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Utopia in Eighteenth-century England
Sarah Scott and the Hall's Protofeminism

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To my mother, who taught me strength

To my father, who taught me dedication

To my sister, who taught me patience

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Introduction

Being a woman has never been easy. It is not easy to be a woman nowadays, when many battles for women's rights have already been fought and won, but despite this the results obtained remain hanging by a thread, which can break at any moment, causing History to take several steps backwards. It was not easy to be a woman in the eighteenth century, when fighting for women's rights was not even conceivable. At least until 1792. Indeed, "historians have generally been inclined to date feminism from the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (Johns 2003; 50), a work that certainly marked a divide, a clear separation between before and after it. But such a text was not brought to light thanks to the social commitment of its female author only. "[T]here was a multifaceted feminist tradition before her time" (Johns 2003; 50), which, although composed of writings that have not caused as much of a stir, is still worthy of being studied and deserves to be valued, since it constitutes the basis of a revolutionary thought capable of changing the course of History. Among the pioneers of this movement must be mentioned Sarah Scott. Because of its visionary character in terms of the exaltation of women's roles in the society of the time, her utopian novel is analysed thoroughly in this thesis, attempting to take into account all those significant elements that make this text protofeminist. Before discussing this, however, it is necessary to describe in general what were the inspirations of this female writer, both on a literary and personal basis, that led her to write her most important work.

Beginning with the literary sources, it must be mentioned that one of the first female writers who addressed in her writings protofeminist themes was Mary Astell. Being convinced of the principle according to which men and women are equal before God, and that therefore, this should also be valid on Earth, she published in 1694 *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* anonymously, as "*a Lover of her SEX*" (Astell 1701; not paginated), where she analysed in detail the condition of women at the time, and in 1697 she added a second

part, where she considered more specifically a beneficial project for the education of women. Brandon Schnorrenberg describes the female author and her work as follows:

A high-churchwoman, her first interest was religion; she came to feminism because she believed that women's souls were equal to those of men, and they deserved equality in all respects. In her *Serious Proposal*, she drew up plans for a 'Monastery,' or preferably a 'Religious Retirement,' for women [and s]he argued that most women act, talk, and think foolishly not from any inherent natural characteristics, but as the result of the deficiencies of their education (1982; 264, quoting Astell 1701; 36).

It was precisely her interest in female education that made her a pioneer of feminism, in a patriarchal society that had always, but increasingly starting from those years, tried in every way to oppress and prevaricate women, who were therefore forced to remain in ignorance. To counteract this, her main goal, as well as her hope, was to recreate those “*Millenium Days* (original emphasis), in which [...] a Tyrannous Domination, which Nature never meant, shall no longer render useless, if not hurtful, the Industry and Understandings of half Mankind” (Astell 1730; 180), by founding an all-female institute. Astell herself wrote that the aim of the latter would have been “to expel that cloud of Ignorance which Custom has involv'd [women] in, to furnish [their] minds with a stock of solid and useful Knowledge, that the Souls of Women may no longer be the only unadorn'd and neglected things” (1701; 45) in society.

For this protofeminist writer, therefore, only through an adequate educational path can women oppose the attempts of oppression by patriarchal society and assert themselves. Moreover, according to the female author, developing the intellect is one of the methods to get closer to God. Indeed, Johns explains that

[r]ationality [is considered] as the locus for women's identity in Astell, who argued that reason infuses human beings with divinity. Thus she emphasised attention to education and the development of women's rational faculties. Such education would make women the absolute selves imagined and created by God (2003; 31).

Consequently, the institute presents itself as an all-female community, in which its members cultivate their own personality and knowledge, following the dictates of Christian morality, in a path of re-appropriation of their own identity. More specifically, the female writer with her *Serious Proposal* addresses those women who are no longer very young, who are left alone, and who wish to follow an alternative lifestyle, distant from the traditional one of patriarchal society, where women necessarily had to be accompanied by a husband. As Brandon Schnorrenberg explains, “[t]his community was to be one primarily of mature women, who were to both study and teach. Astell saw women joining the community for various reasons and varying lengths of time” (1982; 266), depending on their needs and desires.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that the female author “saw her community as one for ladies, that is women of the upper classes” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 267), probably because Astell herself belonged to a high social class, and, consequently, in the treatise, are taken primarily into consideration those conditions that were problematic for them. For instance, in the community, those gentlewomen are welcomed who possess a large inheritance and, therefore, need guidance in choosing a husband, since, on the one hand, the desire for wealth can convince devious people to come forward, and, on the other hand, a woman who has not received an adequate education, being naive, may not realise that she is falling straight into the plot of some unsavoury suitor. As a consequence, “[i]n the retirement an heiress would be free from temptation and pressure and thus able to make a match of her own choice” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 267). Moreover, “[p]laces [are] also to be provided for redundant daughters of the upper classes, who could come with a smaller dowery than a suitable marriage would require” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 267), and thus, in the community, they can avoid the humiliation of having to find a husband just to survive. Lastly, “the retirement [is] also a refuge for spinsters” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 267), always understood as belonging to a high rank.

As regards the planning of daily activities within this women’s society, the female utopist decided to give a very general program, thus distancing herself from a strictly monastic regime, in which the days are marked by fixed timetables. Overall,

“[t]he members’s time was to be divided into devotions, work, study, and other occupations” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 266), without a rigorous order. In any case, Astell “ha[d] a very clear idea [...] of the kind of education she want[ed] for women, emphasising pragmatism, quality control, and accessibility more than range and erudition” (Rees 1996; 212), thus, focusing on knowledge that is useful for significantly improving the lives of these women under difficulties. In addition to duty, the community is “not only permit[ted] but recommend[ed] harmless and ingenious Diversions, Musick (*sic*) particularly, and such as may refresh the body without enervating the Mind” (Astell 1701; 56), so that these moments of leisure would serve to renew enthusiasm for the charitable project. Even if, on the one hand, Astell “acknowledge[d] limitations on female activity and intellect” (Rees 1996; 213), almost certainly due to the cultural legacy of the patriarchal system which was very difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate, especially at the end of the seventeenth century, on the other hand, “[w]hat women [could] do, [...] she want[ed] to be done well” (Rees 1996; 213), because, in her opinion, education for the females “ha[d] social value, even if public office [was not] open to them” (Rees 1996; 213) due to the dominance of the male gender in patriarchal society.

In any case, Astell created a system in her utopia that ensured that the women who were part of it became all active and positive components, capable in turn of spreading the good example both inside and, potentially, outside the community. In fact, the female writer

melded diverse ideas about the imitation of Christ with scientific notions of circulation, and her female utopia consequently posited a system of emulation that pervaded her writing. [Her] interest in primitive Christianity and early devotional practice led to her theoretical links among imitation [...] and community, ideas which, in turn, laid the groundwork for the reproductive model that characterised eighteenth-century women’s utopianism (Johns 2003; 27).

In fact, in the retirement conceived by Astell, a virtuous circle is created, whereby each female member is led to emulate her companion who is most devoted to the principles

of the women's society, and by dint of emulating her, she herself becomes worthy of being emulated by another companion, and so on. In addition to the Christian morality that permeates the entire group, the deep bond of friendship that is created among all of them also plays a fundamental role in the prosperity of the community. Johns explains that "love is intended to be multiplied in the monastery [...], a project that suggests ways women's feelings for one another, joined with the need for education and spiritual development, might be converted into a working plan for [...] mutual empowerment" (2003; 9). It may almost seem paradoxical, but it is precisely by imitating each other that each of them finds her own identity. Indeed, the "[w]omen achieve subjectivity and independence in the context of an ideal society in which they [...] model themselves after each other, transcribing the copies of heavenly originals they experience around them" (Johns 2003; 29), and in this way they rediscover their true vocation, they find a purpose, and get closer to God.

Surely, the relationship with divinity for Astell is fundamental, visceral and essential. This also applies to the components of her community, where, however, the female writer decides to take a step further. Not only does God guide and supervise the work of all the female members, but each of them also influences and sets a good example for all the others. As Johns explains, "[i]n the female monastery [the protofeminist] imagined nothing less than a reconfiguration of power, viewing power not only as directed vertically from an omnipotent God but also as mutually and horizontally exchanged among women" (2003; 29). This concept is interpreted metaphorically by Astell herself, who stated that "[a]ll true Lovers of GOD [are] like excited Needles, which cleave not only to him their *Magnet* (original emphasis), but even to one another" (Astell & Norris 1705; quoted in Johns 2003; 42). With this evocative image, the female writer "argue[d] for a magnetic space of mutual female friendship" (Johns 2003; 42), demonstrating that her women's compass can simultaneously point towards the only source of infinite love and towards those who are its clearest reflection, without being wrong.

The good intention of bringing the female members of the community as close as possible to God is not enough to legitimise a utopia where the male gender is

excluded, especially in the English patriarchal society at the end of the seventeenth century. For this reason, “[i]n order to naturalize her same-sex community, she appropriates” the biblical reference of the Garden of Eden and its rendition in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* “and uses [them] to construct an alternative mythology to justify women’s withdrawal from the world of heterosexual social relations” (Macey 1997; 165). By describing her “*Religious Retirement* (original emphasis)” as “such a *Paradise* as your Mother *Eve* forfeited (original emphasis)” (Astell 1701; 36), Astell focuses on what women have inevitably lost as divine punishment after falling into temptation, giving back to the female gender, thanks to her utopia, the hope of being able to find, in addition to a new dignity, a self-determining identity too, without the need for guidance by the male gender. Consequently, since men are not present, the female writer’s “community is distinguished not by the duality, difference, and hierarchy characteristic of the Miltonic garden but by plurality, identity, and equality” (Macey 1997; 166).

In addition to this, it becomes essential for the protofeminist to ensure that those belonging to her small society do not fall into the same error as the First Woman. Therefore, the absolute necessity of education for women is confirmed, in whose minds “[t]he Soil is rich and would if well cultivated produce a noble Harvest” (Astell 1701; 16). Unlike Eden, “[i]n Astell’s garden, knowledge is not fatal” (Macey 1997; 167), and, in fact, the female members of her community can “tast (*sic*) of that Tree of knowledge [men] have so long unjustly *Monopoliz’d* (original emphasis)” (Astell 1701; 52). In this regard, Macey notes that Astell’s “imagery transform[ed] the myth of woman’s original sin into an argument for her emancipation” (1997; 167), and that “[o]nly by seizing the knowledge forbidden them by patriarchal authority can women regain their liberty and build an intellectual and spiritual paradise for themselves” (1997; 168).

All the features of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* described here are useful to better understand the reasons why Astell can be considered one of the first full-fledged feminists and why this work of hers was fundamental in inspiring subsequent feminist writers. According to Johns, “[t]he interpersonal economy [Astell] invented in her

women's community, combined with the change-oriented form she selected for doing so, meshed easily with the ideas of contract and consideration that formed such important parts of her followers' worldview (2003; 48). One of those followers was Sarah Scott, the protagonist of this thesis. This protofeminist writer published her utopian novel entitled *A Description of Millenium Hall And the Country Adjacent* sixty-eight years after Astell's treatise, in 1762. For the design and creation of this alternate world, *A Serious Proposal* was an indispensable source, but not the only one. In fact, Scott also took inspiration from her personal experiences, from some significant events in her life, and from relationships with relatives and friends.

Sarah Scott was born with the name of Sarah Robinson. She was the youngest daughter of nine children, and sister of Elizabeth Robinson, who in the years to follow would become the famous Elizabeth Montagu, founder of the Bluestocking circle. Their relationship was not always idyllic, since their contrasting natures led them to follow two very different lifestyles. Nevertheless, their letters reveal a deep affection that never completely disappeared (Kelly, 2006; 1-2). The relation with her father was not the most loving either. Being "self-serving and ungenerous" (Schellenberg 1996; 100), he never supported Scott, even when she found herself under financial difficulties due to her separation from her husband (Kelly, 2006; 2). It happened in fact that the marriage with George Lewis Scott failed after less than a year for reasons that still remain unknown today. According to Kelly, they

could have ranged from spousal abuse by him, through disclosure of a prior marriage or illicit relationship on his part, to emphatic personal or sexual incompatibility between the couple. The decisiveness of her family's intervention on her behalf [...] make it unlikely, though not impossible, that the cause was partly her relationship with Lady Barbara [...] or the realization by Sarah Scott of her own personal or sexual aversion to conjugality, which a woman at that time would have been expected to overcome or endure (2006; 2).

Lady Barbara Montagu, in no way related to the family of Elizabeth's husband, despite having the same surname, was a great friend of the protofeminist writer. The latter,

meeting her in Bath and learning that she “had an ailing heart”, decided to live together with and look after her for fifteen years after the separation from her husband, “repair[ing] to Bath [...] until the death of Lady Barbara [...] in 1765” (Rizzo 2002; 198).

During that period they organised a small club, nothing like the *élite* circle run by Scott’s sister, where

[a] number of Bath residents, most of them women, gathered to discuss social reform. [...] Their deliberations were focused [...] on their charitable cases, their plans to make their own lives useful and the lives of others more comfortable, and, most notably, their development of a plan for a British utopia where the social evils they were attempting to alleviate would be obviated (Rizzo 2002; 195).

Life in Bath thus proved to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Scott and her *Millenium Hall*, since the women in the group showed great enthusiasm for the adoption of a different lifestyle, in which their role was not just passive and relegated to the domestic environment, as prescribed by the patriarchal system. Rizzo explains that “they created an important new center for the idea of an alternative society in which women like themselves could be active and creative, and serve as benefactors to society with central societal roles”, since they were tired of being “[c]onfined [...] by their sex [...] to their prescribed roles” (2002; 204).

Their desire to be a full part of society stemmed from the fact that they were “women who, like Scott and Lady Barbara, though well born and well educated, had become irrelevant to society from the perspective of those to whom the major purposes of women were the procreation of children and the transmission of possessions” (Rizzo 2002; 199). This demonstrated that the social conventions about gender, typical of the patriarchy, were starting to feel too tight for those women who, for countless reasons, were unable to fit into them. According to the society of the time, a woman without a husband was automatically excluded, as the only socially acceptable conception of a woman was becoming increasingly similar to the ideal of the angel of the house. In contrast to this, Scott and her group demonstrated that

[o]nly single women could dedicate themselves to objectives beyond the well being of their families, and among its other remarkable achievements the Bath circle constructed and provided a model for the deployment of such single women superior to that of useful aunts—a model actually suggesting that women with a sense of mission might make a choice of the unmarried state rather than fall into it (Rizzo 2002; 201).

Self-asserting themselves as women capable of and free to choose what kind of life to lead, the small Bath community became the nerve center of a utopia based on benevolence, where the women who were part of it felt “a desire to mitigate the sufferings, particularly but not exclusively, of women of their own class and condition [, ... because, being] disadvantaged themselves, [they] recognized the disadvantages of others” (Rizzo 2002; 200).

All this found a concrete outlet. Indeed, “[a]t the time of the publication of *Millenium Hall*, [Scott and Lady Barbara] were involved in extensive charitable, and especially educational, work resembling that of the fictional Hall, albeit on a smaller scale” (Schellenberg 1996; 100). Namely, they “set the neighborhood women to knitting mittens and marketed their product to their friends. They [also] instituted a school in which they taught twenty-four poor children, twelve girls and twelve boys, and then added a Sunday school” (Rizzo 2002; 206). In this way, they created a small, efficient and balanced community, where there was no space for prevarication and where the female gender could find a purpose, not being condemned to a passive life, in the shadow of their husbands. Actually, Scott did not stop there. “After Barbara Montagu’s death, [she] experimented with another female community in Hitcham but this experiment failed due to personal and financial quarrels” (Pohl 1996; 57, note 2). In any case, this

was [her] great effort to prove the utopian scheme of *Millenium Hall* practicable, though it was much reduced in scope. [... She] envisioned, more modestly, a country home with a garden, a community of themselves, each contributing not her whole income but a fixed annual amount of £50 that would support the project, and then almost certainly (though they never

got to that aspect) an outreach into the neighborhood to set up schools and useful employment (Rizzo 2002; 208).

All of the above contributed profoundly to the conception of *Millenium Hall*. The group of women in this protofeminist utopian novel withdraw from the patriarchal society of the time to found their own small society, based on completely different principles. Pohl notes that “[t]he community is not only removed from any town or city, but is also set on the fringes of Great Britain. [Therefore,] Cornwall can [...] be seen not only as a cultural but also a geographical enclave” which reflects the “utopian character of the community” (1996; 51), alternative to the reality of patriarchy. Furthermore, Scott’s choice to connect the personal stories of the female protagonists with their vocation to help women under difficult circumstances, results in the creation of a completely new and revolutionary image of woman at that time, a strong woman, who does not need a man to live life fully. As Williams Elliott explains, “[u]niting the sentimental novel with philanthropic discourse [...] enabled Scott to rewrite both genres [, ...] transform[ing] the sexualized victim of both discourses into a desexualized agent of charity” (1995; 538), and, by doing this, she “helped to establish philanthropy as a defining characteristic of the [upper-class] woman and to sanction women’s writing about social, political, and economic problems” (1995; 536), contributing decisively to the feminist cause.

In the light of everything described so far, it can be argued that both Astell’s *Serious Proposal* and the personal events of Scott’s life contributed to the latter’s creation of her utopian novel, *Millenium Hall*. The protofeminist writer took inspiration from the work of her female predecessor, enriching it and making it more complex, broadening its outlook. In particular, Astell’s treatise written sixty-eight years earlier served as a guide for Scott, who drew on the disastrous experience of her marriage, her deep friendship with Lady Barbara, and the experimental community of Bath to devise her all-female utopia. In addition to this, the message that Astell and Scott wanted to communicate to their readers was similar, too. In fact, “Astell’s *'Religious Retirement'* (original emphasis) and Scott’s *Millenium Hall* [...] challenge patriarchal readers and force them to re-examine their beliefs about women’s 'natural'

place in the world” (Macey 174, quoting Astell 1701; 36), through their representation of women who maintain active and useful roles in society and are not passive and relegated to the domestic environment. The two female utopists hoped that their writings could inspire others to change, thus creating a more just, egalitarian and free world, where women were not considered inferior beings anymore. Indeed, according to them, “[a]n ideal reader possessed the capacity to interpret sympathetically, to be moved and, therefore, changed by what she read so that eventually others could read and transcribe her performances” (Johns 2003; 71), triggering a chain reaction capable of changing everything.

The same intentions shape this thesis. In fact, it was written to bring attention to the theme of feminism, in a historical period, today, in which women still see their rights, won with extreme difficulty, threatened. By analysing Sarah Scott’s utopian novel, *A Description of Millenium Hall And the Country Adjacent*, from different points of view, this thesis will try to shed new light on one of the texts that contributed to the first steps of the feminist movement, while highlighting some mechanisms of the patriarchal system that, in the eighteenth century as today, permeate society. Through the analysis of scholarly materials that address different aspects the novel, this thesis will seek to demonstrate the revolutionary essence of the latter, as a profeminist utopia capable of spreading its influence to the rest of society, devising an economic system that opposed the protocapitalist order of the period. On the whole, this thesis will try to give new strength and lifeblood to all the women who will read it, with the hope that Scott’s project will be an example for them, as they face their daily battles.

The first chapter will describe the socioeconomic situation and the currents of thought of the eighteenth century, with specific reference to the condition of women. All this will then be declined in the analysis of the personal histories of the female founders of Millenium Hall, emphasising how their harsh past experiences are instrumental in inspiring them to create a female community with different values. The second chapter will concern the narrative structure of the novel, with particular attention to the narrative voices, namely, the anonymous male narrator and Mrs Maynard, and their complementarity. Furthermore, it will analyse the spatial

organisation of the Hall, which reflects the female founders' rediscovered ability to manage an efficient system without necessarily corrupting it, as men do in the external society. The third chapter will explore the relations of each of the five female protagonists with female figures of the previous generation, contrasting the latter's isolation in the patriarchal society with the former's strength found in union. Moreover, the various charitable activities that the Hall's women lead will be examined, highlighting the substantial difference in values between those on which these ventures are based and those that underpin the protocapitalist system. On the whole, the three chapters of this thesis will try to demonstrate that the themes addressed in Scott's novel make it fully adhere to the feminist cause.

Chapter I

Utopia and Society: Two Opposite Sides of the Same Coin

Sarah Scott wrote a utopian novel with protofeminist characteristics in a historical period when the opportunities for women to express their views on their status within society were severely limited. In a social climate in which the granted female roles were all contained in the domestic environment, *Millenium Hall* represented one of the first attempts, along with those of other female authors, towards change and gradual emancipation. However, since this was the embryonic stage of what would become structured social criticism only over time, the female writers of the eighteenth century who dealt with this issue did not have the means to produce a detailed theoretical analysis from the philosophical, sociological, and economic points of view, so they decided to resort to the literary genre that was a symbol of that time, namely the novel, and to insert utopian elements into it, aiming at proposing a new type of society, where women could play active roles. As Brandon Schnorrenberg states, “[t]he eighteenth century feminists offered [...] a modest utopian beginning for a movement not even yet fully realized” (1982; 271), by imagining the creation of a better world.

On closer inspection, for eighteenth-century English women, imagining a better world was becoming an increasingly pressing need, since “the evolution of cultural ideas about the relation of public and private spheres” (Mangano 2015; 471) in that period meant that the role of women was progressively tied to the latter and less and less to the former. For women writers in particular, the situation was complex. While their profession allowed them to participate actively in society with their writings, their gender limited them. As Mangano explains:

By the mid-eighteenth century, the professionalization of writing and the development of modern socioeconomic theories created a different context for women’s ability to participate by name [...]. At the same time as female authorship became more common, it grew less visible due to the constriction of women’s work to the domestic sphere (2015; 471).

In a literary environment like that, namely restrictive and limiting, the choice of the genre to use to communicate a message became fundamental. In this case, the novel proved to be the best option, since, in the eighteenth century as well as today, it could contain within its pages references to serious themes without being severe. Indeed, “[f]emale utopian authors [...] used the novel to challenge the separation of private and public spheres and the consequent limitations on women’s freedom of action and expression” (Johns 2003; 49), thus addressing protofeminist issues without having to write a theoretical treatise. More specifically, the utopian novel gave female writers the opportunity to inspire reflections in the readers thanks to the characteristic of verisimilitude. In this regard, Johns affirms that

[o]ne factor that allowed for the expression of feminist utopianism was a new understanding of fiction that recognised the uneasy position it occupied between the poles of lying and truth-telling. [...] U]topian authors in particular were able to exploit this new understanding of the seemingly real for what appeared liberatory rather than purely conformist ends. They assumed that readers would comprehend an apparent reality, and yet, within its parameters, they would revel in fashioning a new one. [...] U]topia readjusted a familiar world according to women’s desires for greater self-possession (2003; 15).

Thanks to this literary genre, female writers who felt the need to improve their own and others’ condition as women, found the opportunity to express themselves, with the aim of self-affirmation and finding their own active role in society. Besides, “[u]topias are satires of current conditions, blueprints for how a society might be better formed, or descriptions of a dreamland that can never really be achieved. All however share a desire for improvement in the human condition” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 263), and the protofeminists of the eighteenth century really needed it.

Since the definition of utopia given above includes all types of them, it is important to make a distinction at this point: the protofeminist authors of the eighteenth century create utopias that are clearly different from the classical ones, precisely because their goals are opposite. Indeed, if on the one hand “[t]raditional

utopias [...] regiment the society by identifying people, by molding behaviour and regulating desire” (Johns 2003; 12), and also “rely on the pressure of infrastructure to fashion ideal citizens [, ...] feed skepticism about human nature and assume the need to curb its excesses through institutions” (Johns 2003; 13), all with the aim of making order and control reign, on the other hand

women’s utopias of the mid-eighteenth century [appear] very different from the highly regulated cities of traditional utopists [because t]heir ideal societies [correspond] to a developing model of a constitutional monarchy and commercial economy rather than [revert] to a political ideology that rest[s] on ideas of divine right and patriarchal authority (Johns 2003; 18-19).

Protofeminist utopias, therefore, respond to the changes of their historical period, and following these, the female authors try to devise alternative realities where women are an integral part of the system, and are no longer oppressed and kept under constant observation by the male gender.

Furthermore, this genre written by women and aimed mainly at women is opposed to another genre designed specifically for them, namely conduct books. The latter are nothing more than collections of rules of behaviour for young women who are preparing to enter society, and, consequently, need to be instructed on good manners to be observed in various situations. The goal of these manuals was to shape the consciences of their female readers in such a way as to make them conform to the model of the woman who is only dedicated to her home and family, not contemplating any other life choice as possible. In fact, Johns explains that

[f]emale utopists challenged the privatising effects of conduct literature and much domestic fiction as they created a communitarian model. In their novels, the development of a group of main characters took the place of individual *Bildung*, and unusual plot elements were introduced, including the organisation of schools; the mathematical calculation of wages, savings, and populations; the building of public institutions; and the development of agricultural cooperatives. [These l]iterary innovations occurred as a way of enhancing a political message (2003; 4),

that of opposition to the relegation of women to the domestic environment and, consequently, that of the integration of the female gender into active roles in society.

Protofeminist writers, therefore, promoted ideas of change, but at the same time they were aware of the fact that certain social ameliorations could not happen overnight. As a consequence, they were convinced that it was necessary to develop a different *forma mentis* for the female gender, which only by acquiring a new and emancipated conscience of itself would have been able to carry forward its own demands. It is important to underline, however, that this was not a total revolution in women's thinking, which would happen later in time, but rather a first attempt to show women valid alternatives for their lives. In relation to this, female utopian writers demonstrated that they cared about education as the only means to achieve protofeminist aims. In this regard Rees explains that in the eighteenth century

[f]reedom [became] a personal and social [...] objective, and women writers at [that] stage [did not] waste their time focusing their utopian dreams on unthinkable futuristic forms of emancipation [. ...] What they focus[ed] on instead [was] the attainable: above all, better education, seen as the key to inner freedom, and also capable of being institutionalised in utopian structures (1996; 205-6).

Trying now to describe more specifically the entity of these utopian projects, the first element that can be noticed in these texts is the interest of the female writers in creating alternative realities that are not hyperbolic and idealised, but concrete and linked to the real society of the time. Indeed, according to Johns, the female "authors seek first and foremost to represent a world that offers satisfactions in many areas and for whole groups of people, and they delineate how that world can be instituted within their own" (2003; 10). Consequently, the organisation of the entire utopia is always very realistic, inclusive of all aspects of the daily life of the people who constitute it, and aimed at spreading its example of social improvement. What can be found at the basis of these protofeminist utopian novels is that these

invented societies foreground the establishment of a viable mode of group life involving family, friends, neighbourhood, and community [; ...] they

take into account the full range of human needs—material, economic, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual; they construct environments, beautiful and efficient, that are to foster happiness and convenience; [...] and they establish means to perpetuate the society (Johns 2003; 10).

It is worth mentioning, however, that all this is not to be considered simply the product of the unbridled imagination of bored women, but rather a literary genre that was born to satisfy the concrete needs of the female gender, which in turn developed from the social, political and economic transformations that affected eighteenth-century England. Johns' analysis in this regard is particularly pertinent. According to her,

[f]emale outposts responded to [...] the rise of parliamentary politics, the expansion of commerce and international trade [and] corresponding shifts in ideas about human psychology, education, and the family [...]. Pressed by economic necessity and feminist ideas, women writers exploited the openings offered by such changes to create their reproductive or replicative utopian model (2003; 11).

Thus, for the profeminists of the eighteenth century, imagining and writing about utopia became in themselves methods for actively participating in society, devising alternatives where their female protagonists could exercise their virtues to the fullest. “[W]omen writers were determined to embed their stories in the political and social environment, to contribute to contemporary debate”, and in this way they succeeded in demonstrating that “[t]he distance to utopia [...] need not be far, and [that] social change is within the power of individuals, even those of modest means” (Johns 2003; 12).

In fact, one of the main themes on which these female authors focused their attention was that of helping those who had little or belonged to discriminated minorities, who, had they been left defenceless, would most likely have been crushed under the oppressive patriarchal system, while in a profeminist utopian reality they could rediscover their dignity and a purpose for their life. As Johns explains,

[e]ighteenth-century feminist utopian writers [...] saw in their changing social world opportunities for improving the lot of subalterns. As a result, their utopian visions seem unusual; they foreground themes that are subordinated in the mainstream tradition, such as love and friendship, education, and cooperation (2003; 7).

Imagining communities built on the basis of benevolence and kindness, “[e]ighteenth-century women [...] directed their focus on the plight of women and other subalterns and sought ways to use emerging socioeconomic ideas, along with Christian beliefs, to propose a fairer society” (Johns 2003; 18). Their writings represent potential solutions to the difficulties experienced daily by women and other minorities, showing the possible existence of a new world, no longer governed by selfishness and male chauvinism, but by altruism and respect.

Considering the fact that since the dawn of time women have been subjected to male domination, they “have often needed the dream, the hope of change” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 263), and just as often, imagining different, more just and free possibilities was the only way for a woman to alleviate her suffering. In eighteenth-century England, however, something changed: women took courage and put their protofeminist ideas down on paper, writing about “proposals for partial reforms of society, or the creation within the existing society of communities which operate independently according to different standards, [...] creat[ing] plans for ideal societies” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 264). Even if these were first attempts, where no actual invectives against the patriarchy were carried out, where “complete equality [was] seldom [being] really advocated” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 264), and where the female authors looked for “a middle way that adapted the predominating discourses rather than fully rejecting them” (Johns 2003; 159), it is still important to recognise the novelty represented by those texts, in which women decisively affirmed their identity and demonstrated that they were just as suitable as men, if not more so, to act outside the domestic environment.

This is precisely one of the main aims of protofeminist utopias: to give proof of the efficiency and versatility of the female gender, which proves capable of managing

beneficial activities from both a human and an economic point of view. In fact, according to Johns, “[f]eminist utopianism [...] emphasise[s] the shifting nature of public and private realms despite economic, political, and social tendencies toward rending apart and gendering them” (2003; 159), showing alternative realities where there are no fields of action reserved for men and off-limits to women. In these utopian female societies, “women [can find a shelter] where they [can] escape from worldly vanities, social pressures, and society’s accepted concepts of what a woman’s place ought to be. Their goal [is] to establish a new atmosphere in which women [can] develop as individuals” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 266), in an act of self-determination. The best way to do this proves to be that of organising an economic activity, which in a patriarchal and male chauvinist society is the sole prerogative of men, thus making themselves the architects of a process that includes the management of both human resources and money. On this topic Johns reflects clearly, stating that,

[b]y participating in commerce, both social and economic, the utopian subject will increase the domain of virtue. Individuals begin by reforming their own households and estates and can then move out into their neighbourhoods, counties, and realms. Female utopists[’ ...] communities [...] come into being and change through time, work with the personalities in the group, and spell out the continuing financial and psychic costs of their creation (2003; 15).

The real revolution brought about by profeminist writers lies in the fact that they manage to insert feminine elements, such as benevolence and mutual exchange based on friendship, into their charitable activities, in such a way as to cancel out the negative characteristics linked to money typical of the patriarchal system, such as selfishness and thirst for gain, consequently creating an environment in which mutual respect, equality and kindness dominate. Moreover, “[b]y imagining the utopian reconciliation of virtue and commerce, [the female authors counter] increasing pressures to separate the public realm from the private, economy from domesticity, and justice from benevolence” (Johns 2003; 50), creating a more balanced world.

The next step that is contemplated in these utopias is the diffusion of their good example. Indeed, once the method tested in protofeminist utopias proved to be efficient, involving more and more people who actually managed to improve their lives, it logically followed that the female writers also imagined repeating a similar experience in different places, with the aim of potentially bringing good everywhere. Thus, “[t]hrough their success in attracting and training their members, these communities could then spread out to reform society” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 266) as a whole. The spreading process was conceived in a very natural way, since people who were not yet part of such a thriving system did not need to be forced to feel a desire to emulate it. In fact, as Johns explains,

[w]omen’s utopias of the eighteenth century [...] figured the globalisation of utopia through a process of reproduction, or a kind of self-perpetuating replication [...], encompassing not only the birth and education of children in order to expand and multiply utopias but also the propagation of utopian ways of life and behaviour through imitation and circulation, moral conversion, transcription [...] and literary mitosis (2003; 2).

As mentioned above, the type of woman who figures as the protagonist of these utopias differs greatly from the archetype of the angel of the house, which at that time was definitively becoming the only model to imitate for young women. In fact, in that period, the development of new social classes linked to the transformations of the economic system led to a change in common thinking about the female gender. In a society where the male figure was increasingly becoming dominant, women were forced to take some steps back. As Williams Elliott explains:

the domestic woman was represented as the reservoir of morality and stability. This domestic ideal, which pictured women as modest, chaste, and devoted only to the interests of their families, was an integral part of the bourgeois ideology that gradually displaced the older aristocratic model of society during the eighteenth century (1995; 539).

However admirable in some respects this kind of woman may be considered to be, what was already starting to feel a bit restrictive for the female gender at the time,

and which today is thought to be something inadmissible by everyone who believes in feminist ideals, is the fact that by relegating women to the domestic environment, they are forced to put aside their own identity to serve their husbands and children. It is precisely this injustice that the women who are protagonists of protofeminist utopias oppose, by rationally deciding not to build a family, but rather to remain single and surround themselves with other females, with whom they can form a community. However, if a woman who asserts herself without the need for a man's intervention is acceptable in a utopian novel, this is not the case in the actual English patriarchal society of the period. Indeed,

[s]ince, according to domestic ideology, a woman's virtue and value [are] defined in relation to her reproductive capacities, a single adult woman [is] by definition a misfit or a burden [...]. In fact, both the terms 'old maid' and 'spinster' [acquire] their pejorative connotations in the eighteenth century, when unmarried women [... pose] a challenge to domestic ideology's ability to contain anxieties about changing social conditions (Williams Elliott 1995; 540).

A woman who was single and in control of herself was considered a threat to the *status quo* in all respects. Evidence of this is given by the institutions of that time, which, being managed mostly if not entirely by men, were mainly concerned with controlling women, pigeonholing them and making them fit within those characteristics considered the only ones suitable for them according to social conventions. As Williams Elliott explains, "many of the [ventures] promoted in philanthropic prospectuses and charity sermons aimed to rescue victimized single women and restore them to their proper place in the home—ideally, by finding them husbands" (1995; 536). Only by remaining under the control of a man could a woman think of being integrated into the society of that period, even if that meant the annihilation of her own person.

This is thought to be the only way to prevent the female gender from creating discomfort and degradation, for example by becoming a prostitute. Besides, in the eighteenth century, but unfortunately, in some instances, nowadays too, it was

inconceivable that a single woman could live a respectable life, because a free and independent woman is always dangerous. Indeed, “[t]he fact that so many of the new philanthropic ventures that originated in the middle of the century had somehow to do with women’s sexuality or its consequences demonstrates how fears about social problems were often translated into gendered terms” (Williams Elliott 1995; 539), when actually in most cases the causes for them were to be found in the same patriarchal system that made women victims. Another fear of the protocapitalist society linked to single women undoubtedly concerned the money needed to support them, since at the time they were not allowed to own anything. The issue was that, “[w]ithout adequate economic resources, unmarried women of almost all classes could drain the finances of their families or, in the case of spinsters of the lower classes, the parish rate-payers” (Williams Elliott 1995; 540), thus becoming a loss-making business that generated no profit. However, on the other hand, “[i]f women were of age and not married, [...] they were legally independent” (Williams Elliott 1995; 540), and consequently they could decide for themselves.

This fact is particularly interesting when women belonging to the higher social classes are considered. In that historical period, they began to feel the need to assume important roles in society, which at the time, as very often today, were reserved for men. As a consequence, in order “[t]o get access to something approaching masculine power, eighteenth-century ladies had to become visible in a new way; that is, they had to be perceived not just as exemplary but also as useful in the class-specific task of disciplining the lower orders” (Smith 1995; 280), and, in fact, they thought about creating charitable activities, which did not have the characteristics of an oppressive and controlling institution, like those managed by men, but rather had the objective of spreading good example by helping people in need. Projects of this kind already existed in England before the eighteenth century, but the difference consists in the fact that those were managed by married women, who relied on the disposable income guaranteed by their husbands, while these new charitable schemes were conceived by single women, without men holding managerial roles. In both cases, however, what put at risk the thriving of these women-run ventures was the increasingly widespread

idea in the eighteenth century that females could not be allowed to have public prominence. In this regard Williams Elliott explains that,

[a]lthough women of the landed classes continued to play their traditionally large role in rural charitable activities by distributing largesse and advice to their poorer neighbors and tenants, tending to the sick, founding and teaching in charity schools, and, in some cases, leaving large benefactions in their wills, the developing ideology of domesticity threatened to make women's active participation in newer businesslike charities seem inappropriate and improper (1995; 536).

In this way, therefore, the archetype of the angel of the house strongly limited the possibilities of women, who, being “[e]xcluded from the leadership of these new charitable projects, [...] faced the potential loss of the opportunity [...] not only for useful public activity, but also for an alternative vocation to marriage” (Williams Elliott 1995; 536), consequently remaining with only two alternatives available: finding a husband, namely, adapting to a passive and unjust life, or being excluded from society by becoming a spinster.

At this point it is important to clarify a concept that has not been made explicit until now: at the time, marriage was considered an obligatory step for everyone, but especially for women. Without a husband, a woman was condemned to a life of shame, as well as, very likely, of economic hardship. At the same time, however, getting married often brought suffering, too. For instance, the groom was in most cases older than the young bride, which could lead to moments of discomfort in intimacy, and, furthermore, since he had exclusive control of the family assets, for her this meant having to constantly depend on him. As a consequence, “[g]iven the tremendous disadvantages for women of marriage and reproduction, it is not surprising that feminist utopians proposed numerous ways of avoiding them” (Johns 2003; 57), and of escaping the patriarchal system. In a society where “women exist[ed] as objects of exchange [...] and were] transformed into gifts, which in turn bec[a]me commodities, being formally exchanged in order to yield profit for men” (McGonegal 2007; 294), planning a better alternative became a revolutionary act.

Unfortunately, however, for many women of that time, and even for some today, tying themselves to a man was the only viable option. To make matters worse, for the male gender the marriage bond was to be considered as any other business, where love, respect and complicity were not contemplated. The only thing that mattered was the value of the commodity that was being purchased, that is, the woman, to quantify which it was necessary to consider the purity of her virtue. The “problematic of female virginity as a non-negotiable term in the marriage bargain” (McGonegal 2007; 294) made it extremely humiliating from a female point of view, as everything that represented a woman was reduced to her body, the only thing that belonged to her before marriage but which she was destined to lose, together with her identity. In an eighteenth-century union between man and woman, only the man gained. As McGonegal explains, “whereas a woman’s symbolic capital [was] constituted negatively since her only virtue [was] virginity, a man’s symbolic capital [was] constituted positively through the ‘defeat’ of female virginity, which [was] considered a sign of [...] bravado” (2007; 296), then as now.

Before closing a deal, however, it is necessary to ensure the quality of the goods. In a heterosexual relationship within the patriarchal system of the time, this translated into courtship. This procedure was nothing more than a staging, a sugarcoated representation of greedy male desire. In fact, “the codes and conventions of courtship aim[ed] at producing and maintaining male dominance by transmuting aggressive male heterosexual practices into proper, honourable, and respectable practices” (McGonegal 2007; 296), which, if followed correctly, succeeded in the intent to ensnare the prey. In all of this, women were helpless; they did not have the means to actively oppose it, and it would not even have been convenient for them to do so, since by losing the opportunity to marry they would also risk losing the possibility of remaining involved within society. All she could do was to bide her time. Indeed, “female chastity—the main determinant of women’s good repute in the marriage market—[was] a form of capital whose value [was] ultimately grounded in deferral, or rather rule[d] surrounding proper timing” (McGonegal 2007; 297): only in that way could a woman

try to have her value respected, by keeping under control as much as possible the more or less insistent *avances* of the man interested in gaining her.

In any case, it seems clear that everything a man put into play during courtship was calculated on the value of the profit he would have received once he had tied his prey to marriage. Very often, in fact, it happened that courtship was interpreted as a real investment by the representative of the male gender, who equated the value of his time and money spent in tokens of love to that of the woman he was interested in. In this business, she had no purchasing power, but rather her “power rest[ed] only in [her] ability to be surveyed” (Morton 1999; 195). Unfortunately, all she could do was to submit to this petty system and make the most out of what she had, namely her body and her qualities, by showing them off, with the aim of equating them in turn to the investment of her potential future husband. Concerning this, Morton explains that

sumptuary display is [...] evidence of [a woman's] position as an object of exchange and spectacle, a living property which could purchase—according to the value of its dowry and lineage—a husband and his social rank and whose 'value' is proved or augmented by visible 'charms,' beauty and accomplishments. A woman displays the rank of her husband, her power lying only in her ability to attract attention (1999; 188).

However, this power only gives the illusion of having decision-making value, because in a patriarchal system only men have the final say. McGonegal underlines that the “gifts proffered by male suitors are not pure or unconditional, but generate the obligation of an extorted counter-gift” (2007; 295) on the part of the representative of the female gender, which in the eighteenth century corresponded to agreeing to lose any right to the possession of her material goods and her body. In this regard Johns explains that “[d]ependence on a patron or husband represented double slavery because it bound a person's mind (feelings of gratitude and affection) as well as body (time and physical inclination to act)” (2003; 80), limiting, if not cancelling, the freedom of the woman who in most cases felt forced to accept, not only because of social conventions, which in themselves already had a significant weight, but also because of the potential sense of guilt that would have derived from a refusal, since it

would have meant proving herself ungrateful by not wanting to repay the debt contracted by accepting *avances* and gifts. In fact, “[w]omen were forced into domestic slavery by the custom of the duty of gratitude rather than any legal or religious sanction, and they risked social ostracising for failing to be grateful” (Johns 2003; 60), ending up condemned to a life on the margins.

In the eighteenth century, therefore, women were forced to submit to a double dependence, both emotional and economic. “[P]resuming or expecting to be supported” (Johns 2003; 60) financially by her husband meant being a conceited woman, and, therefore, she had no chance of asserting her rights. “Moreover, [she] had no legal redress if support was denied” (Johns 2003; 60), since the entire asset, once married, passed into the hands of the man, and consequently only he could decide whether to be magnanimous and grant something to his wife or not, all the while being completely legitimised by the marriage contract. Johns notes that “even money to which women had legal right was viewed in practice as largesse in the part of husbands” (2003; 60), and so, even if legal documents established a woman’s right to own money, this was considered a concession, an act of generosity rather than a duty of the man.

In general, it can be stated that gifts in heterosexual relationships of the eighteenth century were nothing more than blackmail in disguise. Thanks to them, in fact, the male gender, supported by the patriarchal system, could exercise its power of control over the female gender. In this regard McGonegal explains that between husband and wife “relations of power that render[ed] the gift a manipulative gesture in the context of capitalist exchange” (2007; 293) were established, and in that context, nothing was given for free and the concept of *do ut des* reigned supreme. That did not only create a gender inequality, but also a class inequality. It happened very often that a woman was forced to marry a man just because he belonged to a higher social class and, therefore, was able to improve her economic condition. Indeed, if on the one hand, “when gifts exclude[d] the possibility of an equivalent return, they bec[a]me a means of exercising domination [, ... and t]hey [were] also a manipulation tactic, a way of eliciting feelings of obligation”, on the other hand they “highlight[ed] class

difference” (McGonegal 2007; 299), as it was always a rich and upper-class man who conquered with his means a woman in more or less worse economic conditions, never the other way around.

This did not just apply to married couples, by the way. In fact, the “social inequality integral to gift giving” (McGonegal 2007; 293) could also be found among relationships between women. In particular, this happened between high society women and single women who had no other way to live with dignity than to put themselves at the service of the former, becoming their companions. This condition, like marriage, could hide several dangers. In fact, it often happened that the gentlewoman at first appeared generous, affectionate and welcoming, while over time she would take advantage of her higher rank and the created relationship of dependence to mistreat and humiliate her subordinate. About this, McGonegal explains that,

[i]f gentry women g[a]ve gifts to so-called 'toad-eaters' [, ...] they [did] so in order to demand and reinforce their recipients' subservience in a manner that seem[ed] consensual. The situation of being overpowered with gifts is overpowering precisely because it is often a strategy of reinforcing and contributing to a sense of social inferiority (2007; 298).

In both cases, therefore, whether it was marriage or companionship, the concept of benevolence that is at the basis of profeminist utopias was not contemplated, and everything was regulated by the lust for possession, typical of the economic system that was developing precisely in the eighteenth century. In fact, “charity in the form of personal care and attention [was] essential to the construction and maintenance of relations of dominance when capitalism [was] not yet fully consolidated and institutionalized” (McGonegal 2007; 300), and that forced women to suffer more and more injustices. From these bases, therefore, the writers of profeminist utopias decided to start, with the intent of opposing all this and of demonstrating that, despite the “[c]ontemporary exegesis emphasized Eve’s subordination to Adam, insisting that woman was created from and for man” (Macey 1997; 162), thus supporting the atavistic rhetoric of the patriarchal system, “[w]omen’s current subordination [was ...]

the product of history rather than essence, and as such it [could] be undone” (Johns 2003; 56).

To prove this, Sarah Scott decided to put the personal stories of the five female founders of her utopian community at the centre of her novel. These form the largest part of the work, and, consequently, the most important part, too, as they are essential to bear witness to the abuse suffered by the Hall’s women and thus give reason for their desire to live away from the rest of society. This is exactly one of the leitmotifs of the inset narratives—women’s grief caused by the male gender—but, fortunately, the ladies of Millenium Hall eventually find a way to sublimate that affliction by organising their community. According to Cruise,

[t]he significance of the[ir] chronicles is that despite their individual singularity, they form a collective history out of which the autonomous history of Millenium Hall has been created. In each instance, [...] women suffer at the hands of men, who are apt to be dissimulating, malicious, unprincipled, and whimsical (1995; 561),

but this does not prevent the female founders from rebuilding their lives by forming an all-female union. “The narratives of the women characters rehearse time and again the painful and often futile sacrifices made by women, in the name of duty and against feeling, to uphold male authority” (Rees 1996; 223-4)—this does not happen out of a spirit of pure self-denial, but rather out of a considered choice that leads the five ladies, each in her respective case, to express their virtues.

Indeed, Schellenberg notes that

Scott present[ed] the reader with repeated instances of women making difficult choices as evidence of a rational strength, a properly ordered internal hierarchy of reason and passion, that is inherent in the female self rather than imprinted upon her through patriarchal control. Indeed, feminine reason can be most fully exercised when it is unencumbered by male passion or inadequacy (1996; 98),

and that is why their intellectual abilities reach a peak of efficiency once they are applied in the design and creation of Millenium Hall, where there are no men trying in

any way to overpower women. With this act of self-assertion, the female protagonists of Sarah Scott's novel prove that they are not damsels in distress, but strong, courageous women, capable of standing on their own two feet and revolutionising their lives when necessary. In fact, as Cruise affirms, "th[e] series of [narratives] is transformed not into a predictable story of eighteenth-century women characters but into an uncommon and defiant history of collective fulfillment and enlightened self-interest" (1995; 563).

Moreover, "this community [...] challenges the very grounds of the ideology of gender to which its individual members conformed so admirably in their earlier lives" (Schellenberg 1996; 98), and to do so they decide to enact a small revolution, questioning the ideological foundations of the system of their time, of which they no longer want to be a part. With the establishment of their female society, the Hall's women express a

critique of patriarchal mythology by elaborating a homosocial myth of origin for the community. [...] The stories Mrs Maynard tells the [male] narrator are the community's 'sacred history,' and they serve a dual function: they explain why Millenium Hall exists, and they establish the paradigms of hetero- and homosociability that define the women's world-view (Macey 1997; 171-2).

The first history narrated by Mrs Maynard is that of Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan. It is the only one of the four that brings together the lives of two female founders, while the others to follow deal with one of the ladies at a time. The reason for this choice is given by the female narrator herself, who states that they are the true "first inhabitants of, and indeed the founders of this society" and that "from their childhood [they] have been so connected, that [she] could not, if [she] would, disunite them in [her] relation; and it would be almost a sin to endeavour to separate them even in idea" (Scott 1762; 30). The story starts with Miss Mancel, who before anything else is described as "the most beautiful child" ever seen (Scott 1762; 32). It is interesting to note that the eyes looking at her are those of a man, who cannot help but comment on Louisa's physical appearance in a moment of great shock and suffering for the child,

who at the tender age of ten sees the only relative she had ever known, namely her aunt, die in front of her.

Having been left alone in the world, since her parents had left England when she was an infant and had lost contact with her, little Miss Mancel is being cared for by Mr Hintman, another man who cannot control his “excited [...] curiosity”, his “desire of seeing this miracle”, and consequently fixes his gaze on Louisa, judging that “she looked so extremely beautiful, that [he], highly as his expectation had been raised, was struck with surprize (*sic*)” (Scott 1762; 34). Mr Hintman has no connection whatsoever with Miss Mancel, but nevertheless decides to become her guardian, since he has an “ample fortune [...], and ha[s] no children, or family to partake of it” (Scott 1762; 37). This also entails Louisa being “educated in all accomplishments proper for a young person of fashion and fortune”, and in fact she is soon accepted by a “French boarding school” (Scott 1762; 37), where “her mind [is] cultivated with the greatest care, and no accomplishment omitted which she [is] capable of acquiring” (Scott 1762; 38).

Miss Mancel’s education thus proves to be of paramount importance to Mr Hintman, who in all likelihood, from the very moment he took the child under his wing, already had it clear in his mind how he would dispose of Louisa once she reached the appropriate age for marriage. In this regard, Alliker Rabb underlines that the “[e]ducation of a woman simply makes the conquest of her more interesting. [Mr Hintman] has given [Miss Mancel] access to knowledge through books as a prelude to sexual knowledge” (1988; 10). Indeed, during her stay at the institute, Louisa “receiv[es] every proof of the most tender affection” from Mr Hintman, who “call[s] upon her frequently, and seldom without some present, or a proposal of some pleasure” (Scott 1762; 48). By being “lavish of his money to her” (Scott 1762; 48-9), Miss Mancel’s guardian puts his plan into action, which consists in binding her to him by means of implicit extortion, counting on the fact that Louisa, when the time comes, will feel obliged to accept any kind of proposal from him, even if it is indecent, since she cannot sin by ingratitude. Williams Elliott explains that

Mr. Hintman's designs are the reverse of those of philanthropic institutions, including the one at Millenium Hall; the education he provides for his deserted orphan is aimed at seduction instead of against it. Miss Mancel's story therefore discloses the unspoken potential for exploitation built into men's philanthropic institutions for victimized women. Because as an object of charity the woman is expected to repay her benefactor's gift with gratitude and obedience, she is actually in a position of further risk (1995; 547).

In fact, it was common in that period, as it still is today, unfortunately, for a man to feel entitled to put forward proposals, which almost every time became demands, against a woman in an economically and/or socially disadvantaged position, appealing to their sense of gratitude, guilt and duty. This could happen in public charities run by men, as well as in private households. And this is precisely what happens to Miss Mancel, who feels "great obligations to [Mr Hintman]" (Scott 1762; 49), and as a consequence, at some point, she finds herself "reduced [...] to great difficulties" (Scott 1762; 57). Indeed, "Mr Hintman's [...] caresses which suited her earlier years [are] now [...] improper; [...] and yet to inform him of the impropriety, implied a forward consciousness which she was not able to assume" (Scott 1762; 57). On the other hand, though, Louisa's protector, who has become a predator in effect, is "too ardent in his purposes to give up his favourite scheme", and indeed insists that she "accompany him into the country" (Scott 1762; 61), with the probable intention of sexually possessing her and thus forcing her into marriage.

As explained above, the nuptial bond too often becomes a prison for the women, and in fact Cruise affirms that, "[b]y sanctioning and constraining female representation, marriage would disqualify Miss Mancel from representing her worth or acting upon her spiritual values" (1995; 564). Fortunately, Louisa is spared this cruel fate, because "Mr Hintman die[s ...] in a fit of an apoplexy" (Scott 1762; 62), just three days before the agreed departure. Subsequently, various vicissitudes lead Miss Mancel to become the companion first of Lady Lambton and then of Mrs Thornby. The latter turns out to be her mother, who returned from America after being widowed by both her first husband, Mr Mancel, and her second, Mr Thornby, with the intention

of finding her daughter. Together, the two live six years of “perfect calm” (Scott 1762; 135), until Mrs Thornby sadly dies of fever. Therefore, Miss Mancel finds herself heir to forty thousand pounds, and once she reconnects with her dear friend Mrs Morgan, who has now become a widow, together they take possession of the house that the latter had inherited, transforming it into Millenium Hall.

Mrs Morgan, born Miss Melvyn, meets Louisa at boarding school, but her story begins before that. Mrs Maynard in fact tells of the former’s mother, Lady Melvyn, and her marriage to Sir Charles. As Cruise explains,

[f]orced into a marriage she did not want, Lady Melvyn submits to her filial duty and takes as her husband [...] a man who is at once sober, good-natured, and attractive. Missing from this portrait are those attributes she really seeks in a husband: intelligence and understanding. [...] Therefore,] Lady Melvyn compensates for her husband’s inadequacies (1995; 564),

by often having to put herself aside in order to indulge and make her husband stand out. A similar situation is repeated in the case of her daughter, Miss Melvyn. Indeed, once she leaves the boarding school due to reaching the maximum age for pupils, she is forced by her stepmother, the second Lady Melvyn, to marry Mr Morgan. It is the same stepmother who had kicked her out of the house, since she wanted to have an exclusive relationship with Sir Charles without the burden of his daughter. For the same reason then, once she has returned, Miss Melvyn must marry so that she leaves her father’s house for good. To make this happen, the second Lady Melvyn falsely accuses the girl of having a clandestine affair with a farmer who lives nearby; thus, Miss Melvyn is forced to accept Mr Morgan’s insistent flattery in order to avoid a scandal that would result in the loss of her reputation. As Schellenberg notes, among the five female founders, “the courtship plot and marriage ending are circumvented in every case but that of Mrs. Morgan” (1996; 94), and unfortunately for her, it is a disastrous experience.

In fact, “Mr Morgan[’s ...] disposition appeare[s] as ill suited to her’s (*sic*) as his age” (Scott 1762; 93), and he “despise[s] her understanding”, even if he is still “indeed fond of her person” (Scott 1762; 107). Her husband’s appreciation of Mrs Morgan’s

physical appearance is the greatest punishment she has to endure, as being desired by a man for whom she has no feelings causes her disgust. As Mrs Maynard reports: “she suffered less uneasiness from his ill-humour, brutal as it was, than from his nauseous fondness” (Scott 1762; 107). This is just one of many “repeated descriptions of the married state as one of irresolution and unhappiness caused by the instability of a mutable world and often exacerbated by the dangers of a forcibly created intimate society” (Schellenberg 1996; 94). Unfortunately, marital rape is not the only violence suffered by Mrs Morgan within her marriage. Mr Morgan in fact prevents her from having any contact with her dear friend Miss Mancel, who, once free of Mr Hintman’s demands, had found a nearby dwelling to live in. Therefore, the “connection of soul and body” between two women is abruptly broken by a man who wields his power with cruelty (Scott 1762; 102).

According to Mrs Morgan’s husband, “[his] wife must have no other companion or friend but her husband”, because “[he] shall not choose to have my faults discussed between [his wife] and [her] *friend* (original emphasis)” (Scott 1762; 101). The fear of being judged by the female gender then drives Mr Morgan to act with overbearing force against his wife, who helplessly can do nothing but accept her fate. Mangano explains that “[t]he potential surveillance of private male virtue, under the guise of female friendship, threatens the hegemonic surveillance of female virtue by the patriarchal gaze” (2015; 475), and in fact it is only with the death of her husband that Mrs Morgan is able to break out of the patriarchal panopticon in which she was confined and join with her precious friend Miss Mancel, founding their female community. Macey comments on this:

Mrs Morgan and Miss Mancel regain 'paradise' only after Mr Morgan’s death, when they are able to establish a household together at Millenium Hall. The community they found realizes the promise of Astell’s Serious Proposal: 'transplanted' from unhappy homes to an idyllic 'garden,' Miss Mancel, Mrs Morgan, and the women who join them blossom, sustained by 'the prop of Virtuous Friendship, and confirm'd in Goodness by holy Example' (1997; 172, quoting Astell 1701; 94).

The second story told by Mrs Maynard, who follows the chronological order in which the remaining three female founders joined the community, concerns Lady Mary Jones. Orphaned and “entirely destitute of provision” (Scott 1762; 156), she is taken in by Lady Sheerness, her aunt. The latter is described as a woman “with a good person, [...] infinite vivacity[, a]n unbridled imagination [...] and [...] a great deal of wit” (Scott 1762; 157), which gives her the opportunity to seduce her husband, who, “in the decline of life, had been captivated by her youthful charms” (Scott 1762; 157). Her lifestyle devoted to “giddiness and perpetual dissipation” (Scott 1762; 158), which remains unchanged even once she becomes a widow, means that when Lady Mary Jones is adopted, she is “initiated into every diversion at an age, when other girls are confined to their nursery” (Scott 1762; 159).

As a consequence, the young girl soon becomes “coquettish and extravagant” (Scott 1762; 159), not having the opportunity to receive a proper education, neither on the rules of good conduct for a Lady, nor in general on religious, ethical and moral principles. What happens to the protagonist in this story is analysed lucidly by Morton:

Lady Mary’s rank is increased by the display and acquisition of what, because it has been valued by others, will increase her display value. As her line of sight is limited to her own acquisition of spectacle, however, she does not realize that her value may be potentially decreased [. ...] As an object of spectacle subjected to unregulated exchange she loses value and becomes [...], in Mary Astell’s words, ‘cheap and contemptible’. While the economy of spectacle is maintained by display, that display, in turn, is dependant upon self-surveillance (1999; 197, quoting Astell 1701; 4).

It is precisely this self-awareness that Lady Mary Jones lacks, as she does not realise how dangerous the consequences of her attitude can be for her reputation.

Indeed, by “play[ing] off a thousand airs of coquetry (*sic*)” (Scott 1762; 160), the young woman attracts the attention of Mr Lenman, a man described as “moderately agreeable, his understanding specious, and his manner insinuating” (Scott 1762; 160). It is precisely his manipulative nature that comes in handy when he insistently tries to convince Lady Mary to marry him in secret by arranging an elopement in Scotland.

Citing fear “of not being accepted by her aunt” (Scott 1762; 161) as the main reason for refusing to make the marriage public, Mr Lenman, together with his lover, sets the date of departure. Fortunately, however, just the day before the adventure begins, Lady Mary falls ruinously from her horse, and is forced to stay in bed for a fortnight while she recovers. It is during her convalescence that she learns that her suitor is actually already married and that this is the real reason for all that secrecy.

It is only at this point that Lady Mary’s eyes are opened to reality: “[s]he [is] frightened to think how near she was becoming the object of general ridicule and disgrace” (Scott 1762; 164), but this is not enough to make her radically change her behaviour. In fact, shortly afterwards she becomes closely acquainted with Lord Robert St. George, “a very fashionable man, much caressed by the ladies” (Scott 1762; 167). These characteristics tickle Lady Mary’s vanity, who sees “Lord Robert as a conquest of importance” (Scott 1762; 168). The latter turns out to be an expert in seduction techniques, as he devises a plan to be alone with Lady Mary and openly declares his interest to her. When this happens, “Lady Mary [does] not perceive she [is] left alone with Lord Robert, till the growing freedom of his address ma[kes] her observe it; but as prudence [is] not one of her virtues, she [is] not at all disconcerted with this *tête à tête*” (Scott 1762; 170). Only after repeated insistence, “his perseverance increase[s] Lady Mary’s surprize (*sic*), and [...] at length she [thinks] it necessary to retire, notwithstanding his utmost endeavours to detain her” (Scott 1762; 171).

After this episode, the young woman, confiding in a friend, begins to realise that “her vivacity” should always be “under the direction of modesty” (Scott 1762; 172), and not “degenerat[e] into levity” (Scott 1762; 173). It is thanks to the positive results of this self-examination that Lady Mary is able to face Lord Robert again, this time relying on her acquired sense of dignity. When she “tell[s] him his pursuit [is] in vain” (Scott 1762; 175), her suitor is at first stunned, but later starts “treating her with a respect which her conduct deserve[s]; for he plainly [sees] she had acted in contradiction to her own heart” (Scott 1762; 176), and, therefore, definitely abandons his intention to seduce her.

When Lady Mary reaches the age of twenty, she is also deprived of her only remaining relative, her aunt Lady Sheerness, who “depart[s] to a world of which she had never thought, and for which she [is] totally unprepared” (Scott 1762; 178). Unfortunately, her reckless lifestyle causes Lady Mary to face “considerable debts” (Scott 1762; 179), to repay which she is forced to sell all her remaining possessions. She is relieved from her state of poverty by a distant relative, Lady Brumpton, who takes the protagonist of this story into her house for five years, before she is struck down by a “nervous fever” (Scott 1762; 186) that causes her death. This time Lady Mary receives “ten thousand pounds, and all [Lady Brumpton’s] plate and jewels” (Scott 1762; 187). Following a chance meeting with Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan, Lady Mary decides to join Millenium Hall, providing her legacy to expand the community through charitable actions.

The third inset narrative is that of Miss Selvyn, Lady Mary’s friend who advised her on how to deal with Lord Robert. Forced to grow up without her mother due to her death, she is educated by her father, who instructs her in various subjects, such as French and history, as well as “[teaching] her true frugality without narrowness of mind; and [making] her see how few of all the expences (*sic*) the world [runs] into [are] necessary to happiness” (Scott 1762; 196). In this way, he “prevent[s] that vanity of mind, which leads people to seek external amusements” (Scott 1762; 196), but exposes her to criticism from acquaintances, who “censur[e] Mr Selvyn, ‘for giving his daughter an education, to which her fortune was so ill suited, and [think] he would have done better to have bred her up to housewifery, and qualif[y] her for the wife of an honest tradesman’” (Scott 1762; 196). In this regard, Alliker Rabb notes that there is a “pattern of personal achievement (through mastery of the male canon), public ridicule, and self-rejection” (1988; 10) concerning women who attempt to actively join the patriarchal system, but inevitably fail. Before entering the female community, in fact, culture for a woman can only be an extra *quid* taken into account by men who establish her value. As Morton explains, “knowledge, so intimately connected to [...] utility, and order at Millenium Hall, becomes an *accomplishment* (original emphasis), an adjunct to or aspect of spectacle” (1999; 194).

Moreover, the only topic Mr Selvyn decides to avoid with his daughter is that of religion, as “he [can]not teach her what he [does] not believe” (Scott 1762; 197), but this lack is filled by the priest of their parish, who teaches her “the truths of christianity, which though the most necessary of all things, was at first the only one neglected” (Scott 1762; 201). At the age of about seventeen, she moves with her father to London, where, thanks to her neighbour Lady Emilia Reynolds, she is introduced to Lady Sheerness’ circle of acquaintances, in which she meets Lady Mary Jones and becomes friends with her. Shortly afterwards, Mr Selvyn dies and bequeaths to his daughter “three thousand pounds, a fortune which exceed[s] her expectation, though it [is] not sufficient to suffer her to live in London with convenience. [Therefore,] Lady Emilia invite[s] her to her house” (Scott 1762; 203), and together they live peacefully, until Colonel Lord Robert St. George “quarter[s] in a town not far from them [... and] renew[s] his slight acquaintance with Lady Emilia and Miss Selvyn” (Scott 1762; 204), whom he had met a few times at gatherings organised by Lady Sheerness.

Visiting them often, Lord Robert ends up falling in love with Miss Selvyn, so much so that he asks for her hand in marriage by interceding with her guardian. The protagonist of this story, however, is convinced that “it could not be advisable for her to marry; for enjoying perfect content, she ha[s] no benefit to expect from change” (Scott 1762; 205), and, therefore, rejects the Colonel. After a few years, Lady Emilia unfortunately falls ill and dies, but not before revealing her true identity to Miss Selvyn: she in fact confesses to being her real mother. She bequeaths to her daughter “twelve thousand pounds, and all her personal estate” (Scott 1762; 220). At this point Miss Selvyn decides to get back in touch with her friend Lady Mary Jones to ask her to join the community of Millenium Hall, which actually happens. Her inheritance, added to the common fund of the women’s society, is used to create “the community of indigent gentlewomen” (Scott 1762; 221).

The last history deals with the life of Mrs Trentham. Orphaned at the age of eight, her father left her as his last will “eleven thousand pounds, recommending both her person and fortune to his Mother Mrs. Alworth”, who “ha[s] outlived all her

children [... and] receiv[es] her grand-children into her family” (Scott 1762; 227). Before dying, however, Mr Trentham manages to give Harriot some moral guidance:

By teaching her humanity, he initiate[s] her into civility of manners. She [learns], that to give pain [is] immoral [...]. Any thought therefore that could hurt she suppress[es] as an indispensable duty, and to please by her actions, and not offend by her words, [is] an essential part of the religion in which she [is] educated (Scott 1762; 228-9).

Certainly, therefore, among her father’s teachings there is no envy, a characteristic which instead distinguishes her three female cousins, Miss Alworth and two Miss Denhams, with whom Miss Trentham lives together with her only male cousin, Mr Alworth. The former “let no opportunity escape of making [Harriot] feel the effects of their little malice [, ...] continually laying little plots to lessen her in their grandmother’s opinion” (Scott 1762; 229).

Mr Alworth is the only one who sides with her: “being fond of [her], [... he] [feels] great indignation at the treatment she receive[s]” (Scott 1762; 230). The two then form a friendship that binds them even more deeply than blood ties, a relationship that is also fostered by the fact that they are privately educated together by the same tutor. Thus their life goes on until Mr Alworth, being male, has the opportunity “to complete [his] education” (Scott 1762; 231) with a trip abroad. During this period, Mrs Alworth reflects on how desirable a marriage between Harriot and her cousin is, given their complicity. On the other hand, Miss Trentham and Mr Alworth “[have] not extended their views so far. Bred up like brother and sister, a tenderer degree of relation [have] not entered their thoughts, nor [does] any thing more appear necessary to their happiness, than a constant enjoyment of each others friendship” (Scott 1762; 232). Meanwhile, Harriot furthers her education and becomes “perfect mistress of the living languages, and no less acquainted with Greek and Latin [, ... as well as with] ancient and modern philosophy” (Scott 1762; 232).

After two years of separation, Mr Alworth returns home, and his relationship with Miss Trentham resumes as if it had never been interrupted:

Every one talk[s] of their mutual passion; and they [are] so often told of it that they [begin] to fancy it [is] true, but [are] surprized (*sic*) to find that name should be given to an affection calm and rational as theirs, totally free from that turbulency (*sic*) and wildness, which [have] always appeared to them the true characteristics of love (Scott 1762; 235).

Initially a little hesitant, then increasingly convinced, Harriot and her cousin decide to go along with their grandmother's intentions and agree to begin the marriage practices. One of the main reasons for their consent is to be found in their sense of modesty. Indeed, as Mangano explains, "when Mrs. Alworth makes her aspirations known to them, these two friends must scrutinize their relationship and wonder if society can tolerate their intimacy outside the context of a marital union" (2015; 483).

While waiting for all the bureaucratic details to be ready for their union, Mr Alworth happens to meet "Miss Melman, a very pretty woman [... with] an engaging vivacity" (Scott 1762; 237), and since he "[has] been little used to any woman but his sober and sensible grand-mother's two cousins [, ...] a sister [...], and the incomparable Harriot" (Scott 1762; 237-8), he is overwhelmed by the novelty represented by this "complete coquet, capricious and fantastical" (Scott 1762; 238), and inevitably falls in love with her. At this point Miss Trentham decides to take a step back, "and [tells] him, in the most friendly and generous manner, that, 'nothing remained to be done but to cancel [the marriage writings], that, she plainly perceived another had obtained the heart she never possessed'" (Scott 1762; 239). Wearing his heart on his sleeve, Mr Alworth confesses that "he now [...] preceive[s] the difference between friendship and love, and [is] convinced, that esteem and passion [are] totally independant (*sic*), since [Harriot] entirely possesse[s] the one, while Miss Melman totally engrosse[s] the other" (Scott 1762; 239). What happens at this point of the story produces a lucid reflection by Schellenberg, who comments as follows:

The fact that one of the most worthy male characters in the novel [, namely Mr Alworth,] is congenitally prone to irresistible and socially disruptive desire suggests that the so-called perverseness of human nature resides in

the masculine, and therefore that even the admirable man introduces a threat of instability into the intimate circle of friendship (1996; 91).

Giving in to passion, however, does not turn out to be the right choice for Mr Alworth. After two years of marriage, in fact, he returns with his wife to Mrs Alworth's house to take possession of it, as an inheritance received upon her death, and on this occasion he confides his remorse to Miss Trentham. Calling his initial feelings for his wife "ill-grounded", Harriot's cousin confesses that "[h]e too late saw the difference between sensible vivacity and animal spirits, and found Mrs. Alworth [...] too volatile to think, too vain to love" (Scott 1762; 244). Moreover, Mr Alworth, now once again close to Miss Trentham, begins to feel towards her that desire which he did not feel before, when he had the opportunity of marrying her. Acknowledged this, Harriot suggests that "absence [is] the best remedy, and that there [is] nothing to be done but for her to leave the house" (Scott 1762; 247). Morton explains that "desire [...] is profoundly destabilizing. [...] When the married Mr Alworth wishes to return to Harriot after his desire for his wife has dissipated, the potential of an adulterous relationship threatens to deprive Harriot of her chastity and rank" (1999; 200).

Consequently, the only option available to the latter is to put aside her feelings of deep affection for her cousin and move to London, where she lives together with her friend Mrs Maynard. Once in the capital, Miss Trentham decides to try to silence the suffering caused by the distance from her dear Mr Alworth by adopting a new lifestyle in the name of "dissipation" (Scott 1762; 249). Only by getting sick with "small-pox" does she manage to come to her senses, since "[it has] entirely destroyed her beauty" (Scott 1762; 251). Once she moves to the countryside, Harriot rediscovers "[h]er love for reading" (Scott 1762; 251) and some peace of mind, which allows her to lucidly sustain an exchange of letters with Mr Alworth. In this regard Mangano explains that "[t]he distance of writing provides a space for intellectual equality and shared pleasures between the sexes because it displaces the threat of bodies" (2015; 484). From a distance, passions are governable, and instincts are calmed. One day, visiting a person who lives near Millenium Hall, Mrs Trentham learns about the women's community and decides to join in. Upon Mrs Alworth's death, Harriot had inherited

four thousand pounds, which she now adds to the eleven thousand pounds that were his father's bequest, and allocates the whole to the common fund of the women's society for the building of the textile factory. Furthermore, once she learns that her friend Mrs Maynard had become a widow, she invites her to join her and the other founders.

The female founders' histories are essential in order to give a concrete meaning to Sarah Scott's utopia. Without the inset narratives, the Millenium Hall project would only seem like a nice initiative, when in fact the female community is a tangible response to the need of many women in eighteenth-century English society to feel actively part of the system in which they live, without necessarily having to be dependent on a male figure. The sufferings endured by the Hall's women are useful examples to enlighten readers on the limits imposed by patriarchal society on the female gender, first and foremost not allowing women to have public roles in it. Williams Elliott is very clear on this issue:

[the female founders] have all survived attacks on their virtue (or their reputation) and have created for themselves a new position within a transformed domestic ideology. The ladies of Millenium Hall are not wives or mothers; instead of graciously presiding over a home and family, they establish and manage a philanthropic community; instead of channeling their desires toward husbands and children, they live in harmony with other women. In creating this new position for women, predictably, *Millenium Hall* also provides alternative symbolic solutions to the social problems that domestic ideology was supposed to address (1995; 542).

The Hall's community, therefore, while remaining a utopia, nevertheless represented a valid and concrete example for the English society of that time. By virtue of the fact that Scott, along with the other protofeminist writers, devised utopias that contained within themselves, in addition to Christian values, ideals belonging to different schools of thought that developed precisely in the eighteenth century, they were able to show different but possible realities with their works. In particular, the female authors adopted some principles of the Enlightenment, which, with its primacy

of reason, instilled in them the idea of basing their communities on a rational organisation of the spaces and the economic activities managed by their female protagonists, thus creating the conditions for the application of their methods even outside the pages of their novels, that is, in real society. Johns explains that

[e]ighteenth-century feminists [...] anticipated nineteenth-century experimental communities [...] even as they leaned on Enlightenment concepts. That dynamic combination offer[ed] compelling images of ideal societies that [could] inspire the search for more profitable academic, socioeconomic, and political arrangements (2003; 3).

In addition to the Enlightenment, it was exactly from “contemporary political and economic theories” that they took inspiration, combining “evolving discourses of contract” with forms of “practical reformism” promulgated by the intellectuals of the time (Johns 2003; 2).

In particular, “[e]ighteenth-century female authors emphasise[d] Lockean theories of [...] education and human personality while they embrace[d] Scottish enlightenment notions of morality and economics” (Johns 2003; 15): in fact, they maintained that education should be useful for the practice of everyday life and not just based on notions, that personalities should be cultivated by implementing behaviours that follow Christian morality, and that the economy should be based on free exchange, in a climate of mutuality. All of this was reworked by the female writers in a protofeminist key, distancing themselves from the use that was made of these principles in the society of the time. More specifically, female utopists combined the best aspects of the emerging economic system with notions of Christian morality, thus creating communities where productive efficiency and benevolence could be found together. Indeed, Johns affirms that

[t]hey drew simultaneously on ideas of contractual reciprocity and the language of Christian charity and responsibility. In the process, they rerouted the conceptions of social contract, laissez-faire, and the division of labour to turn trade into benevolent exchange [and] individualism into community (2003; 19-20).

The major issue of the society of that period that the protofeminist writers were committed to solving, was the exclusion of women from public life. As a consequence, they aimed at “retheori[sing] the position of women in profound ways, in particular reconceiving contractual relations in both economic and political terms to create a place for women as subjects” (Johns 2003; 10-11). Within their utopias, the female authors imagined groups formed by women only who take on the responsibility of managing in their entirety some charitable ventures, productive activities and also agricultural land, demonstrating that they can do so admirably without the support of any male figure. To do this, it was essential to find confirmation in the accredited theories of the time that could legitimise the entity of their projects. To begin with, “[w]omen utopists [...] were attracted to contractualism because it based personality not on the ownership of land or the achievement of leisure but on participation in equivalent exchanges” (Johns 2003; 54), where a woman had the same opportunities as a man. This concept of equality was also the basis of another philosophical current of that period, that Johns analyses as follows:

the jurisprudential model [conceived] its idea of origin—a foundational social contract—[as] posit[ing] a historical moment when [women] were the equals of men. Human beings, born free in a state of nature, [...] decide for reasons of security or efficiency mutually to consent to a government that will apply laws and dispense justice. In their novels, feminist utopists reenacted moments at this social ground zero where characters came together to create a community, mutually setting the emotional and financial terms upon which the society would be structured (2003; 56).

Thanks to these two socioeconomic theories, the female writers demonstrated that women had all the capabilities to do what men do, and, consequently, did not deserve to be relegated to passive roles. To this, they also added the “civic humanism’s emphasis on virtue and valuing of friendship”, that together with “the concept of Christian charity and love” (Johns 2003; 61) formed the very core of these protofeminist utopian projects.

Benevolence is, therefore, at the basis of the functioning of these communities, that is, that virtue which, together with kindness and altruism, allows the women who manage these charitable activities to truly do good for others, overturning the selfishness and thirst for profit typical of the capitalist system. In such an environment, where respect and equality reign, there are no debts, nor favours to return, but everything is done for the pure pleasure of helping. All this is theorised by one of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment,

Hutcheson [, who] asserted that an exchange of benevolence and gratitude is beautiful because it has the balance and order of a contract—the symmetrical relation of right and obligation—and is therefore conducive to virtuous social interaction. An influential, practical theory of benevolence was therefore adapted to new socioeconomic circumstances (Johns 2003; 83),

and proof of this can be read in the pages of protofeminist utopian novels. In fact, in these communities, those who need help receive it without hesitation, in a totally selfless way, precisely because those who give are immediately repaid by the joy they feel in alleviating the suffering of others.

If this is true for women, unfortunately the same cannot be stated in men's regard. The latter are incapable of feeling empathy and are convinced that they are doing enough good by focusing completely on the production of material goods and the accumulation of wealth, according to the principles of the protocapitalist system. However, this belief of theirs was denied by

John Millar, [... a] student of Adam Smith [, ... who] measured the progress of society by its treatment of women. After women experienced continual improvement from hunter-gatherer to commercial societies, their situation would deteriorate as men, with passions liberated by commercial society, behaved toward them with ever-decreasing dignity (Johns 2003; 53).

If on the one hand the male gender proves to be increasingly prey to its material desires, to the detriment of the female gender which is more and more oppressed and mistreated, causing a real worsening of the whole society, on the other hand “[w]omen

writers invoke new psychological and educational theories, like those of John Locke, and use fiction [...] for behaviour modification” (Johns 2003; 14). In their utopias, in fact, women have the opportunity to affirm their dignity and cultivate their personality, being free from the constraints of the patriarchal system. By writing about this, female utopists could inspire readers to change their lives, in a more or less significant way depending on their possibilities, by trying to participate actively in society.

It is important to stress that the considerable changes described so far, which constitute the theoretical foundations on which these protofeminist utopias are built, are specific to England because they originate here. In the rest of Europe these ideas will be known and studied only at a later stage. This is the reason why “[these ...] form[s] of utopia [are] initially to be seen in British texts[,] because [they] depended for its articulation on new commercial relationships and corresponding political [...] and social ideas, [...] which developed] earlier in Britain than elsewhere” (Johns 2003; 11). Especially with regard to the economy, the English became the architects of an epochal turning of events, destined to completely change a secular world system. In fact, at that time, the “transition during the mid-eighteenth century from a so-called traditional court culture to what has been alternately termed mercantile [...] capitalism” (McGonegal 2007; 292) was witnessed, and therefore, in place of an economy based mainly on agricultural production, another kind emerged that accumulated capital derived from trade. It was also thanks to this new wealth, in addition to technological innovations, that England hosted the first industrial revolution, before any other European country.

However, this does not take away the fact that the countryside also underwent changes in the eighteenth century, although it counted less as a source of national income. The process that in fact was implemented in that period, the enclosing of land, concerned the privatisation of fields that until then had been in the public domain. This was not an immediate operation, nor an easy one. Furthermore, this transformation brought about the development of discontent among the less well-off classes; as a consequence, “the potential for unrest increased” (Morton 1999; 187), and it became necessary to find a solution to the growing poverty. Unfortunately, it took some time to

make institutions adapt to changes of such great magnitude, and make them capable of managing a huge mass of human resources that found themselves in precarious conditions overnight. In the meantime, in response to all this, many small charitable organisations began to spread, which set themselves the goal of managing as much as possible what risked becoming an emergency. Kelly analyses this phenomenon carefully:

in a state lacking major national institutions of public welfare, social surveillance, and policing, the local sphere was a—perhaps the—major arena of social action. In an economy and society increasingly determined by capitalist methods and relations, which the state was ill-equipped to guide or inhibit, intervention in the local sphere could be an important force for ameliorating the worst consequences of agrarian and incipient industrial capitalism (2000; 170).

While on the one hand a huge number of people in eighteenth-century England were under difficulties, on the other hand a small, and with time increasingly larger, amount were becoming immensely rich. This brought about a change in the lifestyle of the latter, who began to spend significant sums of money to surround themselves with material goods, both to satisfy personal desires and to flaunt their social status. Consequently, “[a]n increase both in luxury and the desire for wealth led to a national debate about how to return to virtue and simplicity” (Johns 2003; 6-7), and in this case too, charitable activities became important references, as a symbol of a lifestyle that was humble and observant of Christian morality. The growing relevance of these entities for the society of the time was one of the reasons why protofeminist writers decided to draw inspiration from them for their utopias. Indeed, “many utopian texts offered comprehensive depictions of more modest, less chaotic societies” (Johns 2003; 7), and in particular those written by women represented benevolence as a founding value, demonstrating that the female gender was the most suitable and capable of managing activities of that type. As Johns explains,

[f]eminist utopists of the eighteenth century imagined a world of exchange that was reconfigured to include women as subjects. It was a world of

benevolent exchange in which money counted but Christian charity determined value. What emerged was an ideal state where women could value themselves, were esteemed for their contributions to society, controlled their money [...], and had a hand in determining the shape of their communities (2003; 49).

In these small utopian societies, therefore, money management was fundamental, since without a basic capital it would not be possible to start charitable ventures, but the difference compared to the external society was that this money was not used for profit, but rather to do totally selfless good. In this way, both the giver and the receiver were satisfied, and the bond that was created between the two parties was not aseptic and limited to an economic transaction, but was one of sincere and deep friendship. In this regard, Johns observes that,

[since] benefits accrue to the donor as much as to the receiver, [protofeminists] suggested that benevolence is a bargain like any other [...]. [They] were centrally concerned with charity, [and] that capacity for benevolence depended upon possessing resources—both financial and emotional—that could be given and exchanged. Money, the central component of an autonomous public sphere, was revealed as simultaneously enabling private attachments (2003; 56).

By devising a utopia where “benevolence become[s] part of the system of equivalent exchanges”, and, consequently, “obligation [...] does not create debt and a sense of desperation, because good offices are reciprocal and can be counted on” (Johns 2003; 60), protofeminist writers represented what should have been the only true vocation of charitable activities, that is, giving selfless help, opposing a reality where too often the sense of humanity was replaced by the thirst for profit.

It is precisely this kind of vocation that makes benevolence a bulwark which, in a patriarchal and protocapitalist society, inevitably ends up becoming corrupted. In fact, in the eighteenth century it happened that the principle according to which charity, being the good deed *par excellence*, brings those who do it closer to God, lost its value, and it instead became a way like others to corrupt people under difficulties and

force them to enter the production systems. Before, when profit had not yet become the only aim, the wealthy classes had run charitable activities with two main goals: to please God and to set a good example for the lower ranks. Morton explains that at the time, according to what the upper classes believed,

the surveying eye include[d] not only the public but the constant, all-seeing, and therefore all-knowing and all-powerful eye of God, an eye which, though unseen, require[d their] upward gaze [. . . . Moreover, t]he lower ranks [would] look up to those of a higher rank, who, by providing an example, serve[d] as intermediaries between the lower ranks and God (1999; 199).

As a consequence, charity was driven only by altruism and the desire to respect Christian morality. With the advent of capitalism, however, the reasons that drove the wealthy ranks to act for the good of society changed. If at first “charity was seen as the inheritance or property of the poor, something rightfully theirs”, then “[i]t became more common to see benevolence as a voluntary act of mercy bestowed on the poor rather than a duty required of just Christians” (Johns 2003; 78).

The main reason can be retraced in the fact that those who started accumulating money during that period became increasingly interested in investing it in profitable projects or spending it to satisfy personal desires rather than squandering it to fund charitable activities. It goes without saying that if a rich person decided to do charity anyway, the latter was considered an investment, and for it to be regarded as profitable, it was necessary to test the qualities of the other contracting party. Indeed, “benefactors were encouraged to evaluate the moral character of a receiver before making a donation. Consequently, the receiver’s values were required to pass strict scrutiny, whereas the giver’s attitude remained unexamined” (Johns 2003; 83). While on the one hand the motivations behind an act of charity could have been the most selfish and devious, on the other hand who was being helped was forced to demonstrate that they truly deserved what they were receiving. As Johns explains,

worthiness had to do with the extent to which a beggar would show moral improvement, proper subordination, and increased industry. Such views [...]

were influenced by political economists who emphasised the importance of the supply of labourers and economic productivity. Population preoccupied them as an issue because it was regarded as the strength of the nation; the poor were to be relieved as a way of increasing the number of workers (2003; 78).

Ultimately, then, charity became a business that was necessary in order to fuel the bigger business of capitalism, an investment that would surely have allowed the investor to recover all his expenses, providing him with a workforce to employ at low cost.

Protofeminists strongly opposed all this, and in their utopias they imagined the formation of entire communities precisely on the basis of selfless benevolence. Furthermore, having a particular interest in helping the female minority among all the people under difficulties, these female writers were committed to creating in their novels many philanthropical projects for women that could provide them with knowledge for their own subsistence. More specifically, their female protagonists found charitable ventures that have as their primary objective the education of girls and women, because they are convinced that teaching them useful practices and skills for their daily life is the only way to improve their condition. As Brandon Schnorrenberg explains, in “[t]he eighteenth century [...] reform of education for women was regarded as essential by both conservatives and radicals”, and it was “also [...] regarded by most feminists as the starting point for improving the status of women in any society” (1982; 264); for these reasons female utopists decided to make education the backbone of their charitable projects, and also because “it is through this means that the inhabitants [of the utopias] are trained in the purposes, ideas, and aims of the society” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 264), being able to replicate them once they leave to return to the outside world. Furthermore, the female authors in their communities applied the Christian principle according to which those who belonged to the wealthier classes must set an example for the poor, and consequently

[t]hey agreed in the need for educating young women of the upper classes, not in scholarly pursuits but so that these girls would have something to

occupy their minds besides clothes, flirtations, and parties. Firm religious training, based on the teachings of the Church of England, was where [they] began (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 271),

in order to give a solid moral foundation to young women of the higher ranks, thus making them capable of leading by example other females belonging to the lower ranks.

In particular, the female protagonists of these protofeminist utopian novels also take under their wing a specific group of miserable women who represented “a problem in eighteenth century society, [namely] the young wom[e]n of good birth but no fortune” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 271). Taking as a reference the “increasing number of boarding schools” (Johns 2003; 9) that were developing in England at that time, the female utopists designed an educational system that would provide practical and concrete teachings, in such a way as to scale down the expectations of these destitute gentlewomen and make them useful and active components of society. Brandon Schnorrenberg explains that

[t]he only solution seemed to be to teach [them] to be a governess, a housekeeper, a companion—respectable enough positions but not such as would keep [them] in the upper classes. For a woman, good birth was not enough to keep her from such menial work [, ... and a] young woman trained to be a governess or companion was unlikely to marry anyone of gentle birth. Her best hope was someone such as a solicitor, a doctor, or possibly a country cleric (1982; 271).

Although this might have seemed a less than rosy prospect for women belonging to upper-middle ranks, the commitment shown by the female members of these utopian communities in preparing them for dignified if more modest living conditions must be appreciated, as through their actions they demonstrate that they have found a solution perfectly applicable in reality to an issue that was beginning to weigh on the social fabric at that time.

In general, it can be stated that the various difficulties that afflicted women in the eighteenth century, described in this chapter, were taken into consideration by utopian

female writers, who imagined for them concrete alternatives to a life that, in the patriarchal society of the period, left only two possibilities open: marriage, which entailed the need to conform to passive roles and thus cancelling their identity, or exclusion from society, since by remaining single and being labelled as a 'spinster' they were no longer welcome. In particular, all this was addressed by Sarah Scott in her novel *Millenium Hall*, where the community's female founders run various charitable activities to support women in need.

Chapter II

Narrative and Spatial Structures of *Millenium Hall*

As this thesis already demonstrated in chapter one, for a woman in eighteenth-century England to make her voice heard, to make her opinions known, was complicated to say the least, even more so if the issues she wanted to address concerned her position within the society of the time. In order to deal with these difficulties, the novel assumed a strategic importance for women, for many different reasons, the most significant of which is the novel's characteristic of being a hybrid genre, not entirely a biography, nor a tale, nor even an essay, but the combination of all these. This made the novel a revolutionary key that opened new doors into the literary field to women, who could finally begin to make their "voices on the margins of fiction and history" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 15) heard. In fact, it is not by chance that it was precisely the novel and not another literary genre that became the bearer of social and protofeminist instances of the period, as it was "one of the few accepted means for women to intervene in public life" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 17).

The historical and social context to always bear in mind, however, is that of the eighteenth century. At that time, however much the female and protofeminist voice was forming and spreading, it still had to come to terms with a society deeply tied to patriarchal values, to unshackle which centuries of struggle to come would still not suffice. In the literary field specifically, those who wrote and published their writings in that period were usually men. If a woman did so, she was automatically subjected to judgement by the public, "labeled immodest and narcissistic, and criticized for displaying either [her] virtues or [her] faults" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 19) if she wrote about personal stories, or she was accused of being at the very least presumptuous and almost ridiculous when she ventured to give her opinion about "men or 'the world'" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 19).

As a consequence, the women writers of the period, aware of the context in which they lived, had to come up with ploys in order to succeed in opposing that *status*

quo. One instance of these contrivances was to “endorse the authority they seem[ed] to be questioning” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 8), meaning that female authors would incorporate into their novels some distinctive features of the patriarchal, social mechanisms of the time, precisely to illustrate them and make them glaringly clear to the reader, even more so when these were compared in the same text with a utopian protofeminist society. Another method employed by women writers to gain their own place within the male-dominated literary field was “separating the narrating 'I' from the female body” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 18). Sniader Lanser reflects objectively on this latter aspect: while somehow continuing to fuel the social mechanism of men’s supremacy in the literary field, the adoption of a masculine narrative voice and/or pseudonym has nevertheless given women the opportunity to express themselves, to make themselves and their ideas known to a wider public, without running the risk of being judged *a priori* (1992; 18). Indeed, in the case of *Millenium Hall*, implying that the author of the novel was “a gentleman on his travels” (Scott 1762; not paginated), “allow[ed] readers to identify uncritically with the invented male narrator’s perspective and values” (Mangano 2015; 465).

The application of these techniques allowed women to challenge themselves in the discussion of themes which until then had only been reserved for men, first and foremost trade. In the eighteenth century, commerce, represented by the male part of society, was perceived at the time as characterised by sterile, cold interpersonal relationships established only by economic agreements, a thought that is still widespread today, while the domestic environment, represented by the female part of society, was identified by friendly, affectionate relationships established by reciprocal benevolence. This “problematic cultural opposition between affection and commerce” (Mangano 2015; 465) was based on the umpteenth prejudice against women, regarding their “perceived 'natural' talent for negotiating friendship’s intimate realm that makes them seem less fit for public action” (Mangano 2015; 472). Indeed, it can be stated that “[i]nitially, [in *Millennium Hall*,] the portrait of th[e] hermetic community seems to confirm the cultural equation of ideal femininity with humility and cloistered virtue”

(Mangano 2015; 473), but this lifestyle of theirs does not exclude their capacity to organise and set up an efficient system of production.

“[Q]uestioning [this] separation of public commerce and private relationships” (Mangano 2015; 466) became a fundamental issue to be addressed for some eighteenth-century women writers, to whom relegation to the domestic environment was beginning to feel a little too tight at that point. One of these was certainly Sarah Scott, who by devising the super-efficient Millenium Hall female community demonstrated that the conciliation between the intimate sphere of female friendship and the external, masculine field of trade is actually possible, as the friendship that binds the female founders of the Hall is the same one that allows for the “breaking down of the financial barrier between '[Meum] and [Tuum]” (Mangano 2015; 477, quoting Scott 1762; 52), and consequently for an “access to [their] private histories in a circulation of information (as common property)” (Mangano 2015; 478), with the aim of making this alternative lifestyle known to the outside world as well. Mangano explains this concept clearly:

If Scott infuse[d] interpersonal relations with commercial language, it is only a means to the greater end of infusing modern economic practice with the sentiments of true friendship. In her utopian vision, Scott dr[ew] all forms of commerce, gentry capitalism as well as the literary market, within the bounds of virtuous friendship. Scott imagine[d] the ties of friendship as a ground for economic identities beyond existing networks of patrimony and ideologies of individual venture (2015; 472).

In order to succeed in such a far-reaching demonstration, in addition to replicating certain dynamics of the patriarchal society within the Hall’s environment and adopting a male narrative voice coming from the outside, Scott had to apply to her utopian novel a specific narrative technique. Since the choice of the “narrative voice is a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge that is manifested in and sometimes resolved through ideologically charged technical practices” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 7-8), it became necessary for the authoress of *Millenium Hall* to find the narrative way to express her utopian vision of a profeminist society. For sure, “in order to reach a

public for whom the idea of female community as an alternative to marriage might [have been] unacceptable, Scott [had to use] the voice of a respectable and conventional Christian 'gentleman'" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 230, quoting Scott 1762; not paginated). However, the perspective of the traveller, coming back from his plantation in Jamaica, represents only one side of the coin, one side of the society, the masculine and patriarchal, and himself on his own "can neither enter the community nor represent it as a women's community" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 226), being a man. In order to reunite this part with the feminine and friendly, Scott added the internal perspective of the women who inhabit Millenium Hall, using what Sniader Lanser defines as the

communal voice (original emphasis) [, ...] a spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority [, ...] a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community (1992; 21).

In the specific case of *Millenium Hall*, Mrs Maynard is the spokesperson of the stories of the ladies, who, before coming together and giving life to their project, were "marginal[ised and] suppressed" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 21) by patriarchal society. However, it should not be assumed that her role ends in itself. By narrating the lives of the Hall's five female founders, she seizes a "political possibilit[y] of constituting a collective female voice through narrative" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 22), communicating to the male narrator, the representative of the outside world, that there is another path, another manner, to live a better life. The lives which Millenium Hall's women lived before establishing their little, utopian female society, thanks to Mrs Maynard's narration, gain new and more wholesome significance, as the "[c]ommunal voice [...] shifts the text away from individual protagonists and personal plots, calling into question the heterosocial contract that has defined woman's place in Western [society]" (Sniader Lanser 1992; 22).

Communication between the female and male sides creates the opportunity to bring the internal dynamics of Millenium Hall into the external world. Both narrative voices then, masculine and feminine, are necessary, because the tradesman on his own “clearly cannot narrate without intelligence from the women themselves” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 227), and also because only through his collaboration with Mrs Maynard can the good example set by the women’s community be made known, so that it can be replicated in different contexts. In fact, as Wandless explains, “the revelatory access called for by the narrative oblige[d] Scott to circumvent the protective policies and practices vital to her [u]topian enclosure in order for the novel to achieve its expansive effects” (2009; 259-60), and for this reason she made the two voices coexist,

[t]he [male] narrator [, ... who] detail[s] his impressions and suggest[s] how the progressive principles of the Hall will conduce to virtue in the wider world, [... and] Mrs Maynard’s histories [, which illuminate] the origin and occasion of those principles, the enabling circumstances that make their practice needful and possible (2009; 281).

What Sniader Lanser calls “extrarepresentational' acts” (1992; 16), meaning interventions by a heterodiegetic narrator commenting on the related facts, are made by both the traveller and Mrs Maynard, always with the didactic aim of shedding light on the difficulties that, due to the patriarchal society, then as now, burden women, and at the same time to show a possible alternative. Although Millennium Hall is a quasi-ascetic community, separate from the rest, there is a correlation between it and what lies outside, between internal and external, which can be found not only in the adoption of two different narrative voices, but also in the actual structure of the text. More precisely, the novel is divided into two main sections, one in which the narrator is the tradesman, who relates in first person and therefore stays without a name, and the other in which Mrs Maynard takes the stand, narrating four stories about the female founders, each one distinct from the others thanks to a title. Moreover, the male narrator’s part can be found at the beginning and at the end, thus becoming a frame enclosing the heart of the novel, the most substantial and important part, dedicated to the lives of the women of the community.

The *incipit* of *Millenium Hall* presents an interesting detail—the traveller writes a letter to an unnamed “Sir”, regretting that surely “[he] little expected instead of a letter to receive a volume” (Scott 1762; 1). This Sir is, therefore, no more than the final receiver of the novel, a figure who appears in first person only once, before the beginning, outside the actual narration. In particular, he is found in an advertisement, which in reality is more like a disclaimer, written in his own hand. In this brief paragraph, he identifies himself as “[t]he publisher of this volume” and declares to feel some “anxiety [which] arises from the author’s addressing the volume to him, and making him a compliment in the beginning” (Scott 1762; not paginated). The embarrassment stems from the idea that the readers might think that the tradesman, author of the letter/novel, wanted to flatter the publisher in order to convince him to publish his writing. As a consequence, the latter is compelled to get ahead of himself and trust that “the reader will impute [the compliment] to its proper cause, namely, to the warmth of friendship” (Scott 1762; not paginated).

Here, then, is found, for the first time in the novel, a reference to the value of friendship, which binds people through favours that do not need anything in return—a concept that will be expressed more than once, later in the text, by the ladies of Millenium Hall. It is important to notice that these words come from a figure that is external to the community, who, nevertheless, got to know the latter, albeit not directly, but through the intermediary represented by the supposed author. With the benefit of hindsight, it can therefore be speculated that the female society has indeed managed to extend its positive influence outside its limited confines, guiding the publisher’s actions to the point where the novel was published.

There is another interesting detail, in the advertisement, about the words the unnamed Sir chooses to use in order to further justify his decision: “The gentleman who wrote this volume, is of too much consequence to be obstinately contradicted [...] hop[ing that the] publishing of it will not be imputed to any other motive, but that of [my] readiness to obey” (Scott 1762; not paginated). This mode of expression is the same as the one used by Mrs Maynard when she agrees to narrate the lives of the female founders, from time to time. To the traveller’s requests to continue with the

stories, often made somewhat insistent because of his animated interest, she answers that “[i]t would be unnatural [...] for a woman to quarrel with curiosity; so far from complaining of [his], [she is] come merely with a design to gratify it, and only expect [he] will judge of [her] desire to oblige [him], by [her] readiness in obeying” (Scott 1762; 91), and that “[she] shall not the less readily comply” (Scott 1762; 155). This resemblance in speech confirms the resemblance in recognised values, which in this case is the value of friendship based on benevolence. The women of Millenium Hall have made this their way of life, Mrs Maynard is glad to narrate it to the tradesman, who in turn convinces the publisher. Friendship binds together the internal with the external, the feminine with the masculine, and benevolence with commerce.

In other words, as Wandless explains, the traveller has “authority over the content of the letter [, ...] he holds uncontested sway in the epistolary frame” (2009; 266), and even if he allows himself to exercise his power over the stories of the female founders, applying “principles of selection” (2009; 266) on the information to be actually included in the letter, this remains confined to the part of the novel that is his domain, i.e. the frame. In fact, “Mrs Maynard’s stories resist interruption, superscription, or further embellishment” (Wandless 2009; 267) and “stand [...], by virtue of the structural superiority of heterodiegesis, perhaps most authoritative [...]: had he told these stories himself rather than only recorded them, they would surely have been told differently” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 230). The lady’s part takes on a value very close to that of the Gospel “parables[,] endorsing duty, humility, modesty, piety, and reason while condemning vanity, frivolity, pride, perversity, and unregulated passions” (Wandless 2009; 268-9), in that way becoming necessary to make the Good News also known outside the community—“[t]he narrator’s letter, understood as an appendage, simply makes the histories that she offers more expansive and generically applicable”, and his “control over the final form of the relation” is strictly functional to the best possible success in spreading the message (Wandless 2009; 267).

Once it has been made clear that the two narrative voices work very well together, namely, that

by complementing and conditioning [the male narrator's] imperfect understanding of Hall society with an insider's discerning and artful partiality, [Scott] improve[d] her message at the expense of the messenger, revealing beauties unperceived by the admiring yet blinkered eyes of the beholder (Wandless 2009; 261),

it is now worthwhile to focus on each of them individually, the tradesman and Mrs Maynard. Examining the former, it is impossible not to notice how much his profession influences his understanding of matters. Wandless notes that “his salesmanship [...] distorts and depreciates what he is committed to selling” (2009; 262). His keen interest in Millenium Hall is out of question, as is demonstrated by his willingness to publish his account and thus make as many people as possible acquainted with the alternative represented by the female community. At the same time, however, his perspective is not the same as that of the women who actually belong to that society. His vision, coming from the outside and always aware of commercial aspects, “threatens to obscure, cheapen, and misrepresent the distinctively feminine [u]topia that the narrative envisions” (Wandless 2009; 262). The traveller's remarks on the practical organisation of Millenium Hall, for instance, can be interpreted as misleading, considering that his penchant for pursuing profit is an attitude diametrically opposed to that which guides the actions of the ladies in the community, i. e. benevolence—“[his] commentary underscores [his] inability to appreciate properly the rarefied reasoning or magnanimous behaviour of the women” (Wandless 2009; 263).

Concerning the tradesman's personality then, “[d]espite [the] auspicious indices of the Hall's salutary influence, the overall tenor of the letter punctures the intimation that the narrator has grown in any material way” (Wandless 2009; 264). It should always be taken into account that “the narrator arrives with a fully formed spiritual identity and established habits of thought” (Wandless 2009; 265), being that he dedicated twenty years of his life to making his investment, the sugar cane plantation in Jamaica, thrive. “As a result, he intermittently voices sentiments incompatible with the opinions expressed by the women he admires” (Wandless 2009; 265), but that is

not because he actually disagrees with what the female founders created, rather because his *forma mentis* dictates a different vision. While the male narrator visits the environments of the female society, he applies “his own tastes and experiences as a connoisseur, gourmand, capitalist, and gentleman” to what he sees, because this is his nature (Wandless 2009; 266).

[H]e possesses a worldly acumen that allows him to recognize what is essential and irreducible—the illustrative histories that Mrs Maynard recounts—and to translate the feminized, [u]topian culture of the Hall into terms accessible to outsiders like himself. He alone can make the crucial connection between spiritual and secular economies, discerning the way in which the enlightened charity administered by the women 'is within the reach of every person's imitation' (Wandless 2009; 267, quoting Scott 1762; 153).

Therefore, his being a man dedicated to commerce in any case does not prevent him from appreciating all the qualities of Millenium Hall. Indeed, reading carefully, it can be noticed that

[t]he opening passages feature a submissive, self-deprecating writer, a man who has ostensibly measured himself against a new standard and found his conduct wanting. [...] He casts himself as a true believer at the beginning and the end of the novel, a convert impressed and improved by examples of moral excellence that beg emulation (Wandless 2009; 264).

Consequently, it can be stated that the traveller simply follows his vision of the world while writing an account of a visit to a diametrically different reality, which nevertheless inspires him profoundly. “The fact that the name 'Millenium Hall' is the narrator's invention, a pseudonym designed to protect the women's privacy, [...] suggests that he is creating his own fiction of female community” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 229), reporting all the peculiarities of the latter, at the same time without ever disowning his nature as a tradesman.

It is undeniable that the new world created by the women's society influences him, even if it does not turn him completely upside down, which is what happens to

his travelling companion Lamont, a representative of aristocracy, devoted to a dissolute life based on luxury, idleness and pleasure satisfaction. In fact, when the day comes that the two men have to leave Millenium Hall, the one who at first appeared to be a “coxcomb” (Scott 1762; 3), at that point seems to be a radically transformed person, so much so that he approaches “reading [the] New Testament” (Scott 1762; 261) of his own free will. This contrast in the lives of the two male characters, the tradesman and Lamont, between their mentality before visiting Millenium Hall and after, can also be noticed in the choice of the female author to compare the two opposite economic systems that can be found described in the novel:

By depicting this doubled male gaze, Scott pose[d] her view of friendship as one that resists old and new modes of patriarchal fraternity in political-economic terms. At the same time, Scott contrast[ed] the feminized productivity of [the] estate with the ill effects of ventures governed and inheritances stewarded by men (Mangano 2015; 472).

Thanks to the demonstration of the fact that the efficiency of organisation and production by the female community is significantly better than the corruption and the egoism of the economic system of that period, the two male characters are convinced of moral change and improvement. As Wandless states, “Scott use[d] Lamont’s more fundamental conversion to hint at the magnitude of the [male] narrator’s edification” (2009; 264), as it is only thanks to the teachings of the female founders that the former decides to drastically change the course of his life, and those teachings are the same that the traveller takes in, elaborates and makes his own in his report—“Lamont [...] serves as a weak foil” (Wandless 2009; 263) for the tradesman, in order to demonstrate that a deep moral transformation is actually possible.

In addition to the attention reserved to the economic aspect, the way in which the male narrator observes and gets to know the secrets of Millenium Hall also includes a generous amount of curiosity. Sniader Lanser describes this attitude of his as “a voyeurism, that is precisely what the women have sought to escape in creating their private community” (1992; 228). In fact, the traveller comes across as very insistent with Mrs Maynard, repeatedly asking her to continue with the stories of the female

founders' lives. His behaviour is typical of the male gender *vis-à-vis* women—men want to discover what is different in their opposite, the female gender, in order to know it and control it. This mode can be compared to the rite of courtship, a characteristic practice of the patriarchal and male chauvinist society, in the eighteenth century as now—the male assiduously pursues the female who is the object of his desire, constantly seeking moments to be alone with her to talk in private. So, if on the one hand the tradesman is pressing, on the other hand Millenium Hall's women pull back, with the exception of Mrs Maynard. As Wandless explains:

[a]verse to exposure yet above concealment, the ladies seem amenable to having their stories told so long as they are not implicated in the telling. [...] To authorize a chronicle of their lives would be presumptuous, but that does not prevent the ladies from inspiring the narrator to seek it out himself. [...] Significantly, the arousal of his interest occurs as a peculiar form of play; the ladies can become almost coquettish as they tantalize him with the promise of revelation (2009; 276).

After all, wanting to remain mysterious is a weapon of seduction, too. In any case, “[o]nce the ladies determine that his curiosity is of the proper sort, that he is intent on learning, [...] they do not stand in the way of its seemly gratification. The principals’ circumspect withdrawal [...] sets the stage for a liberal, uninhibited telling” (Wandless 2009; 277), of which Mrs Maynard is in charge.

Moving the attention on the latter now, it is worth describing her role more completely. As explained above, Millenium Hall's community is almost ascetic, composed by women who voluntarily withdrew from the external world and who do not intend to return to it. As a consequence, “[t]o reach her intended audience and communicate the needful message, [...] Scott task[ed] herself with the reconciliation of [these] conflicting representational imperatives” (Wandless 2009; 260), and since “the very legitimation of the novel depends on minimizing this resistance to the [male] narrator lest the community seem to be dangerously hostile to men in general” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 229), the profeminist writer added the figure of Mrs Maynard, in order to put the female founders in contact with the tradesman.

Indeed, if the ladies actually exposed themselves openly to the male narrator, without any mediation by a female voice, they would enact a “sort of ostentation that would impeach their respectability [...] and a] kind of involuntary exhibitionism that spurred them to retire to the country in the first place” (Wandless 2009; 260). According to Sniader Lanser, these motives are “alleged” (1992; 227), since they are reported by Mrs Maynard and are not personally expressed by the women of Millenium Hall, and also, since “the propriety in question seems to be required less by the fictional circumstances than by the culture in which this novel would be published and read” (1992; 228), meaning by the culture of a patriarchal society which did not accept that a woman could express herself freely on personal matters. For this reason the scholar affirms that

the distancing of these stories of heterosexual unhappiness and female friendship from the voices of their protagonists [...] suggest[s] that the women are not authorizing this recounting of their histories—that while they understand that Mrs Maynard must oblige her cousin, [...] they do not endorse her narrative acts (Sniader Lanser 1992; 228).

At this point it is important to underline a circumstance hitherto overlooked—the female narrator is not simply a member of the women’s community, she also is the traveller’s cousin, so these “ties of consanguinity” (Wandless 2009; 273) can be interpreted to represent one more reason to justify the peculiar bond that forms between the two and also the naturalness with which Mrs Maynard narrates the details of the lives of the female founders. The extreme seclusion of the ladies on the one hand and the safety provided by the family ties between Mrs Maynard and the tradesman on the other, are two contrasting elements of the same importance, which do not cancel each other out and which in themselves neither exclude nor confirm the legitimacy of the exchange of information. If on the one hand the “[h]eterodiegetic voice even in a private mode is surely the most authoritative choice for narratives in which women collectively reinforce the superiority of female community over heterosexual relationships” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 228), and so the “communal voice” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 21) of the Hall’s community represented by Mrs Maynard is

fundamental to understand their reasons for putting into practice their utopian project withdrawing from the patriarchal society, on the other hand, “Mrs Maynard’s willingness to unfold their stories to a visitor, especially a male one, would seem to represent a significant transgression”, since “[t]he ladies [...] have purposely chosen to limit their involvement” in the external world (Wandless 2009; 270). Wandless makes hypotheses about this:

If [Mrs Maynard] is ignorant of the [male] narrator’s plans to publish a description of the Hall, her telling at least occurs as a betrayal of confidence; if she is aware of those publication plans and seeks to promote the community as a model for civic reform, her relation then becomes a wilful contravention of the articulated self-limiting principle (2009; 271).

Even allowing for this, however, there can never be found in the novel explicit declarations by the female founders, neither of repulsion towards the traveller, who is not considered as an unwanted intruder but as a guest to be welcomed with benevolence, nor of prohibition for Mrs Maynard to disclose information of any kind about Millenium Hall and its inhabitants. More simply, the ladies are respected in their wish for privacy, not being addressed in the first person about their lives, and at the same time the cousin of the tradesman can rely on the values of friendship and sharing which constitute the basis of the community to feel entitled of dispensing their stories. Indeed, Wandless states that “Mrs Maynard’s preface to her relation, addressed to the [male] narrator, indicates that she adheres to a more general understanding of this discursive freedom” (2009; 276), referring to the “free communication of sentiments” (Scott 1762; 76) which characterises the female society and their notion of ideal society in general, and it also implies that “[s]he enjoys a narrative liberty that encompasses not only what she can tell, but also how she can tell it [, ... because] she is not bound by the strictures that her fellows observe, at least not to the same degree” (Wandless 2009; 279).

Therefore, it can be observed that “[Mrs Maynard] speaks out as an advocate for the beliefs that Millenium Hall was built to embody” (Wandless 2009; 269). The fact that she is to all intents and purposes the spokesperson of the female community

makes her a character in the middle—“[a]lthough she acts as a sixth principal, [...] she may be better understood as a liminal figure [...] who does not belong fully to the community’s inner circle [, ...] but whose marginality allows her to serve as [...] an ambassador of the interior” (Wandless 2009; 262). Mrs Maynard’s role is conceptualised *ad hoc* in order to make the two extremes meet, the reserved Hall’s community and “the [male] narrator, a [...] dislocated figure [...]. By cultivating this remove and tightening this connection, Scott nudge[d] Mrs Maynard out from the interior and into a liminal space where she can reach him” (Wandless 2009; 272).

Moreover, there are three elements that confirm her being in the middle, on the threshold. A fact that, on the one hand, links her to the female founders is that she does not relate her own story personally, but she only “appears briefly in a supporting role in the story of Miss Trentham” (Wandless 2009; 272). Just like the ladies then, Mrs Maynard does not expose herself in the first person, most probably for the same reason, namely modesty. With this behaviour, “[s]he can magnify their goodness precisely because, by doing so, she does not exaggerate her own” (Wandless 2009; 275). On the other hand, a fact that links her to the traveller is “her unqualified enthusiasm for the community” (Wandless 2009; 274), which leads her to describe the virtues of the female founders and the organisation of Millenium Hall with the wonder of an external observer. Lastly,

Mrs Maynard does not bring a fortune [...] to endow the Hall or contribute to the ladies’ many charitable enterprises. She considers herself a lucky dependent, who enjoys a privileged position that she holds at their discretion [...] and] she feels she must recommend herself to them, prove herself deserving of their favour (Wandless 2009; 274).

This behaviour would not be necessary if Mrs Maynard felt in all respects that she had the same importance as the five female founders in the hierarchy of Millenium Hall. As Wandless explains: “she views her attachment to the Hall as a gift of providence, the same divine solicitude that figures so prominently in the histories she relates, yet even that gifting betokens her difference” (2009; 275). Since she does not tell what her life was like before entering the female community, it can only be assumed that the

help given to her friend Miss Trentham and her general good behaviour were sufficient elements for God to grant her this grace. In any case, her role in the novel cannot be clearly demarcated. Mrs Maynard is neither completely inside nor totally outside, she is not one of the female founders nor an external visitor. She is a bridge between the two worlds, the reserved, feminine and benevolent one of Millenium Hall and the mundane, masculine and commercial one of the patriarchal society of the time.

The balance created by the presence of both narrators, the tradesman and Mrs Maynard, is, therefore, crucial to the success of the novel, as only with the intervention of both can the revolutionary example of the women's community emerge from its boundaries. This is also reflected in the *modus operandi* of the female founders, who are aware of the fact that the female element alone is not enough to make the Millenium Hall machine run at full capacity. Indeed, it is necessary for them to add some male characteristics to their own qualities, in order to organise the women's community in the best possible manner. As Schellenberg explains:

the community's authority as a model is endorsed by its possession of four qualities which were particularly legible in mid-eighteenth-century English culture: conversational skill, associated with the social sensibilities so highly prized in discourse of the time; the power of action, generally seen as belonging to the public, masculine domain; rational control over the passions, associated with the classical cultural tradition, transmitted and upheld by male representatives; and moral purity, grounded in the Christian tradition (1996; 97).

Thanks to the combination of male and female prerogatives, a perfect balance is created within the women's society—"at the Hall [...] the traditionally male conversational strengths are combined with the female in a mode which avoids the excesses to which both are ostensibly prone" (Schellenberg 1996; 97). In the estate there is no place for extremes. The mundane life of the patriarchal society, on one side, and the all-encompassing monastic seclusion, on the other, are both rejected in favour of the creation of a commensurate, open social project within a circumscribed community.

As this gendered dichotomy of duty, self-control, and happiness on the one hand, and desire, self-indulgence, and misery on the other suggests, the female community represented in the novel is one in which the self is most fully expressed through sociable behavior. [... However, s]ince the public world is informed by masculine individualism and disruptive desire, true society is relocated in the private or retired (Schellenberg 1996; 92).

The fact that Millenium Hall is a reality in its own right, however, does not exclude the possibility that it is conducive to openness. That is why it is necessary to integrate the male part into the organisation of the female society. In Scott's novel there is a "reworking of the model of conversational exchange from a [purely] 'masculine' one—public, intellectual, witty, and aggressive—to a [primarily but not solely] 'feminine' one—private, affective, discreet, and accommodating" (Schellenberg 1996; 15), which allows the Hall's message to potentially reach the whole world. The choice of the ladies to live in retirement is not due to deep resentment following suffered injustice. The foundation of the community has a higher purpose, one that concerns not only those who inhabit it, but possibly the whole of society, too. As Cruise explains, "[c]ontinence is not the *pis aller* of injured sensibilities but a concerted challenge to the regulating and repetitive patterns public history imposes upon the private histories of women" (1995; 563), and it is precisely in order to change those patterns that the female founders give life to their project and constantly seek to expand it, over time incorporating the surrounding territories into their reality, with an attitude that is never one of total closure, not even towards the male narrator.

Sure, the traveller is gladly welcomed by the ladies upon his arrival, and while on the one hand he can freely describe his impressions of the estate's territory and the various charitable activities run by the Hall's women, on the other hand he has no power over what concerns the female founders' past lives. As discussed above, this is evident from the structure of the novel itself, too. Cruise in fact notes that

[w]ithin th[e] narrative economy [...] both the woman's voice and her history come to monopolize exchange and representation. This structural

imbalance not only serves as the counterweight to the extramural imbalances that prevail but also defines the essential competition between men and women over the right to control the representation of women (1995; 563).

Millenium Hall undoubtedly shows that this fight is won by the females, at least within its community. In particular, the figure of Mrs Maynard, the sixth addition to the group of ladies, figures as a liminal representative, acting as a spokesperson for the other five female founders with an attitude of permissive openness towards the male gender, but at all times remaining vigilant and in full control, in order to avoid an ever-possible prevarication by the man who listens to her. Schellenberg highlights that “the use of a female proxy who is a member of the intimate circle helps convey a sense of celebration, of refusal to be made contingent to male satisfaction or the victim of male aggression” (1996; 96). This sense of protofeminist rebelliousness and self-assertion is what animates Scott’s entire novel, and shapes its narrative structure, as well as the structure of the places inhabited by the utopian community.

Indeed, even the organisation of the spaces within the Millenium Hall estate and the way it is interpreted by the male narrator reflect the two different points of view, the feminine and the masculine, that form the *fil rouge* of the story. Looking through the 1762 edition, on one of the first pages is a beautiful illustration, which captures the moment when the tradesman and his travelling companion Lamont, once they have penetrated into nature walking through a long “avenue of oaks” (Scott 1762; 4), come in sight of what they will discover to be the Hall. The description of their *promenade* is marked by several stages, framing numerous moments in which the male narrator dwells on particular details: first he observes “the beauty of the grounds”, then “the remarkable verdure and neatness of the fields, with the beauty of the flowers” (Scott 1762; 4), later he comes to notice “a shepherd, watching a large flock of sheep”, then again “the greatest variety of cattle” (Scott 1762; 5) and “a company of hay-makers in the fields [... with] children, [... whose] rosy cheeks shewed the benefits of youthful labour” (Scott 1762; 6), until he arrives at the house. Consequently, this path is

presented as a progression, from the restricted area around the traveller's feet to the breadth of the fields, and even if

the [male] narrator's eye does not see into the distance[,] however, the description of his movement away from the road and towards Millenium Hall provides a [...] sense of a receding landscape. [...] This first description [...], then, contains elements of the picturesque aesthetic (Stewart 2003; 4).

Indeed, Stewart bases her analysis of *Millenium Hall* precisely on the opposing modes the tradesman and the community's women have of interpreting the landscape. With regard to the former in particular, she explains that, coming from the outside,

the viewer, from [his] detached distance, engages in a process of configuring the landscape according to a system of abstract rules [, ...] approach[ing] and seek[ing] to understand Millenium Hall with the aesthetic tools of a picturesque tourist. Attentive to the artful composition of the landscape, with its symmetry, variety of natural features, and recession into the distance, [... he] demonstrates an increasing ability to order the landscape according to picturesque principles [... and] is quick to demonstrate his own cultivated taste and appreciation of the landscape as a source of aesthetic pleasure (2003; 3).

To confirm this interpretation, other two episodes can be found while proceeding with the reading of the novel. There, the traveller describes the landscape using “a more typically picturesque manner, for his eye [...] travels into the distance” (Stewart 2003; 4). One of these picturesque descriptions takes place early in the morning, the day after his arrival at Millenium Hall. Here the tradesman “first [goes] into the gayest flower garden [he has] ever beheld”, then his gaze widens slightly to glimpse, “[b]eyond these beds of flowers [, ...] a shrubbery, where every thing sweet and pleasing is collected”, further, “behind the shrubbery [he sees] a little wood, which affords a gloom, rendered more agreeable (*sic*) by its contrast with the dazzling beauty of [...] the garden that leads to it”, and lastly “[i]n the high pale which encloses this wood [he] observe[s] a little door” (Scott 1762; 14). The way in which the traveller's

eyes dwell on details placed at a progressively greater distance in respect to where he stands, giving the description a sense of increasing amplitude of the scene, and also the attention he draws on the contrast between the light in the garden and the shade in the wood, contribute to the creation of a “typically picturesque” (Stewart 2003; 4) environment.

The other moment in which the tradesman stops to contemplate the landscape “demonstrates a further development in the [male] narrator’s ability to identify a purely picturesque view, for he now isolates a particularly expansive part of the estate that recedes right to the horizon” (Stewart 2003; 4). In fact, when the traveller observes the landscape from “a temple dedicated to solitude [, ...] an exquisite piece of architecture”, built on “an eminence”, first he sees “a very large river”, then he notices that further “lies the sea, on which the sun [... shines], and ma[kes] it dazzlingly bright” (Scott 1762; 20). As Stewart states: “The [male] narrator’s description is entirely picturesque, now, for it outlines not only a series of receding stages in the landscape but also the attractiveness of an illuminated horizon where the eye ultimately rests” (2003; 5).

Once these three instances have been analysed, it can therefore be argued that the tradesman, by nature, is inclined to interpret the environment around him in this manner, namely the picturesque mode. It corresponds to his way of understanding the mechanisms that regulate the world, but, as was made clear earlier, his point of view is not the only one that is necessary, and it is not even the most appropriate to fully enter the dynamics of Millenium Hall. Indeed, Stewart affirms that

the picturesque aesthetic, with its emphasis on the viewer’s heightened detachment, ability to select and compose (in effect, control) what the eye sees, and ultimate intent to travel through the setting as a disengaged picturesque tourist, offers an ineffective mode of responding to and fully understanding the community of women inhabiting Millenium Hall (2003; 11).

The traveller’s point of view is that of a person who is an outsider to the women’s society, who comes visiting the Hall from the external world, and who is used to and

complicit in a patriarchal system that the women have voluntarily decided to rebel against. The tradesman lacks a suitable interpretative key, since

the pictorial principles associated with the picturesque aesthetic do not adequately equip [him] with the perceptive tools he needs to achieve a fuller and deeper understanding of [...] the moral, social, and economic reforms in which [the ladies] are engaged. [They] have deliberately chosen to seclude themselves from the type of detached, controlling male gaze associated with picturesque viewing (Stewart 2003; 11).

At this stage it is important to highlight another motivation for the tradesman's being detached during his visit to Millenium Hall, which Stewart speculates on:

The [male] narrator [...] brings [...] not only his privileged experience of travel but also that of social and economic liberty. Undoubtedly engaged in a capitalist venture in Jamaica, [...] he] returns to England able to enjoy the privilege of a leisurely [...] tour [. ...] His interest in the [...] landscape perhaps reflects not only his picturesque taste in viewing [it] but also his broader experience of individual achievement in social and economic terms (2003; 13).

As explained above, in fact, the traveller's profession is fundamental to shape his *forma mentis*. Certainly, his being a man of the world who had the opportunity to get to know different places and cultures made it possible for him to develop a sophisticated taste and to become sensitive to the picturesque details of the landscape, but in addition to this, his being a tradesman gifted him with a particular flair for admiring wide spaces, which become source of inspiration for future projects. As Stewart explains: "the [male] narrator's worldly and capitalist experiences shape his conception of an open and expansive landscape" (2003; 2), and this creates a contrast with the circumscribed and intimate nature of the female community. Therefore, "conflicting ideologies" clash, "[because] the women's establishment of a small, protective and communally-oriented society has led them to design circular spaces that enclose the inhabitants of Millenium Hall and, in effect, resist the picturesque (male) gaze" (Stewart 2003; 2).

This opposition can be noticed not only by the difference between the part of the novel in which the narrative voice is masculine and that where Mrs Maynard is the one who has the floor, but also by the actual descriptions made by the traveller, which,

while clearly picturesque in a number of respects, [...] also demonstrate a striking departure from that aesthetic. Embedded within each account of the gradual unfolding of space is a contrasting enclosure, signifying, perhaps, the [male] narrator's inability to completely and successfully impose on this community and its environment the pictorial values of a well-traveled picturesque tourist (Stewart 2003; 5).

As a consequence, there is further confirmation of the fact that the coexistence of the spatial elements representing the masculine and those representing the feminine in *Millenium Hall* is necessary and functional to the spreading of the message within the novel, as Stewart states: "The women at Millenium Hall [...] necessarily benefit from accepting foreigners into th[eir] circle, who, while they ultimately leave, are nevertheless transformed by it and leave committed to perpetuating its influential work" (2003; 13).

Now, concentrating the attention on the organisation of the spaces inside the community, it is interesting to focus on the fact that Stewart describes the female society as a "circle" (2003; 13), and that later she goes on to make a correlation between eighteenth-century English society and Millenium Hall's women, and between the commercial openness of the former and the intimate closure of the latter:

For the women, [...] it is precisely the capitalist environment and society's inability to uphold the individual in times of social and economic need that motivates them largely to shun the outside world and establish a cohesive community based on principles of equality. That ideology is expressed in the spatial arrangement of their community: in the circular nature of the landscape 'adjacent' to Millenium Hall (Stewart 2003; 13).

Indeed, the circle is a shape that recurs frequently in the novel. Both the area of the cottages built for gentlewomen with economic difficulties and that dedicated to people with physical deformities and disabilities, are "enclosed" (Scott 1762; 22) by hedges

and high fences. Furthermore, Mrs Mancel declares that “beyond that small circle all is foreign to [them]” (Scott 1762; 148), referring to the community to which she belongs and their willingness to retire from the external world, “emphasi[sing] the women’s desire for internal social cohesion” (Stewart 2003; 9).

Continuing with the analysis of the internal spaces of Millenium Hall, Stewart deepens her interest in the circular shape, creating a link between Scott’s novel and the Bluestocking’s literary salons of the period. In the latter’s context, the spatial disposition of the attendees in a circle “became a solution, at least in part, to a social problem: the difficulty of enabling all the participants in a conversation in the public sphere to participate equally”, and even if the circle “was still unable to accommodate differences in status and power within the group [, it n]evertheless [...] provided a starting point for achieving a new ideal of equality” (Stewart 2003; 10). On closer inspection, it can be argued that a very similar dynamic also occurs with the female society, where different social classes can be found, which maintain their hierarchy but in any case collaborate in an environment based on reciprocal benevolence, which in turn puts everyone on the same level. Indeed, the Hall is a “separatist community with clearly defined (hierarchical) social structures which extend the traditional role of women on the estate” (Pohl 1996; 56), meaning that the ladies can re-propose the roles they had in patriarchal society in their own space, using modalities that do not involve prevarication and are rather based on mutual respect, and even if “these circular enclosures have their limitations, for the diverse groups [...] do not constitute a fully integrated community[,] nevertheless, the [...] spaces [...] provide sufficient protection and unity [...] to engage in moral, social, and economic reforms” (Stewart 2003; 11).

The circumscribed area of Millenium Hall makes the women who live there finally free to decide for themselves and thrive, representing a revolutionary project in its being profeminist. Pohl explains that this female society “challenges the historical spatiality of gender, power and knowledge in the capitalist society of mid-eighteenth century England by creating a separatist, utopian space where [they] are given the opportunity of self-determination” (1996; 49). Their secluding to finally create

something just for themselves goes against the founding principles of a patriarchal society, in which women do not hold power at all and are necessarily dependent on a male figure, namely a father, a brother or a husband. Hooper relates this subject to the organisation of spaces: “[f]eminist planners [...] have demonstrated that patriarchal hierarchies of social organization are directly expressed in [...] spatial environments [...], and that the [latter play] a role in reinforcing women’s subordinate position within the social order” (1992, quoted in Pohl 1996; 50). Millenium Hall represents a rebellion against the *status quo*, a utopia in which women are not relegated to the domestic sphere anymore and are finally free “from the early capitalist economic system which creates the gender opposition of male/female, public/private, production/reproduction, work/home” (Pohl 1996; 51).

For this to happen, the spatial organisation becomes a pivotal tool, the main method of asserting a newly acquired power. “[I]n Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, [...] existing 'male' architecture is taken over by a female utopian community and reconstituted as a new spatial form” (Pohl 1996; 51), which they can manage following their own rules, as they have no longer to bow to the dictates of the patriarchy. The architectonic elements created by the ladies—their manor house, the cottages, the houses for deformed people and the factory with adjoining housing for the workers and their families—“not only [affirm] the social and cultural values of the utopian community, but also [deny] the contemporaneous socio-cultural values” (Pohl 1996; 53), not only represent ideals like altruism and equality, but also oppose selfishness and exploitation, which are typical of the patriarchal society.

To all intents and purposes, Millenium Hall is an “autonomous female communit[y] with [its] clearly defined space [, ... which] is appropriated by the female protagonists, re-claimed and re-defined to the[ir] advantage and freedom” (Pohl 1996; 54)—a protofeminist reality in which women can finally be themselves, “[a ...] utopian spatiality and architecture [... which] create a subjectivity beyond the historical gender constructs” (Pohl 1996; 56), after liberating themselves of difficult pasts, strewn with prevaricating men. As Pohl states, “women have always felt the need to imagine other places and spaces which transcend their own alienation, be it

social, economic or cultural” (1996; 56), precisely because their condition never gave them the opportunity to express and assert themselves outside the domestic environment. Creating their own community, Millenium Hall’s women acquire the power of organising a space for themselves, and of spreading their influence on the outside, too, as much as possible, with the only aim of creating a world that is more just and free.

The project of the Hall is certainly one of a kind, but this does not alter the fact that, from the point of view of space organisation, Scott probably referred to a specific mode of construction. Indeed, Pohl argues that “*Millenium Hall* is rooted in the tradition of the estate poem of the [early] seventeenth century where the manorial country-house or Old Hall is more than an architectural feature but is also a symbol of human order and true community” (1996; 53). In this literary thread, the buildings and the places to which they belong acquire a deeper meaning, reflecting the virtues of those people who actually live in those environments. In particular,

the ethos of these poems contains mainly Horatian and Virgilian ideals of simplicity, responsible use of wealth and property, good housekeeping and, specifically important for the earlier poems, hospitality. [...] In this context, architecture plays an important role since the ideal [...] Old Hall is the place of these archaic duties of hospitality and social responsibility (Pohl 1996; 53).

So, in this poetic genre, classical values are recalled, although they do not simply refer to an idyllic landscape and a dreamy atmosphere, typical of the pastoral genre, but to a practical and correct management of a household and its surroundings, creating a sort of manual of good conduct.

If at first this type of poetry was almost exclusively the prerogative of the male gender, as were many other literary genres, “later in the seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century [...] architectural space [is] taken up [...] by women writers and as a result, the country-house [...] is re-negotiated and re-defined so that woman at last demarcates her own space within that space” (Pohl 1996; 54). This is where Sarah Scott took inspiration for her novel, in which Millenium Hall, in the organisation of its

spaces, reflects the new lifestyle of the women who live in it. As Pohl explains: “The deep concern of Sarah Scott with the social function of the country-house in the life of the utopian community is reflected in the re-valuation of the country-house ethos by a female community” (1996; 56). In fact, the ladies prove themselves perfectly capable of imagining and then creating in practice a ramified structure, composed of different parts, each representing an essential building block for the proper functioning of the community and the fulfilling of its aim, all based on a skilfully conceived organisation of space, within its boundaries, which are fundamental in clearly demarcating the difference between the Hall’s efficiency, all feminine, and the chaos of the outside world, dominated by the male gender.

In *Millenium Hall* th[e] protective space is a country estate. [...] The traditions of the seventeenth-century estate poem prepare the ground for a feminocentric country-house culture [...] which functions as a utopian alternative to the contemporary heteroreality in social as well as literary traditions (Pohl 1996; 50).

The difference between the Hall’s female world and the external, male one can also be noticed in the distorted view the traveller has of the actual structure of the manor house. His first impressions, once he walks down the “avenue of oaks” (Scott 1762; 4) and arrives in front of the building, lead him to be ecstatic before the “magnificence of the ancient structure” (Scott 1762; 6). On closer inspection, however, as Pohl states, “the building depicted in the frontispiece as well as described [...] in the text itself is not ancient” (1996; 51). The dwelling represented in the illustration does not resemble at all “the abode of the genius which presided over this fairy land” (Scott 1762; 6), because there is nothing magical or fantastical in *Millenium Hall*. In fact, the house is kept in excellent condition, with a neat façade and a geometric arrangement of doors and windows, and even the front garden area looks well maintained, with clearly divided lawns and paths. This “noble mansion” is certainly “an assured asylum against every evil” (Scott 1762; 7), especially for the women who live in it and need a place where they can be themselves freely, but to be one it does not have to correspond to an enchanted world. Pohl explains that the tradesman cannot understand “the

gynocentricity, the subversion of male authority, the separatism and spatial construction of a female community which does not have to retreat to the depiction of a natural paradise [...] but can now appropriate an architectural space” (1996; 56). Millenium Hall was designed and built following the dictates of a rational and considered organisation of space, which indeed can also be carried out by women and is not only the prerogative of men, as the ladies demonstrate.

This mode of landscape management and building construction is surely contemporary to the period in which the novel is set, namely the 1700s, and has nothing to do with “ancient” (Scott 1762; 6) techniques. This can be detected not only from the external appearance of the Hall, but from its inside, too. In fact, as Pohl explains: “[t]he description of the interior by the [tradesman] as having a large hall which leads to another reception room overlooking the garden is [...] characteristic of the layout of houses of the early to mid-eighteenth century” (1996; 53). As a consequence, it can be stated that the estate in its entirety is idealised in the imagination of the tradesman, who recalls references from the past in order to describe what he sees, linking up with the “Horatian and Virgilian ideals” mentioned above (Pohl 1996; 53). Thus,

[the male narrator] describes the house as an 'ancient structure' in [the] letter [...] although by that time he has visited the house and gardens long enough to be able to establish its real age. It is of no doubt that he connects the principles and virtues of the community of Millenium Hall to the country-house ethos of the seventeenth-century (Pohl 1996; 53, quoting Scott 1762; 6).

For the traveller’s mindset, used to the protocapitalist, patriarchal system, a female community that is able to thrive in that epoch, basing itself on values that are diametrically opposed to the current ones, cannot be compared to anything that exists in the reality he knows, and for this reason he necessarily has to conceive it as belonging to some Golden Age of an indeterminate, fantastical, “ancient” past (Scott 1762; 6). Pohl summarises this concept as follows: “[t]he appropriation of the estate by the [ladies] changes the perception of the male beholder and the [...] building] is

submerged in the vision of an 'ancient structure.' This mythical interpretation not only covers the estate but 'woman' herself" (1996; 55, quoting Scott 1762; 6). Indeed, for the tradesman not only is the house idealised, but the inhabitants themselves, too. This happens because the ladies do not fit the traditional role that women usually fill in the eighteenth-century patriarchal society. Millenium Hall's female founders willingly decided to detach themselves once and for all from that kind of society and to create their own, driven by the desire to no longer have to remain in the shadow of male figures and to finally be free to assert themselves, living by their own rules. The traveller's point of view appears once again inappropriate and out of context, because,

[b]y comparing Millenium Hall to an Old Hall [, he] draws on a literary genre which idealizes country life, feudal social structures and places women specifically within the social role of housekeeper, wife and mother. [...] In *Millenium Hall* the women provide a similar social structure to the traditional country-house poems, but, instead of being a complement to the virtue of the master of the house, they rule over the estate alone (Pohl 1996; 56).

Furthermore, Pohl adds that "the inconsistency [...] between the supposedly 'ancient structure' [...] and an obviously contemporary building and setting [...] create[s] a textual tension between the values [of the] eighteenth-century stately homes and those [of] an Old Hall" (1996; 53), which find reconciliation in Millenium Hall's estate. Indeed, as demonstrated, on the manor a lifestyle is followed that is based on virtues handed down since the Classical Age, but in a modern, rationally organised environment.

The Hall has nothing to do with another kind of dwelling, which also begins to spread in the 1700s and with time becomes increasingly popular among the more affluent members of society, namely the prodigy house. As Pohl explains, "prodigy houses [...] are supposed to be built only to display wealth and status [while their] owners neglect their duties of good housekeeping and hospitality" (1996; 53). It is therefore clear that this type of building differentiates itself sharply from Millenium Hall's estate, because it is founded on totally opposite premises. It could in all

probability be the tradesman's dwelling, if instead of enriching himself in Jamaica he had built his career in England. In fact, "prodigy houses [...] represent the mercantile, individualistic spirit of its owners neglecting their [...] responsibilities to society. In the estate poem[,] the country house becomes [...] a symbol for a society where public and private virtue merges" (Pohl 1996; 53-4). The manor house built by the female founders of the community represents the union between the management of the inhabitants' lives within the Hall's seclusion and the potential spreading of their example in the external world, through the male narrator and the publishing of his letter/novel.

In *Millenium Hall* there is also the description of another type of dwelling which testifies to the ladies' ability to be prudent and rational in the organisation of their estate. In fact, in the last part of the novel the female founders show the traveller and his companion Lamont "the house they had just taken for the new community" (Scott 1762; 221). The building appears "very old, [...] formerly [...] very fine [...], but now much fallen to decay" due to the neglect it has suffered (Scott 1762; 221). In its description, "[the] right use of money and the pursuit of benevolence and charity [by the ladies] is contrasted with the wrong use of wealth in a house [...] whose owners have gambled with their wealth and power and in the end lost their property" (Pohl 1996; 55). Those who inhabited the house before the Hall's women appropriated it evidently did not possess the necessary virtues to make the environment in which they lived prosper, and indeed their management proved to be inefficient due to an unhealthy relationship with money, namely greed on the one hand and profligacy on the other. Under the ladies' control instead, the dwelling can return to its original splendour and to its "function as the home of a social microcosm" (Pohl 1996; 55). In this way, the female founders are able to take their example outside the confined area of the Hall, and even if this is only a small first step, the transformation of the house has in it all the hope of a protofeminist revolution, whereby women are able to take possession of territories, both literally and, then, also broadly, which until that moment were considered a prerogative of the male gender, and they succeed in doing so despite often starting from neglect and mistreatment, just like this house, with the only aim of

rebuilding balance, equality, respect and reciprocal benevolence. In general, it can therefore be stated that

[t]he role of the women on the estate goes beyond the contemporary restrictions of domestic life since they not only own the properties but have full responsibility for the [whole area, and their] female spirit of ownership [...] exercises its influence not only over the house itself but also its surrounding community (Pohl 1996; 55).

In fact, as mentioned earlier, the ladies do not limit themselves to creating a dwelling for their personal use, but, acting out of their generosity and benevolence, decide to build other housing complexes for gentlewomen experiencing financial hardship and for people with handicaps and deformities, in addition to a textile factory, “which contributes to the independence of the house in a non-exploitative way” (Pohl 1996; 55), providing at the same time work for the poor who live nearby. Each of these areas has its own well-defined constituency and is periodically monitored by the female founders. In particular, the area of the cottages, the first one that the tradesman visits after the Hall, is located within a “high pale which encloses [a] wood” (Scott 1762; 14), the houses are arranged in “a row”, and appear to be “new and uniform, and [...] all dedicated to the same purpose” (Scott 1762; 15).

Stewart speculates on the fact that “[t]he enclosed space reflects the unique social cohesion of its inhabitants: twelve women of various ages, who have been rescued from virtual 'starv[ation]' [...] and given modest homes in this secluded setting” (2003; 7, quoting Scott 1762; 15). Indeed, even in this case the circular organisation of the space, which is kept confined, allows those who live there to be all on the same level, in a situation that encourages collaboration and benevolence. In this atmosphere, the twelve gentlewomen, “[f]orming a cohesive community, engage in spinning, weaving, and knitting, the products of which are exchanged” with the female founders for essential goods such as provisions and firewood (Stewart 2003; 7). In this way, as they too have their own space to manage in communion, they acquire the power of self-assertion and are able to demonstrate that “seclusion [...] undoubtedly contribute[s] to

that achievement of social cohesion and [makes them] a relatively self-sufficient community” (Stewart 2003; 7).

Even the area reserved for people with deformities and disabilities has a spatial organisation in a circle, resulting in a zone in its own right. As Morton states: “Removed from display the 'monsters,' like the cottagers, are properly enclosed and surveyed: both are fenced in, a piece of architectural symbolism which suggests the completeness of their contained surveillance” (1999; 204, quoting Scott 1762; 25). In this context, “they find protection from the scorn and cruelty they experienced as public spectacles. Like the twelve women in the previous enclosure, the individuals in this one have been 'rescued out of their misery' and restored to health” (Stewart 2003; 7, quoting Scott 1762; 27). For them, therefore, it is not a question of acquiring the power of self-assertion, which can potentially happen later, but rather of regaining their dignity as humans and being able to see themselves no longer as freaks, rejects of mankind, useful only to be exploited. In order for this to happen, the organisation of space plays a fundamental role. As Stewart explains:

Central to th[eir] recovery is the [ladies'] provision of this shelter [...], which enables the disfigured inhabitants within it to remain hidden from strangers until they, by degrees, learn to accept visitors. This hidden, circular setting, then, again reflects the women's remarkable discernment, for they have utilized the restorative capacity of an enclosed space [...] to revitalize a marginal, powerless segment of human society (2003; 7-8).

Just as these individuals, thanks to the existence of the Hall, manage to build a personality no longer based on their deformed appearance but on their newly acquired abilities, so do the ladies themselves invest in their own and all other members' education, and once again the spaces they inhabit reflect this. In particular, “[t]he [...] grand reception room, normally a formal room for the entertainment of guests [...], is now a room for the intellectual pursuits of the community members and their dependents” (Pohl 1996; 55). As a consequence, this salon, even in its seclusion and circumscription, is a powerful example of profeminist rebellion against the patriarchal society. In fact, the ladies do not accept to being considered objects to be

admired or a spectacle to be witnessed anymore. Instead, they courageously decide to take their lives into their own hands and follow their own rules, which they also formulate thanks to a proper education that only within Millenium Hall and its large room can they finally afford, but which they are not allowed in the outside world, where men are considered the only ones worthy of receiving a full education.

One last example of a circular and circumscribed space in *Millenium Hall* is represented by the places where the traveller hear the inset narratives told by Mrs Maynard. Stewart indeed notices that

th[is] setting [...] is an enclosed one as well. The narrator and Lamont [...] listen to the [first] story in a [secluded] place in the garden, where the flowers and trees [...] protect them [...] and the seclusion enables them to focus [...] on the narrative [. ...] In the subsequent chapters [...], the [male] narrator reminds us that he and Lamont continue to hear the stories in relatively enclosed natural spaces (2003; 8).

In this case, the organisation of space in a circle is the only one which allows the union between the quasi-ascetic life of the Hall's female founders and the mundane life of the tradesman. These circular places ensure that the women's community does not remain just a fantastical utopia, but that it can potentially spread its example to the external world as well, without the female founders ever having to give up their desire to remain detached from the patriarchal society of the time.

The only element that manages to distinctly separate Millennium Hall from everything else, to protect it from indiscreet glances and male chauvinist oppression, is undoubtedly nature. Yet it not only performs these practical functions, it is also charged with allegorical meanings. In the particular case of Sarah Scott's novel, nature's symbolism referred to by the Western and patriarchal society of the time, the one found in classical sources, is made her own by the female author, who then reworks it to her liking, managing to create a feminine and profeminist version of it. According to Macey, in fact, with *Millenium Hall* Scott was able to express her "critique of patriarchal mythology by placing her imaginary community in a symbolic garden" (1997; 168). However, this garden is not represented by the umpteenth ever-

changing description of a primordial and idyllic place, but “[t]he garden of Millenium Hall is [a] sophisticated revision of the Garden of Eden, and Scott use[d] it to naturalize the same-sex community she describe[d]” (Macey 1997; 168). In this novel, all that is part of the collective imagination of society in the eighteenth century, linked to the natural element, is revised from head to toe and turned upside down, through an operation of “creative myth-making” (Macey 1997; 168) on the part of the female writer, who could thus advance her message of protofeminist emancipation, thanks to which women can prove that they do not need men to lead a prosperous and serene life.

The myth of the garden for Western culture is surely represented by Eden, and the source *par excellence* of English literature dealing with this theme is *Paradise Lost* written by John Milton. It is highly probable that the poem was a resource clearly present in Scott’s mind at the time of devising the setting for Millenium Hall, but in the novel the situation is reversed. First of all, instead of being an area circumscribed by a defined perimeter, “the countryside adjacent to Millenium Hall is open and unbounded, anticipating the women’s emancipation from the gendered hierarchy of the Miltonic garden” (Macey 1997; 169). Only the residential zones are protected by the circular shape, while the rest of the landscape is free to stretch as far as the eye can see, thus putting distance between the female community and the rest of the world. In addition to this, the broad scope of the surrounding landscape leaves open possibilities unthinkable within the patriarchal society of the eighteenth century—Eve proves that she does not need Adam’s rib to assert her existence as an individual. Secondly, “[t]he ‘profusion of flowers’ [...] which, surprisingly, bloom simultaneously in the cool Cornish climate” (Macey 1997; 172, quoting Scott 1762; 5), even though they call to mind the image of an earthly paradise, are meant to demonstrate something completely different with respect to the fertility of the union between man and woman. In Scott’s novel

[the] apparently atemporal fruitfulness of [the] country adjacent [...] is the reflection of] the fruitful lives the women lead at the Hall. The revisionary mythology of Millenium Hall associates the [edenic] landscape with a

homosocial [...] community rather than with a heterosexual one (Macey 1997; 173).

Therefore, the Hall's women demonstrate that they can cope on their own, creating from scratch a female society that thrives without the need to be fecundated by a man.

The only man who plays a relevant role within Millenium Hall is the traveller, who, however, as explained above, is not fully integrated into the women's community, but remains a detached figure, observing and analysing from his external point of view. His descriptions of the landscape, which in the first part of this chapter are referred to a picturesque taste of the tradesman, also have deeper roots, reaching back to the classical age. In particular, the male narrator mentions three different sources, in this order: "a scene truly pastoral [...] in the days of Theocritus" (Scott 1762; 4), "this earthly paradise" (Scott 1762; 6) and "the Attick (*sic*) school" (Scott 1762; 7). In doing so, he "garbles his descriptive materials, applying Edenic, Arcadian, and pastoral references indiscriminately to mask his failure to grasp the true nature of the Hall" (Wandless 2009; 262). Indeed, this mishmash of references is merely the expression of a type of Western, patriarchal culture, one that the tradesman actually possesses, but which does not entirely correspond with the ethical foundations on which the community of Millenium Hall is founded. By juxtaposing three different sources in close proximity, within the space of four pages, the traveller proves

to be unable to read the [...] garden into any stable literary paradigm. [...] The images [he uses] are inconsistent: Eden before the Fall, Sidney's Arcadia, and the Theocritan *rus* embody different conceptions of the state of nature. Scott's landscape cannot be interpreted by reference to a single mythological tradition (Macey 1997; 170).

Indeed, as has already been explained in this chapter, the natural elements that constitute the landscape around Millenium Hall are organised by the female founders in a rational and measured way, precisely because all that is part of the estate reflects the balance that underlies the women's community. However, this concept is not understood by the male narrator, who relies on completely different values to describe

his surroundings, namely those of the patriarchal and protocapitalist society of the eighteenth century.

In addition to this, one of the references used by the traveller, that is the biblical and, then, Miltonic earthly paradise, on closer inspection stands in contrast to the other two. As Macey explains, “[t]he [tradesman]’s reference[s] to Theocritus [and the Attic] identif[y] the landscape with [...] classical pastoral poetry and immediately [distinguish] Scott’s garden from the Eden of patriarchal exegesis” (1997; 169). In fact, the latter has inherent religious connotations that the other two sources do not. As a consequence, “Millenium Hall is not the classical *rus (sic)*, nor is it the Judeo-Christian garden of Eden, although both landscapes contribute to its symbolic richness” (Macey 1997; 170). In general it can be stated that “the admiration of Millenium Hall by [the male narrator] is based on a reading of its community as a myth—the myth of the *locus amoenus* and *beatus vir*” (Pohl 1996; 55), but this kind of idealisation of the female society does not correspond to its reality. The Hall’s women are not inhabitants of an earthly paradise, blessed with infinite abundance, nor are they carefree female peasants who idle in idyllic places. The female founders of Millenium Hall prove to be courageous in their act of self-assertion and emancipation, bringing to life a revolutionary project, a community of women that does not need men to thrive.

All this is represented by the organisation of the space they have appropriated, but in order to understand this, it is necessary to possess the same cultural and ethical foundations from which they started. Macey affirms that

the 'country adjacent' to Millenium Hall plays an important role in Scott’s critique of patriarchal institutions. It [...] initiates the deconstruction of patriarchal mythology which will be continued, willingly or unwillingly, by Mrs Maynard in her narrative. On the symbolic level, the landscape bears witness to the success of the women’s [u]topian project, a project which cannot be concealed from prying eyes because it literally transforms the world (1997; 169, quoting Scott 1762).

The ladies take control of the territory, they modify it following their own rules, they make use of it without exploiting it, they make it the reflection of their lifestyle, based

on mutual benevolence, and inevitably they come to create a utopian place, yes, but different from any utopia that had ever been imagined up to that point, exactly because it is not designed by a man, and therefore, better.

Chapter III

Scott's Female Community

The small society imagined by Sarah Scott in *Millenium Hall* is presented as ideal, as a beautiful utopia, but its foundations are deeply grounded in the real, concrete English society of the eighteenth century. Further evidence of this is provided by the fact that the male narrator, in order to identify what he will describe from there on, gives a fictitious name to the estate rather than to the group of ladies. This detail is not insignificant, as it relates to a custom that, at the time the novel was written, was not uncommon in English society, namely the practice whereby people bound by other ties than blood or marriage decided to live under the same roof, constituting a household and considering themselves to be on a par with a proper family. As Van Sant explains, “[t]he household model [...] provided a structure outside conjugality and inheritance patterns but well inside known conventions for social organization, a structure that was varied [...] and continually accommodating families as they were being reconstituted” (2005; 379). Similarly, the female founders are not united by any ties of kinship, but the only element that binds them, apart from their friendship, is the house in which they live. *Millenium Hall* is the result of “a development of the co-residence element of the household family [, ... which] was available [...] by any principle of association, including friendship. The women’s liberty of association is the principal feature brought into view when each joins” the community (Van Sant 2005; 382).

The coming together of the six female protagonists occurs after a period in which each of them has come to realise how difficult it is for a woman to find her place within the patriarchal society of the time. As Van Sant states:

the stories include women who are brought up by non-parents, women who suffer from the change in households when the mother dies and the father remarries, [...] women who live as companions [...] and in general,] women who, over their life course, have had quite unsatisfactory experiences in natal or conjugal families or both (2005; 382).

Perhaps it is precisely because they are different and cannot adapt to the system that governs the world they live in that the female “main characters are expelled from unreliable families and seek fellowship among friends and strangers. In the process they reenact the creation of the initial social contract, creating new communities based on emotional, educational, and moral ties” (Johns 2003; 93). Thanks to the estate they establish, the “women [are freed] from the setting of marriage and children and [...] are] provi[ded with ...] economic security, affective fulfilment, and opportunities to exercise their talents and benevolence in the wider world” (Van Sant 2005; 375).

By building on their past experiences, the ladies have acquired the ability to design a different reality, just for them, in which they no longer have to deal with men. With her novel, “Scott create[d] living groups that protect women from the ideology of conjugality and allow them to build life patterns on the basis of their love for each other” (Van Sant 2005; 375); in this way, Millenium Hall’s women are finally freed from the necessity of having to marry, which is a great relief, since the marriage bond is nothing more than yet another instrument of control exercised by the male over the female. It is not without reason that Alliker Rabb states emphatically that “[m]arriage proves bondage [...] intellectually and emotionally. Thus the women react strongly to all forms of tyranny” (1988; 14). Compared to a heterosexual union, the idea of joining a group of female subjects has a reassuring effect on those who become part of the Hall’s community. Moreover, by doing so, women show that they interpret “the companionate marriage as an arrangement that assesses female value based on merit and therefore advances a new and better position for [themselves]” (McGonegal 2007; 302).

As previously argued, the founding of Millenium Hall is an act of emancipation and self-assertion, bearing witness to the germination of the seeds of protofeminism. Determining themselves as individuals no longer compulsorily dependent on the male gender, the ladies decide to live in seclusion, but this does not detract from the fact that their example can also have positive effects outside their community. Indeed, Morton states that “Scott’s meticulous imagination envisioned a community of women which, in spite or perhaps because of its 'retirement,' actively influence[s] the world around it”

(1999; 185), and this is possible precisely because the female founders finally have the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. The Hall's women become the authors of their own stories, representing themselves as heroines who save their own lives, relying on each other, without the need for men. In this regard, Sniader Lanser comments:

the clear message of *Millenium Hall* is not only that there are virtuous, intelligent women who would rather be with one another than with men, but that some of them have managed, in spite or because of men's absence, to form what is presented as a virtually perfect society. Precisely because the novel not only describes this society but accounts in detail for the circumstances that led five of the principal members to live together, *Millenium Hall* also subverts the mid-century 'heroine's text' by presenting the company of women as the highest reward for the ideal heroine (1992; 225-6).

The inset narratives of the five female protagonists prove to be crucial in creating a stark contrast between the quality of their lives before they founded and entered the community, and afterwards, and between the tribulations caused them by the male gender in their past, and the serenity gained in the women's society circle. Through their stories it is made clear that, since their difficulties

are invariably generated by corrupt male desire or by the susceptibility of male desire to manipulation [, ...] resolution is effected not when the exemplary heroine marries but when she achieves independence, both social and financial [...]. When permitted to choose an alternative social alignment with a female friend, [they enter] the narrative frame of the novel (Schellenberg 1996; 94).

It is precisely in this that the strength of the revolutionary act of these women is found—they totally reject the social norms of the time with regard to the concept of the family. The ladies of *Millenium Hall* are self-determining and, therefore, they rationally decide to unite with each other, denying the principle of the so-called traditional family, a concept that is unfortunately still widespread, according to which

only a nucleus formed by a father, a mother and their children has the right to exist. “Scott [...] save[d] these women from marriages to questionable suitors, but without the romance convention of providing them with worthy alternatives. [...] Instead, the[ir] stories offer an image of friendship rooted in shared property” (Mangano 2015; 481). It is very important to bear in mind that the female community was not born out of a simple desire for recreation, but out of the need for some women to find a place for themselves in the world, and thus find a way to improve their condition. In fact, “[f]or [Scott], the problem was [not] how to get her heroines married [...], but rather to show that a woman who was not married could define herself as something other than an 'old maid' or a 'fallen woman'” (Williams Elliott 1995; 537).

The choice on the part of the ladies is made actively, conscientiously and with a spirit of initiative, precisely because, as Schellenberg affirms, “[a ...] plot pattern rejected by *Millenium Hall* is the sentimental plot of the passive female victim”, and since “[v]irtuous women [...] deserve an escape from the [...] plots which constrain them, [...] an accommodating Providence offers [it]” (1996; 95). While it may be admitted that a divine sign of approval favoured the formation of *Millenium Hall*, providing the female founders with the necessary financial means at the right time, it must not be overlooked that the conception of the project and its implementation are all their own, as are the virtues they possess, which guide them to the accomplishment of various good deeds. As a consequence, “[o]utside the Hall, [...] the artless woman is often powerless against scheming libertines, heartless step-mothers, and unprincipled farmboys[, while] enclosed within the Hall, [...] feminine goodness is transformed into a powerful example” (Smith 1995; 268).

In Sarah Scott’s novel, however, there are also examples of female figures who, unlike the Hall’s women, correspond to the dictates of eighteenth-century English society about their role. In fact, each of the female founders has to deal with women belonging to the generation preceding theirs, with whom they have complicated relationships. While on the one hand the young women who will later form the core of *Millenium Hall* are magnificent examples of virtue, who prove capable of resisting abuse, violence and injustice, on the other hand the female figures from whom they

should take example are unfit to sustain such responsibility. The actions of the latter are in fact governed by pride, jealousy and shallowness, characteristics that demonstrate the consequences of adapting to a patriarchal society, where a woman, in order to survive, must necessarily refine defence techniques that inevitably lead her to have to hide, and in the worst case to permanently lose, her best qualities. Cruise explains that,

By exposing the vanity, invidiousness, and competition that characterize female relationships, [the ladies'] histories underscore two valuable and related lessons. The first is the scarcity of examples of female excellence that women of sense could emulate as they attempt to anchor their identities in the world at large. [...] The second lesson builds upon the first: unchallenged assumptions about the role of women in society validate only those female types that are consistent with the normative codes and prescriptions of character that have cultural currency (1995; 562).

The first example is found in the history of Miss Mancel. As previously mentioned, once freed from the clutches of Mr Hintman, the young woman becomes the companion of Lady Lambton. The latter is described as “a person [...] who [has] no fault, but a considerable share of pride [and who] pique[s] herself upon the opulence of her family, and a distinguished birth” (Scott 1762; 109). Indeed, when her nephew Sir Edward Lambton, who “[has] all his grandmother’s generosity, without any of her pride” (Scott 1762; 111), comes to visit her, and falls in love with Miss Mancel, “Lady Lambton [...] expresse[s] some fears [...], whether there was really any ground for her apprehensions, which she founded on the impossibility of his marrying a woman of small fortune, without reducing himself to the greatest inconvenience” (Scott 1762; 111). Another reason why Miss Mancel could not be the right wife for Sir Edward, according to his grandmother, is “the obscurity of her birth” (Scott 1762; 112).

What is striking about this behaviour is the total lack of sensitivity and empathy in Lady Lambton, who shows that only lineage and wealth are important, when in fact her nephew “[is] actuated [only ...] by the sincerest love that ever took place in a

human heart” (Scott 1762; 115). Sir Edward himself, declaring his love to Miss Mancel, describes his grandmother as a “woman who [can] ungenerously and injudiciously set a higher value on riches and birth than on [Miss Mancel’s] very superior excellencies” (Scott 1762; 115), proving to be heartless. Even when Lady Lambton, aware of having forced Miss Mancel to promise her that she would reject Sir Edward by playing on her sense of gratitude on her behalf, acknowledges “[t]he despair to which Louisa’s conduct reduce[s]” her grandson, “her pride [remains] invincible” (Scott 1762; 116). As a result, Miss Mancel has no choice but to leave Lady Lambton’s house. When her devotee discovers this, he decides “to serve as volunteer in the army in Germany, in hopes [...] to find there a release from his afflictions, which nothing but the hand of death could bestow” (Scott 1762; 120).

In his absence, Miss Mancel reunites with her mother and finds out she is wealthy. When this information is communicated to Lady Lambton, she suddenly backtracks and “accept[s] the proposal in the politest manner” (Scott 1762; 129), but unfortunately this happens too late, as Sir Edward learns of the possible realisation of the union with his beloved Louisa while he is “borne on mens shoulders, pale and almost breathless, just returned from an attack, whereby his too great rashness, he had received a mortal wound” (Scott 1762; 129). Thus Lady Lambton’s blind pride is revealed to be the indirect cause of her nephew’s death. The case of Lady Lambton testifies how “women problematically participate [...] in systems of female exchange inasmuch as they assign exchange value to each other in an effort to increase their personal authority and power”, and she also represents a clear instance of “the acts of complicity performed by women, [of] their engagement in behaviour that perpetuates the hierarchies that oppress them” (McGonegal 2007; 298).

Another example of a woman who has adapted to the patriarchal system in which she is forced to live is certainly the second Lady Melvyn, who, driven by jealousy and greed, puts into action stratagems against Miss Melvyn with the aim of getting rid of her and consequently having control of Sir Charles’ finances, seeking to squander them all on the luxuries and whims of her dissipated life. At first she decides to send the young Miss Melvyn to boarding school, manipulating her father and very often

preventing him from visiting his daughter. When Miss Melvyn has no other choice but to return home, her stepmother fakes a love scandal involving the former, forcing her to marry a man she repulses so as not to lose her reputation. The need to find a distraction, or rather an escape route, from a world that undoubtedly oppresses her, through an over-the-top lifestyle, means that the second Lady Melvyn does not answer to anyone to achieve her goal, not even another representative of the female gender like Miss Melvyn. Here too, therefore, a woman is shown who puts another woman in difficulty, implementing the same oppressive patterns that damaged her in the first place, in a loop of negativity that leaves no room for any type of solidarity or benevolence.

Lady Mary Jones also has to deal with a woman of the past generation who turns out to be as frivolous and shallow as the second Lady Melvyn, though not quite so despicable. Indeed, Lady Brumpton “[has] been educated with great care, [is] very accomplished, [has] read a great deal, and with excellent taste” (Scott 1762; 180), but she fails to channel her culture along the right path. On the contrary, she uses it to surround herself with attentions. What happens is that “her wit and learning [are] the perpetual subjects of panegyric in verse and prose, which unhappily [serve] to increase her only failing, vanity” (Scott 1762; 181). In particular, “[s]he aim[s] at making her house a little academy; all the arts and sciences [are] there discussed; and none dare[s] to enter who [does] not think themselves qualified to shine, and partake of the lustre which [is] diffused round this assembly” (Scott 1762; 181). This makes her approach to culture completely superficial, useful only for showing off.

This attitude does not favour the development of Lady Mary’s education, who, “[b]egging for guidance in reading to keep up with the brilliant throng, [...] is directed to read all the most recent publications: moral essays, a new play, a new history, a volume of sermons—a melange producing confusion” (Rizzo 2002; 198). Shortly after, in fact, the young woman “determine[s] to discontinue that miscellaneous reading, and begin a regular and improving course, leaving to others the privilege of setting in judgement on every new production” (Scott 1762; 181). Rizzo lucidly notes that “Scott with considerable transparency describe[d] her sister [Elizabeth Montagu]

as Lady Brumpton” (2002; 197). Indeed, the Bluestockings circle can be considered a *potpourri* that welcomes artists, literates and intellectuals, in a heated and slightly competitive atmosphere aimed at making a type of culture prevail that is certainly current and always new but not for this reason worthy of great value. On closer inspection, “the experience of the youthful Lady Mary in the salon of Lady Brumpton may have been Scott’s” (Rizzo 2002; 198), who never managed to feel at ease among certain vain and shallow people.

Morton states that in describing Lady Brumpton’s attitudes, “[w]hat [...] becomes apparent [...] is that knowledge, so intimately connected to surveillance, utility, and order at Millenium Hall, becomes an *accomplishment*, an adjunct to or aspect of spectacle (original emphasis)” (1999; 194). As a consequence, Lady Brumpton does nothing but practice behaviours that are perfectly suited to the role of women in patriarchal society—she shows off and attracts attention—so as to have the impression of having some kind of control, when in fact she is only an insignificant part of a large mechanism of prevarication. Fortunately, on her deathbed, Lady Mary’s guardian manages to come to her senses and regret the behaviour she had had in life. “Ultimately, she condemns her own mastery of literature as vanity and neglect of religion” (Alliker Rabb 1988; 10), especially because she realises that all the people she has surrounded herself with in her salons do not actually think highly of her, since they leave her alone when she is no longer able to organise social events.

These representatives of the female generation preceding the female founders of Millenium Hall, together with Mrs Alworth discussed in chapter one, are contrasted only by one positive maternal figure, namely Lady Emilia Reynolds. Hers is a history within Miss Selvyn’s, which retraces her tormented relationship with the latter’s father, Lord Peyton. Very much in love, they decide to get married, but the bureaucratic preparations take a long time. Meanwhile, “Lord Peyton, who [is] in the army, [is] commanded to repair immediately to his regiment, then station[s] in Ireland” (Scott 1762; 213). Before his leaving, certain that they would soon be married, they give in to passion. In the following days, however, Lady Emilia regrets her actions: “as soon as [she has] calmness of mind enough to reflect on what [has] passed, [she] resolve[s]

never to be Lord Peyton's wife. [She sees her] own misconduct in all its true colours [and] despise[s her]self' (Scott 1762; 214).

When she later discovers that she is pregnant, she becomes even more convinced of her decision, and together with lord Peyton she arranges for their little daughter to be entrusted to the Selvyns. Lady Emilia's choice not to marry, and, therefore, not to submit and adapt to the moral dictates of patriarchal society by accepting a shotgun wedding, makes her different from the other maternal figures in *Millenium Hall*, who instead are perfectly compatible with the role of women accepted by the system in force at the time. On the other hand, Miss Selvyn's mother has neither the strength nor the ability to completely free herself from the constraints of patriarchy. As Cruise explains:

Only by rejecting the standard form of female representation as a wife at any cost does Lady Emilia empower herself. Yet because she cannot live in compliance with that standard, she is forced to live a life of secrecy and prevarication. And from it she earns the undying respect of her daughter for her moral integrity (1995; 565).

The good example given by Lady Emilia's virtue is what distinguishes her from the other women of her generation described in the novel, but perhaps for this very reason, her story remains an exception. In any case, all the maternal figures in *Millenium Hall* are alone. Mangano makes a clear-cut reflection on this, and affirms that "[t]heir notions of birth, [...] their vanity [and their sense of guilt] restrict these elders from experiencing sustained virtuous friendship. They are cut off from one another, lacking the sort of counseling community that the Hall embodies" (2015; 479-80). It will then be up to the next generation of women to come together and support each other, but this can only happen thanks to the economic means acquired from the maternal figures of the previous generation. In fact, "[w]hile these maternal figures tend to have a fatal flaw that prohibits multigenerational female community, their funds become crucial to the younger circle" (Mangano 2015; 479).

The legacy that the latter receives is not only material, but also moral: the female founders treasure their past experiences and know which mistakes they must not make

again. According to Mangano, there is a “double sense in which the younger characters’ fortunes are joined together: it is not just by crossing paths but by willingly coordinating funds that the inventors of Millenium Hall transcend the follies of their maternal guides” (2015; 480). Furthermore, it can be argued that in their female community, the female founders themselves become mother figures, but better ones. Rees underlines that the “symbolism of motherly care [...] softens the institutionalism of Millenium Hall: the matriarchal utopia counterpoints the loss and absence of mothers which recurs so conspicuously as a motif in the inset narratives” (1996; 223).

In order to sublimate their sufferings and transform them into something useful in their female community, the Hall’s women do not only rely on their virtues, but also humbly welcome the positive signals sent by God, who, judging the goodness of their intentions, decides to help them in the difficulties they encounter in their lives, saving them from potentially catastrophic situations. The providential events that occur in *Millenium Hall* free the young female protagonists and allow them to create their own small society. In this way, the ladies feel part of something bigger, of a divine plan that can take shape thanks to them. As McGonegal explains: “Recourse to Providence permits [...] the female proprietors of Millenium Hall to effectively disable individual suffering as a motive for [...] collective action. It also allows them to authorize themselves as representatives of God on earth” (2007; 305). After all, divine approval is essential to legitimise the existence of the Hall, which is in fact represented as a place where harmony reigns, reminiscent of Paradise.

While on the one hand *dignum et iustum est* for the female founders to be grateful to God for having given their lives a high purpose, on the other hand the inset narratives demonstrate that gratitude towards mere mortals can often become restrictive and binding. In particular, Miss Mancel is bound by gratitude towards Mr Hintman, who takes her under his wing, allows her to be educated to a high standard and also showers her with gifts. As a result, the young woman feels indebted to him, so much so that she feels obliged to accept his indecent proposal to follow him to the country to carry out his shady purposes. This instance demonstrates how economic dependence was like a prison for the eighteenth-century English woman, as her

freedom remained tied to the male figure, whether it was a father, a brother or a husband. McGonegal explains that “[i]n *Millenium Hall* it is only through seclusion that women are able to escape the false charity and benevolence performed by men intent on increasing their symbolic capital” (2007; 295), since this type of dependent relationships were endemic in the patriarchal society of the time. What at first glance may seem like respectful courtship, which can however degenerate into implicit blackmail, can deceive an inexperienced young woman: “more dangerous [...] than men misrecognizing the real motives behind [their] chivalric behaviour is women misrecognizing these motives: the cost of such misrecognition is, after all, the loss of their symbolic capital in the marriage marketplace” (McGonegal 2007; 296), as she can give in to the *avances* and compromise herself.

After experiencing how much disruption this type of oppressive and unhappy bond can create, the Hall’s women decide together to base their community on a diametrically opposed principle, namely mutual benevolence. It is Miss Melvyn who first introduces this topic, when, at the boarding school with Miss Mancel, she discusses with the latter the true meaning of friendship, which is to be found precisely in the ability of two friends to share everything, rejecting the concept of *do ut des*. For Miss Melvyn,

where hearts are strictly united, she [has] no notion of any distinction in things of less importance, the adventitious goods of fortune. The boundaries and barriers raised by those two watchful and suspicious enemies, Meum and Tuum, [are] in her opinion broke down by true friendship; and all property laid in one undistinguished common (Scott 1762; 52).

Miss Mancel agrees, and also adds that “[she] should not envy [her] the joy of giving, because [she] as receiver should not have the less share of that satisfaction, since by reflecting on [hers she] must partake of it, and so increase [her] own” (Scott 1762; 52). In this way, “Miss Mancel’s rationale spontaneously cancels any invisible debts by describing the reciprocity of sympathetic communion: by imagining the giver’s joy, the receiver verifies an emotional recompense that voids her obligation to the giver” (Mangano 2015; 478). In fact, within the community there will be no need to repay the

benevolence received, because the female founders of Millenium Hall will be automatically rewarded by the satisfaction of seeing their good deeds thrive. As Johns explains, “[b]ecause the benefactor has been compensated emotionally and spiritually for his expenditure, a recipient ought not to be made a perpetually obliged physical and emotional repayer of an unpayable debt” (2003; 82), as instead happened very frequently to many women in the eighteenth century, and as unfortunately sometimes happens even today.

In addition to this, Mrs Mancel also expresses a more general vision of society, always based on free and selfless exchange—a utopian vision that stands in stark contrast to the real society of the time, represented in this case by Lamont, to whom the female founder addresses herself:

How little society is there to be found in what you call the world? It might more properly be compared to that state of war, which Hobbes supposes the first condition of mankind. [...] What I understand by society is a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and correspondent affections; where numbers are thus united, there will be a free communication of sentiments (Scott 1762; 76).

This climate of equality is the basis of Millenium Hall, where, “[i]nstead of yielding to Hobbesian reality, [Mrs Mancel] imagine[s] a world in which benevolent exchange includes everyone equally” (Johns 2003; 106), thus creating an environment where the gratitude of the people who are helped by the Hall’s women is satisfied in itself, without the need to repay any debt. For the ladies, performing good deeds within the community “is simultaneously a way of gaining power and fulfilling Christian duty, because Christ empowers women through others” (Johns 2003; 106), allowing them to demonstrate that a system based on benevolence can be extremely efficient.

The system that the Hall’s women create is the opposite of the protocapitalist system widespread in eighteenth-century society: “this gratitude economy [...] is in fact a feminine version of [the] masculine economy” (Smith 1995; 273), where the only relationships that can be established are based on commercial contracts. Following the analysis made by Williams Elliott, in Millenium Hall “the mutual

obligations created by philanthropy substitute for bonds between landowners and dependents that contemporaries feared were being disrupted by [...] unsettling social changes” (1995; 545). In fact, since the basis of human relationships that develop within the community is benevolence, which means that the expression of gratitude for the good received is exhaustive in itself, “[t]he labouring classes in [...] *Millenium Hall* [...] are more than well disposed to acceptance [...]. [...] T]hey return the gifts provided by [...] the [ladies] with love, affection, and adoration” (McGonegal 2007; 304), and this is more than enough for the female founders, who know very well the suffering resulting from the debt of gratitude, and have therefore decided to eradicate it from their small society.

As previously explained, one of the main reasons why the Hall’s women found their community is the need to free themselves from the repressive gender hierarchy, which, throughout their lives, has forced them to endure various hardships and injustices. However, this does not exclude that within their small society, the female founders choose to maintain a distinction of rank, which allows them to have organisational power and control over the various charitable projects they are responsible for. These skills are implicitly acquired at the very moment in which the ladies decide to live in seclusion and to create different support realities for minorities in difficult situations. Indeed, as Morton explains, “[p]ublic life, it is implied, demands spectacle, while retirement, which delivers women from an exchange that depends upon this form of display, potentially grants them the ability to survey” (1999; 188). Once separated from the worldliness of patriarchal society, where their only permitted role was that of an object to be owned and displayed, the Hall’s women can challenge themselves to create something of their own. It is totally legitimate to admit that they want to put into practice all the necessary means to ensure that their creature, *Millenium Hall*, develops as properly as possible, founding itself on the values in which they firmly believe. It goes without saying that the power of the female founders comes above all from the fact that they belong to a higher social class than that of the people they help. According to Morton,

the female community of Millenium Hall represents a reordering of the eighteenth-century economy of power, in which woman's body is moved from its contemporary position as an object of spectacle and exchange to one in which her 'value' rests upon her utility and her ability to survey. What is equally true, however, is that these changes have inescapably conservative implications [, ... because] this power to survey efficiently shores up an existing social hierarchy (1999; 186).

Moreover, referring to Van Sant's analysis which indicates Millenium Hall as an extended family environment, based on free association and not on kinship or marriage ties, it appears clear that the difference in rank is admitted and, also, that it is not considered unjust. In fact, "nothing about the model of the household family prevented Scott from imagining her practical [u]topia in hierarchical terms as a small society" (Van Sant 2005; 385), and this represents a key element for the correct functioning and efficiency of the community. What must be kept in mind is not so much the female founders' desire to establish a clear hierarchy within their small society, a desire that is never expressed by any of the ladies throughout the whole novel, but rather the desire to give life to a philanthropic project, in order to demonstrate that women too are capable of it. The main goal of the Hall's women is to clearly distinguish themselves from the patriarchal society of the time, which has mistreated them for a long time. As Johns explains, "[i]f the world at large operates in the manner of a Hobbesian state of war, the ideal community embraces a social contract that ensures fairness even as it supports distinctions of rank" (2003; 94).

In any case, it is useful to take into consideration some details that confirm the social hierarchy within the women's society. Morton affirms that "[i]n the neighbourhood of Millenium Hall [...] ranks are clearly distinguished and are organized according to function and their relationship to others [. ...] The result of carefully delineated rank is a well-maintained social order" (1999; 202-3), which makes the entire the entire community system perfectly efficient. In terms of spatial organisation, as previously explained, the estate is divided into several circular areas, each hosting a specific charitable activity. In particular, "the 'ladies' live together in the

main house and each of their dependent communities is structured separately according to upper-class assumptions about different social groups” (Sniader Lanser 1992; 226). Furthermore, even if the various groups present within Millenium Hall, during their daily chores, come into contact with the founders and with each other, it is still always possible to distinguish their social classes. Morton gives two examples in this regard: according to her,

[a]lthough the orphans [...] move among ladies, their rank is maintained in part by their function as dressers. Although the cottagers circulate throughout the community, the architectural and functional space designated for them indicates their hierarchical space: they live in an enclosure behind the Hall; they must support themselves and nurse and observe the disabled who share their social rank (1999; 203).

A further instance is given by McGonegal, who cites an episode found in the last part of the history of Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan which concerns “the marriage of a young woman, who [has] been brought up by [the ladies]” (Scott 1762; 143). On this occasion, the former receives from Mrs Mancel “a fortune, and that she might have her share of employment, and contribute to the provision for her family, [...] and [...] poultry” (Scott 1762; 144). Mrs Maynard explains that

[t]his [...] is] what [the Hall’s women do] for all the young women they brought up, if they [prove] deserving; shewing (*sic*), likewise, the same favor (*sic*) to any other girls in the parish, who, during their single state, [behave] with remarkable industry and sobriety. By this mark of distinction they [are] incited to a proper behaviour, and [appear] more anxious for this benevolence, on account of the honour that [arises] from it, than for the pecuniary advantage (Scott 1762; 144).

According to McGonegal, in this case, the fact that the female founders decided to give gifts only to those who truly deserve them, to those who fully fit into the community’s lifestyle, is a way to exercise their power. “By distributing (economic and symbolic) gifts among women who are deemed virtuous and therefore valuable, the women strategically impose a subtle form of social control” (2007; 302). Still

following McGonegal's analysis, "charitable gifts [...] under the aegis of moral duty are, undoubtedly, designs for producing and preserving a social and economic system that privileges the gentry class to which Scott belonged" (2007; 293), but it is necessary to remember that the privileges of the Hall's women are made available to the needy in all respects. Scott certainly belonged to an elitist and conservative environment, but it is equally certain that her intentions were never to make a caste system, based on the accumulation of wealth and economic blackmail, proper in her novel. Quite the opposite.

As previously stated, providential interventions cause the ladies to find themselves united in founding Millenium Hall. Similarly, the acquisition of inheritances by relatives or guardians can also be interpreted as a sign of divine approval that allows for philanthropic investment. Indeed, Mangano notes that this

mak[es the female founders'] moral authority seem a natural outgrowth of virtues cultivated through friendship. Arising from this combination of merit and luck, their authority involves an ethics of friendship [...] that nonetheless undermines the cultural rationalization of class divisions [, ... because] as caretakers they view their connection to these residents in terms of affective friendship (2015; 481).

Mangano's position appears to be diametrically opposed to McGonegal's. The former provides evidence in support of his thesis that is difficult to refute. According to him, "the power dynamics of Scott's utopia should not be understood as a disguised recapitulation of patronage, primarily because these proprietors thoroughly reject their own claim to personal wealth and property" (2015; 482). In *Millenium Hall* there is no *élite* that wants to make the most of its source of income, oppressing all its subordinates, but rather there can be found a group of women who make everything they have available to create a better, more equal and more just society. Rees underlines that

the ladies are deeply interested in using their power to enable others [...] to achieve what would otherwise be impossible. Their efforts are particularly directed to members of their own sex; and perhaps because, as women, they

have all experienced what it is like to be on the receiving end of arbitrarily exercised power, they at least attempt exercise their own power with sensitivity (1996; 220-1).

The community of Millenium Hall is based on the concept of Christian charity. Evidently, this concept was becoming less and less widespread and appreciated in a society like that of eighteenth-century England, where capitalism was developing in the name of personal gain, well-being and fulfilment before that of others. In fact, Schellenberg reflects on this point as follows: “That such a Christianity would not have been the one familiar to the text’s early readers is indicated by Lamont’s difficulty in comprehending a mutuality between the poor and the wealthy, and by his view of interdependence as slavery” (1996; 99). As a matter of fact, the true meaning of Millenium Hall, the reason for its creation, is contained in the dialogue between Mrs Mancel and Lamont. According to the former, “happiness consists in fulfilling the design of [the] Maker, in providing for [our] own greatest felicity, and contributing all that is in [our] power to the convenience of others”, and when Lamont replies that in this way “[she] seem[s ...] to choose to make us all slaves to each other”, she calmly counters by saying: “I would only make you friends” (Scott 1762; 77).

The best way to carry forward and spread this new lifestyle is certainly education. Johns notes in this regard that

[t]o the Millennium Hall women, utopia depend[s] not on the banishment of hierarchy but on the far-reaching educational project itself [, ... because] education ensures that young people, particularly women of the first rank, will become [...] utopian subjects whose knowledge, reason, and devotion to learning work to perpetuate the socially stratified utopian community (2003; 99).

As a consequence, even if “Scott certainly want[ed] to hold onto the importance ascribed to wealth and lineage”, the distinction of social classes within the community is not a priority, as it is instead “female education and virtue[,] since these impart the attributes of female frugality, self-sufficiency, and order that imply an ability to practise capitalism effectively” (McGonegal 2007; 297).

The ladies themselves, some from childhood, some later, were educated on the basis of these and other values, studying the texts belonging to the literary canon of the time, first and foremost the Bible. As previously explained, in reference to the male narrator, the use of cultural references contained in classical works by men is profoundly different from that made by women. While on the one hand a man uses his culture to idealise reality, on the other hand a woman draws lessons from it that she keeps for herself. With respect to this, Alliker Rabb notes that

Millenium Hall is distinguished by a tension between the use of classical and canonical reading by the men and by the women. The men read reality into literary paradigms drawn from great writers of the past. [...] The women are less likely to effect (*sic*) these correlations between what they have read and what their lives are like (1988; 14).

Since for eighteenth-century women culture was a privilege that was almost never granted to them, the use of courtly references in everyday life was out of place on their behalf. For the female gender, in that period, education had the precise aim of forming impeccable wives, who had all the skills to delight their husbands, take care of the house and the children, as well as possessing Christian morality. It was, therefore, a more practical type of knowledge and less for its own sake. As for the Hall's women specifically, Alliker Rabb states that “[they] have been educated broadly in canonical texts; not one was bred on romances. Yet, if romances have not harmed them, classical writings have not helped them” (1988; 11).

Certainly, from Sarah Scott's point of view, the fact that a woman would waste time reading romances was considered harmful to her moral integrity, since the heroines of those stories represented a model of woman perfectly adapted to the patriarchal society of the period, dependent on male figures who at first mistreat her and then save her in the end. All this is in stark contrast to the image of the woman that the female author of *Millenium Hall* wanted to represent in her novel, that is, a woman who, relying only on her abilities and divine approval, manages to assert herself and carry forward the example of a protofeminist utopia. Since neither what is found in the

canonical texts is useful, nor even less in the romances, “[i]n the schools [the ladies] have established, they do not perpetuate such knowledge” (Alliker Rabb 1988; 11).

The only other type of knowledge admitted into the female community, besides moral doctrine and skills useful for everyday life, concerns the arts. Even though in eighteenth-century English society only a woman of the upper classes was allowed to be taught, for instance, how to paint or play an instrument, with the sole aim of being admired even more by potential husbands, Scott decided nevertheless to include these subjects and other arts in the educational program of Millenium Hall, for the girls belonging to the higher ranks, but with a very different purpose, that is, to create moments of joyful togetherness and to develop their aesthetic sense while remaining within the limits of modesty. Once again, therefore, it is not a question of passive and futile abilities, but rather of active contributions that benefit both the subjects who possess them and others. Morton underlines that “Scott [did] not entirely disdain the acquisition of accomplishments: the inhabitants of Millenium Hall amuse themselves with occupations deemed suitable for their sex” (1999; 195), without ever exceeding and not aiming to show off, but rather just to give a little lightheartedness to their lives with something beautiful made by them. The female founders are perfectly aware of the fact that “knowledge (here differentiated as accomplishment), acquired solely as a means of display, makes those women who have acquired it 'like Tulips in a Garden, to make a fine *shew* and be good for nothing' (original emphasis)” (Morton 1999; 195, quoting Astell 1701; 8), and for this very reason they limit the expression of this kind of knowledge to well-defined moments, where there is no room for vanity.

In general, Millenium Hall’s philanthropic activity is mainly based on education. As Brandon Schnorrenberg affirms, “the training of other women and girls is a considerable factor in the operation of [the] community” (1982; 264), where there is more than one area dedicated to teaching. The first group is formed by “destitute daughters of gentlemen. The ladies of Millenium Hall [take] in a number of these girls who [live] in the great house to be educated and trained” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 270), with the goal of having a better life prospect once out of the Hall. Besides, at that time, being a young woman without money for a dowry meant that she had no

chance of finding a husband, and therefore no place in society. Williams Elliott explains that

such young women of decent birth and good education but no fortune were most likely to succumb to the wiles of the wealthy rake. At Millenium Hall, however, the girls' dangerous desires are carefully rooted out and replaced with the skills that would enable them to be self-supporting by qualifying them as governesses or housekeepers (1995; 545-6).

Indeed, “[t]he girls [are] made conscious [...] of their place and future” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 270), they are quickly informed by the ladies about their limited prospects outside the Hall, so within the female community they only learn things that may prove useful in the future. As Rees explains,

the [school's] immediate aims are practical; and [the female founders] take account of the kind of lives the girls in their care can realistically aspire to [...] in an un-utopian world. [...] In the village school for girls [therefore, ...] the lessons are strictly vocational, with the exception of the all-important and universal religious education (1996; 226).

Both courses on subjects applicable to daily life and on Christian doctrine are essential to direct the young women towards a sober lifestyle, appropriate to their condition. Just because they are fortunate enough to be welcomed into the women's society and receive a high-level education does not mean that once they return to the outside world, they can be sure that their high expectations will be fulfilled. In fact, one of the main goals of the education provided at Millenium Hall is to “keep [the young women] from aspiring to use their superior education to catch a rich husband” (Williams Elliott 1995; 546), since this kind of mentality can be harmful to them. Many instances of similar situations were widespread at the time, stories of women being ensnared and deceived by exploitative men. Williams Elliott's analysis on the subject leaves no room for interpretation:

Vanity, of course, is a code word for sexual awareness; while a major snare for women of any class, it was considered particularly dangerous for girls like those being educated at Millenium Hall. Only extreme modesty and

virtue can ensure their safety in a world where rank and fortune no longer always go together (1995; 546).

Precisely to avoid potential dangerous situations in which the young women educated at Millenium Hall, once returned to the patriarchal society of the period, are seen as naive and easily manipulated, “in their school system [they] are taught saleable skills” (Johns 2003; 55), that is, knowledge that is useful in everyday life, which can guarantee their subsistence. Certainly this comprises “various traditional feminine household tasks, as well as reading, writing, arithmetic, and needlework” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 269). The fact that these skills, according to Scott, had to be acquired by taking part in proper courses and not just by observing someone experienced and trying to imitate her, is significant, because it demonstrates that through teaching it is possible to share not only practical knowledge but also life experience, accompanied by advice on the best ways to face the outside world.

All this contributes enormously to identifying Sarah Scott’s Millenium Hall as a *sui generis*, profeminist utopia, where the ladies’ project does not remain enclosed within the natural barriers around the estate, but rather already conceives within itself the after, the outside, making a concrete perspective of an ideal program. In this regard, the female writer was perfectly aware of the fact that at that time, in a patriarchal society nothing was certain for a woman. In fact, Rees states that “to educate women isn’t necessarily to improve their chances of happiness (indeed it may be positively damaging if a woman marries her intellectual inferior)” (1996; 225), but in any case an education can always be useful for women’s self-esteem, because they can at least count on what they know and what they can do. After all, in an environment like that of eighteenth-century England, “it is far better for [young women] to learn to think rationally, and above all religiously, than not to think at all” (Rees 1996; 225), and this is actually what Millenium Hall tries to convey with its educational charitable activities. In general, therefore, the female founders’ objective is very clear:

By teaching the young orphans under their tutelage not to imagine themselves as the heroines of sentimental novels, but instead instructing

them in skills that will enable them to support themselves in the only occupation available to women of their class, the Millenium Hall ladies enable their charges to follow their own example by refusing the position of sexualized victim (Williams Elliott 1995; 547-8).

In addition to what has already been described so far, other values are also taught in the female community, which are useful for further qualifying the young women of Millenium Hall and making them even more skilled in their ability to face the external world. In particular, “Scott’s novel answer[ed] fears about both women and the poor by stressing the qualities of cleanliness and industriousness that philanthropic writers always insisted were the best antidotes to wayward desires” (Williams Elliott 1995; 543). The outward expression of their modesty often served eighteenth-century women well in demonstrating their moral integrity in various settings and situations. The same goes for clothing. In fact, the girls within the community “are clad coarse and plain” (Scott 1762; 141), and also “[t]he dress of the ladies [is ...] uniform, the same neatness, the same simplicity and cleanliness appear[ing] in each [...] free from any trumpery ornaments” (Scott 1762; 10). According to Morton, in the Hall “fashion, [...] potentially deceitful, is replaced by a fixed, readable sign. Once the primary visual indicator of social rank in the economy of spectacle, clothing becomes a mark of a woman’s morality, a quality closely allied with her social utility” (1999; 198). The combination of these values constitutes a new type of education compared to that normally imparted to young women of that time. What is taught no longer has a merely passive objective, only related to appearance, but acquires an active goal, of a good example to be spread. As Morton explains:

In the economy of spectacle, the gaze of others is indispensable to the augmentation and maintenance of one’s own rank. In [the Hall’s] alternative economy, which may be called the economy of utility, the gaze of others is managed, not for one’s own benefit, but for the edification of the gazer (1999; 199).

Scott’s thinking has always been outward-looking. By educating the new female generations who will return to live in the society of the time, the ladies of Millenium

Hall cultivate the hope of creating a better world for women. Johns' analysis on this topic is enlightening:

education [... binds] together communities while forming young people of all classes to perpetuate the utopian groups that [the female] protagonists fight so hard to establish. But education's part in Scott's utopianism goes further; [... b]y making a family—indeed, a school—of her communities and then having her utopian subjects move out beyond the boundaries into new territories, Scott allowed education to replicate virtue in the economic, social, political, and even literary realms while it justified women's intellectual interests and political engagement (2003; 97).

In addition to the charitable activities concerning education, the female founders of Millenium Hall created two distinct areas dedicated to the assistance of indigent gentlewomen and people with deformities or handicaps within their estate. As regards the first area, it presents itself as “a row of the neatest cottages [...] new and uniform [...] all dedicated to the same purpose” (Scott 1762; 15). Morton notes that “[s]ignificantly, the cottagers [...] have their view of the Hall obscured, while the Hall's occupants have regular and unrestricted access to the cottages” (1999; 193), which implies the control that the ladies rightly have over this pursuit. As previously explained, the Hall's women are responsible for their utopian and profeminist project, which they organised as a large extended family. In fact, Millenium Hall's

household, is extended [...] to include the households of others. Knowledge of those households and the consequent power over them are intimately linked to utility: the cottagers and their occupations are supervised for the public good, which includes increased productivity (Morton 1999; 193).

In this climate of reciprocity in which aid is transformed into productive activities, collaboration is a fundamental element to ensure that everything functions efficiently. Furthermore, in a fully functioning system, each constituent member has its own well-established role: there are those who produce and those who control. Consequently, “[t]here never passes a day that one or other of the ladies does not come and look all over” the cottages (Scott 1762; 17), to ensure that the gentlewomen

maintain adequate standards of cleanliness and that they do not sit on their hands. All this appears to be perfectly in line with the concept of a community based on mutual exchange. As Van Sant explains: “The model of the household family not only allowed but supported Scott’s persistent engagement with instruction and discipline. With this function [...] in view, the [...] women’s inspection [...] of their outlying projects has nothing unusual in it” (2005; 386-7), because the female founders “function as an instructive cadre, ensuring neatness, industry, and proper socialization of the people in their care [... while t]his disciplinary function [...] is accompanied by the same liberty of association [for them] that the women of Millenium Hall have” (2005; 387).

This type of charitable activity was not imagined by Sarah Scott from scratch, but rather the female author took inspiration from institutions already existing in the England of her time. Indeed, Williams Elliott states that the subcommunity of gentlewomen is

[b]ased on an actual eighteenth-century practice of voluntary 'spinster clustering' [... and it] also shares some characteristics with the philanthropic female asylums. [... It] is promoted with a sort of prospectus, outlining its plan and regulations. Each woman is to have a room to herself, [...] there are provisions for expulsion, and inmates are allowed to leave voluntarily (1995; 545).

In addition to this, there are “rules that outline a contractual arrangement stipulating both benefits and obligations and guaranteeing both economic stability and conformity of conduct” (Van Sant 2005; 383). On this last point, Scott wanted to include a very realistic dynamic in the novel, imagining what it might have been like to gather a dozen women who do not know each other in a circumscribed area to live together. Inevitably, “internal conflict [...] is deflected to the secondary community of ladies” (Schellenberg 1996; 94), and indeed one of the cottagers admits that they “used to quarrel, [...] but the ladies [...] shewed [them] so kindly how much it was [their] duty to agree together, [...] or else [they] could not hope to be forgiven by God, [...] that now [they] love one another like sisters” (Scott 1762; 18).

Within the female community of Millenium Hall, therefore, the ladies are not only concerned with education, but also with re-education in being together, in kindness and benevolence. Consequently, “[a]s [the] subcommunit[y] of poor cottagers [...] learn[s] the principles of consensus, pride and quarrelling give way to mutual aid and hospitality” (Schellenberg 1996; 94), according to the lifestyle of the women’s society, and “[o]nce the indigent gentlewomen have internalized the rules of the asylum, they engage in philanthropy just as do their benefactors” (Williams Elliott 1995; 545). It is therefore important to reiterate that the daily occupations of cottagers should not be considered as unpaid work, or exploitation. The Millenium Hall system is based on mutual exchange and selfless benevolence, and there is no personal gain for the female founders.

The decision of the ladies to “take every child after the fifth of every poor person, as soon as it can walk, [...] and] send [them] to [the gentlewomen] to keep out of harm” (Scott 1762; 17) is based on the same concept. On this, “[t]he women argue, predictably for people dismissive of blood relationships, that it is right to take children away from the narrow-minded, [...] Hobbesian families Scott so abhorred” (Johns 2003; 99), because in this way, children have the opportunity to grow up in a healthy and balanced environment, where they do not have to worry about being mistreated or exploited because of their poverty. Moreover, “as soon as they can hold a knitting-needle [the cottagers] teach them to knit, and to spin” (Scott 1762; 17) in order to make them acquire skills right from the start that they will be able and will have to use in their future lives, since “education to utopia depends on children learning that everything they do has an impact” (Johns 2003; 99) and this impact can also change the external world. Overall, this plan “promotes the growth of population by making it more feasible economically for the poor to have large families [...] and] extends the charity beyond childbirth to the raising of the children, providing employment for older women at the same time” (Williams Elliott 1995; 543). In the Hall everyone participates in the common good.

Another area of Millenium Hall, even more protected and hidden, is used to house people with malformations or disabilities. As explained above, in Sarah Scott’s

novel the idea of women in patriarchal society and that of the deformed people are closely linked, as the feeling of being a freak show belongs to both categories. Wandless states in this regard that “Scott mine[d] the correlation between deformity, beauty, and womanhood on several occasions” (2009; 265), artfully managing to convey between the lines of her work the discomfort that is felt when insistently observed. This comparison is analysed lucidly by Williams Elliott:

Like young gentlewomen who spend the better part of their waking hours dressing in order to catch husbands, the 'monsters' are put on display for public viewing. [...] Like the unmarried women in *Millenium Hall*, however, these 'poor creatures' have retreated from the gazing public eye to the asylum of the sheltered country estate (1995; 548-9, quoting Scott 1762; 259, 27).

Even one of the ladies themselves can be considered in particular a monster in the etymological sense of the term, that is, something that is put on display. Indeed “Miss Mancel, who [was] renowned for her extraordinary beauty, stop[ped] attending church because people [came] from all around the county to stare at her—as if she were a 'monster’” (Williams Elliott 1995; 549). The sense of shame a woman feels when she is morbidly observed is something that cannot be explained to someone who has never experienced it. Whoever acts like this is trying to satisfy that kind of detrimental curiosity, not the “one [which] derives from a will to edification and conduces to virtue, [but] the [one which] is a product of the impudent spectatorship that the Hall was built to thwart” (Wandless 2009; 277). In any case, the women of Millenium Hall, after experiencing it first-hand, have understood that this type of attention does not lead to anything good, and that on their part, indulging certain attitudes by proving to be vain can only be harmful.

This achievement, however, is the result of a thorough examination of conscience that the people welcomed into the “asylum” (Scott 1762; 24) are not yet able to do. In fact, once gathered in their circumscribed area, they “boast about [...] how much money their keepers earned” from showing them to the public (Williams Elliott 1995; 549). Not understanding that this behaviour does nothing but fuel a system that is

corrupt in morality, the “poor creatures” (Scott 1762; 27) must be re-educated by the female founders to recover their sense of modesty and dignity and to no longer consider themselves as mere objects and freaks. Williams Elliott explains that they

learn that vanity is the consciousness of one’s body that makes one a victim. [... Therefore, a]n asylum like Millenium Hall represents an escape from the forced display and legal servitude to which both women and 'monsters' could be subjected; but it also represents a withdrawal from the world, which they can never again enter without again taking on the position of victimized object (1995; 549).

While in the external world it is necessary to respect certain canons to avoid being excluded, within the community of Millenium Hall there is no “golden world of uniformly strong beautiful bodies; nor [...] a Spartan regime, contemptuous of physical infirmity” (Rees 1996; 218). People with physical deformities or handicaps are welcomed with open arms by the ladies, who aim to give them greater dignity by convincing them of the possibility of actively contributing to society, thus once and for all ceasing to maintain a passive role in life. After all, “Scott devote[d] considerable thought to the practical question of how to create a sense of self-respect and a role within the wider community for those suffering” (Rees 1996; 218), and a concrete example of this is given by the fact that in her novel, “the household itself is run by people considered unemployable elsewhere” (Rees 1996; 218), like for instance “the house-keeper” (Scott 1762; 150), who, due to “a fever”, has “the fingers of one of her hands [...] contracted quite close to the palm” (Scott 1762; 151).

The visit to the “asylum” (Scott 1762; 24) by the male narrator and his companion Lamont is preceded by a dialogue between the latter and Mrs Mancel, in which he hypothesises that exotic animals are confined within that area. According to the “coxcomb” (Scott 1762; 3), seeing “those beautiful wild beasts, brought out of their native woods, where they had reigned as kings, and here tamed and subjected by the superior art of man [, ... is] a triumph of human reason, which could not fail to afford great pleasure” (Scott 1762; 22). The female founder, however, has a completely different opinion about it. According to her, “when reason appears only in

the exertion of cruelty and tyrannical oppression, it is surely not a gift to be boasted of” (Scott 1762; 22), and she also states that mankind is allowed “to use the animal race for his own preservation, perhaps for his convenience, but certainly not to treat them with wanton cruelty, and as it is not in his power to give them any thing so valuable as their liberty, it is [...] criminal to enslave them” (Scott 1762; 23). Contextually therefore, a distinction is made by Mrs Mancel, because “[w]hen a man forces the furious steed to endure the bit, or breaks oxen to the yoke, the great benefits he receives from, and communicates to the animals, excuses the forcible methods by which it is accomplished” (Scott 1762; 22-3). Thus, in the latter case it is not a question of cruelty, but of putting into practice once again the cardinal principle of Millenium Hall, that is, mutual exchange infused with benevolence. Indeed, Schellenberg explains that for the female founders, “[t]he relationship between human beings and the rest of creation [...] is governed [...] by a reciprocity which allows only interactions that bring benefit to both parties” (1996; 99), without any kind of exploitation.

Rees dwells carefully on this dialogue, and states that by including it in her novel, “Scott show[ed] sensitivity to a relatively new way of thinking about humanity’s responsibility to other species. [...] In this challenge to the eighteenth-century hunting squirearchy, it is tempting to read 'man' as gender-specific rather than universal” (1996; 219, quoting Scott 1762; 23). In fact, the predatory attitude, not only towards animals, is typically male. If, on the one hand, within the female community “[h]uman relationships are [...] to be characterized by mutual kindness and forgiveness” (Schellenberg 1996; 99), on the other hand, in the external world men feel they have the right to exercise their power over all beings they consider inferior. On closer inspection, therefore, it is likely that with this episode Scott wanted to raise awareness not only on the issue of cruelty against animals, but also on the limitation of women’s freedom by male figures in their families. Mrs Mancel’s vehement response to Lamont suggests that this is not just about animals. In fact, Rees comments on the episode as follows: “What is immediately striking about [Mrs Mancel’s] shocked reaction is how applicable her terms are to other kinds of domination: out of context,

they might equally allude to the power lust of empire and slavery, or even to sexual possessiveness” (1996; 220).

In her speech, Mrs Mancel makes a clear reference to the theme of slavery, although a superficial reader may still connect it to the exploitation of animals. The female founder confesses that

to see a man, from a vain desire to have in his possession the native of another climate and another country, reduce a fine and noble creature to misery, and confine him within narrow inclosures (*sic*) whose happiness consisted in unbounded liberty, shocks [her] nature (Scott 1762; 23).

Mrs Mancel in this case is the spokesperson of a thought common to all the ladies, who “object to the institution of slavery [and ...] are sensitive to and adamantly against any form of human flesh for money” (Alliker Rabb 1988; 14). For this reason too it seems inappropriate to describe the people involved in production inside Millenium Hall as rigidly controlled and exploited. In her novel, “Scott [...] decried an essentialist stance [and] furthered Christian notions on the equality of souls, [while] support[ing] the idea of social ranks, created by God, that imply particular social obligations” (Johns 2003; 95), such as, for the wealthier classes, setting a good example by helping those in need.

As explained several times previously, for Scott all human beings are morally equal and deserve to be treated with respect. Johns in this regard explains that the female author’s “argument on behalf of slaves was based on [...] the reciprocal nature of a relationship—the contractual model grounded in a religious idea of spiritual equality—which sheds light on the parallel she created between chattel slavery and slavery in marriage” (2003; 95). In the eighteenth century, a woman was valued basing on her virtues and the wealth of her family, and also, upon marriage, she became the property of her husband, just like a slave. It can therefore be stated that most likely the female writer of *Millenium Hall*, by inserting a reference to the problem of slavery, did not have as her main objective that of contributing to the abolitionist struggle, a movement that was in its infancy at that time, but rather that of making the reader reflect on the female condition. Indeed, according to Sniader Lanser, “analogies with

slavery [are to be interpreted] not as a way of combating slavery but as a way of legitimating women's rights" (1992; 14, note 21).

One of the ways in which a man could, and still can, control a woman was to prohibit her from owning and managing money. As a consequence, once the female founders of Millenium Hall are no longer victims of male domination and also find themselves heirs to fair sums, they decide to adopt a completely different system for the sustenance of their women's society, that of common property. As Schellenberg explains, "shared property is a sign of the dissolution of boundaries between selves [... t]hus the first rule the community sets for its sister establishments is that they maintain equality by the pooling of fortunes" (1996; 93). In fact, the organisation of the estate is based on two fundamental elements of equal importance, namely friendship and sharing. According to Johns, "[p]artnerships depend on the free circulation of not only feeling but also funds, not only caring but also cash" (2003; 104), and this is what makes Millenium Hall the efficient machine it is. With the money in a common pot, the ladies have full control over their projects and are able to launch various charitable initiatives. As McGonegal explains,

Miss Melvyn's dictum that the perfect friendship is possible once notions of individual property are laid aside becomes, in a sense, the model for the economic regulation of Millenium Hall and its proprietors' principle of personal interaction: all of the women who seek refuge there receive benefits from a shared fund to which all contribute (2007; 300).

By including many references to money and production processes in her novel, Scott demonstrated that it is possible, even for an eighteenth-century woman, to think of a different, more egalitarian society. In *Millenium Hall*, the female writer "combined the literary and the economic, positing an ideal contractualism that set in motion an endless sequence of reformative transactions. She reconceived the contract and depicted a self-replicating and ever-expanding utopia" (Johns 2003; 20). The philosophical concept according to which a contract exists as a founding and regulating act of a society is overturned by the female author, who reimagined the social contract of her women's society from a female point of view, which was not

even remotely taken into consideration by the intellectuals of that period. Johns explains very clearly the importance of the change brought about by Sarah Scott in her protofeminist utopia:

Because the idea of reciprocity in the contract requires willing agreement, jurisprudential notions make room for the exercise of women's will and assertion of women's rights. Contractualism, for Scott, made possible a sociopolitical place for female subjects. At the same time, however, Scott, recognised problematic aspects of contractualism and therefore instilled the language of Christian charity into the language of contractual reciprocity to create a utopian dialect (2003; 92).

It has been demonstrated several times in this thesis that religious morality is an essential element of the Millenium Hall organisation, where everything functions on the basis of mutual benevolence. Even in this case, however, Scott did not limit herself to reporting in her novel the Christian values of the Bible as they are, but these too are revisited in a protofeminist key. As Schellenberg explains:

the community of Millenium Hall thoroughly reinterprets the Christian tradition that has been used to uphold the patriarchal structures which have restricted its members' movements in society at large. [...] The [...] Christianity which is subsequently portrayed in the text is not [...] a repressively patriarchal, but rather a communal one (1996; 99).

In doing so, the author of *Millenium Hall* created the conditions for her all-female community, in which women can finally take on active roles of service to society precisely because God allows them to do so. In this regard Johns notes that "Scott transformed the Christian call for charity into a justification for women's ownership, self-possession, and agency" (2003; 109), consequently imagining a utopian reality where women are no longer commodities to which a value is attributed by male figures, but are self-assertive and strong individuals, capable of managing an entire estate. Moreover, "Christian charity, for Scott, requires that one actively give of one's self. [... Therefore,] Christian doctrine fully supports the natural law tenet of self-ownership for women as well as men" (Johns 2003; 62), finally giving the former a

chance to pursue their purpose in life, without limiting themselves to believing that marriage is the *non plus ultra*.

For an eighteenth-century English woman, marriage was the only way to find a place in society and feel accepted by it. On the other hand, the nuptial bond relegated the woman to a passive role, constantly in the shadow of her husband and dependent on him. To oppose all this, the female writer once again referred to the contractual philosophy, and

confront[ed] the marriage contract by insisting on women's status as self-directing individuals. If women are to possess property in their own persons, then they must be able to enter into contractual arrangements by voluntary choice. [... Consequently,] the single life should remain a viable alternative, and women should have the option of living with other women (Johns 2003; 102).

As for this, Scott's life experience played a fundamental role. The disastrous marriage with George Lewis Scott on the one hand, and the years of joy and tranquillity lived with Lady Barbara Montagu on the other, certainly contributed to convincing the author of *Millenium Hall* to create her community as a group of women. However, in the society of the time, if a woman did not want to get married she was inevitably marginalised and judged. For this reason another of the revolutionary changes in Sarah Scott's novel is that she "represented the single life for women not as spinsterhood but as an opportunity for a purposeful, engaged Christian life" (Johns 2003; 104).

The active role of the female founders of Millenium Hall within their community is represented by the charity they operate towards various minorities in need, taking on responsibilities that require the exercise of organisational power and control on their part. For this reason, it can be stated that in the women's society there is no stereotypically feminine environment. Even if the estate and all the people who live there can be considered part of a large household, an extended family, what is carried out by the ladies does not correspond to actions typically executed by women relegated to the domestic environment. Williams Elliott's analysis on this issue is particularly on point:

Philanthropy was crucial [...] because it was a discourse that linked the masculine world of business and politics to the feminized world of domesticity. By writing a novel about women doing philanthropy, Scott purge[d] the novel of its sexualized sentimental overtones; by casting it in the form of a philanthropic tract, she strips philanthropy of its specifically masculine component and makes it hospitable to nonsexualized women (1995; 537).

If *Millenium Hall* contained only the histories of the female founders, without their presence being motivated by the need to give concrete proof of the necessity of creating an all-female community, the novel would be a romance. On the other hand, if the inset narratives were missing, the text would simply be one of the many proposals for charitable activities that were widespread in eighteenth-century England, and the force of the profeminist change would therefore be lost, prevaricated by the patriarchal system of the time. As a consequence, Sarah Scott's novel turns out to be the perfect combination of feminine and masculine, of benevolence and business. For this reason, the women of Millenium Hall become a revolutionary example, showing themselves as those who can concretely make society better without needing a man and not being afraid of being marginalised for this. Williams Elliott explains that,

[b]y proposing women's philanthropy, instead of marriage, as the solution to social problems, Scott retained women's position as the source of society's stability and security at the same time that she opened a new space within that position for unmarried women who could now define themselves as something other than 'old maids' or prostitutes (1995; 544-5).

Since Scott herself was without a husband, it was essential for her not to feel excluded from the rest of society and instead to demonstrate that she was not useless and that she could actively contribute to its improvement. For this reason her novel "imaginatively resolves the problem of integrating the upper-class Englishwoman's traditional charitable role [...] with the principles of public, businesslike philanthropic institutions by utilizing both the discourses of philanthropy and of sensibility" (Williams Elliott 1995; 536). In doing so, Scott devised a unique and revolutionary profeminist utopia, where "[t]he rare balanced economy between matters material

and spiritual, so elusive and divisive an ideal on the outside, becomes a luxury that women left to themselves create from their house divided and sustain with impunity” (Cruise 1995; 570). In this climate that seems almost too good to be true, “the women of Millenium Hall and the neighborhood they have re-ordered demonstrate the physical, economic, emotional, and spiritual well-being that can be achieved through interdependence and a commitment to one’s sociable duty” (Schellenberg 1996; 100).

To achieve the Nirvana of Millenium Hall, however, the path is not easy. Scott’s utopia conceptually represents a revolution of the protocapitalist economic system of eighteenth-century England, in which the female writer added a feminine element, that of friendship. Mangano notes that

[t]he only way society can integrate friendship and commerce [...] is by deconstructing the public/private divide rooted in economic individualism, which, by making women masters of personal friendship and men masters of enterprise, apportions a different set of limitations to each sex (2015; 485).

By embracing male skills in managing economic activities, the ladies have the opportunity to radically change the patriarchal system that until then has excluded them, and starting from their small community, they begin to operate a significant production system, but not out of a desire to accumulate profit, but rather out of a utopian wish to make the world a better place, where respect and equality reign. While writing *Millenium Hall*,

Scott rationalized that women’s superior ability to create and nurture connections with labourers would legitimate what was a fledgling capitalist economy. [...] An economy managed by women is, according to Scott’s logic, especially proficient at converting its own violent impulses into benevolent intentions (McGonegal 2007; 301).

The secret to the success of the project, therefore, seems to be the female ability to unite people through benevolence. This is the method that the Hall’s women apply within their community, and this leads them to create actual production systems such as the textile factory. According to Cruise,

[t]he ability of the women to generate income [and] to support a work force [...] spells the end of their dependence upon adventitious wealth [...] and also suggests that in small ways *Millenium Hall* has begun to make inroads into the outlying world. Without money, economy, enterprise, and commerce, the sinews of the greater civil body, these women could not begin to support their smaller-scale moral endeavors (1995; 566),

and in the same way they could not think of being able to reintegrate into the patriarchal and protocapitalist society of that period all those who, once they had received the aid they needed, decided to leave the female community.

Millenium Hall is proof of the revolutionary stance of its writer. “The fact that Scott subtly emphasize[d] the broadest sense of domestic economy in her novel, as well as its benevolent administration, situate[d] her narrative in the vanguard of newly emerging commercial theory at midcentury” (Cruise 1995; 569), by creating an alternative to the individualistic accumulation of capital and the previous system of land ownership. “Countering both commercial and aristocratic sources of corrosive self-interest, Scott depicts the economic dimension of these friendships as a pattern for renovating the nation’s agrarian heritage as well as its public discourse” (Mangano 2015; 474)—giving life to a countryside household where everything is in harmony, collaboration reigns supreme and no one feels obliged to repay what they receive.

This pattern is also repeated in the “manufacture of carpets and ruggs (*sic*)” (Scott 1762; 254), namely the third charitable activity that the ladies of *Millenium Hall* found, this time thanks to Mrs Trentham’s inheritance. In this casa too, it is a substitute for an already existing institution, which, within the female community, is stripped of its oppressive implications caused by the protocapitalist system. Williams Elliott explains that

[t]he [...] manufacture [...] is [...] put forward as an explicit alternative to the workhouse. [...] Its] evident success serves as an argument for the superiority of a philanthropic venture, which, as in this case, can be administered entirely by women, over political solutions to the problems of poor relief and vagrancy. *Millenium Hall* implies that [...] women, who are

themselves models of industry and cleanliness, are the best guardians and governors of the poor (1995; 544).

In this project the ladies combine the principle of mutual exchange with the production of goods, and this “succeed[s] so well, as to enrich all the country round about” (Scott 1762; 254). Benevolence remains at the basis of this activity as well, and it is precisely this that creates bonds of friendship between the female founders and the people who work in the factory.

Indeed, “[w]hile the women insist that '[they] have no nice regard for profit,' they create a thriving [...] enterprise [...] by gaining the affections of the labouring classes” (McGonegal 305, quoting Scott 1762; 260), precisely because in an environment like that of the estate, where the good received does not have to be repaid, those who get a job and can therefore improve their standard of living feel grateful without feeling indebted. The serenity and joy that this brings also improve the atmosphere inside the factory, so that those who work there are happy to do so. The manufacture’s “utopian scheme theorizes how affective ties between workers and consumers might actually encourage industrial productivity” (Mangano 2015; 473), because in an environment where people work while “singing and whistling, with the appearance of general cheerfulness (*sic*)” (Scott 1762; 254), it stands to reason that a greater workload can be tackled without difficulty.

Another interesting feature of this charitable activity is the age range of the workers and their respective compensation. In the factory the employees and adults, but also children and the elderly. Although this fact may appear to be an infringement of human rights today, it is necessary in this case to try and understand the workers’ conditions in eighteenth-century England. At that time in fact, on the one hand, children were exploited, forced to do extremely hard work for endless shifts, receiving little money in return, if at all, while on the other hand, the elderly, considered no longer fit for work, were left penniless, thus making the management of human resources in the cities increasingly difficult. Consequently, a working reality like that of the Millenium Hall manufacture, where the well-being of employees is guaranteed, appears to be an ideal alternative. In addition to this, it must be added that for the

Hall's women it is essential that those who live on the estate do not remain inactive, regardless of their age. Zeal is a virtue that allows the community to prosper, by making everyone participate as much as possible in continuous relationships of benevolent exchange.

The amount of salary that workers receive at Millenium Hall follows a particular *ratio*. While adult employees are “allow[ed ...] great wages” (Scott 1762; 254), higher than the average value at that time, “the ladies [...] give more to the children and the aged, in proportion to the work they do, [...] as a proper encouragement, and reward for industry in those seasons of life in which it is so uncommon” (Scott 1762; 254-5). In this way, “Sarah Scott endorsed a commercial society that [...] advanced workers’ independence and raised their standards of living” (Johns 2003; 54), helping them rediscover a sense of dignity and a purpose, that is, to contribute to the development of the Millenium Hall project. This way of managing salaries introduced by Scott in her novel is clearly in opposition to what normally happened in eighteenth-century England, where worker gratification was not contemplated, precisely because the protocapitalist system had as its sole objective the accumulation of wealth by investors. On the contrary, the manufacture inside the estate is created specifically for the well-being of those who work there. As Morton explains,

the ladies of the Hall, through a benevolence born of the knowledge obtained by observation, can best maximize the utility of each 'hand' precisely because the factory is operated for the benefit of those hands. The ladies maintain their own utility by promoting the utility of others, an action which ensures the smooth continuance of the social order (1999; 194, quoting Scott 1762; 254).

Thanks to the climate of respect and harmony that is created in the factory, working hours are experienced more lightly, if not even with joy, and, therefore, employees feel satisfied and do not have the need to oppose or protest against unjust regulations. As McGonegal states, “[t]he [...] practices of Scott’s [female] protagonists function to thwart the potential for uprisings as effectually, if not more so, than any forceful show of domination” (2007; 304). Furthermore, the fact that the female

founders are always present in their responsibilities and ensure that their charity continues to thrive, inspires workers to follow their example and, therefore, not do anything that could harm the system. In fact, Morton notes that the ladies' "close supervision [can] only quell the labouring class's notorious potential for disorder: the factory's workers would be restrained from the habitual drinking, pilfering, and irregular work hours that were widely decried during the period" (1999; 194).

Likewise, the Hall's women are careful that during the workers' leisure hours, situations do not arise in which, due to some excesses, the people involved molest the rest of the community. The wedding celebrations of one of the young women raised and educated at Millenium Hall, for instance, are "as pure as [they are] sincere" (Scott 1762; 143), and fit perfectly with the spirit of the community. As Morton explains, "[their] supervised, decorous amusement [...] ensures, above all, that order and utility are maintained" (1999; 201). It is worth repeating that the act of controlling by the ladies is not oppressive, but rather aims at safeguarding the success of their utopian and profeminist project. Moreover, they make the people who live on the estate respect certain behaviours, just as they themselves respect them *in primis*, in observance of Christian teachings. In this regard Morton affirms that the female founders "are subjected to God's gaze, a subjection which, in turn, increases their utility by prompting them to perform their supervisory duty" (1999; 202). All this means that the textile factory system becomes only the first example of a potentially much larger scheme, which can expand while remaining faithful to the founding values of benevolence and mutual exchange. Indeed, Manganò underlines that "these bonds contribute to the long-term expansion of the [H]all's domain, as it gradually incorporates the surrounding estates left to decay through the [...] miserliness and profligacy of the aristocracy", succeeding in this way in "restor[ing] and preserv[ing] an English cultural inheritance" (2015; 480). Millenium Hall, therefore, has the ability to bring lifeblood back into a country drying up due to selfishness and thirst for profit.

At this point it is good to clarify a fact that has remained implicit until now: in Millenium Hall there are also men, but their role is marginal. Indeed, "[t]hough the ladies [...] cho[ose] to live without male companionship, their community [is] not so

exclusively feminine” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 269), since the charitable activities within the estate host several individuals belonging to the male gender. First of all, the children who are given into the care of the indigent gentlewomen are both female and male. Moreover, “[s]chools [are] set up for the children of both sexes on the estate, though it is noteworthy that the school for girls [is] twice the size of that for boys” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 269), most likely because the female founders’ main interest in this case is to give girls a solid foundation to enable them to live in the patriarchal society of the eighteenth century without necessarily having to depend on a man, while boys can already count on the privileges that come with their gender.

In this regard, Rees notes that “working-class boys have, if anything, a more restricted prospect than their sisters” (1996; 226), because their life path is already marked, while girls have more possibilities, some improving their condition, such as marrying a man capable of providing for them throughout their life, others much worsening such as becoming a prostitute. Furthermore, “[i]t is interesting that Scott thought [...] men’s [fieldwork] could be learnt by doing” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 269-70), while girls need to attend school to learn what might be useful to them outside the Hall. Therefore, for the boys, or at least for those who belong to the lower and middle social classes and so find a place in the ladies’ philanthropic project, the opportunities that allow them to live with dignity are immediately available to them. Even if they choose to remain within the estate, men can find employment in the factory and in the fields around the Hall. Moreover, other male figures are present “among the physically deformed” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 269), so it can be stated that the only totally female nucleus is the one composed of the ladies.

In addition to the men employed on the estate, Mr d’Avora lives in the manor house, “a man of excellent understanding, [who has] an incomparable heart” (Scott 1762; 54) and who had been the tutor of Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan in their boarding school days, also advising them how to conduct themselves in the various vicissitudes which affected them before the foundation of the Hall. He is admitted into the female community because, according to Johns, he represents “Scott’s ideal male position [, ... being] a benevolent and trusted man in a society of women who remain

free to bestow their affections as they wish” (Johns 2003; 103). In fact, Mr d’Avora is in no way the object of romantic interest of any of the ladies, but is simply a dear friend and a mentor. He is welcomed “both as a valuable friend, and an useful assistant, in the management of [the female founders’] affairs” (Scott 1762; 139), therefore becoming “himself [...] an object of charity” (Williams Elliott 1995; 550) by the ladies. While admitting that the presence of a man in the manor house is at least unusual, the characteristics of Mr d’Avora must be taken into consideration, because these do not correspond to those of an ordinary English man of that period. He is indeed “a feminized elderly Italian object of charity—a man without legal, familial, or physical authority” (Williams Elliott 1995; 550), and

[b]ecause a proper English man, however sensible or philanthropic, who [has] the power to enforce his will and his desires would be dangerous to the founding purpose of their female asylum, the ladies who seek refuge in the ‘family’ at Millenium Hall choose the grandfatherly Mr d’Avora as their only male associate (Williams Elliott 1995; 550, quoting Scott 1762; 13).

While Mr d’Avora is a permanent resident of the estate, the tradesman and his travelling companion Lamont are just passing through. Their visit to Millenium Hall revolutionises their lives, because they experience the female community as a “defiant representation [that] quite literally forces [them] into the awkward position of quiet listeners and obliging spectators. It also challenges them to rethink their conduct” (Cruise 1995; 570), because they realise how much suffering the privileged position of men in patriarchal society can cause for women. Furthermore, the traveller also understands that the protocapitalist system is not the only one capable of guaranteeing the prosperity of a society, and that indeed benevolence and mutual exchange can be the solid foundations of a flourishing and efficient economy. As a consequence, “[t]he impression Millenium Hall makes is so strong that the [male] narrator resolves to found a similar institution” (Brandon Schnorrenberg 1982; 265), and he also decides to publish his report containing all the information on the estate useful for creating a *replica*. As Mangano explains,

[i]n socioeconomic terms, the private virtue of Scott's hermetic heroines appears to translate seamlessly into the reformed [male] narrator's public agency, allowing him to spread their lessons to a wider audience. The logic of friendship's growing empire implies that the next link in this chain must be the novel's reader (2015; 465).

Thus, as previously clarified, the male figure of the tradesman in this novel is essential to convey the message of the utopian and protofeminist community to the outside. Mangano makes an interesting reflection on this, noting that

Scott's conclusion broaches the possibility that the [H]all's influence might extend to men. Because the utopian scheme requires both the exclusion of men and the reordering of economic life, the novel finally leaves the reader to question which feature is more foundational; are these economic reforms built on the exclusion of men's natures, or might such economic reforms be capable of altering men's passions? (2015; 485).

Taking into examination the entire estate of Millenium Hall, it is clear that there is a need for women to be in charge and to be responsible for the centralised organisation and management of the various parts, even the most peripheral ones. The reason for this is to be found in the traumatic stories of the female founders, who suffered injustice and mistreatment at the hands of men and the patriarchal system. This explains the exclusion of the male gender from managerial roles within the Hall, as its representatives inevitably demonstrate that they possess a *forma mentis* that is incompatible with the founding values of this protofeminist utopia. Consequently, the only way in which men could potentially attempt to recreate a system similar to Millenium Hall is to find a compromise between capitalism, which they cannot do without, and benevolence, a compromise in which, however, the former would be only minimally undermined, while the latter would be irremediably corrupted.

In conclusion, it is important to underline the optimistic note on which Scott decided to conclude her *Millenium Hall*. The end of this novel leaves the reader with hope for a spreading of the good example originally given by the ladies, with the aim,

in time, of revolutionising all of England and then potentially the whole world. According to Schellenberg,

this community has been stabilized not merely through the resolution of the stories of its individual members, but also through the institutionalization of its practice. [... T]he generalization of its philosophy into regulations allows not only the formation of spinoff communities to broaden the influence of Millenium Hall in the present, but also its continuation into perpetuity. [... Moreover,] the educational activities of the group are forming a second generation, trained in its utopian principles, that will allow for continued spatial and temporal expansion (1996; 93).

The future appears bright in the eyes of the male narrator, who after discovering the utopian reality of Millenium Hall is no longer capable of living as he did before, when he was devoted only to the accumulation of profit and was poor in human relationships. Likewise, his travelling companion leaves this experience behind as a completely changed person. As Williams Elliott explains,

[t]he 'conversion' of the rakish Lamont on the [second] last page of the novel suggests that, despite their exile from traditional domesticity, the influence of female philanthropists could actually promote changes in the world outside [...]. If Lamont the rake could be converted not only to religion, but to a new respect for the value of women as charitable agents rather than as sexual objects or marriageable fortunes, then the conditions that objectified and victimized women might also be susceptible to reform (1995; 550-1).

Ultimately, *Millenium Hall* remains a utopia, albeit a realistic one. Even if it is assumed that the male gender can finally open their eyes to the oppression generated by their patriarchal privileges, hoping for a concrete improvement on their part requires a courageous leap of faith, which often turns out to be insufficient. Nonetheless, the female founders remain splendid examples of strong women who, using all their means, manage to rebel against the patriarchy by founding their own female community, over which they maintain control thanks to their act of

emancipatory self-affirmation. Thus, Sarah Scott's novel proves to have a revolutionary force, deserving, therefore, a place in the canon of feminist literature.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* is a revolutionary utopian novel in that protofeminist themes are developed within it. Moreover, throughout this thesis, these have often been related to current issues concerning the status of women today, emphasising how, in the eighteenth century as now, patriarchal society can control women and limit their freedom of action. In particular, this thesis has first mentioned *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* by Mary Astell, since this treatise is one of the most inspiring literary works for Scott, and Scott's own life experiences, as they represent an attempt to put her utopian project created on paper into practical application. This was made to give evidence of the origins of the protofeminist values later developed in *Millenium Hall* and of the increasingly pressing need for women of that period to empower themselves through adequate education and the possibility of playing active roles in society.

Following this, in chapter one, the socioeconomic, political, and philosophical context of the eighteenth century has been compared with the personal stories of the ladies of the Hall and the founding values of their community. In particular, it has been given proof of the fact that women at that time suffered greatly from the pressure of the conventions imposed by patriarchal culture, which are illustrated in Mrs Maynard's accounts of the lives of the five female protagonists. More specifically, it has been shown that the female founders of the protofeminist community devised by Scott are revolutionary models of the female gender, who courageously succeed in resisting the injustices and mistreatment perpetrated against them by male figures, and once free of self-assertion, set up a remarkable philanthropic project, with the main purpose of helping other women experiencing the same difficulties that they have come to know so well.

In chapter two, then, it has been demonstrated that the narrative structure of *Millenium Hall*, which features two narrative voices, one male and one female, is functional for two reasons. Firstly, evidence has been given that the anonymous "gentleman on his travels" (Scott 1762) is essential for the dissemination of the

protofeminist example set by the female community in the rest of society. On the other hand, Mrs Maynard plays a key role in disclosing the motivations behind the establishment of the women's society. Furthermore, this chapter compares the male and female ways of interpreting space. While the former focuses on the expanse of the landscape and the vastness of the horizons, linking this to classical references of idyllic and fantastical worlds, the latter concentrates on the circular organisation of the various charitable activities that take place on the estate, aiming at pragmatism and efficiency. This served to demonstrate the inability of the patriarchal view to understand and give due importance to the validity of the protofeminist system based on benevolence.

Finally, the last chapter has illustrated the actual scope of the Millenium Hall charity project. More specifically, evidence has been provided that the protofeminist ideals of the five female founders, such as benevolence, mutual exchange, friendship and sharing, can be effectively applied to various support activities not only for women, but also for other minorities in need, such as poor families with many children and people with physical deformities and disabilities. Moreover, through a comparison with the protocapitalist system of the eighteenth century, the efficiency of the all-female organisation has been demonstrated, in which desire for profit and selfishness are rejected in favour of kindness and altruism. Ultimately, the change that takes place in the male characters' worldview has been highlighted, which in the case of the traveller takes the form of an inspiration, while in the case of Lamont it becomes a profound transformation. This was useful to provide proof that the alternative represented by the protofeminist community can succeed in expanding beyond its borders and lead the rest of society towards an improvement.

The research represented by this thesis, however, is not exhaustive with regard to certain topics that have only been mentioned. For instance, Mary Astell's work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, has not been given the attention it deserves and has only been superficially described. Furthermore, the importance of the literary genre of the novel for women writers has only been concisely analysed. In fact, the path that led the female gender to enter the literary market has not been adequately explored. Lastly,

the relationship of deep friendship between Mrs Mancel and Mrs Morgan has not been explored, and it has only been taken into account with respect to Mr Morgan's contrary opinion about it, due to his fear of being judged by the women, and not as an example of romantic friendship, i.e. a type of relationship between two women that was very common in the eighteenth century.

In addition, therefore, to the expansion of the research contained in this thesis through the analysis of the themes listed above, further possible developments could include a study of *The History of Sir George Ellison*, another novel also written by Scott and published in 1766 that can be considered a sequel to *Millenium Hall*, where it can be found the same male protagonist returning to his plantation in Jamaica. Besides this, *Munster Village*, another protofeminist utopian novel written by Lady Mary Hamilton and published in 1778, could also be examined, as it describes the organisation of a women's community. An analysis of this work, together with that of *Millenium Hall* and of Mary Astell's treatise, would form a solid basis for the study of protofeminism.

On the whole, the exploration of *Millenium Hall* by Sarah Scott, bringing to light various themes related to feminism, led to a comparison of the condition of women in the eighteenth century with that of women today. Indeed, on numerous occasions during the course of this thesis, similarities have been detected between the situations of oppression and prevarication described within the novel and the current situation of the female gender. In particular, this thesis has sought to stimulate its readers to reflect, inviting them to understand the importance of women's rights, and to remember how fragile they are and how they need to be defended. Of course, feminist struggles in the years between the publication of the novel that is the subject of this thesis and the present have resulted in many aspects of women's lives improving enormously, but this should not be enough to think that it is no longer necessary to be vigilant. In fact, it is essential to always bear in mind that the rights won with sweat and blood by women in the past can be revoked at any moment. History shows on a daily basis that all the hard work done by the female gender has not yet succeeded in demolishing the cornerstones of patriarchal culture, and consequently it cannot be excluded that

everything that today seems normal for a woman, everything that is taken for granted about women's freedom, will once again become utopia. Therefore, the fight must be constant, in the name of women's right to be who they want to be, without necessarily having to live in the shadow of anyone, not even a man.

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