

CHRISTINE GERRARD

The Hillarian Circle: Scorpions, sexual politics and heterosocial coteries

The literary coterie as a subject worthy of investigation enjoys a far higher status than it did some twenty years ago. This change has been largely due the growing scholarly interest in literary sociability in its different manifestations. It is now widely acknowledged, for example, that manuscript culture, continued to flourish beyond the Renaissance into the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that the boundaries between manuscript and print culture were permeable and fluid rather than rigid and discrete.¹ The study of early modern print culture itself has placed a new emphasis on publication as a sociable and collective activity which generated collaborative texts such as the literary miscellany.² The widespread interest in early modern women writers has emphasised the significance of friendship circles as a means of enabling and supporting female literary production.³ Thus it is that scholars such as Carol Barash, Kathryn King, Elizabeth Eger and Betty Schellenberg, to name but a few, have explored a wide range of literary and cultural circles and the means by which they produced, and exchanged ideas and texts through conversations, letters and annotated critical comments, and how these exchanges made their way from manuscript to print and sometimes back again.⁴

This essay will re-examine a literary coterie that was, some sixty years ago, dismissed as marginal and esoteric but which has recently attracted a very considerable degree of critical attention; the so-called ‘Hillarian’ circle of 1719–1726, named after its founder and literary lynchpin, the author, entrepreneur and patron Aaron Hill. I will discuss some of the problems involved in amassing and interpreting the evidence about the Hillarian circle and other coteries, and to show how this particular coterie cohered around a set of contradictory, almost paradoxical ideological tensions, between libertine playfulness and bourgeois propriety, between nostalgic Jacobitism and Whig mercantilism, between self-publicity and self-erasure, between manuscript and print. I will also explore the recent attention paid to the conflict between its purportedly platonic cult of male/female literary friendship, and the sexual tensions bound up in female literary competitiveness and heterosocial as opposed to homosocial literary coteries.

No two coteries are the same and each enjoys a dynamic peculiar to its self. Some entail equal friendships between male literary peers and contemporaries, perhaps former university friends or school friends such as the Eton-based ‘Quadruple Alliance’ of the mid-eighteenth century, between Thomas Gray, Horace Walpole, Thomas Ashton and Richard West, or the Westminster school connections of the ‘Nonsense Club’ of John Wilkes, Charles Churchill, Bonnell Thornton, Robert Lloyd and George Colman of the 1760s and 1770s. Others, such as Addison’s ‘Little Senate’, were dominated by an older or more famous literary patron figure upon whose favour and patronage aspiring younger writers depended. Gender relations obviously pose further questions. Most literary coteries were same-sex circles, but were the dynamics of the male literary circle different from those of the female writing circle? How many heterosocial writing circles existed, and were these familial or relational rather than purely social?⁷ Then there are further questions about the kinds of evidence and data the literary scholar needs to amass in order to recreate the life of the coterie. Extant letters and correspondence, whether in print or manuscript, and contemporary literary and historical anecdotes, are crucial when tracing the movements and power dynamics of literary coteries. In terms of what we might call outputs, what were the tangible fruits of coterie collaboration? Did this involve authors making corrections and suggestions to each other’s work, or did it involve collaborative efforts such as Miscellany publications? Were there dedicatory epistles paying tribute to assistance moral, literary, financial?

Often the membership of these circles remains difficult to determine, because the writers involved adopted literary pseudonyms. This is a particular issue with female authors. The feminist poet Mary, Lady Chudleigh, clearly had an extensive circle of literary female friends with whom she collaborated for her *Poems on Several Occasions*. ‘Almystrea’ has been identified as an acronym for ‘Mary Astell’, but others such as ‘Cleanthe’ and ‘Eugenia’ have never been identified.⁸ Similarly, some still unidentified female members of the Hillarian circle writing for Savage’s *Miscellany* of 1726 addressed other under the pseudonyms ‘Evandra’ ‘Daphne’ and ‘Aurelia’.⁹ Then there are questions of when and if the different members of the coterie met each other. Is it possible, for example, to describe the network of authors or ‘Circle of Friendship’ with whom the royalist poet Katherine Phillips corresponded

in the 1670s as a ‘coterie’ given that she lived in rural Wales and rarely met her correspondents? In the case of those that did meet, where did they meet and how often? Addison’s Little Senate met at Button’s Coffee House, and the Scriblerus Club met (when it occasionally did meet) probably at Arbuthnot’s lodgings at St James’s Place. Male writers could congregate easily within the ‘public sphere’. But what of female or mixed sex literary coteries? Did they meet in domestic residences, over tea, in private and domestic rather than in public spaces?

I had some of these questions in mind when I first started researching a literary biography of Aaron Hill — questions that have since then been more fully articulated and addressed by recent scholarly work on literary sociability.¹⁰ The original impulse for writing the Hill biography came from a desire to reappraise the reputation and writing of an influential literary figure erroneously dismissed as little better than a buffoon, a meddling dunce, ‘absurd, a bore of the first water.’¹¹ Aaron Hill (1685-1750) was, in Brean Hammond’s terms, ‘the cultural glue that held the age together’.¹² He enjoyed a prolific career as a theatre impresario, commercial entrepreneur, stage manager, dramatist, poet and literary patron. He staged Handel’s first opera in England, engaged actively and avidly with writers of his time, including an intimate friendship with the novelist Samuel Richardson. Hill’s vexed relationship with Alexander Pope provoked the hostility and ridicule of the Scriblerians, yet Hill in his own way rivalled Pope in his capacity for literary friendships. Though the Scriblerus club’s long literary shadow has obscured other literary coteries of the early eighteenth century, Hill’s circle—the so-called ‘Hillarion Circle’—was the most lively and important literary coterie in London during the first half of the 1720s, incorporating and encouraging a wide range of male and female writers.

When I began the research for my biography I had planned to devote one chapter to the period 1720–28, Hill’s years as a literary patron in London presiding over his eponymous coterie. But one long chapter rapidly became two, and then three, and soon the Hillarian circle took on a life of its own at the heart of the biography. The chapters on the Hillarian circle attracted the most critical attention. This was due in large part to the fact that one of the circle’s members was Eliza Haywood, and that this material related to a vital chapter in her early life and career. Kathryn King produced two now well-known articles on Eliza Haywood’s early life which drew

further fascinating conclusions about her relationship to Hill, Savage and the circle.¹³ The dynamics of the circle have continued to generate critical interest, reflected most recently in a monograph by Earla Wilputte and an impressively detailed doctoral thesis by Katharine Beautner tracing the circle's trajectory.¹⁴

What was the Hillarian circle, and who was in it? To what extent did it function as a literary coterie? Kathryn King describes the Hillarian circle as 'what might today be called a social network of like-minded peers'.¹⁵ Debatably (in equally modern terms) this 'social network' seems to have had a 'brand', a group style, which identified its products as 'Hillarian'. The adjective 'Hillarian' comes from the poetic name 'Hillarius' which Eliza Haywood boasts she was the first to bestow on Aaron Hill in a series of poems first published in 1725 but which may be dated to three or four years earlier.¹⁶ By 1726, 'Hillarian' was even being used as a critical adjective. When the *British Journal* of 24 September and 1 October 1726 reviewed the poems in the Hillarian circle's most visible published output, *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* (1726), often known as Savage's *Miscellany*, it characterised one of the poems by Benjamin Victor as 'Hillarian' – the adjective implying a distinctive poetic style shared by members of the group.¹⁷ Aaron Hill was the pivotal figure in this circle, acting as friend, encourager, publisher, go-between and peacekeeper, sometime financial patron, using his contacts within the London literary and theatrical world to assist those he befriended. One of the dominant figures in the circle was Richard Savage, the flamboyant poet and aristocrat manqué, who was pursuing his claim to be the unacknowledged illegitimate son of Lady Anne Brett, Countess of Macclesfield, and the late Earl Rivers. There are many extant letters between Savage and Hill from the early period, 1719-20, showing the extent to which Hill promoted Savage as a cause celebre. Then there was Eliza Haywood, who possibly first met Hill as early as 1710, and was during the period 1719-24 closely involved with both Savage and Hill – probably not the lover of either, as Kathryn King conjectures, but certainly she collaborated and competed with Savage, and solicited Aaron Hill's literary attention.

Hill and Haywood exchanged manuscript verses praising each other's talents around 1720–21, which were published in Haywood's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1725). Haywood magnified Hill's charm, talent and wit, overlaying the rapturous language of the sublime with erotic and sensual overtones. In 'The Vision' she

dreams she travels to heaven where she meets a senate of the Sons of Wit poring over a neglected heap of old books. An angel redirects her to earth, where only ‘Hillarius’ can restore poetry. He is hailed by a chorus of angels. She wakes in bed, overwhelmed by rapture: ‘with incoherent Extasies am fir’d, / Such, as of old, the *Baccanals* inspir’d’.¹⁸ Hill in his poems to Eliza praises Haywood as a fusion of masculine strength and female softness, the paradox which male writers had previously used to describe earlier poets such as Behn and Chudleigh. The fourth early member of the group was Martha Fowke, or Martha Fowke Sansom, her married name. Fowke, born in 1689, published her first poems in 1711 including a notable epitaph to Mary Lady Chudleigh, in the miscellany *Delights for the Ingenious*. In 1720 she became well known as one half of the literary epistolary duo Clio and Strephon (the author William Bond, also a member of the Hillarian circle), who together published *Clio and Strephon* that year.¹⁹ Fowke’s poems also appeared that year in Hammond’s *Miscellany*, along with those of her brother Thomas Fowke.²⁰ A large number of Fowke’s poems eventually found their way to Barbados and were published in the *Barbados Gazette*, probably through her relationship with a young Barbadian lawyer Nicholas Hope.²¹ Fowke was one of the most prolific female poets of the early eighteenth century. These four writers were at the centre of the Hillarian circle between 1720–23, exchanging letters, poems and plays. Other writers also solicited Hill’s patronage and became attached to the circle, including the poet Edward Young, future author of *Night Thoughts*; John Dyer, the young Welsh poet who wrote *Grongar Hill* and *The Fleece*; the ambitious Scottish poets David Mallet and James Thomson, author of *The Seasons*; their impecunious fellow Scot Joseph Mitchell; and the Irish theatre critic and historian Benjamin Victor.

When I first worked on the Hillarian circle, trying to piece together its movements, membership, dynamics and literary productions, there were few discursive critical models available for the literary coterie. Clarence Tracey’s biographical study of Savage had up to this point supplied probably the fullest account of the circle but it tended to take its own claims to ideal platonic friendships at face value.²² Studies of the Scriblerus Club, such as George Sherburn’s *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, offered a model of literary networks and group authorship, as did Lance Bertelsen’s *The Nonsense Club* devoted to untangling relations between John Wilkes, Charles Churchill and their circle.²³ Some excellent studies of women’s

coterie writing were beginning to emerge, including Kathryn King's study of Jane Barker and her circle, and Carol Barash's account of the Tory royalist feminist circle around Queen Anne.²⁴ But every study of literary coteries in the early modern period dealt with same-sex or homosocial coteries. Although Katherine Philips' Welsh 'Society of Friendship' in the 1650s, espousing a code of Platonic love, had certain male members, her most famous poetry celebrated same-sex, even, as some critics have averred, lesbian friendship.²⁵ One of the more unusual features of the Hillarian circle was that it was a decidedly heterosexual circle, the women writers being no less well-known (and in some case more well-known) than their male peers. It was not the first literary circle or literary coterie of the early eighteenth century to include women, and indeed there seems have been an overlap with the Duncan Campbell circle of roughly the same period, a circle which included not only Fowke and Haywood but a third well-known female writer, Susannah Centlivre. Campbell, a minor London celebrity, a deaf and dumb fortune teller and seer, described being 'surrounded by my Friends, such as *Anthony Hammond*, Esq; *Mr. Philip Horneck*, *Mr. Phillips*, *Mr. -----*, *Mrs. Centlivre*, *Mrs. Fowk*, *Mrs. Eliza Haywood*, and other celebrated Wits, of which my house, for some Years, has been the general Rendevous, a good Bowl of Punch before me, and the Glass going round in a constant Circle of Mirth and Good Humour'.²⁶ Yet the Campbell circle was more obviously more of a social gathering, far less tight-knit than the Hill circle, with no obvious literary agenda. It did not generate any specific works of its own.

The women in the Hill coterie did not function under the same constraints of decorum that characterised, for example, Samuel Richardson's epistolary circle of women readers and authors such as Sarah Fielding and Lady Bradshaigh, or even the Bluestocking circle of the later eighteenth century.²⁷ The Hillarian circle operated through a romanticised and often sexually charged mode, in which male and female allure and acts of writing were intimately bound up with each other. The relationships between different members of the circle were often biographically controversial; for example the supposition, only recently laid to rest, that Richard Savage was the father of one of Eliza Haywood's bastard children, or the speculation that Martha Fowke was involved in sexual relationships with at least three male members of the circle—Hill, Savage, Dyer—and that sexual jealousy between Fowke and Haywood and between Margaret Hill and Fowke was one of the circle's driving forces.²⁸ Fowke was

unhappily married and pregnant in 1723, when she wrote the manuscript of her autobiographical *Clio*, an extended love-letter to Hill later published posthumously in 1753 as a scandal memoir.²⁹ In this sense the Hillarian circle seems almost a precursor to the Romantic circle of the Shelleys, Godwins and Lamonts.

There are two further characteristics of the Hillarian circle which raise larger questions about the shape, function and trajectory of the literary coterie. Literary coteries of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century were often forged from the shared political loyalties which emerged from the internecine party politics of the post-Civil War era. Hence the royalist connections of Katherine Philips's 'Circle of Friendship', the Tory Scriblerus Club, Addison's Whig 'Little Senate', the radical Whig 'Nonsense Club' of the 1770s. The Hillarian circle was different. It was extraordinarily politically and demographically diverse. The cosmopolitan, Westminster-educated Hill, who had travelled the Middle East, his London grocer's daughter wife Margaret, Martha Fowke, from a French aristocratic landed gentry background, the lowland Scots poets Mallet and Thomson, the Welsh painter and vicar's son John Dyer, the Dublin critic Benjamin Victor. Hill was a staunch Whig, as were Edward Young, Eliza Haywood and Thomson and Mallet. Young remained a loyal Court Whig and fervent Walpole supporter throughout his lifetime, whereas Haywood, Hill and Thomson by the late 1720s opposed Walpole as dissident Whig Patriots. Richard Savage was a crypto-Jacobite whose aristocratic aspirations and early seditious poems on the Jacobite uprising of 1715 entwined his personal life and literary imagination with that of the marginalised Stuarts. Martha Fowke also emerged from a Tory royalist and Jacobite background. In 1716 she exchanged a sequence of ballads with the Jacobite authors William Tunstall and Charles Wogan while they were imprisoned for rebellion and subsequently condemned to death following the Jacobite defeat in 1715.³⁰ While the Hillarian circle supported Savage's claims to aristocratic patrimony (the *Miscellany* was part of this campaign), nonetheless Hill's periodical *The Plain Dealer* of 1724–5, another of the circle's outputs, promoted the ideal of middle class politeness, propriety and manners in the style of its periodical models the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. The paper critiqued aristocratic boorishness and excess, observing that the commoner Richard Savage was not intrinsically inferior to Richard Savage, 'Earl Rivers'.

A further feature of the Hillarian circle—one which might usefully be applied to the study of all literary coteries—is its fluctuating identity and membership even over a short period of time. The group seems to have existed between roughly 1719 and 1726, but its membership changed and it went through at least three phases. There appears to have been an early phase, around 1719–21, in which the members attempted to define their circle's literary identity, during which most of the 'promotional' and complimentary manuscript poems were written and circulated. The middle phase centred in certain ways around the histrionic literary and social ambitions of Richard Savage. The opportunistic Savage hijacked the Hillarian circle, diverting the talents and energies of a polite literary society into promoting his claims to aristocratic birth. A final phase occurred shortly before the publication of Savage's *Miscellany* in late 1726, when Hill threw his energies into the circle's newest Scottish members David Mallet and James Thomson, recently arrived in London, and their obsession with the aesthetic and religious sublime mediated through John Dennis's critical theories.³¹ This final Hillarian phase was almost entirely male-dominated. The Hillarian circle's published projects, such as *The Plain Dealer* of 1724–5, and Savage's *Miscellany*, gave it the appearance of greater coherence and stability than it may actually have had. Its literary commitments outlasted the friendships within which they were forged. Many of the poems which featured in Savage's *Miscellany* had been circulated among the Hillarians in manuscript a few years before the volume was even dreamt up for publication. Biographical developments like Eliza Haywood's bitter rivalry with Savage and Martha Fowke, which occurred before but continued while the *Miscellany* made its slow progress into print over a two year period, made certain sentiments in many of the poems invalid (or at least seem bitterly ironic) at the point of publication.³² Many of the complimentary poems published in the *Miscellany* changed meaning from manuscript to print, and then again because of the changing biographical context. One thing that this shows us is that the intertextual nature of most coterie writing resists a linear narrative analysis. This is particularly true of the Hillarian circle, given its rapid turnover and interpersonal frictions. It is this unstable and competing interplay between contexts (biographical versus bibliographical) that makes the Hillarian circle a particularly rewarding example of a literary coterie in action.

The Hillarian circle's most salient, yet eventually most problematic feature,

was its actively heterosocial dynamic. The Hillarian circle promoted a model of civilised social conduct between the sexes, a model which can be reconstructed (but with some caution) from its fictionalised and idealised versions (*The Plain Dealer* and Haywood's *The Tea Table*) and from comments in contemporary and retrospective correspondence. The physical setting of the Hillarian circle was domestic, intimate and inclusive. With some exceptions, the Hillarians most often convened in Hill's or Martha Fowke Sansom's private lodgings which had been rented by her lawyer husband Arnold Sansom in the Inner Temple since 1712. The *Plain Dealer* extolled such domestic literary gatherings, where one could witness 'a handsome appearance of young people of both Sexes drinking TEA.' Joseph Mitchell recalled how he longed 'with grateful Taste, to enjoy the hours of Tea, In CLIO and MIRANDA's Company'.³³ Miranda was Margaret Hill, Aaron's wife. Such an ideal of mixed-sex congeniality was promoted by the *Plain Dealer*: 'In Place of *Narrow Minds* and the *vilest hypocrisie*, we are growing Profane enough to assert the *Dignity of Humane Reason*, and the *Innocent Privileges of Nature*'.³⁴

Eliza Haywood's highly stylized, almost comically Boccaccian sketches in her *Tea Table: or, A Conversation between some Polite Persons of both Sexes* (1724–5), present an idealised version of these mixed-sex gatherings. Haywood's fictional community is painted in a romantic, almost chivalric, vein. The *Tea Table* society actively avoids gossip, affectation and pretentiousness: everyone is polite and obliging, and even the occasionally intrusive and boorish figures are treated with respect and condescension by the society's hostess, who is too polite either to expel or correct the variously offensive guests. The first part of the *Tea Table* uses the literary coterie as a framing device for an interpolated novel within the text, supplying a fictional model of a critical circle in action. This element of public reading and subsequent critical 'round-table' discussions of literary works may have reflected the real practice of the Hillarian circle's mode of literary collaboration. Similarly, within the second (more topical and satirical) part of the *Tea Table*, Haywood consistently situates various poetic texts within the context of group discussion and polite conversation. One might speculate to what extent this polite turn-taking and approbation corresponded with the reality of the Hillarian gatherings. There is some non-fictionalised textual evidence to at least partially substantiate Haywood's account. Although James Thomson only appeared on the London scene in early 1726,

the numerous accounts of the group's activities preserved in his letters to Aaron Hill seem to corroborate elements of Haywood's representation of the life of the circle. Thomson's letters to Aaron Hill record the novel impressions afforded by being 'admitted into the most instructive and entertaining Company in the World.'³⁵ Thomson's description of the 'downright Inspiration' in Hill's society and the 'moral Harmony' it affords is further complemented by Thomson's praise of both Margaret Hill and her daughter Urania's presence at the tea table.

Benjamin Victor later nostalgically recalled to John Dyer the ambience of the Hillarian gatherings, 'how many delightful hours have we enjoyed with that elegant lover [Hill] and his charming Clio! How like those scenes we read in our youthful days in Sir Philip Sidney's pastoral romance!'³⁶ It is hard to tell whether Victor was thinking of Sidney not merely as a precursor to the Hill circle's interest in Platonic love, but as a member of an earlier, tight-knit Renaissance literary coterie which also mediated between manuscript and print, but the parallel is an interesting one. It is also useful to recall that Sidney's novelistic *Arcadia* depicted a world very far from Arcadian in its power games, manipulation and suppressed sexual desire. Victor's nostalgic idealisation colours the memory of a circle that in the end disintegrated into malice and ostracisation. While the inclusion of women in the Hillarian circle allowed the coterie to put into practice its theories of polite socialisation and introduced diversity into its literary output, the mixed society eventually fostered an oppressive degree of sexual and creative tension. As Kathryn King argued, 'noble friendship between the sexes was a crowning ideal, some would say the besetting delusion of the Hillarian circle.'³⁷ It is partly because the two most ambitious and dominant women writers in the circle, Fowke and Haywood, were in some sense competing for centre space. Fowke captivated the group's attention with her boldly unconventional female voice and rather scandalous familial romantic past (her handsome philandering father, for whom she wrote love poetry, was subsequently murdered by his servant), elements which, like Savage's claims to aristocratic bastardry, might have been difficult to square with the Hillarians' ostensibly Whiggish, polite and reformist aesthetics. Haywood had initially sought Hill's support and admiration and so did Fowke, but whereas Haywood was a professional and prolific female novelist, dramatist and poet, Fowke wrote amatory poetry which tended to play on her own personal allure, so that the boundary between the biographical and the textual was always blurred. The

sensual and libertine poetic self was a key part of her literary persona. In her early signature poem ‘Clio’s Picture’ Fowke portrays herself as an independent, quirky and unconventionally dark-skinned woman, yet she also fetishises her appearance as the subject of the male gaze – ‘To thy kind Eyes *Clio* submits her Form’.³⁸ The artist John Dyer painted Fowke’s portrait, and a number of poems by male poets such as Dyer and Victor which focus on the ekphrastic interplay between painting and poetry objectify her as a figure of sensual allure.³⁹ Responses to Clio the Poet always return to the sensual, such as Aaron Hill’s description of the portrait, which in his opinion accurately reflects ‘That sparkling Soul, that lightens from within, / And flashes unspoken Meanings, thro’ her Skin’.⁴⁰ It is a visual objectification that Martha Fowke Sansom quite actively encouraged. In one of the poems which was later published in Savage’s *Miscellany*, the jaunty ‘To Lady E—H---’, a poem which appears to be addressed ironically to a fellow female writer, almost certainly Eliza Haywood, she contrasts her own dark good looks with those of Haywood, ‘*Chalky* Lady, looking *silly*’, and explains to her ‘how, in Verse to *hunt* a Lover!’.⁴¹ In a series of metamorphic transformations, she is

Still in different Forms appearing,
 To divert the Eye and Hearing;
 And inspire the ravish’d Gazer
 To adore her, and to praise her.⁴²

Fowke’s own confusion over the shape and role that female creativity should assume extends to some of the other poems to or by other women in the *Miscellany*. In his depiction of Eliza Haywood in ‘The Vision’, for example, Hill encounters the usual difficulty in reconciling female diffidence with the traditionally male associations of reason and creativity. He praises the ‘divinely fir’d’ ‘Charmer’ Eliza [...] ‘Where all that’s manly, joins with all that’s sweet, / And in whose Breast engross’d Perfections meet!’⁴³. Instead of providing a gender-neutral depiction of the poetess, Hill’s poem at once imbues Haywood with positive masculine attributes such as ‘impartial Reason’, but over-exaggerates the sensual, physical and feminine attributes of the poet. There is something particularly telling in Hill’s manner of not crowning, but covering the ‘Lovely *Eliza*, hid with Bay-leaves’: ‘But her Wonders to

reveal, / Were to *describe* what I can only *feel!*'⁴⁴ Fowke's inclusion within Savage's *Miscellany* of an entirely new version of the first poem she ever published, her *Epitaph, to the Memory of Mary, the Lady Chudleigh*, first published in 1711, weeks after Chudleigh's death, might suggest a longing to reconnect herself to an earlier turn of the century feminist tradition and literary circle at odds with the world of the Hillarian circle, with its sexually and creatively competitive dynamics. Chudleigh is praised as an icon of stoic feminist virtue, a generous friend and mentor, a female poet whose name (unlike Clío's own) was never besmirched by 'Scandal'.⁴⁵ This sense of female solidarity is also mirrored in the poems by Hill's wife Margaret. 'Miranda' rather mocks the admiring literary adulation of the female poets vying for her husband's attention.⁴⁶ She is the only Hillarian poet who approached female creativity without reflecting on the personal charms of the practicing poetess. Even 'Evandra' praises 'Miranda' as 'A sparkling Soul, in Form divine, enshrin'd! / A *Venus*' Aspect – and *Minerva*'s Mind'⁴⁷ In many ways, Margaret Hill's de-sensualisation of the female poet is due to her understanding of female creativity and fame as a communal achievement: as she wrote in 'To *Evandra*, on seeing some Poems of her writing', 'A Woman's Fame, methinks, all Women share: / And Policy shou'd make her praise their Care.'⁴⁸ Just as an individual's personal charms are fleeting, women's individual poetic achievements should be subsumed to the interests of a cumulative female tradition:

Thou! great Redeemer of thy Sex's Fame,
 Outblazest Manhood with thy tow'ring Flame;
 Ages to come, the wide-spread Light shall see,
 And worship Womankind in Praise of thee.⁴⁹

Savage's *Miscellany* is a fascinating volume which still has not yet had its story entirely told. The interplay between male and female poetic personae within the volume hints at real-life tensions and rivalries. Fowke's libertine poetic persona spilled over into her relationships with some of the younger men in the circle, such as Dyer, Victor and possibly Mallet. Fowke in 'Innocent Inconstant', a reply to Savage's poem 'Unconstant', made no apology for a kind of serial monogamy through creative types: 'When I discern, that heavy Earth prevails / I leave the Lumber, and I shift the

Sails'.⁵⁰ Throughout 1721 and 1722 Fowke and Hill maintained a passionate literary correspondence which seems to have inspired some of Hill's most delicate poems including 'Whitehall Stairs'. This relationship, or at least one side of it, is charted in *Clio*, the autobiographical love-letter which Fowke wrote to Aaron Hill at the end of 1723, almost certainly when she was pregnant. Fowke was also close to John Dyer, but his personal letters show that he began to feel increasingly uncomfortable with the propriety of this relationship.⁵¹

Meanwhile Haywood had begun to incorporate increasingly satirical caricatures of Fowke within her novels such as *The Injur'd Husband* and *A Spy Upon the Conjurer*. These culminated in a thinly veiled allegorical account of Fowke, Savage, Hill and others in her *Memoirs of Utopia*, the first part of which was published in 1724. 'Gloatitia' (Haywood's sexually insulting caricature of Fowke) targeted 'as many of those as her now antiquated Charms have power to seduce'. Fowke herself had got wind of this cruel caricature as she alludes to it in *Clio*, pleading with Hill to protect her from the 'Scorpion Haywood'. Other members of the circle immediately rejected Haywood, Mallet writing to Savage in 1725 claiming of *Clio* that 'after I have begged her pardon for mentioning Mrs H in the same place with her, I must tell you, that if I judge by that Fury's writings, one that thoroughly knows her is acquainted with all the vicious part of the sex'.⁵² It is in *Clio* that Fowke calls Haywood 'The Scorpion Haywood'. One might argue that in some sense the 'scorpion' of my title might be equally be Fowke herself, transgressive, dangerous and alluring. Savage's *Miscellany* went to press after the coterie had effectively ceased to function as a mixed-sex coterie, a tribute to an ideal that perhaps could never have continued owing to the hopeless overlap between the sexual and the poetic. The descriptions in Eliza Haywood's *The Tea Table: or, A Conversation between some Polite Persons of both Sexes* (1724–5), published after her exclusion from the circle, 'seem almost poignant', suggests King, 'in the clumsiness of their attempts to recreate Haywood's role within a still unbroken Hill circle of the mind'.⁵³ Coloured by Haywood's nostalgia, the *Tea Table* posits an idealised coterie, a model of a social and literary community, one from which she was now excluded, and which she could not sustain as a fantasy or a reality.⁵⁴

By 1726 Eliza Haywood had been ejected from the circle. Martha Fowke's

melancholic dedicatory contribution to the second edition of James Thomson's *Winter* (which she published under the name of 'Mira' given the scandal attached to her former name 'Clio') was one of her last published poems.⁵⁵ In this poem 'Mira' foresees the end of her poetic career and even her life as she knew it, contrasting the youthful Thomson's new fame with her own literary demise.

But thou art safe, so shaded by the Bays,
Immortal in the noblest *Poet's* Praise;
From Time and Death, He will thy Beauties save;
Oh may such Numbers weep o'er *Mira's* Grave!
Secure, and glorious, would her Ashes lie.
Till Nature fade – and all the *Seasons* die.

Fowke and her husband Arnold Sansom were evicted that year from their lodgings in the Inner Temple for non-payment of rent.⁵⁶ When Benjamin Victor wrote to John Dyer some time in 1740, he commented on the fragility and instability of the Hillarian circle, the rapidity with which it disintegrated.

As to our poetical friends, which you enquire
after, they are no more! and what is still worse,
their very names buried with them.⁵⁷

Victor discusses the imminent publication of Johnson's *Life of Savage* and the obscurity which met Hill when he retired to Plaistow in 1738. But his chief lament, for the 'delightful hours' of mixed-sex conversation in the Hill household, is telling. The heterosocial dynamic of the Hillarian circle was indeed short-lived. During 1726, the very year that Savage's *Miscellany* was published, the circle around Hill became a single-sex 'Brotherhood', according to the *British Journal*, which satirically depicted the Hill circle as a masculine 'club' with new male members competing for the role of 'secretary'.⁵⁸ Despite the Hillarian circle's earlier active inclusion of female talent, in the end it reverted to a more familiar eighteenth-century type of literary coterie, a homosocial community of ambitious young male poets in search of publication possibilities, patronage and positions.

¹ See, for example, Margaret Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Arthur F Marotti and Michael D. Bristol, eds., *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000).

² See <http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org/>

³ See, for example, Paula R Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 175–223.

⁴ Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649–1714 Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Kathryn R King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675–1725* (Oxford, 2000); Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture, 1740–1790* (forthcoming, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). I am also indebted to the work of Rudolph Slobins, currently researching a D.Phil thesis at Oxford on eighteenth-century literary coteries.

⁷ Betty Schellenberg's case studies of commonplace books and their compilation would suggest that manuscript circulation among family members was common. A notable example is Ashley Cowper's Commonplace Book (British Library Add. MS 28101).

⁸ See Margaret Ezell, ed., *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxvii–xxix

⁹ See Richard Savage, ed., *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* (London, 1726).

¹⁰ Christine Gerrard, *Aaron Hill: The Muses' Projector, 1685–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Leslie Stephens, *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 26 (1891), 'Aaron Hill'.

¹² Brean Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670–1740: Hackney for Bread* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 290.

¹³ Kathryn R King, 'Eliza Haywood, Savage Love, and Biographical Uncertainty', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 59242 (2008): 722–39, and 'New Contexts for Early Novels by Women: The Case of Eliza Haywood, Aaron Hill and the Hillarians, 1719–25'. In *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, ed. Paula R Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 261–75

¹⁴ Earla Wilputte, *Passion and Language in Eighteenth-Century Literature: The Aesthetic Sublime in the Work of Eliza Haywood, Aaron Hill, and Martha Fowke*

- (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); Katharine Beutner, *Writing for Pleasure or Necessity: Conflict Among Literary Women, 1700–1750* University of Texas PhD dissertation, 2011). See also Sara Creel, '(Re) Framing Eliza Haywood', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Volume 14, Number 4 (Fall 2014), 25–48.
- ¹⁵ Kathryn R King, *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 29.
- ¹⁶ See Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, p. 69 and King, *A Political Biography of Haywood*, 31.
- ¹⁷ Two earlier *British Journal* articles of 20 August and 3 September 1726 had also commented in the group identity of Thomson and his 'brotherhood' of writers.
- ¹⁸ Eliza Haywood, 'The Vision', in *Secret Histories, Novels and Poems. In Four Volumes* (London, 1725), ii. 274–7.
- ¹⁹ *The Epistles of Clio and Strephon, being a Collection of Letters that passed between an English Lady, and an English Gentleman in France* (London, 1720).
- ²⁰ Anthony Hammond, ed., *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, Translations and Imitations* (London, 1720).
- ²¹ For the evidence concerning Fowke's authorship of these poems, see Phyllis Guskin, "'Not originally intended for the Press: Martha Fowke Sansom's Poems in the Barbados Gazette', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24.1 (2000), 61–91; Bill Overton, ed., *A Letter to My Love: Love Poems by Women first Published in the Barbados Gazette, 1731–1737* ((New NJ and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2001).
- ²² Clarence Tracy, *The Artificial Bastard: A Biography of Richard Savage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953).
- ²³ George Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933); Lance Bertelsen, *The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749–1764* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
- ²⁴ Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry 1649–1714* (1996) Kathryn King, *Jane Barker* (2000).
- ²⁵ See David L Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul, eds., *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics and Friendship* (Duquesne University Press, 2015).
- ²⁶ *Secret Memoirs of the late Mr. Duncan Campbel[sic], the famous deaf and dumb gentleman*. Written by himself (London, 1732), p. 131.
- ²⁷ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- ²⁸ See Kathryn R King, 'Eliza Haywood, Savage Love, and Biographical Uncertainty', and *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 28–34.
- ²⁹ See Phyllis Guskin, ed., *Clio: The Autobiography of Martha Fowke Sansom (1689–1736)*, (Newark, NJ and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1997).
- ³⁰ *Poems of Love and Gallantry, & c, Written in the Marshalsea and Newgate, by several of the Prisoners taken at PRESTON* (London, 1716).
- ³¹ Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, 114–121.
- ³² In November 1724 Savage had claimed that the volume was ready for publication. It did not appear until February 1726.
- ³³ Joseph Mitchell, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 2 vols (London, 1729), i. 312.
- ³⁴ *Plain Dealer* 65 (2 Nov. 1724).

-
- ³⁵ Thomson to Hill, 5 April 1725, in A. D. McKillop, ed. *James Thomson (1700–1748): Letters and Documents* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1958), 25.
- ³⁶ Benjamin Victor, *Original Letters, Dramatic Pieces, and Poems*, 3 vols. (London, 1776), i. 68.
- ³⁷ Kathryn R King, 'Eliza Haywood, Savage Love, and Biographical Uncertainty'.
- ³⁸ 'CLIO'S PICTURE', in Guskin, ed. *Clio*, pp. 55–6.
- ³⁹ See Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, 78–9.
- ⁴⁰ Aaron Hill, 'To the Author of the foregoing Verses, a Painter, on his attempting a Lady's Picture,' in Savage, *Miscellany*, 58–59.
- ⁴¹ Savage, *Miscellany*, 183.
- ⁴² 'To Lady E--- H---', Savage, *Miscellany*, 182–6.
- ⁴³ Savage, *Miscellany*, 75.
- ⁴⁴ Aaron Hill, 'The Vision', in Savage, *Miscellany*, 75–6.
- ⁴⁵ Christine Gerrard, 'Martha Fowke's Tributes to Mary, Lady Chudleigh, 1711 and 1726', in *The Circuit of Apollo: Women's Literary Tributes to Women in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Laura Runge and Jessica Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
- ⁴⁶ 'To Aurelia, hearing she was an Admirer of Hillarius', in Savage, *Miscellany*, 277–8.
- ⁴⁷ 'Evandra', 'On the Incomparable Miranda's commending what I writ', in Savage, *Miscellany*, 255–6.
- ⁴⁸ Savage, *Miscellany*, 253–4.
- ⁴⁹ 'Miranda to Clio. In Answer to the Foregoing', in Savage, *Miscellany*, 264–265.
- ⁵⁰ Savage, *Miscellany*, 100–1.
- ⁵¹ Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, 79–80.
- ⁵² *The European Magazine*, 6 (1784), 280.
- ⁵³ King, *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood*, 31.
- ⁵⁴ See King, *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood*, 32.
- ⁵⁵ 'To Mr Thomson. On his Blooming Winter', in *Winter. A Poem by James Thomson* (2nd ed, London, 1726), 19.
- ⁵⁶ I am indebted to Phyllis Guskin for this information.
- ⁵⁷ Benjamin Victor, *Original Letters*, i. 68.
- ⁵⁸ *The British Journal* 20 August and 3 September 1726.