

# “My friend Mr. H. Walpole”: Mary Hamilton, Horace Walpole and the art of conversation

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## *Abstract*

This article explores Horace Walpole’s connections with the Bluestocking community in the 1780s, focusing on his long-standing friendship with second-generation Bluestocking Mary Hamilton. Via a close examination of Hamilton’s diaries, correspondence, and manuscript volumes an attempt is made to reconstruct their friendship and to look at it through the eyes of a young woman. The manuscript material produced by Hamilton provides a glimpse into their interaction, communication network, shared interests, and activities. It is argued that Mary Hamilton’s friendship with Walpole formed within the metropolitan Bluestocking salons, and conversation was its driving force.

## *Résumé*

Cet article explore les liens de Walpole avec la communauté Bluestocking (bas bleu) dans les années 1780, plus particulièrement sa longue amitié avec Mary Hamilton, une représentante bas bleu de la seconde génération. La lecture attentive des journaux, de la correspondance et des manuscrits non publiés de Hamilton permet de reconstruire cette amitié à travers les yeux d’une jeune femme. Les manuscrits de Hamilton font découvrir des interactions individuelles, mais aussi un réseau plus large d’intérêts et d’activités partagés. L’article démontre que l’amitié entre Walpole et Hamilton a pris naissance dans les salons Bluestocking de la capitale et qu’elle s’est développée surtout à travers l’art de la conversation.

## *Keywords*

Horace Walpole, Mary Hamilton, Elizabeth Vesey, Bluestockings, Strawberry Hill, manuscripts, conversation

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*Friendship sincere keeps pace with Time,  
And by its energy sublime,  
With soothing sympathy will heal  
Those wounds, humanity must feel.*

Mary Delany<sup>2</sup>

Stories of the past have always fascinated their readers. Every story of friendship a famous person formed, which was narrated by his/her friend, throws more light on that person's character. Many such stories are often brought together from a myriad of references scattered in his/her friend's diaries and letters. They tell us about the time friends spent together, their talks and shared stories, interests and aspirations.

In a diary entry of 5 August 1784, 28-year-old Mary Hamilton wrote with gratitude about her friends: "How shall I ever repay the goodness of so many kind friends as I am bless'd with? I think myself the most fortunate of human beings – Those to whom I give the Title of dear *friends* are people of the most excellent characters & best principles."<sup>3</sup> The renowned man of letters Horace Walpole was among Hamilton's friends, whom she awarded the "dear" title. "My friend M<sup>r</sup>. Horace Walpole", "M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole my dear M<sup>r</sup>. W.", the young woman wrote in her diaries.<sup>4</sup>

In his monograph *The Strawberry Hill Set: Horace Walpole and his Circle* Brian Fothergill persuasively demonstrates that throughout his life Walpole – "a man of many friendships" (13) – enjoyed the company of his female friends both in London and Twickenham, and maintained a voluminous correspondence with many of them. His circle of female friends and correspondents at different periods of life included Lady Suffolk, Kitty Clive, Madame du Deffand, Lady Ossory, and Mary and Agnes Berry (Fothergill 106–137, 236–264). George Haggerty emphasises that Walpole was "a man who valued friendship and who worked throughout his life to make friendships the centre of his 'solitary' existence" (202). Obviously, women intellectuals of the day could not fail to attract Walpole's attention. In his correspondence, we find letters written to and received from the celebrated Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, Elizabeth Carter, Mary Delany and Frances Burney; and they contain scattered evidence of his attending the Bluestocking assemblies. Walpole's Bluestocking connections have sporadically been mentioned in critical work, though their precise and full picture is still to be drawn.

Pondering on the future in Bluestocking Studies, Deborah Heller argues that "the already-published letters and works of Bluestockings and their associates represent a virtually inexhaustible gold mine for willing researchers", and urges to return to sources (162). Indeed, new evidence dug from the primary sources – published and unpublished – can throw more light on the friendships formed by the male and female opinion leaders of the day, their interactions, shared activities and communication networks.

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2 In her memorandum book, Mary Hamilton preceded the quatrain by the following: "written by M<sup>rs</sup>. Delany on the blank leaf of an Almanack w<sup>ch</sup> she gave to her friend y<sup>e</sup> D[uche]<sup>ss</sup> D[owage]<sup>r</sup> of Portland". See Dickenson Family of Birch Hall, Lancashire Archives, Preston, DDX 274/18 (cited subsequently as DDX/).

3 Mary Hamilton Papers, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, GB 133 HAM/2/13 (cited subsequently as HAM/).

4 Mary Hamilton's manuscript output includes sixteen diaries.

This article explores a friendly relationship second-generation Bluestocking Mary Hamilton (1756–1816) kept with the writer, art historian and collector Horace Walpole. By using the manuscript material produced by Hamilton as a starting point, the article tries to reconstruct their friendship and look at it through the eyes of the young woman. Hamilton’s diaries have never been published in full,<sup>5</sup> and her friendship with Walpole has not been considered in critical work to date. The article attempts to answer a number of questions. How did their friendship start? What cemented and nurtured it during the period of fourteen years? What knowledge do we add to our understanding of Horace Walpole’s Bluestocking connections?

When analysing friendships that a person formed and maintained, a historian always needs to understand the social, cultural and historical context in which these friendships operated. It is essential to mention that in the eighteenth century the word “friendship” signified “kinship ties, sentimental relationships, economic ties, occupational connections, intellectual and spiritual attachments, sociable networks, and political alliances” (Tadmor 167). Mary Hamilton and Horace Walpole lived in the vibrant eighteenth century, which saw economic growth, rising urbanisation and improving communications. In Britain, it was a time of exploration and cross-cultural contacts, unprecedented growth of media and new social institutions, spread of literacy and scientific knowledge (Outram 10–11). Many accomplished women of the period propagated Enlightenment ideas, acting as teachers, journalists, salon hostesses, writers, scientists and travellers. Frequently, the women who were actively engaged in cultural production in the second half of the eighteenth century were directly or intermediately linked to the Bluestocking community, which presented “a loosely bounded system or network of separate but interrelated groups of persons or influences” (Heller 162). In London, the salons of Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey and Frances Boscawen were the noticeable venues of intensive intellectual exchange. As Pohl and Schellenberg put it, “These informal gatherings united men and women primarily of the gentry and upper classes, with the participation of a number of more middle-class professionals, in the pursuit of intellectual improvement, polite sociability, the refinement of the arts through patronage, and national stability through philanthropy” (2). The assemblies and parties organised by the indefatigable salonnières attracted a group of well educated young women who became engaged in the Bluestockings’ activities and participated in mixed-gender intellectual communication. They formed the core of second-generation Bluestockings, and Mary Hamilton was among them.

Mary Hamilton (later Dickenson) was born into a family with strong aristocratic connections. Her relations were courtiers, ambassadors, military men, and scientists one way or another involved in the political and cultural life of the nation in the eighteenth century. Hamilton herself was engaged in the royal daughters’ education for about five years. Nevertheless, to a rigid life at court the elegant and accomplished young woman preferred the lively and cultivated atmosphere of the metropolitan salons. After leaving the royal nursery in 1782, she came to live in Clarges Street, sharing the house with her unmarried friend Anna Maria Clarke and her sister.<sup>6</sup>

The young women lived opposite Elizabeth Vesey’s house, which operated as London’s intellectual hub of the day. Mary Hamilton – a young woman of many friendships – attended numerous gatherings of intellectuals. They were of various formats, ranging from the Bas Bleu parties and crowded assemblies to intimate get-togethers at breakfast, tea or, more often, dinner table organised by her Bluestocking friends in their London

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<sup>5</sup> Excerpts from Hamilton’s diaries and correspondence appear in Anson.

<sup>6</sup> For further details of her life see Anson.

and country houses. The young woman had a gift for communication, and she was valued by the friends and acquaintances for her energy, sociability and warm-heartedness. Mary Hamilton was an intellectually curious woman interested in literature, painting, history, botany and conchology. She belonged to the group of those Bluestockings who never published, but she was productive in diary- and letter-writing.<sup>7</sup> Her friend Lady Catherine Herries admitted that Hamilton's correspondence was "extensive" (HAM/1/17/73) and praised her pen for its "openness" (HAM/1/17/80). She wrote: "Your [Hamilton's] letters are so exactly y<sup>e</sup> things I would wish letters to be from what I love; they are the living picture of your thoughts & feelings; – yourself in short – are they not then delightful!" (HAM/1/17/81). Hamilton's wide network of female correspondents included high-profile Bluestockings Hannah More, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu, Mary Delany and Frances Burney. Among her male correspondents were such intellectuals as her uncle Sir William Hamilton, Richard Glover, John Burrows, Joseph Warton and Horace Walpole.

The earliest mention of Hamilton's acquaintance with Walpole is dated 11 January 1783. She noted in her diary: "went to y<sup>e</sup> Veseys – met there – M<sup>r</sup> and M<sup>rs</sup> Pery their 2 daughters M<sup>r</sup> Walpole 2 Miss Clarkes M<sup>rs</sup> Montagu 2 M<sup>r</sup> Wartons" (HAM/2/2).<sup>8</sup> At that time Mary was twenty-seven, and Walpole – thirty-nine years older – was past sixty-five. Their friendship lasted for the remainder of his life.

W. S. Lewis argued that in his later years the owner of Strawberry Hill liked the company of pretty and educated young women full of life and energy (35), and eagerly cultivated friendship with them. Charismatic Mary Hamilton was never shy and reserved in a big company, and felt at ease in the crowded Bluestocking salons. The young woman always relished a good conversation and was on warm terms with many male intellectuals of the day, including Sir Joshua Reynolds, Charles Burney, James Boswell, Thomas Warton, Sir William Weller Pepys and Leonard Smelt. "My society is very select, & of the very first Class as to conversation & Characters" (HAM/2/15), she admitted. Indeed, conversation was the core activity in the salons, and as Elizabeth Eger argues the "Bluestocking circle developed the art of conversation as a form of rational exchange that was particularly valuable to women" (290). Walpole's erudition and talent for instructive and entertaining conversation were for Hamilton a source of intellectual delight and amusement. She valued his knowledge and always mentioned their conversing in her diaries, noting, for example, the following: "I had a good deal of conversation with M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole"; "I spent an agreeable afternoon in hearing the sensible Conversation of M<sup>r</sup>. H. Walpole"; "had the pleasure of his conversation uninterrupted"; "the conversation was agreeable – informing and entertaining"; "his [Walpole's] *elegant & polished* conversation".<sup>9</sup>

It should be mentioned that their long-standing friendship had both active and calm periods. The interval from January 1783 to June 1785 was the most eventful Bluestocking period in Hamilton's life. It was a time when she lived in Clarges Street and was engaged in the Bluestocking activities. In June 1785 Hamilton married John Dickenson and for many years lived in Derbyshire and Bedfordshire, visiting London from time to time. Quite predictably, the "Clarges Street" period was a time of intense communication with Walpole. In many cases the diary entries mentioning their interaction were written by the young woman in telegraphic

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7 On Mary Hamilton as diarist and letter-writer see Voloshkova.

8 The selected diary entries related to Horace Walpole and Hamilton's visits to Strawberry Hill were first published in Anson and later in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*. This article provides accurate and complete quotations from Mary Hamilton Papers, some of them previously uncited.

9 See entries of 22 December 1783 in HAM/2/6, 3 March 1784 in HAM/2/8, 24 March and 22 April 1784 in HAM/2/9, 20 May 1785 in HAM/2/15.

style. For example, on 23 January 1784 she recorded: “At ¼ past 4 went to M<sup>r</sup> Veseys to dinner Miss H. More & M<sup>r</sup>. Cambridge din’d there [...] y<sup>e</sup> Company that came in y<sup>e</sup> Eveg were – M<sup>r</sup> Walpole D<sup>r</sup> Warton M<sup>rs</sup> Carter Lady Herries D<sup>r</sup> & Miss Burney my Uncle S<sup>r</sup> William Hamilton S<sup>r</sup> Rob<sup>t</sup> & 2 Miss Gunnings S<sup>r</sup> Joshua Reynolds & his Niece Miss Palmer – I sat next D<sup>r</sup> Warton M<sup>r</sup> Walpole my Uncle Miss More – a very pleasant Eveg” (HAM/2/7). Nevertheless, even such brief entries can be of use to understand how their friendship operated. A close examination of the diaries has revealed that during two and a half years Hamilton recorded thirty-one instances of interaction with Walpole. Their communication was much more often in public than tête-à-tête, which is explained by the social codes of the day. Sometimes the friends violated the strict rules and enjoyed each other’s company. For example, on 12 May 1785 they left Vesey’s house and walked together to Sir William Weller Pepys’s house in Wimpole Street, which was a long distance from Clarges Street. “When we arrived at Mr. P[epys]’s”, Hamilton noted, “Mr. W[alpole] with great humour presented me to y<sup>e</sup> Company as his Great Granddaughter to prevent y<sup>e</sup> scandal that our coming together might have occasioned” (HAM/2/15). Sometimes their friends sanctioned disregard of the rules, and indicative of this is the diary entry of 31 May 1784 in which Hamilton described one afternoon spent at Mary Delany’s:

The Duchess D<sup>r</sup>. of Portland Lady Bute M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole M<sup>r</sup> Frederick Montagu came in soon after me the Conversation was sensible & agreeable – they talk’d much of Lord Melcombes Diary – his Character & those of the persons *therein* mention’d, of Coxes Travels – of Mad<sup>me</sup> Sevignés letters – of the Persons mention’d in her letters &c &c. I was going away at 9 & as it was yet light intended walking home – but M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole address’d himself to the *three* Ladies & ask’d whether they would give their *sanction* to his taking me home with him in his Coach – they all agree’d that they thought there w<sup>d</sup> be no impropriety in it & I – submitted to their decisions – at ½ past 9 M<sup>r</sup>. W[alpole] & I came away – Lady Stamford & Lady H. Grey came in as we quitted y<sup>e</sup> Room. M<sup>r</sup>. W – told me when we were in y<sup>e</sup> Carriage how highly he esteem’d Lady Bute – how she had through life maintain’d an irreproachable character & w<sup>th</sup> difficulties she had gone through - M<sup>r</sup>. W. said she was one [of] those persons who proved what little consequence *education* was of – for she was brought up by a Mother of infamous *morals* (Lady M[ary] W[ortley] Montagu) & he assured me she was so totally neglected that when she was 14 & 15 Years of age he has seen her play w<sup>th</sup> all y<sup>e</sup> common Children of the Village on y<sup>e</sup> Green at Richmond (if I recollect right) that notwithstanding every possible disadvantage arising from a bad & neglected education – no Woman had conducted herself so well as Lady Bute has done, or had a more *inform’d Mind* – she has a superior understanding - &c & as a *Wife*, Mother & friend she is equall’d by few – & her manners are those of a Woman of true breeding. Now her Children who have rec<sup>d</sup> every possible advantage from education are not what their Mother is – Some of them indeed do her Credit – one, I know Lady *L. Stewart*. M<sup>r</sup>. W. said that tho’ good parents w<sup>d</sup> certainly not neglect to give their children the best education in their power, yet he was persuaded there was little dependence to hope from that, that their Children would turn out well &c &c. I who have not seen so much of the World as M<sup>r</sup>. W – have reason to agree w<sup>th</sup> him from y<sup>e</sup> observations I have made. We went together to the Veseys. (HAM/2/10)

This long passage is also illustrative of the topics discussed in the elite intellectual circle. In fact, they varied considerably, and, according to Hamilton’s diaries, covered literature, painting, history, travels, education,



politics and science. The analysis of the diary entries has shown that the main topics of conversation in which Walpole participated were literature, painting and politics. It is not surprising as these were the spheres he had deep knowledge of, and about which he could share his authoritative views and opinions with other people. In a diary entry of 24 March 1784 Hamilton wrote: “I went & din’d with our opposite Neighbours y<sup>e</sup> Veseys [...] M<sup>r</sup>. H. Walpole came at 8 & staid till 10 & no other company so we had the pleasure of his conversation uninterrupted. He talk’d of Hamiltons works, his Memoirs of Grammont, &c. M<sup>r</sup>. H. Walpole has lately published a new Edition of Grammont w<sup>th</sup> Notes. The conversation was well kept up & was very agreeable” (HAM/2/9). One month later she noted: “went to M<sup>rs</sup>. Delany to whom I was engaged met there M<sup>r</sup>. Horace Walpole y<sup>e</sup> D<sup>ss</sup>. D<sup>r</sup>. of Portland & Lady Weymouth. *Paintings – Vertú & Beauty* were the chief topics of discourse – the conversation was agreeable – informing and entertaining. M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole was in good Spirits & related some lively anecdotes” (HAM/2/9). Indeed, Horace Walpole was a recognised anecdote-teller, and some of his entertaining anecdotes found their way into Hamilton’s diaries. The following mysterious spy story was narrated by Walpole to Elizabeth Carter and Mary Hamilton, and transcribed by her later:

M<sup>r</sup>. [John] Gay y<sup>e</sup> Poet, being one Night in y<sup>e</sup> Gallery of the Play House he enter’d into a conversation with a Lady who sat next to him she was handsome & he found her conversation sensible & agreeable. He liked her so well that he told her he flatter’d himself their acquaintance w<sup>d</sup> not drop there & desired permission to attend her home – She consented provided he would make a solemn promise – never to make enquiries who she was, & never take notice of her whenever they might meet by chance he gave her a faithful promise – he attended the unknown Lady y<sup>t</sup> night to her Lodgings near Leicester fields & afterwards frequently visited her. One day as he was crossing a Street he was much struck with seeing this Lady in y<sup>e</sup> dress of a Beggar Woman asking alms of ye passengers – he was going to speak to her when by a look she gave him he recollected his *promise* & walk’d off. Another day when he went to pay a Visit to *Harley* (Lord Oxford) then L<sup>d</sup>. *High Treasury* y<sup>e</sup> Servants desired M<sup>r</sup> Gay to wait in y<sup>e</sup> Anti-Room as L<sup>d</sup> Oxford had a Lady w<sup>th</sup> him on Business – he did not wait long before y<sup>e</sup> Lady pass’d through y<sup>e</sup> Anti-Room to go away – again he was surprised – for it was his female friend who was dress’d like a Woman of fashion – she again gave him a significant look to take no notice of her & he obey’d – several times did M<sup>r</sup>. Gay meet this Mysterious Lady in different disguises – he kept up his intrigue w<sup>th</sup> her but never could penetrate into her secrets & y<sup>e</sup> solemn promise she had extorted from him prevented him making enquiries &c &c, one Night when M<sup>r</sup>. Gay was in Company at Supper – I think, at Sommerset House – A Note was deliver’d to him y<sup>e</sup> contents were to come immediately to y<sup>e</sup> unknown Lady who was dangerously ill – she conjured him to lose no time for that she had secrets of importance to communicate to him. He went immediately but to his grief & regret She was dead before he got to her Lodgings – M<sup>r</sup> Gay often told this Story & it is an undoubted fact. He made many fruitless attempts to find out after her death who she was but did not succeed – many People conjecture she was a *Spy* in y<sup>e</sup> service of the Ministers of y<sup>t</sup> time. (HAM/2/8)

The other day Hamilton wrote down the anecdote of Oliver Cromwell’s granddaughter which was also related by Walpole:

A Miss Fanny Russel who was a *Grandaughter* of Oliver Cromwell & serv’d y<sup>e</sup> Princess Emily as

Woman of y<sup>e</sup> Bedchamber being on 30<sup>th</sup> of January in waiting of y<sup>e</sup> Princess. The Late Prince of Wales came in just as she was pinning up y<sup>e</sup> train of her RH: Gown – Oh Fanny says he are You not ashamed not to be at Church to day – it is quite extraordinary that You are not mortifying fasting & Prayer for y<sup>e</sup> Sins of your Grandfather – Sir, reply'd she I think it much more extraordinary that the Grand daughter of Oliver Cromwell should be employ'd in pinning up the *tail* of Your Sisters Gown. (HAM/2/9)

In fact, it is little wonder that in Hamilton's manuscripts we find not only the stories narrated by Walpole but narrated about Walpole as well. For example, in Mary Hamilton's memorandum book there is an anecdote related to her by Lord Mansfield in October 1784:

Will Shippen having quoted some lines of Horace in one of his speeches in the House of commons when he was speaking contemptuously of Lord Falmouth, Lord Falmouth much enraged asked M<sup>r</sup>: Poultney who had made those Verses? O says Poultney I can satisfy you, it was *Horace*, was it rejoined Lord F: then I will kick the little rascal, Ill be revenged. – He supposing it to be Horace Walpole. (DDX 274/18)

It is worth noting that the pages of Hamilton's diaries are enlivened by the moments of fun and amusement the friends shared, which make visible the level of informality in their interaction. In a diary entry of 20 May 1785 the young woman confessed of a joke she and her friend Hannah More played on Walpole:

Miss H. More had contrived to give me an afternoon *tête-à-tête*[...] Sitting near y<sup>e</sup> Window ab<sup>t</sup> 9 o'Clock in y<sup>e</sup> Dr.[awing] Room we saw M<sup>r</sup>. Walpoles Coach waiting for him at y<sup>e</sup> Veseys – a prank came into my head to send an anonymous Note to him to challenge him to enter into an adventure *tête baissée*<sup>10</sup> – viz of coming to visit two Ladies – we each wrote a part of the Note & a curious composition it was – can you doubt it being y<sup>e</sup> production of *two* such *Wits* – for in this instance I will not allow that Miss Mores part was cleverer than mine – not long had we to wait in suspense [sic] for Our *Knight* was too gallant to hesitate a moment – he came & gave us *half* an hour of his *elegant & polished* conversation – he was then obliged *to tear* himself away being engaged elsewhere, but made us promise to meet him *at the same place* next Wed.[esday] Afternoon – & by way of *bribe* he said he w<sup>d</sup> bring some thing to entertain us – *A Manuscript* – something of his *own* w<sup>ch</sup> had not yet been communicated to *any one* – this was irresistible – we promised. (HAM/2/15)

Five days later Horace Walpole read out “the promised Manuscript the title of w<sup>ch</sup> was – a *real love Story*” (HAM/2/15) to the company of young women who gathered at Mary Hamilton's.

Notably, two Walpole's friends – Hamilton and More – admitted they had a kind of mock competition for capturing Walpole's attention, which both of them mentioned playfully at different periods. Mary recorded one of her “small victories” on 12 May 1785: “At ½ past 10 M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole brought me home – Poor Miss More she certainly will not sleep to night – before we parted she look'd as yellow as saffron – whilst I w<sup>th</sup> an air of triumph treated her w<sup>th</sup> y<sup>e</sup> disdain of a favor'd Rival [...] M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole is a happy Man to have *two* such

<sup>10</sup> Fr. *entrer tête baissée* – Eng. *to dive in*.

*paragons of perfection* in love w<sup>th</sup> him” (HAM/2/15). Five days later she wrote again : “I went to Lady Herries there we met all those *I had* invited – M<sup>rs</sup> Garrick Miss More – M<sup>r</sup>. *Walpole* who never *left my* side, Miss More look’d fiercely – but I *triumph’d*” (HAM/2/15). In her turn, when Hamilton got married and left London for Derbyshire, Hannah More recaptured the initiative and wrote to her in a “victorious” tone: “I have taken the advantage of Your Absence, like a truly perfidious rival, and am endeavouring to supplant You in the heart of Mr. Walpole as fast as possible” (HAM/1/2/8). Hamilton’s friend Catherine Herries, who also communicated with Walpole in London at that period, often mentioned him in her letters addressed to Mary. She wrote: “M<sup>r</sup> Walpole spoke of you y<sup>e</sup> other night with y<sup>e</sup> greatest love & regard” (HAM/1/17/56); or “I saw our dear friends in Clarges Street [...] M<sup>r</sup> Walpole & M<sup>rs</sup> Carter too – the latter’s head has been bad but is now much better – I shall never rival you with *Horace*; but am a little favourite – I think. He has asked me to see Strawberry Hill” (HAM/1/17/93).

Indeed, Walpole’s friendship was of high value to Mary Hamilton, and the diaries give an impression of its openness and impartiality. In them, no entry is found similar to somewhat sarcastic comment given by Frances Burney in *Diary and Letters*: “In the evening, indeed, came in Mr. Walpole, gay, though caustic; polite, though sneering; and entertainingly epigrammatical. I like and admire, but I could not love, nor trust him” (D’Arbay 272).

Hamilton and Walpole’s friendship might be explained by their common personality traits, values and interests. It is significant that both of them were extroverts with personal charisma that attracted many people. Despite the difference in wealth, the friends were well-connected people with strong communication skills. Hamilton and Walpole found intellectual pleasure in conversations with their numerous acquaintances of both sexes – whether face-to-face or via letters. At the same time, they both had love for fun and a sense of humour. The grief of losing their parents at a young age was known to them, and in their early years Walpole and Hamilton treasured the friendships of the people who were much older. They also valued freedom, and at a certain point in life after having achieved the status – in parliament and at court respectively – were independent in their decision to resign from the posts and start a new chapter in life. Besides, both of them belonged to the group of people for whom the words “philanthropy” and “charity” were meaningful.

Mary Hamilton – like Horace Walpole – was never short of friends and carefully maintained the wide network of her correspondents; it is quite predictable that the networks of Hamilton and Walpole’s epistolary friends overlapped. For example, the shared group of their female correspondents comprised Hannah More, Mary Delany, Elizabeth Vesey, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, Frances Burney, Eva Maria Garrick, Anna Maria Clarke. Notably, all the women were the members of the Bluestocking community.

Hamilton’s diaries of the “Clarges Street” period suggest that she and Walpole communicated with one another in a variety of venues. Out of thirty-one recorded encounters, twenty-five took place in the metropolitan houses, and the rest occurred outside London at Strawberry Hill and Garrick’s villa in Hampton. In London, the friends interacted more often at Elizabeth Vesey’s house – fifteen times. Hamilton – as the Vesey’s neighbour – visited the couple on a daily basis, and her diaries suggest that Walpole attended Vesey’s assemblies more often than those organised by Elizabeth Montagu (one encounter recorded), or Anna Ord (one encounter recorded). Hamilton also documented that she and Walpole stayed for supper at Vesey’s house when other guests left it and continued conversing in a more relaxed atmosphere. The moral support that the friends provided Elizabeth



Vesey with in spring-summer 1785 serves as another proof of Walpole's warm attention for the hostess and preference given to her salon (this preliminary assumption is based on evidence from Hamilton's diaries and correspondence, and further studies are needed to confirm it). It was a period when Vesey's husband fell seriously ill, and the hostess was in such despair that her friends worried much about her nervous state. In an entry of 9 May Hamilton noted:

At 8 oClock I walk'd to y<sup>e</sup> Veseys – I went to meet Mr Walpole to whom I had written in the Morn'g to beg that he w<sup>d</sup> go to M<sup>rs</sup>. Vesey as I knew that he was a *proper person* to be w<sup>th</sup> her at this Melancholy season, I had given private directions to y<sup>e</sup> Serv<sup>ts</sup> to admit him as She had given orders that only – y<sup>e</sup> Dartrey's M<sup>rs</sup> Carter M<sup>rs</sup> Montagu AM [Anna Maria Clarke] & myself were to be let in – he was there. (HAM/2/15)

Later, in her letter to Hamilton dated 4 February 1788 Catherine Herries praised Walpole for his attention to Elizabeth Vesey:

Our poor friend M<sup>rs</sup> Vesey is indeed an object of y<sup>e</sup> truest & kinderest Compassion & so is y<sup>e</sup> good M<sup>rs</sup> Handcock too. I know not whether her suffering is not bitterer than that of y<sup>e</sup> dear failing object of her long & faithful friendship. – M<sup>r</sup> Walpole shows himself in a light so amiable on this subject that it is above all praise: giving so much of that time which all who know him are coveting, to this sad tender office of friendship – I throw in my Mite too: - but it is not as large as I could wish it in any light. (HAM/1/17/101)

It is clear from the diaries that Hamilton and Walpole's friendship was grounded on their mutual intellectual affinity. In addition to a strong interest in literature, which distinguished all members of the Bluestocking community, the young woman shared with the author of *Some Anecdotes of Painting in England* a life-long love of painting (see Voloshkova, 97–98). Describing one of the dinner parties at Garrick's villa in Hampton, she recorded: "M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole sat next to me, we had much conversation relative to Pictures" (HAM/2/14). Hamilton's account of her first visit to Strawberry Hill on 5 July 1783 serves to illustrate the young woman's intellectual curiosity, and registers her approbation of Walpole's collection. Mary Hamilton – in the company of her friend Charlotte Walsingham and her daughter Charlotte Boyle – went to Strawberry Hill on Walpole's invitation:

After I was dress'd I sat down quietly to write till I was summoned to accompany M<sup>rs</sup>. W[alsingham] & Miss B[oyle] to Twickenham w<sup>ch</sup> was at ½ past 1 oClock – we got there in ab<sup>t</sup> an hour – it is 5 miles from Thames Ditton – Mr. Walpole came down to receive us – reproach'd us for being ½ an hour beyond our time. M<sup>r</sup>. Burke Son to the famous Burke was there. M<sup>r</sup>. W. was so obliging as to show us – Pictures – Busts – Drawings of Lady D. Beauclerc not to forget y<sup>e</sup> House w<sup>ch</sup> is all Gothic – every Window decorated with painted Glass – the little Room built on purpose for Drawing by Lady D: Beauclerc for his Play of the *Mysterious Mother* – it is impossible to make memorandums of the things I saw from y<sup>e</sup> great Variety [...] we could only take a transient View – There were also many

Cabinets fill'd with rare & curious things – some w<sup>ch</sup> had belong'd to famous People others executed by y<sup>e</sup> first artists – M<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Vesey M<sup>r</sup>. Pepys M<sup>rs</sup>. Handcock came to dinner – we din'd at 4 – y<sup>e</sup> table extremely well serv'd. y<sup>e</sup> Conversation perfectly pleasant numbers of entertaining anecdotes. After dinner M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole shew'd us a fine China Closet on y<sup>e</sup> *Ground floor* – y<sup>e</sup> Library – other Rooms &c &c. After tea Miss Boyle & myself went to look at y<sup>e</sup> Pictures in y<sup>e</sup> Gal[*l*]ery & Drawing Room adjoining – made mem[*orandum*]: of some at ½ past 7 we were call'd by M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole who told us M<sup>rs</sup>. W[*alsingham*] was waiting for us – I left Strawberry Hill with regret as my curiosity was not half satisfied – but as M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole told me at parting he hoped I should frequently visit his Villa I do not regret so much that I did not recollect all y<sup>t</sup> *pleased me*. (HAM/2/3)

Later Hamilton also expressed her admiration for the famous villa in a letter to her friend Charlotte Gunning:

At ½ past 1 o'Clock we set out for M<sup>r</sup>. Walpoles and got Twickenham at ½ past 2. we had lost half an hour of the *two* we were to spend in looking over the Pictures. I shall not pretend to tell You all I saw – for that is impossibly have you ever been at this Villa? What a Collection! Such Pictures – Miniatures – Antiques – Relicks – China &c &c what w<sup>d</sup> I not give to spend a Month in this Gothic House to examine the various & valuable curiosities it contains. (HAM/1/15/2/26)

While reading the two passages we can imagine the host proudly showing to his guests the house and its treasures, Mary Hamilton's eyes gleaming with excitement. It is not difficult to picture her admiring Lady Diana Beauclerk's drawings or some old manuscripts. We can feel the young woman's impatience in seeing the "Gothic" house and her reluctance to leave it. Even still, not all Walpole's Bluestocking friends who visited Strawberry Hill were as enthusiastic as Mary. For example, in her letter of 1 September 1783 addressed to Hamilton, Hannah More confessed: "I have so little of virtú [*sic*] and antiquarianism about me that I really felt myself quite unworthy of all the trouble he took for me" (qtd. in Stott 62). Notably, after the second and third visits to Walpole's villa in June and September 1785 the young woman expressed her admiration for it with the same intensity of feeling.

It is worth noting that Hamilton mentioned reading *Anecdotes of Painting* long before and after her first visit to Strawberry Hill. She also recorded the receipt of the edition as a present on 18 May 1784: "M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole sent me his 5 Oct: Vols: of Anecdotes of Painters in England in a present this Afternoon very elegantly bound I took y<sup>e</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> opportunity of telling him how much I thought myself obliged" (HAM/2/10).

Moreover, the Hamilton papers reveal her antiquarian pursuits. The young woman read books on history and transcribed various original documents her friends possessed. "I like to collect Manuscripts" (HAM/2/10), she confessed in one of her diaries. For example, during two long visits to the Duchess of Portland at Bulstrode in 1783 and 1784 Hamilton spent much of her time reading and transcribing various manuscript documents the Duchess lent her. She noted, "The D<sup>ss</sup> has many valuable Manuscripts in her possession – w<sup>ch</sup> she inherited from her father Lord Oxford", or "the D<sup>ss</sup> gave me the Catalogue of her Pictures" (HAM/2/3).

Indeed, the young woman not only looked through the catalogues but practised catalogue-making herself. The Mary Hamilton Papers contain a manuscript volume of a "Catalogue of curiosities at Bullstrode". On

its inside sheet, Hamilton inscribed: “An Humble attempt to give a description of *some* of y<sup>e</sup> things in y<sup>e</sup> possession of her Grace the Duchess Dow.[ager] of Portland. Bullstrode Nov<sup>br</sup>. 1784” (HAM/3/4). The catalogue is written both by Hamilton and other hands. One of the loose sheets within the volume contains information about a prayer book by Dominico Clovio in Walpole’s collection. Another manuscript volume in Mary Hamilton Papers is of particular interest. It is a catalogue inscribed “Notes by Hon<sup>ble</sup> Horace Walpole Pictures Woburn Abbey” (HAM/3/5).<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to trace when and how Hamilton got this catalogue written by an unidentified hand. Was it Walpole himself who presented his friend with the catalogue, or did Hamilton inherit it to add to her collection of manuscripts after his death in 1797? These are the questions which do not have answers at the moment, but one interesting detail should be taken into consideration in further studies. In 1797 the Dickenson family bought a house in Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, and lived there for the next fourteen years. Notably, Dickenson’s Leighton House was only eight miles from Woburn Abbey, and John Dickenson recorded many encounters with the owners of Woburn Abbey during that period.

Undoubtedly, distance and time are testing for any friendship. In June 1785, the “Clarges Street” period in Hamilton’s friendship with Walpole ended with her marriage to John Dickenson. The couple went to live in Derbyshire, visiting London occasionally. Nevertheless, Hamilton’s communication with Walpole continued via letters, some of which survive. Sometimes, the couple sent gifts of game hunted by John Dickenson to him, for which Walpole was grateful in his letters dated 22 December 1789 and 25 August 1790. Every time the Dickenson family came to London they immersed themselves into the whirlwind of the metropolitan life and found delight in visiting their numerous friends. For example, Walpole’s notes written to Hamilton during her stay in London in 1792 shed light on his warm attitude to his friend Mary Hamilton. In them, he wrote: “I am as overjoyed as I can be, in my present low state, at the chance of seeing you again”, or “True friends are the best restoratives to a convalescent, & therefore I shall always be glad to enjoy any moments you can spare” (qtd. in Anson 321–322).

Moreover, one of John Dickenson’s diaries written in the form of brief entries provides a glimpse of the couple’s frequent encounters with Horace Walpole in 1788 (see DDX 274/19). From April to June the Dickensons were in London and communicated with Walpole six times (mainly at Elizabeth Vesey’s house). At the end of June, they went to Richmond and stayed at their friend Mr Jackson’s house for the following three months. John Dickenson documented twenty-seven encounters with Walpole during that period. In most cases, Walpole paid them a visit in the evening. On several occasions Walpole and the Dickensons went to see their mutual friends Charlotte Walsingham and Frances Boscawen.

In a diary entry of 27 July 1788 Dickenson noted: “At 7 M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole came & AM [Anna Maria Clarke] M<sup>rs</sup>. Dickenson & I went with him to y<sup>e</sup> play at Richmond – it was Venice Preserved – y<sup>e</sup> part of Belvidera wonderfully well perform’d by a Miss Eddmeads – a Bricklayer’s daughter of Richmond” (DDX 274/19). In her memorandum book Mary also recorded their joint excursion to Oatlands on 10 July 1788:

M<sup>r</sup>. Walpole came to us from Strawberry Hill, & we accompanied him to Oat-lands – in a few days the Duke of York is to take possession of it, he has given the Duke of Newcastle forty three thousand pounds for it [...] The Grotto at Oatlands cost 50,000£ at least so it is reported, I could not but regret

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the catalogue see Walpole’s letter to the Duke of Bedford of 8 December 1791 and commentary to it in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence* (Correspondence, vol. 42, 340).

to see stuck in Mortar Shells & Fossils worthy of the Cabinets of lovers of natural History; after examining the Grotto on the Ground floor we were desired to walk upstairs – where there is a room also – adorn'd with Shells &c – Mr. Walpole seated himself on a Chair & said – Well, this is the first Grotto up one pair of stairs I ever was in! (DDX 274/18)

From that time on there were more encounters with Walpole until Mary Hamilton reported the last visits to her friend and his death by writing laconically:

[23 February 1797] call'd at Lord Orfords he is still confined to his bed & declining very fast...

[27 February 1797] call'd L<sup>d</sup> Orford's – still very ill...

[1 March 1797] call'd L<sup>d</sup> Orford...

[2 March 1797] Lord Orford died this afternoon at 5 oClock - turned 80. (HAM/2/16)

Thus, Mary Hamilton's personal diaries and correspondence provide a fascinating insight into the friendship between Horace Walpole and Mary Hamilton. The diaries are revealing of Walpole's strong connection with the Bluestocking community in the 1780s, and his warm relationship with Elizabeth Vesey, Hannah More, Eva Maria Garrick, and Charlotte Walsingham in particular. A careful analysis of the manuscript material has shown that during a period of fourteen years Hamilton's interactions with Walpole spanned a wide range of activities: attending the Bluestocking gatherings, conversing, visiting their mutual friends, exchanging letters and notes, reading aloud, viewing pictures, and going to the theatre and on excursions. Their friendship was informal and grounded on personal and intellectual affinity. Hamilton's friendly relationship with Walpole formed within the metropolitan Bluestocking salons, and Elizabeth Vesey's house was the place where they most often communicated in the 1780s. Conversation was the driving force of their friendship, and Hamilton, sharing Walpole's love for literature and painting as well as his antiquarianism, was his attentive listener and knowledgeable conversation partner. Hamilton's diaries demonstrate that Horace Walpole was a person for whom the young woman intellectual felt special regard, and whose friendship she particularly valued.

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