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Abstract
In recent years, studies of Charlotte Lennox's The Female Quixote (1752) have focused largely on Lennox's contribution to the discourse surrounding the development of the novel. These readings usefully explore Lennox's representation of the complex relationship between the romance and the novel and frequently cite the attempts of novelists such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding to assert the superiority of their writing projects by distinguishing them from those of romance writers. Yet such interpretations fail to consider how Lennox appropriates the representation of romance reading perpetuated by these novelists in order to participate in other kinds of discourse, most notably that concerning women's learning. Janet Todd briefly considers The Female Quixote within the context of female education, but suggests that the text functions as a conduct book encouraging women's submission to an ideal of womanhood characterized by self-denial and restraint. I will argue that Lennox uses the representation of her romance-reading heroine to critique this ideal and to explore the potential of female education to completely reshape women's role within society, particularly within the public sphere.

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> Heroism, romantick Heroism, was deeply rooted in her Heart; it was Her habit of thinking, a Principle imbib'd from Education.[1]

In recent years, studies of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) have focused largely on Lennox's contribution to the discourse surrounding the development of the novel. These readings usefully explore Lennox's representation of the complex relationship between the romance and the novel and frequently cite the attempts of novelists such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding to assert the superiority of their writing projects by distinguishing them from those of romance writers.[2] Yet such interpretations fail to consider

1 Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or The Adventures of Arabella*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (1752; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 329. References are to this edition.

2 Critics who explore Lennox's contribution to the eighteenth-century discourse regarding the relationship between romance and the novel include Laurie Langbauer, "Romance Revised: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Novel* 18 (1984): 29–49; James J. Lynch, "Romance and Realism in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Essays in Literature* 14 (1987): 51–63; and Mary Patricia Martin, "'High and Noble Adventures': Reading the Novel in *The Female Quixote*," *Novel* 31 (1997): 45–62. Jane Spencer and Catherine Gallagher broaden this discussion to include other genres. Spencer explores how *The Female Quixote* situates romance in relation to both history and the novel, in "Not Being a Historian: Women Telling Tales in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England," in *Contexts of Pre-Novel Narrative: The European Tradition*, ed. Roy Erikson (New York: Morton de Gruyter, 1994), 319–40. Gallagher locates the novel's antithesis not in the romance, but in the scandalous history, in *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 183–85.

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how Lennox appropriates the representation of romance reading perpetuated by these novelists in order to participate in other kinds of discourse, most notably that concerning women's learning. Janet Todd briefly considers *The Female Quixote* within the context of female education, but suggests that the text functions as a conduct book encouraging women's submission to an ideal of womanhood characterized by self-denial and restraint.[3] I will argue that Lennox uses the representation of her romance-reading heroine to critique this ideal and to explore the potential of female education to completely reshape women's role within society, particularly within the public sphere.

Lennox's exploration of women's learning has its roots in the debate surrounding female education that materialized during the late seventeenth century. This period saw the publication of numerous defences of women's learning, texts that declared women to be men's intellectual equals and called for greater parity in women's and men's educations.[4] Her satirical representation of romance reading becomes the vehicle for a serious examination of concerns that proved central for proponents of advanced learning for women. Chief among these concerns is the powerful and often stymieing influence of social custom upon efforts to bring about changes in women's education and, ultimately, in women's lives. Lennox explores this issue throughout her novel as she represents a heroine who attempts to gain control over her life by negotiating between the customs of romance and the customs of eighteenth-century English society. In doing so, she raises the possibility of women's increased participation in public life.

In *The Female Quixote*, Lennox creates a heroine, Arabella, who is "wholly secluded from the World" and leads an isolated existence within the confines of her father's country estate (7). To relieve her boredom, Arabella reads "very bad Translations" of French romances (7). She consumes so many of these voluminous works that she becomes incapable of distinguishing fiction from reality, a condition the narrator describes as the "bad Effects of a whimsical Study" (5). Believing the texts she reads to be accurate representations of her world, Arabella imagines that she herself is a romance heroine, and like these heroines, she resists marriage and seeks adventure. When Arabella

3 Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660–1800* (London: Virago, 1989), 160.

4 Defences of advanced learning for women should be distinguished from other popular forms of educational literature available at the time, including conduct literature, which served largely to offer advice regarding women's proper behaviour. See Deirdre Raftery's *Women and Learning in English Writing, 1600–1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 14–15.

comes of age and is introduced into society, she is often ridiculed for her bizarre notions and seemingly unaccountable behaviour. For this reason, many of Lennox's earliest critics assumed the novel sent a warning to its readers regarding the risks posed by the indiscriminate reading of "dangerous" books;[5] however, Lennox represents Arabella as morally and intellectually superior to the other female characters in the novel, and she clearly illustrates that this superiority is not in *spite* of the heroine's romance reading, but *because* of it.

Arabella's education is undertaken by her father when, at the age of four, he removes her from the direction of her nurses and female attendants: "Finding in her an uncommon Quickness of Apprehension, and an Understanding capable of great Improvements, he resolved to cultivate so promising a Genius with the utmost Care" (6). Despite the encouraging tone of his resolution, Arabella's father calls in teachers to instruct his daughter in primarily ornamental accomplishments—music, dance, French, and Italian. Certainly, this instruction is comparable to the education that many young women of Arabella's social standing would have enjoyed. But Arabella's unregulated consumption of romances within the retired setting of her father's estate renders her education unique, and there is a touch of irony when the narrator refers to romances as "useless Additions to a fine Lady's Education," stating that Arabella "would have made a great Proficiency in all useful Knowledge" if not for her "Study" of these books (5–7). As the novel unfolds, it is the "fine Lady's Education" enjoyed by most of the other female characters in the novel, including Arabella's intellectually inferior cousin Miss Glanville, that proves truly useless. Meanwhile, Arabella's romance reading proves to be the foundation for the development of her superior intellect and imagination.

In order to understand how romance reading contributes to Arabella's intellectual development, it is useful to consider John Locke's ideas concerning the attainment of knowledge.[6] According to

5 In an uncharacteristically positive review of the novel in the *Covent Garden Journal,* Henry Fielding insists that *The Female Quixote* will "afford very useful lessons to all those young ladies who will peruse it with proper attention." Fielding, review of *The Female Quixote*, in *The Criticism of Henry Fielding*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 194. Similarly, Clara Reeve writes in *The Progress of Romance* (1785) that in Lennox's novel, "the passion for the French Romances of the last Century, and the effect of them upon the manners is finely exposed and ridiculed." See Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and The History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt*, 2 vols. (New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1930), 2:6.

6 Whether Lennox read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he outlines his epistemology, is unclear; however, Locke's ideas—particularly those in his *Essay*—maintained a great deal of cultural currency throughout this period of the eighteenth

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), through experience, our minds come to be populated with both simple and complex ideas. We receive simple ideas passively through sense impressions that come from the outside world.[7] Meanwhile, we actively construct complex ideas by separating, comparing, and combining simple ideas.[8] Essentially, Arabella's mind is impressed with simple ideas from two sources. One source is, of course, the romances she reads; the other is her limited social interactions with people living on or around her father's country retreat. The way in which the ideas Arabella receives from these sources impress themselves upon her understanding is a somewhat exaggerated illustration of Locke's notion concerning the way simple ideas are imprinted on the "white Paper" that represents the mind.[9] Arabella's ideas gain complexity when she begins to separate, compare, and combine the impressions she gains from fiction and those she acquires from real life. She first begins to detect the disjuncture between these two sets of ideas—or begins the process of separation and comparison—when she reaches sexual maturity. She is well aware that her sexual attractiveness, together with her wealth and social status, renders her a potential romance heroine. For this reason, she is surprised to find that the life she leads upon her father's estate has not afforded her any adventures: "Her Glass, which she often consulted, always shewed her a Form so extremely lovely, that, not finding herself engaged in such Adventures as were

century. John Valdimir Price writes, "Locke's *Essay* had infiltrated literary consciousness in the eighteenth century unlike that of any other 'philosophical' book." Price, "The Reading of Philosophical Literature," in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), 165. Locke exercised a notable influence on educational writers such as Judith Drake and Mary Wollstonecraft, who followed his ideas, and Mary Astell, who critiqued them. See Raftery, 59–74, and Patricia Springborg, introduction to *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, by Mary Astell (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997), xix–xxxiii. Locke's thinking also captured the attention of popular periodical writers such as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, who refer to Locke more than twenty times in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. See *The Tatler*, 3 vols., ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), and *The Spectator*, 5 vols., ed. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). Price writes, "Almost overnight, Addison made Locke in particular and philosophy in general not only respectable but fashionable" (165). Other confirmed readers of Locke's *Essay* include Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, Jane Austen, and Mary Leapor. See Price, 165–66, and Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25, 77, 139–40, 143, 190.

7 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (1690; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 119.

8 Locke, 163–64.

9 Locke, 104.

common to the Heroines in the Romances she read, she often complained of the Insensibility of Mankind, upon whom her Charms seemed to have so little Influence" (7). As these discrepancies multiply, Arabella must continually interpret incidents that threaten her identity in a manner that renders them consistent with romance.

Arabella becomes adept at the complex reasoning required to combine seemingly irreconcilable simple impressions: she has a "strange Facility in reconciling every Incident to her own fantastick Ideas" (340). One of the greatest challenges to Arabella's romantic world view arises when one of her father's gardeners is caught stealing carp. Arabella is somewhat bewildered by the allegations levelled at the gardener, for she has imagined him to be a person of quality who has disguised himself in order to be near her. Nonetheless, she reconciles the rather glaring facts of the case with her romantic notions. When the gardener is caught at the fishpond, Arabella insists he has gone there to commit suicide out of love for her. She is momentarily thrown into confusion, however, when Mr Woodbind, the head gardener, tells her the young man was caught with the fish actually in his hand: "Fye! fye! interrupted Arabella, out of Breath with Shame and Vexation, tell me no more of these idle Tales" (25). She is in "the greatest Perplexity imaginable" until she constructs a scenario that will account for the fish without damaging the romantic identity she has created for her hero (25). She tells her servant Lucy that the young man grabbed the fish in a desperate effort to conceal his suicidal intentions: "I tell you, obstinate and foolish Wench, that this unhappy Man went thither to die; and if he really caught the Fish, it was to conceal his Design from *Woodbind*" (26). In order to heal the fractures between romance and real life and to maintain her identity as a romance heroine, Arabella must continually exercise her powers of interpretation and imagination. This exercise, more than any other factor, contributes to the development of her intellect.

In essence, Arabella's realization that the ideas impressed upon her by her reading are different from those impressed upon her by her day-to-day experiences becomes the source of her quixotism, what eighteenth-century readers would have recognized as her madness.[10]

10 For discussions of Arabella's madness, see Leland E. Warren, "Of the Conversation of Women: *The Female Quixote* and the Dream of Perfection," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 11 (1982): 367; Wendy Motooka, "Coming to a Bad End: Sentimentalism, Hermeneutics, and *The Female Quixote*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8 (1996): 258; and Scott Paul Gordon, "The Space of Romance in Lennox's *Female Quixote*," *Studies in English Literature* 38 (1998): 511–12.

Arabella's madness, then, in no way precludes the development of her rationality and creativity. It becomes, in fact, an essential component of this development. In and of itself, Arabella's "reality" would have provided little foundation for intellectual growth. The mental work that she must do to reconcile this reality with her "fancies" brings about her improvement. In this way, Arabella is contrasted to the sane but simple Lucy, whose mind can hardly retain impressions let alone negotiate among them. While Lucy complains to Arabella that she "can't make a History of nothing" (305), Arabella, using the materials provided by romance, can do just that, and in doing so, broadens and complicates an otherwise narrow and uneventful existence. As a result, romance becomes the means by which the heroine escapes the limitations that the customary approach to women's learning would have placed upon her understanding.

Lennox's illustration of the relationship between Arabella's romance reading and her intellectual development represents just one of the ways in which her text is grounded in the concerns of educational writers from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many of whom wrote in defence of female learning, including Anna Maria van Schurman, François Poullain de la Barre, Bathsua Makin, Hannah Woolley, Mary Astell, Judith Drake, and Mary Chudleigh.[11] These

11 Whether Lennox read all, most, or any of these writers is impossible to say; however, their work proves a likely source for ideas and attitudes regarding women's learning that were still circulating when Lennox wrote *The Female Quixote*. Though van Schurman maintained her reputation as a learned woman throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, it is difficult to say whether Makin and Woolley were widely read or well known after the turn of the century. While both Astell and Chudleigh appear in entries in George Ballard's catalogue of learned women, published in 1752, Makin is mentioned only briefly in the introduction while Woolley is not mentioned. See Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, ed. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 381–92, 353–56, 54. The arguments of van Schurman, Makin, and Woolley, however, provided the context out of which emerged the work of later writers such as Astell, Drake, and Chudleigh. See Raftery, 30–37; Frances Teague, *Bathsua Makin, Woman of Learning* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 96–97; and Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 13–17. Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* was immediately popular when it was first published in the last decade of the seventeenth century and remained influential throughout the first half of the eighteenth century (Perry, 99–101). Judith Drake's *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* was also successful, with the fourth edition published in 1721. See *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578–1799*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 202. Chudleigh's writing was well received when it was published in the early eighteenth century, and her most famous poem, "The Ladies Defence," was reprinted numerous times along with her other poetry, with a final edition printed in 1750. See Margaret J.M. Ezell, introduction to *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxxv. François Poullain's *The Woman as Good as the Man, or, The Equality of Both Sexes* was published in English in 1677, and passages from his treatise reappeared in the pseudonymous Sophia's *Woman*

writers represent reading as an activity—if not *the* activity—that is central to women's learning, and they rarely fail to comment on the effects of romance reading upon a young woman's intellectual development. Among these writers, however, opinions differ regarding these effects. Some suggest that romance reading can play a positive role in women's learning. In *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (1673), for example, Woolley—mentioning several of Arabella's favourite romances—writes that "such Romances which treat of Generosity, Gallantry, and Virtue, as *Cassandra*, *Clelia*, *Grand Cyrus*, *Cleopatra*, *Parthenissa*, not omitting Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia*, are Books altogether worthy of their Observation."[12] Meanwhile, in *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), Drake asserts that girls mature faster than boys and have a greater knowledge of the world at large because, while boys are spending their time memorizing Latin and Greek vocabulary, girls are reading "*Romances*, *Novels*, *Plays*, and *Poems*, which though they read carelessly only for diversion, yet unawares to them, give 'em very early a considerable Command both of Words and Sense."[13] In the opinion of these educational writers, romances teach young women to revere admirable human qualities, improve women's conversation and their understanding of language, and provide knowledge of a world with which they might otherwise have limited experience.

Other educational writers are less enthusiastic regarding the relationship between romance reading and women's learning, but in varying degrees. Makin, writing in 1673, complains that "frothy Romances" do little more than provide a way for under-educated women of quality to "drive away the time."[14] Nonetheless, while she recommends the reading of other more edifying texts, she ultimately represents romance reading as a fairly benign activity. Astell and Chudleigh are among the educational writers most convinced of the dangers of romance reading. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), Astell insists that an intelligence based upon the reading of romances is worse than the most profound ignorance: "A Woman may study

not Inferior to Man (1739). Subsequent editions of "Sophia"'s work were published as late as 1751 (Ferguson, 265).

12 Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewoman's Companion; or a Guide to the Female Sex* (London: Newman, 1673), 9.

13 [Judith Drake], *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696; New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 63–64. Though published anonymously and at first thought to be the work of Astell, this text is now attributed to Drake.

14 Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*, in *Educational and Vocational Books*, ed. Frances Teague (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 26.

Plays and Romances all her days, and be a great deal more knowing but never a jot the wiser. Such a knowledge as this serves to instruct and put her forward in the practice of the greatest Follies."[15] In "The Ladies Defence," first published in 1701, Chudleigh does not seem overly concerned about romance reading, and while she suggests that women will be better off reading moral philosophy, she asserts that romances are "very innocent and very agreeable Diversions."[16] By 1710, however, her opinion of romance reading begins to sound as unforgiving as Astell's; in an essay entitled "Of Knowledge: To the Ladies," she asserts that romances "and Trifles of that Nature" serve only to "stuff the Memory, to fill it with extravagant Fancies, with false Notions of Love and Honour, to excite the Passions, soften and emasculate the Soul, and render it at once both vain and effeminate."[17] An examination of these representations makes clear that, among educational writers of the period, no univocal response existed regarding the effects of romance reading on young women's learning.

Early practitioners of the novel—most notably Richardson and Fielding—would make it appear otherwise.[18] In his letters, Richardson underscores the instructional value of his work when he describes it as a "course of reading" for young people that will steer them away "from the pomp and parade of romance writing."[19] Similarly, in his preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Fielding differentiates his writing from "those voluminous Works commonly called Romances, namely, *Clelia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astraea*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*, and innumerable others which contain, as I apprehend, very little Instruction or Entertainment."[20] Meanwhile, both Fielding and Richardson are adamant

15 Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies,* 23.

16 Mary Chudleigh, preface to "The Ladies Defence," in *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, 7.

17 Chudleigh, *Essays upon Several Subjects in Prose and Verse*, in *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, 259.

18 As Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti note, Richardson and Fielding would not have referred to their narratives as "novels" and probably had the work of writers such as Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Delarivier Manly in mind when they cited novels, along with romances, as belonging to the group of texts from which they wished to differentiate their own work. See the introduction to *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660–1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backschieder and John J. Richetti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), xi. My use of the term "novel" here follows the definition articulated by Martin, who uses the word to designate the kind of fiction Richardson and Fielding believed they were creating, what she refers to as "the new genre of prose fiction that comes to be called the novel" (46).

19 Samuel Richardson, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 41.

20 Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

about the instructive potential of their own work. Fielding numbers *Joseph Andrews* among those works in which "Delight is mixed with Instruction, and the Reader is almost as much improved as entertained."[21] Similarly, Richardson, in the preface to *Pamela* (1740), asserts that his text will not only "*divert* and entertain" but also "*instruct* and *improve* the minds of the YOUTH of *both sexes*."[22] In the preface to *Clarissa* (1747–48), Richardson writes that "*story* or *amusement* should be considered as little more than the vehicle to the more necessary *instruction*."[23]

Richardson and Fielding were certainly not the first to assert the didactic possibilities of English narrative fiction.[24] They were, however, the first to bolster the novel's reputation as a didactic tool by divesting the romance of any instructional value whatsoever. Clearly, the romance became a foil against which writers such as Richardson and Fielding, both of whom refer to their fiction as a new "species of writing," were able to assert the superiority of the genre they were purportedly developing.[25] As Laurie Langbauer writes, the romance was represented by writers such as Richardson and Fielding as "the chaotic negative space outside the novel that determined the outlines of the novel's form."[26] What has been overlooked is the degree to which the issue of instruction became essential to creating a boundary—or at least the appearance of a boundary—between the romance and the novel. The reputability of the novel depended to some degree not just upon the denigration of the romance, but upon the rejection of the romance's didactic potential and the denial of the disparate representations of romance reading in earlier educational literature.

Charlotte Lennox was among the novelists who perpetuated the representation of romance reading adopted by Richardson and Fielding. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in *The Lady's Museum*, a periodical Lennox edited from March 1760 (roughly eight years after the appearance of *The Female Quixote*) until January 1761.[27] A

21 Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 16.

22 Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Peter Sabor (London: Penguin, 1985), 31.

23 Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (1747–48; London: Penguin, 1985), 36.

24 See, for example, Aphra Behn, *History of the Nun; or, The Fair Vow-Breaker*, in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660–1730: An Anthology*, 4; Eliza Haywood, *The British Recluse; or, The History of Cleomira, Supposed Dead*, in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660–1730: An Anthology*, 154; Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. G.A. Starr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6; and Defoe, *Roxana*, ed. David Blewett (New York: Penguin, 1987), 35.

25 Richardson, *Selected Letters*, 41; Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 8.

26 Langbauer, 29.

27 For a sustained discussion of *The Lady's Museum*, see Judith Dorn, "Reading Women

hodgepodge of fiction, poetry, and essays on subjects such as geography, natural history, and education, *The Lady's Museum* warns at several points about the dangers that romance reading poses to the developing intellects of young women. "Of the Studies Proper for Women," a brief essay of uncertain authorship, encourages women to read the works of the "best authors" and asserts that romances will "corrupt" the imagination and "cloud" the understanding;[28] but the most notable invective against romance reading appears in an abridged version of Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon's *Traité de l'éducation des filles*, portions of which are distributed throughout the periodical.

Fénelon's treatise, first published in France in 1687, was well received and subsequently reprinted in numerous editions. The text was first translated into English by George Hickes in 1707, and a number of revisions, adaptations, and abridgments appeared throughout the eighteenth century.[29] In *The Lady's Museum*, the abridgment of Fénelon's text is presented as "Of the Importance of the Education of Daughters" and has been translated from the French "by a Friend of the Author of the Museum."[30] In his treatise, Fénelon suggests that young women are characterized by an inordinate amount of unhealthy curiosity and asserts that if they are left to their own devices, they will gravitate "with eagerness" towards "objects of an empty and dangerous nature," most particularly romances:

> They are passionately fond of romances, of plays, of stories, of chimerical adventures, wherewith much profane love is intermixed; they give a visionary turn to their understanding, by using it to the magnificent language of the heroes of romance; they even spoil themselves for the world, because all these fine airy sentiments, these generous passions, these adventures which the author of romance has invented merely to please, have not the least relation to the real motives of action in the world, or to those that decide its affairs, nor yet to the false views discoverable in every understanding.[31]

Fénelon goes on to assert that a young woman deeply read in romances and "full of the tender and the marvellous which have

Reading History: The Philosophy of Periodical Form in Charlotte Lennox's *The Lady's Museum*," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 18, no. 3 (1992): 7–27.

28 "Of the Studies Proper for Women," in *The Lady's Museum*, 2 vols., ed. Charlotte Lennox (London: J. Newbery and J. Coote, 1760), 1:13.

29 See H.C. Barnard, introduction to *Fénelon on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), xliv.

30 Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, "Of the Importance of the Education of Daughters," in *The Lady's Museum*, 1:294.

31 Fénelon, 1:370.

charmed her in her studies" reacts with astonishment when she finds that the world does not "afford any real personages resembling her heroes."[32] Filled with an exaggerated sense of her own importance in the world, such a woman will find it extremely difficult to reconcile herself to the private, selfless, and decidedly unheroic domestic role that awaits her: "She fain would live like the imaginary princesses, ever charming, ever adored, ever above all wants: alas! What mortification for her to descend from a state of heroism to the little cares of domestic life."[33]

Fénelon's representation of the romance-reading woman reads in many ways like a description of Arabella. Romances have certainly given a "visionary turn" to Arabella's understanding. The plot of *The Female Quixote* turns upon the disjuncture between the "airy sentiments," the "generous passions," and the romantic "adventures" that inform Arabella's interpretation of the events that unfold around her and "the real motives of action in the world." Arabella must indeed undergo a process of mortification at the hands of the learned divine, who "cures" her before she exchanges a "state of heroism" for "the little cares of domestic life." Though it is impossible to say for certain, Lennox's characterization of Arabella was likely inspired to some degree by Fénelon's invective against romance. Though *The Female Quixote* was written nearly a decade before Lennox's publication of her abridged version of Fénelon's text, this well-known and popular work had been in fairly continuous circulation for forty-five years prior to her writing of the novel. One could argue, of course, that Lennox replicates Fénelon's figure of the romance-reading woman because she shares his position on the effects of romance reading on young women's intellects. For several reasons, however, it is impossible to determine the extent to which the educational writings included in *The Lady's Museum* reflect Lennox's own opinions. In publishing Fénelon's treatise, Lennox is reproducing someone else's translation of another person's ideas. Certainly, Lennox's reproduction of Fénelon's text may suggest her affinity with his ideas, but even this is impossible to say for sure. Lennox was apparently in some financial distress prior to the publication of her periodical and may have felt the need to publish work that was sure to have public appeal.[34] As

32 Fénelon, 1:370–71.

33 Fénelon, 1:371.

34 In a letter to the Duchess of Newcastle in October of 1760, Lennox asserts that she has enslaved herself to the booksellers in order to eke out "a scanty and precarious

Miriam Rossiter Small points out, she was "falling in with a popular tendency when she undertook to bring out a periodical."[35] She was undoubtedly influenced by popular interests when determining what to include in *The Lady's Museum*. When she decided to include Fénelon's treatise, it may have had less to do with her own ideas on women's education than with past readers' positive reception of the text and the likelihood that it would continue to be well received.

Lennox's position on the question of whether romance reading inhibits or perpetuates a woman's intellectual development ultimately remains unclear in *The Female Quixote* as well, and the novel actually demonstrates some ambivalence regarding the matter. On one hand, nothing indicates that Lennox seriously believes that a woman can actually lose the ability to distinguish between fiction and reality as a result of reading too many romances. Arabella is, after all, a satirical rather than a realistic figure. It is often difficult to tell which Lennox finds more absurd: a woman who reads too many romances or the notion that reading too many romances will drive a woman mad. On the other hand, even though Arabella's intelligence is superior to that of most of the other female characters in the novel, there is no indication that Lennox advocates romance reading as a valid component of women's education or that she is implying that romance reading will make women smarter. Ultimately, Lennox does not simply denigrate or advocate women's romance reading. Rather, she appropriates the representation of romance reading generated by educational writers such as Fénelon and perpetuated by novelists such as Richardson and Fielding—a representation she later perpetuates herself in *The Lady's Museum*—in order to build her rather complex response to the state of women's education at the midpoint of the eighteenth century. In a number of ways, this response recasts in fictional form concerns central to late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century defences of women's learning, concerns that ultimately prove much more crucial than questions regarding the relationship between romance reading and education.

One of the most important and problematic of these concerns has to do with the influence of social custom on women's ability to fully realize their intellectual potential. Arguments regarding the effects of custom on women's learning were common during the late

subsistence." Miriam Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters* (North Haven: Archon Books, 1969), 28.

35 Small, 221.

seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries thanks in large part to the influence of Descartes and Locke.[36] For these philosophers, the realization that custom is responsible for determining many of our ideas and beliefs is a liberating one, for custom, unlike universal truth, is subject to variation and change. In other words, it is possible and desirable for individuals to reject or defy social customs that limit their capacity to think and act freely or that move them away from rather than towards truth. In spite of their differing epistemologies, both Descartes and Locke criticize a blind adherence to custom and encourage their readers to question the validity of conclusions that cannot be reached through independent reflection or individual experience. Locke suggests that "we should make greater progress in the discovery of rational and contemplative *Knowledge*, if we *sought* it in the Fountain, *in the consideration of Things themselves*; and made use rather of our own Thoughts, than other Mens to find it."[37] Such ideas proved useful to the defenders of women's learning, who argued that differences in men's and women's intellectual abilities were attributable to the social customs governing how they were taught rather than any natural or innate differences. In his defence of women's learning, the Cartesian thinker Poullain asserts that custom compels individuals to cling thoughtlessly to their beliefs and insists that they "would have as strongly believed the contrary, if the Impressions of Sense or Custom had thereto determined them after the same manner."[38] Similarly, Makin claims, "The Barbarous custom to breed Women low, is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far, that it is verily believed (especially amongst a sort of debauched Sots) that Women are not endued with such Reason, as Men; nor capable of improvement by Education, as they are."[39] Chudleigh echoes Makin's assertion: "That we are generally less Knowing, and less Rational than the Men, I cannot but acknowledge; but I think 'tis oftener owing to the illness of our Education, than the weakness of our Capacities."[40] For these writers, hope for women's intellectual development can be found in the malleability of social custom. Makin argues that the

36 See, in particular, the first meditation of René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2000), 18–22; and Locke, 43–103.

37 Locke, 101.

38 François Poullain de la Barre, *The Woman as Good as the Man, or, The Equality of Both Sexes*, trans. A.L., ed. Gerald M. MacLean (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 63.

39 Makin, 3.

40 Chudleigh, preface to "The Ladies Defence," 12.

refusal to provide women an education comparable to that provided to men is a "bad Custom" that is "continued upon a bad ground" and insists that "Bad Customs (when it is evident they are so) ought to be broken, or else good Customs can never come into use."[41]

While these ideas regarding the variable nature of social custom were potentially liberating, most writers who addressed the subject also acknowledged the extreme difficulty of bringing about significant changes in actual social practice. As Makin writes elsewhere, "Custom, when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of Nature itself."[42] Astell likewise acknowledges the extreme difficulty of challenging custom: "Custom has usurpt such an unaccountable Authority, that she who would endeavour to put a stop to its Arbitrary Sway and reduce it to Reason, is in a fair way to render her self the Butt for all the Fops in Town to shoot their impertinent Censures at."[43] As Locke notes, because custom exercises "a greater power than Nature," it is no wonder "that grown *Men* ... should *not* seriously sit down to *examine their own Tenets*; especially when one of their Principles is, That Principles ought not to be questioned."[44] Ultimately, the power of custom, evidenced in the refusal of individuals to question the rules by which they and others are expected to live, proves a sticky challenge for the defenders of women's learning.

Lennox explores this challenge in her novel, in which she pits the customs of the fictional world of romance against those of eighteenth-century English society. Often, Arabella expresses shock and surprise at the disjuncture that occurs between these two paradigms, for she seems to want to believe that social practice is governed not by custom but by enduring truths revealed to her in the pages of the romances that she reads. This appears to be the case, for example, in her conversation with the Countess, whom she meets at Bath. The Countess is represented as an extraordinary woman who "among her own Sex had no Superior in Wit, Elegance, and Ease" and "was inferior to a very few of the other in Sense, Learning, and Judgment" (322). The Countess had, at a young age, been "deep read in Romances" (323), but her early acquaintance with the world and her direction towards other studies saved her from becoming like Arabella. Taking Arabella under her wing, the Countess gently

41 Makin, 34.
42 Makin, 3.
43 Astell, 33.
44 Locke, 82.

attempts to convince the young woman of the falsity of her romantic notions. In part, this consists of schooling Arabella in what are essentially Lockean notions regarding the customs governing vice and virtue. Locke backs up his claim that most human behaviour is governed by custom rather than by a set of innate natural laws by noting how ideas about morality differ across cultures and historical periods:

> He that will carefully peruse the History of Mankind, and look abroad into the several Tribes of Men, and with indifferency survey their Actions, will be able to satisfy himself, That there is scarce that Principle of Morality to be named, or *Rule* of *Vertue* to be thought on ... which is not, somewhere or other, *slighted* and condemned by the general Fashion of *whole Societies* of Men, governed by practical Opinions, and Rules of living quite opposite to others.[45]

Similarly, the Countess tells Arabella that "what was honourable a thousand Years ago, may probably be looked upon as infamous now" (328). The Countess assures Arabella that romantic ideas regarding vice and virtue for both women and men fly in the face of current society's notions of morality. While one would not think highly of a romantic heroine who had not been "many times carried away by one or other of her insolent Lovers," an eighteenth-century English beauty "could not pass thro' the Hands of several different Ravishers, without bringing an Imputation on her Chastity" (328). In much the same manner, the "same Actions which made a Man a Hero in those Times, would constitute him a Murderer in These—And the same Steps which led him to a Throne Then, would infallibly conduct him to a Scaffold Now" (328). The Countess assures Arabella that while the natures of true vice and virtue cannot be changed, notions regarding what constitutes vice and virtue differ across time and place, and these notions are often mistaken or misguided. The crux of the Countess's argument—an argument later repeated by the doctor who cures Arabella—is that English society, governed by "the Rules of Christianity," more accurately represents true morality than the romances Arabella reads. Though impressed by the Countess, Arabella clings fiercely to her belief in romantic custom: "She was surpris'd, embarrass'd, perplex'd, but not convinc'd" (329). One could argue that Arabella's refusal to abandon her romantic notions of vice and virtue at this point in the novel indicates her belief that these notions represent enduring truths that are above the variances and the slow but inevitable changes that characterize social custom.

45 Locke, 72.

This refusal actually represents a self-interested decision on the part of a woman who elsewhere exhibits a thorough understanding of custom's variable nature. Arabella eschews the customs of eighteenth-century English society for those of romance in order to suit her own desires. From the beginning, Arabella has recognized that eighteenth-century customs governing women's lives carry with them limitations that she finds unbearable. This is particularly true of customs governing marriage, which Arabella believes compel a woman to marry too soon and with too little regard for her own inclinations unless, of course, those inclinations are in keeping with her family's desires. In essence, Arabella's actions throughout the novel represent her attempt to escape the fate towards which other characters in the novel, including her father, her uncle, and her cousin Glanville, compel her. This fate is, of course, her "cure" and subsequent marriage. Arabella sees "Violence" and "Injustice" in her father's plan to marry her to Glanville and laments that she is not "Mistress" of her "own Actions" (39, 44). As James J. Lynch asserts, Arabella is plagued by "a fear of marriage" and "the consequent loss of 'Liberty' and subjection to another."[46] She strives to avoid the fate that she sees represented in the figure of the Countess who, as Catherine A. Craft notes, "personifies that doom to which Arabella must succumb."[47] The Countess tells Arabella, "I was born and christen'd, had a useful and proper Education, receiv'd the Addresses of my Lord—through the Recommendation of my Parents, and marry'd him with their Consents and my own Inclination" (327). They have since "liv'd in great Harmony together" (327). In the Countess's account of her life, courtship and marriage follow closely upon the heels of her "useful and proper Education," and she fails to mention anything that occurs between those two phases of her life. As other novels of the period illustrate—Richardson's *Clarissa*, Haywood's *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, and Burney's *Evelina*—the space of time between the completion of a young woman's education and her marriage represents a potentially precarious period in her life. During this time, she may be led astray: she may fall into the hands of a seducer, choose to marry the wrong man, or resist marriage altogether. For Arabella, however, this space of time has numerous possibilities. She longs to widen it and fill it with "adventures."

46 Lynch, 57.

47 Catherine A. Craft, "Reworking Male Models: Aphra Behn's *Fair Vow-Breaker*, Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*, and Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*," *Modern Language Review* 86 (1991): 837.

When she rejects the customs of eighteenth-century English life for those of romance, Arabella embraces a frame of reference within which her desire to eschew marriage in favour of adventure is acceptable. In fact, the language of romance allows her to shape this desire into conscious thought. The narrator states that Arabella had "always intended to marry some time or other, as all the Heroines had done, yet she thought such an Event ought to be brought about with an infinite deal of Trouble; and that it was necessary she should pass to this State thro' a great Number of Cares, Disappointments, and Distresses of various Kinds, like them" (27). In the same way, the language of romance enables Arabella to articulate her desire to postpone marriage until she finds a man who proves truly worthy of her love and esteem. She believes that "her Lover should purchase her with his Sword from a Croud of Rivals; and arrive to the Possession of her Heart by many Years of Services and Fidelity" (27). Finally, the language of romance allows Arabella to express both her dissatisfaction with those who threaten her independence and her own desire to resist that threat:

> The Impropriety of receiving a Lover of a Father's recommending appeared in its strongest Light. What Lady in Romance ever married the Man that was chose for her? In those Cases the Remonstrances of a Parent are called Persecutions; obstinate Resistance, Constancy and Courage; and an Aptitude to dislike the Person proposed to them, a noble Freedom of Mind which disdains to love or hate by the Caprice of others. (27)

In this passage, which transforms the words of eighteenth-century English society into the language of romance, Arabella not only rationalizes her inclinations against marriage but also reconfigures them as heroic. What would have been considered vicious within the world of the eighteenth-century family becomes virtuous within that of the heroic romance. In other words, Arabella is already well aware of what the Countess tells her later, that beliefs about the nature of vice and virtue differ depending upon custom. Arabella simply chooses to subscribe to the customs of romance and embrace them as if they were enduring truths because they validate her desires in a way that the customs of eighteenth-century English society cannot.

Yet Arabella is an impressive heroine not only because she attempts to exchange one set of customs for another, but also because she is able to play the conventions of romance and eighteenth-century society off one another in order to accommodate her desires. At rare

moments, neither romance nor eighteenth-century customs provide her with a precedent she finds satisfying. In cases such as these, the complex reasoning that distinguishes Arabella's intellect from most of the other female characters in the novel enables her to negotiate between the customs of eighteenth-century society and the world of romance and to think and act in a way that rises above the conventions of both. This is most clearly seen in her determination to fly from her father's house in order to escape marriage to Glanville. Arabella understands that such an action would meet with disapprobation among her family, friends, and acquaintance, but in this particular case, she cannot rationalize her inclination to flee by appealing to the dictates of romance, for the books she has read provide no precedent for her to follow: "She did not remember to have read of any Heroine that voluntarily left her Father's House, however persecuted she might be" (35). Thinking beyond the limitations provided by the conventions of both society and romance narrative, Arabella rationalizes her flight by noting that, unlike other romance heroines, she has no "favoured Lover for whose sake it might have been believed she had made an Elopement, which would have been highly prejudicial to her Glory" (35). Because there is "no Foundation for any Suspicion of that Kind in her Case," Arabella reasons that "there was nothing to hinder her from withdrawing from a tyrannical Exertion of parental Authority, and the secret Machinations of a Lover, whose Aim was to take away her Liberty, either by obliging her to marry him, or making her a Prisoner" (35). Here, as Arabella "mentally rewrite[s] romance convention to suit her particular anxieties,"[48] she creates a space within which an otherwise unacceptable course of action becomes acceptable. In this way, Arabella demonstrates her ability to think and act beyond the limitations imposed by the codes of female conduct available to her.

As the novel progresses, Lennox uses her characterization of Arabella to redefine traditional gender distinctions in even more profound and significant ways, particularly those distinctions that govern women's proper activities within the public sphere and prohibit them from engaging in the kinds of public professions generally considered appropriate only for men. The question of whether or not female education would lead to an expansion of women's activities within the public sphere proved problematic for earlier defenders of women's

48 Lynch, 56.

learning. Frequently, writers such as van Schurman, Makin, Woolley, and Chudleigh appear to reinscribe women within traditional female roles. Van Schurman reminds her readers that the apostle Paul tells women to be "Keepers at home," while Makin goes out of her way to assure her readers that she does "not intend to hinder good Housewifery" and that she advocates "private instruction" rather than "publick Imployment."[49] These writers are careful to assure their readers that, when duty demands it, even an educated woman will remain in the home, submissive to her husband; nonetheless, the language they use to make concessions in the name of woman's duty often suggests they do so rather grudgingly. With a parenthetical statement that speaks volumes, Woolley asserts that even learned women should be obedient to their "lawful (but lording) Husbands."[50] Similarly, Melissa, the heroine of Chudleigh's "The Ladies Defence," betrays a lack of complacency when she reassures her male auditors that, in spite of women's learning, "The Tyrant Man may still possess the Throne."[51] Though she rejects the notion of "publick Imployment" for women, Makin nonetheless notes that "Sometimes Women may have occasions for publick business, as Widows, and Wives when their Husbands are absent, but especially persons born to Government."[52] This tendency to equivocate is suggestive not only of these writers' self-consciousness regarding their own public role as participants in the literary marketplace, but also of their concern with the tastes and prejudices of their audience. Makin is acutely aware that her arguments stand a better chance of acceptance if she is willing to negotiate with her readers: "To ask too much," she asserts, "is the way to be denied all."[53] In other words, these writers are aware that their success depends to some degree upon their willingness to work within the bounds prescribed by the very social customs that they identify elsewhere as oppressive and arbitrary.

The reluctance of these writers to envision an increase in women's participation in "publick business" is also undoubtedly connected to their perception of the public sphere as a potentially threatening space for women. They often associate the public sphere with social

49 Anna Maria van Schurman, *The Learned Maid, or Whether a Maid May Be a Scholar* (1659), ed. Frances Teague (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 13; Makin, 31–33.

50 Woolley, 2.

51 Chudleigh, "The Ladies Defence," line 659.

52 Makin, 33.

53 Makin, 4.

activities that jeopardize women's ability to learn. For the women who are addressed by or described in these educational tracts (in other words, women of the wealthier classes), the public sphere is customarily viewed not as a space in which to work and learn but as a space in which to pursue fashion and public diversion. As Woolley notes, the public sphere becomes for many women a space of spectacle, a space in which to see and be seen: "Many of our sex are to blame, who have no sooner ting'd their faces artificially, than some Attendant is dispacht to know what Plays are to be acted that day; my Lady approveth of one which she is resolved to see, that she may be seen; being in the Pit or Box, she minds not how little she observeth in it, as how much to be observed at it."[54] The defenders of women's education generally agree that this preoccupation with fashion and public diversion renders women insipid and consumes valuable time that could be devoted to study. Makin criticizes women who "trifle away so many precious minutes meerly to polish their Hands and Feet, to curl their Locks, to dress and trim their Bodies," while Chudleigh asserts that time spent studying would "turn to a much better Account, than if it were parcell'd out between the *Glass* and the *Table*, the *Park* and the *Playhouse*, unnecessary *Visits* and expensive *Games*."[55] Writers such as Makin, Woolley, and Chudleigh seem unwilling to alienate their readers by too zealously attacking the social customs that prohibit women from entering public professions. At the same time, they are, in many ways, burdened by their perception of the public sphere as a potentially damaging space for women. With such sensitivities, it is little wonder that they prevaricate when addressing the possibility of an expansion in women's participation in public life.

Not all educational writers were as ambivalent regarding this possibility, however. In 1673, Poullain unequivocally asserts that educated women are just as capable as men of functioning as professors, doctors, lawyers, judges, soldiers, and political and military leaders. Poullain claims that the belief that women's intellectual inferiority bars them from entering the professions is "a false Notion which Men forge to themselves of Custom" and that a woman practising a profession would be surprising "for no other reason, but that of Novelty."[56] Poullain's ideas, though largely ignored when they were first published in English in 1677, continued to circulate throughout the first half of the

54 Woolley, 35–36.
55 Makin, 22; Chudleigh, *Essays*, 261.
56 Poullain, 65–66.

eighteenth century. In 1739, they were reiterated in a controversial pamphlet published by an English author under the pseudonym "Sophia." The pamphlet, entitled *Woman Not Inferior to Man*, would resurface several times before the end of the eighteenth century. Like Poullain, Sophia blames the influence of custom not only for women's absence from traditionally masculine public professions but also for most men's utter inability to imagine that women's participation in such professions could ever be anything but extraordinary.[57]

Lennox participates in this discourse through her characterization of Arabella. To a great extent, this characterization addresses the anxieties about women's participation in public life that perplexed writers such as Makin, Chudleigh, and Woolley, who believed that frivolous interactions within the public sphere could only hinder women's intellectual development. These very concerns, of course, led Astell to advocate the establishment of an academy of women completely removed from the temptations of public life.[58] To a great extent, Arabella's early intellectual development is facilitated by her freedom from such temptations. This retirement from the decadence of society-at-large also frees Arabella from many of the frivolous distractions that dominate the lives and minds of more worldly women such as Miss Glanville. When Arabella is finally introduced into fashionable society, her early education allows her to interact with the shallow and often ridiculous individuals she encounters there without being corrupted by them. To a certain degree, in fact, Arabella comes to exercise a transformative influence over this society.

This influence is particularly evident when Arabella visits Bath with her family. Most of the women at Bath, and many of the men, are represented as participating in a tireless pursuit of fashion for fashion's sake, and they are decidedly unkind to anyone who does not do the same. When Arabella first appears here, the other women are "alarmed at the Singularity of her Dress," the style of which is informed not by the fashions of current society but by those of the romance heroines about whom she has read (263). As a result, Arabella becomes, for a time, an object of raillery and gossip. This situation changes, however, when Arabella attends her first ball. She determines to go to the ball dressed in the style of Princess Julia from La Calprenède's romance *Cleopatra*. After dismissing a mantua-maker

57 Sophia, *Woman Not Inferior to Man*, in *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, ed. Vivien Jones (New York: Routledge, 1990), 229.

58 Astell, 29–30.

who is too insistent upon following the current fashion, Arabella designs her own costume out of the "rich Silver Stuff, she had bought for that Purpose." She does so based not upon what is most fashionable but upon what is most "becoming" (269–70). Instead of thoughtlessly conforming to the current trends, Arabella approaches the issue of dress with characteristic deliberation and imagination.

Arabella's costume produces the effect she desires. Though the design is decidedly unusual, the narrator asserts, "Upon the whole, nothing could be more singularly becoming than her Dress; or set off with greater Advantage the striking Beauties of her Person" (271). Prior to Arabella's appearance at the ball, word of her outrageous costume has already circulated among the attendees, and they are preparing to make a mockery of her: "It is not to be doubted but much Mirth was treasur'd up for her Appearance; and the occasional Humourist had already prepared his accustom'd Jest" (272). When Arabella does appear, however, the crowd is awestruck: "Her noble Air, the native Dignity in her Looks, the inexpressible Grace which accompany'd all her Motions, and the consummate Loveliness of her Form, drew the Admiration of the whole Assembly" (272). Her costume throws into relief her natural beauty and the visible manifestations of her superior character. The crowd, which is associated elsewhere with an excess of talk, is actually struck silent: "A respectful Silence succeeded, and the Astonishment her Beauty occasion'd, left them no Room to descant on the Absurdity of her Dress" (272). During her sojourn at Bath, Arabella resists the dangers and temptations that educational writers often associated with the public sphere. As a result, she brings about something of a transformation (though perhaps a temporary one) of this space. Lennox suggests that she is able to do so because of her learning. In other words, the novel implies that a young woman's early education can potentially protect her from those elements of public life that might otherwise inhibit her intellectual development.

Lennox's novel does not simply suggest, however, that the ultimate purpose of a young woman's education is to transform her into a moderate and rational consumer of fashionable goods and amusements. Certainly, Arabella recognizes the importance of both good taste and moderation. She tells Miss Glanville that it is entirely appropriate for women to concern themselves with fashion to a moderate degree: "I will allow the Ladies to be solicitous about their Habits, and

dress with all the Care and Elegance they are capable of" (280). Similarly, she admits that, while balls and other public amusements should not be considered "The Business of Life" (280), it is appropriate for both men and women to enjoy them in moderation. However, Arabella positions herself not simply as a participant in, but also as a critic of, the society to which she has been introduced at Bath. Immediately after the ball, Arabella tells Miss Glanville, "If the World, in which you seem to think I am but new initiated, affords only these Kinds of Pleasures, I shall very soon regret the Solitude and Books I have quitted" (279). According to Arabella, people who spend their time pursuing such "trifling Amusements" ultimately live their lives "to very little Purpose" (279). Arabella asks Miss Glanville,

> What room, I pray you, does a Lady give for high and noble Adventures, who consumes her Days in Dressing, Dancing, listening to Songs, and ranging the Walks with People as thoughtless as herself? How mean and contemptible a Figure must a Life spent in such idle Amusements make in History? Or rather, Are not such Persons always buried in Oblivion, and can any Pen be found who would condescend to record such inconsiderable Actions? (279)

Of course, it is no accident that Arabella addresses these criticisms to Miss Glanville, for throughout the novel, Miss Glanville's name has become almost synonymous with an intellectually stunted and superficial brand of femininity. Arabella expresses her dissatisfaction with the female population of the Richmond neighbourhood by noting that "she found only Miss *Glanville*'s among all she knew" (341). Miss Glanville and the women she epitomizes, each of them a product of a "fine Lady's Education" (5), are incapable of thinking or acting outside the very narrow sphere of activity with which they have been taught to concern themselves.

Though she is much more subtle than Poullain or Sophia, Lennox envisions a broader role for women in public life and goes so far as to suggest that Arabella is quite capable of engaging in the kinds of public offices generally reserved for men. This vision becomes particularly clear in Lennox's representation of the ways in which Arabella blurs conventional distinctions between feminine and masculine speech. Throughout the eighteenth century, there were definite ideals regarding the nature and purpose of women's conversation. As Leland E. Warren notes, during this period a woman's conversation was expected to be little more than light, charming, easy, and

sensible.[59] At the same time, however, women are frequently represented as falling short of these ideals and speaking endlessly of trivial subjects—fashion, scandal, social events. In 1711, for example, Mr Spectator sarcastically suggests that universities should fill their rhetoric chairs with "She Professors," and asserts,

> It has been said in the Praise of some Men, that they could Talk whole Hours together upon any thing; but it must be owned to the Honour of the other Sex, that there are many among them who can Talk whole Hours together upon nothing. I have known a Woman branch out into a long extempore Dissertation upon the Edging of a Petticoat, and chide her Servant for breaking a China Cup in all the Figures of Rhetorick.[60]

The defenders of women's learning similarly suggest that women are prone to converse about trivial subjects; however, they typically attribute this tendency to a faulty education. Chudleigh asserts that women speak as they are taught to speak and assures her female readers that they are perfectly capable of discoursing upon matters of substance: "Why should not an ingenious Discourse be more acceptable, than a tedious account of the Fashions? And why may we not speak with as good a grace of the Pyramids, as of a fine Manteau; of the Mausoleum, as the trimming of a Petticoat?"[61] In *The Female Quixote*, Lennox represents female speech at its most superficial level: Arabella's neighbour Miss Groves can speak only of "Fashions, Assemblies, Cards, or Scandal" and converses "upon a thousand Trifles" (68), while the other women in Arabella's neighbourhood entertain themselves "with the usual Topicks of Conversation among young Ladies, such as their Winnings and Losings at Brag, the Prices of Silks, the newest Fashions, the best Haircutter, the Scandal at the Last Assembly" (360–61). As Warren points out, such conversation "is hateful to Arabella because she sees it as the normal mode of expression for those willing to accept oblivion."[62] Arabella is disgusted by such talk, for it reveals women's limited sphere of activity and the constraints this confinement places upon their intellectual development.

Arabella herself comes to represent feminine speech at its most ideal. She charms her uncle because, when her conversation does not turn upon romance, it is "perfectly fine, easy, and entertaining" (65).

59 Warren, 376.
60 Joseph Addison, *Spectator* no. 247, in *The Spectator*, 2:458.
61 Chudleigh, *Essays*, 260.
62 Warren, 374.

Glanville is "charmed to the last Degree of Admiration" by Arabella's speech and appreciates "the agreeable Sallies of her Wit, and her fine Reasoning upon every Subject he proposed" (46). Ultimately, the powerful influence of Arabella's speech and her capacity for intellectual discourse stretch beyond the feminine ideal and lead others, particularly Sir Charles, to gender her speech as masculine. Sir Charles admires Arabella for speaking "like an Orator" (269) and says that "if she had been a Man, she would have made a great Figure in Parliament, and that her Speeches might have come perhaps to be printed in time" (311). Elsewhere, Sir Charles asserts that Arabella "sometimes talk'd as learnedly as a Divine," a statement that foreshadows the heroine's later debate with the learned doctor, a debate in which she holds her own quite admirably (314). The novel, then, raises the possibility that educated and intelligent women might be capable of functioning in public roles generally reserved for men. In this way, Lennox's text suggests that learning invests women with the potential to transform public space and their roles within that space. Arabella's profound admiration for the Amazons, one of history's most notorious examples of women participating in customarily masculine activities, suggests her attraction to the possibility of such a transformation (125–26, 204–6).

Of course, the novel actually ends with an altogether different type of transformation, one that involves Arabella's "cure" at the hands of the learned divine.[63] The conclusion of the novel, in which Arabella rejects the role of the romance heroine for a more conventional female role, inevitably brings to mind earlier educational writers' lamentations upon the overwhelming power of the social customs that governed women's lives. The reader is reminded of this power when, just prior to curing her, the doctor tells Arabella that "the Order of the World is so established, that all human Affairs proceed in a

63 Critics have speculated that the character of the learned doctor is based upon Samuel Johnson, even suggesting that Johnson may have written the chapter in which Arabella is "cured." John Mitford first explored this hypothesis in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1843, and Margaret Dalziel discusses it in a lengthy explanatory note in the Oxford edition of *The Female Quixote* (414). For further discussions upon the subject, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Subtle Sophistry of Desire: Dr. Johnson and *The Female Quixote*," *Modern Philology* 85 (1988): 534; Debra Malina, "Rereading the Patriarchal Text: *The Female Quixote, Northanger Abbey*, and the Trace of the Absent Mother," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8 (1996): 281; David Marshall, "Writing Masters and 'Masculine Exercises' in *The Female Quixote*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5 (1993): 133; and Langbauer, 43. Also of relevance is Duncan Isles's discussion of the relationship between Lennox, Johnson, and Richardson in the appendix to the Oxford edition of *The Female Quixote*, 419–28.

regular Method," adding that "the Brave and the Coward, the Sprightly and the Dull, suffer themselves to be carried alike down the Stream of Custom" (379). The reader is reminded of this power once more when, as a result of the combined force of social and generic convention, marriage to Glanville becomes the primary arena in which Arabella will employ her superior intelligence. Understandably, the novel's conclusion troubles many recent critics, who often read Arabella's cure and subsequent marriage as an unfortunate but inevitable submission to patriarchal authority.[64] If we read the novel within the context of the educational discourse that characterized the period, we can more clearly see that the inevitability of this conclusion gives the novel its power. With this ending, Lennox's text moves beyond a complex exploration of the possibilities created by women's learning and becomes a forceful critique of the limitations imposed upon educated women within a culture that restricts their ability to fully exercise their intellectual and creative powers.

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64 See Langbauer, 43–44; Todd, 156–57; and Ellen Gardiner, "Writing Men Reading in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Studies in the Novel* 28 (1996): 9.