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Intellects in Isolation: A Reading of Retirement in *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote*

CLEO O'CALLAGHAN YEOMAN

Abstract: While recent studies of Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) have tended to focus upon female intellectual enlightenment as a developmental process that takes place within social contexts, this essay argues that female intellectual capacity in these novels is innate and associated with rural isolation. This inherent female intelligence ultimately serves to contradict stereotypical, eighteenth-century associations of rurality with ignorance. Through presenting rural isolation as the subtext of their novels, this essay elucidates what may be understood as a methodological use of rural isolation as a means of discussing female intellectual capacity and the implications of its innateness within the eighteenth-century, female-authored novel.

Both Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) tell the story of a young, seventeen-year-old heroine, each of whom is raised in rural isolation. The circumstances of these heroines' respective upbringings are among the first things we learn about them at the beginning of each novel: while Evelina is raised at Berry Hill, a "retired place, to which Dorchester, the nearest town, is seven miles distant" (Burney 21), Arabella similarly grows up in "a Castle … in a very remote Province of the Kingdom, in the Neighbourhood of a small Village, and several Miles distant from any Town" (Lennox 5–6). Also among the first things we learn about them is their noteworthy intellectual capacity: while Arabella is first described as possessing "an uncommon Quickness of Apprehension, and an Understanding capable of great Improvements" (6), Evelina is introduced as "a young female … with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding" (9), and, slightly later, "great quickness of parts" (23). It is in light, especially, of the emphasis that is placed upon their shared "quickness" that a direct parallel may be drawn between the two.

In revealing their heroines' respective capacities for intellectual development, Burney and Lennox simultaneously reveal their potential for enlightenment. The process of female enlightenment is, fittingly, outlined—though not explicitly referred to as such—by Evelina's guardian, Mr. Villars, when he tells her: "you must learn not only to *judge* but to *act* for yourself: if any schemes are started, any engagements made, which your understanding represents to you as improper, exert yourself resolutely in avoiding them" (166). In so doing, Mr. Villars provides an effective retelling—or foreshadowing—of Immanuel Kant's seminal "motto of the enlightenment" (54), "[having] the courage to use your own understanding" (54), first published six years later in 1784. Indeed, Sarah Eron alludes to this idea of process with regard to enlightenment, describing Evelina "as a subject who attains psychological enlightenment by the end of the novel" (195). For the purposes of this essay, I am less concerned with the process of

enlightenment than with these two heroines' potential for it within the context of rural isolation.

By focusing on the intersection of rural isolation and intellectual capacity in *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote*, this essay seeks to achieve two purposes. First, it seeks to reveal the ways in which rural isolation is established and presented by Lennox and, twenty-six years later, by Burney as the subtext of their novels. In a 2007 study of Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815), Janine Barchas argues convincingly that "Isolation and confinement assert themselves as the dominant subtext of the novel," suggesting that this subtext manifests itself "through mechanisms as various as illness, weather, physical space, social circumstances, and . . . language" (337). Building upon Barchas's suggestion, therefore, of an almost methodological employment of isolation, this essay will argue that isolation ultimately constitutes not merely the dominant subtext of *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote* as novels, but also of their heroines' characters. The second purpose of this essay is to show how an upbringing in rural isolation reveals each heroine's intellectual capacity as innate and, crucially, how this essential trait ultimately serves to contradict the stereotypical eighteenth–century dichotomy in which intellectual advancement was typically associated with urban environments and a lack of intelligence was typically associated with rural ones.

Recent studies of both novels have tended toward two things: to view the heroines' intellectual development as a process, as opposed to considering the innateness of their intelligence and how this is presented by Burney and Lennox respectively; and to consider this developmental process within the context of polite society, as opposed to the rural isolation in which both heroines live for the first seventeen years of their lives. Eron, for example, provides us with "a developmental account of the young heroine's rise toward self-consciousness" as, "through the insertion of her own consciousness into the processes of temporality" (171), Evelina "moves from a thing that is *acted upon* to an *acting agent* who causes (or rather prevents) events from happening" (173). Kja Isaacson considers enlightenment within the context of "Evelina's education in polite speech" and the effect this has upon her growing "agency in social situations" (77): "as Evelina becomes socially acclimatized and masters proper modes of speaking, she is able both to manifest her true intelligence and to defend herself when necessary" (73).

In a similar way, much recent criticism of *The Female Quixote* has focused upon the intellectual development of its heroine, often in relation to reading and its broader, social significance. Sharon Palo, for example, explores the correlation between "the representation of [Lennox's] romance-reading heroine" and "the potential of female education to completely reshape women's role within society, particularly within the public sphere" (204), arguing that Arabella is portrayed "as morally and intellectually superior to the other female characters in the novel . . . not in *spite* of the heroine's romance reading, but *because* of it" (205). Karin

Kukkonen elucidates further this relationship between romance reading and the intellectual development of Lennox's heroine to reveal what she coins "the probability of romance" (182), suggesting that Arabella's reading is what allows her to complete "her own learning process" (190), enabling her to subsequently reason "very clearly and openly" (190–91) and to draw "astute inferences" (187).

In choosing to focus particularly upon Evelina's social agency and Arabella's voracious reading of romances, recent criticism has in turn highlighted the different trajectories of these novels. While *Evelina* essentially documents a quest for identity, and thus centers upon its heroine finding her place within polite society, the trajectory of *The Female Quixote* centers primarily upon the distinction between fact and fiction, culminating in Arabella's "curing" (180), through which she is made to realize the error—or "Follies" (180)—of her ways in so determinedly interpreting these romances as "real Pictures of Life" (7). As such, while Arabella is frequently depicted as willful—and even, at one point, "fit for a Mad–house" (157)—Evelina, whose position in society is much more precarious than Arabella's, is invariably ashamed of any social impropriety that she involuntarily commits and "[blushes] for [her] folly" (34). In spite of their behavioral discrepancies, however, these two heroines are, I argue, united in the innateness of their intellectual capacity and in the rurality in which they are raised, which allows them to develop their intelligence in ways that they could not in urban environments. Indeed, although Palo acknowledges that Arabella "leads an isolated existence" growing up (204), and Catherine Gallagher identifies that Arabella's solitude is "the very condition that immerses her" (185) in the reading that is deemed so instructive by Kukkonen, very little has been written to actively and explicitly acknowledge the association of female intellectual capacity with the subtext of rural isolation within either novel. It is, therefore, this deficiency that my argument seeks to address.

In order to characterize, first, the ways in which isolation is presented as the subtext of *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote*, it is important to consider the different ways in which isolation is addressed. Burney and Lennox use a variety of words to allude to isolation—though never isolation itself: seclusion, solitude, privacy. The most prominent and frequently used example, however, is retirement. Evelina is "educated in the most secluded retirement" (9), while Arabella laments the fact that "the perfect Retirement she lived in, afforded indeed no Opportunities of making the Conquests she desired" (7). Stephen Bending provides a particularly enlightening reading of retirement and its implications. Writing with reference to the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu that retirement "is always retirement *from* something, and that something is inevitably the city" (558), he observes that, since the beginning of the eighteenth century, "women had been able to look to a model of female retirement as some form of learned feminist utopia that stressed at once the rejection of fashionable commercial society and the embrace of salutary meditation on worthier topics" (556).

Evelina herself remarks that people consciously choose retirement, when she says of Lord Orville: "I sometimes imagine, that, when . . . his life is devoted to retirement, he will, perhaps, resemble him whom I most love and honour" (74). Naturally, "him whom I most love and honour" refers to Mr. Villars, who, conveniently and prior to this, identifies a retired life in the country as the object of his "own inclination" (19). Her suggestion that Lord Orville will himself, "when his youth is flown, his vivacity abated" (74), choose to devote his own life to retirement is significant in portraying the concept of retirement as one that is voluntary. To this end, retirement is an entirely apt way of describing the women in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), as they, in accordance with Bending's description of female retirement, "attempt to leave the world behind" (558) and appropriately "conceal their virtues in retirement" (*Millenium Hall*, 53). In spite, however, of identifying it as such with reference to other characters, the fact remains that retirement is not an active choice for either Evelina or Arabella, and its use in describing their respective situations is thus problematic for two main reasons. First, having spent the duration of their lives to date in rural isolation, neither heroine initially has ever experienced the "fashionable commercial society" about which Bending writes and cannot, therefore, actively choose to retire "*from*" it themselves. Second, retirement is not, for Evelina or Arabella, voluntary, but rather an inherited state of being, dictated by the actions of others, in which they find themselves and over which they are portrayed as having little to no control.

Indeed, Evelina is essentially twice removed from society; not only does she grow up in isolation, but she also is, as Ronald Paulson once observed, "isolated by her birth" (286). Although it is specifically rural isolation with which my argument is concerned, the isolating nature of Evelina's "obscure birth" (9) is inherently intertwined with the conditions of her upbringing and is, therefore, important to note. As Mr. Villars reveals during one of his opening letters: "In detaining my young charge thus long with myself in the country, I consulted not solely my own inclination. Destined, in all probability, to possess a very moderate fortune, I wished to contract her views to something within it" (19–20), maintaining that "her income will be such as may make her happy, if she is disposed to be so in private life" (21). Ironically, therefore, it is Evelina's lack of any tangible, financial inheritance that results in rural isolation—for, as we later learn, her "only dowry is her beauty" (347), or, at least, it is thought to be so at this point in the novel; thus, the reality of rural isolation is itself a form of inheritance, for it is a direct result of the obscurity surrounding her birth.

When one considers the extent to which isolation may be read as the dominant subtext of Evelina's character, Barchas's work on isolation in *Emma* is especially pertinent. Toward the end of the novel, for example, Mrs. Selwyn—Evelina's second chaperone figure within society after Mrs. Mirvan—tells Evelina to "arm [herself] . . . with all [her] Berry Hill philosophy" (376). Here, most important of all is not so much what is meant by this "Berry Hill philosophy," but

rather the fact that it is termed as such. Berry Hill is, of course, the sole setting of Evelina's childhood and, thus, the epicenter of her isolation; the fact, therefore, that her own, personal philosophy is directly associated with and assigned this symbol of rural isolation is illustrative of the extent to which isolation is intrinsic to her character. Indeed, rural isolation is presented, at the beginning of the novel, as Evelina's past, present, and future; thus, it may be understood as the defining condition of her very existence. In a letter during the first volume, while she is still in London, Mr. Villars writes to Evelina that "The supposed obscurity of your birth and situation makes you liable to a thousand disagreeable adventures. Not only my views, but my hopes for your future life, have ever centered in the country" (117). He continues: "If contented with a retired situation, I still hope I shall live to see my Evelina the ornament of her neighbourhood, and the pride and delight of her family: giving and receiving joy from such society as may best deserve her affection" (118). Such a vision serves to reinforce not only this idea of rural isolation constituting the subtext of Evelina as an individual, but also the idea that the retirement in which she is described as living has been inflicted upon her as a result of her father's refusal to recognize her as his heir and not one that she has chosen for herself.

Like Evelina, Arabella is twice removed from society: first and foremost through her rural upbringing, and second through her devotion to the world of romance, referred to as "a whimsical Study" (5), and to which Betty Schellenberg would no doubt refer as a prime example of "absorptive reading" (149). Though there is no obscurity surrounding her birth, isolation is nevertheless presented as something that Arabella inherits through birth, as is made clear during the novel's opening, which begins with reference to her father, "The Marquis" (5). The reader learns how, having observed "the Baseness and Ingratitude of Mankind" (5) in what is described in the chapter's subheading as "a Turn at Court" (5), the Marquis "resolved to quit all Society whatever, and devote the rest of his Life to Solitude and Privacy" (5). There is no explicit mention of retirement, though this is perhaps because, as Bending notes, rural retirement was a term most often associated with fashionable women of wealth, such as Montagu. The castle to which the Marquis retires, however, and in which Arabella is born is subsequently described as "his Retreat" (5), effectively conveying the same sense of a "rejection" of polite society. Thus, it becomes clear that it is her father's decision to retreat to "the Country, from whence he absolutely resolved never to Return" that leads (6), by extension and without question, to Arabella's experience of growing up "wholly secluded from the World" (7). Patricia Meyer Spacks proffers an astute reading of this particular passage in which she observes that, while privacy is here "a chosen condition" (312), this solitude is inflicted upon Arabella by her father. Indeed, Arabella is more than once referred to by her cousin Mr. Glanville as being "in her Solitude" (66, 69), which not only suggests that this solitude is specific to Arabella and her character but also supports Barchas's claim that language contributes to the

construction of isolation.

In spite of the prominent role played by isolation, there nevertheless develops an inevitability surrounding both heroines' eventual entrance into society—an inevitability that serves effectively to set in place the eighteenth-century, urban-rural dichotomy pertaining to intellectual capacity that is ultimately subverted by the heroines in these novels. Given the obscurity that surrounds Evelina's birth, it is perhaps ironic that she enters society so much earlier than Arabella who, in spite of a "strong . . . Curiosity . . . to see *London*" (65), does not arrive there until the ninth and final book. Evelina wishes "to remain quiet and unnoticed" within society (174), no doubt due to the compromising nature of her circumstances; whereas Arabella is automatically and publicly announced as "daughter to the deceased Marquis" (263), Evelina is "forbidden to claim" (20) her own father's name. As Margaret Anne Doody succinctly puts it, she is "unfathered" and thus "unplaced in society" (40). Nevertheless—or perhaps, as a direct result of this lack of place, for, as suggested by Susan Staves, it is "the controversy of Evelina's legitimacy" that ultimately "serves to force and to justify her contact with a much wider society" (376)—from the very beginning of the novel, her entrance into this society is presented as the inextricable trajectory of events, reflected in the novel's subtitle: *The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.*

The initial correspondence between Mr. Villars and Lady Howard also contributes to this sense of inevitability. Lady Howard observes, for example: "I cannot but think, that it was never designed, for one who seems meant to grace the world, to have her life devoted to retirement" (125). The passive "have her life devoted to" is again indicative of retirement as Evelina's inheritance. Lady Howard proceeds to insist that Evelina "has merit which ought not to be buried in obscurity. She seems born for an ornament to the world" (124). Her use of "ornament" is here significant in drawing a direct parallel with Mr. Villars's own vision of Evelina as the "ornament" of her own retired "neighbourhood" as he outlines an alternative eventuality for Burney's heroine and, to an extent, the novel's structure, in which there occurs an unforeseen turn of events regarding Evelina's fate. Despite his reticence, Mr. Villars agrees that "the time draws on for experience and observation to take place of instruction" (20). A similar emphasis is placed upon instruction when Mr. Glanville, believing it to be the solitude in which Arabella lives that "confirmed her in her absurd and ridiculous Notions, desired his Father to press her to go to *London*" (254), and in so doing, gain an "Acquaintance with the World" (340). Again, an urban setting is explicitly associated with more sophisticated forms of thinking.

Indeed, society is presented by both Burney and Lennox as a catalyst through which their heroines' intellectual capacity is engaged; in being presented with a variety of new situations, Evelina and Arabella are encouraged to engage and, thus, demonstrate their own judgment and reason. This is made clear through various displays of autonomous action and moments of direct cognitive

engagement throughout both novels. Arabella, for example, frequently expresses her distaste for society and desire to return to "the Solitude" that she has "quitted" (279), going as far as to act upon this when, "[n]ot being able to relish the insipid Conversation of the young Ladies that visited her at *Richmond*," she goes instead to "walk in the Park there; which because of its Rural Privacy, was extremely agreeable to her Inclinations" (341). Here, the fact of Arabella actively seeking out the closest alternative to the "Rural Privacy" in which she was raised within an urban context is significant, not only in reinforcing rural isolation as the subtext to her identity but also in presenting rural isolation as the symbol and contributing factor of her own autonomy. Though Evelina does not go to such lengths to avoid social calls, her reflections upon her own expectations of London are, in particular, illustrative of the way in which exposure to society prompts within her a self-appraising engagement with her own mind. Upon admitting, for example, to feeling somewhat underwhelmed by the city sights with which she is presented, Evelina stops herself to write "However, I have seen nothing yet, so I ought not to judge" (27). Her acknowledgment of the significance of the ocular proof is testimony to the application of her own reason and, moreover, her understanding of the formation of judgment as a cognitive process. Such understanding, coupled with the level of self-awareness made visible to the reader via the novel's epistolary form, is precisely what allows Evelina to determine things "in [her] own mind" (30).

While polite society is the setting in which Evelina and Arabella's intellectual capacity is frequently engaged in their respective narratives, their intellectual abilities are evident in rural isolation as well, and it is to this point that I shall now return. Throughout *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote*, a parallel is drawn between isolation and intellectual capacity, as both Burney and Lennox present the former as providing a critical distance from society and as a setting in which the intellectual capacity of their heroines may in turn be isolated. Their time spent in isolation is presented, in particular by Mr. Villars, as a period of preparation for their inevitable entrance into the world in which their innate intellectual capacity is both identified and encouraged. This encouragement is successful in establishing and emphasizing, from the beginning of each novel, an association of intellect with isolation. Mr. Villars, for example, identifies his "study" as guarding Evelina against the "delusions" of pleasure and dissipation "by preparing her to expect,—and to despise them" (20), referring to her as his "pupil" (21), and to her rural upbringing as "the work of seventeen years spent in the country" (118). Similarly, the Marquis, finding in his daughter "an uncommon Quickness of Apprehension, and an Understanding capable of great Improvements" resolves "to cultivate so promising a Genius with the utmost Care" (6); though Arabella's education is subsequently left to her own discretion and takes the form of a close reading of the romances by which she is taught the emphasis that is placed upon the nurturing and preservation of the female intellect within rural isolation.

Indeed, that emphasis on the connection between female intellect and

rural isolation is especially important to note when considered alongside and within the context of the eighteenth-century stereotype that associates ignorance—as opposed to intellect—with isolation, referred to by Lennox as "Country-Simplicity" (10). As a result, partly, of isolation constituting the subtext of *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote*, the stereotype pertaining to associations of education and improvement with rural and urban environments is a prevalent theme throughout each novel. It is also crucial to understanding Evelina's and Arabella's intellectual capacity as one that is innate within each of them since this innateness—and the acknowledgment of this innateness—is dependent upon the acknowledgment, in turn, of this stereotypical association; Evelina and Arabella are recognized as having an innate intellectual capacity *in spite* of their rural upbringing. In her study of the effect of Evelina's education in polite speech on her social agency, Isaacson notes the significance of John Brewer's study of politeness in the eighteenth century. In order to fully understand the implications of associating politeness with city culture—and a lack thereof with the countryside—and the fictional representation of these associations, in which Evelina and Arabella are depicted as exceptions to the rule, Brewer's work is likewise useful to consider here. In accordance with the stereotypical association of politeness with urban environments, Brewer confirms that "Politeness, it was said, could not flourish in isolation. It would wither into self-regard or mutate into intolerance unless it was cultivated in society" (102–03); Evelina's introduction as a young girl with an *already* "cultivated understanding" is, thus, especially pertinent. Brewer continues: "the home of politeness was in company, and the place of company was in the institutions that lay at the heart of urban culture" (102–03). Though not explicitly concerned, therefore, with the intellectual capacity of individuals, Brewer's insight into eighteenth-century polite culture is effective in both contextualizing the disparaging portrayal of the countryside and its inhabitants in *Evelina* and *The Female Quixote,* and in subsequently revealing the innate intellectual capacities of their heroines.

Evelina's early life in isolation is no secret—indeed, it is repeatedly presented as the defining condition of her existence—as is made clear when she enters into society by the remarks other people make about her. In particular, her grandmother, the infamous Madame Duval, is preoccupied with Evelina's rural upbringing—"She lamented that I had been brought up in the country, which, she observed, has given me a very *humpkinish air*" (69) — calling her "a foolish, ignorant country girl" (182). A similar sense of ignorance is automatically attributed to Evelina when she recalls how the Branghtons "were unwilling to suppose that their *country cousin*, as they were pleased to call me, should be better acquainted with any London public place than themselves" (90). This is significant for two reasons: first, the reference to Evelina as the "*country cousin*," in which the association of rurality with her identity further emphasizes the notion of isolation as the subtext of her character. Second, their unwillingness to assume greater cultural knowledge

or cultivated understanding of someone who was raised in rural isolation is wholly supportive of Brewer's claim that "culture travelled only one way, out from London rather than in from the provinces" (494).

While Bending's aforementioned reference to retirement as a "learned feminist utopia" may initially seem to contradict the association of a lack of intelligence with rurality that is reinforced by Brewer, it is important to note that Bending is referring to a fashionable "model" of retirement that was specific to wealthy city-dwellers; it is precisely the fact of their choosing to retire to the country "*from*" the city that makes it fashionable and in keeping with the association of superior, "learned" levels of intellect with urban settings. Brewer's conviction concerning the ostensibly non-negotiable trajectory of politeness is, thus, effective in confirming the fashionable nature of this "model" of retirement whereby, as Bending notes, "country life" is presented "as an ideal against which to set the hurry and bustle of . . . metropolitan living" (557). By arriving "in from the provinces," therefore, Evelina and Arabella appear instead distinctly *un*fashionable, and their experience of "country life" is regarded as cause for disdain—as opposed to "an ideal"—to which a stereotypical association of ignorance is automatically attributed. Indeed, the reality of Brewer's directional claim is made all the more apparent when Mr. Lovel, inadvertently offended by Evelina's "inexperience in the manners, of the world,"—which, as detailed by Burney in her preface "occasion[s] all the little incidents which these volumes record" (9)—uses the knowledge of Evelina's rural upbringing to humiliate her. Speaking "in a sneering tone of voice," he says at the end of a trip to the theatre "For my part, I was most struck with the *country* young lady," before exclaiming rather less subtly "such true country-breeding,—such rural ignorance!" (83); he then proceeds to speak to her in French, before taunting "though I should beg your pardon, for probably you do not understand French" (83), brazenly assigning an air of "Country-Simplicity" to Evelina that is as unbecoming as it is untrue.

References to the country are employed equally unfavorably throughout *The Female Quixote* of which a striking example occurs when Miss Glanville introduces her cousin—again "with a Sneer" (263)—to reveal that Arabella "had been brought up in the Country" and, therefore, "knew nothing of the World" (263). This association of rural ignorance is extended at the very beginning of the novel to the assembled congregation in the local church, the members of which are described as "Rustics, highly delighted with the Opportunity of talking to the gay *Londoner,* whom they looked upon as a very extraordinary Person" (9), and in which the perceived gap between the rural and urban spheres appears all the more tangible. Lennox is, to some extent, even more explicit than Burney in her application of the association of ignorance with rurality to her heroine. Arabella's "little Follies" (180) are, for example, described by her uncle as "being occasioned by a Country Education, and a perfect Ignorance of the World" (180). Thus is revealed the ways and the extent to which this stereotype is depicted by both

Burney and Lennox. The sincerity with which this association is conveyed is in itself important, revealing the ultimate significance of the role played by rurality in highlighting Evelina's and Arabella's innate intellectual capacity; Miss Glanville is accordingly portrayed as struggling to "conceive it possible for a young Lady, bred up in the Country, to be so perfectly elegant and genteel as she found her Cousin" (80). In as much, therefore, as rural ignorance is presented as the widely accepted assumption that would seem to defy this revelation of innate intelligence, it is also the assumption within the context of which this revelation occurs; to be able to view the heroines as figures of example and as exceptions to the rule, it must first be established precisely what this rule is and, moreover, how it is fictionalized within the writing of Burney and Lennox. As neither heroine has ever, at the beginning of either novel, been exposed to the urbanized, "convivial patterns of social exchange" through which Brewer suggests that politeness is cultivated (106), it follows that this trait is one that is innate within them, forming an intrinsic aspect of both of their characters.

Indeed, Evelina is an exception to the rule, as confirmed upon her arrival at Howard Grove, whereupon she defies not only the stereotype relating to rural ignorance but also that of beauty, as Lady Howard relays to Mr. Villars: "Had I not known from whom she received her education, I should, at first sight of so perfect a face, have been in pain for her understanding; since it has been long and justly remarked, that folly has ever sought alliance with beauty" (22–23). Nevertheless, she proceeds to acknowledge the disproving of her expectation, observing that Evelina's character "seems truly ingenious . . . nature has blessed her with an excellent understanding," before reassuring Mr. Villars: "You have no reason to regret the retirement in which she has lived; since that politeness which is acquired by an acquaintance with high life, is in her so well supplied by a natural desire of obliging, joined to a deportment infinitely engaging" (23). Lady Howard's reference to "a natural desire" is highly significant, not least in alluding back to the opening description of Evelina as "the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire" (10), but also—crucially—because this "natural desire of obliging" is portrayed as being sufficient in matching that which is acquired through exposure to the "high life" of polite society. As such, "the retirement in which she has lived" becomes less a cause for preemptive consternation than it does the condition in which Evelina's "natural desire" for politeness is best revealed. Lord Orville, too, openly acknowledges later on in the novel that Evelina "has been extremely well educated, and accustomed to good company; she has a natural love of virtue, and a mind that might adorn *any* station, however exalted" (346). Though, here, Orville does not explicitly allude to the association of ignorance with rural upbringing, his suggestion that Evelina's mind may successfully "adorn *any* station" is significant in discounting any suggestion of rural limitation. His use, moreover, of "nature" reflects and endorses Lady Howard's own employment of it and is sufficient, therefore, in establishing a connection between Evelina and Nature that highlights

her innate intellectual capacity.

Lord Orville continues to confirm that "Her understanding is, indeed, excellent" (346); "I am convinced, that whatever might appear strange in her behaviour, was simply the effect of inexperience, timidity, and a retired education, for I find her informed, sensible, and intelligent" (346–47). Here, his reference to Evelina's "inexperience" is significant in reflecting the way in which Burney and Lennox, in presenting their heroines' respective capacities for intellectual development as innate, establish a clear distinction between this capacity and experience. It is made clear that one does not always guarantee the presence of the other and, moreover, that a lack of worldly experience does by no means disable all intellectual potential within an individual. Evelina's mind is, for example, one that has been formed to an unparalleled "degree of excellence" (125), and yet, it is also "a mind to which greater views are unknown" (21)—not unlike, therefore, the description of Arabella's mind as "at once so enlighten'd, and so ridiculous" (367). Rather, highlighting this lack of experience becomes one of the ways through which Evelina's and Arabella's intellectual capacity is proven innate, existing of its own accord and *in spite* of their inexperience. Indeed, while the accumulation of worldly knowledge and experience is presented by Burney as "the natural progression of the life of a young woman," the virtue of her mind and cultivated nature of her understanding are themselves as undisputed as "her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world" (9).

The revelation of Arabella's own intellectual capacity—referred to as "her noble Powers of Reason" (382)—as one that is innate within her is likewise intrinsic to the course of the novel, though with rather more reference to the stereotype of rural ignorance than in *Evelina*. Upon hearing his father describe Arabella as "quite a Rustic!" (63), for example, Mr. Glanville insists: "Ah! don't wrong your Judgment so much, Sir . . . my Cousin has as little of the Rustic as if she had passed all her Life in a Court" (63–64). Here, the suggestion that Arabella appears as if she has grown up in polite society is testimony to that fact that her status as an intellectually capable female is unhindered by her rural upbringing. It also draws a parallel with Lady Howard's suggestion that Mr. Villars need not "regret the retirement" in which Evelina is raised as, demonstrably, it is ineffectual in causing any alteration to either heroine's capacity for intellectual development. Mr. Glanville continues: "Her fine Sense, and the native Elegance of her Manners give an inimitable Grace to her Behaviour; and as much exceed the studied Politeness of other Ladies I have conversed with, as the Beauties of her Person do all I have ever seen" (64). His use of "native" is especially significant in conveying this sense of innateness; "native" is used, rather like "natural" in *Evelina*, upon multiple occasions throughout the novel, referring to Arabella's "native Charms" (7) and, latterly, upon her arrival into polite society, to "the native Dignity in her Looks," which "drew the Admiration of the whole Assembly" (272). Mr. Glanville's suggestion, moreover, that Arabella's politeness is *un*studied, unlike those of other

women who have grown up within an urban environment, confirms this innateness. It is made clear to the reader at the beginning of the novel that, while growing up, Arabella "had no other Conversation but that of a grave and melancholy Father, or her own Attendants" (7). This is, again, effective in confirming her "native" intellectual capacity for, as Brewer himself notes in relation to politeness, "conversation was the means for its achievement and politeness the means by which social improvement and refinement could be realised" (100); the fact, therefore, that Arabella's own politeness is successful in revealing itself with such an unstudied air is telling.

It is through the medium of conversation in particular that Arabella's intellectual capacity is revealed not only as innate but also as one that distinguishes her "from the rest of her Sex" (117). As Mr. Glanville observes, Arabella "was not only perfectly well in her Understanding, but even better than most others of her Sex" (309), describing "her Conversation" specifically as "far superior to most other Ladies" (37). Similarly, Lord Orville observes that Evelina "is not, indeed, like most modern young ladies, to be known in half an hour; her modest worth and fearful excellence, require both time and encouragement to shew themselves" (347). This sense of comparison is made all the more explicit by the presence of Arabella's cousin, Miss Glanville, "whose Reading had been very confined" (82) and who, having been brought up within an urban environment, is "perfectly versed in the Modes of Town–Breeding" (68). The two cousins are portrayed almost as polar opposites of each other as is made especially clear upon their arrival in Bath when "*Arabella* went up to her own Apartment to meditate upon what had pass'd, and Miss *Glanville* retir'd to dress for Dinner" (290). Their different employments of time illustrate the disparate priorities maintained by each character. Indeed, significantly, in spite of being raised under conditions that, according to Brewer, are conducive to politeness, Miss Glanville is "so little qualified for partaking a Conversation so refined as *Arabella's* . . . since it was neither upon Fashions, Assemblies, Cards, or Scandal" (68); predictably, she soon tires of "the magnificent Solitude" in which Arabella lives, "and [insinuates] to her Brother, her Inclination to return to Town" (81). To this end, a parallel may be drawn between Miss Glanville and Lord Orville's own sister, Lady Louisa, of whom Evelina recounts: "first I had blushed at the unexpected politeness of Lord Orville, and immediately afterwards, at the contemptuous failure of it in his sister" (286). Thus, while conversation is presented to Arabella as a platform from which to demonstrate the capacity of her mind and wit, conversation is, for Miss Glanville, the platform upon which the shortcomings of an upbringing based on these "Modes of Town–Breeding"—or, as it is perhaps more aptly described: "*nothing–meaning* Ceremony" (68)—are revealed. It also, moreover, reinforces the idea—first introduced by Lady Howard—of its not mattering where a character has grown up if that character is instilled with an innate intellectual capacity. Upon one particular occasion, for example, "Miss *Glanville* (to whom all they said was quite unintelligible) diverted

herself with humming a Tune, and tinkling her Cousin's Harpsichord; which proved no Interruption to the more rational Entertainment of her Brother and *Arabella*" (83). This portrayal of conversation as a divisive activity, dependent upon an individual's intellectual capacity, is effective in mirroring a similar occasion toward the end of *Evelina* in which she writes: "All the company then, Lord Orville, Miss Mirvan, and myself excepted, played at cards, and *we*—oh how much better did we pass our time! . . . engaged in a most delightful conversation" (403).

Thus, although Evelina and Arabella's social inexperience is acknowledged and made quite clear to the reader, their respective innate intellectual capacities remain undisputed throughout both novels. In presenting their heroines as having grown up in retirement and away from polite society, Burney and Lennox are able to reveal the full extent and the implications of this innate female intellectual capacity: Evelina's and Arabella's rural retirement is not a retirement of the fashionable kind discussed by critics such as Bending but, rather, one into which they are born and which, consequently, leads to automatic assumptions of their ignorance. Throughout both novels, therefore, rural isolation constitutes not simply an inadvertent form of inheritance that is thrust upon each heroine but also a subtext that ultimately serves to contradict contemporary, predefined associations of ignorance with isolation. Although their intellectual capacity is most effectively exercised and put to the test within society, it is through the fostering of an association of *intellect* with isolation that both the reader and the other characters within each novel are rendered fully aware of their abilities. In spite of disparate narratives from the two heroines, Evelina and Arabella are united by intellect, with the rurality with which it is associated providing a means of reading them in tandem with each other. Indeed, it is precisely through presenting Evelina and Arabella as intellects in isolation within their own right that Burney and Lennox demonstrate, across two generations of women writers, what may be understood as a shared, methodological use of rural isolation as a way of drawing attention to and discussing female intellect within the context of the eighteenth-century female-authored novel.

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