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Beyond the blazon: The female body as experienced in four eighteenth-century novels by women (Charlotte Lennox, Sarah Scott, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth).

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**BEYOND THE BLAZON:
THE FEMALE BODY AS EXPERIENCED IN FOUR
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS BY WOMEN**

by
Susan Colleen McNeill

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

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ABSTRACT

In the eighteenth century, the domestic novel emerged as a venue for female authors to discuss the cultural ideals of femininity and the “natural” female body. They struggled with the prevalent belief that biology, not intelligence, defined a woman’s worth, and with the ambiguities that surrounded the social construction of gender. Cultural forces represented in practices like medicine, in philosophy, and in didactic and conduct literature often imposed conflicting sanctions on female beauty, sexuality, rationality, and education—the defining elements of how the world is experienced through the body. This project shows how four eighteenth-century women writers dealt with the dawning of consciousness about the forces acting on the female body and the embodiment that consequently shapes the role of women in society.

Physical and emotional experiences like injury, childbirth, terror, passion, and love allow a woman to develop an awareness that she is not just a body, but that she is a thinking subject with a body and a mind that function in relations to others. Embodiment arises out of a conscious awareness of the external and internal forces acting on the body, and of the artificiality of socially constructed gender roles. By seeing their bodies in relation to others, and to their culture, women can develop an embodied awareness that the name of “woman” is a cultural creation and that in order to subvert dominant ideology each woman must internalize and take control over the patriarchal gaze that attempts to restrict and define her. The centre of embodiment is individuality, as each woman’s strategy for dealing with the cultural inscription of her gendered body is based on her own experiences in the world, and on her resulting sense of self.

The issue of female experience in the body is explored in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801). In each of these novels the issues of female self-awareness, the cultural construction of femininity and the female body, and the concepts of education, masquerade, deception, illness, and sexuality are explored with reference to their influence on how women experienced life in the world, and in their bodies. Rather than presenting a straightforward and monolithic female body, these novels reveal the conflict and double nature of the social construction of multiple women's bodies, denying the universal condition of womanhood, and advocating individual and conscious experience as the basis of understanding the self and others.

The historical context of this investigation is based in eighteenth-century medicine, philosophy, and didactic literature and the cultural notion of sensibility, supported by modern feminist, literary, medical, and philosophical approaches to female embodiment and literature. These sources allow for a multi-layered cultural critique of eighteenth-century gender constructions, and the role of women in society. It also explores the subtlety of the domestic genre with respect to female knowledge and desire.

DEDICATION

To the memory of Dr. Lorelei Cederstrom

In honour of the woman who taught me the beauty, subtlety, and power of women's literature, and whose insights and encouragement continue to influence my work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the support and intellectual conversation of my thesis director, Dr. Katherine Quinsey. Her enthusiasm for this project sometimes seemed to eclipse my own, and her comments on my work were incisive and invaluable. Our conversations have challenged my critical thinking and my literary understanding of the eighteenth century, particularly with respect to gender. I am likewise greatly indebted to Dr. Janelle Day Jenstad for her meticulous editorial commentary, her support and enthusiasm, and for her sage advice on all manner of concerns regarding my scholarship. I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Stephen Pender for his informative comments on medicine and embodiment, and for giving me the tools to begin exploring the struggle between mind and body. Sincere thanks to Martin Deck for his constant willingness to discuss philosophy and to be my mind/body sounding board, and especially for his friendship. Special thanks also to Margaret Murray and Helen Allen for their kindness and patience in smoothing out the administrative and emotional wrinkles that inevitably arise in the course of completing this kind of project. Thanks to my family for their long-distance support of my endeavours—especially my Dad’s willingness to drive me across the country in pursuit of higher education—and for the uplifting phone calls. Without question, my greatest thanks goes to my Mom, whose unwavering love and support throughout the writing of this thesis—as in every aspect of my life—provide the greatest fuel to my mind, body, and spirit.

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The Cultural Sociogenesis of the Female Body and Eighteenth-Century Fiction

What a chaos!—What a mixture of strength and weakness,—
of greatness and littleness,—of sense and folly,—of
exquisite feeling and total insensibility,—have [men] jumbled
together in their imaginations,—and then given to their pretty
darling the name of woman!

—Mary Hays, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf
of the Women*, 1798.

Long before Simone de Beauvoir observed that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (267), women writers were exploring their roles as socially constructed beings. In the eighteenth century, the domestic novel emerged as a venue for female authors to discuss the cultural ideals of femininity and the “natural” female body. They struggled with the prevalent belief that biology, not intelligence, defined a woman’s worth, and with the ambiguities that surrounded the social construction of gender. Cultural forces represented in practices like medicine, in philosophy, and in didactic and conduct literature often imposed conflicting sanctions on female beauty, sexuality, rationality, and education—the defining elements of how the world is experienced through the body.

The categorization of the eighteenth century as the “age of sensibility” implies an additional element to the understanding of femininity in this period: the idealization of the physical weakness of the female body, and the subsequent weakness of mind it was thought to represent. Medical and philosophical literature of the eighteenth century perpetuated the belief that the emotions of women were their central means of interacting with the world, in contrast to their male counterparts who were dominated by reason. In

response to this male-dominated culture came the women's domestic novel, which sought to present a more complex, holistic view of female experience as *lived* in the body.

What does it mean to have a *lived* body experience? First, and foremost, it implies consciousness: an awareness of internal and external forces acting on the body that change the way it feels or is regarded. This consciousness is realized through physical experiences like injury, childbirth, and illness, as well as through the emotions—which are sensation-based—like passion, sorrow, terror, and love. Each of these psychological and physical experiences contribute to an individual awareness that a woman is not *just a body* designed for male pleasure, the generation of heirs, and economic transmission in the marriage market, but that she is a subject *with* a body, and also with a mind and soul. When I speak of embodiment, I speak of the latter idea of a self-aware, *lived* experience in the body. The most significant external force that has an impact on both mind and body, influencing a woman's sense of self, is culture: a combination of intellectual and artistic definitions of masculinity and femininity, virtue and vice, normal and pathological behaviour, and appearance. Jean-Paul Sartre has argued that the body never consciously exists without the influence of culture;¹ similarly, when de Beauvoir suggests that one “becomes” a woman she is referring to this process of cultural inscription, reinforcing that it is fundamentally artificial, and therefore subject to change.

From the ways in which four eighteenth-century women authors engaged with the medical, philosophical, and didactic constructions of the female body, it is clear that these authors were both challenging and reinforcing dominant ideology by writing about female embodiment. The fictional works under consideration are: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), Fanny

¹ See pp. 279-85.

Burney's *Evelina* (1778), and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801). That these novels are part of the "domestic" genre implies an affirmation of motherhood, marriage, and women's relegation to the private sphere of the home, which these authors did support; however, they also proposed, through their focus on embodiment, means of subverting traditional gender roles, and of escaping the oppressive construction of eighteenth-century femininity.

Problematically, however, the social reformations suggested in the two earlier novels are undermined by the authors' characterizations of an embodied woman as either mentally or physically pathological, while the two later novels, by exposing the dangers of disobedience, reveal the extent to which a *lived* body must still conform to patriarchally prescribed cultural roles. As the novels progress through the mid to the late eighteenth century, what becomes clear is the ambivalence with which the social female body was represented in literature by women, suggesting a heightened consciousness of the artificiality of cultural constructions of gender, as well as an inability to articulate, or act upon, a widespread alternative to patriarchal society.

Feminist literary and social critics have focused their attentions on the "Janus-like quality" (Schofield and Macheski 1) of the constructed female body as modest and erotic, natural and artificial, beautiful and monstrous. Studies on desire, modesty, sexuality, and truth in eighteenth-century fiction have highlighted the role of the emotions in female physical experience and the emergence of social consciousness, while also revealing the ways in which these sensations were appropriated by dominant male society to reinforce female subordination, particularly through an emphasis on sensibility. Nancy Armstrong and G. J. Barker-Benfield's works on the domestic novel and the culture of sensibility

engage with the sociopolitical subversions found in women's novels during the age of sensibility, uncovering the ways in which women authors used the conventions of their society, and the constraints of gender, in subtle and ironic ways in order to subvert dominant patriarchal ideology.

Another way in which eighteenth-century women authors rejected the rigid construction of their social roles was to present the female body as an unreadable sign, obscured by masks and physical deception. The role of the masquerade as a platform for feminist social critique has been widely explored by Catherine Craft and Terry Castle. Both of these critics have shown the masquerade to present a double-bind of freedom and suppression for women that plays on the performativity of gender, denies embodiment and reinforces social artifice, but also allows for the expression of individual thought and a temporary escape from the male gaze and the rigid construction of female beauty and appearance. The masquerade bridges a gap between social and moral discussions of the physical body as a sign of internal, spiritual worth.

The ability of the body to reflect the condition of the soul introduces the foundational critical context for the examination of eighteenth-century women's novels and embodiment: medical and philosophical perspectives on the interaction of mind and body. Challenging the paradigm of Cartesian mind/body dualism, G.S. Rousseau, Roy Porter, Robert Jones, and Barbara Duden have insisted on the interrelation of mind and body to the emergence of consciousness, by exposing the psychological etiology of physical illness and deformity, and the corporeal etiology of emotional afflictions and madness. Their studies have been supported by the work of Michel Foucault on

genealogy and a mapping the body as a history of cultural inscription, as well as Sartre's theory of social interaction as the means of self-awareness.

In addition to these modern theories, Duden, Porter, and L. J. Rather have all engaged in analyses of eighteenth-century physicians' theories of mind/body interaction and treatments of mental and physical disease with respect to self-awareness and embodiment. What these studies reveal is the sociogenesis of the "modern female body," described by Duden as a process through which "people began to describe, treat, become aware of, and satisfy" (3) the bodies that have been socially gendered as *female*.

Eighteenth-century medicine and philosophy enabled women to become aware of their bodies as objects that not only projected their social position, but that also allowed for the experience of interiority—of consciousness and self-knowledge. In contrast, the traditional body of women, focused only on external presentation in accordance with social rules, and did not recognize a distinction between the body and the inner self.

This unconscious, traditional body is represented in literature by the archetypal coquette: this character sees no difference between her social role as a "woman" and her body and mind. By neglecting somatic and psychological experience, the coquette is a socially created and disembodied caricature: because she does not know her own mind or body, she is not in control of her emotions, nor is she self-guided, and so she must rely on others to define and direct her. According to Duden, the qualities of the modern body included "mental control, moderation of the passions, but also restraint of movement and a calculated awareness of environmental influences as they affected "health" (14). The modern female body, then, is differentiated from the traditional coquette-like body by conscious, self-aware, *lived* experience taking place within a social context.

In my study of eighteenth-century women's domestic fiction, I combine feminist literary and social criticism with medical and philosophical discussions of mind and body, to provide a holistic theoretical structure of female embodiment. These theories also offer examples of the hermeneutical forces that reify the socially constructed female body. The complexity of these women's multilayered narratives is revealed by incorporating divergent fields of intellectual inquiry, and by exposing an ambivalence towards female corporeality and social subjectivity that has hitherto been under-emphasized in the consideration of literary representations of female social experience.

More often than not, the women who learned that they could use self-knowledge, reasoning, and sensational experience to effect some change in their lives came to this recognition through their experiences of living within the confines of patriarchal society. In other words, social self-awareness arose from an understanding of the body's movement in the world, which in turn assisted women to understand how they could use their socially constructed bodies to effect change, even if only on an individual level. This conception of the female body emerged out of the socio-historical context of medical and didactic literature, and was influenced by philosophical opinions of mind/body interaction.

There are two fundamental positions on mind/body interaction that influence eighteenth-century thought and literature: Cartesian dualism, and John Locke's experience-based theory of consciousness, now called sensational psychology.² The theory set forth in René Descartes' 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy*³ established an

² This term is used by both Fletcher and Barker-Benfield in their discussions of Locke.

³ The second, fifth, and sixth *Meditations* are the most relevant to the discussion of how Descartes separates the ideas of mind and body. It is also throughout these sections that I find the majority of material with which John Locke takes issue in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690.

essence-based separation between the mind and the body that has continued to dominate Western thought until the very recent past. The crux of this argument is that because Descartes is able to think about thinking, he is aware that he exists in a spiritual form that is *not* tied to a corporeal vessel: Descartes privileges thought over sensation, creating the notion of the disembodied mind.

The result of Descartes' belief that the sensation of the body (*res extensa*) is not a necessary aspect of the functioning of the mind (*res cogitans*) is the privileging of rational thought over emotional and sensory perception. This argument is frequently invoked in eighteenth-century conduct books to support male domination, on the basis that women's minds—informed by emotions, and experienced in the body—were weaker, and in need of male control. For example, in *The Lady's New Year's Gift* (1688), George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, writes: “You must lay it down for a Foundation in general, That there is *Inequality in the Sexes* [...] Your *Sex* wanteth our *Reason* for your *Conduct*, and our *Strength* for your *Protection*; Ours wanteth your *Gentleness* to soften, and to entertain us” (18).

The rejection of experience and sensation is the primary weakness of Cartesian philosophy, particularly with respect to gender construction. Subjectivity without materiality is not a realistic solution to the traditional social construction of gender; Erica Harth argues that “[eighteenth-century] educated women had been made to see that bodily difference counted more than disembodied mind in the distribution of intellectual privileges such as membership in academics and access to public forums” (9). The disembodied mind exists within a philosophical context that has little relevance in daily living. By denying women access to the source of their experiences and sensations,

Cartesian philosophy denied them the opportunity to advocate their subjectivity within the social and material framework that is critical to female embodiment.

By the mid-eighteenth century, a new philosophical position on mind/body interaction had taken hold: John Locke's blend of dualism and materialism, which has since been labelled sensational psychology. Anthony Fletcher has categorized this theory as "a new physiological system" that "combined biology, psychology and social attributes into a powerful ideology of gender difference" (291). Locke's theory, far from being rooted in abstraction, is based on sensation; the conscious experiences of pleasure and pain are fundamental to how Locke believes we gain knowledge of the world. Locke argues that "to be happy or miserable without being conscious of it, seems to me utterly inconsistent and impossible" (II.i.11). Consciousness of sensation, then, is the defining human experience, and requires the interaction of both the mind and the body. It is therefore not surprising that the fiction of sensibility with which my research is primarily concerned, and which focusses on the experiences of the body, emerged during this period. According to G. J. Barker-Benfield, this fiction "was to become the most powerful medium for the spread of popular knowledge of sensational psychology" (6).

As Vere Chappell has argued, quite correctly, "Locke has no post-Cartesian scruples about causal interaction between mind and matter" (100). For Locke, the mind and body interact through sensation. Man is born a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate that gains knowledge only through experience, which in turn allows for self-awareness and embodiment. However, while Locke is willing to admit that mind and body interact, he chooses not to delve into the issue, weakening his overall theory. Chappell suggests that the primary flaw in Locke's theory is his unwillingness to explore the ramifications of

allowing psyche and soma to intermingle: “We have seen him allowing that mind acts upon matter, and he has no objection in principle to allowing causal flow the other way. But how far if at all bodily changes *do* change minds is something he prefers not to go into” (100). Instead, this task was taken up by eighteenth-century physicians. As L. G. Rather writes in the introduction to his study of Jerome Gaub’s medical lectures, “[...] the starting point of any philosophical flight is always our immediate ‘lived’ experience” (9). Any understanding of the modern female body is incomplete without the consideration of how sensation was deemed to influence women, that is, how medicine categorized female somatic experience.

The chief difference between the discussions of the philosophers and the physicians is explained by Rather: “The practising physician soon finds that he cannot behave like the philosopher and ignore the world of ‘lived’ experience in favour of a theoretical construct” (9). As the medical institution had yet to be formalized in this period, each individual doctor had his own beliefs regarding the composition and treatment of his patients’ bodies. To express the multiplicity of ideas on the bodies of men and women, Thomas Laqueur writes of the anatomy books of the time that they are “maps to a bewildering and infinitely varied reality” (164). My aim is to expose the major medical pathways on this map, and thus to support the idea that the social construction of the modern female body is neither universal nor *simply* a case of sexual or intellectual difference. By rejecting the universality of the female condition, this discussion of female embodiment is able to centre on each woman’s personal experiences, and how they lead to her personal sense of self.

Individuality had hitherto been restricted by eighteenth-century physicians' limitation of anatomical knowledge. Their treatment of the body was limited to observing the flow of fluids in and out of the body, and specifically the observance of the six "non-naturals"⁴. Though these six categories are important for men and women alike, the specific fluids that caused the most medical concern regarding the female body were those involved in reproduction and childbirth, since they were invested with a moral, as well as a physical, significance. These are also the fluids over which physicians felt they needed to gain control. Looking at the difference between doctors treating primarily male and female patients respectively, it becomes clear that their patients' treatments were based on largely artificial gendered principles: imagination and morality played a significant role in the diagnosis and treatment of women's illnesses, while those of the men were based on observable responses to the body's "flows."

The treatment of the female body was further problematized by the traditional view of the body as essentially male,⁵ which conflicted with the feminine classification of their emotions. Given the pervasiveness of this earlier understanding of the female body, it would doubtless have taken some time to convince both doctors and society at large that women were in fact distinct beings and not *just* inferior men. Thomas Laqueur elucidates the problem of medical concepts of gender and the body, arguing that "[f]ar from being the foundations for gender, the male and female bodies in eighteenth and

⁴ The non-naturals are described as follows by English physician George Cheyne in his 1724 *Essay of Health and Long Life*: 1. The air we breathe in 2. Our Meat and drink 3. Our sleep and watching 4. Our exercise and rest 5. Our evacuations and their obstructions 6. The passions of our minds. A similar list can also be found much earlier in Michel de Montaigne's 1588 work *Of Experience*, although Galen (129-199 CE) is said to be the first to discuss the non-naturals.

⁵ Renaissance anatomists, epitomized by Vesalius, represented the female reproductive organs as variations on the male organs. According to Laqueur, "The new anatomy displayed, at many levels and with unprecedented vigour, the 'fact' that the vagina really is a penis, and the uterus a scrotum" (79). Laqueur also states that the concept of the vagina as the "sheath" for its "*opposite*, the penis" did not begin to emerge until 1700 (159).

nineteenth-century anatomy books are themselves artifacts whose production is part of the history of their epoch” (164). Laqueur’s statement not only qualifies the limits placed upon physicians due to a lack of anatomical knowledge, but also suggests, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that the medical notion of the body was itself a social construct, a result of production and not *nature* (though this word is used socially to mask the construction). The two major medical standpoints on the female body are represented in the works of physicians George Cheyne and Johann Storch.

Like many of the physicians of the period, George Cheyne spent substantial amount of time in his professional career⁶ addressing the condition of nervousness, which because of its prevalence, he called the “English malady.” The problem of mind and body interaction is central to this condition, and is implicated in the social subordination of women and the struggle for female embodiment. The fundamental importance of Cheyne’s writing with respect to understanding the interaction of the mind and body within a gendered context is that he locates the soul in the mind, at the root of all nervous activity. He writes “[t]hat the Intelligent Principle, or *Soul*, resides somewhere in the Brain, where all the Nerves, or Instruments of Sensation terminate [...]” (5). Cheyne’s attempt to medicalize the intellectual subordination of women works as follows: if women’s nerves are considered weak—as they are in the culture of sensibility—and they are the seat of the soul, then by extension, this soul, or “intelligent principle” of women must also be weak. This is not a new argument, as Malebranche made virtually the same statement fifty-nine years earlier in 1674.⁷ Barker-Benfield has argued that “Cheyne’s

⁶ Cheyne’s other major work was his 1724 *Essay of Health and Long Life*, in which he advocated observance of the six non-naturals, and commonplace cures for a variety of illnesses; daily vomits, bloodletting, dietary restriction, and exercise. (Porter ix-xiv).

⁷ Malebranche “propounded the idea that women were intellectually inferior to men because of the greater sensibility of the nerve fibers in their brain” (Barker-Benfield 23). Quote printed with no citation information.

gendering of the nerves, although usually implicit, was fundamental to his thought” (24). This discussion is arguably one of the most important in eighteenth-century medical and social constructions of femininity.

Rather than looking for the etiology of nervous conditions in the mind, as the field of psychiatry was just beginning to do, Cheyne thought the solution was to be found in the gendered body. In describing feeling and sensation, ideas that are at the heart of embodiment, Cheyne reinforces their basis in corporeality: “*Feeling* is nothing but the Impulse, Motion, or Action of Bodies, gently or violently impressing the Extremities or sides of the Nerves, of the Skin, or other Parts of the Body, which by their Structure and *Mechanism*, convey this Motion to the Sentient Principle in the Brain” (71). In Cheyne’s description of feeling we can clearly see how external forces literally acting upon the body, through the nerves, convey a message to the mind, which in turn allows for consciousness. This treatment of the nerves as central to embodiment is the basis on which the culture of sensibility rests. Barker-Benfield has argued that “sensibility opens the door to discussions of changing identity with the rise of conscious awareness of new experiences” (3); it is the idea of identity that is of paramount importance to gender—sensibility defines a woman’s sense of self.

By virtue of their association with the body, women were seen to be invested with greater sensibility than men. In *Vindication*, Mary Wollstonecraft quotes Samuel Johnson’s definition of sensibility as: “Quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy” (140). The delicacy suggested by Johnson also implied weakness, which became the centre of the definition of female sensibility. According to Barker-Benfield, sensibility “betokened physical and mental inferiority, sickness and inevitable

victimization” (36). Sensibility idealized female physical and intellectual weakness by equating these qualities with “nature” and beauty. An example of glorifying the weakness implied by sensibility can be found in Edmund Burke’s 1757 work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, in which he writes: “the beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it” (qtd. in Blease 66). A similar argument can also be found in section three of Immanuel Kant’s 1764 treatise, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, in which he argues that in place of rationality, women’s minds are informed by “beautiful understanding” and sensation. Kant writes: “I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles [...] But in place of it Providence has put in their breast kind and benevolent sensations, a fine feeling for propriety, and a complaisant soul” (qtd. in Agonito 133). In beautifying sensibility, male authors—and patriarchal society—praised the intellectual weakness that denied women subjectivity by denying them the potential for rational thought and principle.

As sensibility became associated with female desirability, it became fashionable for eighteenth-century women to be afflicted with nervous conditions that were indicative of heightened sensation and perception, and the weakness of female nerve fibres. George Haggerty has argued that the impact of sensibility on women was “the extremes of feeling (tending toward madness) and of bodily dysfunction (culmination in death)” (3): this argument expresses the damage inflicted on the female mind and body as a result of this culture of sensibility. Some women—particularly in the upper classes—who were unable, or unwilling, to reject the cultural forces of sensibility internalized their assertion of female weakness either by going mad, or dying! The weighty implication of this

ideology is perhaps one reason why the didactic, as well as fictional literature of this period, is rife with concerns about the nerves, and their effect on women as part of the social construction of femininity. It is essential to understand how nervous disorders were understood by the medical profession, as they largely contributed to the internalization of popular conjecture—whether correct or not— of what was “normal” in the human body.

According to Roy Porter’s introduction to *The English Malady*, Cheyne believed that “[t]here was no disturbance of consciousness without a prior somatic disorder” (xxxiv). In chapter VII of *English Malady*, Cheyne writes that “it may be very justly affirmed, that no habitual and grievous, or great *Nervous Disorders*, ever happened to any one who laboured not under some real *Glandular Distemper*, either *scrophulous* or *scorbutical*, original or acquired” (184). Cheyne argued that these bodily obstructions were usually caused by living to excess; too much alcohol, rich and fatty foods, and laziness contributed primarily to nervous conditions. The common popular belief, argued by Cheyne, as well as Jerome Gaub and Bernard Mandeville,⁸ was that the bodies that were most susceptible to nervous disorders were those of the upper, or leisure classes, as they had both the resources and the leisure time to overindulge themselves.

Women in the upper classes were particularly susceptible to nervous disorders because their nerves were considered constitutionally weaker than men’s—a condition which Cheyne believed was “determin’d by God and science” (Barker-Benfield 24). Cheyne invokes religious authority to reinforce the physical condition that grounds the culture of sensibility. Barker-Benfield also argues that Cheyne studied a number of

⁸ This claim is made most notably by Jerome Gaub in *De regimine mentis* 1747 and 1763 and by Bernard Mandeville in his 1711 *Treatise of Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*.

women while preparing *The English Malady*, and, though their cases receive little more than passing mention, his opinions regarding women's "natural" predisposition to nervous disorders, and his concerns about maternity, are in keeping with popular social opinion. In his 1711 *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*, Mandeville, like Cheyne, advocated the theory that the "natural" condition of women was prone to hysteria" (Barker-Benfield 25).⁹ The conduct literature of this period also reiterated the opinion that women's nerves were "naturally" constitutionally different, and consequently weaker than those of men, largely because of the strain put on women's bodies during pregnancy and childbirth.

Though the most widely recognized source of most female mental and somatic illness at the time was still rooted within the body—in a woman's reproductive organs, nerves, and fluids—her own understanding, facilitated through the social perception of her reproductive function and its effects on her mind and body, is the cornerstone of the cultural emergence of the female body in the age of sensibility. Barbara Duden has researched the social construction of the female body by studying the cases of Dr. Johannes Storch, an eighteenth-century German doctor. Duden's study of Storch exemplifies what Susan James describes as the "feminist perspective" of body studies, namely, "understanding persons as both bodily and social, and knowledge as interpersonal and interactive" (53).

Duden's research is significant in that it documents the emergence of awareness of female patients to the interaction of their bodies and their thoughts that allows for

⁹ In support of this opinion, Denise Russell writes: "in cultural representations women embody madness, but this is a 'madness which is not ours.' Instead it is the weight of these representations and the repression that they entail which gives rise to madness [hysteria]" (121). See also Kathryn Schwarz's discussion of the role of the womb as the centre of of disease and madness (152), which invokes the ancient belief of the wandering womb.

embodiment. Storch's patients were beginning to recognize that by observing changes in their bodies they could monitor their own health, and they also learned that their "imagination," which Locke and Kant argued replaced "reason," did not affect their bodies in the ways it had been previously believed. What women had to overcome in order to experience a lived body, therefore, were the medical ambiguities surrounding their bodies during key stages of their lives; menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. This search for self-knowledge was neither quick, nor complete. In the early eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant wrote that "women don't give their secret away" (qtd. in Stern 24), to which Hélène Deutsch responded in the middle of the twentieth century, "[t]hey don't because they don't know it themselves" (qtd. in Stern 24).

Among the most pervasive, and ancient, myths of the female body was that women's minds and bodies were weakened by a reproductive system that was constantly ready to conceive. There was no understanding on the part of women or men regarding ovulation, which is evidenced by the fact that many argued that ovulation occurred simultaneously with intercourse, and that orgasm not only facilitated, but assured pregnancy.¹⁰ In 1785 Samuel Farr wrote that "without an excitation of lust or enjoyment in the venereal act, no conception can probably take place" (qtd. in Laqueur 161). It was also widely believed that pregnancy arising from rape indicated that, despite the woman's justified protestations to the opposite, she must have enjoyed the act.¹¹ The physical weakness indicated by women's constant desire for sex in turn led to a psychological weakness, whereby women were thought to have insatiable sexual

¹⁰ See Jones' introduction to the section on Sexuality, 58.

¹¹ Laqueur 161. Though this idea was disregarded by the mid-nineteenth century, psychiatrists continued to advocate forced sexual relations as a cure for hysteria.

appetites¹² that, when unsatisfied, could lead to madness. This was a traditional belief regarding the dangers of female sensuality, for if women were given free reign over their bodies, they might devour men.¹³ The woman's mind, being preoccupied with sex, was a breeding ground for imagination of sexual fulfilment, and pregnancy.

Once a woman became pregnant, her imagination, rather than being satisfied, was of tremendous concern to the physicians of the period. They were primarily interested in the impact of the mother's mind ("imagination") and body on the fetus during pregnancy. Dennis Todd has explained the importance of the imagination to the interaction of mind and body arguing that "as the medium between sense and thought, the imagination did the work of each. It was the messenger of the senses, creating images that accurately replicated the external world. But the imagination also served the intellect, and like the intellect it was 'not tied to the laws of matter'"(57). The infamous case of Mary Toft in 1726 is an exemplary case in point. Toft and her husband Joshua, along with his mother, Anne, contrived a "monstrous birth," which eventually became month-long ordeal of giving birth to 17 rabbits.

Toft's case points out a troubling, but important, phenomenon in gender studies; though staging a "monstrous" birth, she was reinforcing dominant patriarchal ideology that women's reproductive systems were both dangerous and uncertain. Toft served to set back the plight of women in search of self-understanding. Anthony Fletcher has explored this issue in depth, and writes that "women have been the agents of, and have often colluded in, patriarchy as well as resisting it" (xvi). Though Toft's case is extreme,

¹² Philogamus, *The Present State of Matrimony; or the Real Causes of Conjugal Infidelity and Unhappy Marriages* (Jones 77).

¹³ Elizabeth Grosz discusses the historical male fear of the *vagina dentata*, literally the toothed vagina, which to her represents "this horror of submersion, the fear of being absorbed into something which has no boundaries of its own" (194). It is this predatory female sexuality that eighteenth-century men felt they needed to control—they did so through what Foucault calls the "hysterization of women's bodies" (104).

there were many more moderate cases of women's imaginations causing them physical distress, often during menstruation or pregnancy, and these cases too served to justify the concerns of patriarchal society regarding the female body.

Duden also describes how fear, real or imagined, was considered a danger to pregnancy. She writes that "pregnant women and women in childbed in particular were threatened by it [fear]" (147). Upon being caught in the rain and falling down, a pregnant woman arrives in town and "upon her arrival she therefore requested such remedies as were meant for frights" (147). L.G. Rather writes that it was commonly accepted that terror could cause not only hysteric convulsions, but also abortion, and even sudden death (145). Duden also discusses many cases of women who received a fright that caused the "stagnation" of the menses.¹⁴ A physical fright in many cases preceded the emotional fright that stagnation of the menses indicated, as case 16 said, "that she had an evil accumulation in her" (163). In many such cases, the physical "fear" amounted to little more than being caught in a rainstorm, or a slip and fall.

Both the body of the mother and her emotions were seen as a constant threat to an unborn child. Duden writes that "[g]eneration was threatened, above all, by the mood of the pregnant woman herself: woman [*sic*] were physiologically murderous to the fruit, owing to their constitution, their *inner* blood. Hidden in women were death *and* life" (162). In her introduction to Storch, Duden makes it clear that institutions, like medicine, were using their "knowledge" of the female body as a way to reinforce her position as socially secondary to males. She writes that "[f]rom the seventeenth century on, a new, bureaucratic power was employed to destroy this cosmic anchoring of popular culture [that women are life-givers and life-takers] to describe the female body, to interpret its

¹⁴ Cases are discussed on the following pages: 69, 76, 97, 146-7, 159, 162, 163.

ambiguous power as a demonic threat, and to explain its very nature as ‘natural’ weakness” (8). By reinforcing the weakness of women—as in the definition of sensibility—men were able to both deny and control the power of the female body .

The ease with which psychological forces were thought to influence both menstruation and pregnancy, even to the point of causing the body’s fluids to change—menstrual blood to saliva, perspiration, *et cetera*—is indicative of the misunderstanding and fear regarding female reproduction and the basic functioning of women’s bodies. Cheyne, too, fears the fluids of the mother. In *The English Malady*, he asks: “Since then the *Female’s* Juices are what, for a certain Time also feed the *Animalcul*, as they are Good or Bad, Proper or Improper, may they not alter, spoil, or mend the Juices of the *Fœtus?*” (96). Given the previously established connection between the body and the imagination, along with the mysterious power of generation invested in women, Cheyne’s concerns are representative of the male community at large.

Duden spends a substantial portion of her book discussing the fluids of women, and their implications for body concept and self-knowledge. For the doctors of this period, as I have explained, the interaction of mind and body is such that any condition affecting the body, by extension affects the mind, and vice-versa; thus the condition to which women are by “nature” predisposed—hysteria— is an integral mix of the body’s fluids and heightened sensibility.¹⁵ Dr. R. James writes that women are particularly prone to catch hysteria under the following conditions:

especially if they are full of Blood and Moisture, and have not borne
children: As, also, such as are brought up in idleness, or are of a soft Texture,

¹⁵ L.G. Rather addresses this issue via Valangin’s words on the subject that “[t]he sympathy of the body and mind is [...] such that particular affections of the mind will bring on particular disorders of the body, and disorders of the body will in turn affect the mind” (182).

and delicate constitution [...] young Women, whose nervous systems are delicate and weak, who are of a tender habit, and subject to exorbitant Sallies of lawless Passion, are in great danger of this spasmodic Disease [...]. (86)

Smith goes on to say, in much the same vein as Cheyne's earlier argument, that those who get regular exercise, and spend time outdoors are far less prone to the crippling physical, and mental, symptoms of hysteria. But although he says that this kind of living may prevent hysteria, he defines women living in such a way as "robust, masculine Women" (86). The social construction of femininity was such that, for a woman to be considered "good," her body had to be weak and passive—the basis of the theory of sensibility. This is clearly an argument referring specifically to upper-class women, as those in the lower classes would rarely have had the option of avoiding physical labour and exposure to the elements. Once again, medical discourse supports keeping privileged women in a physically weak, and thus socially subordinate, position as idealized by the ideology of sensibility.

The artificiality of a sexually codified body in the eighteenth century, as expressed through the empirical medical literature of this period, helped to create the modern female body in society, though often serving more to legitimize patriarchal strictures on female thought and sexuality than to improve the health of women. The importance of medical discourse in the reification of socially constructed gender is explicitly stated by Ian Maclean, who writes:

[a]lthough apparently not bound by the authority of the divine institution of matrimony, doctors nonetheless produce a 'natural' justification for women's relegation to the home and exclusion from public office, and provide thereby,

as well as coherence with a cultural tenet of theology, an important foundation on which arguments in ethics, politics and law are based. (46)

It is important to note Maclean's qualification of the term "natural," because as it has been shown, the case studies used to explore women's bodily experience often charted the misinterpretations of their fluxes and sensations rather than offering an objective biological study. As women became aware of their own bodies, they began to see the artificiality of their supposedly "natural" hysteric condition. As well, modern female historians have been better able to appreciate the social construction of "woman" by accepting that the gendered body was not based in "nature."

Hannah Barker argues that, like self-aware women in the eighteenth-century, "[i]nstead of seeing sexual difference between men and women as a reflection of purely natural, biological differences, they [modern women's historians] accepted the notion that these distinctions were socially constructed and, therefore, varied with time, place, culture, class and ethnicity" (6). Duden has appropriately called the eighteenth-century female body "the vague corporeality of popular culture" (13); there was no more successful outlet for fostering the belief of the general society regarding the social construction of the body than the didactic literature of the eighteenth century. This phenomenon has been explored by Armstrong, who has argued, following the lead of Foucault, that "[...] various kinds of [fictional] writing worked together in an unwitting conspiracy that would eventually authorize modern institutional procedures" (19).

The pervasive social belief that a woman's physical and mental wellness—as well as her very essence—were rooted in her reproductive organs was perpetuated through conduct manuals and women's "education." As there was little in the way of formalized

female schooling, most women were educated in the home by their mothers and by didactic literature, both of which reinforced female physical, intellectual, and social subordination. Armstrong argues that “English conduct books sought to promote a gender-based philosophy of education known as ‘the cultivation of the heart’” (99). In the light of medical opinions about female reproduction, authors of conduct books were careful to equate the “natural” state of women with “passive asexual virtue” (Jones 57). In an interesting contradiction, however, conduct literature was created to help women make themselves appealing to men, and to attract a husband¹⁶ —which implies that they were to take an active role in presenting themselves as sexually attractive, while seeming to be the paragons of passivity and asexuality. I agree with Fletcher, who writes that conduct books taught a woman to “take hold of her sexuality and make its proper direction the rule of her life” while in the same breath learning “to perceive themselves as desexualized embodiments of spiritual values” (393). According to Blease, the social construction of woman was such that “the perfect woman must have at once an attractive exterior and an infinite capacity for self-suppression” (29).

Take for example, John Gregory’s conservative piece, *“A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters,”* written in 1774. He writes that “[o]ne of the chief beauties in a female character, is that most modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration” (45). Gregory encourages his daughters to maintain their emotional distance after attracting a man, going on to say: “[i]f his attachment be agreeable to you, I leave you to do as nature, good sense, and delicacy shall direct you. If you love him, let me advise you never to discover to him the full extent of your love, no not although you marry him. That sufficiently shews your

¹⁶ See the introduction to Jones’ section on Conduct (14-17).

preference, which is all he is entitled to know” (50). Female sexuality is so dangerous in the eyes of men, that even in marriage Gregory encourages his daughters to keep their feelings of love and passion to themselves. Gregory supports the necessary restriction of female bodily experience, and subsequently, rejects their embodiment.

Gregory’s opinions are similar to those stated over thirty years earlier in another famous piece of didactic literature, written by Wetenhall Wilkes. Wilkes lays out a clear definition of female chastity and underlines its necessity as the first and most important quality in a woman. He writes: “Chastity is a suppression of all irregular desire, voluntary pollutions, sinful concupiscence, and of an immoderate use of all sensual, or carnal pleasures. Its purity consists in *abstinence* or *continence* [...]. An immodest woman is a kind of monster, distorted from its proper form” (30). It is important to take note of the construction of sexually aware women as monstrous, since it is evidence of the degree of social transgression that female agency was thought to represent. Wilkes’ statement also reinforces the paradox of womanhood previously suggested by Fletcher: a woman must take hold of her sexuality in such a way that she is not seen to be aware of her sexual power. This chastity even extends into dreaming and the ever-problematic imagination. Wilkes cautions that women who remember “wanton” dreams with pleasure, are compromising their chastity, as conscious enjoyment of an unconscious act is blameworthy.

Jones points out that while there are a significant number of conduct books that advocate such passive sexuality and conscious repression of passions, there are just as many written about active female sexuality. By emphasizing the lack of consensus about female sexuality in the conduct books, Jones also problematizes the historical, male-

constructed binary between sexually passive, “angelic,” and sexually conscious, whore-like women. The problem with these constructions is that they are based on the idea that male sexuality is “normal,” and that “female sexuality is thus deviant, or at best serves a passively functional role” (58). According to Erica Harth, “woman was considered to be so exceptional to the masculine rule that she was thought to be a monster” (2). Women, then, had to walk a fine line between asexual passivity, which according to the medical literature predisposed them to hysteria, and the medical notion that they were constantly prepared to conceive, and thus had insatiable sexual appetites. By assigning women’s value to their role as the “vehicle through which the human species should be propagated” (Jones 58), and yet denying them the right to the sensations and experiences associated with their sexuality and sensibility, patriarchal society had created an idea of “woman” that no female body could fully accommodate. It was a significant understatement for Savile to write to his daughters that they would require “a wise and *dexterous* Conduct” (18) to become proper women in society.

It is this dilemma that the female authors under investigation in this work are trying to address. After exposing the “no-win” situation for women who are judged exclusively by their bodies and their sexuality, many women writers challenged this position by advocating a more holistic approach to the construction of womanhood. The medical literature of the period shows the interrelation between the mind and body of both men and women, but tends to focus on the physical aspects of the latter, denying their rationality in favour of their biology, and thus precluding the consciousness necessary for female embodiment that is at the heart of this inquiry.

The writing surrounding women's nerves and nervous conditions—the language of sensibility—excluded women from rational discourse. The solution that many female reformers sought to the sexuality paradox was improved female education. These reformers hoped that if they could not achieve equality through their bodies, if their minds could be strengthened, women might become men's intellectual equals. I turn now to the female mind, in the same way that Cheyne addressed himself to the male mind in 1733: “And thou, immortal Mind! Forgive me if I have compelled you, man's better part—nay, more his divine part as well, it is said—to sit neglected and accused throughout a long recital of the crimes that you inflict on your companion the body” (154).

The quest to provide rational education for women became foregrounded in discussions of many female writers throughout the eighteenth century, though perhaps most notably by Mary Astell in the early years,¹⁷ and later by Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More. Since education was itself a part of the larger, and developing, social conditions in England, it necessarily plays a role in the construction of femininity and female embodiment. Since female education had been traditionally based on conduct literature largely written by men, it was not designed to help women become self-aware, rational creatures. Armstrong argues that the educational programs “strove to subordinate the body to a set of mental processes that guaranteed domesticity” (76). Women's education was usually confined to the “domestic arts,” like sewing, painting, singing, and playing the piano. According to Fénelon's *Treatise on the Education of Daughters*, first printed in English in 1707, “[w]omen, in general, possess a weaker but more inquisitive

¹⁷ Astell's beliefs were influenced by seventeenth century education reformers like Bathsua Makin and Elizabeth Elstob (Fletcher 365). For further information on pre-eighteenth century feminism, see Hilda L. Smith.

mind than men; hence it follows that their pursuits should be of a quiet and sober turn” (102).

Belief in the mental weakness of women was directly challenged first by Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies Part I* in 1696. She writes to her fellow women:

And [let us] not entertain such a degrading thought of our own *worth*, as to imagine that our Souls were given us only for the service of our Bodies, and that the best improvement we can make of these, is to attract the Eyes of Men. We value *them* too much, and our *selves* too little, if we place any part of our desert in their Opinion; and don't think our selves capable of Nobler Things than the pitiful Conquest of some worthless heart. (qtd. in Hill 141)

Astell rejects all of the advice being offered through the conduct books I have just discussed, particularly Wilkes and Gregory. Most telling, perhaps, is that Astell was writing some forty years before Wilkes and seventy-five years before Gregory. Despite her *Serious Proposal*, the condition of female education remained virtually unchanged in the early half of the eighteenth century. Astell failed in her attempt to establish a school for girls in the last years of the seventeenth century, and in 1792 Clara Reeve was still writing about the need for good boarding schools for young women.¹⁸

After Astell's 1696 *Proposal*, the next popular women's writing on education came in 1773 with Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady*.¹⁹ Chapone, however, does not reinforce the opinions of Astell on

¹⁸ Reeve, Clara. *Plans of Education; With Remarks on the Systems of other Writers* (1792) [excerpts reprinted in Jones 116-17].

¹⁹ Chapone, Hester. *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady* (1733) [excerpts reprinted in Jones 104-06].

women's intellectual equality with men. She does reaffirm the need for "a competent share of reading, well chosen and properly regulated" (104). In addition, she advocates the traditional arts of dancing, music, and drawing, as well as speaking French and possibly Italian. She does not, however, advocate learning Latin or Greek because the "labour and time which they require are generally incompatible with our natures and proper employments" (105). Chapone suggests that classical languages are too taxing on the female mind, thus reinforcing the weaker intellectual potential of women. These languages were traditionally part of a rhetorical education that prepared men for speaking in public—no wonder they were seen as too difficult for women—which leads Janet Todd to claim that women who were conversant in Latin were "unsexed by their knowledge" (31). After encouraging women to read and study history, Chapone eventually resorts to a traditional view of female intelligence: she reinforces the idea that first prompted the concern of the medical professionals of the period, that the "faculty in which women usually most excel, is that of imagination [...]" (106). This emphasis on emotional sensation undermines the potential for female rationality that is asserted in the educational reforms of Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Though fundamentally traditional, Chapone's rationalist work was praised in the most famous treatise on female education after Astell's *Serious Proposal*, Wollstonecraft's work of revolutionary feminism, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written in 1792.²⁰ In this important work, Wollstonecraft firmly asserts that faulty

²⁰ According to Fletcher, Wollstonecraft "found it worthwhile in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to ridicule Wilkes, express her disapproval of the anti-intellectual tone of Gregory and Fordyce and champion the rationalist Chapone" (388).

education is the result of male misunderstanding of the female body and mind. She writes:

[o]ne cause of this barren blooming [of the female mind] I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from 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. (258)

Wollstonecraft clearly states that men, representing the dominant ideology that constructs gender, see women as so different from themselves that they do not even consider them human. It is this continued dehumanization of women that educational reformers and women authors were attempting to overcome. Wollstonecraft's writing is a direct challenge to Savile's 1688 statement to his daughters that "You are therefore to make the best of what is *settled by Law and Custom*, and not vainly imagine, that it will be *changed for your sake*" (19)²¹; she wants all women to take responsibility for their education and rationality, and, in so doing, to change the way society has constructed femininity.

This is not to say, however, that even Wollstonecraft was advocating a total overthrow of patriarchal society. As Craft-Fairchild has argued in *Masquerade and Gender*, "to offer counterideology is not to subvert ideology; simple role reversals that do not question the roles themselves cannot finally produce lasting change" (5).

Wollstonecraft is not advocating what has mistakenly become a commonplace in "feminist" literature, that the solution to gender subordination is to eliminate interaction with men, or indeed to reverse the gender hierarchy. Wollstonecraft states in *Vindication* that "I do not want them [women] to have power over men, but over themselves" (qtd. in

²¹ Wollstonecraft was not the only woman to challenge Savile's ideas. Savile was a contemporary of Mary Astell and Bathsua Makin, and perhaps in this quote he is cautioning his daughters against the social implications of educational reforms.

Blease 82). The self-integrity that is suggested in the previous statement is at the heart of my discussion of embodiment: education and experience empower women to take control over their own lives, and to become subjects in their *lived* bodies. The most important aspect of female education is rejecting the “sentimental” in favour of the rational, and this means rejecting patriarchal conduct books. Though modern feminists look back to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* as the genesis of their movement, during her own time these theories posed such a political and ideological challenge to established authority that “proper” women went to great lengths to distance themselves from *Vindication*, and its author. This distancing is particularly visible in Maria Edgeworth’s text, *Belinda*, in which she presents a Wollstonecraftian character as the epitome of socially transgressive female behaviour.

Within a year of Wollstonecraft’s treatise, another essay on female education was published presenting an argument for an improved opinion of the female mind while propagating the presuppositions of traditional views of female mental and physical subordination. This contradictory conduct book comes from Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, who in 1793 wrote *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits*.²² Hawkins begins her piece by acknowledging the intellectual difference between men and women. She writes that “[i]t cannot, I think, be truly asserted, that the intellectual powers know no difference of sex [...]. In general, and almost universally, the feminine intellect has less strength but more acuteness [...]. We are not formed for those deep investigations that tend to the bringing into light reluctant truth” (118). Hawkin’s assertion of female acuteness is a restatement of the idea of sensibility. However, less than a page later

²² Hawkins, Laetitia Matilda. *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H. M. Williams, with particular reference to Her Letters from France*, (1793). [excerpts reprinted in Jones 177-20].

Hawkins contradicts herself by saying that when “I confine the powers of women to lighter subjects of exertion, I would not be understood as insinuating that they are incapable of any thing *serious*: I mean only that they misapply them, when, descending below the level of necessity, they fancy they find pleasure in what they are not fitted to comprehend” (119). Hawkins is suggesting that women are capable of serious thought, but not of “*abstruse*” subjects: science, philosophy, and politics are complicated subjects, and are thus best left to male deliberation. Hawkins considers it appropriate for women to learn, among other subjects, natural history, geography, and biography (119). While they require more thought than the decorative arts, these subjects do not serve to increase a woman’s rhetorical powers, nor do they prepare her for a potentially public social role; because history, geography, and biography do not threaten male dominion, women are able to study them. Hawkins supports the ideology of sensibility while still suggesting that women are theoretically capable of greater intellectual achievements.

In a passage that was likely making reference to Wollstonecraft, Hawkins writes that the discourse “which I place in the climax of unfitness, is that of politics; and so strongly does it appear to me barred against the admission of females, that I am astonished that they ever ventured to approach it [...]” (120). While veiled challenges, often almost imperceptible, to the established social order could be permissible in women’s literature, a woman in society who took agency in the quest for female equality posed too great a challenge to patriarchal authority. Conservative women writers of conduct books had to be diligent about distancing themselves from the radical feminism and social criticism of Wollstonecraft and the Jacobins. In so doing, they also distanced

themselves from female embodiment, which is ironically the primary means of achieving any release from the rigid and artificial engendering of the female mind and body.

Women writers of didactic literature during the eighteenth century grappled with the socially accepted notions of female mental capacity, and though they made steps towards improving the “rational” education of women to include reading, speaking additional languages, and learning history, their work—with the exception of Astell, and later, Wollstonecraft— was limited by the “natural” belief that women’s minds were not strong enough to deal with the real subjects that were of interest to men, like philosophy, science, and theology. There is a well established maxim that *knowledge is power*, and by and large²³ patriarchal society of the eighteenth century was careful to guard that power, to prevent it being shared with the *weaker* sex.

By the end of the eighteenth century, medicine, philosophy, theology, and conduct books had reified a construction of the female mind and body that was riddled with conflict and contradiction: women were to be both active and passive, asexual and yet responsible for reproduction, pleasant to look at yet not possessed of vanity, and spiritual though without an understanding of theology. As Armstrong writes, a woman must be “all things to all people” (108). Unfortunately for women, this meant that they had to be what a man wanted them to be, not what they desired, or felt to be their true character. Novels of female embodiment attempt to challenge this situation.

The prevailing discussions of female thought, education, health, and sexuality in the disciplines mentioned above contributed to the establishment of the “culture of sensibility” that has been proven a critical concept in the understanding of the female body in the later eighteenth century. The varied and often contradictory opinions of

²³ See Lonsdale for a discussion of notable exceptions (xxxii-ix).

these social institutions began to solidify into one theory regarding female nerves, intelligence, morality, and inequality with men. Though the hermeneutics of the female body were still being formalized in the dominant discourse of the eighteenth century, the fiction of the mid- to late-eighteenth century reflected the vacillations of women regarding the discussions that focused on their essence, but from which they were largely excluded.

Subjectivity, sensation, experience, and autonomy were undercurrents in all but the most conservative literature of this time period. As women internalized both the supports and challenges to their socially subordinate positions, they became more aware of the roles that their conscious bodies played in social interaction. They recognized that the much disputed interaction between their minds and bodies was a source not only of debate and suppression, but also of potential liberation through embodiment. They began to explore this knowledge through the subtextual messages in the fiction written by and for women in the late eighteenth century. Authors were conscious of the precarious position into which they had been placed, navigating between acceptance and challenge, ideological passivity or quiet revolution, and ultimately their opinions remain as varied as the social notions of the female body.

The cultural sociogenesis of the female body was largely a process of formalizing difference: difference between between mind and body, reason and imagination, conduct and misconduct, constructions of masculinity and of femininity, and ultimately biological men and women. The construction of a fundamental physical difference between men and women, like almost every intellectual development in this period, provided for both the restriction and enabling of female power. Armstrong writes that “[t]he belief that essential differences distinguished men from women and gave each powers that the other

did not possess provided the basis, as Elaine Showalter has explained, on which a feminine subculture sought to extend women's power" (56). With the framework of socially institutionalized constructions of the female body, complete with multiple contradictions, laid in place, I turn to examine the fiction that arose out of this ideological space, to see where, how, and why they challenged and upheld the new vision of the female body in British society.

According to Barker-Benfield, "[n]ovels should be 'conduct books,' their moral purpose 'to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence'" (319).²⁴ Domestic novels, like the larger social institutions, also reflect the contradiction between emancipation and subordination, as women writers often constructed their challenges to patriarchal structure in such a way that they could also be read as supporting the dominant cultural ideology; Lennox, Scott, Burney, and Edgeworth all reinforce patriarchy in their works to an extent, because it was a necessary component, both socially and economically, of their discursive practice. As J. Paul Hunter has argued, "[t]he novel needs approval of the moral guardian and the screeners of fundamental cultural anxieties to gain access to the popular readership that would allow it to be the culture's representation of its new self" (294).

In the chapters that follow, I address how these four authors chose to both challenge and reinforce the cultural ideology of femininity in their discussions of female embodiment, as experienced through the construction of social archetypes, the analysis of beauty and deformity, the process of social inscription on the female body, and the

²⁴ I have chosen not to examine the treatment of the female body in other genres of the period, particularly in Gothic literature, because while it is the genre most associated with female sensibility, and it offers an invaluable perspective in the development of women's literature, the domestic novel—and its representation of "ideal" society and constructions of femininity—reveals the "realistic" social dangers to, and coping strategies used by, some women in search of female autonomy, experience, and self-knowledge.

dangers of physical deception to mental well-being. Chapters two and three explore the subject of female embodiment from outside of the standard social situation in eighteenth-century England: chapter two explores the impact of the romance tradition on a young woman raised in social seclusion; chapter three examines the narratives of women whose negative experiences in society lead them to create a rational female utopia on a secluded estate. In contrast, chapters four and five situate the emergence of the modern female body within the often tumultuous society of eighteenth-century London: chapter four analyzes a young woman's entrance into the world, and the cultural inscription of femininity onto her body, that sparks her consciousness of the need for physical and emotional self-control; chapter five reveals the dangers of adopting a social persona that does not reflect the true nature of the female mind and soul.

Chapter two looks at Charlotte Lennox's challenge to traditional female social roles through sexual self-awareness in *The Female Quixote* (1752). The female epistemological tradition of the romance novel teaches Arabella an awareness of herself, and the rhetorical strength to assert her beliefs. The language of the romance novel is based in sensation, agency, consciousness, and sexuality: it is based in the body of women, and in a body invested with social and rhetorical power—the romantic female body is embodied. The romance novel is responsible for teaching Arabella about the inherent power of the female body, a power that is denied by the concept of sensibility, and that Arabella is forced to address when she encounters polite society. While her romantic behaviour leads to a number of ridiculous “adventures” around her father's estate, Arabella's arrival at the resort town of Bath reveals that her understanding of female self-worth and her interest in rational (male) conversation are incompatible with

socially prescribed roles for women, particularly that of the disembodied coquette. The problematic resolution of the novel sees Arabella reject the knowledge that led to her romantic embodiment, in order to become the wife of Mr. Glanville: in Lennox's portrayal of British society, femininity and embodiment cannot yet co-exist.

Chapter three explores beauty, monstrosity, and female worth in Sarah Scott's multi-narrative, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762). Reversing the common belief that female beauty was a visible sign of moral worth, Scott rejects beauty—connecting ugliness to increased spirituality—by showing it to be the greatest danger to women's happiness. Her five female protagonists receive rational and spiritual educations, and live according to the established rules of female behaviour—obedience, modesty, and chastity—yet they are unable to avoid the pernicious effects of patriarchal society. Not until they retire from the constant male gaze are these women able to exercise their subjectivity and revel in the salubrious interconnection of mind and body.

Chapter four deals with the emergence of female social consciousness in Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778). This chapter centres on social experience, and how it serves to cultivate knowledge and consciousness, leading to embodiment. One of the key elements of Evelina's entrance into the world is her understanding of the male gaze, and the power of shame in the realization of the self. Evelina learns to view herself in comparison to others, an argument that invokes the Sartrean theory of the nature of being in the world. Evelina's hard won experience of modesty and social prudence as the means of preserving female reputation and virtue teach her about the female body in the world, in a way that the conduct books and letters from Rev. Villars could not.

Chapter five is the site of the most holistic discussion of female embodiment, incorporating philosophical, medical, didactic, and social discussions of women's bodies in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801). Though it is another society novel, *Belinda* differs from *Evelina* in that the titular character is not the woman searching for her sense of self. This novel does, however, explore the female body as experienced in the social world, in all of the manifestations discussed in the other three novels. The major significance of this novel is its assertion that the physical body must represent the mind of a woman, if it is to portray her worth to the world honestly; the danger of hiding the true character of the self, and of rejecting self-contemplation, is physical and psychological damage. Illness, like the nervous conditions that exemplify the culture of sensibility, stems from a denial of consciousness and embodiment. Treating illnesses of the body necessarily involves paying attention to the mind, since the two aspects of human existence are inextricably linked. *Belinda* proves that female subjectivity must be an active, conscious process of learning to know and value the inner self, by rejecting the internalization of artificial social constructions of femininity.

The conflict surrounding the cultural (mis)conception of femininity that pervades these novels reveals that, in the age of sensibility, the labels of "woman" and "female" were, at best, socially ambiguous terms.²⁵ The implications of the rigid social restrictions placed on the female mind and body, compounded by the devaluing of *lived* somatic experience are expressed by Rae Langton: "to the extent that these things happen, women remain a kind of *terra incognita*" (130). The medical, philosophical, and didactic literatures of the eighteenth century were focused on describing and confining the female

²⁵ Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown argue in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* "that 'woman' must be read as an historically and culturally produced category that is situated within specific material conditions and is interactive with the complicated problems of class and race." (53)

body, and attempting to make it universally understood; however, they accomplished the exact opposite. What these novels disclose is that women's bodies were so culturally constructed that any individual sense of self could be experienced only from the tenuous position of understanding the social forces acting on the body while rejecting their internalization, of playing a social role, but only one that represented the "true" self.

Female embodiment is a study in the double nature of women in society, and the nearly impossible mediation between being desirable to others, and valuable to the self. With this in mind, it is not so remarkable to find simultaneous support and challenge for patriarchal constructions of femininity in the works of Lennox, Scott, Burney, and Edgeworth; what is remarkable is that they were able to find ways to offer women *lived* bodily experience in a rigid patriarchal system designed to deny them this human right.

Social Bodies: Challenging Cultural Archetypes in *The Female Quixote*

In the previous chapter I established the social framework that supports eighteenth-century constructions of the female body, along with the conflicts and contradictions that they imply. Medical and didactic literature were particularly concerned with reining in female sexuality, largely basing their arguments of subordination on sensibility, biology, and morality. Prescribing the culturally ideal moral course for a woman, the conduct books were responsible for propagating the rigid sexual constructions that defined female existence, and that overshadowed arguments of female intellectual and physical autonomy. Authors also had to challenge the construction of social roles for women. By criticizing the denial of sensory experience and self-knowledge implied by traditional female archetypes, Charlotte Lennox presents an opposition to patriarchal society and its devaluation of female intelligence and embodiment.

In her 1752 novel, *The Female Quixote, or the Adventures of Arabella*, Lennox's titular character challenges female cultural archetypes by serving as an amalgamation of the concepts of beauty and modesty traditionally associated with the feminine together with the intelligence, sexual awareness, reasoning, and rhetorical strength traditionally seen as masculine. Stating the popular opinion of women's worth in 1796, Mary Hays sarcastically wrote that "knowledge and learning, are insufferably masculine in a woman—born only for the soft solace of man! The mind of a young lady should be clear and unsullied, like a sheet of paper, or her own fairer face" (23). By presenting a character who incorporates both mental and physical graces, Lennox is able to deny

female subjugation while exploring the complexity of women's "lived" experience—that is, aspects of sensation, sensuality, and rationality.

In addition to receiving a socially approved female education in the decorative arts, Arabella also receives training in discourse and rhetoric based on the female epistemology of the seventeenth-century romance novel. Novel reading was considered a dangerous pastime for women, whose heightened sensibility predisposed them to the passionate and corporeal language of romance books that put heroines in positions of power. Romance fiction is subversive and dangerous because it teaches women the powers of rationality, sensuality and embodiment. The language of romance teaches women to value their bodily sensations as tools for self-reflection and protection. As an example, Arabella discusses the brave actions of Clelia that brought her to the attention of the Senate, as reported by Scudery: "Her casting herself, with an unparalleled Courage, into the *Tyber*, a deep and rapid River [...] and swimming to the other Side [...] it was to preserve her Honour from Violation" (62; bk. ii, ch. iii). Arabella learns to value her own judgment and to protect her virtue and her body. She also learns to argue for her desires, rejecting the characteristic weakness of female sensibility.

Arabella's mind and body are thus equally cultivated and attractive, and she is able to use both to navigate the social world. Much like the archetypal secondary female characters, Arabella, too, is a social creation, but the society from which she was created does not actually exist: the language of romance exists only in seventeenth-century novels that invert the rules of patriarchal society by putting power and language into the hands of women. Herein lies the basis of her quixotism: the gynocentric world through which she experiences her body and mind are incomprehensible to eighteenth-century

patriarchy. Female autonomy is merely a fictional construction, based on “senseless Fictions,” which, according to the male doctor at the end of the novel,²⁶ “at once vitiate the Mind and pervert the Understanding” (374; bk. XI, ch. ix). As Arabella says two chapters later, the difference between her romantic notions of female subjectivity and ideology of patriarchy is “not in Favour of the present World” (380; bk. XI, ch. xi).

I argue that Arabella’s romantic education, which Laurie Langbauer has called a “lightning rod for the anxieties about *gender*” (30), allows her to develop physical and mental self-understanding, and to create a social world in which these may be expressed with impunity. Robert Jones argues that Arabella’s world is “nothing less than a private fantasy of the public” (159). Lennox juxtaposes Arabella’s fantasy of female power to British society’s public fantasy of the private, whereby women’s bodies and sexuality were designed for male pleasure. The central ambivalence in Lennox’s narrative is a reluctance to advocate either position. While Lennox is presenting a feminist argument that supports female educational reform and the rejection of “natural” male superiority, *The Female Quixote* also reifies the existing sexual stereotypes of women, by ending the novel with the problematic rejection of Arabella’s “ridiculous” subjectivity, and her reclamation for a traditional social role as the passive wife of Mr. Glanville.

Thus, what makes Lennox’s novel such a fascinating study is that while it charts a “proper” social progression and cultural education for Arabella, it also charts her personal regression from autonomy to subservience, self-determination to passivity. *The Female Quixote* explores the impossibility of a theory of embodiment that is based on experience

²⁶ It is widely accepted that this character is based on Samuel Johnson, whose influence on Lennox was substantial. By making her “good Divine” a doctor, she increases his authority to speak to Arabella’s “weakness” of mind and body. Lennox is also making clear that female subjectivity was considered a perversion of the mind by figures of patriarchal authority, which seems to me an ironic invocation of Johnson since it reinforces Lennox’s subversive challenge to the construction of female subservience.

cultivated outside of patriarchal society, as well as the unwillingness of men to allow female autonomy within their own culture. While quixotic, Arabella constructs the social world, beginning the novel as an unclassified woman, one who does not fit neatly into any of the rigid social classifications of Woman in traditional eighteenth-century patriarchal society—because that is not the world in which *she* chooses to live. But, as Savile wrote in 1688, “[i]t is one of the *Disadvantages* belonging to your *Sex*, that young Women are seldom permitted to make their own *Choice*; their Friends Care and Experience are thought safer Guides to them, than their own *Fancies*” (18). It is eventually the experience of the socially programmed male and female characters that brings Arabella back into the world of acceptable (passive) female behaviour and causes her to reject the romantic embodiment that allows for her self-knowledge. Before Arabella can be reclaimed for a traditional gender role, Lennox must establish the social justification, if not *need*, for her romantic deprogramming by exposing the social “dangers” of her challenge to traditional constructions of femininity.

There are four major aspects to Arabella’s defiance of eighteenth-century female archetypes, all of which are interwoven through a focus on female subjectivity experienced in the body: Arabella’s agency in creating the world in which she lives, her education and intelligence, her defiance of patriarchal authority, and her modesty and conduct. Arabella’s understanding of the value of her mind and her body distinguishes her from the established constructions of femininity within the culture of sensibility—supported by the medical profession²⁷—while still conforming to Duden’s theory that from the eighteenth century onward, the “body was used in a new way for the purposes of social classification” (16). Arabella’s body is still central to her social understanding,

²⁷ See Chapter one for a discussion of the medically supported corporeal-based definition of woman.

because romantic ideology—defined by its focus on the power of the female body and emotions as tools of social navigation—encourages *lived* experience.

Arabella also personifies Lennox's view of the difficulty faced by women in transition to a new understanding of the body—the modern female body, its connection to the mind, and its role as a tool of social navigation; this personification is achieved through Arabella's development into an autonomous being, and her subsequent reversion to the role of the passive wife. Langton explains why this transition is particularly problematic for patriarchal society, saying that it allows for “[t]he discovery of one's ability to judge for oneself—and the subsequent discovery that one is a thinking thing—[which] can be at the same time a discovery that women are not made for servitude” (129). This discovery is the key social danger of embodiment: by knowing herself, a woman may reject male authority, thus overthrowing the social order. To effect Arabella's cure, Lennox must reject the factors that facilitate her protagonist's self-awareness, discarding lived experience as encouraged by the epistemological tradition of the romance novel, transmitted by female inheritance.

Just as patriarchal society believed that the female body had to be controlled in order to assure the *pure* transmission of genetic and economic rights to an heir, they also believed it was necessary to guard against any unsanctioned intellectual material which a mother might pass on to her children. As Anita Levy has argued, “female inheritance is customarily presented by women in their novels as dangerous or double-edged” (38). The danger in the case of Arabella's inheritance²⁸ is two-fold: first, the romances invert traditional social relations, placing the power of discourse and agency in the hands of

²⁸ In this case, Arabella's mother not only left behind a store of romances for her daughter to find, but left “very bad translations” (7; bk I, ch.i). Her inheritance is suspect in both *form* and *content*.

women; second, the language of the romance novel is rooted in the female body and in female sexual agency. By using her mother's books as the basis of her knowledge-forming experience, Arabella's education takes a marked detour from the life her father had begun to prepare for her in an approved form of female learning.

In the first chapter of the novel, Lennox clearly establishes the importance that the Marquis of — places on his daughter's education, on the cultivation of "so promising a Genius" (6; bk. I, ch. i) and his promise to "render her Mind as beautiful as her Person was lovely" (6; bk. I, ch. i).²⁹ Arabella's father gives her an acceptable female education in the decorative arts advocated by the conduct literature, thus moulding her from inside-out as an archetypal woman.³⁰ With no social contact to contextualize her knowledge, and teach her to sublimate personal desires for those of public passivity, however, Arabella is not able to properly internalize her role in her father's world.

Because of Arabella's social isolation, when she reads her mother's romances and finds a cultural construction of women as autonomous, embodied beings that is supported by descriptions of society and conduct that takes female power as its guiding principle, she is anxious to emulate this model. Arabella's adoption of romantic ideals of self-knowledge and female agency from her mother's books ironically indicates why the novel has such a potential for cultural subversion—making it the ideal location to discuss embodiment—and why its content was thought to be in need of such scrutiny. As

²⁹ In the discourse of sensibility, which locates the soul in the mind— as the centre of nerve activity in the body—the soul is necessarily as beautiful or ugly as the person, because thought and feeling are "inextricably interrelated" to 'a series of feelings and responses to an external stimulus'" (Barker-Benfield 4). Thus, by enhancing Arabella's mind, her father proportionately improves her physical appearance as well.

³⁰ Vivien Jones discusses the standard conduct book of women's education saying that "the stress is on moderation, the decorative accomplishments (the 'graces of the imagination'), on the fear of overloading the delicate mind or transgressing an allotted role, so that the 'male' subjects—the classics, science, religious controversy—are to be avoided" (100).

Arabella's doctor says at the end of the narrative, "Books ought to supply an Antidote to Example [...] to rectify our Words or purify our hearts" (380; bk. IX, ch. xi). Obviously, he meant books that upheld the status quo of sensibility, and not those posing a challenge to dominant ideology by advocating female bodily experience and rational thought.

Despite the fact that the subject matter in the romances makes Arabella an object of public ridicule and of her own private delusions, they are, for the most part, also tremendously empowering. Lennox must rely upon the subject matter and conventions of the romance genre in order to be permitted to explore issues of female agency and embodiment; her ridiculing of the romance tradition allows Lennox to challenge society with impunity. Nevertheless, by grounding her education and experience in the epistemological, body-based, tradition of romance, Arabella learns to be an active guardian of her own sexuality, and to be confident in her own self-worth and the value of her social body. Just as importantly, Arabella learns to think and speak for herself, thus creating the world around her, since "no social order can be said to exist without the invisible element of language" (Armstrong 34). Notwithstanding, the eighteenth-century reader would have recognized that female-based language offered little possibility for social creation in the patriarchal system.

Arabella's self-creation is a possible ramification of Locke's theory of the *tabula rasa* and the cultivation of knowledge through experience. Numerous scholars have argued that Lockean sensational psychology was used as a basis for feminist assertions of female mental capabilities, despite the fact that Locke himself made no such argument.³¹ According to Barker-Benfield, the influence of Lockean theory is that "[s]ensational

³¹ Barker-Benfield writes: "Whatever Locke's ambiguities on the score, others expressed directly the possible meanings to women of the power to construct selves and environment" (2). Others advocating this position are Alice Browne, Melissa A. Butler, Katharine Rogers, J. Paul Hunter, and Natalie Zemon Davis. These sources were initially cited by Barker-Benfield.

psychology continued to provide scientific authority for the [modern] view that women's natures were not natural at all but the result of custom, of 'climate and manners'" (3).

Arabella's ability to conduct herself as a strong and confident, self-aware woman challenges the cultural idea supported by the medical discourse, that women's bodies and minds were by *nature* weaker than men's. Lennox reiterates the double-bind of the construction of femininity by attempting to qualify Arabella's embodiment by associating it with her outwardly ridiculous behaviour. The way Arabella is perceived by others is influenced by the culture of sensibility that reinforces the weakness of the female mind and body, and it is because Arabella is able to realize the power of these faculties that her experience-based self-awareness seems so ridiculous. Yet, through Arabella, Lennox shows that the ideal of female natural subservience is intrinsically problematic in patriarchal discourse, in keeping with what Ruth Yeazell writes: "most attempts to define woman's 'nature' eventually founder in double-talk" (14).

Sensational psychology reaffirms what Astell wrote in her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* in 1696: "[t]he Cause therefore of the defects we labour under, is, if not wholly, yet at least in the first place, to be ascribed to the mistakes of our Education; which like an Error in the first Concoction, spreads its ill Influence through all our lives" (59).

Arabella's father made the first mistake in grounding his daughter's education in the biologically-based construction of the "weaker vessel," and in giving her enough education to learn rational and rhetorical skills from her mother's books, but no guidance on how they should be properly employed, he is as much to blame for her quixotism as anyone. The importance of proper, rational female education is central to the issue of female embodiment.

To further demonstrate the benefits of a rational, as opposed to a decorative, education, Arabella's learning and intelligence—cultivated through female experience—are juxtaposed to those of her cousin, Miss Glanville, the *archetypal* coquette, whom Lennox describes as follows: she “had a large Share of Coquetry in her Composition, and was fond of Beauty in none of her own Sex but herself, [and] she was sorry to see Lady Bella possessed of so great a share” (81; bk. II, ch. vii). As I suggested in the previous chapter, the coquette represents the traditional, disembodied, female body in society. Miss Glanville is unable to look beyond appearances, and is jealous of anyone whose exterior rivals her own. Rather than being taught to think about her virtue and her mind, Miss Glanville learns that her body, and her beauty, are central to finding social happiness and marriage.

In contrast, Arabella's education was based on self-contemplation, modesty, and female community, and not on social comparison; Arabella values her body for its own worth, not for its worth in relation to others. What the society novels by Burney and Edgeworth later make so clear is that true embodiment must also involve an understanding of the self in relation to others. Because of her lack of social experience, Arabella cannot be expected to properly appreciate the cultural forces acting on her, and so her sense of self is based on a false pretence. Arabella possesses “masculine” confidence based on an understanding of the self, which allows her a degree of social freedom largely denied to archetypal women, particularly coquettes, confined by their shallow sense of the body as a disembodied object of male desire. While Lennox disapproves of the shallow sensibility of the female body as represented in Miss Glanville, she also shows that Arabella's challenge is equally problematic in social situations.

Traditional women like Miss Glanville were taught that the female body and mind are *only* to be appreciated with respect to gaining advantage in courtship—reinforced by conduct books and the ideal of sensibility. While researching eighteenth-century women's medicine, Duden uncovered the pervasiveness of ideologically sanctioned female self-ignorance: “[a]pparently women were the incarnation of some kind of bodily paradigm uniquely resistant to the new and differentiating conception of the inner body” (17); this paradigm was perpetuated by the culture of sensibility. Miss Glanville has no interest in self-reflection or solitude, and after a few weeks on Arabella's estate she is “so tired of the magnificent Solitude she lived in, that she heartily repented her Journey” (81; bk. II, ch. vii). While Arabella is pleased to spend time contemplating her “adventures” and preparing to some day tell the “history” of her life, Miss Glanville rejects self-contemplation as a way of spending time.

Isolation gives Arabella the ability to discover her own potential for rhetorical power, which is repeatedly praised throughout the novel, and which reflects the rationality advocated by Astell. Though she is reputed to have a better understanding than most women, the degree of this compliment is revealed by Arabella's uncle, Sir Charles, who says that “if she had been a man, she would have made a great Figure in Parliament, and that her Speeches might have come perhaps to be printed in time” (311; bk. VIII, ch. ii). Arabella's ability to speak like an orator³² is considered a travesty by Miss Glanville, who “with a malicious Pleasure had secretly triumph'd in the Extravagances her beautiful Cousin had been guilty of” (308; bk. VIII, ch. i). Miss Glanville is unable to overcome the jealousy that prevents her from seeing Arabella as a possible role model. Ironically, the men are more willing—albeit only slightly—to praise

³² 269; bk. VII, ch. vi

Arabella's difference, though they do so with the understanding that she must eventually conform to social mores and become a submissive wife. Arabella's transgression is tolerated only until it interferes with courtship and marriage—the male dominion. For, as Savile wrote in 1688, “The *Institution of Marriage* is too sacred to admit a *Liberty* of *objecting* to it; That the supposition of yours being the weaker *Sex*, having without all doubt a good Foundation, maketh it reasonable to subject it to the *Masculine Dominion*” (19). Lennox's assertion of the necessity of marriage is her way of reinforcing dominant social ideology in the novel.

In total, there are roughly eleven instances of male characters praising Arabella's intelligence and wit throughout the novel, while there are ten statements referring to her strange notions. These numbers signify the social misinterpretation of female rationality, reinforcing that the body is an unreadable sign. Men obviously did not know how to deal with rational women, often mistaking them for madwomen, but they also seemed willing to praise the female mind, saying that Arabella has the potential to be an orator or a Member of Parliament, if only she had been a man: embodiment and social authority are the problem for these men, not female intelligence per se. Lennox has written Arabella as an ambivalent social character because she has invested her with both “masculine” reasoning that is respected by the men in the novel, and with the “feminine” characteristics of beauty and modesty that serve to moderate her transgression and increase her attraction in the male gaze. If not for her beauty, Arabella's intelligence could have resulted in her “unsexing,” which would have ruined her chances of getting married: one of the dangers of transgressing the construction of the female mind as weak. In contrast, the secondary women in the novel are threatened by Arabella's ability to use

female understanding to converse in rational male discourse, particularly because it seems to heighten her artless beauty in the male view. When compared to the complexity of Arabella's social construction, Miss Glanville's archetypal role of the disembodied *coquette* is revealed as one-dimensional and restricting: interestingly, Arabella tells her cousin that people who spend their time "in such trifling Amusements [as pump-rooms, parades, parties, and balls], must certainly live to very little Purpose" (279; bk. vii, ch. ix). Lennox's contrast between Arabella and Miss Glanville clearly criticizes the construction of the woman as an empty shell designed for male pleasure.

The central point of juxtaposition between the characterizations of Arabella and Miss Glanville occurs when the narrative switches locations from the isolated manor of Arabella's father to the centre of British polite society, the resort town of Bath. Rather than impose her romantic world view on potential suitors, Arabella must now navigate an unfamiliar social structure, using her experience as a guide. Unfortunately, the romance tradition on which Arabella's sense of self is based is an inversion of the patriarchal society: at Bath, she is without a system of support for her sense of female worth. Miss Glanville wastes no time in exposing her cousin to ridicule regarding her conception of beauty and dress. Lennox describes Arabella's arrival at the pump house in Bath as follows:

Strangers here are mostly criticized, and every new Object affords a delicious Feast of Raillery and Scandal. The Ladies, alarmed at the Singularity of her Dress, crouded together in Parties; and the Words, Who can she be? Strange Creature! Ridiculous! and other Explanations of the same Kind, were whispered very intelligibly (262; bk. VII, ch. iv).

Like her penchant for “rational” discourse, Arabella’s dress sets her apart from the norm, which was a precarious position for a woman in eighteenth-century society. According to Hunter, a traditional woman who was distinguished from the standard type, and thereby did not have a social place, risked losing her identity (271). Arabella’s social misplacement does not affect her sense of self, but it does lead others to question her character. While the women enviously see her as socially transgressive, the men are entranced by her beauty and her veiled appearance, which have the opposite effect of its intention to deflect attention from her physical appearance. It is interesting to note that the veil, which Arabella considers central to her sense of modesty and propriety, serves to objectify her further in male society. In this case, the male ideal of female modesty differs from that of the woman herself, thus reinforcing the artificiality of male constructions of female behaviour in the culture of sensibility.

Though Arabella’s body is as beautiful as her mind, she prefers to emphasize her ability to speak and rationalize, rather than her physique, because she sees her beauty as only reinforcing her rhetorical power over men; in so doing, she is inverting the principle of sensibility. Margaret Doody suggests a more subversive potential for the veil in her introduction to the modern edition of *The Female Quixote*. She writes that “some mental experiments with sexuality are decorously concealed beneath her self-chosen veil” and that it “allows her to veil her own desires from herself while taking the liberty of imagining the male libidos around her” (xxix). By using the veil, Arabella is able to experience her sense of sexuality while still projecting what she thinks is the aura of modesty. Much as in the masquerade, the veil allows the woman to be protected from the male gaze, while still allowing her to look upon the world, and gain experience.

Arabella gains self-knowledge and explores sexuality while shrouded in the guise of romance.

Arabella continues to assert rational discussion over social comparison and dissipation; while Miss Glanville and the Pretty-Fellows engage in gossip, raillery, and empty conversations of the news and “other Trifles,” Arabella rejects them in favour of a discussion with Mr. Selvin on the “male” subjects of classical history and historians. Arabella bests Selvin’s historical acumen, which causes him such “shame [...] at seeing himself posed by a Girl, in a Matter which so immediately belonged to him,” that “though he was far from being convinced that there were no such Springs at *Thermopylae*[...] yet he resolutely maintained that she must be mistaken” (265; bk. VII, ch. v). Arabella continues to assert her point of view, and even suggests reading material to improve Mr. Selvin’s knowledge. This scene again suggests male inability to deal with intelligent women who are able to argue their positions rationally. Sensibility assumes that women are weak minded, and when this does not hold true, the man feels shame, compelling him to ridicule the woman’s intelligence: yet another danger of challenging archetypal femininity.

Miss Glanville is embarrassed by her cousin’s willingness to advocate her own opinion and engage in serious discussions with men, seeing this behaviour as unfeminine and improper. Being raised in the popular conduct literature of the period, Miss Glanville’s behaviour prefigures what will be advocated by Gregory, twenty-two years later, in *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*. He writes

Be even cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company. —But if you happen to

have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and cultivated understanding. (46)

The reaction by Mr. Selvin to Arabella's intelligence anticipates Gregory's warning to his daughters. While Arabella is supposed to be contented with empty discussions of behaviour and dress, she is not satisfied with such superficial subjects. For Arabella, discussion should encourage thought and self-contemplation.

Upon being asked by her uncle how she enjoyed her first experience of the wider world, she replies: "If the World, in which you seem to think I am but new initiated, affords only these Kinds of Pleasures, I shall very soon regret the Solitude and Books I have quitted" (279; bk. VII, ch. ix). Arabella would rather be alone with her thoughts and her studies in romance, regulating her own behaviour, than being held up to a social measuring stick of public behaviour. The fundamental reason that Arabella dislikes the world of society is because it denies the possibility for a woman to live autonomously. Miss Glanville and the ladies at Bath, while understanding little else of themselves, recognize that appearance is the method of their construction, and their social happiness; Arabella, however, is still unwilling to reject her self-knowledge in favour of marriage.

Rather than sharing Miss Glanville's readiness to be judged by superficial appearance and socially sanctioned behaviour with respect to others, Arabella argues that self-guidance and morality are the only way to value the self.³³ She says: "a virtuous Mind need not be shewn the Deformity of Vice, to make it be hated and avoided; the more pure and uncorrupted our Ideas are, the less shall we be influenc'd by Example"

³³ Arabella is challenging the conduct tradition of documenting ruined virtue as a warning to young women—in effect, scaring them straight. Examples of this type of literature are: Robert Gould's *Love Given O're* (1682), Bernard Mandeville's *A Modest Defense of Public Stews: or, an Essay on Whoring* (1724, 1740), and Joseph Dorman's *The Female Rake* (1736).

(277; bk. VII, ch. viii). Arguing that the virtuous mind is capable of regulating the conduct of the body, without being exposed to the dangers of immodesty, Arabella believes that women have the mental strength to judge between right and wrong without being shown. She is seizing the unity of mind and body, and the personal dominion traditionally reserved for men.

In contrast, eighteenth-century popular opinion on the female body relied on the body to signal virtue or vice, by prescribing rigid forms of behaviour, dress, and physical beauty: by teaching that deviation from the norm signalled a propensity for social transgression, male society attempted to limit female independence. One of the finest examples of didactic literature's emphasis on the external signs of the body can be seen in Joseph Dorman's *The Female Rake*. Though intended as an ironic statement, it has a degree of truth that corresponds with social constructions of femininity. To be acceptable, a woman must be what a man thinks she is, not her true self. He writes:

Virtue, we know, subsists in other's Thought,
 And she is virtuous, who was never caught:
 Our Virtue then, is Prudence in our Choice,
 On that alone depends the publick Voice: [...]
 The world by Outside judges, and we see
 Fame takes its Rise, from what we seem to be [.]” (73)

Arabella's singular style of dress and her artless beauty make her body an unreadable sign in social discourse that is heightened by her powers of thought and rhetoric. Dorman's poem reinforces the artificiality of gender constructions, but also points out the precariousness of a woman's modesty. Even if she is modest, being publicly proclaimed

otherwise could be fatal to a woman's reputation. Through exploring Arabella's behaviour at Bath, Lennox both challenges and reifies the need to prevent ambiguity in social classification, by educating women to fear the unconstraint of their bodies, and their minds: she exposes the social danger of embodiment. Arabella's individuality offers her the chance for self-expression, but at the risk of her public persona becoming that of a beautiful fool.

As I mentioned earlier, Arabella's education and intelligence are both a blessing and a curse, because besides being potentially "unsex'd" by their knowledge, women expressing too much learning also ran the risk of being labelled madwomen. With respect to the medical classification of her condition, Arabella's character is much like eighteenth-century patients suffering from conditions of the spleen. G.S. Rousseau writes that these patients were "lively, quick-witted, acutely sensitive, profoundly obsessive [...] cursed with imaginations that certify their worth" (*Language* 154). Arabella's self-empowering foibles become most problematic once she begins to use them to challenge patriarchal authority directly, particularly with respect to courtship and marriage. During the intervals of Arabella's outright defiance of male sovereignty, the male characters respond by asserting that "her Head is not quite right" (60; bk. II, ch. iii). The price of embodiment is a social label of madness, but, as I suggested in the previous chapter, the price for denying the body is often true madness.

In addition to teaching her styles of speaking and argument, Todd believes that the romances have also given Arabella the wrong impression about her importance in society,³⁴ which was subsequently misinterpreted as a sign of madness. She says that

³⁴ Haggerty offers an argument to similar to Todd's, writing that "Lennox is able to articulate a fantasy of female power that is rarely matched in the eighteenth century" (136). If her female power is essentially imaginary, so too is the male power of the larger fictional patriarchy.

“[Arabella’s] demands on others are eccentric and ridiculous, but they are also improper in the importance they give to the young girl” (155). Instead of being the object of the male gaze, Arabella becomes an active subject, giving herself agency through the romance tradition, which is not only based in imagination and romance—already medically “proven” causes of madness—but which also emphasizes the sensation-based experiences of love and the passions, and focuses Arabella’s thoughts on the body, in direct opposition to the patriarchy in which she is actually living. According to Langbauer, “this sexual madness is seen as particularly dangerous” (41), presumably because it interferes with the patriarchal conveyance of heredity and power through women as the vessels of generation. Female power and embodiment are thus dismissed as products of the imagination³⁵ and Arabella’s avocation of them signifies to male society that “the Lady’s Brain is disorder’d” (301; bk. VII, ch. xiii).

Arabella’s sense of self-awareness and sexuality, though experienced behind her public veil, is expressed through her understanding of how the articulation of a woman’s desire—not exclusively sexual—allows for social agency and embodiment. For example, by telling Glanville and Sir George how she expects them to act, she is able to reject what she considers to be their “improper” advances, and remain in control of their courtship. Similarly, when Arabella tells her father that she does not want to marry the man he has chosen for her, she is able at least to delay his command. Haggerty suggests that this fictional challenge within a fiction actually serves to reinforce dominant ideology by allowing women a “safe” place to vent their frustrations. He writes that “the culture not only allowed but even welcomed these veiled challenges to its absolute control, for by allowing the ‘fiction’ of resistance to be articulated in these novels, it could turn the

³⁵ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the dangers of female imagination in the eighteenth century.

screws of dominance all the tighter” (9). Lennox was aware of the double nature of her narrative, which she addresses by reforming Arabella at the end of the novel in such a problematic manner. The haste with which Mr. Glanville obtains Arabella as his passive wife leaves the reader with a sense of Lennox’s ambivalence about whether this act of social conformity truly signals a happy ending to the novel—or the ultimate rejection of embodiment for the sake of social harmony.

Even in Arabella’s first act of direct challenge to patriarchal authority, Lennox sends mixed messages about Arabella’s future success as a self-directed woman. In Book I of the novel, Arabella flatly refuses her father’s selection of a suitor, Mr. Glanville, asking the question: “What Lady in Romance ever married the Man that was chose for her?” (27; bk. I, ch. viii). She avows to her father that she will obey him “in all just and reasonable things” (27; bk. I, ch. viii) but we are to understand that *she* will decide what is reasonable, not he. Arabella’s knowledge is based on no one’s opinion but her own, and it is this self-reliance which the male characters believe constitutes a mental illness. While ostensibly depicting defiance and resolution, Lennox writes that the Marquis admired this speech as an example of his daughter’s eloquence, and was not concerned about the decision she had made, “being perfectly assured of her Consent whenever he demanded it” (28; bk. I, ch. viii): The Marquis dismisses Arabella’s claim of agency. That Arabella believes she has the ability to legitimately defy her father appears to be a sign of her misunderstanding of patriarchal society, for, when he eventually tries to impose his will upon her, she reacts with “extreme Obstinancy” by refusing to accept her cousin, Mr. Glanville, as a husband. The Marquis retorts by vowing to destroy all of Arabella’s

romance novels, being “excessively enraged” because “these foolish Books[...]have turned her Brain!” (55; bk. I, ch. xiii).

Mr. Glanville fares no better than his uncle, the Marquis, at wooing Arabella in the traditional manner. Arabella expects her suitors to conform to her style of courtship and discourse, in the female language of the romance novel. Mr. Glanville is unwilling to model his conduct as she recommends, and thus suffers a continuous string of admonitions. He is repeatedly labelled by Arabella as “the most presumptuous Man in the World” (33; bk. I, ch. ix) and is told that she is shocked at his willingness to defy her commands by continuing to pursue her. Mr. Glanville is unable to reconcile Arabella’s obvious wit and eloquence with her inversion of social protocol, saying to himself that “One would swear this dear Girl’s Head is turned [...] if she had not more *Wit* than her whole Sex besides” (41; bk. I, ch. x); Glanville is unable to reconcile female intelligence with Arabella’s assertion of personal desire. He is eventually so desirous of obtaining her as a wife, that he even suggests that she might instruct him in the proper conduct of courtship, but quickly reconsiders his offer. It has been suggested by Haggerty that “Glanville becomes interesting only to the degree to which *she* educates *him*” (128). In educating Glanville for her own desires, Arabella inverts the traditional power roles, suggesting the subtextual criticism of power and gender construction being offered by Lennox.

Conversely, Mary Anne Schofield discusses the need for Arabella to discard her romantic notions in order to attract a husband. When talking about Glanville’s feelings for Arabella, she writes that “[i]t is interesting to note that the power here is all the man’s. He must cure her ‘of her romantick passion’” (*Masking* 136). Her passion for romantic

ideology makes Arabella refuse her father, and causes her to repeatedly censure and deny Mr. Glanville of his "right" to her affection. Schofield says that "Glanville can not disguise his maleness and his power"(136), but she is not taking proper account of Arabella's subversiveness. While he would like to be the classic power-wielding male, Glanville is powerless in all of his interactions with Arabella, and is unable to cure her romantic ideals on his own. In fact, he is not able to *order* Arabella to do anything at all.

None of the men who wish to court Arabella fare any better in their attempts to control her than Mr. Glanville. In the case of Mr. Hervey, she completely reverses the power structure, and has her servants accost him when he tries to approach her. As a result, Hervey later says to Mr. Glanville that Arabella is "the most fantastical Creature that ever lived, and, in my Opinion, fit for a Mad-house" (157; bk. IV, ch. iv). Sir George comes closest to gaining Arabella's attention, but significantly he does so through speaking in her rhetorical style. Again, the patriarchal standard has been overthrown, and the man is forced to speak a female sensation-based language of romance in order to have his intentions heard. This language that is based in the body rejects the disembodiment of the Cartesian paradigm, and forces men to acknowledge corporeal experience.

Notwithstanding the nonsensical content of the romances themselves, their language is clearly a powerful female rhetoric, which Arabella has studied and mastered, and which she uses to her benefit by rejecting the traditional construction of female mind as weak and emotional, and with little rational potential. According to Schofield, female epistemology in *The Female Quixote* "attempts to reveal the power that lies beneath the disguise of feminine submission and marital compliance, romantic love and female powerlessness, the controlling ideologies of the eighteenth century" (*Masking* 10). Her

self-involvement³⁶ allows Arabella to express intellectual and sexual agency, a privilege that is socially restricted to men, and that calls into question the “natural” state of female modesty.

Because respectable women in the eighteenth century had no personal agency—they were under the jurisdiction of their fathers until marriage, at which point the right to direct their existence was transferred to the husband—the only precedence for female self-direction is the archetypal *whore*, like Miss Groves, whom Lennox never meant for Arabella to emulate; the lack of prior examples does, however, suggest that Arabella’s behaviour was not only socially challenging, but also morally precarious. It was expected that young women were to defer to their fathers, and then their husbands, on all things, without question. Arabella, because of her atypical embodied education and lack of knowledge about social conventions, never labours under that restriction.

The episodes in which Arabella meets potential suitors like Mr. Hervey, Mr. Glanville, Sir George Bellmour, and Mr. Selvin, and those with men whom she mistakenly takes to be suitors, like Edward, Mr. Tinsel, and Sir Charles, reinforce to the reader that *she* is in control of interpreting the passage of events—Lennox makes it clear that she is in control only in her own mind—while the men are left bewildered. Here we can see the two versions of reality—romantic and patriarchal—in conflict. Sir Charles eventually concludes that Arabella is “absolutely mad, and held a short Debate with himself, Whether he ought not to bring a Commission of Lunacy against her, rather than marry her to his son, whom he was persuaded would never be happy with a Wife so unaccountably

³⁶ Haggerty describes Arabella’s “nearly hysterical self-involvement” (125) which I think is interesting given the language of sensibility during this period, and the frequency with which women who ventured to express their own thoughts were labelled “hysterical.” If she was still considered this way by Haggerty in 1998, it is not hard to see how she could have been viewed as such in 1752, thus reinforcing my point that an eloquent, well-educated woman was prone to being labelled “mad” or “hysteric.”

absurd" (339; bk. IX, ch.ii). Arabella misinterprets the significance of handshakes, kisses, embraces, and speeches, investing them with different emotional and psychological value than society at large does. Lennox is playing with the convention of symbols on which standard courtship is based, as her way of reinforcing the artificiality of that social custom, and the emotions of sensibility as a whole. No wonder there is no possibility for female embodiment in patriarchal society—it cannot be accommodated by patriarchal language.

In contrast to restrictive male language, the result of the power of romance language is Arabella's understanding of her body as an object, a being distinct from her mind and her will. This notion of the body is not advocating the Cartesian "disembodied" mind, however, because Arabella's experiences and sensations are inextricably linked to her body. Proprioception—the relation of perceived stimuli, particularly relating to the body's movement—feeds Arabella's romantic belief that her body is in constant danger of being seized, and that she must be aware of her movements in the world—she is always running, fleeing, jumping—to protect her virtue and chastity. Lennox tempers Arabella's obsessive consideration of her body, by ascribing it to one fundamental aspect of the cultural construction of women—the inclination toward modesty and chastity.

This need to protect her chastity is the one way in which Arabella conforms to the strict conduct books of the time, at least in theory. Wetenhall Wilkes wrote in 1740, that "[c]hastity heightens all the virtues, which it accompanies; and sets off every talent, that human nature can be possessed of. [...] This is the great point of female honour [...]" (29). Arabella also places an inordinate importance on preserving her honour and her body. This is mainly because her romantic education has made her overly aware of her

sexual power, and of the male desire to physically and mentally suppress this awareness. The many rules which she imposes upon her potential suitors, and the “hysteria” with which she reacts to a perceived threat on her person, are her defense mechanisms, the tools she uses to protect her chastity.

Arabella is able to subvert standard gender stereotypes by living in a “delusional” world of female-centred romances, but in order for the novel to end in a socially acceptable manner, she must be reclaimed as a proper woman, by learning to submit to the male order. Mr. Glanville states that “his Happiness depended upon curing her of her romantic Notions” (117; bk. III, ch. iii). The important pronoun in that sentence is “his” happiness, because in the traditional patriarchal structure, a woman’s happiness is inconsequential. As Janet Todd writes, “a woman’s destiny is not self-contemplation and significance but contingency and marriage” (147).

Arabella eventually does get the benefit of a female guide, albeit briefly, in learning her role in society. The Countess of — mediates between Arabella’s romantic embodiment and the notion of female sensibility in patriarchal society. She is what Arabella could be: a woman valued for her sense and understanding, as well as her wit and beauty. A reformed romance reader herself, the Countess is able to sympathize with Arabella’s conflicted understanding of the cultural forces acting on her body, encouraging her to reject her female-centred conception of the world. The Countess teaches Arabella the malleability of culture and the danger of assuming that Nature is a fixed condition: “Custom, said the Countess smiling, changes the very Nature of Things [...] what was Virtue in those Days [of the romance novels], is Vice in ours” (328-9; bk. VIII, ch. vii). After showing Arabella the inversion of social values of vice and virtue, the Countess

disappears from the narrative before being able to cure Arabella's quixotism through female reasoning.

Though Lennox has progressed through the many "adventures" of Arabella while persistently arguing in favour of her self-directed and controlled—though unorthodox and outdated—opinions, she effects a remarkably quick reversal of opinion in the last few chapters of the novel. Without the benefit of the Countess' guidance, Arabella reasserts her romantic notions. After one ultimate attempt to save herself from the perceived ravishers in the woods, Arabella throws herself into the river and nearly dies as a result. Now that she has put her life in danger, and thereby risked Glanville's chance of having the wife of his choice, the seemingly magical character of "the good Divine" appears with "the cure of *Arabella*'s mind greatly at Heart" (368; bk. IX, ch. xi). Unlike the other, powerless male characters, the good Divine would not "bring upon himself the Guilt of abandoning her to her Mistake" (369; bk. IX, ch. xi). The focus of the discourse has shifted to the male subject, restoring the "proper" masculine narrative.

Throughout most of the novel, Arabella has been the authoritative voice of romantic embodiment, but, in her weakened physical state, she is forced to submit her mind to the good doctor.³⁷ In an overtly ironic passage Lennox completely reverses the gender power structure, returning the male voice to its place as the advocate of benevolent power. The good Divine tells Arabella:

You must not imagine, Madam [...] that I intend to arrogate any

Superiority, when I observe that your Ladyship must suffer me to

³⁷ Arabella's physical weakness is not based on nature as suggested by other medical professionals, but which came about as a result of her ultimate, though deluded, act of sexual agency—throwing herself into the river to prevent being "raped." It remains ambiguous whether Arabella's physical distress was precipitated by her mental deficiency, or if it was Lennox's way of representing the punishment for defying patriarchal desire.

decide, in some Measure authoritatively, whether Life is truly described in those Books; [...] You have yet had little Opportunity of knowing the Ways of Mankind, which cannot be learned but from experience, and of which the highest Understanding, and the lowest, must enter the World in equal Ignorance. (379; bk. IX, ch. xi)

The condescension in this passage is painfully obvious. She is being told to allow the world-experienced male character to think on her behalf, and, in an uncharacteristic move, she acquiesces. Within two pages, Arabella rejects every tenet of her self-aware, sensational philosophy. She says: "I begin to perceive that I have hitherto at least trifled away my Time [...] whatever I suffer, I will never more demand or instigate Vengeance, nor consider my Punctilios as important enough to be balanced against life" (381; bk. IX, ch. xi). Now that she has agreed to suffer in silence, the Doctor pronounces a "cure," and prepares to have Arabella and Glanville married. Arabella's ideological reversal now makes her the archetypal perfect female, according to Blease's definition quoted in the previous chapter, for she is beautiful, and willing to suppress her own desires to please her husband.

Few critics have found the ending of this novel realistic, since most see it as Lennox's gesture to ensure the social acceptability of an otherwise largely subversive novel.³⁸ For example, though understanding the constraints under which Lennox was writing, Haggerty calls it an "all-too-pat-conclusion" (135). He writes that "resolution sits so uncomfortably on the action that has preceded it that the novel seems to challenge the very notion of resolution," because the "heroine undergoes a transformation that

³⁸ Such arguments can be found in notable works by Langbauer, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Deborah Ross, and Craft.

renders her so alien from her earlier self" (135). Had Lennox allowed Arabella the possibility for a gradual "female" reformation by the Countess of — she would have learned to mediate between embodiment and social conformity, making for a smoother narrative progression.

Arabella's cure, though it does confine her to the archetypal social role as Glanville's submissive wife, does not signal the end of the ideological ambivalence surrounding her mind and body. Lennox furthers the "dual hermeneutic"³⁹ of the novel with the fact that Arabella is eventually "cured" of her romantic fancies of female intelligence and agency by a rational argument, not coercion. Expressing her standard rhetorical awareness, Arabella must be rationally convinced of the error in her ways before she is willing to accept her traditional social role and be culturally silenced. Nonetheless, however promising this might appear, any redemption in the methodology of the cure is counteracted by her complete submission on the final pages of the text.

Since the movements of the mind and body are inextricably connected, Arabella's willingness to sacrifice her physical agency suggests that she will also concede the self-regulation of her mind. Dennis Todd writes that "the 'power of thinking, self-moving, and governing the whole Machine' of the body resides in consciousness, which is itself but 'the result from the mechanical composition of the whole animal'" (129). Only the empowering female romance epistemology allowed Arabella to direct her own movements and to think for herself. Rejecting this tradition, and without the Countess to advise her otherwise, she must now conduct herself as Wetenhall Wilkes wrote in his *Advice to a*

³⁹ This term was coined by feminist literary critic Patrocinio Schweickart, to signify a text that both perpetuates patriarchy (the negative hermeneutic) and reveals a subversive and empowering model (positive hermeneutic).

Young Lady, that “[i]f the love of a wife be tempered with a tolerable share of good sense, she will be sure never to have any private views of her own” (35).

In *Arabella*, Charlotte Lennox has created a character that not only challenges the eighteenth-century constructs of femininity, but also the rules of social interaction and morality. The body-based language of the romance tradition challenges the female weakness that is central to the ideal of sensibility by advocating a connection between mind and body. Ultimately, however, I think that the novel intentionally ends without a resolution clearly in favour of either female agency and embodiment, or the reification of male domination. Debra Malina has argued that the conflicting ideologies pervading Lennox’s narrative cause the reader to “come away from *The Female Quixote* with no inevitable generalization about patriarchal co-optation of women, and hence no more politically empowered than we began” (283). In response to Malina, I argue that, as Lennox has so eloquently expressed through the character of *Arabella*, fiction may provide the base for empowerment, but it can be experienced and valued, like the female body itself, only in the world of social interaction, which generates knowledge, and in turn creates authority and political structure. *The Female Quixote*’s exploration of gender construction and cultural archetypes reveals the potential for female empowerment, while reinforcing their social subjugation to the traditionally engendered body. What Lennox’s discussion of romantic embodiment proves is that the social body possesses within itself the dual possibilities both of effecting change and reinforcing dominant ideology.

Pathological Bodies: Representations of the Body and Morality in
A Description of Millenium Hall

In nature there's no blemish but the mind;
None can be called deformed but the unkind.
—William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, III.iv.367-8

Eighteenth-century medical and conduct literature established the standards of judging a woman's worth on physical appearance, but what this offered was far from a holistic approach to the female body. New developments in eighteenth-century medicine saw the emergence of what Thomas Laqueur describes as the "two-sex" model of anatomy, whereby women were recognized as essentially different from men, although the male form continued to be considered the normative, ideal body. Women's bodies were subsequently viewed as a natural deviation from this ideal form, as suggested by Harth's comments in my first chapter that the female body was considered monstrous by virtue of its deviation from the male norm.

Felicity Nussbaum has argued that "the category of the monstrous in the eighteenth century loosely refers to the many varieties of unfamiliar beings" (Pleasures 167) that do not have the "complete, common form" of the male body. The body of woman was seen as monstrous in its deviation from the male norm, which suggests that on a physical level, all women are inherently monstrous. The discussion of beauty and its respective virtues and dangers is but one way of gaining access to this wider discourse of socially constructed femininity, and the symbolic language of the body. With the emergence of philosophical treatises on the importance of somatic experience and the indissolubility of mind and body, came a new understanding of the diversity of the female

body that not only distinguished it from the male model, but also addressed the connection between femininity and monstrosity.

In her 1762 novel, *A Description of Millenium Hall*, Sarah Scott reveals a multilayered explanation of this new corporeal understanding of women within an equally complex representation of British society. In her narrative, Scott creates a female utopia on a large English estate, where body and mind are mutually invested in the pursuit of moral happiness, but in an unconventional manner. Inverting the traditional myth of beauty as the marker of female worth, Scott draws on a literary precedent established by Henry and Sarah Fielding, as well as Pierre Antoine de la Place, in depicting ugliness as an indication of virtue and morality, and beauty as a social impediment to women.⁴⁰ Far from being a simple rejection of the superficiality of British gender constructions, Scott's utopia is ironically able to exist only *after* its founders have experienced the rigidity of patriarchal social roles for women, and the paucity of female education and autonomy.

The narrative charts the female characters' worldly experiences of psyche and soma through discussions of beauty and its dangers, and of education, marriage, religion, and illness. The fine young ladies turned social protectresses have all experienced the dangers of the larger world, and are able to circumvent the archetypal triad of virgin/mother/whore⁴¹ only by embracing their social marginalization, and offering asylum to those who are likewise excluded: the physically deformed "monsters," the poor, and the ill. It is Scott's interconnection of female community and the enclosure of monsters within it, that Nussbaum argues, "plays on the connection between domestic femininity

⁴⁰ The following are three notable contemporary examples that may have influenced Scott's novel: Henry Fielding's *Amelia* (1751), Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* (1749), and Pierre Antoine de la Place's *La Laideur Aimable et les Dangers de la Beauté* (1752). The last novel obviously made an impact on Scott, as she translated it into English in 1754 as *Agreeable Ugliness*.

⁴¹ This term is used by Vivien Jones in "Eighteenth-century prostitution: feminist debates and the writing of histories" in Horner and Keane's edited collection, 127.

and women's structural kinship to the perverse, the monstrous, and the deformed" (*Torrid* 151). These women's transgression of traditional social roles, through rational education and the rejection of marriage, connects them to monstrosity, as suggested by French novelist Madeleine de Scudéry, in that "a learned woman at court[...]would be considered a 'monster'—literally on show, displayed as a curiosity" (Harth 87). While discussing the devaluation of female intelligence in the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility, Mary Wollstonecraft writes: "How strangely must the mind be sophisticated when this sort of state impresses it" (238). In order to overcome the "strange" cultivation of the mind, society must come to see beyond its narrow view of female rational potential.

Thus constructed, *A Description of Millenium Hall* subverts the traditional literary genre of the domestic novel by proposing a society where women were not required to submit their minds and bodies to the patriarchy of marriage, while at the same time advocating a conservative moral and behavioural role for women as nurturing, protecting, and spiritually invested beings, and addressing society's concerns about monstrosity and moral character. Linda Dunne has argued that the inclusion of the monstrous in Scott's narrative "appropriates and subverts the common phallogentric perception that all-female communities are inherently defective" (54). Scott's novel is thus a cultural construction that builds on the history of institutional, cultural, literary, and folk knowledge of body and mind, within the larger social concerns of the mid-eighteenth century.

As I have suggested, the interest in monstrosity is closely linked to misconceptions regarding the cabalistic nature of the female body, and its generative properties. In reference to this argument, R.A. Sydie has written: "whether it is the

malignity of the menses or the hysterical uterus, the female body is potentially a wild and dangerous thing, a threat to patriarchal order” (67). In my introductory chapter, I discussed the medical concern about the reproductive fluids of women, and the particular concerns that arose during pregnancy, exemplified in the 1726 case of Mary Toft. While many physicians argued, from the position of mechanical philosophy, that women were not invested with any magical powers,⁴² conjecture regarding the “nature” of women was infused with suspicion about her abilities to give and take life. In his study of “monsters” in eighteenth-century Britain, Dennis Todd has argued that mind/body philosophy only served to heighten people’s interest in the monstrous. He writes that society’s concerns were “rooted in the way many people in the eighteenth century conceived the relationship between the mind and the body and particularly in the way that relationship was so perplexing and uncertain that it became a source of anxiety” (267). Monstrosity represents a social fear, a label for the unknown and unknowable, which makes it an ideal entry point for the discussion of transgressive female behaviour.

Among the most contentious social issues with relation to women were the calls for educational and marital reforms that were intended to improve the quality of the female mind and body, encouraging rationality, self-knowledge, and autonomy. Scott was involved with bluestocking feminism, which advocated the cultivation of knowledge and enlightened conversations, and provided patronage to authors who were interested in serious intellectual pursuit, like Hannah More and Sarah Fielding (Turner 108). Gary Kelly writes in his introduction to *Millenium Hall* that “it [the novel] is the manifesto of

⁴² Cheyne, for example, wrote in his preface to *The English Malady* in 1733, that his goal was to explain “the Nature and Causes of Nervous Distempers (which have hitherto been reckon’d Witchcraft, Enchantment, Sorcery and Possession, and have been the constant Resource of Ignorance) from Principles easy, natural and intelligible [...]” (x).

bluestocking feminism, itself a major attempt to redefine class and gender relations at a critical point in the transformation of English society and culture” (43).

This narrative is invested not only with a feminist interest in carefully cultivated education, harkening back to Mary Astell’s *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* of 1696, but also with the sense of female community that encouraged its author. Dale Spender has written that the bluestocking ladies’ sense of community “by their very existence challenged male dominance; they deliberately cultivated an intellectual life, looked to each other to validate their ideas, and demonstrated their competence—in men’s terms” (103). The community of women at Millenium Hall is, in many ways, a tribute via fictional representation to the bluestocking women who challenged male intellectual authority and social dominance. Though Scott was not advocating widespread social change, Katharine Rogers argues that women who created empowering female narratives “laid essential foundations for [social change] by questioning the sacredness of traditional patriarchal institutions and exposing the sentimental falsifications that obscured their oppressive nature” (53). Since the greatest oppression for women often occurred in marriage, this topic is necessarily central to Scott’s cultural critique.

Marriage reform was at the centre of social discussion throughout the eighteenth century, and was closely related to the abolition movement in the later half of the century: both women and slaves were struggling for freedom of mind and body, both seeking social emancipation and embodiment. Kelly also suggests in his introduction that Scott’s own marriage must have been unpleasant based on the fact that “[h]er family do not seem to have doubted the rightness of her leaving him [her husband]” (21)—his actions must have

been extreme for her leaving to be socially sanctioned.⁴³ Much of the widespread social interest in marriage reform—heightened in many cases by personal experiences—stemmed from the early eighteenth-century work by Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage*. Astell introduced her treatise by criticizing the tyrannical behaviour of men in marriage. The following is Astell’s description of marriage: “To be yok’d for life to a disagreeable Person and Temper; to have Folly and Ignorance tyrannize over Wit and Sense; to be contradicted in every thing one does or says, and bore down not by Reason but Authority [...]” (Hill 90). The mistreatment of women by their husbands is reflective of the larger societal complaint regarding female subjugation and denial of subjectivity, and the despotic behaviour sanctioned by patriarchal culture.

To reinforce the connections with marriage and other forms of economic and physical tyranny within the British empire, Astell, like many advocates after her, paralleled the lives of wives to those of slaves, and even livestock.⁴⁴ *Reflections on Marriage* also addresses the social contract of John Locke’s 1690 *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, whereby he argues for the equality of all men from birth. Arguing that Locke’s position ignored half of the British population, Astell responds in the preface to her third edition of *Reflections*:

If all Men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves? as they must be if being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect condition of slavery? [...] And why is Slavery so

⁴³ Women had no legal right to leave their husbands until almost a century later, when the Divorce Act was passed by British parliament in 1857. Prior to this, women were expected to suffer silently in unhappy and abusive marriages.

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the connection between wives, slaves, and livestock, see Samuel Pycatt Menefee. With respect to the parallels between women’s and animal rights movement, see Moira Ferguson.

much condemn'd and strove against in one Case, and so highly applauded, and held so necessary and sacred in another? (qtd. in Hill, *First* 76)

Astell's position on marriage was reiterated in 1735 in an anonymous piece entitled *The Hardships of English Laws with Relation to Wives*, and again in 1792 with Mary Wollstonecraft's revolutionary treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Alice Browne, Felicity Nussbaum, and Moira Ferguson have all suggested that anti-slavery literature in many ways paralleled early feminist writings, because of their similar struggles for emancipation of mind and body, thus further connecting the condition of women to that of the social "other." The mistreatment of wives is an issue explored throughout the domestic fiction by women during the century, and by the patrons of female intellectual thought and literature, the Bluestocking Circle.

Through the pen of Sarah Scott, however, this common literary theme also opens up a challenge to many of the fundamental concerns and misinterpretations of women's bodies, and their roles in British society. Scott's representation of courtship and marriage in the five women's narratives that weave throughout the novel reinforce that the status of these women is socially pathological. The women's recognition of marriage as an impediment to personal happiness and self-knowledge leads to their transgression of social norms. Sydie has written that "wholesome family life was the 'natural' setting in which the potentially unruly, disorderly, and even threatening female body could be contained and controlled" (74). By rejecting marriage and motherhood, the women of Millenium Hall are able to maintain their own control over their bodies and their virtue. As Nussbaum has argued in *Torrid Zones*, "all the women at Millenium Hall are 'deformed' in the larger sense that none is involved with men in reproductive sex or

consanguine motherhood, and they redefine beauty as a disadvantage” (159). I concur with Nussbaum, but would further clarify that beauty hampers embodiment by placing too great a focus on the appearance of the body, which leads to the devaluation of the mind. Even more dangerous, beauty leads to interactions with men, and often to a loss of subjectivity.

The emphasis on beauty and physical appearance was fundamental to representations of morality and virtue in eighteenth-century Britain, and, this is where Scott focuses her emendatory gaze. In her study of women’s bodies in eighteenth-century Germany, Duden writes: “‘Physical’ or ‘mental’ norms did not exist; consequently there was no distinct pathology” (12). While the medical discipline, itself in the process of becoming formalized, had yet to classify the “normal” states of mind and body, it is an overstatement to suggest that society did not have its own ideas of what constituted aberrant behavior and appearance. Since literature is a product of cultural discourse, in addition to institutionalized constructions, we cannot discount the superstitious understanding of deformity in Britain in relation to Scott’s narrative of female embodiment.

As with most issues relating to the body in this period, there were two differing opinions on the moral and intellectual implications of deformity and pathology. The first view is based on the writings of Francis Bacon, who wrote that the deformed body represented a malevolent soul within.⁴⁵ Deformity is a sign, rather than a cause for Bacon, and was still considered so for many people over one hundred years later. Dennis

⁴⁵ These ideas are put forth in Bacon’s treatise “On Deformity” found in volume 4 of *The Works of Francis Bacon* edited by James Spedding, et al.

Todd discusses this issue at length in his book *Imagining Monsters*, and writes:

[a]lthough the eighteenth century had freed itself from such superstitions that bodily deformity was a punishment from God, it had not freed itself from the stereotype about what the 'character' of a human monster was, what shape his [or her] personality must take as a consequence of his [or her] misshapen body. (225)

If the body was a result of character and mind within, and, if the normative condition of the body was male, then, as I suggested earlier, both the deformed and women were by their *nature* pathological. Scott's aim is not to challenge this opinion, but to suggest that any derogatory sense of their difference be replaced with praise and moral value. The community at Millenium Hall supports, and is supported by, physical deviation from the male norm, and that is why it is successful.

In the earliest pages of the novel, the male narrator carefully explains the physical features and flaws of each of the major five characters in the novel (59-61). What results is essentially an anti-blazon of the female body, a catalogue of mediocrity and ugliness, for the male gaze has not yet been educated to see the value of goodness over beauty. The narrator distinguishes between the beautiful female characters and those, like Mrs. Trentham and Lady Mary Jones, who have been marred by physical affliction. Descriptions of physical character pervade the narrator's discussion of the idyllic estate, from the lame villagers (66), to the monsters (73), and even the servants (168), although he also highlights the order and harmony of the estate. Appearance is central to how the

male narrator and his companion see the estate, making the beautiful women residing there seem exceptional in contrast to the remarkable ugliness that surrounds them.

In in each case, Scott accompanies the descriptions of the beautiful and ugly characters with praise about the morality and piety of each character. As the novel progresses, the men learn to appreciate the women's inner worth, which allows them to see beyond physical appearances: rejection of superficiality allows inner virtue to present itself, since the true character of a woman is revealed through her narrative history, and her thoughts and actions, and not her complexion, eye colour, hair, or dress. This positive characterization of monstrosity and deformity is the second view of deformity, and it corresponds to the religious philosophy of Astell, as well as works by William Hay, Sarah and Henry Fielding, and Antoine de la Place, all of whom argued that ugliness was actually the marker or moral worth.⁴⁶ For these writers, ugliness served as a protection from the dangers of vice, and it also served to reinforce familial obedience, both of which were challenged by beauty.

As Robert Jones has argued in "Obedient Faces," "for many commentators, to suggest a connection between virtue and beauty was to place morality on a very questionable footing" (282). Virtuous beauty is not necessarily a paradox, but because beautiful women were more subject to advances from men, their sexual identity and sense of power was drastically different from those of plainer women.⁴⁷ In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft expounds upon the dangers of beauty, and places the blame squarely on the shoulders of men: "Men are not aware of the misery they cause, and the vicious

⁴⁶ Astell's position is based on the rejection of the body, in her Cartesian avocation of the disembodied mind. For those who directly associate ugliness with moral worth, see: William Hay, *Deformity, an Essay* (1752) discussed in both "Obedient Faces" and *Imagining Monsters*, cf note my 41 on page 67 for other titles.

⁴⁷ See my discussion of beauty and power in relation to *The Female Quixote*.

weakness they cherish, by only inciting women to render themselves pleasing [...] sacrificing the comfort and respectability of a woman's life to voluptuous notions of beauty" (232).

Though she did not share the revolutionary feminism of Wollstonecraft, Scott agrees on the causes and dangers of beauty, using ugliness and monstrosity to encourage social obscurity; she believes that to remove oneself from the patriarchal gaze is the first step towards virtue and spiritual obedience. In *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, Jones writes that this *agreeable ugliness*⁴⁸ allows women to "refuse the adult, and adulterating leap into public life, and to remain both unlooked for and unseen" (185).

Because Scott was predisposed to consider ugliness in a positive light, her inclusion of a number of deformed characters in *Millenium Hall* is not incongruent with its construction of a female utopia. Her thematic implications are two-fold; first, it reinforces the Christian message of benevolence which is a major part of the women's sense of duty and propriety; second, it suggests that the exploitations, abuse, and economic hardships suffered by the deformed are similar to the condition of women, which reveals Scott's rejection of the despotic nature of British patriarchal society in favour of spirituality and embodiment.

To reinforce the parallel between the women and the monsters in the enclosure—proving they belong—Dunne suggests that "the monsters function as a distorted mirror image of the ladies of Millenium Hall" (67). Scott uses the treatment of the monsters as representative of the struggles of her female characters. In discussing the

⁴⁸ This is the title of Scott's 1754 translation of de la Place's novel, *La Laideur Aimable*.

monsters and their enclosure, Mrs. Mancel⁴⁹ says:

How much then must those poor wretched suffer, whose deformity would lead them to wish to be secluded from human view, in being exposed to the public, whose observations are no better than expressions of scorn, and who are surprised to find that anyone less than themselves can speak, or appear like intelligent beings. (72)

Educated women were liable to suffer the same kind of social ostracism and disbelief as the dwarfs and giants living in the garden enclosure. Within the personal narratives, examples of this isolation can be found in the stories of Miss Mancel, Miss Selvyn, and Lady Mary Jones. Miss Mancel's beauty and education cause her to be rejected by potential employers, and, when she is separated from Miss Melvyn, she is without support or friendship from other women. Miss Selvyn and Lady Mary Jones both find themselves ostracized in polite society because of their insistence on modesty and proper conduct: in refusing to play the role of the coquette, they are denied a public identity in much the same way as Arabella in *The Female Quixote*. Millenium Hall not only offers spiritual and educational support for women, it also offers a sense of community for the social outcast.

The reflection between the monsters and the women is not just one-sided; the novel is narrated from the position of a male outsider, who makes it his aim to expound publicly upon the lives of the women living in this community, and in so doing, puts them on public display, like the monsters they have rescued. In learning to value the inner worth of the women after hearing the stories of their lives, the male narrator and his

⁴⁹ All of the characters in the main narrative are referred to as Mrs. out of respect for their ages in keeping with the convention of the age. Mrs. Maynard and Mrs. Morgan are the only two women to have actually been married.

companion are better able to appreciate the goodness and support that the monsters offer one another, and to see what society is deprived of by focusing too much attention on the body and not the mind.

Still, it is important to note that in the sections described by the male narrator, physical appearance is much more minutely described than in the personal narratives which are told by Mrs. Maynard, where the physical is subsumed in discussions of character and the mind. There are, therefore, two different narrative foci in *Millenium Hall*; the body in the narrator's tale; the mind and soul in the women's narrative. In both cases, a deviation from the traditional social construction of mind and body is treated as an instance of pathological nature.

In *Millenium Hall*, Scott weaves her fictional narrative of a gynocentric community full of cultural and physical deformity into the conventional genre of chronicling the lives—education, courtship, marriage, motherhood, death—of proper British women. In this case, they are the stories of the five founders of Millenium Hall; Miss Mancel, Mrs. Morgan (nee Melvyn), Lady Mary Jones, Miss Selvyn, and Miss Trentham. The result is a five-fold, experience-based rejection of the superficiality of constructions of beauty and the body, and a firm avocation of the principles of female rationality, spirituality, and embodiment. The true subversiveness of Scott's novel is that it does not present a challenge to society through the story of one woman—which is easy to refute—but through the similar experiences of over ten women,⁵⁰ which adds decidedly to the authority of the cultural criticism.

⁵⁰ Within the five primary narratives, there are also secondary stories of women related to, often the mother of, the protagonists. For example; Mrs. Thornby, Lady Brumpton, Lady Emilia, Lady Melvyn, the cousins of Miss Trentham, Miss Melman.

The concern with mind and body that features so prominently in intellectual discussions of the eighteenth century, and in *Millenium Hall*, must first be addressed through education, both rational and experiential, since, according to Browne, the “general assertion of women’s equal intellectual and moral worth was the core of eighteenth-century feminist arguments about women in society” (139). It is also the education and just reasoning of the women at Millenium Hall that cause the narrator to assert “how much greater the strength of the mind can exert itself in a regular and rational way of life, than in a course of dissipation” (64). Throughout the five personal narratives in the novel, both rational and polite society are presented and contrasted, as are their respective forms of education. Polite society supports artifice and female subservience, which the women have all experienced. While living in this society, the women conform to the strict ideals of female obedience and propriety, but find the rejection of experience and self-knowledge, and the avocation of female weakness in the culture of sensibility both devaluing and inadequate.

Three representational experiences of education are presented by Scott; education as a pretence for physical possession and as a way for women to entertain men, in the case of Miss Mancel; rational education of the reformed coquette in the case of Lady Mary; education of women for rationality, piety, and obedience, in the cases of Miss Melvyn, Miss Selvyn, and Miss Trentham. In this last type of education, Scott proposes a social role for women that would be advocated by Mary Wollstonecraft in her 1792 *Vindication*: “speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens[...].” (235).

Miss Melvyn was raised by her mother and father, the former who married Sir Charles out of obligation to her parents and possessing “very superior understanding” (83) to the latter. Thus, Lady Melvyn’s example taught her daughter the importance of filial and societal obedience, while her teaching instilled in Miss Melvyn “the principles of true religion” (84), rational conversation, and an ignorance of idle amusements. Lady Melvyn rejects sensibility, instilling in her daughter the principles of spirituality and self-worth. When her mother dies, her father, Sir Charles, remarries, and the new Lady Melvyn wastes no time in telling her husband “that ‘Miss Melvyn’s education had been very imperfect;—that a young lady of her rank ought to be highly accomplished” (86) in the decorative arts of dancing, singing, and painting, the traditional education advocated by the conduct literature of the period: this education is based upon the belief of weakness of the female mind, and that a woman is designed to please a man and not herself. Ironically, this novel aims to prove that the learning advocated by the second Lady Melvyn is itself the imperfect form of female knowledge, as it discourages a conscious understanding of the self.

Miss Melvyn, however, has carefully studied her mother’s teaching, and although she is sent away to a French boarding school by her father and step-mother, she rejects Mademoiselle d’Avaux’s “polite” education, and continues to conduct herself according to her rational and spiritual upbringing. Part of this rationality is an inclination towards assisting other women, which counteracts the envy and jealousy intrinsic in the conduct tradition of advocating beauty as a point of competition in courtship. By focusing her attention on self-understanding through religion and philosophy, Miss Melvyn is able to view her new roommate, Miss Mancel, in light of her sensibility and grief, and not to be

envious of her beauty which “prejudiced every one in her favour” (83). Because of her own sense of self, Miss Melvyn is able to see Miss Mancel as a thinking, feeling subject, and not just a beautiful object. Rationality is therefore responsible for teaching women to see beyond the superficiality of physical appearance—both beautiful and monstrous.

Miss Selvyn and Miss Trentham are likewise educated for rational and moral discourse, and we are even told of the former that she was “bred a philosopher from her cradle; but was better instructed in the doctrine of the ancient moralists, than in the principles of christianity” (200). Miss Trentham was instilled with conservative Christian morals from an early age, learning “to please by her actions, and not offend by her word [...] she was innocence and simplicity itself” (225). Her focus on behaviour and speaking suggests an interaction of mind and body, and the importance of putting forth one’s true self. Problematically though, she is still taught to please others, thus reinforcing female obedience.

Contrary to these two ladies, Miss Trentham’s cousins were raised according to the decorative arts of the conduct books, and like the second Lady Melvyn, they were all educated to become the disembodied coquette; in this style of education, “the first thing a girl is taught is to hide her sentiments, to contradict the thoughts of her heart, and tell all the civil lies which custom has sanctified, with as much affectation and conceit as her mother” (224). The disembodied woman’s denial of thoughts and emotions hearkens back to the character of Miss Glanville in *The Female Quixote*, while the importance of deception in the female character looks ahead to the character of Lady Delacour in *Belinda*. The education of Miss Trentham’s cousins is designed to make them objectified, artificial, and shallow characters. Given the disparity of their educational styles, it is not

difficult to see how Miss Melvyn, Miss Selvyn, and Miss Trentham came to differ from the *norm* of female behaviour by asserting their intellectual and moral beliefs. We can also see that Scott's continued emphasis on interiority and understanding challenges the construction of femininity as corporeal-based—she wants a mediating position between mind and body.

Each of the three women just mentioned also receive a rational—traditionally “masculine”—education in science and philosophy, in addition to cultivated spirituality. However, for all of them, learning is both a blessing and a curse because it indicates a deviation from established female behaviour, while allowing the women to understand the inequalities of their situation, and the relatively slim chance of improving their condition in society. The only way to totally eliminate the negative aspects of female embodiment in patriarchy, is to remove oneself from society, and into what Robert Jones calls “companionable obscurity, the native place of the ugly” (“Obedient” 288).

Though these three women had been raised from a young age to value themselves and others for spiritual worth, and not to value physical pretence, Miss Mancel's education—though not of her own volition—was much more grounded in her beautiful body. Miss Mancel's childhood was filled with what Locke considered to be the two key life experiences, pleasure and pain, supported by a careful education from her aunt, who died when her niece was ten years old. Though her aunt had cultivated “extreme sensibility”⁵¹ and understanding in her niece, it was Miss Mancel's beauty that brought about her continued education at the boarding school of Mademoiselle d'Avaux. Mr.

⁵¹ There is an important distinction that must be made between the sensibility implied in this passage, and the culture of sensibility that I have hitherto been discussing. The aunt's “sensibility” is more akin to empathy and kindness that stems from spirituality—like that of Miss Melvyn—rather than the kind of nervous weakness that the term came to represent in the eighteenth-century with the emergence of medical studies on nervous conditions, like *The English Malady*.

Hintman is first interested in the story of the young lady after hearing her extreme beauty described in conjunction with her tremendous grief and suffering—he sees her emotions as a sign of sensibility and its “beautiful” weakness, as suggested in chapter one. Upon seeing Miss Mancel in a state of shock and oppression, he expresses that “he never saw anything so lovely; and the charms of which her melancholy might deprive her, were more than compensated in his imagination by so strong a proof of extreme sensibility” (80). Again, sensibility, being the emotional extension of physical appearance, serves to enhance a woman’s beauty. Miss Mancel’s beauty and sensibility cause Mr. Hintman to “benevolently” offer to take responsibility of her, and send her to a French boarding school.

The desire with which Mr. Hintman regards Miss Mancel is particularly troubling given the age of the young girl, and suggests that his intentions may not be entirely altruistic. Even in childhood, the female body is subject to male desire, which is clearly condemned by Scott as the story of Miss Mancel progresses. The combination of Miss Mancel’s appearance, and her emotional acuteness in childhood leads Mr. Hintman to begin educating and shaping her for his own future aims.⁵² Education becomes a tool of patriarchal oppression, rather than a gateway to embodiment. Beauty allows Miss Mancel the opportunity of improving her education, but, we are left to ask, at what price? This concern turns out to be well founded. Mr. Hintman’s careful attention to the cultivation of Miss Mancel’s happiness includes his frequent lavishing of books and theatre tickets on his young charge, for which he receives “the wish’d for return of affection and gratitude” (91). She also receives a polite education in the decorative arts,

⁵² This passage reflects the education of Sophia in Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762). Scott rejects this model of female education, as Edgeworth does in *Belinda* with Clarence Hervey’s education of Virginia. This story is also reminiscent of the Pygmalion story, of a man educating and grooming a woman for his desires.

but we are told that “her greatest improvement was from reading with [her roommate] Miss Melvyn, who instructed her in geography, and in such parts of philosophy of which her age was capable; but above all she was most attentive to inculcate into her mind the principles of true religion” (91). Mr. Hintman had not intended for Miss Mancel’s mind to be cultivated in such a fashion, since rationality and moral consciousness stand in opposition to female passivity and subjugation.

As Miss Mancel reaches a more appropriate age, the seeming benevolence of Mr. Hintman recedes in favour of an ardent sexual desire for her, her beauty having only increased during the last five years.⁵³ According to Mrs. Maynard’s narrative, Miss Mancel was “dazzlingly handsome at first view; but such numerous and various charms appeared on a more intimate acquaintance, that people forgot how much they had been struck by the first sight of her” (96). The reiteration of beauty—like ugliness—as merely superficial serves to educate the male narrator to see beyond appearance and seek out internal value. It also challenges the construction of femininity as body-based, as in the culture of sensibility. This is precisely the kind of reaction that Scott prefers, since education and eloquence should make the body only a secondary consideration to moral and rational character.

Most people who knew Miss Mancel were able to see past her beauty—just as in the main narrative when the women overlook the deformity of their staff and residents—except for Mr. Hintman, who we are told “was capable of no love that was not entirely sensual, and consequently selfish” (101). His earlier expression of care and affection was not genuine, but was a classic case of affectation that was so popular in

⁵³ Mrs. Maynard tell the narrator: “It is not strange that Mr. Hintman’s fondness should increase with Miss Mancel’s excellencies, but the caresses which suited her earlier years were now becoming improper” (97).

social gender interaction, like the kind encouraged by the second Lady Melvyn, and Miss Trentham's cousins. Mr. Hintman's aim was not to improve the quality of Miss Mancel's mind and experience by the education he paid for, but as Mr. d'Avora suggests "arose only from a sort of epicurism in his predominant vice" (98). Much like the Pygmalion story and Rousseau's education of Sophia that received scathing criticism from Wollstonecraft, Mr. Hintman is educating Miss Mancel for his own purposes and enjoyment. Melinda Rabb has argued that Miss Mancel's education "simply makes the conquest of her more interesting" (10). Rabb's statement also criticizes the belief that women were to be educated only for male pleasure—female self-worth was irrelevant to male desire.

Though Miss Mancel is able to avoid succumbing to Mr. Hintman (only because he dies), his departure puts her in the precarious position of being a young woman in the world, with no one to protect her. Because of her beauty, no married woman would take her in as a governess, regardless of her superior education and virtue, so she is forced to retire to the country, to be near her friend Miss Melvyn. As her narrative progresses, it is clearly stated that Miss Mancel's beauty is so uncommon that it acts as "the great obstacle" and "disadvantage" to her happiness (135-36). Once again Scott inverts the traditional myth of beauty as the marker of worth, thus reinforcing not only the artificiality of the construction of femininity, but also the real dangers it poses for women's bodies.

To further reinforce this argument, Lady Mary Jones' story is perhaps the most cautionary tale on the dangers of female beauty and faulty education. Her story is that of the rational reformation of the archetypal coquette. As I suggested earlier, beauty was

seen by many during this period as morally and physically precarious, and when this was combined with the kind of superficial education advocated by conduct literature, the beautiful woman was left essentially defenceless with respect to courtship and gender interaction. Lady Mary was raised by her aunt, who is described as the epitome of the type of character Scott wished to reject. Contrary to the other women in the novel, Lady Sheerness (Lady Mary's aunt) was herself raised to belief that "religion was [...] too serious a thing for so young a person" (173) and therefore determined to teach her niece "the knowledge of the world, which in her opinion was the most essential qualification for a woman of fashion" (174), and thus Lady Melvyn was "initiated into every diversion, at an age, when other girls are confined to their nursery" (174).

As a result of this worldly and sensate education, Lady Mary becomes a shallow and coquettish paragon of sensibility and the separation of mind and body, despite the fact that she had "naturally a very good understanding" (174). When she meets a young man, Mr. Lenman, she forms an interest in him, not based on his character or even his person, but because he causes her to think herself more important than she actually is. The danger of power instilled in beauty and the decorative arts is clearly at issue here, with Mr. Lenman saying that "there are no people so often the dupe of their own arts as coquets; especially when they become so very early in life" (175). Her coquettish behaviour and lack of rational education, leads Mr. Lenman to suspect Lady Mary of being morally unscrupulous, and to suggest a private marriage in Scotland.⁵⁴

Wollstonecraft addresses this issue in 1792, writing that "it is vain to expect virtue from women till they are, in some degree, independent of men" (231). It is perhaps more

⁵⁴ In 1753 Britain passed the Marriage Act, which was intended to reduce the number of clandestine marriages—and subsequently ruined women—by requiring a marriage to take place in the regular parish of one of the spouses. Those still wishing to have a secret marriage found an easier time in Scotland, where the laws on this subject were not as strictly enforced.

appropriate to say that it is in vain to expect women to be able to *assert* their virtue until they are allowed to act and think for themselves.

Ironically, it is a physical fall and bad bruising that cause Lady Mary to postpone her trip to Scotland, during which time Mr. Lenman's duplicitous nature becomes public knowledge—as does the fact that he already has a wife. She takes her temporary physical illness and marred appearance to be a sign of God's intervention, and “felt a gratitude to him who, she imagined, might possibly be more careful over his creatures than she had ever yet supposed” (179). Not only is she saved from social ruin, she is also brought to a greater understanding of God's kindness and a consciousness of her precarious position in the world, and all because of her injured face—physical experience leads to consciousness, and in turn, to embodiment and female autonomy.

Unfortunately, having been raised to believe that “pleasure was the only aim of persons of genius” (177), Lady Mary is slow to learn her lessons on the dangers of beauty and coquetry. She soon forms an attachment to Lord Robert, who was “too well skilled in these matters, to remain ignorant of the impression he had made” (181) and who thought her behaviour uncensored enough to make forward advances to her—with the help of a willing female friend of Lady Sheerness. The complicity of women to aid in another's ruin was another aspect of British society that was much criticized in the domestic fiction of this period, as characters often lament the lack of female community. Scott juxtaposes this adversarial femininity to the kindness and helpfulness of the Misses Mancel, Melvyn, Selvyn, and Trentham.

It is Miss Selvyn who comes to Lady Mary's aid, suggests that she modify her conduct, and asks of Lord Robert's compliments: “consider my dear Lady Mary, what

satisfaction they can afford you if they are only the result of a fondness for your person, which would lose all its charms for him, as soon as it became familiarized by possession” (185). This statement is the central point of *Millenium Hall*: valuing the body is not enough, there must also be an appreciation of the mind—only a holistic body is able to find happiness. On that basis, Lady Mary rejects Lord Robert’s advances, and scorns his continued presence near her. What this scene instructs its readers is that women must come to see the shallowness of the patriarchal focus on the body and the unappreciation of the mind and soul, if they are to become conscious of their own strength and virtue. As Armstrong has argued, “the production of female subjectivity entails the dismantling of the aristocratic body” (77).

To this advice, is added Lady Mary’s experiences with her sister-in-law, Lady Brumpton. Lady Brumpton was a beautiful woman with a keen understanding and sharp wit, and, true to form in Scott’s narrative, “when she was better known, the charms of her understanding seemed to eclipse those of her person” (189). For Lady Brumpton, too, education and rhetorical skill had a social backlash, because she was “ridiculed under the appellation of a genius, and a learned lady” (191). One of the dangers of women’s education, as I have already mentioned, was social ostracism, particularly when it was accompanied by physical beauty, for, as Vicesimus Knox’s correspondent writes in 1779, “my own sex stand too much in awe of me to bear me any affection” (108).

Vanity is a danger of standing apart in a crowd, and Scott is careful to moderate her female characters’ sense of power by reinforcing, through the character of Lady Brumpton, that assuming too important a position for oneself in society, based on either psyche or soma, can result not only in social inequality, but also illness, and even death.

Lady Brumpton's excessive desire to be praised for her intelligence causes her to neglect her body, and she eventually succumbs to a nervous fever "which all the art of her physicians could not entirely conquer" (193). The same consequences result from neglecting the body as do from neglecting the mind. Conscious moderation between psyche and soma—which must be learned from reason—is the key to finding social balance.

Eventually Lady Mary, the reformed coquette, internalizes the effects of her earlier behaviour, the advice of Miss Selvyn, and the behaviour of Lady Brumpton to recognize that "happiness did not consist in dissipation, nor in tumultuous pleasures, and could alone be found in something which every age and every condition might enjoy. Reason seemed this source of perpetual content, and she fancied that alone would afford a satisfaction suitable to every state of mind and body" (191); Reason allows both the beautiful and the ugly to find contentment. By reforming her coquettish behaviour and preoccupation with beauty, conforming to the spiritual idealism of the Misses Mancel, Selvyn, and Trentham as well as Mrs. Morgan, Lady Mary is able to join their rational community.

By tracing the stories of the rational education of these five women, we have gleaned some sense of their experiences in the wide world. Each of these women has suffered as a result of her intellectual and spiritual convictions, and her belief in socially conservative behaviour. Perhaps no one suffered more than Miss Melvyn, who was the only woman to marry, and who learned first hand the powerful rhetoric of female beauty and the body as a tool of patriarchal subordination. Rabb has argued that "the female body is the desired *corpus* for most of society" (14) in the eighteenth century; the

language of the body speaks louder than a woman's words. Though Scott has gone to great pains to assure that each of her female characters receives an Astellian education, the power of the male gaze reinforces the corporeal construction of femininity.

Miss Melvyn pleads to her father to be released from the forced marriage to Mr. Morgan, and even entreats her fiancé to reject their marriage, but he is unable to see beyond the superficial. Mr. Morgan's response is that

he admired her eloquence prodigiously, but that there was more rhetoric in her beauty than any composition of words could contain; which pleading in all contradiction to all she had said, she must excuse him if he was influenced by the more powerful oratory of her charms. (126)

She must indeed excuse him, not only for forcing her to marry him, but for repeatedly taking advantage of her person, and causing her to suffer from his "brutal" ill-temper. Like a martyr, Mrs Morgan harboured "a belief that it was her duty to conceal her husband's faults" (155), thus reinforcing her obedience to social mores, since, according to the Marquis of Halifax, "an undecent Complaint makes a Wife much more ridiculous than the Injury that provoketh her to it" (20).

Though Mrs. Morgan's suffering was by far the most lengthy, both physically and mentally, each of the other women has predominantly negative experiences with men: Miss Mancel and Mr. Hintman; Lady Mary and Mr. Lenman and Lord Robert; Miss Selvyn and Lord Robert; Miss Trentham and Mr. Alworth. These interactions cause the women to reject the institution of marriage, thus challenging the conduct ideal that marriage is too sacred an institution to be denied. In fact, Wetenhall Wilkes writes that "superannuated virginity, occasioned by necessity or restraint from marriage, is an

affliction too severe for any of the fair sex, because in these kingdoms it is a kind of imputed scandal” (34). Each of the women had a strong beliefs causing them to reject marriage, although Miss Trentham had the only “legitimate” reason to remain single—physical deformity as a result of small pox.

When the women reject slavery of both the monsters and wild animals, they are also rejecting the slave-like conditions of wives expostulated against by Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, and many bluestocking feminists—based on their own encounters with men. I want to stress that the decisions made by the women at Millenium Hall, though they may be inspired by spirituality, are still based in worldly experience, and that this feminotopia is not a community of innocents. Experience is an enabler of embodiment, and each of the five female protagonists have had to address issues of their minds and bodies in society before being granted access to the estate. One might say that Millenium Hall is a reward for surviving the challenges of patriarchal gender constructions intact—though not unscathed.

Part of what makes *Millenium Hall* such an interesting study in terms of embodiment is that the estate is established for the fostering of the female mind, and the preservation of health in the female body. Mrs. Morgan’s health was quite poor after her confinement in her husband’s sick room, Miss Trentham was still recovering from her small pox episode, and the Misses Mancel and Selvyn were both suffering from the grief of recently deceased mothers (which was compounded by the fact that they had only just met them). Again using the monsters to parallel the social lives of the women, Scott writes that after their liberation from their masters, “their healths were much impaired, and their tempers more so: to restore the first all medical care was taken, and air and

exercise assisted greatly in their recovery; but to cure the malady of the mind, and conquer that internal source of unhappiness, was a work of longer time” (74).

The fourth regulation for living at Millenium Hall is an agreement to “conform to very regular hours” (116), and the men who visit the estate are constantly finding their tours and stories interrupted by events in the women’s daily schedules—particularly meal times. Part and parcel of this regimen is the careful attention to mind and body suggested by eighteenth-century physicians like Jerome Gaub and Cheyne. In his 1747 essay, *De regimine mentis*, Gaub writes that “the mind cannot be managed properly unless account is taken of the body to which it is joined. In turn, the management of the mind is implicitly in and bound up with the proper treatment of matters pertaining to the body” (35; II.3). This understanding of the indissolubility of psyche and soma, and an appreciation of both qualities, signify the women’s *lived* experience in their bodies, and their desire to encourage others to live similar lives.

Though the women’s regulation of mind and body is certainly supported by the medical literature of the period, it also reinforces the moral tenets of their lives. In his preface to Cheyne’s 1733 treatise on nervous disorders, *The English Malady*, Roy Porter writes that “He [Cheyne] frequently, of course, played the medical moralist” (xxx), by considering nervous diseases to be the cause of laziness, richness of lifestyle, and inactivity. Thus, the frugality and moderation of the women at Millenium Hall is ideal for encouraging and maintaining good physical and mental health. Also, by removing the stresses of marriage, and social gender interactions, the women’s thoughts are not preoccupied by troubling concerns about conduct and chastity; as stated in the Bible, “Peace of mind makes the body healthy” (Prov. 14:30).

The balance between mind and body brings me back to my initial discussion of ugliness and moral worth. If we accept what is written in Proverbs about peace of mind, and combine this with the lifestyle supported at Millenium Hall, then even the ugly and monstrous are healthy in body, by virtue of calmness in mind. If health is not an issue, then beauty is simply a case of superficial appearance, and can easily be disregarded, and on that basis, so too can the patriarchal construction of women. Thus, both Scott's secular and religious themes serve to challenge the valuation or devaluation of women based on their bodies.

Scott's desire is not to see all of the marginalized social groups unite to overthrow or subvert male influence, but to internalize the emphasis on morality, rationality, and benevolence that has shaped the lives of the women who now live at the estate. In so doing, readers of *Millenium Hall* will be more able to reject the superficiality of the patriarchal body in favour of higher pursuits—even if they are still forced to live within male-dominated society. Herein lies what Robert Jones has called the “doublethink” of *Millenium Hall* (297). Within this more realistic projection of Scott's feminist message, the fact that the women were essentially forced to live in isolation in order to find happiness is evidence of the restrictiveness of patriarchal power, and its strongest means of reinforcement— marriage. Nussbaum has also recognized the duality of Scott's narratives-within-a-narrative, arguing that it is “both a contrast to male dominance over women and a testimony to its power” (*Torrid* 149). The body is never concrete, or absolute, and particularly not during the eighteenth century, because the medical and philosophical opinions on body and mind were so varied. Scott's narrative is

perhaps the most realistic representation of the conflict between male and female understandings of the conundrum of consciousness and corporeality.

A Description of Millenium Hall gives five examples of the unity of mind and body both in narrative and in lived bodily experience; it also explores how the careful monitoring of intellect and physical health results in happiness. However, because these women are able to experience embodiment with impunity only outside of patriarchal society, Scott's narrative does not support widespread social reform in the same way that later feminotopias would.⁵⁵ This novel weaves together the major threads of eighteenth-century social concern in its treatment of education, sexuality, monstrosity, religion, slavery, medicine, and health; these conditions form our individual and collective understandings of the female body, in all its diversity. Barbara Duden has written that "the nature of the woman's body lies in the eye of the beholder, but the images the observer forms are an echo, mediated through traditions and practices, of culture embodied in the self" (46). Viewing *Millenium Hall*—the estate or the novel—as something other than a close study of cultural praxis and its impact on classifying the pathological gendered body is to do a great disservice to Sarah Scott's multilayered socio-female narrative.

⁵⁵ Examples are Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary* (1788) and Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1805).

Tractable Bodies: Learning Self-Control of the Female Body
Through Modesty and Social Prudence in *Evelina*

I have hitherto addressed the issue of female embodiment within novels where the action is situated largely outside of fashionable eighteenth-century society. In the novels by Lennox and Scott, challenges to patriarchal constructions of femininity have taken the form of romantic and utopian alternatives of female subjectivity. These challenges, however, have not been absolute or unproblematic; if anything, they are marked by ambivalence. In Fanny Burney's 1778 novel, *Evelina*, she too engages in a social critique of the role of women, but her reformations are based within the framework of the society she is critiquing. By offering a *History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, Burney's novel offers a view of British society from the eyes of a young lady yet to be initiated into its ranks.

Edward Bloom writes in his introduction to *Evelina*, that what follows is "a tutorial adventure" (xviii) that teaches its heroine the need for self-control, modesty, prudence, and social conformity. The tutorial is designed to teach Evelina about worldly experience, and how it serves to cultivate knowledge. She is guided in this adventure by her substitute father, Rev. Villars, and her future husband, Lord Orville, thus suggesting that male guidance is an important part of the quest for female embodiment. As Rousseau and Porter have argued, "experience was all [in the eighteenth century], and experience was derived from the senses and was mediated by the highly somatic mechanisms of pleasure and pain" (29). The body is an intrinsic part of the worldly experience that shapes Evelina's public persona and her understanding of society. Learning to control the body through discipline, as suggested by Jeremy Bentham in 1791, is key to consciously

navigating society. At the beginning of the novel, when she leaves the seclusion of Berry Hill, Evelina is a social *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which British society will write its desires, fears, passions, and weaknesses; society will also help Evelina to realize her subjectivity and embodiment. The process of inscribing society onto the body of a woman is accomplished through social comparisons of behaviour, and beauty, through the internalization of the patriarchal gaze, and through self-evaluation and suppression. As part of this process of social conditioning, Burney exposes the artificiality of the eighteenth-century idea of “nature,” and of “natural” female characteristics of virtue and modesty, since Evelina’s most embarrassing public moments are also her most artless assertions of these qualities.

Burney further suggests that the worldly experiences of women nurture individuality not in the mind—as we have seen in the novels by Lennox and Scott—but in the social body, thus reinforcing the central role of corporeality in cultural discussion. This position supports a physically-based identification of women, making *Evelina* an interesting juxtaposition to *The Female Quixote* and *A Description of Millenium Hall*. Burney asserts that if women’s characters were supposed to conform to a “natural” and universal state of modesty, their bodies were decidedly individual. Even when someone else bears her rightful name, Evelina is the only legitimate daughter of Sir John and Lady Belmont, and she proves her birthright through her body—the legacy of her mother’s beauty—when words and reasoning cannot. Because the female body bears the signs of its lineage, and is invested with patriarchal significance, women must be carefully trained to control their physique—especially their sexuality—to properly represent their moral and social importance. When writing of this eighteenth-century phenomenon, Duden

writes that “in this body bourgeois, sexuality became what blood had been to the nobility and the peasants” (15).

Evelina charts the emergence of the social female body, and its role as both guardian and prisoner of female thought and sexuality. On one hand, her modesty, innocence, and artlessness, as expressed through physical signals, preserve her from conjecture about her chastity, in the many embarrassing scenes where her actions contravene social norms. On the other hand, because beauty and sensibility were sexually tantalizing to men, the very qualities that guard her sexuality—blushing and casting down her eyes—put *Evelina* most in danger of losing her virtue. Judy Simons has commented on this phenomenon, writing that physical modesty and innocence present “double-edged benefits, for while they are *Evelina*’s only equipment in the fight for social recognition, they also mark her as a ready victim for unscrupulous seducers” (130). Thus, she is never free from the double-bind of eighteenth-century women, in the expectation that she must be both knowing of and innocent to the ways of the male world. Through the examples of others, and learning from her mistakes (with the help of Rev. Villars and Lord Orville), *Evelina* learns to see herself, and others, within patriarchal society—respectively internalizing and projecting its notions of female propriety and modesty.

The embodiment of these double notions of internalization and projection, knowledge and innocence, artlessness and deliberate social behaviour, nature and construction, epitomize what I mean by the modern female body that emerged in the eighteenth century. According to Duden, this new body “was woven from the same materials of the social imagination that went into the making of a new society” (26). My aim in this chapter is to examine how the institutional and cultural opinions on conduct

and the female body were perceived by, and had an effect on, *Evelina*, allowing Burney to present a start-to-finish construction of the socially embodied woman—distinct from the embodiment attained in relative cultural isolation, as in *The Female Quixote* and *Millenium Hall*.

As much as this novel appears to be a reinforcement of traditional social roles, particularly with the standard narrative conclusion of a happy marriage, Simons suggests that Burney intentionally uses the conventions of domestic literature to promote her subtextual message of social critique and feminism; she writes: “[f]or in her metonymic concentration on details of social decorum, Burney was in fact probing the real uncertainties that related to women’s perceptions of their role and their identity in a world which offered them such contradictory images of self” (130). Perhaps the most pervasive misconception about women’s social roles and characters relates to the idea of “natural” female modesty.

Conduct literature was particularly responsible for cultivating a belief in the modest nature of women’s minds and bodies. In writing his *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* in 1774, four years prior to the publication of *Evelina*, Gregory advises his daughters that “[o]ne of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration [...] Nature has made you to blush when you are guilty of no fault, and has forced us to love you because you do so” (46). Though not part of the conduct tradition, one of the most outspoken advocates of intrinsic female modesty was Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, who wrote in 1758, “Nature wanted it so, it is a crime to stifle her voice” (qtd. in Yeazell 24).⁵⁶

In her preface to *Evelina*, Burney writes that the “*heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is* No faultless monster, that the world ne’er saw,⁵⁷ *but the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire*” (8). If Evelina’s entrance into the world sees her already possessing all the qualities of Nature, in a pure form, untainted by social interactions, then presumably her modesty should be greater than that of the other female characters in the novel—who have been affected by social dissipation—and she should be best equipped for acting with virtue. Yet Burney tells us that Evelina has a “virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart” combined with “ignorance of the forms, and experience in the manners of the world” (7), and that these qualities are the reason for the many embarrassing social situations in which Evelina finds herself: her social faux pas at the ball in London, going down a dark lane at Vauxhall with the Branghton daughters, walking with prostitutes, holding private audiences with Mr. Macartney. We must take these two positions—a virtuous mind and a lack of social experience—to be Burney’s attempt to challenge the “natural” modesty of women, since Evelina’s artless nature serves only to cause her distress.

Ruth Yeazell has argued in her book *Fictions of Modesty*, that “it is a commonplace of the advice literature that women’s modesty is instinctive, but the very existence of the literature testifies to the belief that the ‘instinct’ must be elaborately codified and endlessly discussed” (5). What Evelina needs to learn, therefore, is what constitutes modesty in social interpretation, and how to best project this modesty to

⁵⁶ From Rousseau’s *Lettre à M. d’Alembert*. A similar argument can also be found in Rousseau’s 1762 treatise on female education, *Emile*.

⁵⁷ From John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham’s *Essay on Poetry*.

others. What results is a type of modesty based on public perception, rather than a fundamental internal characteristic: this socially cultivated modesty I consider to be “disciplined innocence.” The danger of this “learned” modesty is expressed by the Marquis of Halifax, who writes that “Whilst you are playing full of Innocence, the spiteful World will bite [...]” (17). Even in the late seventeenth century, then, conduct writers acknowledged that modesty was part of what Laqueur has called “theatrical gender” (151). It is acting the part of the virtuous woman, according to the conduct standards of popular culture, that defines a woman’s modesty and worth, so *Evelina* must learn to play the role to which she has been assigned, by controlling—displaying and hiding as appropriate—her instinctive terror of social exposure.

Worldly experience comes quickly for *Evelina*. Though Rev. Villars charged Lady Howard to “[r]estore [*Evelina*] but to me all innocence as you receive her, and the fondest hope of my heart will be amply gratified” (20; vol. I, letter v), within her first month away from the seclusion of Berry Hill, *Evelina* learns of the many amusements in London, and writes to her guardian “I believe I am bewitched!” (24; vol. I, letter viii). Although he allows his young charge to accompany Mrs. Mirvan and her daughter to London, Villars tells *Evelina* “yet I would fain guide myself by a prudence which should save me the pangs of repentance” (25; vol. I, letter ix). By giving in to *Evelina*’s desire to experience the social world, Villars acts against prudence, and unknowingly instigates a series of public tests that will teach *Evelina* the risks of that world, in a way that Villars’ words alone could not.

Evelina experiences almost immediately the many diversions and amusements for young ladies in the city, from the theatre which puts her in “raptures,” to shopping, and

getting her hair dressed; she writes to her guardian “I believe you would hardly know me, for my face looks quite different to what it did before my hair was dressed” (27; vol. I, letter x). Though her curiosity was heightened by these adventures into the feminine arts, Evelina does not modify her conduct to reflect the more shallow aspects of female conduct that usually accompany these amusements; she has yet to learn that appearances imply a form of behaviour, and that discord between the two opens the doors to social misperception and ill treatment.⁵⁸

It does not take long for the splendour of London to wear away, and reveal the divide between Evelina’s artless virtue and beauty, and the character of British society. At her first ball in London, Evelina is so provoked by the behavior of the men who “looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands” (28; vol. I, letter xi), that she decides: “far from humouring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who should seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me” (29; vol. I, letter xi). At this early stage in the narrative, Evelina does not understand that she has no right to choose the man by whom she wishes to be addressed.⁵⁹ Though she manages to reject the first man who approaches her, Mr. Lovel, another one soon takes his place, Lord Orville, and all of her blushing cannot deter him, so, despite her fear, he leads her to dance. She is “seized with such a panic, that I could hardly speak a word” (30; vol. I,

⁵⁸ Evelina’s misunderstanding of the social implications of physical appearance and spiritual/mental qualities is similar to the experiences of women with rational educations that reject their classification on the grounds of beauty alone, and often suffer social ostracism as a result. Not only do these situations have ramifications in terms of female mind/body interaction, it also reinforces the rigidity of social constructions of women, and the inability of society to accept any deviation from its established norm.

⁵⁹ Recall the quotation I included in Chapter 2, from the Marquis of Halifax, who wrote that “[i]t is one of the *Disadvantages* belonging to your *Sex*, that young Women are seldom permitted to make their own *Choice*” (18).

letter xi) and, in the first of many similar episodes, is only able to move through a sense of shame—at this juncture, because of her quick change of heart and mind.

Evelina is not so unaware of her actions to be insensible of the fact that it is her “ignorance of the world [that] makes her perpetually fear doing something wrong!” to the point that she considers herself “a simple rustic” (30; vol. I, letter xi). She reaffirms to her guardian how “silly” and “childish” her behaviour is, but despite this self-knowledge, she does not realize her behaviour at the ball to be her first act of social impropriety until it is pointed out by the man who initially approached her. Burney’s point is that Evelina has chosen the right man to be attracted to, thus suggesting greater powers of female discrimination than even Evelina realizes. After being made aware of her mistake she sits down, “not daring to meet [Lord Orville’s] eyes” (33; vol. I, letter xi) to avoid seeing him judge her.

This scene introduces what will be one of the most powerful tools in Evelina’s worldly education—the patriarchal gaze. Denise Riley has categorized this gaze by saying to women, “you have been positioned antagonistically as a woman-thing, objectified as a distortion” (97). Consequently, every time Evelina makes a major social faux pas, she is always witnessed by the men in her company, and more often than not by Lord Orville. Yet, Evelina’s embarrassment is what ultimately makes her most attractive to Orville, according to Yeazell, who writes: “the fantasy that shapes Evelina is not merely that the young woman will be loved despite her perpetual embarrassments but that she will be loved because of them—that the more she blushes before the Other, the more she intensifies her beauty in his eyes” (135).

Burney's corresponding social criticism is that, in order to be acceptable in male society, Evelina must make every attempt to make her body and its projections as attractive and flawless as possible to her potential husband—Orville—but without attracting the attention of other men, like Mr. Lovel, and especially Sir Clement Willoughby. Burney is once again exposing the double-bind of female sensibility and sensuality in eighteenth-century gender constructions; the woman must allow herself to be attractive only to the man she will inevitably marry, to make oneself attractive to everyone is a warning sign of immodesty.⁶⁰ While part of this narrative reinforces traditional male-centred social construction, reminiscent of Rousseau's belief that women were designed to accommodate men,⁶¹ Burney does not create in Evelina an anti-feminist character, as it might initially appear.

I agree with Simons, who argues that Evelina's "only defense in a society which is in many respects hostile to her interests is her exploitation of the traditional attributes of femininity" (129). Taking this argument one step further, and expressing a position which I think most clearly expresses Burney's subtextual criticism, is Catherine Craft-Fairchild, who so eloquently writes: "Cultural constraints make it impossible for a woman to achieve a full 'identity'; whatever identity she can negotiate is always in a complex and complicitous relationship to the identity (identities) her society constructs for her" (163).

⁶⁰ This concern about potential immodesty is what prompts many of the conduct books' discussions of chastity. For example, see Wilkes' comments of 1740: "I have heard a lady of nice discernment say, that 'nothing is more dangerous to a female, than the vanity of conquests; and that it is as safe to play with fire, as to dally with gallantry" (31).

⁶¹ See Sophia's character and education in *Emile* (1762) as suggested in the previous chapter (cf note 53). It is also important to note that Evelina's education differs from that of Sophia in that the former's education is based on subjectivity and experience.

Evelina's tutors in this endeavour of learning to control beauty and the female body are the moral male characters, Reverend Villars and Lord Orville. The self-reflection, and possibility of corporeal knowledge that results from her letter writing to Villars are the most important aspect of Burney's epistolary narrative structure. Carol Houlihan Flynn has argued that "the act of writing itself creates physical communion with problematic flesh" (170), which is supported by Simon's comments that the letters Evelina write to Villars are her only outlet for expressing embodied emotions of terror, pain, contempt, and anger (129).

Orville's guidance, too, is obviously central to the plot, as he is not only watching out for a woman he considers to be a "poor weak girl!" (35; vol. I, letter xii) he is also grooming his future wife. Simons has written that Orville's social guidance, in place of that offered by a husband or father, teaches Evelina "to mold herself on a male stereotype of womanly perfection, to cultivate the qualities of modesty, delicacy, and purity as advantages in the society which values such commodities in women" (130).

The characteristics that society thought to represent a modest female character are described by Blease—and which are similar to those cited earlier by Gregory—as "a gentle voice, a downcast eye, a blushing cheek, and a shrinking frame, the outward and visible signs of that chastity which men required in a woman, these are the essential qualities" (70). Though polite society placed an emphasis on visible signs of modesty, I suggest that Burney's narrative challenges this emphasis, by exposing the inability of the "experienced" social characters to distinguish between appearance and reality.

The mere appearance of modesty, through the signs listed by Blease, is superficial and the meaning of those signs ambiguous. Making appearance an unreadable sign of

female worth suggests that it is impossible to know a woman based on external signs. Inner worth must be expressed through action, a result of conscious contemplation, and not through external signs that can be easily misread. As an example of misreading, after making insinuations about the cause of Evelina's blushing, Lovel says to Orville and Mrs. Mirvan, "I presumed not to infer that *rouge* was the only succedaneum for health; but, really, I have known so many different causes for a lady's colour, such as flushing,—anger,—*mauvaise honte*,— and so forth, that I never dare decide to which it may be owing" (79; vol. I, letter xx). The only true modesty is that which comes from within the body, the modesty of the soul. As Elizabeth Spelman has written, "[I]t is in and through the soul, if at all, that we shall have knowledge, be in touch with reality, and lead a life of virtue" (111).

As a case in point, once she is out of sight at the ball, and Lovel accuses Evelina of being ill-bred and unkind, Lord Orville responds "impossible! that elegant face can never be so vile a mask!" (35; vol. I, letter xii). While Lovel describes Orville's behaviour as "philosophic coldness" (46; vol. I, letter xiii) in comparison to the artificial sensibility of the fop's own conduct, Orville is the only moral male character that Evelina encounters in the social world, and only he is able to see the true value of her blushing and tears as signs of inner modesty, in the tradition of the conduct books. It is this ability to see the inner, spiritual worth of Evelina that causes him to later tell her: "I see, and I adore the purity of your mind, superior as it is to all little arts, and all apprehensions of suspicion" (364; vol. III, letter xvi).

In addition to Gregory's earlier comment about the connection between blushing and innocence, the Marquis of Halifax's comments on the power of female modesty also

suggest Orville's position: "You have more strength in your looks, than we have in our Laws, and more power by your Tears, than we have by our Arguments" (18). In consequence, when Evelina's embarrassment at the ball leads her to write to Villars that "I had not strength to make my mortifying explanation;—my spirits quite failed me, and I burst into tears" (47; vol. I, letter xiii), though most of the characters are "shocked and amazed," Lord Orville is sensible that her emotions indicate the pureness of her soul, and addresses her with great politeness, calming her fears.

Not only does Orville introduce Evelina to the male gaze, and the power of comparing oneself to others, he also addresses the interconnection between mind and body, the fundamental basis of understanding eighteenth-century constructions of femininity. The signs of confusion and terror that are conveyed through Evelina's body during the many "incidents" in the novel are but reaffirmations of her intrinsic moral worth, reinforcing what Bloom calls the "incorruptibility of disciplined innocence" (xviii). Within the context of my reading of Burney's treatment of embodiment, Bloom's assertion of discipline is significant because it implies a strict regulation of body and mind, and is similar to the idea that would be advocated as a social critique by Jeremy Bentham in *The Panopticon, or, Inspection House* in 1791.

In *Gender, Sex, and Subordination*, Fletcher expands upon this argument, writing that in creating a panopticon-like female body, men must reinforce the need for physical and spiritual modesty; according to Fletcher, "[m]odesty is the core of self-discipline [...] modesty, predictably enough, teaches a woman to tune her language, avoid bluster, beware wantonness, and rich clothes, and choose her company with care" (386). The best way to reinforce such a pervasive idea is to make modesty a "natural" female condition,

which I have already addressed. It is, however, necessary to reinforce the importance of basing female construction on a “natural” condition of women, for, as Armstrong has argued, “the form of knowledge that will appear to operate in everyone’s interest is the one that appears to reside in things themselves” (35).

Volume one of the novel effectively proves that inherent female modesty often fails a woman in social situations, because society itself is not natural. I am referring to an argument made by Rousseau and Porter in *Sexual Underworlds*: “culture itself was an affront to ‘nature’ —non-transcendental in origin, shaped by convention, the ultimate product of fashion” (157). Evelina must therefore learn to control her body within the confines of an artificial and unnatural society. This is perhaps best expressed through Evelina’s experiences residing with her grandmother Mme Duval and her cousins, the Branghtons; it is after all Mme Duval who says to Captain Mirvan “there’s no nation under the sun can beat the English for ill-politeness” (50; vol. I, letter xiv). Ironically, though, it is the behaviour of Duval and the Branghtons that best prove to Evelina the necessity of choosing her company with care, as suggested by Fletcher, since Mme Duval is characterized as full of “bitterness” and “*grossness*” (52; vol.I, letter xiv).

When Evelina first meets Mme Duval, Villars suggests that his young charge use the bad example offered by her grandmother as reinforcement of the necessity of her own modesty. He writes to Evelina, “the more forcibly you are struck with improprieties and misconduct in another, the greater should be your observance and diligence to avoid even the shadow of similar errors” (55; vol. I, letter xv). The social self-comparison implied in this statement not only reinforces the power of cultural forces on the body, but also the power of the gaze. Evelina, however, is slow to learn this lesson, as she is too innocent to

perceive the artificial sincerity of the men, and with the exception of Mrs. Mirvan and Lady Howard—from whom she is separated when she is with Mme Duval, ironically, when she needs guidance the most—there are virtually no positive female influences to guide her.

As a result, Evelina finds herself in physically and morally dangerous positions, like being caught alone in a carriage with the villainous Sir Clement Willoughby. Unlike Lord Orville, who feels sympathy and concern for Evelina's embarrassment and confusion at the ridotto, Willoughby takes her modesty as a (negative) sign of her worldly ignorance, which might predispose her to men's advances; in this case, the centre of female social defense, modesty, acts as an invitation to mistreatment. Correspondingly, though she chastizes his inappropriate advances upon their first meeting, when she is at the opera with her grandmother and cousins—which is a scene of great social embarrassment for Evelina because of her boorish relatives—Willoughby contrives a way to get her alone in a carriage, where he attempts to impose himself upon her. When she rejects his advances and exerts her indignation at his treatment, he responds that his earlier mistreatment at the ridotto was “the effect of a mistaken, a prophane idea, that your understanding held no competition with your beauty; but, now that I find you equally incomparable in both, all words, all powers of speech, are too feeble to express the admiration I feel of your excellencies” (98; vol. I, letter xxi). As in the case of Arabella's rhetorical power, and the sensibility of Miss Mancel, Evelina's mind—or Willoughby's perception of it—makes her even more attractive to him, thus suggesting one way that the female mind could be used in conjunction with the body to make women objects of the male gaze.

That she has a mind and a body that are both so pure and well cultivated makes him refuse to take her home, or to let her out of the carriage, resulting in her writing to Villars, justifiably, that “[n]ever, in my whole life, have I been so terrified” (99; vol. I, letter xxi). As I mentioned earlier, it is Evelina’s innocence that not only protects her, but also puts her in the most danger from men, creating what Yeazell has called “the almost impossible double-bind of such a position” (130). In her discussion, “*Evelina*, or, Female Difficulties,” Susan Staves writes of the carriage situation: Evelina’s “vocabulary can hardly include terms directly descriptive of sexual assault and rape [...] Evelina does not know exactly what Sir Clement wants to do to her. How could she?” (371). If Evelina has not yet understood the depth of the danger that her beautiful body and artless behaviour pose in male society, she will quickly learn through continued exposure with her family and to their extravagant, and questionable, public behaviour.

Evelina’s outings with her grandmother and cousins are perhaps her most socially and morally dangerous worldly experiences. In the company of these people, and their free behaviour, Evelina experiences the reality of British polite society, described by Blease: “So far as women were concerned, fashionable society relapsed into a condition of barbarism” (2). Is it any wonder, then, that social embodiment for women in this society would offer little possibility for rational and spiritual happiness? Evelina’s only chance for acceptability is internalizing her bodily concerns, of not making such a scene of her flights from danger, but avoiding them by careful, prudent conduct. This is exactly what Villars is suggesting to Evelina when he writes to her:

you must learn not only to *judge* but to *act* for yourself: if any schemes are started, any engagements made, which your understanding represents

to you as improper, exert yourself resolutely in avoiding them, and do not, by a too passive facility, risk the censure of the world, or your own future regret. (164; vol. II, letter viii)

Learning to avoid dangerous situations, however, often comes from experience and self-consciousness; the most frequent teacher is shame.

The idea of shame introduces an interesting connection between mind and body, since the word “shame” stems from the Latin word *pudor*, which is also connected to the female genitalia. *Pudenda* is a word that represents the female reproductive organs, which suggests that the essence of womanhood is shameful and modest. Thus, shame is central to Evelina’s experience in the world, because it defines her condition as a woman. The word *pudor* has a double meaning of shame and modesty, which further connects to the “natural” female condition in society.

Frequently, the party of Mme Duval, M. Du Bois, and the Branghtons visit the gardens around London, which are responsible for heightening Evelina’s consciousness of the physical threats of her beauty and innocence, and for exposing the power of shame in learning to control the body and the emotions. Rabb has suggested that subtle and prolonged metaphors are a literary device that allowed the eighteenth-century woman writer a chance to explore similar female social concerns while still writing within a patriarchal literary system (12). An example of one such metaphor is that of the “garden,” which, as a psychological symbol, represents “consciousness [...] and also the enclosing female principle [...] it is often used as a metaphor for sexual paradise [...]” (Tresidder 89). One must also bear in mind the obvious biblical reference to the Garden of Eden, and the temptation of Eve. Thus, Vauxhall and Marybone are Burney’s loci for

testing the sexual innocence and self-consciousness of Evelina, and signal her internalization of the moral, male gaze.

At Vauxhall in particular, Evelina is exposed to the sexually predatory nature of men in society. The party of Evelina's relatives, rather than safely guiding her through the trials, actually finds her innocence and terror amusing. After being whisked away by Mr. Smith, and fearing a similar encounter with Sir Clement, she attempts to break away from him, only to be mocked by the rest of her party. In recounting the evening to Villars, she writes: "But this was not the only surprise which was to divert them at my expense; for they led me about the garden purposely to enjoy my first sight of various other deceptions" (194; vol. II, letter xv).

When the Branghton sisters suggest that they, along with Evelina, "take a turn in the dark walks" (195; vol. II, letter xv) she is strongly against the idea, and yet, she continues to follow them, "quite by compulsion." Before long, the girls were surrounded by a gang of men, one of whom, "rudely, seizing hold of me, [Evelina], said I was a pretty little creature [...]. In a moment, both my hands, by different persons, were caught hold of [...]" (196; vol. II, letter xv). This scene is but one more example where the body becomes an unreadable sign: being thought a pretty actress (a common euphemism for whore), she is persecuted by the crowd of men, before being delivered from her terror—ironically—by Sir Clement Willoughby. It is most telling that Willoughby should be found in the "dark walks" of the gardens symbolizing Evelina's consciousness, since he was the man to teach her the treachery of men in their treatment of beautiful innocents.

The terrifying scene at Vauxhall is shortly relived during Evelina's visit to the Marybone gardens, with the same party of relatives and "friends." The terror and violent

emotions that she felt at Vauxhall were tremendously physically taxing for Evelina, and their resultant verbal confusion is indicative of her general condition in embarrassing social situations—a testament to the power of embarrassment and shame. Simons has suggested another, more subversive implication of Evelina's confusion, writing that it "reveals the uncertainties about female self-hood that is at [the novel's] heart" (131). Both the importance of the physical strain of sexual politics, and the role of shame, should be considered when looking at the emergence of the disciplined innocence of Evelina's body.

When Evelina is once again separated from the larger group, after being frightened by the fireworks display at Vauxhall, she finds herself being approached by a number of unscrupulous men, trying to get away from them in a "disordered haste" and "every other moment [being] spoken to, by some bold and unfeeling man, to whom my distress, which I think, must be very apparent, only furnished a pretence for impertinent witticisms or free gallantry" (233; vol. II, letter xxi). Eventually she seeks refuge with two ladies, who she soon recognizes as prostitutes. She tells Villars that she is unable to express in words the terror she felt; it is Evelina's perpetual lack of social consciousness that causes both Villars and Orville so much concern for her true modesty, for she does not realize she is risking it until it is almost too late. Language is central to the construction of society, and to a sense of self: since Evelina does not have the language to express the concerns she has about her body, she obviously does not yet have the experience that allows for her articulation. Social embodiment requires a woman to take control of her behaviour and her words—without one of these qualities, she remains vulnerable to male domination.

Evelina gains language-creating experience with the help of the gaze of the moral male, Lord Orville, who reinforces her sense of shame and self-consciousness: "had I,

indeed, been sunk to the ghastly state, which such companions might lead him to suspect, I could scarce have had feelings more cruelly depressing” (234; vol. II, letter xxi). When she later encounters him in the gardens, she again expresses her mortification: “I should have fainted, so great was my emotion from shame, vexation, and a thousand other feelings, for which I have no expressions” (234; vol. II, letter xxi). Again, the lack of language is representative of Evelina’s struggle for a sense of her own body in society. In these two visits to English gardens, two forays into the dark walks of Evelina’s consciousness, shame has been a central feature, this emotion which results from seeing one’s body in relation to others, and “in this act of observation subject[ing] my body to the same order” (Duden 119). Thus, shame teaches Evelina her place in society, by forcing her to compare her body, and behaviour, to those around her.

Yeazell further reinforces the role of shame in the rise of conscious self-awareness, invoking an argument first made by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Yeazell writes,

Indeed, if shame is, in Sartre’s formula, ‘the *recognition* of the fact that I *am*...that object which the Other is looking at and judging,’ it is only appropriate that the story of a young woman’s coming ‘out,’ as the idiom also has it, reads like an extended case history of the phenomenon. (130)

The continual “gaze” of Lord Orville, and especially of Evelina, watching herself being watched—one of the prostitutes tells her “you have a monstrous good stare, for a little country Miss” (234; vol. II, letter xxi)—is how she survives the Eden-like temptations of the gardens at Vauxhall and Marybone with her delicacy intact. The socially embodied

female must accept the gaze of the Other in the world as proof of the existent body, in keeping with what Sartre has argued elsewhere in *Being and Nothingness*: “the body is identified with the whole world inasmuch as the world is the total situation of [its being] and the measure of its existence” (285).

Coming to understand the variability of the world, and the dangers of female beauty and the body, Evelina changes her outlook on society after the two garden incidents, learning that in order to be an acceptable woman in society, she must “represses her spontaneous reactions and cultivate a passive image” (Simons 131). Her behaviour becomes less exuberant, and her concerns more internalized. There is still great focus on Evelina’s “anxious eyework” (Yeazell 130), but this is because her eyes now serve as the idiomatic windows to her soul. Contextualizing her discussion within a discussion of theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Duden writes the “individual character was to reveal itself in the face, in the eyes. Corporeality was disciplined; it internalized itself and withdrew to the private sphere” (15). Evelina has learned that any public female expression of articulated emotion, especially desire—positive or negative—was considered culturally inappropriate,⁶² and therefore only her cultivated modesty may speak of her inner thoughts. In her last five letters of volume II, Evelina’s behaviour becomes, according to Burney, “*uppish*” (251; vol. ii letter xxiv) and generally reserved, thus indicating her emphasis on social prudence and modesty.

Volume II not only teaches Evelina social awareness through the powerful influence of shame and the male gaze, but also helps her learn of the duplicitous character of men, the artificiality of polite society, and the need for the protection suggested by

⁶² Recall Blease’s description of the archetypal “perfect” woman, as quoted in chapter one: “she must have at once an attractive exterior and an infinite capacity for self-suppression” (29).

Simons. One factor that necessitates the internalization of moral guidance and bodily concerns is that young, innocent women—particularly those without parents—have little ability to judge the true character of social bodies, and we have Evelina’s own experiences as irrefutable proof of this assertion. However, after she sends a letter of apology to Lord Orville for her cousins’ behaviour, and receives a lust-filled response (which we later find to have come from the rake, Sir Clement), her faith in the *appearance* of virtue is finally shaken; she is able to articulate the dangers of what she calls “heedlessness,” or social innocence. In the last letters of this volume, Evelina, safely at home with Villars, away from Mme Duval, the Branghtons, Sir Clement, Mr. Du Bois, and Mr. Smith, writes to Miss Mirvan describing her feelings of life in London: “I cannot but lament to find myself in a world so deceitful, where we must suspect what we see, distrust what we hear, and doubt even what we feel!” (259; vol. II, letter xxvii).

The reserve that we see at the end of volume II becomes characteristic of her behaviour in the third volume, showing that she has learned how to control the expressiveness of the female body. Now when she encounters Sir Clement, she is able to calmly, yet forcibly, refuse to be molested by him, to the extent that he calls her a “beauteous Insensible!” (342; vol. III, letter xiv). In this speech, Willoughby also reveals the ways in which Evelina’s modest conduct sets her apart from the other women in the novel. When speaking of the archetypal weak young woman—Lord Orville’s sister—Lady Louisa, Willoughby writes, “’tis such a pretty piece of languor, that ’tis almost cruel to speak rationally about her [...] she is a mere compound of affectation, impertinence, and airs” (343; vol. III, letter xiv); Lady Louisa is yet another prime example of the disembodied coquette that signifies the traditional understanding of the

female body. In contrast, Evelina's behaviour is innocent and polite, yet based on hard-won social experience; she is the paragon of disciplined innocence advocated by Bloom, since her body and mind are now incorruptible after having internalized the patriarchal sense of female propriety. She is able to spurn Sir Clement while still retaining his respect; when writing of his behaviour, Evelina herself now advocates a position similar to that of Villars at the beginning of the novel: "To what alternate meanness and rashness do the passions lead, when reason and self-denial do not oppose them!" (388; vol. III, letter xx).

In 1799, Hannah More wrote that "propriety is the centre in which all the lines of duty and agreeableness meet" (132). Having proven herself against her most constant tormenter, having learned from suffering the physical and spiritual pain of shame and physical embarrassment, Evelina has proven herself as a socially embodied woman. The parallels are now clear between the poem cataloguing Evelina's graces that circulated around Bristol and my earlier discussion of Blease and the qualities of modesty: "SEE last advance, with bashful grace,/ Downcast eye, and blushing cheek,/ Timid air and beauteous face,/ Anville,—whom the Graces seek" (333; vol. III, letter xi). Though her tutorial adventure is now complete, Evelina is still not "whole."

Ironically, social embodiment often causes a loss of personal agency, and it is this situation which is central to the subtextual plot of Burney's novel. Armstrong insists that "[i]t is a woman's participation in public spectacle that injures her, for as an object of display, she always loses value as a subject" (77). Similarly, Simons argues that ceding personal agency is Burney's way of assuring social safety: "This toning down process, in which [women's] freedom of choice is gradually weakened, is the price that all Burney's

heroines have to pay for social protection” (131). What both Armstrong and Simons are suggesting is that social acceptance and subjectivity cannot co-exist in the eighteenth-century construction of woman, a position that is reinforced by Craft-Fairchild’s earlier argument regarding the power of cultural influences. Accepted opinions of female behavior impose themselves upon Evelina’s body, causing her to suppress her corporeality, and yet one critical aspect of her sense of self still needs to be addressed.

Evelina’s entrance into the world has proven “the powerful social structure which determines and limits [women’s] behaviour” (Simons 130) based on bodily and emotional control, and the suffering and dangerous confusion that result from female beauty. Ironically however, it is these very qualities that finally effectuate the happy resolution of the novel. In the preface to *Evelina*, Burney wrote that her protagonist was “a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty” (8), though to this point I have only been concerned with the latter part of this description. I turn now to the “obscure birth” of Evelina and its role in her social confusion, and eventual peace of mind. One of the reasons that Evelina has struggled so much with her sense of identity and her place in society—and that Sir Clement feels entitled to her—is that she has been raised without claim to her proper family name and fortune.

As I mentioned earlier, the eighteenth-century female body was invested with the power of parental lineage, as well as the economic and reproductive generation of heirs, and because Evelina’s name is missing, so too is her sense of identity.⁶³ Without the name to signify her body, Evelina’s emergence as a socially embodied woman cannot be complete. Evelina is lacking a name to ground her as a subject: without a name, her body

⁶³ Simons has also argued on this topic, insisting that “the question of name helps to lay bare the instability of female identity” (131).

is not a fixed sign of patriarchal lineage. Martha Brown has written of Evelina: "Because she is nobody and belongs to nobody, she may be anybody and may belong to anybody. Her quest for identity involves a series of moral tests and moral choices through which she proves herself worthy of the inheritance and name she has been denied" (32). The events of volume III attest to the fact that her conduct has been socially validated, so she is now eligible to take up her rightful place as the daughter of Sir John Belmont.

Though Villars, Lady Howard, and even the extravagant Mme Duval have all pleaded Evelina's case to Sir John, he continues to reject his daughter until the point when he is faced with her, and can no longer deny his child, for she bears in her countenance the legacy of her mother's beauty: "Yes, yes,' cried he, looking earnestly in my face, 'I see, I see thou art her child! she lives—she breathes—she is present to my view!—Oh God, that she indeed lived!—Go, child go,' added he, wildly starting, and pushing me from him, 'take her away, Madam,—I cannot bear to look at her!" (372; vol. III, letter xvii). The power of the female body is more clearly portrayed this scene more than any other in the novel. Sir John is unable to deny the body of his daughter as a mirror of his late wife, and the power of this recognition "almost deprived him of reason" (374; vol. III, letter xvii).

The importance of paternal acceptance can not be over-exaggerated in eighteenth-century domestic novels, since a woman's identity and social reception was inextricably linked with her father and his name. After word of her "true" name becomes public, those with whom Evelina has lately been keeping company addresses her with more care and concern than they have hitherto. However, unlike her earlier self, Evelina is not impressed by their flattery: "There seemed something so little-minded in this sudden change of conduct, that, from an involuntary emotion of contempt, I thanked her, with a

coldness like her own, and declined her offer" (380; vol. III, letter xix). Evelina has learned to conduct herself like a proper woman, and to value sincerity over social artifice. She does eventually agree to join Lady Louisa and Mrs. Beaumont, but only because she sees the embarrassment that her refusal has caused her future sister-in-law. No longer does Evelina require the sanction of Rev. Villars, or the emendatory gaze of Lord Orville to regulate her conduct; she has learned to perceive, decide, and act for herself.

With a proper name attached to such a disciplined body, Evelina's once pure innocence has been replaced by patriarchal innocence, the willingness to advocate self-denial and suppression, in pursuit of social harmony. Though Evelina has more than proven herself, and Sir John has accepted her as his daughter, he finds it too painful to look upon his only legitimate child, seeing in her face the woman he once loved, but cast aside, causing her suffering and death—Belmont tells Evelina he is "thy father the destroyer of thy mother" (385; vol. III, letter xix). The goodness in Evelina's heart is so overwhelming to Sir John, that he again sends her from him, but as a testament to his paternal affection and her moral worth in his eyes, he blesses Evelina, and arranges that Lord Orville and she should be married forthwith. Now that she is the complete package of socially embodied womanhood, Evelina makes it clear that she will devote the rest of her life to acknowledging the goodness and nobility of her new husband, saying "Oh Lord Orville!—it shall be the sole study of my happy life, to express, better than by words, the sense I have of your exalted benevolence, and greatness of mind!" (387; vol. III, letter xix). Unfortunately, Evelina's sense of socially required behaviour leads her to pursue not her own happiness, but that of her husband. Her embodiment is faulty, because it is based on social propriety and not on personal fulfilment.

Fanny Burney's first novel, *Evelina*, is in many ways a reflection of the philosophy of its young author and her not-yet-fully realized critique of eighteenth-century British society. Nonetheless, Burney makes a number of important statements in this novel with respect to the cultivation of female identity, and the influence of social interaction on the female body. The many outrageous and embarrassing episodes to which the heroine must be exposed imply the dangers of both female knowledge and ignorance, beauty, and artlessness. The novel is a study of worldly experience and its impact on the perception, projection, and behaviour of a young woman in society, and implicit in this discussion is a rejection of "natural" female modesty in favor of disciplined prudence. By having Evelina walk a fine line between knowing and not knowing the sexually predatory nature of patriarchal gender politics, how to control herself within that system, and even how to claim a space for herself without her father's name, Burney presents a quiet, yet eloquent, expression of the struggles of female identity and embodiment in a man's world. No longer a *tabula rasa*, Evelina is now embodied by the conflicts and benefits of experiencing the shame, beauty, intelligence, and family of the female body.

Masquerading Bodies: Physical Deception and Hidden Illness in *Belinda*

The social body has been shown to be the product of careful cultivation, both in eighteenth-century women's novels, and throughout the generations following. In his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," Foucault wrote of the human body, that it is "the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)" and that the role of genealogy "is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (148). In Maria Edgeworth's 1801 novel, *Belinda*, the narrative action is based upon just such a genealogy: on the history of the female body as experienced in the social world. Edgeworth presents the female body as "lived" through the major experiences of beauty, illness, normative and dysfunctional social behaviour, emotional suffering, and masquerade. *Belinda* incorporates a multiplicity of institutional discourses regarding the female body and embodiment, among them: medicine, philosophy, marriage, conduct books, and Wollstonecraftian feminism.

Unlike earlier novels of sensibility, however, the titular character is not the character most in danger in the novel; Belinda is the central support around which the worldly characters wildly move in search of meaning, healing, and wholeness. By centring Belinda amongst almost exclusively pathological male and female bodies, Edgeworth is able to show the destructive power of physical and social deception on morality and social harmony. Edgeworth bases her social criticism on the belief that pathology and artifice have become normalized in the discourse of social interaction, and posits that only the entrance of a new moral character, someone self-aware, autonomous, and unsusceptible

to the attractions of dissipation and vanity, can help the other characters to recognize their faults, and help effect the reformation of physical order, and social decorum.

Belinda's power lies in her rational self-understanding, which makes evident the artificiality, pain, and weakness of the "social" body of the other main female character, Lady Delacour. The novel is a warning against duplicity of character, of allowing a social persona to hide a "true" self. More than that, *Belinda* is a didactic novel that conveys to its readers the necessity of self-understanding, moderation, and the interconnection of mind and body: it is, at its heart, a novel of embodiment. In order to contrast the worldly dissipation and physical deception of Lady Delacour and Mrs. Freke to the rational self-assurance of Belinda and Lady Anne Percival, Edgeworth opens her novel by shaking the foundations of society on which femininity is constructed. Edgeworth establishes the weakness of British fashionable society—called by Lady Delacour "this most stupid of all worlds" (13)—through her treatment of mercenary marriages, the duplicity of public and private personae, and the masquerade.

The narrative opens with an introduction to the mercenary marriage market, through Belinda's aunt, Selina Stanhope. Mrs. Stanhope's goal is marry her nieces off to men of fortune greater than their own. Such a "happy" situation is what Mrs. Stanhope is planning for her last single niece, Belinda Portman, though she is not "such a docile pupil" (7; vol. I, ch. i) as her cousins. Mrs. Stanhope is established as a character full of art, who uses her social acumen to attach Belinda to the affections of Lady Delacour, sending her niece to spend a season in London under the guidance of this fashionable lady. Belinda is sent to find a good (rich) husband, with the following words of advice from her aunt: "Your own good sense must make you aware, my dear, that from her ladyship's

situation and knowledge of the world, it will always be proper upon all subjects of conversation, for her to lead and you to follow" (9; vol. I, ch. i). The irony of this statement is made clear throughout the next four chapters of the novel, as Belinda quickly learns from Lady Delacour's own mistakes about the dangers of marrying without love and respect, and passing too much time in social dissipation. Edgeworth suggests her intended irony, writing: "It is sometimes fortunate, that the means, which are taken to produce certain effects upon the mind, have a tendency directly opposite to what is expected" (9; vol. I, ch. i). Rather than convincing her that a mercenary marriage is a profitable and happy situation for women, Mrs. Stanhope's manoeuvres and Lady's Delacour's example teach Belinda the emptiness, and indeed, peril, of making such a commitment. More importantly, the poor examples set by these two women teach Belinda, whose "mind had never been roused to much reflection" and who had "in general acted but as a puppet in the hands of others" (10; vol. I, ch. i), the need to think and act for herself.⁶⁴

Being accepted into the circle of Lady Delacour, a woman noted for her wit and beauty, was considered by those around her to be tremendously fortunate for Belinda. Lady Delacour is the embodiment of the fashionable lady, admired and courted for her "*bel esprit*" and is initially seen by Belinda as the most intriguing person in the world. Newspaper stories circulated about Lady Delacour's parties, her clothes, her witticisms, and she was seemingly the ideal woman in fashionable society. However, Belinda's arrival at the Delacour household in London marks the beginning of her education on the nature of the social female body and its physical and mental sufferings. Not long after

⁶⁴ Kathryn Kirkpatrick makes a similar point in her introduction to *Belinda*, writing: "Faced with these glaring limits in the judgment of others [Lady Delacour, Lady Anne Percival, Mrs. Stanhope], Belinda decides to think for herself." (x)

arriving in London, Belinda “began to see through the thin veil, with which politeness covers domestic misery” and realized that “[a]broad, and at home, lady Delacour was two different persons” (10; vol. I, ch. i). This domestic misery is brought on by an unhappy marriage, entered into as a form of revenge against a former lover, leaving the Delacours without love or friendship. Lady Delacour hid her unhappiness in economic extravagance and social dissipation, living a separate life from her husband. Lady Delacour’s character is particularly interesting because it humanizes the archetypal disembodied coquette by showing Lady Delacour’s suffering and her awareness of unhappiness. Accordingly, in private, Lady Delacour seems, to Belinda, “absorbed in thoughts seemingly of the most painful nature,” and yet in public, she “shone the soul and spirit of pleasure and frolic” (11; vol. I, ch. i).

It becomes obvious to Belinda that Lady Delacour is suffering emotionally and physically, which is no doubt a combination of the unhealthy lifestyle she leads, and the constant role of “mistress of the revels” that she is forced to assume in public. In his 1747 treatise, *De Regimine Mentis*, physician Jerome Gaub writes of the psychological and physical dangers of fashionable society on upper class women and young men:

Shall I speak of the harm [...] inflict[ed] on their bodies when they allow themselves to be urged on by the breath of light spirits to neglect their health and contrive a whole mode of life completely dependent on the changing fashions of the times, to make daily alterations in dress, ornaments, food, social intercourse and amusements that are rarely more in keeping with moderation than over-indulgence? (Rather 128; II.13)

It is not surprising that the external forces acting on Lady Delacour—particularly public

opinion—leads to her melancholy, since Rather's synthesis of *De Regimine Mentis* suggests that "both men and women of this class [*les gens du monde*] are far more subject to emotional disturbances giving rise to harmful effects in the body" (130).

Perhaps the main reason that women in fashionable society were so predisposed to emotional disturbances was the performativity of their social bodies, denying personal agency and self-expression. Katrin Burlin has suggested the "dangerously close correspondence between social and stage performance" (70), which is exemplified by the duplicity of Lady Delacour. The performance of gender is also experienced through the masquerade, which also addresses self-expression by allowing inner sentiment to be revealed without fear of social sanction: as suggested by Henry Fielding in 1728, and reiterated by Terry Castle, "masque the face [...] unmasque the mind" ("Culture" 157).

There has been a profusion of literature written on the eighteenth-century masquerade in the last two decades, because, as Craft-Fairchild has suggested,⁶⁵ it represents the repressive artificiality of "femininity." Craft-Fairchild posits that the masquerade helped to prove that gender was artificial, because it "emphasized that the 'domestic woman' was a culturally produced category" (174). Masquerade offers a scene in which women both attempted to escape the self, and recognized the impossibility of such an endeavour. When the masquerade costumes—those of the tragic and comic muse—appear at the Delacour household, Lady Delacour takes the advice of her waiting-woman, Marriott: "I ought to be tragedy [...] upon the notion that people always succeed best when they take characters diametrically opposite to their own" (19; vol. I, ch. ii).

⁶⁵ Craft-Fairchild has argued that "Female masquerade in the later woman's fiction [of the eighteenth-century] becomes emblematic not of female freedom and desire, but of limitation and oppression" (167).

Ironically, however, Lady Delacour most represents tragedy throughout the novel, so it is most fitting that she switches costumes with Belinda at Mrs. Singleton's, taking on the role of the comic muse, since it is most opposite to her "true" self. At the masquerade, Lady Delacour refuses to let down the guard of her social persona, using comedy as a physical and psychological mask to hide her domestic misery, even from herself. Proving the impact of physical deception on the mental condition of the self was a common literary invocation of the masquerade, leading Castle to argue that "eighteenth-century culture as a whole might also be termed without exaggeration, a culture of travesty. Especially in London, the manipulation of appearances was both a private strategy and a social institution" ("Culture" 157).

The private strategy adopted by Lady Delacour is represented not only in the masquerade, but also in her daily beauty regime, designed to hide her physical illness. As she says to Belinda: "[e]xcuse me for showing you the simple truth; well dressed falsehood is a personage much more *presentable*" (62; vol. I, ch. iv). Lady Delacour's deception also plays upon the convention of external appearance signifying internal worth, as Schofield and Macheski write in their introduction to *Fetter'd or Free*: "though the facade of the female most frequently present to the outside world—that of passivity and subordination—is often assumed to be the real female self, an exploration of the feminine literature of any period reveals the fallacy of such an assumption" (1).

The social implication of masquerade supports Fielding's comment on the unmasking of the mind, as it is the confusion regarding Belinda's masked identity that allows her to see herself, and women in general, as viewed through the male gaze. Clarence Hervey and company offer a scathing criticism of Belinda's character, with the

former saying, “Do you think I don’t see as plainly as any of you, that Belinda Portman’s a composition of art and affectation?” (26; vol. I, ch. ii). In truth, Belinda is exactly the opposite, but the power of appearance is such that Hervey and the other men judge her by the way she has been presented by her aunt Stanhope, and by her beauty, which they assume to be contrived, instead of by her conduct and words. Fashionable society has become so regulated by artifice and deception that people are no longer able to distinguish between reality and appearance.

This scene at the masquerade also allows the men to openly criticize what they assume to be Belinda’s aim in London: attaining a mercenary marriage, in the style of the other Stanhope cousins. The largest part of the men’s criticism is based on women’s ability to use their cultivated talents of beauty, music, and dancing to trap a husband, and exploit his economic power. Edgeworth is clearly condemning the kind of decorative female education traditionally suggested in conduct books, and long since the subject of vitriolic criticism by Mary Astell, Catherine Macauley, Mary Hays, Hannah More, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

In this case, the masquerade reveals truth, because Hervey has so obviously misjudged Belinda by focusing on surface appearance and speculation that he mistakes her for Lady Delacour, and reveals his thoughts about Miss Portman. This scene at the masquerade not only allows for the revelation of truth, but also reinforces the dangers of judging female worth on physical appearance alone. This argument is supported by Castle’s work, *Masquerade and Civilization*, in which she suggests that a masquerade scene is “in the larger social sense [...] a meditation on cultural classification and the organizing dialectical schema of eighteenth-century life” (6). By criticizing the bases on

which gender is judged, through exposing the deceptiveness of physical appearance, Edgeworth undermines the social construction of femininity, and suggests the possibility of a new, morally embodied, sense of female experience.

The masquerade, therefore, allows Belinda the opportunity to hear the true thoughts of men about her, her family, and the current system of marriage, allowing her to experience from a new perspective the artificial standards governing femininity in eighteenth-century fashionable society. This scene serves as an education for Belinda, who, like Evelina, resolves to modify her behaviour so that she is not considered in the same light as her shallow, uneducated cousins, but is valued for her own moral worth. This masquerade episode, however, also serves to reinforce that a woman's value was almost exclusively decided by men, suggesting what Craft-Fairchild has called a "disempowering capitulation to patriarchal strictures that posit female subordination" (172). By internalizing their roles as the comic and tragic muse, respectively, Lady Delacour and Belinda adopt their costumes as social personae throughout the novel, which suggests a potential struggle between the private and public senses of self. Belinda's tragic muse is based on sober judgment and propriety, her own moral conditions, and so she is able to honestly represent her mind and spirit in her public projection of self; in Lady Delacour, Edgeworth exposes the dangers of disassociation between public perception and "true" identity, a danger which has both physical and psychological ramifications.

At the masquerade, Lady Delacour is carrying out a two-fold deception: her comic muse costume hides the misery of her mind, while her dress and make-up hide the illness that is ravaging her body. The fact that both Lady Delacour's mind and body need to be

masked reinforces not only the interconnection between these two aspects of lived experience, but also their ability to act upon each other, causing disease. Duden has written that “[d]isease was to be seen as a mental and psychic disturbance of the relation to one’s environment and fellow human beings” (98), and Lady Delacour’s illness is certainly no exception.

Her ladyship actually tells Belinda that her misery has stemmed from a rejection of self, in favour of the world: “If I had served myself, with half the zeal that I have served the world, I should not now be thus forsaken!” (30; vol. I, ch. ii). Lady Delacour’s comments on social acceptance stand opposed to those presented in *Evelina*, another novel of a young woman’s entrance into fashionable London society: Evelina is taught to sublimate her own emotional and physical responses to conform with normalized social conditions, while in *Belinda* it is made clear that these conditions are those *most likely* to damage the self. Consequently, Lady Delacour’s life of fashion and dissipation has resulted, not surprisingly, in both regret and physical illness, although it is the latter that finally triggers her ladyship’s consciousness of her role in the world and of the artificiality of her social persona.

After revealing her diseased, “cancerous,” breast, Lady Delacour tells Belinda that it is the manifestation of her regret of a wasted life: ““Yes, pity me, for what you have seen; and a thousand times more, for that which you cannot see—my mind is eaten away like my body, by incurable disease—inveterate remorse—remorse for a life of folly—of folly which has brought on me all the punishments of guilt”” (32; vol. I, ch. ii). In the proceeding chapter, Lady Delacour relates the story of her life, exposing the degree of her

socially pathological behaviour—directly responsible for her diseased breast—and serving as a cautionary moral tale for Belinda.

There are three central, and interconnected, aspects to Lady Delacour's life that cause her mental suffering and subsequent physical illness, and which imply Edgeworth's social criticism: her marriage, her rejection of maternity, and her adoption of male social attributes and power. I have already suggested Edgeworth's criticism of the mercenary marriage, which was a commonplace in women's writing by this time, and which she reinforces in the story of Lady Delacour. Lord Delacour had lost all his fortune at the Newmarket horse races, and, being in an economic "consumption," Lady Delacour tells Belinda that "the heiress lozenge is a specific [treatment] in some consumptions" (36; vol. I, ch. iii). The unhappiness that results from the Delacour's mercenary marriage—compounded by Lady Delacour's desire to provoke the man she truly loved—results in a situation suggested by Astell in her *Reflections upon Marriage* over ninety years earlier. Astell wrote that "He who Marries himself to a Fortune only, must expect no other satisfaction than that can bring him, but let him not say that Marriage but that his own Covetous or Prodigal Temper, has made him unhappy" (Hill, *First* 95).

The Delacour marriage proceeded to be a daily power struggle, over money and control of their respective spouses. This kind of adversarial marriage, common in British society, denied the possibility of self-fulfilment to both spouses, and undermined rational and spiritual development in favour of dissipation and external pleasure. By focusing her attention on fashionable society, extravagance, beauty, and vanity, Lady Delacour has allowed her "real" self to be subsumed by her public role, causing her to reject experiences that might have led to personal happiness.

In her 1792 work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft suggests that one ramification of this unhappy style of marriage, and its fundamental devaluing of female self-worth, is the rejection of motherhood, which was still considered to be the most significant experience in a woman's life. She writes:

when a woman is admired for her beauty, and suffers herself to be so far intoxicated by the admiration she receives, as to neglect to discharge the indispensable duty of a mother, she sins against herself by neglecting to cultivate an affection that would equally tend to make her useful and happy. (232)

Though much of Edgeworth's subtextual criticism in *Belinda* rejects the radical feminism of Wollstonecraft and the Jacobins, her treatment of Lady Delacour's maternity is closely in keeping with the argument presented in *Vindication*.

Throughout her three pregnancies, Lady Delacour's assertion of public will affects her role as a mother, and her eventual rejection of her only living child. Again, Edgeworth criticizes the role of public persona in the denial of the self, and the power of social influence—fashion—upon women's bodies. The Delacours' first child was a stillborn son, and, as I suggested in my discussion of medical interpretations of pregnancy in chapter one, the thoughts and behaviour of the mother were understood to influence the condition of the fetus, suggesting that the cabalistic female body possessed both the power of life and of death.⁶⁶ The second child was a daughter, described as "a poor diminutive, sickly thing" (42; vol. I, ch. iii). Since Lady Delacour conducted herself according to the rules of polite society, rejecting her own internal value, it is not surprising that her child was born unhealthy, and that this illness was perpetuated by

⁶⁶ For additional commentary on this subject, see Duden 8.

Lady Delacour suckling her daughter, not out of love, but in accordance with “the fashion at this time” (42; vol. I, ch. iii).

The result of breast feeding was seen by her ladyship as “so much the worse for the poor brats” (42; vol. I, ch. iii), which indicates the decided lack of maternal feeling cultivated in Lady Delacour’s fashionable sentiments. She writes of the experience: “after the novelty was over, I became heartily sick of the business” (42; vol. I, ch. iii).

Wollstonecraft wrote in *Vindication* that breast feeding was a “natural” female behaviour, and that it was necessary in order for women to appreciate their female bodies.

Ironically, fashion is dictated by “nature,” which is itself determined by the cultural ideology at a given time. Thus, Lady Delacour’s decision to breast feed is a cultural projection of “natural” femininity: it is not a personal choice, nor is it based on the health of the infant, but is instead a reflection of status and social conformity.

Lady Delacour engaged in the activity for the status it afforded her in the public eye, and to preserve her reputation as a “natural” mother, though she says that “If I had put it out to nurse, I should have been thought by my friends an unnatural mother—but I should have saved its life” (42; vol. I, ch. iii). The power of public perception was such that Lady Delacour was willing to sacrifice the life of her own daughter to the preservation of her social reputation. Her ladyship was not totally insensible, though, for she felt the suffering of losing this child—though she hid her sorrow, just as she hides her illness—indicating that her sensibility was not lacking, but that it took a subservient position to public opinion.

By deciding to send her third child, Helena, out to nurse, and to be raised at a boarding school, Lady Delacour painfully acknowledged her incapability to properly care

for, and educate a daughter, while possessed of this social persona, which, ironically, offered her the only solace from an unhappy marriage, and a childless home. Lady Delacour acknowledges to Belinda: "I wanted only to explain to you why it was, that when I was weary of the business, I still went on in a course of dissipation. You see I had nothing at home, either in the shape of husband or children, to engage by affections" (43; vol. I, ch. iii). Wollstonecraft has argued that "rational fellowship" in marriage, rather than adversarial and mercenary encounters, would allow women to value their intrinsic worth, which would in turn make them better wives and mothers.⁶⁷

Lady Delacour's rejection of her maternal duty, therefore, is a reaction not only to her unhappy marriage, but also to her devaluation of her body, her worth as a mother, and a woman. In search of a better sense of self, Lady Delacour turns to male social behaviour, still searching for experiences to awaken her own consciousness of a *lived* female body, and to drown her emotional suffering. In contrast, I suggest that physical dissipation can offer no lasting solution to Lady Delacour's mental suffering, since the interrelation of mind and body is such that if one part of the self is damaged, the other is necessarily adversely affected. Supporting this line of argument, Rather has written that in the eighteenth century, "it seemed plain to most of them that the will and the emotions did in one way or another produce far-reaching and sometimes harmful or even fatal changes in the body[...]" (1). Thus, when Lady Delacour looks to masculine behaviour to supplant her suffering maternal femininity, she is bound for disappointment and danger.

⁶⁷ Wollstonecraft writes: "We should then love them [men] with true affection, because we should learn to respect ourselves; and the peace of mind of a worthy man would not be interrupted by the idle vanity of his wife, nor the babes sent to nestle in a strange bosom, having never found a home in their mother's" (241).

Lady Delacour quickly finds a “bosom friend” to teach her the finer parts of what she admits to be Amazon-like⁶⁸ behaviour (34; vol. I, ch. iii). Significantly, Edgeworth chooses to name this friend, Mrs. Freke, which signals to her readers that this character is socially transgressive, and thus not worthy of emulation⁶⁹—and certainly not a worthy advisor on Lady Delacour’s quest for embodiment. Mrs. Freke is described as having “a wild oddity in her countenance” and being “the first who brought [...] *harum scarum* manners into fashion” (43; vol. I, ch. iii). The continual reinforcement of Mrs. Freke’s wildness suggests the danger of unleashed femininity, which, when combined with masculine reasoning, leads to the “dashing audacity” (43; vol. I, ch. iii) that almost undoes Lady Delacour: in the words of Barker-Benfield, “the friend whom [Lady Delacour] thus took to her bosom was the cause of its near destruction” (388). The most significant, and thereby transgressive, event that causes Lady Delacour’s physical illness is intimately connected to gender, politics, and power, all of which were favourite topics of Mrs. Harriet Freke, and considered largely taboo issues for “polite” women.⁷⁰ Supported by “all that the combined force of vanity and hatred could inspire” (53; vol. I, ch. iv), Lady Delacour launched into a political skirmish with her enemy, Mrs. Luttridge (significantly, a friend of Lord Delacour’s) that ended in a public battle of wits being transformed, through the machinations of Mrs. Freke, into an actual pistol duel. Lady Delacour was convinced to act, from what she calls a “prodigious deference for the

⁶⁸ For a discussion of Amazonianism within the mind/body paradigm, see Schwarz.

⁶⁹ Edgeworth constructs in Mrs. Freke, a character embodying major (negative) stereotypes about women: she is crass, uneducated, “vindictive” (in the style of Wollstonecraft), frequently in disguise, plotting, and self-assured—she is a veritable dumping-ground of abject female “nature.”

⁷⁰ Part of the characterization of Mrs. Freke is based upon a criticism of Mary Wollstonecraft and her radical Jacobin politics. This connection is most clearly established in the ironic chapter called “Rights of Woman” (vol. II, ch. xvii) and has been noted by most of the scholars writing on *Belinda*. Edgeworth, and many other moderate women writers, sought to distance themselves from the radical nature of Wollstonecraft’s writings, advocating a mediating position between her style of feminism and the complacency of traditional “weak” social constructions of femininity.

masculine superiority, as I thought it, of Harriet's understanding" (54; vol. I, ch.iv). We do see, however, that Lady Delacour realized the folly of this adventure, saying that "there seemed to me to be no physical, and less moral necessity for my fighting this duel, but I did not venture to reason on a point of honour with my spirited second" (55; vol. I, ch.iv). In showing Lady Delacour's ability to reason properly, Edgeworth is supporting the value of the lady's mind, and potential for rational thought, and is suggesting that, if she rejected being ruled by social forces in favour of self-direction and interpretation, she would be a right-minded woman. It is, therefore, Lady Delacour's unconsciousness of her own power of rationality and conduct that continues to allow her to be manipulated by the *masculine*⁷¹ Mrs. Freke, to the detriment of both mind and body.

When Lady Delacour arrives at the duel with a great degree of trepidation, she hopes to be delivered from such a fatal endeavour; the reprieve she receives changes the course of her life. Upon test firing their pistols into the air, Lady Delacour's was overloaded, and the recoil caused the pistol to strike her ladyship's breast. Kathryn Kirkpatrick has argued, in her introduction to *Belinda*, that "the masculine practise of duelling (significantly performed in male clothing) literally recoils on the female body" and that Lady Delacour's injury and subsequent suffering "may easily be read as the punishments meted out by the body to a woman with too much public ambition, and, we may add, too much power, both social and economic" (xvi). While I acknowledge the validity of Kirkpatrick's argument, I propose that the scene is not entirely negative for Lady Delacour: for, in stopping her body, the pistol wound sparks her consciousness, and begins her *lived* experience in the body.

⁷¹ According to Kirkpatrick, the concern about the *masculine* woman is also a reference to Wollstonecraft, who "exposes the threat of the masculine woman as a bogey, an imaginary terror that employs fear to keep women from improving their condition" (xx).

Disease is a central concern in the medical discussions of mind and body in the eighteenth-century, particularly female illness. The pervasiveness of hysteric conditions, perpetuated by the culture of sensibility's idealizing of the weakened female nervous system, makes the study of female disease not only a personal medical history, but also the history of the cultural inscription, and destruction, of women's bodies. Denise Riley has explored the extent to which the female body is a product of cultural inscription, and writes: "women's bodies become women's bodies only as they are caught up in the tyrannies, the overwhelming incursions of both nature and man" (105). Lady Delacour's body becomes her own—undeniable to her self—through the tyranny of socially deviant behaviour.

The bruised breast, a symbol reminiscent of the Amazon warrior woman,⁷² marks Lady Delacour as a transgressive character, which she sees as the ultimate punishment for living contrary to the prescribed conditions of femininity and her own better judgment. It is particularly symbolic that Lady Delacour's injury should be to her breast, as it is inscribed with triple cultural significance: it is representative of female sexuality, of the heart and soul, and of the nurturing, nourishing, source of motherhood. Kathryn Schwarz has also suggested the symbolic significance of the breast in early modern medicine, insisting, "as in the blazon, the breast in medical discourse offers an index to the rest of the body, particularly the body below" (152). Because the breast is also representative of the internal aspects of female thought, it is to be expected that Lady Delacour would keep her illness well hidden, through physical deception, to prevent the wide world from judging her as a weak-spirited woman. So strong was her desire to conceal the illness, that

⁷² Barker-Benfield refers to it as "Lady Delacour's diseased breast-cum-Amazonianism" (387).

Lady Delacour trusted her health only to a “secret” doctor who prescribed laudanum not only to dull the pain, but also to render her almost senseless on many occasions.

It is the denial of sensitivity, and experience, that most signifies the struggle in Lady Delacour during this period; as she begins to suffer in her body, the extent of her mental pain is also accentuated, but rather than treating her mind, the doctor attempts to suppress her feeling, which acts upon her body, thus perpetuating the problem. Rather, writing on Gaub’s *De Regimine Mentis*, writes of this common eighteenth-century conundrum: “not only were the antecedent causes of many derangements of the body thought to lie in the mind but, more specifically, emotional states were believed to influence susceptibility to certain contagious and epidemic diseases, and even to influence the clinical course of cancer” (17). The more Lady Delacour’s mind suffers, the more her body becomes cancerous; it is at this stage of her struggle to make sense of a psychosomatic illness that Lady Delacour’s body begins to be influenced by its most significant, and its only non-destructive, social force—Miss Belinda Portman.

As I suggested earlier, Belinda has learned from the examples of her cousins, and Lady Delacour, deciding to think and act for herself after recognizing that she is the only one capable of guiding her own conscience. Belinda explains to Lady Delacour, that, contrary to the beliefs of Mrs. Freke, “prudence, not courage, is the virtue of our sex” (321; vol. II, ch. xxiii). As such, women must be directed by morality in order to properly project moral worth, rather than aiming for superficial praise of physical appearance. The guiding principle of morality is reason, which stems from a clear sense of personal virtue and consciousness of one’s role in the world. This consciousness is itself directly related to the interaction between mind and body. This situation has been

explored by Dennis Todd, who quotes from the early eighteenth-century text, *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*,⁷³ as he writes: “the ‘power of thinking, self moving, and governing the whole machine’ of the body resides in consciousness, which is itself but ‘the result from the mechanical composition of the whole animal’” (129). Consciousness, by allowing Belinda to internalize social experience, helps form her sense of identity, and of the way she wishes to be perceived in the world. This combination of consciousness and the influences of both mind and body suggests the ideal of female embodiment presented in the eighteenth century. It is this consciousness that Lady Delacour rejects, but which Edgeworth continues to show that she has: Lady Delacour does not want to know what she knows.

If Mrs. Freke was the representative of negative, “masculine,” womanhood, Belinda incorporates a balance between rationality, sensibility, and feminine virtue, to become the epitome of the modern female body—in essence, not just public presentation. Belinda’s body is no less culturally inscribed than those of Mrs. Freke and Lady Delacour, but rather than relying on superficial corporeality which is ultimately destructive to the body, Belinda incorporates intellectual and emotional factors, to present a more holistic sense of what it means to be a woman in society, and in private. It is the sense of wholeness implied by Belinda that most represents the modern female body as described by Nancy Armstrong: “The modern female body comprised a grammar of subjectivity capable of regulating desire, pleasure, the ordinary care of the body, the conduct of courtship, the division of labour, and the dynamic of family relationships” (95).

⁷³ For citation information, see Todd 303.

We get a sense of Belinda's comfort in her own body by the fact that she is never shown in a state of frenzy, or confusion—contrary to characters like Evelina—nor does she feel it necessary—or acceptable—to deceive others by physical artifice, or behavioural affectation: she tells Lady Delacour: “I detest it [deception] from my soul.” (206; vol. II, ch. xv). Belinda's embodiment, and resulting awareness of society as an artificial construction, is fostered by her calm rationalization of situations, which stand directly opposed to the constant movement of Lady Delacour, which, to Belinda, “seemed to border on insanity” (203; vol. II, ch. xv). As suggested by Carol Houlihan Flynn, “this principle of motion disallows sustained interiority” (161), which once again reaffirms that mind and body necessarily interact upon the cultural body, and its ability to project health and balance, as well as illness. Even if Belinda did not see Lady Delacour's diseased breast, she would still perceive her suffering, by seeing such atypical female behaviour in contrast to her own calm and presence of mind.

Belinda's unwavering rationality is presented as an exception to the rule of British fashionable society, an idea which is supported by the medical literature of the period, and the prevalence of nervous disorders in the culture of sensibility. In *De Regimine Mentis*, Dr. Gaub asks: “yet how many persons, I ask, are calm and steadfast enough not to be overwhelmed at some time by the unbelievable number of chance accidents to which we are continually exposed” (Rather 131; IV.14). Edgeworth shows us that Belinda is just such a person, making her the ideal woman to effect the cure of Lady Delacour's conflicted sense of femininity: Lady Delacour says to Belinda “you have such an admirable presence of mind, nothing disconcerts you! You are equal to all situations [...]” (203; vol. II, ch. xv). While the secret doctor associated with Mrs. Freke leads Lady

Delacour to even greater physical pain, a lack of rational sensation, and further deception, Belinda's presence of mind leads her to suggest a doctor who can treat both mind and body, curing the destructive effects of social dissipation from the inside out.

So great was Lady Delacour's anxiety about public appearance, that she was willing to submit to a secret operation to remove her "cancerous" breast, performed by an unlicensed physician, so that her friends, enemies, and her husband (who ambiguously fits neither of the other categories) would not see her physical and emotional illness. When Belinda first suggests that Lady Delacour consider consulting Dr. X— regarding her condition, and spend time thinking through her course of treatment, her ladyship retorts by saying: "If you have any humanity, you will not force me to reflect—whilst I yet live I must *keep it up* with incessant dissipation—the tetotum⁷⁴ keeps upright only while it spins [...]" (122; vol. I, ch. ix).

Belinda's unwillingness to be complicit in Lady Delacour's public and private deception causes a rift between the two characters, causing the former to retreat to the "rational" sanctuary of the Percival family in Oakly-park. These scenes are perhaps the least subtle aspect of Edgeworth's narrative, serving as a juxtaposition against the Delacour family while also reinforcing to Lady Delacour the kind of marital felicity she might have experienced had she married the man she truly loved—Mr. Henry Percival. Further integrating the two representative families, the Percivals take over the responsibility for raising Helena Delacour when she is not at her boarding school. Thus, Lady Anne Percival truly is an alternate version of Lady Delacour, representing the rationality, marital happiness, spirituality, and maternity that are absent in the latter, and

⁷⁴ *tetotum*: a die with a spindle which is spun like a top (Kirkpatrick 492).

which Belinda hopes to cultivate in her. What Belinda must first accomplish, however, is to “sooth this haughty spirit—all other hope [...] is in vain.” (123; vol. I, ch. ix).

Since Lady Delacour is so resistant to discarding her mask of social dissipation and the jealousy and pettiness associated with it, she is unable to trust Belinda completely, and is therefore unwilling to relinquish to her friend the power of mind and body—it is really not hers to give, since society clearly has this authority over Lady Delacour. Deception on the part of the Delacours’ servants eventually drives a wedge between the suspicious Lady Delacour and her artless friend, Belinda, causing the latter to leave her ladyship to her own devices until she is ready accept rational, honest assistance. Edgeworth is suggesting the difficulties encountered by women trying to experience their bodies in an embodied fashion, since it requires a degree of self-reflection and vulnerability that was largely socially suppressed in women.⁷⁵ This difficulty was compounded by the cultural misperceptions about the female body, and the experience of *living* in the body—often expressed by women through physical pain, like that associated with reproductive functions. Duden has written that eighteenth-century women’s bodies “emerge as the expression of a suffering that is related on in oral form; it is an undescribed, undefined, undefinable body of which they speak” (182). Eventually, as the time of the secret surgery approaches, Lady Delacour realizes the goodness and resolve of Belinda’s heart and mind, and calls for her to pacify her ladyship’s mental suffering, confusion, and loneliness. Belinda—being the steadfast, rational friend—hurries to her side.

⁷⁵ This statement is reflected by Janet Todd’s comment that I quoted with respect to *The Female Quixote*: “a woman’s destiny is not self-contemplation and significance but contingency and marriage.” (147)

Belinda finds a very different sentiment in Lady Delacour when she arrives back in London: her ladyship is willing to be counselled, and to unify her body and behaviour to represent her inner moral character. Lady Delacour says to Belinda:

If I survive this business [...] it is my firm intention to appear in a new character, or rather, to assert my real character. I will break through the spell of dissipation—I will at once cast off all the acquaintance that are unworthy of me [...] I can bear to be mortified for my own good [...] I am willing that the recovery of my moral health should be attributed to the salubrious air of Oakly-park. (292; vol. II, ch. xxi)

Belinda's willingness to assert her moral conviction, even though it meant being separated from her friend, shows Lady Delacour the power of good behaviour as a reforming quality, but, Belinda's real tool in bringing about the reformation of Lady Delacour's opinion is reintroducing Helena into her ladyship's affection, filling the "aching void" (43; vol. I, ch. iii) in her "diseased" bosom, and paving the way for emotional and physical healing.

True friendship and maternal affection—cultivated with Belinda's quiet, but persistent, encouragement—prepare Lady Delacour for the treatment of Dr. X— and prevent her from requiring the dangerous secret operation. We are told that "her ladyship's health rapidly improved under the skilful care of Dr. X—: it had been terribly injured by the ignorance and villainy of the wretch to whom she had so long and so rashly trusted" (315; vol. III, ch. xxiii). By taking the focus of attention away from a rather innocuous injury that had been maliciously exacerbated by a mercenary physician and centring treatment around social and emotional forces acting upon the body, Dr. X—'s

cure is more effective, because it is holistic: “Dr. X—, well aware that the passions have a powerful influence over the body, thought it full as necessary in some cases to attend to the mind as to the pulse [...] he was convinced that superstitious horrors hung upon his patients spirits, and affected her health” (316; vol. III, ch. xxiii).

Dr. X—’s treatment is almost exactly the same as the theory of mind/body medicine advocated forty years earlier by Gaub. In his 1763 lecture, Gaub asks is there anyone who does not now see that the physician has a double role in controlling the mind for the benefit of the body—on the one hand to amend or ward off such causes of disease are due to mental excess and on the other to relieve the ill by making good and skilful use of the mind’s curative faculties? (Rather 196: XXII.45)

This question might just as easily be asked by Edgeworth, since she certainly seems to be providing the proof of such a double-role, through both Dr. X— and Belinda. The result of treating both mind and body—through medicine and social influence—is easily noticed through Lady Delacour, for in removing her anxiety about public exposure, and lessening her reliance upon an artificial social persona, she is able to reconcile with her husband, and to make friends with the Percival family, and thus she “restore[s] her mind to ease and self-complacency” (316; vol. III, ch. xxiii). In healing Lady Delacour’s body and mind, Dr. X— also heals her social transgression, and returns her to a proper role as wife and mother.

While Lady Delacour’s transformation is by far the most dramatic—and substantial—with respect to a discussion of embodiment, it is also worth mentioning that Belinda’s self-guidance and moral benevolence influence other characters, as well. Lord

Delacour reformed his alcoholic and brutish ways, Mrs. Margaret Delacour softened her harshness toward Lady Delacour, Marriott became less authoritative and more supportive of her mistress, and Clarence Hervey was inspired to act upon his own laudable moral character to help Mr. Vincent, and to help Lady Delacour.

From his experiences with Belinda, Hervey also learns to value the rationality and virtue of women's minds, as well as their beauty, and in so doing, comes to see his own mistakes in educating and secluding Virginia Hartley to become his "ideal" wife.⁷⁶ Belinda's behaviour, juxtaposed to that of Lady Delacour, shows Hervey how to look beyond the superficiality of female beauty and to see that only weakness can come from forcing a woman to deny her own desires for the pleasure of men, or society.

Not only does Belinda's influence bring about the positive changes in a number of characters, but jealousy of her unwavering avocation of honesty and morality, and vengefulness resulting from her rejection of social dissipation and transgressive female behaviour causes the negative characters to act in ways that result in their punishments. Mrs. Luttridge, the long-time foe of Lady Delacour and friend of her husband, is punished when her propensity for gambling and dissipation also reveal to Mr. Hervey her deception and cheating at the tables. Hervey threatens to expose her as a cheater, and ruin her ever-important social reputation. Lord Delacour's servant Mr. Champfort is fired for his dishonesty, deception, and mean-spiritedness, and the "simple" maid is let go for her attempts to penetrate Lady Delacour's mysterious boudoir.

By far the most severe punishment is meted out to Mrs. Freke—and it is self-inflicted. Mrs. Freke swore vengeance against Belinda for refusing her friendship, and, as a

⁷⁶ Hervey chose to cultivate a wife just like Sophia, in Rousseau's *Emile* (1762). Rousseau's belief that women were designed to accommodate and please men was the subject of scathing criticism by eighteenth-century feminists; Edgeworth is adding her voice to a loud chorus of women rejecting traditional conduct books and social theories that suggest natural female subservience.

result of a spying episode gone wrong, she ends up permanently damaging her leg; Mrs. Freke is now forced to bear the physical scar of her social and emotional transgression, but unlike Lady Delacour, whose inner goodness cured her ailment, this woman's scar is permanent, and, ironically, will prevent her from further escapades in male dress.

What these resolutions have clearly illustrated is Edgeworth's social criticism and her rejection of cultural actions that, although they are widely accepted, deny the fundamental union between morality, mind, and body. The female characters who cling to masquerading social bodies instead of self-reflection are doomed to suffer public and personal pains. In contrast, the women who follow Belinda's lead and take steps to use consciousness and physical experience as tools to present their inner worth to the world are rewarded with happiness in spirit and socially acceptable relationships. *Belinda* can be seen as Edgeworth's response to a question posed by Gaub in 1763: "What shall I say of the tyranny of custom?" (Rather 197; XXIII.47). Tyranny precipitates consciousness, which in turn allows a person to choose whether to internalize the forces negatively acting on the body, or to resist artificial inscription by projecting thoughts and behaviours that advocate individuality and self-reflection.

Belinda's social body is not so much a mask as a mirror: the people who come in contact with her view their lives and thoughts in comparison to hers, and are able to see their distorted appearances as signs of their inner struggles. Belinda learns to think for herself, and to reject the destructive forces of social malleability and fashion by turning the gaze behind the mask inward rather than outward. By presenting a strong, holistic, principled, female body, Belinda revolutionizes her social circle without rejecting the

femininity intrinsic to her sense of self. Embodiment allows Belinda, and those around her, to become the mediating principle between the extremes of gender construction imposed by an over-reliance on physical appearance and social perception.

Epilogue

The aim of this project has been to show how eighteenth-century women writers dealt with the dawning of consciousness about the forces acting on the female body, and, consequently, shaping the role of women in society. It has explored how consciousness is attained through experience in the world—through physical and mental sensations. Consciousness reveals the artificiality of gender constructions of femininity while also showing that women are unable to remove themselves from this artificiality while remaining in society. Once influenced by institutional forces, the cultural inscription on the female body cannot be erased, but it can be suppressed and forced into normalized discourse, or face alienation from societal resources.

Ironically, this hard-won new sense of the female body in society—an awareness of a suffering, sentient body—is itself an abstraction, as we are never able to remove our bodies from the culture that creates us and allows for our consciousness. Rather than revealing the “true” and “natural” female body, these four novels chart the coping strategies of eighteenth-century women, in a struggle to navigate between the cultural and societal perception of them, and of their own experiences in the flesh. There is no transcendental world of the forms where the perfect female body—or any body at all—exists. We are by necessity dealing in abstraction, because culture is an artificial construction that allows humans to interact with one another.

As I suggested in the introduction, searching for a definite history of female embodiment is an exercise in futility if one is looking to find a “real” female body as a result. What this study has uncovered is the necessary conflict, pain, misinterpretation,

and artificiality of the female body emerging out of a culture of sensibility designed to deny an understanding of the body that is not male. It suggests the contingency of self-knowledge upon forces that are extraneous to the corporeal self—shame, the male gaze, constructions of beauty—and yet are experienced only through the body.

In *The Female Quixote*, Charlotte Lennox clearly reveals that basing female embodiment upon a female epistemological tradition and system of language will not allow for social autonomy and personal consciousness in a male world. The construction of body-based female archetypes is rooted in medical and didactic misinterpretations of sexuality and modesty that deny female intelligence and self-direction. By asserting her own desires and inverting the power structure of patriarchal society, Arabella becomes a character so socially transgressive that she is misinterpreted as a madwoman. Her behaviour interferes with the institution of marriage and the generation of heirs, and so the male characters continue to impose their will upon her, until her body is weakened and forced to comply to the force of a male construction of femininity.

Millenium Hall explores a variety of female narratives, which all centre on the dangers of physical appearance as a marker of moral worth, and the association of female embodiment with monstrosity. By rejecting the sensibility of social constructed female characters, the five protagonists of this novel assert their intellectual and spiritual value, and yet find themselves isolated within polite society. Scott explores the suffering of women who are forced into social obedience, and associates the plight of women with that of side-show freaks, commodified for male pleasure. The women's consciousness of the devalued role of women in society causes them to seek retirement away from the

penetrating and controlling male gaze, where they can live according to their own judgment and unified consciousness of mind and body.

In *Evelina*, Fanny Burney shows that the female consciousness that is possible in male society is at best an expression of passivity and discipline, and at its worst a destruction of individuality and freedom of expression. Burney explores the power of the male gaze in awakening self-knowledge through shame; this idea is central to Sartre's belief that consciousness stems from a sense of the world in relation to others. Burney shows her readers that the cultural conception of Woman is always a work in progress, it is a problematic conglomeration of sensation and interpretation, it is always a body seen by others, and it is felt by the self in relation to others. As in the theoretical Panopticon of Bentham and Foucault, it does not matter if there is a guardian watching over our engendered actions, because we come to do it ourselves: we internalize the social forces working on our bodies, we police ourselves and others, and we perpetuate the artificiality and performativity of gender.

Evelina reveals the process of becoming socially embodied, by disciplining the actions and expression of the female body, but in *Belinda*, Maria Edgeworth exposes this social conformity as a source of deception and illness. She argues that women can come to see the artificiality of their social persona through *lived* experience in the body, and by cultivating the true self through self-contemplation and virtuous behaviour. Though *Evelina* struggles to be what society wants her to be, Lady Delacour's experiences reveal the danger of allowing cultural expectations and perceptions to replace self-direction. By unmasking the artificiality and deception of eighteenth-century society, *Belinda* teaches the other characters in the novel that they must live according to their own desire and

sense of virtue: living in a society of falsity and dissipation is dangerous to the mental and physical health of women who are unable to see themselves as distinct from their social roles.

Contrary to *The Female Quixote*, when the socially transgressive female is “cured” of her embodiment by male persuasion, Edgeworth’s novel sees Lady Delacour educated by the good example, constancy and friendship of Belinda, with the doctor only serving as a support for this endeavours. Significantly though, Dr X— insists upon treating both Lady Delacour’s body and mind, which reinforces the point that has been made throughout the literature under consideration: knowledge of the female body is only part of what is required for embodiment and happiness. Corporeality must be accompanied by consciousness and rational thought in order to subvert dominant patriarchal ideology and prove the possibility for female autonomy. Mary Wollstonecraft’s comments of 1792 most eloquently express the message at the heart of the literature under consideration: “to become respectable, the exercise of their [women’s] understanding is necessary, there is no other foundation for independence of character; I mean explicitly to say that they must only bow to the authority of reason, instead of being the *modest* slaves of opinion” (126).

Each of these four novels helps its readers—both eighteenth-century and post-modern—to see beyond the superficiality of patriarchal gender constructions of women, to see the multiplicity, and richness of female experience, and to see, even in the most rigidly restrained social conditions, the possibility of subversion and of understanding the body to be a history of cultural internalization and experience in the lived—suffering, running, fainting, deformed, adored, adoring, masquerading, suppressing—female body.

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