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## A Woman of Irish Ancestry in the Cultural History of Italian Diplomacy

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### *Abstract:*

Starting from the Irish Manor and the Italian Villa a fil rouge connects Italian and Irish political situation in the eighteenth-century with the fragmentation of the Italic peninsula and its economic decline, and the fact of the post-British plantation system in Ireland with its own monarch and a Parliament controlled by Westminster. A historical account of the life of Mr. and Mrs. Vesey follows that creates a strong cultural link between the two nations. Next steps are Elizabeth Vesey's interest in Lucan House, her role in the creation of literary Salons, and her lifespan in the House. A true Italophile, she had the privilege as the first resident of Lucan House and her ability to create relationships between politicians and literati, of playing a role in the history of Italian diplomacy when the word had not yet appeared in Johnson's *Dictionary*.

*Keywords:* Bluestocking, Cultural Diplomacy, Gothic, Lucan House, Palladian Architecture

### *1. The Gothic Manor and The Italian Villa*

In 1746 The Right Honorable Agmondisham Vesey got married and lived in the Lucan Manor (10 miles from Dublin) with his wife and cousin Elizabeth Vesey, nicknamed Sylph. In 1776 Elizabeth Carter, the wife's close friend, wrote to their correspondent, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu:

Mr. Vesey is made a Privy Counsellor in Ireland, which I believe is very satisfactory to him; but probably our poor dear Sylph would have preferred his being made a constable or churchwarden in England. She has this afternoon been looking over the plan of the new house at Lucan, and seems greatly disturbed to find she is to inhabit a round room, where she conceives she shall be like an old parrot in a cage; upon which Mrs. Handcock and I have promised to add scarlet trimmings to her green gown. (Carter to Montague, Letter, London, May 15, 1776, in Pennington 1817, vol. 2, 357).

The next year, Mrs. Carter addresses the same issue:

I have heard from our dear Sylph [...] As to the house, it seems very little adapted to her genius. It is, I believe, a mere prosaic house, full of mortal comforts and conveniences, without the least particle of romance or sylphery in its whole composition. In short, a house much better adapted to the ordinary wants and purposes of the Right Honorable Agmondisham Vesey, Esq. and privy counsellor, than to those of his aethereal partner. Indeed by every description I have heard or saw of the old castle, the exchange of its irregular and solemn gothic form, for the present display of Mr. Vesey's correct Grecian taste, must be very grievous to her poetical imagination, which at all times was sufficient to prevent any languor from the want of rational conversation; but mere rational conversation is not all she wants; and unfortunately for her, a fine imagination in all its exercises, has a perpetual reference to the affections of the heart, and they reciprocally strengthen each other. With all these feelings, the dear old castle, with the niches in its walls, and a thousand other gothic beauties was to her inestimable; but alas! Mr. Vesey understands not. God mend her health, and give her better spirits, and return her to us next winter, not the worse for all her vexations, imaginary and real. (Carter to Montague, Letter, Deal, September 20, 1777, in Pennington 1817, vol. 3, 39)

The long quotes from Carter's letters say – jokingly – a lot about the old house and the new one, the Vesey couple, and Elizabeth's feelings, imagination, and yearning<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, what Carter conceived, thought or anticipated, is not always a genuine account of the situation (but of this anon).

It is only within the last few years that English and American critics have deigned to recognize any architectural school in Italy later than that of Vignola and Palladio, and even these two great masters of the sixteenth century have been held up as examples of degeneracy to a generation bred in the Ruskean code of art ethics [...] It is only in Germany that Italian architecture from Palladio to Juvara [*sic*] has received careful and sympathetic study. (Wharton 1904, 231)<sup>2</sup>

That is how, in “Villas of Venetia”, Edith Wharton (1862-1937), a scholarly advocate of the “vital moments” of the villa, is censuring the bulk of critics who would bow to John Ruskin's auspicated return from Neoclassicism to the earlier Gothic style, a verdict that springs from his belief that nature and beauty are bound up with concepts of the divine. It is not easy to deduce the different meanings attributed to “English” and “British” (that would include “Scottish” and “Welsh”); as to “Irishness”, the time referred to being before the 1916 proclamation of Irish independence from Britain with the Easter Rising, its Celtic history would often be overlooked. Scottish and Irish critics, independently minded as they were, would entertain, in many cases, different opinions from the English; the former, sometimes, as a matter of principle, the latter, assuredly, because of the links strengthened in the previous centuries, between Italy and Ireland since the welcome in Rome and the Italic territory of Irish political and religious refugees, of the Earls flown from Ulster, and later, of Daniel O'Connell, whose dying wish after his lifelong campaign against British absolutism was traditionally: “My body to Ireland, my heart to Rome, my soul to God” (Reiley 2014). In the next paragraph, Wharton argues that Italian architecture from Palladio to Juvarra has received “careful and sympathetic study” (231) only in Germany, through Swiss born historian Jacob Burckhardt, Gustav Ebe's book on the late Renaissance throughout Europe, and Cornelius Gurlitt who identified in Palladio and Sansovino the sources of the Venetian “villa-architecture” (*ibidem*).

<sup>1</sup> For Carter's relations with Elizabeth Vesey and Ireland see Haslett 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Wharton's work is significantly quoted in Ackerman 1990, 12.

The argument over the *villa* will direct this discussion towards the purport of the Palladian Irish country house, its historiographical origin, its socio-cultural value, and its significance, across the centuries, for the Irish-Italian diplomatic relations.

## 2. *Italy and Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*

After the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Renaissance, Italy experienced an economic and cultural development. The seventeenth century, instead, gradually saw a decline of the industrial structure and the standard of living. By the second decade of the eighteenth century, because of wars and political fractionalization, the peninsula was divided into different powerful dynasties: the Medici in Tuscany, the Farnese in Parma, the Este in Modena, and the Savoy in Piedmont; a Duke with hereditary title ruled the Duchy of Milan; the Spanish Empire ruled the kingdoms of Naples, Sicily, Sardinia; the Papal State ruled the remaining central part of the peninsula. Given the political situation, then, the economy had become exclusively agricultural and resources insufficient for the population.

In the sixteenth century Ireland had been colonized by the English. After the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 which saw the deposition of the catholic King James II of England, Mary II became Queen, then Joint Sovereign with William of Orange III. The heirs of the Protestant Ascendancy who had conquered Ireland in the Elizabethan age, the Anglo-Irish landed gentry, had control over the island. Ireland was nominally an autonomous kingdom with George I and its own Parliament; in fact, it was a state dominated by the King of Great Britain and supervised by his government in London. As of 1714, the island was ruled by the Hanoverian Kings until the 1798 Rebellion that was followed, in 1800, by the Acts of Union with which Ireland was formally annexed to the United Kingdom and its Parliament abolished (1 January 1800).

Eighteenth-century Ireland, a self-ruled region with its own King and Parliament, was a *de facto* state. In its autonomy, then, it should have been able to adopt its own laws and foreign policy; on the contrary, it was, to some *great* extent, dependent on Britain and on laws that could bind her own politics. “Italy”, instead, was not united but subject to the different Signori, the Pope, or the foreign Powers. Both nations were submitted to a coercive authority exerting power and were prevented from becoming unified. They were also both prevented from earning their independence until 1861, Italy, and 1922, Ireland as Irish Free State.

On the cultural-artistic level, Italy and Ireland were linked through the aftermath of the Grand Tour, the journey of formation of the European ruling class and their descendants (Italians as hosts, Irish as guests). The experience aimed at reforming the arts in Ireland. Such was the call of the ancient roots that a grant was proposed in Ireland, by Reverend Thomas Campbell, for native artists to study abroad so that, “England, nay Ireland, might yet vie with Italy” and would “bring Rome home to us” (Campbell 1767, in Stefanelli 2023, cxxv). Although the recommendation was not approved, the habit became established of buying works by art excellencies like Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Pompeo Batoni, Canaletto, or copies of Salvator Rosa’s masterpieces to bring back to Ireland and exhibit in galleries and public establishments. Acquiring pieces from Italy to put on show or sell was a way of popularizing the culture sprung from the Mediterranean.

Both nations shared a condition of hegemonic power exercised, for Italy, by noble families, the Papal authority, or a foreign invader, for Ireland, by the Protestant Ascendancy and foreign authorities on the island. The elite of both would connect with upper class members at home and broaden transnational contacts with members of other nations’ elitarian dignitaries via diplomatic channels or by crossing international borders. In the period under scrutiny the

Grand Tour was considered an initiation rite that became, as has been suggested, *un'istituzione* (De Seta 2014). The “Dream of Italy”, as a recent exhibition recites, was the dream of many Europeans, and of course the dream of the Irish, too<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. *Lucan House*

After several difficulties that included legal proceedings, the great demesne with the white house, in 1560, came into possession of Sir William Sarsfield, who became Lord Mayor of Dublin and sheriff of County Dublin (where the demesne belonged). When he died in 1616, his body buried in Lucan, the property went to his namesake, who died in 1642. His heir was his cousin Patrick, the father of General Patrick Sarsfield, first Earl of Lucan, considered by many a national hero for his role in the siege of Ballyneety (county Limerick) during the Williamite war of 1689-1691.

A neoclassical Monument (designed by James Wyatt) in the demesne is a memento of that Irish leading figure (1660-1693). With the death of Patrick Sarsfield's son in 1719 the male line of the family became extinct. William Sarsfield's daughter Charlotte, who had married Agmondisham Vesey senior, retrieved the property in the course of 1696 upon her husband's claim that, on the death of William Sarsfield in 1675, the Sarsfield estates had passed to his brother Patrick Sarsfield (created Earl of Lucan by King James in 1691) and, on the latter's attainder, were forfeited to the crown. Charlotte was allowed to purchase the estates at a low valuation. At her death in 1699, Agmondisham Sr. continued to live in Lucan, first as one resident, then with his second wife, Jane Butler, and their son, Agmondisham Jr. At Vesey Sr.'s death in 1738, Mrs. Vesey-Butler erected a shrine for him in the cemetery of the Lucan demesne. She lived there with her son, the Anglo-Irish descendant from the Sarsfield-Vesey family who would become the husband of the salonière Elizabeth Vesey<sup>4</sup>.

A quarter century after his marriage, Mr. Vesey, an amateur architect, started thinking seriously on the new Italian inspired mansion that was completed around 1777-1778. It was thanks to the new Lucan House and Mrs. Vesey's role in the intellectual society on both sides of the kingdom (London and Dublin) – referred to in what follows – that a first germ was planted of a cultural bridge between the Irish and the Italian culture to inform and perpetuate the diplomatic links between the two nations. In the mid-nineteen-fifties the Italian government acquired the demesne with the Lucan House as residence of the Ambassador of Italy in Ireland (Laffan, Rooney 2009, 180-181)<sup>5</sup>.

A short detour will draw attention to the fact that, during the long eighteenth-century, diplomacy in the modern sense was non-existent. Since the compilation of the six books' in-

<sup>3</sup> An exhibition, *Grand Tour. Dream of Italy from Venice to Pompeii*, took place in Milan, Gallerie d'Italia, Piazza Scala, from Nov. 19 to March 27, 2022. Curators of the exhibition were Fernando Mazzocca with Stefano Grandesso and Francesco Leone, coordinated by Gianfranco Brunelli.

<sup>4</sup> The Sarsfield-Vesey family, as can be gathered from above, started with the marriage of Charlotte Sarsfield and Agmondisham Vesey Sr., the second son of the Reverend John Vesey, Archbishop of Tuam (County Galway). Agmondisham Vesey Jr. kept the property until his death (1727-1785), when it passed to Agmondisham's nephew, Colonel George Vesey, who married Emily La Touche. Their daughter, Elizabeth Vesey (the namesake of our Elizabeth Vesey), kept the demesne until her death in 1840. Overall, the Lucan demesne belonged to the Sarsfield from 1560 to 1699; by way of marriage, it passed to the Vesey from 1699 to 1840. After that date it came into the ownership of Elizabeth's husband, Nicholas Colthurst. The Sarsfield-Vesey family kept the Lucan House demesne for just below 300 years (Bergin 2018; Irwin 1964). For a complete history of Lucan House, see Stefanelli 2023, clvii-clxix.

<sup>5</sup> The style of the Lucan House is often defined pseudo-Palladian or Neo-Palladian; Palladian, however, is what the owner and the architects who contributed to its building had in mind.

vestigation and criticism of archival and medieval documents and manuscripts by the Christian monk Jean Mabillon in his *De re diplomatica* (1681), more than a century would pass for the meaning of the French word *négociation* to be replaced, in the foreign affairs jargon, by an act of diplomacy, i.e. the art and science of maintaining peaceful relationships between nations, groups, or individuals. The word appeared in *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) in 1791, when both spouses who had lived in Lucan House had died. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of the Pentarchy (France, Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia) that dominated Europe and the great power rivalry between them, with diplomacy to confront the “culture of power” (Scott, Simms 2009); the subsequent century would gather from the previous one and develop the new idea of culture sprung from the Industrial Revolution: ordinary rather than elitarian, inclusive rather than exclusive, with growing social awareness and the knocking down of barriers.

In between the death of the two Veseys (1791) and the beginning of the diplomatic relationship between Italy and Ireland (Irish Free State 1922-1925), doctor Lorenzo Salazar Sarsfield (1857-1924) – with a special emphasis on his second surname<sup>6</sup> – the son of Italian Demetrio Salazar (1822-1888) and his wife, Anglo-Irish Dora MacNamara Sarsfield, was posted to Dublin as a Consul General of Italy to serve in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. During his mission as a diplomat, he founded The Dante Alighieri Society, the most prestigious member of which was Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of radio-wave based wireless telegraphy. He also obtained from the University of Dublin, Trinity College, a chair of Italian Language and Literature.

Today Lorenzo’s great great grandson, Vincenzo Ercole Salazar Sarsfield, an Italian Senior diplomat, serves at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rome. The bond grown between Italians and Irish in the past, enshrined in his surname, carries a four-century old history of “quite simply the most compatible people on the planet”, as former President of Ireland Mary McAleese has pronounced the Irish and the Italians (Savoia in Cortese 2023, ci).

#### 4 *The Vesey Couple*

Turning towards what has been called the infringement into people’s lives, it is imperative to recognize that taking into consideration people’s private lives is, by definition, impossible. It is plausible, however, to touch on events or occurrences stemming from endorsement from reliable sources, records from a subject’s private correspondence or a two-way interaction, on the study of the social and cultural contexts of the specific timeframe, and the conveyance, by word of mouth, of news, events, facts, comments, and even trivia to propagate.

The married life of Agmondisham Vesey Jr. with his cousin Elizabeth Vesey started in 1746, when the couple took their residence in the Lucan castle or, as was called in the county, Lucan Manor, a two-storey over basement a fortress like building with a five-bay extension accessed from a flight of stairs that went back to the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1159. A well-preserved tower belonging to the ancient dwelling rises north of the ruined church in the demesne.

Not long after their marriage, the couple befriended the Rev. Patrick Delany and Mary Granville Delany (1700-1788), who loved to be entertained at Lucan. The four of them had a liking for the minor art craft consisting of a collection of prints to exhibit on walls, a style that came from Italy, where it originated, and became fashionable in Ireland around 1750. Here is the description of Lady Louisa Connolly’s print room at Castletown: “The print room was assembled by pasting prints on to cream painted wallpaper surrounding them with elaborate

<sup>6</sup> See “The Sarsfields” in MacMahon 1995, 3-4

frames with bows and swags cut from printed sheets and then hanging whole sections on to the walls” (Tillyard 1995, 202 and 204). The Lady of the house thus satisfied her “pleasure in planning, ordering and balancing” (*ibidem*). It is the same appreciative manner that Mrs. Vesey would learn to relish at the sight of the Italian classical ideal beauty. Subsequently, as Lady Llanover reports, “Mary Delany visited her friends the Veseys, who lived at Lucan Castle, outside Dublin (replaced, sadly, in 1772 – print room and all – by a Palladian-style mansion)” (Letter no. 563, Mrs. Delany to Mrs. Dews, June 30, 1750, in Llanover 1862, vol. 1), a visit that Mrs. Delany described in a letter to her sister, Mrs. Dewes:

On Monday, Mrs. F. Hamilton, Bushe, D.D. and I went to breakfast at Lucan, left this at half an hour after 7 [...] breakfast prepared for us in Mrs. Vesey’s dairy, and the table strewn with roses; just as we were in the midst of our repast came in Lady Caroline Fox, Mr. Fox, Mrs. Sandford, and Master Fox [...] Mr. Fox is a sensible, agreeable man. Lady C. F. humdrum. It rained furiously; so we fell to work making frames for print. (Mrs. Delany to Mrs. Dewes, Letter, Delville, 30 June, 1750, in Llanover 1861, vol. 2, 202-204)

On 11 April 1751, Mrs. Delany finally received the frames for the prints from her brother, Bernard Granville, to whom she explains the way of going ahead with the work:

I have received the six dozen frames all safely, and return to you, my dear brother, many thanks for them. They are four framing prints [...] The manner of doing them is to have straining frames made as much larger than your print as will allow of the border; the straining frame covered with coarse cloth, the print pasted on it, and then the borders, leaving half an inch or rather less of margin round the print. Mr. Vesey has a room filled with prints made up in that way, and they look very well. (34-35)

As the letter goes, it was Mr Vesey who played the role of print craftsman, and who revealed a sensibility at work described as masculine, classical works with no festoons.

In London Mr. Vesey, thanks also to Joshua Reynolds and his wife’s close friend Edmund Burke’s support, became a member of Dr. Johnson’s “Literary Club” in 1773. In his role as Professor of Architecture in Johnson’s utopian university, he could consult efficiently with the Scottish architect William Chambers about his plans for the new house.

London was the place where a community of learned ladies – the famous Bluestocking coterie – would begin to assemble, as it was happening in France, in the stately premises of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu (to be referred to, later, as “Queen of the Blues”) or at Mrs. Vesey’s lodging, to converse with literati and scholars like, among several others, Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, Adam Smith, Elizabeth Carter, Frances Burney, and personalities of different nationalities.

The following years saw the progress of the couple in the respective areas of activities with the wife providing increasing support to the husband’s enthusiasm and devotion to classical architecture.

The escalation of the Veseys took place with the intervention of painter Thomas Roberts (1748-1777), the young landscapist that the Irish aristocrats and politicians with an interest in neoclassic architecture who lived in Dublin – Lord Charlemont, Thomas Dawson, and Agmondisham Vesey – patronized. His father, “Honest” John, described by Maurice Craig, an “unreconstructed Palladian” (1982, 209), designed the Catholic cathedral of Waterford with Corinthian columns (Laffan, Rooney 2009, 18-19). Before the demolition of the castle and the realization of the Palladian replacement, Thomas was appointed by the Veseys to produce a quartet of four paintings attuned with one another, one of which flaunting the mansion to be destroyed. Two compositions of the “Lucan series”, *Lucan House and Demesne with Figures Quarrying Stone* (n.1) and *The River Liffey in Lucan House Demesne* (n.2), doubtlessly needed a special negotiation with Roberts’ patrons, and more particularly with Mrs. Vesey, about *her* presence (n.1) in the demesne as a figure at the front door in the act of leaving the iconic house in

the wake of her acquiescence of the new abode in the classical style. As for the couple walking in the park (n.2), though not irrefutably the figures of Agmondisham and Elizabeth – as Laffan and Rooney admit (2009, 173) – they gracefully announce the theme of classicism. The gentleman's position recalls the post-Hellenistic Roman marble statue of Apollo del Belvedere that Johann Joachim Winkelmann considered “the highest ideal of art among the ancient works that have survived to this day”<sup>7</sup>. The lady beside him, wearing an elegant attire in expensive purple colour traditionally associated with Royals and accessorized with a stately hat, was an adequate appearance beside her companion. For both, the suggestion came, unquestionably, from the painter.

As a sign of distinctiveness, in a painting intended to preserve the past when the present is *re-presented* in the plans for the new house, the Vesey couple are enjoying, as Arthur Young who visited the Lucan demesne refers in his report, “a walk on the banks of the river, chiefly under a variety of fine wood, which rises on varied slopes, in some parts gentle, in other steep; spreading here and there into cool meadows, on the opposite shore, rich banks of wood and scrubby ground” (1780, 20). As Mrs. Montagu writes in a letter to Mrs. Vesey, “the Gothick days of hospitality” are replaced, at the present time, with refinement and “finer virtues of politeness and delicacy” (Montagu to Vesey, Letter, September 2, 1777, Huntington, mssMO 6507), qualities associated, in Adam Smith's perspective, with “civilization” and “humanity” (1976, 190). In other words, the Lady's apparel, better suited to a social city gathering with the nobility than a stroll in search of fresh air between the verdure of plants and the water flowing towards the “salmon leap” (after “Leixlip”, a town near Lucan on the Liffey), represents the fusion of town and country, savagery and civilization, history and progress, as the Italian style Lucan House to be raised on the Irish natural grounds would symbolize. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, after all, culture required “a more serious social vision of country life” (Williams 1973, 68 and 83), with landscape to balance the real activities of industry that replaced the exclusively elitarian use of the land, as Roberts was transmitting to his patrons. Even the system of improvement that characterized the English countryside with those entering the owner/despot's domain being considered “intruders” was becoming old-fashioned when compared with painting, where the inhabitants of smaller cottages and dwellings were considered ornaments to the landscape.

A modern idea, linked with the new ethics that Roberts may have shared with his patrons, was the sense of inclusion through the “rustic figures” at work in the parkland to transmit to the viewer. Indubitably the explosion of the industrial revolution in England activated the necessity to be mindful of the social dimension involved in the architectural enterprise, namely the workers' hard labour, the owners' economic investment, and the enjoyment available to the community who would be granted the opportunity to walk, fish, rest, or simply benefit from the natural appeal of the trees and the river. An amenity at easy reach for Lucanians who were able to glimpse at the sumptuous quarters through a round opening in the wall to reveal the beauty of the edifice. Thomas Roberts, who was to die at only thirty years of age, anticipated, in his paintings, the concept of a cultural policy that would lead, in our time, to the implementation of cultural relationships that became fundamental when diplomatic relations between states had to be dealt with. With Elizabeth Vesey's Bluestocking assemblies, a wide policy of inclusion was adopted that led to internationalism, interculturalism, and the concept of a “soft power” based on the enhancement of the international presence of frequenters and the upgrading of their cultural standing on the global cultural scene – a strategy that many years later would characterize *cultural diplomacy* (Nye 2011).

<sup>7</sup> From the panel describing the absent statue Apollo del Belvedere in the Vatican Museums removed for restauration (December 11, 2023).

#### 4.2 Agmondisham Vesey Jr.

When the couple got married, the husband had been Accountant and Controller General of Ireland from 1734 and a Member of the Irish Parliament for Harristown, county Kildare, from 1740. The vote for Kinsale, county Cork, came later because a note for “Irish Parliamentary Elections” reports that in 1765 Mr. Vesey disbursed quite a considerable sum of money (£ 760 3s 6d) for entertainment, and more money for invitations to dinner and musical events towards his election<sup>8</sup>. Once his career was fully established and the seats in Parliament secured, The Right Honourable Vesey’s attention could be turned to the architectural context within which the classics inspired construction he had been dreaming of building would be raised. Several books are mentioned in Mrs. Vesey’s library, of which most with her bookplate, some others with the bookplate of her husband and of his heir, Colonel George Vesey, who inherited the demesne when his uncle died<sup>9</sup>. A list follows of the volumes Vesey could count on when he started to work for the new house: Sir William Chambers’ *A Treatise on Civil Architecture in which the Principles of that Art are laid down and illustrated by a great number of Plates* (1757) was certainly instrumental for Vesey’s planning, listing as it does “Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew”. A footnote in the catalogue draws attention to an observation by a Mr. Coulston: “It is a little curious that Scotland, at that time far behind the sister country in painting should have produced both Chambers and Adam, by far the greatest architects of their time [...]” (Robinson 1926, 7). A further group of architectural publications are listed along those without any bookplate, or with the Colonel’s. Given Agmondisham’s academic interest in the discipline, they might have belonged to the uncle with the added Colonel’s bookplate: F. Blondel, *Cours d’Architecture* (1698), Colin Campbell’s *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1731), Matthias Darly, *The Ornamental Architect or Young Artist’s Instructor* (1770), John Evelyn, *Parallel of the Ancient Architecture with the Modern* (with Palladio and L.B. Alberti among the ten Principal Authors who wrote upon the Five Orders, London 1733), William Salmon, *Palladio Londinensis* (1734), Vitruvius, *Les Dix Livres d’Architecture de Vitruve* (1684), Joseph Moxon on *Vignola* (1694), [Claude] Perrault, *Treatise of the Five Orders of [Columns in] Architecture* (1722), Brook Taylor, *New Principles of Linear Perspective* (1749; with Agmondisham Vesey in the List of Subscribers), J. Woolfe and J. Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannica; or the British Architect* (1767)<sup>10</sup>. A list of works, by English and Scottish authors, that does not

<sup>8</sup> A note, in the Sarsfield-Vesey collection, reports: “On June 26 he entertained eighty gentlemen to dinner at a cost of £80; and on the following day he expended £111 14s. 10d. on a ball and supper at which large quantities of wines and spirits were provided. Payments to the town clerk and four poll-takers, and to the sheriff ‘for expedition on the return’; the hire of horses and messengers ‘at and for a month before the election for divers errands’; and the providing of music and a gun with thirty pounds of gunpowder, further increased his expenses. In addition, he had to pay the travelling expenses of eight persons who came from Dublin to vote at the election of magistrates on June 29 ‘when a push was apprehended’” (McCracken 1947, 226; see: P.R.O.I. Sarsfield-Vesey Collection, bundle 54).

<sup>9</sup> When the date of the book publication refers to several decades before the Colonel came into possession of the demesne (1785), the book had belonged with satisfactory evidence to Agmondisham Vesey Jr., especially when the subject was architecture.

<sup>10</sup> Many more works listed: James Gibbs, *Book of Architecture: Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments* (1739), *The Designs of Inigo Jones* (1727, 1743), William Halfpenny, *A New and Complete System of Architecture Delineated* (1749) and *Practical Architecture* (1736), Joshua Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor’s Method of Perspective Made Easy both in Theory and in Practice* (1755) and *The Perspective of Architecture* (1761), Batty Langley, *The Builder’s Director, or, Bench-Mate: Being a Pocket-Treasury of the Grecian, Roman, and Gothic Orders of Architecture* (1747), Robert Morris, *The Architectural Remembrancer* (1751), *Lectures on Architecture* (1734), and *Rural Architecture* (1750), Seb.



include any Irish book might surprise the reader. As a matter of fact, the architect whom the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009), by way of Professor Edward McParland's pen, describes: "the greatest architect in Ireland in the first half of the eighteenth century [...] his greatest building, the Parliament House (latterly the Bank of Ireland) on College Green, Dublin, is a building of international significance" is Edward Lovett Pearce (1699-1733) who did not write books of any notice (2018). He, however, "showed himself, in his annotations to Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura* and in his drawings, to be a sensitive, learned, and discriminating architectural critic and scholar" (*ibidem*). His documentary legacy, too, is an important collection: it amounts to three volumes of architectural drawings catalogued for the use of those who study the architecture of the Georgian era (Colvin, Craig 1964). Too young for having talked to Agmondisham on any specific subject other than during an encounter with him as a child, Mr. Vesey may have learnt of Pearce as architect when he was only fourteen years old in connection with the building in 1722 of William Conolly's stately mansion in Celbrige (few miles away from Lucan), called (above mentioned) Castletown, the first Palladian country house, still today a renowned Georgian mansion. Commissioner of the Revenue in the reign of Queen Anne and George I, Privy councillor in the reign of George II, Speaker of the House of Commons in Ireland and ten times Lord Justice of Ireland, Conolly became rich from buying land confiscated from King James' supporters after the Battle of the Boyne in which William III defeated the exiled King James II (July 1st, 1690). As the only architect, at that time, to have studied in Italy and having travelled widely in the Veneto region where, in 1724, he studied many of Palladio's villas before returning to Ireland, Pearce could boast having met, and studied with, Italian architect Alessandro Galilei (1691-1737) who, in 1717, had come to work for his two kinsmen in Ireland where he "pioneered a neo-antique style of architecture" (McParland 2018). Once back to Italy in 1719, Galilei continued working on the plans for Castletown from a distance and, after meeting Sir Edward Lovett, may have recommended that the twenty-five-year-old continue working on the plans while staying connected with the Italian. The Irish architect's life ended in 1733; his contribution to Castletown consists of the entrance hall and the building of the curved colonnades and wings.

Other travellers on the Grand Tour that Vesey knew well were James Caulfeild, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord of Charlemont (1728) and Thomas Dawson. The former left in 1746, with his tutor Edward Murphy, for Italy, France, Spain, besides the Eastern countries, Turkey, Greece, and Egypt. In Rome he had associated with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and became a benefactor, among others, of Sir William Chambers. He also journeyed to Vicenza (on the road back to Ireland) to survey the Palladian Villa "La Rotonda". Once home, he developed his estate and built his "Casino Marino"; he also approached Thomas Roberts to have him paint his jewel designed by Chambers. With his experience of Italy and, specifically Rome, he had a lot to teach to his friend Vesey who, despite his love for Neoclassicism, never travelled to the South of Europe. The latter grand tourist to Italy, Thomas Dawson (1725-1813), became a member of Parliament for county Monaghan for the period 1749-1768 and belonged to the House of Lords as Baron Dartry from 1770. The son of Richard Dawson and Elizabeth Vesey, Agmondisham Sr.'s daughter, he was Agmondisham Jr.'s cousin. He left for the Grand Tour when he was twenty-six and was at the same time in Rome as Lord Charlemont.

Le Clerc, *Treatise of Architecture* (1732), a translation by E. Chambers from the French of *The Practice of Perspective* (1743), Marie-Joseph Peyre, *Oeuvres d'Architecture* (1765), Stephen Riou, *The Grecian Orders of Architecture* (1767), Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra* (1753).

On January 1773 Vesey, who had already contacted Chambers on his project, wrote to the Scotsman: “I have got the landskip of Lucan and its environs and wish to show you the situation and aspect of a place which I am persuaded will receive great embellishments from your hands” (Laffan, Rooney 2009, 174) and two months later he informed him of his intention of “finishing the South front of your plan at Lucan” that summer. He also asked him for “any rough sketch for a portico of four columns” (*ibidem*). Chambers informed his Irish friend that he did not wish to continue to produce any further material for the house. It seems plausible that between 1772 and 1775 Vesey would have involved James Wyatt in the design of the house – the same Wyatt who would play a key role in the erection of the Monument to Patrick Sarsfield. The staircase at Castletown (completed as late as 1759) provided the model for the same element at Lucan (Irish Architectural Archive, *Dictionary of Irish Architects* 2024)<sup>11</sup>.

In 2017 a Society for Old Lucan (SOL) was founded. In “A new Approach to Lucan House” (2023), Jonathan Cully points out that, instead of incorporating a part of the existing building, the new Lucan House was raised nearer to the river, while the tower and a fraction of the old castle that Patrick Sarsfield had inhabited would stay in its place as a citation of the gothic manufacture. With the original castle demolished and the new house erected, the entrance that approached the house from the side, would have to be changed. “Wanting to better showcase his new house Agmondisham Vesey redesigned the grounds and access to his Demesne”, Cully continues. “A new, longer approach to Lucan House would be laid out, one which would frame the front of his new Villa in all its grandeur and leave any would-be visitors with no doubts as to Vesey’s wealth and standing in society”. Another way of providing the public “a tantalising view of Agmondisham Vesey’s new Palladian villa” was granted by the “oculus” that may have been barred eventually when safety reasons appeared more compelling than ostentation. The appeal of the demesne enriched with an orderly and enlightened Palladian Villa would be appraised nonetheless with security as inherent component of the project’s development (Cully 2023)<sup>12</sup>.

Though it is not possible to know how much of Agmondisham’s knowledge was shared with his wife, a considerable part of it must have been matter for discussion among the artist and both patrons. He curiosity might have also directed her to the Library.

#### 4.3 Elizabeth Vesey

Elizabeth was born in a more than distinguished family: her mother Mary, whose father Denny came to Ireland from Surrey (England) at the time of the Norman invasion, was the only heiress of the Muschamp family, her father Thomas Vesey (the second son of John Vesey, Archbishop of Tuam) was an Eton and Oxford educated First Baronet, and LL.D. honoris causa from Trinity College Dublin. He would become Bishop of Ossory and be created first Baronet of Abbeyleix in the Peerage of Ireland. Their daughter was a refined scion among whose family descendants would be the Viscounts de Vesci and Princess of Wales Diana Spencer.

Perhaps unexpectedly because of her intellectual vivacity, Elizabeth was not offered, being a woman, the choice of higher education. She is reported to have met Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu as early as 1749. By 1750, we are told, the two spa friends “arranged proto-salons during the summers at Tunbridge Wells; and soon after, salons are established every winter

<sup>11</sup> The footnote below his biography for the completion of Lucan House supplies the dates: 1773-1780/81, and the nature of the building: “Apparently contributed to design of house, modifying designs supplied by Chambers” (Vesey, Agmondisham, 1773-1780/8, in *Dictionary of Irish Architects* 1720-1940, n.p.).

<sup>12</sup> The Society for Old Lucan was founded in 2017 by a group of individuals living in Lucan who are all passionate about local history and heritage. See <<https://soc4oldlucan.com/home/blog>> (05/2024).

in the London drawing rooms of Hillstreet [Montagu's] and Bolton Row [Vesey's], as well as at other homes of lesser lights" (Heller 1998, 59). Their encounter was the beginning of a fellowship that developed into intimacy, with a rich correspondence between the two Elizabeths – more than a hundred letters from Vesey to Montagu and replies from the latter (see "Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers" at Huntington Library, San Marino, California). The bulk of existing letters, that the ladies often referred to as "conversations", are vital for the reader to become familiar with the exchange of each other's feelings, the news they supply concerning the societal circumstances and rituals, the celebrations or dramas of friends, affiliates, and associates, their covered political ideas and suggestions, along with, of course, gossip. They were vital, also, for Vesey who could not regularly join the London society on account of her living in Lucan when her husband's parliamentary sessions took place in Dublin – a thing that made her sad and melancholy, but also enlivened her correspondence with descriptions of pictures of the Lucan demesne.

There is evidence of Mrs. Vesey's gradual loosening of the chain that anchored her to the Irish ancient dwelling that greeted her in the demesne as a bride, and her anxious anticipation of the fine fashionable villa where she would live breathing the cultivated air of ancient Rome. Her appeal for the Italian culture was of long track, given her good command of the language and her acquaintance with the literature, of which she could be rightfully called a *connaisseuse*, as is clear from her letters to Lord Lyttelton where she unsheathed her linguistic competence with several quotes from Ariosto, Tasso, and Guarini produced, unsuspectedly, by heart, and her metaphorical disguise behind a *mythic* heroine when, with a flirting approach to her addressee who suggests an elopement, she evokes Medea's kettle for her own rejuvenation<sup>13</sup>. Eliza Vesey, as she called herself, was not an ordinary type in the kingdom of England and Ireland with George I, the first Hanoverian king (1714-1727), at her birth recently crowned, to inaugurate the Georgian era in a period of spectacular maritime grandeur and commercial power. Among the collection of books, a few copies that make Mrs. Vesey's Library "original" carry titles like: *Three unknown books printed at Aberdeen*, *Four Unknown Editions of Cicero*, *The First Circumnavigation of the Globe*, and *The only copy known*, an account that makes the collection as special as her owner. Not to be neglected: works in Italian and Latin<sup>14</sup>.

It should not come as a surprise that the library catalogue unveils, interlaced with a non-strictly rigid alphabetical list of volumes interrupted by sets of thematic or nominal sections, a narrative that tells the reader of the newly acquired pursuance. An excursus from the erratic file advises the reader that the *Considerations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Decadance*, attributed to an unknown "[M.M. Bousquet ]" in square parentheses is, in fact, the work of the better-known Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, a Lausanne-printed edition with Mrs. Vesey's bookplate and her autograph dated 1749 which, at the time when the new construction was being discussed within the family, she had probably delved into already, being French literature and philosophy objects of study for aristocratic ladies. Other books that might have been part of a reading list traced in the catalogue are *Cyclopaedia* by Ephraim Chambers (no connection with the Scottish architect) who was competent in architecture, and a work, dated 1731, dealing with the Greek travels of Pausanias displaying both Mrs. Vesey's autograph in two places and Col. Vesey's bookplate. Similarly, Hooke's *Roman History* (1738-1771) bears both Mrs. Vesey's autographs in three places and Col. Vesey's bookplate. The list of valuable books to acquire for a historical background to the classics

<sup>13</sup> Six letters, Vesey to Lyttelton, are kept at Huntington, "Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers", mssMo 6265-6270.

<sup>14</sup> Algarotti, Dizionario di J. Baretto, Boccaccio, Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Petrarca; in Latin, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, Cicero, Oratius, Lucretius, and other Italian, Latin and ancient Greek authors in English.

would have included *History of Greece at the time of Alexander the Great* by Goldsmith (d. 1774) and *History of England Starting from Julius Caesar's Conquest* by Hume (d. 1776). The relatively nearby dates of publication, 1774 for Goldsmith's with her bookplate and 1762-1763 for Hume's with her autograph in two places to which are added an "Index" and "Note in Her Hand" in vol. 1 and "Notes on Titles" of vols. 3 and 5 (1754-1762), suggest that Agmondisham's heir, who did affix his bookplate on Hume's publication, must have done so after Mrs. Vesey, who had probably received the books as a gift by the authors (both of them, their intimate friends) and, in accord with her own exquisite manners, had examined the books without hesitation and expressed her gratefulness to the authors<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4.4 *Elizabeth to Elizabeth or; Carter to Vesey*

As pointed out above (1), Elizabeth Carter, the scholar translator of Epictetus, was not too soft with her beloved, cherished Sylph, and often tried hard to supply her own (often wrong) impression and appreciation of Vesey's character and attitudes. She could not bear with her taking her distance from Gothic art and move closer to neoclassicism; she was in complete disagreement with Vesey siding with people who sought independence and demonstrated a freer mind; she half promised Eliza that she would go and visit her in Lucan, knowing in advance – and telling her! – that it would never happen; the idea of Vesey not being *English* was hard for her to metabolize, too.

Here follows a sequence of Carter's letters to give evidence of what has been pointed out.

For having turned back on the Gothic style, for betraying Britain's colonial policy, for not being English, and for submitting to her husband's will, Mrs. Vesey deserved being admonished, and Mrs. Carter did not refrain from an attack:

I hope if ever Mr. Vesey talked of demolishing this enchanting abode, he meant nothing more by it than merely to give you an opportunity for the display of your eloquence for its preservation. It is impossible he can be so unsentimental, so unpoetical, and so anti-romantic, as to think seriously of committing so atrocious an action against all the powers of imagination and against you – which all the courts of judicature in Europe, that have any degree of true taste, must allow a most sufficient ground of divorce [...]. (Carter to Vesey, Letter XXXVIII, Deal, August 3, 1768, in Pennington 1809, vol. 3, 343)

In the same letter, projections of the ancient castle's shadows and arches that characterized medieval cathedrals are mentioned *passim* to make Elizabeth aware (by Carter) of the serious error her husband was making while she, inappropriately, subjugated to the masculine authority:

Your French verses are pretty, but French verses can never be either sentimental or sublime; and to mention nothing more, I cannot bear the *riens* [French for: we are laughing] in the last stanza, which might do very well for the chateau of Monsieur le Marquis, but the idea does not form a proper accompaniment to the solemn shades and venerable arches which you and Lady Bingham have so well described at Lucan. (*Ibidem*)

and

<sup>15</sup> More books of historical interest listed in the library catalogue are: Abbé Gedoyn, *Pausanian ou Voyage Historique de la Grece* (1731), with Mrs. Vesey's autograph in two places beside the bookplate of Col. Vesey; N. Hooke, *The Roman History from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth*, 4 vols (1757), with the bookplate of Col. Vesey and Mrs. Vesey's autograph in three places; Oliver Goldsmith, *The Grecian History from the Earliest State to the Death of Alexander the Great*, 2 vols., with Mrs. Vesey's bookplate in each (1774); David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688*, 6 vols, with the bookplate of Col. Vesey in each vol. and with Mrs. Vesey's autograph in two places, an "Index" and "Note in Her Hand" in vol. 1 and "Notes on Titles" of vols. 3 and 5, (1754-1762).

Will the day ever come that I should visit you there? If it was only to laugh, I should never wish it. One may laugh any where; [...] but I should form expectations of a much higher entertainment in conversing with you amid Gothic arches and ivyed towers". (343-344)

Carter's insistence on the Gothic features, cleverly opposed to the style of the Palladian replacement, however, does not question the beauty of the boisterous Lucan's landscape, much less in accord with a classic, pastoral atmosphere than with a native untamed nature, as the footnote useful to integrate Elizabeth and Lady Bingham's description suggests:

In Mr. Vesey's house in London were a set of views of Lucan, from which it appears as a delightful place, abounding in wild and picturesque scenery. (343)

Having set aside the direct opposition to the theme of the house demolition aiming at challenging Elizabeth's resistance, Carter uses a softer approach comforting her friend for the loss of a dear person with reference to a natural landscape reflected through an architectural element:

How much do I feel myself obliged to you for wishing so kindly that I might share your charming morning scene of the river; yet I think I would rather choose to meet you in the more solemn retreat, where the moonlight gleams through the gothic window: I hope you will transport yourself on one of the beams to return my visit on the sea-shore, where the moon forms a scene equally solemn, though in a different style, and I believe you would find the soft murmurs of the ebbing waves as musically soothing as the whispers of your trees. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXVII, Deal, September 10, 1770, in Pennington 1808, vol. 2, 21)

In her intention of waking up Elizabeth by way of asserting her right as a woman to visit the spa with female friends, Carter wrote Vesey in 1771:

By all means, my dear Mrs. Vesey, leave Dr. James to swallow his own powders, and Mr. Vesey to squabble with his two old gentlemen, and do you get as fast as you can to Tunbridge. If you do not find health in the spring, you will at least acquire good spirits from the society. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LIX, Deal, June 13, 1771, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 26)

A month later, she again opposes the style of the past with the fashion of today:

It is scarcely possible, I should suppose that you can have resisted the temptation of the great spectacle in your neighbourhood; at least I think, in the same situation, I could not. Yet perhaps I might have been disappointed in the expectation of realizing my ideas of gothic grandeur and solemnity as too probably the whole show will be influenced by the genius of modern taste, which has substituted the tinsel of finery and the whims of fancy, for the noble ornaments of magnificence, and the solemn and sublime enchantments of the imagination. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LX, Deal, July 26, 1771, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 29-30)

In a further epistolary exchange, Carter quotes from Vesey's letter, a way for the reader to have a first-hand look at the way in which her addressee denies that age might invalidate relationships unless for lack of love. The "natural ties are not loosened by age except in those who never loved much" were the words with which Carter agreed, making a point that:

It is not to these that ambition and avarice succeed, but to the other more earthly passions which are perpetually changing their appearance, 'stained with the variation of each soil', in passing through the several stages of a shifting mortal constitution. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXIV, Nov. 21, 1771, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 41)

If “variation of each soil” entails “variation from the soil of England”, the text evidently carries a nuance of racism towards her Irish friend, since halfway through her letter, she writes condescendingly:

I scarce even met with an Irish woman in my life, who did not in a very kindly manner take root and flourish in the soil of England. We are much obliged to you all for this partiality, for you have among you imported more sense and virtue than I fear we are likely to repay you, by all the hungry people whom we send to eat you up from thence. (43)

Won by Vesey’s soft reaction, she cannot but adopt a persuasive tone:

I congratulate you on the elevated situation of our dressing-room which exalts you above the fogs of Dublin and sets your imagination at liberty to expatiate in the regions of pure aether. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXV, Clarges Street, Feb. 7, 1772, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 45)

Elizabeth would rather express her fears to the more understanding Montagu by confessing her tremors before a decision that the future might judge not worth the financial effort:

Lucan is going on at a great expense I have the weakness not to be able to say no to a pleasant object tho’ it may have its edge in a future Day. The embellishment of Grounds is a smooth deceiver it appears so harmless so natural the solitary winter nights that threaten at a distance are well thought of. (Vesey to Montagu, Letter, July 6, 1774, Huntington, mssMO 6298)

On September 20, 1777, construction was near to completion at Lucan, so Carter, who conceived of her friend as a spiritual creature – “you sylphs, who range ‘the crystal wilds of air’” (1766, 288) – wrote to Montagu from Deal belittling the new Palladian construction because of its inappropriateness to Mr. Vesey’s wife’s intangible nature and good enough for his own normal and unexceptional needs, as was recorded above (1).

By October 2, 1777, Mrs. Vesey, who very much liked the new house thanks also to Thomas Roberts’ ability in preserving its memory through his art, mentioned the beauty of her boudoir as a countermeasure of being unable to reach London, and provoked such reply:

I am enchanted with the situation of your dressing room, and your moral application of the object with which it is furnished, will render it a better school of virtue, that the hermit’s hour-glass and bones, over which he sits dreaming over the end of life, while you are endeavouring to discipline the passions [...]

The same letter also contains a comment on the colonies:

Every body seems very impatient for important news from America; for my little part I have so little hope of any good to the public by such a quarrel, that I chiefly wish intelligence for the sake of the poor people who are anxious for their friends. Oh, that they were all safe in England! (Carter to Vesey, Letter CVIII, Deal, Oct. 2, 1777, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 185)

On 13 July 1775, Carter had written:

Though you are too much of an American to rejoice in the conquest of Long Island, you are however too much a friend of humanity, not to feel thankful, that it has been carried with so little loss on the side of our troops. I heartily wish it could have been accomplished with as little on the side of the poor misled provincials. God grant this check may incline them to listen to proposals of peace. (Carter to Vesey, Letter C, Deal October 13, 1776, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 163)

This piece, however, was preceded by another proposition that would sound rather rude to Mrs. Vesey's ears, if she did not know that Mrs. Carter, by her own admission, is capable of an "idle trick" deriving "from mere flippancy" (Carter to Vesey, Letter XLVI, Clarges Street, Feb 28, 1772, in Pennington Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 29-30):

I hope I shall close my Letter, with the account of their [our friends] being all safe and well on the Kentish shore; and may all bring back English hearts, and English manners, in which wish I trust you are not too well bred to join me. (Carter to Vesey, Letter C, Deal, October 13, 1776, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 162-163)

Carter's rejection of Mr. Vesey's guilty act of demolishing the Gothic castle for the neoclassical construction is evident from a comment in a letter à propos a funeral service she has attended of a young Queen imprisoned at Elsinore taking place in a reconstructed Pantheon model:

It is a strange transition from the solemn archs of Westminster Abbey, to the gay rotunda of the Pantheon, but as it is a fashionable thing, perhaps you will expect me to say something about it. Indeed I can say but little about it, for though I was there one evening I stayed but an hour and found that sufficient pour m'ennuyer. The architecture is, I believe, very fine: and it is, perhaps, the single instance in Europe of so large a building finished in all the nicety of a papier maché snuff-box. This mixture of great and little makes a confusion in one's ideas, and is, I think, by no means advantageous. You would, I think, be pleased with the appearance of the dome. It is lighted by invisible lamps which diffuse a general illumination, very soft and pleasing. In short it is an Arabian tale, or a fairy vision. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXVI, Clarges Street, 28 February 1772, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 52)

### 5. *Politics and Diplomacy*

Whether Bluestocking assemblies would take place in Lucan or in London, it was a pleasure to be hosted by Elizabeth Vesey, as Mrs. Montagu very nicely puts it, when the new Lucan House is completed: "I hope you will convey me to Dublin, for I long to see your charming house, & ye centre of your round room is the centre of my wishes" (Montague to Carter, Letter, September 4, 1777, Huntington, mssMO 6507). Mary Delany and Hannah More, too, would direct attention to their friend's warm dwelling: "[...] no house in Ireland I like so well to be in for any time except my own" is Mrs. Delany's statement about visiting Mrs. Vesey in the Gothic Manor at Lucan when she lived in Dublin with her husband, Rev. Delany (Day 1991, 109), while Hannah More's comment is recorded by Robinson:

Hannah More, whose critical judgement was equal to that of any bluestocking, not only gave precedence to 'Vesey, of verse the judge and friend' in her poem *Bas Bleu*, but she also wrote 'I know of no house where there is such good rational society and a conversation so general, so easy, and so pleasant'. She was introduced to Johnson at Reynolds and pleased the great doctor by her not too artless flattery and her sprightly verses such as the *Bas Bleu*, which Johnson was permitted to see in manuscript. (1926, 34)

In 1772, Elizabeth Montagu describes Elizabeth Vesey's Salon to Elizabeth Carter emphasizing her ability as host: given the size of the room, her private meeting became an almost public one so that

it served a quasi-political purpose bringing together English, Scottish and Irishmen with different loyalties and beliefs who 'all gather together under the downy wing of the Sylph [i.e., Vesey], and are soothed into good humour: were she to withdraw her influence for a moment, discord would reassume her reign and we should hear the clashing of swords, the angry flirting of fans, and St Andrew and St Patrick gabbling in dire confusion the different dialects of the Erse language'. (Major 2002, 180)

The bluestocking salons, thus, “expanded the intellectual and the public space in which women could function without incurring social disapproval” (Meaney, O’Dowd, Whelan 2013, 23). That Vesey inclined towards the political is not a surprise, both as far as national and international affairs are concerned. The extension of nationalities represented in the Bluestocking circle is confirmed in one and a half lines by Hannah More in a letter to one of her sisters (dated London 1781), where she points out the geographical provenance of the profusion of guests followed by her experience of the meeting:

On Monday I was at Mrs. Vesey; she had collected her party from the Baltic to the Po, for there was a Russian nobleman, an Italian virtuoso, and General Paoli. In one corner was the pleasantest group in the world; and having peeped into the various parties in both rooms, I fixed upon that which I best liked. [...] The conversation was quite in my way, and in a great measure within my reach; it related chiefly to poetry and criticism. (Roberts 1845, 125)

Mary Hamilton also has a list of members of humanity one might encounter in the Salons:

one meets with a charming variety of society [...] the Learned, the witty, the old & young, the grave, gay, wise & unwise, the fine bred Man & the pert coxcomb; The elegant female, the chaste Matron, the severe prude, & the pert Miss, but be it remembered that you can run no risque in Mrs. Vesey’s parties of meeting with those who have no claim to respect. (1925, 132)

As to politics, a woman like Mary Delany would write “The world is in a bustle about American affairs, but I’m no politician, and don’t enter into those matters. Women lose all their dignity when they meddle with subjects that don’t belong to them” (Llanover 1862, vol. 2, 103). Maria Edgeworth would refuse her aunt to write on a political subject while she would have been ready to deal with any other subject. For Carter political affairs were threatening; Vesey, instead, is covertly in favour of the “sister colonies”, in respect of whom her dear friend Edmund Burke had pronounced a speech for conciliation (1755) in Parliament containing the famous sentence: “Whatever England has been growing to by a progressive increase of government, brought in by varieties of people, by succession of civilizing conquests and civilizing settlements, in a series of seventeen hundred years, you shall see as much added to her by America in a single life” (Anonymous 2010; for first edition see: Robinson 1926, 13). She was also attracted to Abbé Raynal, the prophet of American Revolution who denounced colonialism, despotism, and slavery, a contentious writer of *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770), and a champion of human rights whom she wished to introduce to Doctor Johnson while her friend Mrs. Carter – not unique in her judgement – deemed him “licentious, profligate, infidel” (Carter to Vesey, Letter CXLVI, Chapel-street, 9 January 1782, vol. 4, in Pennington 1809, 300). Lastly, among many other foreigners, one of her closest characters was General Pasquale Paoli, the Italian patriot who fought ardently for the independence of Corsica earning the confidence and respect, among other Bluestocking participants, of Samuel Boswell, who visited him in Corsica during his Grand Tour and wrote *An Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour to that Island and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* (1768) with a Foreword in the form of a letter from the Right Honourable George Lord Lyttelton where he states that the Government should have shown “more respect for Corsican liberty” (n.p.) and that, he thought, it “disgraces our nation that we do not live in good friendship with a brave people engaged in the noblest of all contests, a contest against tyranny” (n.p.) as he felt they had “never given us any cause for complaint” (n.p.). Besides Elizabeth Vesey, who was near to him in his London years after 1769, Paoli befriended Anna Barbauld, Hannah More, and Hester Thrale Piozzi.



At the time in which the replacement of the house took place, supposed regular (daily, weekly or monthly) sessions presumably took place of the patrons with twenty-two-year-old Roberts as custodian of the Gothic past to preserve. As illustrator of a contemporary broader landscape Roberts may well have suggested to incorporate the display of workers' activity, the small cottages with people and animals, and the vernacular architecture of the village with its busy coming-and-going to provide realism. Gradually, Elizabeth must have shelved the preference for the "dear old castle with its niches and the thousand Gothic beauties" of which her friend Elizabeth Carter was a devotee (Ball 1906, 53).

The new house brought with itself the need for a new decoration: in fact, Vesey's letter to Montagu about ornaments is a starting point to joke about her namesake being able, in her being originated from Circe, the sorceress, to fascinate ("bewitch") her own husband with a description ("Picture") of how the fine decoration of her Salon has added pepper ("je ne scais quoi") to the conversation: "there are who might assemble a company in one of their own coal pits and said company would swear at the bucket that was let down to whirl them up again into daylight but in general I think decoration not useless [...] there is a sort of finesse of arrangement – which tho short of magnificence adds je ne scais quoi to conversation in short it is what your Circeship has so artfully given a Picture of in your reverie to Mr Vesey which I think has bewitch'd him and as for me I am quite mad" (Vesey to Montagu, Letter, 5 March 1778, Huntington, mssMO 6319). Valuable ornaments in the new Lucan House can be identified in Michael Stapelton's plasterwork and Pietro Bossi's mantels, yet, more significantly, she might have played a role in having Pieter de Gree painting the roundels on the models of Angelica Kaufmann in the Blue Room (*blue* from Bluestocking?) on the left of the entrance Hall, a room that is symmetrical with the Library on the right of the entrance Hall. It is a sort of sought-after symmetry, visible from outside, with a dumb window created behind the mantelpiece in the Blue Room. Mrs. Vesey did meet Swiss-born painter Kaufmann, whom her artist-father escorted to Rome to study the Old Masters in Italy. In 1766 she travelled to London where she joined Sir Joshua Reynolds's social circle, and, of course, also attended Bluestocking meetings. She acquired a reputation for portraiture and history painting that led to her becoming a founder member of the Royal Academy in 1768, after which she started focusing her art on female subjects from classical history and mythology.

It is a pity that Elizabeth Vesey lived only for a short span of her life in Lucan House. Nonetheless she continued to entertain in Ireland. Through her polite dealing as a "Shepherdess" of her "flock" in Lucan House when the *villa* was finally available for living there and for her salons held in Ireland (Prendergast 2015, 78-105). At that point, she could count on the perfect venue for renovating the special friendship between Ireland and Italy, while unconsciously setting up the location for future discussions on Anglo-Irish Agreement, European Community policies, foreign affairs in general, and a major venue for international meetings and a polyglot social life – all those diplomatic events that would take place at Lucan House *in the twentieth-century* and through the *millennium* to follow. She thus earned a position in the history of diplomacy.

The last word is appropriately Montagu's, who, writing to Carter on 4 September 1772, remarks:

I delight already in ye prospect of ye blue box (alias Drawing Room) in which our Sylph assembles all the heterogeneous names in the World, & indeed in many respects resembles Paradise, for there ye Lion sits down by the Lamb, ye Tiger dandles with the Kid; the shy Scotchman and ye etourdi Hibernian, the Hero & Maccaroni, the Vestal and the demi [illegible] the Mungo of Ministry and the inflexible partizans of incorruptible Patriots, Beaux esprits & fine Gentlemen all gather together under the downy wing of the Sylph, & are soothed into good humour: were she to withdraw her influence a moment, discord wd reassume her reign and we shd hear the clashing of swords, the angry flirting of fans & St. Andrews and St. Patrick gabbling in dire confusion of different dialects of ye Erse language. Methinks

I see our Sylph moving in her circle, & by some unknown attraction keeping the whole system in due order. (Montagu to Carter, Letter, 4 September 1772, Huntington, mssMO 3304)

A timely circumstance has involved Lucan House demesne in a program of revision of the embassies abroad. Its extraterritoriality status, therefore, will end in May 2024, when President of Italy Sergio Mattarella will give back the Italian inspired House to the Irish people, who, according to their cultural history and intellectual traditions, will treasure it involving visitors in a historical narrative that speaks of the Italian soil's ancient heritage. From now on, Italian visitors in Ireland will take the opportunity to recognize in the original example of Palladian architecture on the Liffey shores a source of one stage of their own civilization.

The closing lines of *Bas Bleu*, the poem devoted to Vesey, convey the depth of her ethical views strictly linked with her intellectual appreciation of the interchange of ideas and thoughts, an entertainment that she cultivated throughout her life (cf. Haslett 2010):

'Tis more than wit, 'tis moral Beauty  
'Tis pleasure rising out of duty (More 1786, 95)

With charm and the “witchcraft” of “conversation”, Vesey uses a “magic spell” that infuses national and moral excellence to the poem, both qualities that make *conversation* a duty and a pleasure with *civilization*, and characterize both society and the nation. A framework, therefore, for the soon to flourish art of *diplomacy*, ironically registered in an update of Johnson's *Dictionary* in the year of her death.

After only seven years from their relocation, Agmondisham died (1785), and Elizabeth suffered her loss before her mental health slowly started to deteriorate.

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