



**Universidad de Jaén**  
*Centro de Estudios de Postgrado*

Master's Dissertation/  
Trabajo de Fin de Máster

**The Bluestockings and their  
“Queen”: MRS. ELISABETH  
MONTAGU?**

**Student: Pérez Ros, María Ángeles**

Tutora: Dr. Eroulla Demetriou Demetriou  
Dpt.: Filología Inglesa

**Julio, 2022**



## Contents

|                                                     |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>                        | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>2. THE TERM “BLUESTOCKING” .....</b>             | <b>10</b> |
| 2.1. THE ORIGIN OF THIS NOMENCLATURE .....          | 10        |
| 2.2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE TERM .....                | 12        |
| <b>3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT .....</b>                  | <b>15</b> |
| 3.1. POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CHANGES .....          | 15        |
| 3.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SALON .....              | 16        |
| <b>4. PRINCIPAL BLUESTOCKING WOMEN.....</b>         | <b>19</b> |
| 4.1. THE FIRST BLUESTOCKING GENERATION .....        | 19        |
| 4.1.1 Frances Boscawen (1719-1805) .....            | 19        |
| 4.1.2 Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806).....             | 20        |
| 4.1.3 Hester Chapone (1727-1801) .....              | 20        |
| 4.1.4 Mary Delany (1700-1788) .....                 | 21        |
| 4.1.5 Sarah Fielding (1710-1768) .....              | 21        |
| 4.1.6 Catherine Macaulay (1731-1791) .....          | 22        |
| 4.1.7 Elizabeth Montagu (1718 or -1800) .....       | 23        |
| 4.1.8 Clara Reeve (1729-1807) .....                 | 24        |
| 4.1.9 Sarah Scott (1721-1795).....                  | 24        |
| 4.1.10 Catherine Talbot (1721-1770) .....           | 25        |
| 4.1.11 Elizabeth Vesey (1715?-1791) .....           | 26        |
| 4.2 THE SECOND BLUESTOCKING GENERATION .....        | 26        |
| 4.2.1 Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) .....      | 26        |
| 4.2.2 Hannah More (1745-1833).....                  | 27        |
| 4.2.3 Anna Seward (1742-1809).....                  | 28        |
| 4.2.4 Hester Thrale [later Piozzi] (1741-1821)..... | 29        |
| 4.3 BLUESTOCKING PRODUCTIVITY .....                 | 29        |
| <b>5. THE “BAS BLEU” .....</b>                      | <b>33</b> |
| <b>6. ELIZABETH MONTAGU.....</b>                    | <b>35</b> |
| 6.1. EXTENDED BIOGRAPHY .....                       | 35        |
| 6.2 ELIZABETH MONTAGU: QUEEN OF THE BLUES? .....    | 36        |
| <b>7. CONCLUSION .....</b>                          | <b>43</b> |
| <b>8. REFERENCES.....</b>                           | <b>46</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX .....</b>                               | <b>52</b> |



## **ABSTRACT**

Being both a woman and an intellectual in the 18th century was a question of challenge. The purpose of this Master's Dissertation is to prove why Elizabeth Montagu, one of the most relevant members belonging to the 18th century group, known as the Bluestockings, was considered to be "The Queen of the Blues". Using a wide variety of research, this study not only analyses the origin of the term and the evolution of its meaning throughout the period, but it also provides a supporting and insightful documentation regarding the most important women conforming the first and second generation of this group as well as their literary contribution to the movement. This study, however, answers the question of how Montagu's role as a businesswoman, conversationalist, sponsor as well as hostess of the best parties and gatherings at her houses eclipsed her role as a woman of letters shining more due to her sympathy and charm towards others instead of her literary production.

**Key words:** 18th century English literature, Bluestockings, Elizabeth Montagu, salonnières, salon, Queen of the Blues.

## **RESUMEN**

Ser una mujer intelectual en el siglo XVIII implicaba todo un reto. El propósito de este trabajo de fin de máster es demostrar por qué Elizabeth Montagu, miembro más relevante del grupo de literatas de la época conocido como "Las Bluestockings", era considerada como la "reina" el mismo. Utilizando una gran variedad de documentación, este estudio pretende no solo analizar el origen del término y su evolución en relación a su significado durante el período, sino también proporcionar una visión sobre las mujeres más relevantes que conformaron la primera y segunda generación de este movimiento. Este estudio, por lo tanto, responde a la pregunta de cómo el rol de Elizabeth Montagu como anfitriona, mujer de negocios, conversadora y patrocinadora al mismo tiempo que organizadora de las mejores fiestas y reuniones en sus casas, eclipsó su papel como literata, destacando más por su simpatía que por su producción literaria.

**Palabras clave:** Literatura inglesa del siglo XVIII, "Bluestockings", Elizabeth Montagu, salonnières, salones, Reina de las "Bluestockings".



## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the mid eighteenth century a social and literary phenomenon consisting of gatherings of mainly women which came to be known as “The Bluestockings” was created in England under the figure of Elizabeth Vesey (1715–1791). Vesey is considered to be the instigator of the tradition of the “Bluestocking” parties (Miegon, 2002: 36). Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800) and Frances Boscawen (1719-1805) were also closely related to the creation and development of this movement during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Pohl & Schellengerg: 2002: 2), continuing into the 1780s with a later second generation of eminent personalities. These aforementioned parties were organised mainly to converse and debate about social and educational matters which “were vital in encouraging female artistic achievement” (Eger 2013: 1), and although these events included both men and women (Pohl & Schellenberg: 2002: 2), the majority of the party attendants were female. This fact, although not right at the beginning but a little later in time, led to the “Bluestockings” being mainly labelled, criticized and censured and the name itself acquired derogatory connotations to describe “intellectual women”. Nonetheless, this cultured and educated group marked a milestone when it came to stirring up what today we would call a sexist country. As Pohl and Schellenberg (3) pointed out, “For better or for worse, the Bluestockings as a specific cultural, social, and political phenomenon played a crucial part in a widening and redefinition of women’s social roles in the eighteenth century” (2). On top of that, their own negotiations of female scholarship, their contribution to literary genres, and their constant participation in public and political spheres provoked continuous debates among their contemporaries about gender roles in these public and private areas (Pohl and Schellenberg, 2002: 3), inventing a new kind

of informal sociability that, according to Eger (2013: 1), “combined the life of the senses with that of the mind.” Last but not least, the subsequent Bluestockings’ publications brought different changes “in the discipline of social and literary history itself” (3). These changes have raised questions about how the “Bluestockings” had been considered until then.

On the basis of the aforesaid ideas, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth OED) offers two different meanings to the word “Bluestocking”. On the one hand, the term is defined as “of, belonging, or relating to a series of assemblies or salons held c1750 by a group of London society ladies, notable for the informal dress worn by the male attendees and for the intellectual conversation engaged in by women and men equally” (OED online). On the other hand, the term was also defined as “of a woman: having or affecting literary tastes in a manner originally associated with the women of the bluestocking circle; that is a bluestocking; literary, scholarly, intellectual; as bluestocking lady. Frequently derogatory” (OED online).

This last definition of the term is worth special attention since, although it seems to be positive when referring to a woman, the truth is, as aforementioned, that it turned into a negative association to this literary movement and its female “salonnières”, as they were sometimes called. This depreciative use reached its peak throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> (OED online). Despite this, however, Eger affirms that the original Bluestockings lived in a world where women started to “shine and even dazzle” (Eger, 2013:1).

Furthermore, the fact that the Bluestocking ladies were so remarkable and gained visibility during the 18<sup>th</sup> century is related to diverse facts. On the one hand, men were supposed to be the only ones to study at university and obtain an academic education.



Those women who reached higher education did so on their own without having any institutional support (Bodek, 1976: 185). Additionally, women were constantly judged “biologically, socially and intellectually” (185) and hence labelled and stereotyped as inferior. Indeed, Lord Chesterfield<sup>1</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Chesterfield, claimed that “women, are only children of larger growth [...] A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humors them, and flatters them, as he does with a sprightly and forward child” (185). Such statements provoked the necessity for women to exhibit their learning and their educational concerns. Hence the bluestocking phenomenon, which emerged with the figure of the salon, brought about the beginning of well-known Bluestocking parties where discussions about political concerns, and the writing of literature, journalism and the educational writing of the day all contributed “to the new image of woman” (187).

Out of all the attendants of these famous parties, it appears that Elizabeth Montagu (1720-1800), a close friend of Elizabeth Vesey, was considered the *Queen* (see section 6.2) of this remarkable group which began to revolutionise the sexist society she lived in. Using the basis of historical and literary material, this Master’s Dissertation intends to analyse the figure of Elizabeth Montagu and to answer whether and why she was, as considered by many, the Queen of this revolutionary group. In order to do this, it will also be necessary to not only focus on Montagu herself, but also on other “salonnières” belonging to what are considered the first and second generations of this group. These members contributed either to the literary panorama of the time or promoted social and gender changes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lord Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope (1694-1773) was a British statesman, man of letters and diplomat.

## 2. THE TERM “BLUESTOCKING”

### 2.1. The origin of this nomenclature

As mentioned previously, the term “Bluestocking” originated in the mid-1700s in Britain when groups of both men and women met together in order to discuss social and educational concerns. These meetings were known as parties or conversation evenings and were mainly held in a salon of the host’s home. The expression “Bluestocking salons” in place of parties is also used. As one can observe in the next chapters, it was Elizabeth Montagu who fascinated her guests by the decoration of her most famous room, “The Chinese Room”,<sup>2</sup> decorated by the Swiss Neoclassical painter Angelica Kauffman,<sup>3</sup> who was also responsible for decorating the majority of the apartments in Hill Street and Portman Square (Clay, 1923: 8). One of the most famous salons apart from “The Chinese Room” was “The Feather Room”, which contained a six-panel feather screen made of the plumage of peacocks, pheasants, jays, and macaws of every sort (Lee 1885: 240-244), creating a sense of majesty in the rooms where the parties were celebrated. However, Montagu’s counterpart, Elizabeth Vesey, created more intimate and not so outlandish rooms. For instance, in her “blue room” and “green room”, the scheme of colours combined in perfect harmony “with the true-blue nature of the assemblies” (Clay 1923: 8).

---

2 “The Chinese Room” is one of the most splendid salons and considered to be the earliest and fully furnished chinoiserie interior in England (Sloboda, 2010: 130). Furthermore, this room was decorated in wild colours and exuberant forms creating a great impact on those who saw it. Moreover, it was also full of objects made of porcelain, lacquer and chintz where imitation, artifice and ostentation was present everywhere (131).

3 Maria Anna Angelika Kauffmann (1741-1807) was a Swiss Neoclassical painter trained in Italy who arrived in England in 1776 and remained there until 1780 (Godden, 2006).

The origin of the term continues to be a mystery nowadays. Indeed, many different attributions to whom was the first to use it may be found. First and foremost, the figure of Mr. Benjamin Stillingfleet (1702-1771) should be highlighted. Stillingfleet was known for being the most eminent member of these societies (Clay 1923:15) and apparently always attended the meetings wearing blue stockings, which were considered informal attire for men as opposed to more formal black stockings (Dobbs 1976: 85). He was considered to be a man of letters whose conversations were absolutely valuable, so whenever he missed one of the meetings his loss was so noticeable that it used to be said, "We can do nothing without the blue stockings" (Clay, 15), inferring both Stillingfleet's charismatic personality as well as his clothing.

Another theory falls upon Mrs. Elizabeth Vesey (the apparent instigator of the Bluestocking society), who replied to Mr. Stillingfleet when he declined her invitation to a literary meeting due to not being "in the habit of displaying a proper equipment for an evening assembly" (Burney, 1832, II:: 189), with "Pho, Pho, don't mind dress. Come in your blue stockings!"

However, if there is one theory gaining strength it is the one that names Mrs Montagu as the first person to use this term in one of her letters, dated March 8, 1757:

Our friend, Mr. Stillingfleet, is more attached to the lilies of the field than to the lilies of the town, who toil and spin as little as the others, and, like the former, are better arrayed than Solomon in all his glory. I assure you, our philosopher is so much a man of pleasure, he has left off his old friends and his blue-stockings and is at operas and gay assemblies every night. (Clay, 1923: 16)

## 2.2. The evolution of the term

Depending on the period in history and the evolution of the movement itself, the term “Bluestocking” has provoked both positive and negative connotations. According to Pohl & Schellenberg (2002: 2), in 1653 the term “Bluestocking” was used to “describe the plain style of clothing of the members of the Little Parliament<sup>4</sup> in Oliver Cromwell’s time”. The word, then, was evidently first used in a derogatory sense. However, it was not until the mid-eighteen century when the term reappeared in order to characterize Stillingfleet’s clothing and the meetings of this group of literary men and women.

When the term “Bluestocking” began to be used in the 1750s and 1760s, it was used in a positive way, to merely describe “the salon circles around Montagu, Boscawen, and Vesey in London, Bath and Dublin”.<sup>5</sup> However, in the late 1770s, the term “Bluestocking” suffered changes to the connotations that it produced not only due to the fact that it was directed to women of the meetings but by those “who feared or felt excluded from Bluestocking society” (Pohl & Schellenberg, 2002: 5) . As time went by (around 1775), a new generation of Bluestockings bloomed and thus the term began to refer to “learned women in general” (5) owing to an increase of assemblies and correspondence between the members where politics and literature were the main topics to be dealt with. Furthermore, in 1784 and according to the OED online, the word “bluestocking”, whose meaning is considered obsolete nowadays, is defined as “To don bluestocking, attend a bluestocking assembly”.

---

<sup>4</sup> Little Parliament was the name given to the first Puritan Assembly of the Notables under Oliver Cromwell’s new Republic. It is also called derogatively, “Barebone’s Parliament” (Carlyle, 2002: 262).

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Montagu, Frances Boscawen and Elisabeth Vesey, as stated previously, were the three first hosts of the bluestocking events.

Bodek (1976: 187-188) states that the term “bluestocking” implied “witty or learned people of both sexes”. Notwithstanding, as the 18th century advanced and the Bluestockings voiced their opinions, the term itself became more pejorative and derogatory in meaning. By 1782 the expression “bluestocking” referred “to a learned, pedantic lady” (Bodek, 1976: 187). Such an evolution of the term from an educated person to a pedantic lady showed the society’s bias where women expressing educational concerns were not seen in a positive light.

However, the French Revolution, which brought about political and intellectual changes around the 1790s, also provoked a new pejorative change in the term “bluestocking”, implying a “dangerously intellectual woman” (Pohl and Schellenberg: 2002: 5). The Bluestockings became prey to the satires by famous poets of the time such as Richard Polwhele in his work *Unsex’d Females* (1798), Thomas Moore in *The Bluestockings* (1811) or Lord Byron in *The Blues: A Literary Eclogue* (1812) (Pohl and Schellenberg: 2002: 5). William Hazlitt (1778-1830) stated “The Bluestocking is the most odious character in society [...]; she sinks wherever she is placed, like the yolk of an egg, to the bottom, and carries the filth with her” (Quoted in Eger, 2010: 206). Consequently, as the Bluestockings were developing into a social phenomenon, there were many studies on them. In this context, the controversial work by Opie,<sup>6</sup> *Detraction Displayed* (1828), rescues the term “Bluestocking” from its derogatory association with “women on display” (Pohl & Schellenberg 2002: 8) and uses the term “Bluestocking” as

---

6 Amelia Opie (1769-1853) was an English author who was involved in radical politics since she was a child. In her book *Detraction Displayed*, she offers a “radical response to the social construction of womanhood” (Pari, 1997:66). In that sense, just as she had supported Mary Wollstonecraft when her reputation was in decline, she tried to do the same with the Bluestockings’ reputation. In fact, her close relationship with many intellectuals of the period was well known, such as with the 2nd generation Bluestocking Anna Laetitia Barbauld. (Pari, 1997: 63-69)

a proto-feminist catchphrase which implied “both the historical group and [...] learned women in general” ( 8). She states:

I think it incumbent on all those women who are really blue-stockings, to dare to be themselves, and to shew by joining seasonably and modestly in intellectual converse, that all females of cultivated minds are not pedants or precieuses, and that they love information for its own sake, and not for the sake of display [...]. If [...] they reply [to their detractor], “I am a blue-stocking, if to love knowledge better than ignorance entitles me to the name”, the pretty assaulter, be it man or woman, will soon lay down the weapon that is powerless to wound (Opie, 1828: 264-266).

Nonetheless, Thomas de Quincey characterized the Bluestockings as being “a feeble minority” (Quoted in Pohl & Schellenberg 2002: 9) of unfeminine women, “not simply obsolete, but even unintelligible to our juniors” and this marked “their disappearance from the literary canon and cultural history of the nineteenth century” (9).

### 3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to comprehend the Bluestockings' line of thinking it is important to place them in the historical context in which they lived and developed their views. Historically speaking, the vast majority of Bluestocking members and the object of this Master's Dissertation, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, can perfectly be framed within the era known as The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century (1660-1785). For this reason, the following sections will be focused on data from 1700 onwards since the majority of the Bluestocking members were born from that date.

#### 3.1. Political and Religious Changes

The Restoration and the Eighteenth century brought diverse changes to the Bluestockings' country of origin. The first happened in 1707 when it became a single nation thanks to the Act of Union joining Scotland and England, creating the nation of Great Britain and provoking social, political and economic changes affecting cities more than rural areas as the populations of the former increased significantly. However, the cohesion of the two nations also provoked a social order where "an ethos of politeness came to prevail" (Lipking & Noggle, 2006: 2057).

The two political parties existing in the period were known as the Whigs and the Tories (very roughly speaking, liberals versus conservatives). In terms of religion, The Tories "guarded the prominence of the established church" whereas the Whigs "Tended to support toleration of dissenters" (2060). Economically, the Tories were mainly defined as traditionalists whose landownership remained as the basis of not only wealth and power but also privilege (2060). Moreover, the Whigs managed the Bank of England

(founded in 1964), contrived the public credit system and invested in financial trading from which they intended to obtain financial independence (Lipking & Noggle, 2060)

In 1714, the Whigs took control of the country and George I became king until 1727. He was succeeded by George II until 1760, when he was followed by George III until 1820. It was under George II's reign when the figure of the Prime Minister of the country first appeared in the figure of the Whig Robert Walpole. He reinforced his power under George II's reign who, by rewarding the Prime Minister economically, controlled the House of Commons and installed dependents in government offices.

On the other hand, the reign of George III brought two essential concerns: a necessity of seeing the nation as a colonial power and the need to create a new social order with a liberal and radical reform. And it was in 1763 when Great Britain was considered to be a nation with interests all over the world (2060-61). However, the wealth generated by industrialization and foreign trade had a negative impact on the different social stratum where the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. In that aspect, in the last decades of the century, British authors deliberated between two strong oppositions: "loyalty to old traditions of subordination, mutual obligations, and local self-sufficiency, and yearning for a new dispensation founded on principles of liberty, the rule of reason, and human rights" (2061).

### **3.2 The importance of the salon**

In a world where women were constantly alienated due to their sex, lacking opportunities to develop their education, and in a period where girls were not educated after turning 12 years old because, according to Lord Chesterfield, too much education might make a woman mad, stimulate her curiosity, and perhaps cause her to be unlucky in love



(Bodek 1976: 185), the literary salon was the only place available for women to express themselves and exhibit their learning and knowledge on certain intellectual issues. Under those circumstances, the salon was even considered as “an informal university for women” (Bodek 1976: 185) since it allowed women to express themselves freely about educational concerns.

The origin of salon meetings and salonnières dates back to Paris in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was Madame Rambouillet (1588-1665)<sup>7</sup> who created the figure of the salon in Paris – as well as the figure of a hostess- with the sole purpose of meeting others informally in order to converse and exchange opinions. It is relevant to point out the fact that in order to enter those meetings everyone had to follow “unwritten laws of morality, honour, and politesse”. In Montesquieu’s (1689-1755) words:

They [salonnières] form a kind of republic whose members always actively aid one another. It is a new state within a state; and whosoever observes the action of those in power, if he does not know the women who govern them, is like a man who sees the action of a machine but does not know its secret springs (Quoted in Gere 1891: 127-128).

In other words, the salon, gave women a power never known before where “they could exert a powerful influence as salonnières” (Bodek, 1976: 186). Tinker (1915: 39) establishes a link between French and English salons as well as creating a connection between the two cultures pointing out:

The salon gave an opportunity for the development of ideas in a new medium – the liveliness of conversation. At such a time, when the formulation of opinion is stimulated by contact with other minds, when all barriers are down, all dread of critics forgotten, a man may give free rein to his doctrines and borrow all the brilliancy that lives in exaggeration (Tinker, 1915: 39).

---

<sup>7</sup> During the first half of the 17th century, Madame de Rambouillet contributed to the art de vivre (art of living) at her own hotel and specifically from her *Chambre bleue* (Blue Room) where she held *assemblées* (assemblies), later referred to as salons (Thiebaud, 2007: 1).

However, as aforementioned, it was not until the mid-18th century when the salons began to appear in England. In fact, it was not until this time and with the creation of the Bluestocking salons that women started to provoke a change. (Dobbs 1976:84). Following their French counterparts, English salonnières accommodated their assemblies in their own houses surrounded by people who listened to them and from whom they could learn (Bodek, 1976: 187). And it was at that moment when “The Queen of the Blues” and her fellow Bluestockings, began to play an important role in the world of salons as well as in conversations. In fact, Montagu visited French salons when travelling in France in 1775 (Pohl & Schellenberg, 2002: 4). Nevertheless, whereas the French salonnières were dedicated to pleasure, learning, and work, the English Bluestockings preferred learning and work to pleasure (Bodek, 1976:188). This could be the reason why Hannah More, in her poem “The Bas Bleu”, distanced herself and the Blues from their French counterparts (Pohl & Schellenberg, 2002: 4).

## 4. PRINCIPAL BLUESTOCKING WOMEN

Although Elizabeth Montagu is the focus of this study, it is equally important to delve into the study of those women who contributed to the movement somehow and who were remarkably necessary for its development and the status it acquired. The Bluestockings have traditionally been divided into the First Generation and the Second Generation, so likewise they are listed here in alphabetical order. The choice of listing them in alphabetical order and not in order of importance is due to the fact that each of them contributed to the movement somehow depending on the generation they belonged to. With this, the aim is to convey not only all the names of the relevant women this movement brought about and how important they were for the society of that time but also the works they produced to enrich the Bluestocking generations.

### 4.1. The first Bluestocking generation

#### 4.1.1 Frances Boscawen (1719-1805)

The first Bluestocking worth mentioning is Frances Boscawen [née Glanville] (1719-1805). According to Miegion (2000: 25), her work highlights the most important aspects concerning not only her domestic but also her social life. Boscawen was known for having a close relationship with Elizabeth Montagu and also received Hannah More's admiration up to the point where the latter included Boscawen's letters in her biography entitled *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, by William Roberts [1834] or in the correspondence of Mary Delany (26). Thanks to her friendship with Montagu, some of their correspondence can also be found in *Bluestocking Letters*, edited by R. Brimley Johnson (1926). Although many of her letters remain unpublished,

some of them were finally published in *Admiral's Wife* (1940) and *Admiral's Widow* (1943), both of them mainly containing Boscauwen's letters to her husband.

#### 4.1.2 Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806)

Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), considered to be the most prolific and fruitful writer among the first generation of bluestockings, wrote poetry, essays and translations as well as being an active writer of letters. Carter was portrayed as "pious and notably conservative politically" (Miegon, 2000: 26). However, according to Miegon (26), "her achievement in classical scholarship was outstanding for a woman of her time". Among all the works she produced the most outstanding are *Poems on Particular Occasions* (1738), *An Examination of Mr. Pope's Essay on Man* (1739), *Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy Explain'd for the Use of the Ladies* (1739) and *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762). In 1808, Carter's nephew, Montagu Pennington (1762–1849), published *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, including letters to Vesey. He also published *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter* (1816) and *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu* (1817). As Miegon (2000: 26) underscores, "health was often the subject of her correspondence" due to her constant headaches.

#### 4.1.3 Hester Chapone (1727-1801)

Hester Chapone (1727-1801) was another essential member of the first generation of the Bluestockings. Self-educated and self-taught, Chapone differentiates herself from the other Bluestockings by claiming that the domestic lives of women "could be intellectually and emotionally satisfying" (Miegon, 2002: 27). Matters such as religion, education, economy, character, friendship and female accomplishments are recurrent topics in her writings and inspired her to write a huge amount of publications and editions

when it came to her epistolary work on female conduct. Her works include *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1775) and *A Letter to a New-Married Lady* (1777), *The Posthumous Works of Mrs. Chapone* (1807), containing several letters, was published posthumously by her family as the title reveals.

#### 4.1.4 Mary Delany (1700-1788)

Mary Delany [née Granville] (1700-1788) was not only a favourite of the royal family but a frequent special guest of Elizabeth Montagu and Frances Boscawen. She was the inventor of what she called “paper mosaics”. As Miegion (2000: 28) states, “Delany carried on notable correspondence and was concerned with the issue of companionate marriage”.<sup>8</sup> Her works comprise a libretto from *Paradise Lost* for Handel (1744), a moral romance, “Marianna” (1759, unpublished), a translation of a Latin flower treatise (1762), letters to Swift (1766), advice on propriety to a great-niece (1777), *Letters from Mrs. Delany (widow of Doctor Patrick Delany) to Mrs. Frances Hamilton, from the Year 1779, to the Year 1788* (1820) and *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville (Mrs. Delany), with Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte* (1861-62), edited by Lady Llanover. Her *Flora Delanica*, a collection of about 985 botanical specimens including her own paper mosaics, are exhibited at the British Museum and were donated by her grandniece in 1897.

#### 4.1.5 Sarah Fielding (1710-1768)

Sarah Fielding (1710-1768) was a member of the Bath community along with Sarah Scott. Miegion (2000: 29) describes Fielding as the elaborator of a “theory of education

---

<sup>8</sup> Lindsey advocated for companionate marriage, which encouraged the use of birth control until a marriage was well established and the possibility to divorce by mutual consent if there were no children (Lindsey & Evans 1927).

and character as well as the scheme of a community for gentlewomen” where she “was especially interested in the issue of equality among sexes”. Fielding was also a developer in the genre of didactic school stories supporting and going through women’s social, psychological and intellectual issues where topics such as tyranny and self-deception could also be found. (Miegon, 2000: 29). Her first work was *The Adventures of David Simple in Search of a Faithful Friend* (1744), a novel which was followed by a sequel titled *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in “David Simple” and Some Others* (1747). Her works also include *The Governess; or, the Little Female Academy* and *Remarks on Clarissa, Addressed to the Author* (1749), *Volume the Last* (1753), *The Cry; A New Dramatic Fable* (1754), *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759), *The History of Ophelia* (1760) and *Memoirs of Socrates* (1762) a translation.

#### 4.1.6 Catherine Macaulay (1731-1791)

Catherine Macaulay (later Graham), née Sawbridge (1731-1791)<sup>9</sup> is described by Miegon as the “first prominent female historian in England” to the extent that she was the first woman to be allowed into the reading rooms of the British Museum. Moreover, Macaulay was considered to be a relevant figure when it comes to the use of primary sources for history writing (Miegon, 2002: 29). Furthermore, her political voice was relevant not only as an educator of modern feminist politics in Britain, but also as a supporter of equality between the sexes in education. (29). Miegon (30) also pointed out that Macaulay was esteemed not only for her achievements as a historian but she was also able to gain support from political radicals in England and revolutionaries in France

---

<sup>9</sup> In 1760, she married her first husband, named George Macaulay, who unfortunately died in 1766. Some years later, in 1778, she married William Graham (Miegon, 2002: 29-30).

and the United States. Her works include *The History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line* (btw. 1763-1783), the political pamphlets *Loose Remarks on Certain Positions to be Found in Mr. Hobbes's Philosophical Rudiments of Government and Society* (1767) and *An Address to the People of England, Ireland, and Scotland, on the Present Important Crisis of Affairs* (1775), and *Letters on Education, with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790). This last work apparently greatly influenced Mary Wollstonecraft to the extent that Bridget (1995: 177) argues that both "English radicals [Macaulay and Wollstonecraft] corresponded with each other" and even that both of them were close "in their ideas on democracy, equality and women's rights" (177). On top of that and according to the same author, Macaulay was "highly respected by Wollstonecraft" (179). Mary Wollstonecraft is even considered to be "a Bluestocking in spirit only" (Dobbs, 1976: 89) and her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) contains many ideas of the Bluestockings and of their predecessors (Dobbs, 1976: 89).

#### **4.1.7 Elizabeth Montagu (1718 or -1800)**

Elizabeth Montagu (1720 or 1718-1800) considered by many experts in the field as the "Queen of the Blues" (Miegon, 2002: 30)<sup>10</sup>, was, as this quote suggests, the first most influential Bluestocking. Indeed, she is the only member of the Bluestocking society to whom this epithet has been attributed. The most abundant works by Montagu are her letters to Sarah Scott, her sister, and Elizabeth Carter (Miegon, 2000: 30) However, besides three anonymous dialogues which Montagu contributed to the poet Lord Lyttleton's book *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760), she only published one more work, titled

---

<sup>10</sup> For more information about Elizabeth Montagu as Queen of the blues, see section 6.2 *Elizabeth Montagu: Queen of the Blues?*

as *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* [sic], *Compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets. With some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. De Voltaire* (1760). Her aforementioned letters were published posthumously in four volumes by her nephew, Matthew Robinson (1762-1831).

#### 4.1.8 Clara Reeve (1729-1807)

Clara Reeve (1729-1807) was particularly exceptional in the sense that although she did not have any contact with any of her relatives and the members of the London circle, she was considered to be a proper Bluestocking thanks to “her learning and literary activity” (Miegion, 2002: 32). Reeve fought for the abolition of slavery as well as for self-sustaining female community, recurring topics appearing in her publications under the genre of domestic and gothic fiction. Miegion exposes Reeve’s advocacy on “the value of romance in representing the interests of women” (32). Her works include *Original Poems on Several Occasions* (1769) and *The Champion of Virtue: A Gothic Story* (1777), republished as *The Old English Baron* (1778). *The Old English Baron*, which reached 10 editions, was translated into French and German and its prominence and relevance lies in its use of supernatural elements. Other works by Reeve are *The Two mentors: A Modern Story* (1783), *The Progress of romance* (1785), *The Exiles or Memoirs of the Count de Cronstadt* (1788), *The School for Widows* (1791), *Plans of Education* (1792), *Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon* (1793) and *Destination or Memoirs of a Private Family* (1799).

#### 4.1.9 Sarah Scott (1721-1795)

Sarah Scott (1721-1795) was the most productive and fruitful member of the first generation of Bluestockings, together with Carter. Scott, Elizabeth Montagu’s sister, was



well-known for her important “manifesto of bluestocking feminism”, *A Description of Millennium Hall* (1762), where she exhibits “an idealized and feminist model of gentry capitalism and a critique of courtly culture”, according to Miegion (2002: 33). This manifesto presents a community run by women who join their resources in order to improve the lives of their neighbours. Her other works include *The History of Cornelia* (1750), *Agreeable Ugliness or The Triumph of the Graces* (1754), Pierre Antoine’s translation entitled *Le Laideur amiable, A Journey through Every Stage of Life* (1754), *The History of Gustavus Ericson, King of Sweden* (1761), *The History of Mecklenburgh* (1762), *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) a sequel to *Millennium Hall* and *The Life of Theodore Agrippa d’Aubigné* (1772) and *The test of Filial Duty* (1772).

#### 4.1.10 Catherine Talbot (1721-1770)

Catherine Talbot (1721-1770) is the next-to-last Bluestocking member exemplified in this chapter. Miegion (2000: 34) characterises her for being “the most reluctant of them to be known as a writer. According to Miegion, Talbot was strongly recognized for advocating “for the equality of the sexes and the dignity of female celibacy and was concerned with women’s social position” (34). Being conscious of the precariousness of her equals, Talbot decided to explore the “aesthetic, domestic, ethical, economic and educational concerns of women” apart from also contributing to what Miegion describes as a “feminized genre of didactic piety and to a new female subjectivity entrenched in the practices of introspection and mannerly conduct” (34). Her works include poetry, essays, allegories, dialogues, pastorals, imitations and letters. Her most famous works are *Athenian Letters* (1741 and 1743), the *Rambler* and the *Adventurer*. Her *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) was published by Elizabeth Carter after Talbot’s

death. It was in the same year, 1770, when *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot* was published.

#### **4.1.11 Elizabeth Vesey (1715?-1791)**

Elizabeth Vesey (1715?-1791) is the last member of this first generation of the Bluestockings to be listed here. On the one hand she was the woman who initiated the Bluestocking parties, becoming the promoter of the movement itself and on the other hand the one who gave the name to this movement (as seen in 1.1). The objective of these parties (also known as conversation evenings) was to converse and discuss literary and political subjects. Considered to be Elizabeth Montagu's closest friend, their relationship came to its end when Vesey left Ireland to settle in London where a strong rivalry distanced them. Regarding her works, they are characterised by their "imaginative, fantastical style" (Miegon, 2002: 36) which is why her friends called her "The Sylph" (37). As Vesey was very interested in the poetry of "Ossian"<sup>11</sup> and the ballad tradition (37), she wrote some verses and letters. However, only a few of them were published in *Bluestocking Letters*, edited by R. Brimley Johnson (1926).

## **4.2 The Second Bluestocking Generation**

### **4.2.1 Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825)**

The first member of this second Bluestocking generation is known as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, (1743-1825) a "provincial Bluestocking" (Miegon, 2002: 25), meaning "not of the capital" and thus, "countrified" and "lacking the culture or polish of the capital" (Kelly, 2002: 105). She published poetry, essays and literary reviews but also works related to

---

<sup>11</sup> Ossian is the narrator of a cycle of epic poems published by James Mcpherson (1736-1796), a Scottish poet.

politics and didactic prose for children. Her ideals were notably liberal when it came to expressing herself freely on issues such as abolition, religion and politics (Miegon, 2002: 25). Barbauld's works include *Poems and Micellaneous Pieces in Prose* (1773), *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781), *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), *Epistle to William Wilberforce* (1791) and *Sins of the Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793), *The British Novelist* (1810), which included bibliographical essays, critical reviews as well as a collection entirely for girls entitled *The Female Speaker* (1811), and many other works.

#### 4.2.2 Hannah More (1745-1833)

One of the most important personalities belonging to this second generation of the Bluestocking movement is Hannah More (1745-1833). Although she belonged to the second generation of the Bluestockings, she was closer to the members of the first generation linked by a strong friendship (Miegon, 2002:31). Indeed, she collaborated as a patron with other first generation Bluestockings in several works. One example is when both Moore and Elizabeth Montagu acted as patrons for Anne Yearsley, a working-class poet, helping her to publish *Poems, on Several Occasions* (1785). Moore's most remarkable work for the content of this Master's Dissertation, the poem *Bas Bleu, or Conversation* (1786), is said to describe all the qualities possessed by the Bluestocking women. Considered to be the most productive female author of this second generation, Moore was also "an educator of the poor, a prominent abolitionist, Christian moralist and philanthropist" apart from expressing "notably conservative views on the education and advancement of women" (Miegon, 2000: 31). Among the many works she published one could highlight the following dramatic works: *The Search after Happiness* (1773), *The*

*Inflexible Captive* (1774), *Percy* (1777) and *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1788). Regarding ethical and religious issues, she wrote *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790), *Village Politics by Will Chip* (1792) and *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-1798), including *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, a bestseller that sold approximately two million copies in just four years. These last two works are considered to be her most famous. Moore also wrote *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), a work concerning girls' education.

#### 4.2.3 Anna Seward (1742-1809)

Another female figure of this second generation of literary women is Anna Seward (1742-1809), known as the "Swan of Lichfield". Her views and thoughts were considered to be radical in relation to marriage and politics. However, she was known for her criticism of conduct books,<sup>12</sup> which "lauded marriage above all else". Indeed, Seward strongly believed in same-sex friendship and appeared to be against opposite-sex marriage (Barret, 2012: 2). She also voiced her opposition to empire and slavery (Miegon, 2000: 34) and was a strong supporter of the American Independence movement. Her works include elegiac poems on David Garrick and Captain Cook (1780), Major André (1781), and Anne Miller (1782); *Louisa, a Poetical Novel* (1784), *Ode on General Eliott's Return from Gibraltar* (1787), *Llangollen Vale, with Other Poems* (1796), *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects*, *Odes Paraphrased from Horace* (1799) and *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804).

---

<sup>12</sup> Conduct books are known for educating the reader on certain social norms. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Phillip Stanhope, John Gregory, Hester Chapone and William Kenrick wrote some of the most famous. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the writer Sarah Ellis (1799-1872) is considered to be one of the most famous conduct book writers.

#### 4.2.4 Hester Thrale [later Piozzi] (1741-1821)

The last woman regarding this second generation is Hester Thrale (later Piozzi)<sup>13</sup>(1741-1821), considered to be a “prominent Bluestocking hostess” and due to her very close relationship to Elizabeth Montagu “brought together both generations of the group” (Miegon, 2000: 35). Notwithstanding, she expressed opposite ideas when it came to her views on second marriages which provoked her becoming distanced from the group. Thrale had strong beliefs on the moral influence of literature and was wary of new ideas regarding education and politics. She was considered to be one of the first women to publish in the “biographical, anecdotal, and travel genres” (35). The great Elizabeth Montagu was also important for Thrale since in 1775 she became acquainted with the former and her circle which influenced her ideals and views. Regarding her works, she wrote *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., During the Last Twenty Years of his Life* (1786), *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson* (1788), *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* (1789), *British Synonymy* (1794), a dictionary of English usage, *Three Warnings to John Bull before He Dies* (1798), a political pamphlet, and *Retrospection* (1801).

#### 4.3 Bluestocking productivity

It is undeniable now to think how the majority of the Bluestockings were so productive and could dedicate themselves to their own concerns and preferences in a society where women were not destined to either emerge or progress. This is due to the fact that all the members who constituted the Bluestocking circle possessed similar attitudes in comparison to other fellow women counterparts. On the one hand, all of them used to

---

<sup>13</sup> She married Henry Thrale, a prosperous brewer, in 1763. However, he died in 1781. Just 3 years later, in 1784, she married her daughter's music master, Gabriel Piozzi, who died in 1804.

receive informal education both from their fathers or brothers (Pittock, 2001: 5). Regarding marriage, the Bluestockings behaved differently as well: Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot, for example, refused to marry since they wished to maintain “an intellectual life without the competition of domestic rules” (5) Hester Chapone’s marriage even lasted just nine months. With respect to giving birth, only one member of the first generation of Bluestockings had a child, Elizabeth Montagu, and he unfortunately died when he was still a toddler (5), which mainly implies that their “minimal domestic requirements and a leisured lifestyle ensured the possibility of literary production” (5). On top of that, whereas the majority of girls’ education was over fifteen – an age when they had to be prepared for getting married – the Bluestockings were preparing and enriching their educational duties. Furthermore, all the members could read Latin as well as Greek and Hebrew (6).

Although at first sight the first generation of Bluestockings were more prominent in creating new works than the second one, the truth is that all the members of this group contributed to the development not only of the group itself but their ideals and concerns thanks to the creation of the salon where the Bluestockings cultivated “a viable and lasting place for women of letters” (Pittock, 2002: 1). It is my opinion that the two generations of educated women contributed to both the movement and to the eighteenth century, creating, innovating, and fighting for their rights as women. Following Pittock’s point of view, who highlights the importance of gathering the Bluestockings as a group instead of isolated characters, one may perceive the amount of works they offered to the literature, values, and prejudices against their sex of the eighteenth century. As expressed in section 4.2, the first generation of Bluestockings’ productions were diverse in number. Elizabeth Montagu was recognized for writing *Essay on the Writings and Genius and of*

*Shakespeare* (1769), Elizabeth Carter, however, translated *Epicetus* (1758). Chapone composed her conduct book entitled *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), among many others.

It remains clear that both generations of Bluestockings (the second no doubt influenced in some cases by the first) contributed positively to the society of that time. They wrote and fought in order to create not only a better society dealing with controversial topics such as politics, religion and social issues but developing and creating new literary genres. Clara Reeve, for instance, published gothic fiction as in *The Old English Baron* (1777), published anonymously and enriched with an abundance of supernatural elements. Sarah Fielding wrote a novel (an unusual genre for the Bluestockings), *The Adventures of David Simple in Search of a Faithful Friend* (1744), and Sarah Scott's (Montagu's sister) manifesto of Bluestocking feminism *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) was representative of the period due to its "critique of courtly culture" (Miegons, 2002: 33). Hannah More and her poem *Bas Bleu* (1786) opened a new world for the Bluestockings. Catherine Macaulay was recognized for her labour as a female historian, feminist politician and supporter of equality and her writings were related to political pamphlets. Nonetheless, although the majority of the Bluestockings' writings were conformed by letters, they also initiated themselves in the world of poetry, dialogues and allegories (Pittock, 2002: 8).

Additionally, the topics dealt with by the Bluestockings were varied, taking into account their worries, concerns and advances throughout the century. Although topics such as domestic and social life, religion, education, economy, female accomplishments, companionate marriage or women's social, psychological and intellectual issues prevailed, they also occupied their time in "masculine" genres (6) such as philosophy,

historiography, biblical studies and literary criticism showing, in this way, a “female rationality” as well as “earning the privilege of an enlarged education for women” (6).



## 5. THE “BAS BLEU”

“Bas Bleu” (also known as “Conversation”) is a poem of the great second Bluestocking generation written by Hannah Moore in 1783.<sup>14</sup> Although Moore is not the centre of this study, this poem does deserve its own place in this Master’s Dissertation since it “describes the charm and social life of these literary women” (Miegon, 2002: 32). Moore commemorates her Bluestocking friends (Dobbs, 1976:86) as well as insisting on the ways in which women might participate in literary conversations (Peterson, 2001: 227). Indeed, it provides the reader with a closer vision of this group of intellectuals.

Another relevant factor about this poem is the title itself. *Bas Bleu*, written in French, perhaps alluding to the Parisian origin of the movement and aiming to make the English one popular in this way (Clay, 1923: 19). Clay also states that in this way the word Blue-stocking “assumed a kind of international significance which attracted public attention” (). With her *Bas Blue*, Moore intended to compile information and characteristics about all the different types of gatherings of the Bluestockings, not only about literature, education and philanthropy but mainly about the social scale they represented (20).

Although I do not intend to analyse the poem as a whole, some parts of it must be taken into consideration in order to make sense of these aforementioned social and intellectual gatherings. Indeed, Moore starts her poem by introducing the name of the “first of the noteworthy heritage of the Blue Stockings” (Clay, 1923: 20), Vesey, by giving her the importance she really deserves (lines 1-2, 8 to 27 and 29 to 30). Further, from lines 42 to 51, the poetess throws light on the Bluestocking assemblies (1923: 21) and it

---

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix for the full version of the poem.

is from lines 52 to 55, where Moore introduces the name of the two relevant figures of the movement, Frances Boscawen and the object of this Master Dissertation, Elizabeth Montagu, giving these three ladies equal importance (21).

The significance of this poem is thus undeniable and is a relevant mirror of the movement at that time. Thanks to Moore, the Bluestocking circle was able to spread and be recognized.

## 6. ELIZABETH MONTAGU

### 6.1. Extended Biography

Although Elizabeth Montagu was briefly introduced in chapter 4.1, many relevant aspects of her private life have yet to be explained. Miegion (2002: 30) describes her not only as “the leader of the first generation of the Bluestockings” but also as a “frequent hostess of the group”. Montagu was affectionately known under the nickname “Fidget” due to her love for dancing. Her father, Matthew Robinson, was of a line of Scotch barons. She was brought up by her grandparents and educated by her grandfather, Conyers Middleton, who worked as a librarian at Cambridge University and was also the biographer of Cicero. Furthermore, he was responsible for instilling in Montagu her interest and love for literature. As Bodek points out (1976: 190), “one night, although dressed for a ball, she sat down, read through the ‘Ajax’ and the ‘Philoctetes’ of Sophocles, wrote a critical letter on both, and went to sleep”. Such was the case that at the age of eight she had already read all of Addison’s *Spectator* essays and at the age of twelve Montagu started to correspond with Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley (later the Duchess of Portland).

In 1742 she married Edward Montagu the (Earl of Sandwich’s grandson), a wealthy man who possessed coal mines in Denton (Northumberland) apart from country houses at Allerthorpe, Yorkshire, Sandleford and Berkshire and with whom she had a child who died in his first year (1744). This fatal event was decisive for the development of her literary salons which allowed her to entertain and evade her pains and sorrows.

Those literary salons were mainly hosted at her London houses –first in her famous “Chinese Room”<sup>15</sup> in Mayfair’s Hill Street and later in Portman Square.

In 1775, on the death of her husband, she inherited not only a generous amount of money but estates containing collieries, which allowed her to reconstruct the houses where the bluestocking members had their meetings. Moreover, she was in charge of all her husband’s businesses demonstrating that an eighteenth-century woman was able to run and occupy the social and economic position of a gentleman (Peterson 2001:224). The salons, the name given to these meeting places, were as significant as their hostess and it was both the salon and the hostess’ role in these meetings that made Elizabeth Montagu recognized, accepted and presented as one of the best Bluestockings.

Her circle was one of the most important of those times and it included Lady Margaret Harley (later duchess of Portland), Elizabeth Vesey, Frances Boscawen, Mary Delany, Hester Chapone, Hester Thrale, Lord Lyttelton, Dorothea Gregory, Horace Walpole, Samuel Johnson, David Garrick, Edmund Burke, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, who painted her portrait. Montagu was also recognized for being the patron of James Beattie (poet and philosopher), Anna Barbauld and Hanna More, with whom she maintained a close friendship.

## 6.2 Elizabeth Montagu: Queen of the Blues?

During the process of my research regarding the information on the character of Elizabeth Montagu, I have found that the majority of the experts on the movement agree on naming her “The Queen of the Blues” providing no more information than the one

---

<sup>15</sup> One room exotically decorated at Montagu’s Hill Street in London (Powell, 1948: 85). See footnote number 2.

included in the quotation marks. For example, in her dissertation, Pittock (2001: 209) entitles a chapter “Elizabeth Montagu, ‘Queen of the Blues’”. Moreover, Bending (2006: 555), in the introduction of his research, also calls Montagu “The Queen of the Blues”, describing her as someone who was culturally associated with the city of London both socially and literally. Furthermore, Dobbs (1976: 84) highlights Montagu as “Queen of the Blues” as well as claiming she was instrumental in the formation of the group itself becoming “one of the leading hostesses for the movement” until her death in 1800. In addition to this, Miegion (2002: 30), portrays her as “The Queen of the Blues” when presenting her biographical sketch. By the same token, in her development of the origin of the Bluestocking term, Bodek (1976: 187) introduces the character of Elizabeth Montagu also as “The Queen of the Blues” when referring to the first record of the word “Bluestocking” in one of her letters. However, these are not the only references to her. Ryskamp & Wendorf (1980: 177) add the following description: “Elizabeth Montagu, universally acknowledged “Queen of the Blues”, a woman with whom – because of the force of her considerable intellect and fortune – aspiring literary women were inevitably compared”. On the other hand, Clay (1923: 19) introduces the character of Montagu thus: “Fanny Burney, on being asked what Johnson called Mrs. Montagu, replied: “Queen, to be sure! Queen of the Blues!” Some chapters later, Clay (34) points out: “Elizabeth Robinson, better known as Mrs. Montagu, “Queen of the Blue-Stockings,” is distinctly a product of the 18<sup>th</sup> century”. On top of that, Powell (1984: 85) in the very introduction of his work states “Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Queen of the Bluestockings”, is perhaps the most famous of those learned ladies of eighteenth-century England who courted literary circles, collected celebrities, and strove to be known as people of learning”. Last but not least, there is no necessity of referring to Montagu by

her name but her nickname. The same was thought by Kelly (2002: 111), who refers to “Sarah Scott, [as] sister of the queen of the Bluestockings [...]” inferring to the reader that this nickname was exclusively designated to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu.

Reading all these scholars’ work one begins to wonder why Elizabeth Montagu was, in fact, considered, named and constantly designated as the “Queen of the Blues”. Indeed, the fact that she was the perfect hostess, her salons were the most attractive to her guests and her home on Hill Street became the first salon in London in 1770 does not turn her into a milestone. Notwithstanding, on delving into her life and discovering several facts about her personality a sense of majesty shines through regarding her character not only as a hostess but as a literate and educated woman. In addition, she was recognized as a woman of the greatest manners whose belongings (property, wealth and power) made the Bluestocking society events possible. Frances Burney<sup>16</sup> wrote in her *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* her opinion on the lady catalogued as “Queen of the Blues” (Miegon 2002: 30):

[...]. The lady of the castle commonly placed herself at the upper end of the room, near the commencement of the curve, so as to be courteously visible to all her guests; having the person of rank, or consequence, properly, on one side, and the person the most eminent for talents, sagaciously, on the other; or as near to her chair, and her converse, as her favouring eye, and a

---

<sup>16</sup> Frances Burney (1752-1840), later known as Madame d’Arblay due to her marriage to General Alexandre-Gabriel-Jean-Baptiste d’Arblay, and fondly known as “Fanny”, is known for being the first novelist in the eighteenth century (Lipking & Noggle 2006: 2810). The publication of her anonymous novel *Evelina* or *A Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778) gave her the reputation and fame needed to rub shoulders with Samuel Johnson, David Garrick and Hester Thrale when the authorship of this famous novel was discovered. Her second novel, *Cecilia* (1782), soon reinforced her reputation. In 1786 and in order to please her father, she accepted a place as a lady-in-waiting at court, resigning five years later due to the independence she lacked. Her novel *Camilla* (1796) brought her enough money to have the economic independence women were not accustomed to having in that period. The role of women developed in her satiric novels even served as an inspiration to Jane Austen. In 1802 she moved to France with her husband, which deprived her of the opportunity to return to her country for 10 years due to the Napoleonic wars. Her novel *The Wanderer* or *Female Difficulties* (1814) is good proof of the marginalization and pain she felt. After her death, her novels and comedies were forgotten in favour of her *Diaries and Letters* (which were edited after her death by a niece of hers), which made her famous and recognized again due to the relevant information she provided of the society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Havens & Sabor, 2017, and Lipking & Noggle: 2006: 2810-2811).

complacent box of the head, could invite him to that distinction. (Burney, 1832: 270-271)

Burney also offers an insight into Montagu's physical appearance which allows us to imagine how Montagu was seen by others: "she is middle-sized, very thin, and looks infirm; she has a sensible and penetrating countenance, and the air and manner of a woman accustomed to being distinguished and of great parts" (Burney, 1: 44).

Returning to her role as hostess, it is also true that her "rigid style of hosting assemblies attracted criticism and led to unfavourable comparisons with Vesey's more informal hospitality" (Pohl & Schellenberg: 2002: 2). Furthermore, William Cowper describes Montagu's rooms as "Mrs. Montagu's Academy" (Tinker, 1915: 197), which implies how the significance, importance and fruitfulness of the conversation carried out in those rooms influenced the designation of Montagu as the "Queen" of the Bluestockings. What is more, due to the power exerted by her conversation, Montagu was described as "la belle president by Lyttleton where Montagu used to occupy a masculine position, whilst compensating with an excessive femininity (Pittock, 2001: 220). Hester Thrale even declared "Yesterday I had a conversazione. Mrs. Montagu was brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgment, critical in talk" (220). It is clear that Montagu's role as a hostess was thoroughly observed. In that sense, Putnam establishes:

There seems to be no doubt in Mrs. Montagu's mind the duties of the hostess closely resembled those of the school mistress. It was she who suggested the topic, controlled the discussion, called upon this guest or that for an expression of opinion, and finally summed up with the dogmatic finality of the eighteenth century. (Putnam, 1970: 269)

Furthermore, Sir John Macpherson<sup>17</sup> wrote to Montagu reminiscing about the meetings in her Chinese Room, highlighting that the pleasures of her assemblies “gave that sweetness and refinement to the thoughts of our Statesmen which could alone counteract the acid and gloom of their Dispositions [...] we are all indebted to you [...]” (Guest, 2002: 63). In their assemblies, political issues were not allowed to be dealt with and literature gatherings were preferred instead. Seating arrangements were of the utmost importance as they would no doubt influence the conversation. In that aspect, Montagu created a semi-circle sitting herself near the head or upper end, in contrast to Vesey who preferred groups of chairs together (Dobbs, 1976: 85).

In a letter to James Boswell, Dr Johnson states “That lady [Elizabeth Montagu] exerts more mind in conversation than any person I ever met with. Sir, she displays such powers of ratiocination, such radiations of intellectual eminence, as are amazing” (Pittock, 2001:209) giving real evidence about how Montagu’s power of conversation was enchanting. Burney also admitted the fact that Montagu, was “a woman of such celebrity in the literary world would be the last I should covet to converse with, though one of the first I should wish to listen to”. This was apparently due to the intimidation projected by Montagu as a conversationalist and as her use of the written and spoken language “conveys an interest in maintaining, if not developing, her literate reputation, one that is enhanced by her exclusive social interest” (Pittock, 2001: 210) as well as being “the first woman for literary knowledge in England” (Burney, I: 38). Burney expresses enthusiasm about meeting Montagu: “I should be the most insensible of all

---

<sup>17</sup> Macpherson was later to become governor-general of India (Guest 2002:63).



animals not to like to see our sex's glory" (37), which undoubtedly reinforces her nickname as "Queen of the Blues".

Montagu was constantly compared to her close friend Elizabeth Vesey maybe because Vesey was the first Bluestocking woman to create the tradition of the parties. Apart from comparisons between them, the power of friendship within the Bluestocking members could also be clearly appreciated. Their differences of beliefs, age, social status or personality were usually set aside when they needed each other (Bodek, 1976: 193).

Together with Montagu's role as a hostess and the warmth of her meetings, her role as a sponsor could also be highlighted since she sponsored Burney, Carter, Chapone, and Moore, among others by housing them and financing their works as well as by encouraging them to write. Montagu also travelled with Chapone to Scotland in 1770 and took Carter with her to Bath in 1763 and to Paris in 1776. (Bodek, 1976: 193). Additionally, she even gave her friend Carter the amount of one hundred pounds (193). These were all characters who raised Montagu's reputation and legacy somehow. For instance, Carter taught Greek to Montagu, Chapone dedicated her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind to Montagu*, since Montagu's patronage was crucial to this publication's success. Finally, it was the figure of Hanna Moore who empowered the Bluestocking members owing to her poetry and educational and philanthropic activities and whose poem "passed from hand to hand in manuscripts and enraptured London society in 1782" (Bodek, 1976: 193).

Although Mrs. Montagu was renowned for her role as a hostess, her salons and her meetings, her works and publications gave her an overwhelming reputation. As her

two collections of letters were published after her death by her nephew, her most known and recognizable work is *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769), for which she was dubbed “Mrs. Montagu of Shakespeareshire” (Guest, 2002: 60) and was acclaimed all over the world. In this work, she extolled the figure of Shakespeare as the greatest poet, displaying a wonderful ability to describe the characters, plots and the beauties of Shakespeare’s verses (60). Nine years before, in 1760 and persuaded by the author of the book, *Dialogues of the Dead*, George Lyttelton, she contributed to three sections anonymously which dealt with a series of critiques of the 18<sup>th</sup> century society. With her published writings, Montagu confirmed somehow her position as a woman of letters accentuating the alias provided by the majority of the experts in the field.

One must also bear in mind that Elizabeth Montagu was a woman and it is well-known that the eighteenth century was a tumultuous period for women in general. They did not possess any liberties and were judged not only biologically or socially but they were considered to be intellectually inferior (Bodek, 1976: 185). Regarding this attitude, when Montagu was only 23 she wrote:

In a woman’s education little but outward accomplishment is regarded...  
Sure the men are very imprudent to endeavour to make fools of those to whom they so much trust their honour and happiness and fortune, but it is in the nature of mankind to hazard their peace to secure power, and they know fools make the best slaves. (in Dobbs, 1976: 82)

With these words, Montagu intended to emphasize how women’s expectations were limited. Her father replied arguing, “Wit is the most dangerous talent you can possess” (Langdon-Davies, 1927: 331), proving just how distant any gender inclusion brought about by The Queen of the Bluestockings really was.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This Master's Dissertation mainly focuses on the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the movement known as "The Bluestockings" which was initially conformed by both men and women until it became a group mainly consisting of women. At the very beginning, this research paper attempts to introduce when, where and by whom the term *Bluestocking* was created. Added to that, it also tries to highlight the adversities Bluestocking women faced when attempting to make and create a space for themselves in a sexist society in an attempt to avoid gender adversities. Chapter two is divided into the origin of the nomenclature (chapter 2.1) and the evolution of the term (chapter 2.2). The former deals with the idea of how the term originated, giving different alternatives of the first person who used it for the first time. Moreover, it describes where the meetings were hosted apart from providing a curious male attribution to the origin of the term. It illustrates how the term evolved meaningfully from derogatory to positive connotations, and in then vice versa. Chapter three evaluates the historical framework in which the Bluestockings developed themselves not only differentiating between political and religious changes (chapter 3.1) but exposing the importance of the salon (chapter 3.3), where the Bluestockings could feel free enough to express their concerns on social and literary issues apart from offering a comparison between the English and the French salon. Chapter four differentiates between the members of the first generation (chapter 4.1) and the second one (chapter 4.2) outlining the most important aspects of their private lives and their production as literates. Chapter five is directed to the poem written by one of the members belonging to the second generation of the movement. The reason of this chapter is to show the proper features of the movement itself as well as its most respected members. It is at the end of this Master's Dissertation (Appendix) where I have

included the whole poem for the reader to be captivated by Moore's words. The last chapter of this work is entirely dedicated to Elizabeth Montagu, her extended biography (chapter 6.1) where aspects of her private life from infancy to adulthood can be, finishing with the question of why Elizabeth Montagu was considered to be, according to the literature studied, the Queen of this fascinating movement.

For the great majority of experts in the field, it is undeniable that the Bluestockings, headed by Elizabeth Montagu, played a significant role in redefining women's role in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from a specific cultural, social and political point of view. Moreover, their works reflect deep changes regarding literature and history itself. Elizabeth Montagu was not only considered as the Queen of this literary phenomenon but the one who greatly excelled within it. However, during the process of researching this Master's Dissertation, the question about why Elizabeth Montagu was considered in such a way both inside and outside the movement occurred constantly to me. Furthermore, it was not only her contributions to the literary panorama and the originality of her conversations that helped her be catalogued as the Queen of the Bluestockings but also her delicate role as hostess, her magnificently decorated houses and her companionship of the most important personalities of the time. Moreover, the fortune she inherited from her husband allowed her to exercise a powerful role as a sponsor of other Bluestockings and her role as a business woman positioned her at the highest peak of the social pyramid.

It was no wonder, indeed, that Montagu played a versatile role inside the eighteenth century as an author, critic, patron, businesswoman and salonnière, positioning herself, in some cases, at the centre of important political, literary and social sectors. But not only Montagu was a productive Bluestocking woman, so were their

counterparts. All members mentioned in this Master's Dissertation helped in some way to break stereotypes against women, fight for their freedom as intellectuals and for positioning women in a well-seen position, giving rise to future women generations.

It stands to reason that Elizabeth Montagu deserves the nickname given. The fact that her role as a hostess was immaculate, the attention towards her guests, enviable and her sympathy and charismatic personality made her be the perfect salonnière, could be also influenced by her role as the sponsor of her counterparts and as a businesswoman. However, this brings up the question of whether her being named as the Queen of Bluestockings had anything to do with the literature she produced. In this sense, it appears not, since her only literary contribution, apart from her intimate letters, was her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare (1769)*. That said, all the aforementioned roles eclipse her role as a literary woman and it is inevitable to think of Elizabeth Montagu as a woman of letters, of interesting and intellectual conversations and the one who was able to impose her personality and thoughts in a world completely run by men.

## 8. REFERENCES

Aspinall-Oglander, C. F. & Boscawen, F. E (1940). *Admiral's wife*. London: Longman & Co.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1943). *Admiral's widow: being the life and letters of the hon. Mrs. Edward Boscawen from 1761 to 1805*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Barrett, R. J. (2012). "'My stand': Queer identities in the poetry of Anna Seward and Thomas Gray". *Gender Forum* (39), 1. Retrieved from <http://www.ujaen.debiblio.com/login?&url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/my-stand-queer-identities-poetry-anna-seward/docview/1095764510/se-2> Last access: 02/06/2022.

Bending, S. (2006). "Mrs. Montagu's Contemplative Bench: Bluestocking Gardens and Female Retirement". *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 4. Pages 555-580.

Bodek, E. G. (1976). "Salonnières and Bluestockings: Educated Obsolescence and Germinating Feminism". *Feminist Studies*. Spring-Summer, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 3/4, 185-199.

Blathwayt J. (2002). "A Bluestocking Bibliography". *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 65, No. 1/ 2, 39-57.

Bridget, H. (1995). "The links between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay: new evidence", *Women's History Review*. Vol. 4: No. 2, 177-192, Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029500200078> Last access: 15/06/2022.

Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2008). "Barebones Parliament". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Barebones-Parliament>. Last access 06/06/2022.

Burney, F. (1880). *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, John Wilson and Son. Retrieved from: [https://books.google.es/books?id=laUsAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Frances+Burney+The+Diary+and+Letters.&hl=es&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Frances%20Burney%20The%20Diary%20and%20Letters.&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=laUsAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Frances+Burney+The+Diary+and+Letters.&hl=es&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Frances%20Burney%20The%20Diary%20and%20Letters.&f=false) Last access: 31/05/2022.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1832). *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from his own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Collections*, 3 volumes. London: Cambridge University Press.

Carlyle, T. (2002). *The Life of Oliver Cromwell: With a Selection from His Letters and Speeches*. Amsterdam. Fredonia Books.

Clay, L. F. (1923). *The Blue-Stocking Movement*. A Thesis Presented to the Department of English. University of Southern California.

Dickinson, H. T. (1976). "Our first 'Prime Minister': Sir Robert Walpole" *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, (232), 19. Retrieved from <http://www.ujaeen.debiblio.com/login?&url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/our-first-prime-minister/docview/2393495386/se-2?accountid=14555> Last access: 06/06/2022.

Dobbs, J. 1976. "The Blue-Stockings: Getting it Together". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, winter, Vol. 1, No. 3. 81-93.

Eger, E. (Ed.). (2013). *Bluestocking Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gere, M. A. (1891). *Women of the French Salons*. New York: Century Co.

Godden, A. (2006). "Miss Angel: The Art and World of Angelica Kauffman" *Contemporary Review*, 288, 262. Retrieved from <http://www.ujaen.debiblio.com/login?&url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/miss-angel-art-world-angelica-kauffman/docview/204956444/se-2?accountid=14555> Last access: 05/05/2022.

Guest, H. (2002). "Bluestocking Feminism". *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1/ 2; ProQuest. 59-80.

Havens, H. & Sabor, P. (2007). "Frances Burney Obo". *British and Irish Literature. Oxford Bibliographies*. Last modified: 27th June 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846719/obo-9780199846719-0008.xml>. Last access: 08/06/2022.

Heller, D. (2018). "The Bluestockings and Virtue Friendship: Elizabeth Montagu, Anne Pitt, and Elizabeth Carter" *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 81 (4), 469-496.

Johnson, R. B. (1926). *Bluestocking Letters*. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head.

Kelly, G. (2002). "Provincial Bluestocking: From the Old Whigs to the Modern Liberal State". *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 65, no. 12, 1/ 2, 105-VIII.

Lee, S. (1885). "Arblay (Fanny Burney)". *Dictionary of National Biography*. New York: Smith Elder and Co.; London; Macmillan and Co.,. Vol. II, 55-58.



\_\_\_\_\_. *Vesey. Mrs. Smith Elder and Co, London; Mcmillan and Co, N.Y. Vol. LVIII,*  
289-290.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Montagu, Elizabeth Robinson". *Dictionary of National Biography*. Smith  
Elder and Co, London; McMillan and Co, N.Y. Vol. XXXVIII, 240-244.

Lindsey, B. B; & W. Evans, (1927). *The Companionate Marriage*. Oxford: Boni &  
Liveright, 1927.

Lipking L. & Noggle, J. [Eds.] (2006). *The Norton Anthology of the English Literature* (8<sup>th</sup>  
ed.) vol. I.

Lyttelton, G. L. & Montagu, E. (1970) *Dialogues of the Dead*. London: W. Sandby.

Miegon, A. (2002). "Sketches of Principal Bluestocking Women". *Huntington Library*  
*Quarterly*. Vol. 65, No. 1/ 2, 25-37.

Norton, M. B. (1981). "Proto-Feminism in Seventeenth-Century New England" [Review of *A*  
*Search for Power: The "Weaker Sex" in Seventeenth-Century New England*, by L.  
Koehler]. *Reviews in American History*. Vol. 9 (3). 324-329.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2701959> Last Access: 15/06/2022.

*Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). Oxford University Press. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, March 2013. Last  
modified: December. Retrieved from: [https://www--oed--  
com.uaen.debiblio.com/view/Entry/20617?rskey=LRDLU9&result=1&isAdvance  
d=false#eid](https://www--oed--com.uaen.debiblio.com/view/Entry/20617?rskey=LRDLU9&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid) Last access: 02/03/2022

- Opie, Amelia (1828). *Detraction Displayed*. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green and S. Wilkin. Norwich. Retrieved from: <https://books.google.es/books?id=9IBpAAAacAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=es#v=onepage&q&f=false>. Last access: 05/05/2022.
- Pari, C. (1997). *Heroines and whores: Transgressive women in British feminist novels, 1790-1814*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; ProQuest One Literature. (304365512). Retrieved from <http://www.ujaen.debiblio.com/login?&url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/heroines-whores-transgressive-women-british/docview/304365512/se-2?accountid=14555> Last access: 05/05/2022.
- Pittock, P. S. (2001) *Bluestocking Culture: English Literary Women's Reading, Letter Writing, and Sociability, 1745-1785*. Colorado: University of Colorado.
- Pohl, Ni & B. A. Schellenberg. (2002). "A Bluestocking Historiography". In *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 65, No. 1/ 2, Reconsidering the Bluestockings (2002), 1-19.
- Powell, W, J. (1948). "The Romantic Bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu". *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Jan, 1948; Vol. 12. No. 1.
- Roberts W, and Boscawen, F. (1834). *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*. London: R. B. Shelley and Sons. Retrieved from: [https://books.google.je/books?id=4DnhnAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=es&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.je/books?id=4DnhnAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=es&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false). Last access: 08/07/2022.

Ryskamp & Wendorf (1980). "Blue-Stocking Friendship: The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu and Frances Reynolds in the Princeton Collection". *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Spring 1980, Vol. 41. No 3. 173-207.

Sloboda, S. (WRONG YEAR1749). "Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation; Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room". *Architectural Space in Eighteen Century Europe. Constructing Identities and Interiors*. Ed. Denise, A. B. and Martin, M. Routledge. 129-134.

Thiebaud, J. R. (2007). *Madame de Rambouillet's "Chambre Bleue" [blue room]: Birthplace of salon culture* (Order No. 3267970). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304850011). Retrieved from <http://www.ujaen.debiblio.com/login?&url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/madame-de-rambouillets-chambre-bleue-blue-room/docview/304850011/se-2?accountid=14555> Last access: 03/06/2022.

Tinker C, B. (1915). The Salon and English Letters (book review). (1915). *The Dial*, 59, 105. Retrieved from <http://www.ujaen.debiblio.com/login?&url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/tinker-chauncey-b-salon-english-letters-book/docview/1296412740/se-2?accountid=14555> Last access: 03/06/2022.

## APPENDIX

The BAS BLEU by Hannah Moore

VESEY, of Verse the judge and friend,  
 Awhile my idle strain attend:  
 Not with the days of early Greece,  
 I mean to ope my slender piece;  
 5 The rare Symposium to proclaim  
 Which crown'd th' Athenians' social  
 name;  
 Or how Aspasia's parties shone,  
 The first *Bas-bleu* at Athens known;  
 Where SOCRATES unbending sat,  
 10 With ALCIBIADES in chat;  
 And PERICLES vouchsafed to mix  
 Taste, wit, and mirth, with politics.  
 Nor need I stop my tale to show,  
 At least to readers such as you,  
 15 How all that Rome esteem'd polite,  
 Supp'd with LUCULLUS every night;  
 LUCULLUS, who, from Pontus come,  
 Brought conquests, and brought cherries  
 home.  
 Name but the suppers in th' Appollo,  
 20 What classic images will follow!  
 How wit flew round, while each might  
 take  
 Conchylia from the Lucrine lake;  
 And Attic Salt, and Garum Sauce,  
 And Lettuce from the Isle of Cos;  
 25 The first and last from Greece  
 transplanted,  
 Us'd here--because the rhyme I wanted:  
 How pheasant's heads, with cost  
 collected,  
 And Phenicopters' stood neglected,  
 To laugh at SCIPPIO's lucky hit,  
 30 POMPEY's bon-mot, or CAESAR's wit!  
 Intemperance, list'ning to the tale,  
 Forgot the Mullet growing\* stale;  
 And Admiration, balanc'd, hung  
 'Twixt PEACOCKS' brains, and TULLY's  
 tongue.  
 35 I shall not stop to dwell on these,  
 But be as epic as I please,  
 And plunge at once in *medias res*.  
 To prove that privilege I plead,  
 I'll quote some Greek I cannot read;  
 40 Stunn'd by Authority you yield,  
 And I, not reason, keep the field.  
 Long was Society o'er-run  
 By Whist, that desolating Hun;  
 Long did Quadrille despotic sit,  
 45 That Vandal of colloquial wit;  
 And Conversation's setting light  
 Lay half-obscur'd in Gothic night.  
 At length the mental shades decline,  
 Colloquial wit begins to shine;  
 50 Genius prevails, and Conversation  
 Emerges into *Reformation*.  
 The vanquish'd triple crown to you,  
 BOSCAWEN sage, bright MONTAGU,  
 Divided, fell;--your cares in haste  
 55 Rescued the ravag'd realms of Taste;  
 And LYTTLETON's accomplish'd name,  
 And witty PULTENEY shar'd the fame;  
 The Men not bound by pedant rules  
 Nor Ladies *Precieuses ridicules*;  
 60 For polish'd WALPOLE show'd the way,  
 How wits may be both learn'd and gay;  
 And CARTER taught the female train,  
 The deeply wise are never vain;  
 And she who SHAKESPEARE's wrongs redrest,  
 [Elizabeth Montagu]  
 65 Prov'd that the brightest are the best.  
 This just deduction still they drew,  
 And well they practis'd what they knew;  
 Nor taste, nor wit, deserves applause,  
 Unless still true to critic laws;

70 *Good sense*, of faculties the best,  
 Inspire and regulate the rest.  
 Oh! how unlike the wit that fell,  
 RAMBOUILLET!\* at thy quaint Hotel;  
 Where point, and turn, and equivoque,  
 75 Distorted every word they  
 spoke!  
 All so intolerably bright,  
 Plain Common Sense was put to flight;  
 Each speaker, so ingenious ever,  
 'Twas tiresome to be quite so clever;  
 80 There twisted Wit forgot to please,  
 And Mood and Figure banish'd ease:  
 No votive altar smok'd to thee,  
 Chaste Queen, divine Simplicity!  
 But forc'd Conceit, which ever fails,  
 85 And, stiff Antithesis prevails;  
 Uneasy rivalry destroys  
 Society's unlabour'd joys:  
 NATURE, of stilts and fetters tir'd,  
 Impatient from the Wits retir'd;  
 90 Long time the Exile houseless stray'd,  
 Till SEVIGNE receiv'd the maid.  
 Though here she comes to bless our isle,  
 Not universal is her smile.  
 Muse! snatch the Lyre which CAMBRIDGE  
 strung,  
 95 When he the *empty ballroom* sung;  
 'Tis tun'd above thy pitch, I doubt,  
 And thou no music wouldst draw out:  
 Yet, in a lower note, presume  
 To sing the full dull Drawing-room.\*  
 100 Where the dire *Circle* keeps its  
 station,  
 Each common phrase is an oration;  
 And cracking fans, and whisp'ring Misses,  
 Compose their Conversation blisses.  
 The matron marks the goodly show,  
 105 While the tall daughter eyes the Beau-  
 -  
 The frigid Beau! Ah! luckless fair,  
 'Tis not for you that studied air;  
 Ah! not for you that sidelong glance,  
 And all that charming nonchalance;  
 110 Ah! not for you the three long hours  
 He worshipp'd the Cosmetic powers;  
 That finish'd head which breathes  
 perfume,  
 And kills the nerves of half the room;  
 And all the murders meant to lie  
 115 in that large, languishing, grey eye;  
 Desist!--less wild th' attempt would be,  
 To warm the snows of Rhodope:  
 Too cold to feel, too proud to feign,  
 For him you're wise and fair in vain;  
 120 In vain to charm him you intend,  
 Self is his object, aim, and end.  
 Chill shade of that affected Peer,  
 Who dreaded Mirth, come safely here!  
 For here no vulgar joy effaces  
 125 Thy rage for polish, ton, and graces.  
 Cold Ceremony's leaden hand  
 Waves o'er the room her poppy wand;  
 Arrives the stranger; every guest  
 Conspires to torture the distress;  
 130 At once they rise--so have I seen--  
 You guess the simile I mean,  
 Take what comparison you please,  
 The crowded streets, the swarming bees,  
 The pebbles on the shores that lie,  
 135 The stars which form the galaxy;  
 These serve t' embellish what is said,  
 And show, besides, that one has read;--  
 At once they rise--th' astonish'd guest  
 Back in a corner slinks, distress;  
 140 Scar'd at the many bowing round,  
 And shock'd at her own voice's sound,

Forgot the thing she meant to say,  
 Her words, half-utter'd, die away;  
 In sweet oblivion down she sinks,  
 145 And of her next appointment thinks.  
 While her loud neighbour on the right,  
 Boasts what she has to do to-night;  
 So very much, you'd swear her pride is  
 To match the labours of ALCIDES;  
 [Hercules]  
 150 'Tis true, in hyperbolic measure,  
 She nobly calls her labours *Pleasure*;  
 In this unlike ALCMENA's son,  
 She never means they should be done;  
 Her fancy of no *limits* dreams,  
 155 No *ne plus ultra* stops her schemes;  
 Twelve! she'd have scorn'd the paltry  
 round,  
 No Pillars would have marked her bound;  
 CALPE and ABYLA, in vain  
 Had nodded cross th' opposing main;  
 [Straits of Gibraltar]  
 160 A circumnavigator she  
 On Ton's illimitable sea. [haut ton =  
 high society]  
 We pass the pleasures vast and various.  
 Of Routs, not social, but gregarious;  
 Where high heroic self-denial  
 165 Sustains her self-inflicted trial.  
 Day lab'rors! what an easy life,  
 To feed ten children and a wife!  
 No--I my juster pity spare  
 To the night lab'rer's keener care;  
 170 And, pleas'd, to gentler scenes  
 retreat,  
 Where Conversation holds her seat.  
 Small were that art which would ensure  
 The Circle's boasted quadrature!  
 See VESEY's\* plastic genius make  
 175 A Circle every figure take;  
 Nay, shapes and forms, which would defy  
 All science of Geometry;  
 Isoceles, and Parallel,  
 Names, hard to speak, and hard to spell!  
 180 Th' enchantress wav'd her wand, and  
 spoke!  
 Her potent wand the Circle broke:  
 The social Spirits hover round,  
 And bless the liberated ground.  
 Ask you what charms this gift dispense?  
 185 'Tis the strong spell of COMMON SENSE.  
 Away dull Ceremony flew,  
 And with her bore Detraction too.  
 Nor only Geometric Art,  
 Does this presiding power impart;  
 190 But Chemists too, who want the  
 essence,  
 Which makes or mars all coalescence,  
 Of her the secret rare might get,  
 How different kinds amalgamate:  
 And he, who wilder studies chose,  
 195 Find here a new metempsychose;  
 How forms can other forms assume,  
 Within her Pythagoric room;  
 Or be, and stranger is th' event,  
 The very things which nature meant;  
 200 Nor strive, by art and affectation,  
 To cross their genuine destination.  
 Here sober Duchesses are seen,  
 Chaste Wits, and Critics void of spleen;  
 Physicians, fraught with real science,  
 205 And Whigs and Tories in alliance;  
 Poets, fulfilling Christian duties,  
 Just Lawyers, reasonable Beauties;  
 Bishops who preach, and Peers who pay,  
 And Countesses who seldom play;  
 210 Learn'd Antiquaries, who, from  
 college,

Reject the rust, and bring the knowledge;  
 And, hear it, *age*, believe it, *youth*,  
 Polemics, really seeking truth;  
 And Travellers of that rare tribe,  
 215 Who've seen the countries they  
 describe;  
 Who study'd there, so strange their plan,  
 Not plants, nor herbs alone, but man;  
 While Travellers, of other notions,  
 Scale mountain-tops, and traverse oceans;  
 220 As if, so much these themes engross,  
 The study of mankind--was Moss.  
 Ladies who point, nor think me partial,  
 An Epigram as well as MARTIAL;  
 Yet in all female worth succeed,  
 225 As well as those who cannot read.  
 Right pleasant were the task, I ween,  
 To name the groupies which fill the scene;  
 But Rhyme's of such fastidious nature,  
 She proudly scorns all Nomenclature,  
 230 Nor grace our Northern names her lips,  
 Like HOMER's Catalogue of Ships.  
 Once--faithful Memory! heave a sigh,  
 Here ROSCIUS gladden'd every eye. [David  
 Garrick]  
 Why comes not MARO? Far from town,  
 235 He rears the Urn to Taste, and BROWN;  
 Plants Cypress round the Tomb of GRAY,  
 Or decks his *English Garden* gay; [William  
 Mason]  
 Whose mingled sweets exhale perfume,  
 And promise a perennial bloom.  
 240 Here, rigid CATO\*, awful Sage!  
 Bold Censor of a thoughtless age,  
 Once dealt his pointed moral round,  
 And, not unheeded, fell the sound;  
 The Muse his honour'd memory weeps,  
 245 For CATO now with ROSCIUS sleeps!  
 Here once HORTENSIUS\* lov'd to sit,  
 Apostate now from social Wit:  
 Ah! why in wrangling senates waste  
 The noblest parts, the happiest taste?  
 250 Why Democratic Thunders wield,  
 And quit the Muse's calmer field?  
 Taste thou the gentler joys they give,  
 With HORACE, and with LELIUS live.\*  
 Hail, CONVERSATION, soothing Power,  
 255 Sweet Goddess of the social hour!  
 Not with more heart-felt warmth, at least,  
 Does LELIUS bend, thy true High Priest;  
 Than I the lowest of thy train,  
 These field-flowers bring to deck thy  
 fane;  
 260 Who to thy shrine like him can haste,  
 With warmer zeal, or purer taste?  
 O may thy worship long prevail,  
 And thy true votaries never fail!  
 Long may thy polish'd altars blaze  
 265 With wax-lights' undiminish'd rays!  
 Still be thy nightly offerings paid,  
 Libations large of Lemonade.  
 On silver vases, loaded, rise  
 The biscuits' ample sacrifice.  
 270 Nor be the milk-white streams forgot  
 Of thirst-assuaging, cool orgeat;  
 Rise, incense pure from fragrant Tea,  
 Delicious incense, worthy Thee!  
 Hail, Conversation, heav'nly fair,  
 275 Thou bliss of life, and balm of care,  
 Still may thy gentle reign extend,  
 And taste with wit and science blend!  
 Soft polisher of rugged man,  
 Refiner of the social plan;  
 280 For thee, best solace of his toil,  
 The sage consumes his midnight oil;  
 And keeps late vigils to produce  
 Materials for thy future use;

Calls forth the else neglected knowledge,  
 285 Of school, of travel, and of college.  
 If none behold, ah! wherefore fair?  
 Ah! wherefore wise, if none must hear?  
 Our intellectual ore must shine,  
 Not slumber idly in the mine.  
 290 Let education's moral mint  
 The noblest images imprint;  
 Let taste her curious touchstone hold,  
 To try if standard be the gold;  
 But 'tis thy commerce, Conversation,  
 295 Must give it use by circulation;  
 That noblest commerce of mankind,  
 Whose precious merchandize is MIND!  
 What stoic traveller would try  
 A sterile soil, and parching sky,  
 300 Or dare th' intemperate Northern zone,  
 If what he saw must ne'er be known?  
 For this he bids his home farewell;  
 The joy of seeing is to tell.  
 Trust me, he never would have stirr'd,  
 305 Were he forbid to speak a word;  
 And Curiosity would sleep,  
 If her own secrets she must keep  
 The bliss of telling what is past  
 Becomes her rich reward at last.  
 310 Who'd mock at death, at danger smile,  
 To steal one peep at Father Nile;  
 Who, at Palmira, risk his neck,  
 Or search the ruins of Balbec  
 If these must hide old Nilus' fount,  
 315 Nor Lybian tales at home recount;  
 If those must sink their learned labour,  
 Nor with their ruins treat a neighbour?  
 Range--study--think do all we can  
 Colloquial pleasures are for man.  
 320 Yet not from low desire to shine  
 Does Genius toil in learning's mine;  
 Not to indulge in idle vision,  
 But strike new light by strong collision.  
 Of CONVERSATION, wisdom's friend,  
 325 This is the object and the end,  
 Of moral truth, man's proper science,  
 With sense and learning in alliance,  
 To search the depths, and thence produce  
 What tends to practice and to use.  
 330 And next in value we shall find  
 What mends the taste and forms the mind.  
 If high those truths in estimation,  
 Whose search is crown'd with  
 demonstration;  
 To these assign no scanty praise,  
 335 Our taste which clear, our views which  
 raise.  
 For grant that mathematic truth  
 Best balances the mind of Youth;  
 Yet scarce the truth of Taste is found  
 To grow from principles less sound.  
 340 O'er books the Mind inactive lies,  
 Books, the Mind's food, not exercise!  
 Her vigorous wing she scarcely feels,  
 'Till use latent strength reveals;  
 Her slumb'ring energies can't forth,  
 345 She springs, she mounts, she feels her  
 worth;  
 And, at her new-found powers elated,  
 Thinks them not rous'd, but new created.  
 Enlighten'd spirits! you, who know  
 What charms from polish'd converse flow,  
 350 Speak, for you can, the pure delight  
 When kindling sympathies unite;  
 When correspondent tastes impart  
 Communion sweet from heart to heart;  
 You ne'er the cold gradations need  
 355 Which vulgar souls to union lead;  
 No dry discussion to unfold  
 The meaning caught ere well 'tis told:

In taste, in learning, wit, or science,  
 Still kindred souls demand alliance;  
 360 Each in the other joys to find  
 The image answering to his mind.  
 But sparks electric only strike  
 On souls electrical alike;  
 The flash of intellect expires,  
 365 Unless it meet congenial fires:  
 The language to th' Elect alone  
 Is, like the Mason's mystery, known;  
 In vain th' unerring sign is made  
 To him who is not of the Trade.  
 370 What lively pleasure to divine  
 The thought implied, the hinted line,  
 To feel Allusion's artful force,  
 And trace the image to its source.  
 Quick Memory blends her scatter'd rays,  
 375 'Till Fancy kindles at the blaze;  
 The works of ages start to view,  
 And ancient Wit elicits new.  
 But wit and parts if thus we praise,  
 What nobler altars should we raise.  
 380 Those sacrifices could we see  
 Which wit, O Virtue! makes to thee.  
 At once the rising thought to dash,  
 To quench at once the bursting flash!  
 The shining mischief to subdue,  
 385 And lose the praise and pleasure too!  
 Though Venus' self, could you detect her,  
 Imbuing with her richest nectar,  
 The thought unchaste to check that  
 thought,  
 To spurn a fame so dearly bought,  
 390 This is high Principle's controul!  
 This is true continence of Soul!  
 Blush, heroes, at your cheap renown,  
 A vanquish'd realm, a plunder'd town!  
 Your conquests were to gain a name,  
 395 This conquest triumphs over Fame;  
 So pure its essence, 'twere destroy'd  
 If known, and if commended, void.  
 Amidst the brightest truths believ'd,  
 Amidst the fairest deeds achiev'd,  
 400 Shall stand recorded and admir'd,  
 That Virtue sunk what Wit inspir'd.  
 But let the letter'd, and the fair,  
 And, chiefly, let the WIT beware;  
 You, whose warm spirits never fail,  
 405 Forgive the hint which ends my tale:  
 O shun the perils which attend  
 On wit, on warmth, and heed your friend.  
 Though Science nurs'd you in her bowers,  
 Though Fancy crown your brow with flowers,  
 410 Each thought though bright invention  
 fill,  
 Though Attic bees each word distil;  
 Yet, if one gracious power refuse  
 Her gentle influence to infuse;  
 If she withhold her magic spell,  
 415 Nor in the social circle dwell;  
 In vain shall listening crowds approve,  
 They'll praise you, but they will not  
 love.  
 What is this power you're loth to mention,  
 This charm, this witchcraft? 'tis  
 ATTENTION:  
 420 Mute Angel, yes; thy looks dispense  
 The silence of intelligence;  
 Thy graceful form I well discern,  
 In act to listen and to learn;  
 'Tis thou for talents shalt obtain  
 425 That pardon Wit would hope in vain:  
 Thy wondrous power, thy secret charm,  
 Shall Envy of her sting disarm;  
 Thy silent flattery soothes our spirit,  
 And we forgive eclipsing merit;  
 430 Our jealous souls no longer burn,

Nor hate thee, though thou shine in turn;  
The sweet atonement screens the fault,  
And love and praise are cheaply bought.  
With mild complacency to hear,  
435 Though somewhat long the tale appear,  
The dull relation to attend,  
Which mars the story you could mend;  
'Tis more than wit, 'tis moral beauty,  
'Tis pleasure rising out of duty.  
440 Nor vainly think the time you waste,  
When temper triumphs over taste. Moore,  
H. (1787), *The Bas Blue*. Retrieved from:  
<https://web.english.upenn.edu/~curran/250-96/Sensibility/morebas.html>. Last  
Access: 04/04/2022