

FEMALE QUIXOTES: LENNOX'S AND AUSTEN'S APPROPRIATION OF JOHN

LOCKE

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DEDICATION

This thesis—which I alternately slaved over and ignored, obsessed about and stressed over, read for *and* read for some more, and which taught me more about my interests, talents, and weaknesses than I could have ever anticipated—is dedicated to my supportive mother and father, to my best friend and partner, Aaron, and to my Yoda, Paul Child.

To my mother who patiently read my truly atrocious writing—until an embarrassingly old age—and who never ceased *trying* to teach me the intricacies of the English language. Thanks, Mom. It took me two decades, but I think I have a passable understanding of how grammar be used.

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ABSTRACT

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The primary obstacle to analyzing the political and educational statements found in eighteenth-century women's fiction is that all texts, fictional or not, were subject to intense scrutiny by the dominant culture, which disallowed women a political voice; therefore, most political or educational arguments authored by women are heavily obscured. This thesis seeks to contextualize female quixotic texts—namely Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*—within the long eighteenth-century's educational debates and to analyze each text's veiled advocacy for female learning. In so doing, John Locke's notions concerning the *tabula rasa*, the conduct of the mind, and education are paramount because female writers, including Lennox and Austen, appropriated his individualistic theories to advocate for intellectual parity. When viewing the female quixotic tradition as a dialogue between female authors and contemporary educational debates, both *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey* signify an emerging ideology that both presents the flaws inherent in gendered education and also calls for more equitable female learning.

KEY WORDS: John Locke, Charlotte Lennox, Jane Austen, Women, Female, Quixotism, Learning, Education, Reading

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

More generally, this sense of 'an ideology' is applied in abstract ways to the actual consciousness of both dominant and subordinated classes. A dominant class 'has' this ideology in relatively pure and simple forms. A subordinate class has, in one version, nothing but this ideology as its consciousness (since the production of all ideas is, by axiomatic definition, in the hands of those who control the primary means of production) or, to another version, *has this ideology imposed on its otherwise different consciousness, which it must struggle to sustain or develop against 'ruling-class ideology.'*¹

Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 1977

In former times, the pen, like the sword, was considered as consigned by nature to the hands of men; the ladies contented themselves with private virtues and domestick excellence; and a female writer, like a female warrior, was considered as a kind of eccentric being, that deviated, however illustriously, from her due sphere of motion ...the revolution of years has now produced a generation of Amazons of the pen, who with the spirit of their predecessors have set masculine tyranny at defiance, asserted their claim to the regions of science, and seem resolved to contest the usurpations of virility.

Samuel Johnson, *The Adventurer* No. 115,
"The Itch of Writing Universal," 1753

As simply observed by Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Pope*, "the purpose of a writer is to be read" (746). However, in the past, the scholarly "reading" of the eighteenth century has too often placed primary sources by female authors into purposeless obscurity. Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), for instance, was not studied by literary critics until 1970, when it was first republished after a hundred and fifty years of neglect, whereas male-authored novels like *Tom Jones* and *Pamela* have consistently been reprinted both for mass consumption and as authoritative texts. In an attempt to acknowledge the literary contributions of female writers like Mary Astell, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Charlotte Lennox, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen, the last half-century has elicited a dramatic upturn in scholarship dedicated to "[restoring]

¹ Emphasis my own.

women's voices to the canon of British Literature" (Bowers 53). Where once the eighteenth-century canon centered on the male authorship of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding—as enshrined in works like Ian Watt's 1957 *Rise of the Novel*—now women like Lennox and Austen hold a place of prominence. Because of this refocusing of critical intention and attention, the current academic conversation features a cultivated interest in eighteenth-century women and the political debates with which they were implicitly and explicitly involved. Though scholars have traditionally analyzed the canonical issues present in women's writing, the evolving critical commentary has elicited a multidimensional approach that both acknowledges and explores the fundamental problem of women's literacy within female-authored texts—thus, enabling a critical study of the complex reciprocal relationship between gender roles, reading, and education in Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

As a result of this refocused critical attention, recent scholarship has emphasized that during the eighteenth century, the education, and more specifically the literary learning, of women was a particularly ubiquitous and divisive issue that reached the scale of national import. In her all-encompassing book *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, Jaqueline Pearson argues that the ideological rhetoric surrounding women's reading was central to "[t]he period's most important debates" (1). Whether dealing with "authority, gender and sexuality, the economics and morality of consumption, national identity and stability, [or] class and revolution," the reading woman permeated the conversation; however, she was never wholly disparaged or praised but clouded by ambivalence (Pearson 1). Because of this philosophical division, the "reading woman" could be a metonym for progress or corruption, erudition or frivolity. These discordant ideals placed the reading woman into a liminal space, at once

a signal of progress and symbol of corruption. Men who thought similarly to the theologian John Brown believed that the female mind was not naturally fit for a literary self-education because women's timidity of mind could easily lead them astray and result in corruption.² Instead, women should focus on the domestic sphere and remain the foundation of morality in the home. Divisively, as Samuel Johnson notes, the eighteenth-century educated woman was *not* content to remain private. Instead, "the revolution of years...produced a generation of Amazons of the pen, who...asserted their claim" to a more equitable education and, as women like Charlotte Lennox and Jane Austen illustrate, to use this knowledge to create novels. Contradictory ideas such as these formed a paradox for the learned woman; while eighteenth-century gender roles were "*increasingly* prescribed in theory," particularly by conservative thinkers like John Brown or James Fordyce, they were, as Johnson illustrates, "*increasingly* broken through practice" (Colley 250).³ Chapters III and IV—which focus on Lennox and Austen respectively—will further explore the complexities of eighteenth-century gender expectations, specifically those that impacted woman's access to both a literary as well as an equitable education.

These warring ideas can perhaps best be described, to make use of Raymond Williams' terms, as the conflict between *dominant* and *emergent* ideologies. When emergent ideologies threaten the dominant culture, Williams argues that the dominant culture frequently responds by enacting more stringent control over new aspects of human existence, thus constraining the emergent culture. Women's reading, for instance, might be deemed subversive by the dominant culture because, "[r]ather than erasing I,

² For the purposes of this thesis, a literary education is defined as knowledge acquired through female reading and writing rather than filtered through a mainstream, primarily domestic, female education.

³ Emphasis my own.

reading might reassert it by privileging personal pleasure, and rather than confining within a domestic sphere, it might open up a wider community of ideas,” thus threatening the status quo (Pearson 17). When eighteenth-century gender roles—specifically those concerning reading, writing, and education—are contextualized within these terms, it is unsurprising that women’s education, the role that reading should play *in* said education, and the systemic enigma of the female *self* both explicitly and implicitly permeate political debates, conduct books, treatises, and novels of the time; in simpler terms, as women pushed back against patriarchal constructs, access to education was further confined as a means of control. In chapters III and IV, this thesis will read *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey* as artifacts of an emergent female ideology that uses a masculine tradition to advocates for women’s learning.

In studying women’s literary responses to these patriarchal customs, John Locke’s theories of the *tabula rasa*, the conduct of the mind, and education all invite analysis because they were both authoritative in eighteenth-century society and also appropriated by women writers. Resultingly, Chapter II focuses on Locke’s theories in order to lay the groundwork for the later study of both Lennox and Austen. In identifying the human mind as a blank page, Locke universalized knowledge and reason. Women like Astell, Montagu, Lennox, and Austen harnessed this notion and demanded that their minds, too, be treated as capable of reason and growth. Further, Locke’s delineation of how a human comes to furnish his or her mind with knowledge, as explored in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* and *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, granted additional material for women to use when advocating for female learning because Locke named education and experience as the two great teachers—both of which were often denied to women. Lastly, in his expansive analysis on the learning of children, *Some Thoughts*

Concerning Education, Locke granted women a model by which they could contextualize their own educational ideas. Chapter II of this thesis both explores the potential that Locke's ideals held for women and also demonstrates how women, specifically Astell and Montague, utilized his principles to appeal for female education. As this thesis progresses, Locke's authoritative ideas, as well as the latent potential they held for women, will be woven into discussion of Lennox's and Austen's quixotic novels.

In 1752 Charlotte Lennox published *The Female Quixote*, contributing her voice to the burgeoning educational conversation and arguing that both a literary education and experience are necessary to produce a moral and agent woman; thus, Chapter III of this thesis focuses on the educational arguments of Lennox contextualized within Locke's ideas.⁴ Through *Quixote*, Lennox advocates for women's equitable education by implementing the quixotic model, as presented in *Don Quixote*, to demonstrate both the intellectual potential of her heroine and the distorting effect that traditional gendered education has upon women. *Quixotism*, which depicts a hero or heroine who strays from reason and reality because of their romantic reading, is at its very foundation a genre concerned with education. After all, in order to rehabilitate the Quixote, one must educate the Quixote. Consequently, as Lennox demonstrates, it is the ideal platform from which to explore female education. Though the protagonist Arabella begins the story accomplished but quixotic, Lennox utilizes Locke's theories to demonstrate that this state is not innate but constructed by the dominant culture. In rendering a Lockean rehabilitation for Arabella, Lennox argues that women, too, are rational creatures capable of reason; however, just like men, they require a careful education that combines both

⁴ According to Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, *education* is learning with the intent "to make our natural faculty of reason both the better and the sooner to judge rightly between truth and error, good and evil" (677). Because of its pervasiveness, this thesis will employ Johnson's moralistic and reason-based definition of education to analyze women's learning.

reading and experience to become rational beings. Envisioning a tangible solution for women, Lennox writes her own “curriculum” that incorporates varied reading material and gives even the domestic women some experience with the world: her periodical the *Lady’s Museum*. Thus, Chapter II demonstrates that Lennox both argues for women’s balanced Lockean learning within *The Female Quixote* and presents a solution within her periodical, solidifying her contribution to furthering women’s education.

Completed in 1799, Jane Austen’s earliest novel *Northanger Abbey* is the logical culminating point of this study because, as Barbara Benedict states, “Nowhere in Austen... are reading and its social consequences more central than [in] *Northanger Abbey*” and, therefore, it is addressed in Chapter IV here (1). Despite Lennox’s active engagement with the educational conversation, it is only Austen who harnesses this discourse, the quixotic form, as well as Locke’s ideas, to write an intellectually empowered heroine, Catherine. In so doing, Austen creates a hierarchy of feminine readers —Mrs. Allen, Isabella Thorpe, Eleanor Tilney, and Catherine Morland—that elucidates the inherent deficiencies of a feminine reading that is founded in male-centric ideology and demonstrates how true education empowers women to create a sense of self that is independent of the dominant discourse. However, the antidote to this poor unreflective reading is presented in the character of Catherine, who combines judicial reading and experience to enact *her own* rehabilitation. The result of this authentic female learning, as well as the subversive manner in which Catherine is continuously characterized, is something truly new in women’s fiction. Where Lennox fails to create a text that functions outside of masculine constructs, *Northanger* is a novel that is able to “invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics” and succeeds in creating Hélène Cixous’ “feminine writing” (42-3). A careful study of

reading in *Northanger Abbey* reveals that Austen utilizes her hierarchy of female readers to illustrate the transformative ability that proper reading has on the female intellect.

Analyzing the text through this lens opens up a singular comparison between Lennox and Austen; though each chronicles the impact that feminine education has upon a woman's agency, only Austen employs authentic writing to create something new, resulting in an early and academically significant instance of Cixous' "feminine writing."

CHAPTER II

Not Born but Made: Women's Appropriation of Lockean Ideals

These are the impressions that are made on our senses by outward objects that are extrinsical to the mind; and its own operations, proceeding from powers intrinsical and proper to itself, which, when reflected on by itself, become also objects of its contemplation — are, as I have said, the original of all knowledge. Thus the first capacity of human intellect is — that the mind is fitted to receive the impressions made on it; either through the senses by outward objects, or by its own operations when it reflects on them. This is the first step a man makes towards the discovery of anything, and the groundwork whereon to build all those notions which ever he shall have naturally in this world.

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 1690

For since God has given women as well as men intelligent souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us the faculty of thinking, why should we not (at least in gratitude to him) employ our thoughts on himself their noblest object, and not unworthily bestow them on trifles and gaieties and secular affairs...Especially since the will is blind, and cannot choose but by the direction of the understanding; or to speak more properly, since the soul always wills according as she understands, so that if she understands amiss, she wills amiss.

Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 1694

In an attempt to characterize the social and cultural features of the long eighteenth century comprehensively, literary scholars and historians routinely apply sweeping, albeit too-often imperfect, labels—The Age of Reason, The Enlightenment, The Age of Sensibility. At the risk of encumbering the age with yet another such term, I propose, for the purposes of this thesis, that we consider the long eighteenth century as an “Age of Education.” From the time John Locke began publishing in 1689 through the dawn of the nineteenth century, there was a significant increase in the number of men and, more pertinent to this study, the number of women writing and publishing texts centered on education; whereas in the seventeenth century women who openly voiced their discontent with the intellectual status quo were rarities— like Mary Astell and Anne Finch—the

eighteenth century saw a steady rise in educational treatises both written by and directed towards women. This trend culminated at the end of the century with Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Hannah More's 1799 *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. This is not to say that women first began contemplating the inequities of gender-biased education during this time, but, in the simplest terms, the rise in literacy, the increase in printed material, and the destabilizing of women's roles did create a unique moment in the history that women filled with their own writings on education. Though these intellectual undertakings are less common in the first half of the century, woman like Mary Astell (1666-1731) and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) made remarkable and early contributions to this burgeoning tradition. The upturn in women's published advocacy of "equitable" education, at least in part, was a response to the shifting philosophical perception of the human mind. Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke found traditional ideas of intelligence to be inconsistent with empirical logic and, thus, rejected the primacy of innate ideas. With his *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1689), Locke depicted the human mind as a *tabula rasa*, a blank page upon which were inscribed perceptions and sensations.⁵ Therefore, in Locke's eyes, one is not born but made. For women, whose lesser status was ingrained early by societal constructs, this perception of intelligence was compelling. As will be explored in the first section of this chapter, which centers on the Lockean conception of the mind, Locke's "new" theory had important implications for the evolution in views of female intellectual potential in England. In his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), which dominates the second section of this chapter, Locke expanded his influence by applying his empirical ideas of human

⁵ From this point forward, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* will be referred to as *Essay*.

understanding to the learning of children.⁶ Though twenty-first-century discussion of Locke is often ruled by his essays on government, his inquiries into education “supersede[d] his political arguments in their breadth of influence on eighteenth-century culture” and paved the way for women to redefine their intellect (Larkin 172). For over a century after his death, Locke’s ideas of the mind and his notions on the education of children permeated eighteenth-century society and, more germane to this study, the educational endeavors of women. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hannah More, and Jane Austen, for instance, are all documented readers of Locke. Thus, as Margaret Ezell argues, Lockean ideals were in the air during the eighteenth century, and “it would have been virtually impossible for a literate person to have been unaware of his theories” (141).

This emphasis on knowledge is not unique to the long eighteenth century. Milton noted in 1644 that education is “one of the greatest and noblest Designs that can be thought on”; however, during this time, whether in periodicals, treatises, or novels, both men and women alike published on education to an unprecedented extent (1). The steady rise in women’s publishing on their too-often repressed intellectual potential is not attributable to a single event or cause, but the prevalence of Locke’s idea of the mind is an intriguing factor. Locke, an “environmentalist,” who like all philosophers of this name believed that one’s environment shaped the individual, shifted away from traditional “nativist” philosophies that promoted innate ideas. Because Locke’s theories made the acquisition of knowledge more universal, women appropriated his work to validate their arguments for a more equitable education. As will be analyzed in the final section of this chapter, which explores women’s implementation of Lockean ideals, women

⁶ From this point forward, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* will be referred to as *STCE*.

educationalists manipulated and even critiqued Locke's work; however, in all cases, Locke's cultural authority was a flexible tool for women thinkers to implement. Though Locke himself rarely spoke of women's intelligence in his writings, the inclusivity of his language carved an opening for women to apply Locke's notions of *human* understanding to their *own* tabula rasa. Through the juxtaposition of Locke's theories of ideas and education with female-authored educational letters and treatises—namely Mary Astell's and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's—it becomes apparent that Locke's theory of the mind was a weapon that women used to point out credibly the socially constructed nature of their ignorance, legitimize their intellectual potential, and argue for a more equitable education.

Before analyzing Locke's *Essay* and *STCE*, we must first place Locke himself in the context of an ongoing and bifurcated debate about the patriarchal nature of his work. Although Locke wrote during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, study of his work and its possible applications for women did not become prevalent until after the feminist movements, which advocated for such inquiries into traditionally "patriarchal" texts. Therefore, the first and second waves of feminism were the catalyst for many studies into the history of woman's subjugation. In the 1940s, Simone De Beauvoir compellingly argued that "[h]istory has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers" (159) Thirty years later, Kate Millet added that "sex is a category with political implications" and that all instances in which "one group of persons is controlled by another" is inherently political (23). These landmark texts were cognizant of the historical realities of women's oppression but also spoke more to the present state of affairs. That is to say, they studied women of the past to evoke change in their own time, not to analyze the complexities of women's roles in preceding centuries. With these

studies of sexuality, power, and the patriarchy, feminist thinkers like De Beauvoir and Millet paved the way for the exploration of canonical texts, such as Locke's, from a feminist perspective. Exemplifying these resulting studies, Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought* and C. B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* both seek to analyze philosophical and political ideas that subjugated women in the eighteenth century and also to "rediscover some of the 'founding mothers' of" feminist thought (Coole 139).

Through the process of revisiting patriarchal texts, Locke and his political, philosophical, and educational ideas have been both attacked and, more recently, rescued by feminist critics. For instance, MacPherson argues that Locke may have propagated the liberalistic and universal ideas of justice and equality, but he never extended these to women. Feminist critics like MacPherson see this self-contradiction as most apparent in his conversation of the marriage contract. Though Locke argued that marriage must be among two consenting parties, he "did not give women the status of consenting individuals" outside of this marriage contract (Coole 139). Feminist criticism of Locke seems to be made up of antithetical pairings, for MacPherson's argument, like seemingly all thoughts on Locke, finds its converse in another feminist critic, Mary Lyndon Shanley. After studying seventeenth-century marriage contracts, Shanley contends that Locke, in fact, revolutionized marriage with his "astonishing notion[s]" that granted women more freedom. As will be demonstrated in later chapters, women's roles in marriage are frequently represented in female-authored novels and, therefore, present an added level of connectivity between Locke's interest and those of female authors. The contradictory view of MacPherson with that of Shanley is merely one example of the contentious nature of Lockean studies; however, it is representative of an ongoing trend

in the scholarly conversation. Is Locke an iconoclastic defender of female rights? Alternatively, does he hypocritically perpetuate the male hegemony? The answer is simple: Many scholars have fallen prey to presentism, posing the wrong question. Unequivocally, John Locke promoted some patriarchal notions with his work; however, scholars who attack Locke for this have mistakenly taken him out of his historical moment and transplanted him within modern ideas of gender constructionism. More moderate critics like Mary B. Walsh maintain that though Locke does perpetuate some “disturbingly patriarchal” ideas, the “latent potential in Locke’s philosophy for addressing women’s particular circumstances” is too often ignored by other feminist critics (Walsh 251). This question—what “latent potential” did Locke’s work grant women? —is one that guides this study. Despite the contentious debates that surround feminists’ studies of Locke, when consideration is given to the universal nature of his theories and the number of eighteenth-century women who were in conversation with his ideas, it is clear that Locke’s work held power for women and that this potential necessitates exploration.

Furnishing the “Vast Store”: Lockean Theory of the Mind

To grasp better the omnipresence of Lockean ideas during the eighteenth century—and their subsequent impact on women educationalists—requires an awareness of seventeenth-century philosophy prior to Locke. Locke himself “was quick to point out that he had not invented a new way of knowing but had only extended a mode of analysis which had [from Aristotle to Descartes] a respectable tradition” (Yolton 341). In the early seventeenth century, humanity was most commonly viewed in two conflicting traditions: (1) in the Augustinian view, where one’s character is grounded in original sin and, as Thomas Hobbes argues, in self-interest, or (2) as innately pure, shaped in the

image of God and then corrupted through experience (Ezell 140). Both nativist concepts emphasize the *innate* qualities of humanity. In consideration of these theories, the most significant distinctions between Locke and his immediate English predecessors, the Cambridge Platonists, are their support of innate principles. Henry More (1614-1687) argues, in his *Appeal to the Natural Faculties of the Minde of Man*, that the belief that “the Soul has no Knowledge nor Notion, but what is in a *Passive* way impressed, or delineated upon her” is incongruent with our knowledge of God (qtd. in Rogers 84). Instead, he maintains that “*actuall Knowledge* in a man” stems from “outward objects” that are merely “reminders” of our native knowledge (84). Two significant points must be noted here. First, consistent with other Cambridge Platonists, More firmly believes that humanity is born with ingrained knowledge and that experiences, or in Locke’s terms “sensations” and “perceptions,” are mere reminders of these inborn “truths.” Second, More is arguing against a pre-established tradition that supposes the mind a blank slate or, as he calls it, an “Abrasa Tabula, a table book in which nothing is writ” (84). From More’s comments, it is clear that Locke did not create the blank page or moldable clay metaphor but merely popularized it. After all, Aristotle spoke of his “unscribed tablet,” and Plato spoke of the mind as a preexisting entity long before English philosophers picked up their pens; therefore, it is important to remember that what makes Locke’s theories singular is not their originality but both the cultural authority that they gained during the eighteenth century and the fact that he situates his theories within empirical epistemology. Further, and paramount to this study, the divergences between Cambridge Platonists’ theories and Locke’s allowed women the vehicle to shed the damaging “fact” of their innate inferiority.

Though pre-established debates inform Locke's most prominent ideas, there are significant differences in his methodology and the terms he employs, and these variances set Locke apart from past philosophers and make him more serviceable for female thinkers. When studying the inborn nature of humanity, seventeenth-century philosophers spoke most commonly of the *soul*— a term that Locke later abandons in favor of the *mind*. The Cambridge Platonists “hardly use the term mind at all,” because seventeenth-century thinkers, who were often theologians as well, emphasized the spirituality of the mind, making the concept of the soul more suitable (Rogers 82). However, this spiritualizing of philosophical inquiry is inherently flawed. By necessity, speculation permeates any exploration into spirituality, and, therefore, speculation drives the philosophical notions of Platonists like More and Ralph Cudworth, who both grounded their arguments in Christianity. That is not to say that the primary distinction between Locke and the Cambridge Platonists was religion—Locke himself was a devout man—but to note the essential difference in their manner of inquiry, which holds important implications for women. More and Cudworth alike entered into their work with a predisposed outcome; God made man in his image, and God's image is not a blank page. However, as any disciple of Bacon's “New Method” knows, one cannot suppose anything as factual that is not proven through empirical evidence. Empiricism, then, is how Locke sets himself apart and facilitates women's discovery of agency

As G.A.J. Rogers illustrates, “To read Locke after More and Cudworth is to move from one world to another” because “theological questions” do not dominate Locke's treatises (87). This is apparent even from the preface of Cudworth's *The True Intellectual Systems of the Universe*, where he undertakes a lengthy attack, or in his terms “apology,” on “Atheistick Doctrines,” setting up his own treatise as a refutation of

environmentalists' thought (1). Thus, it is incontrovertible that theological concerns drive his text. In stark contrast, Locke's "Epistle to the Reader" does not mention theology at all; instead, it introduces what will be an empirical inquiry into the "step[s] the mind takes in its progress towards Knowledge" (*Essay* 1). The juxtaposition of Cudworth and More against Locke demonstrates an evolution in discourse; rather than utilizing philosophy to rationalize theology, Locke used a more pragmatic method of inquiry, which relied on evidence. This is significant for women because when theology is no longer paramount in philosophical and political thought, it diminishes the validity of the Bible as justification for women's oppression. Adam's "innate" dominance over Eve and Paul's misogynistically read sermons hold less significance within Locke's theories; therefore, not only Locke's ideas but his very method hold potential for women.

It is immediately apparent that Locke's pragmatic inquiry into human understanding differed drastically from the religious treatises of the Cambridge Platonists; however, a more in-depth study of Locke's ideas is needed to comprehend why his philosophies appealed to female educationalists during the eighteenth century. The answer is in part found in the universality of Locke's theories and the autonomy that they promoted. This underlying potential for women is illustrated in the landmark *Essay*, which refuted the popular Cambridge Platonists by arguing against innate traits of any sort. Instead, Locke delineates the human mind as a blank slate that requires filling before it takes on any character of its own. In Book II of his *Essay*, "Of Ideas," Locke begins by saying,

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: —How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost

endless variety? Whence has it all the *materials* of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. (*Essay* 2.1.2).

According to Locke, the “blank page” gains knowledge through experiences compiled from sensations and perceptions (i.e., the “self” forms from one’s environment). Thus, all knowledge stems from an individual’s circumstances, education, and everyday existence. As Locke meticulously illustrates, this is true of both abstract ideas like right and wrong or more concrete understandings like mathematics.

Locke’s hypothesis may not seem radical to our modern eyes, but eighteenth-century women were taught of their inferiority from birth, both physically and mentally. Thus, the notion of the *human* mind as a blank page waiting for knowledge was an alluring one. In her article on the roots of liberal feminism, Melisa Butler notes that when viewed through the lens of Locke, “[w]omen had intellectual potential which could be developed to a higher level”; however, this view is not unanimously held (116). Some scholars like Nancy Hirschmann argue that feminist theorists are too generous with Locke and that his “apparent gender neutrality...camouflages conventionally gendered assumptions”; however, what Locke himself believed is not of the utmost importance (168). What is vital is that Locke’s ideas could be (and were) appropriated by women and implemented to justify their intellectual existence. Intentionally or not, Locke illuminated the socially constructed nature of knowledge and—as will be illustrated by Mary Astell, Lady Mary Wortly Montagu, Charlotte Lennox, and Jane Austen—left an opening for women to signify the artificiality of gendered education.

But the question that Locke's *tabula rasa* raises—one that dominated conduct books, sermons and philosophical inquiry—is what happens if individuals misperceive and fill their minds with false ideas rather than “truth?” And further, what are false ideas composed of? Locke's notion of misperception builds upon his theory of how the mind is “furnished” with knowledge and, consequently, holds similar potential for women's traditionally isolated situation. As Neal Wood argues, according to Locke, “we create or re-create ourselves by altering our social environment” because it is our environment that comprises our perceptions and sensations which, in turn, furnish our mind (647). The idea that one's environment is the leading factor in development, or social environmentalism, drove Enlightenment thinking and also raised difficult philosophical question about false knowledge. In the section titled “Of True and False Ideas,” Locke states that

[a]ny idea, then, which we have in our minds, whether conformable or not to the existence of things, or to any idea in the minds of other men, cannot properly for this alone be called false. For these representations, if they have nothing in them but what is really existing in things without, cannot be thought false, being exact representations of something. (*Essay* 2.32.20)

In simpler terms, our *ideas* are not false because they can only be created by the perceptions and sensations with which we have experience; however, our judgement of these experiences might be. Therefore, for Locke, false knowledge stems from incorrect judgement of sensations and perceptions as well as from the unquestioned acceptance of “knowledge” imparted from others. To explain this misperception or faulty judgement, Locke claims that the mind “judges” what it knows “to be a perfect complete idea of a sort of thing which really it is not” (*Essay* 2.32.23). Here, Locke employs the example of gold. A person may join “the ideas of substance, yellow, malleable, most heavy, and

fusible,” together and determine “that complex idea to be the complete idea of gold” (*Essay* 2.32.23). Gold, of course, is much more intricate than this simple understanding and, thus, if a person perceives this definition as complete, he or she has implemented flawed judgement. According to Locke’s *Essay*, all knowledge stems from outside sources and, in order to prevent misperception, a complete image of something is required. Consequently, this theory has potential for women educational writers because, in essence, Locke demonstrates that education is necessary to fight against misperceptions and banish false ideas.

However, fundamental to this theory of ideas, and of utmost concern to Enlightenment philosophers, is the distorting effect that customs, opinions, fashions, etc. can have upon the psyche. In his *Essay*, Locke spends great attention exploring how perceptions and sensations can lead to flawed ideas of reality. Locke challenges his readers to question knowledge, to use empirical evidence, and to rely on their own senses rather than the tenets told to them by others. To enumerate, Locke claims that “custom, a greater power than nature,” holds great influence over the mind because humans are often taught to “bow their minds and submit their understandings to” the so-called “natural” principles of law without question (*Essay* 1.2.25). In his political writing, Locke illustrates how these supposed natural principles allow fathers to rule children and kings to rule subjects with little challenge. As Locke says, “It is no wonder that grown men, either perplexed in the necessary affairs of life, or hot in the pursuit of pleasures, should not seriously sit down to examine their own tenets; especially when one of their principles is, that principles ought not to be questioned” (*Essay* 1.2.25). Compellingly, these ideas are imperative to the flawed learning present within the growing number of female-quixotic novels during the eighteenth century. As will be explored throughout this

study, female educational writings illustrated—as Locke’s theory of the mind predicted—that the wholesale adoption of patriarchal customs weakened women, making them susceptible to false ideas and subjugation.

It is apparent that Locke’s skeptical nature brings into question the possibility of absolute knowledge; however, setting this aside, Locke still argued that a moral education could correct improper judgement and blind acceptance, an idea that was used by women to validate their own arguments for education. From Locke’s *Essay*, says Wood, one should understand that “[w]e must become rational, self-directed individuals, instead of puppets forever manipulated by the strings of fashion, authority, and orthodoxy”; as previously demonstrated, becoming this rational creature is no simple task (663). However, Locke’s notion of the mind, as presented above, holds two important implications for women. First, education is the most vital means to alleviate and to protect oneself against false judgement and to encourage rationality; Locke explores this in more detail in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which will later be analyzed in this paper. And second, accepting knowledge from a source that is steeped in tradition rather than empirical logic is the surest way to ensnare ourselves in “the yolk of false opinion and insidious custom” (Wood 663). Therefore, according to Locke’s ideas on false knowledge and customs, women are in a difficult dilemma. As women educationalists like Astell and Montagu demonstrate through their educational arguments, women are sheltered from gaining their own experiences by social custom and “truth” is handed to them by patriarchal sources; therefore, almost every element of their existence, according to Locke’s own reasoning, sets them up for irrationality and immorality.

Every layer of Locke’s argument seems to form new ammunition for women to use while advocating for more equitable female learning; Locke’s notion of volition

further demonstrates this latent potential. At the conclusion of his exploration into true and false ideas, Locke importantly states, “So that liberty cannot be where there is no thought, no volition, no will; but there may be thought, there may be will, there may be volition, where there is no liberty” (*Essay*, 2.21.8). Here, the individual has used perception and sensation to reach an opinion and to will a specific action, yet he or she is prevented from following through because of a lack of free will. In his conception of liberty, Locke employs his theory of knowledge and false perception to reinforce his political arguments against tyranny and vie for individualism; so, too, did women. When viewing Locke’s ideas of knowledge and power in this light, it is clear that they are highly interconnected and hold “dangerous” potential for women. Lockean logic bolsters the argument that, as illustrated by Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal for the Ladies*, a woman who understands incorrectly will act according to these understandings; therefore, education must be acquired by women as well as men if “proper” conduct is desired. And, more iconoclastically yet still supported by Locke’s ideas, if, as Mary Wollstonecraft argues, we “[s]trengthen the female mind by enlarging it, [then] there will be an end to blind obedience” (93). Thus, the underlying potential of the Lockean theory of the mind to promote autonomy and self-reliance for women is clear.

Before we progress to Locke’s theories of education and their importance to women, we must consider a final important subject, power and its relation to gender. During the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries, liberals, like Locke, “mounted a critique of blind traditionalism,” arguing instead for the education of reasonable individuals who use empirical evidence to make logical decisions (Porter 256). Rather than relegating the masses to ignorance, Enlightenment philosophers believed that each individual “had the right to moral autonomy and self-realization”

(256). However, the issue with this model, as least to those hegemonic and patriarchal forces, is that an educated populace is less malleable than an ignorant one. In consideration of this tension, Locke's theory of the mind and reason is on an essential level political and, resultantly, raises the question of power. Locke, as Alex Tuckness demonstrates, radically argued "in response to those who thought that Adam, by virtue of fatherhood, was monarch to the world...that paternal power exists for a different purpose than political power" (627). Therefore, it makes sense that Locke dedicates a large chapter to the delineation of power. To define power, Locke simply says that the mind "considers in one thing the possibility of having any of its simple ideas changed, and in another the possibility of making that change; and so comes by that idea which we call power" (*Essay* 2.21.1). Importantly, Locke emphasizes the mental rather than the physical aspect of authority, the power *to change* one's mind or *to have* one's mind changed. Again, this idea has political consequences for men and women alike because sovereigns, whether of the state or the home, hold authority not only over the body but also over the mind. Though Locke considers all humans free, some are bound by necessity—the necessity to act, speak, or believe as someone with power over them mandates in order to escape negative consequences—and this limits their freedom. In explaining the power of free will, Locke argues,

So far as a man has power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a man FREE. Wherever any performance or forbearance are not equally in a man's power; wherever doing or not doing will not equally FOLLOW upon the preference of his mind directing it, there he is not free, though perhaps the action may be voluntary. (*Essay* 2.21.8)

According to Locke, individuals who acts against their own desires to preserve their safety within the status quo are not free even though they act voluntarily. To delineate this pull to act against an individual's autonomous desires, Locke utilizes the idea of necessity. This term is important both to Locke's theory of government and to women's conception of agency. Locke argues that our actions are driven by contemplating and judging the dichotomy of happiness and despair; simply, we utilize our knowledge and our judgement to determine which course of actions would best lead to contentment rather than towards the path of distress. However, what happens to the woman whose education, relationship to knowledge, and even access to many experiences are restricted by the dominant culture? In the eighteenth century, woman's experience was so vastly constrained by custom that a proper education and, consequently, proper reasoning were denied to her.

This facet of Locke's power dynamics is valuable in the analysis and comprehension of women's writing in the eighteenth century. As Locke argues, "What is it that determines the will? the true and proper answer is, The mind" (*Essay* 2.21.29). And if the mind, which contains nothing but what an individual has experienced through perception and sensation, is inadequately groomed—as most women's surely were—then, as Mary Astell pointed out in her proposal, those who have a faulty understanding also have a flawed will. Locke's theory of the mind promotes the idea that all individuals require an adequate, if not equal, education in order to judge their own actions correctly and behave morally; viewed in this light education is a societal *duty*. However, the second power dilemma that Locke negotiates is even more unsettling because education cannot eradicate it. A thoughtful individual might judge his actions moral based upon sound reasoning and empirical evidence but still foresee negative consequences, not

because his intentions are improper but because they run counter to societal or patriarchal custom. In order to maintain a semblance of happiness, this individual may act counter to his or her will, and thus, is not free. This struggle between the autonomy of will and the hegemonic force of necessity illustrates the quandary that women, especially writing women, were placed in daily. As Roy Porter noted, the majority of what we know about women and what they “thought—or were expected to think—comes from men, from sermons and courtesy manuals, from male diarists, writers, painters and doctors” (22). Despite the strides scholarship has made in rediscovering female voices, to a great extent this will always be true. And this unpleasant reality has everything to do with power. Even uncommonly educated and worldly women, like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, advised their daughters to “conceal whatever learning [they attained], with as much solicitude as [they] would hide crookedness or lameness” (qtd. in Porter 23). The power that dominant discourse held over women was and is great; it stifled education, snuffed out writing, and confined intelligent women to menial positions. Therefore, Locke’s ideas of the mind, will, and power had great influence in and of themselves because his theories challenged the status quo *and* gained tremendous cultural authority during the eighteenth century. In the hands of female educationalists, this authority became a weapon used to question their position in society, challenge their right to education, and make their voices heard through the written word. What made Locke so useful for women writers is that English society, not unanimously but at large, “warmly applauded” Locke’s theories as the “formation of solid, respectable citizens” (Ezell 142). Therefore, through proxy, the ideas of female educationalists gained traction and were more readily disseminated. As Turner demonstrates in her study of women *Living by the Pen*, “As [Locke’s] ideas gained credence in” the eighteenth century, “they provided a

philosophical basis for an expansion in educational opportunities,” and, as women like Astell, Montagu, Lennox, Wollstonecraft, and Austen demonstrate, opportunities to publish upon education as well (43).

The Age of Education: Locke’s Methodology and Its Implications for Women

John Locke’s contributions to politics and philosophy—namely his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1789)—are often treated as more significant than his thoughts on proper education. However, Lockean critics like Margaret Ezell and Gillian Brown contend that *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1793) had a greater impact on eighteenth-century society than any of Locke’s aforementioned works (Larkin 171). Even Constance I. Smith, whose article establishes that Locke’s ideas were not wholly original, cannot deny that he was the “father of modern education in England” (403). In seeming contradiction, most researchers of eighteenth-century education focus on the latter half of the century because after 1760 there was a dramatic increase in men *and* women publishing on education (Ezell 139-41). However, as Ezell demonstrates, this subsequent “movement was spearheaded largely by the writings of one man, John Locke” (141). Thus, Locke’s importance to any study of eighteenth-century education is evident; however, more pertinent to this inquiry is how women writers availed themselves of Locke’s theories. As is logical and discernable through a study of *STCE*, Locke constructed his schema for education based upon his premise of ideas; therefore, his notions of the *tabula rasa*, misperception, power, and judgment all play a vital role in his model for instructing children to become moral and productive citizens. For that reason, all of the underlying potential for women contained in Locke’s theory of the mind and ideas is also manifest in his notion of education. Locke’s *STCE*—which was initially a series of instructive

correspondences between himself and his friends Edward and Mary Clarke— delineates how a proper upbringing can alleviate the risk of immorality and a variety of other adverse traits; in essence, Locke wrote a detailed guide to raising socially conscious and responsible citizens. This molding of morality is of particular significance to women because they were often viewed as more susceptible to corruption than men. It was a persistent fear voiced in conduct books and sermons that “romance and distraction, the extravagance of vanity, and the rage of conquest” motivated women rather than the pursuit of virtue (Fordyce 14). Thus, Locke’s *STCE* spoke to women just as readily as to men. As Alex Tuckness argues, education, for Locke, “consists in helping people to overcome the temptations of shortsighted behavior,” a danger that women were just as prone to as men (629). As women like Astell, Montagu, Lennox, and Austen demonstrate, Locke’s morality-driven theory of learning coupled with his *tabula rasa* created a new definition of education that women educationalists—and novelists, as will be argued in subsequent chapters—could exploit to substantiate their ideas regarding female potential.

Education, as expressed in *STCE*, is a strategic molding of a child’s mind into something rational and socially responsible, capable of transforming perceptions into proper judgement; therefore, at its most fundamental level, *STCE* is an intentional application of Locke’s theories of the mind onto the most moldable of all clay, children. This interconnectivity between Locke’s *Essay* and *STCE* is observable from the onset of *STCE*. Introducing his premise that education is the means by which mankind improves itself and society, Locke states,

I think I may say, that of all the Men we meet with, Nine parts of Ten are what they are, Good or Evil, useful or not, by their Education. 'Tis that which makes

the great difference in Mankind: The little, and almost insensible Impressions on our tender Infancies, have very important and lasting Consequences: And there 'tis, as in the Fountains of some Rivers, where a gentle application of the hand turns the flexible Waters into Channels, that make them take quite contrary Courses, and by this little direction given them at first in the Source, they receive different Tendencies, and arrive at last, at very remote and distant places. (*STCE* 2)

It is evident from Locke's *Essay* that he views education as the most effective method of creating a rational man; however, from this passage in *STCE* it is clear that Locke's methodology for educating children is a direct consequence of his own theories of the mind. If a man is evil or good it is not a result of his birth, as nativists might argue. Instead, he was *made* that way by his social environment. Importantly, this process of forming one's self begins at infancy and, as such, Locke contends that children must be thoughtfully educated from birth. By applying their "hand" in their child's education, parents can shift the "flexible Waters" and make their children moral and rational beings. Locke does not set down a curriculum for children to read and memorize; rather, he delineates rules that will encourage morality and rationality. When viewed in this fashion, parents do not only create and educate of their own children, but they also safeguard the integrity of society. As Locke argues, "The well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it" that it cannot be neglected (*STCE* 8). Roy Porter notes that during the eighteenth century "[u]pbringings were oriented to groom the young for society (and Enlightenment educationalists believed that, because the mind was originally like a lump

of wax, it was malleable enough to be molded to society's requirements)" (303). Thus, by raising children in a Lockean manner, parents were enacting a civic responsibility.

Taking Locke's previously outlined concept of the mind as the basis for his *STCE*, the sensations and perceptions individuals receive in their youth are the basis of their character; if this is true, then, as Locke argues at great length, raising moral and rational children requires constant and thoughtful attention (*STCE* 25). As will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters, the requisite attention was not given to girls' education, and the negative outcomes of this oversight, which are predicted by Locke's theories, are illustrated by female novelist like Lennox and Austen. Considering the delicate malleability of the mind, Locke dictates that a child must have near constant supervision and that all circumstances and events are teaching moments. Whether applied to boys, girls, or fictional quixotic women, this intentionality in education is necessary to avoid false ideas and the immorality these ideas promote. For instance, when parents humors their children and grants them their desired treat they are, in fact, corrupting "the principles of nature in their children, and [then they] wonder afterwards to taste the bitter waters when they themselves have poisoned the fountain" (*STCE* 26). As Locke mandates, every moment should be viewed for its possible impacts on a child's mind. If not, something common like spoiling a child might manifest itself in the adult as willfulness and pride (27). Female educational writers, whether of treatises or novels, also demonstrate how indulgence of girls' fancies—which they argue is promoted by a traditional "pageantry" education—results in flawed women. This simple concept of action and reaction drives Locke's moral education theory. Remember, Locke believed that human beings "naturally act in pursuit of their own pleasure" and that education is a tool to curb this natural disposition (Tuckness 105). Consequently, Locke's moral

education hinged on the parents' ability to instill intrinsic motivation into the child so that whether observed or not, the child would place aside his or her desires for the pursuit of virtue. As Mary Clarke noted in her responses to Locke, this is not a simple mandate; however, Locke argues that the repeated lessons that the mother, maid, or tutor imparts to the child have a great impact on his or her later ability to restrain desires for pleasure.

Locke gives an exemplar:

These Mischiefs are easily enough prevented whilst he is little, being then seldom out of sight: And if, during his Childhood, he be constantly and rigorously kept from Sitting on the Ground, or drinking any cold Liquor, whilst he is hot, the Custom of forbearing grown into Habit, will help much to preserve him, when he is no longer under his Maid's or Tutor's Eye. (*STCE* 14-5)

Therefore, Locke argues that consistency in youth provides a solid foundation that the child will later utilize when his or her elders are no longer watching over them. In essence, consistent forbearance creates positive habits and promotes future morality, an idea that will later be exemplified by Lennox and Austen.

When this need for constant supervision and instruction is paired with the importance of early childhood perceptions, it is apparent that Locke's model of education is incompatible with a public or boarding school education because these institutions lack the supervision and differentiation needed to form all of a child's experiences into moral lessons; therefore, Locke gives very definite recommendations for a child's primary school days that will facilitate the child's future integrity. As Locke admits, the question of whether a child should be schooled at home or abroad is a complicated one because each side holds "inconveniences" (*STCE* 46). This question of public versus private is

dominant in the discourse of educationalists—it features prominently in both Lennox’s and Austen’s quixotic novels—and thus necessitates exploration.

Locke promotes a moralistic education for the betterment of society; however, he also fears the influence of an imperfect society on youthful minds—after all, he firmly argues against unquestioned adoptions of social customs. Resultingly, Locke’s instructions for *how* a child was to obtain this model education reflect his distrust of society. When addressing his promotion of home education, Locke mimics the contentious questions mothers and fathers might pose to him:

What shall I do with my Son? If I keep him always at home, he will be in danger to be my young Master; and if I send him abroad, how is it possible to keep him from the contagion of Rudeness and Vice, which is so every where in fashion? In my house, he will perhaps be more innocent, but more ignorant too of the World, and being used constantly to the same Faces, and little Company, will, when he comes abroad, be a sheepish or conceited Creature. (*STCE* 45-6)

Locke gives voice to these pitfalls of home education because he knows them to be legitimate concerns. And, importantly, this hypothetical “sheepish or conceited Creature” is wielded against the patriarchy by women educationalists from Astell to Wollstonecraft and is notably reimaged in both *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*. Despite the validity of these claims, Locke mistrusts the hands of society and, therefore, staunchly promotes home education of children where parents can exert more control. In Locke’s rebuttal to his own speculative questions he says, “I confess, both sides have their Inconveniencies, but whilst [the child] is at home, use him as much to your company, and the company of...Genteel and well-bred People...[and] keep him from the Taint

of...meaner People” (*STCE* 45-6). Again, Locke is demonstrating his social environmentalism; if parents control a child’s acquaintances, they can prevent vice from entering the home. In addition, Locke leaves to parental discretion the prospect of going abroad to gain greater experience, but above all he mandates that “breeding at home in their [parents’] own sight, under a good Governour, is much the best (*STCE* 45-6). This model of education was eagerly taken up by female educationalists because if women are left in the home *and* are denied a proper education, then, as Locke explicitly demonstrates, they are likely to be prone to vice, selfishness, and the pursuit of their own pleasures. Locke illustrates that humans are what their environment and education make them; throughout the long eighteenth century, women educationalists sent out a resounding affirmation of this universal notion of the self.

Because Locke’s essay on education is expansive, it invites much further discussion of its contents; however, only one final aspect of *STCE* is needed to discern the possibilities that it holds for women, his own explicit commentary on women themselves. His mandates for proper education can generally be divided into two categories: the physical and the mental. For physical activity and care of the body, Locke says,

I have said he here, because the principal aim of my Discourse is, how a young Gentleman should be brought up from his Infancy, which, in all things, will not so perfectly suit the Education of Daughters, though where the difference of Sex requires different treatment, 'twill be no hard matter to distinguish. (*STCE* 12)

Locke goes on to say that “although greater Regard [is] to be had to Beauty in the Daughters,” they should still be given liberty to engage in physical activity because “the

nearer they come to the Hardships of their Brothers in their Education, the greater Advantage will they receive from it all the remaining Part of their Lives” (14). Thus muddying the waters of traditional gendered education, Locke argues that differentiating between female and male education is not a simple task. It is indisputable that Locke’s essay is aimed at the education of men; however, his thoughts for the education of women are much more ambiguous—largely because of his notions of the mind— and, consequently, are debated among Locke scholars. Using his few comments on differentiated education, Butler, for instance, resolutely argues that, “[t]aken as a whole, Locke’s thoughts on education clearly suggest a belief that men and women could be schooled in the use of reason” (116). However, as Hirschmann notes, Locke’s assertions are few and far between and, therefore, Butler “is too generous to Locke in concluding that he grants girls full equality in reasoning ability” (168).

As *STCE* progresses, Locke continues to make few references to the education of girls, but the telling comments he does make invite female educationalists’ application of Locke to their own writing. Though at times critics disagree on the feminist potential in Locke’s educational theories, clear threads of equality are woven through the fabric of his commentary on women. His comments on female ingenuity, which are exemplary of these more universal views, reveal the applicability of Locke for advocates of women’s education. When describing how to educate a child authentically or organically, for example, he gives an anecdote of watching girls at play. He says,

I have seen little Girls exercise whole Hours together, and take abundance of pains to be expert at Dibstones, as they call it: Whilst I have been looking on, I have thought, it wanted only some good Contrivance, to make them employ all

that Industry about something that might be more useful to them; and methinks 'tis only the fault and negligence of elder People, that it is not so. (*STCE* 115)

In the play of young girls, Locke sees ingenuity, industry, and creativity. His general premise of education works to harness the natural tendencies of children and to employ them for their own betterment. When furthering this point, he uses the play of girls, not boys. This simple choice illuminates Locke's views towards women. Yes, women may have natural weaknesses; however, says Butler, "he had a classic liberal faith in the ability of individual women to overcome these natural obstacles" (118). According to *STCE*, the reason more women do not show this level of ingenuity in their later lives has much to do with societal constructs. Because society does not work to develop girls' innate potential, "elder people" create weakened women. Locke further illustrates his belief in female potential when he discusses the teaching of foreign languages to children. When boys are taught languages, parents tend to employ tutors to teach them grammatical rules and structure. However, Locke argues for a different, more feminine method. He states that he has often seen a "French-Woman teach a young Girl to speak and read French perfectly in a Year or Two, without any Rule of Grammar, or any thing else but prattling to her" (*STCE* 117). The parents' insistence on formal tutoring in the language for boys often has less-fruitful results. Therefore, Locke "cannot but wonder, how Gentlemen have over-seen this way for their Sons, and thought them [their sons] more dull or incapable than their Daughters" (117). In light of these thoughts, it is clear that Locke believed women to hold, if not equal to men, then at least vast intellectual potential. Thus, if society carefully educated the minds of girls, one could reasonably conclude that female citizens would be bettered by adherence to Locke's strictures. And, as Astell, Montagu, Lennox, and Austen demonstrate, women did argue this.

Astell and Montagu: Expelling “the Cloud of Ignorance”

Having presented the fundamental aspects of Locke’s theories of the mind and education, all that remains is to demonstrate how female educationalists availed themselves of Locke to buttress their claims of intellectual potential. As this paper progresses, it will apply Locke’s theories to the writings of Astell, Montagu, Lennox, Wollstonecraft, and Austen; however, chronology does not necessarily mean causality. I do not—in all cases—seek to establish a direct line of influence between these authors but rather to illustrate with exemplars a tradition of female educationalists employing Locke’s ideas and cultural authority. Therefore, as the earliest of these authors, Astell’s ideas will be the first explored.

Though Astell’s religious beliefs triggered a complex relationship with Locke, her writing on women’s education reveals a grudging use of his premises. Because she was both a religious woman and a notable early feminist, Astell walked a fine line. “As an advocate of equality between the sexes in marriage and education, she made it her principle to ‘call no man Master upon earth’” (Apetrei 509). In an effort to grant women this agency she desired for herself, Astell decisively promoted the bettered education of women, most notably in her *A Serious Proposal for the Ladies* (1694). However, according to religious teachings, man was charged as master over woman from his very conception. Consequently, Astell’s iconoclastic views regarding women often clashed with her more conservative beliefs in respect to religion. Interestingly, and perhaps ironically as well, Astell openly critiqued Locke’s *Essay* because his empirical ideas could be viewed, and were done so by many, as dangerously critical of religion. Undoubtedly adding fuel to Astell’s criticism of Locke was the feud that Astell and John

Norris, her friend and Cambridge Platonist, engaged with Locke and his close friend and female philosopher, Damaris Masham.⁷ However, even though she “objected in print to Locke’s deistic views,” Astell also “adopted one of the major arguments” that allowed scientists and Enlightenment philosophers like Locke to question social constructs while maintaining their belief in God, this being the reasoning that the language of scripture is molded to fit social custom and to better convey contrived theological messages (Kelly 26). Astell used these grounds to dismiss references to women’s subjugation. Thus, it is clear that in her writing Astell often struggled to balance opposing views. She both combatted the views of the church on women and heralded pursuit of God as of utmost importance, condemned Locke’s empirical inquiry into the mind, and yet, grudgingly, employed his very methods and ideas. Astell—like Montagu, Lennox, and Austen to come—wielded the language of the patriarchy, namely John Locke, to condemn women’s subjugation and advocate for more equitable learning, a trend that will continue through the eighteenth century and beyond.

Although Astell’s wary and somewhat contradictory relationship with Locke is plain, her educational writings demonstrate that she was, even if hesitantly, in conversation with Lockean ideals. Her *Proposal* was not only a plea for a more beneficial education for women but also an actual entreaty for a specific place of learning for women; in fact, Astell dedicated this proposal “for a woman’s college to the future Queen Anne...who indeed intended to subsidize it, until the bishop of Salisbury dissuaded her” (Kelly 25). In her *Proposal*, Astell argues that in order to “expel the cloud of ignorance which custom has involved us in,” women require an education “to furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful knowledge” (29). Here, Astell’s idea resembles Locke’s

⁷ See Taylor, Kelly, and Springborg.

notion of a moral education. This similarity becomes even more apparent as Astell continues in her entreaty,

[P]ermit us only to understand our own duty, and not be forc'd to take it upon trust from others; to be at least so far learned, as to be able to form in our minds a true Idea of Christianity, it being so very necessary to fence us against the danger of these last and perilous days...And let us also acquire a true Practical Knowledge such as will convince us of the absolute necessity of Holy Living as well as of Right Believing. (30)

In the same vein as Locke, Astell argues that education does not manifest itself in the learning of a specific curriculum but in the acquisition of a foundational understanding of the world. Importantly, and reminiscent of Locke, this discernment of “truth” is not the unquestioned absorption of social custom; rather, Astell argues that a woman requires knowledge to formulate her own understandings and to pursue Christianity with a fuller grasp of what that pursuit entails. According to Astell, says Sarah Apetrei, “women’s education was designed to fully engage them in the reformation of society” (510). Thus, like Locke, she contended that an education should be modeled in a fashion that produces moral citizens, not traditionally “learned” ones. Critics like Patricia Springborg and Derek Taylor have outlined Astell’s commentary on Locke, though they tend to emphasize where their ideas diverge rather than where they converge. However, the imprints of Locke’s moralistic education upon Astell are apparent and more parallels persist. When Astell speaks of a woman’s will she mirrors Locke’s idea that a moralistic education allows individuals to place aside the pursuit of pleasure for nobler aspirations that will lead to more lasting gratification. Astell says, “Especially since the will is blind, and cannot choose but by the direction of the understanding; or to speak more properly,

since the soul always wills according as she understands, so that if she understands amiss, she wills amiss” (31). Though “Locke’s sense-based epistemology” was theologically problematic, Astell demonstrates a grudging “respect” for his ideas by reiterating them almost exactly (Taylor 514). To merge Astell’s and Locke’s language, if a woman does not have foundational knowledge of right and wrong, if her mind is filled with frivolities, then her judgement will be flawed because it is based upon incomplete perceptions and sensations.

As the eighteenth century dawned and Locke’s cultural authority posthumously rose, the implementation of Lockean theories by female educationalists increased and also became more blatant. In the letters to her daughter, for example, Montagu frequently voices opinions that were informed by both Locke and Astell. Turner, for one, illustrates that Astell’s writings inspired Montagu’s educational theories; however, the shadow of Locke is also present in Montagu’s work.⁸ As Astell argued throughout her career and as Lady Montagu told her daughter, “Ignorance and a narrow education lay the foundations of vice” (Melville 15).⁹ Therefore, it should not be surprising that women too often fall into corruption. This belief directly mirrors the Lockean conception of the mind and morality because, as Locke argues, individuals lacking in experience and knowledge are incapable of making informed decisions that successfully set aside immediate gratification for postponed happiness. Reiterating both educationists’ arguments, Montagu asserts that “[t]he same characters are formed by the same lessons, which inclines me to think (if I dare say it) that nature has not placed us [women] in an inferior rank to men” (15). As the education of women in general is limited and focused upon

⁸ See Turner 26 and Pearson 140.

⁹ This digital book does not have page numbers so I have placed chapter numbers in their place.

domestic and pageantry skills, this gendered “learning” continues to produce the same deficient character in women. Locke’s theory that ideas are a direct response to environment, as well as Astell’s recapitulation of this notion, is echoed by Montagu. Furthering these connections, Montagu speaks to her daughter about the positive influences experience has upon the domestic women:

I do not doubt the frequency of assemblies has introduced a more enlarged way of thinking; it is a kind of public education, which I have always thought as necessary for girls as for boys. A woman married at five-and-twenty, from under the eye of a strict parent, is commonly as ignorant as she was at five; and no more capable of avoiding the snares, and struggling with the difficulties, she will infallibly meet with in the commerce of the world. (15).

Similar to Locke, Montagu believes that the society holds “snares” that might entrap the underprepared individual into blind acceptance of custom or immorality. Though she does not stress the importance of carefully regulating one’s exposure to vice, as does Locke, she too argues that gaining a more comprehensive notion of the world aids in judgment. Montagu’s advice to witness the world is representative of the rhetorical arguments of later writers like Lennox and Austen who illuminate the dangers of inexperience and forced ignorance through their quixotic plots. Therefore, the strand of argument begun by Locke is picked up by educationalists like Astell and Montagu and finally passed down to female novelists like Lennox and Austen.

When Montagu gives advice for the education of her granddaughters, it is especially apparent that she is inspired by and in conversation with Locke’s schema for education. Montagu’s daughter, Mary, Countess of Bute—whom Charlotte Lennox

desired as a patroness—was frequently in epistolary conversation with her mother about the education of her daughters. The counsel Montagu grants her daughter frequently echoes Locke’s *STCE* and demonstrates his usefulness for female educationalists. For instance, in one letter to her daughter Montagu states,

People commonly educate their children as they build their houses, according to some plan they think beautiful, without considering whether it is suited to the purposes for which they are designed. Almost all girls of quality are educated as if they were to be great ladies, which is often as little to be expected, as an immoderate heat of the sun in the north of Scotland. (15)

Throughout the entirety of *STCE*, Locke maintains that children require a differentiated education that caters to the particular needs of the individual child; Montagu, taking her cue from Locke and using his authority to grant her own notions validity, also argues that a girl’s upbringing must be catered to her precise needs. With her advocacy of differentiation and experience-based education Montagu mimics, as Muller argues, “the Lockean” model where a “child emerges from a differentiated, exemplary education which includes the child in a functionally differentiated and rationally organized society (7).

Through the juxtaposition of the Lockean notions of the mind and learning with female-authored educational writings, it is clear that the universality of Locke’s theories held latent potential that women harnessed to validate their arguments on the socially constructed nature of female ignorance and to argue for more equitable learning. Women’s appropriation of Locke’s ideas is logical because conduct books, sermons, and other societally significant texts, “engage[d] strongly with the educational theories

propounded by Locke”; during the eighteenth century, Locke became a cultural authority on virtuous education (Halsey 431). Because his methodology was already lauded by society as proper and moral, Locke was the ideal philosopher for women to utilize when advocated for their own learning. Consequently, proponents of female education, like Astell and Montagu, molded their educational notions to work within Locke’s greater theory of learning. However, more vital to this study is later novelists’ utilization of this same method. As Katie Halsey illustrates, “by the end of the eighteenth century...writers of fiction were also beginning to question the unthinking assumption that a domestic education necessarily equipped a girl well for life in the wider world” (438). Though this notion is undoubtedly true, Halsey does not note that this trend is clear *before* the end of the century. As will be argued throughout the remainder of this thesis, female novelists like Lennox and Austen employed the structural form of the quixotic novel and the authoritative theories of Locke to reveal the deficient nature of traditional gendered education and to advocate for learning that creates female agency.

CHAPTER III

**“Rebellious Impulses Lurk Below”: The Philosophical and Educational Implications
of Lennox’s *The Female Quixote***

Making an impression on [Samuel Richardson] was essential, but she wouldn’t do it in the usual way that women impressed men at this time. Her mind was the commodity he would assess, and he had a draft of the early part of her second novel, *The Female Quixote*...He had received only a grammar school education, but she was at an even greater disadvantage, *since her learning had been acquired mostly through her own devices*.¹⁰

Susan Carlile, *Charlotte Lennox An Independent Mind*, 2018

For all that is to be found in Books, is not all built on true Foundations, nor always rightly deduc’d from the Principles it is pretended to be built on. Such an Examen as is requisite to discover that, every Reader’s mind is not forward to make ...Those who have got this Faculty, one may say, *have got the true Key of Books, and the clue to lead them through the mizmaze of variety of Opinions and Authors to Truth and Certainty*.¹¹

John Locke, *The Conduct of Understanding*, 1706

Since the publication of *Don Quixote* in 1605, fictional heroes who “misread” reality because of their reliance on fiction are seen frequently as a symptom of shifting literary aesthetics; during the eighteenth century, the long-lasting dominance of the French romance was eclipsed by the realistic novel which became the new standard in Britain, as upheld by Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne. Consequently, the eighteenth century also witnessed a growing number of novels that depicted characters carried away by reading romances. This emerging quixotic tradition allowed novelists to engage in the bifurcated cultural debate that surrounded these two genres. By depicting characters who strayed from all-important “reason” because of their romantic reading,

¹⁰ Emphasis my own.

¹¹ Emphasis my own.

novelists could simultaneously denounce the spuriousness of romance and bolster the moral authority of the novel.¹² *The Female Quixote*, whose very title places it in the “misreading” tradition, is often contextualized within this debate. Jaqueline Pearson, for instance, demonstrates that through its comparison of romantic and novelistic forms, *The Female Quixote* “presents an intense but covert struggle between male and female over language and texts, over women’s writing and reading and the control of ‘modes of narration’” (203). However, studying Lennox’s *Quixote* only as it pertains to the greater arguments of genre and language strips the text of its most fundamental issue, education.¹³ As will be seen, scholars who study *The Female Quixote* often remark on the centrality of Arabella’s education, but, paradoxically, they rarely make education central to their own criticism. Remediating this oversight, more recent scholarship has expanded its scope to include Lennox’s commentary on female learning, thus tapping into a second and less-scrutinized cultural debate with which Lennox engages. As Sharon Smith Palo argues, “Lennox appropriates the representation of romance reading perpetuated by” quixotic novelists “in order to participate in other kinds of discourse, most notable that concerning women’s learning” (204). Moving this debate beyond *The Female Quixote*, Ana Sagal traces the “practice of reading and self-education” in Lennox’s texts, discovering a proper form of female education in Lennox’s periodical *The Lady’s Museum* (139). As this chapter will argue, an education-centered analysis of *The Female Quixote* illustrates not only how Lennox interacts with the discourse that surrounded female education but also how she appropriates John Locke’s ideas to argue against the

¹² As Samuel Johnson defines in his dictionary, to reason is “to argue rationally; to deduce consequences justly from premises.”

¹³ As defined in the introduction, *education* is learning with the intent “to make our natural faculty of reason both the better and the sooner to judge rightly between truth and error, good and evil” (Johnson, *Dictionary*, Vol. 1 677).

patriarchal model of ornamental female-learning; instead, Lennox demonstrates women's latent intellectual potential, arguing for a balanced education, equal parts book-learning and experience.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Locke's philosophies of the mind and education permeated eighteenth-century society and, consequently, whether through direct or indirect means, female educationalists often utilized his cultural authority to validate their own notions; so too did Charlotte Lennox. Though she does not directly name Locke as source, there are several aspects of Lennox's biography that hint at her likely intentional dialogue with Lockean principles. One such contextual element is Lennox's well-documented participation in the cultural discourse of her era. For instance, before Lennox became a novelist, playwright, and essayist, she was first a poet, and her poems engaged in both the cultural and philosophical debates of her age. In one of her earliest poems, "On reading HUTCHISON on the PASSIONS"—which, as Susan Carlile notes, could have been written as early as age eleven—Lennox responds to the philosophical notions of Francis Hutcheson's through her own literary pursuits. Though this is not directly related to Locke, it does establish her proclivity for philosophical discourse (101). According to Carlile, this poem was a particular favorite "as she reprinted it four times," notably, in her education-centered periodical *The Lady's Museum* (101). However, Lennox's cultural dialogue extends beyond a single poem. In "The ART of COQUETRY," for instance, Lennox advised women to attract men by their wit rather than following the example of the female coquette, whose caricature was vilified in conduct books and sermons. Through her poetry, it is clear that from an astonishingly young age Lennox's writing had a participatory nature that reflected upon both the

philosophical and cultural discourse of her time; as this chapter will demonstrate, analysis of *The Female Quixote* reveals that Lennox's social discourse extends to Locke as well.

Additionally, as Lennox came into her own as a writer, she developed a close relationship with Samuel Johnson, her mentor and staunch advocate; this association supports her connection with Lockean principles because Johnson himself was an ardent proponent of many of Locke's ideas. In his singular *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Elizabeth Hedrick notes that Johnson

not infrequently echoes both Lockean sentiments and Lockean phraseology, sometimes with a parenthetical off-handedness that reveals more effectively than direct quotation ever could, the extent to which Locke's notions had been incorporated into his own views. (422)

Lennox, in the formative years of her career, was intimate with Johnson and, though to what extent is unknown, Johnson was certainly in contact with and assisting Lennox as she wrote *The Female Quixote*. Therefore, if, as Hedrick argues, Johnson internalized Lockean precepts, then it is likely that these same concepts were disseminated to Lennox during her work on *Quixote*. Lennox's past reflections on philosophy and her connection to Johnson—who incorporated the precepts of Locke's *Essay* into much of his work including *The Rambler* and *Rasselas*—is perhaps ancillary to the fact that Locke's "thought everywhere pervades the eighteenth-century climate of opinion" (Watt 31). With these three contextual elements taken together—Lennox's early participation in cultural debates, Johnson's influence, and Locke's general pervasiveness in society—the influence Lockean ideas had upon Lennox's *Quixote* begs consideration.

Analysis of *The Female Quixote* through the lens of Locke's theories reveals the complex, and underrepresented, relationship that Lennox maintains with contemporary educational debates. By scrutinizing Arabella's education, the learning of secondary female characters, and Arabella's concluding "rehabilitation," it is apparent that the ideas popularized by Locke—and then reaffirmed by female educationalists—are reflected upon by Lennox in *The Female Quixote*. Though scholars like Palo and Ruth Mack have connected Lennox's *Quixote* to Locke's philosophy, none have presented an in-depth exploration of how the two authors' ideas on learning coalesce; more significantly, little has been done to understand how Lennox manipulates Locke as a source and what possible implications this has for her commentary on female potential.¹⁴ As this chapter will show, Lennox explicitly draws upon Locke's rejection of innate ideas, his conception of how the mind garners false knowledge, his notion of reading, and his precepts for education to validate her own educational commentary. As Lennox delineates in *The Female Quixote*, genius without the proper education and grooming is highly corruptible; however, the answer is not—as it often was—to relegate woman to the isolated domestic sphere. Therefore, *Quixote* is a thought experiment which implements the Lockean concepts of the mind and education and then asks what happens to the isolated and domestic woman within this model, a schema that promotes careful instruction paired with experience? In answer, Lennox renders Arabella as an intelligent and accomplished woman who lacks the sagacity to make sound judgments only because her experiences are restricted by her isolated and careless instruction. In writing *The Female Quixote*, Lennox herself not only seems to contemplate the problems of women's education but also works to create a solution, one that strikes a balance between isolated self-education

¹⁴ See Palo and Carlile.

and experiential learning. As will be seen, Lennox presents the antidote to flawed female learning in her educational periodical *The Lady's Museum*, which presents a variety of reading meant to enlarge the female mind. Because the quixotic model presents an ideal platform, Lennox utilizes it to affirm that, according to Locke's principles of ideas and education, women must be granted careful instruction that promotes female learning and morality. Thus, in *The Female Quixote*, Lennox plays a hermeneutic game with her readers, manipulating the quixotic form to advocate for women's education and to illustrate that those who fail to "read" the necessity of women's learning within her text are the true quixotic figures.

The Female Quixotic Model: Where Women's Learning and Reading Converge

By their very nature, educational arguments rendered in quixotic texts are centered upon reading; that is, they focus on reading and the implications that it had for learning. Therefore, to comprehend fully Lennox's assertions regarding education necessitates analysis of eighteenth-century views on women's reading in conjunction with those on female learning. As Pearson carefully delineates in *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, women's literacy in the eighteenth century was often a point of political, moral, and ideological controversy; consequently, exploring the literary responses of female authors like Lennox and Austen to this patriarchally biased conversation, one that targeted learned women, is a compelling academic endeavor. However, reading was only such a subversive topic because it is the foundation of learning and, as Locke's authoritative principles illustrate, has the potential to shape moral character. Partially in response to the Enlightenment principles of the *tabula rasa*—and Locke's signification of the mind as exceedingly malleable—British society experienced a "moral panic" over female reading and its negative potential for

women's learning (Vogrinčič 106). In her article on gendered reading, Ana Vogrinčič defines "moral panic" as "a heightened level of concern over the (supposed) behaviour of a certain group or category, and the consequences that this behaviour presumably causes for the rest of society" (106). Britain, as the discourse of conduct books, sermons, and periodicals clearly demonstrates, was greatly concerned about the reading of women and the "dangerous psychological affects" and immorality that female reading might cause (109). Because women were the protectors of virtuous domesticity, the exterior forces of books entering the home challenged "the ideology of separate spheres" and, thus, was thought dangerous and worthy of "moral panic" (Pearson 2).

Although "men's reading was shown to facilitate intellectual development," women's reading was often depicted as debilitating to both women's minds and social welfare (Pearson 4). However, what is not noted in studies of women's reading—like those undertaken by Pearson and Vogrinčič—is the prominence of Locke's theories of education and ideas within the age's commentary on reading; although the human mind was a blank slate, the misogynistic worry was that women were not capable of processing read information and transforming it into moral knowledge with the same accuracy as men. James Fordyce, for instance, argued that women's reading can "swallow up, amongst the young and gay, all sober reflection, every rational study, with every virtuous principle; and to introduce in their room impure ideas, extravagant desires, and notion of happiness alike fantastic and false" (*Character* 48). In fact, according to Fordyce, girls' improper reading material can make "the whole system of life seems converted into romance" (*Character* 48). However, the process of restricting women's reading to maintain morality also alienates them from the most valuable tool that women had to supplement their education, books. Therefore, eighteenth-century thoughts on women's

reading and women's learning, as well as those on the Enlightenment principles of the mind, were naturally in conversation with one another.

Posthumously, Locke made his own important contribution to the eighteenth-century conception of reading, contextualizing reading within his notions of the mind and education; these theories, as Richard Ritter notes, were significant for depictions of female reading well into the nineteenth century (17). In 1706, his essay *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* was published; in this text, Locke dedicates an entire section to the conduct of readers and the impact reading has upon the mind, saying,

Some people are assiduous in reading, but don't advance their knowledge much by it. They are delighted with the stories they read and perhaps can repeat them, taking all that they read to be nothing but history, narrative; but they don't reflect on it, don't make observations to themselves on the basis of what they read; so they are little improved. (*Conduct* 187-8)

Here, Locke unveils the most essential aspect of successful reading, reflection. In so doing, he also justifies one of the most fundamental arguments in Lennox's and Austen's quixotic works: reading in a vacuum, without proper reflection or experiences to assist one in interpretation, is indeed hazardous. According to Locke, reading is one way by which to furnish the mind with the "vast store" of knowledge necessary to inform moral decisions (*Essay* 2.1.2). After reading, "one may say that they have the materials of knowledge"; however, simply garnering the goods for learning does not constitute a moral education (*Conduct* 188). As Locke argues, the learning found in books, "like building materials bring no benefit if they are simply left to lie in a heap" (*Conduct* 188). In order to take one's reading and metamorphose it into moral learning, the reader must

reflect upon the contents of the book, hold these subjects up for judgement against other images he or she has of the world, and determine whether the information brings the reader closer to “Truth and Certainty” (*Conduct* 193). As Locke and, later, Lennox and Austen demonstrate, whether male or female, it is only through this participatory reading that the contents of a book become fruitful.

In her letters to her daughter, Montagu echoes this same notion that proper reading is a dialogue between reader and text, further exemplifying the associations between Locke, female educationalists, and the potential of his theories for women. When giving advice for the education of her granddaughters, Montagu addresses reading and, more important to any study of quixotic texts, specifically the reading of romance:

If any of them are fond of reading, I would not advise you to hinder them (chiefly because it is impossible) seeing poetry, plays, or romances; but accustom them to talk over what they read, and point out to them, as you are very capable of doing, the absurdity often concealed under fine expressions, where the sound is apt to engage the admiration of young people. (Melville 15)

Almost exactly mirroring Locke, Montagu advises that the information acquired through reading be mulled over, examined, and understood within its proper context: fictionalized exaggerations of life or useful knowledge. Importantly, she does not mandate that romances are withheld from girls but rather that a conversation must be maintained between the reader, the fiction, and reality. Through this didactic analysis, learners safeguard themselves against adopting morally harmful ideas. Montagu says that in romance there is “absurdity often concealed under fine expressions”; however, false ideas

obscured within pretty language are found not only in romances but in the patriarchal conception of “woman” as well.

Building upon Locke’s concept of false ideas, eighteenth-century British society asked what happens if the weaker sex, “woman,” was not well-educated enough or even equipped with the intellectual potential to perceive what she read effectively. Quixotism was often the answer. Rather than reading a text as fiction and absorbing only the valuable lessons, women were thought to conflate romantic renderings of heroines and the realities of their own lives, absorbing “absurdity” as part of their identity. As Pearson eloquently puts it,

In popular physiology and psychology, the female intellect was viewed as, like the female body, soft and fragile, with female ego-boundaries dangerously permeable...As a result, women were deemed vulnerable to excessively identificatory reading practices—‘this identifying propensity’—which might endanger their fragile sense of rational selfhood. (85)

Employing Locke’s theory of ideas for patriarchal ends, commentators of the age argued that women were especially susceptible to imitating and “inoculating [the] wrong ideas of love and life” that they learned from improper books—of course, what constituted improper reading was polemical in and of itself (Vogrinčič 109). Further, women’s acceptance of ideas learned from reading was perceived as damaging to their minds and, more important by contemporary standards, to their virtue. “For some commentators, female reading was dangerous because it could distract from domestic duties or transgress the limits of a private sphere” (Pearson 2). For others, “female reading...[was] sexual” and, as such, was dangerous (2). However, in almost all cases, reading held

conceivable peril for women's morality, and, as Locke's moral education argues, human immorality endangers the social structure. A woman's mind was perceived as highly susceptible to acceptance of immorality; thus, some like Fordyce argued that there were "very few [books]...that you can read with safety," going so far as to say that many books are so vile "that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute" (124-25). Therefore, it is clear that, as Vogrinčić notes, a moral panic surrounded female readership and learning and the implication these might have for patriarchal society.

Consequently, and paradoxically then, patriarchal commentators employed Locke's notion of the mind to illustrate that women could easily gain false perceptions of the world through their reading; however, they also denied women the model of education that Locke prescribed as *the cure* for such misperceptions. Though men's literacy rose along with women's, "in the age's literary discourses, misreading tend[ed] to be gendered as feminine" (Pearson 5). Emblematic of this cultural trend, Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Eaton Standard Barrett's *The Heroine*, Maria Edgeworth's *Angelina*, and Austen's *Northanger Abbey* all center upon female quixotism or misreading. Though misogynistic, this trend is logical. Locke had convincingly demonstrated the moral dangers of isolation, deficient education, and the acceptance of false knowledge; therefore, it was valid to fear the hazards of women's reading, but only within this patriarchally limited view. Locke argued that "Judging is, as it were, balancing an account, and determining on which side the odds lie," but, as male and female commentators noted, if a woman does not have the experience to balance the odds adequately, she is sure to make flawed decisions that will likely lead to moral corruption (*Essay* 2.21.69.ii). As Lady Sarah Pennington advised her daughter, "You are just entering, my dear Girl, into a World full of Deceit and Falsehood, where few Persons or

Things appear as they really are” (10). Like Locke, she argues that “it requires long Experience, and a penetrating Judgement to discover the Truth” and to avoid immorality (10). However, because authoritative men—like James Fordyce or John Gregory—argued that books lead to the corruption of the mind, even people who obviously read Locke, like Pennington, strictly regulated female reading.

Thus, commentators on women’s learning and reading used the malleability of the mind to advocate against female self-education through reading. Pennington, for instance, goes on, in overtly Lockean language, to urge her daughter not to read novels and to “Look on every Day as a Blank Sheet of Paper put into your Hands to be filled up...be careful therefore...what you may read” (20). However, this reasoning contains one sizable crack in its foundation; Locke himself recommends a careful, adequate, and varied education as the remedy for such flawed judgement, yet British society denied all but an ornamental education to women. Thus, ironically, those parroting the need for careful and strict gendered education for women were both the cause of and the biggest critics of female misperception of books. Richard Ritter, in his book *Imagining Women Readers 1789-1820: Well Regulated Minds*, notes that even a century after his death, there is a perceivable and “lasting impression that Locke’s work left upon accounts of women’s reading,” because he is used by both the commentators who warn against unwise reading and the women who are advocating for equitable learning—like Astell, Montague, Lennox, Wollstonecraft, and Austen (17).

As Lennox and Austen demonstrate, however, writers and readers “can use a range of resisting strategies to unsettle...authority” and to appropriate texts and arguments “for their own purposes” (Pearson 17). Further, participation in this societal debate of female “misreading” does not necessitate acceptance of its patriarchal stances.

As will be demonstrated through later analysis, Lennox and Austen both appropriate the Lockean principles of the mind and education along with the quixotic form—where flawed reading leads to misperception—to participate subversively in the pervasive cultural debates that surrounded female reading and learning. Through this process, they demonstrate that a balance must be struck between female literary-education and experience; too much of either, experience or isolated reading, will tip the delicate balance in favor of immorality. By following the Lockean model, an individual *should* learn how to utilize sensations and perceptions to gain experience; only then can those experiences be employed to make judgements that take one closer to morality.

Unfortunately, as Lennox's Arabella and, later, Austen's Catherine demonstrate, this is too often not the case for women because of "the fault and negligence of elder People"; that is to say, because of the social constructs that confined female existence, an adequate Lockean education for women was not simply achieved (Locke, *STCE* 115).

Fashioning Arabella: The Misuse of Locke's Model of Education

The very foundation of Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, as evidenced by the dedication and first chapter, heralds itself as a work concerned with two things: women's education and society's flawed methods of addressing such issues. Lennox dedicates her learning-centered book to the Earl of Middlesex, a powerful man whom Lennox credits with giving "Standard to the National Taste" but who also, and likely of more importance, gave one of Lennox's poems as a birthday present to the Princess of Wales (Daziel 338). Lennox begins this dedication, "SUCH is the Power of Interest over almost every Mind, that no one is long without Arguments to prove any Position which is ardently wished to be true, or to justify any Measures which are dictated by Inclination" (1). Lennox lived in a polemic time. And too often during this age, as she aptly notes,

individuals let fancy guide their beliefs and then, illogically, push these unfounded principles onto others' "minds," using "any measures" as justification (1). However, as Locke argues in his *Essay*, individuals should not blindly accept social customs but empirically analyze them to determine their validity. Lennox, as a woman writer, held stakes in several of the key debates of her age, specifically, those of women's learning, reading, writing, and women's general place in the public sphere. The dedication of *Quixote* indicates that she is actively and intentionally opening a dialogue between her text and the ongoing social discourses, specifically, as the novel itself illustrates, with the debates that surrounded women. Through *The Female Quixote*, Lennox holds up for inspection several patriarchal ideas about women—namely the notions that women are innately inferior, that their education should be severely constrained, and that reading in and of itself is dangerous—and, as will be seen, once analyzed empirically, these notions are found wanting. After all, in quixotic texts "what is [really] under scrutiny is women's stake in culture" (Pearson 198). By adopting Lockean principles *and* using the quixotic model, Lennox undertakes an epistemological project to scrutinize the customary "knowledge" that dichotomized men and women and signified woman as the "second sex."

Although Lennox's dedication does not specifically note education as the principal argument of *The Female Quixote*, the Fielding-like subheading of her first chapter does. As her book commences, Lennox forewarns that the reader will discover "*Some useless Additions to a fine Lady's Education [and] The Bad Effects of a Whimsical Study*" (5). Thus, from the start, she asserts to her readers that in this education-centric text she will contribute her voice to the tide of "Interest" that dominated eighteenth-century society and "prove [her] position" through her heroine's education; however,

unlike those who speak purely from “Inclination,” Lennox uses Locke’s cultural authority, theories, and empirical method to validate her beliefs evidentially (1).

Despite the centrality of education within *The Female Quixote*, scholars have done little to analyze the particulars of the protagonist Arabella’s own early learning, instead focusing solely on her subsequent romance reading. Sagal, for instance, notes that during Arabella’s formative years her “father takes personal responsibility for her education at a young age” but says little else about the details of Arabella’s upbringing (146). Even those who have made a connection between Lennox and Locke, like Palo and Mack, denote *Quixote* as “a somewhat exaggerated illustration of Locke’s notion concerning the way simple ideas are imprinted on the ‘white paper’” of the mind (Palo 206). As demonstrated earlier, this education-centric text has been analyzed more extensively for arguments on genre and the effects of romance reading than for education itself. Although many scholars do note in passing that *The Female Quixote* is commenting on women’s education, their lack of close analysis of education obscures Lennox’s argument that Locke’s schema for education cannot work for women if they are not *as* carefully educated as men *and* also allowed experiences to supplement their learning.¹⁵

To comprehend effectually Lennox’s dialogue with contemporary educational arguments, Arabella’s isolated situation and the impact it has upon her mind require contextualization within Locke’s theory of learning. As the book begins, Lennox first presents the location of Arabella’s upbringing and the circumstances that compelled her family’s seclusion. After an ill-fated encounter at court, Arabella’s father, the Marquis,

¹⁵ See Carlile, Hall, Palo, and Sagal.

resolved “to quit all society whatever, and devote the rest of his life to solitude and privacy,” noting society’s baseness as the catalyst (Lennox 5). Because of his disgust with social custom, the Marquis removes himself and, by extension, his daughter from both the harmful *and* the instructive aspects of the world. In so doing, he sets into motion the isolated and thus flawed upbringing of Arabella, which, for Lennox, is representative of the private domestic life that society expected of women; however, as Locke and Lennox both demonstrate, total seclusion is problematic because it severely limits the experiences the mind obtains.

Arabella’s ostensible isolation is important to Lennox’s argument for two reasons: First, in the social dichotomies of men and women, of public and private, women were signified as private. Women’s assignment to the domestic or private sphere was then used as justification for the inadequate education they received. Second, Locke expends much effort in delineating the importance of experiencing things and places outside of one’s realm. Indiscriminate adoption of flawed social customs and an inability to perceive effectively, for Locke, are the natural consequences of isolation. Therefore, when the Marquis chooses the place “of his retreat... in a very remote province of the kingdom, in the neighbourhood of a small village, and several miles distant from any town,” this decision holds implications for both Arabella’s educating and Lennox’s commentary on eighteenth-century women’s learning (Lennox 5-6). Not only is Arabella raised within a remote area of Britain, but she is also situated away from even the smallest town. Completing this absolute seclusion is the Marquis’s refusal to “admit any company whatever” (6). This action, of course, runs counter to Locke’s suggestion that while at home, a child should be introduced to “the company of ...Genteel and well-bred people” to grant him or her access to moral persons—other than the parent or tutor—

who convey varied life experiences to the child (*STCE* 45-6). In glaring contrast, Arabella, like the domestic and, thus, private women, is not in contact with any such persons. Lennox goes to great lengths to demonstrate the totality of Arabella's isolation and the Marquis's inadherence to Locke's percepts because both elements are the crux of her later quixotism—and the arguments Lennox makes for a balanced female education in general.

As Locke argues in his authoritative *STCE* and as Lennox here appropriates the idea, wisdom stems from the “application of Mind, and Experience together”; consequently, those denied access to experience are also deprived of “wisdom” (102). This concept, that remoteness leads to ignorance, is fundamental to Lennox's quixotic plot and to her argument for a balanced female education. In *The Female Quixote*, Lennox almost scientifically designs Arabella's existence, carefully controlling the variables that influence her character. This, of course, is part of her Lockean thought experiment. Locke says that “Improvement in Wisdom and Prudence [comes] by seeing Men, and conversing with People of Tempers, Customs, and Ways of living, different from one another (152). However, society relegated women to the domestic sphere and then denied them everything but a gendered education that vastly constricted experience. Unveiling the exacting contradictions between Locke's widely accepted ideas and society's treatment of women, Lennox applies Locke's theory of the mind onto the socially constructed, isolated woman through the character of Arabella; the resulting female quixote is indeed inferior to man because she lacks the two buttresses of a well-rounded Lockean education, experience and careful, moral learning.

The adverse effects of Arabella's isolation are compounded by the Marquis's failed attempt to implement Locke's model for educating children. Though the Marquis sets out judiciously to educate Arabella using Locke's model, he errs in his execution:

At Four Years of Age he took her from under the Direction of the Nurses and Women appointed to attend her, and permitted her to receive no Part of her Education from another, which he was capable of giving her himself. He taught her to read and write in a very few Months; and, as she grew older, finding in her an uncommon Quickness of Apprehension, and an Understanding capable of great Improvements, he resolved to cultivate so promising a Genius with the utmost Care; and, as he frequently, in the Rapture of paternal Fondness, expressed himself, render her Mind as beautiful as her Person was lovely. (6)

The Marquis's intentions are in keeping with Locke's stated precepts: Arabella is closely supervised by the Marquis in her home-schooling; her teacher—in this case, the Marquis himself—provides careful instruction; and Arabella's mind is given just as much consideration as her physical appearance. However, execution does not always mirror intent. Although the Marquis, or at least Lennox, appears to know Locke's strictures, he fails to bring them to fruition and, therefore, fails to educate his daughter effectually. Instead, the result is a traditionally gendered education that renders Arabella ill-equipped to face the world or reason fully. In this respect, the Marquis is analogous to the many critics of female learning; he uses Locke as his model yet fails to recognize that Locke's schema for education is not compatible with society's traditionally secluded and gendered learning.

In consequence, as part of the “utmost care” he extends to Arabella’s learning, the Marquis incorporates all of the traditional trappings of a pageantry or gendered education, thus leaving Arabella “accomplished” but also quixotic (6). In his curriculum, the Marquis includes learning to speak French and Italian, to heighten one’s “Art,” to dress in “magnificent” fashion, to dance, and to play music (7). As Brigitte Glaser argues, all pursuits “such as French, dancing, music, drawing,” are merely “ornamental accomplishments” that do little to further the mind or morality (192). Therefore, the Marquis’s ostensibly careful and closely regulated schema for education is just as ineffectual as other models for female instruction. This example of inadequate learning holds two points of significance for Lennox: First, Locke’s model mandates not only that parents should cautiously watch over their children but also that they must monitor the moral lessons imparted to them, a vital step the Marquis neglects. Second, the example of Arabella’s education is exemplary of what patriarchal society does to women; it “shelters” them for their own protection, takes hegemonic control over what learning is allowed to them, and then condemns them for their inability to reason adequately. As will be demonstrated throughout Lennox’s text, the consequence of such sexual politics is a weakened or quixotic woman; however, as Arabella demonstrates and Locke took great pains to prove, inadequacy is not innate, and proper reading can be the “Key” to understanding (*Conduct* 193).

The only aspect of Arabella’s early instruction left to analyze is the effects that her seclusion and her pageantry education have upon her ability to transform her limited sensations and perceptions into well-founded knowledge. After Lennox outlines Arabella’s patriarchally administered education, the narrator steps in, stating, “[I]t is not to be doubted, but she would have made a great Proficiency in all useful Knowledge, had

not her whole Time been taken up by another Study”—that other study is, of course, centered upon ornamental “virtues” (7). Despite her flawed education, Arabella shows intellectual promise. As a result, the Marquis “permitted her...the Use of his Library, in which, unfortunately for her, were great Store of Romances” (7). As a direct consequence of Arabella’s seclusion and patriarchal education, she cannot juxtapose her reading material against reality because she has too little experience of the world. Therefore, romance reading is a corrupting force that Arabella takes to be history. Even this quixotic reaction to romance is predicted by Locke. As he argues, some readers who do not contemplate their reading properly may “take all that they read to be nothing but history” (*Conduct* 14). However, Lennox demonstrates throughout the text not that Arabella’s issue is her inability to analyze a text but that her deficiency in experiences leaves her with little against which to judge the material she reads. For this reason, “The surprising Adventures” with which romance is filled “proved a most pleasing Entertainment to a young Lady, who was wholly secluded from the World; who had no other Diversion” (Lennox 7). As Lennox demonstrates, the “innate” inferiority of women does not cause Arabella’s quixotic misreading. Rather, a patriarchal education that limits observed wisdom is to blame for Arabella’s “inability” to inscribe her *tabula rasa* effectively as a man might. Therefore, in response to Lennox’s didactic question—what happens to the domestic woman under the Lockean model of learning—the character of Arabella elicits the answer. Despite her fine reasoning ability and superior virtue, as will be later demonstrated, Arabella’s “Ideas, from the Manner of her Life, and the Objects around her, had taken a romantic Turn; and, supposing Romances were real Pictures of Life, from them she drew all her Notions and Expectations” because the Marquis—a stand in

for the patriarchal man—denies her the other half of Locke’s educational model, experience (7).

Hence, from the start Lennox elucidates her argument clearly: women require an adequate education because when basic experiences and learning are denied to them, their natural potential is squandered, and immorality ensues. To validate this opinion, she appropriates Locke’s models of education and the mind. Locke himself evinced the ease with which mankind is corrupted; as he argued, only education and experience operating in conjunction can arm man against such perversion. At large, British society endorsed Locke’s ideas and the remedy he presented—for men. However, when women were at issue, moralistic commentators instead argued to restrict experience and learning to prevent vice from entering the female, or domestic, sphere. As John Gregory makes clear in his *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, women’s “superior delicacy, [their] modesty, and the usual severity of [their] education, preserve [them], in a great measure, from any temptation to those vices to which we are most subjected (38). This severe education limited the sensations and perceptions allowed to women with the stated intent of protecting them from immorality; however, this runs in direct opposition to Locke’s precepts. Thus, while it was generally accepted that women’s “Virgin purity is of that delicate nature, that it cannot hear certain things without contamination,” it was also thought that men must go out into the world and gain experience to better their ability to judge reasonably (Gregory 68). This phallogentric contradiction, paramount in *The Female Quixote*, is what Lennox argues against through her heroine, Arabella.

The “Useful Knowledge” of Books: The Chasm Between Miss Glanville’s and Arabella’s Education

As the novel progresses, Lennox introduces the character of Miss Glanville, who is both the foil of Arabella and the incarnation of the “woman” engendered by a purely ornamental education that does not contain even flawed reading. Through the juxtaposition of Arabella—isolated, but literary— against Miss Glanville—experienced, but unread—it is apparent that though Arabella is rendered a quixote by her reading, she is also granted exceptional “useful knowledge,” a keen eye for virtuous traits such as honor and chastity, and a wit far superior to the unread Miss Glanville (Lennox 48).¹⁶ To set up this comparison, Lennox slowly weaves in the education that fashioned Miss Glanville’s particularly immoral female character. Having spent time in London and Bath, Miss Glanville, unlike Arabella, is aware of the world. However, akin to Arabella, Miss Glanville was given an ornamental education and is, by eighteenth-century standards, considered accomplished. Antithetical to Lennox’s heroine, Miss Glanville does not supplement her learning with reading of any sort. Because of this deficient reading, Lennox implements Miss Glanville’s flawed character to illustrate that “it is the ‘fine Lady’s Education’ enjoyed by most of the other female[s]...that proves truly useless” (Palo 205). Although other scholars have noted the moral failings of Miss Glanville in comparison to Arabella’s virtuous nature *and* have attributed these differences to Arabella’s literary education, very little analysis has been done of Arabella’s exceptional useful knowledge juxtaposed against Miss Glanville’s markedly deficient learning. Through analysis of several episodes in the text, it is clear that, though Arabella’s isolation has rendered her a quixote, her reading has also given her superior

¹⁶ Here, I use “useful knowledge,” as Lennox does, to refer to knowledge gained of real-world subjects like history, geography, astronomy, etc.

virtue, knowledge of subjects like geography and history, and a wit that Miss Glanville does not possess. The resulting commentary suggests that neither the education of Arabella—which is driven by reading—nor the learning of Miss Glanville—which is based on experience—is entirely efficacious. Instead, a balance is desirable. As Locke demonstrates, and Lennox then adopts and applies to the lives of women, only a combination of learning and experience coupled with a careful eye for the moralistic lessons found within both can produce a rational and responsible citizen—or a self-actualized woman.

To compare the flawed Miss Glanville to Arabella effectively requires an understanding of the virtues and defects of Arabella's adult character. Lennox makes apparent from Arabella's many "adventures" that quixotism has swept her away almost entirely: Arabella, for instance, imagines that a thieving servant is a gentleman in disguise who debases himself simply to be in her presence, she compares the most trivial events of her life to the heroic fictions found in her books, and she even adopts the ostentatious speech of a romantic heroine. Even Arabella's routine conversation with Mr. Glanville exemplifies this "romantic Turn" (Lennox 7). When Mr. Glanville asks Lucy, Arabella's servant, to allow him a private conversation with Arabella, her propensity for quixotism is apparent:

Arabella, blushing at an Insolence so uncommon... I pray you, Sir, pursued she frowning, What Intercourse of Secrets is there between you and me, that you expect I should favour you with a private Conversation? An Advantage which none of your Sex ever boasted to have gained from me; and which, haply, you should be the last upon whom I should bestow it. (31)

Everything from her language, her ideas of proper courtship, and her self-aggrandizing authority are permeated by romance. However, despite her quixotic and comical tendencies, Arabella is also described, by both the narrator and other characters, as singularly accomplished in both intelligence and virtue. As Sagal argues, reading is “vital for a woman’s self-education,” and although Arabella lacks the requisite experience to differentiate between fact and fiction, she has still gleaned value from her reading (141). In fact, Sagal maintains that “Arabella’s good qualities are explicitly connected to her romance-reading habit” (146-7). Arabella herself, in a conversation with Mr. Glanville, her future husband, argues this very thing:

For heaven's sake, cousin, resumed *Arabella*, laughing, how have you spent your Time; and to what Studies have you devoted your Hours, that you could find none to spare for the Perusal of Books from which all useful Knowledge may be drawn; which give us the most shining Examples of Generosity, Courage, Virtue, and Love; which regulate our Actions, form our Manners, and inspire us with a noble Desire. (Lennox 48)

Arabella describes books as the models of virtue; thus, it is apparent that she herself is in dialogue with books and models her own merits on these texts. As Sagal and Lennox both demonstrate, reading, whether romantic or not, is at the root of Arabella’s exceptional traits, especially those with which Mr. Glanville’s is in awe. Like Locke, Arabella promotes reading as an exemplary form of learning that fosters morality. Unfortunately, because she lacks foundational knowledge of society at large, she cannot “reflect” adequately upon her reading and compare it with images of reality as Locke suggests (*Conduct* 193). As a result, Mr. Glanville meets a woman whose “Head is turned” yet who has “more *Wit* than her whole sex besides” (Lennox 41).

In stark contrast, it is ostensible from Miss Glanville's entrance into the quixotic novel that she is inferior to Arabella in manner, wit, and virtue; as is demonstrated through Lennox's delineation of Miss Glanville, these deficiencies are a direct response to her purely ornamental education, which has restricted reading and promoted materialism in its place. Though Arabella also received a traditionally gendered education, she reads extensively; therefore, it is clear that for Lennox reading makes all the difference. This is discernable from Miss Glanville's first appearance in the story where the narrator informs the reader that Miss Glanville is both vain and a coquettish:

[U]pon the sight of Arabella, [she] discovered some appearance of astonishment and chagrin...As Miss Charlotte [Glanville] had a large share of coquetry in her composition, and was fond of beauty in none of her own sex but herself, she was sorry to see Lady Bella possessed of so great a share. (Lennox 80)

Lennox consistently shows that coquetry, vanity, envy, and other unvirtuous traits are fundamental to Miss Glanville's character. This impression is only strengthened after Arabella compliments her appearance and "Miss Glanville received her praises with great politeness but could not find in her heart to return them" (80). Even from a succinct introduction to Miss Glanville, it is evident that despite Arabella's isolation and her romance reading, her disposition is superior to Miss Glanville's. As Lennox didactically conveys, this disparity between the two women has everything to do with education. As James Fordyce argues in his *Sermons to Young Women*, "[T]here is not perhaps in the whole science of female vanity, female luxury, or female falsehood, a single article that is not taught" (10). Thus, like Locke and Lennox, Fordyce marks education as the key cause of immorality—as demonstrated by Miss Glanville. However, Fordyce blames mothers and not the deficient nature of gendered learning for these failings (10). As Lennox

personifies through both Miss Glanville and Arabella, it is the patriarchal construct of gendered education—which cultivates corporeal concerns like singing, dancing, and fashion above intellectual stimulation—that is inherently flawed, not woman herself.

As the novel progresses, the failings of Miss Glanville’s experience-based and decorative education are only confirmed by Miss Glanville’s iniquitous behavior towards men. In a confused exchange between the coquettish Miss Glanville and the quixotic Arabella, Miss Glanville takes offense because she believes that Arabella means to “to sneer at [Miss Glanville’s] great Eagerness to make Conquests, and the Liberties she allowed herself in, which had probably come to [Arabella’s] Knowledge” (Lennox 89). Although this was not Arabella’s intent, Miss Glanville’s guilt-ridden assumptions reveal her own indiscretions. It is the advice given by men and women alike that young women must “[n]ever amuse [themselves] with turning Coquet” because it is a short-lived pleasure that ruins the “reputation” and calls for a “Character of Deceit” (De Pompadour 76). As Locke denotes in his *Essay*, morality compels an individual to place immediate pleasures aside in the pursuit of greater happiness later. However, Miss Glanville—the product of an ornamental education, confined reading, and ample worldly experiences—falls prey to the trap of vanity and uses her ornamental studies to seduce men, placing immediate desires ahead of prolonged, moral contentment. Thus, Lennox makes plain that if women do not enlarge their minds through literary learning, diverse experiences are indeed harmful to their morality, further driving home the Lockean need for both education *and* experience.

In addition to her unvirtuous character, Miss Glanville also lacks the useful wisdom that Arabella consistently displays, a failure that is again ascribable to her lack of a literary education; this is notably demonstrated in the chapter “[w]hich treats of the

Olympic Games” (Lennox 79). In this section, Miss Glanville proposes to attend horse racing as a diversion from the country solitude which she cannot abide. Ignorant of this sport and the vice that often accompanies gambling, Arabella asks if it is similar to the Olympic Games; Miss Glanville, whose “reading had been very confined,” does not know what the Olympics are (82). As an explanation, Arabella gives a detailed *and* accurate answer:

The *Olympic Games*, Miss, said *Arabella*, so called from *Olympia*, a city near which they were performed, in the Plains of *Elis*, consisted of Foot and Chariot-Races; Combats with the Cestus; Wrestling, and other Sports. They were instituted in Honour of the Gods and Heroes; and were therefore termed sacred, and were considered as a Part of Religion. (82)

Although this learning originates from her romance reading, the knowledge she gains is true and precise. Conversely, Miss Glanville comments that she has “never read about any such Things” (82). This prioritization of materialistic pleasures over mental stimulation is typical of Miss Glanville and symptomatic of “the dubious value of ornamental ‘accomplishments’” (Glaser 431). Arabella, again signifying her intellectual prowess, goes on to engage in conversation with Mr. Glanville over Grecian history “for two hours,” thus evidencing that Arabella gains tangible and extensive knowledge from her reading, no matter its genre (Lennox 83). While this tête-à-tête transpires, the narrator takes note that “Miss *Glanville* (to whom all they said was quite unintelligible) diverted herself with humming a Tune...which proved no interruption to the more rational entertainment of her brother and *Arabella*” (83). Unable to match the literary education of Arabella or the masculine learning of her brother, Miss Glanville has no option but to fall back upon an ornamental skill, singing.

In a second demonstrative conversation, Lennox reasserts Arabella's superior knowledge and reasoning ability by juxtaposing her ideas against those of Miss Glanville, whose reading has been so restricted by patriarchal notions of education that she does not even know that the moon is larger than it appears. Before this exchange over the "glorious luminary of the heavens," Arabella has again revealed her quixotic nature. Rather than accepting that Miss Groves—her disreputable neighbor—retreated to the country to avoid a scandalous pregnancy, Arabella concocts a romantic and ridiculous scenario in which Miss Groves' reputation is spared. Miss Glanville, whose time in London grants her a fuller experience of the affairs between men and women, discerns that Arabella's notions are incorrect. Taking great pleasure in elucidating this folly, Miss Glanville compares Arabella's romantic idea of Miss Groves to arguing that the "moon is made of cream cheese" (Lennox 142). Redeeming Arabella's obvious misperception of Miss Groves, Lennox again unveils Arabella's superior knowledge from behind the obscuring curtain of quixotism:

I have taken some pains to contemplate the Heavenly Bodies; and, by Reading and Observation, am able to comprehend some Part of their Excellence: Therefore it is not probable I should descend to such trivial Comparisons; and liken a Planet, which, haply, is not much less than our earth, to a thing so inconsiderable as that you name—. (142)

Notice here that Arabella's deductions concerning the moon derive from a combination of literary education and empirical observation; Arabella, isolated or not, has equal opportunity to observe the "planet" and compare those perceptions to written descriptions of the moon (142). This analysis by Arabella exemplifies Locke's ideals because it is a collaboration between reader, text, and reality. In this instance, Arabella exemplifies the

“true Key” of moral learning because she supplements her reading with observable evidence and measures each against the other, demonstrating that when given the tools, she can read rationally and navigate the maze of “variety of opinions” (Locke, *Conduct* 193).

Miss Glanville, on the other hand, is so obtuse that she continues to rail against her cousin even when Arabella’s information is validated by both education and experience, revealing the inadequacy of both Miss Glanville’s education and her ability to reason effectively:

Pardon me, dear cousin, interrupted Miss *Glanville*, laughing louder than before, if I divert myself a little with the Extravagance of your Notions...you say, that same moon, which don't appear broader than your Gardener's Face, is not much less than the whole World. Why, certainly, I have more Reason to trust my own Eyes than such whimsical Notions as these. (Lennox 143)

Miss Glanville, who blunders through life relying solely on her flawed perceptions and ornamental learning, cannot acknowledge the validity of Arabella’s claims even when they are true. Here, Lennox illustrates that “Miss Glanville and the women she epitomizes...are incapable of thinking or acting outside the very narrow sphere of activity with which they have been taught to concern themselves (Palo 225). Through negative exemplification, Lennox argues that, as Locke himself believed, “It helps not our ignorance to feign a knowledge where we have none”; instead, women like Miss Glanville need to substantiate and compare their thoughts against literary learning to gain “Truth and Certainty”—just as Arabella accomplishes when she is not constricted by society’s social constructs (Locke, *Essay* 2.13.18).

Throughout the text, it is clear that in the hierarchy of female learning, Lennox ranks Arabella's literary self-education above Miss Glanville's purely experience-based knowledge; however, both methods—isolated reading and pure experience—are proven incomplete and ultimately ineffective because they weaken women, leaving them susceptible to the dominant culture. This is perhaps most clearly expressed through both characters' flawed perceptions of Sir George. As the prototypical rake, Sir George serves to reveal and exploit the female vulnerability engendered by traditionally ornamental education. Upon entering into Arabella's and Miss Glanville's society, Sir George makes plain his agenda for both women. For Arabella, he plans “the Means he should use to acquire the Esteem of Lady *Bella*, of whose Person he was a little enamored, but of her Fortune a great deal more” (Lennox 129). After witnessing Arabella's “particular Turn,” Sir George sets out to use his knowledge of French romances to “serve himself with her Foible, to effect his Designs” (129-30). In regard to Miss Glanville, Sir George finds that “It be necessary, in order to [foster] his better Acquaintance with *Arabella*, to be upon very friendly Terms with” her; resultingly, Sir George manipulates Miss Glanville's weak moral character and coquettish ways. He resolves to say “a thousand gallant things” to keep her enamored with him and, therefore, further his goal with Arabella (130). Sir George is experienced in society, rakish, handsome, and well spoken; thus, Miss Glanville is easily swept away by his charms because her experience-based education leaves her ill-equipped to resist them. Both women's imperfect understanding of Sir George's true intentions reveals that their respective educations both fail to fulfill Locke's model for moral erudition, further driving home the need for a healthy balance of experience and literary learning.

Lennox's premise is further confirmed through the ease with which Sir George manipulates even Arabella, the woman who charmed Mr. Glanville "to the last Degree of Admiration" with her "Wit, and her fine Reasoning upon every Subject proposed" (Lennox 46). As an integral component of his ruse, Sir George speaks to Arabella in the cadence of a romantic hero and finds common ground in the adventures of romantic characters. Despite her quixotic leanings, Arabella remains the "consummate empirical observer," consistently using patterns found in her "histories" to support her own judgements (Hall 90). Sir George, however, is equipped with the same examples, which he uses to circumvent Arabella's fine reasoning abilities. Because Arabella is intellectually accomplished but deficient in worldly knowledge, she reasons well—utilizing multiple exemplars to substantiate her assumptions—but fails to deduce empirically. As Elaine Kauver notes, "When Arabella is made aware that Sir George also reads romances" his opinions are authenticated in Arabella's mind because he communicates in her distinct language (217). Therefore, precisely because Arabella is not familiar with social realities, Sir George is able to wield the exact type of knowledge in which she is most effectively deceived. When she speaks to Sir George and Miss Glanville of Miss Groves' scandalous retreat into the country, for instance, Arabella defends her friend by saying Miss Groves was married to her love and thus she broke no rules of decorum—a notion that the reader, Miss Glanville, and Sir George all know is incorrect. Despite the delusion of her ideas, Arabella defends Miss Groves' actions with numerous examples from her readings—just as Locke advises: Cleopatra and Julius Caesar faced similar persecution over their marriage and Artemisa and Alexander were suspect when they ran away together. Not only does Arabella use demonstrative examples to validate her opinions, but she also values other people's opinions as further

substantiation. When Sir George asserts his feigned agreement, Arabella says, “I am very glad...that having always had some Inclination to excuse, and even defend, the Flight of Artemisa and Alexander, my Opinion is warranted by that of a Person so generous as yourself” (143). Reminiscent of her conversation about the moon, Arabella endeavors to reflect on her reading, compare it to observable life, and even validate it through conversation with others. However, in this instance, Arabella does not have the requisite experience to fall back on and, consequently, cannot reach accurate conclusions. Thus, Arabella attempts to live by Locke’s principles—juxtaposing her learning against others’ opinions and experiences of the world—yet her attempts are unsuccessful because of her isolation and inadequate education; as a result, Arabella is manipulated by Sir George and rendered weak by her unwise, gendered learning.

However, it is not only isolated reading that leaves women open to manipulation by the dominant discourse but unbridled experience as well; Miss Glanville, the foil to Arabella, falls for Sir George’s tricks just as readily as does Arabella. Of course, the romantic speeches that work to convince Arabella run counter to Sir George’s agenda with Miss Glanville; thus, he is forced to control Miss Glanville’s particular weaknesses—vanity and coquetry—in the same manner that he employs Arabella’s quixotism against her. To keep both women content and ignorant of his true intentions, Sir George encourages Miss Glanville to perceive any discussions she hears “in this [romantic] strain” as his “ridiculing her cousin's fantastical turn” (Lennox 139). Because of Miss Glanville’s near total ignorance, Sir George is not fearful that Miss Glanville might recognize his insincerity because “the gay coquette...assisted him to deceive her” (139). Sir George, knowing what best flatters Miss Glanville’s vanity, speaks disparagingly of Arabella in her presence and then romances her when Arabella retreats.

As a result of her absolute confidence in Sir George's counterfeited interest in her, Miss Glanville is "certain that Sir *George* is not in love with" Arabella and compromises her reputation in pursuit of his continued affections (192). Miss Glanville, with her experience-based, unread, and ornamental education, is not able to, as Locke says, gain the "principle of all virtue and excellency" because she does not deny herself "the satisfaction of [her] own desires where reason does not authorize them"; this, of course, is a byproduct of her inferior education (*Conduct* 29). Instead, she places her immediate desire for conquest above prolonged happiness and morality. And, resultingly, as will be seen in the final section of this chapter, her prospects become just as stifled as her education.

Careful juxtaposition of Arabella's and Miss Glanville's education—and their resulting natures—further reveals Lennox's educational argument: If the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, then men and women alike require a careful and diversified education that balances book-learning with experience-based knowledge for the purpose of preparing the individual to gain "moral autonomy and self-realization" (Porter 256). As Locke argues, nine out of ten men, or in this instance women, are "Good or Evil, useful or not, by their Education" (*STCE* 2). Through the characters of Arabella and Miss Glanville, Lennox decisively establishes that an isolated literary education leads to valid learning but also to an incomplete understanding of the unknown world. In contrast, a purely ornamental and experience-based education, without reading to grant stability, is the catalyst for immorality and *still* does not grant a true understanding of the world. If Locke's schema of learning—as expressed in his *Essay* and *STCE*—argues for the strategic molding of a child's mind to promote his or her growth into a rational, moral, and socially responsible adult, then Lennox's *The Female Quixote* deliberately shows that

neither form of female learning, a restricted or an ornamental education, fulfills Locke's model.

Harmony Achieved: Arabella's Lockean Rehabilitation

Lennox's penultimate and self-proclaimed "*Best Chapter in the History*" is much debated in scholarship because of the questions that surround its authorship and is "anti-feminist conclusion"; however, these two emphases shift the focus away from Arabella's Lockean rehabilitation and the implications that her transformation has for Lennox argument for women's education.¹⁷ In this chapter, as Anna Uddén's article on "Quixotic Hermeneutics" in *The Female Quixote* notes, Lennox "embeds the arch-critic of [her] day, Samuel Johnson, turning his fictional counterpart into the instrument of the Quixotic reform" (451). However, Uddén's article fails to mention that, as previously demonstrated by Hedrick, Johnson closely identified with Locke's theories, particularly those with moral implications. Because Johnson was Lennox's mentor and close correspondent, his absorption of Locke was similarly taken up by Lennox herself when she depicts Arabella's rehabilitation; this is most evident in the "good Divine" doctor's methodology, both characters' Lockean dialogue, and the empirical nature of their conversation. Importantly, giving proper emphasis to Locke's presence within Arabella's rehabilitation unveils Lennox's liberal argument for equitable education and, further, this focus can "account for Arabella's con-version [sic] without conceding a feminist defeat" (Motooka 252).

Though there are a multitude of circumstances that propel Arabella towards accepting reality, three of these factors explicitly contribute to Lennox's educational

¹⁷ Motooka speaks to the anti-feminist ending of *Quixote* but does not relate it to Locke's ideas.

argument: Mr. Glanville's desire to grant Arabella experience, Sir George's inability to control the romance he constructs, and Arabella's own request for a "worthy Divine" (Lennox 366). First, as Locke's authoritative theories suggest, before Arabella can undergo her re-education, she must gain experiential knowledge of the world. To this aim, after the Marquis's death and numerous romantic "adventures," Mr. Glanville moves to correct the only fault he perceives in Arabella's character, quixotism; reminiscent of Locke, Mr. Glanville proposes experience as the best antidote to Arabella's folly. Because "Mr. *Glanville*...thought the Solitude [Arabella] lived in, confirmed her in her absurd and ridiculous Notions," he poses time spent in London as the remedy (Lennox 254). Importantly, with the death of the Marquis, representative of patriarchal society, and the movement to Mr. Glanville, a more forward-thinking man, Lennox renders a shift between dominant and emergent ideologies. In London, Arabella will gain a greater understanding of the world and, as Mr. Glanville hopes, this will dissuade her from her more outlandish ideas; this decision, of course, proves advantageous because it is in London that Arabella regains her full capacity for reason.

Furthermore, at the same moment that Arabella advances to this new experiential knowledge, Sir George further spurs Arabella's re-education with his romantic fictions. As his fabrication grows more elaborate, Laurie Lanbauer argues that "Sir George, who makes such confident claims about romance, certainly can neither regulate nor restrain it" (31). In his efforts to win Arabella through the defamation of Mr. Glanville, Sir George concocts a romantic plot in which Mr. Glanville is dishonored and, thus, is unsuitable for Arabella; However, as Lanbauer notes, Sir George cannot control this fiction and the series of events that are set into motion by Sir George's lies directly lead to Arabella's

rehabilitation. Thus, the improper reading of a *male character* is a catalyst for Arabella's reformation.

Finally, it is Arabella herself who contributes the last spark needed to truly destroy her quixotic ideas. At the conclusion of the book Arabella throws herself into the River Thames to avoid fictionalized captors and, resultingly, falls ill. In fear for her life, Arabella desires a "Pious and Learned Doctor" to work on both her mind and her body; this doctor—who uncoincidentally is both a physician and a philosopher like Locke himself—is the "Cure" for Arabella. In their subsequent philosophical conversations, the methodology that the Doctor employs, his opinions of reading, and the empirical model utilized in their discussion all highlight Locke's prominence in Lennox's educational argument. When proper attention is given to a balanced feminine education—one which, as will be seen, Lennox herself creates—Lennox argues that social harmony is achieved, and woman is actualized or emerged.

Throughout her penultimate chapter, Lennox employs multiple tiers of Lockean ideas, creating a complex tapestry of female learning that, from its very foundation, is in conversation with Locke; at the base of this didactic analysis is the doctor's use of Locke's methodology to achieve Arabella's renaissance. In Locke's model of education, as expressed in *STCE*, he argues that when raising children the parent should contemplate "first the Health of the Body" because bodily health is "necessary...to our business and happiness" (*STCE* 10). In her re-education of Arabella, Lennox echoes this same balance of corporeal and intellectual concerns. Before initiating his didactic tête-à-tête with Arabella, the Doctor ensures the wellbeing of Arabella's body before progressing to her mind, an act that is fundamental to Locke's *STCE*. However, he "no sooner perciev'd that the Health of her Body was almost restor'd...that [the Doctor] introduc'd the Subject" of

curing her mind (Lennox 368). Foundational to Locke's *Essay* and to Lennox's argument, she also employs Locke's *tabula rasa* in restoring her heroine to full reason. As previously outlined, Locke argues in his *Essay* that the mind is "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas" and it is through "observation...of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves...which supplies our understandings" (*Essay* 2.1.2). This same principle—that the sensations and perceptions that constitute experience are the fundamental to our understandings—is appreciable from the genesis of the Doctor's and Arabella's conversation, and, importantly, it is this empirical model that facilitates Arabella's re-education. For instance, the Doctor explains to Arabella that

[t]he Apprehensions of any future Evil, Madam, said the Divine...must always arise from Comparison. We can judge of the Future only by the Past, and have therefore only Reason to fear or suspect, when we see the same Causes in Motion which have formerly produc'd Mischief. (Lennox 372)

In essence, the Doctor distinctively mirrors Locke's notion that all concepts are formed from experience; these ideas—whether they are the fear of abduction or the notion of proper courtship—are the due results of past sensations and perceptions. Thus, the Doctor employs the empirical model and Locke's theory of the mind to illustrate didactically the flaws in Arabella's perception of the world.

The parallels between Lennox's instructive chapter and Locke's authoritative theories are further established by the Doctor and Arabella's discussion of reading itself; in this exchange, the Doctor's concept of proper reading closely mirrors Locke's advice as evinced in *STCE* and *Conduct*. To review, Locke argues that those who read assiduously do not by this act unquestionably gain knowledge because proper reading is a continuous dialogue between text, reader, and reality; only by constant comparison of

read experiences with lived ones can a reader access “truth.” Arabella enthusiastically contemplates what she reads, constantly making observations upon her nook-learning in an attempt to process it in a Lockean manner, but she goes astray because of the perfectly useless material with which she is supplied. When the Doctor analyzes Arabella’s use of read-exemplars as the foundation of her flawed understanding, he enumerates that, “[t]he 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”; however, when “senseless Fictions” are used as foundational knowledge, it “pervert[s] the Understanding” (Lennox 372, 374). Thus, understanding of the world derives not only from one’s own knowledge but also from measuring and judging others’ experiences; this is true whether these experiences are absorbed from acquaintances or literary characters. However, the Doctor argues that the “Authority of Scribblers” begs questioning—just as, according to Locke, the validity of social custom requires scrutiny. Similar to Locke, Lennox’s doctor argues that through reading an individual gains experiences, which provide the mind with the “instruments of knowledge,” but to make reading useful, the proper material and the proper method must both be employed.

Even the demonstrative texts that Lennox’s doctor suggests as exemplary reading further link Lennox’s educational arguments to Locke’s work. According to the Doctor, Arabella’s problem lies not with her fine reasoning abilities but with her choice of reading material. Instead of romance, the Doctor recommends “The Fables of Æsop” as moral reading and also recommends the “solid Instructions” of Richardson—who, intriguingly, specifically uses Locke’s *STCE* in his famous *Pamela* (Lennox 377). It is not coincidence that in his *STCE* Locke specifically suggests that to prevent filling the

mind “with perfectly useless trumpery ...Aesop's Fables [are] the best” for a child (116). Therefore, not only does Lennox model her concept of proper reading upon Locke’s ideas, but her “good doctor” recommends the very same reading material to stave off vice.

Finally, and arguably most significantly, the empirical dialogue employed by *both* the doctor and Arabella closely mirrors the theories found within Locke’s work and solidifies Lennox’s educational argument. This protracted and didactic exchange contains a multitude of examples that express the essential Lockean nature of Arabella’s rehabilitation; however, three exemplars—Arabella’s reciprocation of the doctor’s empirical questioning, her refusal to accept custom as unquestionable fact, and the emphatic advocacy of experience as the great teacher—will sufficiently evince the similarities. To begin, the doctor asks of Arabella, “How is any oral, or written Testimony, confuted or confirmed?” (377). Rather than telling Arabella how knowledge is determined true, reminiscent of *STCE*, the doctor creates a moral lesson, not a moment of condemnation. In response, Arabella correctly answers, “By comparing it...with the Testimony of others, or with the natural Effects and standing Evidence of the Facts related, and sometimes by comparing it with itself” (378). This participatory learning, which depends on the successful comparison and analyzation of information, is precisely what Locke suggests. Continuing the empirical model, the doctor asks, “If then your Ladyship will abide by this last...You will perceive that your Authors have parceled out the World at Discretion” (378). After the Doctor carefully questions the accuracy and legitimacy of the “*French Wits*” from whom Arabella gains her knowledge of subjects like ancient history, Arabella is forced to admit, based upon empiricism, that she is unable to validate her notions with factual evidence (375).

However, she does not accept this knowledge, even from an authoritative figure like “the good Divine” doctor, without logically and systematically questioning it to prevent—as Locke mandates—the wholesale adoption of social custom; this furthers Lennox’s argument that the dominant discourse cannot be accepted wholesale. After *conditionally* accepting that her French romances are not historical, she then asks the doctor why “supposing them Fictions, and intended to be received as Fictions, you censure them as absurd?” (378). For Arabella, and for Lennox as well, identifying something as fiction does not strip it of moral value, as arguments of *The Female Quixote* evince; logically, therefore, the doctor must next denote romantic knowledge as absurd in order to signify it as improper reading material. In so doing, he brings back to center Locke’s emphasis on experience, furthering Lennox’s argument that women, too, require experience balanced with education. When asking “whether Life is truly described in those Books,” the doctor explains that “the Likeness of a Picture can only be determined by a Knowledge of the Original” (379). Therefore, the problem with French romances is not the fictionality but the absurdity of the problems they address; “[e]very Page of these Volumes is filled with such extravagance” that they cannot represent the problems of life (380). However, the most damning circumstance of Arabella’s reading is not the material but her lack of experience—after all, outlandish fictions can be “imbued with political implications” (C. Johnson 32). As the doctor says to Arabella, “You have yet had little Opportunity of knowing the Ways of Mankind, which cannot be learned but from experience, and of which the highest Understanding, and the lowest, must enter the world in equal Ignorance” (Lennox 379). Two significant points are present in this statement; first, as Lennox systematically argues throughout *Quixote*, experience of the world is essential in discerning where true and false knowledge diverge. Second, both the

“highest” and “lowest” understandings enter the world as a *tabula rasa*—whether male or female—therefore, no matter the sex the education should be the same. Throughout *The Female Quixote*, it is made clear that only a combination of education, read-learning, and experience, all geared towards the attainment of morality, will result in a fully actualized and virtuous individual, capable of subverting the dominant discourse.

With Arabella’s recovery of “the free Use of all her noble Powers of Reason,” so too are the benefits of a moral, literary, and experience-based education fully realized (Lennox 382). Although Arabella is embarrassed and, thus, reflects often on the ridicule “to which she now saw plainly she had exposed herself,” she also attains a more prosperous end than her counterpart Miss Glanville or the pretender Sir George (383). Sir George, “entangled in his own Artifices,” marries Miss Glanville out of “Necessity,” which, the narrator notes, is a “Fit of Penitence” for his crimes. The union between Miss Glanville and Sir George, which occurs on the same day as Arabella’s and Mr. Glanville’s, is only a marriage in the “common Acceptance of the Word” (383). Thus, Miss Glanville, with her ornamental and vice-ridden education, receives the natural consequence of gendered learning, a marriage grounded in patriarchal constructs; however, Arabella receives a different end. After she realizes the unreality of her notions of courtship, she tells Mr. Glanville that she is “happy to be desired for a Partner for Life by a Man of [his] Sense and Honour” (Lennox 383). Some see this quick abandonment of her powerful romantic notions as the giving over of her authority to the hegemonic construct of marriage; however, if Lennox is in conversation with Locke, then marriage does not necessitate loss of power. Mary L. Shanley, in her survey of marriage contracts, notes that Locke prepossess that marriage is entered into voluntarily by both partners and, radically, that it can be dissevered as well. Further, “Locke explicitly rejected the notion

that marriage requires absolute sovereignty in the husband,” granting male authority only in disagreements between husband and wife over common interests such as children and property (Shanley 88-9). Therefore, according to Locke’s “individualistic premises,” Arabella maintains control over her “self” within a marriage that combines “Virtue and laudable Affection of the Mind” (Shanley 91, Lennox 383). Therefore, if Lennox’s appropriation of Locke’s ideas is accepted, then Arabella’s union with Mr. Glanville is not the submission of romantic woman to rational man but the culmination of Arabella’s Lockean education. In other words, by combining Locke’s notion of proper reading with Arabella’s empirical mind and a—albeit belated—rational education, Lennox demonstrates that this balanced learning allows woman to reach self-actualization. Further, the dominant ideology, as embodied by the Marquis, can be overcome by more moderate and emerging notions like those personified by Mr. Glanville.

Finally, bringing her social commentary out of the realm of fiction and into eighteenth-century women’s lives, Lennox devises and creates her own solution to the issue of unbalanced female education: her learning-centered periodical the *Lady’s Museum*. As Lennox demonstrates through her quixotic heroine, there is reality in romance hidden alongside the lies, just as there are false constructs buried within the “truth” of society’s customs. As long as readers, of both life and books, analyze and question the information presented to them, as Locke promotes, they will gain moral learning through their reading, no matter the material. However, the question remains: from where will moral and reasonable women gain the requisite tools to analyze what they read in both literature as well as in life? Further, and most critical to a woman’s successful “reading,” how will the buttress of experience enter the highly restricted domestic sphere? This “quandary,” pondered through *The Female Quixote* and the

character of Arabella, results in Lennox's creation of the *Lady's Museum*, a highly diversified periodical that may "contribute a solution" (Sagal 146). In the *Lady's Museum*, Lennox incorporates fiction, geography, philosophy, educational treatises—which uncoincidentally mirror Lockean ideas—history, and essays that participate in cultural discourse. As Sagal expresses in her article on Lennox's *Museum*, the periodical can "be read as an endorsement not only of women's scientific study, but also of women's self-directed education as a means for personal fulfilment" (145). Thus, the fictional Lockean experiment of Arabella—through which Lennox questioned traditionally gendered education and considered a possible solution—results in a literary tool that real women could use to further their own self-education. Due to its varied nature, it is clear that the solution hit upon in *The Female Quixote*, that women required a diversified education of reading coupled with experience, is implemented by Lennox in the *Lady's Museum*. Cementing her contributions to eighteenth-century women's education, Lennox utilizes two male dominated traditions, the quixotic novel and the periodical form, to both create a viable model for female self-education *and* to furnish women with the literary tools by which to implement it.

CHAPTER IV

**A Hierarchy of Feminine Readers: Educating the Quixote and “Writing” the
Authentic Woman**

It was not particularly surprising that these same massive disruptions—defeat in America, revolution in France and an unprecedented rate of economic and social change in Britain itself—should also have provoked a restatement of the differences between the sexes and of the need for female subordination...in Britain the boundaries supposedly separating men and women were, in fact, unstable *and becoming more so*. At one and the same time, separate sexual spheres were being increasingly prescribed in theory, yet increasingly broken through practice.

Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the
Nation 1707-1837*, 1992

A relish for reading...should be cultivated very early in life; and those who reflect can tell, of what importance it is for the mind to have some resources in itself, and not to be entirely dependent on the senses for employment and amusement... Reading is the most rational employment, if people seek food for the understanding, and do not read merely to remember words, or with a view to quote celebrated authors, and retail sentiments they do not understand or feel. Judicious books enlarge the mind...Those productions which give a wrong account of the human passions, and the various accidents in life, ought not to be read before the judgment is formed, or at least exercised.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the
Education of Daughters*, 1787

Completed in 1799,¹⁸ Jane Austen’s earliest novel *Northanger Abbey* has been criticized for the juvenile nature of its composition and its lack of overall coherence; however, upon closer study, we find that Austen’s novel, like Lennox’s *Quixote*, engages the complex and multilayered social discourse on women’s reading and learning. Early critics, like Anne Ehrenpreis and Alan McKillop, disregard Austen’s intentional use of

¹⁸ According to Claire Tomalin’s *Jane Austen: A Life*, *Northanger Abbey* was written between 1798 and 1799. Once completed, Austen periodically revisited it until she submitted it for publication in 1803; however, the publisher failed to follow through with printing and, consequently, it was not officially published until after her death in 1818 (92, 122-23, 184, and 275).

the Quixotic form and instead argue that the abrupt alteration of Catherine Morland from her entrance into Bath in Volume I to her Gothic delusions of Volume II creates a discrepancy in character that cannot be unified. If we read *Northanger Abbey* not as a realistic novel but as a critique of women's reading and women's education, however, truth to character is not fundamental to *Northanger Abbey*, as it is in other works by Austen. Indeed, the focus by earlier critics on the inconsistencies of character and form has been challenged by more recent arguments that downplay such inconsistencies in order to acknowledge the political maturity of such an early work. As a result, Austen's didactic use of the quixotic paradigm—as is established by Elaine M. Kauver and Jodi L. Wyatt—as well as its political and social implications, has become significant. The shift in the critical debate surrounding *Northanger Abbey* towards feminist issues lays the foundation for a careful look at the ingrained societal dilemmas of female education—education which is dominated by male ideology and disallows “true” feminine reading or the obtainment of agency. In “Jane Austen and Female Reading,” for instance, Robert Uphaus delineates the political representation of reading in Austen's novels, including *Northanger Abbey*, illustrating Austen's contribution to the cultural debate of women's literacy. However, his extensive survey of Austen merely employs brief examples from *Northanger*. As it could be argued that “[n]owhere in Austen... are reading and its social consequences more central than [in] *Northanger Abbey*,” a brief foray into Catherine Morland's reading cannot uncover sufficiently the sophistication of Austen's argument (Benedict 1). Rather, close analysis of reading within the text reveals not only that Austen functions within the same moral paradigm as Lennox but also that she develops the educational model that Lennox began in *The Female Quixote*.

As established in the preceding chapters, during the long eighteenth century, John Locke's liberal and universal principles were pervasive and, therefore, were engaged by female educationalists like Lennox; in surveying Austen's own education and reading, it is clear that she, at the very least, draws inspiration from both Locke's *and* Lennox's work. The ideological imprints that both authors leave upon her novels begin with Austen's avid early reading. Other than a short yet unproductive stay at boarding school, Austen, like Lennox's Arabella, was educated primarily through reading in her father's library (Tomalin 41-5). Her father was a "profound scholar" who, as her brother implies in Austen's obituary, cultivated her passion for literature (Austen 191). As a result, "[h]er reading was extensive in history and *belles lettres*" and also included canonical authors such as "Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Richardson, Thomson," and, paramount for this study, "Locke" himself (191, Pearson 143). Solidifying her connection to Locke, Austen's favorite moral writer was none other than Samuel Johnson who, as previously established, was a devoted proponent of Locke's ideas and incorporated them into much of his writing, including *The Rambler*, which Austen read (Tomalin 41). Thus, it is apparent that Austen was familiar both with Locke and with authors directly influenced by Locke, notably her "dear Dr. Johnson"; therefore, a linear progression of influence can be established between Austen and Locke's authoritative principles (*Letters* 126). Further, the same is true for her relationship with *The Female Quixote*. In a letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen speaks to her reading of Lennox:

'Alphonsine' did not do. We were disgusted in twenty pages, as, independent of a bad translation, it has indelicacies which disgrace a pen hitherto so pure; and we changed it for the 'Female Quixote', which now makes our evening amusement; to me a very high one, as I find the work quite equal to what I remembered it.

Mrs. F.A., to whom it is new, enjoys it as one could wish; the other Mary, I believe, has little pleasure from that or any other book. (Austen, *Letters* 120)

Here Austen establishes several points of significance: First, she read *The Female Quixote* not once but several times, and when she returns to its familiar plot in 1807, it still resonates with her. Second, she categorizes her female companions according to their proclivity for reading; Mrs. F.A. partakes in their participatory reading “as one could wish” while Mary, reminiscent of Miss Glanville, does not derive pleasure from books at all. As this chapter will demonstrate, Austen (intentionally or not) uses Locke’s model of reading to create a hierarchy of female readers; at the pinnacle of this hierarchy is Catherine, a quixotic character, who uses both book-learning and experience to conceptualize a better understanding of herself. As a result, situating *Northanger Abbey* in Locke’s theories and comparing it with Lennox’s *Quixote* reveals the educational implications latent within Austen’s text.

Although Austen’s novels are frequently placed within the *Bildungsroman* genre—which by its definition “denotes growth, formation, or education” (Barney 174)—there exists little scholarship in which Austen’s advocacy of female learning is emphasized; however, through *Northanger Abbey*, Austen creates an educational argument that is in conversation with educational authors of the past, namely Lennox and Locke. During the late eighteenth century, the sign of the educated woman could signify anything from the “national superiority” of Britain to the radicalism of a failing empire (Guest 101). As Raymond Williams argues, when “emergent” ideologies become a threat to the “dominant” ideology, the “dominant” culture “reaches [its hand] much further than ever before... [into] areas of experience and practice and meaning” in an attempt to restrain the “emergent” and, thus, cement its continued authority (125). In the wake of

rebellion and revolution—when Britain’s dominant discourse feared the strength of the emergent ideology of female equality—these discordant ideals forced the reading woman into a liminal space, at once a signal of progress and symbol of corruption. Consequently, creating “fictions of dissent” during this era, as Austen did, was a precarious undertaking; however, through the use of Lennox’s quixotic model and Locke’s liberal principles, Austen generates an argument for a proper form of reading that debunks feminine myths and allows for true intellectual enlightenment to overcome the deficient nature of domestic education (Miller 316). Further, using Locke’s theories as a guide, Austen creates a hierarchy of feminine readers to elucidate the inherent deficiencies of gendered reading that is founded in male-centric ideology and to demonstrate how true learning stems from a balance of both education *and* experience; further, when this proper education is achieved, as Catherine Morland demonstrates, social harmony is realized and the learned woman is empowered to create a sense of self that is fully emerged, independent of the dominant discourse.

Contextualizing Austen’s Quixote: The “Dominant” and “Emergent” Ideologies

Before analyzing the subversive nature of Austen’s commentary on female literacy, she must first be contextualized within the shifting cultural debates present in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Before revolution struck in both America and France, as Colley contends, “the true position of British women was more diverse than the statute books suggested, and increasingly in flux” (244). In at least partial reaction to both the universal principles of mind, as expressed by Locke, and the emergence of respected, publishing, and public women, like Lennox, the carefully demarcated, restricted role of the British woman was more varied than in decades past. This is not to say that the dominant discourse placed women on equal footing with men but to note that

as the common man advocated for male suffrage, a voice in the political process, and more equitable opportunities, the role of woman—perhaps a consequence undesired—became more malleable (Colley 243-44). Thus, to prevent women’s emergence as autonomous beings, sexual differences were reiterated with renewed vigor. This strengthening of gendered binaries is perhaps most apparent, and insistent, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile*. Both to promote “universal” male rights and to preclude the same advancement for women, Rousseau delineates the differences between species and sex, creating a dichotomous view of gender that solidified women’s inferiority, signifying it as “natural.” In so doing he argues that “the only thing we know with certainty is that everything man and woman have in common belongs to the species, and that everything which distinguishes them belongs to the sex” (Rousseau 358). With his “dazzlingly successful” treatise, Rousseau formulated a methodical framework by which such sexual politics as he promoted were not only validated but also represented as integral to maintaining the natural order (Colley 244). According to Rousseau, biological and natural traits of both sexes verify that “One [man] ought to be active and strong, the other [woman] passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance” (358). Thus, women’s advancement into the public sphere, particularly in regard to education, was again stunted by constricting social customs as exemplified but by no means limited to Rousseau.

With revolution in both America and France, British society’s adverse response to new ideologies intensified, especially when contemplating women’s possible egress from the private sphere; consequently, the very lexicon of individualism, as enshrined in Locke’s authoritative writings, became subversive. As Claudia Johnson explains in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, “Before the French Revolution Lockean ideas

about happiness, education, judgment, autonomous choice, and the limited though necessary role of authority enjoyed general currency”; however, as more and more individuals heralded reform, “conservative observers” saw the individualistic and inclusive language of such men as Locke as a threat to the status quo: The very lexicon of equality was considered dangerously dissident by many (xxi-xxii). Where once conventional words like “reason, judgement, liberty, imperiality, happiness, and independence” were essential to the fabric of discourse, they were now infused with radical, political potential. Therefore, as recalcitrant women like Mary Wollstonecraft employed this “radical” vocabulary to advocate for a female education that promoted “fully rational and self-responsible citizens,” they were labeled as “unsex’d women,” as adversaries of the social welfare (Guest 162). In reading Wollstonecraft’s, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Claudia Johnson notes that during this time

conservative audiences were shocked to realize that if women were indeed educated and permitted to act like ‘rational creatures,’ they might consider themselves entitled, as free agents, to frame their own desires and pursue happiness on their own terms, rather than be content as dutiful daughters or submissive wives. (15)

Wollstonecraft’s participation in the intellectual and public spheres, as well as the aggression with which society censured her for this transgression, is representative of the treatment that forward-thinking women received in the late eighteenth century.¹⁹ Coming of age in this polemical society, Austen, by necessity, carefully chose how best to voice her dissent. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen presents the powerful potential that women’s

¹⁹ According to Harriet Guest, variances of this same opinion were held for Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, and Helen Maria Williams, all of whom were linked to Wollstonecraft’s particular brand of “monstrous woman.”

literary education holds for both restoring social harmony and granting women agency; however, as seen in previous chapters, women's reading was not beyond scrutiny, and 1790s politics, as exemplified by Wollstonecraft, only polarized further the diverse views on female learning and reading.

As Katie Halsey aptly notes, “[A]n understanding of eighteenth-century anxieties over gender roles is central to an understanding of the history of education”; however, this argument must be pushed further because recognizing these sexual politics is also integral to discerning the symbiotic—and potentially subversive—relationship between gender roles, education, and reading (431). In recognition of this complicated and powerful relationship, patriarchal society sought methods of regulating both the education that women received and the read material that infiltrated the domestic sphere. In the 1780s, boarding school became referred to as a “public” education. As Michèle Cohen argues, “[T]his discursive shift was particularly significant because it enabled educationalist and moralists to claim that precisely because” school took place in the “public” it was unsuitable for women whose natural sphere was private (587). Hence, women were increasingly relegated to a domestic, home education that denied them access to experience. When gender roles are thus cemented, women's primary access to worldly experience—whether it be notions of British society, individualistic philosophy, or exemplars of powerful women—stems, by necessity, from reading material. In an attempt to control this literary flow of information, facsimiles of literature were produced in quotation books that were packaged purely for “the fast and shallow acquisition of a wide variety of texts” so that women could mimic “feminine accomplishment” rather than actually being intellectually accomplished (Benedict 2). Further exemplifying this trend, during Austen's maturation, there were published “a number of novels, tales,

poems and educational works [that] centre[d] on full-scale critical analyses of female reading practices” (Pearson 8). Many of these texts depicted women whose reading caused either quixotism or milder misperceptions of the world; this gendered representation of reading became “especially common from the 1790s” onward (Pearson 8). By designating reading as potentially damning to women’s all-important reputations, the reading of unsavory texts—or perhaps more accurately those which challenged the dominant culture—was, if not halted at least, stymied. As Williams argues of culture, when the dominant discourse is challenged by the emerging, in this case intellectually *independent* woman, it often exerts further control over individuals’ lives in an effort to maintain its authority. Thus, the “ambivalent perception of [women’s education and reading] as a sign of progress or corruption” can best be understood as a struggle between dominant and emerging ideologies (Guest 86). Increased gender roles, regulation of information, and denial of worldly experience all work to maintain patriarchal control of women’s lives; however, women like Austen, following the model laid out by Lennox and embodying the ideas of Locke, “developed stylistic techniques which enabled them to use politically charged material” by covert means (C. Johnson xxi).

Writing within such a tendentious society, female authors like Austen appropriated the novel as a means to voice their discontent within a politically rigid system that frequently served to place women “in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone” (Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 88). Consequently, female authors were torn between two steadfastly opposing forces: the need to publish *and* sell within a misogynistic culture and the desire to create authentic female literature. As Claudia Johnson notes, “Authorial self-styling is a sticky business for a woman publicly committed to championing female subordination” (18). However, a careful study of

reading in *Northanger Abbey* reveals that Austen utilizes Mrs. Allen, Isabella Thorpe, and Eleanor Tilney to create a hierarchy of female readers, illustrating the transformative ability that proper reading has on education. When this chain of readers is analyzed in conjunction with Catherine's literary education, Austen's argument gains traction, especially through the seemingly disunifying Gothic delusions of Catherine, which function as a quixotic education. In giving her voice to the tide of opinion concerning women's learning, Austen both refashions the educational model used by Lennox and also echoes Locke's ideas concerning a reading that furnishes the mind. The result is a model of reading that combines education, experience, and contemplation to assist women in forming a self that functions outside the dominant discourse.

Austen's Hierarchy of Female Readers: Models of (Im)Proper Learning

For Catherine Morland, it is not a wise doctor who steps in and cures her quixotic misperceptions but the examples set by other women, both negative and positive, that guide Catherine's maturation and allow *her* to enact her *own* rehabilitation; thus, the moral character of each woman, and more specifically the reading practices of each, invites analysis. As Catherine leaves her country home behind, venturing into and gaining experience from both Bath and Northanger Abbey, she is accompanied by several women, each of whom furthers her experiential education. From some women, like Mrs. Allen, all the useful knowledge that Catherine gains is by negative example; others, typified by Isabella Thorpe, impart vital models for Catherine's learning but are little improved themselves because they lack reflection and judgement. Lastly, in the person of Eleanor Tilney, Catherine observes the model woman, as presented in conduct books of the age. This ideal woman—though moral, pleasing, accomplished, well-read, and even intelligent—still serves as a negative model because she fails to differentiate her “self”

from the dominant ideologies that she embodies. Thus, to understand the balance struck by Catherine's emerging education, we must examine the individual influences of her literary and moral learning, namely the women in Austen's hierarchy of reading.

Mrs. Allen, the least fluent reader and, therefore, the base of Austen's hierarchy, represents the most fundamental problem in women's education: ignorance. Through her frequent visits to Bath, she is educated in the school of social expectation, where gowns, exterior beauties, ornamental accomplishments, and pretense rank far superior to, in Lennox's phrasing, "useful knowledge" (Lennox 48). As a result, and left in a "state of mental vacancy," Mrs. Allen lacks both learning and, more troublingly, any desire to gain substantive knowledge (McMaster 16). Despite Catherine's feverish discussions of *Mysteries of Udolpho*, Mrs. Allen is one of the only characters, male or female, who does not engage in the literary discussions so prominent in the text; in fact, Mrs. Allen, much like Miss Glanville or Austen's aforementioned companion Mary, never gives any book the slightest interest. While Catherine loses "all worldly concerns" in her reading, Mrs. Allen frets over "the delay of an expected dress-maker" (Austen 33-34). Throughout the text, Mrs. Allen often focuses her mind almost exclusively on one subject, fashion. When confronted with an acquaintance in the pump room, for instance, "Mrs. Thorpe talked chiefly of her children, and Mrs. Allen of her gowns"; thus, materialistic rather than intellectual concerns are central to her character (22). However, as Locke argues and as Austen's diverse female characters suggest, deficiency is not innate. In *Conduct*, Locke notes that

[w]e are born with faculties and powers capable almost of anything, such at least as would carry us farther than can easily be imagined: but it is only the exercise of

those powers which gives us ability and skill in anything, and leads us towards perfection. (173)

Mrs. Allen, who exercises her “powers” not for moral or intellectual betterment but for corporeal concerns, is unpracticed in the conduct of understanding and, thus, is far less than perfect. As seen in the epigraph, Wollstonecraft supports this idea and contends that women’s reading, as rendered in the epigraph of this chapter, is essential. Interestingly, in her treatise on the education of daughters—in which she explicitly evokes Locke—she envisages the flawed characters of unread women like Mrs. Allen. As she argues, reading is essential because it allows “the mind to have some resources in itself, and not to be entirely dependent on the senses for employment and amusement” (*Education* 48). Mrs. Allen, entirely dependent on her own senses, is drawn to materialistic pursuits like fashion. As the *only* female character in *Northanger Abbey* who does not read, she is depicted as mindless and in complete compliance with her male-centric society; thus, ignorance seems a natural consequence, for Austen, of Mrs. Allen’s rejection of book-learning in favor of more frivolous affairs.

As Locke argues in his *Essay*, to prevent acceptance of false ideologies, individuals must question social customs and analyze them against their own experiences and learning; however, Mrs. Allen, with her silly obsession with fashion and lack of reading, unquestioningly accepts knowledge from others. As a consequence, she is incapable of forming her own opinions unless they are verified by Mr. Allen, the facilitator of her societal acquiescence. For instance, when Catherine asks her guardian whether it is inappropriate both to break her plans with Mrs. Tilney and to go on a carriage ride with the Thorpes and her brother, the firmest opinion Mrs. Allen can give is, “Well, my dear...suppose you go” (58). However, when Mr. Allen hears of the plans for a

second carriage ride, he authoritatively commandeers his wife's ideas when he affirms, "It is not right...Mrs. Allen, are not you of my way of thinking?" (71). Mrs. Allen, now able to confirm her own thoughts through the absorption of her husband's, states, "Yes, very much indeed" (71). Joanne Cordóon argues that "the more stereotypically 'feminine' the woman, the less likely she is to challenge the dominant discourse and the rhetorical strategy recommended to women" (43). Mrs. Allen fits firmly into this feminine mold and, therefore, she is, like the nine out of ten men that Locke references, made deficient by her education. Consequently, she more closely resembles Rousseau's reimagining of woman: "A woman's reason is practical...but not at finding that end itself...[rather] the woman learns from the man what must be seen" (377). Without proper learning, Mrs. Allen is unable to differentiate her "self" from the views of her husband or the silly fancies that society has assigned women; therefore, she accepts the dominant discourse without question. Austen's other female characters, who all read to some extent, can only be a step forward from Mrs. Allen's obliging feminine example.

As Austen's hierarchy of reading progresses, Isabella Thorpe, who is depicted as an insincere and greedy manipulator, reads extensively, demonstrating that—as Locke argues in *Conduct*—not all reading is constructive; through Isabella, Austen makes clear that judicious reading is as much about the mind brought to a book as it is about the text itself. After Isabella has first introduced Catherine to *Mysteries of Udolpho*, she exclaims that "when you have finished Udolpho, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you" (Austen 24). However, this substantial knowledge of popular literature means little when reading for consumption rather than for "Truth and Certainty" (Locke 193). In her brief analysis of reading in *Northanger Abbey*, Barbara Benedict argues that "Isabella models the cynical use of

literature as fashionable display, a commodity to be conspicuously consumed, rather than a resource to consult for self-improvement” (4). While Catherine eventually discovers the truth of everyday societal greed through her reading of *Udolpho*, Isabella, who lets greed rule her actions—much like Madame Cheron of *Mysteries of Udolpho* or Sir George of *Quixote*—learns nothing of herself or society. As Locke notes in his *Conduct*, “Some people are assiduous in reading, but don’t advance their knowledge much by it” because they fail to “reflect...[and] so they are little improved (14). Isabella, the mindless consumer, reads voraciously but learns little from the act because she fails to compare her read material to knowledge of the world. This superficial reading is exemplified by Catherine’s and Isabella’s conversations about books. When Catherine reveals that she and her mother both enjoy *Sir Charles Grandison*, Isabella responds in outrage, naming one of Austen’s favorite novels as an “amazing horrid book” (Austen 26). As the conversation continues, Isabella’s ineffectual mind only becomes more apparent:

‘Do you indeed! You surprise me; I thought [*Sir Charles Grandison*] had not been readable. But, my dearest Catherine, have you settled what to wear on your head tonight? I am determined at all events to be dressed exactly like you. The men take notice of that sometimes, you know.’ (Austen 26)

Rather than conversing about *Udolpho* or *Sir Charles Grandison* and acquiring knowledge from a didactic dialogue with Catherine, Isabella swiftly changes the subject to more trivial yet entertaining matters: clothes and men. As Wollstonecraft notes, imaginative books, like romance or the Gothic, “ought not to be read before the judgment is formed, or at least exercised” (*Education* 49). Isabella, with what Benedict describes as “fast and shallow”(2) reading for consumption, fails to be transformed by her reading

because she *herself* does not transform her reading into useful knowledge through reflection and judgment.

The more loathsome consequence of uneducated reading, however, is the lack of “self” Isabella continually demonstrates. Much like Mrs. Allen’s, Isabella’s discourse is saturated with meaningless and insincere chatter; however, rather than molding her identity to fit a husband's ideology, Isabella shapes herself into the quintessential sentimental heroine, one who speaks to please. As Rousseau argues, “A man says what he knows; a woman says what pleases. He needs knowledge to speak; she needs taste” (376); Isabella embodies this patriarchal notion indiscriminately, speaking only what pleases. For instance, after arriving home from a day of exploration with the Morlands and her brother, Isabella demonstrates her embodiment of the sentimental “love and marriage” plot where the heroine adopts the hero as her center:

[T]he astonishment of Isabella was hardly to be expressed, on finding that it was too late in the day for them to attend her friend into the house: —”Past three o’clock!” it was inconceivable, incredible, impossible! and she would neither believe her own watch, nor her brother’s, nor the servant’s; she would believe no assurance of it founded on reason or reality; till Morland produced his watch, and ascertained the fact; to have doubted a moment longer *then*, would have been equally inconceivable, incredible, and impossible. (Austen 45)

Isabella’s use of overly sentimental language and complete lack of “reason or reality” both embody the insincere masculine depiction of women. Like Mrs. Allen, Isabella accepts the word of James Morland because the pursuit of him has become her focus and she works to please him. The incapable Isabella—reading without “examination,”

“judgement,” or “attention”—falls into the male-centric trap set for women. She has read the Gothic without seeing the truth masked beneath Radcliffe’s language and, consequently, adopts artifice over agency. Though Isabella is an ineffectual reader, of both life and literature, her Gothic reading has granted her something that Mrs. Allen does not have, the drive to advance her financial situation through the means the sentimental has given, marriage. Throughout the novel, Isabella molds herself into whatever sentimental trope is needed to advance her own goals: doting friend, a guide to Catherine, adoring fiancée, and, when the time comes, pursuer of Captain Tilney’s fortune. Because Isabella uses deceit and masculine writing as inspiration for her machinations, she inevitably finds failure. In her characterization of Isabella, Austen illustrates that reading without a mind for truth leaves women with a false sense of the world and will lead to ultimate failure; however, a more lasting result of this reading is an inability to educate one’s mind to create an authentic self. Isabella, as Cordóón makes plain, “is a creature of her culture, her every word follows the socially sanctioned script for women” (48).

As the third tier of Austen’s literary hierarchy, the intelligent Eleanor Tilney seems initially to remedy the educational problems characteristic to women like Isabella Thorpe and Mrs. Allen; however, Eleanor is representative of the ideal woman and, thus, by definition she must both adhere to and propagate society’s feminine constructs. From her entrance into the novel, the narrator demarcates Eleanor as the patriarchally constructed, prototypical British woman, the standard that Catherine is compared against. This is apparent from the narrator’s first sketch of Eleanor’s person, character, and moral virtue:

Miss Tilney had a good figure, a pretty face, and a very agreeable countenance; and her air, though it had not all the decided pretension, the resolute stylishness of Miss Thorpe's, had more real elegance. Her manners showed good sense and good breeding; they were neither shy nor affectedly open; and she seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her, and without exaggerated feelings of ecstatic delight or inconceivable vexation on every little trifling occurrence. (Austen 36-7)

Reminiscent of Rousseau's foil to Emile—Sophia—Miss Tilney is in perfect balance; she is neither too weak of mind to be silly, like Miss Glanville or Thorpe, nor too strong of mind to be “unsexed,” like Wollstonecraft. But this patriarchally compelled equilibrium nullifies Eleanor's self and has important implications for Austen's educational argument. According to Ellen Jordan, despite the surge in female educationalists who advocated for more equitable female learning, well into the nineteenth century it was accepted still that the end product of female education was “good wives and mothers” (439). Here, Austen recognizes that by engendering women like Eleanor Tilney, the dominant culture solidifies its power because as mothers, such women will morally instruct their children while also submitting to their constrained roles.

Austen's social commentary on the educational shortcomings of such women as Eleanor is perhaps most apparent in her choice of reading material; by exploring the male-dominated histories, which contain few examples of agent or educated women, Eleanor alienates herself and, thus, cannot transform her learning into self-realization. It is apparent from even a cursory reading of *Northanger Abbey* that Eleanor is “the best-educated woman in the novel, with the clearest grasp on the real position of women in English Society” (Zlotnick 285). Further, it is undeniable that in wit, understanding, and

experience, Eleanor is far superior to the newly emerged and naive Catherine; however, Eleanor's literary learning pales in comparison to Catherine's subversive and transformative reading. This is not to say that Catherine has more of "the materials of knowledge" than does Eleanor but that, as will be plain through our analysis of Catherine's reading, Eleanor's contemplation of her reading is incomplete and, as a result, she gains "little true benefit [from] history" (Locke, *Conduct* 188). In her article on female agency in *Northanger Abbey*, Susan Zlotnick argues that Eleanor's "commitment to the 'non-fictional' narratives of male historians offers her no models of women as historical actors" (280). As Catherine herself points out, in history, "the men [are] all so good for nothing, and [there are] hardly any women at all" (Austen 74). While Lennox's Arabella gains authority by creating "histories" out of French romances, Eleanor relinquishes hers to the tide of patriarchal opinion regarding female power. Without novels—vessels of emerging ideology—Eleanor lacks the feminine model of advancement found in fiction and, thus, is bogged down by the knowledge of her menial place in society. As she tells Catherine while at *Northanger Abbey*, "[Y]ou must have been long enough in this house to see that I am but a nominal mistress of it, that my real power is nothing" (Austen 166). Of all of the women in *Northanger Abbey*, Eleanor is the most aware of the patriarchal status quo, perhaps because, as will be demonstrated later, she lives under the thumb of General Tilney, the novelistic stand-in for dominant culture. However, knowledge, in this case, does not grant power but instead renders Eleanor frozen by the sheer weight of her awareness; this is what male-centric reading teaches women, acceptance of the dominant discourse. Eleanor's paralysis is not present in Mrs. Allen, who is too uninformed to recognize her predicament; in Isabella, who sees the possibility of forward mobility in the flawed sentimental depictions of women; or even in

Catherine, who is in the process of learning the ways of society. Only Eleanor Tilney, a reader of male-centric histories, comprehends the true nature of women's dependency and subsequent inability to construct a feminine self; however, as will be seen, Catherine Morland eventually breaks this restraint.

The Reading of Catherine Morland: Perfecting Lennox's Quixotic Education

When Austen is rightfully placed within the quixotic tradition, *Northanger Abbey*, by the nature of its form, becomes a text about woman's educational growth. Further, Austen adapts Lennox' particular model of quixotism, improving upon *The Female Quixote* to grant, at least by modern standards, a more critically satisfactory end for her heroine. Rather than depicting an intelligent woman who makes overt, ridiculous misperceptions, like Arabella, Austen fashions Catherine, who progressively learns and develops through an intentional, harmonious blend of both reading and experience. As Catherine's education advances, Austen, in place of a heroine who is quickly rehabilitated by a Lockean doctor, deliberately molds a heroine capable of implementing *her own* rehabilitation. Thus, by carefully reading the women around her as well as Gothic fiction, Catherine synthesizes the three models of female learning presented by Mrs. Allen, Isabella, and Eleanor Tilney, to construct her own authentic and emerging understanding of the world.

Before the edifying growth of Catherine, Austen's most capable reader, can be demonstrated, she must first be established as an anti-heroine, a character who destabilizes masculine stereotypes; juxtaposition of Catherine against both Emilie St. Aubert of *Udolpho* and Arabella of *Quixote* reveals the subversive nature of Austen's "heroine." Unlike most sentimental heroines, Catherine does not successfully participate

in the “elegant arts” of music, drawing, or any other feminine pastime (Radcliffe 8). In the first chapter of *Udolpho*, Radcliffe describes her heroine thus:

Adjoining the eastern side of the green-house... was a room, which Emily called hers, and which contained her books, her drawings, her musical instruments, with some favorite birds and plants. Here she usually exercised herself in the elegant arts, cultivated only because they were congenial to her taste, and in which native genius... made her an early proficient. (8)

Like Arabella’s unparalleled wit and virtue, it seems there is something inherently prodigious about Emilie. Through her sentimental pursuits, Emilie fully subscribes to the male-centric idea of what an accomplished young woman should be. Despite the sex of Radcliffe, she has, like many before her, produced writing grounded firmly in socially constructed stereotypes, and, therefore, any political truths found in her Gothic fiction are veiled by the patriarchal language it employs. Claudia Johnson argues that during this time “effectual dissent on the subject of sexual difference...was downright dangerous”; thus, this artificially gendered approach was not uncommon (19). Austen, on the other hand, undermines male-centric ideas of femininity by placing her “self” into *Northanger Abbey* and the character of Catherine Morland. In contrast to Emilie, Catherine’s first description overtly contradicts the prototypical heroine:

Catherine was fond of all boys’ plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush. Indeed she had no taste for a garden; and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief. (Austen 5)

Here, Austen markedly delineates the difference between her writing and the tradition against which she argues. Where Radcliffe composes a heroine who is well-versed in the feminine arts, Austen opposes this tradition by subverting expectations. Immediately Austen informs the reader that Catherine will not fit within the sentimental mold of masculine writing; she will be something different that only the informed reader will understand.

This blatant departure from more traditional constructions of femininity is equally apparent when we compare Catherine's "natural" disposition against both Arabella and the ideal woman. Catherine's accomplishments are painted, intentionally so, in sharp contrast to the natural superiority of Arabella; Austen's heroine, however, is "plain as any" (Austen 5). Aside from detesting traditional sentimental pursuits and favoring "boys' play," Catherine's parentage and her subsequent upbringing are also markedly different than that of Arabellas. Where Arabella boasts a highborn father, a dead mother, and a rich country estate, Catherine is one of ten children in a "very plain" family that does not take particularly close care in the education of their children. Despite the perceived inferiority of the Morland family, the narrator does note that Catherine's father, thankfully, "was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters" (5). Thus, among a slew of differences between the two heroines' upbringing, Austen denotes experience as the most significant variance. Further, Catherine is presented in opposition not only to romantic heroines—who too often, intentionally or not, embody the dominant discourse—but also to the cultural ideal of "woman." As Rousseau so elegantly attests, "Nothing in this world is more disgusting than an unclean woman" (395). In her article on "Dirty Girls" and "Dirty Books" within Austen's fiction, Kathy Justice Gentle argues that Catherine Morland's love of dirt classifies her as subversive, just as Elizabeth

Bennett's tromp through the mud signifies her independence. Placed within the context of Catherine's overtly unfeminine characterization, this seems likely; however, with the models of Emilie, Arabella, and the ideal woman looming in the background, Catherine is denoted as something different than merely "dirty." Rather, her model of femininity sets aside eighteenth-century society's restrictive notions of the ideal woman, and instead depicts something attainable and truly *natural* to woman.

Importantly, it is not only Catherine's language, unfeminine pursuits, and upbringing that differentiate her from traditional heroines but also the singular nature of her education, which expressly uses Locke's notion of ideas to reinvent the feminine heroine—specifically in juxtaposition to Lennox's Arabella. Reminiscent of Lennox in *The Female Quixote*, Austen also begins with the retelling of her "heroine's" early education; however, where Arabella has a talent for every pursuit she undertakes, Catherine "never could learn or understand anything before she was taught" (Austen 6). Through Austen's portrayal of Catherine's "learning," it is clear that Catherine is initially described in accordance to absence whereas Arabella is defined by presence; to rephrase, while Lennox speaks to the naturally talented disposition of Arabella, denoting all of her many intellectual and material accomplishments, Austen emphasizes the traits in which her heroine is lacking. For example, she *cannot* draw, sing, play music, read, or speak French well (5-7). As Juliet McMaster posits in her article on Catherine Morland, Austen's heroine is "described largely in negatives," which style her as a void waiting to be filled (19). Reminiscent of Locke's categorization of the mind as a "vast store," McMaster argues that

[a]s with Catherine's 'uniformed mind,' we have the metaphors of the brain as a closet or a suitcase, which may be well stocked with ideas, or bulging with junk, or disappointingly lightweight, devastatingly empty" (19).

Though Locke is not mentioned in her analysis, and, therefore, the connection might be unintentional, McMaster's appraisal of Catherine nevertheless creates an interesting Lockean argument: If Catherine is indeed a blank page, an empty store, then, even more so than Lennox's *Arabella*, she is the prototypical Lockean model. Through her literary and experiential development, she is able gradually to obtain, evaluate, and judge knowledge as she experiences society; thus, Austen's subversive heroine emerges from the Lockean conception of the mind and ideas.

As a reader, however, Catherine Morland does not immediately contradict stereotypes; although Austen utilizes "feminine writing" to characterize Catherine at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine initially reads as a sentimental heroine does, poorly without self-reflection. Before her societal education has begun, Catherine's reading abilities subscribe to the tenets of "the fast and shallow acquisition of a wide variety of texts," which were packaged by men for female consumption (Benedict 2). During Chapter One, without giving any context, Catherine quotes in quick succession Shakespeare, Pope, Gray, and Thompson—all of whom are, uncoincidentally, quoted in Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Catherine did not learn these quotations by reflective reading that would inform her mind but only knows them to be "serviceable" for heroines, quotations that could have been picked up in eighteenth-century quotation books (Austen 7). Benedict argues that "[f]rom these recontextualized literary snippets Catherine is intended to learn to value sentimentality and to use books to nourish feeling" (3). Further, Catherine's use of quotation books reveals that the constricting force of

dominant culture, as analyzed in previous sections, is present within Catherine's home as well. However, the lessons learned from Isabella, Mrs. Allen, and Eleanor remind us that this reading leads not to true feminine education but to complete absence of identity. Despite the disappointing nature of Catherine's male-centric reading, it is the foundation of Catherine's learning process, and it introduces (with subtle allusions to Radcliffe) Austen's satire of the Gothic, an indispensable tool for Catherine's eventual discovery of societal truth.

Though Catherine's ability to read both situations and texts improves with her exposure to the world of Bath and *Udolpho*, this intellectual progression has not yet developed into an intelligence worthy of an authentic "feminine" heroine. To counteract this deficiency, Catherine, unlike the other female characters, is capable of learning a new way to read and, consequently, can learn to educate herself. Joanne Cordóon states, "Having escaped the traditional pursuits for girls, Catherine has not been warped into an artificial social female" —like Emilie St. Aubert, other female readers of *Northanger*, or even Arabella—and is, therefore, able to mold herself into a "solid young woman" (44). During the Bath volume of the novel, this idea is solidified by Catherine's burgeoning reading. Moving past the surface level reading of Chapter One, Catherine is now completely engrossed by *Udolpho*:

Catherine was then left to the luxury of a raised, restless, and frightened imagination over the pages of *Udolpho*, lost from all worldly concerns of dressing and dinner, incapable of soothing Mrs. Allen's fears on the delay of an expected dressmaker. (Austen 51)

Where before Catherine enjoyed books only if “nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them, provided they were all story and no reflections,” now she is intellectually absorbed in her reading (7). Benedict sees this flourishing literary mind as a contrast to the Thorpes’, who read so shallowly that they cannot commit themselves to expansive texts like Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison* or Burney’s *Camilla*. Though this is undoubtedly true, more importantly, Catherine both loses the meaningless pleasantries of society in the pursuit of proper reading and furthers her ability to read in a proper Lockean way. “Dressing,” “Dinner,” and “Dressmaker,” the stereotypical distractions of a well-possessed woman, are unimportant when compared to the lessons of *Udolpho*. Here, her consuming and thoughtful reading begins to resemble Arabella’s; however, Catherine’s simultaneous access to both reading and experience allows a more moderate yet self-driven education, which, as Austen demonstrates, is more authentic.

Significantly, Catherine’s newfound ability to read deeply directly corresponds with her improved reading of society’s flaws, a clear signal of her improving feminine education and embodiment of Lockean reading. Even before Catherine has reached Northanger and she is engulfed in Gothic delusion, she “gradually begins to see people as they are, not as they are officially classified in society” (Mathison 143). This emerging consciousness is especially true when applied to Catherine’s changing perception of Isabella Thorpe. Where once Isabella invoked “powerful admiration” from Catherine who was “grateful... for the chance” to “procure such a friend,” now Catherine questions Isabella’s motives and integrity (Austen 20). As Catherine’s literary education continues, she can perceive the difference between sentimental speech and a person’s contradictory actions, unlike Arabella in her dealings with Sir George. Though *Mysteries of Udolpho* is grounded in masculine language and, therefore, cannot reach its full feminine potential, it

does demonstrate the deception of society, a deception to which Catherine is awakening. At the commencement of Volume II, Isabella says, “It is not on my own account I wish for more [money]; but I cannot bear to be the means of injuring my dear Morland”; however, Catherine’s “uncomfortable feelings” warn her otherwise (93). These feelings of uncertainty, which are eventually eased by Isabella’s reassurances, mark the results of Catherine’s literary education and consequent maturation. At this point, Catherine does not yet see Isabella’s real character or even understand what she feels, but she is made uncomfortable by the contradictions in speech and actions she perceives; these feelings are later transferred to Captain Tilney as Catherine’s Gothic delusions move her further toward the discovery of “truth.” By carefully reading and observing, Catherine has both surpassed Arabella in readerly understanding and also ventured towards Locke’s “true Key” of reading.

Despite the disunity many critics have perceived in *Northanger Abbey* because of Catherine’s Gothic delusions, Austen utilizes the Gothic to teach Catherine the truth of fiction. Again, the betterment of reading leads directly to an understanding of societal truth, and comprehending the constructs of society is the only means to create a sense of self that functions outside said constructs; thus, Catherine’s growth as a reader, through the Gothic, is vital to Austen’s creation of her educational argument. However, this argument is not observed by all critics. Benedict sees Catherine’s Gothic illusion as “a literary invention that ignores context and probability for impression and sensation” (3). In actuality, this interpretation “ignores” the truthful lessons Catherine gains from her slip into fantasy and, consequently, revokes the literary freedom that Catherine has gained. *Northanger Abbey*, if nothing else, is a tale of learning, and learning necessitates mistakes to gain knowledge, as Locke’s *SCTE* outlines clearly. In fact, Austen uses the word

“learn” thirty times in her 170-page novel, drawing attention to the intellectual process Catherine undertakes. Creating a feminine education that functions outside the dominant ideology is not simply done; however, Catherine demonstrates its possibilities through her accusations against General Tilney. In her work, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Claudia Johnson argues that Catherine can make these revelations because she is “unencumbered by the elaborate properties that tie the hands of Gothic heroines, is free to make blunt declarations and to ask embarrassing questions that expose the duplicity and the deficiency of those on whom innocence such as her own ought to rely” (47). In essence, the authentic language that differentiates Catherine from other heroines is also what allows for Catherine’s self-education. Further, Catherine’s unapologetic questioning of authoritative figures signifies her unwillingness, as Locke provokes in his readers, to accept social custom on faith alone: Catherine’s social consciousness is emerging.

In Volume II, the primary source of Catherine’s education is the repressive force of General Tilney who is himself “Gothic” in his ability to stifle the potential of women. At first, Catherine cannot understand the relief she feels when out of the General’s presence: “He turned away; and Catherine was shocked to find how much her spirits were relieved by the separation. The shock however being less real than the relief, offered it no injury; and began to talk with easy gaiety” (Austen 123). As her Gothic delusions build on her discomfort and her subversive ideas emerge, Catherine’s relief is transformed into outright suspicion. *Mysteries of Udolpho* has taught Catherine the repressive effect that greedy men—like Signor Montoni or Sir George—can legally have upon a dependent woman; however, Catherine is not yet intellectually ready to admit the social reality of greed and, therefore, confronts it within the medium she understands, the Gothic. Rather than recognizing “the moral and physical coercion” that Mrs. Tilney must have

experienced at the hands of General Tilney, Catherine pulls the Gothic into “the daytime world of manners, where it can be shown,” eventually, “for the everyday occurrence it is” (Johnson 37).²⁰

Though Catherine has progressed as a reader, before she can reach her full potential she must transcend the *appearance* of societal truth in order to accept the *reality* that fiction presents, thus completing her literary education. When Catherine first realizes that the mystery she concocts around Mrs. Tilney’s death is false, she is utterly abashed, and the narrator states, “The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awaked” (Austen 136). Here, Catherine has temporarily abandoned her true “illusions”; however, the doublespeak of the narrator foreshadows her eventual realizations. General Tilney is only kind to Catherine because he desires the (nonexistent) fortune he imagines her to have. As soon as the folly of his assumption is revealed, the true greed of General Tilney comes to light. *This* is the scary truth of the Gothic, a truth that transcends the masculine language it is presented in, a truth that Catherine discovers. Gothic fiction pulls from the legal realities woman faced and depicts a world “where a father can be a British subject, a Christian, a respectable citizen, *and* a ruthless and mean-spirited tyrant” who “in some legitimate sense of the term can ‘kill’” a woman slowly through socially accepted repression, disallowing any sense of identity (C. Johnson 40). Yes, when General Tilney places Catherine in that carriage without warning or explanation, “romance” *is* gone and she *is* “awakened”; however, she is not awakened to her own folly but has become aware of the fictitious nature of her societal constructs, and, as a result,

²⁰ Interestingly, both Janine Barchus and Claire Tomalin make different yet compelling cases for Austen’s being aware of real life and contemporary atrocities that resembled Gothic fiction. Further, Barchus argues that *Northanger Abbey* revolves around a very specific location and family, both of which have scandalous histories.

comes to accept the realities of the Gothic. Through Catherine's juxtaposition of experiences against reading, she observes, reflects, and judges what she reads against the fabric of life; in so doing, she gains the "true key of books, and the clue to lead [her] through the mizmaze of variety of opinions and authors to truth and certainty" (Locke, *Conduct* 193). In comparison to Arabella, whose rehabilitation is sudden and primarily external, this gradual self-sufficient maturation is both more fulfilling for Catherine and, for contemporary readers, rendered a feasible rather than ideal model of woman.

At the conclusion of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is educated in reading literature effectively and, by extension, reading the unpleasant truths of English society. When she leaves home, she is as "free from the apprehension of evil as from the knowledge of it," but she arrives back wondering how "three months ago had seen her all this; and now, how altered a being did she return" (Austen 163). However, Catherine's education has allowed not only the realization of truth but also a creation of a feminine self. Austen, in a powerful expression of emerging ideology, grants her heroine the power of choice, reversing the traditional role of women's being not "initiators of their own choice, but rather receivers of men's" (C. Johnson 36). When Henry Tilney comes to find Catherine at her home, the narrator informs the reader,

Henry was now sincerely attached to her, though he felt and delighted in all the excellencies of her character and truly loved her society, I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of [a] heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own (168).

Catherine, unlike the sentimental heroines of her time, is granted the power of choice and, therefore, does not conform to the will of a man. Much like the one Locke promotes and the one that Arabella herself achieves, Catherine's marriage is entered into gradually and willingly on both sides, a byproduct of choice not necessity. In having the narrator call attention to her subversive ending, Austen simultaneously grants Catherine the power to create a self *and* solidifies the influence of a "true" proper education. Through a study of feminine reading and its political consequences, *Northanger Abbey* truly does become something "new."

Medusa's Daughter: Female Authenticity in Austen's Conception of Catherine

Though Lennox did something both remarkable and exceptional with *The Female Quixote*, the language and method that she employed masked Arabella in traditionally masculine language; contrariwise, Catherine, in almost every aspect of her character, subverts the dominant ideology of "woman" and, therefore, creates an authentic conception of the female self. When *Northanger Abbey* is recognized as Helene Cixous' "feminine writing," the radical content of Austen's work is even more evident, and reading is further highlighted as a tool of dissent. In her landmark text *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous argues that most writing, no matter the sex of the author, is grounded in patriarchal language and, therefore, the "workmanship" of female writing "is in no way different from male writing" (878). In order for a text to be truly feminine, Cixous argues that woman must place her "self" into the writing:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (875)

To accomplish this task, the female author must recapture and repurpose language for the creation of “feminine writing” that depicts “woman” faithfully. This rewriting of the dominant ideology is essential for the advancement of women because, as Cixous says, writing is “the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social cultural structures” (879).

Importantly, Cixous also sagely notes that a woman must place “her self” in writing, not herself; this is to say, the very essence of the woman writer, free from social constructs or dominant ideologies, should be written into the work. This connectivity between literature and the creation of a “self” permeates Austen’s work. It seems that Austen, with her veiled commentary on female reading, education, and the self, perceives the political importance that writing holds and utilizes it thusly. In fact, Joanne Cordóon argues that *Northanger Abbey* “challenges misogynistic rhetorical norms for women” and, thus, invents “the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics,” successfully creating “feminine writing” (Cordóon 41; Cixous 866).

Throughout the Bath and Gothic volumes of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen’s narrator repeatedly emphasizes how Catherine Morland subverts the expectations of a sentimental heroine, a heroine who embodies male-centric ideology. As Catherine moves through the challenges of maturation, her actions, and, more importantly, her language remain “free of ‘feminine’ evasions” and, therefore, “reflect her actual desires rather than her culture’s opinion of what they should be” (Cordóon 44). Though Cordóon’s classification of *Northanger Abbey* as “feminine writing” is capably argued, she exclusively focuses on the juxtaposition of Catherine’s sincere language against the culturally manufactured discourse employed by characters like Mrs. Allen, Isabella, and Eleanor Tilney. By excluding both Austen’s use of the quixotic model to educate her

heroine and also her employment of Locke's individualistic ideas, Cordóon misses the political implications of Austen's statement: The authentic woman—educated in both literature and experience, taught to compare book-learning and actual experiences against one another in pursuit of truth—is the ideal woman because she is self-actualized, not constructed.

Despite the many arguments claiming the disunity of Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, viewing the two volumes as “feminine writing” on the importance of female education unifies the text and creates a cohesion traditionally seen as lacking. Through Austen's hierarchy, ineffective feminine readers—like Mrs. Allen, Isabella, and Eleanor—illustrate how a deficiency of reading corresponds to inadequate education and ultimately results in the adoption of society's feminine constructs. If individuals cannot see the falsely constructed nature of social expectation, they will conform; as a result, one is unable to form a self that does not mirror society's false ideology. However, the antithesis of this dilemma is depicted in the character of Catherine. Because she rejects feminine tropes and does not lose her identity in the absorption of a male-centric ideal, Catherine's literacy grows. Where she begins *Northanger Abbey* as a skim-and-quote reader, an in-depth reading of *Mysteries of Udolpho* and the careful observation of female exemplars enhance her feminine education and allow her to discover political truth within fiction. Though some scholars, like Benedict, view *Northanger* as a cautionary tale against reading sentimental Gothic novels, this analysis does not recognize that Catherine's reading of *Udolpho* is a commentary on the educational debate of the age. Thus, it is through Catherine Morland's quixotic learning that Austen contributes her voice to the political conversation regarding female reading. Because of Catherine's growing literacy, she discovers the absurdity of women's preoccupation with trivial

matters, and she learns about the sexual politics of female subordination. This knowledge ultimately allows her to choose her husband and rupture the “feminine” roles that bind her. As the epitome of the judicious feminine reader in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine demonstrates how an authentic feminine education enables women to construct a self that functions outside of the dominant culture’s false consciousness, making Austen’s earliest written novel a critically significant instance of true “feminine writing.”

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- Surveyed both the feminine and masculine tradition of the eighteenth-century novel
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Directed Study, Sam Houston State University, TX 2018

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