's dismissive claim from his *Rambler* 158: '[lyric poetry is] set free from all the laws by which other compositions are confined, and allow[ed] to neglect the niceties of transition, to start into remote digressions, and to wander without restraint from one scene of imagery to another.'[52] Against this he argues that lyric poets, particularly the authors of odes 'knew that rapture, not argumentation, was the constitution part of that species of poetry which they cultivated', turning Johnson's dismissive use of the word 'rapture' in 'The Life of Gray' against its author, and claiming that 'Sublimity is the essential and characteristic perfection of the Ode'. Highlighting the sacred origins of the genre, Potter gives a manifesto for his theory of lyric that makes a defining virtue of its 'incoherence', and which lays the groundwork for the language of sublimity which permeates Potter's overall critique of Johnson:

> [The Ode requires] the highest flights of imagination to which even the Epic Muse dared not aspire: she prescribed laws to herself, which confined her to one

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[50] James Boulton, *Samuel Johnson: The Critical Heritage,* (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 30
[51] Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets,* 4 vols, (London: Printed for C. Bathurst, 1781), IV, p. 478-9.

[52] Robert Potter, *An inquiry into some passages in Dr. Johnson's Lives of the poets: particularly his observations on lyric poetry, and the odes of Gray* (London, Printed for J. Dodsley, 1783), p. 13; for the text of 'Rambler 158', see Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht Strauss, 23 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1969), V, pp. 75-80, (p. 77)

> great action; and she pursues her plan with grave dignity: but the Lyric is a Muse of fire that rises from the wings of Extasy, and follows her Hero or her God from one glorious action to another, from earth to heaven.[53]

Like Montagu herself a decade earlier in her arguments against Voltaire's neoclassical criticism, Potter's language of aesthetic transcendence becomes interwoven with a language of heroic independence and, as we will see, becomes part of a moral-aesthetic attack on Johnson's role as literary critic.

It is not, however, Potter's attack on Johnson's 'Life of Gray' which is of primary interest here. While Montagu knew Thomas Gray, hosting him in 1768, she doesn't appear to have been particularly interested in him, finding his taciturnity irksome, writing to her sister that 'it is the common failing of men of genius to exert a proud superiority, or maintain a prouder indolence.'[54] It was another of Johnson's *Lives*, that of Lord Lyttelton, with which she herself took issue. Johnson's 'Life of Lyttelton' does not have the intensity of his 'Life of Gray', offering a blasé dismissal of his subject's talents, rather than an impassioned critique. Of Lyttelton's poems, for example, Johnson states:

> They have nothing to be despised, and little to be admired. Of his Progress of Love, it is sufficient blame to fay that it is pastoral. His blank verse in Blenheim has neither much force nor much elegance. His little performances, whether Songs or Epigrams, are sometimes spritely, and sometimes insipid.[55]

In a gesture which exists across the *Lives*, but is particularly pronounced here, Johnson interweaves his condescending remarks on Lyttelton's works with reflections on the man himself, whom Johnson appears to view as an idle dilettante; his poems 'are the works of a man of literature and judgement, devoting *part* of his time to versification', his *Henry II,* was 'published with such anxiety as only vanity can dictate', and his *Dialogues of the Dead* (co-authored, of course, with Montagu) is 'the production rather, as it seems, of leisure

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[53] Potter 1783, p. 14. For a more in-depth look at Potter's critique of Johnson and analysis of the Horatian and Pindaric references in Gray's verse, see Frederick Keener, *Implications, Readers' Resources and Thomas Gray's Pindaric Odes,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), pp. 73-82; and for its relation to other contemporary criticisms of the *Lives*, see Boulton, p. 30

[54] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Mary Robinson, 4 December 1768', Correspondence of M[rs] Elizabeth Montagu, British Library, London, BL Add MS 40663, f. 9.

[55] Johnson 1781*,* IV, p. 502.

than of study, rather effusions than compositions'.[56] This is complemented by a dig at Lyttelton's political career too, remarking of his petition to the king for Robert Walpole's abdication in 1737 that 'His zeal was considered by the courtiers not only as violent, but as acrimonious and malignant.'[57] In addition to this critique, Johnson adds a derisive reminder that 'the Doctor', meaning D[r] Robert Saunders (b. c.1727), whom Lyttelton employed to correct his *Henry II,* was 'a man originally a comb-maker, but then known by the stile of Doctor', implying that Lyttelton knew so little of the world of print that he was able to be duped by a con-man.[58]

Montagu's anger at Johnson's slanderous biography of her friend was heartfelt. In a 1781 letter to William Weller Pepys, she employs Johnson as a by-word for vindictive *ad-hominem* biographies, hoping that her nephew and subsequent editor, Matthew, will be 'worthy of… the envy, and the malice, and the railing, of such wretches as Dr. Johnson, who bear in their hearts the secret hatred of hypocrites to genuine virtue, and the contempt of Pedants for real genius.'[59] The controversy over Johnson's 'Life of Lyttelton' has been addressed in detail by Betty Schellenberg, who sees it as epitomising the conflict between Montagu and Johnson's fundamental disagreements over the public or private nature of textual identity, or 'character', with Montagu's coterie-inflected belief that it was essentially private, conflicting with Johnson's public view:

> Johnson's Lives of the Poets…provoke[ed] a confrontation between the coterie ideal of character as properly for the "interested" – in other words, as the property of a man and his immediate circle – and the print-based view of character as a public artifact, at once a valuable commodity in the commercial trade and a fit object of observation and judgment for any reader, contemporary or succeeding, who might take an interest in it.[60]

By making Lyttelton's 'character' public property, and defining him through aristocratic unprofessionalism, Johnson violates the sanctity of private 'character', as Montagu sees it. Schellenberg includes Potter alongside William Weller Pepys and Richard Graves as supporters of Montagu in this debate, and is more willing than Reginald Blunt to

[56] Johnson 1781, p. 497, 492.
[57] Ibid, p. 490.
[58] Ibid, p. 498
[59] 'Elizabeth Montagu to William Weller Pepys, 14 August 1781', MO 4069, quoted in Schellenberg, p. 179.
[60] Ibid, pp. 176-180, (p. 176)

acknowledge Montagu's role in influencing Potter's production.[61] I would concur with Schellenberg's argument, but take it further, to explore the way in which Potter's *Inquiry* resonates with Montagu's conception of 'character', and how Johnson's *Lives* is conceived to be a direct attack on their coterie values.

Prior to his engagement with the specifics of Johnson's 'Life of Gray' in the *Inquiry*, Potter writes a general critique of the critical preconceptions of the *Lives* as a whole, which focuses primarily on the meaningless and insipid subject matter of his biographies:

> In reading the life of any eminent person we wish to be informed the qualities which gave him the superiority over other men: when we are but poorly put off with paltry circumstances, which are common to him with common men, we received neither instruction nor pleasure…The present passion for anecdotes may make these levities pardonable: but when the narrative goes further, and reflects upon the social and moral character of a worthy person, it must be taken up in an higher tone.[62]

Reading Potter's demand for morally elevating biography in the context of Montagu's complaint over the 'Life of Lyttelton', the thesis underlying this statement becomes apparent. Biographies which are written in 'an higher tone' will both protect the coterie form of 'character' from public debasement, and provide a sanitised replacement which will be useful for 'instruction' and 'pleasure'. Johnson's sharing of insipidities, especially when performed out of a desire to capitalise on 'the present passion for anecdotes', places him in the role of the grub-street muck-raker, betraying the secrets of the elite in order to court the favour of a public uninterested in their own improvement. Whilst the Lyttelton scandal circulates in the background of Potter's criticism of Johnson's anecdotal method in general, it rises to the forefront when Potter recounts Johnson's documenting of a story, later retracted, that Lyttelton misled visitors to William Shenstone's garden at Leasowes into 'inconvenient points of view', so they would concede the superiority of his own gardens at Hagley.[63] Lyttelton, as in his 'Life', here appears essentially petty. The fact that the conflict takes place over the Leasowes, a garden which Shenstone had made a by-word for leisured retirement through his poetry,

[61] Schellenberg, p. 178.
[62] Potter 1783, pp. 4-5
[63] Ibid, p. 8.

gives the text an air of subversion, a dig at aristocratic coterie culture.[64] The fact that Potter follows this anecdote with the reflection, 'if the eminent virtues, the liberal disposition, and benevolent heart of Lord Lyttelton could not secure his heart from such a rude attack, who may hope to escape?' suggests that the inclusion of this anecdote is an implicit nod to Montagu, and the coterie world she represents.

The image of Johnson as an epitome of the hack-reviewer who 'has so long been habituated to receive and submit to his decisions, that they are now by many considered as infallible', emerges throughout Potter's critique in both *An Inquiry* (1783) and his *Art of Criticism* (1789).[65] The latter primarily consists of a –sometimes paragraph by paragraph– deconstruction of Johnson's *Lives* as a whole, but which includes a conclusion which includes the following characterisation:

> As his own character was inconsistent, so his countrymen, nine in ten of whom despised his principles, and nine in ten of the remainder his uncouth manner approaching to savageness, though he was enamoured of a smooth luxurious age, adored him. So devoted was he to the ways of the world, that in his latter work, he, as Bacon says of Machiavel, taught rather what men do, than what they ought to do…[66]

In a vein very similar to Montagu's own Mrs Modish, 30 years earlier, Potter's image of the 'luxurious age' is one that is defined by negation. Potter attacks the low-born, acquisitive Johnson as the antithesis to the polite society gentleman, uninterested in moral improvement, but adored and followed by a public that, nevertheless, hangs on his every word. The comparison with Bacon's Machiavelli is striking for the moral weight that it places on the shoulders of the literary taste-maker. Literary criticism, it is implied, is equivalent to moral leadership. By conflating the role of the sociable gentleman with that of moral exemplar, Potter not only humiliates Johnson's well-known lack of social grace, but concomitantly valorizes the sociably-defined coterie model, epitomized by his patroness.[67] Potter would have been particularly invested in alienating Johnson from the elite society of Montagu and her coterie, given the way in which his own experience of

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[64] For a comprehensive view of the relationship between Shenstone's rural poetry and coterie culture, see Schellenberg, pp. 92-153.
[65] Potter 1783, p. 2.
[66] Robert Potter, *The Art of Criticism, as Exemplified in Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (London, Printed for T. Hookham, 1789), pp. 190-1.
[67] Herbert G. Wright, 'Robert Potter as a Critic of Dr. Johnson', *The Review of English Studies*, 12.47 (1936), pp. 305-321, (p. 305)

meeting Johnson in 1779 was defined by Johnson's social power, and Potter's own humiliation. According to the *Literary Anecdotes and Contemporary Reminiscences* (1852) of Edward Henry Barker (1788-1839), Potter and Johnson 'met' in 1779:

> At length D[r] Johnson's name was announced. M[rs] Montagu with all due form took M[r] Potter by the hand, and introduced him to D[r] Johnson, by saying: - 'D[r] Johnson, M[r] Potter.' D[r] J. muttered out something like, 'Well, well.' M[rs] M. thought that D[r] J. did not hear, and again said, 'M[r] Potter, D[r] Johnson.' D[r] Johnson in the same sort of tone repeated his mutterings. M[rs] M. was irritated at D[r] J.'s apparent neglect of what she said, and still supposing that he did not hear the name of Potter mentioned, again said, 'D[r] Johnson, M[r] Potter the Translator of Aeschylus.' D[r] J. then said – 'Well, Madam, and what then?'[68]

This quintessentially Johnsonian anecdote throws into sharp relief the power dynamics at play within Montagu and Potter's relationship, and the correlation between social power and literary-critical stature. Johnson's refusal to acknowledge Potter literalized the fact that Johnson, in spite of his background, was able to both participate in an elite society barred to Potter, but was able to police its boundaries as well. The fact that Johnson does so, not with a display of acute politeness or wit, but with a rude dismissal, can only have stung further. Potter's conviction of Johnson's essential savagery and unfitness for polite society is made explicit in his direct reference to the Montagu-Johnson feud in the *Art of Criticism:*

> Of the mud cast by Johnson, as related by Boswell, on Mrs Montague's book, the true motive was probably her neglect of him, his savage manners not suiting her group of literati.[69]

Note the use of the same term, 'savage', to describe Johnson's inability to participate in the elevated Bluestocking literary community. In a letter to Montagu written during the composition of *An Inquiry*, Potter employs a touch of irony in characterising Johnson as

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[68] Edward Henry Barker, *Literary Anecdotes and Contemporary Reminiscences of Professor Porson and Others,* 4 vols, (London: Printed by J.R. Smith, 1852), I, p. 2.

[69] Potter 1789, p. 17; the passage of Boswell to which Potter is referring is most likely this scene from *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1786) in which Johnson and Boswell discuss Garrick: 'I spoke of Mrs. Montague's very high praises of Garrick. JOHNSON. 'Sir, it is fit she should say so much, and I should say nothing. Reynolds is fond of her book, and I wonder at it; for neither I, nor Beauclerk, not Mrs Thrale, could get through it.' James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides,* (London: Printed by Henry Baldwin, 1785), p. 299.

Shakespeare's Caesar, simultaneously invoking Montagu's own critique of Johnson's *Shakespeare*, and emphasising Johnson's isolation and moral vacuity:

> It will be no difficult task to Show that Dr Johnson has no portion nor Sense of that aetherial flame, which animates true genius to make daring incursions into unexplored regions of invention, and boldly to Strike into the pathless Sublime. Were he content to be only dull in himself, one might bear with him; but he is the cause also that dullness is in other men, through the undeserved reverence which the public has long been taught to pay to his dictates; nay, what is worse, with a gigantic insolence he pulls down established characters, and Suffers no fame to live within his baleful influence;
>
> He doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus; and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
> To find our Selves dishonourable graves.[70]

Potter invokes the image of the Popean satirist eviscerating a grub street hack, in the allusion to 'dullness', juxtaposing it with the proto-Romantic language of the 'aetherial flame' of 'true genius', turning Johnson's bullying persona into an image of tyrannical mediocrity. He caps this description with the quotation from *Julius Caesar*, I:2, from Cassius' description of Caesar. As in the allusion to Johnson as Machiavelli, the moral and political overtones of literary criticism are clear. There is an implicit charge that Johnson's Augustan neoclassicism lacks the creative imagination and affective sophistication to engage with Shakespeare. This resonates with Montagu's own critique of Johnson, as expressed in her letters to Elizabeth Carter, Sarah Scott, and Lord Bath in the aftermath of the publication of Johnson's edition. Whilst she is very polite in *The Essay on Shakespear* itself, characterising Johnson as possessing 'genius and learning', her true feelings are typified by her reflection to Carter that 'he has not in his criticisms on the plays, pointed out the peculiar excellencies of Shakespear as a Dramatick poet' and observation to Scott that 'he neither enters into the conduct of the drama nor characters

[70] 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 12 December 1782', MO 4164.

of the persons in a critical manner'.[71] Whether Potter is aware of the terms of Montagu's critique of Johnson directly or not, his characterisation Johnson's sterile bombast strongly invites the implication of an opposing creative genius, in the form of Montagu herself. Montagu, in understanding the terms of Potter's flattery, enacts her own superior understanding of the drama.

Potter's critique of Johnson is matched by his disdain for the reading public as a whole, from whom Montagu and his other patrons have shielded him, and for whom he reserves a derisively acidic tone:

> [T]o what purpose is it to present the Public with works of manly and Attic composition, when nothing will go down but the nauseous morcels with which his many-headed Worship is daily gorged? Yet I have Some pride in giving my honest testimony against the mawkish Sing-Song (to Speak no worse of it) which disgraces the present age.[72]

This outburst, made in response to the negative reception which Potter's *Euripides* had received from publications like Smollett's *Critical Review*. The reviewer had called the first volume 'neither chaste, poetical, classical, or harmonious', described it as 'coarse and indelicate', and devoted 23 pages to a systematic deconstruction of Potter's technique, including, in a gesture which must have particularly stung, deferring at one point to Dr

[71] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 19 July 1766', MO 3176; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Sarah Scott, Tuesday, 18 February 1766', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017), <https://doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0160070a1c >. [accessed 20 December 2018]; For similar reflections on Johnson's preface to Shakespeare, see also 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 2 October 1766', MO 3185 and 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 21 October 1766', MO 3817; For a discussion of her meeting with Johnson himself, in which she also reflects on him as an arch-critic who 'use[s] what God has given [him] as a light to shew everyone the imperfect nature & defective compositions of man', see 'Elizabeth Montagu to Lord Bath, 15 October 1762', MO 4586, quoted in Schellenberg, p. 167.

[72] 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 March 1786', MO 4171.

Johnson as an authority on translation style.[73] Potter aligns the critic's duty with a religious vocation, invoking th inedible morsel of false kindness in Proverbs 23 to describe the public's consumption of immoral and insincere filth as opposed to sound guidance.[74] The characteristics which define creative genius, the antithesis to the grub street hack, are also evocatively and purposefully articulated in Potter's letters to his patroness. Here we find the creative associated with 'Attic' and 'manly' identities, while in the deconstruction of Johnson above, he was characterised as lacking 'that aetherial flame, which animates true genius'. As addressed in chapter 2, 'Attic' confirms Potter's allegiance with an elite classical education, which ties in with the generally anti-mercantile tone of his screed, whilst linking his academic practice to his system of ethics even more distinctly. 'Manly' and 'Aetherial', however, seem to give contradictory impressions, both in the physicality of one and spirituality of the other, but also in the ways in which they resonate with the gendered language of Montagu's clients. As we have seen in the case of Woodhouse, the pose of manly heroism was a means by which they could simultaneously assert their value to Montagu, as champions or defenders, and counteract the potential charge of subservience that their financial and professional dependence on her support might have implied. Potter aligns this implicit pugilism with his critical practice, rather than the explicit language of heroism, as Woodhouse had done. See, for example, this

[73] 'The Tragedies of Euripides translated', in *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, ed. by Tobias Smollett, 329 vols, (London: Printed for A. Hamilton, 1782), LII, pp. 17-28, 161-173. (p. 17, 161). Potter himself appears to direct Montagu's attention to this critical attack, among others, in a letter of 25 June 1782, referring to them as 'grossly illiberal, and mainly ignorant', continuing the strain of aligning moral-social virtue with literary appreciation. See 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 25 June 1782', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017) < http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0160075a1c >, [accessed 20 March 2019]. With characteristic pessimism, Potter appears to have focussed on his most negative reviews. Other reviews of 1782 and 1783, such as the one in the 'Domestic Literature' section of *The New Annual Register for the Year 1783,* (London: Printed for G. Robinson, 1784), pp. 268-9 [sections paginated separately], and 'The Tragedies of Euripides, translated', *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal,* 76 vols, (London: printed for R. Griffiths, 1782), LXVII, pp. 241-246, review the text positively, only finding it lacking in comparison to *Aeschylus,* and the Scottish bookseller Thomas Davies (1712-1785) included Potter alongside Thomas Francklin (1721-1784), Michael Woodhull (1740-1816) and Richard Paul Jodrell (1745-1831) as cultivators of a new age of English familiarity with Greek drama two years later in his essay on Congreve in Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies*, 3 vols, (London: Printed for the Author, 1783-4), III, p. 382.

[74] Proverbs 23: 7-8 [King James Version], *Bible Hub,* <http://biblehub.com/kjv/proverbs/23.html>, [accessed 20 March 2019].

characterisation of the anonymous author of a *London Magazine* review of *An Inquiry* from August 1783, in a letter to James Beattie:

> I have been very finely abused in the London Magazine for August last; but the writer is Such a puny whipster, that it would be unmanly to take any notice of him;[75]

The subtle intertextuality of 'puny whipster', the term employed by Othello to describe the lesser men who take his sword from him after the murder of Desdemona resonates with Potter's sense of slighted masculinity.[76] It is also notable that manliness is a quality which he begrudgingly allows to Johnson as well, in the opening to his *Inquiry*, suggesting that the possession of a 'vigorous and manly understanding' alone does not justify the public status of the critical authority. The other element of Potter's idealised creative persona, ethereality, is employed as a gloss on the artistic transcendence of social convention, and appears sparingly in his public and private writings. In his *Aeschylus,* beyond the simple use of 'aetherial' to denote divine or immaterial, as in the characterisation of the gods as 'pendent in th'aetherial air' in *Prometheus Chain'd*, Potter uses 'aetherial light' to denote the world of the living, as opposed to the world of the dead, in his translations of *The Libation Bearers* and *The Persians.*[77] This spiritual resonance is aligned with poetic creativity by Potter's use of the term in his critical writings. In characterising Aeschylus' genius, Potter employs it to emphasise the strength of the tragedian's creativity:

> Thus tragedy owes its existence to the creative hand of Aeschylus: like his own Prometheus, he not only gave it being and form, but animated it with the

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[75] 'Robert Potter to James Beattie, 10 March 1784', MS 30/2/404. The review to which Potter refers can be found is 'Potter's Inquiries into Johnson's Lives', *The London Magazine, or, Gentleman's monthly intelligencer,* 449 vols, (London: printed for R. Baldwin, 1783), LII, pp. 155?-162, *Hathi Trust Digital Library,* <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081682779>, [accessed 1 May 2018]. Unfortunately the only extant copy of the text is missing both the beginning of the text and the contents and index entries.

[76] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by E.A.J. Honigmann, (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997), V.ii, l.242.

[77] Aeschylus, I, p. 107, II, p. 174, 351. An attempt to discover which ancient Greek word Potter is translating as *aetherial* reveals that he has no prototype for this usage in the original text, and the speeches in which this expression is used are both insertions of Potter's own designed to transform discussions of prior events, the death of Agamemnon and the glory of the Persian empire, into speeches directed at the dead themselves. For this I have been consulting the Greek text as provided in Aeschylus, *Tragedies and Fragments,* ed. by Alan H. Sommerstein, (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 112, 262.

> brightest ray of etherial fire; leaving posterity to admire the force of his genius…[78]

As we have seen, Potter denies that Johnson possessed this aetherial quality in his letter to Montagu. He carries this assertion almost verbatim into his *Inquiry*; 'It is certain that the Critic has nothing of this sympathy, no portion nor sense of that vivida vis animni, that etherial flame which animates the poet.'[79] This conceptualisation of the relationship between artist and public emerges finally in Potter's correspondence with Montagu in 1783, when he begrudgingly acknowledges the relatively positive reception that *An Inquiry* had received from its readers:

> I must think the better of the Public, a Sensation agreeable enough, for favouring an attempt to vindicate the injured reputation of persons who were ornaments to their country: I have done an act of justice, I have obliged Some persons whom I wish to oblige, I have gratified my own mind, which is the finest thing in the world, and, what weighs with me more than all this, I am honoured with your approbation. To your judicious and animated criticisms I am greatly indebted, I freely availed my self of them; they are the igneus vigor, the aetherial Spirit which give light and ~~Spirit~~ life to my mass.[80]

Potter's self-congratulation acts as an elaborate dedication to his patroness. He first reaffirms the value of his public role, claiming to have done no less than 'an act of justice'. He then reiterates the direct appeal to elite sociability, through the implicit elevation of 'Some persons' to a status above 'the public', creating an aesthetic-moral elite akin to that which resonates throughout Montagu's *Essay on Shakespear*. It is the final gesture, however, in which he pays his ultimate tribute, collapsing his selfhood into a mere empty vessel into which Montagu breathes the 'aetherial fire' of inspiration. However rhetorically empty and hyperbolic the gesture may be, Potter is seeking to attribute socially and morally transcendent creative genius to Montagu herself, a creativity which is implicitly opposed to the mindless bestiality of the reading public, embodied in Samuel Johnson.

Proximity and Distance: Potter's Sentimental Strategy

[78] Aeschylus, I, p. xx
[79] Potter 1789, p. 38.
[80] 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 1 July 1783', MO 4165.

The details of Potter and Montagu's ultimate estrangement are difficult to untangle. It is evident that after the publication of *Aeschylus,* Potter was already starting to capitalise on Montagu's society connections to acquire new patronage. His dedications of *Euripides* to the Dowager Duchess of Beaufort and *Sophocles* to the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire; his constant hints about the 'warm zeal for [his] interest' exhibited by Sir William Jerningham, 6th Baronet (1736–1809); attention from Lord George (1736–1809) and Lady Elizabeth Harcourt (d.1826); and attempts to inveigle Montagu into vouching for him with her first cousin once-removed, Richard Robinson, Bishop of Armagh (1708-1794) all indicate Potter's desire to climb the eighteenth-century British socio-cultural *cursus honorum*.[81] It is clear that, by 1789, Potter felt his public role sufficiently separated

[81] See the dedication to Potter's *Euripides*, vol. 1*,* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1781) for his dedication to the Dowager Duchess of Beaufort and *Sophocles* (London: Printed for G.G.J and J. Robinson, 1788), for his dedication to the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire. For Potter's name-dropping of Sir William Jerningham, and invitations to wait on him at his ancestral estate of Cossey, see for example 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 3 April 1784', MO 4167, in which he anticipates a preferment at Jerningham's hand, and 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 18 July 1786', MO 4177, which refers to a visit at Cossey. Somewhat confusingly, Potter employs the same descriptor, 'Mr Jerningham, to refer to his fellow poet and Montagu correspondent, Edward Jerningham (1737-1812), brother of William, and it is only from contextual factors like the presence of Lady Jerningham, and references to an epistolary intimacy between 'Mr Jerningham' and Montagu that one is able to determine that letters such as Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 25 June 1782', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017) < http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0160075a1c >, [accessed 20 March 2019], refer to Edward and not William. The Harcourt patronage appears to have been secured in the wake of *An Inquiry*, with the first painstakingly casual name-drop in a discussion of Potter's consideration for a ministerial preferment, 'I mentioned this to Lord Harcourt', occurring in 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 3 April 1784', MO 4167. Clearly this discussion went well, as two weeks later, in 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 19 April 1784', MO 4168, Potter is considering the Harcourts' favour to him as comparable to Montagu's own:

> You do me the highest honour, for a favour from your hands is the most flattering mark of distinction any man can receive; it acquires an additional value by passing through the hands of Lord Harcourt: to be patronized by the Great and the Good is perfect Satisfaction.

Finally, the overtures to Richard Robinson are discussed in 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 28 June 1779', MO 4160 and 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 24 February 1781', MO 4162. Evidently the two-year delay in recognition has lead to a certain amount of desperation in Potter's appeal. As he has no choice but to acknowledge the impropriety of asking Montagu for an introduction to her more powerful relative, admitting 'I have no other method of reaching the Primate but by this application to you'.

from Montagu's own, that he was able to include in *The Art of Criticism* (1789), alongside the continuation of his own anti-Johnsonianism, a mild yet distinct reproach of his former patroness' writing style. After favourably quoting Montagu's *Essay on Shakespear*, Potter bizarrely qualifies his endorsement by claiming that 'This fine description, though a lady's, is embarrassed with a pedantic superabundance of commas, which, multiplied, are often productive of confusion instead of clearness.'[82] This distancing, whilst relatively mild when compared to Montagu's other breaks with former clients such as Yearsley and Woodhouse, which both ended with recriminations and total severance of communication, reveals the ease with which the terms of Potter's deference can be inverted into an assertion of superiority. His masculinity, which, as we have seen, always stands as a problematic element in his flattering of Montagu, here emerges as the ground on which he is able to transcend her. The association of gender and literary critical technique, present throughout Potter's rhetoric and epitomised in the word 'manly', comes to the fore here, and Montagu's writing is itself gendered, and thus dismissed.

The roots of Potter's troubled relationship with Montagu may be found as early at 1782, however, in the readiness with which Potter abandons his overtly moralist-critical mode of literary patronage, and opts instead for an unstable language of sentimental affectivity. Potter's attempts to inveigle his way into Montagu's favour look very similar to those adopted by Woodhouse. In the social and sentimental spheres Potter employs the same play of similarity and distance, with the latter having rather more success than the former. Potter's bluntest and most recognisable appeal for financial support, and the only one which is directly attested in Montagu's own correspondence, is the sentimental appeal for charitable aid. A quintessential example of this may be found in his letter of June 25, 1782:

> I had passed through this winter better than usual, till the 30th May, when my old rheumatic complaint attacked me with uncommon violence; this was for some days attended with a fever: after having tortured me for fourteen days, it formed a junction with the Influenza: together they have made wild work, but I flatter my self that I am crawling towards better health, though I am yet a miserable reptile, and very weak. During the first days of my illness my second daughter showed dangerous symptoms from a cold; a violent inflammation seized her lungs, an unrelenting Hectic burnt her up, and she was carried off very rapidly:

[82] Potter 1789, p. 15. For a discussion of this passage in the context of Potter's anti-Johnsonian stance, see Wright, pp. 307-8.

> my poor Mary was very dear to me, we were excellent friends, her loss is a severe affliction. Forgive me this; the next page shall have no complaint.[83]

This account, whilst we have no reason to doubt its essential sincerity, forms part of a carefully structured appeal for Montagu's continuing support, placing Potter in the role of a tragic victim of circumstance. Essentially the function is to explain his delay in producing his *Euripides*, which he will go on to describe the process of writing on the next page. His account is framed as an escalating sequence of crises, with the death of his daughter deliberately withheld until the full catalogue of his own ill health can be completed. Employing this account in this context, and for this purpose, appears somewhat macabre in retrospect, but it ties into a sentimental framework that emphasises Potter's familial identity. Stepping back from the masculinised and public status of the public critic or the academic translator, Potter offers an intimate insight into his private identity as a father, employing sentimentality as a means of cultivating familiarity. In emphasising his familial status in this way, Potter's rhetoric echoes that of Hannah More, 3 years later, in her 'Prefatory Letter' to the *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785) authored by her and Montagu's client, Ann Yearsley. As Kerri Andrews puts it, 'More had made sure Yearsley's maternity was prominent', and the similarly tragic appeal, this time to the general reader, is that 'she may be a mother in the biological sense of the word, but More's account makes it clear that she is unable to provide for her children'.[84] In the purest form of sentimental appeal, the economic sphere is placed in conflict with the sentimental and domestic. For Potter the situation is more delicate, what he wants is intimacy and advancement of interests at this stage rather than financial aid. However, the same implied antagonist, a cold unfeeling system, is placed in conflict with the sentimental. Where Yearsley's antagonist was poverty, Potter is confronted with the demands of the press, and hiss suffering becomes a means to cultivate an empathic engagement that transcends the financial and intellectual.

This, of course, has the side effect of converting Potter into a sentimentalised beneficiary of philanthropic support, and we get a glimpse of him in this role in the

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[83] Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 25 June 1782', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017) < http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0160075a1c >, [accessed 20 March 2019].

[84] Kerri Andrews, *Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, Patronage and Poetry,* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp. 45-6.

letters Montagu received from her sister, Sarah Scott, in the late 1780s and early 90s, in which Scott's letters discussing Potter refer directly neither to his recent *Sophocles* (1788), nor to *The Art of Criticism* (1789), nor to his work as a schoolmaster or cleric, but are entirely concerned with his state of health and the condition of his family. See, for example, this account from October 1790:

> Mr Potter is better than he was some time ago, his complaint is said to be of the same nature as the Bishop of Durham's incurable, but slow in destruction; if he does not suffer greatly one must wish him to last out as long as possible for the benefit of his family, as he can now save somewhat of his income for them, which was not possible till lately.[85]

Scott is referring to Potter's having been granted a living in 1789 at Lowestoft by Bishop of St Asaph, Lewis Bagot (1740–1802), which had doubled his income. Potter has become what his gestures for sympathy and identification with his domestic role were always tending towards, an object of sympathy and charity, rather than an equal.

While Potter was willing, successfully or unsuccessfully, to court Montagu's favour on the grounds of sentimentalised appeals to her bourgeois charitable instinct, he also relied on the ability to distance himself from others in the same position, as a means of maintaining a certain degree of familiarity. Two final examples will show the success and failure of Potter's posture. The clergyman was always anxious to establish a qualitative difference between himself and Montagu's labouring-class clients; see for example his attitude towards the Ann Yearsley scandal, as it unfolded in 1785-6:

> We have long expected to See or hear of Some violent abuse of you from Mrs Yearsley; in November last I was told of her ingratitude; well might She Say "Mine is a Stubborn and a Savage Will." I hope the Strange woman has been better advised; but the world will not forgive her insolence to you; and Mrs

[85] 'Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, 24 October 1790', *The Letters of Sarah Scott,* ed. by Nicole Pohl, 2 vols, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), II, p. 332. The 'incurable, but slow in destruction' condition which Scott identifies in both Potter and Thomas Thurlow, Bishop of Durham, (1731-1791), is bowel cancer. Thurlow's rectum, with its tumorous developments, was preserved by the Royal College of Surgeons, and can be viewed at the Hunterian museum, Object number RCSHC/P 192. For its full catalogue entry and image, see 'RCSHC/P 192 - rectum, Carcinoma, Cancer and Fungated Sores, Mounted wet tissue', *SurgiCat,* <http://surgicat.rcseng.ac.uk/Details/collect/4811>, [accessed 8 May 2018]. See also Karen Ingram, 'Tissue to Text: Ars moriendi and the theatre of anatomy', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts,* 15.1 (2010), pp. 48-57, (p. 53; fig.5);

> More's assiduous benevolence, together with her admirable Preface to the Poems, entitles her to universal respect; She has it.[86]

Whether afraid of potential accusations of disloyalty himself, over his pursuit of other patrons, of whom more below, or whether he was merely attempting to capitalise on an opportunity to assert his own faithful deference, the class terms on which Potter grounds his critique of Yearsley could apply equally well to Woodhouse, the other disgraced former beneficiary of Montagu's literary patronage. With malicious artifice, Potter quotes from one of Yearsley's own declarations of her social non-conformity and lack of urbanity, from her poem 'To Stella; on her Accusing the Author of Flattery, and of Ascribing to the Creature that Praise which is due only to the Creator'. The conceit of the poem is essentially that Yearsley, not understanding the codes of polite behavior, transcends them and reaches a new level of sincerity by praising More [Stella] through the only means she knows, prayer:

> For mine's a stubborn and a savage will;
> No customs, manners, or soft arts I boast,
> On my rough soul your nicest rules are lost;
> Yet shall unpolish'd gratitude be mine.
> …
> Blest in dispensing! gentle Stella, hear
> My only, short, but pity-moving prayer,

[86] 'Robert Potter to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 March 1786', MO 4171. In August and September of 1785, relations between Yearsley and Hannah More had become so venomous that More was moved to write a piece, now unfortunately lost, for *The Bristol Gazette* and *The Public Advertiser*, called 'Patroness and Client', which laid out her grievances against Yearsley's ingratitude. Yearsley's response was to enlist another of her middle-class contacts, the Lambeth surveyor, James Shiells, to write a riposte, which appears in *The Public Advertiser* on the 10th of September 1785. By the end of October More had begrudgingly yielded control of Yearsley's finances, and she was in pursuit of a new patron. While the absence of More's opening salvo makes it difficult to state exactly which of these documents Potter is referring to, the timing suggests that he is alluding to one of the documents in this dispute. The balance of probability, given that Shiells refers to 'an invidious paragraph inserted in your {sic} and other papers', is that *The Public Advertiser* manifestation of More's letter appears in the issue of 2 September 1785, which is the only likely candidate from the missing issues from August and September 1785 in the Burney Collections, and Joyce Tompkins identifies Shiell's engagement in the Yearsley case as not beginning until the end of August 1785 in any case. For accounts of this episode see Andrews, pp. 38-50, esp. pp. 42-3; J.M.S Tompkins, *The Polite Marriage,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 76; For Shiells' article itself, see 'To the Printer of the Public Advertiser', *Public Advertiser*, Issue 16005, September 10, 1785, *Burney Collections of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century British Newspapers*, [accessed 15 March 2019].

That thy great soul may spare the rustic Muse,
Whom Science ever scorn'd, and errors still abuse.[87]

In a vein very similar to the Woodhouse letter with which we began this chapter, Yearsley deliberately cultivates an image of religious simplicity and artlessness as a means of emphasising the superiority of her patron.[88] The patron's role becomes one of guide and protector in the world of 'customs, manners, and soft arts'. 'Savage' in this context is used to imply an alienation from the insidious insincerity of the *bon ton,* as we saw satirised in Mrs Modish in the last chapter, and in its place we see a sincerity so pure, that it can only be expressed in quasi-religious language, no matter how 'taint[ed with] profanity and blasphemy' it may appear.[89] Potter seizes on the instability which Yearsley's 'savage' persona introduces into her relationship with More, and reads it as a confirmation of the ultimate inability of those without 'soft arts', i.e. those whose identities are defined by labour rather than social role, like Yearsley and Woodhouse, to form true relationships with their higher class patrons. Potter emphasises this by further implying both that Yearsley renders herself 'Strange' in this torn identity, and that she is ultimately incapable of acting on her own initiative in any case, his reference to her being 'better advised' presumably indicative of a suspicion that the appropriately middle class Shiells was the real driving force behind Yearsley's attack, rather than merely her public representative. Ultimately, Potter grounds his critique in terms of a classist rhetoric, in which polite sociability, the one asset he can claim over his lower class rivals, is the defining factor in developing intimacy with Montagu.

Ultimately, therefore, we can see the presiding mechanisms by which Montagu's clients courted her as a patron simultaneously cultivating similarity and distance, in both literary and sentimental terms. Firstly, they directly correlated their own intellectual interests with hers, reading texts she directed them towards or pursuing controversies she

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[87] Ann Yearsley, *Poems on Several Occasions,* 3rd edn. (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1785), p. 56.

[88] The degree to which Yearsley's performance of religious simplicity represents part of More and Montagu's strategy for marketing *Poems on Several Occasions,* and the conflict over Yearsley's church attendance and baptism of her children, is addressed by Mary Waldron in *Lactilla: Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753–1806,* (Atlanta, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 58–59.

[89] Andrews, p. 62; Modern critics tend to read these lines as anticipatory of Yearsley's push-back against More's influence, with the tension that their potential blasphemy caused being a forerunner to the more explicit patron-client conflict which would emerge later that year. See Andrews, pp. 61-3 and Christmas 2001, pp. 240-1.

was personally invested in. Secondly, they cultivated a rhetoric in which public and private morality was grounded primarily in literary productivity, turning Montagu's support into means of absolute self-actualisation, literally associated with divinity by Potter and Yearsley. Thirdly, they sought to engage Montagu in bonds of equable intellectual exchange whilst at the same time cultivating an identity of sentimentalised anonymity defined through hardship, to appeal to the middle class philanthropy of their patroness. Texts, literary, epistolary, and critical, run throughout all of these discourses, with the careful negotiation of private and public, labour and conversation, being fundamental to the patronised author's simultaneous mission of public identity formation, and private coterie appeal. In the next section, we will see the power dynamic reversed, as Montagu steps into the ostensible role of coterie subservient in her relationship with Henry Home, Lord Kames, in the 1770s, and we will see how coterie authorship could function not as a delicate balance of personal and patronly interests, but as a discursive battleground, with neither participant willing to accept the identity imposed by the other.

Contested Space: Lord Kames' Dominant Discourse

Following her first visits to Edinburgh in the 1760s, Elizabeth Montagu cultivated an extensive engagement with the themes and arguments of the Scottish Enlightenment luminaries like Smith, Ferguson, Gregory, Blair, but particularly, Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782). When Montagu and Kames met in 1766, he was serving as a circuit judge on the Scottish criminal court, and had already established a literary career in legal history, jurisprudence, and speculative philosophy. His works of the 1740s and 50s had laid out his essential philosophical and political allegiances: *Essays on Several Subjects concerning British Antiquities* (1747), a collection of legal and constitutional historical essays written in the wake of the '45 rebellion, offered an anti-Jacobite approach to Scottish legal and constitutional history.*Essays on the Principles of Natural History and Religion* (1751) declared a philosophical sympathy with 'common-sense' philosophy - later to be crystallised in Beattie's *Essay on Truth* (1770) - against the radical scepticism of his peers,

and *Historical Law-Tracts* (1758) was a conjectural history of the evolution of law which helped to establish the 'stadial' model of philosophical history.[90] In the 1760s Kames had crystallised his engagement with speculative history with the first edition of the ever-expanding compendium of his theories on aesthetics and human nature, *The Elements of Criticism* (1762), which we will see Montagu engage with in the course of this section, and published the *Principles of Equity* (1760), a comparative study of English and Scottish jurisprudence. In the period covered by this correspondence, Kames would continue to expand the *Elements* in each successive edition, and extended his conjectural historical output with *Sketches on the History of Man* (1774). *Sketches* is the text with which Kames secured the allegiance of the Bluestockings, with a thesis that, like William Alexander's, not only treated women's status in society as an index of social progress, but advocated improved female education in one of its chapters, 'Rise and Progress of the Female Sex'. This concluded with the statement that 'in an opulent monarchy [which Kames believed Great Britain to be] female education is of high importance, not singly with respect to private happiness, but with respect to the society in general.'[91] 1766 was also the year that Kames inherited the estate of Blair-Drummond in Perth-shire, in 1766 and, alongside the development of the estate which we will see take place across these letters, Kames added a final string to his jurisprudential bow, land management. His *Gentleman Farmer* (1776) and *The Present State of Husbandry in Scotland* (1778), offered personal insights on agricultural land-management from aristocratic and governmental perspectives respectively.[92] The last decade of Kames' life was spent consolidating his intellectual and legal status, with *Elucidations Respecting the Common and Statute Law of Scotland* (1777) and *Hints on Education* (1781) providing educational primers for lawyers and children respectively, distilling Kames' professional and philosophical careers.[93] The power balance between Kames and Montagu represents the total inversion of that between Montagu and Potter or Woodhouse but, as we will see, similarities in social dynamic emerge nevertheless.

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[90] Ian Ross, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of His Day,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 51-55, 203, 99;
[91] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Six Sketches of the History of Man*, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Creech, 1774), I, p. 219.
[92] Ross 1972, 324, 317; A. Durie and S. Handley, 'Home, Henry, Lord Kames (1696–1782), judge and writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13643>, [accessed 19 January 2019].
[93] Ross 1972*,* 363-4

Critical scholarship on Montagu and Kames' relationship has blossomed in recent years, particularly through the work of JoEllen Delucia and Karen O' Brien. Before Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor's ground-breaking *Women*, *Gender, Enlightenment* (2005) had re-inserted women into Enlightenment philosophical discourse, and Karen O'Brien's *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth Century Britain* (2009) had highlighted the parallels between Bluestocking and Scottish Enlightenment historiographical programmes, Elizabeth Montagu received scarcely a mention in Kames scholarship as anything more than a friend and reader. In Ian Ross' biography, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of his Day* (1972), for example, her most substantive role is being sentimental interlocutor in the summer of 1767, inspiring Kames to leave his sick bed to intercede in the case of an orphan, and mourning Kames' death.[94] The sociologist William Lehmann, in his rival biography to Ross, *Henry Home, Lord Kames, and the Scottish Enlightenment* (1971), is even more dismissive of Montagu. His assessment of Montagu and Kames' relationship bears quoting in full, as it is both brief, and almost comically misguided:

> We may not wish to count the "blue-stocking" Elizabeth Montagu among important literary figures, but whatever success she did achieve in letters, was clearly influenced by her intimate friendship and her correspondence over fifteen years with Kames.[95]

The pre-supposition of both Ross and Lehmann is that Montagu's relationship with Kames was characterised an exchange of sensibility on her part, for intellectual rigour on his. This reading resonates curiously with Kames' own attitude towards his correspondence with Montagu, and will, I hope, be successfully debunked in the course of this chapter. O' Brien and DeLucia's engagement with the correspondence lacks the essentially flawed preconceptions of Ross and Lehmann's overly sentimentalised readings, but goes too far into abstraction. O' Brien's conception of an essential agreement between Scottish Enlightenment historiography and Bluestocking feminism, and DeLucia's incorporation of Montagu and Kames' discussion of Ossian into a broader analysis of parallels between Bluestocking feminism and Macpherson's sentimentalised translation both highlight ideological overlaps between Montagu and Kames' interests, neglecting the trajectory of their relationship as manifest in their letters

[94]Ross, p. 135, 366.
[95] William Lehmann, *Henry Home, Lord Kames, and the Scottish Enlightenment,* (Martinus Nijshoff: The Hague, 1971), p. 61.

as a whole.[96] Looking past the ideological agreement between Montagu's feminism and Kames' interest in the historical role of women, one can see the real disparities of power within their relationship. Revisiting the correspondence between Montagu and Kames as a whole, and exploring the discursive and interpretative dynamics at play within it, reveals the gulf between interpretative agreement and the dynamics of 'mutual assistance, friendship, and encouragement', which constituted true Bluestocking sociability.[97] Instead, what we see in the letters between Montagu and Kames is a discursive battleground, in which both Montagu and Kames try to assert their control over the terms of their relationship and intellectual identity, through a series of discussions of texts, ideas, and the correspondence itself.

Montagu and Kames' correspondence began in 1766, following their introduction at one of the gatherings organised by Dr John Gregory in August of that year. Montagu had been a longstanding friend of Gregory in London, inviting him to her Bluestocking assemblies, and maintained contact after the latter's departure to Edinburgh in 1764.[98] Montagu describes her initial meeting with the members of the Scottish Enlightenment, in a letter of 30th August 1766, reflecting an initial excitement at their coterie, seeing it as paralleling in many ways her own Bluestocking assemblies:

> [In Edinburgh] I had a lodging which look'd to the South, & gave me a fine prospect & sweet air. The Houses being built on the side of a Hill have some of them 14, few less than 11 stories, which stories are call'd flatts, I had a flatt that lifted me almost to ye moon, tho I ascended only 2 stories. Indeed I passed all my time at Dr Gregorys whose flatt is still more elevated. & is almost in the third Heaven. The manner of living at Edinburgh is very agreeable. at a reasonable time some friends assemble to supper, the cares of the day are over, & conversation goes on gayly & without distractions. We had Dr Robertson, Dr Blair, Lord Kaimes, & several ingenious men, & some very agreeable Women at supper, ^almost^ every evening. Les Savants & les beaux esprits here are neither pedantic nor pert nor are les philosophes a species apart, Living in the Capital City, & in mix'd society, they are extreamly easy & well bred. The civility paid to

[96] Karen O' Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth Century Britain,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 74-77; Delucia, pp. 64-5.
[97] Andrews, p. 27; See also Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 118.
[98] Paul Lawrence, "Gregory [Gregorie], John (1724–1773), physician and writer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11468>, [accessed 12 May 2018].

> strangers is most uncommon, every one thought how I was to be amused & entertain'd at the assembly as soon as I express'd a wish to see scotch dances.[99]

One can see the interplay of familiarity and distance, familiar from Potter and Woodhouse's letters to Montagu, emerge here in a new form. Montagu's initial conception of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers both bears out the consistencies between their conception of the polite, sociable, mixed gender, grounding of modern philosophy, and her own Bluestocking philosophy, but also subtly conveys her own status of London femininity as marginal to this group. Montagu's self-conscious identification of herself as a 'stranger' is born out both by the lengths to which she goes to spatially de-familiarise the site of these interactions. The contrast between Montagu's carefully curated Bluestocking social space, at this point still the 'Chinese Room' at 23 (now 31) Hill Street, Mayfair, and the way in which John Gregory's flat is characterised, is striking. The location of Montagu's dressing room, within the context of the domestic spaces of the house, is indicative of the way in which she plays with the relationship of exterior, interior, and private, in establishing a site which is public facing, yet under her total control:

> Until she moved to her lavish house at Portman Square in 1781, Montagu held these gatherings in her Hill Street home. That Montagu held some of these events in her dressing room was consistent with the eighteenth-century practice of using that semiprivate space – physically associated with the female body – for informal entertainment and conversation. The room was located on the first floor of the house, adjacent to both a Great Room, used for larger, formal entertainments, and Montagu's bedroom…For small gatherings, the dressing room was used independently of the Great Room, and in conjunction with it when larger assemblies were planned.[100]

This careful layering of space, from the public, to the semi-private, to the private, along with the meticulous management of the interior design of each room in accordance with its respective status, highlight Montagu's associations of location, comfort, and social power. Gregory's flat, as she characterises it to Carter at least (bearing in mind that Carter would have been familiar with Montagu's Chinese Room), is characterised as

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[99] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 30 August 1766', MO 3182, Huntington Library.

[100] Stacey Sloboda, 'Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation: Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room', in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. by Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin, (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 129-148, (p. 132)

being diametrically opposed to this comforting image. Not only does Montagu need to define the term 'flatt', a mode of housing unknown to the London upper class but also she emphasises its strangeness by underlining it twice.[101] Rather than the obvious differences of spatial arrangement between a two-or-three storey London townhouse, Montagu's attention to Gregory's living arrangement is centred primarily on its height. This height is given magical, almost-divine, characteristics. Not only does it refuse to obey physical laws 'I had a flatt that lifted me almost to ye moon, tho I ascended only 2 stories', but it is twice characterised as celestial, identified with the moon here, and also the 'third heaven'. Montagu's reference to the 'third heaven' is an allusion to St Paul's exhortation of divine ineffability in Corinthians 2:12, the same language we have seen in the astral projection letters in Chapter 1, and Talbot's 'Letters to a Friend on a Future State':

> It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.[102]

The spatial metaphors give a touch of irony to Montagu's glowing account of the easy sociability of the Edinburgh philosophers. They may be advocating a free engagement, antithetical to the notion of their existence as 'a species apart', but their gatherings take place in an environment that is elevated into the sky, and their conversation is implicitly associated with the unknowable divine. This strangeness is subtly emphasised further by the fact that the philosophers appear to be amused by Montagu's assumption that they will be acquainted with 'scotch dancing', her attempt to discuss a uniquely Scottish cultural form is treated as an amusing confirmation of her outsider status.

Montagu's recollection of her initial encounter with Kames, in her letter of 11 February 1767, 6 months into their correspondence, can be seen as acting against this

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[101] Montagu's lack of familiarity with 'flat' as a form of residence is not surprising, given that the term does not appear as one of Johnson's definitions of the word 'Flat' in his *Dictionary* (1755), and is not attested in the *Oxford English Dictionary* until the early nineteenth century. Curiously, by Walter Scott's 1824 *Redgauntlet*, residence in flats is distinctly associated with Scottish domestic practice, contrasted with English residence in 'a dwelling-house'. See Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols, (London: printed by W. Strahan, 1755-8), I, p. 815; "flat, n.2." *OED Online*, (2018), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/71170>, [accessed 13 May 2018].

[102] 'Corinthians 2:12, 1-3' [King James Version], *Bible Hub,* <http://biblehub.com/kjv/2_corinthians/12.html.> [accessed 17 May 2018]

sense of alienation, and inaugurates the theme of discursive manipulation through spatial language, which is central to Kames and Montagu's epistolary relationship:

> I am convinced that we have been acquainted in a state of pre-existence, I do not know when, nor indeed where, whether we first met on the Orb of this Earth, & had a short Coquetry in the Planet Venus, or a sober platonick love in Saturn, but I am surer we did not first meet at Edinburgh in the year 1766, therefore, the doubts that would be pardonable in a new friendship, cannot become us. Your Lordship may remember our souls did not stand like strangers at a distance, making formal obeisances, the first evening we supped together at our friend Dr Gregorys, we took up our story where it had perhaps ended some thousand years before the creation of this Globe; if we gave it a prefatory compliment, it was only as ye customary form to the new edition of a work before publish'd.[103]

Combining the tropes of astral projection, a device often employed in Montagu's letters to Carter and Vesey, with the same conceit of a metaphysical authentic social and intellectual bond contrasted with conventional sociability in which Talbot and Grey took such pride, Montagu reclaims the environment of her relationship with Kames. Playfully toying with the platonic language of transcendent love, Montagu's employment of an astronomical framework reconfigures the meaning of her previous extra-terrestrial figuring of the Edinburgh philosophers' gatherings. The astrological conceit of planetary influence being responsible for various emotional states, long debunked as actual physical science by Montagu's day, nevertheless provides a discursive opportunity for Montagu to absent herself from the rules of polite sociable deference.[104] Re-imagining time as well as space, Montagu projects their relationship to '1000 years before the creation of this Globe', once again enacting a transcendence of the actual space and time of their encounter. It is as if Montagu was deliberately challenged by the spatial elevation of Gregory's flat, and is making an effort to stretch the canvas even wider, as a means of encompassing and controlling the space within her own infinite wit. These exercises are given a distinctively textual aspect with Montagu's final image, that of her and Kames'

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[103] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 11 February 1767', GD24/1/573/f.5-8.

[104] For a comparable text which employs a more modern approach to the alignment of planetary motions with sociability, see Elizabeth Carter's own poem 'While clear the Night and ev'ry Thought serene' (1738), dedicated to the astronomer Thomas Wright. Here the order and purpose of the planets act as examples for harmonious sociable interaction, rather than active causes of it. See ; Elizabeth Carter, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle,* ed. by Gary Kelly & Judith Hawley, 6 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), II, pp.347-8, p. 444, n.11.

conversation as prefatory material to the sublime conversation they enjoyed in a neo-platonic pre-existence, itself conceived as a literary work. In this brief extract we can see not only the familiar dynamic of familiarisation and defamiliarisation emerging, and Montagu employing a carefully balanced relational pose to facilitate this, but also see the two frameworks in which these dynamics are employed; space, both geographical and conceptual, and text, primarily the letters themselves, and Montagu's 'Essay on Ornament'.

The spatial dimension of Montagu and Kames' relationship is embodied most neatly in the fact that the growth of their connection was paralleled by Kames' commissioning of improvements in his house and estate at Blair-Drummond, and that Montagu was consulted and kept abreast of these developments, as both an interested party, and a landscaping and interior design authority after her successes with the aforementioned Chinese Room, and her commissioning of architect Robert Adam to design an annex for her Sandleford estate in 1765.[105] In his first letter to Montagu in 1766, Kames describes his 'discovery' of a new space on his estate, which he will convert into a winter garden over the course of their correspondence:

> There is a mass of wood, as you will recollect, near the house of at least six or seven acres, grown up by neglect to an impenetrable thicket. I ordered a path to be made in it, and, on my return from the circuit, was agreeably surprised to find a great variety of pleasing heights and hollows had lain quite concealed. I propose this for a winter-garden; sand-walks to be carried through it in all directions; and a variety of evergreens will afford shelter, verdure and dry footing all the winter over. I enjoy this spot even by anticipation, the scene of many amusing thoughts with a sensible companion, and of meditation when alone.[106]

This description, coming as it does at the outset of his correspondence with Montagu, firmly establishes both Kames' spatial power, and the aristocratic elite ideology that underpins it. For Kames the landscape of his country estate, in contrast to the picturesque wilderness Montagu describes in the letters from Scotland, filled with images of natural sublimity and elegiac echoes of Ossianic verse, constitutes a blank page, onto

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[105] Barbara Schnorrenberg, 'Montagu [née Robinson], Elizabeth (1718–1800), author and literary hostess', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19014>, [accessed 17 May 2018].
[106] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 29 October 1766', in Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home, Lord Kames*, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Printed for William Creech, 1807), II, pp. 35-6.

which he can write his ideal image of retirement.[107] This image, given Kames' status as a male aristocrat with legal and intellectual authority, was not confined by the same anxieties over conspicuous consumption which had troubled Montagu in her work at Sandleford, and could therefore be entirely dedicated to the moral and intellectual self-fashioning of Kames and his immediate circle.[108] The activities that Kames assigns to this garden are indicative of the parameters within which he hopes to define his relationship with Montagu. Walks in this garden accompanied by 'a sensible companion' – a flattering reference to Montagu herself – will be confined to 'amusing thoughts', while solitary walking will facilitate 'meditation'. This model of philosophical retirement stands in stark contrast to the intellectual sociability practiced by Kames in his role as Edinburgh *philosophe*. It provides a spatial symbol for the relationship between philosophical discussion and familiar conversation, within society, the two may be combined, but in the private space of the ego-estate, the two must be separated.

The analogy between Kames' conception of the curated space of his aristocratic estate and the controlled nature of familiar epistolary discourse is borne out by the abundance of meta-epistolary comments which he includes in his letters to Montagu, trying to characterise their discussion along very similar lines to those he imagines in his winter-garden. This letter from 1766, which appears to have been crafted by Kames as something of a manifesto for their correspondence as a whole, makes this very apparent:

> At once, to bury ceremony in the bottom of the sea; I proposed this Letter as an example of mere chit-chat, confined to no subject nor rule. Hereafter the writing to Mrs Montagu I shall consider as but thinking aloud; for I am sensible that the least restraint between friends or companions Soon becomes painful. Whether

[107] For indicative cases of Montagu's sublime descriptions of Scotland, intermingled with Ossianic memory see 'Elizabeth Montagu to Mary Robinson, 4 December 1766', Correspondence of M[rs] Elizabeth Montagu, British Library, London, BL Add MS 40663, f.9-14; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 2 November 1766', GD24/1/573/f.5-8; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Vesey, 1763', MO 6371; 'Elizabeth Montagu to Lord Lyttelton, 29 September 1759', MO 1389; and for more in-depth discussions of her Scottish tours, see W. Powell Jones, 'The Romantic Bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 12.1 (1948), pp. 85-98, which reproduces many of Montagu's letters from Scotland; & Ian Ross, 'A Bluestocking Over the Border: Elizabeth Montagu's Aesthetic Adventures in Scotland', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 28.3 (1965), pp. 213-233, which discusses Montagu's letters from her 1766 tour in the context of contemporary theories of the sublime.

[108] For a discussion of Montagu's anxieties over the propriety of her landscape development at Sandleford, and efforts to appeal to a broad sense of elite social and economic responsibility, see Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth Century Culture,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 167-9.

> this shall be a long or a short Letter, whether it shall be sense or nonsense I do not mind. All I mind is to let nature take its course. The first subject I go upon is borrowed from an apology you make in letting three long days pass without writing. My Dear Mrs Montagu it is my sanguine hope that our correspondence shall be converted into a serious friendship to last for life. Beware therefore of duty, obligation, apology and all such connections as bind together the common herd of mankind. Among friends affection and inclination ought to be the only connecting principles. Here I vow that you never shall have a letter from me but when my inclination prompts me; and if you will be governed by the same rule, I foresee a long and agreeable correspondence.[109]

By formalising the conceit of letters-as-conversation, and emphasising the hedonistic aspect of correspondence to the point of darkly predicting a cessation of correspondence should Montagu fail to engage in correspondence with the same deliberate lightness of touch that he employs, Kames attempts to impose his own discursive framework on the correspondence. Unlike Montagu, his framing is based on diminishing the discursive power of the epistolary genre and divorcing it from debate or intellectual improvement. Kames is attempting to feminise his correspondence with Montagu, drawing on the same tropes of relational feminine epistolarity which we saw Madame de Sévigné's English readers identifying in her letters in chapter 1. Nor is this merely a posture for Kames. Whilst he does begrudgingly participate in the types of philosophical and historical discussion which Montagu prompts, as we saw in chapter 2, he does reprimand her for the content of her letters, on one occasion openly batting down her attempts to engage with him as an intellectual peer. His response to such an attempt in 1767 is one of mock-serious affront:

> You behave to me like a buskin'd Queen acting a capital part in a capital play, without once admitting me behind the scenes into any degree of ease or familiarity. The Professor is the only subject; not a word of my concerns; not a word even of your own, (I suppose because they are mine likewise), your health, your amusements, the company you keep, the books you read, or whether you be as much regarded in your own country as you are here.[110]

Whilst this reprimand is playfully delivered, Kames is reflecting a serious concern over the nature of his relationship with Montagu. Engaging with Kames as an intellectual

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[109] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 November 1766', MO 1164.
[110] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 16 April 1767', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, < http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/homeheEE0020070a1c >, [accessed 19 May 2018.]

equal, here characterised as 'The Professor', rather than participating in familiar correspondence, is portrayed as participating in an insincere performance, stepping outside of her prescribed feminine role. The image of Montagu as a queen conveys Kames' central argument, that she has overstepped her role as socialite-correspondent by attempting to engage him as a fellow philosopher. Kames' subsequent itemisation of the appropriate subjects of conversation, emphasises the degree to which he attempts to mould Montagu, through their correspondence, into a being fundamentally defined by responsiveness and sociability. He characterises her as such at the end of the same letter, having calmed a little; 'in one way I hope always to deserve your favour, which is, by imitating you in every good and social principle, to the best of my power.'[111] As a practitioner of 'social principle[s]', i.e. polite sociability, Montagu may be praised and imitated, but when she strays into the masculine space of philosophical dialectic, she loses the right to exemplarity.[112] Perhaps Kames' cruellest invocation of this restriction occurs in a letter from October 1767, when he enters into what appears to be an extension of the type of moral anthropological philosophy he practiced in his published works, only to reveal at the end of a lengthy excursus, that it was all merely an elaborate means of praising Montagu's sociable virtues:

> Of the animal man Some are made for themselves who have no principles of sodiality because Such principles in them would be of no use to others. Such beings of the insect kind, crawling upon the face of the Earth do certainly exist; but my Correspondent is none of these: nay she is the reverse in every respect.

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[111] Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 16 April 1767', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, < http://dx.doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/homeheEE0020070a1c >, [accessed 19 May 2018.].

[112] The predominant male homosociality of Scottish Enlightenment, and the degree to which its model of feminized sociability provided a window for Enlightenment female intellectual practices, has been the subject of much recent critical discussion. Jon Mee's *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community, 1762-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 63-5, as we have seen, places the Scottish model of conversation in dialogue with the aristocratic sociability of the Earl of Shaftesbury, leading to a tentatively optimistic reading. This notion is shared and extended by JoEllen DeLucia's more recent *A Feminine Enlightenment* (2016), which goes so far as to identify features of the Enlightenment programme specifically with Bluestocking philosophy. The most recent word on the subject is from Kate Barclay and Rosalind Carr, whose reassessment of the situation highlights women's social role as 'facilitat[ing]' male intimacy, Kate Barclay and Rosalind Carr, 'Women, love and power in Enlightenment Scotland', *Women's History Review*, 27.2 (2017), pp. 176-198, (p. 180)

> Her social connections extend so wide, that it is not easy for her to perform any action or almost to move a step without affecting others.[113]

Kames is evidently intending an act of self-parody, playing with the conventions of his preferred genre as a means of 'admitting [Montagu] behind the curtain', to use his own phrase, but the end result is merely sinister. Montagu is bracketed into Kames' system, and 'defined' as essentially affective and sociable. A letter from 1771 reveals that Kames' attitude only intensifies through their correspondence as his rhetoric becomes less subtle. This culminates in an Ovidian image which draws Kames' control of the space of the winter-garden and discursive authority over Montagu's identity together into a metaphor with implications so shocking that even Kames feels the need to qualify it immediately afterwards:

> [T]he tree of pleasure is of the deciduous kind. I know but one way of making it an Ever green without corrupting the mind so as to lose sight of another world, and that is to plant Mrs Montagu there — you'll hold this to be a figure of speech: I acknowledge it, but then it comes as near truth as any figure ever did.[114]

In an updated and moralised parallel to the transformative eroticism of Ovidian or Petrarchan poetics, Kames paralyses Montagu, rendering her an object of 'pleasure' without agency, and definitively aligning his actual authority over the winter-garden, with the discursive authority he is trying to wield through his letters.

Contested Space: Montagu Writes Back

Where Potter and Woodhouse, to a greater or lesser degree, can be seen to be attempting to mould themselves into discursive roles that they think will appeal to Montagu, the empowered figure in their epistolary relationship, Montagu shows no such readiness to submit to Kames' authority. From the initial dislocation discussed above, she quickly moves into a position of spatial and discursive assertiveness. This is her response to Kames' projection of the winter garden as a space of sociable amusement and intellectual detachment:

[113] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 22 October 1767', MO 1167.
[114] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 25 December 1771', MO 1174.

> I remember perfectly the walk your Lordship mentions, and all the beauties of that sweet place. It is happy for a person of your taste, to find in his morning's walk, the pastoral, the epic, and the tragic beauties. The gently murmuring river, the shady banks, the beautiful pastures, the noble Castle of Stirling, rising in the pride of impregnable strength, defying force and time; and the ruined castle of the Regent, which brings to mind *the tale of other times*, the catastrophe of ambition, and the downfal of greatness, suggest the soft and tender, the sublime and melancholy ideas, and exercise the various powers and affections of the soul. Where there is this happy assemblage of poetic and romantic beauties, so properly adapted to his genius, we will sit and read the charming poet, who sings of
> Le Donne, i caverlieri, l'arme, gli amori,
> Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese.
> I approve greatly of your Lordship's scheme of making a *winter-garden*. We are apt to do in our gardens, as we do in our minds; to cultivate the gay ornaments of the summer season, and aim at having all those things which flourish by mild sunshine, and gracious dews; forgetful of the rude elements of human life, and regardless of the seasons of unfriendly and churlish weather, when sun-beams warm no more, and chilling hoar-frosts fall. Sage is the gardener who procures a friendly shelter of ever-greens to protect him from December storms, and cultivates the winter-plants that adorn and enliven the dreary season. He is but half a philosopher, who, when the gardens of Epicurus are out of bloom, cannot retire into the Stoic's walk; and he is too much one, who would rigidly prohibit the gay flowers and sweet aromatics of the summer, and sit always under the cypress-shade: So I expect to find the roses and carnations at Blair-Drummond in June, as well as the snow-drop and cyclamen in December. Your winter-garden will be a moral lesson, as well as a pleasant walk for your posterity, recommending to their cultivation, unfading merits and faithful friends.[115]

It would be hard to imagine a more definitive rejection of the essentially superficial nature of Kames' epistolary manifesto. Rather than reading the landscape as a space of idle amusement or private reflection, Montagu actually uses the epistolary form to apply to it a succession of interpretative frameworks, teasing out the symbolic and moral implications of the different aspects of the view. This mode of reading nature can be traced back as far as 1741, at least, when a youthful Montagu, in the midst of reading Cicero, having been inspired by her readings in Conyers Middleton's *Life of Cicero* (1741), looks out of the window at a colony of rooks, and muses on their political philosophy; 'I have not yet discovered ye form [of] their government, but [I] imagine it is Democratical. There seems an equality of power and propriety, and a wonderful agreement of

[115] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 4 November 1766', Tytler 1807*,* II, p. 37-9.

opinion.'[116] Montagu's epistolary record is replete with other examples of a similar tendency, to the extent that it can be considered not merely a refusal to participate in Kames' discursive space, but instead an application of the same type of spatial reconfiguration referred to above. Her attitude to the landscape is couched in a language of proto-Romantic exhortation, which jars strongly with Kames' proprietorial pose. Kames' description had been perfunctory and casual, with the landscape defined through its function and ownership, reflective of the same conception of land first implicitly in purely economic terms, in his pamphlet *The Progress of Flax Husbandry in Scotland* (1766), and later in more depth as a means of economic, moral and political self-improvement as appears in his *Gentleman Farmer* (1776).[117] Montagu instead applies a succession of literary and philosophical readings to the landscape, readings which bind the landscape to a system of signification which transcends Kames himself. First she invokes the fall of James Douglas, 4th earl of Morton, (1516-1581) as a historical narrative of tragic hubris.[118] Then she refers to Ossianic 'tales of other times' which, by their elegiac celebration of the long-deceased martial heroism of third century Celtic Scotland, implicitly evoke the ephemerality of human grandeur, and finally Ariosto, in the quotation from *Orlando Furioso*. These intertexts, and Montagu's decision to emphasise them in her approach to the space, all draw attention to the landscape as an invitation to moral speculation.[119]

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[116] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 10 August 1741', MO 815.

[117] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer: Being an attempt to improve agiculture, by subjecting it to the test of rational principles.* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Creech, 1776), p. xvii, xviii.

[118] Douglas, the last of the Scottish Regents, achieved political ascendancy by taking control of the privy council of the future James I at Stirling Castle in 1578. He enjoyed a situation of comfortable semi-retired authority until 1580 when Elizbeth's ambassador Richard Bowles revived his alleged complicity in the assassination of Lord Darnley in 1767 and he was put to death. According to David Hume, Douglas' return from semi-retirement was potentially motivated by 'ambition', and he sees Morton's tenure as regent as characterised by factionalism and avarice. See G. Hewitt, 'Douglas, James, fourth earl of Morton (c. 1516–1581), regent and chancellor of Scotland', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7893>, [accessed 4 January 2018]; David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution 1688,* 8 vols, (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1767), V, pp. 234-5.

[119] Montagu's assertion that a landscape should convey its natural beauty rather than be defined by use should not be over-emphasised, her reading is entirely in accordance with that employed by Lancelot "Capability" Brown at her estate at Sandleford. It is merely worth noting that she particularly emphasises the non-artificial aspects of the landscape here, whilst Kames is outlining his project for landscape redesign. See John Phibbs, "Brown, Lancelot [known as Capability Brown] (bap. 1716, d. 1783), landscape gardener and architect." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2017), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3635>, [accessed 22 May 2018].

When Montagu does move on to the winter garden itself, her conception of the landscape again proposes a philosophical and intellectually elevated approach to the space. Anticipating Kames' rebuke that she speaks 'only to the Philosopher', Montagu grounds her letter not merely in philosophical themes, but in explicitly academic philosophical language, invoking the juxtaposition of the Stoics and the Epicureans as a means of binding ornament and design, the appropriately feminine sphere in which Kames wants to engage her, to the language of comparative philosophy, in which she wants to engage him.

Kames' response to Montagu's discursive disobedience is bizarre; rather than openly rebuking Montagu, or trying to push her onto other themes as he would do later, he publishes this section of her letter. The 1769 fourth edition of Kames' *Elements of Criticism* includes a slightly edited version of Montagu's letter, given in a footnote to Kames' discussion of gardening more broadly, and winter-gardens in particular. This letter is presented as being from 'a correspondent, whose name I shall conceal so I not be thought vain'.[120] Whilst Kames' gesture may appear simply flattering, and he clearly felt it to be so himself, the apparatus and context surrounding Kames' quotation suggests otherwise. Though he does continue to discuss Montagu's 'Essay on Ornament' throughout its gestation and publication, and it is ambiguous what exactly he is referring to when he claims 'I am most seriously bent to have your name some where in that book' in 1766, but whichever text he is referring to, Kames does not wait for an affirmative response from Montagu.[121] He only draws Montagu's attention to this note specifically in 1769, after it was printed:

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[120] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism,* 4th edn, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Millar, 1769), II, p. 449. The edited version of the letter appears as follows:

In life we generally lay our account with prosperity, and seldom, very seldom, prepare for adversity. We carry that propensity even into the structure of our gardens: "we cultivate the gay ornaments of summer, relishing no plants but what flourish by mild dews and gracious sunshine: we banish from our thoughts ghastly winter when the benign influences of the sun chearing us no more, are doubly regretted by yielding to the piercing northwind and nipping frost. Sage is the gardener, in the metaphorical as well as the literal sense, who procures a friendly shelter to protect us from December storms, and cultivates the plants that adorn and enliven that dreary season. He is no philosopher who cannot retire into the Stoic's walk, When the gardens of Epicurus are out of bloom: he is too much a philosopher who will rigidly proscribe the flowers and aromatics of summer, to sit constantly under the cypress-shade.

[121] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 November 1766', MO 1164.

> In the last Edition of the Elements of Criticism, which I ordered to be delivered to you, there is a shining passage vol: 2. Page 449 which I owe to your Ladyship, tho I ventured not to use your name without your consent.[122]

Kames employs the differing cultural associations of print and manuscript to literalise his charge that Montagu speaks to him only as a philosopher, whilst literally erasing her. Converting their exchange into a public performance and erasing the identity, and more specifically the gender, of his correspondent, enables Kames to reclaim control over the philosophical interpretation of his winter garden. This is literalised in the mise-en-page by the juxtaposition of Kames' voice in the primary text, and Montagu's, which is confined to a footnote. In an inversion of the print relationship between Montagu and Potter, the dominant Kames expresses his discursive power by forcing his interlocutor into the margins, while Montagu, with her commissioned explanatory apparatus, keeps a quiet proprietorial eye on proceedings from the margins. The coterie dynamic at play in Kames' erasure is apparent in the justification that he gives for it. Employing the language of decorous feminine behaviour, as a subtle rebuttal against Montagu's perceived lack of it. Kames claims that he is afraid of being thought 'vain'. Presenting himself as fundamentally opposed to figures like William Strahan or Thomas Birch, who acted as the professional middle men between the print and commercial spheres, Kames' identifies himself absolutely with an elite coterie culture into which the public are invited to glimpse, but not engage.[123] To include Montagu's name in print would be to invite the public directly into their conversation, rather than keeping the conversation decorously aristocratic and exclusive. Robbed of an identity, Kames' anonymous correspondent becomes essentially indistinguishable from his own perspective, to the lay reader. The implication is that Kames is emphasising his argument with support from his coterie, which is figured as homogenous entity that endorses Kames' text, rather than a collective of individuals with differing perspectives. Also, more directly, Kames' membership of the Edinburgh philosophical scene was so well known, that erasing the gender of his interlocutor would likely have led to the automatic assumption that it was one of his fellow philosophers to whom he was referring.

Though the exact timing of the submission of the fourth edition of the *Elements* to press cannot be precisely determined, it is likely that Kames would have found his

[122] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 9 December 1769', MO 1169.
[123] See Schellenberg, p. 16.

decision to publish Montagu's initial reflections on the winter garden vindicated by her continued problematisation of his elite model of aristocratic sociability. Her letter of the 12th of December 1766, written in response to the above-mentioned manifesto of epistolary idleness, makes this plain. Montagu opens her response by reaffirming the necessity of grounding intellectual reflection and elite coterie contemplation within a broader social context:

> Perhaps there is not any thing more delightfull than escaping from the bustle of society to the quiet of solitude, unless it be, the returning to society after having been long confined to solitude, if I was assured your Lordship would ^not^ draw an inference from it to my disadvantage, I would own to you, that the transitions from the Town to the Country, & from the Country to the Town, are inexpressibly delight-full to me. Different powers of the mind are exercised in the different situations, so pray do not intirely impute this taste in me to levity.[124]

In a gesture that responds to, and inverts, the concerns of thinkers like Catherine Talbot over the dangers of retirement, Montagu argues that an existence which is defined totally by isolation and disconnection will be lacking in philosophical depth as well as social refinement. This concept is emphasised by Montagu's employment of a distinctly professional image to characterise her vision of integrated coterie sociability and worldliness. In a discursive mode that makes the fullest use of the generic instability of the epistolary form, Montagu enters into a miniature narrative that is half-fable and half-philosophical thought experiment:

> I imagine a Pedlar would be extreamly pleased at first if he was made a King; & from measuring tape & country needles, was exalted to balancing the interests of Empires, & considering the ^arduous^ affairs of government, till finding how little his speculations affected the state of the World, & that his most studious thoughts ended ^often^ in ineffectual schemes, he would wish to return to an employment in which he could realise his intentions & find his capacity on a level with his business. This is just the case of every human creature who is not engaged in some profession or important situation. In ^the^ World, we carry about the small wares of social life, are very busy, and a little usefull.[125]

In an ironic declaration of the value of worldly engagement over abstracted jurisprudence, Montagu unites her sociable and professional identities in the image of the Pedlar, presenting her participation in the world as parallel to the work of politicians like

[124] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 12 December 1766', GD24/1/573/f.1-4.
[125] Ibid.

Kames. However 'small' these actions, they are 'a little usefull', in comparison to the 'ineffectual schemes' of the high-minded. The image of the Pedlar also adds a connotation of displacement to her archetype of worldly engagement. The immediacy and practicality of the Pedlar, who has to shape and re-inhabit the world around him moment-by-moment as he moves between markets plying his trade, inverts Kames' conceit of space as an ego-document, a site in which his social philosophy may be literalised. The Pedlar, with whom Montagu will explicitly identify at the end of this letter, 'I am longing for my Pedlars pack', functions as more than an embodiment of the value of worldliness. he represents the polite female intellectual, who must re-define and re-assert their identity and discursive power with each new encounter, lacking the spatial grounding of a quantifiable ego-document like Kames' winter-garden. This image is naturally hyperbolic, Montagu's social and financial situation is very similar in practical terms to that enjoyed by Kames, they both have large estates and participate in similar social circles, the disparity Montagu is emphasising is merely a rhetorical game. Her point here is directly contradicted, for example, by a 1760 letter she wrote to Elizabeth Carter, bemoaning the rigamarole of social engagement, and fantasizing about a space of rural retirement, akin to Blair Drummond: 'I shall endeavour to get myself a retreat in summer in some wild Country where I may live with departed saints & sages for some months every year, rather than waste my time on every idle fool that asks for it.' [126] It is significant that she grounds the identity of this persona in the one field in which there is a notable difference between herself and Kames, that of commerce. Montagu aligns a commercial, worldly discourse with that of social and moral improvement. The influence of Hannah More's conception of moral and social reform can also be felt in Montagu's representation of the binary between the elite philosophical speculator and the manual labourer:

> The inherent dignity of the Soul makes ^it^ sometimes disdain these petty occupations, & love to retire to the proud state of meditation; there it enters into the Operations of Omnipotence, & the views of infinite wisdom, looks with delight through the infinite gradations of beings, & with amazement round the boundless system of creation, it exults at feeling itself an intelligent spectator of such a Majestick scene, & in the arrogance of its reasoning, & the pride of its reveries, wonders how it could ever condescend to the low commerce of ordinary life, & says to itself it will for the future dream in state. But Alma, by the Mother's side, a poor mechanic, satiated with the long idleness of a Summers holyday, again crys out for her shop & her tools, & leaves to intellectual beings

[126] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 24 October 1760', MO 3039.

> the life of meditation, & wisely says, her business lies chiefly where she can add to the happiness & comfort of her fellow creatures.

Engaging in a practical morality grounded in the virtuous practice of physical labour, 'alma', who could be a character in one of More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, embodies a romanticised model of good behaviour which is the antithesis to Kames' detached abstraction.

Montagu is, naturally, just as disconnected from the realities of working class experience as Kames, More, or, in the Romantic continuation of this tradition, Wordsworth and Coleridge, but this does not stop her from wielding her comparative worldliness against her implicitly 'proud', 'arrogant', correspondent. She even goes so far as to explicitly identify herself with this character, claiming at the end of her letter that 'to own the truth I am longing for my Pedlars pack'.[127] Whilst this letter does predate the golden age of Montagu's working class patronage in the 1780s, the fact that she chooses to emphasise her worldliness, as opposed, perhaps, to an overt reference to the Bluestocking assemblies themselves, suggests that she is already interested in cultivating a model of sociability which allows for affective identification across class lines. As if to round off the tour of enlightenment philosophical tropes, Montagu concludes her letter with a small capitulation, utilising the neoplatonic conceit of the music of the spheres to offer Kames a conciliatory reflection on his public role as a judge, before skewering the lowest hanging fruit in her rogues gallery, the bon-ton:

> In a sweet retirement I imagine the mind keeps time to the musick of the spheres; its movements are such as correspond with the nature of things, & are not affected by prejudices or examples, but keep even & true measure with reason & its appointed duties. In the bustle of the World we are often impell'd to what is wrong, diverted from what is right, & carryd about in the whirl of fashion & predominant opinions.

The philosophical game that Montagu has been playing throughout the letter comes to absorb Kames' own anticipated defence. His dual roles of philosopher and judge are both based on the application of the speculative and abstract conceptions of justice, progress and moral elevation, to the pragmatic discourse of contemporary law. But of course this has itself been undercut by Montagu's reflection that true virtue must be grounded in social intercourse and worldly exchange, rather than abstract appeal. Her

[127] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 12 December 1766', GD24/1/573/f.1-4.

final sting, at fashion and opinion, is an acknowledgement, like that encapsulated in her attack on the bon-ton through Mrs Modish discussed in Chapter 2, that fashionable society, in its current state, is merely a moral trap from which she is distancing her own philosophical and moral value systems. She may even be consciously evoking her *Dialogues of the Dead* here, given the degree to which Lord Lyttelton, and his embodiment of civic humanist virtue, forms a recurrent topic of discussion for herself and Kames.[128] We will close our discussion of Montagu and Kames' correspondence by discussing its textual consolidation. The 'Essay on Ornament', which Kames solicited in 1767,

'Gladly would I quot my author': Montagu's 'Essay on Ornament' and Kames' *Elements of Criticism*

The story of Montagu's 'Essay on Ornament', the most significant single piece of her unpublished critical writing beyond her correspondence itself begins on the eighteenth of March, 1767, when an irate Kames furiously transcribes, and sends to Montagu, a description of the king's state coach, gleaned from 'an old newspaper' which had been being used as 'a wrapper' prior to Kames' discovery.[129] The article begins with the description of the front and sides of the coach:

> The new state Coach is magnificently elegant. In the front panel is represented Britannia, attended with trade and commerce, and the emblems of our happy constitution in Church and state: on the back ground is a distant view of London. In the back pannel are depicted, with their attributes, Neptune and Amphitrite, accompanied with Tritons and Naiads, bringing their tributes to the English shore from all quarters.[130]

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[128] See for example 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 27 September 1773', MO 1173.

[129] Unfortunately the specific newspaper to which Kames is referring has proved impossible to locate. Kames' distaste notwithstanding, the coach itself has remained a fixture. Now recognized as the 'Gold State Coach', the coach designed by Samuel Butler, with its official state debut in 1762, has continued to be used in every royal coronation from George IV onwards. See Royal Collections, 'Samuel Butler (active 1762), Gold State Coach 1762', RCIN 5000048', <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/5000048> [accessed 4 June 2018].

[130] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 18 March 1767 {enclosure}', MO 1165.

This passage, which is the first paragraph of the page-long article, appears to be as far as Kames is willing to engage. His letter accompanying this piece launches into a heartfelt critique of new coach for its violation of the principle of 'utility' as Kames lays out in his definition of 'relative beauty' in the *Elements of Criticism*. In Kames' account of beauty, he divides beautiful objects into those which have 'intrinsic beauty', which 'is discovered in a single object viewed apart without relation to any other.' His example for this the perception of a tree, in which its 'colour, figure, size, and sometimes motion', combine harmoniously to form 'a single complex perception' which constitutes an experience of beauty. Kames contrasts this with 'relative beauty' which is derived from the utility of the object and its relation to other objects: 'Relative beauty is accompanied with an act of understanding and reflection…intrinsic beauty is ultimate, relative beauty is that of means relating to some good end or purpose.'[131] The State Coach, with its presiding allegorical sculpture dismissed as an inharmonious 'a strange jumble of fictions', loses its right to claim intrinsic beauty, whilst its essential uselessness as a coach prevents Kames from allowing it relative beauty either:

> A Coach Serves the purposes not only of carrying us from place to place, but also of defending us from the weather. In the latter view I cannot relish paintings upon the pannels, which require to be protected from the weather not less than the passengers within. Some Sort of japanning, it is true, may answer that purpose: but in point of beauty appearance prevails over reality; and nothing will ~~appear~~ ^be^ beautiful to a good taste but what appears suitable and proper.[132]

Inspired by the necessity of attacking the state coach, which Kames refers to as 'the negative' of proper taste, the cantankerous philosopher asks Montagu to provide him with 'Something from your Ladyship to adorn the next Edition of the Elements of Criticism; and I will suggest a subject if you have not any other that relishes more. The subject is of Ornaments, what proper what improper.'[133] In response Montagu produced her 'Essay on Ornament'.

The very brief epistolary opening to the Essay, which is likely the immediate impetus for Kames' above quoted complaint that Montagu only addresses him as a

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[131] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 3rd edn, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Millar, 1765), I, pp. 184-6.
[132] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 17 March 1767', MO 1165.
[133] Ibid.

philosopher, openly and deliberately delineates her essay and defines its genre, whilst simultaneously indulging in a humorously extreme application of the modesty topos:

> To own the truth, there is an invincible ^obstacle^ to my writing, which is, that I cannot think, To meditate upon a subject, to investigate, to analyse, belongs not to me, a butterfly, not a bee, amongst the flowers of Parnassus, I sport my idle summer's day, unqualified to collect the sweets I feast upon. I can suit fringes to a garment, or a set of topknots with tolerable fancy, but the Science of Ornament, if I may call it so, leads beyond my knowledge in to the ^recesses &^ labyrinths of History & Mythology, I believe, if we were to examine it we should find all our ornaments of architecture derive their descent from the Religious or Civil Institutions.[134]

The image of the industrious bee, a stock metaphor with which Montagu was long familiar, is here juxtaposed with the ornamental butterfly, a deliberately gendered image, which Montagu comprehensively eviscerates.[135] Montagu's catalogue of thought processes of which she claims to be incapable give an impression of her as utterly submissive to the mode of epistolary conversation which Kames outlines for her in their initial exchange. Her pose implies the same mode of correspondence we saw Walpole championing in his discussion of Sévigné in chapter 1, reactive, pleasant and, essentially superficial.[136] Montagu then deftly shrugs off this association by not only characterising her academic activity as the 'Science of Ornament', but employing the rhetoric of heroic masculinity to characterise it, with 'recesses and labyrinths' evoking the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur. Montagu then goes on to adopt the same authorial mode she will later employ in the *Essay on Shakespear*, alternating between the lordly second-person pronoun of Enlightenment philosophy, and an anecdote-heavy first person, which draws attention to her polite sociability, but integrates this into her academic writing style, rather than distinct from it.

The structure of the Essay employs a comparative historical approach similar to that we have seen Montagu employing in her discussions of ancient Greece and the

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[134] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.

[135] For examples of Montagu's prior moralising engagement with the stock image of the drone, see 'Elizabeth Montagu to Edward Montagu, 1749', ed. Montagu, III, p. 121, and 'Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 8 October 1766', MO 3185, in which bees and wasps are invoked to highlight the differences between valuable and venomous literary critics.

[136] The studied superficiality of polite female conversation, as advocated by Montagu's and Kames' mutual friend, Dr John Gregory would, of course, go on to find its most famous nemesis in Mary Wollstonecraft, see *A vindication of the rights of woman: with strictures on political and moral subjects,* 2 vols, (London: Printed for J. Johnston, 1792), I, pp. 53–55.

Ossianic world. Her overarching thesis is that, contrary to Kames' assertion of the absolute binary between 'relative' and 'intrinsic' beauty, the social and symbolic function of artistic practice, whether considered in terms of fashion, ornament, or religious imagery, constitutes a link between the two. The first section of the essay establishes the sociable academic tone of the work by grounding its abstract philosophical conclusion within Montagu's network of contacts. Montagu conceptualises the modern vogue for neoclassical art through the work of 'my friend Mr adam,' referring to either Robert or William Adam, the well-known neoclassical architects. She goes on to define this architectural fashion as stemming from the inherent aesthetic virtue in objects created for religious purpose, whether the belief systems which underpinned them are still extant or not:

> Art is not first employd to decorate & enoble ordinary objects, but is exerted originally in honour of things held in reverence. A desire to represent the object of devotion first set Sculptors & Painters to work. Love, Veneration, gratitude, flatter, & luxury, afterwards imployd the arts Which devotion inspired.[137]

By historicising Kames' definition of 'utility', and allowing for the prospect of beauty as the recognition of a sentimental legacy of religious love, Montagu not only provides a philosophical justification for the antiquarian and classical tendencies in her own research interest, but articulates a mode of historical analysis in which sensibility and rationalism are yoked together. Sensitivity to aesthetic value is linked to a form of trans-historical empathy. As the essay goes on she unites this to the cult of civic humanism and neoclassical models of political economy, whilst simultaneously demonstrating her engagement with Scottish Enlightenment epistemology. She essentially proposes that classical artefacts act on the imagination which, by the principle of the association of ideas, inspires the contemplation of the cultures they embody:

> In ornaments of dress we should apply to opinion, in those of edifices to imagination. Objects are often recommended more by introducing a certain set of ideas ^than from their form.^ Every Roman antiquity is enobled by the Majesty of the Commonwealth. It would be odd to say, the Battle of Marathon & the Straits of Thermopylae, added some grace to a Tripod or a Vase, & that in looking on a Statue of Jupiter, Mars, or Juno, you owed some part of your pleasure to Homer, Pindar & ye other greek poets… the eye of imagination, in its fine phrenzy rolling catches with rapture a glance of an intellectual World, looks

[137] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.

> through the perspective of ages with sacred veneration on objects celebrated in history, or immortalised in verse:.[138]

Whilst this does roughly fall into Kames' definition of 'relative beauty', in that the appreciation of these objects is contingent on their association with other objects and ideas, the invocation of the principle of free association problematises this. As Montagu observes, the actual form of the object becomes somewhat irrelevant in the chain of associations in which it is linked, and the ultimate unpredictability of the human mind causes any sense of relational beauty as being in any way correlated to the object which inspires it becomes ultimately ludicrous.

Not content with confronting Kames in the field of abstract philosophical reason, Montagu confronts the comparative historian on his own turf, highlighting the correlation between historical consciousness and artistic appreciation and even, in a gesture of surprisingly acute class consciousness, contemplating the modes of historical discourse which are denied to the modern world by the vagaries of historical taste and aesthetics:

> Civil institutions have an effect upon the arts. Triumphal arches, Pyramids, Obelisks, Monuments for the dead, all these gave models for ~~architure~~ architecture & when their a ^original^ application is lost still give us ornaments, & have to us a grace that has its source in their first honourable destination. A Fat old fellow & a Goat, are surely not very Gracious forms, yet who dislikes Silenus & his companion? To adorn the Festival, & swell the triumph, our ancestors had a World of allegorical Pageants, Faith, Hope, & Charity, scattered almonds and raisins, Figs & dates, on a Lord Mayors day; the Virtue & Vices had mock fights, but these things being too subtile for the Vulgar, & too gross for the learned, never gain'd any establishment nor animated artists to any degree of perfection, so that we are obliged to recur to ancient superstition & ancient artists.[139]

Whilst Montagu does not go to the extent of formulating a cohesive theory of the relationship between class and cultural memory, the fact that she appears to consider the erasure of British folk-tradition as an accident of historical taste, rather than an inevitable consequence of its inherent inferiority, suggests that she is already starting to cultivate the theoretical groundwork for the self-conscious elevation of labouring class creative voices in her own day. We have already seen this manifested practically in her promotion of Yearsley and Woodhouse, and theoretically in her *Essay on Shakespear,* which presents

[138]'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.
[139] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.

Shakespeare's perceived lack of education as essential his creative genius: 'What the critic investigated by art and study, the wisdom of nature unfolded to our unlettered poet.'[140] Fiona Ritchie has argued that this point 'can also be read as arguments in support of women's activity in the public sphere'.[141] With this in mind, the canonisation and re-centring of carnivalesque culture here and in the pedlar image discussed above can be seen as an extension of both her upper class self-deprecating wit, and a gendered challenge to Kames' discursive authority.

Turning again to directly combat Kames' central theme of 'Utility', Montagu invokes the same juxtaposition of nature and artifice which Kames had drawn in his initial definitions of 'relative' and 'intrinsic' beauty and, with the playful disregard for discursive boundaries which is apparent throughout this entire correspondence, collapses nature and artifice, intrinsic and relative, into one another in a deft stroke of wittily satirical natural philosophy:

> It is certain that the great artificer has conceal'd the usefull under the beautifull. We perceive the beauty of every part of a minute animal immediately, it is obvious to sense, but it is by reasoning we perceive its admirable fitness to its destination. In dress, I will allow, every ornament shd, if possible, appear of use; but this from reasons the Beholder seldom traces to their source. Too curious adorning of the Person makes a man appear effeminate, a Woman Coquettish.[142]

Applying the language of fashion to the intelligent design Kames considers inherent in nature, and drawing an implicit analogy between the dressmaker or stylist and the working of the divine, Montagu reiterates the problematic relationship between Kames' categories of beauty. In the process, she also further bridges the discursive gap between 'masculine' natural philosophy and 'feminine' fashionable concerns. As with her undermining of the principle of utility as a valid delineating factor in terms of historical artefacts, here its value as a philosophical principle is undercut by the providentialist reasoning that all nature is ultimately defined by use. In Montagu's analysis the detachment of the category of beauty from the concept of utility will always be erroneous. She goes on to offer something of a conciliatory note, agreeing that utility does serve a function in historical conceptions of beauty, although one far more rarefied

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[140] Montagu 1769*,* p. 148.
[141] Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 69
[142] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.

and cynical than Kames initially entertained. Montagu summarises one of the key themes of her analysis, the ultimately social function of conceptions of beauty, by treading even more definitively on Kames' discursive toes by grounding her argument in the same pseudo-anthropological comparative history which forms the bulk of Kames' own works:

> That Man aims at distinction for Valour, Power, Wealth &c and assumes readily such ornaments as indicate some superiority in these respects is very certain. Savage nations paint themselves in order to look terrible to their Enemies. Princes in some parts of Africa have scars imprinted on their faces to denote their quality. I suppose as a sign of being lineally descended from Warriors. But peculiarities of dress are of a nature distinct from those ornaments of which I imagine your Lordship wd particularly enquire. In every Country where there is any degree of Civilisation, the favourite objects of luxury & pride will be adorn'd with some cost & pains.[143]

It is not until this anecdote, towards the end of the Essay, that Montagu acknowledges that what she is arguing may deviate from Kames' initial commission. Even this admission though, is given through a heavy veil of irony. Having established a fundamental continuity between fashion, beauty, politico-cultural structure, history, and even divine agency, Montagu then coyly returns to the modesty topos, implying that she has wasted Kames' time on flippantly feminine subjects. This reflection on the association of the social performativity of dress, and the relationship this implies between beauty, cost, and manufacturing labour forms the final strand of Montagu's essay. Having run 'ornament', which has been completely subverted into the fields of aesthetics and social discourse by this point, through the realms of historical-cultural analysis and religion, Montagu rounds off her analysis with an economic reading of the nature of ornament as considered in different cultures:

> The horse furniture of the Turk, the Carpet on which the lazy asiatick lolls his inactive hours away, the Fountain which mitigates the breeze of his sultry noon, will have their decorations, but as the value & reward of the manufacturer, who makes these decorations, depends on the fancy & caprice of a private Patron or customer, he dares not to lay out too much time & pains in his performance; he depends much on the fineness & richness of the materials in which he works, gold, silver, silk, ^& many other things^ have a standard value, the workman knows the price at which they will be purchased, but he does not know at what his inventions will be estimated, for there is no common subject of veneration or liking between him and his Customer; the subject the artificer has chosen may displease, then the labour is lost, Poverty will work Wherever wealth will

[143] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.

> purchase its labours, but where Ornaments are not appertaining ^to^ or derived from the sacred sources of religious ceremonies or Civil institutions, there may be fancy displayd & pains employ'd, but art will not be establishd on any principles, nor can Imagination collect from any common Store House or Treasury subjects of universal celebrity.[144]

In defining Ornament as indicative of cultural and racial predispositions, as well as socio-economic conditions, Montagu binds her study of ornament into the broader terms of her conception of historical consciousness. Her reflection that the temperature and environment, 'the Fountain which mitigates the breeze of the sultry noon' informs this concept of national aesthetics also shows the influence of Montesquieu's climatic theory of national character, as established in his *Spirit of Laws* (1748). The capriciousness she finds in eastern art can be seen as an aesthetic extension of Montesquieu's famous declaration on equatorial morality:

> In temperate climates we find the inhabitants inconstant in their manners, in their very vices, and in their virtues: The climate has not a quality determinate enough to fix them. The heat of the climate may be so excessive as to deprive the body of all vigor and strength. Then the faintness is communicated to the mind; there is no curiosity, no noble enterprize, no generous sentiment; the inclinations are all passive; indolence constitutes the utmost happiness… [145]

Though there are no direct references to Montagu's having read *The Spirit of Laws* directly, his reference to the passivity of inhabitants of southern countries, does underpin its theoretical framework. Where Montagu supersedes her precedents is in the conception that, within the Enlightenment lexicon of conjectural-historical anthropology, 'Ornament' represents another framework through which these differences can be analysed.

On the 21st of September 1767 Kames replied to Montagu's essay with two closely written sheets which constituted 'what I have added upon Ornaments to be inserted in the next Edition of the Elements' according to the appended letter. This letter has an understandably defensive tone; 'You'll observe that many of the thoughts are taken from a Letter of yours, but miserably reduced from the sprightliness of your composition; which however was necessary to preserve the identity of stile.' Kames goes

[144] 'Elizabeth Montagu to Henry Home, Lord Kames, 13 April 1767', MO 1175 A.
[145] Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent, (London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1750), p. 320.

on to explain why he cannot accredit the work to Montagu herself; 'Gladly would I quot my Author; but the imputation of vanity terrifies me, which I would certainly draw upon myself by professing in public my intimacy with Mrs Montagu. It also strikes me that if she be to appear in public it ought to be with greater dignity than in giving to an Author a few hints about ornament.'[146] Sure enough, when this passage does appear, on pages 473 to 476 of the Fourth edition of *Elements of Criticism* in 1769, it does indeed appear without any attribution whatsoever, not even the perfunctory footnoted attribution of the insight to 'a correspondent', as he had done with Montagu's reflections on winter gardens in the same publication. The propriety of silencing Montagu in this way is debatable, Montagu it must be said was still favouring anonymity for the initial publication of her *Essay*. Yet the grounds under which Kames refuses to even acknowledge Montagu's work publicly are indicative of the same dynamic of discursive dominance we have seen throughout his correspondence with her. Montagu is bracketed not only by her femininity, in the charge that revealing her would make him guilty of 'vanity', boasting about having rich and powerful friends, but it would also betray the coterie nature of their relationship, the exposure of which to the public would be a violation of their elite sociability,.

The one consolation which may be drawn from Kames' erasure of Montagu's intellectual labour is the fact that her essay, after Kames' 'miserable reduc[tion]', has become totally unrecognisable. Gone are the socio-cultural readings of historical aesthetics and the evolution of religious devotion into modern conceptions of inspirational beauty. Instead Kames presents pat generalisations. This example of the aesthetic disparity between a mundane and sacred objects, through the image of Silenus, is lifted directly from Montagu's essay, but, robbed of its place in her overall argument, becomes nothing more than an amusing anecdote:

> For instance, the reverence we have for the ancients is a fruitful Source of ornaments. Amalthea's horn has always been a favourite Ornament, because of its connection with a Lady who was honoured with the care of Jupiter in his infancy. A fat old fellow and a Goat are surely not graceful forms; and yet Silenus and his companion are every where fashionable ornaments. What else but our

[146] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 September 1767', MO 1166.

> fondness for antiquity can make the horrid form of a Sphinx So much as endurable?[147]

What Kames casually brushes off as 'our fondness for antiquity', is Montagu's argument that beauty works through the free association of ideas, and action of the trans-historical imagination into a conception of classical virtue. In place of Montagu's defence of Ornament as a reasonable subject for comparative historical and anthropological study, Kames instead gives a description of how objects may be best placed in a room, cherry picking from Montagu's essay the elements which do not contradict his own philosophy. He carefully edits the text in order to eliminate the theory of historical aesthetics which Montagu has established, replacing it instead with a light disquisition on ornamental etiquette:

> Statues employ'd as ornaments are proper to adorn the great stair that leads to the principal door of a Palace, or to occupy the void between pillars. But a niche in the external front is not a proper place for a statue: and the situation of statues upon the roof or upon the top of the walls would be so ticklish as to give pain by the fear of their tumbling down. To adorn the top of a wall with a row of vases is an unhappy conceit, by placing things apparently of use where they cannot be of any use.[148]

Whilst Montagu would not submit any more work to Kames for publication, she did persist in maintaining a correspondence with him, one that was frequently playful, and often frustrating, as we have seen. The continuation of their 'friendship' would seem to indicate that Montagu took Kames' plagiarism less seriously than we have here. Montagu herself does not address the subject again in this correspondence. There is, however, the reaction of one of Montagu's other correspondents which belies her polite façade. Scrawled on the bottom of Kames' bastardised rendition of Montagu's essay there is a note, in the hand of Lord Lyttelton: a terse note which encapsulates Kames' behaviour perfectly: 'I am vext to see that so much of your admirable letter is stolen and spoilt here.

[147] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, "The extracts Ld Kames made from my letter on ornament with his alterations", MO 1163; contained within 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 September 1767', MO 1166.
[148] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, "The extracts Ld Kames made from my letter on ornament with his alterations", MO 1163; contained within 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 September 1767', MO 1166.

You must, if you can, leave out whichever the parts he has mangled.'[149] This would suggest that Montagu, and her friends, were aware of the disservice Kames had done her, and Lyttelton, who, whilst still falling short of open acknowledgement, had always asserted Montagu's identity as a fellow intellectual within the anonymous framework of his own *Dialogues of the Dead*, offering a glowing assessment of the intellectual 'Friend' in the preface, and a note stating 'The following three dialogues are by another hand' prior to Montagu's contribution to his work.[150] Montagu's continued faith in her own arguments continued as well, despite the treatment they had received from Kames, as is attested by the fact that, during a 1772 epistolary exchange with James Beattie on William Jones' recently collection of orientalist poetry, *Poems: Consisting chiefly of Translations from Asiatick Languages* (1772), she gives a reading of Eastern verse which echoes the Essay on Ornament.[151] After engaging with the transition from hieroglyphics to language, and the preponderance of allegory in ancient cultures in a gesture which echoes her discussion of Ancient Greek allegory in *The Essay on Shakespear,* Montagu concludes by reflecting on oriental emotional caprice and sensuality and gives a familiar Montesquieuian moral reflection:[152]

> Something of the pomp & luxury of an Asiatick Poets descriptions certainly arises from the wealth & plenty of his Country, & ye display of gold & jewels & ye perfumes &c in the Palaces of the Great… As to the Passions I believe them to be much more violent in warm Countrys, & as the Asiatick life is more indolent, the body employd in less motion, & the mind less diverted by variety of objects, it desires what it likes with more vehement & uninterrupted attention.[153]

Though Montagu playfully claims, as she does throughout her correspondence with Kames, that 'these are my random thoughts upon your questions but as they are merely

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[149] 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, "The extracts Ld Kames made from my letter on ornament with his alterations", MO 1163; contained within 'Henry Home, Lord Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 September 1767', MO 1166.
[150] George Lyttelton, *Dialogues of the Dead,* (London: Printed for W. Sandby, 1759), p. vii; 290.
[151] 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 5 September 1772', MS 30.2.98.
[152] 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 13 December 1772.' *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017), <https://doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0010032a1c >, [accessed 6 Dec. 2018]; For Montagu's discussion of allegory and superstition in the *Essay on Shakespeare,* see Montagu 1769, pp. 153-157;
[153] 'Elizabeth Montagu to James Beattie, 13 December 1772.' *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. by Robert McNamee et al. Vers. 3.0, (2017), <https://doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/montelEE0010032a1c >, [accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

my own, I have no great confidence in them,' the similarities in argument to the Essay on Ornament, and the depth of her reasoning suggest that her reflection here is a consolidation of her existing theory, rather than an off-the-cuff comment.

A 1778 letter from Sarah Scott offers the last word on Montagu's relationship with Kames. Long after the 'Essay on Ornament' affair, and indeed the bulk of their correspondence entirely, Montagu's candid honesty with her sister reveals a Kames who is absolutely outdated, boring, pedantic, and irritating:

> 'The insensible state of, as it were, it so ill suited to your mind that I am by no means contented it shou'd be yours; however I flatter myself it is removable at pleasure, or by pleasure, since you coud divert yourself of it during the visit of Lord Kaimes, who by the description I have received of him from you is a pretty strong trial of the Spirits, & woud leave you no moments of relaxation. His Lordships years to be sure seem better suited to an antediluvian Lover than to one of the present Century, but if his ardour is taken into the account he may be allowd of a proper age for an Enamorato of a Lady of prudence, who woud not make choice of a Harlequin or a rope Dancer for the sake of their agility; he who can travel an hundred miles to make a short visit to his Goddess must surely be young enough to obtain her gracious smiles.[154]

In the three case studies of Woodhouse, Potter, and Kames, I have addressed some of the ways in which the power structures and imbalances behind patronage and coterie networks are articulated at the level of epistolary text and print discourse. Drawing on the basis of network theory laid down by scholars like Schellenberg and Sairio, I have aimed to show the ways in which correspondence provides unique evidence for conceptualising such power imbalances. With the Foucauldian premise that discursive authority represents a position of relational power, I have highlighted the ways in which interpretation and epistolary self-expression become spaces of conflict over meaning and identity. These conflicts take place in part in the spheres of constructions of masculinity and personal virtue, as in the cases of Woodhouse and Potter's manipulations of their gender status, and the latter's self-conscious positioning of himself as a public moralist and critic-hero. The most notable discursive conflicts that have emerged in this chapter, however, are those that centre on spaces and literary interpretation. The former could be approached conceptually, as in Potter's anxieties about inclusion in Montagu's inner circle or Kames and Montagu's attempt to map their respective conceptual structures

[154] 'Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, 31 August [1778]', *The Letters of Sarah Scott,* ed. by Nicole Pohl, 2 vols, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), II:168.

onto their correspondence, or physical, as in Montagu's physically managing access to Woodhouse in polite society and her own sense of displacement in the Edinburgh flat with the Scottish Enlightenment literati. In the first chapter we saw the positive side of Leonie Hannan's thesis of the importance of the virtual letter space as a site of interpretative and creative freedom, through the cultivation of affective intimacy in the Bluestocking response to Sévigné, here we have seen the inverse of this spatial metaphor, with the sense of displacement or lack of spatial control being exploited within each correspondence as a mechanism for controlling its interpretative parameters. This brings us to the most essential continuum through the case studies, that of reader response and interpretation. Following Markman Ellis' discussion of the social dimensions of reading in *Bluestockings Displayed,* I have analysed epistolary descriptions of acts of reading as socially performative acts, but by combining these descriptions with analysis of the language of interpretative dislocation and self fashioning, I hope I have produced a model for tracing the correlation between reading and coterie power across larger bodies of work like the *EMCO* corpus.

Conclusion

Across the thesis and the mini-edition, my purpose has been to construct a series of models for future reader-response analysis of epistolary documents based on a combination of close reading and the types of large-corpus textual analysis offered by a digital humanist framework.

The first chapter was based on the isolation of an individual text or well defined cluster of texts, here the letters of Madam de Sévigné and works which discussed her, and the contrast between responses to these texts within my chosen correspondence, and those in what I termed 'popular' culture, meaning primarily magazine and periodical culture, as well as the print sphere more broadly. This mode of analysis is intended to be applicable to any de-limitable text or body of texts in which the researcher's subjects engage in extended critical discussion. Such a mode of analysis will allow for the cultivation of detailed accounts of reading experiences of a single text or cluster within a single network across an extended period of time. Such an analysis throws into sharp relief the points of contention and continuity between the reading practises within the

subject group and those outside of it. In this case stereotypes around the French, and around femininity, concepts of affectivity, and the relationship between physical and spiritual community all emerged as central components in the Bluestocking reading of Sévigné, and points on which their reading diverges from the 'Popular Sevignism' I have identified across the chapter. In identifying these themes, this chapter has developed both the concepts of Bluestocking affective community, and the epistolary techniques by which it is achieved, as well as providing additional material evidence for the social function of collaborative reading, as outlined by scholars like Markman Ellis, in consolidating communities and defining relationships. This represents just one example of such a focused analysis, however. Alternatives I could have chosen, and which I plan to approach in future research as the *EMCO* corpus expands include the Ossianic corpus, about which Montagu corresponds with Carter, Vesey, Beattie, Kames, her sister-in-law Mary, from the initial publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in 1760 through the 70s and 80s; The collective reading of Shakespeare would represent another potential de-limitable case for future analysis, particularly if temporally isolated to the period of 1761 to 1769, the period in which Montagu composed the *Essay on Shakespear*. This would allow for the limitation of correspondence to the inner circle of that composition, Lord Bath, Lord Lyttelton, Elizabeth Carter and Sarah Scott.

The second chapter was a more loosely defined process of tracking the transformation of a particular discourse through a series of correspondences and print texts, without an individual text or specific author at the centre of that discourse. This opened the corpus of relevant material far wider than in the first chapter, and required more assertive thematic limitation and differentiation. For this purpose I chose to explore the intersection between Montagu, Carter, and Talbot's conception of moral community and the eighteenth-century cult of Neoclassicism, conventionally seen on separate sides of the debates between modernity and luxury. I once again traced the points of fragmentation between their source texts and interpretative frameworks, and the moral imperative behind their identities as public women. I was able to identify the classical exclusion of women from the public sphere, rejection of the 'feminine' as irrational, and confinement of Platonic and Socratic modes of conversational self-improvement to a closed circle of elite aristocrats as the central points on which the Bluestocking reading departed from their sources. Here their interpretative creativity became more central to the discussion, as did the relationship between epistolary and

print text, as Montagu, Carter, and Talbot adopted strategies, from the diagnosis of failures in the ancient societies themselves, to redefinition of key concepts like 'feminalities', to the Platonising of the public sphere, in order to reclaim classical concepts of civic virtue for rational Enlightenment female communities like their own. This mode of analysis of the evolution of divergent horizons of expectation can be applied to a wide range of discourses across the Bluestocking epistolary corpus, and with the release of the *EMCO* and extension of the *Electronic Enlightenment* holdings, researchers will be able to apply the same method to both provide microscopic text-by-text evidence to substantiate the broad analyses of discursive evolution in works like Emma Major's *Madam Britannia,* with its self-conscious alignment of Anglicanism and femininity as well as opening the field to entirely new discursive structures arising from the letters themselves.

The third chapter provides a model for analysing the correlation between power dynamics within coterie or patronage relationships and the acts of interpretation take place within the epistolary and print documents produced by them. The correspondence of James Woodhouse attests to the ways in which social and financial power may be levelled, directly and indirectly over not only creative output and epistolary self-fashioning, but also over acts of seemingly independent interpretation. By teasing out the 'brainwashing' aspect of Woodhouse's complaint in the *Lucubrations*, I was able to explore the ways in which Woodhouse himself recognised the imposition of artificial interpretative frameworks on his personal reading when under Montagu's aegis. For Robert Potter, his attempts to define his own authorial persona around Montagu's intellectual interests, and carve out a space for himself as a coterie partner in her social circle, rather than a financial dependent, represent the same conflation of social and discursive power. The correspondence between Montagu and Lord Kames shifts the spatial image onto the correspondence itself, with the two correspondents, closer in social power than was the case in the other two case studies, clashing over the virtual space of the letter itself. Discursive power is literalised most directly throughout the letters in Montagu and Kames' attempts to determine the function of their correspondence, Kames defining it as a friendly, flirtatious correspondence, in which Montagu's contribution is primarily ornamental, the feminine 'softening' of Addisonian conversation, whilst Montagu treats the correspondence with the philosopher as an intellectual exchange with the potential for real intellectual development. This conflict

reaches its zenith in the 'Essay on Ornament', with Montagu's comparative historical-anthropological analysis of aesthetics literally re-written into an insipid collection of reflections on where objects should be placed in a room. The analytical approach behind this chapter aims to build on work by scholars like Betty Schellenberg, by exploring the fractures and conflicts behind social authorship, as well as the opportunities. The dominant themes here, of spatial and interpretative acts as sites of conflict, are more specific to this body of data but, as with chapter 1, I do believe that a fuller engagement with spatial acts across the Bluestocking corpus will yield informative results about the power dynamics at play.

Ultimately, both the digital edition and the thesis represent anticipatory gestures to the much larger, collaborative, hyper-linked digital projects currently in development at *EMCO* and *Electronic Enlightenment*. These chapters have reflected a series of techniques for addressing, through literary close reading, reader responses to a single text, interpretative responses to a broad discourse, and the correlation between acts of reading and network formation. It has also provided models for delimiting large bodies of data through, text, theme, and relationship. Each of the major discourses associated with Bluestocking scholarship that this thesis has touched on, affectivity, politeness, publicity, patronage, literary creativity, the nature of correspondence has been subtly altered and developed, and it is my hope that future studies on the ever expanding corpus of digital letter facsimiles, both Bluestocking and otherwise, will be able to build and expand even further, converting the macro data produced by practical difficulties of access and scale, into microscopic analysis of discursive change in epistolary documents line-by-line and word-by-word.

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