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**The Female Quixote:
Internalized Misogyny and Parody of Eighteenth-Century
Representation of Women**

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Introduction

Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, published in 1752, is often considered to be an influential proto-feminist text for two reasons. First, due to its ironic treatment of the novel versus romance issue prevalent in the eighteenth century and second, due to the gender debate it sparked among critics. Feminist readings, such as those of Thomas H. Schmid and Patricia Meyer Spacks, maintain that the novel can be read as “primarily an emplotment of female power” (Schmid 21) in which “the psychic need [of women] for alternatives to a socially defined state of meaningless and powerless activity” (Spacks 533) is expressed. In contrast to these stand the traditional patriarchal readings of the novel by Lennox's contemporaries, written by famous authors such as Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, who praised the novel (Spacks 532) most likely because they read it as “the account of a misguided and foolish girl restored to sanity by male authority” (Spacks 536).

What is interesting about these interpretations is that one way or another, they all look at the novel with a focus on notions invented by men: Schmid's analysis is based on hysteria – a supposed disease with an extensive list of contradictory symptoms that was created by men (Maines 20-21) – and Spacks' interpretation is centred around Samuel Johnson's involvement in the creation of the novel. Yet none of the interpretations seem to take sufficiently into account the fact that the inherently misogynist vocabulary and sentiments of the age must have left their mark on Lennox's mind – a mark she could not have subverted, if she was even aware of it at all. While it can hardly be expected of Lennox's male contemporaries to approach the novel from a woman's point of view, scholars taking a feminist approach could be expected to do so.

In light of this, my analysis will agree with the approach of Catherine A. Craft, who took into consideration the fact that radical women writers were severely judged (Craft 821) even as late as the end of the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). According to Jane Spencer, the reception of Wollstonecraft's work proved that “women writers had been accepted only on condition that they remained within a limited, feminine sphere” (as qtd. in Craft 821). This gives rise to the possibility that female authors either needed to invent ingenious methods to deceive male critics if they wanted to publish their own opinions or they had to submit to the formula prescribed by men (Craft 822).

Therefore, an important aspect of the novel that has often been discussed is whether the gender issues presented, and their way of presentation, are an expression of the author's internalized – and possibly unconscious – misogyny, which would mean that Lennox conformed to the formula; or if they are the expression of her criticism of patriarchal thinking in the guise of irony – verbalized without being able to fully subvert the contemporary misogynist vocabulary and thought pattern due to external pressure as described above. This paper will argue for the latter option, however, it must be taken into consideration that these two possibilities may not be mutually exclusive.

The novel is primarily set in rural England where Arabella, the heroine, grows up to believe that romances are accurate descriptions of real life, which causes various conflicts throughout the story. From the first page of the book numerous passages point quite obviously to both the possibilities of internalized misogyny, as well as to the criticism of patriarchy: the narrator often makes ridiculing remarks at anything remotely connected to Arabella's character and her way of thinking, thus criticising the romance genre, but this representation is also treated with irony, implying that the criticism should not necessarily be taken seriously. It is, of course, also important to note that the gender issue in this novel cannot be separated from the general genre debate of the eighteenth century concerning romances and novels. In the eighteenth century, novels, which were presented as realistic descriptions of real life events, were considered to be superior to romances but most novels that ridiculed romances turned out to be much more like romances themselves. This is mirrored in the structure of the text: *The Female Quixote* is presented as a novel, which ridicules the romance genre, even though the plot line itself is a typical romance plot. One of the reasons why the gender and the genre issue seem to be inseparable in this novel is because both the romance genre and an unconventional gender model are represented by Arabella. This causes a strong internal struggle in the story, because Arabella's link to the romance genre implies traditional and often misogynistic notions about femininity, while as critics have previously pointed out, the unconventional gender model, based on the omnipotent heroines of the romances that Arabella mimics, has proto-feminist implications.

Therefore, the main enquiry of the paper is whether the misogynist representation of Arabella or the anti-patriarchal possibilities of Arabella's world seem to be more justified, and whether, at a closer look, the gender issue might be separated from the genre issue. The latter aim is relevant because if the issues of gender and genre are separable then that implies

the possibility that Lennox combined the genre debate with her gender-related views – regardless of her vocabulary – on purpose, whereas if they are inseparable then that implies that perhaps she had no choice but to tackle both issues at the same time.

1. Issues concerning the representation of gender-segregated education in Book I

Gender-segregated education was of critical importance in and even before the eighteenth century as it was one of the primary means of keeping up the status quo in which men were in a socially superior position to women. However, an interesting phenomenon is that women had more freedom to criticise men and society for this state of affairs in the late seventeenth century, as Mary Astell's famous *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest. By a Lover of Her Sex* (1694) shows. Astell claimed that "the Cause therefore of the defects We labour under [vanity and lack of understanding] is, if not wholly, yet at least in the first place, to be ascribed to the mistakes of our Education, which like an Error in the first Concoction, spreads its ill Influence through all our Lives" (Astell 17-18). In fact, she explicitly claimed that "We're indeed oblig'd [sic] to [men] for their management, in endeavouring [sic] to make us so [despicable and forlorn], who use all the artifice they can to spoil, and deny us the means of improvement" (Astell 14). Yet it must be noted that even such severe criticism failed to have noticeable results as women's education was becoming simpler and more confined to specific subjects. Whereas occasionally it was possible for a woman to learn a variety of languages, including Latin and Greek, along with history before the 1640s (Fletcher 368), by 1677 young girls were mostly "instructed in the art of dancing, singing, music, writing, and all manner of works" (Reynolds 258). John Ashton's account of women's education during the reign of Queen Anne in his book entitled *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne* (1922) sheds light on the rather vague term 'all manner of works'. He quotes a lady from the time period who received "a liberal education, that I might be a complete gentlewoman; away he sent me to the boarding school; there I learned to dance and sing, to play on the bass viol, virginals, spinet, and guitar. I learned to make wax work, japan, paint upon glass, to raise paste, make sweetmeats, sauces, and everything that was genteel and fashionable" (as qtd. in Ashton 18). Clearly the education of girls in boarding-schools was becoming more and more domestic and increasingly closed off from academic pursuits. Somewhat naively, Fletcher surmises that "it simply did not cross

men's minds that girls could be taught to reason as boys could" (Fletcher 364). However, the systematic exclusion of women from all forms of serious education suggests that the question had in fact been thoroughly thought of. Fletcher's own words support this more suspicious view when he writes that during the middle of the 18th century "some girls were being allowed into men's intellectual pantheon now that it was more clearly established than it had been previously that they were a different kind of being and *one that was less threatening than had been assumed* to men's hegemony" (Fletcher 373, emphasis mine). And indeed their education was conceived as a threat, as Astell's defensive argument suggests: "We pretend not that Women shou'd [sic] teach in the Church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow'd [sic] them" (Astell 56). Clearly Astell felt the need to reassure potential male readers that women were not aspiring to trespass on their privileges, although somewhat paradoxically she also berated them for being so arrogant as to not accept advice from women (Astell 13). In fact, it seems as though Astell was trying to soften the edge of her own critical remarks in order to nullify the potential apprehensions of her male peers. This being said, it seems as though the question of women's education was thoroughly examined, rather than innocently overlooked as Fletcher suggested.

Interestingly nearly sixty years passed between the publication of the Astell's and Lennox's works and nothing had changed in society in terms of education, while, as Craft's work on Wollstonecraft's reception indicates, in terms of freedom of speech women were more restricted in Lennox's time. Yet as the following analysis will show, Charlotte Lennox had ample if not entirely sufficient means of her own to criticise the educational system of her time.

1.1. Misogynistic or proto-feminist representation of women's education?

Throughout the first book of the novel Arabella's education and her mental capacities are frequently commented upon, and interestingly, they present a rather conflicted picture, alternating between misogynistic and proto-feminist descriptions. The very first chapter, which already exhibits this ambivalent attitude, includes an elaborate description of her education:

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; [...] She soon became a perfect Mistress of the *French and Italian Languages*, under the Care of her Father; and it is not to be doubted, but she would have made a great Proficiency in all useful Knowledge [sic], had not her whole Time been taken up by another Study (FQ6, emphases mine).

This passage suggests that Arabella received an education that was quite usual for a woman of her rank in the eighteenth century, as the description in Susie Steinbach's book on eighteenth-century women indicates:

children from wealthy families began their *education at home*, in the nursery as very young children and later in the family's schoolroom. Many *aristocratic parents participated in their children's education* [...] Girl's were trained to be accomplished young ladies. Beyond the basics of reading, writing, and religious instruction, they learned singing or piano playing, drawing and *modern European languages* (Steinbach 173, emphases mine)

The phrases I emphasized in the two quotations are very similar in content, implying that Lennox knew exactly how upper class women were educated. However, the final clause of the passage quoted from *The Female Quixote* is a deviation from the norm established so far, in which the narrator warns the reader that Arabella's education did not exactly follow customs. Steinbach indicates that eighteenth-century aristocratic girls, in addition to traditionally feminine subjects, often learned “maths, science, or classics from their brothers' tutors” (Steinbach 173), which possibly were the subjects the narrator refers to as the useful knowledge Arabella could have learned (FQ6). However, in the absence of a brother, and possibly through the negligence of her father, Arabella rather turned to romances, which she supposed “were real Pictures of Life, [and] from them she drew all her Notions and Expectations” (FQ7). It is interesting that Steinbach brings the classics as an example of what a girl might have learned through her brother's education; since in the novel the romances Arabella reads are mostly based on characters from Roman and Greek history and mythology. More specifically Arabella claims to have read French author Madeleine de Scudéry's romances (FQ100,434), who often published her works under the name of her brother, Georges de Scudéry (Scudéry 3), in which “admirable Heroes would put whole Armies into Terror, and with his single Arm oppose a Legion” (FQ 100). Reading these romances gave Arabella a

cursory knowledge of names and places in Roman and Greek history. However, these only served as a skeleton for the love plot that was always central in romances.

Based on Lennox's apparent knowledge of upper class educational customs, one might interpret this coincidence as a deliberate inversion: while men had the chance to gain real knowledge through history lessons, women only obtained false information from reading romances – an occupation implied to have often substituted proper education for women. This is not at all surprising if one considers contemporary popular notions on women's education. For example, Rousseau's famous proclamation in 1762 stated that “the whole education of women ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them [...]” (Rousseau 365). The latter part of this quotation implies that women were not simply considered as secondary to men but the words ‘please’ and ‘useful’ imply that women were almost considered to be some kind of domestic and entertaining auxiliaries to men’s public enterprises.

An excursion from Book I must be made at this point, as the fifth chapter of Book VII introduces a character through whom Lennox destabilizes a number of stereotypes regarding education. At this point Mr. Selvin is introduced as a character who “affected to be thought deep-read in History, and never failed to take all Opportunities of displaying his Knowledge of Antiquity, which was indeed but very superficial” (FQ 430). The narrator explicitly reveals him as a fraud before the scene, and the entire chapter revolves around his humiliation by Arabella's partially superior knowledge – despite the fact that she learned what she knew from romances. The most interesting scene in this chapter is when Arabella speaks of the hot springs of Thermopylae (FQ431), of which Mr. Selvin has absolutely no knowledge. Since Arabella is completely unaware of the fact that romances are not authentic sources of history, from her point of view, she is a serious scholar in her field – if romances can be called as such – who can effortlessly demonstrate the integrity of her knowledge, an integrity Mr. Selvin fails to achieve. At this point it must also be noted that despite her internal integrity, she lacked an external one and Arabella’s knowledge was quite poor when contrasted to historically accurate information. The most elaborate example of her imperfect knowledge in the novel is her belief that Pisistratus became the tyrant of Athens because he was in love with the fictional character of Cleorante (FQ 433). However, the very fact that she could confuse Mr. Selvin with fictional events only serves to render Lennox’s criticism on pretentious men more explicit.

This chapter of Book VII accomplishes two goals at the same time. On the one hand, it destabilizes a stereotype based on a popular binary opposition between men and women: while men are generally thought to be smarter than women, this chapter shows that in some cases women can be just as apt scholars as men, and that men on occasion can be just as foolish as women were generally depicted to be – or even more so. In this case, Arabella's is revealed to be highly systematic and structured – even though the majority of her knowledge is based on false data (of which Arabella has no notion) – proving that women are capable of the type of learning that was generally ascribed to men. As for men's foolishness, Mr. Selvin's knowledge is compared to that of Arabella. As all of the opportunities for serious study are open to him he does not have the same allowances as Arabella; indeed his knowledge is internally restricted by himself and his abilities, whereas compared to Arabella's, his knowledge is inferior because Arabella is able to confuse him with the use of partially false facts he should recognize as problematic.

On the other hand, it also contradicts contemporary moralists, highlighting the fact that romances have absolutely nothing to do either with people's lack of factual knowledge or their foolishness. As mentioned above, Arabella has knowledge of historical places despite the fact that she has only read romances, while Mr. Selvin is ignorant of the characteristics of Thermopylae despite his access to history books and avoidance of romances. Furthermore, Arabella, within her own system is not foolish at all: she holds the position she believes she ought to hold, moves freely in her world and reveals a considerable amount of factual knowledge – knowledge which only becomes ridiculous once it leaves the world of romances. Of course, one might question whether her version of the world is an acceptable alternative, or whether her frame of reference does not become powerless once she tries to adapt it to the rest of society. The answer to the first question is yes, while to second I would argue for a negative. Taking Judith Butler's gender performativity theory as a basis, if one creates their gender through a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 519), then by analogy Arabella does the same with the world she imagines for herself. Much like her gender identity, she also legitimises her world, the world based on romances – along with those characters who cooperate, for example Glanville or, even more so, Sir George – through constant repetition of the acts and thoughts by which she created her world view in the first place. The word 'constant' is important because her world could not be legitimised without her attachment to it, much like one's gender identity, whose legitimacy requires “continual

and incessant materializing” (Butler 521) as well. In fact, whether her world is more acceptable or whether it does not become powerless in the face of the external world become interdependent questions and merge once answered, as it is the very fact that Arabella does maintain her own world view in the face of society's contradictions that continually reinforces its legitimacy. However, this only applies from Arabella's point of view; the points of view of other relevant characters will be considered later.

This is a point Lennox made, which can be taken as a proto-feminist attempt to highlight the state of education available to women and the gender stereotypes pervading it. Even though Arabella's ability to create her own world is positive, her world is still based on false data, which weakens its strength along with two other factors. The first of the two is a description at the end of the first chapter, which pointedly focused on Arabella's education, explicitly blaming romances among other factors for Arabella's false notions about the world:

Her 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. By them she was taught to believe, that Love was the ruling Principle of the World; that every other Passion was subordinate to this; and that it caused all the Happiness and Miseries of Life. Her Glass, which she often consulted, always shewed her a Form so extremely lovely, that, not finding herself engaged in such Adventures as were common to the Heroines in the Romances she read, she often complained of the Insensibility of Mankind, upon whom her Charms seemed to have so little Influence (FQ7-8).

This passage is quite similar to Astell's question “And how can she possibly detect the fallacy, who has no better Notion of either [love and honour] than what she derives from Plays and Romances?” (Astell 25) Both of them seem to offer the misogynistic arguments of contemporary moralists as a conclusion: women's brains, even if they are as highly praised as Arabella's, can easily be turned by romances if they are not trained by the proper authors. One such example would be the sermon published in the 22nd volume of Tobias Smollett's *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature* (1766):

but a softness of temper renders [women] equally susceptible of bad impressions; and if their hearts are not fortified by virtuous principles, they are easily captivated by the follies and vices of the age. Plays and romances warm

their imagination, and stimulate their passions [... rather] let her appropriate her leisure to some useful and entertaining author, who may contribute to refine her taste, direct her judgment [sic], elevate her ideas, and inspire her with a love of virtue and religion (Smollett 18).

However, a crucial difference between the arguments is that Astell and Lennox argue that romances have an effect on women's mind – and only if their education is neglected like Arabella's – while Smollett claims it is their hearts that are affected. To use Astell's words: a bad understanding of the world in women “is acquired not natural” (Astell 16-17). This argument is basically identical in meaning to Simone de Beauvoir iconic statement “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 249), claiming as early as the 17th century that nothing in a woman's behaviour is inherently derived from birth.

Second, there is conflict between Arabella's representation by the narrator, who constantly presented her as ridiculous, and the way she is perceived by the main male characters, her father and her cousin, Glanville (FQ 57, 64), who at first consider her to be highly intelligent, although neither turn out to be consistent in their opinions. In addition, the narrator frequently ridicules Arabella – most importantly in the short summaries at the beginning of the chapters in which the readers are directly addressed – and her understanding of life; and therefore, one must question whether the perspectives of the male characters are trustworthy because this will have an impact on the degree of misogyny involved in the narration.

There are three points which suggest that the father's and Glanville's opinions are not objective enough: first, unlike the narrator, they are characters in the story. That is, they are on the same level of the narrative as Arabella, and therefore, they have no access to Arabella's mind. Second, they are both emotionally attached to her, on which ground their objectivity might be questioned. And finally, because both the father and Glanville exhibit contradictory behaviour. Of the two characters, the father seems to be the less trustworthy, due to his apparent absent-mindedness: he is said to have taken “the utmost care” (FQ6) concerning Arabella's studies, yet he has failed to notice that most of the time Arabella was employed with the consumption of romances, and similarly, he failed to notice the direction in which her way of thinking was developing. Furthermore, he only realizes that Arabella does not know how to write a letter properly – that is, properly in terms of the real world's expectations – when he forces her to write to Glanville (FQ63), even though he was supposed

to have taught her how to write, which is another sign of his inattentiveness. After Arabella banishes Glanville from the castle, the Marquis realizes that Arabella's notions were "foolish and ridiculous" (FQ65), which contradicts his original view of her. Based on this, it could be said that, while the viewpoint of the Marquis becomes more realistic once he realises Arabella's shortcomings, it is neither sufficiently objective, since his love for her stops him from punishing her when necessary, nor consistent. Furthermore, as evidenced by his reaction to Arabella's letter-writing style, he does not seem to reflect on his own role in her development either.

Glanville, on the other hand, seems to be less subjective than the Marquis. While he does not know Arabella as deeply as her father does at this point, he does realize that her behaviour is peculiar and unreasonable; and, eventually, he also recognizes her foolishness (FQ251). Yet he still considers her smarter than her entire sex on numerous occasions (FQ64, 80), especially when he thinks: "One would swear this dear Girl's Head is turned, said he to himself, if she had not more Wit than her whole Sex besides" (FQ64), although it might be said that his opinion was coloured by his love for her.

The representation of Arabella has misogynist implications whether or not the reader relies on the viewpoints of the male characters. Therefore, deciding whether the characters' views should be trusted only makes a difference, on the one hand, in the degree of misogyny involved and, on the other, in terms of whether Arabella's representation can be separated from the criticism of the romance genre. If the reader believes the male characters, and accepts that Arabella is in fact truly intelligent, then that implies that the argument of the moralists, that romances are dangerous for women, is accepted as well, as these novels were, then, able to sway the mind of a truly intelligent person. In this case the novel simply seems to reiterate the misogynistic arguments of moralists such as Samuel Johnson, Tobias Smollett or Dr. Gregory. In other words, this interpretation would present the internalized misogyny of the author as acknowledged and made explicit. Whereas if the reader disregards the opinion of the male characters in favour of the excessively mocking opinion expressed by the narrator, who makes fun of Arabella, then that implies that Arabella is not as smart as the men believe her to be. On the one hand, this reduces the apparent dangers posed by the romance genre, but it also makes a covert statement about women: the implication that the not so intelligent Arabella's mind is so easily corrupted by romances becomes an instance of unacknowledged and implicit internalized misogyny, because rather than coming from the

male characters, it comes directly from the unexamined assumptions of either the author or the narrator. One problem with this latter interpretation is that the reader does not get to know what the narrator – or Lennox – might think about women, about who should actually be considered intelligent, or whether they even consider the possibility of the existence of intelligent women.

The main difference between these two readings is that in the first case, both the romance and women are presented in a negative light, whereas in the second case, women are still presented negatively but the romance as a genre is somewhat exempted. This distinction will become especially important in the following chapter, in which Arabella's status as a romance character, who can be considered an empowering model, comes into focus: if one subscribes to the first interpretation, in which the romance genre is dangerous, then Arabella is embedded into a consciously misogynistic discourse which implies that the allure of the romance genre is too powerful even for a strong woman and the gender and genre lines are inseparable. Whereas if one accepts the second interpretation, in which the romance genre is not dangerous, Arabella becomes a part of a text that treats the genre issue in a more liberal-minded manner, yet still maintains misogynistic notions – in other words, in this case genre and gender become separable. This is interesting because if the two are inseparable then that would imply that Lennox needed the one to be able to talk about the other and vice versa, much like feminists would later need to use the category of women in an essentialist manner in the struggle for political reforms (Butler 523).

However, the very fact that the novel does not seem to be able to subvert some form of internalized misogyny is interesting as well. The reason I chose the expression 'does not seem to be able to subvert' rather than a more definitive 'cannot subvert' is because one of the two possibilities that this inability opens up in the question whether it intended to subvert this internalized misogyny at all. In the first case, in which we can talk about an explicit form of misogyny, the first book of *The Female Quixote* could be considered a miniature mirror image of real life circumstances: Arabella, as the alternative gender model to the woman who submits to patriarchal norms, is inescapably embedded in the misogynistic world of the novel, much the same way as any real life eighteenth-century woman who wanted to alter gender norms would be limited to using the misogynistic vocabulary and knowledge base of eighteenth-century society.¹ In this case it might be said that the book was not meant to

¹ Not being educated properly would not have positive effects on their ability to create a new vocabulary for their discourse either, further restricting their possibilities.

subvert the misogyny of its age but rather call attention to it. In the second case, in which we might talk about an implicit, unrecognised misogyny, essentially the same effect is achieved as the novel still calls attention to misogynistic social norms; however, this option does not allow Lennox so much credit for the feat since she did not do it intentionally.

The final remaining problem regarding this distinction is that, as said before, the former interpretation, which gives Lennox much more credit for recognizing and presenting these norms, reiterates the misogynist opinion that the romance genre is supposedly dangerous for women. However, in reality it is dangerous to the status quo rather than to women themselves, which is why these norms can be considered so misogynistic. And as such, by extension, Arabella's alternative gender model is supposed to be dangerous as well. In other words, while this interpretation explicitly brings into light the issue of eighteenth-century vocabulary available for women, it also discourages alternative gender models. In contrast, the latter interpretation, in which the achievement of highlighting the vocabulary issue is not ascribed to Lennox, does not condemn the romance genre, therefore it does not condemn the alternative gender models it represents in this novel. For the sake of clarity the characteristics of the two interpretations are summed up in Figure 1, however, for the time being it remains undecided whether one or the other is a more likely possibility.

1.2. Criticism of the Representation of Men in Society and Men's Role in Women's Education

One of the crucial elements of arguing for a proto-feminist interpretation is Lennox's cunning criticism of men and men's conduct in *The Female Quixote*. As Lennox could not criticise men as explicitly as Astell did sixty years prior her novel is full of passages that praise men on the surface while at a closer look they are blaming men for women's faults. The passage on the Marquis's tastes and lifestyle in chapter 1 is an excellent example:

The vast Extent of Ground which surrounded this noble Building, he had caused to be laid out in a Manner peculiar to his Taste: The most laborious Endeavours of Art had been used to make it appear like the beautiful Product of wild, uncultivated Nature. But if this Epitome of *Arcadia* could boast of only artless and simple Beauties, the Inside of the Castle was adorned with a Magnificence suitable to the Dignity and immense Riches of the Owner. (FQ5)

By looking merely at this passage there is nothing critical in it; however, combined with the following quotation it essentially puts the blame entirely on the father for Arabella's faulty notions: "Her 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" (FQ7). Both Arabella's manner of life and the objects around her are more dependent on the father's choices, which contradicts popular belief that women's mental powers are so feeble that romances have a negative effect on them (Smollett 18) and shows that if a woman's mind is influenced in any way it is due to a much more complex interplay of simultaneously existing circumstances.

A further example can be found throughout the novel when Arabella is praising the heroes of her romances, but most explicitly during a conversation with her uncle when she claims truth to fictional events of single men stopping entire armies (FQ100). This passage brings to mind one of Virginia Woolf's famous quotation from *A Room of One's Own* (1929): "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Woolf 585). This is exactly what seems to be happening in *The Female Quixote*: Arabella sees fictional men and expects real life men to be twice as much as they are. This, however, is what causes one of the central conflicts in the novel: naturally, men are incapable of being more than they are and the fact that they are required to the impossible expectations infinitely vexes them.

Furthermore, the novel not only demonstrates that men are incapable of living up to these romantic expectations it also shows the danger that getting into violent conflicts might pose. In chapter four of Book IV Glanville gets into a fight with Mr. Hervey because of Arabella (FQ252-254) which results in a sword fight, after which Sir Charles, Glanville's father, becomes extremely fearful for his son's life. Thus, as Spacks says Arabella offers the readers "penetrating criticism of social follies" (Spacks 541) and the novel not only presents that the women's position in society is not advantageous for women but points out that on occasion it can be quite disadvantageous to men as well.

2. Arabella as a figure of female empowerment

As briefly suggested in the previous chapter, Arabella's connection to the romance genre can be considered a form of empowerment for women of the eighteenth century. The focus of this

chapter will be twofold, concentrating, on the one hand, on Arabella's status as a romance heroine, and, on the other hand, on the alternative gender constructions represented by some of the characters in Arabella's romance books.

It is unquestionable that Arabella considers herself to be mistress of life and death in the novel, based on her expectations which stem from the romances she had read in her childhood. But the interesting aspect of *The Female Quixote* is that even though the author considered the work a novel, Arabella's assumption of power, which should only be possible in romances, is verbally reinforced. There are three key words which frequently appear in the novel: command, respect and obedience. The most notable of the three is the word 'to command' (for details see figure 2) which, in various forms, appears in the story 103 times, out of which over 50% concerns Arabella's commands – mostly to men – although it must be noted that the word 'command' appears as a noun more often than as a verb – which would signify activity – which, on a textual level, weakens the overall force of the word. In addition, it should also be noted that the only person whose commands Arabella felt obliged to obey was her father, which strengthens her status somewhat, despite the lack of active commands she discharges.

The second most frequent out of these words is 'respect' (see figure 3) which appears 95 times out of which only 55 is relevant for this analysis as in the other 40 occurrences the word is used in the sense 'in relation to'. Out of the relevant 55 occurrences, in 44 cases it is used regarding the respect men feel for Arabella in the story, which again implies that women have a much higher regard in the fictitious world in which Arabella resides and which she demands from her surroundings. This could be interpreted as a form of social criticism on the author's part, regarding the degree or form of respect women were receiving at the time.

The count of the third word – the various forms of obey (see figure 4) – produces similar results as the word 'command' produced: an overwhelming majority (51 out of 93) refers to people obeying Arabella, out of which 42 occasions refer to men, with another 25 referring to men obeying other people. It is also significant that in contrast to this, Arabella herself is never said to obey any women and she only feels the obligation to obey her father and once her uncle. Clearly the distribution of these words resonate on a textual level with Spacks' alternative interpretation of the plot in which Arabella is a “a young woman who relies on romance as a means for self-assertion” (Spacks 536).

In addition to Arabella and all the other romance heroines, Amazons appear in the

novel as well, acting not only as empowering factors but also representing an alternative gender model for women: “men, as valiant, possibly, as *Orontes* (though, questionless, he was one of the most valiant Men in the World), have been cut in Pieces by the Sword of that brave *Amazon*” (FQ 204). This description in itself is not very informative, but it clearly defines a woman with characteristics usually attributed to men: bravery, strength, fighting skill. However, the immediate reaction of Miss Glanville is much more informative:

Lord bless me! said Miss *Glanville*, I should be afraid to look at such a terrible Woman: I am sure she must be a very masculine Sort of Creature. [...] you can never persuade me, that a Woman who can fight, and cut People to Pieces with her Blows, can have any Softness in her Person: She must needs have very masculine Hands, that could give such terrible Blows [...] I don't think there ever could be such a Woman (FQ204).

Miss Glanville rejects the possibility of Amazons being proper women – or even their existence – on the grounds that they do not conform to the gender norms that she expects. In fact, she deemed the very characteristics – bravery, strength and fighting skill – that Arabella praises entirely masculine. These social norms are also reinforced in conduct books, most famously in Dr. Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1761): “We so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description in a way she is little aware of” (Gregory 58-59). When considering this gender issue it should not be forgotten that Lennox's choice of the Amazon myth comes from Greek mythology, therefore it ties the problem back to women's education as well. As mentioned in the previous chapter, romances, based on characters of classical mythology, were the alternative educational option for women without brothers or indulgent fathers. Although it could be argued that through this link between education and mythology the new alternative gender norm that Arabella praises is weakened, it could also be said that Amazons are made more real through the connection as they symbolically pass from the realm of ancient mythology to that of a more realistic world.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Arabella does not form close relationships with other female characters, with the exception of the Countess who appears and disappears within the same chapter. In other words, while men have the opportunity to form friendly, or in some cases, brotherly bonds with each other, women are denied the privilege of forming a

sisterhood – the notion on which the entire Amazon concept of society stands. This is something Craft picked up on as well, although she did not tie it back to the myth of Amazons: she claimed that men do not want women to unite “else they would subvert and perhaps overthrow male authority” (Craft 836). Therefore, it could be said that by invoking the myth of Amazons along with their accompanying connotations of alternative gender norms and social structures, reinforced by the inversion of accepted social roles on a linguistic level, as detailed above, Lennox turned the romance genre into a sort of female utopia. Craft also recognizes this, although she does explicitly name the romance genre as a utopia: “Romance offers a vision exactly opposite to reality: it posits a world where women cease to be rivals, where they bond as men do, and where men offer eternal courtship, which means eternal fidelity and obedience” (Craft 836). However, even this utopia is problematic because while Amazons exist in it, the major expectations in it conform very rigidly to patriarchal gender norms: men are supposed to act as aggressive warriors, while women generally have to play the part of the victim even if occasionally women are allowed to be warriors as well. Interestingly, this clashes with the previous linguistic analysis unless one takes into consideration that they tend to only have power over the few men who fall in love with them, which suspiciously makes it sound like this female utopia is nothing more than the patriarchal notion of the domestic sphere as the site for women's influence taken to its extremities.

As Craft pointed out, in 1752 “contemporary Notions of moral and relative Duties”, the immense increase in the importance of woman's chastity and the patriarchal rigidity of Christianity combine to make the romance heroine barely conceivable. Not only can a woman never be one, she cannot even write about one” (Craft 838). Therefore, Arabella is eventually brought out of her own world view in which she was a powerful female and is forced to conform to the gender norms of society, implying that while the theory of an alternative gender construction was conceivable it was not yet possible to bring it into practise.

Conclusion

Lennox's novel is an immensely complex one which exhibits a poignant criticism of patriarchy's treatment and restriction of women. Due to her complex use of the narrator's voice it is nearly impossible to distinguish whether she considers romances – or the education

– of women harmful or if she rather considers them a way out of the confines of the patriarchal world. On the one hand the novel shows that believing in romances can be harmful for women as well for men, however it also shows that romances cannot be blamed alone because it is rather the state of society and the status quo in the power relationship of the sexes that are more responsible. In this light, romance novels serve as auxiliaries to maintaining the status quo, rather than as main tools. However, the linguistic analysis of relevant words – command, respect and obey – along with the invocation of the myth of Amazons which are linked back to the education of women it can be surmised that Lennox very consciously built up her novel, deliberately making it ambiguous. This would imply that the answer to the question left unanswered in the second chapter is that Lennox was conscious of what she was doing – in other words the first interpretation is more plausible – meaning that the gender and genre issues are inseparable – which gives Lennox more credit but ultimately labels her as somewhat conservative. Her conservatism can be explained by the extreme rigidity of patriarchy, which was not yet ready again for a radical text that openly went against socially sanctioned gender norms unlike a half century before when Mary Astell was writing her critical works – therefore while Lennox might not have agreed with the notions expressed by the implied author and the narrator, it was necessary for her to make a compromise in order to be able to promote at least the theory of an alternatively gendered society. It also implies that to the other question – whether the gender and genre issues are separable in this novel – the answer is no, they were not separable, suggesting that Lennox needed the one to talk about the other and vice versa.

Appendices:

Figure 1: A comparison of two interpretations of Arabella's representation by the narrator

First interpretation (explicitly misogynist)	Second interpretation (implicitly misogynist)
Opinion of misogynistic men is reiterated	Opinion of a potentially female narrator or author is expressed
Condemns the romance genre as dangerous for women	Pro-romance
Narrator acknowledges internalized misogyny	Narrator is unaware of internalized misogyny
Lennox is credited for calling attention to vocabulary issue	Lennox is not credited for highlighting the vocabulary issue
Alternative gender model is discouraged	Alternative gender model is not discouraged
Lennox explicitly points out issues but is essentially conservative	Lennox implicitly points out issues and is essentially liberal-minded

Figure 2: Table on the use of the word 'command' and its various forms

Arabella commands someone	Men	Noun	35	58
		Verb	23	
	Women	Noun	2	8
		Verb	6	
Arabella commanded by someone	Men	Noun	4	5
		Verb	1	
	Women	Noun	0	0
		Verb	0	
Commands not related to Arabella	Men	Noun	7	11
		Verb	4	
	Women	Noun	21	21
		Verb	10	
Total				103

Figure 3: Table on the use of the various forms of word 'respect'

Arabella's respect for	Men	7	11
	Women	4	
	Other	0	
Respect for Arabella from	Men	34	44
	Women	4	
	Neutral/Plural	6	
Respect regarding other people and other uses of the word 'respect'	Men (respecting women)	19	40
	Women (respecting someone)	2	
	Other use of the word	19	
Total			95

Figure 4: The use of the words 'to obey', obedience, obedient and their negative forms

Obeying Arabella	Men	42	51
	Women	8	
	Plural	1	
Arabella obeying	Men	11	12
	Women	0	
	Other	1	
Other characters obeying someone other than Arabella	Men	25	30
	Women	1	
	Other	4	
Total			93

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