

BREAKING THROUGH WALLS AND PAGES: FEMALE READING AND  
EDUCATION IN THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

BY

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## Abstract

My project compiles the historical information surrounding the rise of the novel in England as well as the conversations regarding female education in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I show how Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Frances Burney's *Evelina*, and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* depict education and reading in the novels. Novel reading is positive for the females in the novels, despite the fear that existed of women being seduced by novel reading and romance. Ultimately, I show why these novelists choose the form of the novel to manipulate other genres in order to show the restrictive nature of conventions and institutions of patriarchy in society. Through the novel, the authors expose how patriarchy was embedded in the very texts that informed female reality.

## Introduction

The rise of the novel was a monumental process in England. Taking a prominent position next to other forms, such as poetry and letters, the novel outlasted many forms and continues to be popular with readers today. Various scholars trace the rise of the novel in England, such as Ian Watt, John Bender, and Nancy Armstrong. Male writers, such as Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, were successful authors in the male literary culture during this rise of the novel. Women had to establish their success in a culture that provided greater ease and opportunities for male writers, and this rise of women novelists remains a crucial event in the history of literature, especially as women became known as the novel's "principal consumers and producers" (Richardson 185). Women, right alongside men, began in the mid to late eighteenth-century to take a prominent role in authoring novels as a way to establish a new type of literary presence. Many women even moved to London to gain literary recognition among their social circles (Prescott 39).

With the gendered education that existed in their society, women had to overcome great obstacles in establishing themselves as authors in a society that undervalued them. The rise of the novel and the female novelist can be aligned with the discussion on education that became more dominant during the late eighteenth-century in England. Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More are a few of the prominent women who began this discussion of education that started to gain national attention. Wollstonecraft in particular criticized conduct books for advocating a separate and gendered education. Many women also discussed education specifically in their novels. Alan Richardson notes, "The novel in this era is still more obviously permeated by the

growing emphasis on childhood and education, which accompanies the emergence in England of the Bildungsroman, or novel of development” (7). Why did women, such as Charlotte Lennox, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen, publish novels about women who are constantly reading and misreading their environments? Despite anxieties concerning publication, these authors show how reading, both literal and figurative, is educational and transformative in society.

If we look at the response to women reading novels at this time, we find that many people thought that novel reading was a source of corruption for women. More and Wollstonecraft, for example, wrote novels while condemning the genre (Richardson 175). The female novelists that I will discuss in my thesis, however, do not condemn novel reading. They utilize the novel to discuss conventions in society and other genres of writing in order to take a stand on issues that became restricted dialogue in items like conduct books, didactic writings, and histories. The novel allows these authors to reclaim a space for women and their protagonists, who gain recognition of the societal inequities that existed in their culture. The heroines are not passive readers, but they are active challengers of situations and characters.

My project analyzes and brings together the historical situation regarding novels, women reading and publishing, and education during the time period in England. While a close reading of the three texts, *The Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, and *Northanger Abbey*, occupies the primary focus of my paper, a historical lens in which I touch on the larger themes of education and novel reading at the time period sets up my argument and first chapter. Various critics have noted how all three of the authors, particularly Frances Burney and Jane Austen, struggled with anxieties about publishing their works. In

addition, all three works are similar in the fact that they portray women who often misread their environments and even novels, but ultimately these authors do not condemn novel reading or novels. I will move through the novels to show how education and reading functions in the protagonists' societies. I will end with a final section on the form of the novel and why these authors choose this literary form. Jane Austen came at the end of the century and beginning of a new one and often complicates categorization. Ros Ballaster notes, "The effortless ironic complexity of Jane Austen can, in this context, be seen not only as the remarkable product of a singular individual, but also as the culmination of a century of experiment with the act of control through apparent abnegation of narratorial presence" (202). By beginning with Lennox and ending with Austen, I not only want to align the topic of education and novel reading, but also show the process by which novelists influence each other. I want to exemplify how novels and novelists built on what came before in order to look towards the future. Austen's uniqueness and genius are the result of years of experimentation with the novel's form. And importantly, it is through the novel that these three women most effectively accomplished their goals.

Each novelist manipulates other literary forms in the novel in order to create an open-ended and developing story. I utilize M.M. Bakhtin in my theoretical analysis to make the claim that all three novelists choose the novel because of "its ability to critique itself" (6) and the fact that it "sparks the renovation of all other genres" (7). Various pieces of secondary criticism analyze how these works individually manipulate other forms and conventions. My project brings all three works together because they can shed light on each other and the role of education and novel reading in creating a space for

women. This project depicts novels that extend over fifty years in order to show the extent and importance of these topics in women's and the novel's history. The novel form is crucial in opening up this discussion of education and gender.

Chapter one of my project focuses on the historical background regarding education and novel reading during the eighteenth-century in England. Various books have been published in recent years about education, literature, and female authorship during this time period. Sarah Prescott addresses the increase of women in the marketplace in her work *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture*. Alan Richardson tackles both literature and education at the same period in *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, arguing that education became a prevalent debate at the time period (2). Using these works and various primary sources as starting points for my discussion, I situate the topics of education, novel reading, and publication in conversation with each other. I then proceed to work through the history of the three author's publishing backgrounds to make a claim about female anxiety in the industry of writing novels. These women utilized novels as a space to write about real societal issues that had often been confined to conduct books or male publications and histories. This chapter sets up my argument for analyzing the three novels that directly address these issues. Jan Fergus and Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert directly discuss Jane Austen and her authorship. Other critics, particularly, Catherine Gallagher, are helpful in addressing Burney and Lennox and their authorial struggles. I will conclude with questions that set up my second and third chapters: How do these authors address their own authorial struggles in their works? How do they create a useful discourse that can combat systems of patriarchy?

Why do they choose to utilize the novel as the form to talk about these issues of education and novel reading?

Chapter two of my project shifts to an analysis of the *Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, and *Northanger Abbey*. I move through the works in this order, true to the order in which they were published. I analyze how education is gendered in each of the novels and how this leads characters to misread novels, environments, and people. In *The Female Quixote*, Arabella creates her reality based on the French romances she reads; she is self-educated with these texts that are referred to throughout the entirety of the novel. In *Evelina*, Evelina similarly comes from a secluded environment educated by her adopted father Villars, whom she updates through letters while experiencing a new environment in London. Her writing of letters is another fascinating experimentation with how people read situations and convey information. Finally in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland enters the public sphere after lacking an adequate education; the balls that she attends and abbey she visits are parodied and mocked as Catherine learns the reality of her situation and the world around her. Regardless of this *misreading* of novels and environments, I do not claim that the authors criticize novel reading; in fact, they allow it to empower women to a certain extent. Each of the protagonists has a secluded upbringing and lacks proper teachers. Males attempt to teach women how they should act and speak. All of these novels address the development of women in a society that advocated a type of education preconceived on the knowledge of men. Women had to resort to their own means of empowerment. I explore the social situations, particularly the balls and conversations between men and women, which expose inadequacies of these systems. All of the female protagonists learn how to read their own environments or utilize reading in

order to come to greater recognition of the pitfalls of their societies and create a space for themselves through direct action and agency.

Chapter three, in an expansion upon chapter two, analyzes how the form of the novel allows for an open dialogue about things that became restricted in other forms available to society at the time period, such as conduct books. I use the novel theory of M.M. Bakhtin here, as it is useful to support my argument of why these female authors chose the novel in order to tell stories and portray many voices. All three novelists manipulate other forms in the novel in order to do so. In *The Female Quixote*, it is an excess of romance that allows readers and other characters to laugh at the foibles of the protagonist. In *Evelina*, the epistolary form, comedy, satire, sentimentality, and thematic conventions are all played with in the analysis of Evelina's development and ultimate union with Lord Orville. I focus primarily on the epistolary form. Finally, in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen critiques romance and parodies the gothic to make a statement about novels. Her blending of the comedic and dark nature of situations emphasizes the Bakhtinian open-endedness of the novel. The novel brings the topics I examine in the first chapter to reach fruition. The works force a conversation and digest older forms in order to critique and transform them, and this is what makes them works that have survived over the years. The novel endings are not satisfactory, and women succumb to the power of men when they marry, but this artificiality is exposed by the critique of the forms and the ability for the novel to expose this artificiality. Women can see the true evils that lurk in their society by learning to unravel conventions.

In my conclusion, I briefly examine the three novels in conversation with each other. The influences of Burney and Lennox are very visible in Austen's work, for

example. Austen cites two books by Burney in the very text of *Northanger Abbey*, and her works are indubitably influenced by the years of experimentation of the women writers before her. Romantic notions are critiqued in all three novels. Looking at these three works and authors together forms a definitive outlook on the novel as a form that depicted themes concerning women and society during the time period. The novel form was so critical because it allowed for an unrestricted discussion of topics that were more restricted in other forms, such as conduct manuals, plays or magazines. The books are about the structures that restrict women, both literally in castles and abbeys and metaphorically through systems of patriarchy and conventions found in antiquated writings. It is through these various forms and conventions that female novelists were able to manipulate and critique existing conversations and discourses and provide new avenues. The novel does not restrict women as so many other structures do; reading allows for spaces of interpretation.

## Chapter 1- Education and Novel Reading: Women's Anxieties and Agency in the Literary Marketplace

Eighteenth-century England experienced the fast growth of the novel; this form became a crucial part of society and culture. The novel rivaled other forms that previously existed, such as poems, letters, and plays. It is not that these other forms ceased to exist; the novel just became the new mode of literary expression that persisted through the ages. In a market of male authors who had greater access to resources, women still contributed from the very beginning to this rise.<sup>1</sup> Women ultimately had a harder time paving a way for themselves in a society filled with obstacles, and this rise of women novelists remains a crucial event in the history of literature, especially as women became a huge part of the success of this expanding literary culture. Women had to manipulate literary form and conventions in order to convey their own unique messages about topics of crucial importance, such as this very patriarchy embedded in society that made it harder for women to achieve success. With a form that continues to be popular with readers today, it is crucial to ask questions about this rise that shaped an ongoing cultural production. In what ways did the rise of the novel influence women? How do novel writing and reading relate to learning and systems education at the time period? And finally, how do these themes become manifested in the novel?

I first compile the historical background of the novel and its rise in England during the eighteenth-century, as I believe that this context will help set up the close readings of the three novels I am working with over the course of this project. I

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Patricia Martin directly notes how *The Female Quixote* is situated in the discussion initiated by Richardson and Fielding that suggested female writing was different and thus lesser than writing by males. She claims that Lennox utilized romance in such a way as to bring women into the tradition of the novel, "by challenging the very gendering of literary genres and their histories" (59).

specifically turn to women's roles in this process. There was much more at stake for women wanting to publish during the time period. These anxieties stemmed from a variety of issues that will be elaborated on later, such as the perceived compromise of female modesty and the forfeit of femininity. In addition, "women were attacked for having the temerity to write without having the necessary learning and taste" (Fergus 3). Learning and education are two common terms in discourse and female manuals during this period. The anxieties of female education and novel reading can be aligned as literacy also greatly increased at the time, and more people were taking part in these discussions. Each of these topics indubitably affects the other. In a society in which men controlled and had access to the structures of education, women had to make additional efforts in order to establish their presence and involvement. Novel writing was one area in which women established this manifestation of power and initiative. I examine how novel reading and writing allowed women to gain power in their societies.

Along with my discussion of novel reading and education, I turn to three female writers from the mid-eighteenth century to early nineteenth-century who addressed education and reading in their own novels about women. While various women address these issues in their works in both fictional and nonfictional pieces, Charlotte Lennox, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen provide an excellent survey of how education and reading both literally and figuratively work in their own societies. In addition, each of these writers struggled with anxieties of publication in the historical period in which she was writing. Thus, these three females and their novels offer an analysis of common trends as well as developments in society of these very themes over time. Their novels became a way for them to take a stand about issues regarding patriarchy in society.

## Publishing and the Literary Marketplace

Beginning this discussion, it is important to recognize that women played a crucial role in the developing literary culture in England. In the past, the reading public was quite small, and the audience was primarily male (Fergus 7). This began to change, however. The loosening of legal restraints in the Eighteenth-century on printing led to a boom in publishing. In the 1740s, circulating libraries were becoming common. These factors expanded this reading public greatly.<sup>2</sup> Plays and dramas, which had been previously marketable for women, ceased to be so; even poetry proved to be less profitable for women (Prescott 19). Women had to make a living, and novel writing emerged foremost as a way to do this. Like men, women strived for the means to make a living outside of the domestic sphere. Sarah Prescott notes the role they played during this period, observing their crucial involvement in literary networks as a means for moving ahead in the marketplace (16). Paula McDowell provides evidence that women worked in the print trades in growing numbers (136). Some women published anonymously, also contributing to this rise in female authorship. Regardless of this growth and the increasing ease of publishing, males still controlled the literary culture and means of production, and females had to “justify their precarious positions as women in a predominantly male literary culture” (Prescott 35). They had to carve out a larger space for themselves, and they had a difficult task in doing so.

An analysis of how the three novelists went about publishing their own works reveals the anxious mindset of female writers and information about the time period in which they were writing. Even though they gained power through publication and saw

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<sup>2</sup> See further overview of culture and society in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England in the introduction of *The Norton Anthology: The Restoration and Eighteenth Century*.

the novel as a way to discuss issues in society, there were anxieties about publication because men controlled the stories that were circulating. Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, which was published originally with *Northanger Abbey* in four volumes, reveals this plight in the one of the last chapters of the novel, in which Anne Elliot claims that men have had many advantages to tell their stories: "Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything" (Austen 242). Females had to in turn compose their own stories. Though published after her death, the messages about reading in these last two novels seem to properly end Austen's career. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar are crucial scholars in discussing this relationship of females and their writing, noting that "a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her" (17). Women had to subvert and reform conventions established by men through writing, as women did not participate as fully in past histories and stories in a way that spoke to their true predicaments. Gilbert and Gubar expound upon female writers:

Women from Jane Austen to Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, work whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible levels of meaning. Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards (73).

While their novels may not seem revolutionary, this project will claim, as Gilbert and Gubar note, that these females did gain authority and in turn endowed the novel authored by women with authority and transformative power.

All three female writers I am analyzing read themselves, and this influenced what they included in their own works; they knew what existed in the literary field and aimed to do something new. Interestingly, all of these writers struggled with or had anxieties regarding the publication of their novels. While the biographical information on Lennox is the least detailed, it can be deduced by what does exist that Lennox struggled financially despite the popularity of her novels. During her lifetime, Lennox's name never appeared on *The Female Quixote*, through her fame rests mostly in this novel based on the satire *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. This novel was published in 1752, really before the peak rise of the novel or the discussion about education by women such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More. By placing this novel in this project, I reveal the themes that reach their full fruition in other novels, especially in Austen's work, in later years. In a review most likely published by Samuel Johnson in *Gentleman's Magazine*, she was commended for her work (Small 20). Even after her semi-autobiographical work *Harriet Smith* and success of *The Female Quixote*, however, she had to rely on other factors in order to ensure her success. Many of her male friends were involved in the publishing industry, including Andrew Miller who became her primary publisher and employer. And he was still reluctant to publish the novel in 1752 (Gallagher 154). After the success of her novels, Lennox turned to translating texts as another way to earn money, but as a female she did not earn a great deal (Amory). After she was separated from her husband, she suffered with even greater financial struggles that extended through her entire life. These struggles with both finances and publication emphasize the additional hurdles women grappled with at the time period.

Frances Burney too had a complicated literary history that preceded the success of her novel. She refused to reveal her name in *Evelina* and had mixed feelings about identifying herself as a novelist.<sup>3</sup> Despite her desire to publish and be successful, she was still reluctant to put a name on her own novel (Delafield 25). Only after she gained success was she comfortable with using her reputable name to negotiate with publishers (Thaddeus 25). She had to rewrite *Evelina* in another handwriting because her true handwriting was recognizable to London composers.<sup>4</sup> Burney had various anxieties despite being from a literary family. Her father was a musician, and Frances was exposed to musicians, singers, and managers at her own house where concerts were often held (Jones xi). From the time she was a child, she helped her father compose speeches for characters in plays. She was exposed to this culture of entertainment, attending operas, the theatre, and musicals with her family (Jones ix-xi). After *Evelina*, she even composed a play that was accepted by the Drury Lane Theatre; it was not performed because others “persuaded Burney to follow the dictates of propriety rather than risk exposure as a writer for the public stage” (Jones ix). *Evelina* contains many aspects of the entertainment, such as public performances, that she witnessed growing up. She anonymously wrote to her publisher, “the plan of the first Volume, is the Introduction of a well-educated, but inexperienced young woman into public company, and a round of the most fashionable Spring Diversions of London. I believe not before been executed, though it seems fair field open for the Novelist, as it offers a fund inexhaustible for

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<sup>3</sup>Samuel Choi (“Self- Inscription in the Discourse of Letters”) and Amy J. Pawl (“Names and Their Owners in Francis Burney’s *Evelina*”) talk in greater extent about the anxieties of Burney’s own publishing history and how this is enacted in her work *Evelina*.

<sup>4</sup>*Nobody’s Story* by Catherine Gallagher discusses women in the literary marketplace, focusing on Burney in chapter 5. She particularly talks about the namelessness of *Evelina* in her letters and thus the namelessness of her creator, or Burney in the literary marketplace (211).

Conversation, observations, and probable incidents” (EJL ii. 216). It is important to note that Burney saw her novel doing something different, even though she located her work in the male tradition in the preface. She intended to transform subjects through things as simple as fictional conversation and incidents. Nevertheless, she still had initial anxieties concerning if her novel would be successful or not, and this hesitancy caused her to proceed through her literary life with greater caution.

Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, unlike the other two works being analyzed, was not published until after the author’s death, despite Austen’s attempts to get the work published during her lifetime. Claire Grogan brings attention to this detail in her introduction to the 2002 edition of *Northanger Abbey*. When her brother Henry published the 1816 manuscript, he included the advertisement in which Austen notes that “thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun” (Grogan 9). Austen importantly allows readers to note the failure of her publishers in not publishing this work. While it was her earliest written novel, most likely composed between the years 1798-1799, it was not published until 1818. There was no doubt that Austen wanted her work to be seen. For Austen, striving to be a professional author was a major and lifelong objective that would probably have continued for many years if it was not for her early death. Like Burney, the Austen family’s access to print initially helped her with her career as a writer (Fergus 4). She still, however, experienced delays from every printer she pursued for her published novels and she received a lack of reviews during her own lifetime (Fergus 7). Regardless, Austen pursued other novels with success and was able to see some of her popularity before her early death.

All of these latter factors in the public and private spheres create an environment of instability, both financially and emotionally. All three of these authors had to struggle to write when attacks were coming in a variety of forms and discourses. They struggled with the publication process and gaining adequate funds from their works. Nonetheless, they all grasped topics and critiqued and transformed them and even took older forms and transformed them in the novel. All three of these women rose to fame, and their novels are reprinted today in great numbers. Even at the time in which they published, while not as lauded as they should have been, they were recognized for doing something different and monumental with their words. Lennox was commended by Samuel Johnson as a superior woman to all those he was with at the Essex Head Club in 1784, including Frances Burney. She received both assistance and support from him over her lifetime (Small 20).<sup>5</sup> Burney, after favorable reviews of *Evelina*, latched on to the success the novel provided her. She was able to support herself almost entirely by the funds from two of her novels. Austen, though not a supporter at the time, was asked by the Prince Regent to dedicate her work *Emma* to his majesty. With these notes of praise, these novelists did indeed create a space for themselves and held a power over readers, both male and female. They broke through the many obstacles that existed in their paths.

### Female Education and the Fear of Novel Reading

Education directly involves reading, pieces of fiction and nonfiction, as well as social situations. Alan Richardson notes that “education was one of the most hotly contested and frequently discussed topics of what is often called the Romantic era” (2).

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<sup>5</sup> This account of Burney’s life by Small is one of the most famous and only accounts that exist to offer a detailed biography of Lennox’s life. Still, much about Lennox’s early life is unknown.

The 1780s often marks the starting point for this discussion, and this plot aligns well with the rise and development of the novel. There was discussion prior to this point, such as in John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), but the growing number of debates and discussion took place later on in the century and were clearly influenced by these earlier writings on education. There was a rise in literacy among the poor, and England was working toward national education (Richardson 46). These two factors led to an increased attention to this institution. Education was obviously discussed in a variety of forms, especially conduct books, manuals, and magazines for women. People searched for texts that could be used for the education of children as well (Richardson 128). Early instructional items, such as *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744), were published to instruct children. This book in particular had a series of rhymes for each letter of the alphabet (Richardson 109). Sarah Fielding, in *The Governess*, stresses the importance of education through fables and short stories designed to instruct children. This work is often described as the first novel in English written for the audience of children (Ward 21). Candice Ward notes of Fielding, "Regardless of genre, Fielding warns, without critical engagement reading is a useless activity" (22). She crucially stresses through her stories that women are just as capable as men of exercising reason. Already emerging is this gender debate regarding education. Also, this stress on critical engagement is something that will become crucial to the protagonists of the novels I am analyzing; they utilize reading to engage with others and their surroundings.

Women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More wrote on education, calling for greater emphasis surrounding the institution in which women were unfairly regarded by these very works that emphasized a certain type of femininity.

Wollstonecraft deplors the situation of women that she attributes to “a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers...” (Wollstonecraft 171). She particularly criticized conduct books in order to call for an equal education for males and females; she claimed that these types of texts call for a separate and gendered education for the sexes. Wollstonecraft’s views were seen as very radical for her time because of her proposals for the national agenda.<sup>6</sup> More also talked of education to a great extent in her work, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education with a View to the Principles and Conduct of Women of Rank and Fortune*; unlike Wollstonecraft, however, she proposed women strive for rights from within their proper sphere and thus was less radical in her views (Richardson 180). This fighting from within one’s proper sphere rings throughout More’s chapter VI on filial obedience: “They should be led to distrust their own judgment; they should learn not to murmur at expostulation; but should be accustomed to expect and to endure opposition. It is a lesson with which the world will not fail to furnish them; and they will not practice it the worse for having learnt it the sooner” (More). These differing views, both radical and conservative in nature, stress the importance of female education at the time and the ongoing efforts of women to criticize the current means of teaching.

Despite the anxieties surrounding publishing and education at this time, women played a crucial role in producing novels in a culture that looked down upon the very act of female reading. Jan Fergus notes that “18<sup>th</sup> century moralists denounced the novel as

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Richardson discusses Wollstonecraft and other female writers on the topic of education further in *Literature, Education and Romanticism* (175-180).

dangerous popular entertainment and primarily a female study” (155). She goes on to note how this view was misguided, as men and women both took part in this rise of novel reading. Women still were unfairly perceived, however, as being corrupted by novel reading. Works such as the *Lady’s Magazine*, which ran from 1772-1812, also depicted this view of women and novel reading.<sup>7</sup> There were warnings to the female of the possibilities of the heart being seduced by romances. These warnings also dominated period conduct books. In addition, there are many female novelists who do not uphold the act of reading in their works; they do the very opposite of the three novelists I will be analyzing. They instead mock the heroines who fall subject to this activity.<sup>8</sup> Men as well as women condemned female reading. Educationalists John Bennett and James Fordyce strongly condemned novel reading for women. More and Wollstonecraft, while advocating for women, also did this in their writings. It is important, then, that the three authors I will be analyzing depict women who must learn to read their environments in society after a very sheltered upbringing. Their novels are radical in the fact that the heroines must recognize and point out how the society in which they are living is flawed. They first must, however, encounter and then counter the fears that society perceived as resulting from novel reading. This is the first step they take in addressing the problems in the education of females. The protagonists in *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey* especially must radically change how they interpret their reading and their own societies after they fall subject to the fiction they read. In *Evelina*, a metaphorical reading

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<sup>7</sup> See further analysis of this point in Joe Bray’s *The Female Reader in the English Novel*.

<sup>8</sup> Claire Grogan notes some of the novelists who do so. She cites Hervey’s *Louisa*, William’s *Julia*, Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray*, Hay’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs of Women*. Although this particular study will not include an in depth look at these novels, an interesting expansion would be an analysis of these novels alongside the novels that promote and celebrate women reading.

supplements this literal reading in which Evelina must interpret and revise in her development throughout the novel.

### The Form of the Novel

All of these different types of writings—conduct books, fables, histories told by males, and various other educational texts—have something crucial in common; they stress the desire and importance of a discourse on education for all ages and especially women. Looking at all of these forms helps trace the development of the novel. I want to stress the presence and importance of these older forms, such as the magazines, fables, and conduct books, because they were crucial in influencing the novelist. Various pieces of nonfiction and fiction had visible effects on the writing of authors. Furthermore, the inadequacies in these works led others to take up the same issues in their own works, such as the novelists that I will be analyzing. While the manipulation of specific forms in each of the novels will be particularly analyzed in chapter three, these other forms foremost influenced the topics of education and reading discussed in the novel and show the process of revision and development that occurs over time.

The conduct book is so important in the development of novels because it is a crucial predecessor in the discussion of what female education should look like. With the “emergence in England of the Bildungsroman, or novel of development” (Richardson 7) the discussion of education expanded in new way. Kathryn Sutherland notes conduct books’ ability to absorb other forms in order to create a text which calls for the proper duties of women (26). This form was used as an educational means to instill behavior and values in women. The novel that discussed education can be seen as being influenced

greatly by these conduct books, which is why the traces of such books are seen in the novels that will be analyzed. In *Evelina*, in particular, the letters from Villars can be seen as a moral code instructing Evelina in her moral education. Nancy Armstrong comments on the novel and conduct book: “With the novels of Burney and Austen, furthermore, the conduct-book ideal of womanhood provided the ideal against which novelistic representations of women asserted themselves as being more true to life” (473). The novel became a more realistic way to depict daily life and circumstances. Though fiction, the novel nonetheless provided for these women important avenues to talk about education and gender. In these texts, Armstrong claims that the female novelists asserted a unique power. I want to elaborate by stressing how different this literary power was from former power asserted in conduct books and other forms of writing because of its ability to absorb and transform these very past forms in a space that allowed for this flexibility and reformulation of crucial topics in society.

These fictional novels have an important role in interpreting society at the time period. Though fiction, they open up discussions about real issues. The novel’s ability to exhibit realism is something widely discussed in tracing this rise of the novel. Ian Watt, for instance, notes how the novel’s development reflects both social and intellectual change during the time period. John Bender reinforces this same idea and goes one step further, noting that the novels themselves enable change (Fergus 155).<sup>9</sup> Ian Watt notes that the novel is “the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals” (375). This attention to realism became a common hook for scholars analyzing these novels. Characters and scenes in Austen’s works, while fictional,

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Fergus traces this rise discussing these scholars in Chapter 7 of *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*.

are often recognized as being very realistic portrayals of everyday life and interactions, which makes her novels so popular for readers even to this day. With this being said, I claim that these novelists used their fiction to talk about education and reading everyday interactions in a society that was constructed on the authority of men. Unlike Wollstonecraft and More's pieces on education, these women writers chose fiction in order to make their points. Like them, they critiqued different forms that already existed. Olivia Murphy notes, "The quixotic novel, like the gothic novel, has a history of raising uncomfortable questions in the minds of readers as to the nature of literary realism, and our own (and other's) perceptions of reality" (48). Two forms that I will be working with later on are referenced; this point reiterates the similarities in novels that draw upon tropes and conventions in order to bring about a certain level of literary awareness to realism.

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The rise of the female novelist is a feat of great power; it is also a rise that brings about discussion of education, gender, and societal systems at work. Women did not have the same opportunities or ease of seizing the same opportunities offered to men: "As all women were barred from universities and faced innumerable other disadvantages and varieties of repression, the story of virtually every woman author in the period is one of self-education, courage, and extraordinary initiative" (Greenblatt 2068). Women had to write themselves into a canon that was absent of the depiction of true female experiences, and the novel emerged as the form for them to do so. Catherine Gallagher notes that the novel being constantly attacked actually sparked "a constant need to revise it" (xvii). There was an overwhelming ambivalence surrounding the novel, and this went right

along with the ambivalence surrounding female education at the time period. Ultimately, any form of writing or instruction becomes restrictive and is subject to revision, and the novel is what the three authors I am analyzing chose to use to take a stand against the way things were. These were all women who were fortunately educated in a society and at a time when “daughters seldom managed to catch a serious education” (Thaddeus 42). This did not mean that all women were as lucky, as this seems to indicate why they wanted to depict females in their novels that lacked the same opportunities. Lastly, these women have all been located in the male tradition of authorship that existed, especially as Lennox was influenced greatly by Cervantes, and Burney referred to prominent literary men in her own preface. They did not do this to write in the same line of these men, but they did it to transform what was to come in the subsequent pages of their novels.

Chapter 2- Reading Characters and Situations: Education and Novel Reading in *The Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, and *Northanger Abbey*

The three novelists utilized their settings in order to directly transform how education and reading are portrayed in a society, especially regarding women. As I mentioned the novel's direct connection to realism and its intended motives, I conclude that these women wanted to transform crucial discussions that were circulating in society regarding education and the novel, especially regarding the fear of females being seduced or corrupted by novels. Through close readings of a few specific scenes in each of the novels that display how reading is used positively, I will show the education that could be gained by proper reading and even from initial misreading. Both men and women read in the texts, and the conversations and interactions of these characters reveal a great deal about the patriarchy embodied in society's structures.

While education and reading manifest themselves differently in each of the three novels, there is a similar message about the ability for reading to allow for an opening in interpreting a society controlled by men. Female education ties all three novels together, as all of the protagonists have a similar space in the novels dedicated to their upbringing and education. It is also a topic, as explored in chapter 1, which is directly intertwined with novel reading. The lack of discussion and detail about education sparks the misreading of books and situations by female protagonists in the novels. Female reading is positive in these novels, however, because it allows the protagonists of these novels to take charge in ways that were hindered by society and the males controlling situations and institutions of power. Reading offers women a tool for growth or simple recognition of how society manifested power unfairly at the time period. In *The Female Quixote*,

reading romances allows Arabella to gain the skills and wit of an orator. In *Evelina*, Evelina often reads situations that allow her to accurately judge the various male suitors that surround and prey upon her. A heavy metaphorical reading supplements the literal reading of texts in this novel. In *Northanger Abbey*, the gothic novel allows Catherine to recognize the evils in the abbey and systems of patriarchy embodied by General Tilney, John Thorpe, and even Henry Tilney. Ultimately, the power of reading allows the women in the novels to gain agency that was hindered in their insufficient educations. These three authors, through their novels, combat the anxieties of female reading at the time period and allow new avenues for interpretation.

#### Reading Reality in *The Female Quixote*

Reading romances occupies the plot of *The Female Quixote*. I will not be focusing on the exaggeration of romance in the novel as much in this section as how reading functions in the novel. Arabella utilizes her reading to gain crucial skills that she did not obtain in her insufficient education. It is thus a tragedy when the doctor, acting as a teacher to Arabella at the end of the novel, “cures” her of her whims and ability to interpret fiction. The end of the novel indicates a metaphorical death for her persona, a point that most scholars agree upon in their analysis of this novel.<sup>10</sup> This death, however, I argue, indicates the lack of solution to the problem at the time period; even at a time where women could take on significant roles, such as authors, barriers existed to hold them back. Arabella, in giving up her romantic notions, ultimately succumbs to the greatest romantic reality for women, marriage to Glanville. A somewhat artificial ending

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<sup>10</sup>Deborah Ross is one scholar who does this, as she argues that Arabella’s cure can be compared to Don Quixote’s death (470). This paper will not go in depth on this point, but it is important to recognize this influence on Lennox’s work.

or unsatisfactory one offers a more conclusive statement about reality than one in which the heroine actually finds a solution or fairytale ending. The female is silenced at the end of the novel, but future novelists picked up where Lennox left off, especially Austen in *Northanger Abbey* with her defense and discussion of novel reading.

There is much discussion of reading in *The Female Quixote*, as it is on the surface visibly a work about a young woman who reads French romances and then acts upon these realities. Elaine M. Kauvar and Mary Patricia Martin touch upon these themes in the novel. Kauvar notes how Arabella responds to the situations based on the novels she reads, creating her own adventures and a reality of her own, and one of the novel's main themes is the coming to age theme; it is a Bildungsroman (Kauvar 213). She goes on to relate how these themes later manifest themselves in new ways in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Mary Martin's analysis locates the novel in the discussion of Samuel Richardson and Samuel Johnson; she claims that Lennox became representative of women's writing after these men and claimed the novel as a woman's writing (45-48). She notes that "Richardson's and Fielding's place in eighteenth-century women's fiction is evidence that women writers at mid-century did register the controversy around the novel, and felt themselves participating in it" (Martin 51). Lennox depicts this very discussion in her novel through Arabella's reading. Education is gendered in Arabella's society. This aspect leads to her own inadequate education, but reading is positive regardless in making Arabella a smart woman who can rise above her male peers in the speeches she makes at various points in the novel. It is often Arabella who takes a role as "teacher" or "orator" without even realizing it—she has the ability to captivate her listeners because she is saying something that warrants this attention.

The education of Arabella in *The Female Quixote* is inadequate and almost entirely absent in the novel; this point is crucial to note in an analysis of education at the time period. What is not said in the text indicates the lack of resources and energy given to female education. Little has been said in secondary criticism concerning this topic in the novel, either. Arabella lives in a remote castle with her guardian, the Marquis, and she is entirely secluded from the world. It is stated in the novel that “he taught her to read and write in a very few months” (Lennox 6). This is the first education she receives, and it leads her to love reading. In her solitude, she takes up reading; she has nothing else to occupy her time. This is not something to be condemned, but in her situation, it unfortunately leads to bad reading. Her father allows her to peruse the books of the house, which allows her to invest hours into “great stores of Romances and, what was still more unfortunate, not in the original French, but very bad translations” (Lennox 7). These are the books on which she bases her reality, and they are not books that teach her skills needed to adequately function and interact with others in her society at the time period. No one prevents her from reading these texts, however, and she invests her time and energy into memorizing these romantic stories.

The true weight of Arabella’s seclusion is made known when the reader discovers that Arabella only attends a Sunday service when she is seventeen. This beginning indicates the plight of females who were not prepared for the world. Even though “the best Masters of Music and Dancing were sent for from London to attend her” (Lennox 7), she allows the books to take up most of her study, and she does not interact with society outside of the Marquis. Furthermore, the music and dancing directly set up this gendered education; readers are not told that she is being taught other fields, such as math and

science. Even the first chapter heading, “Some useless Additions to a fine Lady’s Education,” indicates the lack of true importance these activities had for the development of young ladies (Lennox 5).<sup>11</sup> It is a very particular type of study that her father allows her to pursue, and in general that men wanted for females during this time period.

This education of reading, dancing, and singing should naturally lead to Arabella’s role as a wife, as her father would like her to marry his nephew Glanville, whom Arabella refuses to marry. Her reading (quite surprisingly to her father and Glanville) causes her to reject a man, something she may not have done without these examples from her books. I will argue that this is the first positive thing that results from her reading, as she gains the confidence and ability to say no at a time when marriage was advocated and hard to resist for a young female in Arabella’s situation. Even though she does choose to marry Glanville at the end of the novel, she does it with a greater realization of her circumstances. This proposal comes very early on in the novel, and Lennox shows the adamancy of Arabella in refusing his hand, despite the insistence of her father. A sign of agency, books have allowed her to refuse what everybody else wants for her. This sign of defiance is the first step in her greater awareness of the controlling nature of patriarchy in her society. Arabella replies to her father regarding the situation, “Since Love is not voluntary, I am not obliged to any Person for loving me...” (Lennox 44). She controls her own life story. Sir Charles later tells Glanville, regarding Arabella’s future: “...and when you are her Husband, you may probably find the Means of curing her of those little Follies, which at present are conspicuous enough...the instruction,

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Richardson, in his compilation of female writers on education, notes that “nearly all women writers of the educational treatises and conduct book asserted the need for a more substantial education and condemned the emphasis on superficial ‘accomplishments’ in girls’ boarding schools” (170). His point reiterates Lennox’s point about these “useless additions” to female education.

which then you will not scruple to give her, and which, from a Husband without any Offence to her Delicacy, she may receive, may reform her conduct” (Lennox 180). There exists a clear divide in the way in which men and women think regarding Arabella’s future. Arabella is looked upon by the men in the novel as a sick woman who must be cured by a husband, the ultimate control that men held at the time period, as women lost most of their power in a marriage.<sup>12</sup> This framework poses a general problem regarding female agency in that Arabella’s opinions and expressions are not valued.

Once interacting with others, Arabella’s past reading often causes her to seem foolish in situations and uneducated. It results in grandiose misreading that causes the other characters in the novel to laugh at her (and no one teaches her differently). It is not a surprise then in the subsequent chapters that Arabella bases her reality on and refers to examples from these stories in order to move through her own life as well as relate to the people she encounters. She often puts her own body in danger, trusting strangers and running away from the castle at one point to escape her fictional ravisher. Despite these dangerous actions, Arabella does create adventures for herself,<sup>13</sup> something that has been absent from her upbringing outside of the pages of her novels. She is ignorant of the dangers because she has not been educated in any other way. This lack of knowledge adds to Lennox’s overall discussion of how education was unfairly distributed in society, and Arabella cannot find a way out unless she literally tries to escape the castle and educational upbringing that confines her. It is only in Bath, for example, that she begins

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<sup>12</sup> Jan Fergus notes of women’s existence after marriage, “Married women had no legal existence. They could not own property or sign contracts” (3). Arabella faces this fate in the novel.

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Ross notes this point, stressing the empowerment that results from her agency in making decisions and taking these adventures, as the history “makes women the central figures” (464). This is a complicated point to make. While I do think that these adventures empower her, I also believe that they are obviously harmful when they put Arabella in danger. My main focus will be on the skills she develops outside of these adventures.

to realize how her reading has been misguided; it is also in Bath when she gains the attention of others because of her wit and ability to speak well on various subjects. This exposure, though she is unprepared for it, is a necessary part of the learning process for Arabella. Bath is a place foremost embedded in patriarchy, but it is also a place that allows for the socialization and thus the development of Arabella's character in her interactions with others. At Bath, she will compare her reading with reality; she also must confront new situations and engage with her surroundings in new ways.

While I will not be going into detail about each of these whimsical instances Arabella experiences in the novel, as these examples do not display the positive side of her reading, it is clear from any one of them that she has a keen ability to retain and recite information to others. She has not read poorly; in fact, her memory is outstanding as she cites examples and complicated names and histories almost instantly. There are pages in the novel devoted to these detailed examples, in which the reader becomes exhausted reading and attempting to translate the antiquated examples. This lengthy process in itself exemplifies the great concentration it would take to memorize such texts. One such example of the juxtaposition of such knowledge and names occurs when Arabella receives the history of Miss Groves. In order to relate to Miss Grove's experience with and separation from her lover, the writing master, she notes:

Love is ingenious in Artifices: Who would have thought, that, under the Name of Alcippus, a simple attendant of the fair Artemisa Princess of Armenia, the gallant Alexander Son of the Great and unfortunate Antony, by Queen Cleopatra, was concealed, who took upon himself that mean Condition for the sake of seeing his

adored Princess? Yet the condition of Orontes, Prince of the Massagetes, was far more ingenious... (Lennox 72).

And this discussion goes on for lines as Arabella notes even more names and examples. These examples allow Arabella to mystify her listeners, as she is the only one who has read these texts. Still, however, her ability to retain this information is a sign of her knowledge developed through her own means of reading. Her ability to take this information and create meaning for herself exemplifies her ability to utilize the resources she is given growing up in her environment.

Arabella's wit and superiority when rallying and speaking to others on various topics proves that reading has developed other skills outside of her imagination, however. She becomes a central figure in her environment just like the women in the histories she reads; these histories are "told from a perspective that makes women central figures" (Ross 464). These scenes of Arabella's speaking prove that reading has been a positive tool for her and ultimately made her an individual that impresses both men and women during arguments.<sup>14</sup> One instance of this is her speech on raillery itself, in which she notes that it is the "poorest kind of Revenge that can be taken" and "There ought to be a great distance between Raillery and Satire, so that one may never be mistaken for the other..." (Lennox 268). Sir Charles even notes that she speaks like an orator: "Sir Charles in his way, express'd much Admiration of her Wit, telling her, if she has been a man, she would have made a great Figure in Parliament, and that her Speeches might have perhaps to be printed in time" (Lennox 311). These skills of memorization and application to conversation in developing such speeches were established through her extensive reading, so in this case, her reading is very positive. Patricia Martin reiterates this point, observing,

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<sup>14</sup> Here, I reiterate Ellen Gardiner's point that romance has taught Arabella superior critical judgment (4).

“the very things in which Arabella is most distinguished can be seen as a consequence of her romance reading” (57). Furthermore, Sir Charles’s statement is an acknowledgment of the discrimination women faced in their society, as a man with this skill to orate would have been recognized for such a speech. Soon after at the ball in Bath, she speaks on what she believes makes a virtuous mind. Again, this speech indicates her ability to speak on other topics outside of epic battles, love, and valiant men willing to risk their lives for princesses. Lennox exemplifies the capacity for women to take charge in the presence of men, even men who are well-educated themselves.

In contrast, in looking at the relationship of men and reading, there is a greater divide since men do not read as well in this novel.<sup>15</sup> Glanville makes a fool out of himself when trying to speak about the novels because “he pretended to be deeply engaged in reading, when, in Reality, he was contemplating the surprising Effect these books had produced in the Mind of his Cousin...” (Lennox 50). He never actually reads the texts that Arabella gives him. Often, he enacts the romances of Arabella instead.<sup>16</sup> He becomes seduced by the very romance he condemns. In addition, Mr. Selvin seems to be at a loss of what to say to Arabella on history because she can speak for hours on end of various topics that he himself does not realize are just fictional. It is only the female Countess that can relate to her because of her past reading. More often than not, Arabella is not the foolish reader, just the foolish participant in a society that has encouraged her misreading for many years. Sir George is one male character who has read extensively and well in the novel, but he is manipulative and uses the very stories to play a game with Arabella

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<sup>15</sup> Deborah Ross notes that Arabella reads, even if it is bad reading, unlike most of the people she encounters in the novel (466).

<sup>16</sup> Chapter 3 will expand upon Glanville’s enactment of romance in order to make a claim about the satire of romance in the form of the novel. Men’s manipulation of romance is restrictive in *The Female Quixote*.

over the course of the novel, hindering her recognition of reality.<sup>17</sup> He may be a good reader, but he does not enact positive effects through his manipulation of the romance he reads. His reading therefore restricts the female subject.

Even though Arabella may be reading the wrong information, she has read it well, better than most males in the novel, who do not read at all. Women can rise above men through conversation and knowledge, even if they must educate themselves. Reading has given Arabella superior skills, skills that have helped her rise above her inadequate education and seclusion. She can speak with confidence, she has an excellent memory, and she even argues against marriage for most of the novel, going against the ultimate romantic notion. When men try to control Arabella's reality, they exclude and threaten to obliterate the female; Arabella's words and actions bring the female back into the novel. Lennox is resituating romance in the hands of females, not condemning it through her blatant satire; the form of the novel, as will be shown, allows her to do so.

### The Power of Writing and Reading in *Evelina*

What is not commonly focused on in an analysis of Frances Burney's *Evelina* is how Evelina reads and interprets situations and characters in the novel, which seems to provide a useful tool for determining female agency and identity in this novel. The letters from her caregiver Villars are the texts that inform her reality and call her to question her duties and desires, not unlike the romances that Arabella had as guides in *The Female Quixote*. She reads these letters constantly, and these are literal indicators of her ability to read. In Evelina's situation, however, her own judgment and reading of situations and

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<sup>17</sup> Chapter 3 will further expand upon Sir George's manipulation of romance, as this manipulation is restrictive to the female in the novel. Lennox further critiques and revises romance through this portrayal.

men in the novel is often more accurate than the letters she receives with judgments from Villars or the advice from Madam Duval. In addition, Evelina's misreading often comes after listening to or reading the advice of others. This novel is much less focused on this literal reading as it is a metaphorical reading of characters and situations that supplements Evelina's growing ability to read accurately in the novel. At one point in the novel, this metaphorical reading is directly referred to as Mr. Villars exclaims that Evelina "is a book that both afflicts and perplexes me" (Burney 264). I will look at a few situations in which Evelina's own experience and judgment serves her well in reading situations and characters; men, on the other hand, often act as bad readers and informers of situations themselves and therefore cannot adequately help Evelina in the novel.<sup>18</sup>

Evelina writes constantly in the novel, and this writing portrays an important aspect of her developing identity. Catherine Parke notes that Evelina becomes "an agent of history" when she situates her name with the letters that she writes (167). This name is so important in establishing her presence in a crowded London that often pushes her aside. Samuel Choi similarly talks about the importance of a name in his article, exemplifying the scarcity of Evelina's actual name and signature in regards to the letters that she sends others, especially Villars in the novel, noting that she chooses to use her name when she feels as if her identity is compromised (Choi 263). Through these letters, he argues, Frances Burney attempts to insert Evelina back into history. Both of these scholars are crucial in starting my discussion of education and reading in this novel. Additional

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<sup>18</sup>In the novel, John Bray notes, "though few details are given throughout the novel of Evelina's reading matter, and she is rarely shown reading, part of Lord Orville's courtship involves their reading together" (33). Most of the reading in the novel, however, is a metaphorical reading of society. This is an important point to note because unlike *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*, this novel does not focus on the reading of novels. I think this is an important work to include in my survey, however, because of its discussion of education and form.

articles also discuss the naming associated with the novel and these letters in particular—Evelina’s identity is constantly at stake throughout the novel. This discussion that occupies a great deal of study on *Evelina* will provide a useful starting point for my own discussion because Evelina’s identity is at stake in her developing ability to read. I will not focus on these signed signatures as much as Evelina’s actual mark on situations and behavior towards characters that she encounters in the novel.

Evelina’s education in the novel, which is quite brief, limits her understanding of the world and gives her a shaky start when she transitions to London. Evelina shares the same secluded upbringing as Arabella; the similarities are striking. It is noted by Burney in the preface that “a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life...” (9). Her caregiver Villars has provided her with an education, an education that is not greatly elaborated on in the text. She is not reading romances as Arabella was, and she certainly is not experiencing the world, either. Villars believes that the “time draws on for experience and observation to take the place of instruction” (Burney 20). He even notes that she most likely will exhibit “a thousand deficiencies” in his letter to Lady Howard (Burney 21). This acknowledgement of her lack of education seems to be more progressive than that of the Marquis in *The Female Quixote*, but neither man does much to enhance the education of these young women. This relates to a greater national discourse about education at the time period because the female is again not adequately provided for by society—she is tossed around between caregivers for a replacement to an actual education in other fields. In sending Evelina directly off with others, Villars sheds this educational responsibility onto others while keenly observing through detailed letters.

Evelina is aware of her inadequate upbringing and laments that she has not received a greater education at her first ball in London. This is after her confusion of how dancing engagements work at a ball. She does not realize the impropriety of turning down one man and then dancing with another. When she is asked where she was educated, she replies, "Where I most sincerely wish I now was!" (Burney 46). She mourns that she has not been given more education. She later notes, "But really, I think there ought to be a book, of the laws and customs a-la-mode, presented to all young people, upon their first introduction into public company" (Burney 84). This deficiency of educational materials further exemplifies the lack of importance given to this matter in her upbringing. This reference to reading also indicates the need of a literal text that could allow her to gain valuable skills. Catherine Parke notes, "Evelina's wish for such a book makes an inside commentary on the novel itself and defines one of its purposes to offer the reader mock encounters with the unfamiliar, dangerous situations that Evelina must puzzle out for herself" (168). Already on her own, Evelina must learn to navigate her world, and thus her reading of her surroundings becomes more important without these literal texts.

Villars encourages Evelina to marry as an ultimate achievement of her upbringing; her skills only need to allow her the ability to marry and eventually care for a family. This desire is similar to the Marquis's desire for Arabella to marry his nephew Glanville. Villars exclaims, "My plan, therefore, was not merely to educate and to cherish her as my own, but to adopt her as the heiress of my small fortune, and to bestow her upon some worthy man, with whom she might spend her days in tranquil cheerfulness, and good-humour, untainted by vice, folly, or ambition" (Burney 128). This is the only future that

Madam Duval can see for her as well, predicting her “marrying into some family of the first rank in the kingdom...” (Burney 122) Without a man to support her, Evelina is not given other options to sustain herself. There is no alternative at the end of the novel, either; Lord Orville and Evelina return home and marry. Luckily, her own reading has allowed her to choose a man worthy of her abilities and character. But it is important to note that she can only gain full power after the acknowledgement from her real father at the end of the novel. Evelina must struggle to find her voice in the novel while surrounded by people who have their own reading of her future, formed on what was expected for a young woman of her society and circumstances.

Evelina quickly becomes a keen observer and recorder of her surroundings when she is left to fend for herself, even though exclaiming at first, “yet I hardly know how to go on...” (Burney 25). She writes almost everything to Villars, detailing her experiences and emotions. At one point, this task becomes overwhelming to Evelina: “I can write no more now. I have hardly time to breathe—only just this, the houses and streets are not so superb as I suspected” (Burney 27). Evelina’s letters compose almost the entirety of the novel, as they illustrate so much of the daily occurrences in London and all of the places Evelina frequents. They take the reader from Drury Lane Theatre to Portland Chapel to St. James Park and various other places. She records her environment as she sees it, gaining an awareness of her surroundings that becomes embodied in her letters. Her detailed letters exemplify her ability to write well and record and analyze situations. How she interprets situations provides a survey of her ability to read. Despite her inexperience in the world, her developing judgments of people and situations are very often very accurate.

Despite inadequacies in her education, Evelina is soon able to distinguish between the good and bad qualities of characters surrounding her. Evelina makes an initial mistake in the novel at the ball of not accepting an engagement and then agreeing to dance with another, lamenting “that I (she) had not considered the impropriety of refusing one partner, and afterwards accepting another” (Burney 35). This small mistake came from her seclusion and inexperience in the world—she has never been to a ball before. Regardless of this small blunder, she is able to see her misstep and the subsequent real danger that lurks in her society, as several men in the novel prey on Evelina, and women in general, from the ball scenes forward. This ball scene comes to represent the larger problem in the novel of men who want to control her ability to make decisions. Evelina’s ability to read them is part of her ability to read well. There are several ridiculous men in the novel, and Evelina observes and adequately records their flaws in her letters. The Captain, for example, is perhaps the most crude and sexist character in the novel; he also hates foreigners. There are pages in the novel devoted to his fights with the French Madam Duval. Upon meeting her, he blatantly states, “Who wants you? . . . Do you suppose, Madam French, we have not enough of other nations to pick our pockets already?” (Burney 52). Later on in the novel, he places women in an inferior light: “What signifies them as girls? Do you think they know their own minds yet? . . . they are a set of parrots, and speak by rote, for they all say the same thing: but ask ‘em how they like making puddings and pies, and I warrant you’ll pose ‘em” (Burney 110). The Captain’s speech is not only derogatory to women, but illustrates a male opinion of female agency and the value of female conversation. He does not grant Evelina, or females in general, agency; regardless, Evelina expresses her own thoughts and opinions in her letters and

makes her own judgments, never once valuing his character or considering that he could be of higher morals.

Evelina is not seduced by romance and thus by the ridiculous men in the novel who want her—she seeks solitude and quite the opposite for herself while in London. Like the romantic books that Arabella reads, the men and their schemes act as a parallel for Evelina in this novel. Evelina is able to relate the ridiculous nature of these men to Villars in her letters and takes means to avoid them, which is hard to do, as they keep reappearing. For example, Evelina must dance with Lovel after his persistent urgings, but she does not value his character. To avoid the persistent Willoughby, she does not go downstairs until tea time (Burney 59). Later on, she finds herself trapped in Sir Clement's chariot as he orders it to go the wrong way; the terror in this scene is visceral, as she yells at Clement to let her out: "If you do not intend to murder me, for mercy's, for pity's sake, let me get out!" (Burney 100) Evelina must articulate herself strongly in order to maintain her identity. She is further hindered in growth by Madam Duval, who claims ownership of her against Evelina's will; and Evelina must concede as her father will not claim ownership of her. When she wishes to stay in instead of attending a ball, Madam Duval laughs at her, calling her a "foolish, ignorant country girl" (Burney 182). A caregiver for Evelina for most of the novel, she too fails to value her person. All of these experiences trap Evelina and threaten to annihilate her voice and compromise her identity; this aspect of her reality makes her struggle to step forward that much harder in the novel. She still makes an effort to escape the clutches of these people, however, and she never becomes permanently trapped under the power of any one person. This ability

to read characters allows her to create a protective space for herself. Without books to inform her perception of reality, she must rely on her developing judgment in London.

In addition to reading characters, Evelina can adequately assess situations.

Evelina can see through the schemes of the Captain against Madam Duval; Evelina many times wants to laugh at the ridiculous nature of such schemes, especially the elaborate one in which Duval is deceived into thinking Du Bois has been sent to jail. She later notes that the dinner served by her relations, the Braughtons, is “ill-served, ill-cooked, and ill-managed” (Burney 176). Her cousins are rude and do not act properly in various public situations, such as operas. Evelina can distinguish the low nature of these people she is surrounded by. Evelina thus knows when to take action without consulting them. She separates herself from the actions of such characters and becomes a heroine when she helps a poor man, who ends up being her brother. She prevents him from committing armed robbery, which he was considering resorting to because of his poverty. She drops her own purse for him to offer him greater financial assistance. She can directly relate to his powerlessness in the novel. In the end, she gains a true relation, adding to her formation of identity in the novel. This action importantly stems from her own judgment, empathy, and reading of the situation. Furthermore, she takes this correct action without consulting Villars or Madam Duval, exemplifying her growing awareness in the novel and ability to take action during scenes of importance. In the previous scene, she prevents her brother from impending ruin in the novel.

In contrast to Evelina, the men in this novel are generally bad readers, as they were in *The Female Quixote*. The first instance of this is seen in Mr. Lovel at the play. Lovel does not even know what is going on in the play, so he cannot respect the

performance. “I have no time to read playbills; one merely comes to meet one’s friends and shew that one’s alive” (Burney 82). Another instance of Lovel’s bad reading is seen when he is discussing classics with Mrs. Selwyn. When he is asked to recite classic texts, he says –“ really, one has not much time, even at the university, for mere reading” (Burney 287). He condemns reading once more in his blatant confession that he does not read himself. In addition, Villars cannot read his own daughter; when she returns home briefly, he cannot understand her melancholy mood, even explicitly saying she is “a book that both afflicts and perplexes me” (Burney 264). As I emphasized before, this statement represents the metaphorical reading that is such a large part of the novel. Villars cannot give her the advice needed to feel better about Lord Orville. And even Lord Orville cannot adequately read the situation regarding Evelina and her frequent meetings with her brother, as he believes this man could indicate a romantic interest and pose a threat to his own relationship with Evelina. All of these instances of reading poorly indicate the inability for men to accurately read characters and situations. Men in this novel have a specific view of their own surroundings and women, and they rarely are open to thinking differently or considering alternative explanations. Their restrictive mindsets thus hinder the female subjects with whom they are involved.

Despite some misreading throughout the novel, Lord Orville is the only man who Evelina encounters that allows a space of agency for women, and her ultimate ability to read his true character rewards her. Orville is always considering Evelina and making sure the opinions of females are heard: “I am most desirous to hear the opinions of these young ladies, to whom all public places must, as yet, be new” (Burney 110). Orville is the one man who has gained a good opinion in Evelina’s eyes, but Villars thinks an overt

letter signed in his name tarnishes his character forever.<sup>19</sup> Despite his countless good gestures, this false letter penned by Willoughby and not Orville convinces Villars to warn Evelina of his character in a letter. When Evelina then takes steps to avoid him, she is at her unhappiest in the novel. She later continues to interact with him, however, as he proves himself to be worthy of her respect and attention. She allows a reading of his character to outweigh this brash letter and the advice of Villars to “quit him!” In other words, she allows her metaphorical reading of Orville to outweigh her literal reading of the letter (Burney 309). When others ignore her, she notes of Orville that he “honoured me with his entire attention” (Burney 289). Despite Villars’ continued advice to avoid him, she continues to read his character and compare him to other men she encounters, such as the brash Sir Clement. Orville in turn sees the intelligence of Evelina, noting that her mistakes are the result of “inexperience, timidity, and a retired education, for I find her informed, sensible, and intelligent” (Burney 347). Once she finds out that he never wrote the letter, she trusts him fully. At the end of the novel when she accepts him, she gains a valuable husband who will grant her agency. He has proven to be a far better suitor than any other man in the novel.

Characters do encourage and uphold the act of literal reading for Evelina. While not a large part of the text, novel reading is still a recurring theme in the novel. Evelina states in one of her letters of Lord Orville, “When we walk out, he condescends to be my companion, and keeps by my side all the way we go. When we read, he marks the

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<sup>19</sup> This letter, at the time period, would have been disreputable as it was received before marriage and indicated a declaration of love for Evelina (Campbell 563). Villars could have assumed that Evelina had compromised her modesty and innocence to Orville. After reading the letter a second time, Evelina exclaims, “my astonishment was extreme, and was succeeded by the utmost indignation” (Burney 242). It is important to note that Evelina, while then warming up to Orville after his various good actions, does not initially think well of him after her reading.

passages most worthy to be noticed, draws out my sentiments, and favours me with his own” (Burney 296). She further goes on to note that the “time spent with him” brings her to “social freedom” (296). He is aware of her capacity to read and learn, and he shares in this activity with her, upholding novel reading. Unlike the other men in the novel, he does not act in a deceitful or manipulative way toward her. Mrs. Selwyn also displays Evelina’s inclination for novel reading. When asked by an obnoxious gentleman how she will spend her time, Selwyn answers for Evelina: “In a manner that your Lordship will think very extraordinary, for the young lady reads” (Burney 275). Later on, Selwyn introduces Evelina to some other books. These references to literal texts indicate the value of such writings in society. Harder to find in the text than instances of figurative reading, these accounts exemplify the development of Evelina in the novel.

Evelina marries Orville, but she also gains power over her name. She has been able to distinguish the good hearts of men from the bad ones. She utilizes her writing to display her progress in reading the society she is situated in, and this stands the ultimate test when she is being influenced by various men in the text. Like Arabella, her reality has been one of seclusion with a primary caregiver; unlike Arabella, Evelina does not read romances. In the end, while she falls into a romance, she is not a romantic. She cares for Villars and Orville, but she does not elaborate on grand romantic plans for the future—she will go back to Berry Hill for a while to be with Villars. Finding a place where she is valued is her ultimate goal in the text, and her ability to distinguish both good and dangerous circumstances and characters allows her to prevail as a heroine of her own writing. She rescues her ailing brother. She chooses Lord Orville, who enhances her future and ability to read. And she is recognized by her father after he realizes her

unending capacity for forgiveness. Her ability to make these decisions of value portrays the power of her own reading of her situation.

### Reading Real Terror in *Northanger Abbey*

Jane Austen, heavily influenced by Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, portrays a protagonist in *Northanger Abbey* who reads and bases her reality on the novels that she reads.<sup>20</sup> Instead of romantic texts, however, these writings are gothic stories. Austen parodies and critiques specifically gothic and romantic thematic elements and novels, but she does so in order to bring about new ways of reading society and the novel itself. Many critics have noted how this new reading is manifested in Catherine's realization of the elements of her society that are actually quite repressive and gothic.<sup>21</sup> I will not debate this element, but I will instead look at how Austen's engagement with and deconstruction of multiple texts allows her to redistribute power in the novel, which has been solidified in the system of patriarchy. The true Gothicism and terror of her reality becomes embodied in Catherine's society, but she must utilize her knowledge of the gothic to realize this fact. In support for my argument, I can turn to Claudia Johnson. She talks about this system of patriarchy in society in regards to Catherine's development: "She is discovering the betrayals of paternal figures and the discourse they yield" (47). Therefore, Catherine can discover how women have been marginalized in her society in history and the present. She becomes increasingly perceptive as the novel progresses, indicating the ability for reading to transform the individual. Her education, like those of

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<sup>20</sup> Kauvar emphasizes the influence that this novel had on Austen, noting that she ultimately changes and revises what is in this very novel (216).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Hopkins and Claudia Johnson are two such critics who note this in their works, which will be cited later in my paper.

the other two protagonists, does not set her up for success, and she must also combat this fact in her own development and reading throughout the novel. *Northanger Abbey*, as noted by Marilyn Butler, “has far more literary allusions of a more bookish kind than any other Austen novel” (148). It is thus crucial to analyze the worth of reading in Catherine’s society.

At the opening of the novel, readers see how education has been constructed in the formation of the young Catherine Morland. Mary Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” elaborates on the gendered inequalities in education:

The education of women has, of late, been more ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, of establishing themselves, — the only way women can rise in the world—by marriage (173).

In Catherine’s early years, her education is quite free from this system of patriarchy; she could even be labeled a tomboy: “She was fond of all boy’s plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush” (Austen 37-38). And she “shirked on her lessons” in writing and French. It is important to note that Austen creates an atypical female who in a sense goes against romantic notions of a heroine, seeming to imply that women lose a sense of freedom in their standard societal education that is bound in gendered expectations. Unlike Arabella and Evelina, Catherine is rather free in her upbringing. Catherine is soon, however, rendered stupid by the expectations of

society and forced to submit to the typical gendered behaviors of her time. Her progression is visible over the course of a short chapter in the novel: “Her love of dirt gave way for finery, and she grew smart; she had now the pleasure of sometimes hearing her father and mother remark on her personal improvement” (Austen 39). She is required to memorize books and quotes in order to enhance her education “in training for a heroine” (Austen 40). These are the books and quotes that were seen to be essential in the training and improvement of a young woman. Marilyn Butler stresses this inadequacy of Catherine’s early education in regard to the defects of girls’ education noted by Johnson in an issue of the *Rambler* (148). Catherine must learn to view the world as a female is supposed to view the world. Power is taken away from her as she becomes a passive participant in her society. This beginning hinders her ability to grow and read situations of her own, especially when she enters the society at Bath. In addition, she is secluded until 17 in a village in Wiltshire, and is unprepared, as the other protagonists were, for the reality of the world.

Reading soon becomes a major focus of *Northanger Abbey*, and Austen portrays it in a very positive manner regarding women. Men in the novel like John Thorpe criticize the novel, claiming they “are all so full of nonsense and stuff” (Austen 71). He is not a character that readers value, however. He does not know that Ann Radcliffe authored *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and he condemns Burney’s *Camilla* (Austen 71). He only acknowledges Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and Mathew Lewis’s *The Monk* as being decent, both of which are authored by males. Clearly, Austen is not condemning novel reading, but a type of reading that has been misconstrued and gendered in society. Rather, Austen upholds reading in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen explicitly defends reading of the novel in

her digression about novelists who mock novel reading: “Yes novels; — for I will not adopt the ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they themselves are adding...” (Austen 58) Unlike many others before her, she will uphold the novel and those who read the novel. Austen goes on to state the gendered nature of novels throughout history:

And while abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or the man who collects and publishes in some volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens, —there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. ‘I am no novel reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that I often read novels—It is really well for a novel.’ —Such is the common cant. —‘And what are you reading, Miss—?’ ‘Oh, it is only a novel.’ replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame—‘It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;’ or in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed the world in the best chosen language. Now, had the same lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such work, how proudly she would she have produced the book, and told its name; though the chances must be

against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste...

Austen clearly outlines her views of novel reading. The female is unfairly treated in reading novels—she is made to feel as if the act of reading has no worth. If she were reading something else that was seen of value at the time (a work, for instance, by a male author), she would not undergo the same condemnation. Through this speech, she exposes Thorpe as a misguided male voice on the value of novels. She further shows how female reading is not inferior, but it is the female subject that is seen in an inferior light. Austen then sets out to prove that Catherine's gothic reading is useful in her reading of characters and society. Even though Catherine ultimately succumbs to the power of marriage in her society, she is able to acknowledge and somewhat resist the way power is embodied by males in a harmful way in society.

Despite her inadequate education, Catherine is quite perceptive at times in the first volume of the novel—she does read certain situations well. Her opinion is rarely valued, however, as the power of men is often working against her. These times need to be mentioned as they signal her progression and attempts to taking back control and power in the novel. She just cannot adequately reconstitute her situations. She sees Isabella's flirting with Henry Tilney's brother, but there is little she can do about it. She is anxious about the situation, however, and realizes that this behavior could ruin the relationship between Isabella and her own brother: "She spoke to Henry Tilney on the subject, regretting his brother's evident partiality for Miss Thorpe, and entreating him to make known her prior engagement" (Austen 154). This conversation goes on for quite a while in which Catherine pleads with Henry to correct the situation, but he treats her

entreaties quite lightly, and she is forced into thinking that “Henry Tilney must know best” (Austen 157). She has read this situation in the text correctly, but others fail to acknowledge her opinion. In addition, Catherine travels alone to make apologies to the Tilneys for missing her engagement, something she knows is impolite on her part. Both of these situations indicate Catherine’s agency and ability to articulate and act on her perceptions. Catherine often does not have the ability to change situations, but she nonetheless tries to take a stand at times and change the situations surrounding her.

In the second half of the volume, Catherine must correctly read her own environment in the abbey while combatting the stories of Henry Tilney—she must learn and accurately recognize how novels have been powerful tools for her interpretation of surroundings. She is interacting with quite a different text, a more sinister text in the abbey. Catherine must harness power and knowledge in order to become an accurate reader of her environment. First, however, Henry and the gothic novel complicate her ability to do so by painting a picture of what Catherine expects at Northanger Abbey. He creates a “burlesque gothic story for Catherine” (Butler 138). Unlike John Thorpe, Henry is an exceptionally good reader in the novel. He has read various histories that he elaborates on the novel. He also speaks very highly of reading: “The person, be a gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid” (Austen 120). He claims that he has read “hundreds and hundreds” while at Oxford (Austen 121). Emphasizing Marilyn Butler’s point that Henry is the only knowledgeable reader in the novel, I claim that he knows how to manipulate the gothic genre to create such a realistic retelling (137). Henry proves that men read the same novels as women

read, and the fear Catherine holds that “gentlemen read better books” is implanted by societal perception (Austen 120). He is undoubtedly a strong reader.

Henry’s manipulation of gothic stories, however, becomes misleading for the ignorant Catherine. Jacqueline Howard notes of Henry’s manipulation of the females: “...Henry is made to speak from that position of male superiority which his education, profession, broader experience, relative independence, and seniority in years have bestowed. He expects and gains amusement at the expense of Catherine and Eleanor—a proclivity we see again in his protracted burlesque of gothic novels on the way to Northanger” (177). This statement exemplifies the power he has as a male in society as well as how he hinders the recognition of reality of the female subjects. He attempts to control Catherine’s imagination through this gothic story and acts as a poor teacher to her. Catherine in turn is thus suspicious of everything the least bit out of the ordinary at the abbey upon her arrival. Her novels and reading come to life through Henry’s retelling. She must learn to utilize her own reading of the gothic to realize the underlying horrors of a patriarchal system of control that lies in the hands of men. Henry, while a good reader, is an example of the patriarchal system working against Catherine as she attempts to interpret her new surroundings. He plays on her ignorance to encourage her miseducation and belief in these fantasies.

Catherine trusts Henry Tilney more than any other male in the novel, and he is thus able to utilize his position of power to manipulate her for a great length of time. On the carriage ride to Northanger Abbey, he fills Catherine’s mind with imaginings of what may befall her. She responds to him after his long list of gothic horrors: “Oh! Mr Tilney, how frightful! —This is just like a book!” (Austen 162). He sees her alarm and proceeds

to elaborate on his stories. He is utilizing the gothic genre to create a story that Catherine will attempt to read in her surroundings at *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine already realizes how mistaken her expectations had been on approaching the abbey: “To be sure, the pointed arch was preserved—the form of them was Gothic—they might be even casements—but every pane was so large, so clear, so light!” (Austen 165) Despite the external appearance of comfort in the abbey, Catherine allows the narrative of Henry to overtake her imagination. She consumes her time with finding what is inside a chest in her room. There are many signs that other things are more frightening, such as the General’s looming presence, but she cannot see this yet. Once Catherine discovers the washing bill in the chest, “nothing could now be clearer than the absurdity of her recent fancies” (Austen 174). Reality and experience allow her to correct her understanding and reading of the external appearance of the abbey. What is truly gothic is more deeply embedded, which she still has yet to discover. The problems lie not in the novel itself or idea of a novel as a literary form, but in the power of males that control or restrict females.

Catherine begins to read the gothic in the characters of *Northanger Abbey*, and this is a crucial turning point for her in the novel. She is conducting a deeper reading of her situation, and she begins to realize how power is unfairly distributed in her life. She has a feeling about General Tilney that begins at her initial arrival at the abbey: “...but General Tilney, through such a charming man, seemed always to check upon his children’s spirits, and scarcely any thing was said but by himself...” (Austen 159). In his absence, the night passes with “much positive cheerfulness” (Austen 169). The real sinister aspects of the story come, however, when Catherine begins to suspect the General

of foul play regarding his dead wife: “His cruelty to such a charming woman made him odious to her” (Austen 181). She believes that something is being concealed in the castle, and even though it is not a physically locked up woman, the abbey is definitely a place that metaphorically traps women and divests them of power. Henry further strips Catherine of power when he discredits her claims: “Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own understanding of what is passing around you...” (Austen 195). Catherine begins to weigh what is happening around her and sees these things that are actually gothic in her surroundings. Isabella’s betrayal of Catherine’s brother is just one of these instances. Catherine is then rashly sent off by the General for home alone without any money. Now she is cruelly treated, as Eleanor notes that “not even the hour is left to your choice; the very carriage is ordered, and will be here at seven o’clock, and no servant will be offered you” (Austen 217). This experience directly sheds light on the injustices of a society where men commanded and were listened to at the expense of women. Elaine Kauver notes that “Catherine’s initial suspicions are somewhat accurate” (216). Catherine’s reading is more sophisticated than Arabella’s in *The Female Quixote* because she is able to integrate her reading with everyday reality. In this regard, the novel expands upon Lennox’s discussion of novel reading.

Catherine returns to her family, and her mood has changed as she realizes her unfair treatment. A dark nature pervades this scene: “I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace...” (Austen 224). The gravity of what has happened really sinks in, as General Tilney will suffer no consequences for his actions toward Catherine. Catherine does not do well after this dark experience, literally pining away after men

have used and viewed her in the text. Education reenters the novel as Catherine's mother attempts to give her an essay, "The Mirror" to instruct her on how to properly act as a young girl (Austen 231). This gendered view of education held by her mother allows Austen to reemphasize the predicament of an education that stresses a certain type of female behavior. And the discovery of the general's real expulsion of Catherine only makes the power held by men more sinister. Catherine was truly right in her judge of General Tilney's character: "Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (Austen 236). This is a turning point for Catherine, who realizes the real horror of his character, and in a sense, it is an awakening for Henry who rejects his father in telling Catherine the truth. Their marriage signals an uncertain destiny. While initially acting against the General, their marriage will forever put them under the power of the general. The reign of tyranny is not completely broken; Catherine just has a greater awareness of it. She has been able to read her actual gothic environment, and therein lies the success and empowerment of reading in the novel. It may not have made Catherine an agent; she is, however, a more aware participant in and observer of her own society.

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Reading transforms and empowers. It is a crucial part of the education process, and both good and bad reading lead to knowledge. I have taken *The Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, and *Northanger Abbey* and shown how education is situated in the novels. I then looked at how reading becomes a major part of the protagonist's upbringing and ability to

read reality. All of the heroines counter the fears of female reading because they overcome their initial bad reading or develop crucial skills even when reading bad texts. They use their reading to critically engage with their surroundings. Men also read poorly in these novels, and this indicates that the issue goes beyond what was typically gendered male and female during the time period. Reading romance or gothic has similar outcomes—it allows one to interpret surroundings in a new way—whether or not this is entirely accurate. Often, it can lead to revelations. Novel reading was a topic that became commonplace in discussions of female education, and these novelists use their own writing and reading to make new statements. In each of these novels, the marriages end the stories. The women could not stand up against this ultimate institution; they all, however, are more aware and capable of reading situations and characters in their lives. The forms that become embodied and manipulated in the novel also further these points and will be analyzed in the next and final chapter. These forms become restrictive because they are often controlled by men; women use their own knowledge in turn to gain back power and credit the very forms that are portrayed in these novels.

Chapter 3- Bakhtin's Novel: Reformulation of Romantic, Epistolary, and Gothic  
Conventions in *The Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, and *Northanger Abbey*

Finally, I will be looking at the three novels and the forms or conventions that they critique or manipulate. While the last chapter primarily focused on reading and education, this chapter will directly analyze how the form of the novel, as noted by Bakhtin, allows for a critique and restructuring of other forms that restricted conversations, harking back to the items discussed in chapter one, such as magazines, conduct books, and fables. Not condemning other forms, these authors talk about aspects of their society that became restricted, especially when controlled by men. In these texts, men often control these conventions and thus the education system. I will start with a framework provided by Mikhail M. Bakhtin and his theory on the novel's form and its embodiment of genres. I will then move to analysis of how each novel critiques and reformulates a certain form or genre in order to expose the restrictive nature of these very forms in how they are situated in society. All of these novels have been discussed in regard to their categorization, which is actually quite complicated. Each novel experiments with various conventions of other forms, but I will be focusing on the main ones in this chapter. For *The Female Quixote*, this is a satire of romance; for *Evelina*, a critique of the epistolary form; and *Northanger Abbey*, a parody of the gothic. Ultimately, these manipulations of form become further ways for the authors to talk about the same issues of education and novel reading that I discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this project. These discussions of education and novel reading in society restrict women when they close off avenues for growth; in other words, when they close off input from women. In turn, these authors, through their novels, embody the strength of women. Each novel I am

analyzing accomplishes something slightly different, and *Northanger Abbey* seems to provide the greatest restructuring of conventions in relation to societal problems (in that its ending is the least conclusive), but each author uses a similar method to produce her work of fiction. While these are female novelists, it is important to note that the males in the novels often attempt to control the stories being told, and this is where problems arise in that this control restricts female voice and agency. These novelists are striving for an awareness of this patriarchal manipulation in their texts.

The novel becomes a place where other genres are incorporated and revised. In M.M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, he notes that "the novel is younger than writing and the book: it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute perception, that is, to reading" (3). In this first crucial chapter of his work, he notes the ability of the novel to manipulate other forms: "The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their form and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating them" (5). While some more recent scholars have critiqued his theory in noting the more recent decline of the novel, Bakhtin notes that the novel engages with present and past realities and redefines individuals.<sup>22</sup> I have already observed that the three authors take other forms and place them in the novel. Using Bakhtin is helpful in understanding this reformation of conventions. The novel becomes for Bakhtin an open-

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<sup>22</sup> Contemporary theory since Bakhtin's theory largely debates his theory on the novel, as it claims the novel has been declining as a literary form. Various works have been published under this debate known as the "death of the novel." Jose Ortega and Gasset, Roland Barthes, and Walter Benjamin are common scholars associated with this debate. This debate, I believe, is not relevant to my discussion because this debate came after these novels. The novel, in its peak rise, did and still continues to critique and restructure conversations. Even if it may not be as true today, I am situating this discussion in theory that acknowledges the high expansion of the novel at this time period.

ended and ever changing form. Bakhtin writes, “The novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed” (27). This is precisely why I am arguing that these women chose the novel as a way to talk about society’s issues. They had all experimented with other forms before they produced their novels and were influenced by what came before them. Lennox had published various poems; Burney, plays and diaries; and Austen, short juvenilia. These authors did not simply talk about issues, such as education and reading, but they also took other forms in order, I argue, to make a statement about the dangers of restrictive modes of instruction or writing, especially when in the hands of men who for had many years controlled the histories that were being told. And these were discussions that were not finished and needed renovation in society.

The conventions and forms in these novels may be restrictive, but the novel is not in the fact that it incorporates a variety of voices and opinions and is “multiform in style” (261). The discourse of the novel involves the voices of many individuals, both male and female, and Bakhtin becomes even more important in discussing the conflicting voices in a novel. As genres enter the novel, different language enters the novel. Bakhtin refers to heteroglossia to discuss this diversity of language: “Authorial speech, the speeches of the narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships” (263). Lennox, Burney, and Austen portray a variety of voices in their works in order to show how multiple voices and forms of writing exist in a society, but patriarchal voices are shown to limit the female when they attempt to manipulate or control the writing that women read. Language and discourse should not close off input:

“The unity of a literary language is not a unity of a single, closed language system, but is rather a highly specific unity of several ‘languages’ that have established contact and mutual recognition with each other” (Bakhtin 295). Men in the novels attempt to shut down the type of novel reading that Bakhtin advocates—a reading that reformulates and opens up discourse. I am in turn, in my close readings, critiquing the voices and stories that attempt to become conclusive in the novels in their patriarchal nature. The very form of the novel does not uphold a certain form or genre, but displays an array of conversations that should pose questions. It is the novel that allows the exposure of genres and discourse that become restrictive when in the hands of controlling men.

The novel and its striving for realism fit into a discussion about education, male power, and reading, as these topics were societal discussions at the time period. All of these works escape an easy categorization, and this is ultimately because of their existence as novels. This form seemed to allow the greatest space for these women as writers and for unrestricted discussion on these topics as well, topics that were developing and changing at the time period in which they were writing. The protagonists in each of these texts must recognize how men are controlling the means of literary production, and this recognition can lead to the needed change. The books do not offer solutions, but they offer pleas for change in society and institutions. Through their manipulations of genre and form, the three novelists produced novels that make statements about patriarchy embedded in a society, making the novels important works for interpreting the society in which they were written. By using the form and structure of the novel, these authors attack the conventions of society and literary texts that are restrictive. Patriarchy is embedded in the very forms of the novels, and these women

create a dialogue that is open to transformation. These authors uphold the reading of females, and it is through their manipulation of other genres and their conventions that they show how society and particularly men misconstrued the female.

### Romantic Stories and Satire in *The Female Quixote*

In *The Female Quixote*, the satire of romance is visible from the very first chapter. Based on many of the conventions of *Don Quixote*, Lennox's *The Female Quixote* exaggerates the conventions of romance throughout the entire novel, explicitly visible in skimming the chapter headings. "A very heroic chapter" and "Containing an Incident full as probable as any in Scudery's romances" are two such headings that indicate this blatant satire. I will pay attention specifically to the romantic histories relayed in the text by male characters, especially by Sir George. These histories and male voices are the ones that excluded and manipulated the strength and voice of women. Unlike the heteroglossic nature of language that Bakhtin noted, the male stories in this novel restrict female input and do not advocate for the existence of a variety of voices and language. While Arabella's adventures are the main crux of the text, the male stories and voices quickly become a large factor in determining Arabella's reality. Glanville's enactment of romance and the doctor's lecture to Arabella share in this same exclusive principle. When Arabella attempts to use romance, she also takes agency as noted in chapter two in her refusal of marriage and her ability to speak as an orator on various topics. There is not a concrete solution at the end as much as there is a predicament of women who are not fairly educated and then are persuaded by men to act certain ways. Romance, like any other form, becomes restrictive when it traps women. And the romantic notions of the

Marquis, Glanville, Sir George, and the doctor do this throughout the novel. And they do provide alternative means to educate Arabella. Lennox gives authority to women through her manipulation of romance and granting of power to Arabella's imagination and romances because Arabella still is able to learn other skills through the reading of romance. Lennox ultimately calls for greater attention to female agency throughout the novel and the dangerous nature of restrictive male romances.

Lennox supports the romantic genre by using the novel, as many other scholars have noted. This supports Bakhtin's points; the novel contains many forms but does not condemn them. Similar to the way she supports reading, she also defends conventions of romance in the novel. Scott Paul Gordon addresses Lennox's use of romance in the novel, claiming the novel supports the genre because of Arabella's unawareness that romance "can be learned and manipulated like any other code of behavior" (507). It is thus her delusion that rescues the genre. Laurie Langbauer also espouses romance, noting that the excess of romance is what becomes dangerous, and Lennox attempts to separate it from women by "educating Arabella out of it" (31). Langbauer further differentiates between the novel and romance, noting that both forms have rules and conventions but are separate from each other. Romance can be powerful because it allows women to tell stories, even if they are fictions. Deborah Ross reiterates this point about the power of romance. Langbauer's points most explicitly align with the points I will be making about romance. In chapter two, I set forth that romance reading has allowed Arabella to gain skills and education on her own. It is then men's attempt to control romance that degrades it and is why the novel ends. Lennox uses the novel form to manipulate romance and place it in the hands of women. Men who try to control the female through the same

conventions fail and only hinder the heroine's growth throughout the novel. Men try to manipulate Arabella's reality and control her romantic reality, but Lennox performs the ultimate move as she manipulates romance in the novel, allowing romance to have positive effects for Arabella and not the men of the novel. These positive effects of her reading are visible in her speeches and wit throughout the novel. Romance has the ability to transform situations and characters in a variety of ways, many which are positive. The satire of romance is necessary in the novel because it allows Lennox to demonstrate how manipulations of genre can provide new ways to look at issues in society, such as education and patriarchy. I will begin by looking specifically at two sub-romances created in the novel, by Sir George and the other by Glanville in his response to Arabella's romantic inclinations and actions. The ending (in the doctor's cure) will mark a final statement about the restrictive nature of male stories. All of these males' stories ultimately trap Arabella and threaten her ability to create her own stories. Arabella is already not being educated in a manner that would actually create positive development. She should not, in the end, be taught that fiction reading is bad. It is harmful when it restricts knowledge and development.

Various chapters of the novel are dedicated to the history of Sir George that is relayed upon the request of Arabella. He *creates* a lengthy history based on the romances he has read, and his story reveals the exclusive nature of male stories that controlled the written word at the time period. In addition, his reading shows his proclivity toward the same novels only women were thought to be reading. Ellen Gardiner notes that he is the only male character in the text who reads and writes (1). By telling a romance to Arabella, he shows that he too has been seduced by their power. The chapter heading that

marks the beginning of his lengthy story reads, “Containing the Beginning of Sir George’s History; in which the ingenious Relater has exactly copied the Stile of Romance” (Lennox 209). Already visible in this heading is Sir George’s manipulation in his copying, and awareness in doing so, the language of romance. When Arabella asks him to relate his past history, he uses his knowledge of romances to manipulate his own past and influence Arabella: “He was well-read in Romances himself, and had actually employed some weeks in giving a new Version of the Grand Cyrus...he was perfectly well acquainted with the chief characters in most of the French Romances” (Lennox 129). He has read the same works as Arabella, but unlike her, he knows the fiction contained in them. Despite this fact, he creates romances throughout the novel and talks with her and others about them. He claims in his history that he has an illustrious lineage and has fought in great battles, all which are created by his imagination to please Arabella. He encounters various women in his story that he adores, loves, and admires, exemplifying his desire to exploit the female body.

Sir George also takes a series of actions to convince Arabella that he is a true romantic—he shifts his power enacted on fictional females in his stories onto an actual female. He initially gives Arabella a letter, proclaiming that he will die for her: “And that, when you remember my crime of loving you, you will also be pleased to remember, that I died for that Crime; and wish for no other Comfort in Death, but the Hope of you not hating, when he is no more” (Lennox 174). Arabella thus commands him to live when she sees him, as he has manipulated her perception of his actual state of health. He later on in the novel goes one step further and creates an elaborate scheme to fool Arabella, in which he enlists people to play characters out of romance novels. It is this scheme that

ultimately results in a dangerous experience for Arabella in which she becomes physically ill after jumping in the river. Sir George knows that Arabella will fall for his ploys. He is enhancing the effects of her bad reading and creating a dangerous romance for her. He knows that he has the power in this dynamic, as he has been educated that these stories are just fiction. In addition, he does this for his own benefit, not really acknowledging how his schemes will negatively affect Arabella. It is this disregard of concern that characterizes the male behavior throughout the novel. Even in his fictional stories, the apparent disregard for women is visible in his supposed pursuit of multiple ladies over a short time period.

Mr. Glanville, while not reading romances, is drawn into them throughout the novel. He initially harshly condemns the novels that Arabella reads, noting the ill effects they have had on her views and behavior. When she refuses to marry Glanville, her father says of her books that he will “burn all I can lay my Hands upon” (Lennox 55). Contrary to Glanville’s similar opinion of these books, however, he prevents the Marquis from burning the books that cause this behavior. He begins to enact a typical romantic story to please Arabella. While refusing to read the books she recommends to him, he is drawn into her romantic notions and ultimately attracted to her because of them. This begins when he learns that Arabella has run away, when he responds to the situation, “I’ll traverse the Country all Night in quest of her” (Lennox 98). He is drawn to her despite her romantic ideas. As she simply gets on a horse, he admires her as if she is a figure out of a romance: “Mr Glanville, forgetting all her Absurdities, was wholly lost in the Contemplation of so many Charms, as her whole person was adorned with” (Lennox 154). Gardiner reiterates this point that Glanville is attracted to her because of these “romantic

qualities” (5). Glanville also fights Hervey after Hervey criticizes Arabella’s character. Even Arabella notes his change throughout the novel: “She examined his Words over and over, and found them so exactly conformable to the Language of an Oroondates or Orontes, that she could not choose but be pleased” (Lennox 164). When Arabella wants to visit the “sick” Sir George, Glanville claims she should be “contented to see me (him) die at your (her) Feet” (Lennox 190). He becomes the man who will fight a man to death for his princess and possible wife. He condemns Sir George and his lies, but he too is sucked into romance. He uses romance to his benefit, while condemning Arabella’s romantic beliefs. He refuses to see how Arabella can continue reading such stories. He then pulls a sword on Sir George after he learns of Sir George’s deceitful toward Arabella; he actually wounds him as well during this fight. He thus restricts Arabella’s growth as he encourages her follies and does nothing else to support or change her behavior. Like Sir George, he manipulates the romance that is Arabella’s reality.

In the final chapter, the doctor cures Arabella of her fictional delusions, and this ending is one that again reinforces the male power in the text. The doctor wishes to cure her mind, a mind that has only misread and is not sick. He tells Arabella that her histories “are fictions, they are absurd, and they are criminal” (Lennox 375). While they may be fiction, the alternative provided by the doctor is not better. She escapes physical harm, but she is mentally destroyed as she realizes all of the harm her actions have caused. She cries for the injuries she has caused with her delusions and adventures, and Glanville calls this transformation a miracle. She apologizes to the men she has offended, and she is united with Glanville. And Arabella literally is silenced as the book ends. Arabella is not told anymore of how her reading has also resulted in confidence and great speaking

skills. Complicating Bakhtin, this novel ending does not open up an array of possibilities for Arabella; she does not gain a stronger voice. In this way, the ending exposes the dangers of patriarchy and generic conventions of male writing in the novel; the novel does, however, allow for this exposure and critique of restrictive voices. Lennox ultimately shows how romance can restrict but also create. It must be utilized in the correct way, however, in order to be useful and make a statement. Arabella notes when speaking to the doctor, “Truth is not always injured by Fiction” (377). Lennox exemplifies this fact in Arabella’s wit throughout the novel and through the messages about education and novel reading in her own novel. In addition, because of Arabella’s ignorance, her adventures contain certain truths for her. Romance leads to physical harm for these men, because they are controlling and manipulative and fight for control of a female; it is when Arabella is cured of romance, however, that she is ultimately ill. She did not realize how romance was misleading, and when she does, she does not have the power to take back control because she is not given a better alternative or education. Men have taken her only means of agency from her.

Romance creates and destroys in *The Female Quixote*. It gave Arabella the ability to create her own story, and while misguided, it was more real than the schemes of Sir George because it was her own reality. She would need much greater exposure to the realities of London in order to completely change her perceptions—this is something that she was not given in her upbringing. Her fiction reading is detrimental because she has no other means of education in her environment, so in that way, it exposes this flaw in society. Sir George and Glanville, however, destroy opportunities for the growth of Arabella, only encouraging her fancies. Sir Charles too, while not discussed in this

section, only can see a story of Arabella and Glanville, in which Arabella is cured by her husband. And the doctor destroys her ability to read fiction, telling her it has been harmful. His censure is the most destructive because it condemns reading, something that has ultimately been for Arabella a good and self-empowering action. Lennox utilizes the novel to transform these forms and conventions of romance. In this novel, men interestingly are seduced by a form that is often gendered female; this control they attempt to exert over it points out the patriarchy that surrounds Arabella throughout her society. Women need to write their own romances, self-empowering ones that are free from this patriarchy.

#### Men and the Role of Letters in *Evelina*

In *Evelina*, Frances Burney uses the letter to exemplify another restrictive form of power when situated in the hands of manipulative characters. Letters, like other forms of writing, have the ability to restrict the opportunities and judgment of women. In the novel, they are just another voice or convention that is open to critique. I have shown that Evelina's judgment is superior to Villars' in her reading of Lord Orville's character, and she in turn uses letters to add definition and agency to her own life and exemplify her growing ability to read characters and situations. Diaries were commonly associated with women telling their stories, but the novel exposes this form as one that only becomes restrictive when the male tries to control and guide the female protagonist. Letters are empowering for Evelina and portray her reality, but certain letters penned by men, particularly Sir Clement, Sir Clement Willoughby, and John Belmont, become deceitful and manipulative in *Evelina* and threaten to harm her ability to be recognized in the novel.

The novel exposes these letters that fail to recognize the female individual. In addition, Burney uses the novel to reformulate the past, particularly past writing. In the preface to her novel, she refers to herself as being enlightened by the male writers Johnson, Rousseau, and Fielding; she acknowledges their influence on her. Despite this influence, she attempts to create something new with her novel: “I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked; whence, though they may have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers, and though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren” (Burney 10). These male novelists have laid topics to rest with their exclusive texts, but Burney saw her text as opening up these very topics to critique and reformulation. Portraying a similar message to Bakhtin, she acknowledges that the novel will open topics up to discussion. She will do this through a critique of letter writing and situating of letters in the hands of those who need recognition.

*Evelina*, through the form of written letters, is an appropriate starting point to directly address the creation of agency and one’s own story. The presence of letters as a literary form in novels has been common for years, and the peak of epistolary novels was contained to a very specific time period. Elizabeth Cook notes in *Epistolary Bodies* that the form of epistolary fiction largely took shape in the early eighteenth-century. (Cook 8). Despite its prevalence then, however, it was not very common by the time Burney was authoring her works. It is interesting and an anomaly, then, that Burney chose to use letters in her novel. Ultimately, Cook concludes with a definitive statement on how the letter serves to represent the “body of the writing subject, vulnerable like it to markings, invasion, violence of all sorts...” (Cook 32). The letter is thus a crucial form in understanding the subject who writes the letter, as the subject allows the letter to

represent his or her being. Catherine Delafield notes that the letter narrates the “immediacy of the writers’ situation” (Delafield 85). This is seen various times in the text of *Evelina*, as Evelina is presenting the adventures of her encounters with obnoxious and frightening men to Villars. The ability for the novel to stand in for the body and its ability to portray the immediacy of situations are two crucial factors regarding this form that will indicate its ability to be manipulated by both Burney and men in the novel. Burney uses this form in order to critique its restrictive nature. Letters were crucial in self-expression, but often men in the novel use letters to exert their status and power over women and threaten this self-expression of the female.

The male letters in this novel have not been analyzed in depth in any secondary criticism, but they are the ones that Burney is critiquing. Evelina is also often responding to these letters herself. Evelina’s letters create the story of the novel, but it is interesting to analyze the stories created by men and their letters since they are scarcer throughout the novel. Sir Clement and Sir Clement Willoughby’s letters are two examples of the deceitful and controlling letters in novel. First, there is the forged letter by Sir Clement to Madam Duval warning her that her dear friend has been sent to prison: “The letter was then produced. It was signed by the clerk of the country justice...” (Burney 143). Even though Evelina “imagined that Sir Clement must be the author of this note” (which is indicative of her ability to read well), Madam Duval thinks her friend is truly in danger, and this belief consumes her attention. In this instance, the female subject Duval is being manipulated through the letters. She is from another country, and she is easily deceived in believing that this letter is actually from the county of justice. This letter causes a plethora of problems that leads to larger schemes in which Duval believes her chariot is

being robbed. Both Evelina and Duval become the victims of this scheme. Furthermore, Sir Clement Willoughby's fake letter restricts the female subject by subsequently causing Evelina to read characters in a false way. Sir Clement writes in place for Lord Orville, skewing Evelina's view of Orville's character in the overtly forward language of the letter:

Assure yourself that I desire nothing more ardently than to pour forth my thanks at your feet, and to offer those vows which are so justly the tribute of your charms and accomplishments. In your next, I entreat you to acquaint me how long you shall remain in town... My impatience for his arrival is great, through inferior to that with which I burn to tell you, in person, how much I am, my sweet girl,

You grateful admirer,

Orville

In writing this letter, he attempts to dominate the female subject and control her perception of reality and the individuals that surround her. In both letters, an individual writes for another individual and commits an act of forgery. These false words induce the female characters to be misguided and ultimately miseducated. After a second reading, this letter leads Evelina to condemn a male character that has been polite to her throughout her time in London. Through both of these letters, men do not represent themselves, as Evelina attempts to do in her letters. They do quite the opposite by falsely signing letters and placing recognition and concern in places where it is not warranted. By placing these letters in her novel, Burney displays how patriarchal power and deceit

are embedded in literary forms and conventions in society. Letters represent another form that can both hinder and form identity.

While not falsely penned, a letter nonetheless conveys the birthright information of Evelina back and forth between Belmont and other characters in the novel. Without seeing Evelina, John Belmont disclaims his daughter in a single letter; this is another example of how men control individuals through their assumed power in society. In his letter, he does not show much concern for Evelina:

As to the young Lady, whom Mr. Villars so obligingly proposes presenting to me, I wish her all the happiness to which, by your Ladyship's account, she seems entitled; and, if she has a third part of the merit of her to whom you compare her, I doubt not but Mr. Villars will be more successful in every other application he may make for her advantage, than he ever be in any with which he may be pleased to favour me.

This letter leaves Evelina with little money to create a living, and she notes, "my doom is fixed" (Burney 160). She further exclaims, "Outcast as I am, and rejected for ever by him to whom I of right belong—shall I now implore your continued protection?" (Burney 160). With a single stroke of a pen, a man has made a decision that could disfranchise this young female—there is no explanation for this behavior initially, either. His power can be embodied by this one letter, and Evelina can do little about it. In addition, he uses this letter to stand in for actual action or acknowledgement of this possible relation. This affair has huge effects on Evelina. Without his acknowledgement, she may have a completely different future. The letter from John Belmont threatens Evelina's identity because it is this acknowledgement that will give her financial independence to thrive in

life. Moreover, this letter causes her pain throughout the novel because she feels as if she has no place, and this placelessness, more than her lack of fortune, threatens her ability to exist in the novel. A disregard for females characterizes this behavior by men, and John Belmont annihilates the identities of both Evelina and her late birth mother when he fails to claim her. Evelina's mother died in shame and without any acknowledgement, so Belmont's behavior toward women is a continuation of behavior that began many years ago in the past.

Villars' letters are not sinister or threatening like the past letters analyzed, but they too restrict Evelina as they control her behavior and actions—she is most interested in pleasing her caregiver. His letters are often treated as a conduct guide for Evelina, as she seeks something to instruct her to better understand the world she is living in. Vivien Jones notes of Villars' voice in relation to conduct guides: "It represents those moral and education writings which argued that engagement in public entertainment was incompatible with true feminine modesty" (xv). These conduct books are another form that the novel and Burney incorporates and critiques. Evelina exclaims to Villars in one letter: "Unable as I am to act for myself, or to judge what conduct I ought to pursue, how grateful do I feel myself, that I have such a guide and director to counsel and instruct me like yourself!" (Burney 162) Many of these letters from Villars, however, limit and restrict Evelina in the world. And she continually responds to these letters with letters of her own, in which she begins to gain ownership of her name and identity. Villars often skews judgments that she can accurately make, such as regarding Lord Orville's character. He lectures her in one letter, "The nobleman you met at the Pantheon, bold and forward as you describe him to be, gives me no apprehension; a man who appears so

licentious, and who makes his attack with so little regard to decorum, is one who, to a mind such as Evelina's can never be seen with the disgust which his manner ought to excite" (Burney 117). In the same letter, he goes on to describe his judgments of Sir Clement and Lord Orville. Without meeting any of the men Evelina describes, he attempts to instruct her and determine her actions. And he fails to see how she is growing in society in learning to observe and read her own surroundings. He hopes that her time in London "has not undone the work of seventeen years spent in the country" (118). His inability to believe that she will remain morally upright hinders his ability to see or allow her ability to grow. His letters stand in for these conduct books that restricted females in their gendered education. There is an ultimate disconnect between the two in understanding society because she is learning to develop on her own from actual experience, and Villars does not see how this experience is useful to her.

The male stories, in the form of these false or restricting letters, threaten to overshadow the women in the novel, ultimately putting them in physical or emotional danger, and Evelina responds with her own voice, letters, and signatures in order to carve out her place in history and her own relations. Catherine Parke notes how her letters in general come to represent "a construct of her own history" (168). Most of the time these letters are addressed to Villars, but she also sends letters to other characters in order to take charge in situations where her identity has been compromised. For instance, she writes to Sir Clement Willoughby at the end of the novel in which she tells him, "that you will not write again, while in your present frame of mind, by any channel, direct or indirect" (Burney 389). She can see the control he has exerted on her, and she attempts to take steps to gain back control. Evelina also takes initiative when she tells Mr. Macartney

that she will see him the next morning in her stay at Clifton Hill—she will meet with him alone. After Orville questions her relationship with this man, however, she writes to Macartney, “As it will not be in my power to walk out tomorrow morning, I would be no means give you the trouble of coming to Clifton” (Burney 301). And this letter is given to a servant who then delivers the public message to Evelina that Macartney is not to be found to receive the letter. This ordeal happens in the presence of Orville. This situation complicates Evelina’s ability to assert her power. Men still attempt to control her through their actions and opinions, and therein lies the danger in the way they move through society. The signing of Evelina’s own letter in response to Macartney, as noted by Samuel Choi, is a sign of her desire to take power (268). She is still ultimately in danger of being overshadowed by her own brother’s story of disenfranchisement, however.

The problem arises in the novel when men attempt to take the means of literary production from women and use it for their own benefit to the detriment of these very women. Women create stories, but men can easily overshadow their stories with minimal action and letters of their own. Their schemes obliterate female agency, and by using Evelina’s letters, Burney shows the struggles of a young and uneducated female in her society. The novel exposes letters and men that fail to value the female. The novel also allows the epistolary narrative to make a statement about identity in a world that still looked at this type of writing as mainly female. The novel incorporates the conventions of the letter and conduct book in order to exemplify its heteroglossic nature. What becomes more important in *Evelina* is the ability for women to interpret letters accurately and write educated ones without the assistance or influence of men. Letters, like any other form or convention, can be both restrictive and empowering, and Evelina’s letters

show her growth throughout the novel; men's letters, on the other hand, shut down female input.

#### Male Instruction and Entrapment: The Gothic and Romantic Traps in *Northanger Abbey*

The gothic parody has been the focus of *Northanger Abbey* in its analysis. Austen obviously had read and utilized great portions of Radcliffe's gothic works in her own work, particularly *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Unlike in the lighthearted *The Female Quixote*, one cannot always laugh at the gothic undertones in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen revises Lennox's own game and ultimately shows the power that literary forms have in society. While Evelina has laughable scenes as well as terrifying scenes, the lines between funny and serious, and romance and gothic, are not as easy to distinguish in *Northanger Abbey*. Many critics have noted how Gothicism as a literary form is displaced by the gothic nature of a tumultuous world in which larger worries and abuses of power and injustice existed, linking the gothic themes to having larger societal implications. Claudia Johnson and Robert Hopkins talk about the political nature of the Gothic in their articles. Hopkins notes how the political passages in the novel are important in "revealing the difference between Gothicism as a false literary attitude and Gothicism as a genuine symbol of the nightmarish political world of the 1790s and very early 1800s" (310). He talks at length of the actual Gordon Riots at the time that are referred to in the novel. Claudia Johnson expands upon man's power and the gothic novel:

Austen's parody here, as in the juvenilia, 'makes strange' a fictional style in order to determine what it really accomplishes, and in the process it does not ridicule gothic novels nearly as much as their readers ...by making the distrust of

patriarchy which gothic fiction fosters itself the subject for outright discussion which we, like Henry perhaps, dismiss as merely formal, and then to acknowledge, as Henry never does, that ‘the alarms of romance’ are a canvas onto which the ‘anxieties of common life’ can be projected in illuminating, rather than distorting ways” (34-35).

I agree with these critics and add that her manipulation of this genre and various conventions in the novel allows her to shift and resist power that has been inadequately harnessed in society—the gothic becomes a lens for how embodiments of patriarchy in Catherine’s society can be seen.

One cannot brush over the fact that Austen does so much more than just manipulate the gothic—she plays with a variety of forms and conventions in her work. In volume one particularly, Thomas Keymer notes:

Even before the satire on Gothic begins, Austen mocks the hackneyed plot devices of other traditions—novels of sensibility, novels about adventurous foundlings...She also mocks the creaking technical resources of such mainstream fiction since Richardson and Fielding, including the increasingly tired enabling conventions of epistolary and diary fiction and the structural havoc created by interpolated background tales (27).

I acknowledge Austen’s play with many forms, and I will be looking at the conventions of genre in both volumes of this novel, as this conversation specifically allows her to relate to the bigger societal issues at the time period. By placing so many different generic conventions in the novel, Austen advocates for the truest definition of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia. The influence of both Lennox and Burney are seen in her text, and this

influence with the conjunction of a variety of voices allows the novel to take a stand against restrictive patriarchy. Her ending, as will be expanded upon later, is also the least didactic and conclusive of the three novels’.

The complexity of the gothic in this novel stems from its presence in the two volumes of *Northanger Abbey*, in the ball scenes at Bath and then the castle of General Tilney’s. The inclusion of these two volumes, side by side in the novel, exemplifies the mysterious and threatening aspect of the gothic trope that is seen not only in castles, but also in everyday life. Gubar and Gilbert note, “Thus *Northanger Abbey* describes exactly how a girl in search of her life story finds herself entrapped in a series of monstrous fictions which deprive her of primacy” (129). Austen writes a romance, but she does so differently in *Northanger Abbey*. The gothic in *Northanger Abbey* becomes the patriarchal entrapment that males enact upon females, which is seen in a variety of structures. The men in these places attempt to control the female subject and write restrictive stories that denounce female strength. The novel becomes a way to acknowledge this entrapment of the gothic and certain forms and conventions in general. And Austen revises how the gothic is interpreted through a form that allows this manipulation. The gothic stories and reading allow Catherine to see this reality, as elaborated on in chapter two. Women at the time were often seen as weak readers of novels, and this idea is combatted in the novel. Austen’s reformulation of Catherine’s society reconstitutes the female as the agent in her society. Catherine’s reading, female reading, and reading of the gothic are set straight as Austen upholds each one of these aspects of the novel. Catherine does not take charge in any significant way in her society, but she does recognize how power was been unfairly harnessed against her and thus how

the gothic sheds light on her suppressed freedom. The gothic almost becomes a detective novel as Catherine investigates her own reading in her surroundings, not allowing her gothic reading to constrain her.<sup>23</sup> Instead, her reading opens up avenues of action and agency.

Early on in the novel, Austen demonstrates men's ease in controlling situations with their inherent sense of power. Catherine leaves the care of her family, dependent solely on others. This echoes Mary Wollstonecraft, who notes that "girls who have been thus weakly educated, are often cruelly left by their parents without any provision; and of course, are dependent on, not only the reason, but the bounty of their brothers" (193). In Bath, Austen continues to mock the heroine and the place itself. Bath does not offer freedom to Catherine or an accurate picture of reality. It only serves to restrict the heroine, and Catherine's inability to navigate out of this situation labels her as a passive character and quite unheroic. Like the novels Catherine reads and confines herself to, Bath only acts as a replacement for this structure of confinement. What started as an insufficient education at home continues because of her interactions with male characters that act as inadequate "teachers" to Catherine in the novel. Catherine has not yet learned how to effectively escape the designs of others, however, and often cannot because she has little power as a female to do so. She thus undergoes the Bath scenes with little development of the self. Catherine often picks up a novel and leaves stressful social scenes when she can no longer undergo the society of Bath.

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<sup>23</sup>Kilgour talks about the act of reading gothic narratives, noting that it allows the heroine and readers to return to normalcy after a sense of terror ignited by such texts concluding "Reading is thus a dangerously conservative substitute for political and social action, offering an illusory transformation to impede real change by making women content with their lot, and keeping them at home—reading" (8). I disagree and will make the claim that reading allows Catherine to investigate and not be content with her surroundings. The form of the novel allows this form to be unraveled as she gains a new understanding of the society that she lives in and questions others.

At the multiple balls in volume 1, Catherine must learn to navigate through a new and very gendered world, similar to the society Evelina found herself in *Evelina*. These balls are a common convention of courtship novels, and Austen complicates their existence in novels. Austen exemplifies the lack of power women held in such places. She echoes the scenes in *Evelina* where Evelina struggles with turning down men who want to dance with her. Both Burney and Austen similarly emphasize the power held by men in these places. Catherine Morland must suffer with her decision to dance with one man, which prevents her from dancing with another. Austen devotes so much of this novel (essentially one whole volume) to Bath and these ball scenes that one almost loses track of how many ball scenes there are. Balls were a collective space for male and female interaction and courtship and part of the educational experience. Hannah More notes of balls in conjunction with female education:

They step at once from the nursery to the ball-room; and, by a preposterous change of habits, are thinking of dressing themselves, at an age when they used to be dressing their dolls. Instead of bounding with the unrestrained freedom of little wood-nymphs over hill and dale, their cheeks flushed with health, and their hearts overflowing with happiness, these *gay* little creatures are shut up all the morning, demurely practising the *pas grave*, and transacting the serious business of acquiring a new step for the evening, with more cost of time and pains than it would have taken them to acquire twenty new ideas (86-7).

More talks about these balls as places that restrict women in hindering true education. Austen furthers More's outlook on ball scenes in showing how Catherine similarly exits her home and tomboy upbringing for this new world. While her tone is more playful than

More's, she still portrays balls as places that restrict female growth. Austen, in her complication and use of these places, deconstructs their meaning. Balls as a literary convention become indicative of the restrictive limits imposed on women in society. Mechanical language and dancing renders a performance that follows rules. Henry Tilney elaborates on this nature of the ball: "We have entered into a contract of mutual agreeableness for the space of an evening, and all our agreeableness belongs solely to each other for that time" (Austen 95). Through this statement, he exposes the very generic conventions of these situations. Catherine attends various balls, and these are foremost places bound in patriarchy. Catherine must realize the complicated nature of these scenes, as she loses authority when she is engaged with men to dance; yet, her enjoyment at the balls is determined by whom she is engaged to. I suggest that Austen therefore uses these scenes to indicate one way in which power was unfairly constructed in society and then utilized in texts in order to maintain this formal hierarchy of power. These restrictive formalities can be seen in a gothic light because they take away power from women.

Throughout the scenes in Bath and later on in the abbey, the conversations of Henry Tilney also restrict the female subject and foremost expose the restrictive conventions and literary forms in society. He often narrates common societal expectations of females, and while not serious about these things himself or expectant of these things from Catherine, he uses his conversation to gain the attention of the ignorant Catherine. Marilyn Butler notes, "Henry shows Catherine, who at this point only half hear him, that the mind orders the world through genres, lives in them, and plays between them" (151). While these conversations are often flirtatious and playful, I want to stress

that they also display the common opinions held by most men at the time period and thus are important to this analysis of understanding literary conventions. At Bath, he attributes the form of the letter to the female. When he hears that Catherine does not keep a journal, he exclaims, “Not keep a journal! ... I am not so ignorant of young ladies’ ways as you wish to believe me; it is a delightful habit of journalizing which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated. Every body allows that the talent of writing agreeable letters is peculiarly female” (50). He then pokes at female writing with his remark that their letters exhibit “A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a frequent ignorance of grammar” (Austen 50). He fails to acknowledge that females have valuable skills. This is a form that males also used, but he fails to acknowledge this fact. In Volume 2, he talks about flowers and attributes them to the female. When Catherine states that she has begun to like the hyacinth, he tells her that “a taste of flowers is always desirable in in your sex...” (Austen 175). He goes onto state about learning, “The mere habit of learning to love is the thing; and a teachableness of disposition in a young lady is a great blessing” (Austen 175). He lightly condemns the ability for women to learn. These two instances exemplify his insistence on labeling things in society as male and female. While these are not menacing conversations, they indicate that he is aware of the system of patriarchy that looked upon females as weak learners and letter writers. These speeches become dangerous because there are many times when Catherine completely values Henry’s opinions: “It was no effort to Catherine to believe that Henry Tilney could never be wrong” (128). Catherine’s acceptance of these words would be her biggest downfall.

Luckily, her gothic reading allows her to eventually discover this male control in her own society.

In a different way in volume one, Catherine is written into the gothic story of the Thorpes and is essentially bullied into accompanying them for a carriage ride when she already has a prior engagement with the Tilneys. Thorpe is much more aggressive than Henry, and he is the prime example of a domineering man in the novel. Catherine would like to stop along the way after she sees the Tilneys out walking, “but Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged the horse, made odd noises, and drove on; and Catherine, angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit” (Austen 104). The language used in the novel exemplifies the total disregard given to women. As a result of this experience, Catherine then feels the need to justify her actions to the Tilneys, actions that were completely out of her power. It is notable that she goes alone to the Tilneys to redeem herself; she does attempt to take action in the novel and alter her situation. Again, however, she is making decisions based on this desire to appease men who believe they control her ultimate actions. This bullying furthers the gothic nature of her surroundings as well, as men trap her. Rather than being trapped by conversation, she is physically carried away against her will.

During the second volume of the novel, the abbey traps Catherine, as it has trapped her friend Eleanor as well. But the abbey stands in for the greater problem of male patriarchy that has come to trap females at the time period. General Tilney and John Thorpe both exhibit this male dominance over females in the novel. There are various points in the novel in which they have attempted to control Catherine. General Tilney is

perhaps the most oppressive character in the novel, however, as he treats various women unfairly in the novel. It is the general's belief of Catherine's upbringing that is gothic and restrictive. He only wants her to remain in the castle because he believes she is from a wealthy background. He encloses her in a place in order to gain her wealth for his son: "Under a mistaken persuasion of her possessions and claims, he had courted her acquaintance in Bath, solicited her company at Northanger, and designed her for his daughter in law" (Austen 234). This gothic story began in the past back in Bath. While less harmful than the General's, Henry's story about the abbey also traps Catherine because she misreads her surroundings, and the story captures her imagination. In volume 1, Henry spoke on various topics to Catherine that she knew little about. What becomes gothic and more threatening in this volume is that Catherine is away from her family in a new place, and Henry continues to force this terror on her mind. He does not know about his father's conniving plans, so he is less culpable for his behavior in the novel, but still her tortures Catherine's imagination.

The relationship between Catherine and the general parallels the relationship between the general and his family. While readers do not know much about his dead wife, Catherine assumes the general locked her up. While he may have not physically locked her in the castle, she seems to have been trapped in an unhappy marriage. Henry notes that his father loved his wife, "though his temper injured her" (Austen 195). This implication holds real terror for Catherine, who comes to believe that "she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (Austen 236). Eleanor, the general's daughter, holds no real power in her family, either; she is trapped in the house and prevented from marrying somebody she loves because of his lack of wealth and

inferior situation. Susan Zlotnick notes that Eleanor is the best-educated female in the novel, yet she has no power (285). I further this point in noting the similarity of her position to the one that the late wife of the General occupied years ago. On the onset of being sent away, Eleanor tells Catherine she has no true place in the house, “that I am but a nominal mistress of it, that my real power is nothing” (Austen 218). Eleanor cannot demonstrate her true potential when she is locked away in the abbey. These various stories of entrapment are the real stories of gothic that the novel exposes as being dangerous and restrictive. Even Henry Tilney seems to hold little power at times, as his father tries to control who he marries. The general attempts to control almost every individual that he comes in contact with in the novel, and his power impedes women in their ability to gain power in society.

The novel ends with the marriage of Catherine and Henry, after Henry disobeys his father and explains his father’s behavior to Catherine; this conversation indicates the ongoing gothic nature of society and patriarchy. General Tilney still exerts control on Henry and now Catherine—after his awful behavior toward almost every female in the novel, this is quite worrisome. The restrictions this control imposes on characters are made evident through the form of the novel and its manipulation of the gothic. Austen exemplifies how the gothic conventions are seen in everyday society, not just in physical castles. And it is a realization of this element that can lead to a reading of society’s conventions that is invaluable. She ends the novel with a two sided equation, which seems to exemplify the uncertainty of this patriarchal reign in the future: “....I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience” (Austen 240).

This open-ended ending is appropriate, as Austen does not provide a definitive answer but allows her novel to critique various conventions to produce new questions. And it seems ironic in her focus on male action in this statement, not at all centered on the female. Austen is suggesting that neither of these things should actually be recommended or rewarded—her novel, after all, critiques both the actions of Henry Tilney and General Tilney because they hinder Catherine’s education and development throughout the novel. The novel as a whole, in its embodiment of several forms and conventions and inconclusive ending, exemplifies Bakhtin’s depiction of novelistic discourse.

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All three novels exemplify the restrictive nature of forms and conventions, in society and as modes of writing. Patriarchal power became embodied in balls, letters, teachings, and actions, and these novels unravel the very way constructions are solidified in a society in a detrimental manner to females. The novels expose the gendered education that existed within society. These novelists take issues relevant to their time and transform them, as noted by Bakhtin:

The novelist comes into contact with the spontaneity of the inconclusive present; this is what keeps the genre from congealing. The novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed. He may turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose, he may interfere with the conversations of his heroes, he may openly polemicize his with literary enemies and so forth (Bakhtin 27).

Lennox, Burney, and Austen used fiction as a way to provide these paths of discussion and to complicate the voices of characters who exert too much control. Societal discussion included the importance of education and reading the novel. Females

historically had a harder time gaining adequate education, and they were seen as being corrupted by activities such as novel reading. These authors combat this discussion with female characters who gain their knowledge and skills from this very reading that is condemned. And this reading means more when it reveals the faults of the society they are living in. These women make mistakes when they read, but men also do, and more often than not, are corrupted or seduced by the same stories that women were thought to have been seduced by. The only way to change a structure is to manipulate or reconstitute it, and the novel allowed these authors to do so because of its ability to include many different forms, styles, and voices.

## Conclusion

I do not aim for this project to just be a close reading of education and novel reading in Eighteenth-century British fiction, but it is a study of the influence that these three novels have on each other. All three novelists took the themes of education and novel reading and transformed them—women become agents in these texts, and the flaws of society and patriarchal power are exposed. I noted earlier just briefly that Austen's *Northanger Abbey* seems to be the most progressive in its manipulation of genre as it relates to societal issues, because of the blending of horror and irony as it relates to patriarchal control at the time period. As shown in my project, the gothic becomes embodied in people and situations in the novel—it becomes present in the every day.

Because both Frances Burney and Charlotte Lennox's novels influenced Austen, the similarities between the two other novels and *Northanger Abbey* can be attributed partly to this fact. Austen takes the ball scenes from Burney's *Evelina* and the reading of novels from *The Female Quixote* and blends the two elements in her novel. Most important to note, however, is that this presence of the gothic is not so separate from actual experience, unlike the satirized romance in *Arabella* or the letters that can only relay information back and forth between individuals in *Evelina*. In *The Female Quixote*, Arabella's reading is obviously fictional and very different from the reality of others. In *Evelina*, the ridiculous schemes of the Captain are either funny or seemingly terrifying as he puts females in dangerous situations. *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine Morland is engaged by the stories of Henry, but she is also being told lies that will damage her perception of reality. When she is brought home at the end of the novel, there is a horrifying sense of loneliness even though she is surrounded by her family. In

commonplace situations and scenes that should indicate safety, the gothic is still present. There seems to be the least separation between these two elements, and it is the novel that allows for this blending and reformation. Austen portrays the possibility of dangerous conventions in everyday society and culture. The novel allows the concept of genre itself to take on new meanings in each of the novels, and is the gateway for my argument of how novelists are able to discuss relevant issues in their own society. Austen's work incorporates letters and romance, both of which are a large part of *The Female Quixote* and *Evelina*. Her play with so many forms and voices exemplifies heteroglossia in that she includes the genres embodied in the last two works. She uses the cumulative effect of other works to pose questions. All of the novels play with genre and to a certain extent fit into a Bakhtinian reading; it is only Austen's ending, however, that depicts the existence of multiple voices and conventions and provides more openings rather than closings.

Through the research and completion of this project, I have become more familiar with 18<sup>th</sup> century British reading and education. Through the study of these three novelists, I have shown the anxieties that existed at the time period in which these women were publishing. Generally for all women, but also specifically for these three authors, there existed complications regarding finances and publication. These anxieties made their success that much greater, as they overcame many barriers. Women were trying to gain a voice in society through their works, and using the novels, they portray a variety of conventions and language, some of which hinder female development.

Reading is a positive activity in all of these novels. It often leads to misinterpretation, but this is because females have an inadequate education in their societies, and men do not further their growth in this arena. An expansion of this project

would take a broader look in to Eighteenth-century culture and provide a greater survey of male and female writers on the topics of novel reading and education at the time period. *Adeline Mowbray*, for example, is another work by a female novelist that portrays a protagonist who reads and applies her reading of to her actions and reading of society. There are disastrous results as a result of her reading. This type of reading is drastically different than the type that the female protagonists I am analyzing engage in.

I conclude by looking forward a bit to the future of novels. A form that many times takes in influences from past works and portrays a variety of voices, the novels become useful for an analysis for all topics that come under scrutiny in society. All works to some extent take in tropes and connections of other works, and this process is one that brings about and revises various topics and debates in society. Therefore, it is not strange that novels continue to be read and analyzed as intensely today.

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