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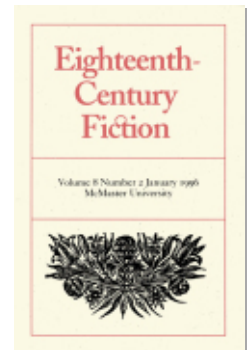
Coming to a Bad End: Sentimentalism, Hermeneutics, and *The Female Quixote*

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# Coming to a Bad End: Sentimentalism, Hermeneutics, and *The Female Quixote* Wendy Motooka

Readers of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) often leave the book feeling that the heroine, Arabella, has come to a bad end—in both senses of the phrase. Until the penultimate chapter, Arabella is a strong, independent, admirably spirited woman. The final scenes of the novel, however, depict her as defeated, humiliated, and subordinated by a dogmatic clergyman. What had seemed a glorious feminist spark disappointingly fizzles into an unremarkable marriage that returns woman to her proper place.<sup>1</sup> Even if Arabella's concession to the patriarchy is not lamented *per se*, the abruptness of her alteration is: "the ending should have been more artistically contrived," writes one critic, while another speculates that the novel's sudden conclusion unhappily resulted from the pressures of Lennox's financial distress.<sup>2</sup> I will argue, however, that Arabella comes to a bad end not through patriarchal pandering or artistic lack, but because of the recalcitrance of the problem described by the novel's characterization and plot. Arabella, after all, is not only female, but also a quixote—and "female" and "quixote" need

1 Readers disappointed by Arabella's defeat include Leland E. Warren, "Of the Conversation of Women: The Female Quixote and the Dream of Perfection," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 2 (1982), 367–80; Margaret Anne Doody, "Shakespeare's Novels: Charlotte Lennox Illustrated," *Studies in the Novel* 19 (1987), 296–310; and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 12–33.

2 See Margaret Dalziel in Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. xviii; and Duncan Isles, in the appendix to the same edition, pp. 423–25. References are to this edition.

not be understood synonymously. Feminist readings that retain the essential femininity of quixotism and the essential masculinity of rationality have difficulty recuperating the book's disappointingly abrupt and seemingly anti-feminist conclusion. To extend the feminist analysis all the way to the end of the book, we must be willing to reimagine the relations between gender, quixotism, and the novel's ultimate sentimentalism.<sup>3</sup>

Addressing the significance of quixotism in Lennox's novel, this essay will argue that Arabella's sudden reformation in the penultimate chapter may be read as an attempt to salvage social coherence in the face of radical and disturbing, albeit stylized, moral and political diversity. The advantage of this reading is its ability to account for Arabella's conversion without conceding a feminist defeat. The political, moral, and epistemological problems that Lennox engages in *The Female Quixote* are not unique to her heroine, any more than the sentimental resolution is unique to the plot. Perhaps no amount of argumentation will convince anyone that *The Female Quixote*'s bad ending is good. Yet the novel's bad ending is valuable, for it offers us insight into the fundamentally similar political meanings of quixotic and sentimental hermeneutics, similarities that destabilize categories such as "rational" and "irrational," "masculine" and "feminine." Arabella's "cure" is no cure—not because she abandons her role as a quixotic reader, but because (like the doctor) she does not. She begins the novel as an empiricist, and ends the novel as an empiricist. The satire in *The Female Quixote* mocks not only romantic extravagance, but also (masculine?) rational empiricism and the reading practices associated with it.

One thing that must first be reconsidered is Lennox's relation to her heroine. Arabella's "madness," as has been often observed, is her desire to hold authority, to figure prominently in history, and to wield power rather than surrendering it in marriage. Romances nourish these aspirations in her, presenting her with supposedly historical examples of heroines who maintain their autonomy by deferring marriage. In offering Arabella this alternate idea of history, romances engender in her a singular (and single) sense of self that resists marriage to Mr Glanville, thereby keeping her at the centre of attention. Arabella's quixotism has thus been seen as her feminism—her desire to be a noteworthy, fully participating member of society, on a par with men. This is not an anachronistic reading of quixotism. As "a Lady," the anonymous author of *Female Rights Vindicated* (1758), observes: "To endeavour refuting an Opinion of so

3 On the sentimentalism of *The Female Quixote*'s conclusion, see also James J. Lynch, "Romance and Realism in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Essays in Literature* 14 (1987), 51–63.

long standing as that of *the Superiority of the Men over the Women, with respect to Genius and Abilities*, must appear to many a strange and impracticable Attempt; and Numbers, even of Women, misled by Prejudice and Custom, may believe no one would be so *Quixotic* as to list herself Champion of the Sex upon this Occasion."<sup>4</sup> Substituting romances for the long-standing opinions of history, Arabella seems "to list herself Champion of the Sex." Late twentieth-century readings frequently extend this quality in Arabella to Lennox herself, thereby setting Lennox up as an author primarily interested in challenging gender hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> In effect, Arabella becomes a figure for Lennox as feminist pioneer, an eighteenth-century woman struggling to write her own way through life. Arabella's opposites—the "empty-headed, selfish, and ordinary" characters, such as her cousin Miss Glanville<sup>6</sup>—serve as foils to Arabella and Lennox, further strengthening the reading of Arabella and Lennox as heroic feminists.

Lennox's own attitude towards romance narrative and Arabella's quixotism, however, appears to have been much more complex, the aim of her self-satire much less clear. Consider the name "Arabella." Though the name is not uncommon in eighteenth-century fiction (Clarissa's sister is an Arabella, as is the Vicar of Wakefield's daughter-in-law and the Fool of Quality's wife),<sup>7</sup> Lennox's inspiration for it may have had a specific, historical source. In a piece written for her periodical, *The Lady's Museum* (1760–61), Lennox depicts Henry the Great of France considering potential brides. One of the possibilities he mentions is "the princess Arabella of England." Lennox's footnote informs readers that Arabella was

daughter to Charles, Earl of Lennox, who was grandson to Margaret queen of Scotland, eldest sister to Henry VIII. Her cousin-german, James VI. king of

4 *Female Rights Vindicated; Or the Equality of the Sexes Morally and Physically Proved* (London, 1758), preface. This tract is a loose translation of François Poulain de la Barre's *Discours Physique et Moral de l'Egalité des deux Sexes* (1673), published in English translation first as *The Woman As Good As the Man* (1677), and again in paraphrase as *Woman Not Inferior to Man: Or, A Short and Modest Vindication of the Natural Right of the Fair-Sex to a Perfect Equality of Power, Dignity, and Esteem, with the Men* (1739). See Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578–1799* (Bloomington and Old Westbury, NY: Indiana University Press and Feminist Press, 1985), p. 266.

5 See Warren; Doody; Laurie Langbauer, "Romance Revised: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Novel* 18 (1984), 29–49; and Judith Dorn, "Reading Women Reading History: The Philosophy of Periodical Form in Charlotte Lennox's *The Lady's Museum*," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 18 (1992), 7–27.

6 Langbauer, p. 48.

7 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (1747–48); Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766); Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality* (1765–70).

Scotland, having in 1602 been declared lawful heir to Queen Elizabeth, the following year a conspiracy was formed in her favour, and she died in 1616, a prisoner in the tower of London.<sup>8</sup>

This Arabella, like the Arabella of *The Female Quixote*, appears as a high-born woman who is particularly threatening to male authority. Such a passing reference would hardly seem significant, except that Lennox habitually goes out of her way to include allusions to the Stuart family in her works. For example, Lennox's chapter on *Macbeth* in her *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753–54) is constituted in large part by acknowledged, verbatim borrowings from Johnson's *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (1745). Yet, at one point, Lennox adds an unusual and significant interpolation to Johnson's text. Having noted the prophecy that from Banquo would spring a long line of kings, Lennox offers readers a "long Account of the Posterity of *Banquo*," allegedly in order to show Shakespeare's flattery of King James. She cites Hector Boece's *Chronicles of Scotland* (1526), which mentions the marriage of Robert, the younger son of Banquo's great-great-grandson, to "the Daughter of Robert of Cruxtoun, from which Marriage the Families of Darnley and Lennox are descended."<sup>9</sup> Thus, while exposing Shakespeare's flattery, she also publicizes the close relation of the Stuart, Darnley, and Lennox families—a clan that seems to have fascinated her, judging from her fondness for these names. Her first novel, supposedly autobiographical,<sup>10</sup> relates the adventures of Harriot Stuart. The central sisters of her fourth novel, *Sophia* (1762), are Harriot and Sophia Darnley.<sup>11</sup> (Is there a Harriot Lennox? Yes, Lennox's daughter, born in 1765.) Quite possibly Lennox's interest in these families came via her husband, Alexander Lennox, who did in fact have pretensions to nobility. In April of 1768, he appeared at a meeting of the Peers in Edinburgh, claiming to be the rightful Earl of Lennox, "the lineal heir-male of the ancient earls of Lennox, of the name of Lennox, lineally descended from a

8 Charlotte Lennox, "The History of the Dutchess of Beaufort," *The Lady's Museum*, 2 vols (London, 1760–61), 1:72–73.

9 Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespeare Illustrated: Or the Novels and Histories, On which the Plays of Shakespeare Are Founded, Collected and Translated from the Original Authors. With Critical Remarks*, 2 vols (London, 1753), 2:276–78. A third volume followed in 1754. Hector Boece wrote in Latin. Since Lennox apparently knew no Latin (*Shakespeare Illustrated*, 2:219), she probably relied on John Bellenden's Scots translation of *The Chronicles* (1531).

10 Miriam Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters* (1935; Archon Books, 1969), p. 118. *Harriot Stuart* was published in 1751.

11 *Sophia* was first published serially in *The Lady's Museum* as "The History of Harriot and Sophia."

brother of Duncan, the Seventh Earl of Lennox." For the next six years, he continued his suit for this title.<sup>12</sup>

It is not clear how deeply invested Lennox was in her husband's quixotic aspirations. Certain quirks in her biography do intimate her willingness to assume a romantic identity. Obituaries and biographical dictionaries describe Lennox as the American-born daughter of a Colonel James Ramsay, Governor of New York.<sup>13</sup> The source for this account of Lennox's American origins was probably Lennox herself, for in 1792, she or her friends petitioned the Royal Literary Fund to assist the "daughter of Colonel Ramsay, Royalist Governor of New York in 1720," with the year 1720 also stated as that of her birth.<sup>14</sup> Scholars, however, have been unable to verify this account of her life. New York never had a governor named Ramsay,<sup>15</sup> and Lennox's father appears to have been no more than a Captain of an Independent Company of Foot while in America.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the alleged year of her birth seems incorrect. Richardson's description of the author of *The Female Quixote* as "hardly twenty-four" suggests a much later birth date, possibly at the end of the 1720s,<sup>17</sup> a conjecture supported as well by the arrival of her first child in 1765. If Lennox was born in the late 1720s, and Captain James Ramsay was indeed her father, then Gibraltar is the likely place of her birth.<sup>18</sup> The biography of Charlotte Lennox given to the Royal Literary Fund may be wrong in all its particulars, but it does present Lennox in a much more romantic light; she is a heroine, a daughter born to the warrior-ruler of a faraway land, or as the Countess in *The Female Quixote* phrases it, a princess "wandering thro' the World by Land and Sea in mean Disguises" (p. 326). Lennox's identification with Arabella may be even stronger than people generally presume, her satiric attack on romance narratives a self-conscious indictment of her own foolish desires.

Yet, in reading Lennox's interests as exclusively aligned with the character of Arabella, we overlook another character who, if recog-

12 Agnes Mary Kynaston, "The Life and Writings of Charlotte Lennox 1720-1804," PhD dissertation, University of London (1936), pp. 26-27.

13 Kynaston, p. 1.

14 Philippe Séjourné, *The Mystery of Charlotte Lennox: First Novelist of Colonial America (1727?-1804)* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications des Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1967), pp. 11-12.

15 Kynaston, p. 2.

16 See Duncan Isles, chronology of Charlotte Lennox in *The Female Quixote*.

17 Small, pp. 14-15. Isles offers 1729-30 as a more accurate birth year, while Séjourné guesses 1727.

18 Isles, chronology.

nized also as a partial figure for Lennox, might allow us to infer more about the novelist's concerns. If names are important—as seems to be the case in Lennox's novels—then we should not ignore the fact that Miss Glanville, Arabella's unromantic foil, bears Lennox's own given name of "Charlotte."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Charlotte Glanville shares with the partially autobiographical Harriot Stuart the same defining characteristic of coquetry.<sup>20</sup> "Miss Charlotte," we are told, "had a large Share of Coquetry in her Composition" (p. 80), while Harriot Stuart wittily confesses, "I was born a coquet, and what would have been art in others, in me was pure nature."<sup>21</sup> So precocious was Harriot in the ways of coquetry that at age eleven she had "all the coquet inclinations of fifteen; and not only knew the full value of a smile, a sigh, or a blush, but could practice them all upon occasion."<sup>22</sup> Lennox saw similarities between such coquetish artfulness and authorial artistry; her twice-published poem, "The Art of Coquetry" (1747, 1750), makes the connection satirically explicit by having the poet derive both her poetry and her coquetry from the same source:

The queen of love herself my bosom fires,  
Assists my numbers, and my thought inspires:  
Me she instructed in each secret art.<sup>23</sup>

"Art" here refers both to poetic "numbers" and to the little coquettish tricks (the "sigh," "the starting tear," the "melting languish") that the poet later recommends; art is indispensable to both authors and coquettes. In this context, Miss Glanville's coquetry is a significant detail, for it identifies her as a contriver. Like Harriot Stuart—and, we might suppose, like Lennox herself (hence the shared name of "Charlotte")—Miss Glanville recognizes her own artfulness. In doing so, she demonstrates a level of self-consciousness that distinguishes her from the female quixote.<sup>24</sup> Arabella is quixotic while Miss Glanville is not, precisely because it is

19 David Marshall, in another context, also argues for identifying Lennox with Charlotte Glanville. See his "Writing Masters and 'Masculine Exercises' in *The Female Quixote*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5 (1993), 105–35. Marshall's essay is primarily interested in accounting for "the problem of writing" in *The Female Quixote*, not "the problem of reading" (pp. 106–7). My own essay focuses on the problem of reading.

20 Unlike the accounts of Lennox's American origins, some of the autobiographical elements in *Harriot Stuart* can be verified to a greater extent, as they do not solely depend on Lennox's own report. See Small, pp. 4–6.

21 Charlotte Lennox, *The Life of Harriot Stuart. Written by Herself*, 2 vols (London, 1751), 1:8.

22 *Harriot Stuart*, 1:8.

23 "The Art of Coquetry," lines 9–11. For text and commentary on this poem, see Small, pp. 232–36.

24 Deborah Ross discusses the contrast between Charlotte's belaboured artifice and Arabella's

the inability to recognize artifice that defines the quixote. Thus, in the contrast between the artless Arabella and the artfully aware Charlotte, Lennox depicts the pronounced interpretive differences that must be reconciled in order that the novel's plot may be effectively resolved. In this light, Arabella's "cure" is no cure at all, for it fails to bring her any closer to her more self-conscious cousin. Rather, Arabella's sentimental conversion leaves intact the naïve, essentialist assumptions of her reading practice, revealing her quixotism as a slight variation on the "masculine" rational authority that seeks to reform her. Miss Glanville, though unattractive at times, represents to a certain extent what a truly reformed Arabella would be. By further scrutinizing the relation between these two cousins, we can begin to surmise the nature of the ambivalence that leads to Arabella's bad end.



Arabella's quixotism expresses itself as her insistence upon interpreting all events within the narrow expectations of romance. She assumes that handsome servants are princes in disguise; treats her often puzzled serving maid, Lucy, as a confidante; and regards unknown men on horseback as knights intent upon ravishment. Empirical evidence is powerless to alter her romantic beliefs, for her romantic beliefs are empirically derived: "she had such a strange Facility in reconciling every Incident to her own fantastic Ideas, that every new Object added Strength to the fatal deception she laboured under" (p. 340). Having grown up on a secluded country estate described as the "Epitome of *Arcadia*" (p. 5), Arabella has learned to accept romances as true histories: "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" (p. 7). With her surroundings so conformable to those represented in her books, Arabella sensibly concludes that romance depictions are accurate, and that people should behave accordingly. Her romantic beliefs may be extraordinary, but they develop under and rely upon the very ordinary intellectual method of empiricism.

For instance, one day Arabella and Miss Glanville, travelling with their family on the road to Bath, find themselves pursued by horsemen. When Arabella sees "Three or Four Men of a genteel Appearance,



on Horseback," her thorough familiarity with romances allows her immediately to recognize the situation; sticking her head out of the coach window, she cries to the riders:

Hold, hold, valiant Men ... do not, by a mistaken Generosity, hazard your Lives in a Combat, to which the Laws of Honour do not oblige you: We are not violently carried away, as you falsely suppose; we go willingly along with these Persons, who are our Friends and Relations. (p. 258)

By eighteenth-century standards, Arabella is not insane, for she is not out of her senses.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Cervantes' Don Quixote, who mistook canvas for fine cloth and stale breath for Arabian perfume, Arabella's senses are in perfect working order. She "sees" what everyone else sees—a few men genteelly clothed. Since the laws of romance have determined that ladies travelling with male companions are likely the victims of ravishment, and that well-dressed men on horseback who approach such ladies are often knights intent upon delivering them, Arabella interprets her observations according to the dictates of probability, concluding that the highwaymen are "Persons of Quality," for "though they came questionless, either upon a good or bad Design, yet it cannot be doubted, but that their Birth is illustrious; otherwise they would never pretend either to fight in our Defence, or to carry us away" (p. 259). Relying on romance rules of conduct, Arabella is sure that the riders could not be robbers, for their illustrious births, as evidenced by their participation in the noble conduct of succouring maidens or carrying them off, are too exalted for so base an occupation.

Obviously, Arabella's reasoning is circular; her assumptions about the men's condition serve also as her evidence. The strength of her belief alone—her unwillingness to see things in any other way—supports her analysis and conclusion. When her companions inform her that the men had intended to "rob us of our Money," Arabella logically responds:

How! ... Were these Cavaliers, who appeared to be in so handsome a Garb, that I took them for Persons of prime Quality, were they Robbers? I have been strangely mistaken, it seems: However, I apprehend there is no Certainty, that your Suspicions are true; and it may still be as I say, that they either came to rescue or carry us away. (p. 259)

In acknowledging that she may have been mistaken, Arabella also maintains that her assumptions about the operations of the world have not

25 A common criterion for rationality in the eighteenth century was the ability to distinguish between imagination and sensation, "impulses originating within from those originating without." See Michael V. DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses: Swift, Sterne, and Augustan Ideas of Madness* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1974), p. 28.



*Novelist's Magazine* (London: Harrison and Co., 1787), vol. 12, plate 4, p. 138. Engraved by William Walker (1729–1793) after a drawing by Thomas Stothard (1755–1834). Reproduced by permission of McMaster University Library.

been proven wrong. All she concedes is that the men may have been robbers, "it seems." And with the absence of certainty, her interpretation has as strong a truth claim as everyone else's, for unless certainty can be established, all interpretations are supported only by probability, which is itself the very issue here. Within the laws of romance familiar to Arabella, the probability is greatest that the riders were knights upon some good or bad design. Experience has taught Arabella's companions, however, that such men are most likely robbers. Yet for Arabella's companions to conclude that their interpretation of the riders is correct—that the riders are most likely robbers simply because men of their appearance are probably robbers—is to use the conclusion as the evidence: in other words, to reason like the quixotic Arabella. There is a method to Arabella's madness, and that method looks strikingly similar to the empiricist epistemology employed by her "rational" companions.

In contrast to so literal a method of interpretation, Charlotte Glanville, as an urbane coquette, understands that representations cannot always be taken at face value, that facts do not always speak for themselves. Two conversations between Miss Glanville and Arabella illustrate this difference. In the first, Arabella's romantic language, unfamiliar to Miss Glanville, leads the coquette into a pained recollection of her own indiscretions. The misunderstandings hinge upon the words "adventures" and "favours." Miss Glanville can hardly believe that Arabella would accuse her of having "adventures," and she is all the more outraged by Arabella's assumption that she would grant a lover "favours." "Have you any Reason to imagine, I would grant any Favour to a Lover?" Miss Glanville demands.

I vow, Cousin, interrupted *Arabella*, you put me in mind of the fair and virtuous *Antonia*, who was so rigid and austere, that she thought all Expressions of Love were criminal; and was so far from granting any Person Permission to love her, that she thought it a mortal Offence to be adored even in private.

Miss *Glanville*, who could not imagine *Arabella* spoke this seriously, but that it was designed to sneer at her great Eagerness to make Conquests, and the Liberties she allowed herself in, which had probably come to her Knowledge, was so extremely vexed at the malicious Jest, as she thought it, that, not being able to revenge herself, she burst into Tears. (p. 89)

What is courtesy for Arabella—a polite and romantically precedented interest in her visiting cousin's "adventures"—is cruelty to Charlotte. Aware of her own shortcomings given current custom, Miss Glanville incriminates herself by presuming that Arabella assumes the worst. Too

cognizant that the opinions of others may easily overrule her own hoped-for self-image, Charlotte cannot take Arabella's words literally. Rather, she infers that by "virtuous" and "austere," Arabella must ironically intend a "sneer at her great Eagerness to make Conquests." Miss Glanville, unlike the female quixote, is attuned to the conflicting presence of other people's narratives. Her understanding of the relation between lived experience and its representation as history or reputation is thus somewhat subtler than Arabella's. As her interpretation of her cousin's remarks shows, Charlotte accepts that representation is not always plain, that literal meanings cannot always be trusted. Within the predominant eighteenth-century hermeneutical dichotomy recently discussed by Joel Weinsheimer, Charlotte plays the knave to Arabella's fool; Charlotte tends to overread (inferring intentional slights and wilful competition from Arabella's romantic folly and artless beauty), while Arabella underreads (accepting romance narratives as self-evident histories).<sup>26</sup>

This hermeneutical distinction between Arabella and Miss Glanville animates their interactions. Though Arabella retains a morally superior air throughout the novel, Charlotte understands the shortcomings of Arabella's credulous empiricism well enough to hold her own against it. Upon hearing the history of Miss Groves, a young woman who ran away with her writing-master, Arabella presumes that the writing-master must have been a nobleman in disguise. Unconvinced, Charlotte exclaims, "you may as well persuade me, the Moon is made of a Cream Cheese, as that any Nobleman turned himself into a Writing-master, to obtain Miss *Groves*." Affronted by the accusation that she "would argue upon such a ridiculous System; and compare the Second glorious Luminary of the Heavens to so unworthy a Resemblance," Arabella expresses her resentment. Charlotte laughingly replies:

Really I think, you have not Reason to be angry, if I supposed you might make a Comparison between the Moon and a Cream Cheese; since 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. (p. 143)

The moon looks more like a cream cheese than like another world, so comparing it to a cream cheese is quite reasonable, Charlotte points out. Seeing is believing, for truth is plain. Now, clearly, Miss Glanville does not believe that the moon is made of cream cheese, as she initially

26 See Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Eighteenth-Century Hermeneutics: Philosophy of Interpretation in England from Locke to Burke* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 1-22.

invokes the comparison in order to express her *disbelief* at Arabella's remarks. Yet, having been chastised by Arabella for arguing upon such a "ridiculous System," Charlotte satirically reinterprets and defends her comparison within the underreader's hermeneutics characteristic of Arabella. She mimics Arabella's literal understanding in order to rally her cousin's quixotic folly. No other character manages to parry with Arabella so acutely and successfully. Arabella looks quite the fool when, "unwilling to expose her Cousin's Ignorance, by a longer Dispute upon this Subject," she seriously begs her "to let it drop for the present." Charlotte's remarks show her awareness of the instability of interpretive systems, particularly the quixotic excesses of empirical method when challenged by truly divergent perspectives. (Without space flight, how could a world-believing empiricist ever convince a cheese-believing empiricist that the moon is actually a world?) The underreading, artless Arabella remains oblivious to these hermeneutical complexities.

Arabella and Charlotte embody two different approaches to interpretation: one assured, absolutist, essentialist; the other self-critical, tactical, contingent. Charlotte's coquettish, manipulative approach holds little appeal, appearing "empty-headed, selfish, and ordinary." Indeed, much of Charlotte's energy goes towards her jealous, ineffective attempts to orchestrate situations in which she might outshine her cousin. Yet Arabella's quixotic confidence, when placed within the context of early eighteenth-century quixotism, is hardly more attractive. Unlike the benign idealist—dreaming the impossible dream—who has since become synonymous with Don Quixote, early eighteenth-century quixotes were often depicted as proponents of undesirable political upheaval. Religious enthusiasts, blamed for the English Civil Wars, sallied quixotically forth in Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663–80), while several years later, the next great threat to English peace—the Pretender and his supporters—were also dubbed quixotic. When James Francis Edward Stuart, the presumed tyrannical "Old Pretender," invaded England in 1715, he was reported to be "raving like Don Quixote ... about Kingdoms, and the Government of Imaginary Islands."<sup>27</sup> Likewise, when the alleged Jacobite Dr Henry Sacheverell came to trial for high crimes and misdemeanors against the (Whig) government, John Dunton mocked him as a "*Bully-Errant*" who "wanders about like the Crack-brain'd *Don of Mancha* ... raving mad about he knows not what."<sup>28</sup> Similar accusations against Sacheverell were

27 Jack Catch, *A Hue and Cry After the Pretender* (London, 1716).

28 *The Bull-Baiting: Or, Sach[everell]ll Dress'd up in Fire-Works* (London, 1710). On the spectacular, violent, and widely publicized Sacheverell trial, see Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Dr. Sacheverell* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973).

made by Daniel Defoe's *Instructions from Rome In Favour of the Pretender, Inscrib'd to the most Elevated Don Sacheverellio, and his Brother Don Higginisco* (1710), and by the pseudonymous Jack Touchwood's *Quixote Redivivus: Or, the Spiritual Knight Errant* (1710).<sup>29</sup> Even John Locke, in defending England against Sir Robert Filmer's pro-monarchical *Patriarcha* during the Exclusion Crisis and the Revolution of 1688, caustically notes that Filmer, by following his own teachings, "no doubt could have made a most Loyal Subject in *Sancho Pancho's Island*."<sup>30</sup> At the heart of quixotism in the early eighteenth century is not madness *per se*, but a particular kind of madness: the kind that expresses itself as an allegiance to a different political arrangement and a willingness to promote that cause.

Such is Arabella's case. If we are to believe the good doctor, a Johnsonian clergyman who "cures" her at the novel's end,<sup>31</sup> her crime is that very quixotic one of inciting social chaos and civil war. Romances, he admonishes her, are criminal because

they teach Women to expect not only Worship, but the dreadful Worship of human Sacrifices. Every Page of these Volumes is filled with such extravagance of Praise, and expressions of Obedience as one human Being ought not to hear from another; or with Accounts of Battles, in which thousands are slaughtered for no other Purpose than to gain a Smile from the haughty Beauty, who sits a calm Spectatress of the Ruin and Desolation, Bloodshed and Misery, incited by herself. (pp. 380–81)

Despite all the other arguments (and they are numerous) that Arabella has withstood throughout the novel, it is this argument that finally compels her consent. Chastised for indulging in tales that erode the "Sense of

29 "Don Higginisco" refers to the Reverend Francis Higgins (1669–1728), another high-flying cleric whose vocal opinions provoked government action. Touchwood's piece went through three editions. See F.F. Madan, *A Critical Bibliography of Dr. Henry Sacheverell*, ed. W.A. Speck, University of Kansas Publications, Library Series 49 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries, 1978), pp. 44–45.

30 *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, student edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 201. According to Laslett, Locke's *Treatises* were written as Exclusion Tracts in 1679–80, though published a decade later as a Revolution Pamphlet; see his introduction in the edition of Locke cited above, pp. 45–61.

31 It has been suggested that Johnson himself actually wrote the chapter in which the good doctor appears, but there is no consensus on the matter. See John Mitford, "Dr. Johnson's Literary Intercourse with Mrs. Lennox," *Gentleman's Magazine* 175 (1843), 132, and his follow-up, "Chapter by Dr. Johnson in *The Female Quixote*," *Gentleman's Magazine* 176 (1844), p. 41. Isles refutes the attribution, appendix, p. 421. Modern readers rarely bother to take sides in this old debate, though they do sometimes remark how much the doctor resembles Johnson. See Spacks, pp. 15–16; Ross, p. 459.

our Alliance with all human nature," a sense that keeps us "awake to Tenderness and Sympathy," Arabella can resist no longer. "[M]y heart yields to the Force of Truth," she concedes, "and now I wonder how the Blaze of Enthusiastic Bravery, could hinder me from remarking with Abhorrence the Crime of deliberate unnecessary Bloodshed" (p. 381). With her quixotism described as a blazing enthusiasm (eighteenth-century code for "unreasonable" political beliefs), Arabella's transformation represents a fantasy of social, political, and epistemological coherence. What had seemed an insurmountable difference between Arabella and the other characters melts away before the soft reforming power of fellow feeling. Where reason and experience were helpless, sentimentalism prevails, thereby resolving the novel's plot.



Yet, in bringing the plot to its resolution, Lennox does not decisively put to rest the issues raised by its development. Why is Arabella, formerly so resistant to the arguments of her quotidian companions, suddenly swayed by a sentimental sermon? Why is there a clergyman at all? Why could the Countess not have done the job? These questions may be answered by examining how quixotism and sentimentalism are related to the differing interpretive approaches characteristic of Arabella and Miss Glanville.

In invoking sentiment as a mediator of political conflict, *The Female Quixote* was not unique. In fact, sentimentalism emerged as an attempt to posit the real, underlying social and moral unity naturally inherent in humanity. The culprit sowing the seeds of doubt was the ethically relativist Hobbes, whose "office of Lord High Bogy-man" was assumed by Bernard Mandeville upon the publication of the latter's *Fable of the Bees* (1714, 1723).<sup>32</sup> Arguing that the "Moral Virtues" amount to no more than "the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride," Mandeville articulates a view of human nature devoid of real social feeling. As Mandeville sees it, human beings are fundamentally selfish, devoted to their "private Interest," and unwilling to place the public good above their own appetites. Societies would never have formed, he reasons, had not politicians invented a system of fictive rewards with which to fool selfish individuals into social behaviour: "being unable to give so many

32 F.B. Kaye, introduction, *The Fable of the Bees*, by Bernard Mandeville, 2 vols (1924; Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), 1:cxvi. References are to this edition. On the reaction against Hobbes, see Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

real Rewards as would satisfy all Persons for every individual Action, they were forc'd to contrive an imaginary one, that as a general Equivalent for the trouble of Self-denial should serve on all Occasions" (1:42). The moral virtues are these imaginary rewards, though perhaps not discernible as imaginary to people who are unable to recognize artifice. In Mandeville's account, civic righteousness is a form of quixotic madness, a reverent devotion to fictitious virtues promulgated by dubious authorities. Lacking Shaftesbury's belief in "the natural sense of right and wrong,"<sup>33</sup> Mandeville presents moral principles as the nominal, arbitrary extensions of fickle, individual desires.

His discussion of the virtue of "honour" will illustrate the point:

Honour in its Figurative Sense is a Chimera without Truth or Being ... an Invention of Moralists and Politicians, and signifies a certain Principle of Virtue not related to Religion, found in some Men that keeps 'em close to their Duty and Engagements whatever they be, as for Example, a Man of Honour enters into a Conspiracy with others to murder a King; he is obliged to go thorough Stitch with it; and if overcome by Remorse or Good-nature he startles at the Enormity of his Purpose, discovers the Plot, and turns a Witness against his Accomplices, he then forfeits his Honour, at least among the Party he belonged to. (1:198)

Mandeville is particularly devious in selecting as his example the horrors of party spirit, which make a mockery of common moral authority and purpose. If virtue were real—more than just a "Name," "the Aerial Coin of Praise" (1:48, 55)—then how could the concept of honour be stretched to encompass all parties? Moral principles are arbitrary because virtue is not real, Mandeville gleefully concludes. The fiction of moral virtue merely rationalizes our selfish desires: "we are ever pushing our Reason which way soever we feel Passion to draw it, and Self-love pleads to all human Creatures for their different Views, still furnishing every individual with Arguments to justify their Inclinations" (1:333). It is this very malleability of rational conduct before the pleadings of desire—"this subtil Sophistry of Desire," as the novel's dedication puts it—that *The Female Quixote* explores: "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."<sup>34</sup> Mandeville's insights into the essence of

33 *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. John M. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 258.

34 On the relation between the dedication's sentiments and Arabella's desires, see Spacks, pp. 15–16. Spacks also discusses the likelihood that this dedication was written by Samuel Johnson.



honour—"to suffer no Affront, which is a Term of Art for every Action designedly done to undervalue [the man of honour]" (1:199)—parallel *The Female Quixote's* own concerns that quixotic convictions lead to socially threatening self-aggrandizement. Not coincidentally, Mandeville identifies "*Don Quixote*" as a consummate practitioner of the arbitrary, ridiculous, self-serving laws of honour (1:199). In both Mandeville's and Lennox's texts, the quixotic figure provides a focal point for contemplating the elusive distinctions between gross immorality and legitimate political difference.

Sentimentalism, on the other hand, turns attention away from the moral and political differences between people. Emphasizing instead the naturalness of social bonds, sentimentalism offers readers a fantasy of sympathetic understanding, universal morality, and political coherence. Francis Hutcheson, professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow and a prominent proponent of the sentimental school,<sup>35</sup> published his first work, *An Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), in order to defend the "Principles of the late Earl of SHAFTESBURY ... against the Author of the *Fable of the Bees*."<sup>36</sup> Significantly, Hutcheson set about to prove that moral principles were an undeniable phenomenon of nature, so much so that he maintained the existence of a moral sense, attuned to right and wrong, just as the eyes and ears are attuned to light and sound. As Hutcheson reasons, "We have got the Number *Five* fixed for our *external Senses*, tho *Seven* or *Ten* might as easily be defended."<sup>37</sup> By thus reclassifying moral distinctions as primary sensations within an empiricist framework, Hutcheson attempts to root virtue firmly in nature. For Hutcheson, virtue is no mere fiction produced by the subtle sophistry of desire; it is real, and should be immediately apparent to anyone not out of his or her (seven or ten) senses. Hutcheson refuses to see quixotism as an expression of fundamentally conflicting rational desires; rather, he quixotically prefers to read it just as Don Quixote does—as a sign of generous dedication to the common good. "The raising universally the *publick Affections*, the *Desires of Virtue* and *Honour*, would make the *Hero of Cervantes*, pining with *Hunger* and *Poverty*, no rare Character," Hutcheson explains, defending the knight against the injurious charges

35 On the sentimentalist tradition in eighteenth-century British moral philosophy, see L.A. Selby-Bigge, introduction, *British Moralists*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, with new introduction by Bernard H. Baumrin, 2 vols (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 1:xxxiii–xcii.

36 See the title page of the *Inquiry*, reprinted in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson*, facsimile edition prepared by Bernhard Fabian, 7 vols (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1971).

37 *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (London, 1728), p. x.

laid at his honourable feet by Mandeville. And lest Quixote's selfless pining appear unattractive, Hutcheson reminds readers of what they may expect from widespread selfishness: "The universal increasing of *Selfishness*, unless we had more accurate Understandings to discern our *niciest Interests*, would fill the World with universal *Rapine* and *War*."<sup>38</sup> The "universal *Rapine* and *War*," from which others had inferred the universality of selfishness, Hutcheson reinterprets as the miserable result of our failure "to discern our *niciest Interests*." His sentimentalism refutes the egoistic theory of human nature, and the arbitrary morality it entails, by collapsing the distinction between individual and social interests. As Pope would later famously write, "Thus God and Nature link'd the gen'ral frame, / And bid Self-love and Social be the same."<sup>39</sup> In such a world, quixotes can be allowed a place within the pale of respectability and community.

Lennox knew Hutcheson's work; his *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* drew from her a poetic response.<sup>40</sup> Yet the relation between sentimentalism and quixotism may be better illuminated by Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744). A novelistic endeavour analogous to Hutcheson's project and related to Lennox's own,<sup>41</sup> *David Simple* begins with the title-character's realization that his cherished brother, Daniel, is a Mandevillean: "in reality one of those Wretches, whose only Happiness centers in themselves [and whose] Conversation ... had never any other View, but in some shape or other to promote his own Interest."<sup>42</sup> Unable to accept that the world contains only creatures so selfish, David grows "as mad as *Quixotte* himself" (p. 27) with the design of travelling ceaselessly through all walks of life rather than not meet with

a human Creature capable of Friendship; by which Word he meant so perfect a Union of Minds, that each should consider himself but as a Part of one entire

38 Hutcheson, p. 201.

39 *Essay on Man*, III.317–18, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, one-volume edition of the Twickenham text (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

40 See "On reading HUTCHISON on the PASSIONS" in Small, p. 155. Small also notes that this poem "was apparently Mrs. Lennox's favorite of her own creation as she reprints it three times after the initial printing."

41 The resemblance between Sarah Fielding's and Lennox's work was enough to convince Lady Mary Wortley Montagu that Sarah had written *The Female Quixote*. See *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 3:67, 88.

42 Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple*, ed. Malcolm Kelsall (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 11. References are to this edition.

Being; a little Community, as it were of two, to the Happiness of which all the Actions of both should tend with an absolute disregard of any selfish or separate Interest. (p. 26)

David's quixotism thus must be read not as a sign of perverse individualism, but rather as an expression of his desire for community, for a perfect "Union of Minds" and the end of all "selfish or separate Interest." This sentimental pattern of complete, empathic resolution to the conflicts generated by the "Power of Interest" is adopted by *The Female Quixote* in Arabella's case; her "cure" has barely taken hold before she and her suitor, Mr Glanville, are "united ... in every Virtue and laudable Affection of the Mind" (p. 383). Charlotte Glanville, on the other hand, who weds the scheming Sir George, is "only married in the common Acceptation of the Word; that is, they were privileged to join Fortunes, Equipages, Titles, and Expence" (p. 383). The true union of minds fittingly eludes Miss Charlotte, whose relation to representation—shared by her fortune-hunting husband and by Mandevillean politicians—has been suspicious, strategic, and self-interested throughout. Her sceptical, all too artful approach to the world leads her to a merely nominal marriage, while Arabella's naïve, literal-minded, essentialist habits of reading prime her for a complete union of minds. A sentimental resolution suits Arabella, as her quixotic ability to mistake convention for reality does not fundamentally differ from the philosophically realist assumptions driving sentimentalism. Within the imaginative world of sentimental philosophy and the sentimental quixotic novel, the greatest threat comes not from essentializing quixotes, but from rational nominalists like Miss Glanville, Daniel Simple, Mandeville—and Lennox herself, who also seems to understand that representation and reality can often be two quite different things.

Recognizing that *The Female Quixote* shifts culpability from quixotes to nominalists explains why the Countess, a reformed reader of romances who seems at first to promise Arabella's cure, cannot bring about the heroine's "conversion." In contrast to the essentialist Arabella, who can confidently proclaim that her unyielding expectations run "according to the Nature of Things" (p. 320), the Countess accepts historical contingency: "the strange Alteration of Things" that has rendered romance narratives "so improbable ... at present" (p. 326). When Arabella tries to defend her own behaviour by alluding to "the Customs of antient Times," the Countess firmly assures her that such precedents cannot always be trusted.

Custom, said the Countess smiling, changes the very Nature of Things, and what was honourable a Thousand Years ago, may probably be look'd upon as infamous now. ... The same Actions which made a Man a Hero in those Times, would constitute him a Murderer in These—And the same Steps which led him to a Throne Then, would infallibly conduct him to a Scaffold Now. (p. 328)

Arabella, however, understands that the Countess's sentiments concede too much to historical contingency. The Countess's ethical flexibility, though seemingly reconciliatory, actually points the way to a kind of moral relativism that would be helpless to resist "the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride." The Countess may smile and speak of change, but she can offer no criteria by which to distinguish between real and nominal virtue. As Arabella objects:

But Custom, Madam, said *Arabella*, cannot possibly change the Nature of Virtue or Vice: And since Virtue is the chief Characteristick of a Hero, a Hero in the last Age will be a Hero in this—Tho' the Natures of Virtue and Vice cannot be changed, replied the Countess, yet they may be mistaken; and different Principles, Customs, and Education, may probably change their Names, if not their Natures. (p. 328)

Focusing on the obstacles to a proper understanding of real virtue—its mistaken nature and its changing names—the Countess counsels Arabella to think sceptically about the relation between reality and representation. Her advice demands too much. As a quixotic reader, Arabella is not a sceptic; she does not easily distinguish between a thing and its name. Thus, when the Countess concludes, "'Tis certain, therefore ... that what was Virtue in those Days, is Vice in ours," Arabella is "surpriz'd, embarrass'd, perplex'd, but not convinced," for she cannot "separate her Ideas of Glory, Virtue, Courage, Generosity, and Honour, from the false Representations of them in the Actions of ... imaginary Heroes" (p. 329). The Countess's nominalist, unsentimental arguments cannot sway the essentialist, absolutist Arabella; abruptly, the Countess disappears from the narrative, and the task of curing Arabella falls to the sentimental, Johnsonian clergyman.

Yet, by making the clergyman's sentimentalism serve as Arabella's cure, the novel does not resolve the hermeneutical conflict driving its plot. That conflict does not exist between Arabella and the good doctor; rather, it persists in the differences between Arabella and the two other main female characters, the Countess and Miss Glanville. The clergyman reforms Arabella, but not greatly. She begins as a naïve quixotic reader; he convinces her to become a naïve sentimental one. That the Johnsonian

clergyman's masculine rationality should effect so minor a transformation is to be expected, for within the novel's dichotomy of essentialist and nominalist readers, the doctor's way of thinking clearly belongs to the essentialist side. Unlike the Countess, who would allow the truth of Arabella's romances but deny their current applicability to life, the clergyman rejects romances wholesale as "senseless Fictions" (p. 374). The Countess's fine distinctions and moral flexibility are useless to a man who, like Arabella, believes in immutable truths conveyed through venerable texts. How should Arabella have known her romances were false? Compare "these Books with antient Histories," the doctor advises, confident that the discrepancies between his books and her books will be sufficient to convince Arabella that hers (not his) are in error (p. 378). Arabella and the good doctor reason much alike, only she is called quixotic while he is called rational. Their virtues are similar, yet have different names. In this way, the narrative's gendering of rationality as masculine cannot be assumed, for the novel's penultimate chapter conflates quixotism, reason, and gender; the doctor's rationality and Arabella's quixotism describe identical patterns of thought. Thus, *The Female Quixote* comes to a bad end not because Arabella is defeated—in a sense, her way of thinking, as opposed to the Countess's or Miss Glanville's, does prevail—but because in opposing quixotism with sentimentalism, the novel fails to resolve the energetic tension that it so hilariously and successfully sets up between sceptical and credulous reading practices. For readers sceptical enough to doubt the existence of the moral sense, Lennox's novel—like the Countess—offers no criteria by which to distinguish between the nature and names of virtue. In today's age of conflicting histories, diverse allegiances, and transforming morals, this is a disappointing omission indeed. Alas, the plan for universal peace—if it is to be found in books at all—must be sought in another one.

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