



# The Moral Economy of English Country Houses in Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" and Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*

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## ABSTRACT

Country estates in early modern England served as significant economic centres for the gentry and nobility, whose wealth was based on agriculture and landownership. However, the country house was idealised in country house poems, which were popular in the early seventeenth century, as a symbol of moral economy based on the paternalistic ethos of feudal society, lauding hospitality, modesty, and simplicity. Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" (1616) praises the moral economy of old English country houses epitomising feudal values to criticize brutal, dehumanising capitalist enterprises embodied by modern prodigy houses. Although Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) is aligned to the principles of early country house poems, it differs from Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst," which has a paternalist discourse, by offering a maternal model of moral economy that is more inclusive and heterogeneous as it includes the disadvantaged groups, like the old and the disabled. Moreover, the feminised moral economy proposed in *Millenium Hall* is more progressive, enabling socio-economic and territorial changes in accordance with high capitalism associated with industrialisation. This study examines Jonson's "To Penshurst" and Scott's *Millenium Hall* to show that although the two works praise the moral economy of country estates, they provide respectively patriarchal and matriarchal versions of moral economy. **Keywords:** "To Penshurst," Sarah Scott, *Millenium Hall*, moral economy, English country houses



## Introduction

Country estates were large tracts of land with grand and lavish houses, and they had an economic aspect as country houses of the gentry and nobility were "working communities whose owners' wealth was derived from land and agriculture" (Barton, 2021, p. 329). Therefore, country houses were not just ostentatious homes for wealthy families, they were also "power houses-the houses of a ruling class," or landowners, whose authority depended on land ownership and "the tenants and rent that came with it" (Girouard, 1978, p. 2). From the Medieval Age to the nineteenth century the ownership of land and country houses were "not just the main but the only sure basis of power" as England's population and wealth were concentrated in the countryside rather than in the cities (Girouard, 1978, p. 2). Although country houses served to empower rich families, country house poems, which were popular in the early seventeenth century, tended to idealise and romanticise the country house as an emblem of moral economy based on the paternalistic values of feudal society, like "hospitality, thrift, lack of artifice, and so forth" (McLeod, 1999, p. 77). Country house poets, including Jonson and Carew, praised country house owners like William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle, who were their patrons, "with a vision of a moral economy which, however idealising, finally ratified the social position of the landowner" (Williams, 1973, p. 94). Hence, country houses eulogised in estate poems represented "the ordered moral economy," which was a hierarchical economic system where "all classes and all people lived in right relationship with each other and with the rest of creation" (Baucom, 1999, p. 166; McBride, 2001, p. 1). According to McRae (1992), the moral economic structure of country estates in early modern England was "static" and "hierarchical" because the landlord had a central position in this structure, but he was "a paternal figure: a steward of the land and its dependants" whose main goal was to manage his manor properly to achieve "a comfortable self-sufficiency" (p. 35). McBride (2001) maintains that the idealised, paternal image related to the country house became important during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as it fortified "English male aristocratic hegemony" (p. 4). Accordingly, the country house was a powerful means of constructing Englishness, gender, and class.

The country house also signified the transformation of "manorialism in its various manifestations to the agrarian capitalism" and "from the medieval ideas of 'tree orders' [aristocrats, the clergy, and peasants] to a society dominated both economically and politically by the middle class" (McBride, 2001, p. 1). This socio-economic reform, in

turn, paved the way for the emergence of country house discourse which “drew on idealized feudal social and economic relationships, represented most conspicuously through the theory and practice of hospitality, invoking a utopia of mediaeval nostalgia that stood as a rebuke to all that was new while, paradoxically, accommodating the very change it excoriated” (McBride, 2001, p. 2). Country house discourse which put the landed class and aristocrats into the centre, showed that “the estate was not simply a source of income but also an expression of lordship, a means of local influence and a mark of social position” (McBride, 2001, p. 3; Bush, 1984, p. 4). On the other hand, Klein claims that aristocrats’ leading position was established “through both their own practice and their patronage, most conspicuously visible in their country houses,” which displayed their “local paternalism” that aimed to contribute to the local economy by supplying work for local people (Klein, 2018, p. 282).

As the studies suggest, scholars focus on the paternal moral economy of country estates. However, there are studies on female country house poets and the role of women in the early estate poems, like Lewalski’s “The Lady of the *Country-House Poem*” (1989) and “Imagining Female Community” (1993), Fowler’s *The Country House Poem* (1994), and Young’s “The Country House in English Women’s Poetry” (2015). Nicole Pohl (1996, 2008), on the other hand, studies the country-house ethos in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* (1762) and the role of feminine utopias in the work of Sarah Scott and Sarah Fielding, arguing that female utopian communities challenge the dichotomous, hegemonic image epitomised by country houses to offer alternative spaces in which women are emancipated from the inferiorising definitions of patriarchy. However, the previous studies do not provide a substantial discussion of the feminised moral economy of country estates. This study aims to examine the maternal moral economy of the English country house discussed in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*. It argues that the novel borrows the principles of conventional country house poems, praising the moral economy of the old English country houses. Scott, like traditional country house poets, inculcates the owners of *Millenium Hall*, a country estate which merges moral economy with the feudal values of hospitality, modesty, and simplicity to ensure the well-being of their communities. However, *Millenium Hall* deviates from the traditional paternalism of country house poems by providing a maternal version of moral economy, which is more progressive in that it enables, social, economic, and physical expansions, adjusting to high capitalism associated with industrialisation. Moreover, the maternal moral economy of the Hall is more inclusive and heterogeneous as it includes the feminised and infantilised groups, including the old and the disabled. Since Ben Jonson’s “To

Penshurst" (1616) is generally "used as the standard by which the topics, characteristics, and moral values pertaining to the genre are defined" (Lewalski, 1989, p. 262), the following sections examine "To Penshurst," which praises the paternal moral economy of Penshurst, and *Millenium Hall*, which portrays a feminised version of moral economy, to demonstrate that although the two works eulogise the moral economy of the country estates mingled with gentle capitalism and feudal patrimonialism as a means to humanise modern, brutal capitalist enterprises, they provide different models of moral economy.

### **Moral Economy and Paternal Protection in Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst"**

Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" (1616) is a country house poem that inculcates the moral economy of the owner of Penshurst, a country estate. In the poem, country estate embodies a feeling of nostalgia for feudal country virtues, like charity, responsibility, "paternal kindness and grateful loyalty" (Stafford, 1989, p. 43). The "organic" feudal life was characterised by "simplicity," "naturalness and integrity" since "men and women, in touch with the soil and the seasons" worked for the well-being of the whole society (Stafford, 1989, p. 43). The solidarity between the lords and vassals enabled the formation of a medieval society which was "less exploitative than capitalist" since "[t]he purpose of the medieval economy was to produce subsistence goods, not commodities for sale," and thus "[f]eudal lords did not have the passion for extracting ever more surplus value," or forcing their labourers to overwork (Stafford, 1989, p. 36). The feudal society also included such ideal qualities as "an agricultural economy without city life" and "a form of political authority based on the traditional domination and rule by notables" (Morrison, 2006, p. 438). Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (1989) argue that the nostalgia for ancient times is incorporated by antiquarian images, objects, and buildings, which "become talismans that link us concretely with the past" (p. 4). This fact explains the growing interest in the study of medieval artefacts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which "promoted the expansion of antiquarianism" (Ortenberg, 2006, p. 237). Nostalgia for the pre-industrial world of the Middle Ages, which was managed by the rules of moral economy, creates an idealised image of feudal society as "reality was never so rosy" although there was "reduction in luxury, greed and corruption" (Stafford, 1989, p. 43). The English Middle Ages were a period of unrest and discontent since the Great Famine of 1315-17, the Hundred Years War, and the Great Plague imposed hardship on poor working classes, who suffered from high taxation and starvation (Cohn & Aiton, 2013, p. 23). While poor labourers experienced the ill effects of socio-political unrest,

the nobility had “a generally increasing desire for comfort and luxury” (Given-Wilson, 1996, p. 96). In the hierarchical feudal system luxury goods were unequally possessed by wealthy and powerful classes (Astarita, 2022, p. 194). The corruption and extravagance of the privileged classes increased the dissatisfaction of the poor classes, which resulted in The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, a rebellion against King Richard II and his “attempts to collect extra taxes” (Kelly, 1991, p. 58). As such, the medievalism of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries was not realistic but idealistic.

The complexity of nostalgia as related to the feudal country life is observed in Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” which enacts the paternalistic vision of moral economy because it “represents the good stewardship and social virtue of Robert Sidney who nurses an organic, self-sufficient, but . . . still hierarchical community” (Pohl, 2008b, p. 229). In the poem, country estate functions as an artefact associated with “a pre-commercial economy” in which “[e]xploitation of the labourer was not severe; the lords were charitable and has a sense of responsibility” (Stafford, 1989, p. 43). Jonson starts his poem by emphasising the distinguishing qualities of Penshurst Place, which was originally built between 1341 and 1350 for Sir John de Pulteney (Nash, 1874, p. 8). The house seems modest, unpretentious, and simple, compared to prodigy houses of the seventeenth century, which are ostentatious, showy, and pretentious:

Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show,  
Of touch or marble; nor canst boast a row  
Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold;  
Thou hast no lantern, whereof tales are told,  
Or stair, or courts; but stand’st an ancient pile, (Jonson, 1870, lines 1-5)

Penshurst, unlike prodigy houses, is not built to display the wealth and social distinction of its owner through an impressive façade, having “marble,” “polished pillars,” “a roof of gold,” or flashy stairs, courts, and lanterns (Jonson, 1870, lines 2-3). The estate is portrayed as “an ancient pile” joined by “soil,” “air,” and “water” to emphasise its connection to traditional, modest country houses of paternalistic, feudal society governed by the principles of moral economy (Jonson, 1870, lines 5, 7-8). The poet’s interpretation of Penshurst within the context of medievalism “are inevitably colored by [his] culture, biases, and purposes” (Carroll, 2018, p. 8) to segregate it from the modern world suffering from economic and moral corruption, which can be observed in his descriptions of the ancient estate. According to Jonson, Penshurst is a complete Edenic place inhabited

by figures from Ancient Greek mythology, like "the dryads" and "Pan and Bacchus," who are associated with nature (Jonson, 1870, lines 10-11). The use of ancient, mythological characters related to the natural world is functional in that it enables the poet to crown Penshurst as an antique estate venerating the beauties and bounties of nature. The estate is, thus, a symbol of the reverence of its owner towards nature since it is surrounded by various trees, like "the broad beech," "the chestnut," and "lady's oak" (Jonson, 1870, lines 12-18), and its lands are "[f]ertile of wood" and they are used to feed "sheep, ... bullocks, kine, and calves," as well as to breed "mares and horses" (Jonson, 1870, lines 26, 23-24). Sidney, the paternal owner of Penshurst, creates "cultured Nature" through cultivating the natural world without exposing it to a brutal exploitation (Marcus, 1993, p. 147). He applies culture to the natural landscape by building the estate, "[a] copse," "ponds, that pay [them] tribute fish," "orchard fruit," and "garden flowers" (Jonson, 1870, lines 19, 32, 39). Accordingly, Sidney creates a balance between nature and nurture, and Penshurst, which is praised for its fertile, natural landscape, appears as an ancient site of moral economy, which is temporally and physically dislocated from modern-day capitalist society that justifies the exploitation of nature for the individual profit of monied classes.

Penshurst is also distinguished from the modern prodigy houses, whose ostentation rests on the tyrannical manipulation of the labour of workers: "And though thy walls be of the country stone, / They're reared with no man's ruin, no man's groan; / There's none that dwell about them wish them down" (Jonson, 1870, lines 45-47). Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" was written during the early capitalist era, which lasted from the mid-thirteenth century to the mid-eighteenth century (Ghodke, 1985). In the early capitalist period "the old economic institution of agriculture was still continuing" and landlords, state leaders, and bureaucrats, who "control[ed] the means to power," had an important role in the organisation of capitalist economy (Tamura, 2002, pp. 113-114). In "To Penshurst" Sidney is involved in early, agrarian capitalism, gathering wealth through land and agriculture, but he is idealised as a benevolent proto-capitalist landlord, who does not tyrannise the agricultural labourers working his lands, or exploit their labour. In parallel with moral economic principles, he fulfils his paternal responsibilities for the poor, who work for him, by saving them from starvation. The labourers are allowed to visit Penshurst, enjoy the abundance and hospitality supplied by Sidney and his family. However, the paternalistic, moral economy of Sidney is oppressive as the role of working-class labour in the construction and development of Penshurst is ignored and concealed beneath the Arcadian landscape of the estate. Agricultural workers are not depicted

as producers, or active participants in the cultivation of the lands of Penshurst, but it is as if Penshurst's cultivated, fertile lands are a gift of God since it is inhabited by mythological divine figures. Nature is also portrayed as a self-sustaining body that does not need the labour of workers. It contributes voluntarily to the moral economic order that prevails at Penshurst:

The painted partridge lies in every field,  
And for thy mess is willing to be killed.  
And if the high-swollen Medway fail thy dish,  
Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,  
Fat aged carps that run into thy net,  
And pikes, now weary their own kind to eat,  
As loth the second draught or cast to stay,  
Officiously at first themselves betray;  
Bright eels that emulate them, leap on land,  
Before the fisher, or into his hand. (Jonson, 1870, lines 29-38)

It is as if animals are not cared by the labourers, but they just enjoy the peace and order in Penshurst and pay their tribute to the kind, hospitable owner of the estate by voluntarily sacrificing themselves to feed him. Accordingly, the workers are stripped off their identities as producers, and they are reduced to be consumers of Sidney's wealth since they are not depicted "as subjects with political agency but as natural emblems of the estate's bounty" (Brayton, 2016, p. 33).

Although the socio-economic order of Penshurst is oppressive, the paternal master and workers form a quasi-family whose members are united by mutual responsibilities to contribute to the common profit of their community. The landowner, who is the head and governor of his community, makes sure that his labourers, who are the real producers of his properties, do not suffer from hunger, and lets the labourers take part in his "open table" where they can share his "beer and bread," "meat," and "wine" (Jonson, 1870, lines 27, 62-63). Therefore, as in pre-capitalist society, where peasants had "direct access to the means of their own reproduction and to the land itself" (Wood, 2002, p. 95), the socio-economic relationship between the landowner and labourers is organised in a paternalistic, harmonious way. Moreover, Sidney, who is idealised as a responsible landowner, is praised for using his wealth properly to contribute to the order and well-being of his community. Instead of spending too much money to have one of the

ornamental, prodigy houses that are "proud ambitious heaps, and nothing else," he employs his money to ensure that not only his family but also his tenants and labourers enjoy a life of abundance and plenitude (Jonson, 1870, line 101). Jonson shows the promising results of Sidney's economic approach while praising his wise and moral governance. Appreciating the paternal governance of their landlord, lower classes feel no grudge or envy for him or his family, but they show their respect and gratitude for their master through supplying him with such presents as "nuts," "apples," and "cheeses" (Jonson, 1870, lines 52-53). As the poor are happy to give their lord both their labour and the products they gain through their labour, Sidney is able to have a surplus of provisions, which he shares with the workers. Therefore, the moral economic system of Penshurst, which relies on the mutual responsibility between the landlord and peasants, increases not only Sidney's wealth but also the peace and order of his society. As such, the paternalistic moral economy of Penshurst, consolidated with gentle agrarian capitalism, is provided as a better alternative to the brutal, callous capitalist economy of contemporary prodigy houses.

### **Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*: Moral Economy in a Maternal Terrain**

Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), like "To Penshurst," proposes moral economy as an alternative to servile capitalist economy that favours the self-interest of monied classes. *Millenium Hall*, which is established by six upper-class women, is a Neo-Palladian English country house that merges classical virtue, "which was to be directed for the benefit and enhancement of civic life," and the simplicity of classical architecture with elegance and order (Tavernor, 1991, p. ix). In parallel with the principles of moral economy, the ladies of *Millenium Hall* consider the common goodness of their matriarchal society rather than exploiting poor people's labour to increase their personal wealth. An old woman living in their community emphasises the difference between the moral economy of the virtuous ladies and the dehumanising capitalist economy of their former manipulative capitalist masters, who "grew rich, because they had [their] work, and paid [them] not enough to keep life and soul together" (Scott, 1986, p. 13). She explains that she and other poor people joining the women of the Hall used to suffer from abusive capitalist system, where they were devastated by poverty and "hard labour" (Scott, 1986, p. 121). Therefore, the old woman maintains that it is mean capitalist landowners who are responsible for the sufferings of working classes since they do not give labourers the money they deserve for their hard work. The female founders of *Millenium Hall*, on the other hand, do not usurp the labour of their workers, but they



attempt to establish a fair and efficient economy. The ladies also share the surplus of their earnings “for [their] design being to serve a multitude of poor destitute of work, [they] have no nice regard to profit” (Scott, 1986, p. 205). In this respect, they are distinguished from capitalist masters who are engaged with “inhumanity,” and “self-indulgence” to maximise their individual profit (Scott, 1986, p. 177).

Like Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* uses country estate as a symbol embodying the landladies’ utopic project to create a community based on modesty, virtue, and order, which were inculcated as the reminiscences of patrimonial feudal moral economy. Millenium Hall attracts the attention of the anonymous male narrator and his young companion Lamont, who take refuge in the Hall after their coach is broken down in a stormy weather:

We approached the house, wherein, as it was the only human habitation in view, we imagined must reside the Primum Mobile of all we had yet beheld. We were admiring the magnificence of the ancient structure, and inclined to believe it the abode of the genius which presided over this fairy land, when we were surprised by a storm, which had been some time gathering over our heads, though our thoughts had been too agreeably engaged to pay much attention to it. (Scott, 1986, p. 6)

The narrator is impressed by the façade of the house, which he describes as “[an] ancient structure” (Scott, 1986, p. 6). Putting the Hall and its owners at the centre, the male narrator describes the ladies as “the Primum Mobile,” an ancient Greek notion explained by Dante as the largest and swiftest sphere that includes “the other eight lower spheres and sweeps them along in its daily revolution around the Earth” (Chiarenza, 2010, p. 711). The narrator argues that the ladies of Millenium Hall, like the Primum Mobile, control and direct other people living in the buildings contained by the Hall. When he and his young friend enter the estate, they come across a women’s school that is like “[an] Attic school,” namely an ancient Athenian school, where they are involved in such artistic endeavours, like “painting,” “drawing,” and “carving” (Scott, 1986, pp. 6, 7). The male narrator’s tendency to draw a relationship between the Hall and antiquity, which is associated with order and simplicity, is apparent also in his depiction of the country adjunct:

The morning dew, which still refreshed the flowers, increased their fragrance to as great an excess of sweetness as the senses could support.

Till I went to this house, I knew not half the charms of the country. Few people have the art of making the most of nature's bounty; these ladies are epicures in rural pleasures and enjoy them in the utmost excess to which they can be carried. All that romance ever represented in the plains of Arcadia are much inferior to the charms of Millenium Hall, except the want of shepherds be judged a deficiency that nothing else can compensate; there indeed they fall short of what romantic writers represent, and have formed a female Arcadia. (Scott, 1986, pp. 178-179)

The narrator portrays the pastoral lands of the ladies as "a female Arcadia" (Scott, 1986, p. 179), referring to ancient times to form a kinship between the Hall and the old, Arcadian country estates symbolising pre-capitalist economy based on nature's bounty. The apparent nature-based economy of Millenium Hall, like Penshurst, is aligned to agrarian capitalism as its beauty and bounty are produced by the workers employed by the landladies of the Hall. As an example, the wood belonging to Millenium Hall, is crafted by "the commonest labourers in the country," under the supervision of the ladies who, akin to capitalist masters having the means of production, organise the labour (Scott, 1986, p. 16). However, the agrarian capitalist economy of the mansion is not callous since it is redeemed by the principles of moral economy. The workers have the opportunity to enjoy the pastoral lands of the Hall, whose moral economy enables them to live in "rural simplicity, without any of those marks of poverty" (Scott, 1986, p. 5). Like Ben Jonson, who praises the simple, yet elegant taste of Sidney, both the narrator and Lamont observe and scrutinise the ladies' lands that reveal their good taste, which is a part of their moral economy. The two men cannot suppress their admiration for the wood designed by the ladies which "is laid out with much taste" (Scott, 1986, p. 16). The ladies create a nurtured landscape where "art had lent her assistance to nature" without exposing nature to brutal destruction (Scott, 1986, p. 16). In line with the principles of feudal moral economy consolidated with gentle agrarian capitalism, they are kind towards nature, which is a source of their wealth, and they cultivate wilderness and turn it into a productive economic body to increase the wealth of their community: "The wood is well peopled with pheasants, wild turkeys, squirrels and hares .... Man never appears there as a merciless destroyer, but the preserver, instead of the tyrant, of the inferior part of the creation" (Scott, 1986, p. 17). Accordingly, the Hall functions as an emblem of moral economy connoting socio-economic order as it enacts "[the] careful balance between court art and country 'nature,'" which is observed in early country house poems (Marcus, 1993, p. 146).

Although the Hall, like Penshurst, is managed according to moral economy based on hospitality and socio-economic order, its maternal moral economy is distinguished from the paternalism of Penshurst. The feminised economic model of the ladies is more advanced as it alternates between unfree labour and free wage labour, which are respectively associated with pre-capitalist and capitalist economies. Pre-capitalist economy is related to unfree, or forced, labour as peasants were forced to give their "surplus labour" to the appropriators "by means of direct coercion, exercised by landlords or states employing their superior force, their privileged access to military, judicial, and political power" (Wood, 2002, pp. 95-96). Free wage labour, on the other hand, operates according to the principle in which labourers "sell their labour-power and drawn voluntarily into the process of capitalist production" and "capitalists can appropriate the workers' surplus labour without direct coercion" (Brass, 1994, p. 96). Although Sidney's moral economy is imbued with a gentle, paternal capitalism, it is closer to pre-capitalism because workers are exposed to the socio-political hegemony of the male landowner, and they receive the food and care of their master for their labour instead of earning wage, as in feudal society. However, the feminised moral economy of the Hall is shaped by both pre-capitalist and capitalist values. As in pre-capitalist economy, workers are allowed to access to the lands of the Hall and to the means of their own labour, and they are exposed to the control and oppression of their landladies, who appropriate their labour through monopolising extra-economic socio-political power. The ladies have "[the] full power" to order and manage everything in their community "with great economy," and they use their socio-political superiority to set rules for workers, moulding them into the moral economy of Millenium Hall, where they are supposed to be "pure," "sincere," virtuous, and efficient labourers (Scott, 1986, pp. 111, 114). Nonetheless, the ladies redeem their oppressive economic model through establishing a moral economy, which has feudal values emphasizing the duties of agrarian masters. Within this scheme, they use some money to provide the poor with "a most comfortable place" where "[they] have everything [they] want and wish," and they establish "a fund for the sick and disabled from which they may receive a comfortable support" (Scott, 1986, pp. 12, 205). The ladies also display the hospitality of a responsible feudal landowner towards their labourers and host them at "[their] hospitable mansion," where they can listen to family concerts, or attend the balls conducted to celebrate the weddings of couples from labouring classes (Scott, 1986, pp. 6, 10). Moreover, they hire "nurses for the sick" and improve the lives of the workers by establishing almshouses, schools, and modest cottages, which are neat, "new and uniform" (Scott, 1986, pp. 111, 12). Since the female proprietors care for the poor and sick, they appear to be maternal

figures, who call themselves as "stewards" of their property and labourers, rather than an abusive and tyrannical landowner (Scott, 1986, p. 201). Nevertheless, the Hall's feminised moral economy is also characterised by capitalist norms. The founders of the Hall establish a self-reliant agrarian capitalist economy to isolate their community from the outer world. Specifically, they direct agricultural workers to be indulged in dairy to produce their own milk products (Scott, 1986, p. 59). Furthermore, they initiate a factory for crafting rugs and carpets, where workers, dressed "in a condition of proper plenty," earn their own money and exude "the appearance of general cheerfulness" (Scott, 1986, p. 201). In this way, the ladies help the labourers to lead a prosperous life in "[a] heavenly society" and deter them from looking for another gentle capitalist master to whom they can sell their labour (Scott, 1986, p. 200). However, the moral economy of Millenium Hall is oppressive since the female landlords monopolise the labour market, forming a closed agrarian capitalist economy, in which the labourers have hardly any commercial connection with the outer male-oriented capitalist world. In this tightly closed economy, the ladies have no rivals since they keep the agricultural labour force and "the distribution of the money entirely in their own hands" (Scott, 1986, p. 201). Although the ladies are authoritative, they do not make their workers feel coerced, but pay good wages to the producers of labour, considering their age and performances:

[T]hey prevent the poor from being oppressed by their superiors, for they allow them great wages and by their very diligent inspection hinder any frauds. ... As the ladies have the direction of the whole, they give more to the children and the aged, in proportion to the work they do, than to those who are more capable, as a proper encouragement and reward for industry in those seasons of life... (Scott, 1986, p. 201)

Since the workers exchange their labour for wage as in capitalist societies, they, unlike their counterparts in Penshurst, do not completely depend on the benevolence of their landowners. The labourers procure their essentials without being restricted to provisions supplied by their masters. Accordingly, the maternal economic system of Millenium Hall "adjust[s] to developing capitalism" and employs a semi-free wage labour system (Johns, 2000, p. 39).

The moral economic framework of the Hall, unlike Penshurst, is progressive and expansionist since the ladies try to expand their agrarian economy by moving towards

high capitalism. The novel was written after the mid-eighteenth century, a period which witnessed the transition from “Early capitalism” to “High capitalism (from 1760 to 1914)” (Ghodke, 1985, p. 156). In the high capitalist period economy was no longer controlled by aristocrats, or state authorities, but by “the capitalistic entrepreneur,” and the period witnessed the emergence of industrial society “characterized by big business and the dynamic business cycle” (Tamura, 2002, p. 115). Allying with emerging high capitalism, Millenium Hall undergoes economic, physical, and territorial expansions because the ladies continue to build new settlements in their lands to increase the wealth of their society. They invest an agreeable amount of their capital to the establishment of a house for gentlewomen, who agree to join their fortune to the economy of Millenium Hall to seek refuge in the ladies’ lands. Since this capitalist enterprise “cost[s] [them] a trifle” and the interest of money given by the gentlewomen is “appropriated to the use of the community,” the female landlords decide to buy and restore an old mansion for another group of gentlewomen to make extra profit (Scott, 1986, pp. 205, 65). The Hall’s agrarian economy is further enhanced by the establishment of “[the] manufacture of carpets and rugs which has succeeded so well as to enrich all the country round about” (Scott, 1986, p. 201). The introduction of this factory is a socio-economic reform in *Millenium Hall* as it brings about a change in traditional agrarian economy and signals a transition to industrial economy. The manufacture becomes a great economic success because “it has much more than paid its expenses” (Scott, 1986, p. 205). However, Mrs Morgan, a landlady of the Hall, explains that they, unlike industrial capitalists, do not use the surplus of their capitalist enterprises for their own benefit but for the poor and the dependent so that “they may receive a comfortable support” (Scott, 1986, p. 205). Since the ladies benefit from developing capitalism to contribute to common goodness of their community, their maternal, progressive moral economy heralds a gradual humanisation of harsh, brutal capitalist economy managed by self-interested, patriarchal masters. The intended gradual economic reform is epitomised by the transformation of the male narrator. The narrator, who is a tradesman symbolising modern-day patriarchal capitalism, praises the ladies’ moral economic system, which is open to progress and expansion. As he is impressed with the moral economy of the ladies, which ensures the socio-economic order of the Hall, “[his] thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them [the ladies]” (Scott, 1986, p. 207).

Since the ladies’ moral economy is progressive, Millenium Hall, unlike Penshurst, does not appear as a finished, paradisiacal place belonging to the Arcadian tradition. Sidney’s Penshurst is a static and idealised Edenic place inhabited by mythological figures associated

with antiquity. Moreover, in parallel with Arcadian tradition, Penshurst's natural bounty seems to be granted by divine forces without any visible human agency. On the other hand, Millenium Hall and its lands are inhabited by real, visible people, who are depicted as the active subjects of labour rather than the consumers of the benevolence of their landowners, as in "To Penshurst." The workers, including elderly and disabled members, actively contribute to the moral economy of Millenium Hall by working on the lands, in the factory, or within the estate of the ladies. As such, the ladies' maternal moral economy is more inclusive and heterogenous than Sidney's paternal, homogenous moral economy, in which peasants' "ripe daughters" who are "in plum or pear" are the only visible bodies belonging to labouring classes (Jonson, 1870, lines 54, 56). The ladies expect all their labourers to be economically efficient and productive by working, "serv[ing] others," and "do[ing] good to many" (Scott, 1986, p. 13). Therefore, they turn the unproductive bodies excluded in the paternal moral economy of Penshurst into productive bodies to be regained into the economic system. The old woman, who complains about her former capitalist masters, informs the male narrator about the responsibilities of disadvantaged groups, which have been assigned by the ladies of Millenium Hall:

Susan is lame, so she spins clothes for Rachel; and Rachel cleans Susan's house, and does such things for her as she cannot do for herself. The ladies settled all these matters at first ... Thus neighbour Jane who, poor woman, is almost stone deaf, they thought would have a melancholy life if she was to be always spinning and knitting, seeing other people around her talking, and not be able to hear a word they said, so the ladies busy her in making broths and caudles and such things, for all the sick poor in this and the next parish, and two of us are fixed upon to carry what, they have made to those that want them; to visit them often, and spend more or less time with them every day according as they have, or have not relations to take care of them ... (Scott, 1986, pp. 13-14)

While Jonson displays the success of the economic scheme of Sidney through depicting the ripe and healthy bodies of labourers, consuming the wealth of the paternal master, the ladies of the Hall expand the borders of paternal moral economy of Penshurst by integrating the deformed bodies of the old and disabled into their economic system. Consequently, the ladies re-evaluate "the contractual relationships of England's mercantile and industrial economy to include ... those otherwise disadvantaged and excluded" (Johns, 2000, p. 41).

The ladies' inclusive and progressive moral economy also promises social progress towards a more equal society. Having a rigid socio-economic structure fostering the hegemony of its male owner, Sidney's Penshurst does not herald any change in the hierarchical relationship between the master and his labourers. However, the progressive moral economy of the ladies provides a potential for the re-evaluation of the stratified social order within Millenium Hall. Although the female founders of the Hall maintain the hierarchical structure of moral economy, they do not view this stratified system as rigid and definite. They perceive socio-economic hierarchy as a means granted by God to support those in lower social strata, acknowledging that the integrity of this hierarchical system may be distorted if people of upper ranks lose their "temperance, humility and humanity" (Scott, 1986, pp. 202, 203). Therefore, Miss Mancel contends that although they are socio-economically privileged, they regard themselves "only a steward" to poor, dependent people "whose interests [they] ought to be as careful as of [their] own" (Scott, 1986, p. 203). Moreover, she contemplates the possibility of the abolishment of social hierarchy, claiming "as for the future, there may probably be no inequality" between upper and lower classes (Scott, 1986, p. 203). Speculating about a future socio-economic structure without social inequality, Miss Mancel challenges the paternalist moral economy of country estates which is static and based on the strict authority of the male owner.

## Conclusion

Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" and Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*, have nostalgia for old, country houses that are managed according to the principles of moral economy and feudal system resting on the mutual responsibilities between the master and his tenants. Jonson's "To Penshurst" praises the moral economy of Sidney's country estate, which is a static Arcadian place epitomising the virtues of paternalistic, medieval society. Although Sidney is a landlord involved in agrarian capitalist economy by appropriating the labour of his farmers, who are not depicted as the real subjects of labour, he compensates for his capitalist enterprises by employing the rules of traditional paternalistic moral economy. Unlike self-interested capitalist masters, who condemn their workers to starvation, Sidney is lauded as a benevolent landowner, who shares his provisions with his labourers, allowing them to partake in the paternal hospitality of Penshurst to establish an ordered and peaceful community operating through mutual responsibilities.

Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*, like Jonson's "To Penshurst," offers a moral economy infused with feudal values. Millenium Hall, an old country house that stands for the modesty and simplicity associated with feudal culture, is distinguished from ornamental, prodigy houses since it embodies the practical moral economy that favours communal well-being rather than individual profit. Moreover, the refined artistic taste of the female founders of the Hall which combines nature with nurture marks the mansion as a harmonious community which is segregated from the self-serving ethos of capitalist culture justifying the exploitation of nature for the benefit of affluent capitalist masters. Although the ladies of Millenium Hall are involved in capitalist economy, they, unlike self-interested capitalist owners, do not dehumanise their workers or subject them to harsh manipulation to increase their individual profit. Their maternal moral economy, unlike the paternalistic moral economy of Penshurst, includes the disadvantaged workers, like the old and deformed. In *Millenium Hall*, labourers are also regarded as the subjects of labour who actively contribute to the moral economy of the Hall, thus they are not depicted as the consumers of the benevolence of their landowners, as in "To Penshurst." Furthermore, unlike Penshurst, which is a finished, paradisiacal place, the ladies' matriarchal society is progressive because it undergoes socio-economic and territorial changes, cooperating with the tenets of high capitalism inherent in industrial society. Accordingly, "To Penshurst" and *Millenium Hall* offer different versions of moral economy though both idealise feudal past to argue for a hybrid economy amalgamating capitalist economy with feudal moral economy to redeem the inhumane capitalist ventures of their contemporary societies.

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