

Sarah Scott's "Attick School": Moral Philosophy, Ethical Agency, and *Millenium Hall*

Deborah Weiss

At a time in which claims about the morality of feeling were becoming increasingly popular, Sarah Scott offered readers of *Millenium Hall* both a critique of, and an alternative to, moral feeling philosophy. As articulated by such figures as Adam Smith, moral feeling philosophy relied heavily on ideas about the impartial spectator's response to phenomena, particularly on the spectator's feelings of sympathy for the suffering of others. In her critique, Scott highlights the dangers of a system that collapses the distance between thinking and feeling and that encourages both egotism and passivity in the face of suffering. Using the formal resources of the novel, Scott re-establishes inter- and intrapersonal distances necessary for moral judgment. Most importantly, she uses the organization of the novel and the reactions of characters to show that the separation of rational response from emotional reaction is productive of ethical action. In this way, she makes *Millenium Hall* into a school for the moral education of readers.

abstract

FOR THE unnamed narrator of Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), the hidden community of polished, intellectual ladies that he uncovers on his travels seems a world away from any other place in England.¹ After passing through a well-kept forest, a pastoral landscape, and a dense Edenic garden, the disoriented gentleman and his fashionable young companion, Lamont, come across a large and beautifully situated manor house. Invited out of the rain into the great hall of the house, they see a group of elegant ladies and neat young girls at work on a variety of artistic and intellectual projects. Though the narrator is, at this point, unaware that he is on a philosophical journey, the associative metaphor he uses upon entering the hall operates as a guide to the reader: "If we

¹ Some scholars refer to this visitor in *Millenium Hall* as "Mr Ellison" because the same character reappears as the protagonist of Sarah Scott's 1766 novel, *The History of Mr. George Ellison*. For the purposes of approximating the experience of the novel's original readers, I will maintain the narrator's anonymous status.

had been inclined before to fancy ourselves on enchanted ground, when after being led through a large hall, we were introduced to the ladies, who knew nothing of what had passed, I could scarcely forbear believing myself in the Attick school.”² Within the house, at the heart of the enchanted realm, the narrator finds himself in a space that he can only comprehend by making an imaginative connection to Plato’s Athenian Academy.³ It is as if the narrator intuits from the way the ladies approach their work and from their arrangement within the room that he and Lamont have somehow made their way into a philosophical realm.⁴ The implications of this journey are registered on the title page, where one discovers that this travel narrative is intended to “excite in the READER proper sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to a Love of Virtue.” The outcome of the experience, the product of this voyage in and out of a philosophical realm, is to be moral transformation, not just of the gentleman and his travelling companion, but of the reader as well.

² Sarah Scott, *Millenium Hall*, ed. Gary Kelly (1762; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 58. References are to this edition.

³ In using the phrase “Attick school,” Scott may have had in mind Raphael’s “The School of Athens,” a fresco housed in the Room of the Segnatura at the Vatican that depicts Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and other Greek philosophers within a large Renaissance hall. Raphael’s “School of Athens” is commonly understood to illustrate rational truth through philosophy, while the other frescos in the room indicate divine truth, law, and beauty. Just as Plato, holding the *Timeus*, points to heaven, indicating how philosophy leads one to comprehend the divine, Scott sets up *Millenium Hall* as a text that will guide its readers to a higher truth through philosophy.

⁴ A few scholars have noted the philosophical references in *Millenium Hall* without being impressed by Scott’s philosophical engagements. For example, when comparing Scott’s program of female education to Mary Astell’s, Susan Staves writes that “Astell suggests a curriculum that aims at a higher level of philosophical thought, whereas Scott’s women, in keeping with the greater interest in the aesthetic in this period, have more interest in cultivating the arts.” Staves, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 352. Scott does not lay out a particular curriculum, but neither does she seem to privilege the aesthetic over the analytical. Melinda Alliker Rabb notes the classical references in the novel, but interprets the absence of the use of the classical languages as a failing: “Greek and Latin are never used, despite claims of ‘ancient’ learning by several of the female characters.” Rabb, “Making and Rethinking the Canon: General Introduction and the Case of *Millenium Hall*,” *Modern Language Studies* 18 (Winter 1988): 9. The ladies do make classical references, but it is important to recognize that an outward show of erudition through the use of Greek and Latin would have left Scott vulnerable to charges of vanity and might have distracted readers from her engagement with contemporary philosophical trends.

Recent studies of *Millenium Hall* have been divided, for the most part, between interpretations that focus on the Utopian aspects of the novel and those that concentrate on its more realistic elements. With its secret, autonomous, and celibate female community, *Millenium Hall* does seem to be a proto-feminist Utopia.⁵ But at the same time, the novel's detailed presentation of the ladies' altruistic projects and recommendations for estate management make it read like a philanthropy lesson for the virtuously inclined upper classes.⁶ While these two interpretive frameworks seem to be quite far apart in that one explores the ideal and the other the real, they are both centrally concerned with the idea of distance in the novel, albeit with conceptions of distance that are more contradictory than complementary. When read as a Utopian fiction in which separation from society permits the fantasy of female autonomy, *Millenium Hall* appears to be a novel that details encounters located at a great distance

⁵ For more on the Utopian approach, see, for example, Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Feminotopias: The Pleasures of 'Deformity' in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Deformity*, ed. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 161–73; George E. Haggerty, "Romantic Friendship' and Patriarchal Narrative in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Genders* 13 (Spring 1992): 108–22; J. David Macey Jr, "Eden Revisited: Re-Visions of the Garden in Astell's *Serious Proposal*, Scott's *Millenium Hall*, and Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (January 1997): 161–82; Ruth Perry, "Bluestockings in Utopia," in *History, Gender, and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 159–78; Nicole Pohl, "Sweet place where virtue then did rest': The Appropriation of the Country-House Ethos in Sara Scot's *Millenium Hall*," *Utopian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1996): 49–59; and Ana M. 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 (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 107–19.

⁶ Scholars who bring *Millenium Hall* into close proximity with what is "real" in terms of women's experiences that can be historically documented include Gary Kelly, introduction to the Broadview edition; Eve Tavor Bannet, "The Bluestocking Sisters: Women's Patronage, *Millenium Hall*, and 'The Visible Providence of a Country,'" *Eighteenth Century Life* 30 (Winter 2005): 25–55; Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism: 1750–1810* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Dorice Williams Elliott, "Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Female Philanthropy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 35 (Summer 1995): 535–53; James Cruise, "A House Divided: Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 35 (Summer 1995): 555–73; and Nanette Morton, "A Most Sensible Oeconomy': From Spectacle to Surveillance in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11 (January 1999): 185–204.

from the real world of actual female experience.⁷ In contrast, when read as a guidebook to female philanthropy, *Millenium Hall* becomes a novel in which the ladies' projects are so close to the real that they can be mapped onto the concerns and activities of Scott's own social network.⁸

Attention to Scott's positioning of the "Attick School" at the heart of this community allows us to see that the tension between retreat and engagement—or between distance and proximity—reflected in current scholarship forms the core of the novel's thematic interests as well as its formal innovations. That it is negotiating between the ideal and the real, between what is far and what is near, and between what is heard and what is seen, is precisely the point. The metaphor of the "Attick School" prompts us to recognize that *Millenium Hall*, functioning as a philosophical novel, can be an alternative to the social world and an engagement with it at the same time. What links the Utopian retreat to the economic engagement is Scott's philosophical treatment of the concept of distance (with its accompanying mechanisms of remove, reserve, and enclosure) and the formal structures she exploits in order to establish appropriate distances

⁷ As a place of retreat, distant from patriarchal control, the space of *Millenium Hall* has been imagined to contain everything from explicit homosocial to implicit homosexual relations. The approaches that focus on sexuality vary considerably in their interest in and attention to historical accuracy. Macey presents the most convincing argument among this group through his consideration of the homoerotic elements of the pastoral tradition, which he ties to the novel's opening scenes. The lesbian readings of the novel tend to rely more on a particular interpretation of Scott's biography (she lived for many years with Lady Barbara [Bab] Montagu, a wealthy female friend) than on textual evidence. In response to this reliance on assumptions about Scott's relationship with Bab Montagu, I suggest that we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of companionate relationships in the mid- to late eighteenth century. Bannet's research on the Montagu papers at the Huntington Library has shed a great deal of light on the relationship between Scott and Bab Montagu in particular and on companionate relationships in general, but more historical work needs to be done on this topic.

⁸ Bannet has identified the close connection between the philanthropic projects of the ladies and those of Scott and her sister Elizabeth Montagu; she explains that we might see *Millenium Hall* as "an amalgam and imaginative extension of the sisters' various philanthropies: an idealized and politicized recreation of a great estate" (38). Although Scott has traditionally been viewed as a writer who distanced herself from the Bluestockings, more recent scholars have revised this opinion. Bannet, for example, argues that enough information remains in the surviving letters "to demonstrate that Scott consistently had literary, as well as social, interactions with [Elizabeth] Montagu's inner circle" (44).

between characters, between the novel's characters and its readers, and within the psychological (or moral) makeup of readers.

Distance is a central concern for Scott in this novel because, as she shows, it is only by properly negotiating interpersonal proximity that an individual can become an ethically informed moral agent. Scott's use of the concept of distance to investigate ethical relationships suggests her awareness of important mid-century philosophical trends. By the time Scott came to write *Millenium Hall*, the idea of distance had become a central component of eighteenth-century moral feeling philosophy, which theorized that the way individuals imagined the space between themselves and others dictated the kind of reaction they would have when confronted with an experience that seemed to demand an emotional response. The strongest feelings were seen to stem from the closest imagined connections.⁹ Thus, the more one could imagine connections outside immediate self-interest and the family circle, the more one could broaden one's empathetic reactions; and the more extensive and spontaneous this reaction, the more ethical the individual was considered to be. As Norman Fiering has observed, moral feeling philosophy's promotion of spontaneous pity, what he terms "irresistible compassion," had achieved the status of dogma by the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ It is within this philosophical culture that, I believe, we should read *Millenium Hall*. Once we see it as a text written during the high point of moral feeling philosophy, produced just at the moment when sensibility was spreading throughout literary culture, we can recognize that Scott's investment in concepts and mechanisms of distance represents a form of serious philosophical engagement. It is an engagement, however, that resists and challenges the ethical claims of moral feeling. In this novel, Scott's primary concern is to expose the dangers of an increasingly popular ethical system in which thinking and feeling had been brought into a close and logically hazy proximity. In directly addressing distances—between people, within people,

⁹ In "Of the Love of Relations," David Hume explains that, because of our consciousness of self, we are more interested in thinking about those to whom we are closely related: "The idea of ourselves is always intimately present to us, and conveys a sensible degree of vivacity to the idea of any other object to which we are related." Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 2.2.4, p. 229.

¹⁰ Norman Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (April–June 1976): 205.

and between text and reader—Scott offers her audience both a critique of and a rationally-based, ethical alternative to moral feeling philosophy.

From the title page, the metaphor of the “Attick School,” and the narrator’s description of himself as “spectator and auditor” of what he is about to convey, the novel’s original readers would have realized within the first few pages that they had entered into a philosophical realm.¹¹ Moreover, well-informed readers would have known that the specific philosophical ground of *Millenium Hall* was contested territory. Isabel Rivers’s work on philosophical disputes of the eighteenth century, disputes over freethinking and moral theory that lasted through the 1750s, can help us place Scott’s novel in the context of a wider debate over moral feeling philosophy.¹² In her chapter “Defining the Moral Faculty: Hutcheson, Butler, and Price,” Rivers explores “the relation between reason and the affections, and in particular ... the development of and responses to the ambiguous and potentially dangerous theory of the moral sense.”¹³ Rivers identifies Joseph Butler as the most important contributor to the debate on the side of reason, which is important for situating Scott, as Butler had close personal ties to the Bluestocking circle through Catharine Talbot.¹⁴ He was also, according to Karen

¹¹ In the address to the bookseller that opens the novel, the narrator makes an obvious reference to John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* with “the foundation of most of our virtues, or our vices, are laid in that season of life when we are most susceptible of impression, and when our minds, as on a sheet of white paper, any characters might be engraven.” A few sentences later he claims, “I have no other share than that of a spectator and auditor, in what a purpose to relate” (53–54). The narrator’s identification of himself as a spectator has caught the attention of both James Cruise and Nanette Morton. Cruise argues that the narrator’s positioning as a “spectator” demonstrates what a man of commerce might learn from the ladies’ economic system. Although there is a strange absence of Adam Smith in Cruise’s discussion, his argument that the novel stages an interaction between an instrumental and a more spiritually balanced form of capitalism is convincing. In her exploration of the connection between spectatorship and economics, Morton argues that the ladies use their power of surveillance to regulate the behaviour of the lower classes and to reinforce the social hierarchy—only with themselves, rather than elite men, on top.

¹² Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 236.

¹³ Rivers, 236.

¹⁴ Joseph Butler (1692–1752) was assisted in his career by Catharine Talbot’s grandfather, William Talbot, Bishop of Salisbury and then of Durham.

O'Brien, central to the way the writers of the Bluestocking circle formulated "their ideas of active female virtue, free will, and the ability to arrive at a degree of understanding and certainty about this world and the next through the exercise of reason."¹⁵ Scott has deep philosophical affinities as well with the Dissenter Richard Price. In *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758), Price targeted Frances Hutcheson, insisting that Hutcheson's idea of the moral sense was "entirely arbitrary and factitious in its nature."¹⁶ Price comes firmly down on the side of reason in the debate over the precise location of the moral faculty in human nature, arguing that morality can only be "steady, independent, and unchangeable with truth" if the power of distinguishing between right and wrong is located in the "Understanding."¹⁷

Recent work on women writers from Margaret Cavendish and Mary Astell to Eliza Haywood and the Bluestockings has established the breadth and depth of female involvement in the major philosophical trends of the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Karen O'Brien sees a considerable amount of consistency in the work of philosophical women writers of this period. Bringing together elements from John Locke, Samuel Clarke, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, and (later) Joseph Butler, women writers created synthetic accounts of epistemology and ethics that emphasized, above all, the exercise of reason within a domain of knowable and immutable

Butler became Bishop of Bristol in 1738 and of Durham in 1750. Rivers says of Butler that "as a writer [he] contributed two works of enduring importance to two central moral and religious debates of the first half of the eighteenth century, on the constitution of human nature and the evidences of natural and revealed religion" (165). These works are the *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726) and *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736).

¹⁵ Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁶ Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (London: A. Millar, 1758), 10. Eighteenth Century Collections On-Line, Gale [accessed 9 February 2012].

¹⁷ Price, 15–17.

¹⁸ In addition to O'Brien, see, for example, Guest; Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, eds., *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson, eds., *Mary Astell, Reason, Gender, Faith* (Aldershot: Palgrave, 2007); and Lynn Marie Wright and Donald J. Newman, eds., *Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and the "Female Spectator"* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006).

truth. They were committed to the notion that, through education and personal endeavour, women could attain the status of rational beings, capable of arriving at a reasonably secure level of religious certainty and of acting as both philosophers and effective moral agents within and beyond the domestic sphere.¹⁹

Although O'Brien does not discuss *Millenium Hall*, her account of the Bluestocking response to the epistemological and ethical challenges to Christian theology presented by both Locke and Shaftesbury allows us to place Scott's resistance to moral feeling philosophy within the broader debate covered by Rivers. Scott shares with other philosophical women writers of her day (and with a number of influential male philosophers) a concern about the morality of sentiment and a commitment to an idea of virtue that is fundamentally rational. In her promotion of the "understanding" as the seat of ethical response, and in her treatment of the concept of distance, Scott participates in a decades-long philosophical movement that arose to defend stable moral codes against threats posed by moral feeling philosophy.

While she belongs to a larger group of women who resisted moral feeling and is closely linked philosophically to her sister's intellectual circle, Scott stands out from the other Bluestocking writers for her choice of literary form. Elizabeth Montagu, Catharine Talbot, Elizabeth Carter, and the other mid-century Bluestockings expressed their ideas through poetry, translations, publishable letters, literary criticism, and educational tracts. Only Scott conducted a detailed critique of moral feeling philosophy by exploiting the structural and narrative resources of the novel. Because moral feeling is a discourse that is, essentially, about the process through which emotional reaction replaces ethical action, Scott needs to put her reader in a position in which he or she can judge the elements that go into the theory without becoming entangled in the emotional responses upon which the theory is built. The novel is thus the perfect medium for evaluating moral feeling because the author is able to control the reader's proximity to emotional stimulus while manipulating the distances between the characters and between the characters' feelings and their judgments. Scott is, in effect, able to zoom in and zoom out, presenting the characters' responses to experience without engaging the judgment-clouding sentiments of the reader. The

¹⁹ O'Brien, 37.

novel's resources, then, allow Scott to explore an intellectual and affective environment that, while thoroughly informed by moral feeling philosophy, is sufficiently distanced from the reader to allow for a balanced, rational evaluation.

Scott's division of the novel into three main components—frame, philosophical conversation, and sentimental story—guarantees that the reader, while feeling empathy in certain instances, nevertheless is able to maintain a steady emotional distance from the characters. The reader's emotional neutrality is established through the novel's frame, which includes the narrator's initial remarks to his bookseller and his description of the landscape. Throughout the novel, the narrator, whose consciousness guides the reader, remains a figure of affective detachment—not only unnamed, but also emotionally reserved from start to finish. The sentimental aspects of the story are to be found only in the past, in the "histories" of the lives of the ladies before they came to Millenium Hall. It is central to Scott's strategy of distancing emotion, and to her critique of moral feeling philosophy, that the stories of the ladies' lives are conveyed to the narrator and Lamont through the narration of a third person—Mrs Maynard, the only founder whose story is never told. These stories reach the readers, then, as the re-narration of a re-narration—at some point in the undisclosed past, the ladies must have told their own stories to Mrs Maynard. But at no point do the ladies tell the narrator their stories, and at no point do the ladies communicate their intimate thoughts directly to the reader. Importantly, the reader has no immediate access to the most emotional elements of the novel, receiving the sad stories of the ladies' struggles only through a chain of transmission that is presented as oral. This is in stark contrast to narrative strategies of contemporary novels such as *A Sentimental Journey* or *Clarissa* (as different as these are) in which the character conveys his or her emotional responses to the reader with a feeling of intimacy and immediacy. In *Millenium Hall*, lest the reader forget the temporal and narrative distances that separate him or her from the sentimental stories of the ladies, Scott breaks the sections into separate "histories" and pushes them into the novel's past. The novel's present—its foreground—is taken up by philosophical dialogues between the ladies and their visitors that are prompted by things they see on their tour of the estate.

In this novel, feeling is framed by and filtered through moral reasoning. Not only are the “histories” set off from one another by sections of philosophical dialogue, within the narratives themselves highly emotional experiences are enclosed by moral reasoning in the form of philosophical conversations.²⁰ Miss Melvyn is forced to marry an odious, immoral man, Miss Mancel loses the worthy man she loved, and Lady Mary Jones is nearly seduced by an unethical rake.²¹ But through the process of rational conversation between characters within the “histories,” these events are shown to be opportunities for the characters’ moral development and occasions for the demonstration of the value of a system of ethics that carefully separates thinking from feeling. Thus, Miss Melvyn marries Mr Morgan to perform her duty to her community; Miss Mancel rejects her beloved’s proposal because she feels obliged to obey the wishes of the young man’s grandmother, who has been charitable to her; and Lady Mary learns from near seduction to understand the role of chastity in a woman’s life. Through both form and content, these “histories” reinforce the lesson that ethical agency is produced by achieving the right relationship between how one thinks and how one feels. The ladies’ stories teach the reader that individual feeling must be controlled by a rational comprehension of duty. At the same time, the way these stories are told—how they are interlaced with ethical reflection within and framed by moral philosophy without—directs the reader’s attention away from sympathetic identification and towards a conscious assessment of lessons learned.

That the reader comes back after the end of each “history” to the novel’s present, in which the now middle-aged ladies interact

²⁰ For more on the development of the philosophical dialogue in this period and of its connection to the early history of the novel, see Michel Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²¹ Elliott notes, rightly, that “each of the inset narratives is like a miniature sentimental novel; each of the women has been a woman in distress whose virtue has been tried” (538). Her argument is that Scott unites the sentimental novel with philanthropic discourse and rewrites both by making the sexualized female victim the agent of charity rather than the recipient. It is through philanthropy, Elliott maintains, through finding a place for unmarried and older women, that Scott resists the female sexualization demanded by domestic ideology. Elliott is on the right track, I think, in emphasizing both Scott’s intentional resistance to the sexualization of women and her critical engagement with sentimental genres. However, I think “domesticity” as an ideological construct has little traction in this novel.

with Lamont and the narrator, reinforces the importance of emotional distance for ethical agency. At the same time that the ladies' own stories demonstrate the importance of framing feeling with reason at the level of the individual life, the structure of the entire novel allows Scott to challenge and revise ideas about the relationship between intellect and affect at a more theoretical level. Just as the stories of the ladies dramatize for the reader the superiority of an ethical system based on reason, the philosophical conversations in the novel's present convey to the reader the material and spiritual rewards of a moral philosophy that distances thinking from feeling and that, in effect, uses reason to contain, control, and guide emotional response.

The novel's very structure is, therefore, designed to further its thematic interest in resisting moral feeling philosophy through a realignment of thinking and feeling. In the division of the novel between its predominantly affective components (the "histories") and its dominantly rational elements (the conversations between the ladies and the visitors), Scott cleanly divides emotion from reason through genre, chronology, and mode of transmission. The emotional aspects are dramatized through fiction, through stories that resemble popular sentimental narratives. But these fictional elements are pushed into the past and, importantly, they are conveyed through an oral transmission. Consequently, the audience for these stories—the narrator and Lamont—are auditors, not spectators, of emotional events and therefore do not experience the immediacy of feeling that is produced by witnessing a spectacle. What they actually see on their tour, what is immediate to them and what the narrator conveys directly to the novel's readers, are the various results of the ladies' philanthropic efforts—efforts that demonstrate the ethical efficacy of the ladies' rationalist philosophy. If we consider the "histories" taken together to make up the fictional aspect of the novel (although they do contain much embedded philosophy), and the conversations in the present between the ladies and the visitors to constitute the philosophical parts, we can see that Scott has organized *Millenium Hall* not only to distance emotion from reason, but also to confine fiction within the boundaries of philosophy.

Scott's distancing of the spectacle of suffering from her readers through time and mode of transmission should be read as an

ethical position and as an aspect of her own moral philosophy. Spectatorship, as a position through which to judge unfolding events, had come to prominence early in the century. Shaftesbury used the term “spectator” to describe how God views the world in the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, a text first published in 1699 and then included in the influential and popular *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* in 1711.²² And Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, of course, had used the figure as the voice of their periodical. By the time Scott came to write *Millenium Hall*, the spectator had become central to moral feeling philosophy through the recently published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which Adam Smith made the figure of the impartial spectator the linchpin of his influential theory of sympathy.²³ Scott’s opposition to the morality of spectatorship puts her in clear opposition to Smith.

Although Scott mentions spectatorship in the novel’s outer frame, her critique of Smith’s version of moral feeling philosophy begins with the first “history,” in which the story of the community’s founders, Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan, is conveyed. The “History of Miss Mancel and Mrs. Morgan” is sufficiently distanced from the reader to allow for rational judgment when the morality of spectatorship is put to the test. When the “history” opens, the already orphaned Louisa Mancel is, at ten years old, effectively orphaned once again when her aunt dies at an inn just outside London.²⁴ The report of the suffering

²² Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* was so popular that it went through eleven editions between 1711 and 1790. John M. Robertson, introduction to *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1711; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). References are to this edition. O’Brien argues that Shaftesbury’s influence in the eighteenth century was greater even than Locke’s, and she describes him as the “developer of a moral theory grounded in human nature and of a new moral vocabulary which was to have a wide and lasting influence later in the century” (3, 15).

²³ *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was an immediate success and established Adam Smith’s international reputation. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, introduction to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, by Adam Smith, ed. Raphael and Macfie (1759; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1977), 25. References are to this edition.

²⁴ Elliott also notes that Louisa Mancel’s story begins as a “typical tale of sensibility,” but her interpretation of the scene differs from my own in that she sees Miss Mancel’s experience with Mr Hintman as indicative of the “exploitation built into men’s philanthropic institutions for victimized women” (547) rather than as an example of the exploitive undercurrents of moral feeling.

child is conveyed to one Mr Hintman by an unnamed elderly man who, like Mr Hintman, happens to be staying at the inn where the aunt has just died. Upon hearing the story of the newly orphaned girl, Mr Hintman is initially unaffected by the report; in contrast, the old man, who has witnessed the death of Miss Mancel's aunt and who describes the scene, is overwhelmed by sorrow for the grieving child. When the old man tries to interest Mr Hintman in the child's situation, Mr Hintman replies:

"The cause was indeed sufficient ... but I am glad your sorrow proceeded from nothing more immediately concerning yourself:— Misery will strike its arrows into a human heart; but the wounds it makes are not so lasting, as those which are impressed by passions that are more relative to ourselves.—Oh sir,—said the old man—you cannot form an adequate idea of the effect this scene must have on every spectator, except you had seen the child! Surely nature never formed so lovely a little creature!" He continued his praises of Louisa, till at length he excited Mr. Hintman's curiosity. (79–80)

The use of the word "spectator" and the discussion of "passions relative to ourselves" point directly to Scott's interest in Smith's *Moral Sentiments*, and Mr Hintman's discussion of the incident functions as a breakdown of Smith's mechanism of sympathetic reaction. Thus this scene, in which Mr Hintman calculates the propriety of the old man's reaction, can be read as Scott's first foray into unravelling the ethical implications of a theory of spectatorship in which thinking and feeling were brought into close proximity.

According to Smith's formulation, sympathy is produced through a combination of instinctual emotional identification via the imagination and rational assessment of the sufferer's situation. Smith puts a great deal of weight on the idea that the spectator is "disinterested," meaning that he has no personal relationship with the victim and therefore nothing to gain or lose from the spectacle he witnesses.²⁵ But while the spectator may be disinterested in terms of personal advantage, he nonetheless must be sufficiently interested in the spectacle to be able to imaginatively connect himself with the sufferer's experience. As Smith writes, "by the imagination we place ourselves

²⁵ "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it" (1:9).

in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were, into his body” (1:9). The problem, however, for the formulation of the idea of disinterest, comes from the dependence of the spectator’s reaction upon what he can imagine himself to feel. It becomes clear that the spectator can never imaginatively evacuate himself sufficiently so that the experience of the sufferer becomes his own; all he can do is contemplate what he would do were he in same situation, which is an act of calculation rather than one of spontaneous emotional identification. In trying to establish why we do not feel exactly for others as they feel for themselves, and why we sometimes do not sympathize with others at all, Smith must bring the factor of evaluation into the experience of moral feeling. As Smith goes on to explain, although we are able to feel for others through our imaginative capacities, we only do feel for them after we project ourselves into their position and after we conduct a quick analysis of the propriety of the reaction. We may, as Smith claims, naturally be interested in the emotions of others, but even according to the details of his own analysis, it is hard to prove that our interest is indeed disinterested. In fine, the question of what prompts imaginative connection in some cases and not in others can only be answered through what interests the self—through self-interest.²⁶

It is this calculation embedded in Adam Smith’s mechanism of sympathy and the dubious nature of a system of ethics that combines a self-based assessment with emotional identification that Scott investigates through Mr Hintman’s reaction to the orphaned Miss Mancel. At the point in the story in which Mr Hintman first becomes aware of Miss Mancel, he is still an auditor, commenting from a position of distance on the reaction of the spectator (the old man), who appears to have

²⁶ This observation was made some years ago by Fiering, who, in discussing Adam Smith’s role in the development of “irresistible compassion” wrote, “thus, our imagination discovers our own sensations, not the sufferer’s” (211). Numerous other scholars have explored the moral implications of sympathy as expressed through the literature of sensibility and have paid particular attention to the workings of sympathy within unequal social relationships. See, for example, R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

had a spontaneous sympathetic reaction to the child's suffering. Untouched by an experience not yet made present to him, Mr Hintman, in effect, explains Smith's theory of sympathy to the old man, with the intention of lessening the emotional impact of the spectacle. Mr Hintman determines that the cause of the aunt's death is sufficient for the sorrow the old man feels having been witness to the event. However, he informs the old man that only a sorrow that is relevant to one's self can really be long lasting, which is an opinion that resembles Smith's claim that "if, upon bringing the case home to our own breast, we find that the sentiments which it gives occasion to, coincide and tally with our own, we necessarily approve of them as proportioned and suitable to their objects" (1:18). In his Smith-like response to the old man, Mr Hintman is saying that given the cause (the aunt's death), the effect (sorrow) is suitable; but, because the case does not really concern the old man, the sympathy he currently feels will pass quickly. In his language and in the steps he lays out, Mr Hintman essentially explains to the old man what Smith says an impartial observer does when confronted with a spectacle that calls for an emotional response. For Mr Hintman, the affective reaction of the old man bears a proper relation to its cause, but in his own case, it appears that the death of the aunt produces a passion he is unable to see as relative to himself, to use his own terminology. Despite the apparent worthiness of the cause (a twice-orphaned grieving child), Mr Hintman's reaction is one of calculated indifference rather than concern.

At this point it seems that the affective distance of heartless calculation is the cause of Mr Hintman's lack of a humane reaction to the girl's suffering, and that the emotional immediacy of spectatorship might be necessary to produce the particular response Adam Smith describes—after all, Mr Hintman is still an auditor and not a spectator. Once he sees the girl, as the old man has urged, and becomes a spectator, his sympathies are indeed activated. In this case, however, the response initiated by the spectator's sympathy is more problematic than the auditor's previous indifference. If Mr Hintman were acting in accordance with Smith's formulations, he would view the grieving child, feel the child's pain through his ability to imagine emotions of loss and abandonment, and then presumably approve of the child's suffering. However, when Mr Hintman views the grieving child,

he does not feel what she feels—pain for the aunt’s death and the fear of being alone in the world—he feels, rather, a sexual attraction at the sight of suffering feminine beauty: “Though her countenance expressed unutterable woe, yet she looked so extremely beautiful, that Mr Hintman, highly as his expectation had been raised, was struck with surprise. He allowed he never saw any thing so lovely; and the charms of which her melancholy might deprive her, were more than compensated in his imagination by so strong a proof of extreme sensibility” (80). Mr Hintman’s sexualized response to the little girl’s pain calls attention to the possibility that Smith was unaware of the erotics of suffering implicit in his theory of sympathy—an ethical problem that was perhaps more obvious to Scott, as a female writer, than to Smith. For Smith, the imaginative reduction of distance between the self and other was supposed to produce the ethical response of sympathy. The problem is that when Mr Hintman eliminates the physical distance between himself and the girl and thereby reduces the imaginative distance between them, the sympathetic process does not work out the way Smith theorizes that it should because sexual desire gets in the way. In Scott’s portrayal of the ethics of spectatorship, when a beautiful young woman (or in this case, a preadolescent girl) suffers, the male spectator imagines her to be a woman capable of extreme sensibility—that is, a woman capable of an intensity of feeling that signals sexual responsiveness to the male viewer.²⁷ By the end of Miss Mancel’s “History,” Mr Hintman’s interest in the

²⁷ In my reading of the Mr Hintman episode, I owe a debt to Claudia Johnson, whose discussion of Edmund Burke’s description of Marie Antoinette in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* alerted me to the potentially exploitive nature of this type of male sympathy. See Johnson, introduction to *Equivocal Beings*, “The Age of Chivalry and the Crisis of Gender,” 1–19. For a very different interpretation of the sentimental elements in the novel, see Mary Peace, “Epicures in Rural Pleasures’: Revolution, Desire, and Sentimental Economy in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*,” *Women’s Writing* 9 (2002): 305–16. By comparing *Millenium Hall* to *The Histories of Some Penitents*, Peace argues that Scott’s novel subscribes to the idea that women naturally are possessed of greater sensibility than men. She argues that the channelling of the ladies’ taste and sensibility into the enclave of *Millenium Hall* supports patriarchal values because the “naturally refined moral senses of women could not be relied upon to regulate morality and provide a source of social cohesion unless they were contained and separated from the public sphere” (314). Obviously I disagree with Peace in that I see *Millenium Hall* as a novel that critiques and challenges sentimental morality and that, in its promotion of ethical agency, is not bound by concepts of separate spheres.

girl is shown to have been unethical all along: he takes the orphan in and raises her as his ward intending, as the reader later discovers, to carefully groom her to become his mistress when she comes of age.

By setting up Mr Hintman as a Smithian spectator who implodes, so to speak, by exhibiting a particularly self-interested interest in the girl, Scott gives her readers cause to distrust the supposedly spontaneous sympathetic reactions that advocates of moral sentiments thought made us moral beings.²⁸ Theoretically, according to Smith, our sympathy is instinctual: we cannot help but interest ourselves in the distress of others. And, theoretically, according to Smith, this feeling of sympathy is itself a moral act. Within Smith's formulations, sympathy must be elicited through the emotional immediacy of spectacle. However, the sympathetic response also requires an element of mental calculation that can cause the initial impulse to go awry. As the episode featuring Mr Hintman shows, the reduction of the distance between intellect and affect exposes serious ethical problems within Smith's formulations of moral feeling. Unstable and potentially self-serving, sympathetic reactions can be dangerous to others and detrimental to the moral makeup of the sympathizer. Moreover, because the insistence on spectatorship limits sympathy to an emotional response to visible suffering, it eliminates the possibility that compassion could ever be produced through reasoned principle.

Scott's quarrel with Adam Smith can be seen as a response to the reduction of distance between thinking and feeling found throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In *Millenium Hall*, Scott uses episodes such as those that make up the Mr Hintman subplot to suggest that the close proximity between intellect

²⁸ Useful in this context is Fiona Price's examination of how Gothic fiction played a role in the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the ethics of spectatorship and the morality of sympathy. Price would have us understand—and I agree with her on this—that the ethical application of Adam Smith's theories was under investigation by women writers practically from the start. Price writes, "the sentimental novel had indicated a potential weakness in the theory that a distressing scene produces an innate response, a disinterested, morally correct sensibility. Exploring the suggestion that such acts of viewing were often tainted by mercenary considerations or by the desire for power, Gothic writings of the 1790s posited the existence of several distinct forms of gaze." Price, "Myself creating what I saw': The Morality of the Spectator in Eighteenth-Century Gothic," *Gothic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006): 13.

and affect is doubly detrimental to ethical agency because it undermines one's ability to genuinely feel for others and to make impartial assessments. But just as theories that place thinking and feeling in too close a proximity cause ethical problems for Scott, so too do philosophical formulations that put too great a reliance on emotional response alone. Scott investigates moral theories that rely more on the emotions than the mind and exposes their ethical shortcomings in the conversations surrounding *Millenium Hall's* much discussed enclosure scene. In this episode, the ladies and their guests come across an enclosure that Lamont takes to be a private zoo, but which contains humans—"poor wretches" whom the women rescued from what amounts to an eighteenth-century freak show. Upon viewing the enclosure, before being told who lives inside, Lamont exclaims that a zoo is a "triumph of human reason, which could not fail to afford great pleasure" (71). He adds that "nothing gave him greater entertainment than to behold 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" (71). Lamont's comments about the zoo as a pleasing spectacle point directly to the dangers of spectatorship as a foundation for moral theory. Witnessing a spectacle that prompts a strong response, Lamont is unable to differentiate between thinking and feeling. While he wants to claim that seeing animals in captivity is a kind of intellectual experience ("triumph of human reason"), it is, as he represents it, a purely emotional one. His mention of "pleasure" and "entertainment" suggests that what gives him a pleasing sensation is to see beings who once lived independently and, indeed, regally, subjected to human power. The initial problem with Lamont's response—that he takes an emotional reaction for an intellectual one—is made into a more serious ethical issue by the exact nature of the emotions he experiences. It is, quite simply, a moment in which he anticipates taking pleasure from witnessing the pain of others.

Theories of the impartial spectator can help us understand how Lamont's reaction works as another moment in which Scott seeks to undermine the ethical solidity of Adam Smith's formulation of sympathy. Lamont is, at this moment, truly "impartial" in the way that Smith used the term—as an individual looking at what he thinks is a zoo, he has no personal relationship to those

inside and stands neither to gain nor to lose from the spectacle he is about to witness. Smith would have him imaginatively put himself in the other's place, and make a quick calculation of the propriety of the emotion he witnesses; and so Lamont does, in part. But the problem, as Lamont's response shows, is that this kind of emotional identification does not always and certainly does not necessarily operate in a moral way. Lamont eagerly awaits the spectacle, not because he will sympathize with the victim, but because he will feel the sense of power and invincibility of "man" who is the cause of the victim's pain. Scott means to show here, through Lamont's reaction, that a reliance on the sympathetic imagination is an unstable basis for moral life because the direction of that sympathetic connection, when left to the first impulse of feeling, could just as easily be directed towards the victimizer, as towards the victim.

That the stakes of Lamont's enthusiasm about the zoo are as high as they can be is made evident by Miss Mancel's response that it "shocks [her] nature" to see a "native of another climate and another country" taken from home and reduced to misery (71). This "native" from another "climate" that Miss Mancel refers to brings the practice of slavery into the conversation as a subtext. And though the individuals in the enclosure are English men and women, Miss Mancel's comment ensures that the issue of slavery—the problem of the exploitation of humans by humans—is firmly implanted in the reader's mind. This reference to exploitation, in this case to the exploitation of "wretches" once on public display for their keeper's gain, serves as one of the novel's most powerful moments of resistance to theories of moral feeling. When Miss Mancel says that it "shocks [her] nature" to see any "native" treated in this way, she, like Lamont, is conveying to her interlocutors the experience of an emotional response. Unlike Lamont, her sympathies flow in the right direction, which raises the question: Why? What makes Miss Mancel view the zoo (or, by implication, slavery) as a moral wrong rather than as evidence of man's glorious power? While one answer is certainly experience—Miss Mancel herself has been victimized and nearly exploited for her phenomenal beauty—another answer is that she follows the code of Millenium Hall, which is to use her mind to temper and guide her emotions in all situations. Because she understands that the abuse of living beings is contrary to

God's intentions, it is impossible for her to take pleasure in the suffering of others. Even before she explains to Lamont that these creatures he so longs to see are humans, not animals, she corrects his misplaced enthusiasm for the spectacle of suffering: "Everything to me loses [*sic*] its charm when it is put out of that station wherein nature, or to speak more properly the all-wise Creator has placed it. I imagine man has a right to use the animal race for his own preservation, perhaps for his convenience, but certainly not to treat them with wanton cruelty" (71). According to Miss Mancel, animals, like humans, are created by God, and like humans, they have a place in the natural world that should be respected. Removing, subjugating, and humiliating them merely for entertainment is immoral because the result is contrary to God's designs.

While Lamont's misplaced sympathy certainly brings the problems with Adam Smith's impartial spectator to mind, Miss Mancel's response and the specifics of the situation put this scene into a relationship as well with Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*. In her discussion of the individuals in the enclosure, Scott articulates a religiously inspired humanitarianism that has a great deal in common with Shaftesbury's own ideas about suffering. In a remarkably inclusive attitude for the time, Shaftesbury declared half a century earlier that all living creatures were worthy of sympathy and kindness, and he expressed an abhorrence for exactly the kind of pleasure Lamont feels when visiting a zoo: "But to delight in the Torture and Pain of other Creatures indifferently, Natives or Foreigners, of our own or of another Species, Kindred or no Kindred, known or unknown; to feed, as it were, on Death, and be entertain'd with dying Agonys; this has nothing in it accountable in the way of Self-interest or private Good above-mention'd, but is wholly and absolutely unnatural, as it is horrid and miserable" (331). For Shaftesbury, the act of taking pleasure from the pain of others was not only inhumane, but also inhuman and incomprehensible. In a system such as his, in which every creature was understood to work for either its own good or for the good of a larger whole, a pleasure that did no one any good could only be processed through the philosophical escape valve of the "unnatural."

While the enclosure conversation suggests that Scott agrees with Shaftesbury on the subject of an extensive and inclusive

humanitarian ethic, she disagrees considerably with him on the topic of exactly where that humanitarian ethic should come from. It is clear from Miss Mancel's comments that Scott's belief in the immorality of taking pleasure in the pain of others is derived from an understanding of God's plan for the world. But while Shaftesbury seems to believe in an overall system of a Creator's making, he does not see a comprehension of that system as the primary factor in an individual's ethical assessments. Rather, Shaftesbury makes the process of determining right from wrong much more emotional than intellectual; the mind, he writes, "feels the soft and harsh, the agreeable and disagreeable in the affections ... Nor can it withhold its admiration and ecstasy" (251). When an observer views the actions and passions of another, the witness conducts a "trial of the heart" in which he determines if what he sees is just and good. The individual might try to adjust his feelings according to his evaluation, or to learn from them, but the internal moral sense is the faculty of origin for the response. This theory of the inherent benevolence of human impulse rests on a process that is primarily emotional, and it is this emotionalizing of morality, rather than the idea of innate human goodness, that Scott objects to.

As the enclosure episode suggests, the problem with Shaftesbury's theory—not with the *fact* that it advocates for humanitarian responses, but with the *way* it offers its support—is that the emotional, intuitive response is ethically suspect and ultimately unstable. If an individual is to subject a scene to a "trial of the heart," and if intellectual assessment is only secondary at best, what is to keep the heart from feeling the good of something that is actually bad? With Lamont as philosophical foil to Miss Mancel, Scott shows that intuitive feeling, or "irresistible compassion" cannot be the basis for ethical response precisely because an individual's emotional response, when not contained and guided by learned principle, is unreliable. The two different responses suggest that without the ethical guidance provided by an understanding of the God-given, natural place of all creatures, there is no telling what the results of one's emotional reaction might be, whether it would be the impassioned pity of a Shaftesbury or the callous pleasure of a Lamont.

In the pleasure he takes from witnessing the suffering of other creatures, Lamont's emotional responses to spectacles have clear

ramifications beyond the merely theoretical. If an individual responds the wrong way to suffering, if he fails to condemn it, at worst he will encourage it, and best, fail to prevent it. Indeed, one of the most significant aspects of Scott's quarrel with moral feeling philosophy is with its lack of emphasis on ethical agency and with the substitution of feeling for humanitarian action. Adam Smith's comments on altruistic emotion show that feeling itself was coming to be considered an ethical act: "And hence it is, that to feel much for others and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature; and can alone produce among mankind that harmony of sentiments and passions in which consists their whole grace and propriety" (1:25).

In contrast to Smith, who suggests that those who indulge their feelings are the most moral of individuals, Scott sets aside "benevolent *affections*" in favour of benevolent actions. The ladies, as they appear to the visitors, engage in few affections of any kind, demonstrating little emotion as they show the gentlemen around the estate. And yet, although they appear to feel little, either for themselves or others, their whole lives are devoted to benevolent action. The enclosure for the "poor wretches," which allows them to regain confidence and cultivate virtue, is only one of the ladies' many philanthropic enterprises; importantly, it, like all their endeavours, is not based on the indulgence of "benevolent affections" but rather on a dispassionate understanding of their duty. Moreover, as Scott makes clear throughout the novel, the ladies' philanthropic successes are only made possible by their ability to distance themselves from relationships to others that are based on emotional connections. It is because they do not feel for the unfortunate, because their emotions are so carefully contained by their rational judgments, that they are able to oversee a vast humanitarian enterprise that includes, along with the "poor wretches," a community of destitute old women, several disabled household servants, and a group of impoverished gentlewomen. In a society heavily influenced by moral feeling philosophy, in which feeling for others was represented as ethical in and of itself, and in which philosophy was increasingly written by authors who presented themselves as tender hearted "men of feeling," Scott makes a point to show that it is precisely because they do not act on the basis of feeling that the ladies are able to do so much good for so many people.

Although it initiates a relatively brief conversation within the novel, the enclosure episode has considerable thematic importance to the text as a whole, an import clearly indexed by the amount of critical interest the enclosure has attracted.²⁹ The text certainly invites a connection between the "poor wretches" who live in the enclosure and their patronesses who live in the enclosure-like estate of Millenium Hall, and this parallel makes the episode an emblematic instance of Scott's use of form to explore her thematic interest in the ethics of distance. The structure of the enclosure in which the "poor wretches" live can be read as an analogy for the ladies' estate—a protected enclave, far from the prying eyes and corrupting influence of "the world." The ladies resemble the inhabitants in their history of moving from moral difficulty to a life of virtuous activity. Like the "wretches" who have been left, as a result of their experience, vain of their very deformities and proud of their ability to generate income, the ladies' experiences in the wider world occasioned a struggle with issues of vanity, pride, and their own commodification in the marriage market. And like the "wretches" who have gradually overcome their internal deficiencies and become happy and useful members of the wider community, the ladies have undergone an experience of moral healing within Millenium Hall that has allowed them to dedicate themselves to ethical action. What is important for both the ladies and their wards is the establishment of an internal boundary between themselves and their unruly passions that is made possible by the physical boundary that distances them from the wider world. Once established, this inner boundary permits them to move outside the physical enclosure and to assist others who are in need. For both the ladies and the "wretches," removal and distance allows

²⁹ Because of their communal lifestyle and rejection of marriage, the ladies have been interpreted as "deformed" when considered according to mid-eighteenth-century standards for femininity and expectations for female behaviour. Felicity Nussbaum emphasizes that the ladies' deformity comes from their embracing of homosexual relationships. There is little evidence in the novel for homosexual bonds. I think the ladies could be conceived of as deformed according to contemporary standards of femininity by virtue of their rejection of sexuality and their investment in philosophy. My position on their deformity is more in keeping with that of Guest, who uses the enclosure episode in *Millenium Hall* as a way to understand the public perception of Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Carter, both of whom were much more prominent as female intellectuals than was Scott (Guest, chap. 4, "The Literary Lady as Public Spectacle").

them to make the adjustment to their feelings that produces the moral transformation necessary to transcend the boundary. In the case of the ladies, the enclosing of their sentiment by a rational approach to suffering has made them capable of ethical action on a vast scale as providers of employment and virtuous self support for widows, orphans, indigent gentlewomen, jobless men, and the “wretches.”³⁰ All this active good in the world is made possible through a moral philosophy that regulates distance, a philosophy concretized through the enclosure.

But the distance provided by the enclosure is not enough, either for the “wretches,” the ladies, or the gentlemen visitors—it is only a first step towards reform and ethical agency. The separation of Millenium Hall from the outside world provides a space for philosophical expansion and moral improvement, but these efforts would be inadequate if moral theory were not brought back into contact with society’s most pressing needs. Scott makes the necessity of ethical agency concrete through the geography within the novel. The estate, which at first seems so remote—even enchanted—to the reader and the narrator, is shown as the novel progresses to be closely tied both physically and philanthropically to the wider social world. By the novel’s end, the sense of enchantment with which it opened has been definitively broken by the gentlemen’s tour of the grounds and their surroundings. As the visitors and the ladies walk and talk, as the visitors learn about the ladies’ “histories,” and as they take instruction on moral philosophy, the physical grounds of the estate open up quite clearly and not at all magically into a self-sustaining landscape of croplands, timberlands, game reserves, fishing ponds, and one economically healthy small manufacturing town. Far from being an isolated enclosure, Millenium Hall appears at the end to be an exemplary country estate, its boundaries seamlessly crossed by girls educated for marriage, country farmers in search of wives, and gentlewomen seeking temporary shelter.

³⁰ Of course, there is reason to cast a sceptical eye on the ladies’ charitable projects by looking at the social implications of their work. Susan Staves notes the emphasis on traditional hierarchical social structures in the novel (355–56), and Johanna Smith argues that what seems to be an example of gender solidarity is only achieved through using philanthropy to enforce existing class hierarchies. Johanna Smith, “Philanthropic Community in Millenium Hall and the York Ladies Committee,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 36, no. 3 (1995): 266–82.

Millenium Hall as a place within a novel, and *Millenium Hall* as a novel, effect a complex movement away from social forms, into enclosure, and back out again. Geographically, Millenium Hall the estate functions as a middle ground, as a kind of way station that brings people in, assists them, and then sends them out again in a condition to aid others. For some, that assistance is more directly economic than moral. But for others, such as for Lamont and the narrator, the direction received at Millenium Hall is economic only in the sense that the moral philosophy they have learned will no doubt have an impact on their future activities. For these two gentlemen, who guide the readers' perceptions, the removal afforded by Millenium Hall is akin to the experience of attending a philosophical academy. They enter into what seems to be an alternative environment, unconnected to the place they have left behind, only to discover that a school for philosophy is, of all places, the one most conducive to ethical development. The experience of Lamont and the narrator within the philosophical school of Millenium Hall is meant to be a model for the experiences of the reader within the philosophical school that is the novel. Duplicating the experience of the visitors to Millenium Hall, then, visitors to *Millenium Hall* enter, separate themselves from the social world through reading, and then depart from the world of the book with a new, more ethical understanding of moral philosophy.

The readers' guides in this endeavour and their proxies are the narrator and Lamont; through them, visitors to the novel experience the reforming effects of temporary separation. At the novel's end, the two visitors—representatives of the morally bankrupt worlds of fashion and commerce—are significantly altered by their visit and are poised to complete the pattern of physical and emotional separation, moral regeneration, and ethical re-engagement. As a result of having heard the stories of the ladies, of having engaged in philosophical conversations, and of having seen the effects of the ladies' moral philosophy, each man has learned the lesson most necessary to his own improvement. Lamont, we are told from the beginning, had been led to "infidelity" through his partial and superficial use of reasoning (55). As a high-society rake, he found amusement at the expense of others, justifying and excusing his unethical conduct by his "rational" scepticism about religion. As a man

who had followed fashion, he was obviously unaccustomed to thinking for himself, and despite his claims of using reason, he has consistently shown himself to be swayed by emotion rather than principle. In the end, the narrator tells us he has discovered Lamont not simply reading the Bible, but thinking about it in relation to what he has seen at Millenium Hall. As the narrator tells the reader, “He [Lamont] told me, ‘he was convinced by the conduct of the ladies of this house, that their religion must be the true one’” (248). Through their example, the ladies provoke in Lamont an analytical revelation about the connection between one’s philosophy and one’s ethical role in the world. As for the narrator, he ends the story with the simple line: “For my part, my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a smaller scale” (249), which is a comment that can be understood to refer to his book as well as his plans for his own estate.

Although the narrator’s comments about his own plans are brief, his transformation is much more significant than Lamont’s. He is, after all, not an unbelieving man of fashion prone to specious reasoning, a greater danger to himself than others. He is, rather, a slave-owner, a man whose whole course of life has been devoted to profiting from the hard labour and suffering of others. We have been told in the novel’s outer frame that the narrator has just returned, morally and physically ill, from twenty years spent managing his estates in Jamaica. He stumbles upon Millenium Hall in the midst of a journey undertaken to restore his health before his planned retirement to his country estate:

I was advised by an eminent physician to make a very extensive tour through the western part of the kingdom, in order ... to cure the ill effects of my long abode in the hot and unwholesome climate of Jamaica, where, while I increased my fortune, I gradually impaired my constitution; and though one, who like me, has dedicated all his application to mercantile gain, will not allow that he has given up the substance for the shadow, yet perhaps it would be difficult to deny, that I thus sacrificed the greater good in pursuit of the less. (54–55)

In his responses throughout the novel, the narrator seems an everyman of commerce, dedicated to gain and oblivious to other considerations, physical or ethical. But the brief mention of Jamaica in the first few pages throws the moral significance of his situation into high relief. Now ill, and wondering if his life’s work has been of any real value, the cure he proposes for himself

is permanent separation, as if the only alternative to causing suffering is a complete separation from it. Of his proposed retreat to his English estate, the narrator writes, "the eagerness with which I longed to fix in my wished for retirement, made me imagine, that when I had once reached it, even the pursuit of my health would be an insufficient inducement to determine me to leave my retreat" (55). What the narrator is seeking is, in effect, a Utopia that he hopes will act as an antidote to the "unwholesome" reality of his own life. His reference to his life of commerce in Jamaica and his anticipated transformation into a man of contemplation on his estate calls to mind the current critical conversation that frames our own interpretation of *Millenium Hall*. Just as recent readers of the novel have divided into two camps, those who view it as a relatively realistic economic narrative, and those who see it as a Utopian fiction, the narrator, in his reflections on his own life, limits his options, seeming to consider only economic engagement or idyllic removal. As a man whose economic engagements have caused his moral illness, he sees a complete and permanent separation from those engagements as his only cure.

The narrator's visit to Millenium Hall fundamentally changes both what he thought he was looking for and his understanding of the role of distance in his life. Eagerly anticipating his own retreat, a place permanently separated from the outside world and from his ethical disease of the past twenty years, the narrator finds himself at Millenium Hall, a place that seems to be, for the ladies, the Utopia he has imagined for himself. But Millenium Hall (and *Millenium Hall*) is neither a Utopia nor a version of the real world. Rather, it is an "Attick School," a place for philosophical education in which the individual learns to distance reason from emotional response and thereby prepare him or herself to become an ethical agent. When the narrator does, ultimately, go on his way, he leaves transformed—intellectually and ethically equipped for his new life. In this way, through Scott's moral philosophy, through the articulation of a theory resistant to moral feeling, Utopian desires are transformed into a blueprint for ethical action. As the narrator says, all his thoughts are now focused on a scheme to imitate the ladies' actions on a "smaller scale." In his desire to imitate the ladies, and by virtue of his plan to engage philanthropically with others, the narrator shows that he has been healed through his education in the "Attick School."

The novel's conclusion suggests that those readers willing to let the narrator be their guide, as the ladies once were his, will be healed as well through discovering moral philosophy and the path to ethical agency within the pages of *Millenium Hall*.

In an age in which the morality of feeling had achieved a level of popularity that would only increase in the coming decades, Scott offers her readers an important critique of moral feeling philosophy on its own terms. Moral feeling philosophy claimed to promote morality through the spectator's impartial, spontaneous, emotional response to suffering. But Scott, by staging such scenes and distancing them from the reader through time, space, and genre, establishes both the pernicious egotism and the unethical passivity of emotional response. Drawing on the structural and narrative possibilities of the novel, she exposes moral feeling philosophy as Utopian in its assumption that emotional response in any form can ever constitute a reliable basis for an ethical approach to life. By transforming moral philosophy into a narrative, Scott displays its inherent fictitiousness while placing the reader at a safe distance from the seductive claim that feeling is productive of morality. More than just producing a Utopia or a handbook to philanthropy, Scott uses an innovative literary form to challenge the dominant moral theories of her day, and thereby helps establish the novel as a central genre and the female novelist as an important figure in the development of eighteenth-century philosophy.³¹



Deborah Weiss is assistant professor of English at the University of Alabama where she teaches courses in eighteenth-century literature and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel. She has published articles on Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth and is currently working on a project that investigates the philosophical engagements of late-Enlightenment women novelists.

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