

Learning From the Heroes:
Characterization, Education, and Charlotte Lennox's
The Female Quixote

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Charlotte Lennox, a female poet and novelist of the eighteenth century, has recently received more attention from literary critics because of her novel, *The Female Quixote*. Written in 1752, Lennox's novel emerges during a time of debate and reevaluation of the educational properties of fiction. The characters of a text were considered an important part of the instructional aspects of the work, serving either as good or bad examples for the reader. Many debates centered around how a character should be presented in a piece of literature. Some critics advocated purer characters who lacked flaws, thinking they served as better examples. Others argued that the mixed characters, those who displayed imperfections and learned from their mistakes were

more beneficial to a reader. Lennox's insights on this debate can be found in *The Female Quixote*. Her novel examines the dangers and advantages of both forms of characterization, and finally, advocates a compromise between the two.

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I. Introduction

When Charlotte Lennox began writing in the mid-eighteenth century, she entered a literary world struggling to redefine itself. Men and women of letters were beginning to focus their attention on the development of what would eventually be known as the novel. Writers of fiction at this time could sense that something was changing in the world of English letters. A new self-awareness emerged among authors, and they began to recognize that the literature they were writing was innovative and would influence generations of writers to come. Hence, these writers began to debate among themselves, questioning what kinds of settings, plots, and characters best fulfill the nearly universally-recognized purpose of a piece of fiction: to entertain and to educate the reader.

To achieve this purpose, many authors decided to write about perfect or nearly perfect characters to inspire their readers to strive for greatness. These writers feared that portraying their "good" characters as fallible might lead their readers astray by providing bad examples. Many social, political and religious leaders throughout history have agreed with the perspectives of these advocates of pure characters, desiring to avoid anything that might possibly corrupt the reading public. Samuel Johnson, the great author and literary critic of the eighteenth century, advocated this kind of character, writing that in fictional works, he "cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability...but the highest and

purest that humanity can reach."¹ In other words, when the author has the opportunity to invent a character, the character should be a "pure" example of virtue, to be emulated by readers.

Others believed that a more realistic portrayal of a character with human flaws and shortcomings would be easier to identify with. Henry Fielding reflects this view in his novel *Tom Jones*, in which he writes about a rather licentious young man who eventually reforms his behavior. Fielding warns his reader of his method of characterization: "we shall represent Human Nature at first to the keen appetite of our reader in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country."² Fielding makes a conscious choice to focus on the lower social ranks, portraying country life, considered less civilized, less unique than life at court or in a large city. He prefers to show the darker sides of Human Nature, and encourage, through character growth and change, improvement in the reader. According to authors like Fielding, imperfect characters are better able to demonstrate growth and personal improvement, two supposed benefits from reading fiction.

Ian Watt, in his work *The Rise of the Novel*, notes this conflict in characterization and its power to define what is and what is not considered a romance. He states that "the 'realism' of the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding is closely associated with the

¹Johnson, Samuel. "Rambler #4", *Essays from the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler*, Ed. by W. J. Bate. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. 14.

²Fielding, Henry. *Tom Jones*. New York: Random House, Inc, 1950. 3

fact that Moll Flanders is a thief, Pamela a hypocrite, and Tom Jones a fornicator."³ The flawed, or mixed nature of the main characters of eighteenth century novels indicate the new emphasis on capturing the realities of life. Whereas previously, the main characters in most fictions were idealized or archetypal, representing one type of person, or embodying one particular trait, instead, the literary world began to emphasize realistic heroes or heroines, flawed and individual. Watt continues, "the novel arose in the modern period, a period whose general intellectual orientation was most decisively separated from its classical and mediaeval heritage by its rejection—or at least its attempted rejection—of universals."⁴ This rejection of universals demands the creation of characters that are flawed and unique, instead of perfect and universally good. Hence, the debate about how to portray characters involved not only heroism, but also the growing attempts at differentiating between "realistic" fiction, the novel, and romantic fiction.

Charlotte Lennox emerged as a writer during this literary debate about characterization, and several of her novels reflect this conflict, though none so clearly or compellingly as *The Female Quixote*. Lennox wrote *The Female Quixote* in 1752, in the midst of this debate on fictional characters. Several of her contemporaries, including Fielding, Johnson, and Samuel Richardson, were engaged in an ongoing struggle to justify their particular position on this issue. Lennox, a friend and colleague of both Richardson and Johnson, took advantage of her connections in the literary world to

³Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957. 11.

⁴Watt, 12.

create a work of fiction that explores both sides of the issue of character. She herself chooses to create an imperfect main character, Arabella, who must learn from her mistakes in order to create a happy and respectable life for herself. However, Arabella's favorite pastime and source of knowledge are her French heroic romances, which include perfect, "pure" characters. These French romances were popular in Britain about a century and a half before Lennox wrote her novel. They depicted tales of honor and love between people of high rank and virtue. Arabella tries to associate herself and others with the idealized heroism of such literature, and tends to want to reject the realistic, flawed aspects of the characters and the world around her. The mistakes that she falls prey to as well as the advantages she gains from these heroic examples illustrate Lennox's own ideas about the most effective and educational aspects of fictional characters.

Like so many of her contemporaries, Lennox desires both to amuse and to teach her readers something valuable through her writing. She conveys instruction partially through the characterization and growth of the characters in the novel. The plot of *The Female Quixote* revolves around a young lady who is obsessed with an outdated version of characterization. Arabella, using the women in her favorite French romances as examples, desperately wants to be able to define herself as a romantic heroine, and wants and needs to be able to discern who around her is also heroic, or virtuous, and who wants to do her harm. Her delusions are amusing, since the values that Arabella embraces seem quaint and out of place in eighteenth century British society. However, her struggles to define herself and those around her, relying on her inadequate education and total lack of experience, add an undertone of solemnity to the novel. Lennox's allusions to romantic

characters and events, and the analysis of their effects on Arabella's psyche suggest the danger of relying too heavily on the use of fiction as a substitute for real experience and education. Arabella's reliance on perfect, romantic heroines to serve as examples of conduct and virtue is the source of some of her struggles to function in eighteenth century society. However, the lack of virtuous examples cause many of the characters around her to fall into imperfections and vices themselves. Through her analysis of the benefits and detriments of these pure characters on Arabella's life, Lennox explores the debate on characterization, as well as the conflicts around the emphasis on the educational properties of fiction.

II. Eighteenth-Century Women and Fiction

Nearly all eighteenth century novelists tried to create heroes and heroines that a reader could look up to, emulate, or identify with for his or her own moral benefit. There was a desire at this time that a work of fiction be as realistic as possible, in order that readers might learn how to conduct themselves in society, how to discern between good and bad people, and how to identify positive and negative traits within themselves. Educational texts were seen as very valuable, especially for the overprotected and undereducated women in society. Instructional books on how to act in social settings became a popular genre of nonfiction. Fictional texts concerning admirable young women began to serve much the same purpose as these instructional guides. Hence, the development of virtuous, heroic, *and* realistic characters, who encounter the same struggles that a typical eighteenth century woman might face, became an emphasis within the literary world.

Thus, it is important that Lennox decides to focus on Arabella, a female heroine and a female reader, as she sifts through her struggles with heroism. Lennox sets her novel in England, and her quixote is a young woman, lonely and impressionable, seeking identity and knowledge. Lacking a supervised education and good female role models, the quixotic Arabella relies on her badly-translated French heroic romances to teach her what she needs to know about the world. Arabella's reliance on books stems from her uncomfortable and restrictive home life--a life that many women in the eighteenth

century would have identified with, at least in some way. Her mother having died three days after she is born, Arabella is left without any kind of female role model to look up to. Her father, loving and kind to her, though rather detached and introverted, is not an adequate source of knowledge and companionship for an intelligent lady such as Arabella. Hence, Arabella's life is lonely and dull, certainly not fit for a young woman. She turns to her mother's fictions to pass the time, reading romances more than the educational texts available to her.

Lennox makes an important statement when she writes that Arabella inherits the romances from her mother, who "had purchased these Books to soften a solitude which she had found very disagreeable."⁵ The romances here become a female legacy, not because of a feminine predisposition for fantasy and frivolity, but because of a huge burden of boredom and forced lack of involvement in the real world. For both the mother and the daughter, life is determined in a large part by the male head of the household, the Marquis, and they have no choice but to live lives of seclusion with him in the countryside, with little or no social interaction. Since these two women are greatly limited in educational opportunities, their romances act as a substitute for a real education, for real experience with the ways of the world.

Hence, like too many women at this time, Arabella's education and knowledge of the world must come to her second-hand, through books and through accounts of other peoples' lives. Though her options were limited, an eighteenth century woman like Arabella was expected to peruse educational reading materials, and the romance was not

⁵Lennox, Charlotte. *The Female Quixote*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. p 7.

considered educational. Joseph Addison, an eighteenth-century literary figure, laments one woman's wasted time: "What improvements would a woman have made, who is so susceptible of impressions from what she reads, had she been guided to such books as have a tendency to enlighten the understanding and rectify the passions, as well as those which are of little more use than to divert the imagination?"⁶ In the eighteenth century, the extent of a woman's education was greatly dependent on how much study she did in her spare time, and therefore, reading certain types of fiction seemed to detract from valuable reading time that could otherwise be used to improve the mind. Furthermore, because women were protected from the world, and consequently had very little personal experience, experience had to be borrowed from other sources, such as literature. Like Arabella, women were seeking knowledge of their world, and they did not always know where to look for this knowledge. Many turned to books in order to gain vicarious world experience.

Katherine Sobba Green notes the importance of novels in the education of eighteenth century women when she quotes a woman who laments, "If I had read such books...before I was married I should have chosen better; I was told, that all men were alike except in respect to fortune."⁷ Too many women, unprepared and unsure about the world, were forced to choose a husband without having any real way to gauge his character. Sobba comments on the above quote: "Serious novels, particularly those

⁶Small, Miriam Rossiter. *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1935. 89.

⁷Green, Katherine Sobba. *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991. 52.

written by certain women writers, would be especially helpful to young women who must choose partners for life."⁸ Such novels teach a certain amount of discernment, presenting both "good" and "bad" characters and character traits.

Writers like Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, both popular novelists in the eighteenth century, chose to use techniques of characterization to provide examples and lessons for their readers, and especially for their female readers. Samuel Richardson recognized the need for good fictional examples of virtuous women for his female readers to emulate. Consequently, in his novel, *Clarissa*, he makes a point to address women specifically in his preface, claiming that the positive examples of the two heroines in his novel should be "recommended to the *younger* part (more especially) of Female Readers."⁹ Richardson is one of many eighteenth-century novelists particularly interested in providing positive or educational examples of virtuous women for his readers to learn from. Novels like *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, both written by Richardson, were intended to both entertain and instruct a primarily female audience.

However, though such "serious novels" like *Clarissa* were considered beneficial to young ladies, other novels, including romances, were treated with suspicion, their educational benefit questioned. Containing unlikely situations and only pure characters, that is, characters who are either totally heroic or totally corrupt, the French heroic romances seemed unrealistic and therefore, not a feasible example for a reader to follow.

⁸Sobba, 52.

⁹Richardson, Samuel. *Clarissa*. Ed. George Sherburn. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962. xix.

An inexperienced woman could easily gain a false impression of the world through her choice of reading materials, and Lennox's Arabella is an example of how this could happen.

III. Arabella's Education--From Romance to Reality

Arabella's education and discernment, both obtained at least in part from badly-translated French Romances, often fail her throughout the course of *The Female Quixote*.

Her attempts to emulate the flawless heroines in the stories results in some unattractive character flaws that make her look either ridiculous or rude. Social practices have probably never resembled those found in the French romance tradition, and consequently, Arabella's role models are outdated at best, displaying traits and attitudes that are unacceptable to eighteenth century society, as well as unattainable for an imperfect human being.

One of Arabella's less attractive traits is her total faith in the power of her charms, a rather vain aspect of her personality, but nonetheless, one that is learned from the romantic heroines she so admires. Just as the heroines of her favorite stories possess flawless and powerful beauty, Arabella assumes that her appearance must equal their perfections. Therefore, she is indifferent when faced with Sir George's flattery, "the most extravagant Compliments being what she expected from all Men."¹⁰ Such a high opinion of the power of her beauty in the world of romance is normal and justified, though to everyone around her, including the reader, her belief in her own comeliness seems vain and proud. She is so confident in her charms that she is surprised when a man does not fall in love with her. Arabella suspects Mr. Selvin, Mr. Tinsel, and even her own uncle

¹⁰Lennox, 118.

of falling for her. She is somewhat surprised that, "her Uncle was not insensible of her Charms,"¹¹ but not overly so, for in her romances she finds several other examples of such incestuous attractions. Rather, Arabella expects such dramatic responses to her beauty, wondering "how any Solitude could be obscure enough to conceal a Beauty like hers from Notice."¹² This kind of vanity, though amusing, is disturbing. An eighteenth century woman is expected to be beautiful, if possible, and humble at the same time. Arabella's misinterpretations of society's expectations for her reveals the dangers lurking in the text of the romance that is taken too literally.

Another blight that Arabella picks up from her romances is her perfectionism. Despite Mr. Glanville's complete and total devotion to her, she often treats him with a ridiculous amount of severity, convinced that her honor depends on such distance and strictness. He truly loves her and does anything he can to make her happy, but she is not satisfied with his efforts to make his love known. Arabella expects him to be perfect—to know and fulfill her every need and expectation. After all, the heroes in her romances do no less for their beloved ones. When he displeases her, she banishes him from her presence without allowing him to explain or defend his actions, following the decorum set by her favorite heroines. Because of this kind of perfectionism, her ability to discriminate between her friends and her enemies is frequently lacking, and nowhere is this flaw more evident than in her dealings with Glanville. Despite his continued devotion and his frequent proofs of his love for her, Arabella still treats Glanville with

¹¹Lennox, 164.

¹²Lennox, 7.

suspicion, holding him at a safe distance. Because of the unattainable examples she follows, Arabella's discernment, so important to a woman while choosing a husband, is flawed.

Her judgement is so skewed that when a rival lover, Sir George, fabricates a story about Glanville's disloyalty, she does not trust Glanville's protestations of innocence. Instead of listening to the explanations of others, she assumes she knows what is happening before it can be explained to her, relying solely on the fictional examples in her books. The Doctor notes the tendency in her personality to jump to conclusions and judge others prematurely: "Your Imaginations, Madam...are too quick for Language; you conjecture too soon, what you do not wait to hear."¹³ Arabella's impatience with imperfections and her snap judgements are her major faults, causing many problems for those who love her. In the end, these snap judgements endanger both her own life and the lives of those around her.

Arabella's perfectionism carries over into the way she feels she ought to be treated, and the power she thinks she should have over others. The examples from her romances cause her to believe "that Love was the ruling Principle of the World,"¹⁴ and therefore, that she has the ultimate power of life or of death over those who are enamored with her. Hence, she pridefully commands Mr. Selvin to leave England, because she thinks he dares to be in love with her. After following to the romantic tradition and commanding him to leave the country, she states her belief that Mr. Selvin will find

¹³Lennox, 370.

¹⁴Lennox, 7.

comfort merely in following her commands.¹⁵ Such an unrealistic expectation of Mr. Selvin, though inspired by her romances, is difficult to overlook and justify in Arabella's personality. Indeed, she makes herself look ridiculous in this situation, as Mr. Selvin is clearly innocent and is certainly a sympathetic character, undeserving of her displeasure. Her discernment fails her in this situation, and she tries to rid herself of a true friend and advocate, mistaking his friendly devotion for romantic admiration.

Again, assuming more power than she really has, Arabella commands her lover, Glanville, to recover from his illness. She firmly believes, according to the laws of the romance, that her presence alone will cure him of his fever. When Miss Glanville voices her apprehensions of her brother's condition, Arabella responds, "He must not die; and shall not, if the *Pity of Arabella* is powerful enough to make him live."¹⁶ Hoping that Glanville's love for her resembles that of the romantic hero, she expects him to recover when she condescends to visit him. She goes so far in this belief to be displeased with Glanville when he "disobeys" her command that he recover, though of course, this is an impossible request. Those around Arabella are shocked and offended at the power she claims to wield over her admirers. Both Sir Charles and his daughter, Miss Glanville, are disgusted with Arabella and her reaction to Glanville's illness. Sir Charles accuses his niece: "You want to carry your Power farther than ever any Beauty did before you; since you pretend to make People sick and well, whenever you please."¹⁷ However, Sir Charles

¹⁵Lennox, 313.

¹⁶Lennox, 131-132.

¹⁷Lennox, 145.

does not understand that she believes that other "beauties" have in fact wielded power over sickness and health in the cases of their admirers. Though Arabella believes that she is not unique, that most women wield this kind of power, nevertheless, to those around her, her attitude appears ridiculous, and usually causes them offense.

Because of Arabella's imitations of romantic heroines, she often puts herself in dangerous social situations. For a woman in the eighteenth century, reputation was everything, and endangering that reputation is playing with the future. James Fordyce, a Scots minister in the mid-eighteenth century, comments on the extreme importance of a woman's unsullied reputation:

The honour and peace of a family are, in this view, much more dependant on the conduct of daughters than of sons; and one young lady going astray shall subject her relations to such discredit and distress, as the united good conduct of all her brothers and sisters, supposing them numerous, shall scarce ever be able to repair.¹⁸

He claims that a woman's reputation affects not only her own happiness, but also that of her family and friends. The dangers of a sullied reputation were very real, and therefore, a woman's discernment was her best weapon. Unfortunately, Arabella's discernment is unpredictable at best. Consequently, some of her most amusing, but also quite serious adventures involve moments when she unknowingly endangers her reputation because of her bad judgement and literalization of her romances. Such is the case in her encounter with Miss Groves, a lady of very questionable reputation. Upon questioning Miss Groves' servant about the reputation of her mistress, Arabella learns that she has been

¹⁸Fordyce, James. "On the Importance of the Female Sex." reprinted in *Evelina*. by Frances Burney. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997. 449.

twice pregnant out of wedlock, and has a sullied reputation in general. Normally, a well-bred woman who did not wish to incur a similar reputation would try to avoid Miss Groves because of the choices she has made in her life. Arabella, however, refuses to believe such an unflattering look at her new friend, and insists on translating Miss Groves' past into a romantic and therefore legitimate history. She assumes that everyone around her must resemble the virtuous, faultless heroines she so admires, and therefore she insists that Miss Grove's "Case...is much to be lamented; and greatly resembles the unfortunate *Cleopatra's*."¹⁹ Arabella cannot fit Miss Grove into her vision of reality—there are no "Miss Groves" in the romantic tradition. Instead, she must make up a history for her friend—one that fits her own world view. Consequently, Arabella's judgement again fails her, and she spends her time trying to befriend a woman of poor character instead of avoiding her and the questionable reputation which could affect her own.

Later, Arabella mistakes another questionable person for a woman of quality. She encounters a prostitute in male costume on the street, and insists that she is a princess in disguise. Again, she must make this prostitute fit into her romantic world view by creating an identity for her. Her desire for Glanville to protect the girl causes him a great deal of embarrassment, and the crowd certainly does not know what to think of Arabella's intervention. Though her actions are kind, nevertheless, her discernment is faulty, and because of the inaccurate examples in her romances, Arabella involves herself in a questionable situation which, again, could damage her own reputation.

Though Arabella's motives are generally admirable, as in the incident with the

¹⁹Lennox, 77.

prostitute, she often unknowingly puts herself in danger of ridicule or abuse, or she puts others in danger, simply because of her skewed vision of the world. She endangers herself several times throughout the novel, fleeing the house without accompaniment or jumping into the Thames River to escape a "ravisher." Her faulty vision of the world gives her the misplaced courage to confront highwaymen, mistaking them for knights intending to rescue her, and to approach strangers for help. Often, in fleeing from a perceived danger, she puts herself in real danger, as is the case in Book II, where she flees from the gardener. She enlists the help of a passing gentleman, "The Service I desire of you is, to convey me to some Place where I may be in Safety for the Night."²⁰ Though she does not know this man, she is willing to rely on his aid, in the tradition of her chivalrous romances. However, in eighteenth-century society, for a young lady to entrust herself to any male besides her relatives or her most trusted family friends is extremely risky. Arabella's judgement proves to be quite bad in this situation, for the gentleman is "extremely glad at having so beautiful a Creature in his Power," and is "willing to have her at his own House."²¹ His designs are not honorable, for it is improper for Arabella to be alone with a stranger, especially in his own home, yet he is not concerned with propriety. Arabella herself is "suffering no Apprehensions from being alone with a Stranger, since nothing was more common to Heroines than such Adventures."²² In this situation, the dangerous side of Arabella's delusions is evident.

²⁰Lennox, 100.

²¹Lennox, 100.

²²Lennox, 100.

Arabella's actions and expectations are also dangerous to those around her. Her desire for vengeance and her expectation of bloodshed are shocking and callous. According to her, and according to her romances, it is typical for a lover to kill in defense of his beloved's honor. She says she considers Glanville to be "a Man possessed of Virtue and Courage enough to undertake to kill all [her] Enemies and Persecutors, though [she] had ever so many."²³ In a surprising reversal of roles, her cousin, Miss Glanville, appears virtuous in this passage, as she points out the immorality of Arabella's expectations: "A strange kind of Virtue and Courage, indeed, to take away the Lives of one's Fellow-Creatures!"²⁴ Clearly, the valuing of vengeance and valor above human life does not fit well into the Christian society that Arabella inhabits. Nevertheless, whenever Glanville seeks to confront someone peacefully, Arabella calls him a coward or a traitor. Glanville's good-nature frustrates her, since according to the laws of the romance, she may expect him to act with violent abandon toward one of her perceived enemies. Her values in these situations are flawed, according to eighteenth-century standards. She claims that her perceived ravisher is more worthy her esteem than Glanville, because of his willingness to fight for her, and that "nothing is so contemptible in the Eyes of a Woman, as a Lover who wants Spirit to die in her Defense."²⁵ Her exaltation of courage above all else clearly is out of place in eighteenth-century society.

In fact, Arabella's delusions nearly prove to be the cause of her death. She jumps

²³Lennox, 127.

²⁴Lennox, 127-128.

²⁵Lennox, 156.

into the Thames River in order to avoid another potential "ravisher," almost drowning and giving herself a serious illness. In a state of near-death, she acknowledges that "this Action appear'd to her rash and vain-glorious,"²⁶ though she still defends her motives for jumping. By trying to save her honor, she nearly loses her life. Though her intentions may have been honorable, the fact remains that her assumptions are unfounded, and as the Doctor later tells her, "I see you harrass'd with innumerable Terrors and Perplexities, which never disturb the Peace of Poverty or Ignorance...they are happily defended from wild Imaginations: They do not suspect what cannot happen, nor figure Ravishers at a Distance, and leap into Rivers to escape them."²⁷ The Doctor recognizes that Arabella's delusions do not cause exclusively amusing or harmless incidents; they are also the source of a great deal of anxiety and harm to herself.

Despite all of the consequences of Arabella's delusions, even more interesting than Lennox's reflection of negative societal views about the romance are her incidents and descriptions that complicate this issue. Lennox uses Arabella as a means to satirize the romance and as an example of the dangers of literalizing such fiction. However, Arabella is not without her own virtues and attributes. In fact, she is the most endearing character in the novel. Often her virtues stand out in stark contrast to the rather barren morality of the characters around her.

One way that Arabella stands out is in relation to her finely developed tastes, which are highly influenced by her romances. Unlike most of the women around her,

²⁶Lennox, 366.

²⁷Lennox, 371.

she does not fall prey to fashion trends, but manages to look lovely without spending her time keeping up with changing clothing styles. She "follow'd no Fashion but her own Taste, which was form'd on the Manners of the Heroines,"²⁸ and therefore, through her unique clothes, she shows her confidence and individuality, as well as her ability to know "how to set off her Charms."²⁹ Instead of relying on her trendiness and ability to fit in, Arabella's social strengths and beauty come from "that irresistible Charm...which commanded Reverence and Love from all who beheld her."³⁰ She is not loved merely for her "most charming Face," or her "Shape easy and delicate,"³¹ but for her inner beauty and poise which reflects upon her outward appearance as well. At the ball in London, Arabella arrives attired in a very outdated style, reminiscent of a heroine in one of her romances. Here again, she emulates a character she looks up to, applying the same formula of consulting examples from her readings when faced with a new experience, in this case, a dance. The difference is that in this case, Arabella's formula is successful. The guests of the dance are prepared to laugh at her eccentricity and outdated sense of fashion, but when she enters the room, "a respectful Silence succeeded, and the Astonishment her Beauty occasion'd, left them no room to descant on the Absurdity of her Dress."³² She disarms her would-be mockers by her comeliness and poise. In this

²⁸Lennox, 269.

²⁹Lennox, 270.

³⁰Lennox, 272.

³¹Lennox, 6.

³²Lennox, 272.

case, the romances have served her well, teaching her to be confident, for her favorite romantic heroines never give their own appearances a second thought.

Her cousin, Miss Glanville, provides a sharp contrast against Arabella's strong confidence and easy style. In the areas of appearance and personal maintenance, Arabella's skills and values shine through, while Miss Glanville's are portrayed as questionable. While Arabella rejects the frivolity of fashion, Miss Glanville revels in it, and spends a great deal of time maintaining her appearance. In one incident, "Miss Glanville, having spent four long Hours in dressing herself to the greatest Advantage, in order, if possible, to eclipse her lovely Cousin,"³³ is surprised to find that it takes Arabella very little time to prepare to go out. Miss Glanville's extreme vanity works against her, while Arabella's minimalist style, learned from her favorite heroines, best compliments her natural beauty.

Furthermore, Miss Glanville's insecurities are also a sharp contrast to Arabella's confidence. Instead of encouraging her cousin, Miss Glanville looks for every opportunity to ridicule or embarrass her. She resolves, "to be present while her cousin was dressing, that she might have an Opportunity to make some Remarks to her Disadvantage,"³⁴ trying to destroy Arabella's confidence and poise. Arabella, on the other hand, is free and sincere with her compliments to her cousin, praising "the Clearness of her Complexion, and the Sparkling of her Eyes."³⁵ This kind of courtesy and kindness is

³³Lennox, 83.

³⁴Lennox, 83.

³⁵Lennox, 91.

very common in Arabella's romances, and the virtuous, pure heroines in these stories admire one another, instead of envying. Like these heroines, she is not at all threatened by the beauty of Miss Glanville, but rather, she wishes to encourage her cousin and increase her confidence. However, "Miss Glanville, who could not think it possible, one Woman could praise another with any Sincerity,"³⁶ instead reacts with suspicion and a loss of confidence. She is shallow and self-centered when compared to her cousin.

Arabella's interactions with the deceptive Sir George are especially important for illustrating how the influence of the romance tradition lends her confidence and good judgement. Sir George, an acquaintance of Glanville, catches on to Arabella's delusions and tries his hand at fabricating a romantic tale in which he is the hero, in order to win her over. Surprisingly, though Arabella believes Sir George and does not doubt a word of his story, nevertheless, she is not deceived by his character, which is apparent throughout his imaginary history. Using a great deal of discernment, based on romantic principles, she does not allow Sir George to beat her at her own game, and recognizes his faithlessness and disloyalty, his playboy lifestyle. Because of the pure, faultless characters that Arabella is so familiar with, she notices right away that Sir George's story does not live up to a romantic standard. In the end, unimpressed by his story, Arabella tells Sir George, "Mr. Glanville spoke too favourably of you, when he called you only inconstant; and if he had added the Epithet of Ungrateful and Unjust, he would have marked your Character better."³⁷ Arabella here demonstrates her well-developed

³⁶Lennox, 91.

³⁷Lennox, 250.

discernment and judgement, which, surprisingly, have been aided by her romances. Here, she recognizes the flaws in Sir George's personality that would make him an inadequate husband.

Hence, critics like Laurie Langbauer are incorrect in assuming that women are the only ones who are in need of ideals in this novel. Male characters like Sir Charles and Sir George could certainly use some high values and ideals. Though Sir George is familiar with the romances, he does not value them, nor does he recognize the legitimate ideals within them that could be applied to his own life. This is clear when Arabella accuses him of infidelity during his attempt to impress her with his romantic exploits. He understands the basic actions and speech patterns, but not the underlying ideals, that make a man a hero.

Glanville's father, Sir Charles, often questions his niece's love for such nonsense, telling her, "I think a young Lady of your fine Sense...should not be so fond of such ridiculous Nonsense as these Story-Books are filled with."³⁸ He compares such books to the fairy tales he read when a boy, which "only spoil Youth, and put strange Notions into their Heads."³⁹ Throughout *The Female Quixote*, Sir Charles remains ridiculously serious, unimaginative, and consequently, a bit slow to grasp what is going on around him. He does not understand Mr. Glanville's patience with Arabella's foibles, and has no sense of the overwhelming devotion that Glanville has toward her. Sir Charles certainly could use some of the "strange Notions" he has avoided by rejecting the ideals in certain

³⁸Lennox, 61.

³⁹Lennox, 61.

stories.

Standing out in contrast to Sir Charles and Sir George is Mr. Glanville. Though he is unfamiliar with the romances themselves, nevertheless, he is attracted to the ideals he sees personified in Arabella. His education comes through his courtship with his cousin. In a sense, Arabella, like a romantic heroine, is his text, and he learns well the importance of his behavior and the need to live by ideals and virtue. He appreciates the speeches she makes on various ideals, all inspired by her romances, as well as many of her more virtuous behaviors. From the beginning of the novel, Mr. Glanville already exhibits signs of his worthiness and his valuing of high ideals, though he comes to perfect them through his trials to win the heart of Arabella. Hence, the value of the romance is not exclusively a female legacy, and even men can recognize the value of the basic ideals that are held up by the romance tradition.

Arabella's adoption of the rules of romance allows her to extend the time of her courtship, in order to better teach Glanville how she wants to be loved. Her father expects and even commands Glanville, "Gain her Heart as soon as you can, and when you bring me her Consent, your Marriage shall be solemnized immediately."⁴⁰ Arabella is understandably unsatisfied with a hasty courtship, for though Glanville may be a worthy husband, nevertheless, the way he goes about courting her at the beginning lacks the kind of idealism and respect that Arabella wants and expects from a relationship. The rules of romance allow her to extend her courtship a bit, giving her more time to determine what Glanville is really like, testing his sincerity and love. Her rather

⁴⁰Lennox, 31.

unreasonable expectations and often cruel treatment of Mr. Glanville has been noted already. Still, though at times she is overly rigid in her rules, Arabella nevertheless gets Mr. Glanville to resolve "to accommodate himself, as much as possible, to her taste, and endeavor to gain her Heart by a Behavior most agreeable to her."⁴¹ She teaches Glanville how to love her, and refuses to let love blind her from his shortcomings and flaws.

She tells him to "wait patiently for what heaven will determine in your Favour: Therefore endeavor to merit my Affection by your Respect, Fidelity, and Services; and hope for my Justice, whatever it ought to bestow."⁴² Arabella believes that Glanville has to earn her love, and that she does not owe it to him. Furthermore, she waits for time and heaven to tell her whether Glanville is the right man for her. She relies not on her own immediate ideas and preferences, but on a more trustworthy and reliable source of discernment--a long-term study of his behavior. Her mention of the word "justice" as being one of the determinants of her acceptance of Glanville indicates that she intends to judge his behavior impartially and carefully, and only to marry him if he truly earns it through his actions. Because of this scrutiny, she has a relatively realistic vision of the extent of Glanville's love for her, and happily, it is very close to her ideal.

Arabella also uses her discernment, learned in large part from her romances and the heroic examples therein, to determine the worthiness of the other suitors around her. As a woman of marriageable age, being courted by the men around her, Arabella must

⁴¹Lennox, 46.

⁴²Lennox, 137.

use a great deal of discernment in determining who is sincere, who is a good man, who has her best interests in mind. However, as a woman who was rarely allowed to leave the house, Arabella's knowledge of the world is extremely limited. In fact, her first admirer is so confident of her ignorance, he says to himself, "The poor Girl...has been kept in Confinement so long, that I believe it would not be difficult to persuade her to free herself by Marriage. She never had a Lover in her Life; and therefore the first Person who addresses her has the fairest Chance for Succeeding."⁴³ Indeed, Arabella is in a precarious position, for all she really knows is how the heroes and heroines in her romances act. However, she skillfully uses her knowledge of the ideals of love to protect herself from men like the one she sees in church.

Unlike Miss Glanville, Arabella takes love very seriously, and she carefully considers the actions and reactions of her admirers. Lennox, again contrasting Arabella with her modern cousin, creates a great deal of satire on the courtship beliefs and practices of the eighteenth century. Miss Glanville is distressed when she thinks that Arabella speaks, "to sneer at her great Eagerness to make Conquests, and the Liberties she allowed herself in."⁴⁴ Arabella may be too strict and rigid in her rules of decorum, but Miss Glanville is just the opposite--desperate for male attention and willing to compromise some of her principles to win admirers.

Miss Glanville is so desperate to win herself a husband that she lowers her standards for the men around her. Without Arabella's high ideals, and armed with only

⁴³Lennox, 9.

⁴⁴Lennox, 89.

the eighteenth century belief that a woman should be married, regardless of the quality of the husband, she develops certain ideas that put her at high risk for making a bad match. When Arabella tells her cousin that most heroines take ten years testing and selecting their husband, Miss Glanville is aghast: "Did she consider what alterations ten years would make in her Face, and how much older she would be at the End of Ten Years, than she was before?"⁴⁵ Here, Miss Glanville misses the point. She assumes that love is based on appearance, that her face will draw a husband to her. Arabella instead emphasizes the emotional side of love--that which is based on honor and responsibility, not on issues of physical attraction or childbearing only.

Arabella's ideals allow her to be rid of Miss Glanville's desperate attitude and actions toward love. In fact, when her cousin points out that "there is not one Man in an hundred that would take so much from your Hands as he does"⁴⁶, warning Arabella of Glanville's worthiness and limited patience, Arabella answers with confidence: "Then there is not one Man in an hundred...whom I should think worthy to serve me."⁴⁷ Though her haughtiness does emerge a bit here, in this case, it works in her favor, helping her to raise her standards for the potential husbands around her. Miss Glanville's observation, that Arabella's demands and ideals reduce the number of men who are willing to court her, is exactly what Arabella wants. By weeding out the less-than-suitable men, she makes her decisions and her future that much more reliable.

⁴⁵Lennox, 111.

⁴⁶Lennox, 111.

⁴⁷Lennox, 111.

In the end, Arabella's high standards and rather meticulous system of courtship pay off, while Miss Glanville's ill-thought-out and hasty marriage is less successful:

the first mentioned pair [Sir George and Miss Glanville] were indeed only married in the common Acceptation of the Word; that is, they were privileged to join Fortunes, Equipages, Titles, and Expense; while Mr. Glanville and Arabella were united, as well in these, as in every Virtue and laudable Affectation of the Mind.⁴⁸

These concluding lines of the novel offer a last contrast--a last look at the importance of maintaining ideals, a desire for something higher. Note that "the common Acceptation of the Word" "marriage" is lacking such ideals--not just in Miss Glanville's life, but in the world in general. Lennox's critique of the common view of marriage is that it excludes real love, that it has become a financial and political contract, not an expression of affection or respect for another person. Arabella's ideals about love, learned from the basic underlying principles of romance, allow her to find "a Partner for life"⁴⁹ in the loving and devoted Glanville.

Arabella's romances educate her in how to select a mate, as well as in more general subjects, such as history. Her intelligence is not lacking, and "it is not to be doubted, but she would have made a great Proficiency in all useful Knowlege, had not her whole Time been taken up by another Study," that of reading the French romances.⁵⁰ Despite these lines and others like them, which would lead the unwary reader to believe that all of Arabella's moments of lucidity and eloquence are driven from her investigation of other, more "legitimate" readings, in fact,

⁴⁸Lennox, 383.

⁴⁹Lennox, 383.

⁵⁰Lennox, 7

much of her intellectual conversations and speeches come from what she has learned in her romances. Her discourse on glory, which so charms her uncle and Mr. Glanville, comes directly from the values and incidents that she has absorbed from her fictions. She says,

Glory is as necessarily the result of a virtuous Action, as Light is an Effect of the Sun which causeth it, and has no Dependence on any other Cause; since a virtuous Action continues still the same, tho' it be done without Testimony; and Glory, which is, as one may say born with it, constantly attends it, tho' the Action be not known.⁵¹

These idealistic and philosophical views of glory, so eloquently stated, come directly from the values, ideals, and incidents found in the romance tradition. Arabella could only gain such insights on virtuous actions and their just reward by interpreting and learning from the actions of her favorite heroes and heroines, who of course, practice perfect virtue and live in a perfect world. Ironically, Glanville does not recognize the source of Arabella's speeches, and instead, "charm'd into an Extacy at this sensible Speech of Arabella's, forgot in an Instant all her Absurdities,"⁵² though these very "Absurdities" are the source of this "sensible speech" and others. Owing a great deal of her knowledge and eloquence to her romances, Arabella manages to awe even the well-educated men around her with her speeches and her ideas. Her cousin, Glanville, admires and loves her because, "she charmed him to the last Degree of Admiration by the agreeable Sallies of her Wit, and her fine Reasoning upon every subject he proposed."⁵³ Despite her romantic fixations, and to a great degree, because of her romantic fixations, her

⁵¹Lennox, 304.

⁵²Lennox, 304.

⁵³Lennox, 46

intelligence is such that she constantly wins people over. Even her uncle, Sir Charles, though constantly confused by her eccentricities, after one of Arabella's romantic speeches, "in his Way, express'd much Admiration of her Wit, telling her, if she had been a Man, she would have made a great Figure in Parliament."⁵⁴

This uncommon degree of knowledge that Arabella possesses is best illustrated by a scene in which, once again, her knowledge is contrasted with her cousin's, Miss Glanville's, ignorance and frivolity. When portraying the two women, Lennox sets up a kind of comparison of the romantic way of thinking, represented by Arabella, and the more modern, realistic manner of thinking, represented by Miss Glanville. Miss Glanville nearly always falls short of Arabella's mental capacities, virtues, and reasoning abilities in these comparisons. While Arabella speaks with the gentlemen about various historical and social topics, Miss Glanville seems restricted to the most menial, traditionally "female" subjects. Hence, Mr. Glanville and Arabella converse for two hours about "Grecian History...while Miss Glanville (to whom all they said was quite unintelligible) diverted herself with humming a Tune, and tinkling her Cousin's Harpsichord; which proved no Interruption to the more rational Entertainment of her Brother and Arabella."⁵⁵ Here, Miss Glanville demonstrates the limited extent of her education, while Arabella knows a great deal about Classical history and culture, a mark of a well-educated person at this time. Ironically, the reader may presume that her source of this knowledge is the French romances, which tend to be works of historical fiction, commonly set in Classical Greek or Roman environments. Although Arabella's knowledge of history is different than Glanville's in that it is

⁵⁴Lennox, 311

⁵⁵Lennox, 83.

colored by the tones and the fictional aspects of the romance, nevertheless, she is able to converse with him about this subject, and he in turn is surprised by her intelligence. Thus, Arabella's knowledge of ancient Greek history indicates her love of reading and her curious intellect, as well as suggesting some legitimate or practical purpose for the romances. Here the romances again serve as an educational force in Arabella's life, allowing her to converse with those who have received a more "masculine" education. On the other hand, Miss Glanville's inability and lack of desire to enter such a learned conversation indicates her dislike for such intellectual entertainment. Instead, she plays the harpsichord, implying her ornamental, "feminine" education.

Miss Glanville further proves her frivolity in London, where she delights in scandal and gossip. She enjoys the company and attention of Mr. Tinsel, the slanderer, who is more than happy to tell Arabella about the "adventures" of various guests at the ball. However, Arabella has in mind the lofty and noble adventures of a romantic heroine, not the scandals of eighteenth-century high society. Miss Glanville defends Mr. Tinsel's propensity for slander, remarking, "What Harm is there in what Mr. Tinsel was telling us? It would be hard indeed, if one might not divert one's self with other People's Faults."⁵⁶ She is perfectly willing to be entertained at the expense of others, whether it is she herself who is doing the ridiculing or whether she is listening to another's satire.

Arabella's response to her cousin's frivolity is wise and virtuous: "Those who can divert themselves with the faults of others are not behind hand in affording Diversion."⁵⁷ She

⁵⁶Lennox, 277.

⁵⁷Lennox, 277.

recognizes that slander touches everyone around it, and that no one who engages in it is immune to it. Such a lesson is best learned from romances, since in a perfect, idealized world, a slanderer would get his just desserts and be slandered himself. It has already been noted that Arabella avoids ridicule by rising above it herself, maintaining her confidence and refusing to partake in the slander of others. She explains what she would prefer to hear about: "I expected to have heard the Adventures of some illustrious Personages related; between whose Actions, and those of the Heroes and Heroines of Antiquity, I might have found some Resemblance."⁵⁸ Arabella wishes to hear good things about the people around her, not negative incidents. Again, the influence of her romances causes her to reject negatives and the discussion of imperfection, which does not really fit into her idealistic, romanticized vision of the world.

It is interesting that in the above quote, Arabella states her desire to compare the actions of the people around her to those of her favorite romance characters. Instead of hearing about poor examples, and learning from the misfortunes and bad choices of her peers, she prefers to be uplifted by her knowledge of other experiences. Just as her romantic heroes and heroines inspire her, so does she wish to be inspired by the living people around her. She comments directly on her beliefs:

The Ugliness of Vice...ought only to be represented to the Vicious; to whom Satire, like a magnifying Glass, may aggravate every Defect, in order to make its Deformity appear more hideous; but since its End is only to reprove and amend, it should never be address'd to any but those who come within its Correction, and may be the better for it: A virtuous Mind need not be shown the Deformity of Vice, to make it be hated and avoided; the more pure and uncorrupted our ideas are, the less shall we be influenc'd by

⁵⁸Lennox, 277.

Example.⁵⁹

Arabella's theory, one that is echoed by Samuel Johnson and several other eighteenth-century literary figures, is that villainous people in literature should only be represented for an audience of very flawed folk. An innocent reader without any great or outstanding vices should only see good examples in order to be inspired to continue in valorous behaviors. Here, Arabella summarizes the main argument advocating the use of pure characters in literature, though she extends it to real life as well.

Arabella's desire to hear about the lives and "adventures" of the people around her mirrors the effect of fiction on the reader. She understands the importance of learning by example. However, the examples that she learns from are problematic. Instead of reading about women like herself, in similar situations and social experiences, Arabella reads about people far removed from her own class and world. When the real people around her do not exhibit the perfections of the romantic characters, Arabella is surprised. Her perceptions of the world, and especially her perceptions of other people, do not fit the realities around her. However, in this case, Arabella's assumptions about the world are much more appealing than those of her friends. She adamantly believes in the virtue of the people around her, and expects them to live up to her ideals, learned from the pure characters she loves to read about. Thus, in the incidents with Miss Groves and the London prostitute, mentioned earlier, Arabella refuses to see their flaws, the mixed nature of their characters, and in her own imagination, creates new identities for them which resemble those of the pure characters of her romance. Arabella's idealization of these two

⁵⁹Lennox, 277.

characters allows her to see beyond the social stigmas surrounding them and to reach out to them in a friendly and sympathetic manner. Her unwillingness to see vice, though somewhat dangerous to her life and reputation, nevertheless, can be an endearing quality. Hence, Arabella's curiosity about the lives of others is not born of a desire to hear gossip, but of a desire to learn more about the world and people around her, to hear more good examples, to know of more heroes and heroines.

Her world is so centered around purity and virtue, that any hint of slander that Arabella hears offends and displeases her. She even doubts the truth of such gossip, deciding that the slanderous stories she hears at the dance are "rather detached Pieces of Satire on particular Persons, than a serious Relation of Facts."⁶⁰ It is important that though Arabella sincerely believes in the truth and historicity of her far-fetched romances, she nevertheless has enough sense and discernment to realize that slander is not a pure "Relation of Facts", but a series of exaggerations and half-truths, designed to ruin a good reputation. Though her judgement has failed her to a certain extent in the area of literature, nevertheless, Arabella often displays a great deal of ability to determine between truth and lies in the world around her. Miss Glanville, however, representing the tastes and behaviors of certain eighteenth century women, and thus serving as a satirical figure herself, prefers to know of the faults of realistic characters, rather than hearing about Arabella's idealized heroes and heroines.

Here, Lennox dramatizes the eighteenth century conflict about characterization and realism, as Arabella and Miss Glanville represent the older and newer way of looking at the issue, respectively, and Arabella's view seems to come out on top. Ironically, because of her

⁶⁰Lennox, 276.

idealization and "unrealistic" manner of thinking, she sees more clearly than many of the people around her, including Miss Glanville. Lennox uses examples of Arabella's virtues, many inspired by her romances, to satirize the overly "realistic" vision of life in which people tend to concentrate on the vices and imperfections around them. In other words, Arabella's tendency to focus on pure examples calls the "more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life"⁶¹ into question. By making Arabella's idealism problematic, and yet so admirable, Lennox complicates this literary issue of realism versus idealism in characterization.

Though Arabella does uphold certain admirable values and ideals, her failures in this area come from her inability to separate the abstract concepts that she admires from the specific manifestations of them in the actions and characters of the romances. She defends her favorite heroes and heroines, reminding the Countess that "Custom...cannot possibly change the Nature of Virtue or Vice: And since Virtue is the chief Characteristick of a Hero, a Hero in the last Age will be a Hero in this."⁶² Arabella wants to believe in the universality of virtue and goodness, but the Countess reminds her that as social customs change over time, the manifestations of virtue also change. Arabella's trouble comes from the fact that "she could not separate her Ideas of Glory, Virtue, Courage, Generosity, and Honour, from the false Representations of them in the Actions of ...the imaginary Heroes."⁶³ As a reader, Arabella misunderstands the ideal of interpretation and emulation. Instead of appreciating the differing cultural context of the romances and learning from the more abstract principles of virtue, she falls into the trap of

⁶¹Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957, 11.

⁶²Lennox, 328.

⁶³Lennox, 329.

attributing certain virtues with certain heroes and their time-specific actions. As Green points out, "what is quixotism but an identificatory model taken too far?"⁶⁴ Arabella is right to hold onto the ideals found in the romance, ideals that are rarely held to and valued in the world around her. However, she does not understand that these ideals must be separated from the specific incidents and characters in her romances. Therefore, when she attempts to apply these ideals to her own life, she does so by acting in a ridiculously outdated or culturally unacceptable manner. This accounts for Arabella's frequent mistakes and vices, but also for her virtue and independence that rises above the culture in which she exists.

⁶⁴Green, 47.

IV. The Countess' Cure--A Sympathetic View

To further complicate the issue of mixed versus pure characters, as well as the conflicts between the romance and the novel, Arabella's cure is initiated by a woman who is sympathetic to the romance tradition. The Countess, who recognizes and admires the beauty in Arabella's character and the influences of the romance over this beauty, takes an approach to "curing" her young friend of her romantic fixations that is very different than the final approach of the Doctor. Unlike the Doctor, who reflects the very negative and biased opinions of society at this time toward this kind of fiction, the Countess tends to acknowledge and even legitimize the legacy of the romance. She takes a gentler approach to the "cure," and acknowledges Arabella's interest in these books, as well as their appeal, being careful not to belittle something that is so dear to her friend's value system. In fact, the narrator dubs Arabella a "fair Visionary"⁶⁵ when describing the Countess' perceptions of her. This label refers to the underlying idealism that Arabella cherishes, and her good intentions, and certainly does not degrade either her or her romances.

Throughout her dealings with Arabella, the Countess demonstrates her knowledge of the romances. Her greetings and discussions with her new friend indicate that she knows the "proper" way for a heroine to act, and Arabella is delighted to find someone who is willing to conform to the same codes of friendship and manners as she is. They both rattle off various incidents from different romances in order to prove their statements. The Countess thoughtfully matches her behavior to Arabella's in order to make her more comfortable, so much so that Mr. Glanville and his father, Sir Charles, were "within a little of thinking her as much out of the Way

⁶⁵Lennox, 323.

as"⁶⁶ Arabella.

Throughout her attempts to cure Arabella, the Countess betrays no sign that she might dislike or disbelieve such literature. Instead, she informs her inexperienced young friend that "one cannot help rejoicing that we live in an Age in which the Customs, Manners, Habits, and Inclinations differ so widely from theirs, that 'tis impossible such Adventures should even happen."⁶⁷ Instead of railing against the dangers of the romances and doubting their legitimacy, she makes Arabella aware that times have changed, and that generally, the specific incidents recounted in the romances no longer apply to the life of a young woman. Note however, that she does not discount the importance of the great sentiments and ideals found in the texts. Her argument is only against the literalization of the stories. She does not at any time point out that Arabella's favorite "histories" are fictions, however, being careful only to note the cultural differences brought by time. Instead, she tells Arabella that the unlikely events recounted in romances not "having happen'd within the Compass of several thousand Years, People unlearn'd in Antiquity would be apt to deem them idle Tales, so improbable do they appear at present."⁶⁸ Here, the Countess seems to defend the romances, stating that those without knowledge of ancient times would consider them unrealistic. Hence, the label of "ignorant" falls not upon Arabella, for believing in the stories, but upon the skeptics, for completely ruling out their historical plausibility. Here, unlike the Doctor, the Countess is more concerned with establishing a distinction between past social customs and present social customs than proving

⁶⁶Lennox, 325.

⁶⁷Lennox, 326.

⁶⁸Lennox, 326.

that romances are pure fantasy.

The Countess makes her most important distinction between present reality and the text of a romance when she discusses heroism and characterization with Arabella. "Custom," she tells her, "changes the very Nature of Things, and what was honourable a thousand Years ago, may probably be look'd upon as infamous now...The same Actions which made a Man a Hero in those Times, would constitute him as a Murderer in These."⁶⁹ The Countess, trying to gently reason Arabella out of her misuse of her favorite books, points out that the old romantic heroes, under the modern value system, are unheroic and even villainous. "Judging them by the Rules of Christianity, and our present Notions of Honour, Justice, and Humanity, they certainly are"⁷⁰ bad men. The Countess recognizes how relative a concept like heroism can be, how it must change with a changing society. By pointing out some of the outdated values and characterization of the romance, the Countess further differentiates between the laudable universal ideals found in the romance, and the specific incidents that are too far removed from present society to serve as literal examples of behavior. Nevertheless, even during her critique of the genre, she still exhibits her tolerance and even affection for the romance tradition.

Because of her tolerance for the romance throughout her attempt to cure Arabella from her delusions, the Countess has inspired many different interpretations from critics. In *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, Jane Spencer talks about the Countess' role in weaning Arabella from her fictions. The Countess at one point uses her own life as an example to her young friend, and asserts that her life contains no great "adventures" in Arabella's sense of the word, that she has

⁶⁹Lennox, 328.

⁷⁰Lennox, 328.

not been carried off, that she married a good man and lives in harmony with him. Spencer claims that the Countess advocates an uneventful life for women, and that "the ideal woman in eighteenth-century life is the woman about whom there is nothing to say...The ideals offered to Arabella are silence, anonymity, and the end of the story--or rather, no story at all."⁷¹ Spencer's view of the Countess' eighteenth century life compared to the lives of the romantic heroines is that the Countess is boring and that she lacks identity and acknowledgement. Such an argument is influenced by a false perspective of Arabella's delusions. The adventures she expects are frightening and disturbing. Being carried away by ravishers--potential rapists--certainly is not a pleasant idea, by any stretch of the imagination. Furthermore, the continuous abduction of and battling for women by the heroes of the romance tends to commodify women. When the Countess says "one cannot help rejoicing that we live in an Age in which the Customs, Manners, Habits, and Inclinations differ so widely from theirs, that 'tis impossible such Adventures should ever happen,"⁷² it is potentially a happy and liberating thought for Arabella. The Doctor notes Arabella's distresses, caused by her expectation of "adventure", when he tells her, "I see you harrass'd with innumerable Terrors and Perplexities."⁷³ He expresses his concern that Arabella's ideas of adventures and events are disturbing, and not something to retain or attempt to preserve. The "average" life that the Countess advocates is one without great misfortunes or twists of fate--it is one of security and peace.

⁷¹Spencer, Jane. *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*. New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986. 190.

⁷²Lennox, 326.

⁷³Lennox, 371.

Furthermore, though Spencer argues that the Countess lives an anonymous life, she overlooks the fact that the Countess is well known as a woman of virtue and good repute. Though she has had no "adventures," she has the high ideals that get the notice and the respect of the good people around her. She is "the celebrated Countess of ----," implying her fame and renown. This Countess is able to silence those who disagree with her and she is widely praised by society. Hence, she becomes a kind of modern-day romantic heroine, pure in character and famous for her ideals, not for her romantic adventures and exploits. She serves as a new example for Arabella.

Consistent to the image of the Countess as modern romantic heroine, she is in a sense "carried away" by a realistic and legitimate "adventure". When her mother falls ill, the Countess leaves to take care of her, and thus she shows her involvement in the events of eighteenth century fortunes and misfortunes, and not the frivolous and questionable "adventures" of the romance. Unfortunately, the Countess leaves before she is able to completely help Arabella gain a proper perspective on her romances. She merely plants the seeds of doubt that the Doctor will later cultivate.

Clearly, as a modern manifestation of a pure heroine, the Countess is a character who is sympathetic to and can identify with Arabella's love for the romance tradition. Her desire is to help her friend learn to understand the genre properly, to recognize the differences between her books and her life, not to advocate Arabella's complete rejection or abandonment of these texts. Laurie Langbauer recognizes both Lennox's and the Countess' attitude toward the romance when she writes that during the discussion

between Arabella and the Countess, Lennox's mockery of romance

disappears. For a moment she explicitly values romance: Arabella and the Countess, alike because they have read romance, are also similar paragons of virtue. Those outside the influence of romance, like Miss Glanville and the women of London, are empty-headed, selfish, and ordinary.⁷⁴

Langbauer is correct to highlight the positive tone of the chapters that depict the discussions between Arabella and the Countess. The tone of the novel changes here from one reflecting many negative social beliefs about the romance to one that is tolerant and even celebratory of the genre. Interesting, as well, is the acknowledgement that Arabella and the Countess are both two of the most virtuous characters in the novel, reflecting many of the most appealing characteristics of the romantic heroines.

However, Langbauer incorrectly assumes that Lennox wishes to label the romantic tradition a female legacy, and that women outside of the romantic tradition suffer from a lack of the bond that Arabella and the Countess share. Instead, the bond between Arabella and the Countess goes beyond the romance tradition, though it is aided by it. These two women value ideals and virtue, raising themselves above the common actions of the people around them, and upholding worthy values that have long since become unpopular or unpracticed. Both of them, through their admiration for aspects of the romance tradition, have learned to admire and emulate virtue in its purer forms. Hence, the same impulse that makes Arabella desire to think the best about those around her causes the Countess to seek to help Arabella upon hearing her ridiculed by gossips.

⁷⁴Langbauer, Laurie. *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. 89.

V. The Doctor's Cure--An Anti-Romance Perspective

Unlike the Countess, the Doctor's perspective on romances is less than tolerant.

Expressing an anti-romance point of view, he recognizes the potential dangers that threaten Arabella because of her unrealistic views of life. To try to cure her, he makes use of a logical, reason-centered argument against the delusions that Arabella has come to accept as fact, essentially educating her out of her former, imperfect education. He condemns the romances, and consequently, the romantic characters, that "at once vitiate the Mind, and pervert the Understanding; and which if they are at any Time read with Safety, owe their Innocence to their Absurdity."⁷⁵ The Doctor is rather harsh with Arabella's treasured books, accusing them of confusing and corrupting their readers because of their lack of realism, and because of the super-human examples they present. He goes on to prove to Arabella, using rather complex logic, that the romance is fictitious, absurd, and criminal.

However, the Doctor does not condemn all texts. Instead he makes a point of reminding Arabella that "Truth is not always injured by Fiction"⁷⁶, thus justifying certain types of literature. According to the Doctor, authors often write fictitious works in order to illustrate important facts about real life, since "the Power of Prognostication, may, by Reading and Conversation, be extended beyond our own Knowledge: And the great Use of Books, is that of participating without Labour or Hazard the Experience of others."⁷⁷ He reminds Arabella that fiction provides

⁷⁵Lennox, 374.

⁷⁶Lennox, 377.

⁷⁷Lennox, 372.

a means of learning from others' experiences, of safely and indirectly experiencing various events and situations.

Certainly, the romance provides an opportunity to safely escape from one's own life into a different world and a different set of experiences. However, according to the Doctor, since the world of the romance is so far removed from eighteenth century British society, the experiences found in texts like *The Grand Cyrus* and *Clelia* are useless, in an educational sense. Hence, such books are vastly inferior to novels founded on realistic characters, situations and events, which may be read to gain knowledge about the world. "The only Excellence of Falsehood," the Doctor goes on to say, "is its Resemblance to Truth,"⁷⁸ since such fictions are able to take the place of real-world experience for the unexperienced, who ideally will learn vicariously through the characters of realistic literature. The realistic, mixed characters which were becoming more common in fiction at this time are supposedly easier to identify with and easier to emulate, since they do not reach unattainable levels of perfection like the characters in the romances tend to do. In his defense of fiction, the Doctor goes so far as to mention the existence of one novelist in particular who, "has found the Way to convey the most solid Instructions, the noblest Sentiments, and the most exalted Piety, in the pleasing Dress of a Novel."⁷⁹ One may assume that the Doctor is referring to Richardson, and his novels, *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Here, the Doctor reflects the views of eighteenth-century British literary critics, in citing Richardson's novels as examples of beneficial realistic fiction.

Richardson received a great deal of praise for the educational benefits of his novels. In

⁷⁸Lennox, 378.

⁷⁹Lennox, 377.

his preface to *Clarissa*, verbalizes his educational goals in creating the main character:

The principal of the two young Ladies is proposed as an Exemplar to her Sex. Nor is it any objection to her being so, that she is not in all respects a perfect character. It was not only natural, but was necessary, that she should have some faults, were it only to shew the Reader, how laudably she could mistrust and blame herself...As far as is consistent with human frailty, and as far as she could be perfect...she *is* perfect. To have been impeccable, must have left nothing for the Divine Grace and a Purified State to do, and carried our idea of her from woman to angel.⁸⁰

Here, Richardson proposes that *Clarissa*, his heroine, be considered an example to his readers.

Note his desire to both proclaim her humanity and imperfections, as well as defending her as being as perfect as is humanly possible. Richardson tries to be on both sides of the debate about character here, desiring to portray a virtuous, pure character that is nevertheless human and fallible.

In fact, Richardson's view on characterization was a common one. Samuel Johnson believed that a fictional character should be in some way imperfect, but not too much so, for fear of confusing and corrupting the reader. He criticizes authors who are too realistic in their portrayals of humanity:

Many writers, for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favour, we lose the abhorrence of their faults, because they do not hinder our pleasure, or, perhaps, regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit.⁸¹

⁸⁰Richardson, xx.

⁸¹Johnson, 13.

Note the reluctance to allow too much human fallibility to seep into a fictional character. Despite the insistence on the importance of having characters that grow and improve themselves, authors like Richardson and Johnson reflect the concern of eighteenth century British society that fictions continue to serve a moral purpose, and in no way advocate any vice.

Like Richardson, Frances Burney, a writer in the late eighteenth century, desires to make her educational goals clear by justifying her characterization in the introduction to her novel. In *Evelina*, Burney explains that, "the heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is 'no faultless Monster, that the World ne'er saw,' but the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire."⁸² Like Richardson, she emphasizes the mixed character of her heroine, the flaws that attest to her humanity. Burney quotes a line of a poem which describes a perfect being as an impossibility—a monstrous or freakish creature. For a piece of fiction to be beneficial, clearly, the characters must not be in the pure forms which were so popular in the French heroic romances, but in the more "natural" mixed character forms. She reflects the common view of her day, that nothing beneficial in literature can come of something unrealistic. Truth and true education can only come from reality, or at least an accurate reflection of reality.

Still, even *Evelina*, whose realistic failings Burney emphasizes, is in fact a nearly faultless character. Though, like Arabella, she is inexperienced and therefore makes some social *faux pas*, nevertheless, her morality and virtue are never compromised or called into question. Burney is careful to create a heroine that is nothing but a good example, a woman perfect in virtue but incomplete in her knowledge of the world. Hence, in this and in other novels, the differentiation between these mixed characters and the pure characters of the romance tradition

⁸²Burney, Frances. *Evelina*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997. 55-56.

is very slight.

In most cases, the debts that the eighteenth century novelists owe to the romance tradition in the realms of characterization and plot are quite clear. Ironically, though Richardson is most often praised in eighteenth-century literary criticism as a genius of realistic fiction, his debts to the romantic tradition cannot be overlooked, especially in *Clarissa*. *Clarissa*, though set in eighteenth-century Britain, is a story that hearkens back very much to the stories of beautiful women being abducted by ruthless villains. Despite the dishonorable intentions of these ravishers, they are somewhat controlled by the power of their victim's virtue. *Clarissa*, the heroine of Richardson's novel, is carried off by Lovelace, in a scene very much like those that Arabella is constantly imagining and fearing throughout *The Female Quixote*. The fainting spells, the drawn-out tension between the main male and female characters, and the melodrama of *Clarissa* is unmistakably inspired by the romance tradition that Arabella's Doctor rails against. *Clarissa*, facing her ravisher, cries:

Kill me! Kill me! if I am odious enough in your eyes to deserve this treatment; and I will thank you! Too long, much too long, has my life been a burden to me! Or (wildly looking all around her) give me but the means, and I will instantly convince you that my honour is dearer to me than my life!⁸³

Though *Clarissa* is set in eighteenth-century Britain, nevertheless, the actions and the statements of the characters mirror those of the old romances. The dramatic lament and emphasis on honor coming from *Clarissa* in this and many other passages throughout the novel are similar to those found in *The Female Quixote* and in the romances Arabella constantly quotes.

In a scene very much like the one above, Arabella warns Glanville that if he "thinkest, by

⁸³Richardson, 264.

Violence, to get me into thy Power, my Cries shall arm Heaven and Earth in my defense,...and, if Providence fails me, my own Hand shall give me Freedom; for that Moment thou offerest to seize me, that Moment shall be the last of my Life."⁸⁴ The dramatic valuation of honor over life, and the romanticized images of suicide and death are unmistakably similar in these two passages. In both situations, the characters are so pure as to desire death before dishonor. Clearly, Richardson owes a great deal to the romance tradition that Lennox satirizes.

Lennox acknowledges in both subtle and blatant ways that novelists owe something to the romance tradition. Sir George, Lennox writes, "was perfectly well acquainted with the chief Characters in most of the *French Romances*; could tell every thing that was borrowed from them, in all the new Novels that came out."⁸⁵ Plot twists, characters, and clichés found in escapist fiction reemerge in the eighteenth century and earlier, buried in the text of various novels. Sir George is the character who notes the similarities because his role in the novel is relatively minor, allowing Lennox to subtly acknowledge the role of the romance in the development of the novel without offending writers like Fielding and Richardson, who worked so hard to differentiate their own writing from that of the past. Sir George's study reminds the readers that even a great writer like John Dryden acknowledged borrowing certain characters from French romances. Hence, though *The Female Quixote* highlights the ridiculous side of the romance, it also acknowledges it as an influential genre to the emerging eighteenth-century novel.

Making Lennox's novel seem even more sympathetic toward the romance tradition is the

⁸⁴Lennox, 102.

⁸⁵Lennox, 130

fact that Arabella is allowed to recount so many details and episodes from her library of fiction. To some readers, and certainly to the characters around Arabella, these summaries are tedious and unnecessary. However, as Lennox's biographer, Miriam Rossiter Small points out, *The Female Quixote's* "happiest reception would be with the eighteenth century man or woman who had once enthusiastically buried himself in the romances; who perhaps still cherished a secret pleasure in their far-away unreality,"⁸⁶ but discarded them because they fell out of fashion. Although the novel disguises itself as satirical, it is really a combination of satire and celebration of the romance. The amount of time spent delving into various fictions, repeating scenes, recounting great characters, and describing grand events is suspiciously large, and the satire itself is generally kind, with only a few lines becoming bitingly satirical. The satire that characterizes *The Female Quixote* is too gentle and pleasant to be true criticism, and the admiration that the reader continues to have for Arabella, partly in spite of, and partly because of her romantic fixations, actually begins to work in favor of the romances, rather than against them.

⁸⁶Small, Miriam Rossiter. *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth Century Lady of Letters*. New Haven: Oxford University Press. 1935. 92.

VI. A Dual Cure: the Countess and the Doctor

Because of the subtle defenses and even celebrations of romance and pure characterization that are found throughout *The Female Quixote*, Arabella's final cure seems puzzlingly contradictory. Her illness and near death, caused by her romantic fixations indicate that she needs some kind of means to bring her out of her delusions, for her own safety and for the well-being of those around her. However, after the Countess' gentle discussions with Arabella, the Doctor's harsh logic and impatience with certain fictions are unexpected. Many critics have struggled to determine why Lennox introduces the Countess simply to replace her with the Doctor. Some conjecture that Lennox was advised to lengthen her text, and consequently, had to eliminate her first cure, add some other adventures, and then find some other means of enlightening her heroine. Others claim that Samuel Johnson himself offered to cure Arabella, playing the part of the Doctor, and writing, in his *Rambler*-esque style, the Doctor's arguments against the romance. Both of these claims are as yet unproven, and tend to take the focus from the text of *The Female Quixote*, discussing biographical details of Charlotte Lennox instead of analyzing the effects of this double cure on the meaning of the work.

Lennox, as a highly praised and admired author of the eighteenth century, certainly would have been aware of the implications that Arabella's cure would have on the interpretation and tone of the text. Hence, Arabella's sessions with the Countess, though short and abrupt, must have a great deal of significance in the novel. It has already been noted that the Countess' methods of curing her friend differ greatly from the Doctor's. She manages to encourage Arabella, recognizing how disturbing and devastating the complete and sudden reorganization of her world could be. Hence, Arabella's "Blushes, her Silence, and down-cast Eyes gave the

Countess to understand Part of her Thoughts; who for fear of alarming her too much for that Time, dropt the subject."⁸⁷ Instead of providing Arabella with a swift and immediate end to her romantic delusions, the Countess seeks to gently reeducate her, helping her sift the positive romantic ideals from the outdated characters and manners in the romances.

Most importantly, the Countess serves as an example to Arabella. Without a mother, or any other type of female mentor, Arabella is eager to find a companion in the Countess, especially one of such great virtue. She clearly looks up to her kind, intelligent friend, and admires her greatly. The Countess acts as the embodiment Arabella's romantic ideal of a pure heroine that she can emulate, yet in this case, the heroine is well-fitted to the manners and conduct of eighteenth century British society. Slowly, she begins to replace the heroines in Arabella's world. As a concrete, living example of someone worthy of Arabella's respect and emulation, the Countess is for a time a more accessible heroine for her to look up to. Hence, instead of simply destroying Arabella's vision of the world and leaving a large void in her life, the Countess begins to replace Arabella's old delusions with practical examples of virtue in the real world.

However, if Lennox had simply allowed the Countess to slowly and subtly adjust Arabella's world view, the urgency and danger of her situation would not be clear to the reader. Assuming that the Countess were to continue her cure, it is unlikely that the plot of *The Female Quixote* would have reached the climax where Arabella endangers her own life and the lives of those around her, making it clear that her romantic delusions are anything but harmless and innocent. Otherwise, the reader might fall into the confusion described by Samuel Johnson in

⁸⁷Lennox, 326.

his "Rambler #4", and become unable to recognize the severity of Arabella's flaws. The urgent need for her cure only becomes clear after she jumps into the Thames River and falls deathly ill. Once she is brought to the brink of death, the Doctor enters the text and cures her with swift logic and reason, and cures the reader at the same time from any admiration for Arabella's romantic vices.

The Doctor is able to cure Arabella swiftly, without as much caution as the Countess, because of the hopeful example that the Countess has set earlier in the text. Arabella already has certain images in her mind, and a new, modern example of an appropriate heroine for her to emulate. Therefore, when she is convinced by the Doctor that she has "hitherto at least trifled away [her] time"⁸⁸ on the romances, and that they are in fact fictions, she is able to bear this blow to her world view, though even with the Countess' preparation, it is not easy for her to accept.

A similar situation occurs in Cervantes' seventeenth century novel, *Don Quixote*, upon which Lennox's *The Female Quixote* is based. When Don Quixote is cured of his romantic delusions, his spirit is crushed, and he cannot accept the change. Without the ideals that once sustained him, he is left without hope or purpose, and consequently, his death follows his conversion. The real world is bleak compared to his vision of reality. Arabella's cure could have been just as tragic as Don Quixote's, except that her romantic vision is not totally abandoned. Because of the earlier involvement of the Countess, she manages to retain a hopeful vision of the world.

Nevertheless, the change is taxing to Arabella. Once she has been cured, the Doctor

⁸⁸Lennox, 381.

notes that "Solitude was necessary to compose her Spirits after the Fatigue of so long a Conversation."⁸⁹ Arabella is shaken by her new vision of the world, a world which the Doctor admits gives, "so little Pleasure to Purity and Benevolence."⁹⁰ Presumably, it is only the example of the Countess and her modern purity and ideals that allows Arabella to accept such a blow to her psyche. Inspired by her friend, and the encouragement of the Doctor, Arabella resolves, "I hope wherever Corruption prevails in the World, to live in it with Virtue, or, if I find myself too much endanger'd, to retire from it with Innocence."⁹¹ This resolve, to continue in her idealism, though apart from the specific examples of the romantic heroes and heroines, is what allows her to go on with her life. Through the efforts of both the Countess, providing hope and ideals, and the Doctor, acting as the voice of reason and reality, a potentially devastating situation turns out to be a difficult, though positive one for Arabella. Hence, the two different approaches to her cure are essential to her survival and happiness.

⁸⁹Lennox, 382.

⁹⁰Lennox, 380.

⁹¹Lennox, 380.

VI. Conclusion

Through the inclusion of both the Doctor, who advocates realistic, mixed characters, and the Countess, who appreciates the ideals and purity found within certain fictions, Lennox acknowledges and legitimizes both perspectives. In fact, both of these perspectives must work together to overcome Arabella's misinterpretation of the fictions she reads. The Doctor must inform her that "nothing is more different from a human Being, than Heroes or Heroines."⁹² Consequently, the Countess must present a pure yet realistic example of virtue to take the place of the romantic characters.

Through her inclusion of both views of fiction, Lennox demonstrates that there are problems and advantages with both. It follows that the most advantageous solution to the problem of romance versus the novel is to combine certain aspects of the two. Of course, this was already the case in the eighteenth-century, as the romance was extremely influential to the development of the novel, so much so that it is difficult to define the difference between the two. The boundaries of these genres overlap, and it seems that Lennox would have it this way. The overwhelmingly disparaging opinions about the romance threatened to remove its ideals and advantages from literature altogether, displaying only a bleak picture of life as it is, with all of its vices and hardships and none of its hope. However, a novel or a piece of fiction without ideals could not sufficiently equip or educate a reader. A scientific, purely observational relation of life is more difficult to learn from than a chronicle of overarching ideals and principles that can be modified to fit a variety of situations.

These ideals are part of the legacy that the novel, especially that of education and of

⁹²Lennox, 380.

courtship, owes to the romance. Long after Lennox's death, writers, especially female writers, continued to write about women faced with the same situation as Arabella: how to choose a suitable husband, despite a limited, ornamental and feminine education and a lack of experience. Many of these heroines turned to romantic ideals, which partly aided their struggles and partly thwarted their attempts to understand the real world. As one of the first female authors to focus on the plight of the unexperienced marriageable woman, Lennox set the groundwork for female writers to come. A long line of authors like Frances Burney and Jane Austen owe a great deal to the "female quixote" image that Lennox began, as well as to the courtship plot that she helped to popularize in fiction.

In the tradition of courtship novels, novels written for women concerning how best to succeed in marriage, *The Female Quixote* holds up high ideals and standards, as well as a realistic perspective of the world as the way to a good partnership. High standards, both for oneself and for one's admirers is crucial, and can only help in efforts to find a mate. This idealism is not the romanticizing of the institution of marriage. On the contrary, it is essential that a woman understands the dangers of a bad marriage and how common and easy it was to enter into one. Katherine Sobba Green, in her book, *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820*, notes that:

if one is tempted to read courtship novels solely as propaganda that duped women into unwary acceptance of a domestic ideal, one should remember that although these novels generally concluded with the obligatory wedding and a foreshadowing of conjugal bliss, their minor characters alone--women won with promises, ruined, and abandoned, wives turned shrews--would have sufficed as a warning about how uncommon the ideal domestic relationship was in real life. For every love match depicted in novels, periodicals, and conduct books, there were several exposes of

failed marriage.⁹³

Clearly, in the case of the courtship novel, the mixed vision of characterization and of the world is essential to its educational value. If it only displayed a positive picture of romance, women would have less knowledge of the dangers and warning signs of a bad marriage. If fiction only portrayed failed marriages, the population of Britain would have plummeted dramatically in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hence, the most appropriate and useful vision of marriage and courtship could only be a realistic, mixed vision that shows both the good and bad sides of the situation.

To the eighteenth-century readers who purchased *The Female Quixote* and novels like it, it was important that the literature they read contained both the idealistic aspects of the romance, which they could look up to, as well as realistic aspects of the novel, which they could identify with. The similarities of the immensely popular *Clarissa* to the romance tradition has already been noted, and they simply prove the continued appeal of and interest in the romantic tradition. The heroes, exploits, and love stories of the French heroic romances had been absorbed into eighteenth century popular culture, and though they were undervalued in word, nevertheless, whether consciously or subconsciously, they were important and influential in the literature and ideas of the time. As Nothrop Frye notes in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, that "the popular demand in prose fiction is always for a mixed form," so that there is a combination of idealism and archetypical aspects of heroes with realism and characters that can be identified with.

Clearly, in *The Female Quixote*, Lennox shows that there is something to be learned from both pure and mixed characters, if they are read and interpreted in a proper manner and

⁹³Green, 53.

context. In the literary realm, this was not an especially respectable view for her to advocate, which accounts for the blatant satire of the romance in the novel as opposed to its more subtle defense. Though Lennox expresses the negative views of the romance in her novel, she also manages to make Arabella, a woman who is totally absorbed in the world of the romance, a strong character who is both endearing and admirable. Arabella is a living representation of the negative aspects of the romance genre and mentality, clearly an imperfect example of a young lady, and yet, she remains a sympathetic heroine, in many ways an example to the women around her, as well as to the readers of *The Female Quixote*. Hence, she is at once an example of the good and of the vice, of the benefits and detriments that can accompany the reading of any kind of fiction. Through her depiction of the *Adventures of Arabella*, Lennox helps her readers to value the positive aspects of both ideals and of reality, and to think about the ways in which an educational work of fiction should be interpreted and applied to real life.

Conflicts and concerns about how heroes and characters are portrayed still continue today, two centuries later. Modern debates about violent or immoral movies and television programs reflect the continuing societal concern about how the way the characters in various forms of entertainment affect the viewer. When movies portraying controversial characters are shown, people are concerned that these characters might be misinterpreted or emulated by an undistinguishing viewer. However, a movie about a perfect character would probably receive poor ratings because of its unrealistic plot. Today, some would argue that too many movies, television programs and books are void of ideals, but well-stocked with "realistic," imperfect characters. Our society could use some twentieth-century "Countess"-type characters to replace the ideals that have been lost.

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