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**Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona**

**‘In Mutual Confidence’: The Construction of a Female Arcadia in
Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* (1762)**

Treball de Fi de Màster/MA dissertation

Author: Helena Zúñiga Centenero

Supervisor: Dr Carme Font Paz

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística
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Abstract

Sarah Scott's best-known novel *Millenium Hall* (1762) presents a female utopian community in the countryside of Cornwall. This arcadia is created by upper middle-class women who are resentful with the male-dominated society that subordinates them and confines them to the private, domestic spaces. These ladies decide to establish an alternative and self-sustainable community, ruled by women, away from the world of men, that is called Millenium Hall. Despite the innovative creation of a female community that challenges the traditional values of its time, there is a general tendency among scholars to categorise the novel as a conservative and moderate text. In view of this, the aim of this dissertation is to examine the construction of alternative values in this female community in order to show how Scott's novel is in fact a ground-breaking text and an example of women's resilience in the eighteenth century. Sarah Scott not only proposes a new set of renovated values for her idyllic society, she also openly condemns the violence exerted over women showing instances of non-conformism and female agency through her female characters. Finally, she demonstrates how the reforms she proposes in her novel can be embraced by everyone and not only by women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction	4
0.1 Sarah Scott and the Bluestockings.....	5
0.2 Women and the Emergence of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century	8
Chapter 1. The Construction of New Values in an Alternative Feminine Community..	12
1.1. Education	12
1.2. Marriage.....	15
1.3. Self-sufficiency.....	19
Chapter 2. Women’s Resilience and Resistance to Social and Political Constraints	25
2.1. Condemnation of Violence: Manipulation and Dependency.....	25
2.2. Examples of Non-conformism and Female Agency.....	30
Chapter 3. The Male Characters of the Novel.....	34
3.1. Sir George Ellison as a Narrator	34
3.2. Conflict of Narrators: Sir George and Mrs Maynard.....	37
3.3. The Evolution of Sir Ellison and Mr Lamont	39
4. Conclusions	42
5. Bibliography	46
5.1. Works Cited	46
5.2. Works Consulted.....	47

0. Introduction

Sarah Scott's best-known novel *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Chapters of the Inhabitants and such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections as May Excite in the Reader Proper Sentiments of Humanity, and Lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue*¹ (1762) presents a female utopian community in the countryside of Cornwall. This arcadia is created by upper middle-class women who are resentful with the male-dominated society that subordinates them and confines them to the private, domestic spheres. These ladies decide to establish an alternative and self-sustainable community, ruled by women and away from the world of men, that is called Millenium Hall. The author depicts this female refuge as an ideal place of generosity and hospitality that protects not only women, but also other powerless social groups from society. In fact, the main founders of the community have one characteristic in common: they all have suffered in the hands of men. That is why these women choose to distance themselves from the real world and build a cooperative society that is based on "mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and correspondent affections" (Scott 111)². *Millenium Hall* takes the form of an epistolary novel in which the narrator Sir George Ellison depicts the female community, its inhabitants, values and economic system to an unknown friend. Apart from that, the novel contains four different stories narrated by one of the inhabitants of the Hall in which we can see the backgrounds of the founding members of the community, their experiences of social injustice and how they became residents of this female paradise.

¹ In the following pages, the title will be only referenced as *Millenium Hall*.

² In following references to the author's novel, only the page numbers will be cited.

0.1 Sarah Scott and the Bluestockings

Sarah Robison Scott (1723-1795) was an English novelist. She came from a distinguished upper-class family that gave her access to a thorough education and allowed her to enjoy a high social rank. In 1751, she married George Lewis Scott by mutual agreement. According to Gary Kelly (1995), he was a highly respected mathematician and musician, who was well-connected at court and well-known in society. However, their marriage did not last for long as they separated after a year for reasons that are still unclear. After her divorce, her father refused to “release to her the financial settlement that was to have with her in the marriage” (Kelly 21). She then settled down in Bath with her friend Lady Barbara Montagu. As she was in need for an income, Scott started working as a translator and writer. Although she had already started her literary career as a writer for pleasure with her novel *The History of Cornelia* (1750), she now increased her number of publications in order to make a living. She wrote both fictional and historical novels, as well as educational texts. Apart from *Millenium Hall*, other notable works from the author are *Agreeable Ugliness or the Triumph of the Graces* (1754), *A Journey through Every Stage of Life* (1754), *The History of Gustavus Ericson King of Sweden* (1761) and *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), the sequel of *Millenium Hall* in which Sir George, inspired by the women’s idyllic society, decides to create his own community based on his experience in the Hall and the lessons he has learnt from the women. Scott managed to sell her works successfully, but most of them were published anonymously. Apart from her writing, she also dedicated her life to several philanthropic and charitable projects.

Sarah Scott is not only known for her literary career. She was, in fact, a member of the Bluestockings Society and the younger sister of Elizabeth Montagu, one of the main founders of this intellectual association. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (2002) unravel that “these informal gatherings united men and women primarily of the

gentry and upper classes, with the participation of a number of more middle-class professionals, in the pursuit of intellectual improvement, polite sociability, the refinement of the arts through patronage, and national stability through philanthropy” (Pohl, Schellenberg 2). The Bluestockings were also interested in female education, literature and the enlargement of female social roles in the public spheres. Indeed, these literary salons were an opportunity for women to blur the line between public and private places since although the social gatherings were organised in the intimate domestic space, they were clearly “an expansion of the authentic public sphere into institutions of intellectual sociability” (Pohl, Schellenberg 12). The main founders of these intellectual reunions were Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey and Frances Boscawen who created their salons in the 1750s. The circles were maintained in the 1780s by a second generation of Bluestockings. In these informal assemblies, women performed intellectual discussions, philanthropic projects and supported the publication of female authors. According to Pohl and Schellenberg the Bluestocking women played a prominent role in the cultural and social transformations of the second half of the century that entrenched a renovated system of values in England. Furthermore, Harriet Guest (2002) adds that these women thought of their gender in terms of a collective identity and that this group consciousness demonstrates how these women had “a powerful sense of duty or obligation to be socially and publicly useful (Guest 69).

Sarah Scott became a member of the Bluestockings Society along with her sister. However, several scholars remark that “she disliked the large Bluestocking assemblies and was rarely to be found at them” (Bannet 2005, 43) preferring to participate in smaller and more intimate gatherings. Nevertheless, she kept a close relationship with the Bluestockings’ inner circle. Her sister and other members of the society supported and patronaged her writings advising and encouraging her. According to Betty Rizzo (2002),

after the end of her marriage, Scott established her own community in Bath. Montagu's Bluestocking Society, which was located in London, focused on the elite members of society, and thus tended to invite to discussions only the well-known, popular individuals of the moment in order to maintain the sophisticated reputation of her salon. In opposition to her sister, Scott's community in Bath centred its attention on charitable events. However, this does not mean that she did not have her sister's support. Apart from Montagu, she was financed as well by her friend Lady Barbara (Bab) as she had a very reduced income at that time. As Bannet indicates, Scott was herself "both subject and object of philanthropic patronage" (Bannet 31). Scott practiced philanthropy with poor and handicapped women, destitute gentlewomen, orphaned children and the impoverished classes.

The philanthropic community of Bath was interested as well in the construction of an alternative community where women could be publicly active. In fact, the core of this group consisted of women who, like Scott, were unmarried and, though well born and well educated, were therefore irrelevant to society as they were not fulfilling what was expected from them as women: "the procreation of children and the transmission of possessions" (Rizzo 199). Thus, what Scott and the members of her group wanted was to change their situation and empower themselves. According to Rizzo, the women of the Bath community supported one another by sharing their resources, and refusing to accept their peripheral position in society as unproductive women. They created a community in which women like themselves could play active societal roles and serve as benefactresses. Bannet and Rizzo relate this intellectual society to the creation of *Millenium Hall* as the novel could be considered a fictional example of the community of Bath that expands the philanthropic projects of these women. In fact, Scott tried to put their liberating society into practice through what they called the Hitcham experiment which consisted in the

creation of a small female community in a small farm at Hitcham. Rizzo states that this experiment was Scott's great effort to prove that the utopian scheme of her novel was possible to put in practice on a reduced scale. Elizabeth Montagu also contributed to the project. However, the Hitcham experiment did not last for long and came soon to an end, not because the women were unhappy living together, but for various reasons regarding influences from outside the community, and some conflicts of loyalty. After the failure of the experiment, Scott confined herself from public life and devoted her time writing novels but keeping contact with her sister and the inner circle of the Bluestockings.

0.2 Women and the Emergence of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century

Scott's publication of *Millenium Hall* also coincided with the rise of the narrative genre in the height of the eighteenth century. The progress of the middle class and the expansion of public education contributed to the increase of the reading population. Furthermore, literature was for the first time addressed to a bigger audience as it was no longer produced just for people who could afford an education in classical letters. This way, as Ian Watt indicates (1975), reading became a leisure activity for the middle classes and indeed the novel was an "easier form of literary entertainment" (Watt 48) that facilitated a more rapid and inattentive reading habit. The gradual development of the reading public and the demand for simpler genres that no longer obeyed the traditional literary standards made possible as well that the act of writing became a more accessible profession for the members of the middle class, including women, since it eventually turned into a business.

Josephine Donovan (1991) identifies the connection between the rise of the novel and "the entrance of large numbers of women into the arena of literary production for the first time in history" (Donovan 441). Donovan points out that one of the reasons why women could contribute to the production of the novel was because this was the first literary genre that did not require an extensive classical training, "from which women had

been barred for centuries” (Donovan 442). Many women saw thus writing novels as the opportunity to gain an income and become gradually independent since it was possible to do it within the limits of the domestic sphere. However, writing did not only become a profession for women, but it also became an instrument of vindication to criticise the emerging capitalist system and the commodification of women in the marriage market. Donovan explains that the decline of arranged marriages encouraged the rise of marriage market exchanges which made women “more overt commodities by requiring them to sell themselves” (448). The marriage market became in fact a predominant topic in eighteenth century novels. In this way, women novelists not only wrote to support themselves, but to show resistance to the objectification of their gender and exert the diminished power that was granted on to them. Sarah Scott, as a member of the Bluestocking Society, also sought to express these ideas in her novel *Millenium Hall*.

Several scholars have already analysed Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, from different perspectives. However, there is a general tendency among them to categorise the novel as a rather conservative and moderate text. For example, in her article, Susan Lanser (1992) remarks on the limitations of the narrative strategy of the novel. Lanser claims that, in her search of a masculine approval for her novel, Scott tries to legitimise her own work by using a male narration. Nevertheless, by making a gentleman narrate the story of these women, the author reduces the subversive nature of the novel. Lanser also points out that Scott only centres her rebellion on women from the upper classes, maintaining a certain distance between the privileged women of the community and the labouring classes. Julie McGonegal (2007) argues that in her novel, Sarah Scott resists male dominance, denouncing conventions and codes from her contemporary society that contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal hierarchies. Nevertheless, she also specifies along with Lanser that *Millenium Hall* is not a classless utopia and even argues that the

women of the community reproduce, on some occasions, the same dynamics of the external world with the members of the working class that are also part of the community. Nicolle Jordan (2011) follows this line of thinking and claims that Scott's narrative remains conservative. Although Jordan focuses her argument on the landscape ethos of Millenium Hall, she also discusses the economic and social system of the community, arguing that Scott's society reinforces capitalist production practices by aestheticizing industrious and physical labour in her novel where we can see that the working-class members of the community are stereotyped as people who embrace labour. Thus, Jordan as well as McGonegal argues that by maintaining a social hierarchy, Scott's subversive text is rather modest and not a radical narrative.

After having seen how some scholars classify *Millenium Hall* as a considerably non-progressive novel, focusing, on most occasions, only on certain aspects of the text, the aim of this dissertation is to examine the construction of alternative values in the female community in order to demonstrate how Scott's novel is in fact a ground-breaking work and an example of women's resilience in the eighteenth century, rather than a conservative text that does not challenge the socio-cultural values of her time. Some scholars have already pointed their analysis towards this direction. In his article, James Cruise (1995) centres his argument on the male protagonist of the novel, Sir George Ellison, focusing on the effects the community of Millenium Hall exerts upon him. Cruise argues that Sir George, as a former slave owner in Jamaica, is not a qualified narrator to tell the story of these women. Although the narrator admires the community, he still undermines their values imposing his own thought over theirs and treating them with a degree of paternalism. According to Cruise, Ellison's narration of the story is limited and thus, the reader cannot fully identify the essence and purpose of the female arcadia which is to protect women from the social injustices of the external world. However, despite the

superficial, restrictive vision we can have of this society through the eyes of Sir George, Cruise still argues that Scott's novel is an uncommon and defiant text in which the author exposes the limitations and constraints that were imposed upon women during the eighteenth century and shows in this way some signs of noncompliance and nonconformity. Nicole Pohl (1996) argues in her article that *Millenium Hall* challenges not only the socio-political values of the eighteenth century, but also the literary traditions of her time by creating a separated utopian alternative reality where women are given the opportunity of self-determination. Although Pohl's main interest in her text is the relationship between space and gender, and the architectural representation and utopian thought, she clearly defends that Scott's novel deconstructs the male-dominated social and political spaces of her contemporary society as they are reclaimed and redefined by the female protagonists of the novel. Finally, Bryan Mangano (2015) states that Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* is a ground-breaking novel since the author proposes a new type of economy and commerce system based on friendship and reciprocal affection. According to Mangano, by doing so, Scott defends gender equality in public spheres as she asserts that women are as good as men in professional positions related to businesses. The significance given to female friendship in the community of Millenium Hall makes Scott's text an unconventional and innovative narrative that dares to explore alternative ways of living for women beyond marriage.

In a similar way to these considerations, I will try to demonstrate how Scott's novel is a revolutionary text that challenges the societal pressures and cultural limits to which eighteenth-century women were subjected, and how she defends female agency through her fictional work. In order to do so, I will firstly focus on the construction of alternative values in the feminine community, paying special attention to education, marriage and self-sufficiency and showing how the Millenium Hall residents managed to

construct their ideal asylum supporting their community by themselves. Secondly, I will analyse the personal narratives of the main characters which present instances of non-conformism and resistance to social and political constraints from the external world. Finally, I will examine the two principal male characters of the novel, the narrator and Mr. Lamont, to see how they both perceive the utopian place, and what they learn from it through their observations by analysing the purpose of using a male narrator in a female community.

Chapter 1. The Construction of New Values in an Alternative Feminine Community

1.1. Education

After being advised by his physician to travel to the western part of Britain in order to ameliorate his health with a “frequent change of air, and continued exercise” (54), Sir George Ellison decides to set on a journey around the country with his younger companion Mr Lamont. However, when they reach Cornwall, their carriage breaks down unexpectedly and they are forced to seek a refuge to stay the night. At that moment, both characters see a house at the end of a large avenue of oaks and feel immediately attracted to it. On their way to the house, they are fascinated by the beauty and elegance of the grounds that surround them: “It is a mile and a half in length, but the eye is so charmed with the remarkable verdure and neatness of the fields, with the beauty of the flowers which are planted all around them, and seem to mix with the quickset hedges, that time steals away insensibly” (56). As they come nearer the residence, the beauty and the fragrance of the flowers and plants increases, and the scene becomes more animated as they see “the greatest variety of cattle” (57) on one side of the road, and a group of young women working the fields on the other side. Gary Kelly points out that when Ellison first arrives at the Hall, a shepherd’s music reminds him “of the pastorals of Theocritus, thus

associating the place with Arcadia, or the idealised and egalitarian rural world of classical myth” (Kelly 36) and soon after, the narrator depicts the pastoral landscape surrounding the house as an “earthly paradise”, “a fairy land” and an “asylum against every evil” (58). From the very beginning, we can thus see how Ellison immediately associates Millenium Hall to an idyllic place and compares it to a paradise. However, the exterior scenery of the community is not the only element that catches his attention.

While the two gentlemen are admiring the bucolic surroundings of the Hall, a serious storm gathers over them. In order to protect them from the rain, one of the residents of the mansion invites them to come inside. At that moment the narrator is introduced to the women inhabiting Millenium Hall and is astonished from what he sees within the walls of the house. “If we had been inclined before to fancy ourselves on enchanted ground, when after being led through a large hall, we were introduced to the ladies, who knew nothing of what had passed, I could scarcely forbear believing myself in the Attick school” (58). Sarah Scott presents her utopian community with a rather strong, radical image. Several scholars have compared this first scene of the ladies with Raphael’s painting “The School of Athens” (1508-11) portraying a group of philosophers led by Plato and Aristotle (Gary Kelly, Deborah Weiss 2012). However, in this passage of the novel, the author seems to replace all the male philosophers of the scene with the female members of her ideal community. The women and girls appearing in this scene are performing similar activities to the characters of the painting: they are reading, writing, and having intellectual discussions. Furthermore, Ellison also perceives objects and tools that indicate the study of other disciplines. For example, the narrator finds “three large book-cases”, “an orrery” which is a mechanical model of the planetary system, a “globe” and other academic supplies such as pens, ink and paper. Apart from that, there

are younger girls as well drawing landscapes and figures, carving picture-frames in wood and doing embroidery, and finally a young woman translating a text to French.

Through all these activities that the women are performing in the hall, we can see that Scott is providing her protagonists with a thorough education that goes beyond the restrictions of domestic life. As a member of the Bluestocking Society, Scott questioned the type of limited education that young women received in their lifetimes. That is why, in her utopian world, the women of the Hall do not only learn how to clean, sew and manage the household, they also learn other academic disciplines that contribute to the growth of their intellectual faculties. However, the ladies are not only concerned with exercising the mind. As we learn later, they also perform some physical activities to exercise the body, such as walking around the fields every morning and taking care of the gardens. This full training shows how the ladies of Millenium Hall are interested in accomplishing a Renaissance education, exercising at the same time body and mind.

Further in the novel, we become aware that these women are also skilled in playing instruments and performing “family concerts” (62). The narrator is completely absorbed when he sees them carrying out the performance: “the songs were sung in a manner so touching and pathetic, as could be equalled by none, whose hearts were not as much affected by the words, as their senses were by the music” (63). On that same evening, Ellison also discovers that the inhabitants of Millenium Hall are capable as well of maintaining clever and articulated conversations. Ellison describes their talent as follows:

The conversation after supper was particularly animated, and left us still more charmed with the society into which chance had introduced us; the sprightliness of their wit, the justness of their reflexions, the dignity which accompanied their vivacity, plainly evinced with how much greater strength the mind can exert itself in a regular and rational way of life (64).

With the extensive and varied abilities that the women of Millenium Hall display, Scott seems to be proposing a different education for young girls. She shows how women are

perfectly capable of learning the same fields of study as men by accomplishing the same results. In fact, the women make references to Hobbes and Shakespeare, proving in this way how the women know about humanistic disciplines. By educating her characters in an alternative manner, the author shows how she rejects the traditional, constrained and insufficient training that is given to young women. Through the example of a broad feminine education, Scott seeks to highlight the importance of women receiving an extended and more adequate education that does not limit them to the private, domestic domains and allows them to become full members of public life. According to Julie McGonegal, Scott wants to express the significance of female education as an essential attribute for women to be wise, self-sufficient and be able to participate in the economy of the country effectively. In her novel, Scott demonstrates how women could be useful to society if they received a proper education, if they could be like the philosophers of the “School of Athens”. *Millenium Hall* explores this way how alternative values could improve the situation of women in the external world.

1.2. Marriage

The society of Millenium Hall is principally formed by women. Apart from the main five founders, there are also orphaned girls who have been destitute after their parents’ death, and old women in the community. After settling down in the complex of the Hall, Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan decide to take care of impoverished people by accommodating them in the neighbourhoods surrounding Millenium Hall and transforming thereby the community into a refuge for every person who is in need. Nevertheless, this utopian society is not only an asylum for people with economic problems as it is also a safe haven for women who wish to escape the social constraints outside Millenium Hall. Scott’s community is a place for women who do not want to be defined by their relationship with men. In fact, this is one of the main reasons why the protagonists of the novel seek a

refuge out of the real world. We can see their stories of hardship in relation to men in the narratives of Mrs Maynard. They move to the estate of Millenium Hall in order to build a community where they are not powerless and submissive towards men. As Gary Kelly illustrates, Millenium Hall is a place for “women preferring virtuous poverty to courtly seduction, independence to subjection in marriage, and female friendship to competition with other women in the game of coquetry” (Kelly 31).

Thus, the notion of marriage for the women of the Arcadia is seen as a limitation. Dorice Williams Elliot (1995) explains that the role of women in eighteenth-century society was extremely constrained, and although marriage was considered “the safe and proper place for a woman”, once married they legally ceased to exist and were dependent of their male counterparts. Together with promoting the education of women, the Bluestockings were also interested in “the emancipation of women for a larger, beneficent and feminising social roles” (Kelly 24).

Thus, in her idyllic society, Scott proposes new alternatives to marriage for women. Indeed, in the novel, marriage is perceived as a limitation, even a burden on some occasions. In the case of Miss Melvyn, she sees her marriage to Mr Morgan as an unjust punishment for something she has not done as she is unfairly accused by her stepmother with unfounded allegations. As a result, she is forced to marry a man in order to protect her reputation, even though that man is much older than her and knows she will never love him: “how dreadful is it at my age, when nature seems to promise me so many years of life, to doom myself to a state of wretchedness, which death alone can terminate, and wherein I must bury all my sorrows in silence” (128). Furthermore, Mr Morgan is described as a remarkably miserly man who, once married to Miss Melvyn, only wants her for himself, forbidding her to see her friend Miss Mancel. During their marriage, he confines her to the house keeping all her money away from her. After Mr Morgan’s death,

her health is so deteriorated because of her long confinement that she needs several weeks to fully recover her wellness. However, she is not the only one who suffers a forced marriage. In this same imbedded narrative, Mrs Maynard explains that Miss Melvyn's mother, the first Lady Melvyn, was also forced into a marriage by her parents. Lady Melvyn sees her marriage as a restraint in her life since her husband is a weak, ignorant man who is not interested in any of the intellectual disciplines she likes. Thus, the author provides several examples of women who are led to a marriage they did not embrace. Marriage is thus depicted as a limiting institution that is used to control women to their male counterparts. That is why some of the protagonists who enjoy more freedom than Miss Melvyn refuse to marry. This is the case of Lady Mary and Miss Selvyn, who knowing the disadvantages they will endure by marrying, they decide not to change their "happy present situation for the uncertainties of wedlock" (210).

In order to escape from the restrictions of marital relationships, the ladies decide to establish Millenium Hall. After Mr Morgan's death, when Mrs Morgan and Miss Mancel are finally free from their family constraints and both have a small fortune from their relatives' inheritance, they decide to retire into the countryside to pursue the lives they have always wanted separated from the rest of the society. Scott's female refuge is ground-breaking from the very beginning since the women inhabiting it have escaped their society because they prefer to live among female friends rather than men. Friendship is in fact the basis of this community. Laura L. Runge and Jessica Cook (2019) clarify that in the eighteenth century, friendship was "understood in gendered terms that privileged the male" as it was "conceived as fundamentally public and civic" something that "excluded women from the category of friend by virtue of their status as inferior or contingent to male relations" (Runge, Cook 6). There are no hierarchies between the five founders as they are all at the same level and they maintain balanced relations of power.

Millenium Hall is seeing by these women and the ones that arrive later as an alternative to marriage. Susan Lanser claims that Scott's novel is quite significant because the ladies defend the superiority of a female community over heterosexual relationships with their alternative lifestyles: "for the women of accomplishment and sensibility who constitute Millenium Hall's society, theirs is a community of choice, indeed an "earthly paradise" explicitly preferred over marriage, which most of the women have come to Millenium Hall to avoid, escape or recover from" (Lanser 225). Bryan Mangano states that Scott sees female friendship and reciprocal services as the necessary grounds for happiness, economic success and social cohesion. With this alternative community Scott is challenging the traditional social system of the real world, exposing Millenium Hall as more prosperous society. For example, she illustrates how women are better landowners with one of the last houses they have acquired for the community. The former proprietor of the house spent all his earnings in gambling and other vices which forced him to sell all his estate, including the house, however, the women are perfectly capable of maintaining it in good conditions. For the author, female friendship is thus a stronger force to keep up a community successfully. Furthermore, in this female society, women do not suffer at the hands of men, they are not submitted to them, and they can avoid the violence that is exerted towards them in the external society. That is why, in this community the majority of women prefer female companionship rather than men.

Apart from that, in Millenium Hall, Scott seeks to give women new identities beyond their roles within marriage through the practice of philanthropy. According to Dorice Williams Elliot, philanthropy was an opportunity for women to participate in public life and "an alternative vocation to marriage" (Elliot 536). In fact, Elliot explains that unmarried women at that time were usually seen as "misfits or monsters" since they did not fit in the domestic role of wife or mother. That is why many of them dedicated

their lives to philanthropic actions. Scott's aim in *Millenium Hall* is to represent how "a woman who was not married could define herself as something other than an old maid or fallen women" (Elliot 537). The solution she finds in order to define women beyond the domestic confinements is through the use of philanthropy which gave women a different purpose in life that was not related to their sexuality. When the women settle in Millenium Hall the first thing they do is to establish an extensive philanthropic system in order to help mistreated people like themselves. The women of Millenium Hall are not characterised by their roles as mothers and wives as they are defined, in fact, by their charitable actions to the people who need them. Their humanitarian system allows them to be in charge of a community and "instead of channelling their desires towards husbands and children, they are in harmony with other women" (Elliot 542). Scott's novel therefore breaks with the traditional portrayal of women in the eighteenth century as she depicts her characters as women who prefer to live with female friends rather than husbands, and who can exert power beyond the restrictions of domestic life which helps them maintain an independent and self-sufficient community.

1.3. Self-sufficiency

One of the most disruptive and ground-breaking characteristics of *Millenium Hall* is the self-sufficiency of the community and how Sarah Scott seeks to recreate a feminine society in which women are able to support themselves without any kind of external aid, including male assistance. Nevertheless, several scholars have been very critical with the way Millenium Hall sustains itself as they tend to focus exclusively on the social system of the community. For example, Julie McGonegal argues that Scott's novel is not a classless utopia and that the women inhabiting the Hall reproduce, on some occasions, the same oppressive patriarchal system that manipulates and exploits the labouring classes, "preserving a social and economic system that privileges the gentry class"

(McGonegal 293). Nicolle Jordan follows this pattern of thought as well and claims that Scott's narrative remains "within the realm of conservative ideology" (Jordan 52) since the economic and social system of the community reinforces the capitalist production practised by aestheticizing industrious and physical labour, where working class people seem to "embrace labour as a beautiful way of life" (Jordan 51). Susan Lanser also points out that Scott only centres her rebellion on the women of the upper classes by maintaining this way a certain distance between the privileged women of the community and the labouring classes. Lanser concludes therefore that the class hierarchy of the utopian society does not really pose a threat to the patriarchal status quo keeping the subversion of the novel rather subtle.

It is true that from a first glimpse, the community of Millenium Hall does not seem to be a radical creation of the author since it appears to maintain the same social structure as the external world by stereotyping the labouring classes as people who embrace physical work and keeping the privileges of the upper classes. However, if we look at the text from a feminist perspective, taking into account the context and the purpose of the novel our view might change. As Gary Kelly argues, Sarah Scott wrote her novel when the practice of gentry capitalism was expanding: "this was the application of capitalist practices of entrepreneurship, investment, and modernisation to the agrarian economy of the landed estate" (Kelly 11). During this period of prosperity and transformation for the middle and upper classes, many women attracted to these groups attempted to participate in public life in order to achieve "social and cultural leadership and economic and political change" (Kelly 14), and some of them, especially the Bluestockings, were trying to express their ideas through their writings. In this changing environment, and as part of this intellectual society, Sarah Scott sought to do the same by proposing a reform of the social, cultural and economic dynamics through the community of Millenium Hall, which

as Kelly states is “a utopian version of gentry capitalism reformed according to bluestocking feminism” (Kelly 26). Furthermore, if we take into consideration the purpose of the novel which is to build a community that is entirely formed by women who can live independently, Scott is certainly proposing as well in her text that women are perfectly capable of managing this new, emerging economic system without men’s assistance.

We can capture the details of how this utopian society reflects a reform of the traditional values through the functioning of the community that is narrated by Sir George Ellison. During the narrator and Mr Lamont’s stay, the ladies show them around the complex of Millenium Hall while they explain how it works. Firstly, there is not a hierarchy of power between the five founders of the Hall and they are all equal since the basis of this society is friendship and not a stratified power structure. This is clearly illustrated in the way Miss Mancel describes Millenium Hall: “a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services; and correspondent affections” (111). This depiction of the society shows explicitly how this community is radically different from the real world outside this complex. It is a state that takes care of its people, where everyone must contribute to the well-being of the community, even the founding ladies have daily business to attend to.

Apart from that, these women do not seek to become rich and increase their wealth. They are only interested in maintaining their community and all the people that depend on it, in a self-sufficient way facilitated by the location of the Hall. Mrs Morgan depicts their sustenance system as follows:

That building, (pointing to what we thought a pretty temple) which perhaps you imagine designed only for ornament or pleasure, is a very large pidgeon house, that affords a sufficient supply to our family, and many of our neighbours. That hill on your right-hand is a warren, prodigiously stocked with rabbits; this canal, and these other pieces of water, as well as the river you saw this morning, furnish our table with a great profusion of fish.

You will easily believe from the great number of deer you see around us, that we have as much venison as we can use, either in presents to our friends, or our own family. [...] These are indeed our riches; here we have almost every thing we can want, for a very small proportion of that expense which others are at to procure them. (110).

After this description Sir Ellison asks the ladies if they do not fear the isolation that their self-sustained community causes them. To this question, one of the founders, Lady Mary, provides an answer that highlights the happiness that their friendship brings upon them, which she emphasises is the only thing that they really need. This aspect of the feminine community shows again how innovative Scott's society is by giving more importance to their friendship than to the fact of enlarging their profit. This trait also demonstrates that Millenium Hall is not a rigid capitalist society like some scholars have defined such a female arcadia. Furthermore, these women do not seek to be leaders of a reformation of the system as Miss Mancel makes clear to the narrator. They wish their society to be discreet and pass unnoticed. As James Cruise and Nicole Pohl explain, the protagonists know that it is only through a complete separation of the external world that they can establish their alternative system of generosity and economic justice. It is their only way to be free and independent. They are not interested in fame or popularity because they do not want to lose what they have built in Millenium Hall, away from men.

As we have seen, Millenium Hall is not only inhabited by the main founders of the community, in fact, there are numerous people living in this utopian society. Mrs Morgan and Miss Mancel are the first ones to settle in Millenium Hall which is, in reality, an estate that Mrs Morgan has inherited after her husband's death. Afterwards, they invite the rest of the protagonists to stay with them. When all the protagonists finally settle, they decide to make Millenium Hall a refuge for all types of disadvantaged people, especially women. At the beginning of the novel, Sir George talks to one of the old ladies who was taken in by the main characters. She explains that she was almost starving before she was accepted into the house, like many of her neighbours in the Hall: "few of us had rags to

cover us, or a morsel of bread to eat” (65). This woman also explains that they were all exploited by two landowners who “had our work, and paid us not enough to keep life and soul together” (65). Their situation improves when they are accepted in Millenium Hall as the ladies provide for them decent accommodation and employ them in a reasonable way. We also learn from this conversation between the narrator and the old lady that some of the poor women in the neighbourhood have some disabilities, some of them are deaf and some blind, but they are all accepted in the community without any discrimination.

However, impoverished people are not the only ones accepted in the Millenium Hall. Later in the novel, we also learn that the leaders of the community take care of the children from poor families that cannot maintain them by securing an education for all of them. Apart from children, Millenium Hall takes care as well of “indigent gentlewomen” (115) and lodge them in another mansion of the complex. Nevertheless, things are different for these young ladies. As most of them possess a small fortune, if they want to take the benefit of this asylum, they must “deposite, in the hands of a person appointed for that purpose, whatever fortune she was mistress of, the security being approved by her and her friends, and remaining in her possession. Whenever she leaves the society, her fortune should be repaid her, the interest in the mean time being appropriate to the use of the community” (116). Mrs Maynard explains that the founders of the community make sure as well that these young girls receive a proper education, providing for the society musical instruments and books for them to learn. Therefore, we can see that this community works differently. The ladies of the Hall take into consideration the background and income of the inhabitants they accept in the community by dividing them into different groups: the ones who can pay for their stay and the ones who cannot afford it to see how they can contribute to the community as everyone is expected to participate in the well-being of the society, working or carrying out any task they can perform. With

this scaled system Millenium Hall is able to subsist successfully. Furthermore, as we learn later, the community is extremely prosperous as Mrs Maynard indicates their society is constantly increasing. Finally, Millenium Hall also accepts orphaned girls and widows in order to protect them from the injustices of the external, male-dominated world.

According to Gary Kelly, Sarah Scott proposes in her novel a new economic and social system that is not purely based on the oppression of the labouring classes for the benefit of the gentry classes. He states that the author demonstrates how the reform of gentry capitalism is possible if it is led by “representatives of one set of the oppressed” in other words, by women.

Women (or at least women of education and virtue) are not only capable of managing the ‘estate’ – a task usually restricted to men – but can improve the ‘estate’ precisely by applying attributes conventionally assigned to women, in domains conventionally left to them. These attributes include nurturing, healing, and conciliating and these domains include domestic management, the arts, and local charity (Kelly, 28).

Thus, as we can see, in Millenium Hall, Scott shows how women are not only capable of participating in the economic sectors but are also able to ameliorate them through a process of feminisation. Through this process, the author is therefore critical with patriarchal and gentry capitalism systems that neglect women as active economic agents of change. In her novel, Scott thereby invents a society that amends gender inequalities and social injustices. She builds a community where women can appropriate and redefine traditional male spaces without being subordinated. Millenium Hall therefore does not reinforce a conservative, patriarchal structure as previous scholars have claimed. This society provides a safe haven for women that is completely self-sufficient and successful without male intervention.

Chapter 2. Women's Resilience and Resistance to Social and Political Constraints

2.1. Condemnation of Violence: Manipulation and Dependency

Although several scholars have branded *Millenium Hall* as a self-controlled text that only executes a superficial criticism of the eighteenth-century system, we can observe throughout the novel that there are clear passages where the author openly denounces violence against women and the various ways in which they are exploited. Scott exposes this subordination of women through the experiences of the female proprietors of Millenium Hall, in the personal stories that are narrated by Mrs Maynard. The adversities that these women must face usually result from the unjust system that puts pressure on them. After having seen the surroundings of the Hall, Sir George inquires her relative about the women inhabiting it. Mrs Maynard accepts to answer all of his questions and starts narrating the lives of the two main founders of Millenium Hall: Mrs Mancel and Mrs Morgan. In this first story we can see several examples of the direct and indirect violence that is exerted upon women.

In the case of Louisa Mancel, her story is quite a tragic one. She is an orphaned, ten-year-old girl when she is adopted by Mr Hintman. At first, it seems this gentleman is a kind, caring man who is really preoccupied by Louisa's education. He enrolls her into a French boarding school so that "her mind should be cultivated with the greatest care, and no accomplishment omitted which she was capable of acquiring" (82). Indeed, during this period Miss Mancel learns dancing, music, and drawing; "besides other things generally taught at school" (83). In addition, Miss Melvyn, who will later become Mrs Morgan and is a few years older than Louisa, helps her with her reading, and teaches her geography, philosophy and religion. However, when Miss Mancel turns fifteen things start to change. Firstly, Mr d'Avora, who is Louisa's Italian instructor, and Miss Melvyn, notice that Hintman keeps behaving as if Miss Mancel were still a child, which they think is

something inappropriate: “It is not strange that Mr Hintman’s fondness should increase with Miss Mancel’s excellencies, but the caresses which suited her earlier years were now become improper” (97). Mr d’Avora eventually decides to investigate on Louisa’s guardian and discovers who he really is:

Every person told him, ‘that Mr. Hintman had a very great fortune, which he spent entirely in the gratification of his favourite vice, the love of women; on whom his profuseness was boundless. That as he was easily captivated, so he was soon tired; and seldom kept a woman long after he had obtained the free possession of her (98).

It is at this moment that we acknowledge Mr. Hintman’s true, Machiavellian plans with Miss Mancel. He was only taking care of her because he felt sexually attracted to her. His only interest was to possess her until he had obtained what he desired, then he would have probably left her alone and destitute. As Nicolle Jordan indicates, he assumes that the fact of providing an education for her entitles him to do as he pleases with her (Jordan 36). In this way, we also learn that sexual desire drives him to take in Louisa as her own child, and not empathy or understanding towards her situation when he acknowledges he had never seen anything so “lovely” and “extremely beautiful before” (80). Through the example of Hintman, Scott denounces the abuse of power exerted by men over women which in this case is extremely perverse. Hintman takes advantage of his superior position as a man to manipulate her adoptive daughter. According to Jordan, “he is a gentleman and therefore possesses certain rights and privileges, which should in turn oblige him to protect his dependents and look after their best interests” (Jordan 36), but, as we can see, Hintman does not respect this social rule as he only thinks in the benefits that taking care of Miss Mancel will give him in the future. He only sees his protégée as one of his possessions, and his position as a gentleman allows him to do as he likes with her. Fortunately, before Mr Hintman’s scheme reaches its ends, he suffers a sudden death “in

a fit of an apoplexy” (100), and thus Miss Mancel does not endure the consequences of his plan.

The author may also be condemning the commodification of women that allows men to treat them as mere objects of their property, and the limited options that women have to survive if they are not under the custody of a man. Indeed, when Mr Hintman dies, the gentleman who informs the two girls about his death also tells them that Louisa’s guardian has deceased without a will, therefore he has left Miss Mancel destitute and without an inheritance. Mr Hintman’s properties are this way inherited by other male members of his family. Miss Melvyn condemns the “inconsistency of that affection, which could suffer a man to rest a moment without securing a provision in case of death, to a young woman he seemed to love with the greatest excess of tenderness” (101). Through the example of Miss Mancel, Scott denounces the irresponsibility of men who leave their female children and relatives financially unprotected and illustrates the restrained conditions in which women live if they are completely dependent on men. After her guardian’s death, Louisa is left without income and as a woman she does not have the means or resources to improve her situation. It is in fact thanks to her friend Miss Melvyn that Miss Mancel is able to move forward after she finishes school. In this way, Scott not only criticises the excessive boundaries that constrained women’s lives in her contemporary society, but she also criticizes the irresponsibility and abuse of power of certain men from the upper classes. The author shows how women are subservient to a system that does not allow them to subsist alone.

Another example of resilience in *Millenium Hall* is the case of Miss Melvyn. Mrs Maynard narrates her story together with Miss Mancel’s as both characters are close friends since their childhood. When Miss Melvyn’s father marries another woman after his wife’s death, she is forced to go to the same French boarding school as her friend,

despite the fact that her mature age that does not require her to go to an educational institution anymore. In fact, her new stepmother manipulates her father so that he sends his daughter away. However, some years later when Miss Melvyn can no longer be at school, she returns home to her father and helps Miss Mancel lodging into a farm in the same neighbourhood. As Mrs Maynard narrates, during this period the new Lady Melvyn tries to make her stepdaughter's situation at home "as irksome as possible" (104). She continually complains to her husband about Miss Melvyn's behaviour, she accuses her of offences she has not committed and prevents her from visiting Louisa in the farm, till she finally decides to humiliate her once and for all. She pretends having discovered an intrigue between her stepdaughter and Simon, a young farmer of the neighbourhood, and tells her husband about it insisting on the damage this issue can cause to the reputation and honour of the family. Sir Charles blindly believes his wife and forces her daughter to marry another gentleman called Mr Morgan in order to hide her infamous act. Mr Morgan is in fact an old man of fortune who has been trying to seduce Miss Melvyn unsuccessfully for some time.

When Miss Melvyn finds out about her stepmother's scheme, she is completely devastated. Although she intends to convince her father of her innocence, her attempts are useless since he has already been persuaded by his wife. At this point the protagonist understands that she has no choice but to accept her marriage to Mr Morgan in order to save her family's reputation and her own. She also knows that even though she tried to deny the facts, she would be in disadvantage. As Mrs Maynard says:

Especially in an affair which could not be rendered public without hazarding Miss Melvyn's character; for reputation is so delicate a thing, that the least surmize casts a blemish on it; the woman who is suspected is disgraced; and though lady Melvyn did not stand high in the public opinion, yet it was scarcely possible for any one to believe she could be guilty of such flagrant wickedness (124).

That is why she decides to submit to her father's order and accept Mr Morgan marriage proposal, even though she despises him. She feels it is her duty to maintain the family's respect in society. In this case, Scott reflects again the constraints and limitations to which women were subjected in their lifetimes. Although it is true that it is a woman who puts Miss Melvyn in this situation, the pressure to preserve the honour and reputation of the family and to remain "pure" in order to succeed in the marriage market leaves the character with no choice about her life. As Kelly explains, women were required to be subordinated "to transmit property and status from one man to another through marriage; to sustain the status of the landed family by representing and presiding over certain cultural and social practices; and to ensure the perpetuation of the family as a social and property institution through the generations" (Kelly 12). Furthermore, Scott seems to criticise the importance that is given to women's social reputation and how easily it can be ruined, dooming a woman for the rest of her life. Runge and Cook remark that women's honour was solely related to sexual behaviour and chastity and thus it belonged only to the male who "is publicly accountable for her sexual reputation, a decidedly truncated network of power and identity" (Runge, Cook 6). The only solution that Miss Melvyn sees feasible not to endanger her family's status is to marry a man that she cannot love. This example shows the precarious and delicate state of single women if they are not under a man's protection since she cannot solve her problem on her own, she is required to marry a man. Through this character, Scott condemns again the boundaries that are enforced upon women that create an over dependence on men and how the notion of reputation can be used as a tool to control women by shaping them into lower members of society who must rely on men if they want to survive, as the system forces them to subject themselves to them by becoming their wives and mistresses.

2.2. Examples of Non-conformism and Female Agency

However, in the short narratives, Scott does not only condemn the violence exerted over women by men as she also provides some examples of non-conformism and female agency through her characters. Thus, in the novel, women are not only victims, but they are also agents of their own lives. In some of the short stories narrated by Mrs Maynard the protagonists refuse to submit to the role that is given to them. In the case of Miss Melvyn, when she finds out that her father wants her to marry Mr Morgan in order to hide her presumed offence, the young girl tries to defend her innocence and attempts to convince her father to let her stay in the house. Although Sir Charles, Miss Melvyn's father, does not allow her daughter to remain single because he has already been persuaded by his new wife, Miss Melvyn's reaction and willingness to defend herself show that she does not submit to her father's orders without fighting back. She tries to reject her marriage, but unfortunately, she does not have enough power to get away with it. However, this is not the case for the following protagonists.

The history of Lady Mary Jones is different. She is destitute at the age of ten when both her parents die. Nevertheless, she is soon taken by her aunt Lady Sheerness. This woman takes good care of her niece; however, she has a doubtful reputation. During her youth, she was a vain, conceited girl "with every gratification at her command, that an affluent fortune, and an indulgent husband could bestow" (173), and according to Mrs Maynard her behaviour does not really change during her adulthood when she is a widow. In this way, Lady Sheerness educates her niece in the same way she was educated:

She entered into all the fashionable tastes, was coquettish and extravagant; for Lady Sheerness very liberally furnished her with money, and felt a sort of pride in having a niece distinguished by the fineness of her dress, and her profusion in every expense, as it was well known to have no other source, but in her Ladyship's generosity (174).

This inadequate education jeopardises Lady Mary's reputation upon several occasions. In the first case, she is tricked by a wealthy gentleman into a private marriage in Scotland, something that would definitively ruin her respectability. Mr Lenman takes advantage of her careless personality and his influence over her in order to manipulate her. Fortunately, Lady Mary has a small accident just before the fixed day of their secret marriage that prevents her from attending and allows her to discover his wicked plans by chance.

Lady Mary learns from her mistake and becomes aware of her imprudence. When a second gentleman approaches her with similar intentions, she knows she has to act differently. However, Lord Robert St. Georges is already familiar with her mindless behaviour and intends to take advantage of her: "He imagined he should meet with an easy conquest of a giddy, thoughtless girl, entirely void of all fixed principles, and violently in love with him; for his vanity exaggerated her passion" (181). When she finds out that he is trying to seduce her, she tries to stop him first on her own, but "he still continued to address her with a freedom of manners which she now perceived was insulting; she wanted to discourage his insolence" (184). At this point, Lady Mary talks to a friend, which we later discover is Miss Selvyn, who encourages her to stand up and face him. The young girl thus decides to confront him and tells him to put an end to his disrespectful courtship as she already knows his real intentions by threatening him to tell her aunt "who could not suffer such an insult on her niece to pass unresented" (186). After that, Lord Robert who did not expect this reaction, still tries to call her attention and charm her, but he eventually desists. This scene in the story of Lady Mary Jones is a clear representation of non-conformism. When the protagonist realises the intentions of the last gentleman, she attempts to stop him with her friend's support. She does not react passively to this man's endeavours; she fights him back. Here again the author emphasises the importance of female friendship in complicated situations. It is Miss Selvyn who helps

her to get out of this dangerous flirtation with a man. McGonegal points out that in her novel, Scott exposes the violence exerted towards women “by revealing that the codes and conventions of courtship aim at producing and maintaining male dominance” (McGonegal, 296), by aggressively attacking women’s reputation. The author probably aims at subverting this system of male domination through the example of her characters in *Millenium Hall* who fight back these traditional practices.

The story of Miss Selvyn is doubtlessly the most radical example of a nonconformist character. Miss Selvyn comes from a family of small fortune. She lives only with her father in the countryside. However, when she turns seventeen years old, her father decides to move back to London, where they meet Lady Emilia, a single lady of a very large fortune, who immediately becomes friends with Miss Selvyn. In London, she also becomes acquainted with Lady Mary and helps her with her relationship with Lord Robert. A few years later Mr Selvyn dies, and her daughter is taken under the care of Lady Emilia who takes her back to the countryside. At that moment, Lord Robert, who lives in a town nearby the two ladies, becomes strongly attracted to Miss Selvyn. He attempts to call her attention, but the young girl ignores him. Seeing that his intentions are overlooked, he asks Lady Emilia to acquaint her friend with his love. When her benefactress tells Miss Selvyn about Lord Robert she immediately makes clear her position regarding marriage: “It could not be advisable for her to marry; for enjoying perfect content, she had no benefit to expect from change; and happiness was so scarce a commodity in this life, that whoever let it once slip, had little reason to expect to catch it again. For what reason then should she alter her state?” (206). Through this response, she demonstrates that it is not her intention to marry as she is perfectly happy being single and does not wish to change her estate. This is a clear example of female agency as Miss Selvyn wants her future to be in her own hands. She wants to be in control of her life and

does not wish a man to become her superior. With this character, Scott labels her novel as a ground-breaking text since she is categorically breaking apart from the traditional values of her society by portraying a woman who openly rejects marriage because she prefers to live on her own.

Nevertheless, this is not the only example of female agency that Miss Selvyn performs. When she lets Lord Robert know about her decision, he cannot believe her opinion and attempts to change her mind. Miss Selvyn first explains politely that it is not a matter with him in particular as she would have rejected equally every other man's marriage proposal. Nonetheless, Lord Robert still insists on knowing if she has any objection to him since he cannot understand her position, and Miss Selvyn finally tells him that:

Had she been better inclined to enter into the matrimonial state, his lordship was not the man she should have chosen, not from any dislike to his person or understanding, but from disapprobation of his principles; that, in regard to her sex he had a lightness in his way of thinking, and had been so criminal in his conduct, that of all men she knew, she thought him most improper for a husband (208).

Here, Miss Selvyn not only dares to refuse his proposal, but she is also brave enough to tell him her opinion about his indignant behaviour and accuses him of abusing women. She latterly explains that she knew how he had treated her friend Lady Mary which "had disgusted her". At this point, Lord Robert tries to defend himself blaming her friend arguing that "when a woman's behaviour was very light, his sex were not apt to imagine there was any great fund of virtue; nor could it be expected, that any one else should guard that honour, of which she herself was careless" (208). Nevertheless, here Miss Selvyn sides with the victim and protects Lady Mary. She even compares her situation to a man, asking the gentleman if he would have done the same: "If you observed a man who neglected to lock up his money, and seemed totally indifferent what became of it, should you think yourself thereby justified in robbing him?" (209). With this comparison the

protagonist tries to teach him a lesson. She does not accept the justification of his actions and explains to him that she cannot respect a man without virtue by condemning his behaviour as “criminally deceitful”. Through the character of Miss Selvyn, we can see thus a clear example of non-conformism and female agency. She not only refuses to marry as she also condemns unhesitatingly Lord Robert’s actions, defending women’s dignity as a group. James Cruise argues that the short narratives “demonstrate the constraint and repression that Scott’s women have suffered in the greater world. And if taken as discrete histories, they paint a series of sombre portraits whose subjects depict the wages of noncompliance and nonconformity” (Cruise 565). In this way, Scott also creates a certain sisterhood between her characters as they defend themselves with a certain group consciousness against the violence exerted towards them. It is in fact these traits of nonconformism what drives these women to create a new, alternative society away from men by departing from the hard experiences they have endured in order to be free and independent. Two characteristics that the outside, male-dominated world does not allow them to be.

Chapter 3. The Male Characters of the Novel

3.1. Sir George Ellison as a Narrator

As we have seen, *Millenium Hall* is structured following different narratives. On the one hand there is the main narration of Sir George where the author depicts the female asylum, its inhabitants, values and economic system to an unknown friend, in the form of a letter. On the other hand, we have the short narratives related by Mrs Maynard who turns out to be Sir Ellison’s distant cousin. In these brief stories Mrs Maynard describes the personal experiences of the main five founders of the community and how they became residents

of *Millenium Hall*. There is a broad debate about the role of Sir George Ellison as the narrator of the novel in which some scholars analyse the utility and purpose of using a male raconteur in a female utopia, and there is a general tendency to categorise the male narrator as a detriment for the novel. Susan Lanser remarks on the limitations of the narrative strategy claiming that in her search of a masculine approval for her novel, Scott tries to legitimise her work by using a male narrator, and thus the readers cannot receive a complete representation of the community since it is “always filtered through a voyeuristic paternalism” (Lanser 226). Lanser concludes therefore that although *Millenium Hall* is a subversive text, the narrative technique self-silences the novel, and the women’s resistance remains subtle. James Cruise also argues that Sir George, as a former slave owner in Jamaica, is not a qualified narrator to tell the story of these oppressed women. Although the narrator admires the community, he still undermines their values imposing his own thought over theirs and treating them with a certain degree of paternalism. Nevertheless, Cruise acknowledges that despite the restrictive vision we can have of this society through the eyes of Sir George, Scott’s novel is still an uncommon and defiant text in which the author clearly exposes the limitations and constraints that were imposed upon women in the eighteenth century. Nicolle Jordan argues along similar lines that Sir George’s narration is not convincing as a device as he seems to be more interested in the natural environment that surrounds the Hall rather than in the protagonists and the main purpose of their community, which is to protect women from the outside world.

Although it is true that at first sight Sir George might not seem a useful narrator for the depiction of a female Arcadia, the use of a male narrator has its own advantages. If we take into account the historical context of the novel in which women were gradually starting to publish their own writings, the use of a male narrator could have its different

purposes. Firstly, Scott's resort to Sir George as the main voice of *Millenium Hall* might have been motivated by a willingness to reach a wider readership. As Ian Watt indicates, at that time the vast majority of novel readers were women. Thus, by using a male narrator, Scott may have wished to avoid her novel to be labelled as a 'feminine text' just for women and to reach a broader audience, including men. Furthermore, to use a male narrator was also a good technique in order to transmit her innovative, unconventional ideas without being censured as her novel suggests that even men can accept this different community and come to admire it. Therefore, Sir George as a narrator could be a strategy for the author to convey her thoughts on social reform, in a way that can reach more people without alarming her readers, by softening her ground-breaking community through the voice of a conventional gentleman. Apart from that, we need to take into consideration that even though Ellison might seem an inconvenient narrator, he is still a fictional character, and that the real narrator is the author behind this character. Thus, the novel does not really self-silences or sabotages itself as Scott is probably transmitting all the elements she wants to communicate of her community through the voice of the narrator. As we have seen, some scholars claim that the depiction of Millenium Hall is contaminated by the perception of the narrator and thus we cannot have a full vision of the community. However, even though it is possible that Sir George is not depicting a faithful portrayal of Millenium Hall, Scott makes sure that the women of the Hall give their opinions and explanations about the community, correcting both Sir George and Mr Lamont's commentaries if necessary. In this way, we can observe that the use of a male narrator has different purposes for the transmission of the novel. However, Ellison is not the only character that is part of the narration, as we also have Mrs Maynard.

3.2. Conflict of Narrators: Sir George and Mrs Maynard

In the novel, Mrs Maynard is in charge of narrating the personal stories of the women inhabiting Millenium Hall. These stories relate all the adversities the founders of the community had to face before becoming members of the female paradise. Apart from that, this sequence of narrations also provides details of the foundation and management of the community. Several scholars have argued about the contrast between the narrations of Mrs Maynard and Sir George focusing on the possible invasion of one narrative over the other. Susan Lanser claims that Mrs Maynard is

repeatedly “pumped” by the narrator for information that is not quite yielded willingly. For instead of authorising Mrs Maynard as a communal voice, the novel exposes her position as compromised and the gentleman’s demand for the women’s stories as a voyeuristic invasion that comes to resemble just the kind of behaviour the women have come to Millenium Hall to evade (Lanser, 227).

Thus, according to Lanser, Mrs Maynard’s narration is compromised by her cousin. However, this is not entirely true since at the beginning of the novel this woman is willing to speak for her friends as they are “above wishing to conceal any part of their lives, though themselves are never the subject of their own conversation” (76). Thus we can see that Mrs Maynard has her companions’ permission to narrate their stories. Furthermore, later in the novel Miss Mancel says that although they do not desire to be leaders of a social and economic reform, they wish to influence the people within their reach with their alternative way of living, and at that moment Sir George and Mr Lamont are part of their small circle “we wish to regulate ourselves by the laws laid down to us, and as far as our influence can extend, endeavour to inforce them; beyond that small circle all is foreign to us” (166). Finally, Lanser also argues that even though the short stories are narrated by another woman and thus not appropriated by Sir George, he is still the male dominant voice and thus the women’s stories remain at a secondary level. Nevertheless, Ellison remains anonymous throughout the novel, Scott does not reveal his name. We

know the narrator is Sir George because of the sequel *The History of Sir George Ellison* in which the author finally unravels his name. By maintaining his name hidden, Scott lessens the prominence of this character, she deprives him of a full identity, something that the residents of Millenium Hall clearly enjoy. This characteristic of the narrator helps keeping him in the background of the novel and not shining over the true protagonists: women themselves.

James Cruise also analyses the combined narration of both characters; however, he argues differently from Lanser. He states that this narrative strategy serves to silence the male narrator for long periods that are only interrupted in the long history of Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan. In addition, Sir George “never comments in any direct way on the narratives he hears or requests any supplemental details about the individuals involved” (Cruise 563). So through the technique of using a double narrator, Scott is able to break with the male narrative voice and counteract the prominence given to Sir George as a narrator. Furthermore, Cruise also argues that this balance between the narratives defines as well “the essential competition between men and women over the right to control the representation of women” (Cruise 563). Scott thus demonstrates again the limitations of women in the eighteenth-century society. In this case, as Lanser remarks, by making a woman narrate the stories of the protagonists, the author avoids the appropriation of these personal experiences by a man that would have probably told their stories differently. In this way, with the technique of a double narrator, Scott is able to discreetly mask the radicality of her text through the voice of a gentleman that facilitates her novel a broader audience, while at the same time she maintains the resistance and independence that the women of Millenium Hall have achieved, by making a female friend tell their story. Therefore, there is not really an existing conflict between both

narrators. Mrs Maynard and Sir Ellison's narrations are balanced in order to keep the vindicative properties of the Arcadia.

3.3. The Evolution of Sir Ellison and Mr Lamont

Finally, there is another purpose in the use of a male character for the narration of the novel. Through the two main male characters, Scott demonstrates that the social reform that she presents in *Millenium Hall* can be performed both by men and women, showing that it is not only a change for the inhabitants of the community. In fact, the narrator and Mr Lamont undergo a significant transformation during their stay in the Hall proving that the effect that the community has upon these characters is positive. When Sir George comes to Millenium Hall in order to ameliorate his health after several years in Jamaica, he is surprised by the hospitality and generosity of the women. As he indicates at the very beginning of the novel, he is just a "spectator" and an "auditor" (54) in the community, he does not have an active role. Cruise argues that "as a man whose own history over the past twenty years includes a period during which he was a slave owner in Jamaica, Sir George barely seems qualified to document the activities of a community whose principal claim is its resistance to subjugation" (Cruise 556) and that although he endorses the community, he seems to slightly undermine its value. This might be true; however, we can observe there is a certain evolution in the character of Sir George. At first, although he admires the ladies and is continuously praising their work, he appears to be subtly judgemental with some of the activities they perform or how they take care of all types of indigent people. As a man of commerce, he is especially interested in the economic system and how the women make profit from their method. When he sees that the society of Millenium Hall is perfectly sustainable and prosperous even though it is isolated and does not receive male assistance, he is convinced that this alternative community based on affection and reciprocate services is completely efficient and valuable. Indeed, at the

end of the novel, he states that “if what I have described, may tempt any one to go and do likewise, I shall think myself fortunate in communicating it. For my part, my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a smaller scale” (249). In this way, the author proves that this reform is for everyone as Sir George is willing to change his way of working by applying what he has learned from the ladies. In fact, in *The History of Sir George Ellison*, the narrator carries out the women’s program changing his social relations and his economic strategy.

This transformative process also affects Mr Lamont. At the beginning of the book, Sir George describes him as a young, agreeable man with a certain degree of vanity and with a “high opinion of himself” (55). He has a rich father that has always enable him to do as he wants which, according to the narrator, has rendered him a conceited, impertinent man. Furthermore, Sir George adds that “fashion, not reason, has been the guide of all his thoughts and actions” (55), and thus he has always preferred fashionable entertainment rather than study. When they first meet the ladies, Lamont remarks that “on a more intimate acquaintance we should find their manners much rusticated, and their heads filled with antiquated motions, by having lived so long out of the great world” (64). However, as the novel progresses, Mr Lamont changes his mind and starts admiring the women’s rational and feminised lifestyles. He gradually accepts the work these women are doing in the community and seems to understand their position and why they decided to isolate themselves. He also asks questions about the foundation and management of Millenium Hall in order to know more about them and the women make him think about his own opinions on the outside world. Towards the end, Mr Lamont is fully affected by the female society, but unlike Sir George who decides to imitate them, the younger gentleman undergoes a religious transformation believing for the first time in his life in Christianity: “he was convinced by the conduct of the ladies of this house, that their religion must be

the true one” (248). In fact, the narrator finds him reading the New Testament just when they are about to leave the asylum. Therefore, he embraces the values that the ladies of Millenium Hall have adopted and is willing to behave like the protagonists.

We can see thus that both male characters experience a deep transformation in Millenium Hall and that they are not the same they were at the beginning of the novel. Some scholars have debated about the reformation of Sir George and Mr Lamont. James Cruise argues that the ending of the novel is very ambiguous since, although the narrator states that he wishes to imitate the women, he does not specify how or in what way, and thus it is not clear that the lessons he has learnt from the community have really affected his conduct. Bryan Mangano, on the contrary, argues that the development of both characters is successful as both give signs of a transformation. Indeed, there seems to be a clear transformation among the male characters. Through these two personages Scott demonstrates that the alternative values of Millenium Hall can also be embraced by men. There is a clear evolution of Sir George and Mr Lamont throughout the novel, both are first surprised by the female society, but they progressively accept the changes these women have made and how their community works. As Mangano claims, they both show signs of a willingness to change their behaviour, and in the narrator’s case, Scott proves his transformation in the sequel. Thus, through this masculine conversion, the author is able to transmit her feminised system to a broader audience bringing her society closer to men and women and making the reform possible for everyone. We can conclude, therefore, that Millenium Hall causes a real impact on Sir George and Mr Lamont, and that the women of the community teach these men a lesson about the precarious conditions of women in the external world and the different types of violence to which they are exposed by making them understand their experiences and their motivations to start a new, pioneering society separated from men.

4. Conclusions

In this analysis of the novel, we can see how Scott's female utopia can be regarded as a ground-breaking text. There are several characteristics that distance this novel from conservative and moderate standards. Firstly, the feminine community that the author builds in the countryside of Cornwall presents renovated values that do not support the conventions of the outside world, but they break apart from them. Scott constructs a community with alternative values that do not subordinate women to their male counterparts. As we have seen, the author gives her female characters a thorough education that involves the learning of academic disciplines that contribute to the growth of their intellectual faculties comparing the women to the philosophers of Raphael's "School of Athens". Apart from that, the utopian society also gives women alternatives to marriage. Millenium Hall is in fact depicted as a female refuge for women who do not wish to marry. The adversities the characters have endured in the hands of men have driven them to build a community where they are not powerless and submissive towards men. Indeed, one of the most important characteristics of *Millenium Hall* is that the women inhabiting the mansion have escaped their society because they prefer to live among female friends. Scott establishes friendship as the basis of the community. The author claims that it is female friendship what makes the community so successful for it represents the necessary grounds for happiness, economic success, and social cohesion.

Another disruptive characteristic of *Millenium Hall* is the self-sufficiency of the community and how Scott seeks to recreate a feminine society in which women are able to support themselves without any kind of external aid. Although some scholars have classified the economic functioning of Millenium Hall as an oppressive system that reinforces capitalist production, as we have seen, this community cannot be compared to the external world. There are no hierarchies between the five founders and the community

is not organised around an authoritative leader that controls the rest of the population. Their system does not work as the strict capitalism that was growing in the eighteenth century. Scott proposes a reform of the economic system through a process of feminisation that amends gender inequalities and social injustices. Apart from that, these women do not seek to become rich and increase their wealth, as Mangano indicates they thoroughly reject “their own claim to personal wealth and property” (Mangano 482) and they are willing to spend it all on the well-being of the community.

Secondly, Scott also condemns the violence committed against women in different ways, in the short stories narrated by Mrs Maynard. The author clearly denounces the masculine abuse of power to manipulate and deceive women, which in the case of Miss Mancel is extremely perverse. The author also condemns the commodification of women that allows men to treat them as objects of their property, and the reduced options women have to survive if they are not under the protection of a man, thus creating an overreliance of women on men. Scott also reflects on the constraints in the private lives of women. She gives the example of Miss Melvyn who is forced to marry in order to maintain the reputation of her family. Through this example, Scott points at the importance that is given to women’s social reputation and how easily it can be ruined, dooming a woman for the rest of her life. However, in her novel, the author does not only present her characters as victims of social injustices as she also provides examples of non-conformism and female agency. In some of the short stories the protagonists refuse to submit to the roles that are given to them. As we have seen these are the cases of Lady Mary and Miss Selvyn. They both stand up and confront Lord Robert. Scott also shows how these women want to be in control of their own lives and do not wish to become subordinate to men.

Finally, Scott also presents innovative techniques through the male characters that distance her novel from a conservative text. Although some scholars argue that the male narrator is in detriment of the novel, it can be observed that the author assigns her own purposes to Sir George. She attempts to reach a wider audience without being censured by avoiding the categorisation of her novel as a feminine text. Furthermore, she also uses a male narrator to convey her thoughts on a reformation of the society without alarming her readers through the voice of a conventional gentleman. Besides, Scott counteracts Sir George's narration with the voice of Mrs Maynard who prevents the male narrator from appropriating the stories of the protagonists. Finally, the author also proves the efficacy of her utopian society through the two male characters of the novel, Sir George and Mr Lamont. They both undergo a significant transformation in Millenium Hall that completely changes their personality and behaviour. Through these two characters, Scott demonstrates that the alternative values of Millenium Hall can also be embraced by men and thus her reformation of a feminised system is possible for everyone.

To conclude, from a feminist perspective we could categorise this novel as a revolutionary and pioneering text of the second half of the eighteenth century. As a member of the Bluestockings Society, Scott was interested in the development of female education and the enlargement of social roles for women in public life. In *Millenium Hall*, she tries to illustrate the ameliorations that the reform of the social and cultural values of her contemporary society could bring not only for women, but for all the community. While Scott's novel follows certain patterns of conventionality, her alternative and innovative content counteracts its conservative traits. Scott dares to depict a society that is managed and ruled only by single women who wish to participate in public life and be independent from men. Furthermore, on a more personal level, at the time of the publication of *Millenium Hall*, Scott was almost destitute from all her fortune after her

separation from her husband. She depended on the philanthropy of her acquaintances in order to publish her writings and thus, she did not have all the liberty to write about what she liked. She could criticise the system, but she had to be also grateful to the elites that were sustaining her work. That is why it is important to analyse this novel considering its historical context as well. Scott's novel did not have a major impact on her time, however it surely contributed to the formation of the pre-feminist ideas, which vindicated the public presence of women and were gradually emerging at that time. Only the fact that she was a single woman who dared to publish her novels is already a considerable step towards the creation of a feminist idiosyncrasy as she made visible not only her own thoughts on political and social matters, but she also raised awareness about women's writing. It could also be considered that she followed the steps of her women writers' predecessors who were also politically engaged in women's vindications. Therefore, *Millenium Hall* is a necessary link in the chain of women's writing and the configuration of a feminist literary tradition.

For further research, I would be interested in examining the broader political ramifications of Scott's text in the context of the social contract that her imagined community proposes for women as full citizens. In the light of contemporary authors such as Mary Astell, Sarah Fielding or Mary Hamilton, I would seek to explore the similarities and points of contact among their communities. Although none of these renders such a detailed depiction as in *Millenium Hall*, they chime with the core concept that women's independence in the private sphere, by choosing whether to marry or not, or whom to marry, was connected with an autonomy of the individual (whether man or woman) in economic terms and in a legal framework that guarantees equal rights. The interplay between the social and the personal is, after all, the core of Scott's contribution to the creation of a feminist consciousness.

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