

Gentlemen and Gentle Women: The Landscape Ethos in *Millenium Hall*

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The rural landscape in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* is not simply the setting but rather a way of seeing the world that the novel scrutinizes. This article synthesizes various readings of landscape in Scott's novel in order to assert its construction of a landscape ethos that encompasses ethical, aesthetic, and economic experience. Drawing on cultural geography and art history, I assess the relationship between the novel's content and form and argue that peripheral details contribute to its larger textual landscape, thus giving rise to the ethos in question. This formal analysis exposes the conservatism of the novel's social and gender politics. The landscape ethos unites the female inhabitants of the Hall with their male visitors, naturalizing their shared gentility and rendering their social privilege more stable even as the seemingly more urgent concern—women's vulnerability—eludes the narrator's grasp.

abstract

IT IS a truism that Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) demands to be interpreted through the lens of landscape. Described in the contemporary terminology of landscape architecture, the eponymous estate dominates the novel as the reigning expression of this cultural phenomenon. Scott's decision to set her proto-feminist Utopia on the grounds of a remote Cornwall estate attests to the currency of the domestic rural retreat as an ideal site for cultural, social, and political inquiry.¹ In *Millenium Hall*, the rural landscape is not simply the setting but in fact a way of seeing the world that the novel scrutinizes.² Such a formulation

¹ For more on the literary and cultural function of the rural estate, see Ann Kibbie, "The Estate, the Corpse, and the Letter: Posthumous Possession in *Clarissa*," *ELH* 74, no. 1 (2007): 117–43; April London, *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Clara Tuite, "Domestic Retrenchment and Imperial Expansion: The Property Plots of *Mansfield Park*," in *The Postcolonial Jane Austen*, ed. You-Me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (London: Routledge, 2000), 93–115.

² I am indebted here to Denis Cosgrove's influential mode of cultural geography: "Landscape denotes the external world mediated through subjective

goes to the heart of competing definitions of landscape; hovering between a visible object and visual process, landscape may serve as a compelling heuristic through which to assess the novel's social and gender politics. Landscape, then, is more than a theme or an object in this story, and there is much to be gained from an attempt to synthesize differing interpretations of landscape in the novel and to seek a more global understanding that comprehends its function in harmonizing form and content. As a culturally generated textual system, landscape involves a complex thought process that transcends the "natural" world of its purview and inflects the way the characters relate to their external world. The landscape heuristic links the frame narrative set at the Hall to the multiple inset narratives detailing how the women came to live there. Such a theoretical apparatus explains the apparent disjunction between the male narrator's serene visit to this *locus amoenus* and the traumatic episodes that cumulatively demonstrate the women's need for a rural sanctuary. In the starkest terms, the contrast generates an ethical geography by which vice festers in the city while virtue retires to the countryside. The vistas, follies, garden-side conversations, florid aromas, multiple retreats to the country, even a rug factory—all are of a piece with a more diffuse ideology in which aestheticized land undergirds an emergent economic order based on agrarian capitalism and a nascent manufactory system. In this sense, Millenium Hall's landscape is the physical manifestation of an ethics of piety, industry, and benevolent stewardship. The novel creates a synergy among this ethics, its progenitors, and the environment they generate, a synergy explored throughout this article as the landscape ethos.

Descriptions of landscape, though extensive and recurrent, occupy a relatively small portion of the novel. These descriptions are provided by the male narrator, Sir George Ellison, an accidental visitor to the Hall who rhapsodizes on its beauty in terms that situate the estate in the discourse of landscape aesthetics and rural improvement.³ Interspersed within these

human experience ... Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world." Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 13.

³ The narrator remains anonymous throughout *Millenium Hall*, but retroactively receives his name in Scott's sequel, *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766). One thread of criticism on the novel explores how Scott uses Ellison as a tool to expose the erroneous judgments that the novel seeks

aesthetically oriented episodes is a sequence of narrations told by Mrs Maynard, a Hall inhabitant, who happens to be the narrator's cousin and therefore welcomes his coincidental visit and provides intricate details of the community's foundation and management. Each time she introduces "The History of Miss ..." (as each of the four inset narratives is titled), her narrative voice displaces his own. And yet, their moral sensibilities often echo one another, suggesting how a certain ethos unifies the story even as the plot shifts from a bucolic estate tour to a series of anguished and dizzyingly complex tales of orphanhood, mother/daughter separation at birth, paternal weakness or turpitude, financial destitution, and so forth.⁴ Such a narrative structure of traumatic tales embedded within the story of a dreamlike idyll intimates how landscape serves various functions that are mutually reinforcing; landscape is the location of, the cause of, and the reward for proper ethical behaviour. As Sir George Ellison and his callow (though eventually redeemed) travelling companion Lamont sit in the garden listening to Mrs Maynard describe the woeful tales that precipitated the Hall's establishment, they assimilate the pastoral principles that her life embodies and vow to perpetuate them in the future. (The 1766 sequel *The History of Sir George*

to correct. Regardless of whether he interprets the women's estate as they wish it to be interpreted, the fact that the estate itself is the means of critique is the impetus for my argument. See Vincent Carretta, "Utopia Limited: Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and *The History of Sir George Ellison*," *Age of Johnson* 5 (1992): 303–25; James Cruise, "A House Divided: Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *SEL* 35, no. 3 (1995): 555–73; Nicole Pohl, "'Sweet place, where virtue then did rest': The Appropriation of the Country-house Ethos in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Utopian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1996): 49–59; Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle: Re-Reading the English Novel, 1740–1775* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 88–101; Suzanne Stewart, "[B]eyond that small circle all is foreign to us': Social and Spatial Cohesion in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Lumen* 22 (2003): 1–14; and William Wandless, "Secretaries of the Interior: Narratorial Collaboration in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no. 2 (2008–9): 259–81.

⁴ The estate tour has prompted several critics to explore the role of domestic tourism in Scott's novel: see Zoë Kinsley, "A Tour to Milford Haven and *Millenium Hall*: Female Charity and the Example of Elizabeth Montagu," *Eighteenth-Century Women* 3 (2003): 199–224; Crystal B. Lake, "Redecorating the Ruin: Women and Antiquarianism in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *ELH* 76, no. 3 (2009): 661–86; Susan Lamb, *Bringing Travel Home to England: Tourism, Gender, and Imaginative Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 220–49; and Stewart, 1–14.

Ellison demonstrates how Millenium Hall generates fledgling communities that mimic and extend its ethical prerogatives). The landscape ethos thus emerges as a set of principles: the benevolent stewardship, aesthetic cultivation, and industrious productivity of rural land; the exercise of these principles both legitimates and perpetuates the paternalistic system by linking the estate's ethical, aesthetic, and economic foundations.

Consider how the novel's opening section sets the stage for the first inset narrative, "The History of Miss Mancel, and Mrs. Morgan."⁵ Having remarked upon the estate's beauty, spent the night there, and toured its extensive grounds in the morning, the narrator is brimming with enthusiasm for his surroundings. In awe at what he has just seen on the grounds, he asks his cousin to explain "this wonder"; in anticipation, he describes the scene as he awaits her reply:

We sat down in an arbour, whose shade invited us to seek there a defense against the sun, which was then in its meridian, and shone with uncommon heat. The woodbines, the roses, the jessamines, the pinks, and above all, the minionette with which it was surrounded, made the air one general perfume; every breeze came loaded with fragrance, stealing and giving odour. A rivulet came bubbling by the side of the arbour, whose gentle murmurs soothed the mind into composure, and seemed to hush us to attention, when Mrs Maynard thus began to shew her readiness to comply with my request. (76–77)⁶

The way Scott composes the scene with natural and man-made elements, and the way these seem at once to constitute Ellison's surroundings and to infiltrate his vision, illustrate the multiple meanings of landscape. The flowers, arbour, and stream are not

⁵ Sarah Scott, *Millenium Hall*, ed. Gary Kelly (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995), 77. References are to this edition.

⁶ The passage is a typical evocation of the *locus amoenus*. Pohl argues that Ellison mistakenly situates the estate in such classical traditions as the *locus amoenus* and *beatus vir* (55). Likewise, Cruise argues that "the pastoral-ism of Millenium Hall is so only by virtue of geographic setting" (566). Whether or not Ellison's perception is sound in terms of the literary tradition to which the Hall belongs, for my purposes his participation in an ethics and aesthetics of landscape is key. In a similar fashion, Stewart argues that the narrator, a prototype of the picturesque tourist, misinterprets the estate design because his biases blind him to the women's deliberate construction of circular spaces (13). Stewart's detailed investigation of conflicting interpretations of landscape design informs my own claim that landscape aesthetics constitutes a key axis along which the novel channels its meaning.

only items in the scene but also expressions of his mode of visualization, prompted by touring the estate grounds. So taken is he by his environment that he sees nature itself conjuring the delivery of the story; the flowers exude their scent to enhance the tale, and the rivulet “hush[es them] to attention.” A passing literary flourish (for Ellison is writing the account in a letter to a friend), his imagery also implies that a natural harmony subsists between his own experience and what he is about to hear.

As we turn the page in suspense, we enter the remote past to discover the tragic childhood of Miss Louisa Mancel, one of the two original founders of the Hall. The convoluted nature of this tale exemplifies the ways in which seemingly incidental details resonate with what I am calling the landscape ethos of the unifying frame narrative provided by *Millenium Hall*. Though lengthy, the passage in question demonstrates how the distant people and places that preceded the Hall echo certain dimensions of its existence. Thus, Mrs Maynard begins her tale:

You may perhaps think I am presuming on your patience, when I lead you into a nursery, or a boarding school; but the life of Louisa Mancel was so early chequered with that various fate, which gives this world the motley appearance of joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, that it is not in my power to pass over the events of her infancy. I shall, however, spare you all that is possible, and recommend her to your notice only when she attracted the observation of Mr Hintman. This gentleman hearing that a person who rented some land of him was come to London, and lodged at one of those public houses which by the landlord is called an inn, at the out-skirts of London, on the Surry-side; and having some occasion to speak to him, he went thither. (78)

Though peripheral to the heart of the story, this initial encounter with Hintman perplexes readers by raising questions about the proper form of stewardship, a central concern in the novel. During this episode, one of Hintman's dependents effectively delivers another over to him. The tenant introduces Hintman to Louisa and agrees that it is in her best interest to be taken into the landlord's care. These are the circumstances in question: when Hintman arrives at the inn, the tenant, an old man, has just witnessed the death of Louisa's aunt. As he comes downstairs to greet Hintman, he is wiping away tears after comforting the child in the wake of her loss and imminent destitution in the absence of other family to provide for her. When the old man declares

his willingness to adopt Louisa, Hintman insists that he himself assume the charge: “he should have great reason to reproach himself if with the ample fortune he enjoyed, and having no children or family to partake of it, he should suffer another to take that charge, to whom it could not be so convenient” (82). The old man’s inferior social status, and duty to his own children, contribute to the impression that it is more appropriate for Hintman to assume responsibility for the apparently orphaned girl. By having Hintman meet Louisa while in the process of performing his duty as a steward, the narrative places two instances of stewardship in contiguity. It initially appears that, in addition to his not having a family, Hintman’s status as a steward makes him the more suitable guardian, but when we later learn of his sinister plot to groom Louisa according to the highest standards, only to discard her once he has “possessed” her, we realize the error of assuming that a steward of property will make the best steward of a child. The language used to describe his previously undisclosed plans for Louisa indicates that his error is one of misdirected ownership: “Among his friends he made no secret of his designs in all he had done for her, and boasted frequently of the extraordinary charms which were ripening for his possession” (101). By misconstruing the privileges of “possession” and assuming that providing for Louisa’s education entitles him to do what he will with her, Hintman exemplifies the problems of a system that makes land ownership the basis for authority in all other realms, including that of child protection. Scott’s novel offers a modest corrective, advocating that female rather than male stewards are more likely to protect women’s interests. Ultimately, the fact that we first meet Hintman in his capacity as a landlord serves no other narrative purpose than to establish that he is a gentleman and therefore possesses certain rights and privileges, which should in turn oblige him to protect his dependents and look after their best interests. His egregious failure to do so exposes the weakness of a system that invests propertied men with the power to treat women as possessions and makes it difficult to interfere when this power is abused.

On the surface, then, the tortuous circumstances leading up to Hintman’s chance encounter with Louisa seem gratuitous. Why should it matter that he happened to be seeking out his tenant when he fatefully crossed the path of the girl upon whom

he would settle such malign designs? I have been suggesting, though, that to begin the first inset narrative with a negative example of stewardship becomes a way for the novel to forecast its commitment to ethical stewardship. If we situate the details of the Hintman episode in the larger context of the landscape ethos, it becomes significant that he is a landowner. In keeping with the principles of stewardship, such a position obliges him to conduct his affairs in a duly responsible and benevolent manner. But, as we learn over the course of Louisa's story, his conduct as a landed gentleman is inconsistent. Though he ensures that Louisa is "educated in all accomplishments proper for a young person of fashion and fortune" and gives "strict charge that her mind should be cultivated with the greatest care" (82), his upright character loses its integrity when he suddenly dies without a will and his "ample fortune" fails to benefit his charge. Louisa's dear school friend Miss Melvyn, also the beneficiary of Hintman's largesse, is shocked to learn of the gentleman's dereliction of duty: "she burst into tears, and uttered some exclamations concerning 'the inconsistency of that affection, which could suffer a man to rest a moment without securing a provision in case of death, to a young woman he seemed to love with the greatest excesses of tenderness'" (101). In light of these events, the introduction of Hintman as a landlord is not negligible—it locates him in an economy based on land ownership and foretells the consequences of mismanaging one's property. A wayward gentleman, Hintman's failures as a steward are twofold: he manages his estate ineffectively, thus failing to protect his dependent, and he deliberately appoints himself Louisa's guardian knowing all the while that he will be her ruin.⁷ These aspects of the Hintman episode bring into focus the landscape ethos, a sensibility engendered by the natural beauty, happy productivity, and benevolent stewardship brought together by the women of Millenium Hall. Because we encounter

⁷ Lake argues that Hintman is guilty of "historical neglect" because he fails to be a proper "caretaker" of the nation's female monuments; she interprets Scott's novel as a form of feminist antiquarianism, arguing that *Millenium Hall* figures women as ruins who then become objects of preservation, restoration, and improvement (670–72). Lake's notion of female monuments and my own interest in how women function as inappropriate objects of possession are complementary insofar as we both grapple with how Scott's novel enacts the process by which women oscillate between being owners and objects of property.

Hintman immediately after Ellison has rhapsodized over the estate's exceptional beauty and glimpsed its inhabitants' rigorous work ethic, Hintman's failure to abide by this ethos appears all the more corrupt.

The stark contrast between Hintman in the inset narrative and the Hall women in the outer frame, who manage their land so expertly and generously, elevates the detail of his land ownership to a matter of singular importance and reiterates the importance of the landscape ethos. Readers encountering the irresponsible landowner might remember, along with Ellison, the more responsible old woman whom he met while strolling through the grounds prior to sitting down in the arbour. He had seen her when he stumbled upon two enclosures, one for formerly impoverished old women and the other for "poor creatures"—spaces that the Hall women have constructed in their effort to be generous stewards of their property.⁸ The old woman who benefits from their charity explains that "there are twelve of us that live here. We have every one a house of two rooms, as you may see, beside other conveniences, and each a little garden" (66). Just as "a person who rented some land of [Hintman]" becomes an important thread in the larger network of detail infusing the landscape ethos, so too does the woman's comment that "we have ... each a little garden." Having a garden implies that she is a good steward of the meagre estate she oversees in her corner of Millenium Hall. She is a living example of the ladies' own proper stewardship, prefiguring in miniature the way in which Ellison himself will go on to practice such principles as industry, cleanliness, and the right use of one's resources. She becomes a link in a metaphorical chain of stewardship, and the women of the Hall are its forgers.

The landscape ethos at Millenium Hall generates a wholesale economic system whereby people who may have languished without work not only gain employment but also perpetuate the system once they enter it. Scott renders the woman's

⁸ The second of the two enclosures on the women's property houses "those poor creatures who are rendered miserable from some natural deficiency or redundancy" (72). Though the subject of considerable scholarship, the "dwarf" enclosure is beyond the scope of my inquiry. See, for example, Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 149–62; and Ashley Stockstill, "Better Homes and Gardens: The Fairy World(s) of Sarah Fielding and Sarah Scott," *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 6, no. 2 (1998): 137–58.

circumstances prior to her settlement at the Hall as a matter of thwarted productivity: “I was almost starved when they put me into this house, and no shame of mine, for so were my neighbours too; perhaps we were not so painstaking as we might have been; but that was not our fault, you know, as we had not things to work with, nor any body to set us to work, poor folks cannot know every thing as these good ladies do” (65). This comment on the nature of labour reveals how production inhabits an aesthetic ideology. The old woman endorses industrious labour as the good life and condemns non-productivity as a potential source of shame (for her disavowal of shame paradoxically reveals the novel’s shaming of anyone who does not work). Situated in the narrative as a set-piece illustrating the principle of edifying labour, she both practices the Hall ethics and produces its signature physical feature: a garden. And she contributes to Ellison’s aesthetic experience by enacting a scene that prompts him to observe: “I was so pleased with the good effect which the charity of her benefactors had on the mind, as well as the situation of this old woman” (68). Ellison and the old woman become mirror images in this moment, creating a *mise en abyme* in which one character encounters another who embodies their shared ethical principles and aesthetic practices, and they in turn are reflected in the myriad other industrious members of the community.⁹ The moment captures the landscape ethos as a dynamic process whereby the novel’s frame structure replicates its aesthetic and ethical principles such that the cultivation of the land, and the resulting landscape, become both the object and the means to achieve it.

A similar effect occurs in a subsequent section of “The History of Miss Mancel, and Mrs. Morgan.” Like the Hintman episode early in this history, another seemingly peripheral reference to landed property figures in the plot, again prompting readers to appreciate proper principles of stewardship. After an array of misfortunes has forced apart the two devoted friends Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan (a.k.a. Miss Melvyn), they eventually manage to live in proximity to one another when Miss Mancel takes lodgings on a farm near the home of Miss Melvyn’s father Sir Charles and her stepmother Lady Melvyn. This farm, initially

⁹ London also notes that the enclosure of cottages “serves as a microcosm for the community as a whole;” she pursues the labour politics of this scene rather than its contribution to an aesthetic experience (117–18).

a convenient abode that allows the friends to maintain their intimacy, becomes a tool that Lady Melvyn uses to blackmail her step-daughter, of whom she is extremely jealous. She resents Miss Melvyn because the young lady's virtue threatens to unmask her own machinations to keep her husband in thrall only to herself. Part of her ruse is to coerce her step-daughter to marry Mr Morgan despite his advanced age and depraved character. When Miss Melvyn refuses his offer, Lady Melvyn sees that she can prevail by telling her husband that "she had discovered an intrigue between his daughter and Simon the young farmer" (108). After describing Lady Melvyn's devious behaviour, the narrative introduces the ploy that will soon oblige Miss Melvyn to accept Mr Morgan's proposal. As Mrs Maynard explains, "The farmer where Miss Mancel lodged had a son, who was in treaty with Lady Melvyn for a farm, which at the end of the year would become vacant. This person she thought fit for her purpose, as Miss Melvyn's going so frequently to Miss Mancel might give some colour to her invention" (107). By using the lease on a farm as a way to enlist the farmer's son in her plot against her step-daughter, Lady Melvyn exemplifies the abuse of landed authority that readers also witnessed in Mr Hintman. Both characters fail to steward their property in a responsible, or even honest, manner. While Hintman fails to "secure a provision" for his charge, thereby neglecting his landed property in an overzealous pursuit of his female "possession" (101), Lady Melvyn uses her property as a weapon against the young woman she considers a rival for her husband's attention. Neither character performs the rightful duty of a landowner, which the ladies of Millenium Hall model in so many ways that the contrast between themselves and the antagonists in Mrs Maynard's tale cannot be lost on Ellison or on the readers. The inclusion of seemingly gratuitous details relating to landed property—Mr Hintman's tenant, Lady Melvyn's farm—discloses Scott's sensitivity to the ways in which the stewardship of land can become perverted, serving as a tool in selfish and nefarious schemes rather than as the means to create a beautiful and productive estate. Scott may not mean to imply that either character's depravity necessarily causes the failure to steward one's property; however, the convergence of these two traits—moral depravity and the abuse of one's privileges as a steward—certainly enables readers to make

that inference. These peripheral details suggest that the landscape ethos in *Millenium Hall* entails not only the proper stewardship of land but also the ability to recognize, and the will to challenge, abuses to this ethical system.

The foregoing instances in which the landscape ethos emerges out of correspondences between the novel's outer frame and inset tales also lend themselves to a meta-critique of the novel's narrative landscape. The relationship between detail and narrative structure calls for closer scrutiny that is sensitive to the dialectic between content and form. As we have seen, the contrast between the Hall's carefully managed estate and the woefully mismanaged property of Mr Hintman and Lady Melvyn suggests that *Millenium Hall* engenders the landscape ethos in part through its purposeful narrative construction. We caught a glimpse of this strategy in Ellison's setting of the arbour scene prior to the beginning of Mrs Maynard's first history. The way he pictures the scene, replete with assorted flower species and gently flowing water, testifies to how his mode of visualization creates an aesthetic framework for the ethical lessons about to be delivered in Mrs Maynard's tale. Furthermore, his admiration of the natural beauty and benevolent stewardship of the Hall predisposes readers to censure characters who violate the principles exemplified there. Scott also uses the technique of calculated juxtaposition when she interrupts Mrs Maynard's tale precisely in the midst of the drama concerning Miss Melvyn's allegedly improper relations with Simon the farmer. The interlude of more than ten pages describes the beautiful walk that Ellison and his companions take to visit a home modelled after the Hall and the ladies' plans to construct another one in the near future. The disjunction between Lady Melvyn's Machiavellian dealings and the ladies' unparalleled philanthropy becomes instructive when considered in light of the landscape ethos. Ellison again bespeaks this ethos when, two paragraphs into the interlude, he describes the commodious park that abuts the Hall:

The park is close to one side of the house; it is not quite three miles round; the inequality of the ground much increases its beauty, and the timber is remarkably fine. We could plainly perceive it had been many years in the possession of good economists, who unprompted by necessity, did not think the profit that might arise from the sale a sufficient inducement to deprive it of some fine trees, which are now decaying, but so happily placed, that they are made more venerable

and not less beautiful by their declining age. This park is much ornamented by two or three fine pieces of water; one of them is a very noble canal, so artfully terminated by an elegant bridge, beyond which is a wood, that it there appears like a fine river vanishing from the eye. (109–10)

Ellison's observations remind us to appreciate how landscape design and land management contribute to the model society we are visiting; furthermore, the value of these contributions increases because they are situated alongside a story about a character who soundly defies the principle of generosity. The passage occurs a page after Lady Melvyn's imputations about "Simon the young farmer" (108), providing a contrast between invidious and industrious forms of estate management. Such detailed attention to the careful arrangement of objects in a scene—trees "so happily placed," a canal "artfully terminated by an elegant bridge"—applies to Scott's frame narrative itself. The landscape aesthetic that inculcates sensitivity to the arrangement of objects in a vista also informs the structure of the novel. Noticing how one instance of admirable estate management reflects upon another example of dereliction of duty enhances a reader's experience of the novel. The formal reinforcement of the plot's commitment to landscape as an ethical practice becomes a way for the novel to marshal landscape as an all-encompassing approach to the world rather than simply a visual object to behold or to cultivate.

Art-historical approaches to landscape offer useful ways to appreciate the harmonizing of shape and substance in Scott's work. The landscape ethos of *Millenium Hall* is further refracted when the landscape-as-plot reflects the landscape-as-frame. The synergy between the two causes the novel's content to echo its form. Fleeting details, such as Hintman's status as landlord and the old woman's garden, exemplify a dimension of landscape theory that focuses on the relation between subject and background in painting. Malcolm Andrews has investigated this relationship in order to argue that the putative "subsidiary, accessory, peripheral status" of landscape belies its primary, rather than secondary, function in the production of artistic meaning.¹⁰ Using Italian Renaissance paintings of Saint Jerome

¹⁰ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29.

to demonstrate this claim, Andrews explains: "In the mutually dependent relation between landscape and saint, landscape depends on the human subject for giving it moral or spiritual significance, but the human subject needs the landscape to complete his meaning. Landscape becomes a dramatic agent rather than simply a decorative setting."¹¹ Though sinister rather than saintly, Hintman likewise needs the Millenium Hall landscape to acquire his meaning as a squandering gentleman. In effect, he becomes part of the narrative landscape insofar as he is one of the signifying elements that contributes to the overall portrait of a society committed to benevolent stewardship and aesthetic cultivation of land. To reiterate Andrews's point, the Millenium Hall landscape is the "dramatic agent" that steers Ellison through the estate, triggers his aesthetic response, and inspires his decision to model his own home on this one. Likewise, the frame structure compels readers to assess the novel's component parts and to draw conclusions about its aesthetic and ethical meanings based on the part/whole configuration.¹² The landscape ethos thus operates on two levels, such that no aspect of the story exists outside its purview.

If readers appreciate the formal/substantive harmony of the novel, their pleasure is reflected in the characters who share a similar aesthetic experience. Andrews, in addition to illuminating the relationship between the apparent foreground and background elements in the story, also offers a lucid assessment of landscape as a source of pleasure and knowledge in Western aesthetics: "Important issues of identity and orientation are inseparable from the reading of meanings and the eliciting

¹¹ Andrews, 36.

¹² In reference to the novel's structure, Schellenberg correlates the dynamics of centre and periphery to the gender hierarchy, arguing that ultimately, "Although the feminized community is made central and authoritative in the text, it remains marginal and inaccessible within its heterosexual cultural context" (89, 96–97, 101). Ana M. Acosta offers a complementary interpretation of the narrative frame that, she argues, "is mirrored by the novel's spatial design"; the inner recess enclosing the "monsters" "is separate physically and semantically" and constitutes "an internal correlative to all that has been pushed outside of the frame, what is not to be seen or described." Acosta, "Transparency and the Enlightenment Body: Utopian Space in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*," in *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*, ed. Nicole Pohl and Brenda Tooley (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 114.

of pleasure from landscape.”¹³ *Millenium Hall* stages the two dimensions of Andrews’s formulation in that it depicts characters who read meanings in and draw pleasure from the landscape. One scene in particular makes a spectacle of both the reading and the pleasure. When Lamont mistakenly assumes that a professional landscape architect has designed “a very fine wood,” Ellison observes the misreading and takes subtle delight in witnessing the ladies disabuse his friend of his presumption:

Lamont observed the artist’s hand was never more distinguishable, and perceived in various spots the direction of the person at present most famous for that sort of improvement.

The ladies smiled, and one of them answered that he did their wood great honour, in thinking art had lent her assistance to nature, but that there was little in that place for which they were not solely obliged to the latter. Miss Trentham interrupted her who was speaking and told us that as she had no share in the improvements which had been made, she might with the better grace assure Mr Lamont that Lady Mary Jones, Miss Mancel, and Mrs Morgan were the only persons who had laid out that wood, and the commonest labourers in the country had executed their orders. Lamont was much surprised at this piece of information, and though he would have thought it still more exquisitely beautiful had it been the design of the person he imagined, yet truth is so powerful, that he could not suppress his admiration and surprise. (68–69)

Scott exposes the legibility of landscape here. She depicts Lamont looking at the scene and detecting the imprint of a fashionable designer (most likely “Capability” Brown, given his popularity at the time of the novel’s publication). For Lamont, having one’s estate designed by a modish landscape architect elevates its value, and elevates the women by signalling their inclusion in a coterie of aesthetes. When one of the ladies demurs, modestly giving credit to nature rather than art for the scene’s beauty, Miss Trentham interrupts her in order to acknowledge the efforts of the other dwellers, Lady Mary Jones, Miss Mancel, and Mrs Morgan (formerly Miss Melvyn). Delicately intervening, Miss Trentham reveals nonetheless that staking a claim to the design would be lacking in “grace.”¹⁴ Meanwhile,

¹³ Andrews, 8.

¹⁴ Wandless scrutinizes the modulations between modesty and forthright commendation in Scott’s novel; he argues that by disclosing the ladies’ troubled past, Mrs Maynard “evinces a willingness to dispense with niceties if doing so will exalt the community and the ladies who govern it” (279).

Ellison's triumphant aside that "truth is so powerful" implies a faint satisfaction that his friend's taste has been altered in spite of himself. Similarly, the women derive pleasure from their visitors' recognition of the beauty they have created, and their virtue for having created it.

That a landscape is what inspires this flurry of judgments is remarkable to say the least. Each of the characters—and through them, the reader—is reading the others through their respective readings of the vista before them.¹⁵ Lamont's enthusiasm, the lady's self-effacement, Miss Trentham's graciousness, and Ellison's implied censure of Lamont's jejune behaviour—all are transmitted through "a very fine wood" that sets off a chain reaction of judgment. The divergent responses to the vista exemplify how landscape becomes a screen onto which characters project their own taste, assumptions, and opinions of others. For landscape to mediate among such an array of judgments, which extend beyond the scope of natural beauty and into the realm of character assessment (and "truth" itself), suggests its unique capacity to absorb multiple meanings and to generate a coherent belief system grounded in the aesthetic value of land. In this sense, landscape is a medium that serves to unmask Lamont's false judgment and superficiality and to verify the women's virtue and taste, which verification in turn enables them to produce a design worthy of the esteem usually accorded to renowned experts. Landscape is thus a medium for an ideology of taste that, as we have seen, also entails certain behaviours such as virtuous labour on and benevolent stewardship of the land.¹⁶ A facet of the landscape ethos, then,

Mrs Maynard and Ellison may threaten the modesty of the five principal founders; by focusing on landscape as a site of this tension, I emphasize how it is a necessary element in the larger subjective interplay among the novel's characters.

¹⁵ Lake's argument is apropos here; with reference to John Dixon Hunt's notion of the "academic picturesque," she asserts that "landscapes like those represented in Millenium Hall emphasized 'readability' by including iconographic visual stimuli that viewers would attribute to classical texts. Thus, the landscape required a certain degree of learning, an ability to identify the architectural symbols' textual antecedents" (668–69).

¹⁶ In the field of visual culture, W.J.T. Mitchell theorizes landscape as a medium; the concept constitutes the first two of his nine "Theses on Landscape": "1. Landscape is not a genre of art but a medium ... 2. Landscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other." Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5–34.

this ideology of taste compels the characters to appreciate purportedly authentic beauty and to dismiss the work of experts as inferior because it derives from professional self-interest rather than selfless philanthropy.¹⁷ In this amalgamation of functions, from object of aesthetic pleasure to medium for an ideology of taste, to narrative framework and ethos, landscape becomes a multifaceted textual system whose distinctive roles are mutually reinforcing. The characters' judgments of the landscape occur within a larger context in which readers judge the novel based on the resonance among a range of elements that not only echo the value of aestheticized land but also refract an ethos that derives pleasure from the harmonious arrangement of objects within the frame. Sharing the same aesthetic experience as the characters we read about, readers come to know the landscape ethos as a natural and all-encompassing worldview.

So far, my investigation of the landscape ethos in *Millenium Hall* has focused on how the novel both stages and produces aesthetic pleasure in the contemplation of rural landscapes. Unremarked but certainly not insignificant is the insinuation of use value and exchange value into scenes that enter the narrative as occasions for visual pleasure. Such is the case in one foregoing scene, in which Ellison, while admiring the Hall's park, observes, "We could plainly perceive it had been many years in the possession of good economists" (109). It is certainly plausible to argue, as James Cruise has done, that Ellison's remark exposes him as an irremediable capitalist, ever inclined to assess the world according to the values he holds as a former Jamaican planter.¹⁸ But the women themselves have initiated this particular walk as a tour of the Hall's agricultural and economic vitality. Ellison explains, as they set out, that "Lady Mary observed, that after having shewn us the beauties of the place, they ought to exhibit the riches of it" (109). For one of the principal founders of the Hall to voice a basic tenet of neoclassical aesthetics—the harmony of beauty and use—

¹⁷ Nanette Morton has explored the role of taste in Scott's novel using John Barrell's influential theory of the prospect view. She argues that the women's taste, evidenced in their ability to articulate abstract values through the contemplation of landscape, empowers them as surveyors of their property. At the same time, they practice surveillance over their dependents, requiring obedience and submission to the Hall's hierarchical value system. Morton, "A Most Sensible Oeconomy": From Spectacle to Surveillance in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11, no. 2 (1999): 185–204.

¹⁸ Cruise, 58.

indicates that Scott is incorporating this principle into the very architecture of her novel. Her commitment to economic efficiency as a pillar of successful philanthropy emerges in scenes whose outward beauty belies their invisible utility, such as a temple that houses pigeons, a hill that is a rabbit warren, and waterways teeming with fish. These features of the landscape lie hidden in plain sight, but they also resemble the old woman's garden and other scenes of merry industry, such as the one Ellison encountered as he first approached the Hall the day before. The extended description of Ellison and Lamont's approach to the Hall enacts this harmonizing of beauty and use: "Mr Lamont and I walked towards an avenue of oaks, which we observed at a small distance. The thick shade they afforded us, the fragrance wafted from the woodbines with which they were encircled, was so delightful, and the beauty of the grounds so very attracting, that we strolled on, desirous of approaching the house to which this avenue led" (56). The dual impact of the carefully designed landscape at this moment in the story—to entice the travellers towards the abode and to establish the reigning aesthetic of harmonized beauty and use—reveals how Scott uses the dualistic aesthetic to lure characters towards the Hall and readers into her novel. Scott, via the narrator, elicits our taste for purposeful pleasure. Similarly, Ellison's imagery in this introductory moment foretells the technique he will use to set the scene in the arbour prior to Mrs Maynard's narration; he imagines the wafting fragrance steering him down the avenue just as it will lull him to rapt attention beside Mrs Maynard.

That Ellison perceives the convergence of use and beauty suggests that even from the beginning of the novel, his aesthetic sensibility makes him ripe for the encounter he will soon have. This quality serves as the enticement needed to tempt a visitor who might otherwise resist the unconventional experiment underway at Millenium Hall. For if, as Jane Spencer and others have argued, the narrator remains deaf to his hostesses' primary aim to protect women from society's innumerable dangers, the shared commitment to what I have delineated as the landscape ethos enables a communion among characters despite their entanglement in the very voyeurism the women mean to avoid.¹⁹ Given "how selective [Ellison's] moral conscience is

¹⁹ See Jane Spencer, introduction to *Millenium Hall*, by Sarah Scott (London: Virago Press, 1986), xi–xv; Cruise, 555–73; Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions*

when matters of property, money, and the status quo are at stake,” it is no surprise that paternalistic stewardship becomes the primary principle that he shares with the Hall women.²⁰ What begins as an encounter with natural beauty becomes an object-lesson in the interdependence of use and beauty, labour and leisure, production and consumption, thereby establishing a pattern for many subsequent scenarios in which superficial beauty masks invisible but no less important industry. In this sense, the narrator’s initial rhapsody over the beautiful and wisely placed oaks and woodbines presages his entrance into the Hall itself, where the spectacle of virtuous industry dazzles his already enchanted mind.²¹ In typical fashion, Scott also plants a scene of virtuous labour within the approach to the estate in order to forecast the value of this quality: “our observation was soon called off by a company of haymakers in the fields on the other side of the avenue. The cleanliness and neatness of the young women thus employed, rendered them a more pleasing subject for Lamont’s contemplation than any thing we had yet seen” (57).²² By inserting a scene of industrious labour into a depiction of visual pleasure, Scott partakes in the picturesque tendency to aestheticize what might otherwise look like toil. In the next breath Ellison fends off the intrusion of vulgarity: “in them we beheld rural simplicity, without any of those marks of poverty and boorish rusticity, which would have spoilt the pastoral air of the scene around us” (57). If, as Tim Barringer

of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 221–38; and *Wandless*, 266.

²⁰ Cruise, 559.

²¹ Schellenberg treats the travellers’ approach to the Hall as a figuration of masculine desire and “sexual attraction” (89, 96); yet it remains fruitful to contemplate the role landscape plays in this expression of desire and to consider how this role generates the landscape ethos.

²² In addition to establishing the standards of beauty and ethical behaviour, the narrator’s repeated appreciation of cleanliness aligns him with what Donna Landry has called the Twickenhamization of the countryside. The absence of blood and ordure there signals, for her, the emergence of a rural aesthetic that favours sterility and neatness over the more begrimed rusticity of an earlier rural gentry. The fastidious cleanliness of the Hall is aligned with its picturesque qualities, locating it squarely within a middle-class ethos that equates dirt with filth. Landry, “Alexander Pope, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the Literature of Social Comment,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650–1740*, ed. Stephen N. Zwicker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 314.

observes, the picturesque is “an aesthetic category based on the idea of the landscape as a source of visual pleasure rather than a site of work,” then Scott contributes to its elucidation by bringing the spectacle of the labouring poor within the purview of her novel’s landscape ethos.²³ By depicting characters who take pleasure in observing others engaged in meaningful work, Scott subsumes labour within the category of the aesthetic.

The landscape ethos—a system founded on the aesthetic appreciation and benevolent stewardship of rural land—enables the aestheticization of labour in Scott’s novel. While the foregoing scene offers a glimpse of labour’s value, it nevertheless does not delimit edifying labour to the agricultural kind. Two pages after the busy haymakers, Scott presents an even more impressive tableau of righteous industry when she has Ellison enter the Hall and remark upon the activities underway:

In the bow sat two ladies reading, with pen, ink and paper on a table before them at which was a young girl translating out of French. At the lower end of the room was a lady painting, with exquisite art indeed, a beautiful Madonna; near her another, drawing a landscape out of her own imagination; a third, carving a picture-frame in wood, in the finest manner, a fourth, engraving; and a young girl reading aloud to them; the distance from the ladies in the bow window being such, that they could receive no disturbance from her. At the next window were placed a group of girls, from the age of ten years old to fourteen. Of these, one was drawing figures, another a landscape, a third a perspective view, a fourth engraving, a fifth carving, a sixth turning in wood, a seventh writing, an eighth cutting out linen, another making a gown, and by them an empty chair and a tent, with embroidery, finely fancied, before it, which we afterwards found had been left by a young girl who was gone to practise on the harpsichord. (59)

The sheer range of pursuits is enough to make Ellison admit that he is “ashamed that we had intruded upon them” (59). Yet in the context of his didactic epistle, the tableau is clearly designed to inspire admiration of industry, and in this sense prefigures many subsequent encounters such as the one with the old woman and her garden. Remarkable too is the way this tableau resonates with aspects of landscape that I have situated in relation to art-historical scholarship. A portrait of happy

²³ Tim Barringer, “Picturesque Prospects and the Labor of the Enslaved,” in *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds*, ed. Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 41.

industry multiply framed by other tableaux that echo its value by similarity or contrast, the scene emblemizes the novel's landscape ethos. That two figures in the tableau are in the process of drawing a landscape reiterates how this construct permeates the daily life, ethical commitments, and aesthetic experiences of the community. Equally noteworthy is that landscape is the sole discourse capable of encompassing nearly all of the "many arts" (59) represented here; its capaciousness gathers in the carved "picture frame ... engraving, ... and perspective view"—accoutrements that further valorize the landscape apparatus. In regard to the figure "drawing a landscape out of her own imagination"—who turns out to be Mrs Morgan—Betty Schellenberg remarks that she is "thereby associated with the sustaining and creating roles of God."²⁴ It therefore seems that Scott deliberately chooses Mrs Morgan, an "extremely majestic" character (60), as the one to be engaged in drawing a landscape; the most admirable character thus figures forth the most worthy art form.

If haymaking constitutes Ellison's first glimpse of virtuous labour, and arts and letters comprise his second, then his encounter with the rug factory near the end of the novel would appear to be the culmination of his education in the Hall's work ethic. In an assessment of the novel's careful progression of such episodes, James Cruise suggests, "With the advent of commerce the community appears to align itself most clearly with the final stage of progress as detailed in the four-fold theory [of civil society]."²⁵ Though sensitive to the pitfalls of this reading, Cruise is surely correct in arguing that the placement of the carpet workshop near the end of the novel cannot be coincidental. Leaving aside the larger question of the four-stages theory, I want to call attention to how the narrative absorbs non-agricultural labour into its landscape ethos. Having established a pattern whereby genteel characters such as Ellison, Lamont, and their hostesses tour the entire community in order to admire the scenes of happy productivity, the travellers—and readers—are poised to assimilate the rug factory into our understanding of the good life. By now we understand that as benefactors of their community Louisa Mancel, Mrs Morgan, and their peers have engineered a complex social organization

²⁴ Schellenberg, 99.

²⁵ Cruise, 566.

whose constituent members embrace labour as a beautiful way of life. Ellison, especially, is most inclined to take pleasure in the spectacle of other people's labour. After concluding the tale of how Harriot Trentham came to live at the Hall, he explains:

As Miss Trentham's fortune made a good addition to the income of the society, they on this occasion established in the parish a manufacture of carpets and rugs, which has succeeded so well as to enrich all the country round about ... As the morning was not very far advanced, I asked Mrs Maynard to conduct us to this manufacture, as in my opinion there is no sight so delightful as extensive industry. She readily complied, and led us to a sort of street, the most inhabited part of the village, above half a mile from Millenium Hall. Here we found several hundreds of people of all ages, from six years old to four score, employed in the various parts of the manufacture, some spinning, some weaving, others dyeing the worsted, and in short all busy, singing and whistling, with the appearance of general cheerfulness, and their neat dress shewed them in a condition of proper plenty. (243)

Because the scenario replicates so many encountered before, of Ellison standing in the background admiring an instance of harmonious industry, it seems almost immaterial that the object of admiration is a rug workshop and not a landscape. The figures in the scene signify contentment in rigorous activity, regardless of whether they are gathering hay or dyeing cloth. Children, especially, enhance Ellison's vicarious enjoyment of industrious labour. In that opening scene he relishes, even more than his view of the female haymakers, "the sight of the number of children, who were all exerting the utmost of their strength, with an air of delighted emulation between themselves, to contribute their share to the general undertaking. Their eyes sparkled with that spirit which health and activity can only give, and their rosy cheeks shewed the benefits of youthful labour" (57–58). The imagery of the last sentence—sparkling eyes, rosy cheeks—resonates with that depicting the rug workers "all busy, singing and whistling" (243). Perhaps children receive particular attention because they represent pure vulnerability without the additional threat of femininity, which Ellison seems incapable of acknowledging as a potential source of tension. Yet he seems predisposed to notice expressions of merriment whenever he comes across scenes such as this one. That his "delight" occurs in response to a visual spectacle explains how the landscape

ethos integrates factory labour into its aesthetic; this visual economy processes physical activity only as exhilarating exertion and forecloses the recognition of distress.

Ellison's readiness to perceive delight rather than drudgery in scenes of physical labour is a manifestation of his social and professional privilege, not surprising in a novel in which the landscape ethos imbricates agricultural and industrial labour within its purview. Here, again, the social history of landscape as an art form may put this process into perspective. Drawing upon Denis Cosgrove's influential work, Andrews elaborates on the cultural geographer's reading of landscape to suggest that "landscape arises increasingly as land acquires capital value, becomes itself a form of capital—a commodity with little or nothing of the personal value and 'social meaning' it had for those for whom it was home—and an aesthetic value replaces a use and dependency value."²⁶ This transformation in the value of land, from use and dependency value to aesthetic value, occurs over several centuries and constitutes a fundamental feature of the emergence of capitalism. Given the vogue for landscape gardening in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, and the use of the English landscape garden as an index of the nation's purported singularity, it makes perfect sense for Ellison—and Scott—to subsume factory labour within their vision of rural England. In keeping with their particular form of improvement rhetoric, the picturesque aesthetic becomes an ideal means to incorporate the lessons of capitalist productivity. Without denying the radical implications of Scott's fictional experiment, I nevertheless argue that the landscape ethos effectively circumscribes her work within the realm of conservative ideology. By synthesizing the hierarchical and paternalistic values of an older, customary culture with the more equitable principles of the emergent middle classes, *Millenium Hall's* landscape ethos reveals the power of landscape to accommodate, and thereby supersede, challenges to the status quo such as that undertaken by the Hall's proto-feminist principals.²⁷ In other words, the

²⁶ Andrews, 20–21.

²⁷ During their visit to the carpet workshop, Miss Mancel observes, "Each state has its trials; the poverty of the lower rank of people exercises their industry and patience; the riches of the great are trials of their temperance, humility and humanity. Theirs is perhaps the more difficult part, but their present reward is also greater if they acquit themselves well; as for the future, there may probably be no inequality" (245).

landscape ethos is what makes it possible for Ellison to nurse the illusion of complete agreement with the ladies' views, even after making several attempts to challenge them; their social solidarity outweighs, or obfuscates, the tensions that exist between them as men and women.



Millenium Hall belongs to the larger history of landscape in the West insofar as it demonstrates how a certain epistemological orientation developed in the early modern period that compelled people to see their world in a particular way. Mrs Morgan, Mrs Maynard, Sir George Ellison, and the others experience communion together because they have learned to see their world through the lens of landscape. Whether the experience is truly transformative for Ellison remains an open question; the more important point for my argument is that the landscape ethos creates the conditions for social entrenchment among characters with conflicting gender loyalties. That the dictates of gentility override those of women's self-protection is reinforced, in part, by the novel's frame structure, which makes harmony a paramount concern for both plot and form. In more general terms, I have demonstrated that the landscape ethos, as a unifying heuristic, links elements of the story that might otherwise seem unrelated. Ultimately, the landscape ethos unites the women and their male visitors, naturalizing their shared gentility and rendering their social privilege more stable even as the seemingly more urgent concern—women's vulnerability—eludes the narrator's grasp.²⁸ As we have seen, the power structure that the women have established depends on their stewardship of an aesthetically ordered estate. In a narrative thoroughly preoccupied with visual pleasure, the beauty

²⁸ Jennie Batchelor's suggestive reading of the gift economy in Scott's novel offers another compelling explanation for the novel's failure to realize its radical potential. Although seeming to offer "a viable alternative to the problems women face in the labor and marriage markets," she concludes that the novel's provision for middle-class women is ultimately inadequate. Because these women can reciprocate for the gift of deliverance provided by the Hall only by giving their benefactors an occasion for pleasure, they effectively "exchange one form of 'mortifying dependence' for another." Batchelor, "Fictions of the Gift in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," in *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Linda Zionkowski and Cynthia Klekar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 170–71.

of their estate seems just as important as its economic viability. Whether or not this assertion is true for the women, who carefully resist objectification, Ellison ensures that visual pleasure remains a primary benefit of the Hall. Because the landscape apparatus works primarily along a visual axis, it accommodates the voyeuristic dimension of patriarchy that the women mean to eschew. By attending to the integration of social, ethical, and formal concerns that the landscape heuristic provides, we may better understand the uneasy alliance of proto-feminism and benevolent paternalism in Scott's novel.



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