

Elizabeth Montagu: Queen of the Bluestockings

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*Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800) was a central figure in the Bluestocking Circle in eighteenth-century London. Samuel Johnson called her 'Queen of the Blues'. Whilst she was best known as a salon hostess, she was also a writer and a businesswoman. Montagu was a patron to several artists and writers and was especially supportive of young female poets including Helen Maria Williams, Hannah More and Ann Yearsley. This essay looks at Montagu's impact as a female patron through two artefacts: firstly, James Barry's *The Distribution of the Premiums*, one of the murals in *The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture* painted in the Great Room of the Royal Society of Arts in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and secondly the dedicatory poem *To Mrs Montagu* in Helen Maria Williams 1784 poem *Peru*. Montagu's placement in the centre of *The Distribution* surrounded by high status individuals including The Prince of Wales, Edmund Burke and William Shipley is a significant indication of her influence and status. Williams's dedication gives an insight into the supportive environment provided by Montagu and the Bluestocking Circle. Examining the artefacts together, as this essay argues, shows Montagu was not only a leading salon hostess but also a significant female patron and role model, recognised by artists and poets who chose to honour her influence.*

Elizabeth Montagu (1718 – 1800) was at the centre of artistic and literary life in eighteenth-century London. Given the title 'Queen of the Blues' by Samuel Johnson, she was a Shakespeare critic, businesswoman, patron, and salon hostess. She inspired artists and writers, was politically well-connected and her extant correspondence of around 8000 letters has been described as among the most important surviving collections from the eighteenth century.¹ Today Montagu is most often remembered as a leading hostess of the Bluestocking Circle, a practice of women holding assemblies in their London homes where men and women could discuss contemporary ideas and 'promote the life of the mind'.² This essay looks beyond the salon to examine Montagu's influence on the work of artists and

writers by considering two artefacts produced during her lifetime honouring her as a patron. The first artefact is James Barry's painting *The Distribution of Premiums in Society of Arts*, part of his murals entitled *The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture* (see Figure 1). The murals were painted in the Great Room of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) in central London between 1777 and 1784 with some later amendments. The second artefact is Helen Maria Williams's 1784 political poem *Peru* which is dedicated to Montagu. *Peru* marks the Tupac Amura uprising in Peru 1780-1783 which aimed to overthrow Spanish colonial rule. These artefacts have been chosen because they are very different to each other and so help to illustrate the diverse ways in which key Enlightenment

¹ 'Montagu [Née Robinson], Elizabeth (1718–1800), Author and Literary Hostess', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19014>>.

² Elizabeth Eger, *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008), p.16.

figures engaged with and responded to Montagu's influence. This essay begins by outlining recent research and providing a brief biography of Montagu before considering the artefacts and how they work together to illustrate Montagu's influence.

Montagu, Barry, and Williams have all been the subject of recent research. Montagu is the subject of an ongoing initiative, the Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online project, begun in 2017 with the aim of publishing an annotated online edition of her letters.³ In 2008 Montagu featured in an exhibition called 'Brilliant Women, 18th Century Bluestockings' at the National Portrait Gallery in London and its accompanying book which studied the influence of the Bluestocking Circle.⁴ The *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* has produced editions in 2002 and in 2018 by Nicole Pohl and others focused on Montagu and the Bluestocking Circle.⁵ The research has mainly focused on Montagu's life, her friendship networks and correspondence providing only a summary level view of her influence as a patron. Barry's work was the subject of a major exhibition and conference in Ireland in 2006 to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of his death but much of the research into Barry results from William L. Pressly's work. Pressly's book *James Barry's Murals at the Royal Society of Arts* has done much

to highlight the importance of the murals.⁶ The work of eighteenth-century female poets has been highlighted through work done by Paula Feldman, Paula Backscheider and others.⁷ Williams's work as a travel writer recently featured in an exhibition at Chawton House under the title 'Trailblazers: Women travel writers and the exchange of knowledge' highlighting her status alongside Mary Wollstonecraft and other contemporary female writers.⁸ By looking at how Barry and Williams have incorporated Montagu into their work and comparing their depictions of her, this essay aims to look more deeply at Montagu's influence as a female patron.

Montagu's birth into a wealthy family who were able to give her a good education and high-status connections provided the foundation for her position in society. She was born Elizabeth Robinson on October 2, 1718, in York, the first daughter and fifth child of Matthew (1694 – 1778) and his wife Elizabeth (c. 1697 – 1746). Her intellectual development began early when as a child she and her younger sister Sarah, born in 1720, spent time with their step-grandfather Dr Conyers Middleton, a classical scholar and librarian for Cambridge University. Hugh Trevor-Roper describes Middleton as, 'famous in his own time, both as a thinker and a stylist'

³ 'Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online' <<http://emco.swansea.ac.uk>> [accessed 3 January 2023].

⁴ Eger, *Brilliant Women*.

⁵ *Huntingdon Library Quarterly Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 65 NO.1/2 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3817726>> [accessed 8 March 2023]; *Huntingdon Library Quarterly 'The Commerce of Life': Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800)*, 4 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), LXXXI <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26661600>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

⁶ William L. Pressly, *James Barry's Murals at the Royal Society of Arts: Envisioning a New Public Art* (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2014).

⁷ Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry [Electronic Resource]: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre*, Ebook Central (Baltimore, MD ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) <<https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3318421>> [accessed 17 July 2022]; Paula R. Feldman, *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology* (Baltimore, Md. ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁸ Jess-Williams-CHL, 'Exhibition- Trailblazers: Women Travel Writers and the Exchange of Knowledge', *Chawton House* <<https://chawtonhouse.org/whats-on/exhibition-trailblazers-women-travel-writers-and-the-exchange-of-knowledge/>> [accessed 20 February 2023].

whose works would later influence Voltaire.⁹ Middleton was also librarian for Edward Harley, second earl of Oxford. Harley's daughter Margaret Cavendish Harley (later Duchess of Portland) and Elizabeth began a long friendship, which continued as the Duchess developed her Bulstrode estate into a renowned centre for knowledge sharing and collecting.¹⁰ In 1742 Elizabeth married Edward Montagu, who was around 25 years older, a wealthy businessman with coal mining interests in north-east England and a member of Parliament from 1734 to 1768. They had only one child, John, born in 1743 who sadly died before his second birthday. The couple split their time between London, their Sandford Priory estate in Berkshire, Allerton in Yorkshire, Denton outside Newcastle as well as visits to Bath and Tunbridge Wells. Several portraits exist of Montagu around this time including one by prominent Scottish artist Allan Ramsay completed in 1762 at the height of his career.¹¹ In an acknowledgement of Montagu's intellectual status this portrait shows her elbow resting on the third volume of David Hume's *The History of England* which had been published in 1759.¹² Without a family to take up her time and with the financial means to pursue her long-standing literary interests her society status continued to grow. Her credentials as an author were established with her 1769 work *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear [sic]*,

*compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets. With Some Remarks Upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire.*¹³ Here Montagu robustly defends Shakespeare against the criticism of Voltaire who had claimed in 1733 that Shakespeare lacked both taste and knowledge of the rules of drama. She argues that 'every English gentleman has an education which gives him an early acquaintance with the writings of the ancients' and credits Shakespeare as a 'Heaven-born genius'.¹⁴ Montagu's work seems to have been well received and to have acted as a landmark for female literary criticism.

Montagu was a driving force behind the Bluestocking Circle which developed around the mid-eighteenth century in the homes of Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey, and Frances Boscawen. Eger describes the group as 'wealthy women who invented a new kind of informal sociability and nurtured a sense of intellectual community'.¹⁵ The term 'Bluestocking' came into use around 1756 as a joke about Benjamin Stillingfleet, a scholar and botanist, who wore blue worsted stockings typically associated with working men to salon gatherings where more formal silk stockings were expected. Its origin is closely associated with Montagu and she referred to 'blue stocking philosophers' in her correspondence, although Myers attributes its first usage to Montagu's friend Samuel

⁹ Hugh Trevor-Roper and John Robertson, *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven, UNITED STATES: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 72 <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3420949>> [accessed 14 February 2023].

¹⁰ 'Elizabeth Montagu Biography' <<http://emco.swansea.ac.uk>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

¹¹ 'Ramsay, Allan, of Kinkell (1713–1784), Portrait Painter', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23073>>.

¹² 'Elizabeth Montagu (Née Robinson) - Person Extended - National Portrait Gallery' <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/personExtended/mpo3136/elizabeth-montagu-nee-robinson?tab=iconography>> [accessed 14 February 2023]; 'Hume Texts Online' <<https://davidhume.org/texts/h/vol3/>> [accessed 14 February 2023].

¹³ 'An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear - at Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online (EMCO)' <<http://emco.swansea.ac.uk>> [accessed 14 February 2023].

¹⁴ Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear, Compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets. With Some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire* (Dublin: printed for J. Potts, W. Sleater, D. Chamberlaine, J. Williams, and W. Colles, 1778), p. 2, Eighteenth Century Collections Online <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0116607475/ECCO?sid=gale_marc&xid=0473583d&pg=1> [accessed 24 February 2023].

¹⁵ Eger, *Brilliant Women*, p. 21.

Torriano.¹⁶ ¹⁷ Over time the term has come to be associated with earnest, studious women in a somewhat derogatory way but the original Bluestocking Circle was one of opulent socialising and included men whose intellectual interests and friendship was valued by the women.¹⁸ The term appears to have been in wide circulation by 1779 to describe the group who were highly respected for their literary taste and superior education.¹⁹ Women were excluded from universities in the eighteenth century and this type of forum provided an outlet for participation in intellectual discussions. In addition to the chief hostesses the circle included Hester Chapone, Hester Thrale, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Mary Delany and later Hannah More although attendance was fluid and there is no definitive list. Male guests included Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, David Garrick, Horace Walpole, George Lyttleton and Joshua Reynolds.²⁰ The broad range of interests of the attendees including literature, art, theatre, science, and politics ensured the circle were well-placed to have informed and wide-reaching discussions.

By the latter part of the eighteenth-century Montagu was in what has been described as ‘the most advantageous position possible for a woman in the eighteenth century’ of being financially independent and able to pursue her own interests.²¹ She was widowed in May 1775 and inherited most of her husband’s estate

including his mining business. She showed herself to be an astute businesswoman, clearly enjoyed her elite status and was not afraid to spend her money. She engaged in a building program, particularly in London, refurbishing her Hill Street house several times including fitting out her dressing room with fashionable Chinoiserie. In 1775 she initiated the building of new house, Montagu House in Portman Square, employing renowned artists and architects before occupying the house in December 1781. The decoration included a ‘Feather Room’ completed to her own design and immortalised by William Cowper in his poem, *On the beautiful Feather-Hangings, designed for Mrs Montagu*.²² Montagu’s grand home continued to provide a venue for meetings of the Bluestocking Circle. In a further indication of her social and intellectual status in the late eighteenth century she was included in Richard Samuel’s 1778 painting *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo* (see Figure 2). This places Montagu alongside Catherine Macaulay, Anna Letitia Barbauld and others as one of the leading female intellectuals of the time.

The inclusion of Montagu’s image in Barry’s *Distribution* shows her as part of a wider, mixed elite group. The *Distribution* is one of a series of murals painted by Barry following the move of the RSA to a purpose-built house in John Adam Street near the Strand in central London in 1774. Montagu was a member of the RSA for almost

¹⁶ ‘Letter from Elizabeth Montagu to Messenger Monsey - at Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online (EMCO) <<http://emco.swansea.ac.uk>> [accessed 15 February 2023].

¹⁷ Sylvia Harestark Myers, ‘Elizabeth Montagu: The Making of a Female Critic’, in *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Sylvia Harestark Myers (Oxford University Press, 1990), p.179.

¹⁸ Sylvia Harestark Myers, ‘Prologue: Learning, Virtue, and Friendship: The Making of the Bluestocking Circle’, in *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Sylvia Harestark Myers (Oxford University Press, 1990), p.7.

¹⁹ *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.15 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667428>>.

²⁰ Eger, *Brilliant Women*, p.28.

²¹ ‘Montagu [Née Robinson], Elizabeth (1718–1800), Author and Literary Hostess’.

²² Nicole Pohl, ‘“Knitting Needles, Knotting Shuttles, & Totums & Cards & Counters”: The Bluestockings and the Material Culture of Fibre Arts’, *Textile History*, 50.2 (2019), 143–62 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2019.1653599>>.

Figure 1: James Barry, *The Distribution of Premiums in the Society of Arts*, 1777-84 and 1801.
Oil on canvas, 360 x 462cm. ©Royal Society of Arts, London

Figure 2: Richard Samuel, *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*, 1778,
oil on canvas, 1321 x 1549 mm. (© National Portrait Gallery, London).

half a century as, unusually for the time, women were allowed as Members from the beginning of the Society in 1754. Her involvement may however have been limited since it was only in 1807, after her death, that women were allowed to attend and vote at all meetings and committees.²³ From the outset the RSA has had a wide remit, describing itself as being ‘for our members to pool their subscription funds, to be spent on initiatives for the public good’.²⁴ In March 1777 Barry approached the Society to paint the murals asking only for expenses to cover the cost of canvas, colours, and models. In his 1792 book written to explain the murals Barry states that his overall aim was to illustrate, ‘that the obtaining happiness, as well individual as public, depends on cultivating the human faculties’.²⁵ His series is made up of six paintings which are 361 cm high and form an almost continuous band around the Great Room. Together they illustrate the development of civilisation and human knowledge. *The Distribution* is the fifth in the series; the first two depict the progress of Greek civilisation, the third shows the victors at the Olympic Games, the fourth is the *Navigation* or *Triumph of the Thames* and the final painting shows *Elysium* or the *State of Final Retribution*. Part of the RSA’s work was to award premiums or prizes to individuals in the categories Agriculture, Polite Arts, Manufacture, Colonies and Trade, Chemistry and Mechanics.²⁶ The *Distribution* is a heroic group portrait which shows Members of

the RSA in an idealized London setting presenting the premiums in the form of medals.

Montagu’s central position in the painting is significant and Barry seems to have deliberately chosen to acknowledge and highlight her role as a female patron rather than as a writer and hostess. The painting has a tripartite composition with three linked groups of figures. The left-most group is dominated by the Prince of Wales standing next to Lord Romney, President of the Society and near William Shipley, the RSA founder. The right-most group includes Edmund Burke and the Society’s first President, Lord Viscount Folkestone. The middle group is predominately women and Montagu appears in the centre of this group presenting a young woman who has won a gold medal for a large piece of cloth (possibly shot silk) to the Duchess of Northumberland. The medal is held by a younger girl who is being inspired to follow the example set. The grouping of a young girl, an older female patron and female nobility in the centre of a painting bounded by elite male groups seems to make a statement about how highly Barry perceived the value of female intellectual development, mutual support, and the importance of their involvement in the work of the RSA. Johnson is shown close by, pointing to Montagu, as a female role model and this is supported by Barry’s reference to Montagu in his accompanying book as ‘that distinguished example of female excellence’.²⁷ Barry further explains that Johnson

²³ Anton Howes, *Arts and Minds: How the Royal Society of Arts Changed a Nation [Electronic Resource]* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 23 <<https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.degruyter.com/isbn/9780691201900>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

²⁴ ‘History of the RSA’, *The RSA* <<https://www.thersa.org/about/our-story/history>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

²⁵ James Barry, *A Description of the Series of Pictures Painted by James Barry, Esq. And Preserved in the Great Room of the Society Instituted at London, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce. To This Is Added, a Short Account of Some Other Works of Art with Which the Room Is Ornamented* (London: Printed by W. and C. Spilsbury, No. 57, Snow-Hill, 1800), p.3, Eighteenth Century Collections Online <<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CB0126549897/ECCO?sid=primo&xid=e387443c&pg=1>> [accessed 3 January 2023].

²⁶ Henry Trueman Wood, ‘The Royal Society of Arts VI—The Premiums (1754–1851)’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 60.3086 (1912), 208–16 (p.208).

²⁷ Barry, p.19.

is pointing out Montagu to the young Duchesses of Rutland and Devonshire for their ‘attention and imitation’.²⁸ The Duchesses have their attention focused on each other and are holding hands in a demonstration of the value of female friendship. The earnest expression on Johnson’s face seems to be urging them to focus on being patrons rather than less serious pursuits. The *Distribution* has been interpreted as demonstrating how the state of the arts and commerce in Britain might be improved under the enlightened patronage of such institutions as the Society.²⁹ It shows an interesting balance between classical and new values by placing the RSA membership in a classical setting whilst emphasising their influential membership and the innovative aspects of their work.

Montagu was a role model and patron for younger women writers including Williams, who dedicated her six-canto poem *Peru* to Montagu in acknowledgement of the support she had received. *Peru* is one of Williams’s earlier poems written in 1784 when she was 25 years old. The poem is an epic romance which gives a sentimentalised account of the Peruvian ‘Great Rebellion’ of 1780–1782 led by Tupac Amaru II and picks up on Enlightenment ideas of freedom. Williams never travelled to Peru and within the poem she acknowledges her reliance on the accounts of others in the ‘Advertisement’

and in footnotes.³⁰ The subject matter is indicative of the breadth of interests and discussions in the Bluestocking Circle and Montagu’s associated patronage. Williams made a brief reference to Montagu in her earlier 1793 poem *Ode on the Peace* about the American War of Independence but in the dedication of *Peru* the tribute is greatly extended indicating that Montagu and Williams may have grown closer during the 1793–1794 period.³¹ Duquette supports this in suggesting that Williams was visiting Montagu’s home as early as January 1793.³² The dedication for *Peru* is in the form of a prefatory poem with the title *To Mrs Montagu* and fulsomely praises Montagu for providing an encouraging environment for writers and artists. The poem is composed of eleven quatrains of iambic pentameter with a predominately abab rhyme structure. The opening lines set the tone of the poem by invoking the classical image of the Muse who bends deferentially to Montagu. Montagu’s home is likened to a ‘Shrine’ and later to a ‘Fane’. As Natasha Duquette proposes this is suggestive of Montagu providing not just a venue for meeting but also spiritual sustenance and protection.³³

*While, bending at thy honour’d Shrine, the Muse
Pours, Montagu, to thee her votive strain,
Thy Heart will not her simple notes refuse,
Or chill her timid soul with cold disdain.*³⁴

²⁸ Ibid., p.19.

²⁹ ‘Barry, James’, *Grove Art Online*

<<https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/display/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/0ao-9781884446054-e-7000006539>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

³⁰ Helen Maria Williams, *Peru, a Poem. In Six Cantos*. By Helen Maria Williams [Electronic Resource], Eighteenth Century Collections Online (London: printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1784), p.vii <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0114875057/ECCO?sid=gale_marc&u=oxford> [accessed 3 January 2023].

³¹ Helen Maria Williams and T. Cadell, *An Ode on the Peace* (London: Printed for T. Cadell ..., 1783), p.19 <<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009262210>> [accessed 4 August 2022].

³² Natasha Duquette, ‘Painting in Bright Characters: Helen Maria Williams’s Poetic Tributes to Anna Seward, Elizabeth Montagu, and Marie-Jeanne Roland’, in *The Circuit of Apollo Eighteenth-Century Women’s Tributes to Women*, ed. by Laura L. Range and Jessica Cook, Early Modern Feminisms (University of Delaware Press, 2022), pp. 123–41 (p.127) <<https://doi.org/10.36019/9781644530054-009>>.

³³ Duquette, p.123.

³⁴ Williams, ll.1–4.

Williams refers to the Bluestocking meetings as a 'social Circle' where 'drooping Spirit' can be restored or nourished. The discussions include 'Science' which seems to be used in a broad sense and bring joy to the participants as wit and wisdom come together.

*To lead his drooping Spirit to thy Fane,
Where attic joy the social Circle warms;
Where Science loves to pour her hallow'd strain,
Where Wit, and Wisdom, blend their sep'rate
charms.³⁵*

Later in the poem Williams praises Montagu's role as a Shakespearean scholar. Williams draws attention to the 'finish'd Page' that has claimed a place for women as literary critics. The generic references to 'Women' and 'imperious Man' show the broad impact that Williams attributes to Montagu. In Williams's view, Montagu's Shakespeare criticism has provided a landmark for all aspiring female critics. There is extravagant praise for Montagu suggesting she is a role model who will be remembered through successive ages and provide continuing inspiration for other women.

*For this, while Fame thro' each successive Age
On her exulting lip thy name shall breathe;
While Woman, pointing to thy finish'd Page,
Claims from imperious Man the Critic Wreath;³⁶*

The relationship continued as evidenced by Montagu's inclusion in the list of subscribers for Williams's *Poems in Two Volumes* published in 1786, a list headed by The Prince of Wales. Williams also included another reference to Montagu in her novel *Julia* published in 1790.³⁷ Williams left London for France in 1789 and

began literary salons of her own and she is perhaps best known for her responses to the French Revolution of which she became a direct observer.

Montagu, Barry, and Williams were all in London in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a time when the 1793 Peace of Paris was a likely topic of discussion as it affected British relationships with Spanish America. Williams's poem is dated London, April the 24th, 1784 and although Barry's murals were opened for the first exhibition in 1783, he is known to have been working on amendments until 1803. The Bluestocking Circle was still in existence although by the 1790's a younger generation including Hannah More were coming to the fore. No evidence of Montagu, Barry and Williams meeting together has come to light but future work on correspondence could change this as they moved in the same social circles. Barry's painting and Williams's poem are aimed at broadly similar audiences of enlightened citizens. Barry shared, at least in part, Williams's interest in South America as Pressley reports that in 1803 Barry amended the lower right corner of *The Distribution* to include two scrolls, one of which mentions the antiquities near 'Lake of Titiaca', a misspelling of Lake Titicaca in Peru. Given the timing of this late addition it is not mentioned in Barry's 1792 explanatory book, but Pressley suggests that Barry was advocating for scientific examination of earlier civilisations which offered the promise of astonishing discoveries.³⁸

In conclusion, by examining artefacts which feature Montagu it is possible to see evidence of her influence beyond that of society hostess.

³⁵ Ibid., ll.17–20.

³⁶ Ibid., ll.37–40.

³⁷ Duquette, p.128.

³⁸ Pressley, p.351.

Barry's work is a particularly significant portrait as it depicts Montagu as a participant in a mixed, elite group in a prestigious location. Showing Montagu alongside figures including Johnson, Burke, and others emphasises the extent of her influence and the respect she commanded. In comparison, Williams is one of several female poets who honour Montagu as a patron. Ann Yearsley and Mercy Otis Warren also dedicated poems to Montagu, but *Peru* seems especially significant because of its subject matter and the nature of the dedication. Looking at Barry's painting and Williams's poem alongside each other makes a strong statement about the breadth of Montagu's interests and the extent of her influence. Eger summarises Montagu as 'a beacon of female learning' but perhaps two lines from More's *The Bas Bleu* from 1801 provide an even more fitting description.³⁹

*she whom SHAKESPEARE's wrongs redrest,
Prov'd that the brightest are the best.*⁴⁰

³⁹ Eger, *Brilliant Women*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ 'Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive / Works / The Bas Bleu. (Hannah More)', ll. 56–57
<<https://www.eighteenthcenturypoetry.org/works/03982-wo020.shtml>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

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