

Holding the Eel of Science by the Tail: Women's Sociability
in the Eighteenth-Century British Scientific World

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Abstract

In eighteenth-century Britain, intellectual and scientific activities were primarily organized through the operations of formal societies; however, these scientific societies did not admit women as members. Despite this, a community of upper class women grasped the “eel of science” by its elusive tail and engaged in intellectual and scientific activity without the benefit of advanced formal education at a university or academy. This informal gathering of male and female friends began to refer to their group as the Bluestocking Philosophers. This thesis examines the Bluestocking Philosophers by considering the concepts of community, network, public/private, knowledge, and understanding, and how these concepts fit into the broader histories of women in science. By examining the interactions, social rituals, and the pursuit of knowledge of the Bluestockings, I shed light on women’s active sociability within the scientific community and thereby further our understanding of gender and science in the eighteenth century.

Founding member, Elizabeth Montagu, is the center of this study. She facilitated the group’s participation in philosophical discussions, made recommendations of studies of natural history, classical history and a broad range of philosophies, and engaged in the mutual exchange of scientific knowledge and objects. It is for these reasons that I bring the studies of the Bluestocking Society into the context of the scientific activities occurring in eighteenth-century London. By exploring the topics of sociability, education, identity formation, and the creation of an intellectual society, I argue that members of the Bluestocking society desired to be involved in public science because they were shaped by their unique circumstances as affluent, childless, well-educated, and sociable women.

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Introduction:

When I am sitting in my garden, I can add myself to the whole map of created beings. I consider some insects feeding on a flower which like them was call'd forth by the rising sun, & whose race and task of life will end with its decline. My imagination can travel on, till it gets to those planets whose revolution round the sun is many years in accomplishing ... My hopes, fears, desires, interests, are all lost in the vast ocean of infinity & Eternity ... From these thoughts I draw a philosophick peace & tranquility for what atom in this stupendous system shall presume to find fault with its place & destination.¹

Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson) was born to a privileged family in York, England and was educated, along with her younger sister, by their relative Dr. Conyers Middleton, the Cambridge University Librarian and noted classical scholar. Young Montagu accompanied her grandfather to academic soirees where she first encountered the thrills of academic life and where she began to build a network of intellectual friends. When she reached the age twenty, although she was expected to marry, Montagu did not have a high opinion of men or of the institution of marriage. Instead, she desired to live in London in order to soak up the intellectual atmosphere and had hopes to be known for her accomplishments. Filled with ambition, Montagu thought that marriage would mean throwing away her lofty intellectual dreams. Although she married the much older Edward Montagu at the age of twenty-two, she resolutely did not let marriage stifle her ambition.²

Montagu had a fierce determination to be an active participant in London's intellectual community. She thrived on the lively and pertinent discussions with which she filled her elegant drawing room. The regular attendees at these social gatherings began to call themselves the

¹ Huntington Library MO4533 quoted in Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 135. Note: all spelling in quotations are the original eighteenth century authors'.

² Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, "Montagu, Elizabeth (1718-1800)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19014>, accessed 15 April 2016]; Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

Bluestocking Philosophers. Montagu required that only the leading intellectuals visit her, insisting on wit, knowledge and irregular personalities to liven her household and keep her attention. Without gaming and with minimal talk of politics, Montagu insisted her company contain more than just upper class society and invited both men and women to participate. Montagu envisioned the Bluestocking Society as a means of proliferating knowledge and exchanging ideas over polite conversation.³ She and the other women in the Bluestockings participated in more intellectual activity than their literary publications inform us; they were engaged in the growing community of natural philosophy and science, only without formal recognition.

My thesis explores how gender influenced the sociability of scientific activity in eighteenth-century Britain. At that time, science and other intellectual pursuits were based on networks of interactions amongst individuals who made up a community of shared ideas. There was ritual intermingling amongst intellectual disciplines that made it easy for Montagu and Vesey to build and maintain relationships with known members of the scientific community. Additionally, Montagu organized the Bluestocking Assemblies based on similar principles upheld by formal societies, such as the Royal Society of London, which centered on scientific activities; they pursued knowledge unabashedly and shared ideas with people from differing social standings.

Those “who hold the Eel of Science by the tail” according to Alexander Pope, were individuals who obtained only superficial index learning.⁴ Holding an eel by its tail was the improper way to skin it; but one could eventually deepen their learning and discover the proper

³ Rosemary Baird, “‘The Queen of the Bluestockings’: Mrs Montagu's house at 23 Hill Street rediscovered,” *Apollo* 158.498 (Aug. 2003): 43; Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁴ Alexander Pope, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Henry W. Boynton, (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1903), Book I, line 279.

way to skin an eel and thus holding it by the tail was an acceptable first step into learning. Montagu and the Bluestocking Philosophers progressed from holding the eel by its tail, to embracing it with confidence and exposing the British public to the presence and value of intellectual women. By closely examining the interactions, social rituals, and pursuit of knowledge of the Bluestockings that appear in their correspondence, I will shed light on women's sociability within the scientific community and further our understanding of how women participated in eighteenth-century science.

Historiography

Previous scholarship of the Bluestocking Society and its women members focused on the literary and artistic outputs of the women. In her groundbreaking work in 1990, Sylvia Myers argued that the Bluestocking women's pursuit of learning was encouraged by friendships and provided these affluent women with a sense of community.⁵ Through her extensive biographical descriptions of what these women did and what they wrote, Myers claims that the circle of supportive female friendships was essential to the success in publishing of many later Bluestocking women.

After Myers, there was no scholarship on the Bluestockings until Gary Kelly's six-volume edition in 1999. Kelly focused on what he termed 'Bluestocking Feminism.' For Kelly, the Bluestockings exhibited a feminism unique to the group and the time.⁶ Although Kelly's interpretation still confined the Bluestocking women within sexist discourse, he opened up discussions of gender and enlightenment reasoning that the Bluestockings represented. This led to studies such as Nicole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg's collection (2003), in which the first

⁵ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁶ Gary Kelly, *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999).

generation of Bluestocking women, primarily as individuals or the relationships between two or three, were examined.⁷ Although the collective aspects of how the Bluestockings operated were omitted, this approach highlighted the women's intellectualism and how their actions reinforced aspects of identity.

Elizabeth Eger (2010) was the culmination of these previous histories, combining community, feminism, gender, and public identity to explore how the Bluestocking women consciously held public roles and influence.⁸ Her examination of the writings of nine women associated with the Bluestockings highlighted the public ventures of the Bluestocking women and the cultural weight of their patronage, letters, and conversations. Unfortunately, Myers, Kelly, Pohl and Schellenberg, and Eger overlooked the importance of the Bluestocking women who did not publish, the scientific pursuits of members, the role of male members in building the intellectual community, and how the Bluestocking community changed over time.

The most recent publication on the Bluestockings is Deborah Heller's collection: *Bluestockings Now!* (2015), which illuminates the Bluestocking network and how networks in general played a significant role in the intellectual, sociocultural, political, and economical development of the Enlightenment period.⁹ Unlike the previous scholars, who focused on Bluestocking women members who published literary works and omitted both those who did not publish and the male members, Heller expanded the geographic context, the timeframe, and included areas outside the traditional literary context such as science, religion, and business. Her use of a social network model to explain the interactions between Bluestocking members and with others not considered part of the group reveals the motivations behind the Bluestocking

⁷ Nicole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg, *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, (California: Huntington Library, 2003).

⁸ Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 28.

⁹ Deborah Heller, *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

relationships and the functioning of the group as a community with shared interests. The Bluestockings Society pursued intellectual goals, as both a society and as individuals, and their idyllic desire to obtain and share knowledge through the open exchange of ideas is similar to actions of ‘scientific’ societies. For these reasons presented by Heller, I think it is important to move the study of the Bluestocking’s sociability to their practice of public science.

In addition to this evolving literary history of the Bluestockings, there are broader historical philosophies that informed my research, particularly women’s history, the history of science, and the history of women and science. Major influences in each of these areas respectively are Amanda Vickery, Steven Shapin, and Londa Schiebinger. Amanda Vickery’s work on women and their daily activities in Georgian England argued that genteel women benefitted from expanding material and intellectual worlds.¹⁰ By following the typical lifecycle of a genteel woman, Vickery shows the nuances in socially acceptable behaviours for women and aspects of marriage arrangement, marriage, childbirth, and household management where the lines between submission and autonomy were blurred. However, Vickery’s focus on the physical and external limits imposed on women leaves room for an investigation on the internal mental narratives that shaped individual women’s behaviours.

Steven Shapin’s exploration of who was allowed to do science in the early modern period is my foundation for the connection of scientific knowledge to credibility.¹¹ According to Shapin, ‘a gentleman’ was a trustworthy social role; he embodied the proper class and gender-shaped characteristics, such as trustworthiness, morality, integrity, and honour, needed to conduct or comment on science. Women, as dependents, were excluded from truth-telling social roles

¹⁰ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Amanda. Vickery, “Golden Age of Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (Jun., 1993): 383-414.

¹¹ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 86-87.

because of both their dependence on men and their imagined placement within the domestic sphere. Women's reliability and credibility was a complex mix of their legal standing as 'coverts,' or dependents, medical ideas that they had stronger imaginations and weaker reasoning, and philosophical concepts on ethics. In particular, Shapin's work informs my chapters on women philosophers and their contributions to scientific knowledge and their creation of an intellectual community in which to share their knowledge.

Londa Schiebinger's work, *The Mind Has No Sex?* examined the possibilities and limits that gender set for women in science and how gendered science came about.¹² She argued that women's limited involvement in scientific activity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was due to the social structure informed by the scientific view that women's bodies and minds were inferior in comparison to men's. The changing cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity emerged in debates about women's abilities to practice science, in turn informing scientific knowledge itself. With the institutionalization of a science where women were excluded, women still operated on the periphery of these academies and communities and many even had a place at the conversational table. I use Schiebinger's arguments to inform my chapters on female philosophers and I examine their participation on the periphery of the Royal Society of London and the Académie des Sciences in Paris with particular attention to their social connections.

¹² Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Terminology

Public and Private

My use of ‘public ‘ and ‘private’ align with the theory of Jurgen Habermas, who suggested that concepts of ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres were constructed to explain the types of activities that occurred in any given space.¹³ Explained by Conal Condren, in the eighteenth century behaving in public meant acting in an other-directed, non-selfish way aimed at a common good or public weal. This ideal required one to act morally these expected behaviours were typically applied to individuals who held public office. Practices other than public office fell also within this definition and required one to behave with moral integrity and for a public or common good.¹⁴ Essentially, the public sphere was any situation where an individual could claim authority over other individuals and impose a moral voice. On the other hand, the private sphere was any situation where an individual was passive or subordinate within the relationship. This meant that there were no fixed places known as the ‘public sphere’ or the ‘private sphere’ but multiple publics and privates where more than one physical, social, and psychological reality was possible.

Knowledge and Understanding

My use of ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ align with Johann Gustav Droysen’s theory. For Droysen, describing something, even in great detail, was explanation (*erklären*), whereas in order to understand (*verstehen*) something one is required to interpret the subject in context and through intuitive sympathy and imagination ascribes meaning. Droysen made the distinction

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 13-18.

¹⁴ Conal Condren, “Public, Private and the Idea of the ‘Public Sphere’ in Early–modern England,” *Intellectual History Review* 19, no. 1 (2009), 21.

between natural science (*Naturwissenschaft*) and history (*historische*) on his separation of explanation, practiced by the former, and understanding, practiced by the latter.¹⁵

Community and Society

My use of ‘community’ and ‘society’ align with the theory of Ferdinand Tonnies, who characterized community as regular, personal interaction and a ‘common way of life,’ whereas society involves limited, usually institutionally mediated relationships, founded on self-interest.¹⁶ I also follow Anthony Cohen’s theory of community in which he describes a community as a mental construct that encompasses both similarity and difference.¹⁷ The members of a community ‘have something in common’ which ‘distinguishes them in a significant way from members of other communities. Each individual, including both those within the group and those outside of it, ascribes this boundary with symbolic meaning. Thus, according to Cohen, community requires a consciousness. Also, early modern historians Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepherd also provide a definition of eighteenth-century communities and society that I follow in this thesis.¹⁸ They define community as a process that was an expression of collective identity and thus as a process with parts that need to be examined. These parts included: the institutional arrangements such as practices and roles; the people who were in, out, excluded, and those who chose not to be in it; the actions, the geographical places, the time in which it was done; and the rhetoric surrounding it. Withington and Shepherd argue that in the seventeenth century, community and society were conceptualized interchangeably and involved company,

¹⁵ Johann Gustav Droysen, *Grundriss Der Historik*, (Leipzig: Verlag Von Veit & Comp., 1868), 10-11; Harry Ritter, *Dictionary of Concepts in History*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 246.

¹⁶ Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepherd, “Introduction: communities in early modern England,” in *Communities in Early Modern England: Network, Place, Rhetoric*, ed. Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepherd, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Anthony Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, (London: Routledge, 1985).

¹⁸ Withington and Shepherd, “Introduction” in *Communities in early modern England*, 12.

conversation and fellowship, and served either common interests or assistance to one another in the management of business.¹⁹ This definition expanded in the eighteenth century with the increase in rule-based social interactions where institutions or governing bodies set rules and people follow them voluntarily in order to participate.²⁰

Network

My use of ‘network’ aligns with Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory, where a network is not a thing, but the recorded movement of a thing.²¹ A network is thus the framework for ascribing meaning to a heterogeneous grouping of actors and actants. Networks are built activities that are performed. According to Latour, it is through tracing these associations that one can explain society by redistributing and reallocating action. In particular, I primarily use Latour’s actor-network theory to understand identity formation by tracing the network of actors (friends, relations, and activities) that an individual has and how these actors influence that individual through a myriad of interactions.

Sources

My evidentiary base is correspondence. Primarily, I use the collection of letters left by Elizabeth Montagu, as well as other known male and female participants in the Bluestockings, composed between 1740 to 1800, to explore how she and the Bluestocking Philosophers

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁰ Craig Muldrew, “From a ‘light cloak’ to an ‘iron cage’: historical changes in the relation between community and individualism,” in *Communities in Early Modern England: Network, Place, Rhetoric*, ed. Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepherd, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 161.

²¹ Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, (1996): 369-381; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social an introduction to actor-network-theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bruno Latour, “Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist,” *International Journal of Communication* 5, (2011): 796-810; Cassandra S. Crawford, “Actor Network Theory,” *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer, (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

navigated the male-dominated scientific community. I have selected Montagu because of her position as the informal leader of the Bluestockings and because she was the most active letter writer of the group. Unfortunately, most of Elizabeth Vesey's letters are missing from the historical record. Montagu's abundant correspondence has been bound in the printed collections of *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues" Her Letters and Friendship from 1762 to 1800, Volumes 1-2* edited by Reginald Blunt, (1923) and *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence Volumes 1-4* edited by T. Cadell and W. Davies, (1813) the latter which is transcribed on the online database: *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries 1500-1950*. Montagu's early letters reveal the extent of her education as a young woman, her continued intellectual pursuits, how she developed her identity as a female philosopher, and was able to establish herself as an accepted female intellectual within her community.

The letters also reveal Montagu's feelings about her education, her scientific activities, and the intellectual relationships she built and maintained throughout her life. Letters from others who recognized themselves as part of the Bluestocking community were chosen to demonstrate that Montagu was not an isolated and unique occurrence, but that she was one of several women with intellectual and scientific pursuits. Montagu's internal mental narrative was one filled with curiosity and, coupled with the encouragement she received from intellectual male and female friends and the camaraderie she experienced with like-minded women, she decided that an intellectual life was a real possibility for her. By adding these letters from other community members, both men and women, I shed light on the importance of interpersonal relationships and the careful construction of a more inclusive community to pursuing science in eighteenth-century Britain.

Methodology

I examined these sets of correspondences in two ways. First, I analyzed the language of the letters to see what was mentioned in regards to education, scientific practice, and sociability and how these themes were presented alongside each other. Secondly, using basic social network analysis, I read the letters to investigate the relationships within the Bluestocking community as well as the differences in power that were constantly being negotiated. In particular, I looked at how the conduct between correspondents was influenced by the gender and status of correspondents. All together, I reveal the inner functioning of the Bluestocking community and its place within the intellectual community of Britain.

In order to examine the social processes of women engaging in intellectual and scientific activities, I employ gender as a category of analysis. I place the Bluestocking women within the broader context of the social-scientific world in order to understand the social power influencing their actions. Situating their actions this way allows me to reimagine and complicate the simplified views of why women were not more involved in formal science by focussing on the creation of power relations within intellectual communities and the designation of sexed roles. Following the philosophy of Joan Scott, I explore how meanings are constructed based on sexed bodies in relation to each other, how these meanings are used in a society, and how they change.²² Following Scott, I examine the social process that kept most women in the eighteenth century from actively participating in the public scientific community. Both formal and informal modes of power are key to my discussions.

In order to connect the scientific and intellectual activities of Elizabeth Montagu to the realities of many women living in Enlightenment Britain, I have used the concept of the lifecycle

²² Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 19, no. 5 (Dec., 1986): 1053-1075; Joan Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?" *Diogenes* 57, no. 1 (February 2010): 7-14.

to structure my thesis. An eighteenth-century affluent British woman's life was usually a steady procession through different stages, during which she held different duties and thus had different experiences. If she was lucky, she would progress through all the stages, transitioning from a child/youth to a wife, a mother, a widow, and a grandmother. Following this progression helps us to understand women's behaviours within and between stages. By following Montagu from childhood, through adulthood, marriage, childbirth, motherhood, and widowhood, I am able to highlight how her circumstances influenced her choices and ultimately affected the path she walked through life. This method also reveals the evolution of Montagu's intellectualism, the development of her social network, and the progression of her thoughts on women as public intellectual philosophers. Through this method, I am able to argue that Montagu and other Bluestocking women engaged in public discussions and became significant producers and disseminators of scientific knowledge because their social standing and wealth provided them with an extensive education in childhood, the encouragement they received from parents and mentors as young women, the fact that they remained childless, and ultimately created a community which supported women's intellectual pursuits.

Research Questions and Chapter Overview

This thesis is divided into four main sections. Each one focuses a stage in a woman's life to highlight the natural evolution of affluent women into scientific pursuits. This is done so by using Elizabeth Montagu's life as a case study. I begin by investigating the epistolary relationships and family histories of women practicing science that were the foundations for the support and encouragement of women's education and practicing of science in the eighteenth century.

Chapter one examines how the epistolary relationships of Elizabeth Montagu occurred alongside face-to-face relationships, which led to the formation of a multifaceted and far reaching intellectual community. I argue that Elizabeth Montagu carefully constructed and meticulously maintained her circle of correspondents in order to participate in the exchange of knowledge with a wide range of people in Britain's intellectual society. In particular, this chapter focuses on three areas of letter-writing: the social debt of entering an epistolary exchange, the blurred distinctions of private and public, and the creation of a sense of community. This chapter also follows the family histories of members of Elizabeth Montagu's epistolary community to reveal how the family histories of women practicing science likely influenced a female's pursuit of scientific activity or a male's acceptance and support of women practicing science.

The next chapter details the education of young women and the theories behind educating girls and boys separately and distinctly. It uses Elizabeth Montagu's reactions to her education and the burgeoning changes that were occurring to women's education to argue that her rigorous education and curiosity instilled her with the belief that her pursuit of natural philosophy, astronomy, and microscopy were acceptable leisurely pursuits for an educated woman to pursue well into adulthood. I argue that the combination of new opportunities in the education of young women, the encouragement from both men and women to learn, and an abundance of leisure time allowed affluent women, like Montagu and other Bluestocking women, to pursue intellectual stimulation beyond the typical formal education of only a few years. In particular, this chapter focuses on two areas of education. Firstly, I examine the philosophy behind women's education and the changes made to the subject matters available to them. Secondly, the subjects Montagu wrote most abundantly about, including Classical History, Languages, and Natural Science, and the encouragement to learn she received from both her educators and like-minded men and women.

Chapter three explores Montagu's transition into adulthood where, because of her education, marriage to a wealthy man, and remaining childless, she was able to continue her education and participate in scientific activities. This chapter examines two areas of Montagu's domestic scientific practices. Firstly, her pursuit of scientific studies is analyzed, including an examination of her group studies of philosophy and natural history, which included microscopy, collecting, and visiting philosophers both in Britain and in France. Secondly, I present her thoughts on science and God, science and politics, and science and literature alongside her developing sense of self as a philosopher and her perceived place in the intellectual world. I also use this chapter to analyze the gendered construction of socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in regards to public intellectual activities and how it related to the attitudes and behaviours Montagu expressed in her letters. I argue that although Montagu and the Bluestocking women only informally participated in scientific activities on the periphery of formal institutions, they facilitated the dissemination of scientific knowledge through their social network and influenced the course of science. Chapter three also presents Montagu's perspectives on the relationship between God and science.

Finally, Chapter four examines how Montagu, together with Elizabeth Vesey, arranged a place for their intellectual community to hold discussions with like-minded intellectuals outside of their correspondences. This chapter details four areas of the Bluestockings' activities: how the Bluestocking Society was created from Montagu's social network and how it functioned as a community, the activities the Bluestockings participated in and promoted as a society, how the public perceived their actions, and the legacy they left for future generations of intellectual women. I compare the Bluestocking Assemblies to the formal operations of Royal Society of London to determine that the Bluestockings had similar objectives, but were limited by their gender from formally being involved in, and being recognized by, the scientific community of

London. This chapter also presents how the women who participated in these gatherings desired to naturalize the participation of women in the intellectual community by encouraging a new generation of women scholars and making their contributions known to the public. I argue that with several examples of intellectual and scientific communities and societies closely connected to her, Montagu was able to create her own society for intellectual discussions out of her carefully constructed inclusive community.

Women's formation of intellectual societies has been overlooked within the history of science. By detailing the Bluestocking women's social rituals and pursuit of knowledge, I shed light on women's active sociability within the scientific community and further our understanding of gender and science in eighteenth-century Britain. This thesis was written with an awareness that before the twentieth century women often tended to present themselves as supports to science and scientific men, rather than pioneers, and therefore they may have written things they did not privately believe in order to appear acceptable. It is important to look at the social structure of eighteenth-century science in order to see what has, and has not, changed since in regards to women's participation in science. By presenting Montagu's lifecycle and the similar actions of other Bluestocking women this thesis contributes to the literature on the social structure of eighteenth-century science and the role that social power played in limiting, but not stifling, women's involvement in scientific activity in Britain.

Chapter One: Epistolary Sociability

To the Dutchess of Portland.
Horton, May 22, 1734.

Madam,

I suppose by this time the town is empty enough to give you leisure to read a tedious letter from a country correspondent. ... but such is my misfortune I have nothing to entertain you with. If I should preach a sermon upon an old woman who died yesterday, you would think it a dry subject; or if I tell you my papa's dogs have devoured my young turkies, you will rather laugh at me than pity me: or should I give you an account of our bustle about the election, it would not entertain you extremely...

I am surprised that my answer to your Grace's letter has never reached your hands. I sent it immediately to Canterbury by the servant of a gentleman who dined here, and I suppose he forgot to put it in the post ... If my letter were sensible, what would be its mortification, that, instead of having the honour to kiss your Grace's hands, it must lie confined in the footman's pocket, with greasy gloves, rotten apples, mouldy nuts, a pack of dirty cards, and the only companion of its sort, a tender epistle from his sweetheart, "tru tell Deth" ... I believe the fellow who lost my letter knew very well how ready I should be to supply it with another.

I am, Madam, your Grace's most obedient servant,
Elizabeth Robinson.²³

Eighteenth-century Britons enjoyed the benefits of an affordable postal system, in which one usually only had to wait two to three days for a letter to reach its destination within Britain.²⁴ The system, however, was not without its flaws. Occasionally a letter carrier or "cruel and barbarous post-boy" would delay a letter's delivery just as Elizabeth Montagu experienced in 1734 and 1741 when her letter to the Duchess of Cambridge and a letter to her from her sister respectively were "robbed" from their recipients by careless post handling.²⁵

²³ Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, "Document 4: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Cavendish Harley Bentinck, May 22, 1734," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence, vol. 1*. (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 11-13, [accessed from *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)].

²⁴ Eve Taylor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11-12.

²⁵ Montagu, "Document 12: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2*, 47-49.

Because my research has relied heavily on the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu and those within her circle of acquaintances, this chapter is a preliminary analysis of the people with whom Montagu corresponded and the nature of her epistolary relationships with them. By examining the different types of relationships (family, female friendship, and male friendship) Montagu maintained, this chapter examines three aspects of letter-writing. Firstly, how epistolary relationships were maintained through a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and material goods that encouraged each participant into a social obligation to be fulfilled. Secondly, how letters blurred the distinctions of private and public. And thirdly, how epistolary exchange was used to create a sense of community. It also reveals individuals with a family history of women practicing science by tracing the family trees of some individuals within Montagu's network.

Although my study draws heavily on Montagu's letters, it is important to examine the people with whom she shared information because they made up Montagu's carefully cultivated social network. Participating in any intellectual activity at this time was dependent on who you knew; one's social network was of the utmost importance for sharing and receiving knowledge amongst other things. The individuals discussed here were to whom Montagu wrote most frequently, they are by no means a complete representation of Montagu's vast network. It is also important to know that Montagu was in control of her epistolary relationships and used them as a means of expressing and presenting herself to both men and women. She set her own words down on paper and defended her ideas with authority. It was through this epistolary network that Montagu assembled a community of like-minded individuals and participated in the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Letters to Family

Montagu wrote to her sister, Sarah Robinson (later Scott), with the intimacy one would expect from sisters. Unlike Montagu, Scott sought a quieter life in the country. She married George Lewis Scott (1708-1780) in 1751, who had no means to support her, against her older sister's wishes. The marriage ended abruptly when her father and brothers removed her from Scott's residence.²⁶ From then on, Scott lived with Lady Barbara Montagu in the quiet company of her friends in the country and at Bath.²⁷ Their different life paths are rarely mentioned in their letters. Instead, the sisters focused on sharing their daily activities, news, and educational recommendations.

When Montagu was away from her household in London, such as when she visited the Duchess of Portland, Margaret Cavendish, at Bulstrode or when she toured France in 1776, she wrote detailed descriptions of her daily activities to Robinson. These lengthy letters were commonplace for relationships at a distance and were a way of maintaining the familiarity of friendship by relaying what would have been everyday conversation if it occurred in person.²⁸ She wrote an account of her day from Bulstode, hour by hour:

I attended chapel till half after one, and from that time till two, employed myself in the necessary decorations of my person. Then I was summoned to follow the call of nature and the dinner-bell to the dining-room ... till an hour after dinner, and then I proposed to write; but Doctor Young came in and entertained my mental faculties ... till six, and left me a notion or two which I could not digest till tea came in ... at last I understood all very clearly, and am come down to write just before the hour of cribbage.²⁹

This journal-like description was Montagu's way of explaining not only her daily activities, but also the thoughts and emotions she experienced throughout the day. Also, writing when one had

²⁶ Betty Rizzo, "Two Versions of Community: Montagu and Scott," in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* edited by Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, (California: Huntington Library, 2003), 198.

²⁷ Gary Kelly, "Scott, Sarah (1720–1795)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24912>, accessed 2 Aug 2017].

²⁸ Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 46.

²⁹ Montagu, "Document 19: Letter from Mrs. Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu vol.2.*, 67-70.

to answer the “call of nature” brought an incredibly deep level of intimacy into the letter. Montagu’s letters from France, on the other hand, were detailed but superficial since they consisted mostly of the names of people she was meeting and her judgments of their character.³⁰

Montagu and her sister maintained a steady stream of correspondence throughout Montagu’s life, alongside regular visits to each other’s estates. Montagu closed her letters with the phrase “your most affectionate sister, and sincere friend” demonstrating the bond of bloodline and affection the sisters shared.³¹ Montagu also expressed her delight in having spent time with her sister to Reverend Friend in 1741, expressing that she, “had the joy of seeing my dear Pea yesterday; I cannot express the happiness of such a meeting, but it is saying enough to own it more than recompensed the pangs of parting.”³² Betty Rizzo argues that Robinson and Montagu were distanced by Montagu’s friendship with the Duchess of Portland, Margaret Cavendish, since their friendship took Montagu from her home and away from her younger sister.³³ Although each sister chose a different path through life, their sustained, affectionate, and jovial correspondence suggests they enjoyed each other’s company, through letters and in person. Because Robinson was living at home with their mother and father for most of the time of their correspondence, it is possible Montagu’s affections were only a display to be read aloud by Robinson in their parent’s household. However, the frequency of their correspondence, and the time they spent in each other’s company would be difficult to explain if there was a case of estrangement. What is more likely is that the sisters had a loving, but sometimes strained relationship, caused by the occasional bout of jealousy and their different outlooks on life.

³⁰ Montagu to her Sister Chaillot, Aug. ye 11th 1776, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues” Her Letters and Friendship from 1762 to 1800 Volume 1 1762-1776*, ed. Reginald Blunt (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1923), 322.

³¹ Montagu, “Document 65: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Sarah Robinson Scott,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu vol.3*, 286-293.

³² Montagu, Document 46: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to W. Freind, May 9, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu vol.1*, 188-193.

³³ Rizzo, “Two Versions of Community,” 195.

The Reverend William Freind (*bap.* 1715, *d.* 1766) was a cousin of Montagu's through marriage and was the man who performed her marriage to Edward Montagu in 1742.³⁴ Despite his work as a clergyman, Montagu's relationship with Freind was more familiar than pastoral. In her continuing relationship with the reverend, Montagu informed him of the health and activities of her family, her own daily activities and also expressed her thoughts and criticisms of general society, of women's education, and of the philosophy of learning. She explained to him in 1741 why she wrote of her family to him, since "it would not be pardonable in me to say so much of myself, my sister, and my brother, if I did not suppose them to be persons for whom you had some affection."³⁵ Montagu always followed the proper form when writing to Freind. For example, she scolded Freind in 1741 for not upholding his end of their epistolary relationship; writing, "So far I have been civil enough; but now expect to taste a little of the bitterness of my wrath. Pray why did not you tell me in your letter if Mrs. Freind was well ... are not these matters of importance in friendship?"³⁶ She expressed in a 1744 letter, "I take pleasure in your virtues, rejoice in your successes, wish prosperity to all your undertakings; I am interested for your children, and am in love with your wife as much as you are; your happiness makes a part of mine, and your excellent conduct a part of my good conscience." This demonstrates that the mutual exchange of information that occurred between these cousins was primarily news of friends and family, though the Reverend occasionally became an outlet for Montagu's opinions on society.³⁷ These statements also demonstrate how each participant in an epistolary exchange was obliged to share knowledge. Montagu expected the Reverend to share information about his family's

³⁴ Richard Sharp, "Freind, William (*bap.* 1715, *d.* 1766)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10156>, accessed 2 Aug 2017].

³⁵ Montagu, "Document 20: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, November 15, 1741," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 70-80.

³⁶ Montagu, "Document 20: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, November 15, 1741," in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 70-80.

³⁷ Montagu, "Document 64: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, July 01, 1744," *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 297-301.

wellness just as she had supplied him with news of her own.

In addition to relaying the family's recent actions, Montagu divulged her uncertainty about the benefits of learning to Freind, writing, "It is best to admire and not to understand the world. Like a riddle, by its mystery rather than by its meaning" and also, "those gaining a knowledge of the world are blotting their minds with a registrar of black deeds."³⁸ A year later, perhaps after investing more time in her learning and aware of the many benefits to being an educated woman, Montagu commented to Freind that she was "concerned for the honour of our sex" because "dissimulation is looked upon by many fathers and mothers as an accomplishment, and ignorance as merit."³⁹ Montagu stressed to Freind that he should give his daughter "an excellent education, and teach her it is much easier to be what one should be, than to seem what one is not."⁴⁰ Montagu appeared candid and emotional when writing her thoughts to the clergyman, which was probably the result of their familial connection.

Montagu wrote extensively to her cousin and friend Gilbert West, who was a poet and philosopher and close friends with authors Montagu would later come to correspond with, such as George Lyttelton and William Pitt.⁴¹ West was also friendly with the Cavendishes and his times spent at Bulstrode caused Montagu severe jealousy.⁴² West and Montagu became close friends in the final years of West's life and was Montagu's literary connection to writers of poetry and Classical literature.⁴³ Montagu's letters to West abounded with updates of her latest readings and

³⁸ Montagu, "Document 37: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to W. Freind, 1740?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 135-139; Montagu, "Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 229-234.

³⁹ Montagu, "Document 34: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1742?," in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 155-159.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Penelope Wilson, "West, Gilbert (1703-1756)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2005, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29084>, accessed 25 May 2016].

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

with her honest and informed opinions on them. Knowing that West was somewhat of an expert when it came to literary texts and philosophies, Montagu provided him with her critiques that she knew he would appreciate. For example, in 1751, Montagu wrote to West about Rousseau's comments on Genoa, in 1752 about Mr. Hooke's *History of the Romans*, in 1753 about "Locke's discourse on miracles" and in 1754 about "Mr. Pococke's account of many things rather strange and fine."⁴⁴ Taking the time to write her thoughts on her latest reading to him was a gift of conversational exchange, since as Dalton notes, "sending a letter or procuring a book was a sign of personal devotion that engendered a social debt to be fulfilled."⁴⁵ She delivered constant opinions on her readings and expected his in return. Their relationship of giving and receiving opinions on published works was carefully navigated so that Montagu never put herself in a position of giving West any advice. For instance, in a 1753 letter she took care to retreat when she offered advice writing, "I cannot help thinking I have just run into two great absurdities, one in supposing you could want advice, another in imagining I was fit to give it you."⁴⁶ According to letter manuals, advice given between friends, equals, or family members was only to be done indirectly and with wit or teasing so as to avoid causing offence or resentment.⁴⁷ She valued his guidance and the literary connections she made through him were invaluable to her later ventures into authorship.

Since West and his wife were part of the group that met at Bulstrode for lively

⁴⁴ Rousseau: Montagu, "Document 40: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, October 31, 1751," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 171-177; Hooke: Montagu, "Document 46: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, November 26, 1752," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 196-202; Locke: Montagu, "Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, January 13, 1753," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 217-224; Pococke: Montagu, "Document 62: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, November 5, 1754," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 272-277.

⁴⁵ Susan Dalton, *Engendering the republic of letters: reconnecting public and private spheres in eighteenth-century Europe*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 7.

⁴⁶ Montagu, "Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, January 13, 1753," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 217-224.

⁴⁷ Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 68.

conversations, Montagu's relationship with West was also carried out regularly in person. Montagu lamented his departure in a letter in 1752 by writing, "To say I regret the loss of your company at this place, and in my present situation, would very ill express the value I set on your conversation, and I should be cautious of even appearing to fall short in my estimation of it, as it is by that only I can be at all worthy of the pleasures and advantages that arise from it."⁴⁸ She also commented in 1754 that West was, "a welcome and a frequent guest, because you bring with you those virtues and graces, whose presence I would desire."⁴⁹ Montagu appreciated the world West opened up to her through letters and in-person visits to his garden. She expressed this in 1752 by writing,

Your letter, like manna in the wilderness, was a very sweet and pleasant refreshment, seasonably and kindly bestowed ... You talk of courts and councils, of kissing the hands of Kings and Princes, and such things as in my sequestered bower were totally forgotten. You introduce me to a known world when you carry me into a garden planted with firs and laurel, and you offer them to me for subjects of moral reflections, for which, as you rightly judge, I have by nature and circumstances, all the leisure and dullness from whence they usually proceed.⁵⁰

Montagu's enjoyment of West and his wife's company appears sincere; when inviting Frances Boscawen over for dinner and conversation in 1749 she commented that, "if we can get Mr. West and his wife of the party, we shall have a feast of reason that would please a true ancient epicurean, and stoic too."⁵¹ Montagu's praise of West and his wisdom shows her delight at their philosophical conversations via their epistolary or face-to-face relationship. Thus, epistolary relationships reinforced face-to-face relationships at times when individuals were separated by drawing on their ties of community and reminders of their time spent in each other's company.

⁴⁸ Montagu, "Document 43: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, September 2, 1752," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3*, 187-190.

⁴⁹ Montagu, "Document 59: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, September 03, 1754?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3*, 262-266.

⁵⁰ Montagu, "Document 46: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, November 26, 1752," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3*, 196-202.

⁵¹ Montagu, "Document 25: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Frances Glanville Boscawen, 1749," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu vol. 3*, 102-110.

Montagu's epistolary relationships with family members were often good-humored and carried on a conversational tone that read as if a number of people were involved in the conversation. Several friends and family members are mentioned in each letter, and thus the letter did not just concern the sender and receiver, nor was it simply a dialogue. Letters between family members had the entire family tree and a community of neighbours and acquaintances entangled within them. Because of this, letters seemingly written from one individual to another were not necessarily a private conversation with information meant for one recipient. Although Montagu expressed genuine affection and friendship in addition to familial ties, writing to family members was an obligation and a way of demonstrating respect and obedience to one's family.⁵² She always addressed her recipient with the proper title to acknowledge the place of power in the relationship.⁵³ Scott is addressed as "My dear sister" in a display of authority over her younger sister. Cousin Reverend Friend is addressed submissively with "Dear Sir" and although Cousin West is addressed "My dearest cousin," Montagu's closing sentiments always included a variation of, "Your most affectionate cousin, and obliged, and faithful humble Servant" displaying her subservience to the elder man.⁵⁴ Montagu's conversational tone, anticipating it would be read aloud, and her proper epistolary etiquette continue throughout her letters to both male and female friends. Although these family members held a special relationship with Montagu compared to other correspondents, they were deeply entwined in her network. They connected her to others and were equally valuable as participants in Montagu's creation of her social and philosophical identity.

⁵² James Daybell, "Female Literacy and the Social Conventions of Women's Letter-Writing in England, 1540-1603," in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700* ed. James Daybell, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 69.

⁵³ Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 65-66.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Letters to Like-Minded Women

Letters between women significant in Montagu's life from childhood to widowhood are important because they display a women-centered environment in which the correspondents displayed confidence and communication with each other as rational equals. The friendships between female letter writers were marked by trust, honesty, and communication. These women to form an identity based on the exchange of ideas and accumulation of knowledge, which was later the foundation of the Bluestocking group.⁵⁵ Montagu's friendships with Cavendish, Donnellan, Carter, Vesey, and Boscawen were based on common intellectual interests combined with the need for a community for intellectual support.⁵⁶ In these relationships, Montagu and the other Bluestocking women were aware of the public ramifications of their private choices. They enthusiastically and thoroughly engaged with public ideas and in public forums, by reading publications and discussing them in letters and in person.⁵⁷

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Portland, was the second closest of Montagu's friends as a young woman, after her sister, and arguably Montagu's most influential acquaintance. Montagu's grandfather introduced Montagu at the age of twelve to the seventeen year-old Cavendish and, because of the duchess' slightly older age and her more elevated socioeconomic status, Montagu valued her friendship to the Duchess very much. She wrote in a letter to Reverend Freind that, "Her Grace has a friendship for me I can never find in any one else; nor indeed would it give the same pleasure from any other person; because then I must be ungrateful,

⁵⁵ Sarah Person Pittock, "Bluestocking Culture: English Literary Women's Reading, Letter Writing and Sociability, 1745-1785," (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2001), 177.

⁵⁶ Susan M. Yadlon, "The Bluestocking Circle: The Negotiation of "Reasonable" Women," in *Communication & Women's Friendships: Parallels and Intersections in Literature and Life* ed. Janet Doubler Ward & Joanna Stephens Mink (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 118.

⁵⁷ Pittock, "Bluestocking Culture," 192.

as it would be impossible for me to love any one as I do her.”⁵⁸ Cavendish became one of Montagu’s greatest connections to British intellectual and scientific society.⁵⁹

Cavendish’s great grandmother, Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1623?-73), Duchess of Newcastle, had been an ambitious natural philosopher who published several significant works. In 1667 The Duchess of Newcastle was so well known in scientific circles that the Royal Society invited her to attend demonstrations by Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke.⁶⁰ The Duchess of Newcastle participated in a network of philosophers and engaged in discussions with philosophical acquaintances both via correspondence and in person.⁶¹ She had access to this network only through her husband, William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle. Unfortunately, the Duchess of Newcastle was not able to cultivate intellectual companionship with other like-minded women simply because there were so few in existence and no institution or social practice to bring them together.⁶²

Having such an imaginative, ambitious, and bold woman as a great grandmother would have influenced Cavendish, the Duchess of Portland, to pursue a similarly social and scientific life. The Duchess of Newcastle’s activities in the public scientific world of publishing were not yet normalized in the seventeenth century. She wrote mostly within a literary-scientific genre and kept her publishing as verse and poetry. However, the Duchess of Portland and her circle of friends in the early eighteenth century were beginning to make it so that women engaging with sciences, like natural philosophy and botany, were not so shocking. It was Montagu’s exposure to this circle of educated and curious intellectuals through her friendship to the Duchess of Portland

⁵⁸ Montagu, “Document 2: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2, 5-13.

⁵⁹ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 21; 24.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: the extraordinary life of Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle, the first woman to live by her pen*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁶² Ibid., 49.

that shaped her stance on women and scientific activities, publicity, and the exchange of knowledge through a network of like-minded people.

The Duchess of Portland continued her great grandmother's interests in science and was especially interested in natural philosophy, collecting natural objects, and botanical specimens.⁶³ Her affiliation for objects such as feathers, flowers, and shells inspired her to send such items to Montagu. Gifting a natural history object, Eger notes, was considered a "token of affection that both supplemented the emotional relationship expressed and worked to strengthen other networks of exchange" between the women.⁶⁴ Montagu eagerly engaged in the exchange of objects in her letters with Cavendish and would also send the Duchess specimens. Montagu went as far as to order others to procure specimens that she could then send to the Duchess; in 1738 she wrote, "I would catch you some butterflies, but I have not seen any pretty ones. I have order'd people upon all our Coasts to seek for shells, but have not yet got any pretty ones."⁶⁵ This exchanging of objects demonstrates that Montagu and the Duchess' early relationship was filled with learning about and collecting natural philosophy specimens. The two well-educated women spent their time together at Bulstrode engaged in scientific collecting and would then arrange the Duchess' collection into ornate displays. This mutual interest in the natural world bound the women, and each of their networks of exchange, together; each network benefitted from the connection between Montagu and Cavendish as both objects and knowledge passed between them.

In addition to exchanging objects, the letters between Montagu and Cavendish were open, full of compassion and warmth, and occasionally dotted with flippant remarks from Montagu.⁶⁶

⁶³ Stacy Sloboda, "Displaying Materials: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland's Museum." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43, no. 4 (Summer 2010), 457.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Eger, "Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects: Bluestocking friendship and material culture," *Parergon* 26, no. 2 (2009), 127.

⁶⁵ Montagu, "Document 42: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 5, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 165-170.

⁶⁶ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 29-30.

Montagu addressed the Duchess as “Madam” and closed with a variation of “I am, your Grace’s most obedient servant” in the proper manner to address a recipient of higher rank than the writer.⁶⁷ Early in their epistolary relationship, the Duchess encouraged Montagu to send her verses and Montagu complied eagerly.⁶⁸ Montagu then asked the Duchess to send her some drawings, since she herself was being taught by her father to draw in order to pass the time spent in the country.⁶⁹ Montagu’s usual clever and convivial letters to the Duchess were occasionally dotted with dampened emotion when Cavendish reported illness. In 1738, young Montagu wrote a somber letter that discussed her own struggles with illness, mortality, and included an introspective meditation on life that seems far beyond her twenty years of experience:

I wonder people can so much forget death, when all we see before us is but succession; minute succeeds to minute, season to season, summer dies as winter comes. The dial marks the change of hour, every night brings death-like sleep, and morning seems a resurrection; ... our youth has no joy, our middle age no quiet, our old age no ease, no indulgence ... Little is allowed to freedom, happiness, and contemplation, the adoration of our Creator, the admiration of his works, and the inspection of ourselves.⁷⁰

Montagu closed this letter by writing that she was sure the Duchess would find these thoughts from her heart more acceptable than the usual news and compliments. This striking letter demonstrates the intimacy and candidness of their young friendship.

Montagu also consulted Cavendish via correspondence when she was pensive about her intellect or her presentation of self to others. She discussed having “a head of great capacity, but a great part of the space is unfurnished”⁷¹ and being “cautious as to my conversation” and

⁶⁷ Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 65-66.

⁶⁸ Montagu, “Document 5: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, November 3, 1734,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 13-15.

⁶⁹ Montagu, Document 7: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, June 21, 1734,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 17-21.

⁷⁰ Montagu, “Document 15: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 1738,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 54-56.

⁷¹ Montagu, “Document 30: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, January 27, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 133-136.

“doubting all things.”⁷² This sharing of fears about learning and intellectual pursuits stemmed from their mutual exchange of recommendations for study. For example, Montagu made recommendations for the Duchess’ classical history studies, such as a pamphlet on Cicero by Lyttelton, and in return Cavendish recommended Montagu read an “account of the life and writings of Homer.”⁷³ Both Montagu and Cavendish were keen to inform the other of their current studies and would encourage the other to follow a similar path.

Their relationship was strengthened by the Duchess inviting Montagu to visit her home in Bulstrode with a number of other active intellectuals for long periods. The group studied languages, read treatises on natural philosophy, and spent time gazing through microscopes. Montagu’s experiences at Bulstrode expanded her education by exposing her to worldly experience and the benefits of “group study.” Cavendish invited to her home the most interesting people she knew, which included many Fellows of the Royal Society.⁷⁴ The visits had a great impact on Montagu’s early socializing since she wrote about her experiences with Cavendish to her other correspondents in great detail, especially to her sister and to Anne Donnellan. When Montagu wrote to Cavendish, she often expressed that in comparison to the guests at Bulstrode her current company was dull. In 1738 she wrote, “the surprising and entertaining incidents so frequent at Bulstrode, are so scarce at Mount Morris” and in 1742 that she would “rather live in Aeolus’ den then in the country at this time of the year without the voice of, at least, ten people, of which one talks and nine laugh, for a small family is not sufficient enough to drown this

⁷² Montagu, “Document 47: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 13, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 194-199.

⁷³ Cicero: Montagu, “Document 44: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 7, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 176-180; Homer: Montagu, “Document 59: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, August 2, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 257-264.

⁷⁴ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 35.

hollow wind.”⁷⁵ Montagu valued the Duchess’ company, recommendations, and connections to her social network and their friendship, based on common interests, remained strong until it was derailed by Montagu’s rocky transition into motherhood.

Until both women bore children Montagu and Cavendish’s common interests were natural philosophy and interesting conversation. Thereafter their interests changed. Although Montagu was still recommending things for the Duchess to read up until around 1748, their friendship had cooled by 1753.⁷⁶ Montagu, reflecting on their estrangement years later, expressed that the Duchess displaying her youngest son while Montagu was mourning the loss of hers was impolite and had caused her a great deal of sadness.⁷⁷ In 1748, two years after his death, Montagu gave away her son’s clothing, and began to accept her new role as a childless woman.⁷⁸ The Duchess, having six children at this time, and Montagu led different lives. Their epistolary relationship slowly dried up with common interests becoming scarce. Despite their diminishing correspondence, in 1779 Montagu regarded her days at Bulstrode and her young affection with the Duchess, as significant and influential; she wrote to Cavendish that, “your Grace’s conversation and example led me to a way of thinking which makes the happiness of all times and all seasons. You taught me neither to admire nor covet what was not really good.”⁷⁹ Montagu regarded Cavendish as both a friend and a mentor who shaped her learning and who demonstrated that intellectual interests could be developed alongside domesticity.

⁷⁵ Montagu, “Document 12: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, December 17, 1738,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 40-47; Montagu, “Document 53: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, December 28, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 246-252.

⁷⁶ Montagu, “Document 11: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 1747,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 45-48; Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 103.

⁷⁷ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 103.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁹ Montagu, “1 Dec. 1779, Hill Street,” quoted in Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 43.

Anne Donnellan was another of Montagu's youthful and important friends. Donnellan was born in Ireland around 1700, which made her at least 18 years older than Montagu, though the age difference was never mentioned nor did it seem to influence the friendship. Donnellan moved to London with her mother and stepfather and never married; instead, she gained some independence after her sister married well and all the dowry went to Anne.⁸⁰ By remaining unwed and childless, Donnellan's leisure time allowed her to expertly maintain friendships and correspondence; her relationship with Montagu was no exception.

Montagu and Donnellan met through mutual friend, Mary Pendarves (later Delany), and the two women connected over being primarily self-taught after their brief education before the age of thirteen.⁸¹ They later bonded over being childless and having an abundance of leisure time to pursue intellectual studies. The letters that passed between them were often serious, encouraging of each other's education, full of study recommendations, and, as was with the letters to Cavendish, contained natural objects of material exchange. In 1749, Montagu arranged an exchange with Donnellan writing, "I have sent you some small feathers, that you may at your convenient leisure finish me a rose and send it down."⁸² The two women established a relationship of exchange where a gift, or natural object, is sent with the expectation that a similar gift would be received in return. When together, Montagu and Donnellan continued their interests in natural objects by visiting gardens and arranging collections of shells together, after writing to mutual friend Cavendish descriptions of each shell.⁸³

Montagu encouraged Donnellan in her studies in 1742 writing, "May your mind repose in virtue and truth, and never indolence or negligence! That you already know much, is the best

⁸⁰ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 38.

⁸¹ Patrick Kelley, "Anne Donnellan: Irish proto-Bluestocking," *Hermathena* no. 154 (Summer 1993), 9.

⁸² Montagu, "Document 23: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 1749," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 95-99.

⁸³ Montagu, "Document 58: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, August 02, 1743," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 272-275.

incitement to know more.”⁸⁴ The recommendations for studies made between them were often of Classical histories and translations, including Homer, Pliny, and Nepos.⁸⁵ This demonstrates that both Montagu and Donnellan followed a similar thread of learning, and how there was mutual dependence on each other to guide their studies. Their friendship stayed remarkably consistent throughout the years, and Montagu regularly expressed to Donnellan her thoughts on women’s learning. It was in letters to Montagu that Donnellan first felt comfortable enough to express her intellectual interests.⁸⁶ Together, the two women exchanged recommendations, participated in natural history, and engaged in philosophical discussions about learning.

In addition to maintaining childhood and young adult friendships throughout her life, Montagu also acquired some friendships with educated women as an adult. She became friends with Elizabeth Carter in her thirties and was overjoyed with their acquaintance. She wrote a heartfelt letter to Carter in 1758 solidifying their friendship with the sentiment, “I look upon my introduction to your acquaintance as one of the luckiest incidents of my life, if I can contrive to improve it into friendship.”⁸⁷ The most significant aspects of Carter and Montagu’s relationship were their encouragement of each other, and their bond over authorship and publishing. Before their friendship, Montagu expressed no interest in publishing. It was only after she received Carter and Lord Lyttelton’s encouragement that Montagu anonymously published the last three entries of Lyttelton’s *Dialogues of the Dead*. She thanked Carter in 1760 writing, “With her encouragement I do not know but at last I may become an author in form. It enlarges the sphere

⁸⁴ Montagu, “Document 23: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, January 01, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 89-94.

⁸⁵ Homer and Nepos: Montagu, “Document 40: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Anne Donnellan, April 20, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 152-160; Pliny: Anne Donnellan to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 15 Apr. 1741: *Climenson*, i. 70-1, mentioned in Kelley, “Anne Donnellan,” 13.

⁸⁶ Kelley, “Anne Donnellan,” 13.

⁸⁷ Montagu, “Document 17: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, June 06, 1758,” in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu, vol. 4.*, 74-77.

of action, and lengthens the short period of human life.”⁸⁸ Montagu also conversed with Carter about women and their role in society, a philosophical debate Montagu was struggling with between choosing domesticity or the public life of publishing. Montagu did not think it was proper for a woman to give up her domestic obligations to pursue publishing. She commented to Carter in 1760 that she had “long been sorry to see the best of our sex running continually after public spectacles and diversions, to the ruin of their health and understandings, and neglect of all domestic duties.”⁸⁹ Montagu consciously attempted to balance her domestic responsibilities and the pursuit of intellectual, and public, happiness. Montagu also relied on Carter to continue her education, especially with Classical languages and translations. Unlike Montagu, Carter was educated in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew by her father.⁹⁰ Montagu would practice her Latin by conversing with Carter about Classical texts using rough Latin quotations, an activity which she never did when conversing about Classical texts with any of her other female friends.⁹¹ In sum, Carter and Montagu’s friendship was established on, and maintained by, mutual admiration of intellect and ambition. It was Carter’s support and encouragement that gave Montagu the courage to pursue the public life of an intellectual and published woman and to adopt a public identity.

⁸⁸ Montagu, “Document 54: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 1760?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu, vol. 4.*, 259-263.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Anna Miegou, “Biographical Sketches of Principal Bluestocking Women,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 Reconsidering the Bluestockings (2002), 26.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Carter, “Document 4: Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, November 1, 1758,” in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu Between the Years 1755 and 1800, vol. 1.*, 12-16 [accessed from *British and Irish Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)]; Carter, “Document 10: Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, June 4, 1759,” in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, vol. 1.*, 41-45; Carter, “Document 14: Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, October 6, 1759,” in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, vol. 1.*, 61-64; Montagu, Document 68: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, December, 1760?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. Montagu, vol. 4.*, 345-353.

Montagu and Elizabeth Vesey began their friendship in the late 1740s and became close friends by the 1760s, when both were in their forties.⁹² Vesey was born in Ireland and was brought to London at a young age to socialize in great circles much akin to Montagu and her time spent in Cambridge with her grandfather.⁹³ Where Montagu's intellectual identity formation had a public drive, Vesey, on the other hand, had no desire to become a published writer; she only engaged in intellectual pursuits for her own interests – without any literary or scientific output.⁹⁴ Vesey and her husband dined with Montagu regularly, but returned seasonally to Ireland. Montagu thus kept her relationship with Vesey familiar by writing detailed letters describing all aspects of her life. Although Vesey never travelled further than Ireland, London, and Bath to engage in pleasant company, she found plenty of company in those locations to satisfy her energies and preferred to share knowledge through social gatherings than letters.

Montagu's letters to Vesey were primarily about the Bluestocking Assemblies and the attendees. In 1764 and 1768 she wrote of individuals she thought worthy of admittance to the Society and of those she considered not suitable.⁹⁵ Montagu also discussed the success of the Assemblies; in 1778 she praised Vesey for her latest assembly held in her blue room; she was delighted that “all people [were] enchanted” despite “the magic figure of the circle is vanished” which was Montagu's preferred way of hosting the assemblies in her own drawing room.⁹⁶ Montagu admired Vesey's spirited socializing, which often stepped outside conventional conduct. However, she also attempted to guide Vesey, with the help of mutual friend Carter,

⁹² Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, “Vesey, Elizabeth (c.1715–1791),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2015, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28257, accessed 6 Aug 2017].

⁹³ Maria Anita Stefanelli, “Elizabeth Vesey and the Art of Educating Oneself, Between London and Lucan,” *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* no. 3 (2013), 329.

⁹⁴ Stefanelli, 330.

⁹⁵ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Hillstreet, March 17 (1764?), *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 4; Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Hillstreet, Feb 2nd, 1768, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 168.

⁹⁶ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Hill Street November 13th 1778, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 58-9.

towards more rational self-regulation in order to show that intellectual women were rational.⁹⁷ Vesey's ability to be different and do something new while also wanting to be accepted and admired by polite society was admired by Montagu. Their relationship allowed Montagu to navigate a path through these conflicting desires.

Frances Boscawen and Montagu were dear friends, bonding over their mutual abundance of leisure time due to frequently absent husbands. Boscawen's husband Edward was a Captain in the Navy who spent time in the West Indies, India, and America. Frances Boscawen was distantly related to Margaret Boscawen, who kept a 'plant booklet' that contained her personal notes on plants and flowers commonly found in the countryside that were to be collected, dried, distilled and used in medicines.⁹⁸ This household engagement in medicine involved a network of family and friends who shared crucial knowledge of plants and procedures. This family history of scientific knowledge production and dissemination in the Boscawen family continued into the eighteenth century. Frances Boscawen's involvement in Montagu's network and the Bluestocking Assemblies is a type of continuation of socializing practices that were grounded upon an interest in science.

In 1757 after many years of friendship, Montagu described Boscawen to her sister as "humble, charitable, pious, of gentle temper, with the firmest principles and with a great deal of discretion, void of any degree of art, warm and constant in her affections, mild towards offenders, but rigorous towards offence and speaks her opinion very freely to young people."⁹⁹ The two women spent much time together and in their letters they conversed about the joys of their visits; in 1756 Montagu wrote to Boscawen her envy of Boscawen's current company, writing "I am

⁹⁷ Deborah Heller, "Elizabeth Vesey as the Sylph in Bluestocking Correspondence," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 Reconsidering the Bluestockings, (2002), 233.

⁹⁸ Anne Stobart, *Household Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3, 89.

⁹⁹ Montagu, "Document 11: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1757?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 4.*, 42-44.

glad you have so agreeable a society with you; for my part I have no more idea of the joys of the country at Christmas ... I want the daily news, the hourly visitants, the variety and change of company during the winter”¹⁰⁰ The letters Montagu wrote about and to Boscawen demonstrate Montagu’s desire for intellectual female friendship and the ways in which she maintained close relationships with similar women through flattery, affection, and encouragement.

Letters to Men

Writer Lord George Lyttelton and Montagu began their epistolary relationship in 1755 after meeting through her cousin Gilbert West. Through observations and interactions at West’s social gatherings of literary professionals, Lyttelton and Montagu were able to conduct an intellectual relationship without flirtation and courtship.¹⁰¹ Montagu discussed a wide variety of literature with Lyttelton, including books of contemporary history by William Robertson, Voltaire, and even Lyttelton’s own works.¹⁰² She also wrote to Lyttelton about other intellectual interests she had in philosophy, metaphysics, and oriental languages – especially the “Shanscritta Language” expressing the variety of her interests.¹⁰³ Lyttelton was the individual who encouraged Montagu to publish and gave her the opportunity to do so anonymously in his satire *Dialogues of the Dead*. In 1759 the letters between Montagu and Lyttelton evolved into an exchange of letter-books. These books were gifts of entertainment and displays of wit and learning which evolved

¹⁰⁰ Montagu, “Document 8: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, November 12, 1756,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 29-32.

¹⁰¹ Markman Ellis, ““An Author in Form” Women Writers, Print Publication, and Elizabeth Montagu’s *Dialogues of the Dead*,” *ELH* 70, no. 2, (Summer 2012), 421.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*; Robertson: Montagu, “Document 47: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lord George Lyttelton, 1759,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 225-230; Voltaire: (Montagu) to Lord Lyttelton, Sadleford, June 10, 1765, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues” Her Letters and Friendship from 1762 to 1800 Volume 1 1762-1776*, ed. Reginald Blunt (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1923), 123.

¹⁰³ Montagu to Lord Lyttelton, June the 2d, 1768, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 173.

into the writing of the *Dialogues* in 1760.¹⁰⁴ Montagu and Lyttelton maintained a professional and literary relationship of mutual admiration that gave Montagu the courage to publish and evolve from a self-inward-looking intellectual into a productive one.

Letters from Montagu to her husband were different than those to other men and also from those to family members. Letters between husband and wife were considered personal and intimate since they often contained important business information or matters of reputation and honour.¹⁰⁵ In 1742 at the age of twenty-two, Elizabeth married the fifty-one year-old Edward Montagu, owner of Northumbrian coalmines and heir to greater wealth.¹⁰⁶ Before her marriage, Montagu did not hold a high opinion of men or of the institution of marriage; she thought that marriage would mean giving up on her intellectual dreams.¹⁰⁷ In 1738, Montagu described her ideal man to Cavendish:

He should have a great deal of sense and prudence to direct and instruct me, much wit to divert me, beauty to please me, good humour to indulge me in the right, and reprove me gently when I am in the wrong; money enough to afford me more than I can want, and as much as I can wish; and consistency to like me as long as other people do that is, until my face is wrinkled by age, or scarred by the small pox; and after that I shall expect only civility in the room of love.¹⁰⁸

Fortunately, by marrying Edward, she received both wealth and compassion; a combination that Montagu thought crucial to a successful marriage – for she thought, one could not only marry for love.¹⁰⁹ Montagu found Edward to be a pleasing companion, despite his duties as a Member of

¹⁰⁴ Ellis, "An Author in Form," 422.

¹⁰⁵ Daybell, "Female Literacy," 70-1.

¹⁰⁶ Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 120.

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, 'Montagu, Elizabeth (1718–1800)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19014>, accessed 15 April 2016].

¹⁰⁸ Montagu, "Document 11: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, 1738," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 36-39.

¹⁰⁹ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 93.

Parliament that left her alone in the country for long periods of time.¹¹⁰ Before their marriage, she wrote of Edward to Reverend Freind in 1741, praising “his generous affection in loving all my friends, and during every opportunity for my conversing with them” and that he was “very obliging” to her during their courtship.¹¹¹ When together, Montagu and Edward went on many trips to his other properties as well as visited Cambridge and Oxford to see friends and to explore the elaborate university collections of natural history.¹¹² There were mutual expectations in a marriage: conventionally husbands were to offer kind consideration and in return receive wifely obedience.¹¹³ In letters to her husband throughout their marriage, Montagu referred to Edward affectionately as “My Dearest” and referred to herself as “your most grateful, and obedient wife”¹¹⁴ or “Your most faithful and affectionate wife.”¹¹⁵ Montagu understood that a wife needed to be perfectly complaisant and in return she gained economic support and sufficient time to fill with her intellectual interests.¹¹⁶

The Montagus primarily conversed about the health of family and friends, and the activities each of them was engaged in while apart; Montagu also added her wishes for the pleasure of her husband’s company. Because they spent much time apart, Edward supported Montagu’s desires to visit friends and engage in intellectual discussions. Montagu wrote to Donnellan, “though Mr. Montagu does every thing that can make home agreeable, he has never

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 100.

¹¹¹ Montagu, “Document: 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 229-234.

¹¹² Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 101; Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Margaret Cavendish, Aug 09, 1744.

¹¹³ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Gregorian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 59.

¹¹⁴ Montagu, “Document 27: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Edward Montagu, 1749,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 117-120; Montagu, “Document 28: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Edward Montagu, 1749,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 120-123; Montagu, “Document 13: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Edward Montagu, 1757,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 48-51.

¹¹⁵ Montagu, “Document 38: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Edward Montagu, September, 1751,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 165-169.

¹¹⁶ Yadlon, “The Bluestocking Circle,” 124.

by the least hint recommended to me to stay in it.”¹¹⁷ Montagu divulged her thoughts to her husband about her education, women’s duties, and mankind’s pursuit of knowledge. In 1751 she wrote, “Though the education of women is always too frivolous, I am glad mine had such a qualification of the serious.”¹¹⁸ Then in 1753 she debated whether women’s pleasure should reside in her domestic work, or in “the cabal and intreigue of the state.”¹¹⁹ This discussion of such matters with her husband reflects the openness of their relationship and the mutual respect they had for each other. However, the primary focus of their letters was detailed news of themselves, which functioned as a way to maintain their marital intimacy and affection over distance and time. Edward wrote to his wife in 1745, “The happiest days that ever I passed in my life have been with you, and I hope Heaven will give me the long enjoyment of your charming society, which I prefer above everything on Earth.”¹²⁰

With the support of her husband and the encouragement of both female and male friends, Montagu established a social network of individuals whom shared common interests in science, literature, technology, and philosophy. Although this network was connected through Montagu, many links between these individuals were revealed. This demonstrates the connectedness and community upon which the Bluestocking Society was based. From these reflections, the breadth and depth of relationships that Elizabeth Montagu cultivated throughout her lifetime are apparent. From childhood she learned that socializing with the right people gained her access to the knowledge she desired. Through a carefully constructed network she could also share her knowledge and advance someone else’s learning in a mutually beneficial exchange. Montagu’s

¹¹⁷ Montagu, “Document 52: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, December 05, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 241-245.

¹¹⁸ Montagu, “Document 37: Letters from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Edward Montagu, August 30, 1751,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 160-165.

¹¹⁹ Montagu, “Document 52: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Edward Montagu, 1753,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 233-236.

¹²⁰ Edward Montagu to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Allerthorpe, 29 September, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 211.

sociability occurred within strict social boundaries deemed acceptable for her gender and social standing and policed by recipients, just as Montagu was sure to police others for improper epistolary etiquette. For Montagu, writing was an integral part of her existence, “fundamental to her identity” and an activity that brought her great happiness.¹²¹ Detailing the relationships within Montagu’s community of correspondents complicates the primary category for studies of intellectual life – participation in public. In fact, success in the public sphere, especially for women, required a supportive family life and encouraging friendships. Montagu made a point to balance domesticity and public sociability to create an intellectual identity with aspects of both; therefore, the domestic sphere is crucial to understanding women’s public participation in science.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 93.

Chapter Two: A Young Woman's Education

I am glad you have a daughter ... I take a pleasure and a pride in seeing them, as Providence designed them fairest and best of all God's creatures. But though they are outward form most obliged to nature in the inward fashion nature is ungratefully allowed no part ... Dissimulation is looked upon by many fathers and mothers as an accomplishment, and ignorance as a merit, and a woman is turned into the world to act by deceit or folly as either happens to prevail in her mind. I am sure you will give the little demoiselle an excellent education, and teach her it is much easier to be what one should be, than to seem what one is not.¹²²

In 1742, recently married Elizabeth Montagu wrote a congratulatory letter to her cousin on the birth of his daughter. Montagu had only recently moved into adulthood and had become at once a wife and the head of a household, leaving the primary stage of education behind her. She used the birth as an opportunity to pen her concerns "for the honour of our sex," and to comment on the limitations of the current way young girls were educated. In this chapter, I examine Montagu's childhood and young adulthood before her marriage, a time when young women were educated for their futures as wives and mothers. I describe the ways in which women's education was being reimagined throughout the eighteenth century. Emerging changes were often based on how women's education was imagined in opposition to the education of young men. Upper class women were prepared for futures different from those for men and were thus distinctly educated. Montagu's experience is used as a case study to show how women's education was changing in two areas. First, it was expanding into new subject areas, which reflected affluent British society's growing interests in science. Secondly, affluent women received encouragement from their male educators and from other educated women to pursue lifelong learning and not only before marriage. Any arguments that suggested women should have more power in the public sphere or intellectual community were still far too controversial and were thus made rarely and

¹²² Elizabeth Montagu, "Document 34: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1742?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu. With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence, vol. 2.*, (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 155-159. [accessed from *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)].

hesitantly.¹²³ Sweeping changes to women's education were not yet in the works, however, the increase in subjects accessible to women, and changing theories about women's intellectual capabilities allowed women, like Montagu and her Bluestocking cohorts, to be educated more than their grandmothers.

In order to understand education in eighteenth-century Britain it is important to understand contemporary gender roles. Even before the eighteenth century, the notion of a public space implied the privacy of other spaces and allowed for the two constructs to interact.¹²⁴ Although these separate spheres were constructed, there was still a difference between the public sphere and publicity and between the private sphere and privacy. There was fluidity to particular spaces, in that they could be at one time public and at another time private depending on the activities taking place within them. Behaving in public required one to behave with moral integrity and for a public or common good.¹²⁵ On the other hand, the private sphere was any situation where an individual was passive or subordinate within a relationship.¹²⁶ Over time these distinctions became increasingly gendered but not exclusively public/male and private/female.¹²⁷ A Habermasian public sphere focused on public behaviour or activity. According to Jessica Kross, "public" in the eighteenth century referred to "a body of private individuals who form a public opinion."¹²⁸ These individuals exercise reason and judgment of the world, and they share their assumptions, values, and conclusions about that world. Kross also included individuals who

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Manushag N. Powell, "See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Spectation and the Eighteenth-Century Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 2 (Winter 2012), 256.

¹²⁵ Conal Condren, "Public, Private and the Idea of the 'Public Sphere' in Early-modern England," *Intellectual History Review* 19, no. 1 (2009), 21.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).; Jessica Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (Winter, 1999), 385.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 386.

communally engage in personally rewarding behavior and those “who judge the taste, virtue, value, or education of other people” to be acting in public.¹²⁹ An elite woman’s public space may have been in her house, however the domestic location did not necessarily make the space private; the activities that could occur in her house under her request or supervision made her house public. The eighteenth-century house was not simply a private, domestic, sheltered space, since it was also the center for social encounters.¹³⁰

These accounts of public and private help in understanding eighteenth-century education by emphasizing the existence of layered public and private spaces. Women experienced a variety of different realities that were influenced by the dominant patriarchal culture of the eighteenth century, which affected the content of women’s education. Nevertheless, according to Amanda Vickery, it is important to examine “the ways in which women shaped their own lives within a male-dominated culture.”¹³¹ She emphasizes that there is an “unpredictable variety of private experience, in any given period, whatever the dominant ideology.”¹³² Montagu, however, represents many of the women who, because of changes in the theory and practice of women’s education, were able to participate in multiple public and private spaces. Combined with her upper class status, and the encouragement from her father, grandfather, and young women friends, Montagu gained the confidence and wherewithal to construct the life she desired: a life of learning, socializing, and engagement with new and exciting developments in the intellectual community. Montagu learned what behaviours were appropriate for women and was able to navigate a life of the mind while still maintaining her womanly and wifely duties. The theory of gendered separate spheres, which does not map exactly over public and private, aligns with the

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Gregorian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9.

¹³¹ Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age of Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (Jun., 1993), 389.

¹³² Ibid., 390.

conceptualization of education in eighteenth-century Britain. However, there are aspects of Montagu's education that encompass multiple and changing publics.

Affluent women's education was highly regulated, and meant to teach the proper domestic habits which would provide women with "virtue."¹³³ According to John Locke, "virtue" referred to moral and instrumental qualities that were indispensable to civil order and was the foundation of eighteenth-century theories of education. Virtue was the responsibility of a gentleman, or one who participated in public society, to behave in a manner that was for the common good. It was a skill acquired from a young age through learning.¹³⁴ Although Locke did not specifically write about girls and virtue, he did not single out boys but rather opted for using "children" when outlining the importance of teaching virtue.¹³⁵ Although centered on morality and civility, in practice the virtues taught to a boy were different than those taught to a girl. An affluent girl's education often began with her mother, who held the responsibility for the education and care of all children until they were old enough for formal education around the age of seven. Children were seen as companions, and their education, regardless of sex, was taken very seriously.¹³⁶ Most importantly, mothers were to teach children the Christian religion and proper manners. Thus, women had to be able to read the Bible and display chastity, obedience, discretion, and prudence.¹³⁷ A well brought up girl was trained to be a dutiful wife and mother, capable of managing a household, and taking care of her husband and children as needed. Young women were to display modesty, delicacy, and reserve; any behaviours that negated this were considered unnatural for women to possess. They were not to be witty, because wit was not soft

¹³³ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, (1749).

¹³⁴ Mihai Androne, "Notes on John Locke's views on education," *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences* 137 (2014), 78.

¹³⁵ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, (1749).

¹³⁶ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 110-1.

¹³⁷ Joanna Martin, *Wives and Daughters: Women and Children in the Georgian Country House*, (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 213.

or delicate, their good sense was not to be displayed, and their learning was to be kept a secret in order that men would not get jealous or overshadowed. Women's education was to be limited in order that they were malleable for their husband.¹³⁸

In the eighteenth century gender was central to the understanding, construction, and implementation of education.¹³⁹ Ideas of masculinity were embedded in public education, whereas ideas of femininity were embedded in private education. This separation enabled educators to construct the character of each sex, often in opposition to each other, and to focus on the traits that each sex required for their respective futures. It was understood that each sex has to be educated on completely different platforms. From a moral standpoint, educators thought that because public education was intended for boys, because only men would be active in public affairs, it was therefore unsuitable for girls to receive a public education.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, a persistent moralist theory is reflected in Reverend Bennett's *Strictures on Female Education* in 1787. Moralists like Bennett thought young men needed confidence, and the ability to make friendships to succeed in their future public roles, whereas women needed grace and timidity for their domestic ones.¹⁴¹ The idea of confidence and competitiveness in girls or their participation in a public role was unthinkable, save for a female monarch. Young women were not thought to need to make friendships, because they would acquire their husband's social circle through marriage. It was thought that young women's friendships characterized by "private correspondences, assignations, and intrigue" could be dangerous.¹⁴² Women were taught useful tasks they would use around the home, such as knitting, needlework, and netting. It was also common for girls to

¹³⁸ Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 14.

¹³⁹ Michele Cohen, "Gender and 'method' in eighteenth-century English education," *History of Education*, 33, no. 5, (2004): 586.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 587.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 588.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

learn modern languages, literature, music, dancing, dress, and needlework.¹⁴³ Although this moralist theory of education for women persisted throughout the eighteenth century, new ideologies did emerge and expanded what affluent women were learning in the home.

Although attitudes about women's education had begun to change in the seventeenth century they had never been linked with ideas about a women's place in society until the eighteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, women writers called for improvements to women's positions in the areas of education, legal and economic, and sexual morality.¹⁴⁴ During the second half of the eighteenth century, an interest in women's learning arose, which led to changes to the content of young women's education. However, concerns remained about how much women should know about the world. Montagu questioned the benefit to having knowledge about the world. She wrote to Reverend Freind in 1741, lamenting her education after reading the life of Cicero:

I often think that those people are the happiest who know nothing at all of the world, and sitting in the little empire of their fireside, where there is no contention or cabal, think we are in a golden age of innocence; for those gaining a knowledge of the world are blotting their minds with a register of black deeds.¹⁴⁵

For Montagu, learning was not always a euphoric and enlightening activity. She sometimes felt burdened by her discovery of the "black deeds" in the world. This, however, did not appear to discourage her pursuit of knowledge in any considerable way.

Philosophers, such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, explored new ideas about the mind, which complicated notions of women's abilities to reason and be educated. They investigated the idea that "the peculiar 'weaknesses' of women's character were attributable not

¹⁴³ Ibid., 594.

¹⁴⁴ Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), 1.

¹⁴⁵ Montagu, "Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 229-234.

to their nature but to a faulty education and therefore could be corrected.”¹⁴⁶ For René Descartes, reason was by nature equal in all people. Mary Astell also claimed that rational faculties existed equally regardless of the time in which an individual lived, their socioeconomic status, or their sex.¹⁴⁷ German Philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz asserted that women’s abundant leisure time allowed them to be greater cultivators of knowledge than men and their natural curiosity made them suitable candidates for studying.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the education of women continued to be tied to views about how a woman should behave intellectually and morally. The principal debate was whether women’s education should be ornamental for them to be good companions, useful for them to be good mothers and heads of households, or else to enable them to earn an independent living.¹⁴⁹

Women’s education continued to be largely ornamental and useful throughout the eighteenth century. This was the case despite the greater range of subjects taught to some women. According to prescriptive literature from the beginning of the eighteenth century, affluent young women were expected to be able to read, write, and speak French and Italian, be well-read in English literature, have a thorough understanding of geography as well as ancient and modern history.¹⁵⁰ Also essential were lessons in drawing, dancing, and music, singing and playing the piano or harp, which were skills used to entertain guests.¹⁵¹ By the middle of the eighteenth century a basic understanding of arithmetic was acceptable and by the end of the century, general natural history or specific studies of botany were included.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Cohen, “Gender and ‘method’,” 592.

¹⁴⁷ Joan K. Kinnaird, “Mary Astell and the Conservative Contribution to English Feminism,” *Journal of British Studies* 19, no. 1 (Autumn, 1979), 62.

¹⁴⁸ Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 41.

¹⁴⁹ Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind*, 82.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵¹ Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, 234.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*; Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, 215.

The three-pronged goal of young women's education remained to improve her moral character, to make her competent in general conversation with men, and to equip her to educate her children.¹⁵³ During the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century, some women were encouraged to know something about astronomy, microscopy, and experimental physics.¹⁵⁴ However, their access to knowledge remained mediated by men.¹⁵⁵ Women learned from male tutors or their husbands, but did not engage in their own scientific experiments or direct their own learning. Studying sciences was not thought to disrupt women's moral virtues since subjects like natural philosophy promoted modesty and religious reverence.¹⁵⁶ The education of any one girl was largely determined by the individual family's decisions and their attitudes toward education. Despite what conduct books and prescriptive literature suggested about the ideal woman's characteristics, the reality of each educated woman's experience indicates that there was no consensus about the type and degree of education appropriate for young women in early modern English society.¹⁵⁷

For example, around the age of three, Montagu was passed from her mother's care into her father's, who eagerly began to educate his eldest child. This followed the view that after mothers had properly raised the children during their nursery years, fathers were expected to prepare male children for a career and female children for their role as wives.¹⁵⁸ Montagu received an unusual amount of attention and encouragement from her father.¹⁵⁹ He encouraged her to learn vastly and deeply while upholding that learning and socializing were the two most

¹⁵³ Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind*, 42.

¹⁵⁴ Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 37.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, 377.

¹⁵⁸ Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The emergence of separate spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 124.

¹⁵⁹ Rizzo, 119

important things to being an intellectual. Montagu's father appointed Dr. Conyers Middleton to oversee his eldest daughter's education. Dr. Middleton was the Cambridge University Librarian from 1721-1750, Woodwardian Professor of Geology at Cambridge from 1732-4, noted classical scholar and author, and husband to Montagu's maternal grandmother, Sarah Drake.¹⁶⁰ Dr. Middleton was a surrogate parent for many of his female dependents, which was a traditional manner of educating young women from affluent families. While writing *The Life of Cicero*, Middleton had two nieces living with him and he considered procuring subscriptions for that publication in order that he could continue to financially support his nieces.¹⁶¹ While not a Fellow of the Royal Society himself, Middleton was a well-connected intellectual whose network of acquaintances included members of the Society.

Montagu lived with Dr. Middleton at his estate in Cambridge while she was a very young girl. Later on, as a young lady she would visit him at Cambridge to participate in the gatherings Dr. Middleton hosted with a variety of people.¹⁶² Learning politeness and the proper manners when interacting with elite society was taught to young women by engrossing them in such rituals.¹⁶³ It was believed that if children spent time in the proper company, they would naturally feel comfortable in those circles as adults, so children were sent off to relatives who had access to such circles.¹⁶⁴ Having been exposed to this array of society at her grandfather's house, Montagu came to crave the excitement of social gatherings as a young lady and well into her adult, married life. She wrote in 1742 to Cavendish that, "I am sure your Grace thinks I am not capable of envy,

¹⁶⁰ John A. Dussinger, "Middleton, Conyers (1683–1750)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18669>, accessed 17 Oct 2016]; *A Cambridge Alumni Database*. University of Cambridge, [<http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2016.pl?sur=&suro=w&fir=&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=MDLN698C&sy=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50>, accessed 6 Mar 2017].

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Ingrid Helen Tague, "Women and ideals of femininity in England, 1660-1760," (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Brown University, 1997), 320.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

or you would not have made me liable to the sin, by saying you had so much company that I covet, and that they had your company, which most of all things I covet. ... We are quite alone here.”¹⁶⁵ Also, in 1745 Montagu described to Cavendish the pleasures of a vast and varied company:

All pages of human life are worth reading. The wise instruct, the gay divert us, the absurd cure the spleen, the imprudent shew us what to shun, the vapoured teach us that reasonable employments, and sufficient exercise, are necessary to keep the frame of mind and body in order; and, in short, it cannot be unprofitable to converse with human creatures, of whom even the imprudencies teach us experience, and whose thoughtlessness gives occasion to reflection.¹⁶⁶

Montagu enjoyed the range of personalities she could meet at social gatherings, and though she was not so polite as to describe everyone as polite company, she was polite enough herself to write of the value in meeting the less agreeable members of society.

Though Montagu’s letters left out the precise aspects of her education that came in her early years from Dr. Middleton, there is one instance where she mentioned his influences directly. In a letter to Gilbert West, Montagu wrote, “though, as Dr. Middleton was my godfather, you may suppose that I have read his Evangelist with great veneration, I cannot find much solid comfort in a doctrine without promise.”¹⁶⁷ “Reflections on the variations, or inconsistencies, which are found among the four Evangelists” was published after Dr. Middleton’s death in *Miscellaneous Works of the late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton, D.D.* (1752). Its intent was to prove the integrity of the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the certainty of the facts they propose, and thus “the truth of Christianity itself.”¹⁶⁸ Middleton also published *The History of the Life of Cicero* in 3 volumes in 1741, which his former pupil,

¹⁶⁵ Montagu, “Document 7: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, October 23, 1745,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3.*, 28-34.

¹⁶⁶ Montagu, “Document 31: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, January 31, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 136-145.

¹⁶⁷ Montagu, “Document 55: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, September 27, 1753,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3.*, 243-250.

¹⁶⁸ *Miscellaneous Works of the late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton, D.D.* (1752).

Montagu, diligently read, recommended, and discussed with Reverend Freind, Anne Donnellan, and Margaret Cavendish.¹⁶⁹

Montagu never explicitly explained her learning in letters, but she casually demonstrated through stories, metaphors, and philosophical thoughts the extent of her education. Montagu did not simply engage in studies decoratively, she sought a well-rounded and informed perspective on any given area. This is most evident in her studies of classic literature and history. In letters to Anne Donnellan and Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Portland, who were Montagu's closest friends, Montagu made recommendations for translations of Pliny, Cicero and Nepos, and not always translations to English; sometimes she recommended Italian or French texts.¹⁷⁰ She was not only knowledgeable in Roman history, and engaged with several translations and interpretations of the events, she also made informed recommendations to other female friends and continued to engage with what she called the "learned disputes" of classical history. Classical knowledge was an expected part of women's education and Montagu had two close relationships with men who were well versed on the subject of classical history: her grandfather, Dr. Middleton, and Mr. George Lyttelton. Lyttelton wrote a pamphlet on Cicero, which Montagu had recommended to Cavendish. In addition to making recommendations, Montagu engaged with the literary commentaries on Cicero, acknowledged the differences of opinion and joined in the intellectual debate. She asserted to Cavendish that, "one loves to hear what is said on both

¹⁶⁹ Montagu, "Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to W. Friend, 1741," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 214-220; Montagu, "Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 229-234; Montagu, "Document 40: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Anne Donnellan, April 20, 1741," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 152-160; Montagu, "Document 44: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 7, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 176-180.

¹⁷⁰ Montagu, "Document 40: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Anne Donnellan, April. 20 1741," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 152-160; Montagu, "Document 44: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 7, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 176-180.

sides.”¹⁷¹ In the same letter, Montagu revealed her limitations in understanding the “learned dispute,” which was her way of conveying that she would continue to follow it and would eventually come to understand it after continued engagement with the subject.

Learning was something Montagu engaged in whenever she had the time. When Montagu fell ill while visiting Cavendish, she reported to Donnellan that she “read dialogues, studied well penned narrations, read whole books of question and answer, and in short meddled with no work that was not entitled a discourse upon something or other.”¹⁷² Donnellan was also a highly intellectual woman who joined Montagu in continuous learning, via their epistolary relationship, home visits, and the Bluestocking Assemblies later in their lives. It seems that Montagu was ceaseless in her pursuit of knowledge through reading and engaging in critical thought – or so she wrote in her letters. It is quite possible that she was keeping up an appearance of always studying, but it would have been nearly impossible for her to uphold that façade when she mentions specific authors and treatises as proof.

There is not much discussion in her letters of the languages Montagu could read or converse in. Nevertheless, there were a few hints that she could read well in English, French and Italian, and that she could recognize Latin, Greek and Hebrew. In a letter to Cavendish, she wrote that she was quite taken with a book “written by an ancient gentlewoman skilled in Latin, dipt in Greek, and absorbed in Hebrew I cannot tell.”¹⁷³ This suggests that Montagu could identify Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages and quite possibly read some of them, as the book is not said to be a translation. Although Latin was not often taught to young women like Montagu, one of her acquaintances speculated that she could read and understand Latin. In 1757 she replied to a

¹⁷¹ Montagu, “Document 44: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 7, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 176-180.

¹⁷² Montagu, “Document 9: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, December 02, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 31-35.

¹⁷³ Montagu, “Document 60: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, December 08, 1743,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 280-284.

letter from a Dr. Monsey writing, “I thank you for all the wit and the wisdom, and the Latin and the Greek in your letter; for though I have no skill in these matters, it looks as if you thought I had, and the presumption does me some honour.”¹⁷⁴ Although she was flattered she insisted, “I shall not shew your letter, lest it should make people imagine I understand Latin,” and she did not want to mislead anyone about her knowledge.¹⁷⁵ Because the nature of Montagu’s relationship with Dr. Monsey is unclear, and only a handful of letters between them that have survived, it is difficult to know whether Montagu truly could not read Latin. In the same letter, Montagu also decided to associate herself with a feminine object: “I have not got my thimbles on; I think they will do me more honour in the country, for in London the ladies will not know what they are usually designed for.”¹⁷⁶ This association and claim that women in London were disassociated with domestic activities would have reminded Monsey that she was a lady and ladies usually did domestic things, such as needlework, and not masculine things, such as learning Latin.

Young women’s education was purposefully constructed to be unlike upper class young men’s education, which always included Latin and classical history, because women were not thought to be capable of learning a methodological language like Latin.¹⁷⁷ Latin was masculine because it was ordered, logical, structured, associated with authority, and considered permanent. It was also the bases for reading the works that were essential to know for the conduct of public business and government. In contrast, vernacular languages, such as Italian or French, were thought to be liable, unstable, ephemeral, and thus feminine.¹⁷⁸ For boys, Latin training began at the age of seven or eight and was to prepare them for attending university and landing a career as

¹⁷⁴ Montagu, “Document 24: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, March 08, 1757,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4, 115-121.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Cohen, “Gender and ‘method’,” 589.

¹⁷⁸ Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22.

a physician, lawyer, professor, government official or church official. For women to have the same training was seen as impractical since they would not be entering these careers.¹⁷⁹ But in reality, many young women were taught Latin, such as Elizabeth Carter, or learned it themselves, like Montagu, in order to read Classical Histories in the original. Because of these women's independent acquisition of often fragmented and piecemeal Latin, the only critical gender difference that truly existed in the education of upper class children was not access to Latin itself but access to a particular method of learning Latin.¹⁸⁰ Women's pursuit of Latin demonstrates how the seemingly concrete boundaries that separated men and women's education could be, and were in fact, both fluid and permeable.

Montagu's use of Latin was markedly different when conversing with Elizabeth Carter, a woman, than with Dr. Monsey, a man. There were a few instances where Montagu conversed with Elizabeth Carter using rough Latin translations. In 1760, she wrote to Carter in a Latin quotation from Cicero's Orations:

The tuneful Nine are not found in a library, they inhabit a temple of their own: atqui sic à summis hominibus eruditissimisque accepimus, caeterarum rerum studia, et doctrina, et praeceptis, et arte constare; poetam natura ipsa valere, et mentis viribus excitari, et quasi divino quodam spiritu inflari.¹⁸¹

Translation:

For men of the greatest eminence and learning have taught us that other branches of science require education, art, and precept; but that a poet is formed by the plastic hand of nature herself, is quickened by the native fire of genius, and animated as it were by a kind of divine enthusiasm.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Third Edition. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 143.

¹⁸⁰ Cohen, "Gender and 'method,'" 591.

¹⁸¹ Montagu, "Document 68: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, December, 1760?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 4.*, 345-353.

¹⁸² William Duncan, *Cicero's Select Orations, Translated to English with The original Latin, From the Best Editions, in the Opposite Page; and Notes Historical, Critical, and Explanatory Designed for the use of schools, as well as private gentlemen*, (New Haven: Sidney's Press, 1811).

In this letter to Carter, Montagu praised her on her wit and wisdom in English before diving into the Latin and used the quotation from Cicero to emphasize her admiration. In the same letter, Montagu also quoted from Virgil's *Aeneid* after urging Carter to publish her poetry:

The very best of your poetical productions have never been published, they may indeed have been seen by a few in manuscript, but the finest things in sheets are soon lost; foliis tantum ne carmina manda; Ne turbata volent rapidis ludibria ventis; print them and bind them fast, I beg you.

A manuscript from 1730 translated the lines from Virgil as: "Only commit not thy *prophetic* Verses to Leaves, lest they fly about in Disorder the Sport of the rapid Winds."¹⁸³ Montagu was aware that Carter had been educated in Latin as a young girl and the two often recommended Classical texts to each other in a mutual exchange of information. Montagu did not reveal which classical work the Latin she used came from; however, Carter was likely to recognize it and Montagu would have been aware of that. The ability to take quotations from popular works, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* or Cicero's *Orations*, would have been quite easy for Montagu to do without understanding the Latin itself since many published translations were available to her.

The instances where Carter used Latin for Montagu to read displayed her more advanced relationship with the language. Carter used a similar construction and vocabulary as Tacitus without quoting directly from his work:

Yet there is always reason to be apprehensive for a life like yours, when one considers how often that observation is verified in a general sense, which Tacitus makes on the favorites of a particular people -- *breves et infausti generis humani amores*: a melancholy event, but whenever it happens, ordered no doubt with a gracious intention, in a state which admits only of imperfect wisdom and virtue, and in which distinguished excellence and its necessary consequence, general esteem and affection, are such powerful temptations to the

¹⁸³ *The Works of Virgil Translated into English Prose, As near the Original as the different Idioms of the Latin and English Languages will allow. With the Latin Text and Order of Construction in the same Page; and Critical, Historical, Geographical, and Classical Notes, in English, From the best Commentators both Ancient and Modern; beside a great Number of Notes entirely new. VOL. II. The Fifth Edition.* (London: Printed by Assignment from Joseph Davidson, M.DCC.LXX).

giddy constitution of the human heart.¹⁸⁴

This short phrase translates as “short and unfortunate are the loves of the human race.” Carter manipulated the Latin to suit her intention of conveying her reaction to Montagu’s poor health. This manipulation could have been intentional, or it could have occurred because Carter was working from memory. The significance of this presentation of Tacitus from Carter to Montagu is that Carter would have been aware of Montagu’s true level of Latin capabilities. At the very least, Carter must have assumed that Montagu could recognize the passage if the author was given and enough context was provided. Carter did this again with a short quote, this time directly from Horace’s *Odes*: “Sis licet felix ubicunque mavis!”¹⁸⁵ It translates as, “May you be happy wherever you prefer (to live)!” Carter quoted this after divulging that she preferred the country rather than the city for her health. This particular poem of Horace’s was a warning to Galatea to choose where she lives carefully by using the myth of Europa as an analogy. There were two other occasions where Carter used short Latin phrases casually to convey a sense of something that was better conveyed in Latin than English. In 1759, Carter wrote “*videlicet*,” which literally meant “it is permitted to see” but conversationally implied, “it will be seen” or “only the future will tell” when the two were arguing over who will love the other the longest.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, in 1760, Carter wrote, “*terra incognita*,” when describing her exploration of Barham Downs in Deal to Montagu, which literally meant “unknown land”. These quick phrases lay seamlessly surrounded by English without

¹⁸⁴ Elizabeth Carter, “Document 4: Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, November 1, 1758,” in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu between the Years 1755 and 1800, vol.1.*, (London, England: F.C. & Rivington, 1817), 12-16, [Accessed from *British and Irish Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)].

¹⁸⁵ Carter, “Document 14: Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, October 6, 1759,” in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, vol. 1.*, 61-64; Identified as Horace’s *Odes* Book 3 Poem 27 1st line of the 4th stanza.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, “Document 10: Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, June 4, 1759,” in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, vol. 1.*, 41-45.

explanation or much in the form of context, in contrast to the longer quotations. It must be that Carter knew Montagu could recognize at least a few common Latin phrases and would understand what Carter was attempting to convey to her. When conversing woman-to-woman, it was acceptable for Montagu to demonstrate her knowledge of Latin, but when conversing with men, it was best for women to keep that skill to themselves.

Although Montagu did not appear to know Greek, Carter did, and in 1763 the pair had to pacify a librarian and assure him that Carter's knowledge of Greek was a quiet absorption and not an outward threat. Montagu and Carter had been travelling from Calais to Spa and stopped in St. Omer at a Jesuit college. They had asked for Greek manuscripts "to the great amusement of the Librarian, who imagined her to be possess'd, and would fain have exorcised her."¹⁸⁷ The women were aware that their learning was unconventional and could cause some shock to others. In a letter to Lord Bath in 1763, Montagu joked about how she did not know Greek which made her "not too wise ... but wise men and learned Women are apt to be arrogant and despise their neighbours. I don't name any names."¹⁸⁸ Montagu was content with the languages she knew and joked that learning too much and thus being too wise was not good for a person's character and sociability, male or female. Montagu was aware of her level of learning and of the perceived level of her learning. She did not want to be so learned that she became a shut-in or unable to relate to her peers or to be perceived as such.

In addition to identifying Classical languages, Montagu was also engaged in studying French and Italian and combined these language studies with her love of natural philosophy. In a letter to her sister, Montagu mentioned her intention to read a French text on natural philosophy, writing, "I assure you the Duchess and I intend to become speculative, and read the *Spectacle de*

¹⁸⁷ (Montagu) To.Mrs.Vesey Spa ye 14 of July (1763). *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 48.

¹⁸⁸ Montagu to (Lord Bath) 1763, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 63.

la Nature, with a treatise on Butterflies.”¹⁸⁹ She also expressed envy towards her sister’s Italian studies on a separate occasion because her own were suffering due to a lack of “good” Italian books, which forced her to “read rather for the language than the subject.”¹⁹⁰ This mention of Italian suggests that she read other languages for two purposes: to read the subject matter available in that language, and to learn that language – the former practice being the one she preferred to do. Montagu also commented to Donnellan on the method of educating young women in languages as children.¹⁹¹ She agreed with Donnellan that childhood was the best time to acquire a language, because children have “a memory fit to receive impressions, and a mind not capable of reasoning,” which “are the properest capabilities for acquirements of this sort.”¹⁹² She also recognized the problem with learning languages, or any challenging subject, in childhood, writing that, “when we are young we are too idle to seek advantages not offered to us.” If Montagu had the inclination to learn languages that she had in adulthood when she was a child, she believed she would have had a much easier time. Nevertheless, it does not appear that Montagu let any challenges to learning languages impede her from learning and expanding her vocabulary in French or Italian as an adult.

Throughout the process of learning languages, Montagu read everything she could about the world and the people and animals living in it. A product of this acquisition of knowledge was that Montagu developed a sense of herself as an intellectual. Montagu’s description of herself to Cavendish perfectly demonstrates her self-understanding as an intellectual and is evidence of how Montagu was conscious of her intelligence. She wrote, “I am very cautious as to my

¹⁸⁹ Montagu, “Document 13: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 50-53.

¹⁹⁰ Montagu, “Document 7: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol.2., 24-26.

¹⁹¹ Montagu, “Document 23: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 1749,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 95-99.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

conversation, for I never pretend to think or to know, or to hear, or to see. I am a sceptic, and doubt of all things; and as a mediator between my opinion and all positive affirmation make use of an – it seems to me and – a perhaps, and – it may be.”¹⁹³ This shows that Montagu saw her education as ongoing and that she consciously decided to act accordingly, not presuming to know things. This was the conventional feminine way to conduct oneself in polite company of men and women, which Montagu undoubtedly knew. As was mentioned above, displays of confidence were considered masculine and being a “cautious conversationalist” would have been seen as appropriate behaviour for an educated woman to display. What is also important about this skeptical attitude that Montagu embraced is its connection to Cicero and his theories on man’s knowledge. Montagu was familiar with Cicero and would have known his insistence that even if there were mountains of evidence or no other alternative had been presented yet, any theory was always subject to change because there was no such thing as an eternal truth.¹⁹⁴ Although Cicero obtained this academic skepticism from his teacher, Philo, and misinterpreted his predecessors, Arcesilaus and Carneades, Cicero asserted that it is more shameful to guarantee something to be true than to assert that something false is probably true.¹⁹⁵ Montagu was familiar with Cicero from her studies in Classical History, having read and discussed Middleton’s *The Life of Cicero* and Lyttelton’s “Orations on Cicero” with Cavendish and the company at Bulstrode. It appears that she decided to apply the lessons from the great Orator’s philosophies to her own education.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Montagu, “Document 47: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 13, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 194-199.

¹⁹⁴ Edward Clayton, “Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.),” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [http://www.iep.utm.edu/cicero/ accessed 6 Mar 2017].

¹⁹⁵ Harald Thorsrud, “Cicero on his Academic Predecessors: the Fallibilism of Arcesilaus and Carneades,” *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40, no.1 (January 2002), 10.

¹⁹⁶ Montagu, “Document 66: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, October 11, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 294-297;

In addition to having an opinion on how to acquire knowledge, Montagu also held ideas about the dissemination of information throughout history. In a letter to West in 1753, Montagu remarked that although knowledge accumulated over time, “till mountains, heaped on mountains, reached the skies!” she recognized that the process was not just cumulative. For Montagu, it was important to acknowledge the work that an individual had to put into learning, since “Great improvements are made by the extraordinary portion of intellectual gifts in individuals, not the inheritance and succession of ages. From Archimedes to Sir Isaac Newton, what a chasm!”¹⁹⁷ She closed with the assertion that, “The only great and perfect in art of science are the self taught” placing additional emphasis on those who put considerable effort into being knowledgeable.¹⁹⁸ The “self taught” Montagu referred to was almost certainly herself and other women who, after their short period of formal education as children, pursued knowledge on their own in young adulthood and after marriage. She could have also simply been referring to mankind in general, singling out anyone who chose a learned life after formal education. She described the work involved in learning through the use of a metaphor her husband, being the owner of several coal mines, would understand: coal mining. She wrote, “to excite a man to the pursuit of knowledge, has stew’d pleasures like flowers on the surface; delight and sure satisfaction, like the ore and gem, are buried in the mine and can thence be brought only by labour, time and strong application.”¹⁹⁹ In Montagu’s opinion, it was those individuals who worked hard in their pursuit of knowledge, like herself, and who made great achievements in the arts and sciences who were worthy of praise.

Montagu, “Document 44: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 7, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 1.*, 176-180.

¹⁹⁷ Montagu, “Document 49: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, January 6, 1753,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3.*, 209-216.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Montagu was aware that education varied for women, even women in her own socioeconomic class. With four older brothers, Montagu knew that education was different for men than for women. In a letter to the duchess Cavendish, Montagu mentioned her brothers who were away at school and how proud of them she was.²⁰⁰ There was no hint of jealousy or longing when writing of them and their time at school. Instead, she praised both their characters and their advances in learning. This suggests that Montagu viewed education in two distinct gendered realms. Men attended school outside of the home where they learned certain subjects and behaviours that were applicable to their futures. Women by contrast stayed at home to be educated in different subjects and behaviours that would help them become proper wives and mothers. Although Montagu did not attend a school and was not educated formally past the age of thirteen by grandfather, she pursued learning in her late teens and twenties with her female companions: her sister Sarah Robinson, the Duchess of Portland Margaret Cavendish, Anne Donnellan, and Frances Boscawen. After the death of her infant son John in 1744, she had no more children. She instead focused her energy and time in her twenties and thirties on learning. She did this throughout the rest of her adult life by maintaining and expanding her network of learned men and women who encouraged her and engaged in the mutual exchange of knowledge. Through this carefully constructed community of learning, Montagu undertook intellectual pursuits to keep her occupied. She does not appear to have coveted the education her brothers were given at public school or University. Neither did she express any feelings that her education was inferior to her brothers, it was simply different.

Montagu's correspondence with Margaret Cavendish, Anne Donnellan, Gilbert West, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Vesey, and Sarah Scott reveals that the education of young women

²⁰⁰ Montagu, "Document 39: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, August 21, 1742," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 178-181; Montagu, "Document 40: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, August 24, 1742," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 182-185.

was not necessarily contained within the stage of childhood. Although efforts to educate and prepare her for marriage were undoubtedly the main focus of her parents and her tutor, their encouragement grounded her desire to make learning a lifelong pursuit. Her husband facilitated this ambition. The opportunity for a lifelong pursuit of knowledge was partially made possible by Montagu's childlessness. Vickery argues that when women split the duties of raising and caring for children, women with young children had little time for "the pleasures and activities of spinsterhood or the honeymoon years."²⁰¹ It was also through this divergence from the common path married women took through life that Montagu was freed from the primary intention of women's education: to educate her children.

This combination of new opportunities in education, encouragement from others to learn, and an abundance of leisure time had a significant impact on Montagu. However, although she was not free from the obstacle of lingering ideologies about women that restrained her learning, she took full advantage of her circumstances. Montagu upheld her womanly and wifely duties set within changing philosophies and attitudes regarding women's education and their ability to reason. The most important aspect of her education, besides the idea that learning was a life-long endeavor, was the importance of socializing and creating a network of knowledgeable friends and acquaintances who would assist her pursuits and whom in turn she could assist. With no formal outlet, such as the Royal Society, to fulfill her desire for passionate intellectual discussions, Montagu, with support and engagement from her network, constructed her own place to do so, the Bluestocking Society.

²⁰¹ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 110.

Chapter Three: A Female Philosopher

All the powder is combed out of my hair, all the vanities are vanished out of my head. I am meek in my Manners and humble in my apparel but rather more clean than is usual for a female Philosopher.²⁰²

Writing to her husband in 1764, Elizabeth Montagu referred to herself as a philosopher, accepting that her life was an intellectual one that revolved around accumulating and disseminating knowledge. Her identity as an intellectual and a philosopher developed during Montagu's middling years, as she spent her time accumulating knowledge from acquaintances, discussing her theories with friends in letters and in person, engaging in scientific activities, and travelling outside of Britain to experience other countries' systems of knowledge. Unlike the average affluent woman Montagu dedicated significant time and effort to intellectual pursuits. By holding "the eel of science" by the tail, she had a taste of the excitement that in-depth learning could bring her and she made a conscious effort not to let the eel slip through her fingers.

Usually, after a young woman of Montagu's time married, she usually quickly transitioned into motherhood. In the eighteenth century women were expected to fill their time caring for all the members of their household while maintaining social relationships with her husband's friends. Motherhood required almost all a woman's emotional and physical energies and was widely known to cause a decline in sociability, even when nannies and nursemaids were employed. Mothers were less mobile and had less time to write letters and receive guests.²⁰³ For Montagu, the usual path of a married woman into long-term motherhood was cut unexpectedly short with the death of her son at only a year old. This reality gave her the time to pursue her education further and to continue to build on her already substantial social network. Montagu had

²⁰² (Montagu) to her Husband London, May the 10th 1764, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 1*, 100.

²⁰³ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's lives in Georgian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 114-5.

adored her son while she had him, writing to her sister that “it is a great pleasure to me to see him gathering strength every day, and I hope making a provision of health for years to come.”²⁰⁴ Although she had been a doting and enthusiastic mother, she embraced the life of a childless intellectual, letting her curiosity fill the void of motherhood. After her son’s death Montagu became a published author, made and received house calls to well-known intellectuals in Britain, toured Paris and its l’Académie des Sciences, and visited several curiosity cabinets, gardens, and menageries.

This chapter examines two areas of Montagu’s domestic scientific practices. Firstly, her pursuit of scientific studies, including an examination of her group studies of philosophy and natural history, such as microscopy, collecting, and visiting philosophers both in Britain and in France. Secondly, her thoughts on science and God, science and politics, and science and literature are explored, alongside her developing sense of self as a philosopher and her place in the intellectual world. I also use this chapter to analyze the gendered construction of socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in regards to public intellectual activities and how it related to the attitudes and behaviours Montagu expressed in her letters. Although her actions only reveal her informal participation in scientific activities, by facilitating a dissemination of scientific knowledge through her social networks and encouraging critical thought in discussions, I argue that she was actively involved in exploratory scientific activity and the promotion of scientific studies.

In eighteenth-century Britain, scientific practices were mostly contained within institutions that formally excluded women; the Royal Society for example. However, women had

²⁰⁴ Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, “Document 59: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1743,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, with some of the Letters of Her Correspondence, vol. 2.*, (London, England: T.Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 276-280. [accessed from *British and Irish Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)].

been participating in scientific activities on the periphery of formal science since the sixteenth century. Women's activities may be characterized as an informal presence in the practice and dissemination of scientific research.²⁰⁵ According to the Royal Society of London's charter, the society was supposed to be open to people regardless of their region, nation, or profession and was to be for "Minds of all sizes."²⁰⁶ In general, women were allowed to participate in intellectual discussions, attend lectures and demonstrations, and even work for the Society as illustrators of botanicals or building wax models; however, they were not granted formal memberships.²⁰⁷

Studying science was an acceptable practice to fill affluent women's leisure time. Since women were believed to be more curious than men which suited them to philosophy and, in particular, natural philosophy.²⁰⁸ This curiosity was also seen as acceptable because these women's access to scientific knowledge was through educated gentlemen who were trusted "truth-tellers" according to the genteel honour code.²⁰⁹ According to Aristotelian anthropology, women were thought to have stronger imaginations and weaker reasoning, which affected their judgement.²¹⁰ Affluent women like Montagu and many of her female friends, were not bestowed with the same social credibility as their male counterparts and thus had to participate on the periphery of scientific culture.

Montagu participated in gatherings where participants read and discussed authors well known for their works on philosophy, natural science, and experimental science. She first

²⁰⁵ Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 20.

²⁰⁶ Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society of London*, (London, 1667), 62-3; quoted in Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 24.

²⁰⁷ Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?* 26-7.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 53; 65; Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 66-68.

²¹⁰ Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 88-9.

encountered these gatherings before she was married, when she spent time at the Duchess of Portland's manor at Bulstrode. In 1741, she reported to her sister Sarah Robinson that Francis Bacon "has lately been amongst our studies."²¹¹ Francis Bacon's body of work included classical topics, legal commentaries, and natural history with the climax of his philosophical works the *Novum Organum* (c. 1620). Bacon characterized the work as "a new logic, teaching to invent and judge by induction, (as finding syllogism incompetent for sciences of nature), and thereby to make philosophy and sciences both more true and more active."²¹² Baconianism was the philosophy of usefulness in knowledge that the Royal Society adopted, which was later linked to the importance of experimentation to create scientific facts.²¹³ Montagu did not mention which of Bacon's works the party studied on that particular occasion, but it is clear that visits to Cavendish were highly educational occasions for Montagu.

Cavendish, as a duchess, held a higher social status than Montagu and as a result Cavendish connected Montagu to a wider intellectual network. Cavendish's husband was a Fellow of the Royal Society (1739) and enjoyed social gatherings as much as his wife.²¹⁴ The Cavendishes' always tried to have interesting company, especially when they had guests like Montagu staying with them. At the time of her 1741 visit, when they discussed Bacon's works, the circle of guests included: Dr. Edward Young, Dr. Alured Clarke, Dr. Thomas Shaw, Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert West, Mrs. Mary Pendarves, and Mrs. Dewes.²¹⁵ Dr. Young, was a satirical poet whom Montagu was quite taken with, Dr. Clarke was the Dean of Exeter Cathedral, Dr. Shaw

²¹¹ Montagu, "Document 7: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 24-26.

²¹² Markku Peltonen, "Bacon, Francis, Viscount St Alban (1561-1626)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/990, accessed 12 Nov 2016].

²¹³ Larry Stewart, *The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660-1750*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12-13.

²¹⁴ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 25.

²¹⁵ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 40.

was the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford as well as a known traveller, botanist and conchologist, and Gilbert West was a poet and classical translator.²¹⁶ As for the women, Mrs. Pendarves (née Granville, later Delany) was skilled in drawing, fascinated by botany, and drew beautiful botanical specimens. Montagu wrote to her in 1743 praising her for having “a mind that comprehends and a hand that records and represents its beauties” as well as “a philosopher’s and an artist’s part in the natural world.”²¹⁷ Little is known about both Mrs. Dewes and Mrs. West.²¹⁸ This mix of genders, backgrounds, and personalities gave the group a rich diversity that Montagu enjoyed to such an extent that in 1742 she exclaimed to Anne Donnellan with melancholy that “Our happy society is just breaking up, but I will think of it with gratitude, and not with regret, and thank fate for the joyful hours she lent me, without blaming her for putting a stop to them.”²¹⁹

Although it is not known whether the group studied Bacon’s *Novum Organum* or studied the scientific method he proposed in that work, she did write about a system of natural philosophy that was similar to Bacon’s in a letter to Gilbert West over ten years later in 1753. Montagu wrote of “Naturalists” and their work “to class the different kinds of plants and animals” which was rampantly occurring at this time.²²⁰ She stated how she would like to see the scientific method applied to plants also applied to mankind and the differences of character that existed. This demonstrates that Montagu engaged with the ideas she read in philosophical books and did not simply memorize and regurgitate without adding something to the discussion. She

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Montagu, “Document 121: Letter from Elizabeth Montagu to Mary Granville Pendarves Delany, December 1, 1743?,” in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs. Delany, vol. 1.*, Sarah Chauncey Woolsey (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1879), 257-259. [accessed from *British and Irish Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)].

²¹⁸ Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, “Delany, Mary (1700–1788),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7442, accessed 2 April 2017]; Elizabeth Eger, “Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects: Bluestocking friendship and material culture,” *Parergon* 26, no. 2 (2009), 118.

²¹⁹ Montagu, “Document 23: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu January 01, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 89-94.

²²⁰ Montagu, “Document 51: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, January 21, 1753,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3.*, 224-230.

thought she could apply the scientific method of classifying plants to a different area, one she was more interested in: the behaviours, values, and morals of human beings. Montagu valued the transmission of knowledge through written works and argued that, “When we consider what discoveries in philosophy have been made, how many arts have been improved, how easily by printing each improvement in science is communicated to all nations, and how safely conveyed through ages.” For her, the idea that “Newton’s light, and Bacon’s sense” could enter “the mind of every attentive reader” was the way in which science would advance throughout time.²²¹ Therefore, she believed her contribution to the advancement of knowledge was her dissemination of knowledge, including her own analysis, to her network.

One of Montagu’s strongest recommendations to other women was that they pursue studies in natural philosophy. As one of the newest subjects to be considered acceptable to include in women’s education at the time, Montagu was eager to explore the subject herself, and told her sister to engage in it also. She wrote,

I would advise you to begin a course of natural philosophy, and get acquainted with your fellow citizens, the grasshoppers. I assure you the Duchess and I intend to become speculative, and read the *Spectacle de la Nature*, with a treatise on Butterflies. As for tawdry human Butterflies, they are not worth studying; for no microscope has yet been invented to discover their brains; and the object is too minute, I fear, to be rendered visible.²²²

Montagu’s interest in human behaviour is used here to make fun of elite people in society whose only cares are their looks and not their intellect. Montagu displayed her awareness and use of microscopes and their application in natural philosophy. She also engaged in the use of microscopes with Cavendish. She wrote to her sister in 1741 that, “The sun will not shine on our microscope, which is a great vexation to the curious. Last night by the candle, I saw a fringe upon

²²¹ Montagu, “Document 49: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, January 6, 1753.” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 209-216.

²²² Montagu, “Document 13: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 50-53.

a leaf that would have done excellently well for your apron.”²²³ Although they had to improvise by using candle light to see the delicate details of a leaf, Montagu was able to see the microscopic image of the leaf clearly enough to compare it to her sister’s domestic apron, framing their scientific study of natural objects within her domestic frame of reference.

Writing to Cavendish a few years later, Montagu was using a microscope again with a different group. Using Mr. Baker’s microscope she saw a “restlessly industrious wheel animal” whose behaviour captivated her.²²⁴ Henry Baker was a Fellow of the Royal Society since 1741 and was known for his microscopy throughout Britain.²²⁵ It is unknown how Montagu came to be looking through a microscope either designed by or given to her by Baker, or even if Baker was in her company at the time. Baker’s microscope design was revised and submitted to the Royal Society in only 1740, but it sold for some years afterwards because of its three advantages: the object could be close to the lens, it did not have to be transparent, and it could magnify the small details of whole creatures and the motion of a small animal.²²⁶ Baker was also known for creatively combining poetic verse with his scientific studies a talent that likely attracted Montagu to his work.²²⁷ Her participation in this popular scientific activity with an instrument connected to the man who is credited as the one who popularized microscopy in Britain demonstrates once again that Montagu was well informed of the latest trends in scientific activity.

²²³ Montagu, “Document 19: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 67-70.

²²⁴ Montagu, “Document 7: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, October 23, 1745,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 28-34.

²²⁵ “Fellow details: Baker; Henry (1698-1744),” *The Royal Society Collections*, [https://collections.royalsociety.org accessed May 10, 2016].

²²⁶ Marc J. Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible: Microscopy in the Enlightenment*, (Surry: Ashgate, 2009), 30.

²²⁷ G. L'E. Turner, “Baker, Henry (1698–1774),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1120, accessed 10 May 2016].

Social connections were also required for another aspect of natural philosophy: collecting. Natural objects were collected for curiosity cabinets, menageries, and Universities, which usually combined personal collecting with public display. The Royal Society promoted the practice of curiosity and maintained its own collection of curiosities and specimens referred to as the Repository.²²⁸ The Repository was also designed to house observations and experiments as well as objects to provide a foundation on which to build knowledge about the objects.²²⁹ In the early years of the Repository, the Society employed a collector to procure objects and a botanicals collector in order to seek out specimens and objects of interest, in addition to the ones donated by correspondents, members, or in response to requests in the *Philosophical Transactions*.²³⁰ Both natural and artificial curiosities from the Repository were exhibited at the weekly meetings of the Society for the consideration of the members. An object's curiosity was based sometimes on its rarity and other times on its history or the story behind its acquisition.²³¹ The connection of text and object was considered crucial to the Repository's purpose and objects without text to identify and validate it or text without objects were considered fragmented and problematic.²³² Because the curiosities were on display and presented in meetings, they contained an element of spectacle. The exhibitions were also sites of sociability as well as education, since collaboration and discussions of the curiosities occurred at public meetings and were published in the *Philosophical Transactions*. Importantly, it was not only the professionals at the Royal Society who collected and displayed curiosities, it was also a common practice of wealthy individuals who wanted to engage in natural philosophy and display their erudition.

²²⁸ P. Fontes da Costa, "The Culture of Curiosity at The Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 56, no. 2 (May, 2002), 149.

²²⁹ Jennifer Thomas, "Compiling 'God's great book [of] universal nature': The Royal Society's collecting strategies," *Journal of the History of Collections* 23, no. 1 (2011), 2-3.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²³¹ Fontes da Costa, "The Culture of Curiosity," 151.

²³² Thomas, "Compiling 'God's book [of] universal nature,'" 6.

Montagu did not have access to the meetings of the Royal Society or the Repository, but she did tour famed collections with groups of friends in much the same fashion as young men did on their Grand Tour. Her first visit was to the collections at Oxford University with her husband and some friends in 1744. She wrote to Cavendish that on “the thirty-first of July we spent an agreeable day seeing new objects and old friends.”²³³ In the letter she indicated that she had also toured the University of Cambridge.²³⁴ By visiting the collections at Oxford and conversing with scholars at both Oxford and Cambridge, Montagu expanded her knowledge of natural objects as well as her own social network of intellectual people. Montagu continued to make visits to intellectuals with collections throughout her life. In 1762 she wrote to Carter that she “went to see the marbles which my friend Lady Pomfret gave to the University” with her husband, Dr. Monsey, and other men and women to make up a small group.²³⁵ Lady Pomfret gave the marbles to the Bodleian Museum in 1755 and it was Montagu’s connection to her that brought the group to the museum. When she was visiting Paris in 1776, Montagu visited collections. In a letter to Vesey, she described that, “After having wonder’d at the greatness, admired the Magnificence, and approved the elegance of the Apartments of State, I was carried into the Cabinet of natural curiosities.”²³⁶ The philosopher who looked after the collections happened to be a man Montagu had been acquainted with in London, a “Mr. de Bomar,” who enthusiastically showed her the collection and the English-style garden. The philosopher was Jacques Christophe Valmont de Bormare (1731-1807), a distinguished naturalist and author of *Mineralogie* and the *Dictionary of*

²³³ Montagu, “Document 65: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, August 09, 1744,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 301-304.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Mrs. Carter from Hagley, 1762. *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues” Her Letters and Friendship from 1762 to 1800 Volume 1 1762-1776*, ed. Reginald Blunt (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1923), 24.

²³⁶ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Paris, July 2d. 1776, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 317.

Natural History.²³⁷ With each visit to a new collection Montagu compared it to the others, becoming connoisseur of collections.

Collecting in the eighteenth century was extensive and practiced by such a variety of people that it took on various forms and functions. The underlying principles that connected collectors was a “dedication to observing, cultivating, chasing, collecting, experimenting, dissecting, preserving, drawing, and describing” plants, animals, fossils and rocks.²³⁸ Complex networks of exchange, collaboration and debate formed around collecting and produced an overwhelming amount of natural history knowledge.²³⁹ According to the philosophy of Johann Gustav Droysen, collecting provided a description of natural objects but not an understanding of them. Collectors described natural objects but did not produce an understanding of their objects because understanding required interpretation based on context. The objects were removed from their natural context and examined for characteristics to describe them, which increased knowledge, but not understanding.²⁴⁰ Collecting was also fuelled by fascination and a desire to increase knowledge of the world. Indeed, collectors often expressed a desire to obtain total knowledge and a complete record of the world.²⁴¹ Cabinets of curiosities contained tangible evidence of the collector’s skills and efforts as naturalists and observers of the natural world. The size of the collection was indicative of the number of individuals who were involved in procuring the objects; large collections required an extensive network.²⁴² It appears that Montagu and Cavendish collected through their networks because they wanted to participate in the culture of analyzing natural objects and display them in their homes for social prestige. Cavendish, with her

²³⁷ Reginald Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 318.

²³⁸ Mary Terrall, *Catching Nature in the Act: Reaumur and the Practice of Natural History in the Eighteenth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Harry Ritter, *Dictionary of Concepts in History*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 246.

²⁴¹ Terrall, *Catching Nature in the Act*, 11; Patrick Mauries, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 2002), 7.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 132.

further reaching social connections, was able to collect and display on a much larger scale than Montagu could ever achieve. Despite this, both their intentions, and the meanings they placed on objects and collecting, were of a similar vein.

Cabinets attempted to have interesting and rare items that would impress their visitors. Montagu joked in a letter to West that “the wisdom of a statesman” was so rare that if found it would surely be kept “as the virtuosi do the natural ore, in a cabinet.”²⁴³ Typically, collecting was divided into three categories: animal, vegetable, and mineral. These principle aspects often governed the organization of cabinets of curiosities.²⁴⁴ The objects needed to be arranged and described in order to produce knowledge and be valuable to society. In the letter to Cavendish in 1742, Montagu described the aspects of the duchess’ closet that particularly captured her attention and offered a detailed description of the attributes many curiosity cabinets held.

Montagu’s collecting was on a much smaller scale than any of the collections she visited; but undertaken according to accepted practices and for similar reasons. In particular, natural objects fascinated Montagu. She admired the shells of all sizes and the variety of feathers, which she and the duchess often spent hours sorting and arranging for amusement.²⁴⁵ In addition to exploring the objects in the duchess’ cabinet, Montagu collected feathers for her own amusement. In 1749 she requested that Donnellan procure her half an ounce of French partridge feathers from an acquaintance of hers and half an ounce of dyed yellow feathers from Donnellan herself.²⁴⁶ She also asked, “Pray has not the macaw dropt some small blue or yellow feathers?”²⁴⁷ She collected feathers attentively with careful consideration from correspondents in Britain and abroad, noting

²⁴³ Montagu, “Document 74: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, September 28, 1755,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3, 333-335.

²⁴⁴ Terrall, *Catching Nature in the Act*, 2.

²⁴⁵ Eger, “Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects,” 117.

²⁴⁶ Montagu, “Document 24: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 1749,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3, 99-102.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

their size and colour and the birds from which they came. Montagu artfully sorted, trimmed, and sewed her feather collection together to cover both a screen and the walls of what became known as her “feather room”²⁴⁸ This combined her interests in being a person of public interest, the aesthetic appeal of the feathers, as well as her interests in classification.

Montagu also travelled outside the country later in her life in order to extend her social network and to meet the men whose philosophical works she had read. While in France, she discovered that, just as in England, literature and science intertwined. She departed in 1776, a year after the death of Mr. Montagu, and met with several members of the l’Académie des Sciences. The purpose of her trip was to meet intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, and authors in France. This type of trip was often a way for any woman pursuing ‘a path to enlightenment’ or a ‘life of the mind’ to enjoy social independence and acquire refined judgment.²⁴⁹ Since women were still primarily expected to remain at home at the time when Montagu travelled, a woman travelling alone for the purpose of obtaining knowledge was a recent development. Montagu’s widowhood may have given her some freedom from social custom, thus making her trip an acceptable way for her to demonstrate her new status as an independent widow.²⁵⁰

Montagu wrote to both her sister and to Elizabeth Vesey about the copious number of distinguished individuals she met during her tour. The letters are a laundry list of phonetically spelled names and positive descriptions. She met several members of l’Académie des Sciences and likened the members to those of the Royal Society in London, describing them as “delightful” and “very agreeable.”²⁵¹ Montagu met with a variety of people including naturalists,

²⁴⁸ Ruth Scobie, “‘To dress a room for Montagu’: Pacific Cosmopolitanism and Elizabeth Montagu’s Feather Hangings,” *Lumen* 33, (2014), 123.

²⁴⁹ Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour: British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 5-6.

²⁵⁰ Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 137-140.

²⁵¹ Montagu to her Sister Chaillot Aug. ye 11th 1776, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 322.

such as Comte de Buffon, who published monumental volumes on birds and minerals and was head of the Jardin du Roi, and mathematicians, such as Jean le Rond d'Alembert, who was in the process of writing *Opuscules Mathematiques* and *Eloge* at the time of meeting Montagu.²⁵² She also engaged in a lively event at the Academy that combined poets with the scientists, philosophers, and mathematicians where "Descourses are read by the Academicians relative to the subject on which the Poets are to deliver their verses to be judged by the Academy, who bestows the prize on him whose work is most approved."²⁵³ The event was open to the public and combined literary creativity with scientific enquiries. This combination of literature and science in the Academy extended to some of its members as well, who did not see barriers between the two subjects. Montagu dined with Denis Diderot, who was a celebrated novelist, essayist on the mathematics of acoustics, and editor of and contributor to the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire universel des arts & sciences* that attempted to capture the entire knowledge of the Enlightenment.²⁵⁴ Montagu's reputation as a learned woman with interests in scientific activities and authorship along with her social connections are what enabled her to attend the l'Académie's meeting and to dine with several profound members. Her tour of France expanded her circle of intellectual acquaintances internationally and opened her up to more scientific knowledge and practices, which she passed on to her own network.

Like most of the scientific and philosophic writers and intellectuals Montagu read and conversed with, she also believed that her relationship with God facilitated her relationship to the natural world. It was commonly believed that God bestowed humans with curiosity and that he

²⁵² Sandra Knapp, "Comte de Buffon: A Grand Theorist (1707-1788)," in *The Great Naturalists* ed. Robery Huxley (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 142-143; *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 1*, 323.

²⁵³ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Sepr. 7th. 1776, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 1*, 329-30.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 332; Philipp Blom, *Encyclopedie: The Triumph of Reason in an Unreasonable Age*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2004), 37, 42.

wanted them to enjoy it.²⁵⁵ The notoriously skeptical Scottish philosopher David Hume in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1738) insisted that all knowledge arose from the curiosity of individuals.²⁵⁶ In a letter to Donnellan, Montagu described God as “the parent of age, the nurse of worlds, the teacher of all science ... that which lent leisure to the creation of light, and the reforming of chaos.”²⁵⁷ Many believed the connection between God and science was unbreakable.

The common view of the connection between God and the world was based on assigning ‘causes’; God was the ‘first cause,’ the natural laws inherent in matter and material systems such as Newton’s laws of motion and gravitation and Kepler’s laws of celestial mechanics were the ‘second causes,’ and the ‘final cause’ was the universe’s purpose.²⁵⁸ The ‘second causes’ shape the Earth and its cycles and were thought to be set in place by God to run like a giant clock: orderly and predictable, occasionally random, but governed by rules. The ‘final cause’ was understood as God’s purpose for each person and the whole of what he created; most people believed he was still guiding the universe despite the uninterrupted operations of his natural laws.²⁵⁹

The pursuit of natural philosophy to uncover the “secrets of nature” stemmed from at least the sixteenth century and informed the conception of science upon which the Royal Society was founded.²⁶⁰ Science was the exploration of unknowns whose “secrets” would be revealed once

²⁵⁵ Peter Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England,” *Isis* 92, no. 2 (June, 2001), 287.

²⁵⁶ David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, 2.3.10, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1911), Vol.1, 448 summarized in Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy,” 287.

²⁵⁷ Montagu, “Document 32: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, March 03, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 145-149.

²⁵⁸ Keith Thompson, *Before Darwin: Reconciling God and Nature*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 40-42.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²⁶⁰ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11.

examined or after experimentation. Revealing the “secrets of nature” was a methodology of discovery that, coupled with the prevailing curiosity and wonder about the natural world, included questioning God.²⁶¹ The work of naturalists and natural historians seemed to prove the existence of God, or at least confirm its plausibility, because of the elegance of design that was evident in natural forms and functions.²⁶² Such as the elephant’s trunk and its dexterity, the fittingness of the barn owl’s eyes to detect prey, and the pattern on orchids to attract a wasp to pollinate.²⁶³ Everything appeared to fit like puzzle pieces to a master plan.

Montagu stressed a connection between God and science or God and the natural world in a letter to West.²⁶⁴ She wrote, the “great Author with the highest reverence and gratitude” is seen in “even a slight observation of his lowest works” when “in each grove and meadow, find enough to admire and delight in without the help of science to investigate the great laws of the universe.”²⁶⁵ She acknowledged God’s hand in creating nature, but thought God could be admired in natural things without knowing the secondary causes. This thinking persisted throughout her life. In a letter to Lyttelton in 1760, Montagu described how she contemplated the universe and its creator with a combination of scientific knowledge and faith. She wrote of staring at the stars and contemplating “the stupendous laws by which all these vast bodies move, but with the same precision has appointed the modes and term of existence of the smallest animal that inhabits them; and to the least atom that composes these worlds has given its invariable properties.”²⁶⁶ Montagu wrote with wonder and admiration that she could experience in part the

²⁶¹ Ibid., 278.

²⁶² Thompson, *Before Darwin*, 63.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Montagu, “Document 42: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, May 26, 1752,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 180-186.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Montagu, “Document 55: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lord George Lyttelton, July 14, 1760,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 263-268.

processes that God created that make up the universe, from the stars and planets to mites and atoms.²⁶⁷

In the eighteenth century, collecting the natural world to produce knowledge was still fuelled by wonder; however, in a philosophic or scientific sense, “informed” wonder was beginning to be thought separate from the vulgar superstitions.²⁶⁸ Montagu noted this trend in society to move away from the admiration of wonders in a letter to West in 1753:

Arguments of equal credibility are not always equally believed. The regular process observed by nature in her ordinary productions, and the causes of many extraordinary appearances being now discovered, the philosophers are averse to a belief of miracles. An experience that many things formerly considered as such, were but in the ordinary course, and regular effect of certain powers and qualities, and frequent detection of imposture and fraud in those who pretended to miraculous powers, have together rendered men's minds more averse to that subject, and less open to the conviction of such proofs, so that they raise up both physical and moral objections to such arguments.²⁶⁹

Montagu adamantly wrote about herself in opposition to the ignorant, but she did get excited about the contemplation and admiration of God’s works. Imagination was thought to be the breeding ground for vulgar enthusiasm and superstition, including belief in all the phenomena that eluded medical and natural philosophical explanation. The denigration of the imagination was thus the key factor in keeping women from science, since they were thought to have stronger powers of imagination than men.²⁷⁰ Montagu combated this prejudice about women as she began her life as an intellectual. For example, in a letter to Anne Donnellan in 1742 she explained that she understood the differences between a learned mind and a vulgar one by imagining a scenario where both were watching a comet streak across the sky. The learned person, such as herself, would understand its “unconfined and unaccountable motion, through the vast universe” while

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 331.

²⁶⁹ Montagu, “Document 50: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, January 13, 1753,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 3.*, 217-224.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 339; Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 88.

the vulgar “raise superstition, error and mistake” and “pay greater worship to the wandering meteor, than to the right regulated planet.”²⁷¹ Montagu did not understand herself to be vulgar or a woman with a pathological imagination that would keep her from becoming a credible intellectual.

Montagu also had an opinion on the interactions between the state and science based on her observances of practices in England and Sweden. In a letter to friend and botanist Benjamin Stillingfleet (1702-1771), Montagu stated that she thought the state should establish good academies to create the proper climate for intellectuals, like they had done in England, where “the rays of favour should shine on them if they inhabited the farthest degree of the poles.”²⁷² Although Montagu wanted state establishment of scientific institutions, she adamantly wanted politics kept away from studies of science that occurred in these institutions and explained to Stillingfleet that,

I have too much respect for science to expose it to the seductions of a court. When the chemist leaves his laboratory, and instead of enquiring into the secrets of nature is prying into those of the cabinet council, and the mathematician studies the law of nations instead of the laws of motion, they are ill employed, and business is ill performed.²⁷³

She did not mention specifically that she thought England had the best system, only that state-sponsored academies were the ideal institutions to encourage scientific activities.

Montagu was outspoken about how and where she thought science should be done; she believed that public dissemination of knowledge led to advancements in science and thus was not shy about asking acquaintances to share their knowledge with her and with others. In a letter to Dr. Messenger Monsey (bap. 1694, d. 1788), Montagu mentioned, “I should be very glad to have

²⁷¹ Montagu, “Document 52: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, December 05, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 241-245.

²⁷² Montagu, “Document 14: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Benjamin Stillingfleet, September 15, 1757,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 57-62.

²⁷³ Ibid.

your speculations upon all subjects, and, that you may go through the sciences” and also that, “I should be glad if you would make a visit to a lord chancellor or a chief justice, that I might have from you some theological discourses.”²⁷⁴ Dr. Monsey was the physician to Lord Godolphin and later appointed physician to Chelsea Hospital, a title he held until his death.²⁷⁵ Despite this transition into polite society, Monsey was known to be a religious freethinker and eccentric and “maintained his original plainness of manners, and with an unreserved sincerity sometimes spoke truth in a manner that gave offence.”²⁷⁶ Montagu overlooked Dr. Monsey’s poor manners because he had knowledge she wished to obtain. She may have looked upon his poor manners in the context of Rousseau, in that Monsey might not yet have learned the artifice of polite society yet. Besides requesting Dr. Monsey’s thoughts on every scientific subject and theological questions for herself, she also asked him to “edify the world with a treatise on the military arts, and in less than a week’s residence with Mr. Bradley in the observatory at Greenwich, you would give us such botanic essays as would delight and inform even our friend Stillingfleet.”²⁷⁷ Both Stillingfleet and Richard Bradley (1688? -1732) were avid botanists. The Royal Observatory, founded in 1675 at Greenwich, was the first state-funded scientific institution with the intention of advancing knowledge of navigation, time keeping, and star positions.

Later in her life, Montagu desired to engage in studies of languages and topics far beyond Britain and the continent. In 1768, she wrote to Lyttelton,

²⁷⁴ Montagu, “Document 26: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, July 05, 1757,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 128-132.

²⁷⁵ J. F. Payne, “Monsey, Messenger (*bap.* 1694, *d.* 1788),” rev. Michael Bevan, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18984>, accessed 2 April 2017].

²⁷⁶ William Munk, “Messenger Monsey,” *Lives of the Fellows Volume II*, (London: Royal College of Physicians of London, 2009), 84. [<http://munksroll.rcplondon.ac.uk/Biography/Details/3161>, accessed 2 April 2017].

²⁷⁷ Montagu, “Document 26: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, July 05, 1757,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 128-132.

I wish our Sovereign would encourage the study of all the Oriental languages ... All countries have in some ages perhaps produced wisdom, but I should be most desirous to recover the Philosophy and Laws of the East, from whence the Grecian Sages borrow'd their Legislation, morals, natural philosophy, etc. I wd give all my French and Italian for the Shanscritta Language.²⁷⁸

Wherever wisdom existed, Montagu wanted to know it; she desired to go back as far in history as was necessary in order to understand how humanity had evolved politically, morally, and scientifically. Montagu was quite taken with what she knew as “the Orient” in many ways, as were many Britons at the time; she coveted their designs to such an extent that the walls of her living room and her dressing room at Hillstreet were plastered with Oriental wallpaper that peeked out between Oriental paintings, her floors were blanketed by Oriental rugs held down with Oriental furniture which was topped with Oriental trinkets and figurines.²⁷⁹ With Britain’s international trade expanding, Asian goods were available to even modest consumers and the Chinoiserie style reached its apex in the eighteenth century.²⁸⁰ By extending her curiosity about the Orient beyond fashion to politics and wisdom, Montagu demonstrated her deep-rooted fascination with acquiring as much of the knowledge of the world regardless of the culture that created it.

In May of 1760, Montagu became a published author with her anonymous contribution of three excerpts in Lord Lyttelton’s *Dialogues of the Dead*. She had been encouraged to do so by Lyttelton and her friend Elizabeth Carter. She wrote to Carter later that year eager to know the reception of her works by the Academy of Sciences at Deal. Although there is no record of a formal academy in Deal, many small academies existed in Britain throughout the seventeenth and

²⁷⁸ Montagu to Lord Lyttelton June the 2d, 1768, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 173-4.

²⁷⁹ Rosemary Baird, “The Queen of the Bluestockings’: Mrs Montagu’s house at 23 Hill Street rediscovered,” *Apollo*. 158.498 (Aug. 2003), 43.

²⁸⁰ Robert A. Leath, “After the Chinese Taste”: Chinese export Porcelain and Chinoiserie Design in Eighteenth Century Charleston,” *Historical Archeology*, (1999), 48.

eighteenth centuries.²⁸¹ The success of the Royal Society stunted the growth of any other chartered societies or academies in England; however, informal gentleman's societies existed, such as those in Spalding or Peterborough, which operated as extensions of the Royal Society.²⁸² The society at Deal was likely an informal group that Carter had connections to since she lived in the area. The *Dialogues* were a satirical look at the morals of mankind, defending wit and learning and the status of women.²⁸³ The work was extremely popular and was one of the great literary successes of that year, possibly due to the public's curiosity regarding anonymous authors.²⁸⁴ Montagu valued Carter's opinion, since Carter was a published author, but she was also concerned with how the public viewed her work. Because her *Dialogues* targeted fashionable female society, commercial authors, and the market driven world, her essays opened her up to criticism for her hypocrisy in attacking her own social group.²⁸⁵

As a published author, Montagu stepped into a new social role, one that was public. She did not remain anonymous for long. Montagu wrote to Carter that being an "author in form ... enlarges the sphere of action, and lengthens the short period of human life."²⁸⁶ She knew publishing would bring her some attention and hoped, like many authors, that her work would still be read and influential after her death. She humbly added, "to become universal and lasting is an ambition which no one but great genius's should indulge; but to be read by a few, and for a few years, may be aspired to."²⁸⁷ She also compared authorship to writing natural philosophy,

²⁸¹ Denise Phillips, "Academies and Societies," in *A Companion to the History of Science* ed. Bernard Lightman (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 227.

²⁸² James E. McClellan III, *Science Reorganized: Scientific Societies in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 104-5.

²⁸³ Markman Ellis, "'An Author in Form': Women Writers, Print Publication, and Elizabeth Montagu's *Dialogues of the Dead*," *ELH* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 426.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 425.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 427-8.

²⁸⁶ Montagu, "Document 54: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 1760?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 259-263.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

“we see in nature, some birds are destined to range the vast regions of the air, others to fly and hop near the ground, and to pick up the worms.”²⁸⁸ Although she did not publish much more, Montagu’s intermittent fame opened her up to more social connections.

The second time Montagu published anonymously was her critique of Shakespeare in 1769. On this occasion, Carter was eager to report to Montagu how it was received; she wrote, “It has yet been noticed by the Critical Memoirs of the times and the Critical Review, and both have spoken highly of it, but especially of the latter. I beg of you to get some of your half learned acquaintances if you have any at Deal *who hold the Eel of Science by the tail.*”²⁸⁹ Carter suggested that Montagu had extended her social circle to include those at Deal, whereas nine years ago Montagu had to go to Carter for news from Deal. Carter described the people at Deal by using Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad* to express that grasping knowledge is difficult to achieve and thus most people are only “half learned.” Those “who hold the Eel of Science by the tail” according to Pope, were those who were dedicated to the acquisition of learning – real deep and difficult learning – as opposed to index learning or an abstraction of learning that many others tried to pass as real knowledge for things.²⁹⁰ Pope used the word “Science” to indicate deep knowledge and Carter used it here to equate literary knowledge with scientific knowledge.

As she continuously collected knowledge from her expanding social network Montagu’s awareness of her intellect grew over time. In a letter to Cavendish in 1742 she wrote, “Pray do not complement my head; such as it is, it is at your service. It is not a head of great capacity, but a great part of the space is unfurnished.”²⁹¹ She was modest about her learning and wanted to learn more with the help of the duchess. At only twenty-four years old in 1742, Montagu was not

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Mrs. Carter to Montagu July 1769, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 227.

²⁹⁰ Robert Scholes, “Is There a Fish in this Text?” in *On Signs* ed. Marshall Blonsky, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 319

²⁹¹ Montagu, “Document 30: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, January 27, 1742,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, vol. 2.*, 133-136.

yet married and her future remained somewhat uncertain; marriage loomed and she likely thought that motherhood would engulf her foreseeable future. By 1764 and the comfortable age of forty-six, Montagu was well established in her identity as an intellectual, having spent the previous two decades building her social circle, publishing, and participating and organizing intellectual assemblies. She referred to herself in a letter to her husband as a “female Philosopher” as she described her appearance while mocking the usual appearance of intellectual men and women. She wrote, “All the powder is combed out of my hair, all the vanities are vanished out of my head. I am meek in my Manners and humble in my apparel but rather more clean than is usual for a female Philosopher.”²⁹² Years of indulging in her curiosities with like-minded men and women gave Montagu confidence in her intellect and, although she was aware of the usually unflattering image of an intellectual, she was willing to embrace the title of philosopher and adorn it with her own grace and style.

Montagu filled the middle and later years of her life with learning, discussions, engaging with science, and expanding her intellectual social network. She was passionate in her pursuit of knowledge and let it guide her to new people, ideas, and places. The life she divulged in her letters became increasingly public with visits to new acquaintances, men of the Royal Society and l’Académie des Sciences, and with her publication that only briefly remained anonymous. With this public life she had constructed, Montagu sought to share and receive knowledge of the natural world. By establishing the Bluestocking Assemblies around 1750 with the intent to share knowledge and promote conversations about science, Montagu began acting in a Habermasian public manner and therefore created a female, public, domestic space. She engaged with Bacon’s philosophy and the new philosophies that underlined science and the scientific method of the

²⁹² (Montagu) to her Husband London, May the 10th 1764, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 1*, 100.

seventeenth and eighteenth century; she met with leading men in the fields of microscopy, philosophy, natural philosophy, geology, geography, and history, and she engaged in discussions about and the practice of microscopy, naturalist collecting, and she read and debated various scientific treatises in English, French, Italian, and possibly even Latin. Montagu not only matured to have both her hands firmly around the middle of “the eel of science,” she seemed to have it in a full embrace as her learning deepened with time and dedication.

Chapter Four: A Circle of Acquaintance: The Bluestocking Philosophers and ‘the Bas Bleu’

We have lived much with the wisest, the best, and most celebrated men of our Times, and with some of the best, most accomplished, and most learned Women of any times. These things I consider not merely as pleasures transient, but as permanent blessings; by such Guides and Companions we are set above the low temptations of Vice and folly, and while they were the instructors of our minds they were the Guardians of our Virtue.²⁹³

Elizabeth Montagu, who had embraced the identity of an intellectual woman throughout adulthood, easily transitioned into the independence that her widowhood provided. She had pursued an intellectual life since the 1760s and by the 1780s through her interactions with knowledgeable men and women of the Enlightenment, she was aware that she had already experienced an exciting chapter of human history. During widowhood many affluent women found increased independence. No longer tied to their husband, widows were considered the head of a household, with control over their lives and property.²⁹⁴ In the eighteenth century the age of sixty was associated with old age, although it also depended on one’s health and outward appearance.²⁹⁵ With the death of her husband in 1775, fifty-four year old Montagu was far from old herself and expected to live out the rest of her life with vigor. Montagu wrote to her sister after the period of mourning that followed Mr. Montagu’s funeral that her “spirits are not the dancing spirits they used to be” but that, “I trust to my natural temper that I shall again be what I used to be.”²⁹⁶ Mr. Montagu died without an heir meaning that Elizabeth Montagu inherited the

²⁹³ Montagu to Mrs Vesey 1785, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 7.

²⁹⁴ Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?*, (London: Longman, 1998), 136.

²⁹⁵ Susannah R. Ottway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

²⁹⁶ Montagu to her sister, 1775, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues” Her Letters and Friendship from 1762 to 1800 Volume 1 1762-1776*, ed. Reginald Blunt, (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1923), 300.

majority of his estate. Given that it was socially and legally acceptable for widows to carry on their husband's estates this inheritance made Montagu a rich and landed proprietor.²⁹⁷

Montagu acknowledged that learning was a communal act that required the reciprocal sharing of knowledge and wisdom. She believed that such sharing could produce virtuous people and a better society. Montagu wrote primarily to others about the benefits she received from being acquainted with learned people, not about her contributions to intellectual society. Her passion for learning, developed in early childhood, transformed into active learning by bringing together knowledgeable people in her drawing room. Having embraced "the eel of science," Montagu had the confidence to display her intellectual identity to the public and to facilitate the sharing of knowledge with others.

Montagu was dissatisfied with common women's social practices that included tea, gossip, and cards. According to Reginald Blunt, a friend of one of Montagu's descendants who compiled and edited a collection of Montagu's letters in 1923, "she was too level-headed and had too much common sense for any great enthusiasm about the conquest of cards and claret by the tea-cups of Hill Street and Bolton Row."²⁹⁸ Hanna More, a later Bluestocking woman, noted that Montagu loved good conversations and the "unreserved interchange of thoughts with a few intimate friends."²⁹⁹ Montagu wished to influence society. She wrote to Elizabeth Carter in 1760, "I shall think myself happy if I can do any thing towards clearing society of their lowest and meanest follies."³⁰⁰ Montagu was determined to change public attitudes of learned women by naturalizing

²⁹⁷ Reginald Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 1*, 301; Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 138.

²⁹⁸ Blunt was given the letters by his friend Emily Climenson who was an ancestress of Elizabeth Montagu. *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 10.

²⁹⁹ Hannah More, quoted in *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 11.

³⁰⁰ Elizabeth Montagu, "Document 54: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 1760?" in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her correspondence, vol. 4.*, (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 259-263. [accessed from *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries, 1500-1950*, (University of Chicago: Alexander Street Press, 2017)].

and socializing their scholarship.³⁰¹ She hoped this would encourage a new generation of women to be participants in Britain's intellectual community and would allow women to use their intellectual capacities to learn, publish, and pursue a life of the mind without facing the resistance that Montagu herself and the original Bluestocking women had faced. By adopting the hostess role, Montagu placed herself as the hierarchical head of the Bluestocking collective, alongside friend Elizabeth Vesey. Together these women controlled the knowledge that was being shared and who had access to it.

This chapter examines four themes about the Bluestockings. Firstly, how the Bluestocking Society was created from Montagu's social network and how it functioned as a community. I explore the intricacies of Montagu's social network that enabled her to create the Bluestocking Society using actor-network theory. Secondly, the activities the Bluestockings participated in are analyzed and compared to those of the Royal Society of London. This reveals how the Bluestocking women members were limited by their gender from formally being involved in, or being recognized by the scientific community of London. Thirdly, I look at how the public perceived their actions and how they navigated their public presence as intellectual women is analyzed. A discussion of their efforts to normalize the presence of intellectual women in society and their legacy closes this chapter.

In many ways the Bluestocking Circle had roots in the small network of female scholars of the seventeenth century who acted within the republic of letters and who were an integral component to the dissemination of knowledge.³⁰² These female scholars for example desired to pursue active scholarship and saw themselves as part of a larger community of like-minded men

³⁰¹ Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108-9.

³⁰² Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

and women.³⁰³ Through correspondence, they discussed philosophy and theology, studied languages, and offered friendship, advice and support to each other functioning through multiple social networks.³⁰⁴ These women were able to participate in this activity since the ideal of the republic of letters was to transcend gendered divisions in order to work together for the advancement of learning. However, in reality, gender still filtered women into a subset of the intellectual republic since it affected what they learned, who they knew, how they built social connections, and how they structured their lives to make time for learning.³⁰⁵ The Bluestockings of the eighteenth century made it more acceptable for women to pursue scholarship by cultivating a feminine public space in which they could participate in discussions and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge through correspondence and gatherings.

Hanna More's poem "The Bas Bleu," composed in 1783 and published in 1786, was an insider's account of the Bluestocking assemblies. The piece broadcast the group's ideals to its readers and became a defense against satirical depictions in the following years.³⁰⁶ The naming of the group members as "Bluestockings," has a fragmented and colourful history full of contradictions and confusion. Montagu wrote to Elizabeth Carter "what connection has stockings with conversation? ... Pray explain this matter, for I perplexed my head in vain about it."³⁰⁷ The term "bluestocking" originally referred to men's blue worsted stockings that were associated with informal occasions. The term's application to the group of learned women appeared to be Elizabeth Vesey's venture. After she teased the eccentric botanist and Bluestocking member Benjamin Stillingfleet for wearing blue stockings to an event at which he should have worn the

³⁰³ Ibid., 2.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁰⁶ Moyra Haslett, "Becoming Bluestockings: Contextualizing Hannah More's 'The Bas Bleu,'" *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 1 (2010), 89.

³⁰⁷ Quoted in the introduction without direct reference to date. *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 4.

white silk of the gentry, the joke spread throughout the small group in the 1750s.³⁰⁸ They adopted the name “blue stockings” from then on to refer to the casual nature of their gatherings. After 1775, the term “bluestocking” referred to more than just members of the group, but became an umbrella term for describing the activities of intellectual women and any woman who aspired to be a public intellectual.³⁰⁹ The term also highlights the domesticity of the space the Bluestockings occupied and how the group could only remain informal.

There was no formal institution of a Bluestocking Society. Instead, Montagu and Vesey’s gatherings grew organically from their social connections and a desire for occasions to discuss literature, philosophies, and natural history with other knowledgeable men and women on a regular basis. As I explored in the previous chapter, Montagu engaged in such discussions through her correspondence and through visits to and from many different individuals. Montagu first mentioned a group gathering to discuss intellectual topics in a letter to Margaret Cavendish from Bath in 1740. She mentioned a “Judge F---“ who was “one of the woeful members of our coffee-house” and that a “Mr. Morgan Vane has lately admitted himself of the dismal coffee-house” where she wrote that Charles Lyttelton and Tom Wyndham were speaking at.³¹⁰ Montagu’s engagement in a coffeehouse group at Bath before attending the intellectual group focused with Margaret Cavendish at Bulstrode, and before hosting her own intellectual group, is significant. Bath was a spa town where fashionable society would go to restore its health and to socialize. This first casual coffee-house group Montagu engaged in at Bath set the tone for her later hosting of the Bluestocking Circle as she mimicked the informality and the mixing of both men and women in her gatherings.

³⁰⁸ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 6.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

³¹⁰ Montagu, “Document: 25: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, January, 1740,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 1., 90-93.

Montagu's network of correspondents, many of whom she regularly met with in person, combined with the networks of each of her close friendships to become the foundation of the Bluestocking Circle. The underlying commonality of Montagu's correspondents was an interest in studies, be they natural history, philosophy, classic literature, or languages. By keeping discussions in letters and small gatherings about intellectual topics, by sharing and lending books, and by exchanging knowledge and natural history specimens, a sense of community was built. These individuals who were interacting on the basis of shared interests were brought together by Montagu and Vesey and given a space in which to discuss ideas. For the women in the network, this was likely the only public space for them to do so. These smaller personal networks of individual Bluestocking men and women combined and the Bluestockings as a community became "producers, evaluators, and diffusers of cultural innovation."³¹¹

Although the community was never officially instituted, it was a mental construct that members were aware of belonging to a community of like-minded individuals. They were invited to regular meetings and discussed topics they had in common with those in attendance. This awareness of a collective identity did eventually lead to them calling themselves the Bluestocking Philosophers. The community was never officially named the "Bluestocking Society," nor was there a fixed group of people who attended the regular meetings; however, Montagu, and Vesey to a lesser extent, exercised control over the particularities of the Assemblies. Montagu, in consultation with Vesey, decided when and where the group met and she often discussed with regular attendees, known as the Bluestocking Philosophers, who would be invited as guests and who was admitted to be a Philosopher. Montagu and Vesey designated certain evenings for themselves; Tuesday meetings were at Vesey's and an unknown night was Montagu's. It is also

³¹¹ Deborah and Steven Heller, "A Copernican Shift; or, Remapping the Bluestocking Heavens," in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, ed. Deborah Heller (London: Routledge, 2015), 39.

possible that Assemblies were held at Mrs. Ord's, though little is mentioned about those evenings.³¹²

The group had regular attendees, but if there were lists of those who attended taken at each evening, it would constantly change. In a letter to Vesey in 1764 Montagu wrote that she was “jealous of the Original society” after receiving letters from other members of the group, which she referred to as, “the blue stocking Lodge.”³¹³ In this same letter, Montagu contemplated the addition of a Mr. Caulfield to the Lodge and questioned his worth to their society, indicating that she drew clear lines between the original members and newcomers to the group. She was open to guests visiting and sharing knowledge, but membership was a different story. She agreed to admit Mr. Caulfield since “he may be only an elegant spectator of forms, or consider blue stockings as the least deviation from the simplicity of the golden age.”³¹⁴ This demonstrates Montagu's control over the group's composition and her care to allow individuals of the right character into the group. It also reveals that members came from Montagu's extended network. She was not only inviting individuals she had met or corresponded with, but also those who were recommended to her from her friends and acquaintances.

Montagu was prepared to welcome men into the Bluestocking Society. She wrote to Vesey that, “I have got a new blue stocking with whom I am much pleased, a Mr. Percy who publish'd the Reliques of the ancient Poetry; he is a very ingenious man, has many anecdotes of ancient days, historical as well as poetical.”³¹⁵ Though she never wrote of women to be included as members of their society, she did praise her women friends, especially for their participation. For example, she wrote to her sister Sarah that she thought there was “not a grain of evil in”

³¹² Reginald Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 11. Mentions that Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Buller fought one night at Mrs. Ords.

³¹³ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Hillstreet, March 17 (1764?), *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 4.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Hillstreet, Feb 2nd, 1768, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 5.

Frances Boscawen; “She is humble, charitable, pious, of gentle temper, with the finest principles, with a great deal of discretion, void of any degree of art, warm and constant in her affections, mild towards offenders, but rigorous towards offence, and speaks her opinion very freely.”³¹⁶ Her discussions with her female correspondents of men’s suitability to join the society, and not vice versa, indicates that women were incorporated into the group in a different manner than men. Men’s accomplishments and contributions to society were evaluated whereas women’s character and virtue granted them acceptance.

Virtues, in the Enlightenment, were those characteristics that enabled a human being to flourish in their social environment. As was explored in chapter two in relation to women’s education, according to Locke, virtue was essential to social order and was considered necessary for gentlemen to have in order to participate properly in public affairs.³¹⁷ A virtuous gentleman behaved in a manner that was for the common good.³¹⁸ Here, virtues were the polite characteristics Montagu uses to describe women she knew and whom she thought worthy to join her community of intellectuals. She described Margaret Cavendish in 1741 as “foremost in virtue as in rank.”³¹⁹ She described men in terms of virtue also, writing to Gilbert West that, “having so long dwelt on your virtues, I will now remember your talents.”³²⁰ However, these virtues of men were never weighed in discussions of them joining the Bluestocking’s company. Perhaps it was because women did not necessarily have published works or public activities to discuss that Montagu had to discuss their virtues instead.

³¹⁶ Montagu, “Document 11: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1757?,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 4., 42-44.

³¹⁷ Mihai Androne, “Notes on John Locke’s views on education,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences* 137 (2014), 78.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Montagu, “Document 46: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to W. Freind, May 9, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu* vol. 1., 188-193.

³²⁰ Montagu, “Document 55: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, September 27., 1753,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu* vol. 3., 243-250.

The setting for Montagu's Assemblies was her drawing room, first at Hill Street and then at Portman Square, London. From the beginning there were strict rules to Montagu's evenings. Montagu disliked how cards were central to most gatherings instead of discussion and expressed this sentiment as early as 1741 when writing to her sister Sarah Robinson about the activities with Margaret Cavendish at Bulstrode. She exclaimed that, "Philosophy and prophecy come generally après coup. Reason determines our arguments, but passion governs our actions. What pity that sentences, systems, and definitions, should give way to cribbage!"³²¹ Thus, cards, as well as discussions of politics, were barred from both Montagu and Vesey's evenings. Vesey's Tuesday gatherings involved guests enjoying dinner before the circle discussion and dinner conversations were "equally various and discursive" according to regular attendee Frances (Fanny) Burney.³²² Burney (1752-1840) was a member of the younger generation of Bluestocking women and, according to Samuel Johnson, was the rising wit that would one day replace Montagu as the head of the group. Burney documented her interactions with the group in her diary in which showed solidarity to these intellectual women singled out for their remarkable abilities.³²³ Burney described Montagu's assemblies as controlled and stratified:

At Mrs. Montagu's the semi-circle that faced the fire retained during the whole evening its unbroken form, with a precision that made it seem described by a Brodtingnagian compass. The lady of the castle commonly placed herself at the upper end of the room, near the commencement of the curve, so as to be courteously visible to all her guests; having the person of the highest rank, or consequence, properly on one side, and the person the most eminent for talents, sagaciously on the other, or as near to her chair and her converse as her favouring eye and a complacent bow of the head could invite him to that distinction. Her conversational powers were of a truly superior order: strong, just, clear, and often eloquent. Her process in argument, notwithstanding an earnest solicitude for pre-eminence, was uniformly polite and candid.³²⁴

³²¹ Montagu, "Document 15: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741?," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, 318.

³²² Reginald Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2, 3.*

³²³ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 257.

³²⁴ Frances Burney quoted in Eger, *Bluestockings*, 112.

Montagu wanted all individuals who attended to experience the same conversation and for the information shared at her assemblies to be accessible to all in attendance. Burney's description also indicates that Montagu gained as much attention at the assembly as any of her featured male guests. Because of the negative attitudes about women and displays of female learning, Montagu's creation of a space in which she could control, manipulate, and express herself on her own terms gave her power. Although she was still confined by social customs, she was able to push boundaries of acceptable behaviour since she controlled the environment in which it occurred.

Although Montagu and Vesey had similar visions for the group gatherings, there were stylistic differences between their gatherings. Montagu insisted on arranging chairs in one large circle where everyone was facing each other and all participants experienced one conversation. Vesey, on the other hand, preferred smaller groups of three individuals where several conversations could be had at once and she liked to patrol the room jumping into any conversation of her choice. Frances Burney found Vesey's manner confusing and troublesome since, "everybodys sitting with their backs to one another ... in a confused manner, all over the room."³²⁵ Sofas and chairs were placed back to back and Vesey would zigzag around with two or three ear trumpets carrying a stool and cushion around the room joining whichever conversation pleased her.³²⁶

The assemblies held by Montagu and Vesey generated public interest partly because of them being hosted by women and partly because of the well-known guests who attended. The public responses about the group varied. Some thought that the bluestockings were making

³²⁵ Reginald Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 4.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

learning and virtue respectable for women and therefore were dangerous to society.³²⁷ Montagu and Carter were even considered as possible characters in play. Doctor Edward Wilson wrote to William Pitt that they “would be finely portrayed by your pen and might give you an opportunity of determining the just merits and standard of a literary female.”³²⁸ He went on to describe Montagu as,

A highly instructive accomplished Woman possessed of great affluence, who indulges herself in a chaste display of fashionable as well as literary Elegance, makes her Drawing Room the Lyceum of the day, maintains a luxurious hospitality for the Votaries of that Science which she loves, and patronises the learning which She herself adorned.³²⁹

Dr. Wilson praised her drawing room assemblies and how she patronized other women to give them the same opportunities to learn as she had as a young woman. He described Carter as,

In a state of Mediocrity is humble as if she knew nothing, While She is not only the most learned Woman of any age but one of the most learned Persons of that in which she lives: the pure sublime Genius which never swerves from Virtue, accompanied her in the paths rigid Discretion and is contented to slumber while its favorite Votary is employed in the Daily habitual exercise of domestic Duties.³³⁰

His celebration of Carter and her learning compares her not to women, but to learned men; however, he cautions this remark by complementing her discretion and by highlighting her feminine domestic duties. The fact that Dr. Wilson thought a play with these two women as characters would be “a most entertaining, instructive and exemplary Picture” that the public would be interested in seeing indicates a segment of society’s curiosity about learned women.

³²⁷ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 271.

³²⁸ Doctor Wilson to Mr. Pitt (1780), *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 99-100.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

Others who were more critical thought that the Bluestocking women were encroaching into the masculine public sphere and male learning. They attacked the group through satire and gossip worthy reporting.³³¹ Montagu reported to Carter that:

I hope you have met with an absurd paragraph in the morning Herald, which says, that at Mrs. Vesey's the other night, there happened such a dispute between the blue stockings, that had it not been for the timely interference of the unlettered part of the company might have ended fatally; that there are now 2 parties of the blue stockings, Mrs. M^u at the head of the seceders.³³²

The difference in styles of the two ladies had been embellished into a scandalous conflict and Montagu wanted to set the record straight. She had not been at an assembly at Vesey's that evening since there had been no Tuesday club meetings that winter. She assured Carter that "The Club has met only twice since our dear Vesey's came to Town" and that she "was not at her House those evenings, having been hindered one time by my dining Guests staying late with me, another time by a previous engagement ... so my Secession was involuntary."³³³ This controversy shows that the group had become a public spectacle and the newspapers used anything of interest as a means to entertain readers, even if "the whole of this fine story is the invention of the writer of the paragraph."³³⁴ Montagu concluded the letter to Carter with a praise of Vesey's drawing room where she created a paradise in which no one could feel violent, "Even Samuel Johnson was seldom brutally rude in her society" and he was known to be rowdy at Montagu's gatherings.

Montagu often praised Vesey for her assemblies in "the blue box" that was her drawing room. In 1772 she wrote to Carter,

there the Lion sits down by the Lamb, the Tyger dandles the Kid; the sly scotchman and the etourdi Hibernian, the Hero and Maccaroni, the Vestal and the demi rep, the

³³¹ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 271.

³³² Montagu to Mrs. Carter December 15th, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 5.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

Mungo of Ministry and the inflexible partisans of incorruptible Patriots, Beaux esprits and fine Gentlemen all gather together under the downy wing of the Sylph, and are soothed into good humour ... Methinks I see our Sylph moving in her circle, and by some unknown attraction keeping the whole system in due order."³³⁵

Her praise was not just of Vesey's ability to lead discussions of people with opposing opinions, but also of the Bluestocking group itself that the two of them had created. They brought people with varied interests to discuss important matters in a polite and civilized manner. She also reported to Vesey in 1778 that she was happy with anticipation of the winter she would spend in Vesey's society and once again praised her arrangement,

In that blue room where all people are enchanted, tho the magic figure of the circle is vanished, thence; a Philosopher, a fine Lady and a Gallant Officer from a triangle in one corner a Maccaroni, a Poet, a Divine, a Beauty, and a Ottaheite Savage, a wondrous Pentagon in another; then the Coalition of Parties, professions, and characters which compose the group standing in the middle of the room; the flying squadrons of casual visitants that are ever coming in and going out! Great Orators play a solo of declamation; Witts let off epigrams like minute guns; the sage speaks sentences, every one does his best to please the Lady of the enchanting room,

For all contend
to win her grace whom all commend.³³⁶

The use of a circle was Montagu's preference, and it did seem to be a small point of contention with her that Vesey did not follow that format as Montagu brought it up repeatedly. Vesey was determined to prevent the formation of a large circle and Montagu seems to be praising Vesey's design through gritted teeth. That is not to say that Montagu did not like or get along with Vesey. She wrote to Gilbert West in 1755 that she was glad he had met Vesey as "she is a very amiable agreeable woman, and has an easy politeness that gains one in a moment, and in reserve she has good sense and an improved mind, to keep up the approbation she acquired by manners."³³⁷

³³⁵ Montagu to Carter September 4th, 1772, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 6.

³³⁶ Montagu to Mrs. Vesey Hill Street November 13th 1778, *Mrs. Montagu "Queen of the Blues," Volume 2*, 58.

³³⁷ Montagu, "Document 68: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, July 13, 1755," in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 308-312.

Montagu and Vesey each had their own ideas of how their assemblies should operate but still respected each other's designs.

The Bluestockings admitted members through acquaintance, similar to the Royal Society in the 1660s, whose membership was also somewhat random and had more to do with friendship and personal recommendation than of the individual's level of scientific interest.³³⁸ However, unlike the Bluestockings, the Royal Society was a corporation with a royal charter that was focused on research and its dissemination.³³⁹ The Royal Society was dependent on the dues of members. Commoners and fellows and only a few scientists received a salary.³⁴⁰ There were admission fees, subscriptions, and irregular pressing to support certain research. This allowed fashionable gentlemen to contribute to scientific research even if they did not have the time to do experiments themselves.³⁴¹ This monetary support of research, along with attendance at meetings, demonstrations, and lectures, was the Baconian backbone of the Society. Guests who attended the meetings were critical to the Society's success.³⁴² The public awareness of the Society was important from its onset. The *Philosophical Transactions* were meant to publicize scientific information and open up new fields of research to other scientists as well as to fulfill the curiosity of curious Englishmen in the broader society.³⁴³

In formal ways the Bluestocking group could not compare to the Royal Society. However, their commitment to publicizing and sharing knowledge stemmed from a similar philosophy. Women like Montagu lived amongst the society of gentlemen, many of who were fellows or associated with the Royal Society and thus were exposed to the philosophies around practicing

³³⁸ Michael Hunter, *The Royal Society and its Fellows 1660-1700: The Morphology of an Early Scientific Society*, (England: The British Society for the History of Science, 1982), 9.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁴³ Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 52-3.

science and the functioning of the Royal Society. This shaped her education and her pursuit of knowledge as an adult, which led to her desire for a space in which she could engage in discussions of science, literature, and philosophy. Montagu did not demonstrate a desire to be a fellow of the Royal Society; she apparently understood her social role as a female and desired a space that suited her needs in a distinctly feminine way. Thus, there was no formal publishing outlet connected to the Bluestockings, like the *Philosophical Transactions*, nor were there fees or subscriptions. There was, however, a kind of nomination process where Montagu and Vesey decided which individuals were suited to join. Moreover, the hostesses regulated the formal discussions.

Montagu and the first generation of Bluestocking women constituted a community of friendships, encouragement, and engagement in intellectual activities with men and women that fit within the ideals of the Enlightenment. With the publication of Hanna More's poem in 1786, 'The Bas Bleu' the group became "Bluestockings" publicly for the first time as a recognized group and not just a female social gathering.³⁴⁴ This public prominence of learned women had begun mid-century and continued to grow; yet the Bluestockings thought they needed to defend the sociable ideal they represented.³⁴⁵ The publication of the poem became the group's public statement and it represented the future of the Bluestockings and the changes that were occurring with the second generation of members. With the public interest in the group in the 1780s came satirical representations of the assemblies and unflattering attacks on its members.³⁴⁶ Although from the start the Bluestockings were a mix of men and women, the satirical representations always depicted them as women and focused on the femininity of the group.³⁴⁷ More's poem

³⁴⁴ Haslett, "Becoming Bluestockings," 90.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

focused on the attitudes on publication and encouraged female publication. As the publicity of the group grew, being or becoming a Bluestocking had more to do with being publicly known than it was about a social group with a particular way of thinking or philosophy.³⁴⁸

More's poem also connects the Bluestocking's activities to science and demonstrates the mingling of all intellectual activities. More described science, chemists, geometry, physicians, and antiquarians interacting alongside lines such as, "Our intellectual ore must shine, Not slumber idly in the mine," and her use of "she."³⁴⁹ This language and the many references to scientific activities demonstrate the Bluestocking's awareness of, and connections to, scientific activities. More connects "conversation" to power and refers to it as "that noblest commerce of mankind," "wisdom's friend," and "the object and the end, Of moral truth, man's proper science, With sense and learning in alliance."³⁵⁰ The poem situates the Bluestockings understanding of science and knowledge, and places the value and importance of sharing this knowledge with others as mankind's highest priority. With this as their philosophy, the Bluestockings understood their roles as facilitators and promoters of science and intellectual activity to be both public and important.

The more intimate gatherings that Montagu hosted at Hill Street had vanished as Montagu and Vesey expanded their social networks and hosted gatherings with other learned women and men. They wanted to present their activities to the public and expose London to women's influences. The legacy of the first generation of Bluestocking women was increased support and encouragement that led young women tentatively to professional authorship and the possibility of making a living by writing. There was ambition and urgency to progress this new phenomenon of women writing, publishing, and pursuing a life of the mind and the publicity that would

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 106.

³⁴⁹ Hannah More, "The Bas Blu: or, Conversation" (1786), lines 288-289.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 296; 324; 325-327.

undoubtedly accompany it.³⁵¹ Through these actions, Montagu and the first generation were “successful reshapers of the possibilities for women, setting in train a remodeling of alternate and adjusted female identities that culminated in the group concept of ‘women’.”³⁵²

As the younger generation of Bluestocking women took prominence, the original circle retreated into quieter, less social, retirement. Vesey was one of the first to discontinue hosting and attending the assemblies when her husband’s health declined in the 1780s.³⁵³ The group then lost Cavendish in 1785 and Mary Delany in 1788.³⁵⁴ Montagu, on the other hand, reportedly was hosting breakfasts for 400 to 500 people as late as 1792 and it was not until her final year of life, at age 82, that she began to slow down her socializing.³⁵⁵ Carter described her as “in perfect good health and spirits, though she has totally changed her mode of life; she never goes out except to take the air of a morning ... lets in nobody in the evening, which she passes in hearing her servant read, as alas! her eyes will not suffer her to read to herself.”³⁵⁶ Even as she could no longer attend assemblies or host them in her drawing room, Montagu continued to read and to learn. Carter also noted that she thought Montagu’s isolation from society was only to be temporary and that “this pause of exertion will restore her to us ... and that a taste for the comfort of living quietly will for the future prevent her from mixing so much with the tumults of the world as to injure her health.”³⁵⁷ Female retirement in the eighteenth century was a venture into solitude and reflection that often occurred seasonally and not just at the end of life.³⁵⁸ Leaving London for her country home of Sandleford in Berkshire was Montagu’s seasonal retreat,

³⁵¹ Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 244.

³⁵² Deborah Heller, *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, (London: Routledge, 2015), 2.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 265.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

³⁵⁶ Mrs. Carter to (?) 1799/1800, *Mrs. Montagu “Queen of the Blues,” Volume 2*, 334.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ Stephen Bending, “Mrs. Montagu’s Contemplative Bench: The Bluestocking Gardens and Female Retirement,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (December 2006), 556-7.

although not always with enthusiasm.³⁵⁹ She admitted in 1741 to Reverend Freind that “society, and coal fires, are very proper for frost; but solitude and green trees for summer.”³⁶⁰ However, in July of 1755 she expressed to Gilbert West that, “after five months of the most serious retirement, I shall be glad to return to the chearful joys of society.”³⁶¹ It was common for women to retire to the country permanently upon the death of their husbands, but Montagu was not the type to leave the companionship she created in London. Unfortunately, Carter’s prediction that Montagu would be renewed by her time in the gardens of Sandleford proved to be false. Montagu never returned to London.

The Bluestocking group and their assemblies, as organized by Montagu and Vesey, arose out of lifetimes spent engaged in philosophic and scientific literature and a desire for a space in which both men and women could discuss the latest developments in these areas. Montagu’s connections to the Royal Society of London and l’Académie des Sciences in Paris provided her with a model on which to base her vision for the Bluestocking Assemblies. Montagu and the second generation of Bluestocking women wanted to create and control a public space where women could exhibit their learning and contribute to the larger intellectual community. With the death of her husband and the independence of widowhood, Montagu concentrated on learning and disseminating her knowledge via the Bluestocking Assemblies. The freedom she gained in widowhood might have influenced her venture into a more public role than she had imagined for herself when beginning her education and community of intellectuals as a young woman. A lifetime of support from both male and female peers also gave Montagu the confidence to take on the public role of a female intellectual. Although the Bluestocking group and their female

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 561.

³⁶⁰ Montagu, “Document 1: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, 1741,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 2., 1-4.

³⁶¹ Montagu, “Document 67: Letter from Elizabeth Robinson Montagu to Gilbert West, July 3, 1755,” in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu*, vol. 3., 300-303.

members faced some criticism and misrepresentation when they gained a public reputation, they continued to uphold their ideals and pass on encouragement and support to the next generation of learned women who built on the foundation laid by Montagu and the original Bluestocking members.

Conclusion

The study of science in eighteenth-century Britain is incomplete without a look at women acting on the periphery of formal institutions. An important group of women who created and controlled their own intellectual community and became influential to the dissemination of scientific knowledge, and to the future participation of women as public intellectuals was the Bluestocking Society. Although the Bluestockings have been extensively analyzed for their influences in the literary sphere of London culture, the ways in which these women were connected to scientific culture and the ways these women acted communally in the scientific sphere of London has been overlooked. By using Elizabeth Montagu as a case study and following the typical stages in the lifecycle of women during the Enlightenment I was able to identify how a community of like-minded women came to navigate and participate in the social world of scientific studies in London.

This thesis has argued that through the education young affluent women received, the encouragement they were given by their educators, and the friendships with like-minded women they established, affluent women engaged in intellectual studies that combined natural history, philosophy, and literature and developed identities as intellectuals. This identity formation led them to desire a place where they could formally discuss intellectual topics in public and normalize the presence of intellectual women in society. The importance of the Bluestocking women who did not publish, the scientific pursuits of members, the role of male members in building the intellectual community, and how the Bluestocking community changed over time were all examined.

By placing my study of the Bluestocking Society and both its female and male members within the context of public science in eighteenth-century Britain, several important conclusions came to light. Firstly, my exploration of this woman-centered, intellectual community of

correspondence and face-to face interactions revealed the importance of maintaining relationships and following the social rules of proper conduct. Montagu's relationships with family members, and with intellectual women and men revealed that she was continually exchanging knowledge and encouragement. Montagu made requests for knowledge and advice and diligently shared recommendations for studies alongside her observations and evaluations. Her engagement with like-minded individuals bolstered her sense of self as an intellectual and made her a member of a supportive community. This sense of community was reinforced by her frequent visits to groups at Bath and Bulstrode, where she could engage in small group discussions that centered on intellectual topics. It was this community that Montagu had cultivated that she eventually brought together and organized into the informal society that centered on discussing and disseminating scientific knowledge.

Secondly, by examining the educational background of an affluent woman and the changing tensions between philosophies about women's intellectual capabilities, I discovered the importance of encouragement from both men and women to the later success of women intellectuals. Montagu was encouraged to learn to her full capabilities, and with the help of her emergent community of like-minded young adults she engaged in studies of classical history, philosophy, Italian, and French. Although her gender influenced the type of education she experienced, Montagu received encouragement and support from her male tutors that gave her the confidence to make learning a life-long endeavor. Her studies as a young woman were made possible through individuals in her network with whom she exchanged knowledge, encouragement, and recommendations throughout her life. The encouragement she received from her intellectual community as a young adult was crucial in leading her to see value in women's learning for not only herself, but for future generations as well.

Thirdly, by identifying the scientific aspects of life-long learning that affluent women engaged in publicity and how public activities, including publishing, the importance of the Bluestocking's publicity to the formation of an intellectual identity was illuminated and contrasted with their conscious choice to retain their domesticity. Montagu's engagement with the latest scientific treatises and philosophies with gentlemen and women at her assemblies, and with intellectuals from the continent as well as Britain, was executed with the domestic grace of a proper hostess. Her correspondence with intellectuals and their interactions at Bluestocking Assemblies developed her identity as a female philosopher and gave her the confidence to declare her identity in public and act publically as a virtuous and thoughtful person who was acting for the best of society and not herself. She was explicit that learning and communicating knowledge was best for society as a whole. Although female presence in formal public science was rare, their presence at the public Bluestocking Assemblies was acceptable due to its peripheral connection to the formal scientific practices of the Royal Society and their domestic setting and practices.

Finally, my discussion of how the Bluestockings emerged from a group of individuals bonded by like-minded community to engage in scientific discussions demonstrates the importance of the Bluestocking's role as an influential society. By combining of the intellectual networks of individual Bluestocking women, the group organized itself as a place where men and women could both engage in scientific and philosophical discussions and advance each other's knowledge. Their intellectual networks, their backgrounds in advanced education, their encouragement of each other, and their particular interests in natural history, led these women to desire an institution where their community could exist in public. It was informal, but controlled by women and, because of their education and connections to men in formal societies, the philosophies of the Enlightenment were embedded in their operations. They valued virtue and

politeness and they shared knowledge freely with each other and withheld knowledge from the unprepared minds of the vulgar. Most of all, the Society was the means by which women could begin to normalize the presence of intellectual women in society.

Ultimately, the Bluestocking Society has been undervalued for its importance in the public intellectual and scientific community of Britain. The women founders and the male and female members engaged in serious discussions that disseminated and furthered scientific findings and Enlightenment philosophies. These actions, arranged and controlled by women, prove that scientific activities were not exclusively male and that gentlewomen were capable of holding valued credibility when it came to sharing scientific knowledge. I have illuminated the complex and changing presence of women and science in eighteenth-century Britain through my analysis of the Bluestocking's informality and domesticity, their leveled hierarchies and the importance of a supportive family and community.

With this thesis I bring awareness to the importance of studying women and science and their attempts to balance domesticity and public identities in order to hold social and intellectual credit in the scientific community. Women, such as Montagu, Vesey, Donnellan, Cavendish, Delany, More, and Burney sought to challenge and change attitudes about women involved in public roles and created their own hierarchy of power at their Bluestocking meetings where women were in control and facilitated discussions where men and women participated as intellectual equals. Although they did so informally, nevertheless, their actions impacted public perceptions of intellectual women in both positive and negative ways. This duality of positive and negative perceptions might not have been ideal; however, the presence of Bluestockings in public roles was a step towards normalizing the presence of women's participation in public science. The Bluestockings would not have been able to do this without the support of a like-minded community brought together by the ambitious eel tamer, Elizabeth Montagu.

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