

“The Tyranny of Custom”:

Charlotte Lennox’s Critiques of Eighteenth-Century English Gender Customs in Her Novels,

*Henrietta* (1758) and *Sophia* (1762)

by

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For my father, Michael Popp.

## Acknowledgements

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### Abstract

This thesis offers an examination of two of eighteenth-century female author Charlotte Lennox's lesser-known romance novels, *Henrietta* (1758) and *Sophia* (1762), in an attempt to piece together how Lennox's vision of ideal womanhood compares to the dominant vision of ideal womanhood depicted in eighteenth-century English conduct manuals. Lennox is commonly considered to be a fundamentally conservative female author – this thesis challenges this conception of Lennox. The central motivating questions for this thesis are: to what degree was Charlotte Lennox capable of both imagining and articulating a vision of women's independence within the confines of the conventions of the romance genre? And what shapes does this vision take in relation to the dominant gender norms of her period?

In an attempt to answer these questions and demonstrate that Lennox's novels are not as conservative as they seem at first glance, Chapter I of this thesis, drawing upon the research of Michael McKeon, explores the dominant vision of ideal womanhood set forth in eighteenth-century conduct manuals.

Two individual chapters of this thesis are dedicated to Lennox's novels. Both Chapter II and Chapter III compare Lennox's depictions of women to those found in conduct manuals to see where they fall in relation to the dominant gender norms of her period. In Chapter II, which is dedicated to *Sophia*, we look closely at Lennox's depiction of two sisters, Sophia and Harriot, to show how Lennox demonstrates that not adhering to gender custom can offer a woman more agency and autonomy. In Chapter III, which is dedicated to *Henrietta*, we examine the ways in which Henrietta is rewarded for her loyalty to her liberty of conscience.

Finally, Chapter IV of this thesis engages with the scholarship of Constance McCormick Platt to discuss how the romance genre was not exactly a viable form of writing for female authors to create a space for discussing social critiques realistically. This thesis pushes back against Platt's concept of the "return to the patriarchy," arguing that the endings to Lennox's novels are not as conservative and straight-forward as a woman returning to the protection of the patriarchy.

**Key Words:** conduct manuals, custom, feminism, gender, romance

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Short Titles

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University of Denver, 1980.



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“The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain” (1778), 3

## Introduction

Several reasons motivated my decision to focus my senior honors thesis on Charlotte Lennox's depictions of women in her novels, *Henrietta* (1758) and *Sophia* (1762), and I would like to begin this thesis by sharing them with you. In my junior year at the University of Michigan, I took a class called "Female Enlightenment Writers," which was taught by Professor Clement Hawes. In this class, I read novels and essays by women like Mary Astell, Jane Austen, Aphra Behn, Frances Burney, and Mary Wollstonecraft. While I certainly enjoyed reading the works of these influential women, I fell in love with Charlotte Lennox's witty prose when I read her most famous novel, *The Female Quixote*. Immediately after the end of the semester, I sought out more of her work to read. However, when I looked at popular booksellers like Amazon and Barnes & Noble, I came up nearly empty handed. For some time after this, I forgot about Charlotte Lennox. It was not until I learned that I would be writing a senior honors thesis that she began to haunt me once again.

I considered writing my thesis on Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. I was still impressed with the novel and eager to write about it, and the scholarly conversation around the novel was booming. However, once I stumbled upon Toni Bowers' "The Achievement of Scholarly Authority for Women: Trends in the Interpretation of Eighteenth-Century Fiction," I decided that writing my thesis on *The Female Quixote* would be sort of a disservice to an author that I respect so much. Written for the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ASECS Women's Caucus, Bowers' essay seeks to "delineate broad trends that have characterized a small subset of Caucus members' work—book-length, gender-oriented interpretations of British prose fiction" (Bowers 51). In her essay, Bowers explains that the emergence of scholarship focused on "categories of difference" occurred in the last three decades of the twentieth century and has helped us expand upon our

knowledge about different people and cultures from the past. However, she also points out that, like many other things in this world, scholarship has trends. Bowers asserts:

Scholarship, like so much else, tends to proceed in fits and starts, according to the somewhat mysterious momentum of *trends*. Widespread interest in a new subject or method often builds from an initially slow response to new research that only gradually comes to influence other scholars' work. Pioneering scholars republish previously out-of-print primary texts; deploy innovative interpretive methods toward unlikely textual subjects; or produce provocative rubrics for previously overlooked or dismissed categories of writing, writers, textual production, or readers. (Bowers 52)

In other words, pioneering scholars discover voices that have been silenced by the past and bring them into the present. Scholarship such as this is extremely important, as it encourages us to pursue “substantial engagement with once-shadowy figures” of the past, such as Charlotte Lennox. (Bowers 56) However, trends come and go. Just as quickly as the scholarship around these “shadowy figures” is generated, “too often, recent editions of indisputably major eighteenth-century works by women fall quickly out of print” (Bowers 57). As I continued to read through Bowers' essay, I began to mourn all of the works by female writers that have been left in the past. I also began to feel a sense of responsibility to prevent this from happening to Charlotte Lennox.

After all, even though Lennox may be considered a “shadowy figure” of the past now, in her own day she was pretty close to the center of English literary life. In fact, Richard Samuel even depicted her in his painting of *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (1777).

Additionally, she entertained close relationships with some of the canonical literary figures of



**“The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain” (1778)**

After similar painting by Richard Samuel, published in 1777.

Caption reads: “The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain. Miss Carter, Mrs. Barbauld, Mrs. Angelica Kauffman, on the Right hand; Mrs. Sheridan, in the Middle; Mrs. Lennox, Mrs. Macaulay, Miss More, Mrs. Montague, and Mrs. Griffith, on the Left hand.

her time, such as Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson. Her role as a female author was rather unusual for her time, as she was one of the few women to both put her own name on and accept payment for her publications. Samuel Johnson

especially recognized the courage it took for a woman to risk public criticism through authorship. For most, women were essentially private: publication – laying oneself before the public through one’s words – challenged that construction, which meant that a woman author’s personal life would then be open to scrutiny. In contrast, male authors’ personal lives were of little importance to their literary success. (*An Independent Mind* 56)

Lennox’s female protagonists often find themselves fearing for the destruction of their reputation. While this was a common source of anxiety for many women in Lennox’s time, it would seem that Lennox’s role as a known female author amplified these concerns. Because Lennox “ventured into the public sphere, she was vulnerable to accusations of vanity... If there was any doubt about her personal respectability, her writings – and thus her mind – would not be

taken seriously” (*An Independent Mind* 57). In her novels, Lennox depicts women entering the public sphere and becoming vulnerable to similar accusations which would tarnish their reputations and their personal respectability. This seems to reveal that, known author or not, women who “ventured into the public sphere” were risking their reputation for their independence. It follows, then, that examining Lennox’s work is essential for forming a better picture of what life was like for eighteenth-century women, as not every woman was content to confine herself to the domestic sphere. So, it should not be so difficult to find “reasonably priced, professionally edited, student-friendly editions” of Lennox’s lesser-known novels, as *The Female Quixote* is not the only one of Lennox’s novels that can help us develop a richer understanding of the social structure of her time. (Bowers 57)

Thus, I renewed my search efforts for physical copies of Lennox’s other work, this time looking for used editions, and came up with two of her lesser-known novels, *Henrietta* and *Sophia*, on eBay. After reading and developing my own opinion about these two novels, I began to conduct my research on the scholarly conversation surrounding them. I was surprised when I found that some scholars regard Charlotte Lennox’s novels as “fundamentally conservative” and wondered why this was the case. Is it because her critiques on the patriarchal structure of eighteenth-century England are not substantial or explicit enough? Is it because “no woman is envisioned permanently outside of marriage” in her novels? (Schürer 23) Or could it be because her heroines conform too closely to prescribed female gender roles in eighteenth-century England? These are all plausible explanations, but I feel that many perceive Lennox’s novels to be more conservative because she was constrained by the formal and conventional attributes of the romance genre, as well as the fact that, due to “her moment in history, Lennox had to present more polite young women” (*An Independent Mind* 7). Accordingly, my central motivating

questions for this thesis are: to what degree was Charlotte Lennox capable of both imagining and articulating a vision of women's independence within the confines of the conventions of the romance genre? And what shapes does this vision take in relation to the dominant gender norms of her period? I argue that the ways in which Lennox depicts women in her novels are far more complex than some scholars have made them out to be. Similarly to Catherine A. Craft, I feel that Lennox manages "to embody within conservative tales, subversive female stories, tales which picture heroines who are in control both of themselves and of the men around them" (Craft 838). However, there are many ways in which Lennox's tales are not conservative at all, and I hope to better articulate that as I offer my own interpretations of her novels in the following chapters of this thesis.

In my first chapter, I discuss the patriarchal notions of ideal femininity as analyzed by contemporary scholarship and as outlined in eighteenth-century conduct manuals for women. To better understand the social structure that eighteenth-century English women were living in, and Lennox was writing about in her novels, I will be referring to Michael McKeon's "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760," which explains how the emergence of gender difference in England lead to social, class, and economic differences that favored men and forced women into a role of submission. I also cite Ingrid H. Tague's "Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Eighteenth-Century," which discusses how a variety of social changes in the early eighteenth-century lead to "widespread concerns about gender norms and created a sense that institutions such as marriage, which supported traditional values, needed to be reinforced" (Tague 79). Next, I discuss one of the ways in which men tried to instill a patriarchal ideal of femininity into young women: conduct manuals. To do this, I refer to editor Vivien Jones' anthology, *Women in the*

*Eighteenth-Century: Constructions of Femininity*, which pieces together texts about and by women from the eighteenth-century, such as conduct manuals and critical definitions of women's writing, to better outline the ways in which women were constricted by the gender customs of Lennox's time. In particular, I will be examining the conduct literature of George Savile, Wetenhall Wilkes, Samuel Richardson, and John Gregory to outline the qualities of their patriarchal vision of femininity.

In my second and third chapters, I will be discussing Charlotte Lennox's novels *Sophia* and *Henrietta*. The aim of these chapters is similar: I wish to compare Lennox's depictions of women to the idealized femininity we saw in the conduct manuals I discussed in Chapter I for the purpose of identifying the specific ways in which her heroines challenge or complicate these prescriptions. I believe that Lennox implicitly advocates for her own idealized version of womanhood (and, to a lesser extent, manhood) in these two novels. Lennox's idealized womanhood often reveals itself to be in both subtle and direct opposition to the gendered customs of her time. Much of these two chapters will consist of my interpretations of different aspects of Lennox's novels, as well as frequent reflections on how the passages demonstrate conformity or opposition to the gendered customs that I discussed in Chapter I. I will of course be placing my interpretation of the characters and events in Lennox's novels in conversation with the other scholars who wrote about them; although, "aside from scholarship on *The Female Quixote*, little literary study has been done on Lennox's large oeuvre" (*An Independent Mind* 19). In Chapter II, which focuses on *Sophia*, I will be referencing Norbert Schürer's introduction to *Sophia*. In Chapter III, which examines *Henrietta*, I will be placing my interpretation in conversation with Edith Sedgwick Larson's *Early Eighteenth-Century Women Writers: Their Lives, Fiction, and Letters*, as well as Alison Conway's "'Uncommon Sentiments': Religious

Freedom and the Marriage Plot in Charlotte Lennox's *Henrietta*." By the end of these chapters, I hope to have demonstrated the nuanced way in which Lennox challenges the patriarchal social structure of eighteenth-century England, despite also partially conforming to gender customs at times.

In my fourth and final chapter, I will address the tension that is created between the societal critiques Lennox presents in her novels and the form that she chooses to present them in: the romance genre. I will refer to Constance McCormick Platt's *Patrimony as Power in Four Eighteenth-Century Women's Novels: Charlotte Lennox, "Henrietta" (1758); Fanny Burney, "Eveline" (1778); Charlotte Smith, "Emmeline" (1788); Ann Radcliffe, "The Mysteries of Udolpho" (1794)* to discuss how the romance genre was not exactly a viable form of writing for female authors to create a space for discussing social critiques realistically. I will introduce Platt's concept of the "return to the patriarchy" and then push back against it as I argue that the endings to Lennox's novels are not as straight-forward as a woman returning to the protection of the patriarchy. Thus, I will discuss how the romance genre only *seems* to work against Lennox's attempts at depicting an ideal vision of womanhood in a patriarchal society and gives Lennox's novels a reputation for being more conservative.

Might Charlotte Lennox's conservative reputation be one of the reasons her novels seem to be going out of print? This could be so. It is important that we refresh our understanding not only of women's eighteenth-century literature, but also the social structure in which they were living, to gather a deeper understanding of the human condition. Susan Carlile, one of the leading experts on Charlotte Lennox, reminds us that we must "resist the temptation to judge eighteenth-century novels by twenty-first century standards" (LHW 1). The fact is that we lose many modern readers "when we cannot figure out how to get them to connect with the plights of young



people in circumstances and with mindsets very different from their own” (LHW 1). I feel that this may be the case with the decrease in interest in Lennox’s *Henrietta* and *Sophia*. Therefore, I believe that my research is important because it might allow modern readers to develop a deeper understanding of the conditions that women were living in during the eighteenth-century and a deeper appreciation of Lennox’s lesser-known novels. As Carlile notes, “studying this period is much like reading a book set in a foreign country. By getting outside of our own perspective we come to understand humans in far more nuanced ways” (LHW 2). I hope that my research will demonstrate how reading Lennox’s novels can help us better understand the constrictions eighteenth-century English women were under in particular aspects of gendered social arrangements.

## Chapter I

Before we can begin to delve into Charlotte Lennox's depictions of women both conforming to and opposing gender customs in her novels, we must examine the social structures, norms, and expectations that governed eighteenth-century English women's lives and make clear in general what eighteenth-century gender customs were. Only then can we begin to take a closer look at what shape Lennox's vision of ideal womanhood and women's independence takes in relation to the dominant gendered expectations of her period. Literature often reflects real life. One must keep this in mind as one reads women's literature from the eighteenth-century, so as not to project twenty-first century ideas about social order and gender custom onto characters in eighteenth-century novels.

To better understand how Lennox critiques eighteenth-century gender customs in her novels, let us first examine what motivated the creation of these patriarchal gender customs. There are two ways we can look at the construction of more concrete gender customs in the eighteenth-century. The first way for us to view this phenomenon is as an economic division between the public and domestic spheres. In his "Historicizing Patriarchy," Michael McKeon asserts that "what we have learned to call the separation of the public from the domestic sphere is materially grounded in the capitalist transformation of the English countryside... the emergence of modern patriarchy, and its system of gender difference, cannot be understood apart from the emergence of the modern division of labor and class formation" (McKeon 298). In this modern division of labor, women were designated to perform "inside work" and men to perform "outside work." By extension, this division of labor restricted "female identity to that of wife and mother, roles whose customary authority in the broad domain of kinship was now gradually limited to the circumscribed domain of the household" and "conceived the contractual affairs of the polity as

an exclusively male preserve” (McKeon 297). This distinction between domestic female “inside work” and public male “outside work” only served to ossify the male domination and female subordination that had long been a constant in English society.

The second way for us to look at the construction of a more concrete and explicit set of gender customs in the eighteenth-century is as a biological distinction between men and women. In eighteenth-century England, there were changes in the ways that society perceived gender difference. McKeon asserts that “it was only in the eighteenth-century that female bodies ceased to be seen as aberrant versions of a unitary male body, and were viewed instead as physically and naturally different” (McKeon 301). This development gave rise to the notion that certain qualities and behaviors were either “natural” or “unnatural” for the sexes to exhibit. As McKeon puts it, “in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, England acquired the modern wisdom that there are not one but two sexes; that they are biologically distinct and therefore incommensurable, and that they are defined not by behavior, which is variable, but by nature, which is not” (McKeon 301). Instead of the differences between men and women being only social, they were now also biological. Consequently, it would seem “as though the traditional, sociocultural embeddedness of the difference between men and women were now separated out and concentrated as an explicit and inescapable principle of social construction” (McKeon 302). Therefore, while gender distinctions permeate every age of English history, the biological distinction between men and women fueled a stricter and more explicit concept of gender customs in the eighteenth-century.

In summation, then, economic and biological distinctions in gender contributed to the social constructions of the time. However, there were other influences on the more explicit attempts to outline gender customs for women in the eighteenth-century. One such influence, as

asserted by Ingrid H. Tague, was an increase in the belief that “marriage was deteriorating into a business contract” (Tague 76). Tague references some of Lennox’s eighteenth-century contemporaries, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montague, attributing to them the feeling that “rather than being respected as an institution ordained by God and necessary to social stability... marriage was an object of mockery, used only as a cynical means of increasing wealth. Brides were being bought and sold with no regard for their future happiness or compatibility” (Tague 76). One cannot definitively say that there was a qualitative change in eighteenth-century motivations for marriage. While many studies suggest that “love was always accepted as an important factor in choosing a spouse,” others state that “marriage among the elite continued to reflect patriarchal and economic motives” (Tague 78-9). However, I suggest that the literature of the time does reflect a desire to move away from marrying for money and toward an idealized form of marriage for love —Lennox’s novels, *Henrietta* and *Sophia*, certainly question the motives of the aristocratic family members who attempt to marry Lennox’s heroines off to men they do not love or esteem. Regardless, “a variety of social changes arguably led to widespread concerns about gender norms and created a sense that institutions such as marriage, which supported traditional values, needed to be reinforced” (Tague 79). One result of these widespread concerns was a “striking increase in the production of conduct manuals for women, which sought to restore traditional gender roles by describing in detail every aspect of the ideal woman” (Tague 80). What was the ‘ideal woman’ that conduct manuals sought to describe? To better outline the qualities that an ‘ideal woman’ was meant to possess, according to the conduct manuals which seem to have played such a large role in instructing women to behave according to gender custom, let us take a closer look at some of the conduct manuals that were in circulation during the eighteenth-century.

George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, in *The Lady's New Year's Gift, or, Advice to a Daughter* (1688), writes about the 'natural' differences between men and women, and how women need to take much more caution with their virtue because of the disadvantages of their sex. He states:

You must lay it down for a Foundation in general, That there is an *Inequality* in the *Sexes*, and that for the better Oeconomy of the World, the *Men*, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of *Reason* bestow'd upon them; by which means your Sex is the better prepar'd for the *Compliance* that is necessary for the better performance of those *Duties* which seem to be most properly assigned to it... We are made of differing *Tempers*, that our Defect may the better be mutually supplied: Your *Sex* wanteth your *Reason* for your *Conduct*, and our *Strength* for your *Protection*: Ours Wanteth your *Gentleness* to soften, and to entertain us... You have more strength in your *Looks*, that we have in our *Laws*, and more power by your *Tears*, than we have by our *Arguments*.  
(Savile 18)

In this passage, we can clearly see the effects that the biological and economic distinctions between men and women that McKeon referred to had on eighteenth-century English gender customs. In this view, men naturally have "reason" and "strength," making them the "better" option for "outside work" in the public sphere. In contrast, this view holds that women were naturally made for "compliance" and "gentleness," making them fit for "those duties which seem to be most properly assigned to it," which most likely means "inside work" in the domestic sphere. In conduct manuals such as this, men and women are not only depicted as distinct, but also as *unequal*. Although Savile suggests that women can obtain power through their "looks" and their "tears," we can see that there is no real power for women to obtain by following the

instructions of conduct manuals. At the end of the day, what women learn from conduct manuals is simply supposed to help them “entertain” men. In Savile’s work, we can also clearly see hints of Tague’s argument that conduct manuals were meant to reinforce traditional values, such as marriage. Savile proposes that “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*” (Savile 19). Hence, it would seem that Savile sees marriage as the answer to the “inequality” between the sexes – because females are “naturally” the “weaker sex,” they are in need of “Masculine Dominion” to live a good life.

If George Savile asserts the existence of a biological distinction between men and women, Wetenhall Wilkes’ *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740) serves to elaborate upon some of the qualities that are “natural” for women to possess, such as chastity. Wilkes asserts that “Chastity is the next virtue... no charm can supply its place; without it beauty is unlovely, wit is mean and wanton; quality contemptible, and good-breeding worthless” (Wilkes 29). We can see here that gender custom is even more important than class or social status – for women, at least. Not adhering to gender custom is a woman’s downfall in the eighteenth-century. As Wilkes says, “Chastity is so essential and natural to your sex, that every declination for it is a proportional receding from womanhood. An immodest woman is a kind of monster, distorted from its proper form” (Wilkes 30). The real reason why Wilkes asserts that chastity is a “natural” female quality is because it is a quality that men desire women to have, mostly due to their anxieties about paternity, but also because of their desire to maintain “Masculine Dominion” over women. This is why, at the end of the day, it does not actually matter if a woman is chaste – it only matters that she is *perceived* to be chaste. We can also see

this later when Wilkes says, “My present design is to caution you against all levities of dress, carriage, or conversation, that may taint or blemish the purity of your mind... Therefore, be not industrious to set out the beauty of your person; but, as I said before, let your dress always resemble the plainness and simplicity of your heart” (Wilkes 30). According to conduct manuals, women are not to dress too suggestively or talk to anyone whose acquaintance might tarnish their reputation. Thus, women not only need to maintain their chastity, but also the appearance of it, by dressing modestly and not seeking out attention.

We can see more of Wilkes’ train of thought in Samuel Richardson’s *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741), where he asserts the importance of women guarding themselves against licentious rakes. As I mentioned before in the Introduction of this thesis, Richardson is especially important to the scholarly conversation about how Charlotte Lennox depicts her heroines’ interactions with eighteenth-century English gender custom, as he is a close acquaintance of hers. In his conduct literature, Richardson asks a female reader, “What, my dear child, can you propose by such a match [with a rake]? Is his pay sufficient to maintain himself? If it be, will it be sufficient for the support of a family?” (Richardson 36). In these questions, we can see some of the important questions that conduct manuals instruct women to ask themselves about when considering a marriage match. We can also see that marriage for women is not simply about love and esteem—it is about survival. Surprisingly, Richardson advocates for a father to be benevolent toward his daughter upon her choosing to marry a rake. He says, “What she has done is not *vicious*, but *indiscreet*; for, you must remember, that I have often declared in her hearing, that the wild assertion, of a rake making a good husband, was the most dangerous opinion a young woman could imbibe” (Richardson 38). Richardson’s conversation about rakes is particularly interesting—especially considering the plot of his epistolary novel, *Pamela*, in

which his heroine ends up marrying the same man that sexually assaulted her numerous times in the beginning of the novel—as it seems to offer a critique upon dishonorable men. However, men were not necessarily the target audience of conduct manuals, so I would argue that the inclusion of this criticism of rakes is not intended to educate men about their undesired behaviour in the way that conduct manuals try to educate women.

Lastly, John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1744) outlines many of the key qualities of the 'ideal woman' depicted in conduct manuals, such as modesty, silence, obedience, and hidden intelligence. Gregory states, "one 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" (Gregory 45). Here, we can see the strong push for women to remain in the domestic sphere that McKeon discussed. Women were not only meant to adhere to domestic duties, but also to completely avoid the public sphere, if possible. Gregory feels that "this modesty... so essential to your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one" (Gregory 46). Conduct manuals tell women that they are expected to be "silent" – seen, but not heard. This is especially true when intellectual discussions among men are happening, as Gregory also instructs women to "be even cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company... if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding" (Gregory 46). An educated woman is a condescending woman, according to conduct manuals. A woman being educated upsets the social order and goes against the "natural" order of the world in which men are supposed to be superior to women. Thus, any woman who



possesses “good sense” and “learning” is instructed to play dumb when they are in the presence of men.

If the arguments of Savile, Wetenhall, Richardson, and Gregory are combined, one can gather a general consensus of what the aim of conduct manuals was: to instruct women on how they might “create themselves as objects of male desire, but in terms of which will contain that desire within the publicly sanctioned form of marriage” (Jones 14). The ‘ideal woman’ for the eighteenth-century Englishman is chaste, submissive, and uneducated, among other things. With so much literature promoting this patriarchal vision of ideal womanhood and insisting that it is a “natural” one, it may have been difficult for women to imagine any other way of being. There may appear to be tension in this idea when one considers my earlier claims that conduct manuals are written in response to shifting social mores. One might wonder, does behavior follow conduct manuals, or do conduct manuals follow and attempt to correct behavior? This is a rather difficult question to answer, as “politeness scholars have tended to either ignore women when examining politeness as a gendered culture, focusing exclusively on male politeness, or—which is much more common—ignored gender as a category all together” (Ylivuori 2). Women’s conduct as it was typically observed in relevant social circles, then, was never really a topic of focus in the study of eighteenth-century conduct, although there has been some developing interest in it over the last several years. The recent scholarship of Soile Ylivuori finds that “women of polite society picked up many of the codes of politeness from their everyday social surroundings, in addition to being taught by their governesses, tutors, dancing masters, family, friends, and social peers. However, there existed also a massive print culture that aimed to discuss and define the polite norms and communicate them to members of polite society” (Ylivuori 9). Thus, my ultimate goal is not to provide an extensive account of how all eighteenth-

century English women behaved, but rather to examine the didactic literature which aimed to create normative ideals of female conduct and compare them to the vision of ideal womanhood depicted in Lennox's novels. Simply put, "women could react to the discursive norms of gendered politeness" in many different ways—they could "negotiate them as a part of their identity, ignore them, or even... reject them in favour of alternative modes of behavior and, respectively, ideals of femininity" (Ylivuori 4). That is, women *did* come up with their own visions of womanhood and women's independence, pushing against the idea of "natural" femininity and women's association with the domestic sphere during the eighteenth-century. Charlotte Lennox would have been familiar with works such as Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), which explicitly began to dismantle some of the ideals found in conduct manuals. However, it was quite difficult for women to overtly go against the eighteenth-century grain of gender customs, and I believe we can see some of this dissonance in Lennox's novels. Thus, in my next two chapters, I will begin to discuss how Lennox's vision of ideal womanhood compares to the dominant gender norms of her period.

## Chapter II

Now that we have illustrated the dominant eighteenth-century vision of ideal womanhood as it is depicted in conduct manuals from the time, as well as the social structure and gendered expectations that fueled it, let us begin to examine how Charlotte Lennox's vision of ideal womanhood compares to the dominant gender norms of her time by taking a closer look at her 1762 novel, *Sophia*. The format of *Sophia*'s original publication was innovative: "it was one of the first novels written by a major author in the eighteenth-century (of either sex) specifically for publication in a periodical—Lennox's own *The Lady's Museum*" (Schürer 9). It is of importance to note that the story was originally titled "The History of Harriot and Sophia." However, it was then republished under the title we know it as today, *Sophia*. Although Lennox's true intentions for the change in title will never be clear, there are many ways in which we can speculate about them. I argue that the original title was meant to be ambiguous so that readers could draw their own conclusions about who is supposed to be the didactic model of the tale, Sophia, the sister who more closely conforms to the gendered expectations of her time, or Harriot, the sister who more obviously subverts them.

Scholars generally depict Lennox's heroines as model ladies who conform to the gendered expectations of their time; however, this is not necessarily the case in *Sophia*. One common move that Lennox makes in her courtship-to-marriage plots is the juxtaposition between her exceptional heroines and other girls who embody less idealized traits, such as coquetry and general unlikableness. In *Sophia*, this juxtaposition occurs between Sophia and Harriot, who are depicted as polar opposites, and serves to create a contrast between two idealized visions of womanhood. Schürer notes that, at first, "the authorial voice seems to approve only the decisions made by Sophia, the more 'proper' sister; however, there is a subtext in the novel, indirectly

creating a space for an understanding of Harriot, the older sister” (Schürer 9). I agree with this assertion and argue in this chapter that Harriot can in some ways be read as the more ideal and independent of the two sisters, despite—or, perhaps, as a result of—her subversion of the gendered expectations of her time.

In the first chapters of *Sophia*, readers are offered ample examples of how the two sisters are different. In these first comparisons, we can see how Lennox at first appears to elevate Sophia above Harriot. For example, “While Harriot was receiving the improvement of a polite education, Sophia was left to form herself as well as she could; happily, for her a just and solid judgement supplied the place of teachers, precept, and example. The hours that Harriot wasted in dress, company, and gay amusements, were by Sophia devoted to her reading” (*Sophia* 54). Harriot is depicted as being vain, as she values wealth and appearance over education and virtue, while Sophia is depicted as exactly the opposite. Harriot is not a woman who “avoids the public eye” (Gregory 45) or cautions herself “against all levities of dress, carriage, or conversation” (Wilkes 30). Despite her “polite education,” which very well may consist of reading conduct manuals, Harriot lives her life the way she wants to. Thus, Harriot overtly subverts the vision of ideal womanhood that conduct manuals attempt to instill in young women.

While one might initially assume, then, that Sophia is being depicted as a woman who conforms entirely to the vision of ideal womanhood conduct manuals depict, but this is not actually the case. Sophia devotes her time to reading without the guidance of “teachers, precept, and example” to help her form judgements about the world. While she is born with a “just and solid judgement” that keeps her concealed in the domestic sphere (for a time), she is still not the idealized woman that conduct manual writers desire. Conduct manual writers would not be enthusiastic about the education that our narrator claims Sophia possesses. Sophia’s passion for

reading is something that is supposed to set her apart from the gender customs of her time, despite how, “by the unwearied application to her reading, her mind became a beautiful store-house of ideas: hence she derived the power and habit of constant reflection, which at once enlarged her understanding, and confirmed her in the principles of piety and virtue” (*Sophia* 55). One can deduce that there is some dissonance in the way Lennox constructs her seemingly preferred heroine. The idealized womanhood that Lennox portrays in *Sophia* is timid in the ways she allows her to demonstrate her independence. We are told that *Sophia* gains power from her reading, but also that her reading only strengthens her adherence to the “principles of piety and virtue” that were idealized in conduct manuals. One might see *Sophia*’s adherence to the gendered expectations of her time as a conservative characterization that coincides with the traditional values of a patriarchal social structure. However, I view *Sophia*’s attachment to piety and virtue as an extension of her freedom of conscience. *Sophia* is not simply clinging to virtue and piety because the men who write conduct manuals are telling her to. *Sophia* is pious and virtuous because, through her independent reading, she came to her own understanding of how she thinks she should live her life.

Examining the different solutions these two sisters find for their poverty, as well as the outcomes that ensue from them, is important because it reveals Lennox’s critique that an unmarried woman in eighteenth-century England has few options for obtaining financial stability and shelter. For *Sophia*, “the management of the family entirely devolved upon her; for her mother had no taste for anything but pleasure, and her sister was taught to consider herself a fine lady, whose beauty could not fail to make her a fortune, and whose sole care it ought to be to dress to the greatest advantage” (*Sophia* 55). In other words, *Sophia* has to develop a plan for taking care of her mother and sister, who always demand more than they can afford. She “looks

for a workable solution—an eminently middle-class and common-sense response, rather than a sentimental submission to suffering” (Schürer 28) While Sophia begins to look for solutions like becoming a Lady’s companion, Harriot decides to “make her appearance in every place where she might increase the number of admirers” (*Sophia* 55). Harriot is not exactly an oddity in this case—many women in the eighteenth-century had to rely on marriage, or the protection of a patriarch, to provide them with financial stability. However, Harriot is seemingly villainized for her overt desire to solve her financial problems with a marriage match while Sophia is celebrated for her decision to work. Some might argue that Lennox is criticizing Harriot for subverting the desired gender customs of the eighteenth-century, but I argue that Lennox is criticizing Harriot more for her love of frivolous things than her opposition to gender custom. Harriot is a woman of poverty—not a lady of fortune. Lennox thus finds fault with Harriot for deluding herself into thinking a woman of her lesser means could make a marriage match substantial enough for Harriot’s superficial appetite. This is because, at the end of the day, Lennox recognizes that marriage has devolved into a business contract, and Harriot would not be a very good financial investment for the wealthy men she wants to attract.

Why else might Harriot be condemned for wanting to use a man to fix her financial situation? I argue that it is because Harriot is opening herself up to the attentions of licentious rakes, such as Sir Charles, who plays the love interest of both Harriot and Sophia in the *beginning* of the novel. In descriptions of his character, we find rather scathing critiques of the relationship between nature and custom. Sir Charles Stanley was “among those looking upon [Harriot] as a conquest of no great difficulty” when he “formed the mortifying design of making a mistress of her” (*Sophia* 61). Here, our narrator points out recognizable flaws with Sir Charles’ character. He is known to be a “young baronet of a large estate, a most agreeable person, and

engaging address: his fine qualities made him the delight of all who knew him, and even envy itself allowed him to be a man of the strictest honour and unblemished integrity” (*Sophia* 61). However, Sir Charles’ behavior in trying to make a mistress out of Harriot certainly does not agree with his reputation of being a “man of the strictest honour and unblemished integrity.” Our narrator goes on to explicitly question the belief about the relationship between birth and worth that was so prominently held in eighteenth-century England, saying:

Persons who connect the idea of virtue and goodness with such a character, would find it hard to conceive how a man who lives in a constant course of dissimulation with one part of his species, and who abuses the advantages he has received from nature and fortune, in subduing chastity, and ensnaring innocence, can possibly deserve, and establish a reputation for honour! But such are the illusions of prejudice, and such the tyranny of custom, that he who is called a man of gallantry, is at the same time esteemed a man of honour, though gallantry comprehends the worst kind of fraud, cruelty, and injustice (*Sophia* 61).

Here, Lennox raises a critique on class, reputation, and gender. First, we can see that “the status assumption that birth automatically dictates worth was replaced by a class conviction that birth and worth are independent variables” (McKeon 303). This ideological shift in the way people thought about birth and worth was another result of the scientific advancements in biology that occurred during the eighteenth-century. People began to criticize the “biological essentialism that consists in locating personal value in bloodline, demystifying the ‘naturalness’ of aristocratic honor as an arbitrary social construction” (McKeon 303). As an illustration of this ideological shift, our narrator questions whether Sir Charles, a marquis, is worthy of his reputation for being honorable when he actually appears to be a licentious rake. Additionally, Lennox is critiquing the

emphasis that gender customs place on women to be chaste and innocent, when there appears to be a noticeable absence of people trying to educate men about gallantry so that they can prevent themselves from committing “fraud, cruelty, and injustice” upon women. I believe that this is one of Lennox’s more explicit critiques on the double sexual standard of the “tyranny of custom.”

In Sir Charles courtship of Harriot, and then Sophia, we can see Lennox’s concerns about women’s reputation bubble to the surface. Sophia becomes suspicious of Sir Charles’ courtship of Harriot because he “had not yet made any proposals of marriage” and “her good sense immediately suggested to her that such affected delays in a man who was absolutely independent, and with a woman whose situation made it a point of delicacy to be early explicit on the head, could only proceed from intentions which he had not yet dared to own” (*Sophia* 61). In this moment, Lennox seems to be implying that Harriot’s actions are villainized only because of their potential to ruin her reputation. It is not so much Harriot’s desire to court men that is seen as vice, but Harriot’s lack of caution with her reputation. Lennox also critiques the rake who prolongs his courtship of a woman because he has dishonorable intentions by showing that women are not guaranteed safety in courtship because of men like Sir Charles, who make the world dangerous for women and their reputations. Unfortunately for Sophia, in her attempts to protect Harriot’s reputation, she leaves her own vulnerable. When Sir Charles first rests his eyes upon Sophia,

He instantly saw something in her looks and person which inspired him with more respect than he had been used to feel for Mrs. Darnley and Harriot; a dignity which she derived from innate virtue, and exalted understanding. Stuck with that inexplicable charm in her countenance which made it impossible to look on her with indifference, he began



to consider her with an attention which greatly disgusted Harriot, who could not conceive that where she was present any other object was worthy of notice. (*Sophia* 62).

According to Sir Charles, Lennox's heroine possesses "innate virtue," a natural femininity that is so powerful that it is palpable. Sir Charles completely loses interest in the less virtuous Harriot and diverts his full attention to the conquest of Sophia, who he sees as more closely resembling the ideal woman illustrated in conduct manuals. Sir Charles' conviction to pursue Sophia for her virtuous nature offers a critique on Lennox's part about the dangers that come with women adhering to gender custom. The ideal womanhood presented in conduct manuals is ideal because it is what eighteenth-century men desire in a woman. Consequently, when a woman models herself after that vision of ideal womanhood, she becomes more desirable to men, including licentious rakes, than a woman who does not adhere to gender custom. By becoming more desirable, her reputation also becomes more vulnerable to destruction.

Sophia continuously rejects Sir Charles affections, and the internal conflict Sir Charles begins to feel as a result of said rejection reveals a critique upon the social structure of eighteenth-century England. Apparently, Sir Charles does feel some apprehensions about trying to make Sophia a mistress—"the secret upbraidings of his conscience disquieted him amidst all his flattering hopes of success; but custom, prejudice, the insolence of fortune, and the force of example, all conspired to suppress the pleadings of honour and justice in favor of the amiable Sophia, and fixed him in the barbarous resolution of attempting to corrupt that virtue which made her so worthy of his love" (*Sophia* 69). Here, it seems to be implied that Sir Charles' gallantry is a result of the social structure of the eighteenth-century. Because of the class system, it is not seen as natural for him to want to marry a woman so below him in rank, so instead of setting out to marry the virtuous Sophia from the start, he initially tries to make a mistress out of her. Thus,

it seems that Lennox is implicitly suggesting that one of the reasons that marriage is deteriorating into an economic contract is because the class system prevents people from marrying for love. Sophia also makes a statement which implies that there are flaws in the class system, as she is apprehensive about “all the mortifications a young woman is exposed to, whose poverty places her so greatly below her lover; that she is to consider his professions as an honour, and be rejoiced at every indication of his sincerity” (*Sophia* 76). In Sophia’s apprehensions about courtship and marriage, Lennox offers a critique on how the social structure of eighteenth-century England makes it impossible for a woman to be truly safe without a man in her life. A woman needs the financial security of a man to be secure in the world, so a woman in poverty is particularly exposed because men use her poverty as a bartering chip to get what they want out of her.

Lennox reveals that a woman’s reputation is in danger not only when she gives cause for concern about her virtue, but also when a man simply pays her attention. When it becomes clear that Sir Charles is trying to make Sophia his mistress, she begs for advice from her male guardian, Mr. Herbert, who tells her that she “must resolve to see Sir Charles no more: it is not fit you should receive his visits, since you suspect his designs are not honorable, and you have too much cause for suspicion. It is not enough to be virtuous: we must appear so likewise; we owe the world a good example, the world, which oftener rewards the appearance of merit, than merit itself” (*Sophia* 90). In this advice, Lennox explicitly provides her readers with a hard truth—for women, it does not actually matter to the public whether one is *actually* virtuous or not. It is all a matter of appearances. This advice is particularly haunting when it is read in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it begs one to think of the MeToo movement, in which so many women’s sexual assault allegations were ignored because of people placing more value on appearance than

reality. Because Sophia's reputation will be destroyed if she continues to allow Sir Charles to court her after his giving her an extravagant gift of a townhouse and a settlement of three-hundred pounds a year, she must never see him again so as to continue to appear virtuous to the public (even though she already is truly virtuous).

In juxtaposing Sophia's story with Harriot's, we can see that the two visions of ideal womanhood that Lennox presents in this novel function in very different ways. The ideal womanhood depicted in Sophia is considered to be better if one cares about reputation, while the ideal womanhood depicted in Harriot is better if one does not. While Sophia flees to the country to protect her reputation, Harriot gets everything she wants by not caring about hers. Sophia learns that Harriot is living in the house that Sir Charles had tried to give to Sophia because she became a mistress to a "Lord L—," who had bought the place from Sir Charles. When Sophia's mother shares this information with her, she also chastises her, saying that the place "might have been yours, and without any offence to your virtue too, yet you thought fit to refuse it: but I will not pretend to reprove one so much wiser than myself—" (*Sophia* 176). In this moment, we can see that a woman who follows the ideal womanhood prescribed by conduct manuals is still condemned in society. Sophia is the model for virtuous womanhood in this novel, but she still faces backlash from her mother for it. In her response to her mother, we can see Sophia's true motivation for adhering to the gendered expectations of the eighteenth-century. Sophia says,

Alas! My dear mamma, your greatest affliction is not the loss of your annuity, or the debts with which you are encumbered, it is my sister's unhappy fall from virtue. That parent... who sees a beloved child become a prey to licentious passions, who sees her publicly incur shame and reproach, expelled the society of the good and virtuous, and

lead a life of dishonour embittered with the contempt of the world, and the secret upbraidings of her own conscience... (*Sophia* 177).

While Sophia's mother is entirely concerned with climbing the social and financial ladder, Sophia is concerned with the state of her reputation. Moments such as this, in which Sophia reflects upon the dangers that come with a ruined reputation, seem to expose Sophia's true motivation for adhering to the gendered customs held up by conduct manuals, which is not "innate virtue," but the fear of destroying her reputation and losing what little security in life she does have. Thus, while Lennox's heroine embodies all of the qualities that constitute "female nature," it is with full knowledge of what happens to a woman if she does not at least appear to possess these qualities.

Harriot does not have the same fears as Sophia, and because of it, her idealized womanhood allows her to prosper in her own way, even when her "situation began to be so generally suspected, that she was in danger of being wholly neglected" (*Sophia* 180). Harriot's actions, which greatly subvert the gendered expectations of the eighteenth-century, are finally becoming noticeable to society. She is in danger of being neglected because society shuns a woman with a ruined reputation. However, Harriot is steadfast in her desire for luxury. As our narrator puts it, "the wretched fallen Harriot was proud! The diamonds that glittered in her hair, the gilt chariot, and the luxurious table; these monuments of her disgrace contributed to keep up the insolence of a woman, who by the loss of her honour was lower than the meanest of her servants, who could boast of an uncorrupted virtue" (*Sophia* 181). While this may sound like a scathing denunciation of Harriot and her attachment to luxury, one could point out that Harriot is able to realize herself far more than Sophia. Harriot achieves everything she wants, and if it was not for her living in eighteenth-century England, she would probably continue to prosper in her

own way. However, because she does live in a time in which women are constricted by strict and explicit gender customs, her happiness is fleeting. Sophia tells her,

You call me cruel, Harriot... for estranging myself from your company; but consider a little, whether it is not you that are both cruel and unjust. Why would you deprive me of the only reward the world bestows upon me, for a life of voluntary poverty; you have exchanged a good name for dress and equipage; and I, to preserve one, subject myself to labour and indigence: you enjoy your purchase; but should I lose mine, were I to have the complaisance for you which you require. Leave me to my reputation then, since it is the sole recompence of those hardships to which I willingly submit; and if you wish to recover yours, be contented to be poor like me. (*Sophia* 182).

This passage reveals that Sophia is completely controlled by reputation, as it is the only “recompence” that she receives for adhering to the gendered expectations of the eighteenth-century. Her stepping away from the domestic sphere to take care of her mother and herself seems to be an outlier to her character. Harriot, on the other hand, does not care what other people think of her. She only cares about herself and how she can more easily get the things that she wants out of life. While Harriot is condemned for this by Sophia, it is striking that a woman in the eighteenth-century would prioritize her own interests over the interests of society.

So, is it possible that Lennox’s original title of this story “The History of Harriot and Sophia” was meant to be ambiguous so that readers could draw their own conclusions about who was supposed to be the didactic model of the tale? It is true that hardly anyone in Lennox’s time would have considered Harriot a good model to follow— “within the limits of eighteenth-century moral fiction, Harriot is openly condemned” (Schürer 27). However, one can still look at Harriot as a model for personal freedom. Harriot steps “beyond that limited framework,” which

gives her an opportunity to “realize herself more than Sophia,” as “it does seem that the path of respectability followed by Sophia greatly limits her personal freedom as compared to Harriot” (Schürer 27). It seems quite plausible that “Lennox may have been trying to background Harriot’s subversive role when she changed the title” to *Sophia*. (Schürer 27). While one can never truly know the intentions of the author, I feel that Lennox does not necessarily want us to villainize Harriot. Instead, I believe that she wants her readers to recognize the limited means that women have to take care of themselves in eighteenth-century England, and how strict gender customs make it even more difficult for a woman who subverts them. Thus, it is quite possible that Lennox’s elevation of Sophia in the title change indicates her recognition of a hard truth—eighteenth-century England is not ready for girls like Harriot, as being a girl like Harriot may offer one more freedom and autonomy for a while, but in the end, the “tyranny of custom” cannot be escaped entirely. Thus, holding up Harriot as a didactic model may be dangerous for both Lennox and her readers. Lennox does not want to condemn her readers to a fate of forced marriage like Harriot, but she does want to offer readers a dream in which a woman can achieve everything she wants, even if she is condemned for it.

Through her depiction of two sisters who make very different decisions in life, both conforming to and opposing gender customs along the way, Charlotte Lennox implicitly criticizes the reality that women do not have many opportunities of exercising independence, and when they do, it is because of some dramatic circumstances that leave their reputations open to constant threats. Whether a woman is like Sophia, whose ideal womanhood more closely coincides with the gender customs outlined by conduct manuals, or Harriot, whose ideal femininity completely subverts them, she was condemned to matrimonial dependence if she

wanted any sort of security in life. Next, let us examine the vision of ideal womanhood and women's independence that Lennox presents in *Henrietta*.

### Chapter III

In Chapter II, I sought to demonstrate how Charlotte Lennox's female characters both conform to and oppose eighteenth-century gender customs in her novel, *Sophia*. Now, I would like to look more closely at her 1758 novel, *Henrietta*, to examine what vision of ideal womanhood is offered in Lennox's depiction of her heroine. I argue that Lennox's vision of ideal womanhood in *Henrietta* is more explicit than the ones she offers in *Sophia*. I also believe that, in *Henrietta*, we can see a more explicit critique of the patriarchal social structure of eighteenth-century England.

There are many ways in which the vision of ideal womanhood that Lennox presents in *Henrietta* stands in more direct opposition to the gendered expectation of eighteenth-century England than the visions she offers in *Sophia*. The first quality that sets *Henrietta* apart from *Sophia* and *Harriot* is that she voluntarily chooses to exit the domestic sphere, while *Sophia* and *Harriot* are thrust into the public sphere because they have no other means of taking care of themselves. Unfortunate circumstances bring *Henrietta* to run away from her great aunt's house—these circumstances are a result of *Henrietta*'s desire to express and preserve her liberty of conscience. *Henrietta* is a devout Protestant who is frequently forced to stand her ground in religious arguments with her Catholic aunt. *Henrietta* states that Lady Meadows “would often engage me in arguments upon the subject of religion, which I generally strove to evade; and when I found that would not do, I defended myself with great courage, and with so much success, that she would tell me with an air, half smiling, half angry, I was too hard for her, and that she would consign me over to the chaplain” (*Henrietta* 7). Unlike *Sophia*, who is called intelligent but is never really depicted as exercising her intelligence, we can actually see *Henrietta* demonstrate her wit. In fact, she “began to be extremely fond of disputing with the



chaplain; and, instead of shunning it, as I used to, I even invited his opposition” (*Henrietta* 59). Henrietta is open to hearing new ideas and having her own beliefs challenged. The intellectual debates about religion that they have excite her. The part of Henrietta that loves learning is the part of her that stands in direct opposition to the ideal womanhood illustrated in conduct manuals. According to John Gregory’s conduct manual, Henrietta is supposed to keep her knowledge “a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding” (Gregory 45). However, Lennox’s vision of ideal womanhood does away with the idea that women should hide their intelligence, instead insisting that they exercise their intelligence whenever possible, especially in arguments with arrogant men.

Lennox’s vision of ideal womanhood in *Henrietta* also depicts women challenging the patriarchal structure of society. After her frequent conversations with the chaplain are corrupted by his infatuation with her, Henrietta critiques Lady Meadows, saying that she “governed herself wholly by [the chaplain’s] advice; and that the greater work of her salvation might be perfected, and her every word and action be under his direction, he lived in the house with her where he ruled in a most arbitrary manner; his absolute empire over the conscience of my lady, rendering his dominion over all that had any dependance on her as uncontrolled as he could desire” (*Henrietta* 54). Here, we are offered a depiction of a woman who lives by the laws of a Catholic patriarch. If one reads this scathing characterization in light of the custom manuals that we discussed in Chapter I, one might notice that Henrietta seems to mock the insistence that women need to live under the “Masculine Dominion” of men. (Savile 19) According to conduct manuals, women in eighteenth-century England were to spend all of their time trying to perfect their characters under the direction of a patriarch, whether that be a father, guardian, or chaplain.

Conversely, Henrietta criticizes her aunt for her dependence on the chaplain, partially because of their Catholic faith, but also because her aunt is allowing a man to assert his “absolute empire” or his “Masculine Dominion” over her conscience.

Lennox also reveals the dangers that can occur when a woman tries to distance herself from “Masculine Dominion.” After ignoring the patriarch of the household, Henrietta “soon found, by [her] aunt’s altered behavior, that he was endeavoring to undermine [Henrietta] in her affection” (*Henrietta* 60). Because her aunt subscribes to the patriarchal society that threatens to turn Henrietta into a victim, she starts to treat Henrietta with less kindness. Then, she presents Henrietta with a marriage match. It seems, then, that Lennox is pointing out that, like in the case of Harriot, when a woman does not conform to the gendered expectations of her time, she is forced into a marriage in an attempt to gain control over her again. The man that her aunt proposes to her, “or rather commanded [her] to accept,” was Sir Isaac Darby, a Roman catholic baronet who “had a large estate, was not much above sixty years of age, his person just not horrible, and he was not quite a fool” (*Henrietta* 60). The young and beautiful Henrietta adamantly rejects the proposal. She tells her aunt, “to put an end to all your hopes, be pleased to know, that I am determined never to give my hand till I can give my heart with it; for I have no notion of being perjured at the altar, and of vowing to love, honour, and obey, when it is impossible for me to do either” (*Henrietta* 54). Conduct manuals tell women to love, honour, and obey their husbands – even if their husbands are not their chosen life partners. They imply that, in doing this, a woman gains power over her husband. Lennox rejects this idea when Henrietta explains that she is not willing to give up her independence for a man she does not care for. Thus, Lennox’s vision of ideal womanhood gives women the option to choose to marry a man they love.

Another way in which Henrietta and the vision of ideal womanhood she represents subverts the idealized vision of passive womanhood in conduct manuals is that Henrietta can be snarky and scathing. In Henrietta's frustration about her situation with her aunt, she writes a letter to her guardian, Mr. Damer, in which she depicts Lady Meadows in a particularly negative light. Lady Meadows sees Henrietta with this letter and demands to read it, but Henrietta refuses to show her the letter because she feels ashamed of how she depicts Lady Meadows. This, of course, causes Lady Meadows to become suspicious of Henrietta, as she assumes that Henrietta is secretly corresponding with a lover. Henrietta says, "how did I that moment inwardly regret my vanity, which had suffered me to rally the faults of a person on whom I am so absolutely depended, merely to display my wit. I was so vexed at the dilemma to which I had reduced myself, that I burst into tears" (*Henrietta* 65). In this moment, we see that Henrietta is not the inherently good heroine that is typically featured in the romance genre. Henrietta's satirical depiction of her aunt in her letter "shows a hostility which seems misplaced in the role of a conventionally good heroine" (Larson 226). This hostility also seems misplaced in the role of an eighteenth-century English woman—at least, if conduct manuals are indeed assigning women roles.

Lennox also seems to offer a critique on the insistence of conduct manuals that women remain innocent in Henrietta's futile attempts to win her aunt back over to her side. In fact, she "went to bed, full of hope that [she] had in part removed myself to her good opinion; but innocence is not always a security to its possessor, because malice attains its ends by arts, which a good mind cannot conceive, and therefore is unable to guard against" (*Henrietta* 68). While conduct manuals insist that women be innocent and chaste, innocence and chastity do not inherently protect women from corruption. In fact, they keep women blind about the dangers of

the world and unable to protect themselves from them. Henrietta's innocence makes her confused and surprised by the chaplain's sexual advances toward her instead of insulted and outraged. Her desire to maintain the image of innocence keeps her from showing her aunt the letter she wrote, which is the only way she truly would have rid her aunt of her suspicions. Thus, Lennox's vision of ideal womanhood does not aim to force innocence upon women.

Lennox's vision of women's independence is best expressed in Henrietta's exit of the domestic sphere. When Henrietta's aunt offers her the ultimatum of marrying the old Catholic man or getting sent to a convent, Henrietta feels that "the loss of liberty seemed so frightful a misfortune, that [she] was almost distracted with the idea of it" (*Henrietta* 75). So, instead of choosing one of the paths her aunt and the chaplain laid out for her, Henrietta creates a third path for herself by running away. Henrietta desires independence—she wants to be free to choose who she marries and free to choose what religion she practices. In fact, her desire for independence is so strong that Henrietta "would rather submit to the lowest state of poverty, than marry a man whom [she] could neither love nor esteem; or change the religion in which [she] was bred, and with which [she] was entirely satisfied" (*Henrietta* 76). Henrietta's exit from the domestic sphere is quite different from Sophia's. Sophia had to exit the domestic sphere to take care of her family. And, while she may have had a lover who she was trying to avoid, she did so solely for the preservation of her reputation. Henrietta, on the other hand, is fleeing people who continuously dismiss her free will. She "is forced to defend her liberty of conscience over and over again, choosing at one point to go into service rather than compromise her religious principles" (Conway 232). Therefore, the difference between Lennox's two heroines seems to be that Sophia stumbles out of the domestic sphere while Henrietta purposefully flees it. As Larson

notes, Henrietta's exit of the domestic sphere is also different from many other eighteenth-century novels with female heroines. Larson says,

Henrietta's departure shows remarkable self-sufficiency. Unlike Clarissa, she has no lover to offer her supposed protection, and unlike Sophia Western, she has no maid to accompany her. In addition, her leave-taking is notably prosaic in comparison to theirs. There is no threat of armed pursuit to frighten her into betraying her self-interest as in Clarissa's case; nor does she leave stealthily in the middle of the night as Sophia does. She leaves simply, during the day, walks to the main road, hails a stagecoach, whose crowded passengers reluctantly make room for her, and is on her way to London. (Larson 209-10).

Ultimately, Lennox seems to be implying that women could have an incredible amount of self-sufficiency, if they would just choose to actuate it. In an ideal world, a woman would not need the "supposed protection" of a lover or a maid to survive out in the public sphere. However, Lennox does not depict Henrietta as living in an ideal world. In fact, after recounting her history to Miss Woodby, Henrietta is whisked away into what seems like trial after trial on her liberty of conscience and her reputation. First, Henrietta ends up staying in the lodgings of Mrs. Eccles, an eccentric and manipulative woman. Mrs. Eccles notices that men stop into her shop if they catch sight of Henrietta and tries to get her to stand in the shop more often. Mrs. Eccles also rents out a room to a man who seems to be particularly interested in Henrietta. This man, a young lord, gets Miss Woodby to share Henrietta's real identity and history with him. Our narrator describes the situation well: "A young woman eloped from her relations, with no body about her of authority enough to control or direct her actions; these were very favorable circumstances for a man of intrigue: and he resolved to be no longer kept a distance by reserve, which he imputed either to

affection or artifice, and which a suitable share of boldness could only overcome” (*Henrietta* 93). Henrietta is on her own in the world—she does not have a patriarch, or a patronym, to protect her because she chooses to preserve her freedom of conscience and her bodily autonomy instead. Without an attachment to a wealthy man, Henrietta is essentially left prey for licentious rakes such as this young lord, who decides his next best course of action in winning the affections of Henrietta is hiding himself in her closet so he can spy on her.

Furthermore, Lennox reveals that the dangers of the outside world prevent women from exercising their autonomy. When Henrietta hears movement from her closet and discovers that the young lord is inside it, she is struck with equal parts rage and terror. While he does not do anything but beg her to forgive him for his insolence and to meet with him the next day, “the dangers she was exposed to, made her almost repent of having fled from her aunt’s tyranny; and mortified as she was by such shocking insults, she thought it would have been a less misfortune to be the wife of Sir Isaac Darby, or the inmate of a gloomy convent, than the avowed object of a libertine’s passion” (*Henrietta* 95). In this moment, Henrietta begins to question her decision to run away from her aunt’s ultimatums. She begins to think that either of the miserable options she had been offered by her aunt might have been a better fate than running away to London, an anonymous urban space beyond her familial connection. Her running away from home opened her up to threats that could ruin her reputation and her future. These threats leave her feeling that she would rather give up her freedom of conscience than live in fear. Larson says that “Lennox’s heroine does face difficulties, but Lennox ignores the maxim that girls who run away from home will be destroyed” (Larson 277). While Henrietta does manage to avoid permanent damage to her reputation, the threat of her reputation being destroyed is always there. It is true that “Lennox implies, and Henrietta feels, that the world is unsafe for a woman depending on her own

resources”—however, it is not because “a woman on her own is more likely to be persuaded to engage in a private correspondence with a designing lover, and that kind of recklessness invited disaster” (Larson 219). It is because it is not safe for a woman in eighteenth-century England to be independent because of the constant external threat that is placed upon them.

Thus, while Lennox is capable of imagining a vision of ideal womanhood in which women are capable of maintaining their liberty of conscience, Lennox does not seem to be able to imagine a vision of thorough-going female independence within the confines of eighteenth-century England’s gendered expectations. While women can subvert the gender customs that constrain them, they cannot entirely escape constraint due to the dangers that await them outside the domestic sphere. While Lennox does not imagine her heroines permanently outside of the domestic sphere and the protection of the patriarchy, she does make readers hopeful for her heroines at the conclusions of her novels. In Chapter IV, let us begin to discuss how Lennox makes readers hopeful for the marriages her heroines enter into.

#### Chapter IV

Thus far, I have sought to demonstrate how Charlotte Lennox's female characters both conform with and stand in opposition to eighteenth-century gender customs in her novels, *Henrietta* and *Sophia*. Now, I would like to begin to delve into *why* there is such tension in Lennox's depictions of eighteenth-century English women. I ask: to what degree was Charlotte Lennox capable of both imagining and articulating a vision of women's independence within the confines of the conventions of the romance genre? Therefore, in this chapter, I will be examining how the artistic form of the romance genre may not have been a sufficient one for Lennox to express her social perspective as a woman in the eighteenth-century, particularly due to a feature in the courtship-to-marriage plots featured in both *Henrietta* and *Sophia* that Constance McCormick Platt refers to as the "return to the patriarchy." However, I will also be contesting Platt's position by attempting to show how, despite the conventions of the romance novel working against her, Lennox is able to get her implicit social critiques across through her depictions of the flaws of the patriarchy: the failing of fathers and the danger of licentious rakes.

In her *Patrimony as Power in Four Eighteenth-Century Novels*, Platt outlines some of the key features of the romance novel. First, "the Romance features... a heroine who is an exceptional example of humankind" (Platt 11). I hope I have already demonstrated how both *Sophia* and *Henrietta* can be read as exceptional examples of humankind for their time in my previous chapters. Second, "circumstances surrounding her birth are perplexed in certain ways: her parentage may be mysterious, she may have been left an orphan, she may face some threat from without or within the family. Whatever the case, such complications do not disrupt her life until she is an adolescent of marriageable age, at which time she is thrust into the world" (Platt 11). I have not yet touched upon this in this thesis, but Charlotte Lennox's novels always include



a history of her heroines' families which demonstrates how the circumstances surrounding the birth of her heroines are certainly perplexing.

Charlotte Lennox's inclusion of her heroines' family histories serves a purpose which stands in direct opposition to the idea that women should be attempting to "return to the patriarchy." In fact, the family histories in Lennox's novels attempt to show that the patriarchal structure of social and family relations is a faulty one. In *Sophia*, we are told that

Harriot and Sophia were the daughters of a gentlemen, who, having spent a good paternal inheritance before he was five and thirty, was reduced to live upon the moderate salary of a place at court, which his friends procured him to get rid of his importunities. The same imprudence by which he had been governed in affairs of less importance, directed him likewise in the choice of a wife: the woman he married had no merit but beauty, and brought with her to the house of a man whose fortune was already ruined, nothing but a taste for luxury and expense, without the means of gratifying it" (*Sophia* 53).

It is made clear here that Sophia and Harriot's "gentleman" of a father is a rash man, one who acts rakish in that his decision to marry his life partner is solely based on her beauty, rather than her mind. In fact, his decision to marry is neither economic nor based on love. Their father does not reform the rakish behavior of his youth and, because of this, his family makes a quick descent into poverty. In this case, then, Lennox makes it clear that reliance on the patriarch is not a viable option for women in the eighteenth-century. In fact, problems for women only continue to get worse after the death of their patriarch. Lennox tells us that "the death of Mr. Darnley threw his little family into a deplorable state of indigence, which was felt more severely, as they had hitherto lived in affluence of all things, and the debts which an expense so ill proportioned to their income had obliged Mr. Darnley to contract, left the unhappy widow and her children

without any recourse” (*Sophia* 56). Thus, after the death of their patriarch, the now all-female family can no longer live on contract and continue to accumulate debts that will never be paid for. In other words, the women have no means of rectifying their situation without the help of a man. Lennox’s depiction of the poverty they fall into is more explicit than the depictions of female poverty provided by her female contemporaries. She tells us that, “the plate, furniture, and everything valuable were seized by the creditors. Mrs. Darnley and her daughters returned to a private lodging, where the first days were passed in a weak despondence on the part of the mother, in passionate repinings on that of the eldest daughter, and by Sophia in decent sorrow and pious resignation” (*Sophia* 56). Lennox’s depiction of these three women’s subjection to poverty and public humiliation after the death of their patriarch provides an implicit critique on eighteenth-century gender customs as a whole. She begs her readers to ask, in what kind of world is it fair that a man’s daughter should pay for his failures?

In the case of Henrietta, Lennox includes a family history which goes back as far as Henrietta’s grandparents to critique the patriarchal structure of society. The love story of Henrietta’s parents only begins when her grandmother, newly widowed, goes to the estate of Henrietta’s father to request a pension from his father, an earl. However, this pension is denied when the earl tells her, “I am sorry it is not in my power to do you any service. Your husband sold out, therefore you have no right to the pension. I pity your misfortune; but in this case there is nothing to be done” (*Henrietta* 25). Again, we can see a woman thrust into a precarious financial situation because of the death of her patriarch. Again, we see a woman left without the means of rectifying her poor situation because of the patriarchal social structure of eighteenth-century England. Lennox goes on to demonstrate that there is really only one way for a woman to rectify her situation: a marriage to a man. Henrietta’s grandmother is only able to resolve her

financial turmoil by marrying off Henrietta's mother, who had clearly caught the eye of her father. However, Henrietta's grandmother shows reluctance about this. Why would she not, considering she may be condemning her daughter to the same fate she currently suffers?

In a patriarchally structured society, a woman without the protection of a patriarch is endangered by men of fortune who have no interest in proposing matrimony. These licentious rakes coerce young women into corrupting their virtue and tarnishing their reputation. Therefore, even though Henrietta's father is a well-off man, Henrietta's grandmother "reproached herself for taking her [daughter] with her, for accepting the money, for giving a direction. She dreaded the consequence of having exposed her child to the attempts of a young man formed to please, and by his rank and fortune enabled to pursue every method that could gratify his passions" (*Henrietta* 26). In Henrietta's grandmother's apprehensions about Mr. Courteney's courtship of her daughter, we can see an implicit critique on Lennox's part about the gendered and socioeconomic power dynamics of eighteenth-century England. While Mr. Courteney does not end up being a rake that uses and abuses women, Lennox shows that he is still a failure to the women in his family in the end. Despite the love Mr. Courteney has for Henrietta's mother, his father is displeased by his decision to marry a woman so below him in status, so he renounces him from the family. Consequently, Mr. Courteney loses all hopes of financial security for his wife and children and the failure of the patriarch becomes a cyclical pattern in Henrietta's family.

To summarize, we can see that it is because of the perplexed circumstances of their early lives which end with the failings of their fathers that Henrietta and Sophia are presented with the opportunity to exit the domestic sphere when they are of marriageable age. However, this period of independence in the public sphere is riddled with trials (another feature of the Romance novel)

that test their adherence to eighteenth-century English gender custom. A woman's adherence to gender custom is particularly important for a woman who is out on her own in the world, because her reputation is even more susceptible to being tarnished. I hope that I have demonstrated this in Chapter II and Chapter III of my thesis. Now, I will move on to discuss what is perhaps the most important feature of the romance novel, according to Platt, which is the moment when,

After enduring trials, the protagonist of romance undergoes a marvelous experience or series of coincidences—the recognition, in Aristotelian terms—in which she is reunited with the lover or family from which she has been separated, reconciled to the parent from which she had parted, identified as rightful heiress, restored to the place she has lost. Like comedy, romance concludes happily, usually with a pair of marriages. Unlike comedy, the nature of romantic characters is exemplary. They are examples of humanity at its noblest, hence their fate is a paradigm of human fate in the world. (Platt 12)

This moment of recognition and reconciliation is what Platt refers to as the “return to the patriarchy.” In *Sophia*, it is the moment when Sophia, assisted by the advice and money of her male guardian, marries Sir Charles. Reading this ending with the “return to the patriarchy” in mind, one might suggest that Sophia's virtuous behavior and compliance with gender customs is rewarded with an exceptional marriage match. The same could be said about Henrietta, who, after spending some time as a companion to multiple ladies of fortune, may be suggested to be rewarded for her virtue and loyalty to her faith with a profitable marriage match, paid for jointly by her male guardian and her long-lost but recently found brother. With the romance novel's “return to the patriarchy,” Platt argues that “hope, then, is a primary effect of romance: virtue is rewarded... The world view encouraged by romance is that miracles can occur in human history and that they probably will occur in the lives of the virtuous and exemplary rather than the

mediocre or wicked. Romance holds out a carrot to us if we are able to identify in some way with its heroines and their trials” (Platt 14). However, as I stated before, Lennox does not attempt to imply that all virtuous people will be rewarded. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, while Henrietta’s parents’ marriage was a happy one, they were in no way rewarded financially for their virtue or their decision to marry for love, two things that conduct manuals celebrate in a marriage match.

How, then, does Charlotte Lennox make readers hopeful for the marriages that occur at the ends of her novels, if she implicitly insists that the protection of a patriarch does not offer any real safety to women? I argue that Lennox seems to call for a reformation of the patriarchy with her depictions of fathers who fail their families and licentious rakes who cannot win the hearts of their heroines until they reform. Platt asserts that “the heroines’ lovers in these novels are of secondary importance. It is a secure place in society through their patrimony that the heroines desire” (Platt 19). However, I do not entirely agree with this statement. Of course, both Henrietta and Sophia desire a sense of security in life, but their marriages are not as simple and transactional as that. Through the reformation of their rakish lovers into sentimental men, Lennox critiques the insistence that is placed on women to be chaste and virtuous in a world where there are so many men who have not been taught to not flatter young women solely with the intentions of stealing their virtue. Lennox depicts her heroines entering into an idealized version of marriage, in which there is love and respect between woman and man and money plays a lesser (but still important) role.

In Chapter II of this thesis, we discussed the licentious rake Sir Charles, who attempted to make a mistress out of both Sophia and Harriot. Throughout the course of the novel’s events, Sir Charles sees the errors of his ways and undergoes a reformation of sorts. Sir Charles begins to

feel genuine love for Sophia, and while fear of this powerful and pure emotion keeps him from submitting to his feelings for some time, by the end of the novel his complete reformation becomes apparent when he decides to give up on his rakish ways and marry Sophia. Of course, after having a long conversation with Sophia, Sir Charles “obtained her leave to demand her of her mother, to whom he shewed the writings, which were already drawn; and by which Sophia had jointure and pin-money, equal to the settlements that had been made upon Lady Stanley” (*Sophia* 197). While this may seem like a highly economic and transactional marriage, as well as a return to a patriarch who offers safety and security, I would argue that the ending of *Sophia* is not so simple. In Sophia’s case, her patriarch has undergone a reformation which makes him a desirable marriage partner for Sophia. In fact, her male guardian, Mr. Herbert, “some years after this marriage took occasion to compliment [Sir Charles] upon the delicacy, the ardor, and the constancy of his affection” (*Sophia* 199). Additionally, his giving her a jointure and pin-money assures readers that, if Sir Charles dies, Sophia will not suffer the same fate that she, her sister, and her mother did when their patriarch died. So, while Sir Charles does offer her financial security, it is a version of financial security that subverts the patriarchal structure of society because it is entirely hers and will not be taken from her upon his death.

Harriot’s fate is not so fortunate, although I would argue that it is not because she did not possess her sister’s “steady adherence to virtue” (*Sophia* 196). Both Mr. Herbert and Sir Charles were “desirous to have her decently settled” (*Sophia* 197). Everyone tried to rush Harriot into a marriage that she did not really desire at the end of the novel. So, it is “the report of the fortune she was likely to have [that] made her be thought a prize worthy the ambition of a young officer,” and not genuine love. (*Sophia* 198). With the greater emphasis on the economic nature of their union, readers are not left hopeful about the outcome of Harriot’s marriage. As the man

who married her could be considered a licentious rake who is consumed with the idea of money, it is quite possible that he will fail her like her father did, and she will be left in a condition worse than the one she started in at the beginning of the novel.

In Chapter III of this thesis, I mostly discussed Henrietta's defense of her liberty of conscience in relation to her religious and social principles. However, Henrietta's story takes a shift in the latter half of the novel, when "in place of the religious principle that Henrietta was forced to defend earlier in the narrative appears a standard of sexual integrity" (Conway 240). While traveling in Paris with Miss Belmour, the lady of fortune she is currently serving as a companion to, the ladies run into two gentlemen: "Mr. Freeman" and "Mr. Melvil." Henrietta immediately becomes infatuated with Mr. Melvil, and Mr. Melvil with Henrietta, but she knows that she can never be with him because of their difference in class. Mr. Melvil himself does not wish to give in to his desire and attempt to corrupt the virtuous Henrietta—he states, "May I perish... if I would degrade such excellence to a mistress; but if I were capable of such a design, her virtue, I am sure, is incorruptible" (*Henrietta* 214). Thus, Henrietta's beloved, who she does end up marrying at the conclusion of the novel, is not a licentious rake at all (although, he does meet her under a false identity). Instead, the licentious rake who needs reforming at the end of this novel is Henrietta's long-lost brother, Mr. Courteney, who reunites with his sister under the false name of Mr. Freeman.

The reunion of these two siblings is not a sweet one, as it demonstrates that Mr. Courteney is no gentleman. Before discovering the true identity of his sister, he attempts to persuade her to partake in informal relations with Mr. Melvil, but the virtuous Henrietta says, "Mr. Melvil is a young man of rank and fortune; I am poor and dependent; my birth perhaps greatly inferior to his... I would not receive his addresses without the sanction of his parents

consent” (*Henrietta* 220). Henrietta’s practical response seems to imply that she has learned from the mistakes of her parents and wants nothing to do with a man outside her means because there is no way they could live a life with both love *and* security. Despite her rejection, Henrietta’s brother insults her by continuing to press her on the subject, saying “Melvil is not the name of my friend; he is the heir of an illustrious title and a great estate: he loves you, he will make your fortune; do not throw away this opportunity of freeing yourself from poverty and dependance, nor let a romantic notion of virtue deprive you of the advantages that are offered you” (*Henrietta* 220). These lines depict the dangerous position many women in the eighteenth-century were put in: sacrificing their virtue and their reputation so that they could lessen their poverty and dependence. We saw this exact situation occur, albeit somewhat less dramatically, during our examination of *Sophia* in Chapter II. Women who gave in to their tempters in exchange for wealth and independence usually suffered grave consequences, like Harriot. Mr. Courteney, of course, knows this, and is a rake for attempting to tempt a woman into her own damnation.

Platt reads Henrietta’s reunion with her brother as a “return to the patriarchy.” She asserts that, “after Henrietta is reunited with her brother, a remarkable change occurs in the way she is depicted. The focus of the story shifts from her to her brother’s role in unravelling her difficulties. She hardly utters a word for the rest of the novel. It is as if Lennox assumes that once she has fallen under the legitimate patriarchal power, she need act no more on her own behalf” (Platt 60). I do not entirely agree with Platt’s position. While it is true that Mr. Courteney begins to take over her story as he pulls Henrietta out of the public sphere which has almost destroyed her reputation over and over again, I do not think that Mr. Courteney is just any “legitimate patriarchal power.” The authorial voice depicts a change in Mr. Courteney which I feel Platt does not recognize. Platt says that Henrietta “seems to have forgotten the fact that [Mr. Courteney]



behaved so ignobly toward her and would by extension behave so to all unprotected women. Restoration to fortune has dulled Henrietta's memory of the desirability of independence" (Platt 61). However, I argue that Henrietta's rakish brother undergoes a reformation which makes him a "friend and protector" (*Henrietta* 222). Upon their reunion, Mr. Courteney tells Henrietta, "What a wretch I have been!... Indeed, my dear sister, I never shall forgive myself for having ignorantly practiced on your virtue" (*Henrietta* 222). In this moment, we can see Mr. Courteney regrets his rakish ways. In response to his regret, Henrietta offers him a lesson: "Oh! that my brother... would be taught by this accident never more to form designs against innocence; and, in cases like mine, to consider every virtuous young woman as a sister" (*Henrietta* 222). Platt suggests that Mr. Courteney would continue to behave ignobly toward all unprotected women, but the authorial voice tells us that Mr. Courteney is "extremely moved at these words" (*Henrietta* 222). If our omniscient narrator tells us that Mr. Courteney learned his lesson, why should we not believe them? Especially considering readers are given no indication that Mr. Courteney continues to behave rakishly before he, like a virtuous heroine, is rewarded with a marriage to an "opulent heiress" at the end of the novel.

I also disagree with the notion that Henrietta is forgetting "the desirability of independence." Simply put, Henrietta never desired *total* independence—her goal throughout the entirety of the novel was winning back the affection of her family so that she could return to them. However, Henrietta also wanted to possess her liberty of conscience—the freedom to follow her own faith and the freedom to choose her own marriage partner. Neither of these liberties are sacrificed upon her reunion with her brother. While it is true that it is rather ironic that Henrietta agrees to stay in a convent while her brother finds a more suitable living arrangement for her after running away from her aunt for the very same reason, it is because the

convent no longer carries a threat “under the auspices of domestic rather than religious discipline” that Henrietta agrees to go. (Conway 241) She recognizes that her brother is not going to tread on her liberty of conscience by sending her to the convent, saying to him, “I cannot suspect you have a design upon my religion, as my aunt had, and mean to confine me all my life” (*Henrietta* 237). Henrietta also ends up possessing the freedom to choose her own marriage partner, in a way. As I said before, Henrietta learns from the mistakes of her parents and does not agree to marry the marquis until she has the blessing of his family, and the financial support of her brother and male guardian. However much the story seems to push her to the background and focus on her brother’s creation of her marriage contract instead, one must not forget that, for the lovers at least, settling on a dowry was not on their minds.

Platt asks a question, specifically pertaining to *Henrietta*, but applicable to *Sophia* as well: “... is Lennox indicating the most conceivable form she knows for a woman’s truly happy ending: the protection and support only a monied family alliance can bring?” (Platt 66). I argue that, while it is true that Lennox’s heroines often conform to the gendered expectations of their time, and that they do end up returning to the protection of a patriarch at the end of their stories, Lennox’s depictions of women are far more complex than Platt makes them out to be. Lennox’s heroines also oppose the gendered expectations of their time and demand a sort of reformation of the patriarchy that they return to in the end of their stories. Thus, in her novels, Lennox provides her readers with hope that they will achieve their own idealized marriage with their own reformed patriarch, despite the reality that they are living in being harsh and heavily prejudiced against women. By examining Lennox’s less popular novels in light of the gender customs of eighteenth-century England, one can develop a deeper understanding of eighteenth-century English social constructions and the way women navigated them. There is no reason that

Lennox's novels, *Henrietta* and *Sophia*, should not be more commonly taught in curriculum focusing on women's literature, and I hope that this thesis might help people realize this and put on a greater focus on Lennox so that she does not become just another "shadowy figure" of the past.

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