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Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and the Dangers of Romance-reading

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INTRODUCTION

Eighteenth-century England underwent a Quixote-mania. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605; 1615) was incredibly successful in England: it was read, translated and replicated several times. English literature assimilated the idea of *Don Quixote* thoroughly and naturalised it. However, quixotism, and it is part of its allure, is an incredibly multifaceted concept that problematises issues such as idealism, the comic and satire, empiricism, pragmatism, aesthetics, skepticism, madness, fiction, imagination, gullibility, etc. It can be declined and investigated from a multiplicity of perspectives.

The focus of this thesis is on one aspect of the so-called Quixotic fallacy, that the eighteenth century appropriated and replicated:

> In fine, he gave himself up so wholly to the reading of Romances, that a-Nights he would pore on 'till 'twas Day, and a-Days he would read on 'till 'twas Night; and thus by sleeping little, and reading much, the Moisture of his Brain was exhausted to that Degree, that at last he lost the Use of his Reason. A world of disorderly Notions, pick'd out of his Books, crouded into his Imagination; and now his Head was full of nothing but Inchantments, Quarrels, Battles, Challenges, Wounds, Complaints, Amours, Torments, and abundance of Stuff and Impossibilities; insomuch, that all the Fables and fantastical Tales which he read, seem'd to him now as true as the most authentick Histories.[1]

In the eighteen century, characters often loosed their minds for reading too much and too bad, and, incidentally, they usually were female characters. This thesis aims at

[1] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, translated from the Spanish by P. A. Motteux, Everyman's Library, London, 1991, p. 15.

establishing the existence of a topos and analysing it in its causes, constituents and manifestations. The arguably most popular eighteenth-century instance of a romance-reader with the head turned by books is Arabella, the protagonist of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. Arabella, secluded in her father *Arcadia*, inherits her mother's library and fills her mind with hero and heroines, adventures and perils. If Don Quixote mistakes himself for the knightly hero of a romance, Arabella thinks herself a courtly heroine of a romance and expects her life to conform to that of a French seventeenth-century romance. She knows nothing of the world and ends up projecting her books on real life, arousing hilarious misunderstandings and comic mistakes.

The character of Arabella is analysed in the first chapter. After a contextualisation of *The Female Quixote* in the life of her authoress, with a special attention on the role of romances in Lennox's experience, the book is addressed. The plot is unraveled, and the themes delved into. *The Female Quixote*'s indebtedness to *Don Quixote* is considered, for much of the ambivalence carried by the Don is inherited by Arabella. Her status as a Quixotic-fool and Quixotic-observer is exposed: Arabella is both a vehicle of humour, directed to romance, and of an unsettling satire toward the wicked society. Moreover, Arabella's enactment of romantic plots enhances a metafictional reflection on the opposition of romance and novel, particularly relevant in the eighteenth-century discussion on fiction. According to this interpretation of the *The Female Quixote,* Arabella represents the decayed and ridiculous romance, whereas the world and characters around her have progressed into the realm of the novel. The friction between reality and imagination, romance and novel, has provided fertile ground for the

feminist criticism that identified romance as the female pole of the binary opposition and the novel as the male. However, also in this case, interpretations are contradictory in that romance could feed the stereotype of women's frivolity and weakness, or could represent women's space of liberation. Finally, conscious of the compresence of engagingly dialectic elements, the treatment of Arabella and her entrance (or disappearance) into the world are discussed.

The second chapter starts from the assumption that literary anxieties may mirror contextual circumstances. Therefore, it considers the historical romance-readers and it traces the stereotypical associations of romances to low-literature and to women readers. Women's reading habits were indeed a widespread moral anxiety of the century: women could not be trusted to disengage themselves from their readings, and romances and novels were accused of inoculating wrong ideas and expectations about life and love. Therefore, the chapter investigates the alleged dangers of romance-reading and its incidence on female education.

Picking from the fervid Quixotic vogue and the social circumstances that characterised women's relation to literature, female readers acting out what they read in books developed into a stereotyped literary figure. The third chapter anatomises the trope in its constituents: reader, books, and reading. It demonstrates that Lennox's Arabella was by no means an isolated phenomenon, formulaic procedures can indeed be detected in several other narratives featuring a Quixotic reader. An interrogative about books is then aroused: is there a noxious characteristic in the books that Quixotic readers read? A common element that entraps and ensnares? The choice of books is therefore

investigated and hypothesis on the endangering power of fiction drawn. Finally, the quixotes' incapacity of recognizing the difference between text and reality, and the anxiety about misreaders of both texts and reality, call into question the reader relation to texts, particularly fictitious ones. Quixotic readers are diagnosed a distorted mimetic disorder and an excess of empathy in their relation to books. Not surprisingly, the same characteristics are recognised in women readers.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Charlotte Lennox's and romance-reading

Charlotte Lennox's first biography was published in 1935[2] and reissued in 1969 after the discovery, in Scotland,[3] of the so-called 'Lennox Collection', a body of forty-six letters between Lennox and several eminent men of letters, among whom Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, all unusually interested and engaged in her life. Progressively, the author has been emancipated and dignified to the point of being registered among the 'mothers of the novel'.[4]

There is little substantiated information about Charlotte Lennox, née Ramsay. The Royal Literary Fund, in 1792, recorded a petition for assistance to 'the daughter of Colonel Ramsay, Royalist Governor of New York in 1720'.[5] But New York never had a governor Ramsay. The information about her is so rarefied as to be difficult even to recognise her status as an American. According to Philippe Séjourné, who focuses his researches on the American-ness of the author and appoints her as the 'first Novelist of Colonial America',[6] 'she herself can be held responsible for creating a legend around her own name'.[7] Charlotte Lennox's date and place of birth are obscure, but can be

[2] Miriam Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Woman of Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1935.
[3] Sonia Maria Melchiorre in *Genius Prevails and Wits Begin to Shine*, Sette Città, Viterbo, 2016, p. 171, specifies that "they were kept in an album deposited with the British Linen Bank in Dunfermline in the name of Alexander Sutherlan and some efforts were made in that year to trace his heirs. The album was then sent to the National Library of Scotland where Duncan Isles, the graduate student was allowed to transcribe them".
[4] Dale Spender, *Mothers of the novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen*, Pandora, London, 1986.
[5] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Woman of Letters,* p. 57.
[6] Philippe Séjourné, *The Mystery of Charlotte Lennox, First Novelist of Colonial America (1727?-1804), Nouvelle Série No. 62* in *Publications des Annales de la Faculté des Lettres Aix-en-Provence*, Aix-en-Provence, 1967, p. 11.
[7] Ibidem.

collocated around the end of the 1720s, possibly in Gibraltar[8] or New York.[9] What is certain is that, at an unknown age and for unknown reasons, she was sent to England. Critics speculate about the existence of a wealthy aunt, who was meant to host her,[10] others conjecture an educational voyage. Then, the biographical record grows even murkier. However, a memoir of Lennox, published in *The British Magazine and Review* in 1783,[11] indicates that Lady Isabella Finch and Lady Rockingham took an interest in her. It would be consistent with the dedication to Lady Isabella Finch in her collection of poems. Anyway, we found her at an early age, alone, poor, trying to make a living out of acting and writing. Her first time in print is a collection of poems titled *Poems on Several Occasion*, published in 1747. However, Lennox's first major publication is *The Life of Harriot Stuart, Written by herself*, in 1750, and her major success is *The Female Quixote or, The Adventures of Arabella*, published in 1752. Her life was a constant struggle for money, with little contribution by her unhelpful and financially-draining husband Alexander Lennox, whom she married soon after the publication of her poems. She supported him and their two children, and finally left him in 1793, but not before he had managed to turn their son against her. According to Séjourné, Lennox expresses her frustration toward the loyalty and submission that a disillusioned wife must show to a husband for whom she has no respect in her last novel, *Euphemia*, published in 1790. Nevertheless, from the very beginning to her destitute death, in 1804, Charlotte Lennox

[8] Margaret Anne Doody, 'Introduction' to Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. By Margaret Dalziel, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.
[9] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteen-Century Lady of Letters*.
[10] Much of the information on Lennox's early years has been inferred from her first novel *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1750), where a strong autobiographical influence has been recognised.
[11] 'Mrs. Lennox.' *The British Magazine and Review 3* (July 1783): 8-11. Rpt. In Charlotte Lennox, *Sophia*, ed. Norbert Schurer, Broadview, Peterborough, 2008, pp. 205-11.

was untiring and industrious. She dedicated herself to several translations from the French, six that we are aware of, wrote four novels and three plays. She pioneered Shakespearean criticism with her *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753-4), the first work that traces Shakespeare's sources. She started a magazine in 1760, *The Lady's Museum* (1760-61), that, in the opinion of Kathryn Shevelow, 'is one of the most intelligent and valuable early women's magazine'.[12] Although it did not prosper, it hosted the serialised publication of 'The History of Harriot and Sophia', later published as *Sophia,* in 1762. She also attempted drama; her first play *The Sister* – with an epilogue by Oliver Goldsmith – appeared for only one night, but *Old City Manners* obtained a discreet success in 1775-1776.

Though disagreeable, Alexander Lennox had the merit of introducing her, through the printer William Strahan, to Samuel Johnson, who offered her his literary advice and a long-lasting friendship. Johnson wrote for her dedications, reviews, proposals, and, allegedly, some chapters. Miriam Rossiter Small goes as far as to suggest that *Shakespeare Illustrated* was probably his idea. Through Johnson, she secured an introduction to Samuel Richardson and an acquaintance with Henry Fielding. The three authors were impressed with her talent and brilliance. Duncan Isles, in the appendix to the Oxford Edition of *The Female Quixote* examines their influence on Lennox and notices that 'by introducing her to Richardson' Dr. Johnson 'provided her with a particularly valuable new ally, who helped her in at least three distinct ways: as a novelist, he gave her literary advise; as a printer, he printed the first edition of *The*

[12] Kathryn Shevelow, 'Charlotte Lennox', in Janet Todd, *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Totowa (New Jersey), 1987, p. 197.

Female Quixote; as one of London's most prominent men of letters, he used his influence in the literary world on her behalf'.[13] Moreover, Fielding wrote a surprisingly favorable review of *The Female Quixote* in *The Covent Garden Journal*;[14] that is considered the best book review Fielding ever wrote.[15] Her literary friendships extended, among others, to Garrick, who produced her plays, Goldsmith, who wrote an epilogue for her, and Reynolds, who painted her portrait. Indeed, by 1755 Charlotte Lennox 'was one of the most famous and highly praised writers in England'.[16]

Doody imagines Lennox as a young girl reading and re-reading romances.[17] Indeed, it is safe to assert that Charlotte Lennox was well-acquainted with romances even before writing *The Female Quixote*, since French romances of the early-to-mid-seventeenth century supplied the fiction read by English young people of both sexes in the early eighteenth century. According to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Isabella Finch, who probably acted as Lennox's patroness and to whom *Poems on several Occasion* is dedicated, was 'the only Lady at Court'[18] to have her own library, which would have been accessible to Lennox.

Already in 'Shallum and Hilpah, An Epistole', the last of her 1747 poems, Lennox mocked romance convention:

What Thoughts can figure all my vast Distress?

[13] Duncan Isles, Appendix "Johnson, Richardson, and The Female Quixote" in Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.
[14] Sir Alexander Drawcansir (Henry Fielding), *The Covent Garden Journal*, Vol. 1, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1915, p. 279.
[15] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters*, p.13.
[16] Shevelow, "Charlotte Lennox", p. 196.
[17] Doody, 'Introduction' to Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xiv.
[18] Lady Mary Montagu (1967) quoted in Patricia L. Hamilton, 'In Search of Lady Isabella's Library; or, A Question of Access', in *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*, *Vol.*2: Iss. 1, Article 14, 2012, p. 1.

> What Words the Anguish of my Should express,
> When to my Rival you resign'd your Charms,
> And fill'd his richer, but less faithful Arms?[19]

Also in the poem 'The Art of Coquetry' (1750) she uses chivalric conventions while suggesting how to conquer men's heart.

Then, in her first novel, *The Life of Harriot Stuart*, Lennox is explicit about Harriot's relation to romances. It is an epistolary novel in which the protagonist gives the account of her life in a one-way correspondence with a phantomatic Amanda, who never replies. Harriot is an eager and precocious romance-reader and interprets her own life in terms of what she has read:

> These horrid romances, interrupted my mother, has turned the girl's brain. The heroines of these books are always disobedient: and I suppose she intends to copy their example.[20]
>
> I compared my adventure with some of those I had read in novels and romances, and found it full as surprising. In short, I was nothing less than a Clelia or Statira. These reflections had such an effect on my looks and air next day, that it was very visible I thought myself of prodigious importance.[21]

After all, Harriot is not totally wrong, for her life shows indeed all the perils and vicissitudes of romance: she is kidnapped by a party of Indians, captured by a Spanish privateer, recaptured by an English captain that tries to rape her, deceived by a lover, shut in a convent. The book is full of heroines telling their perilous stories in truly

[19] Charlotte Lennox, *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by a Young Lady*, S.Paterson, London, 1747, p. 68.
[20] Charlotte Lennox, *The Life of Harriot Stuart, Written by herself*, Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish (Montana), 2004, p. 76.
[21] Lennox, *The Life of Harriot Stuart*, p. 66.

romance style. Often, associations to Lennox's own life have been drawn. The infers mainly considered the voyage to England and the fact that Harriot is a poet, and some of her verses had appeared also in Lennox's *Poems*.

Moreover, in March 1751, Johnson published in *The Rambler* a brief sketch of a deluded romance-reader called Imperia, filled with false expectation by the perusal of romances. According to Duncan Isles, Lennox 'had discussed her idea with Johnson, who paid it the compliment of imitation'.[22]

After *The Female Quixote*, then, Lennox's novels are deliberately realistic, but she never entirely forsakes romantic motifs. Indeed, in her last novel *Euphemia*, young Clara Bellenden, a great romance-reader, is rebuked by her mother for reading romances. She is defended by the heroine:

> I perceive the book was lettered on the back, it was Sidney's Arcadia; I smiled. 'That is a romance, is it not Madam?' said Mrs. Bellenden; 'Clara is very fond of those sort of books, too fond I think.' Clara blush'd, and seemed apprehensive of more rebukes on this subject. 'It is a romance, Madam,' said I, 'but it is a very ingenious work, and contains excellent lessons of morality…'[23]

[22] Isles, Appendix, in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. 420.
[23] Charlotte Lennox, *Euphemia*, in *British Women Novelists 1750-1850*, Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1992, pp. 185-186.

1.2 *The Female Quixote*

When, in 1752, *The Female Quixote, or the Adventures of Arabella* was published, it was officially anonymous and technically unrecognised. The anonymity was an open secret though, as Lennox's other works were advertised as being by 'the author of *The Female Quixote*', yet her name did not appear on the title-page until the edition of 1783. The book met with great success, and passed to a second edition three months after the first. Within almost sixty years, eight editions appeared; the last in 1810, after Lennox's death in Mrs. Barbauld's anthology of eighteenth-century novels, *British Novelists*. It was soon translated in German, French and Spanish, and imitations and allusions proliferated. It became one of the most popular novels of the second half of the century. The review in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (March, 1752) was so good that it had been suggested that it was written by Johnson himself:

> The solemn manner in which she treats the most common and trivial occurrences, the romantic expectations she forms, and the absurdities which she commits herself, and produces in others, afford a most entertaining series of circumstances and events. Mr. Fielding, however emulous of Cervantes, and jealous of a rival, acknowledges in his paper of the 24th, that in many instances this copy excels the original; and though he has no connection with the author, he concludes his encomium on the work, by earnestly recommending it.[24]

Fielding's review is particularly relevant given the Quixote-influence he was under in his own writings. In 1729, he called his play *Don Quixote in England*, and

[24] Sylvanus Urban, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xxii, Printed for Edward Cave, London, 1752, p. 146.

Joseph Andrews's title page announced 'Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes'.[25] This review, while giving his blessing to *The Female Quixote*, represents his official interpretation of *Don Quixote*. It appeared in the *Covent-Garden Journal* for March 24, 1752, eleven days after the publication of Lennox's work. Cervantes has the advantage of being the original and Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are superior to Arabella and Lucy, advocates Fielding. However, he admits:

> I cannot help observing, they may possibly be rather owing to that Advantage, which the Actions of Men give to the Writer beyond those of Women, than to any Superiority of Genius. Don Quixote is ridiculous in performing Feats of Absurdity himself; Arabella can only become so, in provoking and admiring the Absurdities of others. […] I come now to speak of those Parts in which the two Authors appear to me upon an Equality. So they seem to be in that Care which both have taken to preserve the Affection of their Readers for their principal Characters, in the midst of all the Follies of which they are guilty. Both Characters are accordingly represented as Persons of good Sense, and of great natural Parts, and in all Cases, except one, of a very sound Judgement, and what is much more endearing, as Persons of great Innocence, Integrity and Honour, and of the highest Benevolence. […] I will proceed in the last Place in those Particulars, in which, I think, our Countrywoman hath excelled the Spanish Writer. And this I am not afraid to declare, she hath done in my Opinion, in all the following Particulars. First, as we are to grant in both Performances, that the Head of a very sensible Person is entirely subverted by reading Romances, this Concession seems to me more easy to be granted in the Case of a young Lady than of an old Gentleman. Nor can I help observing with what perfect Judgment and Art this Subversion of Brain in Arabella is accounted for by her peculiar Circumstances, and Education. To say Truth, I make no Doubt but that most young

[25] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. by Douglas Brooks-Davies, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 1.

> Women of the same Vivacity, and of the same innocent good Disposition, in the same Situation, and with the same Studies, would be able to make a large Progress in the same Follies. Secondly, the Character of Arabella is more endearing than that of Quixote. […] Thirdly, the Situation of Arabella is more interesting.
>
> […] Fourthly, here is a regular story. […] Fifthly, the Incidents, or, if you please, the Adventures, are much less extravagant and incredible in the English than in the Spanish Performance. The latter, in many Instances, approaches very near to the Romances which he ridicules. […] In the former, there is nothing except the Absurdities of the Heroine herself, which is carried beyond Common-Life; nor is there any Thing even in her Character, which the Brain a little distempered may not account for. She conceives indeed somewhat preposterously of the Ranks and Condition of Men; that is to say, mistakes one Man for another; but never advances towards the Absurdity of imagining Windmills and Wine-Bags to be human Creatures, or Flocks of Sheep to be Armies.
>
> Tho' the Humour of Romance, which is principally ridiculed in this Work, be not at present greatly in fashion in this Kingdom, our Author hath taken such Care throughout her Work, to expose all those Vices and Follies in her Sex which are chiefly predominant in our Days, that it will afford very useful Lessons to all those young Ladies who will peruse it with proper Attention. Upon the whole, I do very earnestly recommend it, as a most extraordinary and most excellent Performance. It is indeed a Work of true Humour, and cannot fail of giving a rational, as well as very pleasing, Amusement to a sensible Reader, who will at once be instructed and very highly diverted. Some Faults perhaps there may be, but I shall leave the unpleasing Task of pointing them out to those who will have more Pleasure in the Office. This Caution, however, I think proper to premise, that no Persons presume to find many: For if they do, I promise them, the Critic and not the Author will be to blame.[26]

[26] Sir Alexander Drawcansir (Henry Fielding), *The Covent Garden Journal*, p. 279.

In appropriating part of his title, Lennox openly acknowledges her indebtedness to Cervantes and places herself in the Cervantine tradition, and begins a series of Quixote novels, which appear sporadically through the next four or five decades. Indeed, as the Don mistakes himself for the knightly hero of a romance, Arabella, in *The Female Quixote*, mistakes herself for a courtly heroine of a romance and expects her life to conform to that of French seventeenth-century romance.

The heroine, Arabella, is the daughter of a marquis, who, having met with ill-treatment at court, retires in a very remote castle with a young wife. In order to escape the baseness and ingratitude of mankind, the marquis recreates the 'Epitome of *Arcadia'*,[27] Doody accordingly refers to him as the first 'slave to imagination'.[28] After the death of her mother, Arabella is reared by her father in his pastoral creation, isolated and concealed from the world. She is given a good education and raised in a context of the most exemplary behavior, so that she becomes a model of learning and decorum. The marquis is amazed by her uncommon quickness of apprehension and understanding and the beauty of her mind matches that of her person. 'Nature had indeed given her a most charming Face, a Shape easy and delicate, a sweet insinuating Voice, and an Air so full of Dignity and Grace, as drew the Admiration of all that saw her. These native Charms were improved with all the Heightenings of Art; her Dress was perfectly magnificent; the best Masters of Music and Dancing were sent for from *London* to attend her' (Lennox 1752: 7). Arabella seems the most accomplished young lady, except for

[27] Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. by Margaret Dalziel, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 6. Henceforth quoted in brackets in the text.
[28] Doody, Introduction, in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xx.

one, fatal flaw: as a result of reading romances she is completely immersed in a romantic world. Indeed, her mother has purchased a great store of romances to ease her solitude, that proves a most pleasing entertainment to Arabella:

> Her Ideas, from the Manner of Life, and the Objects around her, had taken a romantic Turn; and supposing Romances were real Pictures of Life, from them she drew all her Notions and Expectations. By them she was taught to believe, that Love was the ruling Principle of the World; that every other Passion was subordinate to this; and that it caused all the Happiness and Miseries of Life. (Lennox 1752: 7)

Arabella whiles away her hours reading romances, which she believes are historically true. She is seventeen and all she knows of the world she has learnt from books. Therefore, she substitutes reality with the fictitious adventures she reads. Her literal reading of romance leads to comic mistakes and absurdly ridiculous mix-ups. Imbibed with heroic sentiments of courtly love, her mind is filled with the most extravagant expectations and the strangest notions: she sees herself surrounded by adorers and perils.

The episodes with these supposed adorers are quite comical. Arabella notices a gentleman in church, a certain Mr. Hervey, who sends her a letter intending to flatter her. Arabella, in accordance to the romance principle that prohibits to open a letter from an unknown lover, sends it back unopened. Unfortunately, with the intention of having a nearer view, Mr. Hervey rides up to Arabella, who takes him for a ravisher. A few months after the incident Arabella stumbles upon another ridiculous mistake: she becomes convinced that the new gardener is in fact a gentleman in disguise, who wants to declare a passion for her. When he is caught stealing carp from the pond, Arabella insists on believing that he is trying to drown himself out of hopeless love for her.

After this couple of embarrassing episodes, Glanville enters the scene. Glanville is Arabella's cousin and the marquis has always planned to marry them. He immediately falls in love with Arabella, but, to Arabella's horror, he is very deficient in the code of gallantry prescribed by her books and mortally offends her right away. 'His Person was perfectly handsome; he possessed a great Share of Understanding, an easy Temper, and a Vivacity which charmed every one, but the insensible *Arabella*' (Lennox 1752: 30). Actually, she sees his merits but is displeased with his manners. Initially, Glanville, who has never read romances and has no notion of his cousin's heroic sentiments, ascribes her curious behavior to her country education. Several times he mortally offends her and is banished from her presence, then he understands:

> her Usage of him was grounded upon Examples she thought it her Duty to follow; and, strange as her Notions of Life appeared, yet they were supported with so much Wit and Delicacy, that he could not help admiring her, while he foresaw, the Oddity of her Humour would throw innumerable Difficulties in his Way, before he should be able to obtain her. (Lennox 1752: 45)

Indeed, it is often underlined how Arabella is absolutely intelligent and her conversation, when not turned upon any incidents in her romances, is perfectly fine, easy and entraining.

When the marquis suddenly dies, Glanville's father, who is also Arabella's uncle and now guardian, pays her a visit. Sir Charles is confused by and displeased of his niece's fondness for romances 'for they only spoil Youth, and put strange Notions into their Heads' (Lennox 1752: 61) and shares with Glanville the preoccupation that her whimsies will expose her to ridicule. Indeed, 'her Character was so ridiculous, that he

[Glanville] could propose nothing to himself but eternal Shame and Disquiet, in the Possession of a Woman, for whom he must always blush, and be in Pain' (Lennox 1752: 116) so he resolves to cure her of her romantic notions and substitute them with a better knowledge of life and manners. 'But, he added with a Sight, That he knew not how this Reformation would be effected; for she had such a strange Facility in reconciling every Incident to her own fantastic Ideas, that every new Object added Strength to the fatal Deception she labored under' (Lennox 1752: 340).

After a period of confined mourning, Glanville and his sister Charlotte brings Arabella to the races – which Arabella insists upon designating as the Olympic games – where they meet Sir George. The latter is a baronet, who is interested in Arabella's fortune and, being well-read in romances himself, he detects her peculiar turn and resolves to profit by her folly. In the meantime, Arabella is engaged in another adventure: she sees the former gardener, the one she once mistook for a concealed lover, talking with the house-steward. She fears he has come to kidnap her, so with her maiden's help she flees, sprains an ankle and swoons. She is found by Glanville, who, under great embarrassment, brings her back home. However, Arabella is not pleased with him: he should have at least died with grief at the thought of her loss. Meanwhile, Sir George's plot to seduce her continues: he talks to her in the heroic style, he even sends her a letter (that she can open since he has not declared himself, so he cannot be formally considered a lover). Glanville discovers Sir George's machinations and beg him to stop and help him banish her romantic ideas from her imagination. Sir George complies but maintains that he must quit his heroics by degrees to be credible, and tells

his history in the approved style of romance. It is a story of passions and intrigues in which he fails to conceal his moral shallowness, and Arabella accuses him of shameful inconsistency.

The year of mourning being expired, the party sets out to Bath. Arabella sparks interest right away: 'The Ladies, alarmed at the Singularity of her Dress, crouded together in Parties; and the Words, Who can she be? Strange Creature! Ridiculous! And other Exclamation of the same Kind, were whispered very intelligibly' (Lennox 1752: 263). Primarily, it is her veil over her face, after the heroic fashion, that creates confusion: her name and status are whispered all over. In Bath, the group befriends Mr. Selvin and Mr. Tinsel. Arabella believes that both men are in love with her and finds, to her disappointment, that this is not the case. Tinsel, in fact, believes her to be mad and Mr. Selvin is the victim of several misunderstandings that culminate with Arabella banishing him from England.

The celebrated Countess of – expresses the desire to be acquainted with her. She acknowledged 'that she herself had, when very young, been deep read in Romances; and but for an early Acquaintance with the World, and being directed to other Studies, was likely to have been as much a Heroine as Lady Bella' (Lennox 1752: 323). The Countess features as an ideal instructor, who attempts to re-educate the girl explaining to her the historical changeability of concepts:

> Such is the strange Alteration of Things, that some People I dare say at present, cannot be persuaded to believe there ever were Princesses wandering thro' the World by Land and Sea in mean Disguises, carry'd away violently out of their Father's Dominions by insolent Lovers – Some discover'd sleeping in Forests,

> other Shipwreck'd on desolate Islands, confin'd in Castles, bound in Chariots, and even struggling amidst the tempestuous Waves of the Sea, into which they had cast themselves to avoid the brutal Force of their Ravishers. Not one of these Things having happen'd within the Compass of several thousand Years, People unlearn'd in Antiquity would be apt to deem them idle Tales, so improbable do they appear at present. (Lennox 1752: 326)

Not only would they appear improbable, ancient hero and romance ladies would never meet the standard of decorum of present times. 'Custom, said the Countess smiling, changes the very Nature of Things, and what was honourable a thousand Years ago, may probably be look'd upon as infamous now' (Lennox 1752: 328). Many of her heroes would be considered murderers and the ladies would not be seen as worthy. Arabella is perplexed and embarrassed but cannot be brought to divide the notions of value and virtue from the romance models of representation. The Countess character is dropped rather abruptly and Arabella's treatment is completed by a Doctor.

Indeed, the party moves to London, and then to Richmond, where Arabella is engaged in another adventure. She is deceived by a woman, an actress paid by Sir George, into believing that she is the afflicted Princess of Gaul deluded by Aramenies, who she happens to recognise in Mr. Glanville. Arabella is shocked and things precipitate. Glanville suspects the conspiracy of Sir George and, transported with rage, strikes him with his sword. In the meantime, Arabella's life is in danger after she has plunged into the Thames, 'intending to swim over it, as *Clelia* did the *Tyber*' (Lennox, 1752: 363). The physician who cures her of her fever also treats Arabella's mind with a dialogue of intense reasoning and confutation after which Arabella's heart 'yields to the

Force of Truth' (Lennox, 1752: 381). Restored to ideas more proper to her character, Arabella happily marries Mr. Glanville.

1.3 Quixotism and Female Quixotism

Ronald Paulson believes that, together with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Cervantes*' Don Quixote* is the book that most profoundly exerted a shaping influence on English writing of the eighteenth century. 'As Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) served as model for the sublime, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) served for the comic',[29] to the point that 'as Dryden and other writers noticed, Milton's Satan could be read as a Quixote whose grandiloquence has tragic consequences'.[30]

By 1700, *Don Quixote* enjoyed an immense success in England, it was read, translated and replicated several times. No national literature assimilated the idea of *Don Quixote* more thoroughly than the English. England indeed can boast the first translation from Spanish, the first critical edition, the first commentary and the first biography of Cervantes. The first translation was Thomas Shelton's in 1612, followed by the translation of the second volume in 1620. John Phillips's translation was published in 1687, and Peter Motteux's translation, based on the English version of Shelton and on the French of Filleau de Saint-Martin, appeared in 1700. Motteux's translation emphasised the burlesque and the farcical qualities of *Don Quixote*, aiming principally

[29] Ronald Paulson, *Don Quixote in England, The Aesthetic of Laughter*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998, p. ix.
[30] Ibidem.

at the laughter. In 1742 Charles Jarvis' translation came out, more literal but more dignifying. Tobias Smollet's translation, published in 1755, appeared too late to influence Lennox's work.

Don Quixote was so influential that initiated a string of rewritings with a certain set of quality. Juan de Dios Torralbo Caballero in his article[31] reports the eight 'mythemes' or 'semes' at the fundamental base of the Quixotic myth, which, according to Esther Bautista Naranjo, a work needs to share to be ascribed in the Quixotic order:

> an easily recognisable appearance, as against an exemplary and symbolic behaviour; the triangle of desire, and the role of books as the means to attain the ideal; a glimpse of madness; the transformation of the world through language, and its adjustment to the sublime ideal; the inner double: a split personality (the real person and the visionary character adhered to the ideal pursued); an individualistic and subjective character searching for its own truth, which is linked to the ideal of justice, peace and universal harmony; the desire to improve oneself and to overcome adversity both in the name of knightly heroism and for the love of the lady; criticism of materialism in modern society and the defence for declining values through the character's commitment to its ideal of justice and honour, which is presented in the text by a distant narrator and an open polyphony of voices, a learning process: from enthusiasm and fantasy to disillusion in order to recover 'sanity' and a more authentic identity, thus overcoming the visionary side of the split personality.[32]

[31] Juan de Dios Torralbo Caballero, ''Borrowed from Cervantes': Imitatio and invention in Lennox's *The Female Quixote*', in *Ambigua, Revista de Investigaciones sobre Género y Estudios Culturales*, No. 3, 2016, pp. 85-103.
[32] Esther Bautista Naranjo (2015) quoted by Caballero, 'Borrowed from Cervantes', p. 89.

As it is clear, *The Female Quixote* fills all the requirements. Lennox admits her debt to Cervantes right from the title of her work, *The Female Quixote*. Moreover, the explanatory heading of the first book, which is itself a feature coming from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, plainly announces the influence of the Spanish writer: '*Contains a Turn at Court, neither new nor surprising - Some useless Additions to a fine Lady's Education - The Bad Effects of a whimsical Study, which some will say is borrowed from Cervantes*' (Lennox 1752: 5).

The first big parallelism is in the main characters' deluding fondness for books. Indeed, Don Quixote and Arabella have their brains turned by books. Arabella keeps a 'great Store of Romances [...]. The surprising Adventures with which they were filled, proved a most pleasing Entertainment to a young Lady, who was wholly secluded from the World' (Lennox 1752: 7). Likewise, the *idalgo*:

> You must know, that when our Gentleman had nothing to do (which was almost all the Year round) he pass'd his Time in reading Books of Knight-Errantry; which he did with that Application and Delight, that at last he in a manner wholly left off his Country-Sports, and even the Care of the Estate.[33]

In the definition of Susan Stave: 'A quixote is a man whose consciousness is formed by the reading of some particular kind of literature, and who then goes forth into the world, assuming the world's reality will match the literary reality he knows'.[34] Arabella is therefore a Quixotic character. Not only, she is an English-Quixote. Wendy Motooka

[33] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, translated from the Spanish by P. A. Motteux, Everyman's Library, London, 1991, p.14.
[34] Susan Staves, "Don Quixote in Eighteenth-Century England", in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Duke University Press, Durham, 1972, p. 193.

interestingly demonstrates that all the 'English quixotic characters are not insane by empiricist standards. The senses of English quixotes are always reliable'.[35] They do not hallucinate, they interpret the world according to systems that result fanciful and lacking. In particular, Motooka's intention in pointing it out is to uncover the attack toward empirical rationality and its relativeness. Unlike Cervantes' Don Quixote, Arabella sees exactly what the other characters see. Her quixotism expresses itself as her insistence upon interpreting all events within the narrow expectation of romance 'Her Ideas, from the Manner of her Life, and the Objects around her, had taken a romantic Turn; and supposing Romances were real Pictures of Life, from them she drew all her Notions and Expectations' (Lennox 1752: 7). There is a sort of rationality in her madness. Or, at least, it is not absolutely inexplicable. Quixotism represents a possibility to hold an authority and figure in history, which for Arabella is almost a delusion. However, Motooka recognises in Lennox an effort not to gender quixotism. Arabella's insistence upon examples and supposedly historical precedents distance her from the negative, and feminised, pole of irrationality.

Anyway, due to the passivity imposed on female characters, Arabella cannot have an object of desire, a quest. She must be the object of someone else's desire. Therefore, Paulson theorises, 'Lennox's radical departure is to have a Dulcinea change places with Quixote and become the protagonist […] Arabella is both Quixote and Dulcinea – the

[35] Wendy Motooka, *The Age of Reason. Quixotism, Sentimentalism and Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 6.

roles being not exchanged but combined; and for this reason she worships herself […] She is the subject that carries the Quixotic sensibility but is also an aesthetic object'.[36]

The two footmen characters, too, mirror each other. Both Sancho Panza and the maid Lucy are models of puzzled fidelity and innocence. They become comical for the absentmindedness with which they behave and see the world. They mimic their masters, yet do not possess the same propriety of ideal and rhetoric. The awkwardness that arises is indeed very laughable. For example, Lucy, appointed to relate her mistress's message, misspells all the words:

> Sir, said *Lucy* adapting the Solemnity of her Lady's Accent – My Lady bad me say, that she will grant - No, that she consents to grant you a short Dience (Lennox 1752: 299).

Other specular characters can be recognised in Cervantes' priest and Lennox's divine, since both endeavour to cure the protagonists from their follies. And, finally, Sir George may find a model in the duke who mocks Don Quixote in the second part of the book, for both characters devise a setup expanding on the fantasies of the protagonists.

There are also similarities in the stylistic and thematic aspects, and some passages parallel each other. Firstly, both narratives share an episodic nature, even though *The Female Quixote* is much less digressive (a quality appreciated by Fielding in his review). Then, they share a certain ambiguity of genre-identity, that complicates classification, yet arouses interesting ambivalences. A generic hybridity, which furnishes a counter-

[36] Paulson, *Don Quixote in England*, p. 171.

genre quality. *Don Quixote* cannot be considered a simple book of chivalry and neither simply a book about books of chivalry. Of course, the literary Quixote can serve as a device for pointing out what seems to be the absurdity and unreality of whatever literature is popular at the time. Thus Cervantes uses *Don Quixote* to parody chivalric romances and Lennox takes on romances. Yet, the global parodic intention is nuanced and layered, and the attacks on various kinds of fiction do not extinguish the satirical potential of the Quixote idea. It would be simplistic not to acknowledge the strategic use of the Quixotic myth by Lennox. Especially considering the metamorphosis that was investing *Don Quixote* in the eighteenth century, both in the critics and in the imitations. From the farcical buffoon, burlesque for its own sake, with the eighteen century also came an emphasis on *Don Quixote* as a satiric work. Until, toward the end of the century, the critical perception progressed and the discussion on quixotism focused on the inherent dignity and noble idealism. By 1819, indeed, William Hazlitt inserts Cervantes, 'who may be considered as having been naturalised among ourselves',[37] in the section 'On the English Novelists' of *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*:

> [*Don Quixote*] presents something more stately, more romantic, and at the same time more real to the imagination, than any other hero upon record. […] Its popularity is almost unequalled; and yet its merits have not been sufficiently understood. […] The pathos and dignity of the sentiments are often disguised under the ludicrousness of the subject, and provoke laughter when they might well draw tears. The character of Don Quixote himself is one of the most perfect disinterestedness. He is an enthusiast of the most amiable kind; of a nature equally open, gentle, and generous; a lover of truth and justice; and one who had brooded over the fine dreams of chivalry and romance,

[37] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, J. Templeman, London, 1841, p. 218.

> till they had robbed him of himself, and cheated his brain into a belief of their reality. There cannot be a greater mistake than to consider 'Don Quixote' as a merely satirical work. Or as a vulgar attempt to explode the long-forgotten order of chivalry. There could not be the need to explode what no longer existed.[38]

Lennox's *The Female Quixote* appears when the transition was already in progress. So there is no reason to believe that the ubiquity traceable in the book is not intentional. The eccentricity of Arabella serves both the parodic intent, based on hyperbole and exaggeration of features, and its etymology: Arabella's perspective on reality comes from a fancifully distant and unsuspected point, yet can be revealing and disruptive.

The Female Quixote and *Don Quixote* seems to be conscious of their implications. Cervantes is sometimes addressed as, not only the originator of the modern novel, but of the postmodern too, considering the inclusion of the metanarrative literary disquisitions. For instance, the definition of poetry that Don Quixote provides in chapter XVI of the second part to Don Diego de Miranda, the Gentleman in green. Or, when Arabella expounds on the difference between raillery and satire, in chapter VI of Book VII.

> There ought to be a great Distance between Raillery and Satire, so that one may never be mistaken for the other: Raillery ought indeed to surprise, and sensibly touch, those to whom it is directed; but I would not have the Wounds it makes, either deep or lasting. (Lennox 1752: 268)

The responses of their interlocutors are similarly surprised:

[38] Ibid., pp. 218-9.

> I protest, Lady *Bella*, said Sir *Charles*, who had listen'd to her with many Signs of Admiration, you speak like an Orator. (Lennox 1752: 269).
>
> The Gentleman hearing *Don Quixote* express himself in this manner, was struck with so much Admiration, that he began to lose the bad Opinion he has conceiv'd of his Understanding.[39]

However, the plot of *The Female Quixote* is completely independent and ingeniously creates situation well-set in the current age. In the words of Rossiter Small: 'Mrs, Lennox takes the general idea and enlarges upon that, making a consistent story independent in character and plot'.[40] There are some passages that have their direct source in the Spanish work, such as the bonfire of books and the final conversion, but their outcomes are inevitably divergent. According to Margaret Dalziel the different outcomes of the two parallel episodes emphasise the contrast between the tragic quality of the original, and the comic nature of *The Female Quixote*.[41] In *Don Quixote*, the burning of the books goes beyond the parody of the books of chivalry, Cervantes reflects the Inquisition and the banning of books. In *The Female Quixote*, the episode happens right at the end of Volume I:

> The Girl is certainly distracted, interrupted the Marquis, excessively enraged at the strange Speech she had uttered: These foolish Books my Nephew talks of have turned her Brain! Where are they? Pursued he, going into her Chamber: I'll burn all I can lay my Hands upon. (Lennox 1752: 55)

[39] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Vol. 2, p. 114.
[40] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters*, p. 99.
[41] Margaret Dalziel, Explanatory Notes in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. 398.

Just as the marquis was giving order to have the books destroyed, Glanville rescue them in his first chivalric, even though opportunistic, gesture:

> Though I have all the Reason in the World to be enraged with that Incendiary Statira, said Glanville laughing, for the Mischief she has done me; yet I cannot consent to put such an Affront upon my Cousin, as to burn her favourite Books: And now I think of it, my Lord, pursued he, I'll endeavour to make a Merit with Lady Bella by saving them. (Lennox 1752: 56)

In *Don Quixote*, the books cannot avoid the unworthy fate. The curate and the barber together with the house-keeper and the niece select the books to condemn to the flames:

> The Curate […] desired the Barber to reach him the Books one by one, that he might find some among 'em, that might not deserve to be committed to the Flames. Oh, by no means, cry'd the Niece, spare none of them, they all helpt some how or other to crack my Uncle's Brain. I fansy we had best throw 'em all out at the Window in the Yard, and lay 'em together in a Heap, and then set 'em o'fire, or else carry 'em into the Back-yard, and there make a pile of 'em, and so the Smoak will offend no Body.[42]

Dalziel exposes a reference also in Arabella's hyperbolic account of Artaban: 'The Law has no Power over Heroes' (Lennox 1752: 128). Dalziel links it with the episode where Don Quixote is in danger of being arrested for having freed a group of prisoners: 'What Blockhead of Justice durst issue out a Warrant to apprehend a Knight-Errant like me? Could not his Ignorance find out that we are exempt from all Courts of Judicature?'.[43]

[42] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Vol. 1, p. 47.
[43] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Vol. 1, p. 448.

In *Don Quixote*, the curate and the Canon of Toledo (who, Motteux specifies in a footnote, 'is Cervantes himself all along'[44]) engage in a conversation about the demystification romances that reminds of the condemnation of romances by the divine in *The Female Quixote*. The subject is: probability and imitation as the characteristics of good fiction. 'Falsehood is much the more commendable, by how much it resembles Truth; and is the more pleasing the more it is doubtful and possible'[45] says the Canon. 'The only Excellence of Falsehood, answer he [the Doctor], is its Resemblance to Truth' (Lennox 1752: 378), echoes the Doctor. These passages could very well be drawn from the same discourse:

> Besides all this, their Stile is uncouth, their Exploits incredible, their Love immodest, their Civility impertinent, their Battles tedious, their Language absurd, their Voyages preposterous; and in short, they are altogether void of solid Ingenuity, and therefore fit to be banish'd a Christian Commowealth as useless as prejudicial.[46]

> But who can forbear to throw away the Story that gives to one Man the Strength of Thousands; that puts life or Death in a Smile or s Frown; that recounts Labours and Sufferings to which the Powers of Humanity are utterly unequal; that disfigures the whole Appearance of the World, and represents every Thing in a Form different from that which the Experience has shewn. (Lennox 1752: 378-9)

[44] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 464.
[45] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 463.
[46] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Vol. 1, p. 464.

Lastly, the treatment and the ending. According to Catherine Gallagher 'the Quixote's cure begins not with the renunciation but with the acknowledgement of fiction'.[47] The *anagnorisis* that precedes the transformation.

> Mercy, answer'd he, that Heaven has this Moment vouchsafed to shew me, in spite of all my Iniquities. My Judgement is return'd clear and undisturb'd, and that Cloud of Ignorance is now remov'd, which the continual Reading of those damnable Books of Kight-Errantry had cast over my Understanding. [48]

> I begin to perceive that I have hitherto at least trifled away my Time, and fear that I have already made some Approaches to the Crime of encouraging Violence and Revenge. (Lennox 1752: 381)

1.4 Quixotic Fool and Quixotic observer

Don Quixote had unsettled the conventional definition of comedy and satire, ridicule and sympathy. Paulson writes: 'Faced with the polarization of ideal and real, imagination and empiricism, the reader begins with the old satiric assumption that imagination is judged by an empirical norm and found wanting; but then one notices that empiricism is also judged by the norm of imagination – and after that, at length, there is nothing to do but balance imagination and empiricism, replacing satire with an incongruity that came to be the distinguishing feature of satire'.[49]

[47] Catherine Gallagher*, Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 179.
[48] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Vol. 2, p. 543.
[49] Paulson, *Don Quixote in England*, p. xii.

'The Quixote syndrome is at the same time a vice and a corrective'.[50] Accordingly, Arabella is both the ridiculed Quixotic fool and the ideal Quixotic observer. So that, both her imagination and the world's perception of her are problematised. Moreover, since the problem with Arabella is her romance-reading, this satiric ambivalence extends to romance: the addressee of the mockery and the vehicle of satire.

Rossiter Small unproblematically defines *The Female Quixote* 'a burlesque after the fashion of *Don Quixote*'.[51] In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding defines burlesque as the 'Exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our Delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprising Absurdity, as appropriating the Manners of the highest to the lowest'.[52] Burlesque may contribute to laughter and entertainment. Comedy, on the contrary, comes exactly from nature, from the observation of what is ridiculously discordant. The main source of comedy is affectation. Therefore, according to Fielding's categories, *The Female Quixote* is a comic work that consciously uses burlesque to the purpose of parodic imitation. The attempt is successful and the actions are sufficiently absurd to rouse wonder and often mirth; 'frequently they are ingeniously devised and seldom are they beyond the range of possibility'[53] Rossiter Small adds.

Doubtlessly, one of the most evident intentions is to ridicule French seventeenth-century romances, deriding them as a specious form of fiction, nonsensically excessive. In particular, the romances Arabella eagerly reads, 'and, what was still more

[50] Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1967, p. 275.
[51] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteen-Century Lady of Letters*, p. 12.
[52] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, p. 7.
[53] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteen-Century Lady of Letters*, p. 72.

unfortunate, not in the original French, but very bad Translations' (Lennox 1752: 7), are La Calpranède's *Cassandra,* Mlle. de Scudéry's *Artamenes; or, The Grand Cyrus*, *Clelia* and *Cleopatra*.

Romances are aesthetically flawed. They are openly criticised in some of their formal features, for example the enigmatic quality of their language or the endlessness. In one of the few discursive footnotes, Lennox argues that 'This Enigmatical Way of speaking upon such Occasions, is of great Use in the voluminous *French* Romances; since the Doubt and Confusion in it is the Cause of, both to the Accus'd and Accuser, gives Rise to a great Number of succeeding Mistakes, and consequently Adventures' (Lennox 1752: 351). Furthermore, when Glanville, to please Arabella, attempts to read some romances, 'counting the Pages he was quite terrified at the Number, and could not prevail upon himself to read them' (Lennox 1752: 50).

However, ridicule is the tool most used against the romantic foolery: the comic effect is, firstly, aroused by the intricate and unbearable romantic rules. Instances of heroic commandments are: a letter from an unknown lover is never to be opened; a hero must undergo a great deal of trouble, cares, disappointments and distresses before confessing his love; a damsel's heart can be conquered only after years of silent service; a hero has to prove his distinction by a great and generous action, for instance to hazard his life facing a considerable danger; it is an unpardonable crime to tell a lady you love her.

‘The effect of transplanting the female half of the courtly love code in the eighteenth century is to produce a monster of egotism and self-sufficiency’[54] argues Paulson, perhaps overstating. Arabella ‘grants Audience’ to her admirers, she expects ‘Signs of Contrition’ (Lennox 1752: 70, 67). She is often thatched of cruelty and has no problem to say: ‘Do you think I have any cause to accuse myself, though five thousand men were to die for me!’ (Lennox 1752: 175). Arabella is not flexible in her foolery and often banishes Glanville from her presence, once because he dared to talk her about love: ‘I will not pardon the man who shall have the Presumption to tell me he loves me.’ (Lennox 1752: 44). There is no doubt as to her rightness and everyone else’s wrongness, Paulson continues ‘Quixotism in Arabella means a rigidity of behavior’.[55] Arabella sees men around her as lovers or ravishers; she believes that she has power over the life of her lovers. As far as she acts in accordance with the romantic rules, she does not feel responsible for the harm she does.

However, her character is not odious at all; Lennox worries to balance the irony with the sympathy to the result that Arabella is in fact really amiable. She is indeed a strict observer of romantic forms, and always search for a precedent in literature. Glanville finds that ‘her Usage of him was grounded upon Examples she thought it her Duty to follow’ (Lennox 1752: 45): ‘Searching the Records of her memory for a Precedent, and not finding, that any Lady ever open a letter from an unknown lover’ (Lennox 1752: 13). At another point, Arabella, about to flee from her home, pauses to consult romance convention: ‘The Want of a Precedent, indeed, for an Action of this

[54] Paulson, *Satire and the Novel*, p. 276.
[55] Ibidem.

Nature, held her a few Moments in Suspense; for she did not remember to have read of any Heroine that voluntarily left her Father's house, however persecuted she might be (Lennox, 1752: 35). Or, the comic mix-up of Edward the gardener for a hero in disguise, for example, finds its precedent in Cassandra, where Oroondates Prince of Scynthia disguises himself as a gardener. Oroondates in particular seems to have typified the romance hero for eighteenth-century writers and the ideal reader would have immediately got the reference.

A fault that was usually recriminated to romances, which Lennox exploits in a very comical manner, was the ambiguity of language. Arabella's style is high-flown and her gesturality is exaggerated: 'lifting her fine Eyes in Heaven, seems, in the Language of Romance, to accuse the Gods for subjecting her to so cruel an Indignity' (Lennox 1752: 32). Also the style of her letters is singular: 'Yet he [Glanville] told her, her Stile was very uncommon: And pray, added he smiling, who taught you to superscribe your Letters thus, 'The unfortunate *Arabella*, to the most ungenerous *Glanville*?'' (Lennox 1752: 40). Comic incomprehension rises also from the use of common language. For instance, in the meaning of the world 'adventure':

> Arabella in the Style of Romance, intreated the Countess to favour her with the Recital of her Adventures.
>
> At the Mention of this Request, that Lady convey'd so much Confusion into her Countenance, that Arabella extremely embarrass'd by it, tho' she knew not why, thought it necessary to apologize for the Disturbance she seem'd to have occasion'd in her.
>
> Pardon me, Madam, reply'd the Countess, [..]the World Adventures carries in it so free and licentious a Sound in the Apprehensions of People at this Period of

> Time, that it can hardly with Propriety be apply'd to those few and natural Incidents which compose the History of a Woman of Honour. (Lennox 1752: 327)

A similar mistake happens with Charlotte. When Arabella uses the word 'adventures', meaning high-heroic actions, Miss Glanville understands it as sordid affairs, or when Arabella speaks of 'favours', meaning 'tokens of a lady to her champion', the word is perceived by Charlotte Glanville as meaning 'sexual commerce'.

The hilarious effect is particularly successful in the hopeless confusion aroused by Arabella's unintelligibility: 'the poor Fellow [the innocent gardener accused of being a persecutor], who understood not a Word of this Discourse, stared upon her like one that had lost his Wits' (Lennox 1752:101). Misunderstandings make up the fabric of the novel. In particular, Lucy's character boosts the comic effect. Lucy is Arabella's maiden and devolves upon her to bear her mistress' messages or to carry out her ideas, that she struggles to understand. Communication is problematic also when the reception of a story or of an event is dual, and Arabella and the reader have different understandings of the same incident. The episode with Mrs. Groves is emblematic, for the reader promptly ascribes her to the category of the 'fallen woman', while Arabella has little difficulty in finding a romance precedent with which innocently interpreting her tale. The discrepancy between Arabella's belief in romances as historical documents and our knowledge of the falsity of this belief makes her the object of ridicule.

Finally, romances are a moral danger. They are untrue and deceitful and 'teach young Minds to expect strange Adventures and sudden Vicissitudes, and therefore encourage them often to trust Chance' (Lennox 1752: 314). Arabella is so imbibed with

romances that she cannot read reality and does not recognise the real dangers she encounters. For instance, when, in order to escape a supposed attack from the gardener she runs from her house and trust the first man she bumps into 'Her carelessness shows the extent to which romances have confused her, since they contain only royalty dressed as royalty and royalty disguised as peasantry'.[56] Moreover, also the refusal to marry Glanville, a man that Arabella's actually like, appears rather foolish. Her reason is nonsensical: 'What Lady in Romance ever marries the Man that was chose for her?' (Lennox 1752: 41).

However, contemporary criticism holds that *The Female Quixote* is far from being a simple satire on the dangers of romance-reading and its relation to romance goes beyond the oversimplifying ridicule. 'Any romance heroine has power simply by virtue of her role, supported by the weight of centuries-long tradition. Thus the reader cannot avoid feeling that Arabella, who is supposed to be wrong, is actually right, because this is her story'.[57] The emphasis on the excess of feeling in the heroic tradition reveals what is in fact lacking in contemporaneity: Arabella's quixotism shows how far the world has fallen from the idealism of courtly romance.

The clash of codes arouses hilarity as an immediate effect, then prompts a deeper reflection on the attraction of what the form of romance represents. Arabella reflects:

> The world is quite different to what it was in those Days (..) I am sure, replied Arabella, the World is not more virtuous now that it was in their Days, and there is no Reason to believe it is not much wiser; and I don't see why the Manners of this Age are to be preferred to

[56] Deborah Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror: The Didactic Dilemma of *The Female Quixote', Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 27, No.3 (Summer 1987), p 460.
[57] Ibid., p. 461.

> those of former ones, unless they are wiser and better.
> (Lennox 1752: 44)

Curiously, there is not much of eighteenth century for being a satire of eighteen-century society. Paulson laments: 'However, in Book VII, as if she remembered it was expected of her, Mrs. Lennox takes her characters to Bath and London, introducing Arabella to a wider circle of acquaintance, and it is at this point that the book almost breaks'.[58] He considers it a clumsy and rapid attempt of satire after an extensive and meritorious psychological investigation.

However, feminist criticism examined the matter extensively and exposed the layered satire. Laurie Langbauer notices that the reader often watches the other characters laughing at Arabella, more than laughing at her himself.[59] So, if the characters laugh first the reader is slightly dissociated from his own laugh, made perhaps to reflect on it. There is an extreme contrast between the privileged position of women in romances and the realities of lived experience for most female romance readers. Arabella is shut up in a castle, without freedom of movements, her husband is chosen for her as a transaction of property (Helen Thompson signals a Cinderella motif in the background[60]). In a situation where Arabella is completely powerless and socially subordinated, the romances act out a reversal of power. Indeed, schooled by romance, Arabella's first thought of Glanville is that his 'Aim was to take away her Liberty, either by obliging her to marry him, or by making her a Prisoner' (Lennox 1752: 35). Marriage

[58] Paulson, *Satire and the Novel*, p. 277.
[59] Laurie Langbauer, 'Diverting Romance: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote'*, in *Women and Romance: The Consolation of Gender in the English Novel*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1990.
[60] Helen Thomson, *'*Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*: A Novel Interrogation', in *Living by the Pen: Early British Women Writers*, ed. by Dale Spender, Teachers College Pr., New York, 1992.

is an annihilation. Yet, eighteenth-century women fulfil the social expectation if they are wives. The confusion of the Countess when asked about her adventures arouses a laugh that is depressed by the explanation that follows:

> And when I tell you, pursued she with a Smile, that I was born and christen'd, had a useful and proper Education, receiv'd the Address of my Lord – through the Recommendation of my Parents, and marry'd him their Consents and my own Inclination, and that since we have liv'd in great Harmony together , I have told you all the material Passages of my Life, which upon Enquiry you will find differ very little from those of other Women of the same Rank, who have a moderate Share of Sense, Prudence and Virtue (Lennox 1752: 327).

Also, Charlotte Glanville is surprised at Arabella's reluctance in marrying her brother. Following the examples of heroic disobedience, Arabella wants to be her own person, 'My first Wish, my Lord, replies Arabella, is to live single, not being desirous of entering into any Engagement which may hinder my Solicitude and Cares' (Lennox 1752: 41).

Romantic codes of chivalry give Arabella a position of power and influence that otherwise she would be to renounce:

> She feared, that, at once to satisfy that Passion as well as his Love, he would make himself Master of her Liberty: For, in fine, said she to Lucy, to whom she communicated all her Thoughts, have I not every thing to apprehend from a Man, who knows do little how to treat my Sex with the Respect which is our Due. (Lennox 1752: 34)

Romances defy the very notion of decorum, the eighteenth–century woman should be silent, submissive, invisible, Arabella believes instead that a lady's reputation depends

‘upon the Noise and Bustle she makes in the world’ (Lennox 1752: 128). She speaks emphatically and at length, whereas, according to conduct books and contemporary rules, a young unmarried woman should remain totally silent. ‘If she had been a man she would have made a great figure in Parliament, and that her speeches might have come perhaps to be in printed in time’ (Lennox 1752: 311). She wants to be the protagonist of risky enterprises, be adored, have a ‘history’ that is something more than a good marriage. Romance conventions give women the power to tell their own ‘history’ in solemn moments. Of course, contemporaneity resists this act of rebellion. She is never successful in her attempts to draw others into her world, or to make them acquainted with the rich source of her imaginings. Glanville refuses to read the romances that so excite her but he fails miserably to pass the test of the subsequent conversation, showing that he has only been pretending to have read the works in question. He knows without reading them that they are valueless, on the grounds of fashionable hearsay:

> Arabella coloured with Vexation at his extreme Indifference in a Matter which was of such prodigious Consequence, in her own Opinion; but disdaining to put him in mind of his Rudeness, in quitting a Subject they had not thoroughly discussed, and which she had taken so much Pains to make him comprehend, she continued silent; and would not condescend to afford him an Answer to any thing she said. (Lennox 1752: 50)

Arabella is always addressed as nonsensical and continually isolated. The power of imagination, that has such a liberating potential for Arabella, is led back under the stigma of madness. Langbauer, acknowledging the long tradition of the *topos*, advocates that female power can exist only as a delusion, only as long as Arabella sticks to her

romantic ideal. The world rejects Arabella because she is threatening as an amazon. Indeed, the amazons of romance come up frequently: Arabella finds them attractive and the men in the story think they are an abhorrence 'O shameful! Cried Sir Charles, offer a Woman the command of an army! Brave fellows indeed, that would be commanded by a Woman!' (Lennox 1752: 205).

However, notwithstanding Sir Charles' attempt to ridicule her models of supreme virtue and generosity comparing them to Jack the Giant Killer and Tom Thumb, Arabella's so-called romance delusion can be considered, in fact, morally superior, hence her slowness to be convinced that she is in error. Modern life constantly disappoints Arabella for being both degenerate and shallow:

> If the World, in which you [Sir Charles] think I am but new initiated, affords only these Kinds of Pleasures, I shall very soon regret the Solitude and Books I have quitted […] I am of Opinion, replied Arabella, that one's Time is far from being well employ'd in the Manner you portion it out: And People who spend theirs in such trifling Amusements, much certainly live to very little Purpose.
>
> What room, I pray you, does a Lady give for high and noble Adventures, who consumes her Days in Dressing, Dancing, listening to Songs, and ranging the Walks with people as thoughtless as herself? How mean and contemptible a Figure must a Life spent in such idle Amusement make in History? (Lennox 1752: 279)

1.5 Romance and Novel

Satire is used in *The Female Quixote* to expose romance and, at the same time, it serves as a critique towards the hypocrisy and wickedness of society. However, satire is not the only genre which presents ambiguity in Lennox's work. Indeed, the book itself is a giant metafictional genre play. Helen Thomson recognises in this self-reflective examination on the nature of fiction a post-modernist attitude. Not only is she a mother of the novel, she is 'one of the novel earliest critics',[61]for she deconstructs and questions genres. In particular, romance and the novel contend for the major role. The tension between the two is intense because it interests multiple layers. Firstly, is *The Female Quixote* a romance or a novel?

Of course, genre theorists agree that genres are not clear-cut and monolithic. That is especially true about the novel. 'There is hardly a function peculiar to other literary genres which [the novel] has not, partially at least, absorbed. The epic, history, tragic, comedy, satire – all have contributed to feed this insatiable organism' writes the critic F.C. Green.[62] There have been, however, attempts to draw the line and define the novel. The main characteristic invoked to differentiate the work of early-eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction is realism, a certain fidelity to human experience. Ian Watt specifies, 'the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it'.[63] William Congreve, in 1691, distinguishes the two: 'Romances

[61] Thomson, 'Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*: A Novel Interrogation', p. 113.
[62] F.C. Green (1931), quoted in Paulson, *Satire and the Novel*, p. 8.
[63] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, Penguin Books, London, 1972, p.11.

give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight'.[64] Also Samuel Johnson endorses the novel's reliability, as opposed to romance's 'machines and expedients'.[65] So, according to Deborah Ross, for Charlotte Lennox, as Johnson's protégée, 'writing as if the novel were completely separate from the romance was like following a clearly marked path into a bog'.[66]

Yet, as Northrop Frye advocates, the two genres refuse the dichotomy and are in fact in a close relationship; many eighteenth-century novels 'use much the same general structure as romance, but adapt that structure to a demand for greater conformity to ordinary experience'.[67] Elements of romance creep also into Johnson's conception of the novel, such as the polarisation of values or the preservation of justice. *The Female Quixote* seems coherent to the criteria which Frye lists as the three main stages of plot structure in romance, 'the *agon* or conflict, the pathos or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict'.[68] Ambivalently, the plot conforms to the conventions of realism in that it is not a loose, episodic one and neither are Arabella's adventures really improbable. In addition, the element of satire is undeniable: this would place it in the realm of the anti-romance. A romance-deluded girl in an unidealised world, unsynchronised with her code of manners. Deborah Ross explains the uncertainties: '*The Female Quixote* makes use of the same romance/antiromance

[64] William Congreve, *Incognita or Love and Duty Reconcil'd*, Edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York and Boston, 1922, p. VII.
[65] Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, No. 4, (31 March 1750), in Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vol.1, Alexander V. Blake, New York, 1846, p. 60.
[66] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', p. 457.
[67] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachussets), 1976, pp. 38-39.
[68] Ibid., p. 39.

paradox' as *Don Quixote*. But in Lennox's hands the contradiction is sometimes confusing […] After all, she was writing in a tradition that elevated the novel and deprecated the romance'.[69]

The complex relation between genres in *The Female Quixote* does not stop at the formal level, but represents its very core. The Quixotic narrative about Arabella functions as pretext for a metafictional discourse. Lennox writes *The Female Quixote* in 1752, so she was engaged in the great shift in sensibility that invested the literary scene in the mid-eighteenth century. The newly emerging novel was challenging the once dominant romance. Lennox reflects upon the transition of genre, the change of taste, the legacy of romance and the worthiness of the novel that is to substitute it. *The Female Quixote,* capturing such debate, is therefore the site of contrasting literary genres that act and are acted upon. So, perhaps, disentangling the shifting positions of romance and novel can help to place it within one tradition or the other. Or, as it is more likely, to identify its meaning in the dialectic interplay between its genres.

First of all, romance seems a bit anachronistic in the mid-eighteenth century. 'The Satire of *The Female Quixote* seems in great measure to have lost its aim, because at the time it first appeared, the taste for those Romances was extinct, and the books exploded…[T]his book came some thirty or forty years too late… Romances at this time were quite out of fashion, and the press groaned under the weight of Novels, which sprung up like Mushrooms every year'. [70] Therefore, the emphasis on the exaggerations

[69] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', p. 458.
[70] Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt*, The Facsimile Text Society, New York, 1930, pp. 6-7.

of romance may be just a pretext to proclaim the novel's own realism. It is like the scene where Arabella enters the ballroom dressed as a romance heroine: Lennox wants us to think that her use of romance is just stage dressing. 'Mrs. Lennox does not satirize Arabella's romances as much as use this form as a convenient vehicle for introducing romances into the humdrum life of Arabella and her readers'.[71]

However, if the title casts it in the satiric paradigm of a Quixote figure deluded by reading many romances, the novel's subtitle, *The Adventures of Arabella*, is a reminder of its romantic promise. Romance, indeed, is not simply ornamental and resists control. In both the attempts of Sir George to replicate a romance (the chapter dedicated to his 'History' and his final scam with the actress), romance revolts against him: Arabella unmasks his faults precisely in the story he tells, and he ends up stabbed and Arabella almost drowns in the Thames. Arabella, even though presented as a spoof, is genuine. She really is a courtly heroine, a perfect model of beauty and virtue, 'a heroine in the old romance tradition'.[72] Dalziel suggests that 'unlike Don Quixote, Arabella is also created to be the heroine of a serious love-story, a story with the conventional romantic characters and the conventional romantic ending'.[73] Indeed, the story opens with a very common romantic situation: a father retired in a remote castle brings up his daughter, motherless, in isolation. Moreover, in Bath the assembly room is in speechless admiration when she enters the room dressed as Princess Julia. According to Langbauer, the Arabella that is supposed to exist beyond her romantic self is not very convincing

[71] Paulson, *Satire and the novel*, p 276.
[72] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', p. 468.
[73] Margaret Dalziel, Introduction, in Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella*, Oxford UP, London, 1970, p. xiii.

because she is rarely shown. The speeches that should impress the readers, those that charm Glanville, turn out to be very romantic after all: Dalziel's source study proves that Arabella's discourse on raillery is actually taken from a speech in *Artamenes*.[74] The novel cannot escape romance. When Glanville is angry at Arabella for her ridiculous request of dueling with Mr. Hervey, he winds up doing exactly what the heroic rules expect, that is attacking him. Glanville becomes a romantic champion. His transformation begins when he saves Arabella's books for being burnt and, by the end, the reader sees him throwing himself on the knees before her (Lennox 1752: 124). Of course, Lennox is conscious that novel borrows from all genres, so it is not surprising to find instances of heroic tradition in the new genre. Sir George claims that 'he was perfectly well- acquainted with the chief Characters in most of the French Romances; could tell every thing that was borrowed from them, in all the new Novels that came out.' (Lennox 1752: 129-30).

The metanarrative interpretation, which sees the two genres observing and ridiculing each other, finds an interesting gender-binary parallel. Romance is the female pole and novel the male. Romance has traditionally been considered a woman's form, Langbauer asserts: the marginalised, 'the negative of the defining agents'.[75] However, it has been interpreted as both empowering and diminishing. Ellen Moers has looked at the association of romance and female power as a source of empowerment;[76] it accords women a space and a voice. In this perspective, Arabella is heroised for acting and

[74] Ibidem.
[75] Langbauer, "Diverting Romance: Charlotte Lennox's The Female Quixote", p. 66.
[76] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1976, p. 137.

speaking against the dominant culture and romance celebrated as a strategy of liberation. Indeed, in her questioning the genre that is to substitute romance, Lennox seems to find little hope for heroism among women. The notion of decorum and propriety confines women in a remissive position of passivity. Arabella's physical entrapment is her condition in realty. She is able to escape it thanks to an act of imagination routed in the books, which were her mother's only heritage, confirming a positive alignment of romances and women. Arabella is listened and indulged upon, not because she is mad, but because she is not playing by modern rules. Besides, Arabella's counterpart in contemporary life, for rang, sex and education, is Charlotte Glanville, who is represented as a rather shallow and coquettish character.

On the other hand, the relation gender-genre condemns women to be associated with a genre that excludes them from the realm of seriousness and credibility. The dangers of romance –lack of restraint, irrationality, silliness – are the sins ascribed to women, as opposed to the verisimilitude, probability, didactic and entertaining function, which regulate the novel. Fielding in his review to *The Female Quixote* praises the association of romance-reading and women for it is much more credible that a young girl would go delusional for reading romances than an old man. 'By exposing romance, Lennox exposes women',[77] he writes. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, argue that romance trivialises women because it reflects a male idea of them, they speak of 'the glass coffin of romance'.[78] In this sense, Lennox is taking

[77] Drawcansir (Henry Fielding), *The Covent Garden Journal*, Vol. 1, p. 279.
[78] Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979, p. 50.

distance from a derisive and ridiculing representation of the excesses of women, mocking it in order to leave it behind.

The ending further complicates things. Arabella is cured, enters the world, abjures romance, and disappears. Modern readers are usually dissatisfied with the finale; she is not a renewed and better woman, not that we know of: the book ends, her 'History' ends when romance is left behind. Arabella, in modern terms, is defeated. 'She now forgoes her own control of the world, renounces narrative power, and submits to the role of object of the paternal authority which also claims the name of reason'.[79] The woman has returned to her proper place. Arabella's union with Glanville could signify the end of the age of romance, that can continue to live only within the new genre of the novel. This explanation is coherent with Ian Watt's assertion that the novel became a genre when 'the code of romantic love began to accommodate itself to religious, social and psychological reality, notably to marriage and the family'.[80]

Another interpretation sees the marriage between Arabella and Glanville as a reconciliation of the narratives of the two genres, the novel and the romance. Thomson advances the hypothesis of a double ending. One in the novel tradition – marriage – and one in romance tradition. This latter needs what Northrop Frye calls 'the revolutionary quality', which is often clear 'near the end of a romantic story, usually at the recognition scene':[81] Glanville, transformed in a proper romantic hero, mistakenly stabs Sir George.

[79] Doody, Introduction, in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xxxii.
[80] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, p. 136.
[81] Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, p. 163

According to Motooka, the sentimental ending is not a betrayal of Arabella's quixotism. Quixotism and sentimentalism are in fact parallel systems of interpretation and understanding of the world. The doctor 'cures' Arabella when he convinces her that the system that she employs to decipher reality, that is romances, jeopardises tenderness and sympathy. The interpretative key, in this case, is the contrast between Arabella and Charlotte. Arabella, in her romantic folly, misreads the situations, Charlotte over-reads, inferring intentional slights and willful competition with her cousin. In this interpretation, the opposite of Arabella's quixotism is not the sentimental union with Glanville, but the unsentimental alliance of Charlotte Glanville and Sir George 'only married in the common Acceptation of the Word; that is, they were privileged to join Fortunes, Equipages, Title, and Expence' (Lennox 1752: 383).

1.6 The treatment of Arabella

'Charlotte Lennox's chief problem with her novel was how to bring it to closure', says Doody, 'Quixotes must be brought back within the pale, tamed, made to recant'.[82] Cervantes' Don Quixote is forced back to his senses and dies. What should have happened to a female Quixote? Barbauld, who is not satisfied with Arabella's conversion, is of the opinion that 'the grave moralizing of a clergyman is not the means by which the heroine should have been cured of her reveries. She should have been recovered by the sense of ridicule; by falling into some absurd mistake, or by finding

[82] Doody, Introduction, in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xxix.

herself on the brink of becoming the prey of some romantic footman'.[83] However, Lennox had other plans: Arabella is talked out of her illusions by sound and serious reasoning, or, as Doody calls it, 'a brainwash session'.[84] Lennox's intention was to write an entire third volume to explain why Arabella's illusions do not work, and she is not entitled to that kind of power she exercises, but Richardson vetoed the idea and Lennox complied. Hence, the summary nature of the last Books, that Barbauld criticises for being 'not very well wound up'.[85] Richardson wrote a quite explicit letter:

> Richardson to Mrs. Lennox, 13 January 1752 (Houghton Library)
>
> Dear Madam,
>
> It is my humble Opinion, that you should finish your Heroine's Cure in your present Vols. The method you propose, tho' it might flatter my Vanity, yet will be thought a Contrivance between the Author of Arabella, and the Writer of Clarissa, to do Credit to the latter; and especially if the Contraste will take up much Room in the proposed 3d Volume. If it will not take up much, it may be done, if you *will* do it, that way (which I beg you to consider, and to consult Mr. Johnston before you resolve) at the latter End of the Second Volume. You are a young Lady have therefore much time before you, and I am sure, will think that a good Fame will be [in?] your Interest [*sic*]. Make therefore, your present Work as complete as you can, in two Volumes; and it will give Consequence to your future Writings, and of course to your Name as a Writer; And without a Complement I think you set out upon an admirable Foundation.

[83] Laetitia Barbauld, *"Mrs. Lennox: Introduction to The Female Quixote"* in Barbaud, Mrs, *British Novelists Series*, vol. 24, Forgotten Books, London, 2017, p. iii.
[84] Ibid., p. xxxi.
[85] Ibid., p. iii.

> Excuse Haste. I write while a Friend is with me. And have hardly time for Reperusal. I am, Madam, Yours most sincerely S. Richardson. [86]

Duncan Isles' guess is that Lennox's plan was to continue with the Countess's attempt to cure Arabella, 'which begins so promisingly and yet is abandoned so abruptly and oddly (Book viii, Chs. 5-8)'.[87] He thinks that the original intention was that the Countess would have educated Arabella by reading *Clarissa*. An approach which was used fifty years later by Maria Edgeworth in *Angelina; or l'Amie Inconnue*,[88] where Angelina, corrupted by novels of sensibility, is cured by reading of *The Female Quixote*. However, the Countess starts educating Arabella and then the thread is lost. The Countess can educate Arabella because she read romances and, to the surprise of all the presents, masters their language. Shadi Neimneh in her genre study argues that a 'novel must be a romance before satirizing romances',[89] justifying in this way the heroic appearance of *The Female Quixote*. In the same way, the Countess can act a transformation because she already witnessed hers. Accordingly, the treatment the Countess tries to effect is mainly an attempt at historicizing romances as something of the past. She says: 'The same Actions which made a Man a Hero in those Times, would constitute him a Murderer in These—And the same Steps which led him to a Throne Then, would infallibly conduct him to a Scaffold now' (Lennox 1752: 328). The solution

[86] Isles, *Appendix* in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. 424.
[87] Ibid., p. 426.
[88] Maria Edgeworth, *Angelina or l'Amie Inconnue* in Maria Edgeworth, *Tales and Novels*, Baldwin and Cradock, London, 1832-3.
[89] Neimneh Shadi, "Genre reconsidered: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote"*, in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 4, S2, MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy, July 2015, p. 504.

in this case could have been not to not read romances, but to read them in the right way. Not using them as conduct books.

However, the Countess disappears from the narrative quite suddenly. Langbauer suggests that Arabella cannot be cured by a female character because it would not be consistent with the gender equation woman : romance = man : novel. 'Power and authority can enter the text only as a man because only a man can dispel romance'.[90] The doctor who treats her, though, is so lofty and vainglorious as to appear hardly credible. It can be ascribed to the particular type of character referred to as the virtuoso, or the pedant, which appears in the so-called satires on learning, which are critiques of erudition and abuses in learning particularly diffuse in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the transitional nature of the century involved also, and especially, the relation to knowledge: on the one hand the old learning, scholastic and pseudoscientific knowledge based on authority and religious revelation was still strong, on the other, the modern forms of knowledge based on reason and experimentation had already emerged. Within the genre of the satire on learning both side of the controversy are satirised, sometimes indistinctly to expose the limits of knowledge. Although the virtuoso is intensely connected to the contemporaneity, its roots are Quixotic: he is a literary maniac, who seeks to impose his intellectual approach on the world. Particularly in Bath, Arabella innocently exposes the pedantry of the fops: 'the heroine's absurdity is nothing to

[90] Langbauer, "Diverting Romance: Charlotte Lennox's The Female Quixote*"*, p. 66.

theirs'.[91] Lennox employs a virtuoso in a straightforward way in Mr. Selvin, however also the pompous display of erudition of the doctor may be traced back into the type.

The official treatment of Arabella occupies chapter xi of Book ix, which is subtitled:

> *Being in the Author's Opinion, the best chapter in this History*
> (Lennox 1752: 368)

The divine who has cured Arabella from the fever she was suffering because of her dive in the Thames decides to clear her mind from the disorders romances had occasioned in her imagination. They engage in a debate where Arabella 'endeavour'd, by Arguments founded upon Romantik Heroism, to prove,' that her conduct was 'not only reasonable and just, but also great and glorious, and exactly conformable to the Rules of Heroick Virtue' (Lennox 1752: 368). The divine is initially at lost, Arabella presses him to tell her guilt, to expose the criminal desires and corrupt passion that he must have spotted in her if he wants to cure her. The doctor tells her that her guilt is in her imagination, that acts too fast and conceive things that, according to the laws of probability, do not happen in reality: 'there is no such Castle, Desart, Cavern or Lake' (Lennox 1752: 373). But Arabella is his equal in intellect and promptly answers that he has no proofs, in fact the books, if books account as probability, are on her side:

> Universal Negatives are Seldom safe, and are least to be allow'd when the Disputes are about Objects of Sense; where one Position cannot be inferr'd from another.
>
> That there is Caste, any Man who has seen it may safely affirm. But you cannot with equal Reason,

[91] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', p. 466.

> maintain that there is no Castle, because you have not seen it.
>
> Why should I imagine that the Face of the Earth is alter'd since the Time of those Heroines, who experienc'd so many Changes of uncouth Captivity? (Lennox 1752: 373)

The doctor has not read the 'contemptible Volumes' (Lennox 1752: 373-4), senseless fiction written by scribblers, depraved, perverting and absurd. Arabella thence defies him to prove his groundless point:

> First, That these Histories you condemn are Fictions.
> Next, That they are absurd.
> And Lastly, That they are Criminal. (Lennox 1752: 347).

So he proceeds to prove that the stories were mere lies with no historical basis. The authors lived in a time so distant from the undocumented events that they could not possibly be witnesses. On the top of that, they parceled history arbitrarily, mixing countries, persons and ages to the point that events bear no relation to reality. They are not even entirely to blame, for they had no intention to be believed. If that was the case, the authors would bear the mark of infamy and falsehood, which is a moral baseness. Arabella cannot concede this, for 'There is a Love of Truth in the human Mind' (Lennox 1752: 376) and an instinctual emotional attraction to human virtue, which cannot be falsified. The doctor agrees, 'The only Excellence of Falsehood, answer he, is its Resemblance to Truth' (Lennox 1752: 378).

Indeed, her credulity is even more surprising because these books are entirely inconsistent in their facts. They are absurd: adventures so odd do not happen in life. Arabella, however, contradicts him for she finds her life full of strange incidents. The

doctor replies that she cannot truly know since the ways of mankind are only known from experience and she has had not enough. He, who instead is experienced, can testify that human beings are not heroes. According to Doody, a tricky moral issue is avoided here. It is nonsensical to assert that a woman's life cannot be dangerous, any reader of *Clarissa* would know, especially since both romance and the novel seem to agree on the supreme value of intact chastity. Doody furthers her examination: Arabella has taken upon herself 'the role of heroic protector of her own chastity', that is a task traditionally held by men. Her actions look absurd because a bigger mechanism is already controlling what happens to her, she just has to realise. The doctor turns the matter around and advocates that the examples shown in romances are dangerous instances of cruelty, vengeance and misery, and encourage violence and false tenderness. Arabella blushes with embarrassment: 'My Heart yields to the Force of Truth' (Lennox 1752: 381).

'The pious and learned Doctor –' is modelled after Samuel Johnson, and it is speculated that the entire chapter is written by him. Rossiter Small states, perhaps exaggerating, that 'The most important single fact in Mrs. Lennox's literary life: that from its beginning in 1750 until Johnson's death in 1784 she received the warm approval and assistance of Samuel Johnson'.[92] Fortunately, more contemporary critics rehabilitated her characterisation and reinforced a more accurate picture of Lennox's capabilities. However, it is a matter of fact that Lennox secured Johnson's patronage and esteem and that he played a part in furthering her career. Johnson was known to be

[92] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Woman of Letters*, p. 1.

very unfriendly and severe especially to female authors, yet the accounts of their relation seem creepily otherwise:

> The doctor took her on his knee, as if a mere child; after which he carried her in his arms, to shew her his library; and as if resolved to be uniform in his conduct, sent his servant to a pastry-cook, to purchase some cakes for the young lady. Mrs. Lennox found herself greatly embarrassed, but a respect for his character stifled even the idea of resentment, and she preserved an intimacy with him until near the period of his decease.[93]

Sir John Hawkins remembers the lavish party at the Devil Tavern that Johnson threw in her honour. An elaborate supper was served, and he was particularly struck by the hot apple-pie. Johnson crowned her with a laurel wreath he had prepared and the celebration went on till eight in the morning.

Johnson was one of the most prominent men in the literary world, and used is influence also on Lennox's behalf. For instance, he introduced her to Richardson and together they persuaded the reluctant Andrew Miller to accept her manuscript for publication. Johnson and Richardson discuss the manuscript also in their correspondence: writing to Johnson in 1751, Richardson reported to have not finished reading 'Mrs. Lennox's Piece', but very much liked it. Their contribution to *The Female Quixote* could have been possibly more extended: James Boswell claims that Johnson had written the dedication to the Earl of Middlesex, and the attribution has never been disputed. Reverend John Mitford, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1843, is the

[93] Ibid., p. 12.

first to attribute to Johnson the whole of the penultimate chapter. He advances internal and external evidence: firstly, the praise of Johnson in the novel, the heading of the chapter – *Being in the Author's Opinion, the best Chapter in this History* - , Johnson's esteem for Lennox, and also the difference in style and subject from the rest of the work. Rossiter Small agrees that Johnson had a hand in this chapter, at least partly. She notices that the tone changes radically. In a two-page note to the heading of the chapter, Dalziel points out that the attribution to Johnson was a plausible theory.[94] The main reason rests on internal stylistic evidence, which are more characteristic of Johnson's style than Lennox's. Namely, doublets, triplets, parallelism, abstract words, the sententiousness. None of these evidence, though, is conclusive, as Duncan Isles specifies in the Appendix. The chapter is influenced by Johnson's idea and phraseology, but 'linguistically, there appears to be nothing in it that a good writer familiar with Johnson's style could not have achieved; structurally, the dialogue and argument are far below Johnson's standard'.[95]

1.7 Mock-heroine and reformed-heroine

'A reader seeking wisdom from *The Female Quixote* would often be unsure whether to view Arabella as a model or as a warning'[96] writes Deborah Ross. The divine's attack on romances culminates in his distinction between truth and fiction. However, his advice

[94] Dalziel, Explanatory Notes, in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, pp. 416-7.
[95] Isles, Appendix, in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. 422.
[96] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', p. 466.

is to replace romance-reading not with reality but with another form of fiction, the novel practiced by Richardson and theorised by Johnson.

> Truth is not always injured by Fiction. An admirable Writer of our own Time, has found the Way to convey the most solid Instructions, the noblest Sentiments, and the most exalted Piety, in the pleasing Dress of a Novel, and, to use the words of the greatest Genius in the present Age, 'Has taught the Passions to move at the Command of Virtue.' (Lennox 1752: 337)

Lennox has inserted footnotes to the effect that the 'Writer' is Richardson, the 'Novel' *Clarissa* and the 'greatest Genius' Johnson. Aside from this explicit praise, a Richardsonian influence can be perceived throughout the whole *The Female Quixote.*

Paulson thinks that Lennox's heroine comes from Richardson's area, 'Arabella is a woman with the sense of inwardness associated with her sex and substantiated by the conventions of inwardness so strongly implanted in Pamela and Clarissa'.[97] Indeed, both authors undoubtedly explore the world of possibilities and limitations of exceptional women. Clara Withmore compares Arabella and Clarissa and defines the first 'much more womanly',[98] more natural and vivid than the saint-like Clarissa. Joseph F. Bartolomeo, who dedicates an essay to Arabella and Clarissa, demonstrates how Lennox rejects such Richardsonian devises as the emphasis on love and abundance of moral sentiments. Lennox accepts Richardson's artistic advice, but then prefers adopting practices such as 'the omniscient narrator, the satiric attack on the 'feminized' genre of

[97] Paulson, *Don Quixote in England*, p. 174.
[98] Clara Withmore, *Woman's work in fiction, from the restoration to the mid-Victorian period*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, 1910, p.34

the romance and an emphasis on humor over pathos and sentiment'.[99] And yet, the two authors are not disconnected. Bartolomeo's thesis is that *The Female Quixote* is a comic rewriting of *Clarissa*. According to this theory, Hervey, Arabella's first suitor, reminds of Solmes; Charlotte Glanville echoes Clarissa's sister, Arabella. Bartolomeo thinks that the reversal of names is not casual: the jealous Richardsonian Arabella becomes the genuinely good protagonist, and Lennox's own given name – Charlotte – is given to the unromantic Miss Glanville.

Lennox's Arabella searches for a precedent in romances to know what to do in case of 'a tyrannical Exertion of paternal Authority, and the secret Machination of a Lover, whose Aim was to take away her Liberty, either by obliging her to marry him, or by making her Prisoner' (Lennox 1752: 35); a situation familiar to *Clarissa*'s readers. Indeed, according to Langbauer, Arabella not finding a heroic precedent of a heroine fleeing from home is a joke on Richardson.[100] However, Arabella attempts a flight through a garden door that reminds of Clarissa's far more consequential garden door. In both stories, then, there is a duel. But, also in this case, the outcomes are dramatically different. According to Bartolomeo, in this mirror universe, Lovelace is represented by Sir George. He engages in deceitful machinations and maneuvers the narrative in order to seduce Arabella, but again, his plan is foiled. Janet Todd goes as far as comparing Arabella herself to Lovelace. They masterly create false words, even though one is unconscious and the other very deliberate. Arabella and Clarissa live in and flout a world

[99] Joseph F. Bartolomeo, "Female Quixotism v. 'Feminine' tragedy: Lennox's comic revision of Clarissa", in *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, edited by Albert J. Rivero, MacMillan Press LTD, London, 1996, pp. 163-176.
[100] Langbauer, "Diverting Romance: Charlotte Lennox's The Female Quixote".

of courtship, marriage, and rape. They repeat often that they will not marry against their will, both arrive to the point to threaten their life. Moreover, they are both self-conscious of the power given by controlling one's own 'history'. Arabella properly instructs her servant Lucy on how to relate her story, Clarissa commissions Belford to compile a collection of letters that will make light on what happened to her: 'It will be an honour to my memory, with all those who shall know that I was so well satisfied of my innocence, that having no time to write my own story I could entrust it to the relation which the destroyer of my fame and fortunes has given of it'.[101] However, the motives which propel their actions, their outcomes, and their reception are so divergent that Arabella's ridicule and Clarissa's tragedy are enhanced by the comparison. Arabella is never in real danger; this discrepancy allows the necessary detachment to laugh. So, it can be argued that Arabella is Clarissa's mock-double, and their author, exploiting different methods, investigate the same problems, menaces, and options women have to face.

Or, on the other hand, Clarissa could be the model, the exempla; whereas Arabella is what not to follow. Deborah Ross writes that 'Arabella is designed in part to teach young girls what not to be. Thus, she is given traits – including an interest in sex – from which model heroines like Clarissa are supposedly free'.[102.] After all, Richardson expresses a manifest intent of instructing. He proposes *Clarissa* as the positive model for female readers, and example to the entire sex:

[101] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed. by Toni Bowers and John Richetti, Broadview editors, Ontario, 2012.
[102] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', p. 461.

> In the Letters of the two young Ladies [Clarissa Harlowe and Anne Howe], it is presumed will be found not only the highest exercise of a reasonable and practicable Friendship, between minds endowed with the noblest principles of Virtue and Religion, but occasionally interspersed, such Delicacy of Sentiments, particularly with regard to the other Sex; such instances of Impartiality, each freely, as a fundamental principle of their friendship, blaming, praising, and setting right the other, as are strongly to be recommended to the observation of the younger part (more especially) of the Female Readers.[103]

Moreover, in the original preface of the fourth volume, written by William Warbuton, of *Clarissa*, the connection between truth and fiction and its distortion in the realm of romance is addressed:

> The close connexion which every Individual has with all that relates to MAN in general, strongly inclines us to turn our observation upon human affairs, preferably to other attentions, and impatiently to wait the progress and issue of them. But, as the course of human actions is too slow to gratify our inquisitive curiosity, observant men very easily contrived to satisfy its rapidity, by the invention of *History*. […] But as it commonly happens, that in all indulgent refinements on our satisfactions, the Procurers to our pleasures run into excess; so it happened here. […]
> Hence the Original of the first barbarous *Romances*, abounding with this false provocative of uncommon, extraordinary, and miraculous Adventures.
> But satiety, in things unnatural, soon, brings on disgust. And the Reader, at length, began to see, that too eager a pursuit after *Adventures* had drawn him from what first engaged his attention, MAN *and his Ways*, into the Fairy Walks of Monsters and Chimeras. [...]
>
> If the Reader seeks here for Strange Tales, Love Stories, Heroical Adventures, or, in short, for anything

[103] Ibid., p. 29.

> but a *Faithful Picture of Nature* in *Private Life*, he had better be told beforehand the likelihood of his being disappointed. But if he can find Use or Entertainment; either *Directions for his Conduct*, or *Employment for his Pity*, in a HISTORY *of* LIFE *and* MANNERS, where, as in the World itself, we find Vice, for a time, triumphant, and Virtue in distress, an idle hour or two, we hope, may not be unprofitably lost.[104]

That is exactly the fiction that the Doctor proposes to Arabella:

> [One without] a single Occurrence that can cause much Surprize, or produce any unexpected Consequences of great Importance; the Order of the World is so established, that all human Affairs proceed in a regular Method, and very little Opportunity is left for Sallies or Hazards, for Assault or Rescue; but the Brave and the Coward, the Sprightly and the Dull, suffer themselves to be carried alike down the Stream of Custom (Lennox 1752: 379).

Jane Spencer ascribes Arabella to a group of heroines who make 'mistakes about the choice of friends, about reading matter, about lovers and love – in short about the young woman's place in the world'.[105] She calls them reformed heroines. Fallible, but unfallen. Their ultimate redemption serves a didactic and conforming tradition towards social acceptability. However, says Spencer, 'I suggest that woman writers were drawn to the didactic tradition not because they wanted to preach female subordination, but because this tradition could be used for the development of a new and more complex treatment of female character'.[106]

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[104] W. Warburton, Preface to Volumes III and IV (1748) of Richardson's *Clarissa*, in B. Boyce, *Prefaces to Fiction*, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, 1952.
[105] Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Women Novelist. From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 141.
[106] Ibid., p. 143.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Romance-reading in the eighteenth-century.

'Reading is not eating',[107] cautions Janice Radway, questioning the status of the reader. In particular, Radway studies the encounters between audiences and mass cultural products in the endeavour to discredit the common equation of the reading process with processes of consumption, a metaphor often used to dismiss popular literature: 'that it is not simply bad, nor even worthless, but that it is capable of degrading, indeed, of corrupting those who enjoy it'.[108] She attacks the idea of reading as passive, complacent, almost lobotomizing. Reading is not eating, the internalisation is not automatic and predictable (and it is not necessarily ominous).[109]

Following Radway's assumption that the connection between reading and imitating is complicated by contextual circumstances and that the process of internalisation is far from being automatic, this analysis of the trope of the romance-reader turns its attention toward the historical romance-reader. This chapter aims at providing the answers for questions such as: who read romances in the eighteenth century? What kind of interest did such romances enhance? What social consequences had romance-reading? What were the dangers hidden in romances? How far historical

[107] Janice Radway, 'Reading is not eating: Mass-produced literature and the theoretical, methodological, and political consequences of a metaphor'. *Book Research Quarterly*, Vol *2*, Issue 3, (1986), pp. 7-29.
[108] Ibid., p.7.
[109] Interestingly, in *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert uses the verb 'avaler', to devour, to describe Emma Bovary's action of reading. The verb underlines the element of insatiability, and also of uncritical automatism, that facilitates the imitation.

readers, both male and female, allowed the rhetoric of what they read, together with the prevailing cultural discourses surrounding proper means of reading, to influence how they read it? Clara Reeve, in *The Progress of Romance,* writes that 'the effect of Romance, and true History are not very different'.[110] But, is it so?

The sources for historical reading experience are scanty and problematic, and tend to reveal more about what people read than about why they read what they did. The information comes from book trade data, studies drawing on journals, diaries, and correspondences, and analysis of the marginalia. However, they cannot tell about the full range of an individual's reading material and they are limited to a tiny fraction of eighteenth-century readers, that cannot be considered representative and comprehensive. It proves difficult even to assess literacy, since there are many stages between being functionally literate and completely illiterate, which varies between region, classes, and sex, with difference between cities and rural areas. Jacqueline Pearson, in her study on women reading, observes that 'for one thing, reliable literacy rates are unavailable, partly because the concept of literacy has been shown to be more slippery than it once seemed'.[111] By the 1720s only a 25 percent of women could be considered literate, with higher levels of literacy in the south-east of England than in the north, until the later eighteenth century, when the north overtook the south. In comparison, the data collected by R.S. Schofield, reported in Amy Hodges's work,[112]

[110] Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt*, The Facsimile Text Society, New York, 1930, p .102.
[111] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 11.
[112] Amy Hodges, 'Performing Literacy: How Women Read the World in the Late Eighteenth-Century British Novel', Theses and Dissertations, 523, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 2012.

seems optimistic, as they estimate a 40 percent rate of literacy in 1750. The dissimilarity is explained precisely with the approximations concerning the concept of literacy. Schofield carries out his analysis by examining signatures on marriage registers, but, as Hodges points out, 'that does not necessarily speak to the number of women who read longer works, such as novels, as writing one's name is much different from reading a three-volume set'.[113]

Moreover, among the readers, only a tiny fraction can be investigated at all: and this fraction is by no means a representative sample. The individual readers whose experiences are best documented are in fact often those who achieved lasting literary celebrity. 'A few women from privileged classes – Mary Shelley, Mary Russel Mitford, Clarissa Trant, Anna Larpent and a few others – kept detailed records of their reading, but such evidence tends to cluster in the later period, and is rarely available for women below the professional classes'.[114] Doody, in the Introduction to *The Female Quixote,* provides some accounts of devoted romance-readers, also demonstrating that romances were a literary presence, at least until the 1730s. She quotes some accounts of Mary Delany mentioning of reading de Scudéry's romances, in the summer of 1732:

> 'We have begun *Clélie*, she is a much better French lady than an English one.' The future Mrs. Delany had evidently read 'the English one' in her youth. She recalls the novels at odd moments: the Princess Royal's wedding dress in 1734 'puts me in mind of *De Scudery*'s description'.[115]

[113] Ibid., p.8.
[114] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 11.
[115] Doody, "Introduction", in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xv.

Horace Walpole, in his youth, was a voracious romance-reader. 'His friend Henry Seymour Conway teased him about his early reading at Eton: 'I remember you buried in romances and novels; I really believed you could have said all the *Grand Cyrus*'s, the *Cleopatra*'s, and the *Amadis*'s in the world by heart'".[116] Walpole himself reminds when, at Eton, quixotically fantasised of replaying Virgil and *Clélie*: 'As I got farther into Virgil and *Clelia*, I found myself transported from Arcadia, to the garden of Italy, and saw Windsor Castle in no other view than the *capitol immobile saxum*'.[117] Also Samuel Johnson, Rossiter Small reminds, read romances in his youth: 'When a boy he [Johnson] was immoderately fond of reading romances of chivalry, and he retained his fondness for them through life'.[118] 'Although the romance here referred to is closer to the subject of satire in *Don Quixote* than in *The Female Quixote*, the idea of a false influence is similar',[119] Rossiter Small specifies.

As engaging as these accounts are, they are the experiences of exceptional readers, with out-of-the-ordinary reading practices. They only partially shed light on the reading practices available to eighteenth-century readers. Pearson adds that they might not even be completely reliable, for example, 'Frances Burney was nervous about her reading, and seems not always to tell the literal truth about it'.[120]

[116] Ibidem.
[117] Horace Walpole to George Montagu (1736), quoted by Doody, "Introduction" to Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xv.
[118] James Boswell (1791) quoted by Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters*, p. 90.
[119] Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters*, pp. 90-1.
[120] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 13.

However, even though individual experiences differ among readers, it can also be helpful to reflect on reading as an universal human experience, considering 'how groups of people may have shared such reading styles or interpretative practices, thus enabling, instead of a universal model for the cultural context of reading, an appreciation of the more fragmented way actual historical reading communities developed',[121] as Ian Jackson in his study on eighteenth-century readers suggests. Community of readers formed a shared view of a good reading practice and appropriate reading material. Jacqueline Pearson, for instance, explores how ideologies of reading led to the trope of women's reader and conditioned the way women read, suggesting the existence of 'good' and 'bad' reading practices, that were often gendered.

Furthermore, book trade data provide interesting information on the range of possible reading material that people actually bought or borrowed; their scope includes stock and borrowing records, subscriptions and community libraries' records, information deriving from book clubs, circulating libraries, booksellers and libraries. In particular, given the high cost of books, circulating and community libraries became vital access points to reading material and greatly influenced the format, distribution, and publishing of books in the century. They were privately owned and run commercially for profit. Readers, who paid a subscription, chose their books from a catalogue. According to Edward Jacobs' analysis of the market of circulating libraries, 'circulating library catalogs offer one of the most revealing views available of book

[121] Ian Jackson, 'Approaches to the History of Readers and Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The Historical Journal*, (Dec. 2004), Vol. 47, No. 4, p. 1050.

publishing and reading in eighteenth-century'.[122] Jacob investigates two large circulating librarian publishers, Lowndes and Heavisides. Lowndes ran one of the earliest, largest, and most successful circulating libraries in London, operating continuously from 1751 until the 1780s, whereas Heavisides was a smaller provincial circulating library, which operated small shops in Darlington. The two differ in scale, composition, location, date and stability of the enterprise, fairly representing therefore the whole spectrum of both national and local market.

Lowndes' 1766 catalog lists 6,290 titles, of which only a ten per cent was fiction, and the 1790 catalog of Heavisides' Darlington library offered readers 466 titles, of which 90 percent was fiction (but he is the one with the highest percentage). The study of their catalogues shows that, during the last third of the century, circulating libraries became a predominant force in fiction publishing, in particular they increasingly connected femininity with an authorial function for fiction. In other words, circulating library publishers privileged anonymously feminine fiction, contributing to making femininity a highly-contested aspect of eighteenth-century British society. The explanation lays in the fact that circulating library publishers were associated with down-market merchandise and often favoured anonymity. Jacobs explains:

> Economic and cultural circumstances made circulating library publishers and female authors, especially novice ones, mutually attractive to each other, and circulating library publicity pointedly recruited manuscripts from women. Yet if female authors more often approached circulating libraries than other publishers, the female authors who published with

[122] Edward Jacobs, 'Eighteenth-Century British Circulating Libraries and Cultural Book History', *Book History,* Vol. 6 (2003), p. 2.

> circulating libraries may have insisted on anonymity more often than women who published with other traders, since circulating libraries were more disreputable than other publishers, being routinely condemned for crass pandering to fashionable taste and for poor workmanship. [123]

Anonymous femininity, often labeled 'by a lady', became such a trademark that many works by men were strategically marketed as feminine. As a result, apparently in defiance with historical reality, the commercial libraries begun to be perceived 'as a female-dominated space representing both second-rate literature and transgressive sexuality'.[124]

'What dominates the literature, in twentieth century as in the eighteenth, is the stereotype of the circulating library as a place 'mainly…patronized by women' renting out novels: but neither half of this seems to be literally true'.[125] Jan Fergus' study of the records of the Clays,[126] booksellers of the East Midlands, helps casting doubts on many of such received ideas about eighteenth-century readers. It seems that women preferred reading magazine instead of fiction. Sentimental fiction, commonly associated to the female audience, was borrowed by men as well as women. Moreover, there appears no significant difference in the choice of book by servants and employers. The tastes of male and female readers of all classes were actually not as different, and fiction had much less readers that we are used to believe. 'Some [circulating libraries] kept very

[123] Ibid., p. 10.
[124] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 152.
[125] Ibid., p. 168.
[126] Jan Fergus, 'Eighteenth-century readers in provincial England: the customers of Samuel Clay's circulating library and bookshop in Warwick, 1770-1772', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 78 (1984), pp. 155-213.

small stocks of fiction (only 5 per cent at libraries in Allen's library, Hereford, and about the same for a library in Leicester): the three libraries in Bath whose catalogues survive show proportions of fiction of 45, 10 and 8 per cent. Despite the usefulness to hostile propagandists of an image of libraries dominated by women reading pulp fiction, this was not historically true'.[127]

Indeed, Fergus locates the growth in novel-reading among women in the provinces beginning around 1770, in contrast to Ian Watt's characterisation of the early eighteenth century as the era of the novel. Undoubtedly, the novel-reading public augmented but not that much as to justify the novel-reading paranoia that ensued.

Jacobs, in his essay on the practice of books selection,[128] argues that the organisation of books in eighteenth-century bookshops represented and influenced the classification of people in received social identities. In particular, he considers the way of cataloguing and shelving books, which influence book selection and was instrumental for the identification of readers within the proper reading-community, hence within the proper social class. Firstly, he considers circulating libraries' catalogues: 'books were almost always organized by printed format, and, within formats, they were often organized by discursive genres and/or by alphabetical keyword'.[129] Jacobs analyses one of the earliest surviveng catalogues, *A New Catalogue of the Curious and Valuable Collections of Books... Which are lent to Read, By the Year, Quarter, or single Book, By*

[127] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*. p. 169.
[128] Edward Jacobs, "Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain.", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1999), pp. 43-64.
[129] Ibid., p. 51.

William Bathoe, Bookseller, at the Original Circulating Library (Being the first of its Kind in London) (1757). Its table of contents divided books into three class of format – folios, quartos, octavo and duodecimo -, subsequently divided into categories of genre. ‘The fourth category of folios is "Romances and Poetry," while the third category of quartos is "Romances and Novels," and the fourth category of octavos and duodecimos is "Romances, Novels and other Books of Entertainment”.[130] So, variations of format for apparently similar genres encouraged costumers to assign different status and function to different formats. Thus, books in octavo and duodecimo appear more modern and useful than those in folio; these more portable formats not only offer more genres to choose from, but also monopolise both the distinctly modern class of "Romances, Novels and other Books of Entertainment" and the equally modern class of practical books of "Husbandry, Gardening, Cookery, etc”’. Occasionally then, the catalogues were further alphabetised by title key-word. In Bathoe’s catalogue, for instance, among the octavo Romances and Novels, a number of items began with the world ‘love’ or ‘lovers’. In short, locating a particular title in Bathoe's catalogue presented customers with an effective syllabus of books that presented similar topics and bore the same generic conventions, that moreover had the same printed format and, implicitly, the same status.

Shelving, then, is the other factor that conditions the costumer’s choice. Libraries followed an organisation in separate format regions, in vertical sequence, from left to right. Therefore, the infolios, that generically were less numerous, happened to be placed

[130] Ibid., p. 52.

in elevated positions, so the access to them was complicated by the discouraging use of a ladder or the intervention of the shop keeper. Their physically higher position conferred to them a certain ‘elite’ status and conditioned their modes of selection that could not be based on simple browsing. On the other hand, the smaller formats were more easily reachable for general costumers, favouring their perusal, and, therefore, the proliferation of popular literature.

The development of such practices fostered and helped the flourishing of the book market, and, at the same time aroused moral anxieties connected to the unregulated use of books. ‘As James Raven, among others, contends, the development of new readers through down-market practices, such as selling books serially in parts, renting books, and selling remainders cheaply, provoked widespread fear that unregulated reading might distract or even corrupt servants, women, provincials, and other inexperienced, uneducated, and "lower-class" readers’.[131] Raven studies the illustrations of circulating libraries and notices that they fostered images of the staff mediating the access, that could be alarming, of women readers to bookshelves, thus assuring the moral reliability of the library. In particular, the image of Hall's Library in Margate seems to support Jacob’s inferences: ‘Much as Bathoe's catalogue privileges books in octavo and duodecimo as more generically plentiful, useful, and entertaining, in this image the lower shelves of smaller books are significantly fuller than the higher shelves, and all of the books that people are reading appear by their size to have come from these lower shelves’.[132] Significantly, the only person selecting a book is precisely a woman.

[131] Ibid., p. 58.
[132] Ibidem.

Doody, in *The True Story of the Novel*, where she retraces the progress of the *roman* from its origin, is curious to know who were the readers of the ancient *roman*. Unfortunately, also in this case, 'the evidence is unsatisfactory and diffuse'.[133] However, since the Second Sophists' era, that is particularly significant for the attention writers such as Apuleius and Achilles Tatius received after the Renaissance, romance-readers seem to be quiet contemptuously disregarded by commentators. They are identified as the uneducated, the low and, especially, women. Doody slyly comments:

> The low, the uneducated – the impotent – women: these unenviable and even despised groups keep turning up as the putative readers of antique novels. The idea that writers of 'classical times' might have written something that pleased *women* seems in itself enough to drive classicist into a frenzy of disapproval.[134]

Hence explained, at least partially, why romances ended up in the hands of women. But, how came that they end up being so disregarded? 'Women and romance: in the tradition of English fiction, as well as in popular culture, these two terms seem inextricably intertwined. […] Scudéry-like romances constituted the light literature of English circulating libraries and continue today, as Harlequin romances,[135] to stock supermarket racks',[136] advocates Langbauer. Clara Reeve writes that, in the eighteenth

[133] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1997, p. 19.
[134] Ibid., p. 21.
[135] Harlequin romances are series of romances and women's fictions published by the Toronto-based company Harlequin Enterprises Limited. The company, founded in 1949, started reprinting titles from Mills & Boom, a British publisher of popular romance novels, and by 2012, it became a 1.5-billion-dollar-a-year business and the synonymous of romance novels.
[136] Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolation of Gender in the English Novel*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1990, p. 1.

century, romances 'are now become the lumber of a bookseller's shop, and are frequently seen to wrap a pound of sugar from the grocer's'.[137] Lastly, Doody denounces that '"Romance" is despicable, a term reserved for a certain low selection of the bookstore appealing'.[138]

Doody explains that romances, in England, became associated with the aristocratic and feudal establishment, whereas, paradoxically, in France they were affiliated with vulgar middle-class nuisance, hostile to the centralised state. Indeed, in seventeenth-century France, Richelieu reorganised power structures towards a central and authoritative rule, and, in order to submit to a central control also the correctness of literature and language, he set up the *Académie Francaise* (1634). Although they were not allowed to be members of the *Académie*, educated women felt involved in the discourse on reading and invented the *salon*. 'They held that it was possible for women to meet and know men as friends and to engage in interesting conversation without being bound by the intimacies of either sexual congress or familiar bonds. […] This French women's movement was to be far-reaching; ultimately our coeducational university arises from it'.[139] Everything that was connected with the salons – the women that attended them, the discussions, the fictions that depicted them, such as de Scudéry's *Artamène* – was termed *Précieuses*. Doody traces the implication of the term: '"Precious" was an abusive term dating back to the Middle Ages – a woman who thought

[137] Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt*, p. 70.
[138] Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, p. 15.
[139] Ibid., p. 265.

too highly of her personal integrity or untouchability, who was too chary of sexual favors or unwilling to marry, was termed "precious"'.[140]

The salons were lively spaces, animated with ideas of revolutionary importance, and, most importantly were frequented by both men and women. 'The classical works were jealously guarded as a male preserve, but women could read the romances and both men and women could discuss and allude to them'.[141] Prose romances read in and fostered by the salons were, for example, those of Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701), who frequented the salons and organised her own, called *Société du samedi*. Huet enthusiastically writes of de Scudéry, who initially published under the name of her brother George:

> None can, without Amazement, read those [romances] which a Maid, as Illustrious in her Modesty, as her Merit, has published under a Borrowed Name ; depriving her self so Generously of that Glory which was her Due, and not seeking for a Reward, but in her Virtue; as if while She took much Trouble for the Honour of our Nation, She would spare that Shame to Our Sex.[142]

De Scudéry was widely read and translated, together with Honoré d'Urfé (Aphra Behn took from *L'Astrée* her pseudonym *Astrea*). Her romances, according to Doody, were somewhat annoying to absolutism. They were lengthy, disconnected, escaped the unities, 'deliberately diffuse and discursive, offering a variety of characters, events, and

[140] Ibidem.
[141] Doody, "Introduction", in Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, p. xvi.
[142] Pierre-Daniel Huet, *The History of Romances*, Made English by S. Lewis, Printed for J. Hooke, London, 1715, p. 146.

emotional responses. Early seventeenth-century French novels like *L'Astrée* and *Clélie* have multiple centers of interest (an inheritance from Heliodorus and Montemayor, among other). The novels' multicenteredness and variety of viewpoints pose an implicit structural critique of absolute rule'.[143] Moreover, they gave a glimpse into the life of important contemporary society figures, often disguised as Persian, Greek, and Roman warriors and maidens. Mme de Scudéry's romances became a cause of social concern and the salons become particularly ostracised by Louis XVI, and Molière, in 1659, conveniently staged his comedy *Les Précieuses ridicules*. 'It is easy in an English context to suppose the "Romance" must always be seen as monarchical, and as an enemy of the middle classes (as represented by the Roundheads). But the Novel (or Romance) can be attacked on the other side equally well. Boileau, taking the hint from Molière, is the first to think of the brilliant charge that the "Romance" or "Novel" – *le roman* – is *bourgeois*'.[144] Boileau, in *Dialogue des Héros de Roman*, attacks de Scudéry, and accuses her characters of being effeminate, an insidious threat to the force of the state, vulgar and lacking a lofty vision.

Explicitly to counter Boileau, Huet writes a treatise, *Traité de l'Origine des Romans* (1670), tracing the origins of romance. His treatise first appeared as a preface to Mme. de Lafayette's *Zayde*, and was translated into English in 1672. According to Huet, romance has a distant origin ''tis neither *Provence*, nor *Spain*, as some are of Opinion, that we shall find to have given Birth to this agreeable Amusement: We must

[143] Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, p. 265.
[144] Ibid., p. 266.

in the Pursuit of it, enquire into the remotest Countries, and derive our Account fto the most Latent Part of Antiquity'.[145] He sets the romance in a large context, 'he insists upon its polyglot energies, its multiracial origins […] it is the product of combination, of contact between Southern Europe, Western Asia, and Norther Africa. And behind these regions, the regions of Greece and Syria and Ethiopia and Egypt, there lie other areas, hinterlands not without influence'.[146] The great merit of romance is to influence the mind into virtue, through delight rather than through subduction. 'I call them Fictions, to discriminate them from True Histories; and I add, of Love Adventures, because Love ought to be the Principal Subject of Romance. It is required to be in Prose by the Humour of the Times'.[147] Huet traces the progress of romance from the Mediterranean area to the centuries, listing 'The Original of Romances'[148] from Arabia, Persia, Egypt, and Syria, that then took root in Greece, and proceeded to Rome. He accounts for the romances in the Middle Ages in Europe: 'It shall suffice if I tell you, that all these Works which Ignorance has given Birth to, carried along with them the Marks of their Original, and were no other than a Complication of Fictions, grossly cast together in the greatest Confusion, and infinitely short of the Excellent Degree of Art and Elegance, to which the *French* Nation in now arrived in Romances'.[149]

Huet states the superiority of France in the production of contemporary romances and explains it with the liberty that French women enjoy:

[145] Huet, *The History of Romances*, p. 2.
[146] Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, p. 18.
[147] Huet, *The History of Romances*, p. 138.
[148] Ibid., p. 27.
[149] Ibid., p. 138.

> ‘They are in a manner Recluses in *Italy* and *Spain*; and separated from Men by so many Obstacles, that they are scarce to be seen, and not to be spoken with at all. Hence the Men have neglected the Art of Engaging the Tender Sex, because the Occasions of it are so rare. […] But in *France*, the Ladies go at large upon their Parole; and being under no Custody but that of their own Heart, erect it into a Fort, more strong and secure than all the Keys, Gates, and Vigilance […] The Men are obliged to make a Regular and Formal Assault against this Fort, to employ so much Industry and Address to reduce it, that they have formed it into an Art scarce known to other Nations.
>
> ‘Tis this Art which distinguishes the French from other Romances, and renders the Reading of them so Delicious, that they cause more Profitable Studies to be neglected’.[150]

French ladies became masters of the art of romance, to the point of being unable to reconnect it with its source anymore. ‘And lest they should blush at this Ignorance which they find themselves too often guilty of; they perceive they had better disapprove what they don’t know, than take the Pains to learn it’.[151] The repudiation of the antique romance is the great fault that Huet ascribes to the modern one. Nevertheless, he declares himself aware of the accuses directed to romance: ‘They exhaust our Devotion, and inspire us with Irregular Passions, and corrupt our Manners. All this may be, and sometimes does happen. But what can’t Evil and Degenerated Minds make an Ill Use of? Weak Souls are contagious to themselves, and make Poyson of every Thing’.[152] Not

[150] Ibid., pp. 139-40.
[151] Ibid., p. 141.
[152] Ibid., p. 143.

only are modern romances faultless, they are necessary for the advancement of the young.

More than a century later, in 1785, Clara Reeve sets out to a similar effort:

> In the following pages, I have endeavoured to trace the progress of this species of composition, through all its successive stages and variations, to point out its most striking effects and influence upon the manners, and to assist according to my best judgement, the reader's choice, admist the almost infinite variety it affords, in a selection of such as are most worthy of a place in the libraries of readers of each class, who seek either for information or entertainment.[153]

In order to provide an accurate examination, she uses the form of a dialogue between three characters, Euphrasia, Sophonia and Hortensius, disputing on the value, virtuosity and merit of romance. The dialogue allows Reeve to represent the contradictions about fiction endemic in her culture: Hortensius represents the traditional, male-centered culture, he disapproves of most fiction and believes that women 'read more of these books than men' and are more likely to be 'hurt by them',[154] Euphrasia and Sophonia defends the genre. In particular, Euphrasia retraces the origin of romance, which, consistently with Huet's treatise, are to be found in the earliest accounts of all civilisations. The book is divided into 'Evenings', during which Euphrasia proceeds to tell the story of romance through centuries. She lists some of the ancient romances, like *The Æthiopic History of Heliodorus*, which dates back to the fifth century A.D, and goes

[153] Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt*, p. iv.
[154] Ibid., pp. 80-1.

on to consider the romances of the Middle Ages, which underwent a renewed interest especially in France, and with modern fifteenth- and sixteenth-century romances.

> This infatuation spread through France, Italy, Germany, and England, but more remarkably in Spain, where the young nobility were so deeply infected by it, that it called forth the pen of Cervantes. Who by ridiculing Romance and Knight Errant in *Don Quixote*, in some degree checked this frenzy: but the effect of his ridicule was not so universal as is generally believed. […]There is good reason to believe, that even Cervantes himself, was not cured of it.[155]

Romances are universal, not confined in place or time. However, she continues,

> No writings are more different than the ancient Romance and modern Novel, yet they are frequently confounded together, and mistaken for each other. There are likewise great distinctions to be made between the old Greek Romances, those of the middle ages, and those of the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries. Books of all these kinds have been enthusiastically read and admired of late years they have been absurdly censured and condemned. If read indiscriminately they are at best unprofitable, frequently productive of absurdities in manners and sentiments, sometimes hurtful to good morals; and yet from these Genus there may be selected books that are truly respectable, works of genius, taste, and utility, capable of improving the morals and manners of mankind.[156]

The extravagances and absurdities that romances raise have often been pointed out, but the good effects that they produce few have attempted to show. In particular, she refers

[155] Ibid., pp. 58-9.
[156] Ibid., p. 7.

to the romances the taste of which was of lately revived in France, especially by Calprenéde, D'Ufré, de Scudéry:

> They were written with more regularity, and brought nearer to probability; but on the other hand by taking for their foundation some obscure parts of true history, and building fictitious stories upon them, truth and fiction were so blended together, that a common reader could not distinguish them, young people especially imbibed such absurd ideas of historical facts and persons, as were very difficult to be rectified.[157]

They are harmless, and have even a moral tendency, but may be improper in the hands of young people. Sophonia intervenes and points out that this kind of books are said to produce a particular affectation in writing and speaking, that is still addressed as romantic. However, Euphrasia defends them for, she says, they may lead to an excess but is nevertheless an excess of virtue, not of ridicule. 'Let us suppose the character of Don Quixote realized, with all its virtues and absurdities. I would ask, whether such a man is not more respectable, and more amiable, than a human being, wholly immersed in low, groveling, effeminate, or mercenary pursuits, without one grain of private virtue, or public spirit; whose only thoughts, wishes, and desires, are absorbed in worthless self?'.[158] She continues:

> If it taught young women to deport themselves too much like Queens and Princesses, it taught them at same time that virtue only could give lustre to every rank and degree. – It taught the young men to look upon themselves as the champions and protector of the weaker sex; to treat the object of their passion with the utmost respect; - to avoid all improper familiarities,

[157] Ibid., p. 64.
[158] Ibid., p. 103.

> and, in short, to expect from her the reward of their virtues. […] Such as I have described them, are the French Romances – The *Astrea* of *D'Urfé*, - *Cyrus* and *Clelia* by *Mesdemoiselles Scudery*, - *Cassandra* and *Cleopatra* by *Calprenede*, - *Ariane*, - *Almabide*, - *Polexander*, - *Ibrahim*, - *Francion*, - and many others of the same kind'.[159]

However, Reeve writes in the eighteenth century. Those romances were outdated, Sophonia remembers her old aunts gathering to read them. 'These were books that pleased our grandmothers, whose patience in wading thro' such tremendous volumes, may raise our surprize',[160] says Euphrasia but they deserve our respect as works of genius of literature. 'Romances have for many ages past been read and admired, lately it has been the fashion to decry and ridicule them; but to an unprejudiced person, this will prove nothing but the variations of times, manners, and opinions'.[161]

Evening VII is dedicated to the novel. Euphrasia explains that novel means new, a novelty in opposition to romance, 'though they have lately been confounded together and are frequently mistaken from each other'.[162] She attempts a distinction:

> The Romance is a heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. – the Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. – The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things as passes every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us

[159] Ibid., p. 68.
[160] Ibidem.
[161] Ibid., p. 105.
[162] Ibid., p. 110.

> into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story, as if they were our own.[163]

Congreve for example in the Preface to his prose narrative *Incognita* (1692) defines his own novel in these terms:

> Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroines, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty performances, elevate and surprise the Reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives off, and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concern'd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, viz. these Knights Success to their Damsels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye. Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and Odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unprecedented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight. And with reverence be it spoken, and the Parallel kept at due distance, there is something of equality in the Proportion which they bear in reference to one another, with that between Comedy and Tragedy.[164]

However, the authors of what we now commonly understand as eighteenth-century novels tended to reject the term 'romance' as well as the term 'novel'. For example, in his Preface to *Clarissa,* Richardson warns his readers not to expect 'a light Novel, or transitory Romance'.[165] Doody explains the indiscriminate use of the two

[163] Ibid., p. 111.
[164] Congreve, *Incognita,* p. 5.
[165] Richardson, *Clarissa*, p. 30.

terms arguing that the 'supposed distinction between Romance and Novel has in the past been employed somewhat disingenuously (and exploited not without purpose), and as the emphasis on that supposed distinction has often done more harm than good, I propose to do it without it altogether'.[166] Indeed, she refers to all the works she deals with as 'novels' because, romance and novel, she states, are ultimately are the same things. The division, uncertain as it is, comes from an idea of history, and of history of literature, as a linear progress: 'the Novel replaces the Romance as Reason replaces Superstition'.[167] '"Romance" is a dismissive term, especially in English usage; other European languages have admitted the unity of Romance and Novel: a novel is *le roman, der Roman, il romanzo*. Only the English speakers have maintained a perpetually stern attitude to despised Romance'.[168]

Finally, according to Dieter Schulz, eighteenth-century novelists conceived their works as opposed to a sort of hybrid of novella and heroic romance:

> The convergence of romance and novella in a fiction characterized by frivolousness and lubricity had fatal consequences for the already somewhat outmoded heroic romance. The rhetoric of romance, still genuinely idealistic in La Calprenède, Mlle. de Scudèry, and others, came to be associated with scenes of illicit sexuality. As a consequence of this development, Richardson later uses the hyperbolic, " Roman " style to designate the language of the villainous seducer.[169]

[166] Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, p. 16.
[167] Ibid., p. 3.
[168] Ibid., p. 15.
[169] Ibid., p. 90.

So even when the target of the polemic is called romance, it refers to a genre 'profoundly influenced by the productions of such writers as Behn, Manley, and Haywood'.[170]

2.2 The dangers of romance-reading

The discussion concerning the status of the novel and its possible effects in the latter half of the eighteenth century overlapped with a debate about women as readers. Obviously, both men and women, boys and girls, read in this period, but the issue in fiction, reviews, and educational works is dominated by women's reading. 'In the eighteenth century, the "fiction" problem – the danger that readers will come to prefer, indeed believe in, an imagined world rather than the real one – was largely construed as a female problem',[171] confirms Scott Paul Gordon. Women were already perceived as in all respects weaker, fanciful, more sensitive and thus more liable to bad influence: it was assumed that women could be more susceptible to quixotism – 'as with other cultural problems such as nerves or hysteria'.[172] Reading, due to its passive and receiving component, is gendered as female. Moreover, novels were associated to both female readership and authorship and featured a growing number of heroines. Indeed, even though the extent of the phenomenon has been resized, the growing of female reading audience was a commercially and culturally significant consequence of

[170] Dieter Schulz, '"Novel," "Romance," and Popular Fiction in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', in *Studies in Philology* 70, no. 1 (1973), p. 91.
[171] Scott Paul Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006, p.34.
[172] Ibid., p. 35.

improving female education and changing patterns of leisure in the middle classes. Consequently, the necessity to control the access to this market arose.

In *The Rambler* Johnson warns against the noxious influence of novels:

> These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.[173]

The situation seemed alarming: readers, it was increasingly noticed as the century wore on, could not be counted on to disengage themselves from their readings. Consequently, writers continuously felt upon themselves the duty to revise the fictional genre.

Kate Flint, retracing the origin of the commonplaces about women's reading, recognises the latter half of the sixteenth century as 'the first time in English literary history that women were recognised as constituting a specific secular readership',[174] when chivalric adventures were being flanked by a growing number of courtship romances, focusing on love, usually directed to women. Juan Luis Vives, one of the most influential advocates of humanistic learning in the early sixteenth century, already cautioned women against such insidious romances: 'a woman should be aware of all these books, like serpents or snakes'.[175] Interestingly, prescriptions that ruled women's

[173] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 4, (31 March 1750), Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vol.1, Alexander V. Blake, New York, 1846, p. 61.
[174] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 22.
[175] Juan Luis Vives (1540) quoted in Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 22.

relation to reading are remarkably similar from the Renaissance to the next three centuries, linking together preoccupations with bodily and mental fitness. It can be assumed, therefore, that women's reading has never been unproblematic, simplifications and stereotypes have proliferated – as, for instance, the alleged 'natural' delicacy and sensitivity that render them vulnerable to the appeal of fiction.

The association of women to a certain kind of literature, that appears to be not only stereotypical, but also historically incorrect, is owned to the distorted process of construction of the idea of femininity. The debate on the innateness of human nature was fervent in the eighteenth century and the intrinsic characteristic of women were part of the discussion. Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular, is an advocate of the nurture side of the nature/nurture debate. This means that qualities, character, characteristics are acquired through experience, models and society. Unfortunately, Wollstonecraft was the radical countertrend. The position, which recognises in women a series of identifying characteristics, inclinations and interests was strong and stubborn. For example, writers such as Richard Polwhele argued that women's love for sentimental literature is natural, a consequence of their weaker character, more inclined to softness, irrationality and sensitiveness. In his poem 'The Unsex'd Females' (1798), written as a reaction to Wollstonecraft's ideas, he writes:

> 'Go, go (she cries) ye tribes of melting maids,
> Go, screen your softness in sequester'd shades':
> […]
> What tho' the fine Romances of Rousseau
> Bid the flame flutter, and the bosom glow.

(II. 67-68; 71-72).[176]

Wollstonecraft's point was that the ideals of femininity could be revised and women could be educated out of the stereotype. Part of the exercise of reestablishing women's dignity and independence also includes taking distances from the literature of love, sentiment, valiant heroes and endangered heroines, that contributed in forming the female character and reinforcing the stereotype. 'How difficult it was for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits',[177] writes Wollstonecraft in the *The Wrongs of Woman*. The sexualisation of women's softness, weakness and denying women a serious, rational pursuit, society relegates them to a lifetime of plotting romances.

So, in the eighteenth century the issue about women's reading becomes political and a threat to order that regulated the private and the public. Nancy Armstrong and Jane Spencer stress that the eighteenth-century increasingly cultural attention given to women was a consequence of the consolidation of the middle-class. Gallagher quotes them in *Nobody's Story*:

> Although women writers gained acceptance and prestige, becoming the spokeswomen for cultural change, these critics argue that they did so only by constructing a discourse that "reformed" women by locking them into a disciplinary domestic sphere. Armstrong and Spencer identify a discursive break prior to the 1740s: on the "before" side is the

[176] Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females; A Poem, addressed to the author of The Pursuits of Literature*, Cadell and Davies, London 1798.
[177] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, edited by Michelle Faubert, broadview edition, Claremont, 2012, pp. 174-5.

> aristocratic model of woman, political, embodied, superficial, amoral; on the "after" side is the middle-class model, domestic, disembodied, equipped with a deep interiority and an ethical subjectivity.[178]

Romances were likely to instill false expectation in the unwary reader. The vision, fostered by romances, of the woman, which was lofty, demanding, and unattainable, jarred with the idea of domesticity, prudery, and modesty, that was expected from eighteenth-century women. Standards of propriety and decorum were undergoing a reevaluation. Gallagher recalls the story of Walter Scott's grandmother, who, remembering of having enjoyed a work of Aphra Behn in her youth, wished to read it again but felt ashamed at the depravity and could not continue reading. 'What appeared just and moral in the 1750s seems, to the narrower standards of female propriety of the 1820s, simply 'impure'.[179] The main prerogative of an eighteenth-century woman was to be a good wife; her readings should therefore prepare her for her role within marriage. Janet Todd, exploring women's status in eighteenth-century society, notices how 'women became commodities',[180] whose business was little more than motherhood.

However, 'if women had far less power in society than men, they grew great in moral importance'.[181] They became 'the symbol and guarantors of a secure, middle-class virtue',[182] the preservers of the values of charity and compassion. Women readers and writers, consequently, began to be increasingly relegated to certain genres. 'A "new

[178] Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, p.xx.
[179] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p.24.
[180] Janet Todd, *Sensibility, An Introduction*, Methuen, London, 1986, p. 17.
[181] Ibid., p.18.
[182] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain,* p. 2.

sense of female market" became increasingly commercially important, leading to changes in publishing in fields like science and history and to the introduction of "more finely printed novels" to appeal to a "young, female, and leisured audience"'.[183] The categorisation of genres was, indeed, a trend: genres differentiated as the life style of middle-class men and women differentiated in separate spheres. Moreover, a huge number of advice manuals aimed at specifically young girls emerged. Indeed, concerns clustered especially around young women, whose minds were considered more susceptible and suggestible, and even liberals as Wollstonecraft believed it was necessary to control access to literature for young women. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Wollstonecraft comments:

> Those productions which give a wrong account of the human passions, and the various accidents of life, ought not to be read before the judgement is formed, or at least exercised. Such accounts are one great cause of the affectation of young women. Sensibility is described and praised, and the effects of it represented in a way so different from nature, that those who imitate it must make themselves very ridiculous. A false taste is acquired, and sensible books appear dull and insipid after those superficial performances, which obtain their full end if they can keep the mind in a continual ferment.[184]

Also Reeve, who attempts a defense of the fictional genre, capitulates on the necessity of regulating the access of girls to fiction: 'It is certainly the duty of every Mother, to

[183] Ibid., p. 9.
[184] Mary Wollstonecraft, 'Thoughts on the education of daughters', in *The works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol.4, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, William Pickering, London, 1989, p. 48.

consider seriously, the consequences of suffering children to read all the books that fall in their ay indiscriminately'.[185]

In *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1805), Maria Edgeworth reports the epistolary exchange between two gentlemen, who dispute upon the education of women. The first gentleman is afraid that unrestrained reading, and education in general, would lead to 'follies, and faults, and evil, which have been found to attend the character of a literary lady'.[186] The dangers and faults those ridiculous literary ladies are likely to incur upon would spoil the reserved and modest character women should preserve. Their vanity would be inappropriately flattered, resulting in a boldness of manners and of conduct, symptom of their intoxicating want of power and of universal admiration. He summons Molière:

> Moliere has pointed out with all the force of comic ridicule, in the Femmes Savantes, that a lady who aspires to the sublime delights of philosophy and poetry, must forgo the simple pleasures, and will despise the duties of domestic life. I should not expect that my house affairs would be with haste dispatched by a Desdemona, weeping over some unvarnished tale, or petrified with some history of horrors, at the very time when she should be ordering dinner, or paying the butcher's bill […] I have heard that if these sublime geniuses are wakened from their reveries by the *appulse* of external circumstances, they start and exhibit all the perturbation and amazement of *cataleptic* patients.[187]

[185] Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 101.
[186] Maria Edgeworth, *Letters to Literary Ladies*, J.Johnson, London, 1805, p. 20.
[187] Ibid., p.34.

The gentleman who answers back, on the other hand, finds no reason to believe that women's understanding is in any way different from men's: 'that men are naturally stronger than women, is evident; but strength of mind has no necessary connection with strength of body'.[188] The faults the second gentleman finds in women are not the result of unrestrained liberty, but of the improper education they receive. Indeed, he sponsors education as the most reasonable solution to contrast the perils his fellow had listed. It may provide women with an undistorted idea of liberty and a sane relation with power. However, he adds, there are readings more problematic than others:

> I apprehend that many of the errors into which women of literature have fallen, may have arisen from an improper choice of books: those who read chiefly works of imagination, receive from them false ideas of life and of the human heart. Many of these productions I shall keep as I would deadly poison from my child; I should rather endeavour to turn her attention to science than to romance, and to give her early that taste for truth and utility, which when once implanted can scarcely be eradicated. There is a wide difference between innocence and ignorance.[189]

Moreover, 'the days of chivalry are no more': the glories of romance have faded, 'but the real permanent pleasures of domestic life remain in their stead'.[190] He is confident that reading and education won't drive women away from the place (male) society cut out for them:

> I speak as if it were actually in our option to retard or to accelerate the intellectual progress of the sex ; but in fact it is absolutely out of our power to drive the fair

[188] Ibid., p.85.
[189] Ibid., pp.72-3.
[190] Ibid., p.95.

> sex back to their former state of darkness ; — the art of printing has totally changed their situation ; their eyes are opened, — the classic page is unrolled, they *will* read ; — all we can do, is to induce them to read with judgment — to enlarge their minds so that they may take a full view of their interests and of ours. — have no fear, that the truth upon any subject, should injure my daughter's mind ; it is falsehood that I dread : — I dread, that she should acquire preposterous notions of love, of happiness, from the furtive perusal of vulgar novels, or from the clandestine conversation of ignorant waiting maids.[191]

Also Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), recognises that 'the education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them'.[192] Female education was hitherto directed to render them 'insignificant objects of desire – mere propagators of fools!',[193] pleasing valuables for the marriage market. Wollstonecraft advocates equality, starting from education. Indeed, the apparent difference between the sexes' mental capacities is produced by social institution, and social prejudices, rather than being ordered by nature. The innocence much praised in women is in fact ignorance, caused by their forced state of subordination:

> Confined then in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they

[191] Ibid., pp.100-1.
[192] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ed. by Deidre Shauna Lynch, Norton Critical Edition, New York, 2009, p. 13.
[193] Ibidem.

> neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue, are given in exchange.[194]
>
> And can they deserve blame for acting according to principle so constantly inculcated?[195]

The fondness for romances, according to Wollstonecraft, is a symptom of the lack of education, and contributes to the degradation of the sex. Romances propagate prejudices and do not work towards the strengthening of women's minds and the exercising of the understanding.

> Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice. These are the women who are amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties.[196]

That is a consequence of the impossibility for women to participate in the political and civil life. 'The mighty business of female life is to please, and restrained from entering into more important concerns by political and civil oppression, sentiments become events, and reflection deepens what it should, and would have effaced, if the understanding had been allowed to take a wider range'.[197] It is not very far from the

[194] Ibid., p. 60.
[195] Ibid., p. 127.
[196] Ibid., pp. 192-3.
[197] Ibid., p. 193.

initial circumstances in Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. Frivolity or excess are the consequences of the seclusion, and subordination, women are condemned to.

However, Wollstonecraft advocates against novels only if the alternative is reading 'something superior',[198] 'those works which exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination':[199] the reading of history, for example. However, she acknowledges that reading novels is better than no reading at all, since the exercise of reading is itself an exertion of the thinking power. Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, in *Practical Education* (1798), agree on the importance of the choice of books. Reading histories is much more suitable to young people than improbable fictions, since 'the habits of truth must be formed before dangerous temptations are presented'.[200] Since the first impressions on the imaginations influence the entire character and conduct, it is important to present the right models:

> We know, from common experience, the effects which are produced upon the female mind by immoderate novel-reading. […] A tragedy heroine, weeping, swooning, dying, is a moral picturesque object; but the frantic passions, which have the best effect upon the stage, might, when exhibited in domestic life, appear to be drawn upon too large a scale to please. The difference between reality and fiction is so great, that those who copy from any thing but nature are continually disposed to make mistake in their conduct, which appear ludicrous to the impartial spectator. […] Besides the danger of creating a romantic taste, there is reason to believe, that the species of reading to which we object has an effect directly opposite to what is intended to produce.[201]

[198] Ibid., p. 94.
[199] Ibid., p. 93.
[200] Maria Edgeworth, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, J. Johnson, London, 1801, p. 341.
[201] Ibid., p. 333.

Ultimately, arguments against romance and novel-reading were numerous and they varied according to who they were addressed and to which book they referred to. Commentators addressed themselves to questions of what women should read, and what they should be protected against reading, how they should read, where and when they should indulge this occupation. Yet, 'what kind of woman did reading make?',[202] asks Pearson, and what kind of danger may a woman reader run into?

'Broadly, one could divide the reproaches into those ascribing to novels the dangerous psychological affects, triggering imitation and inoculating wrong ideas of love and life; and into those referring to the mere habit of novel-reading as a physically harmful waste of time, damaging not only the mind and the moral of readers, but also their eyesight and posture'.[203] However, the ultimate fear is seduction and corruption. Since, as Pearson explains, the discourse on literature tended to be polarised in terms of binary opposition between good and bad books, women were encouraged to trust somebody else's judgment, in the choice of their reading material, usually a man or at least their mothers.

In particular, fiction invariably gave rise to most of the anxiety. Reading fiction was judged as frivolous, if not degenerate. It was thought to excite the passions, promote unrealistic romantic expectations, and suggest erotic fantasies. It fostered an ambiguous, and transgressive, idea of sexuality, and it was intended as an idle recreation. Novels were considered at best ephemeral, at worst immoral. Hortensius, in Reeve's *The*

[202] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 1.
[203] Ana Vogrinčič, 'The Novel-Reading Panic in 18thCentury in England: An Outline of an Early Moral Media Panic', in Medij. istraž., Vol. 14, No.2, Zagreb, 2008, p.109.

Progress of Romance, expresses a common preoccupation about novel reading: 'The seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart, - the passions are awakened, - false expectation are raised. – A young women is taught to expect adventures and intrigues, - she expects to be addressed in the style of those books, with the language of flattery and adulation'.[204] Reading was felt to be a potentially seditious employment, as it may cause women to lose interest in the domestic duties, and make them indolent or less self-abnegating. A thief of time, dangerously useless, which might be spent on housewifely duties. 'Unless she reads aloud to entertain an audience, a reading woman clears a space for her own pleasure and potentially neglects her primary duties of caring for others'.[205]

Frivolous recreational reading is banned, however, reading may be accepted as a form of service. Indeed, reading could also be moral and educative, as it creates a liminal space between the social and the private and offers a glimpse of the world without having to, indecorously, experience it; especially the reading of some literary forms particularly suggested to women, like conduct books, letters, magazines and novels. 'Books provided women with 'a way of remaining in the home … and yet communicating … with the world outside''.[206] In this sense, reading is itself a domestic activity. Indeed, 'reading was most legitimate for women when it figured the pleasure of domesticity'.[207]

[204] Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, p. 78.
[205] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 108.
[206] Ibid., p. 2.
[207] Ibid., p. 92.

The image of women's reading is polyvalent, if not paradoxical, and it offers a representative display of cultural and sexual anxieties surrounding women. Pearson expands on the pleasures and perils of reading:

> However, each reading pleasure is haunted by a dark double. If reading promised renewed community of family ties, it could also threaten their erosion: in particular, reading shared by a mother and a daughter is a repeated site of anxiety, a means of articulating the age's 'matrophobia'; if reading could figure the pleasures of virtuous sexuality, it could also threaten the dangers of corrupt sexuality; and if scenes of reading can generate happy endings, they can also generate dangers, for the female reader.[208]

If reading was incompatible with the duty of a wife and mother because of the threaten it posed to domestic ties, women were also urged to read to compensate for their less rational nature. However, women's reading had to be policed because the wrong books could exploit precisely that propensity to emotions and exercise a vicious influence. Certain texts might corrupt the innocent mind, especially because women were thought to be peculiarly susceptible to emotionally provocative material. Moreover, women were likely to incur in the error of misreading, that, since women's reading practice was thought flowed and unmethodical, tended to be gendered as feminine. Women were thought to be 'the prototypical absorbed readers, ready to give themselves over to the imaginative flights of fiction', the misguided reader par excellence, the enthralled reader, the prototypical victim of imaginative excess'.[209] An uncontrolled imagination

[208] Ibid., p. 105.
[209] Laqueur (1995) quoted by Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, p. 35.

supposedly plagued women, leading to all kinds of excess: convulsion, nymphomania, hysteria, transgressive sexuality.

Lastly, the perils of fiction-reading did not confine to a cultural and moral problems, some were physical and practical. For example, a cluster of anxiety was the influence of reading on women's body: 'girls being urged to limit their 'reading' because it was an enemy to 'health and beauty', likely to 'hurt [the] eyes' or 'spoil [the] shape' of the woman reader. Immoderate reading caused fainting and even dangerous changes in pulse rate'.[210]

[210] Ibid., p. 4.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 The Quixotic-reader: a topos.

Women's reading became a real social anxiety in eighteenth century. In particular, female readers acting out what they read in books developed into a stereotyped figure, picking from the fervid Quixotic vogue and the social circumstances that characterised women's relation to literature. Unwise reading became 'one of the most hackneyed situation in the novel of this period'[211] and misreaders with their heads turned by books became a common literary figure. The vulnerable reading girl seduced and the theme of blunted judgement induced by reading fiction recurred compulsively. Pearson notices that, whereas the *Lady's Magazine* selected and proposed some novels supposedly educative and enriching, in general the heroines of conduct books were careful to completely avoid novels and tended to dedicate themselves to more serious readings: 'West's Maria Williams, More's Lucilla Stanley or Sandham's Ellen Stanley prefer books 'on serious subject', which tell 'truth, which novels never do''.[212]

Gillian Brown underlines the connection of the trope to the Quixotic vogue and diagnoses Quixotic-readers the 'quixotic fallacy':

> the quixotic fallacy leads readers to confuse not only literature with its effects - to take the literary artefact as a personal mirror - but to forget altogether the artifactual status of a literary representation.[213]

[211] Pearson, *Women's reading in Britain*, p. 15.
[212] Ibid., p. 196.
[213] Gillian Brown, 'The Quixotic Fallacy', in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 32, Duke University Press, 1999, p. 251.

Lennox's Arabella was not an isolated phenomenon: the impressionable or deluded reader, confusing life with fiction, was indeed a common theme. Its pervasiveness is partly explained, as Paulson theorises, by the potential of the female Quixote of connecting the comic and the love plot.

George Colman, the Elder, in *Polly Honeycombe* (1760), 'a dramatick novel of one act',[214] pictures a fiction-reading miss trying to fashion life into a novel. Jane Austen, who read and appreciated Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, employs a deluded reader as the protagonist of *Northanger Abbey* (begun c. 1798-99, published posthumously in 1818). Mary Wollstonecraft, who challenges the fictional form in the effort to encourage women to accept a different type of feminine ideal, in her late and unfinished work *The Wrongs of a Woman, or Maria* (1798), uses Maria to questions the novel of sensibility. Maria Edgeworth's *Angelina; Or, L'Amie Inconnue* (1839), that aimed at an audience of adolescents, is a case of straightforward Quixotic narration, in which the heroine is cured by reading *The Female Quixote*. Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813) employs a Quixotic-reader to convey a conservative satire. Finally, also Margaritta in Sarah Green's *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810) is a standard female Quixote whose unwise reading leads to seduction and unhappiness.

Considering the popularity of the topos, formulaic procedures can be detected. Usually, Quixotic-readers are brought up in isolation, secluded from the world. Polly

[214] George Colman, the Elder, *Polly Honeycombe*, printed for T. Becket, London, 1760.

Honeycomb laments that her 'cross Papa'[215] hardly ever let her go out. Lennox's Arabella grows up isolated in her father's Arcadia. Austen confirms that there is a rule of confinement and loneliness when she ironises on the fact that 'no one who has ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine', moreover, her father 'was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters'.[216] Catherine Morland missing the necessary requirements confirms the existence of a stereotype. *The Heroine*'s Cherry Wilkinson, on the other hand, is properly motherless and she is 'not deficient in the qualities requisite for a heroine, is indisputable'.[217] She resolves to be called Cherubina and she invents for herself a nobler lineage:

> Now, indeed, wretchedness is complete; the cup is full, even to overflowing. An orphan, or at least an outcast; immured in the prison of a proud oppressor – threatened with a husband of decent birth, parentage and education – my governess gone, my novels burnt, what is left to me but to flight?[218]

Wollstonecraft's Maria is confined in an insane asylum. No mother fondled her, no father protected her, her husband deserted her and she had been removed from society and relegated in the remotest place, a madhouse. After all, 'Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?'.[219] This initial condition is, in every case, necessary to create the archetype of the simple reader, to explain their impressionability. Angelina's resistance to common sense 'arose from certain mistakes in her education. – She had

[215] Colman, the Elder, *Polly Honeycombe*, p. 5.
[216] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* edited by Marilyn Butler, Penguin books, London, 2011, p. 15.
[217] Eaton Stannard Barrett, *The Heroine*, Henry Frowde, London, 1909, p. 11.
[218] Ibid. p. 17.
[219] Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, p. 167.

passed her childhood with a father and mother, who cultivated her literary taste, but who neglected to cultivate her judgement: her reading was confined to works of imagination; and the conversation which she heard was not calculated to give her any knowledge of realities. Her parents died when she was about fourteen […]'.[220] Books offer a relief, and how could it be otherwise: 'The books she [Maria] had obtained, were soon devoured, by one who had no other resource to escape from sorrow, and the feverish dreams of ideal wretchedness or felicity, which equally weaken the intoxicated sensibility'.[221] Pity, sorrow, and solitude all conspire to nourish the impossible wishes, and, from a natural progress, the expectations of such 'self-willed, unaccountable, romantic'[222] girls. In *Romance Readers and Romance Writers*, Margaritta is a motherless country girl whose real name is Margaret. She conducts a modest life with her father and her sister, but she knows that a true heroine of romance must experience a share of sorrow before the winding up of her adventures: 'Alas! the clouds of fate intervene, and at present obscure our future destiny; one brutal uncle, a rigid father, and a rustic sister, all combine to persecute the wretched Margaritta!'.[223]

Of course, female Quixotes read freely. Polly urges her nurse to go to the circulating library to order all the new novels of the winter as soon as they come out: 'I have not read so many books for nothing. Novels, Nursee, Novels! A Novel is the only thing to teach a girl life, and the way the world and elegant fancies, and love to the end

[220] Edgeworth, *Angelina*, p. 9.
[221] Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*, p. 169.
[222] Edgeworth, *Angelina*, p. 2.
[223] Sarah Green, *Romance Readers and Romance Writers: a Satirical Novel*, Printed for T. Hookham Jr., London, 1810, Vol 1, p. 11.

of the chapter'.[224] Her father is worried that 'these cursed Novels have turned the girl's head'.[225] Arabella has free and unsupervised access to her mother's library. Catherine Morland is just as good:

> provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them, provided they were all story and no reflection, she had never any objection to books at all. But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine ; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.[226]

She expects to come across noblemen and baronets accustomed to forcing and kidnapping young girls, robbers, or at least to be the victim of a fine tempest. With her friend Isabella Thorpe, they meet and shut themselves up to read novels together. Maria reads and re-reads the books belonging to a mysterious inmate, 'and fancy, treacherous fancy, began to sketch a character, congenial with her own, from these shadowy outlines'.[227] Maria prefers stories about love, 'her attention', writes Wollstonecraft, 'strayed from cold arguments on the nature of what she felt',[228] the conditions around her command her an inclination towards irrationality, emotionalism and indulgence. Angelina 'happened, at a circulating library, to meet with a new novel called "The Woman of Genius" – The character of Araminta, the heroine, charmed her beyond measure';[229] and she resolves to start on a journey to meet the authoress. Cherubina has

[224] Colman the Elder, *Polly Honeycombe*, p. 4.
[225] Ibid., p. 19.
[226] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 17.
[227] Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of woman*, p. 173.
[228] Ibidem.
[229] Edgeworth, *Angelina*, p. 10.

prepared by ‘a five years’ course of novels (and you can bear witness that I have read little else)’.[230] ‘In short’, Cherubina explains, ‘I began wishing this the case, and have ended with believing it’.[231] Margaritta relishes the ‘extatic moments of fond delusion’[232] that books offer to her mind. Her father had indulged her, on account of a long confinement from illness, with the perusal of those novels a neighbouring circulating library afforded and she became ‘a slave to them’.[233]

No matter how obvious it is to external observers that the Quixote’s vision is distorted, Quixotes harbor no such suspicions. Their outward social awareness relaxes and they end up projecting the stories from the books on reality and acting accordingly. Action is the fundamental characteristic of the Quixotic fallacy. The reading has to have a serious and tangible consequence on the life of the reader. It does not limit to a mental state, or an augmented imagination, that ends when the book ends. The effects on the reader’s life are visible, in their conduct or their bodies. Browns alludes to the fact that Quixotic narrative shares with the pornographic genre the trespassing of the limits of the book. Polly thinks to know life: ‘Do you think, Nursee, I should have such a good notion of love so early, if I had not read Novles? […] I have such a head full of intrigues and contrivances! Oh, Nursee, a Novels is the only thing’.[234] Polly opposes the arranged marriage, resolves to elope, thinks of setting the house on fire, indulges in an affair with a man whom she conceives to be a gentleman but who turns out to be her nurse’s

[230] Barrett, *The Heroine*, p. 11.
[231] Ibid., p.12.
[232] Green, *Romance Readers and Romance Writers,* Vol.1, p. 9.
[233] Ibid., p. 10.
[234] Colman the Elder, *Polly Honeycombe*, p. 5.

nephew. Catherine reads real life in the light of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and expects Northanger Abbey to hide spectres and dark secrets. She is seriously convinced that her host, General Tinley, has murdered his wife, she has read too many books not to know it. Mary, on her part, projects her romantic fancies on Darnford. Arabella conducts her life, and conditions the lives of others, according to heroic principles. Angelina is very disappointed when her journey to South Wales meets with no difficulty or adventures, she is even annoyed at the moon for preventing a delightful incident, indeed 'Miss Warwick had an ungovernable propensity to make a display of sensibility; a fine theatrical scene upon every occasion; a propensity which she had acquired from novel-reading'.[235] Margaritta falls in love often and mistakes a servant for a prince and the yellow, unhealthy looking and libertine Sir Charles for a sincere admirer. Moreover, she falls into a pigsty chasing a perturbed spirit of some noble ancestors of hers. Cherubina, because of the burlesque intent of the author, is perhaps the most striking case of imitation. As Arabella, she finds a heroic model for every action, but the actions she engages in are not just odd, they are crimes: she leaves her father in a madhouse, she steals, deceives a loving couple into breaking up, she even blows up a house with gunpowder.

Gordon, moreover, notices another characteristic that female Quixotes have in common: 'these quixote narratives insist that young women who read too many romances will mistake unfit men as promising suitors, will expect all suitors to behave in ways that few actually will, and refuse promising suitors as unfit: these behaviors

[235] Edgeworth, *Angelina*, p. 16.

form the basis of most female quixote plots'. Gordon summons Johnson's "Imperia" to prove his point, who 'expected nothing less than vows, altars, and sacrifices'.[236] Also Arabella, Cherubina, and Margaritta confirms this theory.

The others take distances from the Quixotic-reader. Polly asks her pretender, Mr. Ledger, whether he ever read the 'History of Emilia', Mr. Ledger promptly dissociates from such readings: 'Not I, Miss, not I. – I have no time to think of such things, not I'.[237] Glanville cannot bring himself even to begin reading the books that Arabella offers to him. In *Northanger Abbey,* Mr. Thorpe is shocked at being asked his opinion about Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* 'Udolpho! Oh, Lord! not I, I never read novels; I have something else to do'.[238] The main reaction the Quixotic-reader arouses is hilarity. Angelina is very conscious of the consequences she will incur: 'It is my unalterable determination to act and think upon every occasion for myself; though I am well aware, that they who start out of the common track, either in words or action, are exposed to the ridicule and persecution of vulgar or illiberal minds'.[239] A general burst of laughter runs round the hall when Cherubina mistakes sheep for banditti and statues for corpses. Grundy, who deceives her into believing him the noble Lord Montmorenci, mocks her cruelly with his company: 'her setting up for a heroine, and her affectation while imitating the manners and language that authors chuse to give their heroines, would

[236] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 115, (23 April 1751) in Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vol.1, Alexander V. Blake, New York, 1846, p. 215.
[237] Colman the Elder, *Polly Honeycombe*, p. 14.
[238] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 47; the crude Mr. Thorpe here shows a prejudicial knowledge of contemporary literature. He has never read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, yet he scorns the thought as girlish and nonsensical. 'Not, I faith! No, if I read any it shall be Mrs. Radcliff's; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them*' (p. 47) Austen unmasks his shallowness right away. In 3.2. of this thesis, motifs and similarities between the books that Quixote-readers read will be examined.
[239] Edgeworth, *Angelina*, p.11.

make a tiger laugh'.[240] Also Lady Gwyn, who organises a crowing ceremony in Lady Cherubina's honour, confesses that it was merely a prank to amuse her guest at Cherubina's expense. Also Margaritta often exposes herself 'to the ridicule of the servants, the reproofs of her father, and the laughter of her uncles and her sister for her absurdities'.[241]

However, the hilarity is easily explained: the Quixotic-reader does not represent a serious danger, for their pattern of imitation is recognisable and their models identifiable. The principles acted out lose their disruptive potential because they are not rationally internalised, they are just aped. And, who does not laugh watching a mimicry? 'The quixote never really poses a danger to community standards but rather raises such affective concerns among his or her family and community that they hasten to make the quixote's odd sense of reality a commonplace. And this sense of reality, however absurd, is always intelligible, always available for imitation'.[242] It is not just a deviance, it is a substitution, harmless because of its obvious fictionality. Brown continues:

> Like the mad, with whom quixotes are often identified, quixotes choose to mime well-known standards: heroic figures, noteworthy characters, or famous personages from history or fiction. Their objects of emulation must be a recognizable part of cultural currency in order for their emulations to make sense, to themselves as well as to others. Quixotes accordingly strictly observe the etiquettes and practices associated with their models.[243]

[240] Barrett, *The Heroine*, p. 279.
[241] Green, *Romance Readers and Romance Writers*, Vol. 1, p. 39.
[242] Brown, 'The Quixotic Fallacy', p. 260.
[243] Ibidem.

Paulson uses Bergson's essay 'Laughter' to explain the concept. If a person or a character can be reduced to a bunch of reproducible elements, it means that a certain automatism has crept into his/her person. Living persons are unique, they cannot be doubled through some mechanism. Wherever there is absolute similarity, some sort of mechanism is at work. There is never a moment's confusion or uncertainty about the delusory status of the Quixote's perceptions. The case of Margaritta is explicative: she is deceived by Lady Isabella precisely because the lady trusted that she would replicate the romances, a few translations from the French, she had proposed to her. 'The perfidious lady designed first to delude her mind with those seductive novels, whose chief subject is love, and that was generally produced by *beauty*; and these novels did not always make *marriage* that *finale* of the piece, but rather taught the young mind to lean to love *unrestrained* and *unlimited*'.[244]

Finally, crucial to plots featuring Quixotic-readers is the conversion: 'not the repudiation or elimination but the conversion of the quixotic reader'.[245] In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry awakes Catherine from the visions of romance:

> What have you been judging from? Remembering the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you - Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay

[244] Green, *Romance Readers and Romance Writers*, Vol. 2, p. 12.
[245] Brown, 'The Quixotic Fallacy', p. 260.

> every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?'
> They had reached the end of the gallery; and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room.[246]

Arabella and Catherine are compelled into admitting that the romance they had imagined was in fact a self-created delusion created under the influence of the sort of reading they had indulged. The characters of improbability and impropriety of their wild illusion are promptly underlined, England is not a place for exaggerations. Reality recognises fiction and eradicates it. In *The Wrongs of a Woman*, Mary deliberately revolts against society, that had betrayed her in every way possible, explains her reasons, and is nevertheless found guilty. The judge, considering her case, cannot forgive a deviance from the preservation of order:

> The judge, in summing up the evidence, alluded to 'the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow. For his part, he had always determined to oppose all innovation, and the new-fangled notions which encroached on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles in public or private life – and, if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was an opening flood-gate for immorality.[247]

Angelina has a rapid and sketchy reformation, perhaps underlining the moral intention of the short novel, she learns the error of her ways and immediately understands the value of her lot. 'There is no occasion to say any more about it at present – tomorrow, as you like romances, we'll read Arabella, or the Female Quixote; and you shall tell me

[246] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 186.
[247] Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of woman*, p. 284.

which, of all your acquaintance, the heroine resembles most'.[248] Also in *The Heroine* redemption passes through a book: Cherubina falls seriously ill, is convinced of the immoral tendency of her past life by a clergyman, and reaches the final conversion reading *Don Quixote*. Finally, Margaritta, deceived, seduced and pregnant with an illegitimate child, repents: 'O life, life! How do thy real events condemn the fictitious joys and sorrows of romance, and shew the folly of such idle and improbable adventures!'.[249]

The trope of the deluded reader has no inherent political agenda, it is available for appropriation and serves the author's purpose. *Polly Honeycombe* is a farce; Austen, through Catherine's credulity, mocks Radcliffe and the Gothic apparatus, and also the Bath novels. At the same time, the Quixotic-reader is, indeed, a reader, and it consequently allows a metanarrative reflection on reading. So, *Northanger Abbey* is also a very self-conscious anatomy of the heroine-centered, woman-targeted novel in its variant forms. Wollstonecraft attacks the sentimental tradition, and at the same time exposes the condition of imposed inferiority forced on women in non-sentimental society. Barrett, on the other hand, pertains to the conservative reaction to the French Revolution, that stirred up a widespread anxiety over what women read and thought.

As the analysis of *The Female Quixote* the first chapter pointed out, the Quixotic-reader is an interesting, and highly engaging trope, by virtue of its ambivalence. The figure of Quixote in what Gordon defines 'normative ways' or 'orthodox tales'[250]

[248] Edgeworth, *Angelina*, p. 81.
[249] Green, *Romance Readers and Romance Writers*, Vol. 3, pp. 62-3.
[250] Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, p. 5.

encourages readers to mark the Quixote as the other, to distance themselves and to strengthen their confidence in the existence of one single, objective and indisputable reality. Quixotes undergo a process of restoration of common perceptions. In this sense, the 'Quixotic' label is a strategy to validate one's own reality, supposedly rational, and dismiss the distorted -Quixotic- perception of it. Such narratives are typical of the optimism of the Enlightenment and its trust in rationality. However, in the same Quixotic figure is contained the impossibility of the project and Quixotic tales blur and frustrate the boundaries between imagination and reality. In particular, from the eighteenth century on, Quixotes have been deployed to accuse and challenge the values of the society that ill-treats them. Humorously, such idealizing readings have, in turn, been accused of being Quixotic, of over-reading the text.

Independently from its purposes of burlesque or of satire, the deluded reader carries a quizzically intellectual game about fiction itself, that includes a self-referential aspect that complicates the relation with the readers of the Quixotic narrative, who are fiction-readers themselves. Moreover, female Quixotes offer fertile soil for consideration about women's role in society, and often inspired feminist interpretations, which appreciate the scope that quixotism affords individual desire, even though classified as fanciful. For example, Quixotic scenarios allow for rewritings of the marriage plot. 'Women quixotes, like all quixotes, certainly make (up) their own worlds',[251] comments Brown.

[251] Brown, The Quixotic Fallacy', p. 262.

To be fair, even though the trope of the deluded reader satirises especially women, fiction exercises its seductive power also on men. In Richard Graves's *Spiritual Quixote, or The Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffrey Wildgoose: A Comic Romance* (1773), Mr. Wildgoose's quest begins after he has read too many seventeenth-century Puritan tracts. He is cured and rejoins the community he had left: Mr. Wildgoose 'had been for some time under the influence of a deluded imagination: but … the mists, which has clouded his reason, seemed now to be dispelled'.[252] In Jane Austen's *Sandition (1817),* Sir Edward, as a number of villains in periodical fiction, reads *Clarissa* to identify with Lovelace rather than with the heroine:

> The truth was that Sir Edw: whom circumstances had confined very much to one spot had read more sentimental Novels than agreed with him. His fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned, & most exceptionable parts of Richardson; & such Authors as have since appeared to tread in Richardson's steps, so far as Man's determined pursuit of Woman in defiance of every opposition of feeling & convenience is concerned, had since occupied the greater part of his literary hours, & formed his Character.[253]

As Brown asserts, the Quixotic fallacy may render women easily manipulated; however, the seducer must meet their literary demands and conforms to the manners imposed by their imagination. In other words, as Sir George Bellmour slyly understood in *The Female Quixote,* they must enter their words.

[252] Richard Graves, *Spiritual Quixote, or The Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffrey Wildgoose: A Comic Romance*, J. Dodsley, London, 1773, p. 312.
[253] Jane Austen, *Sandition*, Penguin books, London, 2019, p. 159.

According to Pearson, the paranoia about female Quixotes attenuated after the publication of *Waverley*, in 1814, 'a watershed, after which women writers' domination of the novel lessened and the reputation of some previously well-regarded women novelists declined, but the legitimacy of (at least certain) novels for women readers increased'.[254] The dominion of the novel was re-appropriated by male writers, however, concerns and stereotypes about the woman reader were much more obstinate issues.

3.2 The antifictional prejudice and the romance plot

An unavoidable element of the Quixotic fallacy is books. Quixotic-readers are, indeed, readers, and books are the mediator that separates the two words of fiction and reality. The Quixotic fallacy involves an error in the choice of the objects to imitate or credit. Therefore, as eighteenth-century commentators often specify, much depended on the choice of book. The sentiment that romances were harmful reading had been growing through the centuries. The bluestocking Mrs. Chapone is horrified by the injurious readings of her contemporaries. She addresses thus Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, in 1750:

> Indeed I am a little surprised that you, who are impatient with Mr. Richardson's prolixity, should ever descend to the most tedious, as well as unedifying kind of reading in the world, I mean romance. I make no scruple to call romances the worst of all the species of writing; unnatural representations of the passions, false sentiment, false precepts, false wit, false honour, and false modesty, with a strange heap of improbable, unnatural incidents mixed up with true history, and fastened upon some of the great names of antiquity,

[254] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 197.

> make up the composition of a romance; at last of such as I have read, which have been mostly French ones.[255]

Arabella reads French romances in bad translations and imitates every gesture. The role of romance in Lennox has aroused a quantity of interpretative readings: from a late attack on romance, to a landmark in problematizing the novelistic realism. Whatever the interpretations, Lennox creates a well-rounded fiction to take on fiction, contributing in the multiplication of intents within the anti-romance form.

However, Arabella may read Madame de Scudéry, but Catherine reads Anne Radcliffe's Gothic novel, Mary is passionate about sentimental novels. Cherubina reads *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian,* or *The Bravo of Venice*, Margaritta reads translations from the French and Polly is interested in the newest novel of circulating libraries. What do these books share? Is there a common element? What is the secret that charms, attracts, and ensnares?

Austen supposes that the novelistic genre endures a general misconception that degrades it, she calls it an 'injured body':

> Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are

[255] Hester Mulso Chapone (1818), quoted by Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters*, p. 91.

> eulogized by a thousand pens, - there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them.[256]

After all, between the post-Richardson flow of sentimental novels, with many of them obviously deviating from the moral and instructive model, and the acceptance and legitimisation of the novel as a genre, the anti-novel rhetoric has been strong and novels distrusted. Indeed, examples of aversion against and stereotypes about novel-reading can still be found today.

However, as Clara Reeve and Margaret Doody demonstrate, there are elements of continuity between genres, romance and the novel in particular (Doody advocates that romance and the novel are ultimately the same thing). Certainly, the initial, maybe just apparent, opposition of romance and novel collapses under the influence of the Gothic novel, sometimes seen as a hybrid of novel and romance, and consequently to the revival of romance during the Romantic era, that legitimises the novel rather than standing as an alternative. Therefore, another hypothesis may be brought forward: it may be argued that fiction itself arouses anxieties, and that Quixotic narrations enact an antifictional prejudice.

The connection between utility and suitability undoubtedly worried the eighteenth century, hence the claims of so many early novels to be renditions of 'true stories' to assert the propriety of what novels say and the famous Watt's definition of

[256] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p.36.

the novel[257] as opposed to romance for the adherence to the principle of verisimilitude. Robert Stuart, in *The Heroine*, seems to maintain such a difference between romance and novel:

> Novels such as the Vicar of Wakefield, The Fashionable Tales, and Coelebs, which draw man as he is, imperfect, instead of mas as he cannot be, superhuman, are both instructive and entertaining. Romances such as the Mysteries of Udolpho, the Italian, and the Bravo of Venice, which address themselves to the imagination alone, are often captivating, and seldom detrimental. But unfortunately so seductive are the latter class of composition, that one is apt to neglect more useful books for them; besides, when indulged in extreme, they tend to incapacitate us from encountering the turmoils of active life. They present us with incidents and characters which we can never meet in the world; and act upon the mind like intoxicating stimulants.[258]

Gerard Genette, in his essay "Vraisemblance et motivation', analyses contemporary reactions to *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678), arguably the first text of woman's fiction in France, and points out the interrelation of *vraisemblance* and *bienseance*, 'plausibility' and 'propriety',[259] as preconditions for the public opinion's approval. Nancy Miller expands on plausibility stating that 'plausibility then is an effect of reading through a grid of concordance',[260] the critical reaction to a text depends on the body of maxims and prejudices referred to as the system of values. Genette defines plausibility:

[257] See footnote 63.
[258] Barrett, *The Heroine*, p. 293.
[259] Translation by Nancy K. Miller in 'Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction', in PMLA, Vol. 96, No. 1, 1981, pp. 36-48
[260] Miller, 'Emphasis Added', p. 37.

> What defines the vraisemblable, is the formal principle of respect for the norm, in other words the existence of a relation of implication between the particular behavior attributed to a given character and a given, general maxim. […] To understand a character's behavior is to be able to refer to it as a received.[261]

On the other hand, as Brown observes, novels of course can be quite specifically political, yet, their fictional quality is not itself their political function and message. 'Thus the meaning of the antifictional prejudice may vary depending upon the source of this sentiment'.[262]

According to Miller, though, plausibility is gendered and is itself a political statement. Narratives directed to women, which encourage an identification to an illusory romanticised reality, therefore implausible, do not meet the requirements to gain access to the category of 'good books', of which Pearson speaks.[263] The gender label is manipulated to disqualify and women's literature and supposedly second-level literature are again juxtaposed. The canon in *Don Quixote* quickly exposes the paradox: 'As for my own Particular, I confess, that while I read 'em, and do not reflect that they are nothing but Falsehood and Folly, they give me some Satisfaction'.[264]

However, even though the stereotype about the allegedly 'natural' propensity of women to emotions and sensitivity has exploded and also the stereotype about the effective consumption of novels by women has been proven wrong, these

[261] Gérard Genette, ''Vraisemblance' and Motivation', translated by David Gorman, in *Narrative*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (October, 2001), pp. 239-58, p. 241.
[262] Brown, 'The Quixote Fallacy', p. 255.
[263] See, p. 98.
[264] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Vol.1, p. 475.

commonplaces fed, and still feed, a segment of the literary market usually classified as popular writing, belonging to periodical fiction. Gordon laments:

> ‘Such claims that aimed to disable women from ever triumphing over this problem were pervasive, and they persist event today. Recent critics continue to treat the interested, exaggerated, and often hysterical claims of eighteenth-century writers, who forged this association of women with fiction, as accurate indications of actual reading practices’.[265]

It follows that the attack on plausibility and the attack on female plots are ultimately the same thing and culminates in the assumption that women writers cannot or will not obey the rules of fiction. Moreover, the collateral postulation is inevitably the gendering of verisimilitude as male. That that pass for the truth of human experience and its representation in literature are in fact just reflections and apparatuses of the dominant culture. ‘For sensibility, sensitivity, "extravagance" - so many code words for feminine in our culture that the attack is in fact tautological - are taken to be not merely inferior modalities of production but deviations from some obvious truth’.[266]

Accordingly, Paulson sustains that the common element, which female-Quixotes’ readings share, is the formulaic romance plot and the conventions of romance fiction: the heroine goes through perils and sufferings until the bright marriage ending. What Deborah Ross calls a ‘love of love’, particularly lively during the mid-eighteenth century, that generates contradictions between romance and realistic elements and

[265] Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, p. 35.
[266] Miller, ‘Emphasis Added’, p. 46.

'creates a foggy moral universe'.[267] George Eliot will refer to this class of novels as 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists':

> The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own eyes, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond.[268]

Also Ana Vogrinčič, who outlines the moral panic surrounding novel-reading, attempts a simplified sketch of a romantic plot:

> A characteristic plot featured an unhappy love affair between a lower-class virtuous beauty and a gentleman, both in love with each other, but unable to unite due to severe social constraints. When there seems to be no solution for the two and both are on the brinks of marrying somebody else, a sudden revelation puts everything in order: it turns out that as a baby the heroine was swapped by a nurse and is in fact of a noble birth, a daughter of some lord, which makes it possible for the happy couple to marry. One cannot claim the plots of nowadays romances and soap operas are much different. Using a similar pattern, they on the one side provide the topics of universal relevance, such as love and family relations and average everyday problems, enabling and inviting identification, while on the other, they supply constant emotional drama, extraordinary beauty and exciting adventure.[269]

[267] Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror', pp. 457-8.
[268] George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', in Westminster Review, Vol. 66, London, Oct. 1856, p. 442.
[269] Ana Vogrinčič, 'The Novel-Reading Panic in 18thCentury in England: An Outline of an Early Moral Media Panic', in *Medij. istraž.,* Vol. 14, No.2, Zagreb, 2008, p. 108.

Normand Holland and Leona Sherman, wondering about the extraordinarily long-lived popularity of the Gothic novel and its appeal to women readers, investigate its formula, that has changed little since the eighteenth century:

> A story told by the heroine, often working as a governess companion [hence a nurturing role] in a brooding castle or mansion. She is alternately attracted and repelled by a rakishly handsome man who plays the villain until almost the last page – and who then comes to her rescue.[270]

Radway has asked a group of contemporary devoted Harlequin[271] romance-readers what they look for in a good romance. The answer, at this point, is not surprising:

> the quality of the ideal romantic fantasy is directly dependent on the character of the heroine and the manner in which the hero treats her. The plot, of course, must always focus on a series of obstacles to the final declaration of love between the two principals. However, a good romance involves an unusually bright and determined woman and a man who is spectacularly masculine, but at the same time capable of remarkable empathy and tenderness. Although they enjoy the usual chronicle of misunderstandings and mistakes which inevitably leads to the heroine's belief that the hero intends to harm her, the Smithton readers prefer stories that combine a much-understated version of this continuing antagonism with a picture of a gradually developing love. They most wish to participate in the slow process by which two people become acquainted, explore each other's foibles, wonder about the other's feelings, and eventually "discover" that they are loved by the other.[272]

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[270] Normand N. Holland, Leona F. Sherman, *Gothic Possibilities* in Elizabeth Flynn, Patrocinio P. Schweickart, *Gender and reading: essays on readers, texts, and contexts,* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, p. 215.

[271] See footnote 135.

[272]Janice Radway, 'Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context', in *Feminist Studies,* Vol.9, No.1, Spring 1983, p. 64.

The pair, hero and heroine, seems to be pivotal. The vital element is the creation of the perfect union in which the male part, strong yet nurturing, recognises the worth of the heroine. Radway's sample of readers admit of rejecting a novel when the hero is too abusive, or perverse. Moreover, the romance heroine is an ideal. 'The novel heroine is both a representation (a girl trembling on the brink of a sexual and moral decision) and a metaphor (for an erotic-moral-aesthetic-psychological ideal)'.[273] Radway's research points to the fact that readers prefer an intelligent, strong and witty heroine, rather than the stereotype of the foolish and weak woman. Heroines remind of an elected cast, that in a middle-class contest would allude to the irremediably attractive aristocracy. Wanting to be a heroine is wanting to be something special, something else, to want to change, to be changed, and also to want to stay the same. An identity that struggles to form, or to change, unsettles The struggle for an identity, or an alternative identity, position the heroine, and the reader as a consequence, in the realm of post-adolescence moral and erotic vagueness. Arabella's ultimate wish is not to escape the marriage finale, is to explore, to have a 'history'. Her self-centeredness accords her a space, on the edge between appropriate and inappropriate, between sanity and insanity.

In Barrett's *The Heroine*, Cherubina and Robert Stuart entertain an interesting conversation about being a heroine:

> 'If you mean the heroes and heroines of romance,' said Stuart, 'their performances are useful in teaching us what we should shun, not what we should imitate. The heroine, in particular, quits a comfortable home, turns out to be the best pedestrian in the world; and, after

[273] Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. xxii.

> weeping tears enough to float her work-basket, weds some captious, passionate, and kneeling hero.'
>
> 'Better,' cried I, 'than to remain a domesticated rosy little Miss, who romps with the squire, plays an old tune on an old piano, and reads prayers for the good family – servants and all. At last, marrying some honest gentleman, who lives on his saddle, she degenerates into a dangler of keys and whipper of children; trots up and down stairs, educated the poultry, and superintends the architecture of pies'.[274]

Nevertheless, is there a reason why women are particularly attracted to romance plots, both as writers and readers? Freud answers the question explaining that the day-dreaming, the fantasy whence literature draws, is the adult continuation or substitution of the playing of childhood. Most people build castles-in-the-air and, as it was for playing, these fantasies arouse from the tension toward a fulfillment of a wish or from an unsatisfied wish, a correlation of unsatisfying reality.

> These motivating wishes vary according to the sex, character and circumstances of the person who is having the phantasy; but they fall naturally into two main groups. They are either ambitious wishes, which serve to elevate the subject's personality; or they are erotic ones. In young women the erotic wishes predominate almost exclusively, for their ambition is as a rule absorbed by erotic trends.[275]

The categories, Freud specifies, are not necessarily always separated. However, the predomination of the erotic motives in women is explained by the minimum of socially accepted erotic desire they are allowed. In other words, one's encounter with reality, or

[274] Barrett, *The heroine*, p.88.
[275] Sigmund Freud, *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,* in Charles Kaplan, William Anderson, *Criticism: Major Statements*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, p. 423.

the text, is culturally influenced. Indeed, culture creates psychological needs or expectations which society is then unable to satisfy. Romance fills the void.

According to Kate Flint, the condemnation of romance as a genre, which the early years of the women's movement contributed to, for manipulating women into the realm of suffering and into standardised marriage plots, and for reproducing the stereotyped sensitive, intuitive and dreamy representation of women reinforcing traditional expectations about female-male relation, did not fully considered the contradictions within the genre, the role played by women and the 'imaginative need'[276] that romances supplied. Romance plots are really about finding validation. Indeed, as Radway has argued, 'entering the romance actually allows the woman to feel, imaginatively, at the powerful centre of her own life',[277] in whatever ways she wants to conduct it. Romance-reading can be a way of indulging the self. Radway elaborates:

> It is true, certainly, that the romantic story itself reaffirms the perfection of romance and marriage. But it is equally clear that the constant need for such an assertion derives not from a sense of security and complete faith in the status quo, but from deep dissatisfaction with the meager benefits apportioned to women by the very institutions legitimated in the narrative.[278]

Women's plots are concerned about the fictional representation of women, rather than on the representation of their real lives, nonetheless they address their real problems and desires, challenging the idea of women's passivity and irrationality.

[276] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader* 1837-1914, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 31.
[277] Radway, 'Women Read the Romance', p.72.
[278] Ibidem.

The price to pay for entering the realm of fantasy through such reading matter, it seems, is a detachment from reality, mind-numbing at best, maddening at worst. However, from Radway's researches emerges that this detachment is exactly the effect women enjoy:

> When asked why they read romances, the Smithton women overwhelmingly cite escape or relaxation as their goal. They use the word "escape," however, both literally and figuratively. On the one hand, they value their romances highly because the act of reading them literally draws the women away from their present surroundings. Because they must produce the meaning of the story by attending closely to the words on the page, they find that their attention is withdrawn from concerns that plague them in reality.
>
> […]
>
> On the basis of the following comments, made in response to a question about what romances "do" better than other novels available today, one can conclude that it is precisely the unreal, fantastic shape of the story that makes their literal escape even more complete and gratifying.[279]

The Freudian theme of pleasure returns. Romance-readers want to indulge in pleasing sensations, which are not to be found in real life. Romance-reading functions as an escape from a crushing and unsatisfactory reality, a transfer to a more desirable universe, a moment of abandon and self-centeredness. 'Romance reading is both an assertion of deeply felt psychological needs and a means for satisfying those needs'.[280]

[279] Radway, 'Women Read the Romance', p. 58.
[280] Ibid. p. 61.

3.3 Quixotic reading: mimesis and empathy

As dangerous, stereotyped, disregarded, unadvisable as it can be, a book remains a book. 'Fiction is not the cause but the means by which writers create and readers re-create an experience. Novels do not have emotions – people do',[281] write Holland and Sherman. A reader should be able to dispose of a book as a material object. Thus, while the Quixotic fallacy justifies a concern with the object of literature, it also encourages a reflection on the unreliability of readers in their relations to what they read.

More than once this thesis has mentioned the metanarrative aspect of Quixotic narrations, sometimes obscured by the more blatant satire towards certain literary genres: Quixotic narrations foster a reflection on the act of reading itself. In Gordon's terms, 'quixotism reveals the fear not merely that literature's rhetoric will confuse the mind but that the mind will swallow literature whole and come to view the world through a generic lens'.[282] Indeed, the activity of reading became such a contested issue in the eighteenth century**.** Pearson, for example, underlines the centrality of reading in *Northanger Abbey*:

> Although for some critics the centrality of the gothic criticism has obscured this point, *Northanger Abbey* is fundamentally concerned with reading, and writing, as a woman: reading and writing not only Gothic (and other) novels, but also periodicals […] poetry […],epitaphs […], newspapers […], history […], moral fables […] and essays […], letters journals […], even laundry lists.[283]

[281] Holland, Sherman, *Gothic Possibilities,* p. 216.
[282] Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, p. 33.
[283] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, p. 210.

Quixotic reading is a mimetic experience as the reader seems to act as an automaton in translating words to deeds, reading to actions. On the one hand, readers under the noxious influence could forget reality, neglecting their work or responsibilities or the needs of others. On the other hand, they may try to realise their literary experience and create a conflict of the imagination with the word of the sense. The power of books to arouse, excite, stimulate, and provoke is somehow suspected to lessen the agency of readers and their freedom of choice. 'The quixotic fallacy, confusing life with fiction, attests both to the power of fiction to represent reality (or what can be taken to be reality) and to the susceptibility, whether reasonable or unreasonable, of readers in accepting fictional representations',[284] a destruction of the critical faculty, a failure to distinguish stories from history.

Erich Auerbach, in his *Mimesis*, considers the role of imitation in Western literature's relationship with reality. He does not offer any general and systematic theory, rather he approaches the matter historically, from Homer to Virginia Woolf, interrogating single texts. In the chapter entitled 'The enchanted Dulcinea', Auerbach addresses Don Quixote's relationship with reality:

> Seldom, indeed, has a subject suggested the problematic study of contemporary reality as insistently as *Don Quixote*. The ideal conceptions of a past epoch, and of a class which has lost its functions, in conflict with the reality of the contemporary present ought to have led to a critical and problematic portrayal of the latter, the more so since the mad Don Quixote is often superior to his normal opponents by virtue of his

[284] Brown, 'The Quixotic Fallacy', p.251.

> moral steadfastness and native wit. But Cervantes did not elaborate his work in this direction.[285]

He catches the Don in a moment when his certainties are heavily shaken: Don Quixote sees Dulcinea for the first time and he sees a vulgar peasant on a donkey. The illusion and ordinary reality clashes, and Don Quixote's ability of transformation cracks. The situation is brought back to farce by Sancho and the tragedy is dodged. However, the episode is symptomatic, according to Auerbach, to Quixote's relation with reality: a combination of noble and nonsensical. Ridicule and dignity are so mixed as to form a special multilayered gay realm, a 'brilliant and purposeless play of combination'.[286] Auerbach opposes the idea of a 'wise madness',[287] that acts as a corrective of reality, and recognises that Don Quixote's illusions are held up to ridicule. 'On the other hand, for him [Cervantes] too the phenomena of reality had come to be difficult to survey and no longer possible to arrange in an unambiguous and traditional manner'.[288]

Auerbach does not include *The Female Quixote* in his list, and in this thesis has often been argued that Arabella's distorted relation with reality could very well serve an agenda. However, the mastery to balance fiction and reality is based on the same combination of gaiety and nonsensical that Auerbach finds in Cervantes. The paradigm of quixotism, in Lennox as well as in Cervantes, destabilises the paradigm of mimesis. An imitative pattern within an imitative pattern, that paradoxically absorbs it, and

[285] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991, pp. 342-3.
[286] Ibid., p. 355.
[287] Ibid., p. 357.
[288] Ibid., p. 358.

perverts it. However, the cure from the quixotic fallacy is not a treatment against mimesis. The cure is mimesis itself.

Commentators on female education were particularly concerned about misreading: 'If a woman emulated a literary heroine, she could do so in disreputable as well as admirable ways. Thus novel reading could harm or improve women readers, depending upon what and how they read'.[289] Correcting quixotism requires redirecting mimeticism from Quixotic standards to current or desired social norms, from one interest to another. The waywardness of Quixotes' reading arises from the fact that their reading doesn't accord with peer perceptions and valuations of literary and real objects Indeed, imitation may not be harmful itself, Quixotes are often re-educated through the proposition of alternative (culturally aligned) models. Arabella's case is again exemplary: she is educated into proper readings and appropriate conduct. She is not educated out of mimesis, she is offered the right one, since the mimetic expectation seems to cause anxiety only when misguided.

Paradoxically, Quixotes can be said to fail in mimesis. They cannot read properly the reality around them and do not mime the shared model: 'Far from being too mimetic, she fails [the female Quixote] to be mimetic enough-that is, mimetic of what everyone else mimes. She is, we might say, mimetically incorrect. So the quixotic fallacy would appear to be a fable about solipsism'.[290] In this sense, Quixotic character represent a failure in reading and reproducing reality. The further consequence is that Quixotes

[289] Ibid., pp.255-6.
[290] Ibid, p. 259.

expose reality as a reproducible fiction. Auerbach, in *Mimesis,* does not contest the consistency of the representation of real life in *Don Quixote*, 'all the participants are presented in their true reality, their living everyday existence'.[291] However, as Vladimir Nabokov notices, Cervantes' landscape of 'conventional brooks and invariable green meadows and pleasant woods, all man's measure or improved by man' is nothing as 'the wild, bitter, sunstunned, frozen, parched, tawny, brown pinedark mountains of Spain'.[292] Realism is fiction. Imitation, even if of reality, exposes mechanisms of reproducibility, that unveils inauthenticity. Even when at stake there is reality itself.

The Quixotes' incapacity of recognizing the difference between text and reality, and the anxiety about misreaders of both texts and reality, call into question the reader's relation to texts, particularly fictitious one. The interaction between text and reader is the field of study of reader-response criticism. In particular, questions about objectivity and subjectivity, mediation, prejudice-free perception are all relevant in the context of Quixote narratives. Reading has often been characterised as a process of absorption and dispossession, an experience of fusion in which the reader is entrapped into an aesthetic illusion, and often changed by it (Derrida, in *Positions,* states that 'reading is transformational'[293]). Louise Rosenblatt, who anticipates an entire school of reader-response theorists who assume a bi-active model of reading in which the literary work controls part of the response and the reader controls part, theorises that reading exists

[291] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 343.
[292] Vladimir Nabokov, Lectures on *Don Quixote*, Ed. Fredson Bowers, Harcourt University Press, New York, 1983, pp. 33-4.
[293] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, translated and annotated by Alan Bass, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, p.63.

on an aesthetic-efferent continuum. Reading has both a cognitive and an affective component: aesthetic readers read for feeling and the experience of living like they are in the text, and readers of the efferent stance focus on the information in the text, in order to make some use of it. Quixotic-readers would obviously be positioned in the aesthetic extremity of the continuum. A reader with mimetic expectation, an aesthetic reader, is a reader who has no control on their empathic relation to the text. Empathy, indeed, is defined as the 'capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life on another person while simultaneously retaining the stance of an objective observer. Empathy is both a passive mode of immersion and an active mode of perception and understanding'.[294] An emphatic reader re-enacts aspects of the text's organizing fantasy without conscious understanding. Bouson, who analyses the figure of the empathic reader, recognises the empathic reaction in the clinical phenomenon the 'reenactment':[295] a compulsion to repeat generated by empathy untampered by conscious understanding.

Arabella, whose reading is obviously emphatic, confuses the boundaries between reality and the text, and expects reality to conform to romances. However, empathy is also the quality the doctor invokes to redirect Arabella's mimesis. Arabella's heart 'yields to the Force of Truth', meaning reality, when she realises 'with Abhorrence the

[294] J. Brooks Bouson, *The empathic reader: a study of the narcissistic character and the drama of the self*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1989, p. 22.
[295] Terminology used by the psychoanalyst Gail Reed in 'Toward a Methodology' quoted in Bouson, The empathic reader, p.22.

Crime of deliberate unnecessary Bloodshed' (Lennox, 1752: 381). A layer is peeled, Arabella can reenter reality.

Anyway, reader-response theorists do not agree on the model of reading as an empathic event. Several reader-response theorists advocate for an impossibility of empathy: readers find in the book a projection of themselves, or at least are active agent in the production of meaning. In this instance, readers are controlling over the text, they bring opinions that are not necessarily the author's, have the power of interpreting and redefying messages. Normand Holland, for example, advocates that the fictional text is a space for representing one's own fantasies and fears: 'fantasies are what we project from within onto the outer world. Defenses define what we let into ourselves from that outer world'.[296] Interestingly, also in this case, readers could become Quixotic-readers, misrecognizing things they have themselves created as actually present in the reality, that is represented by the text. In Donna Haraway's terms: 'All readings are also mis-readings, re-readings, partial readings of a text that is originally and finally never simply there'.[297]

Feminist interpretations of *The Female Quixote* find validation in this description of the act of reading. Arabella's sentimental education in the world of romance accords her the space that the world denies her. To have a 'history', to choose who to marry, to have adventures, to be relevant are not necessarily intrinsic qualities of romances, they are Arabella's own desires, that find expression in those romances.

[296] Holland, Sherman, *Gothic Possibilities,* p. 217.
[297] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, 1991, p. 124.

Gordon places Quixotic-readers at this end of the scale. He interprets Quixotic-readers as a metaphor of the impossibility of an unmediated reading. Their perceptions have been shaped by the books they have consumed, but they are unaware of the mediators. Gordon recognises in the Quixotic preoccupation with distinguishing the real and the illusion a 'common proto-Enlightenment obsession':[298] 'the internalizes fictions that prevent the mind from gaining real knowledge of the nature of things'.[299] The debate on perceptions and knowledge is especially lively in the eighteenth-century. In particular, John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) theorises that objects 'obtrude their particular Ideas upon our minds, whether we will or no'.[300] Also Edmund Burke, in *Philosophical Enquire into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), adopts the idea of a passive perceiver. External object produce sensations on the observer. However, Quixotes pervert the natural process. They are '*il*legitimate perceiver[s]'[301] as they 'allow the ideas, patterns, or genres in their minds to distort their perception of objects themselves'.[302] Their minds intrude in a process that ought to be passive, and the fiction they read acts as a filter.

However, if readers differ in their approaches to texts, how much of this difference can be attributed to the social constructions of masculinity and femininity? Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schweickart collected in a volume a series of essays that support the thesis that gender is indeed significant in the interaction between text and

[298] Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, p.15.
[299] Ibidem.
[300] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Printed for T. Longman, London, 1796, p. 92.
[301] Gordon, *The Practice of Quixotism*, p.22.
[302] Ibid., p. 19.

reader, for the background of the reader is relevant in the confrontation. Flynn assumes that:

> the reader can resist the alien thought or subject and so remain essentially unchanged by the reading experience. In this case the reader dominates the text. Or the reader can allow the alien thought to become such a powerful presence that the self is replaced by the other and so is effaced. In this case the text dominates the reader. Either the reader resists the text and so deprives it of its force, or the text overpowers the reader and so eliminates the reader's powers of discernment. A third possibility, however, is that self and other, reader and text, interact in such a way that the reader learns from the experience without losing critical distance; reader and text interact with a degree of mutuality.[303]

This latter stance of balance between empathy and judgment is attained with the correct comprehension of the text. Her study's results reveal distinct gender line in readers' responses to texts. Male responses leaned towards the pole of dominance and detachment more than women', male readers tended to impose previously established norms. Women were more ready to enter into the experience offered by the narrative and participate in the events of the text, they engaged empathically with the text. When the submissive pole is brought to extremes the reader remains entangled in the events of the story and is not able to step back. Flynn's investigation coincides with the results of another study, conducted by David Bleich, on 'comparative literary response patterns of men and women'.[304] More precisely, Bleich finds significant gender-related differences

[303] Elizabeth A. Flynn, *Gender and Reading*, in Elizabeth Flynn, Patrocinio P. Schweickart, *Gender and reading: essays on readers, texts, and contexts*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, p. 268.
[304] David Bleich, *Gender Interests in Reading and Language*, in Elizabeth Flynn, Patrocinio P. Schweickart, *Gender and reading: essays on readers, texts, and contexts*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, p.238.

in reader's responds with regard to the literary genre: men and women, apparently, read fiction differently and lyric poetry similarly. Women distance themselves less from the narrative, 'perhaps another way of articulating the difference would be that women *enter* the word of the novel'.[305] Bleich's conclusions are surprisingly similar to Flynn's:

> The women tend to identify with more than one figure in the narratives, even to identify with feelings and situations, and to experience the reading as a variety of social emotions. Neither the teller nor the tale is radically other for the women. The men, however, draw boundaries much more decisively. For them to 'see' the author is as fluent as it is for the women not to see him or her. Being aware that an author is behind a narrative seems to be a gender-specific form of self-orientation toward narrative for the men. […] The novels were more self-consciously appropriated by the men than by the women, who tended more to 'enter' the tale.[306]

The limit of these studies is generalisation, gender categories – as imposed cultural construction – overlook the individual and the individual's experience but it is important to keep in mind that each reader experiences fiction in terms of their particular style, character and identity. 'There are significant patterns, but there are also significant exceptions'.[307]

Arabella's mimetic experience and imagination are quixotically intertwined. She enters the world of romance; she fuses with the text. Romances act as a filter in her perception of reality. Or, ambivalently, reality participate in her relation with romance. The discrepancy between fiction and reality generates a laughable entertainment, or may

[305] Ibid., p. 239.
[306] Ibid., p. 264.
[307] Ibid., p. 235.

stimulate a reflection on the lacunae of reality. Quixote-like characters (and people) move in a strange region between madness and wisdom. This thesis has peeled off the layers, examined the ambivalences and proposed interpretations, but, after all, we are readers reading of readers. Self-reflection on one's own status as a reader is, possibly, the last layer of the quixotic fallacy.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this thesis has shown that the Quixotic-reader is a topos in which some formulaic elements can be detected. Charlotte Lennox's Arabella epitomises the readers with their head turned by books, to whom I referred as the Quixotic-readers, and she appears not to be an isolated case. Parallels have been drawn among characters that have projected fiction onto reality and significant generalisations about the modality –how- and the object –what- of Quixotic reading have been drawn. Moreover, the trope appears to mirror a social anxiety involving unregulated reading and women readers well-rooted in the eighteenth century, with consequences that transcend the century.

Characters who are diagnosed the Quixotic fallacy usually grow up in isolation, secluded from the world, a condition necessary to explain their impressionability. They read freely and unsupervised and their outward social awareness ends up being modelled after the books they read. Narratives trespass the limits of the book and actively influence the conduct of their readers. The principal reaction Quixotic-readers arouse is hilarity. Hilarity surpasses concern, because Quixotic-readers are never a real danger to society, they are not a disruptive force against the establishment since the model they imitate is always very recognisable. Finally, crucial to plots featuring Quixotic-readers is the conversion, the cure.

The analysis of the character of Arabella revealed several ambivalences and concerns that are confirmed by the other Quixotic-readers and that characterise the

eighteenth century. The parody of a genre, the satire of contemporary society, tensions regarding the fictional genre, concerns toward over-reading, misreading and uncontrolled reading, distress toward women readers and trust in the liberating power of reading fostered interpretations whose reconstruction allows to complete an interestingly multifaceted full picture.

Quixotic-readers are, indeed, readers. A reflection about reading is, therefore, unavoidable. In *The Female Quixote*, the metafictional game involves romance and the novel. Arabella is a devoted, and deluded, romance-reader, therefore embodying an explicit parody of the genre and an implicit satire of contemporary society, which is mirrored by the novel. However, the notion of romance in the eighteenth century was rather nebulous. Arabella reads French romances, after the model of Mme. de Scudéry, which were a literary presence in England at least until the 1730s. However, by the end of the century, as Clara Reeve has Sophonia saying, they were outdated, something a grandmother would read. The anxiety about romance-reading, indeed, extended to novel-reading. Various commentators endeavoured to demonstrated the continuity of romance and novel. The division proves even more uncertain when considering the almost indiscriminate use of the two terms in the eighteenth century. However, the supposition about the stigmatisation of romance is not totally wrong. Indeed, the frowned-upon narratives, which according to the case are French romances, Gothic novels, sentimental novels or romance novels, all share a similar plot and romance features. These are narratives that present a heroine going through perils and suffering until a bright marriage ending, which, humorously, is the same sketchy plot of *The*

Female Quixote itself. Moreover, romantic plots are commonly associated to women readers. During the eighteenth century, in particular, concerns about the fictional genre and women's reading overlapped. The perception was of novels sprouting as mushrooms everywhere, women infallibly falling pray of their noxious power. Actually, the reality was different and, as Jan Fergus and James Raven have demonstrated, the stereotype of the circulating library as a place patronised by women craving for novels was far from being the historical truth. Nevertheless, considering that the novel-reading public was regarded as predominantly female and that women were already perceived as in all respects weaker, fanciful, more sensitive and thus more liable to bad influence, the situation seemed all the more alarming. Romances were likely to instil false expectation in the unwary reader: they fostered a vision of the woman, which was lofty, demanding, and unattainable, jarring with the idea of domesticity, prudery, and modesty, that was expected from eighteenth-century women. At the same time, though, women were also urged to read to compensate for their less rational nature.

Accordingly, in his review of *The Female Quixote*, Henry Fielding found Arabella more credible than Don Quixote, 'as we are to grant in both Performances, that the Head of a very sensible Person is entirely subverted by reading Romances, this Concession seems to me more easy to be granted in the Case of a young Lady than of an old Gentleman'.[308] Women misreaders could not be counted on to disengage themselves from their readings exactly as Quixotic characters, who are susceptible of

[308] Sir Alexander Drawcansir (Henry Fielding), *The Covent Garden Journal*, p. 279.

confusing life with fiction. Indeed, reading became such a contested issue in the eighteenth century.

Quixotic-readers in particular have no control on their empathic relation to the text, and re-enact aspects of the text's organizing fantasy without conscious understanding. In particular, reader-response critics observe that women tend to engage empathically with the fictional text more than men. Far from being the demonstration of women's inclination toward a natural sensibility, this shows that fiction fills an imaginative need that society fails to attain.

Entering the world of fiction means, apparently, a detachment with the world of reality. Eccentric imagination brings with it both the stigma of madness and of superior wisdom. The paradigm of quixotism subverts the ordinary perception of reality, because of an excess of empathy, a misdirected mimesis, or false expectations derived from books. However, whatever the reliability of quixotic-readers' understanding of both fiction and reality, whatever the reason, or the nonsense, at the core of the quixotic fallacy, I found something endearing, and necessary, in the Quixotic imagination. Joseph Addison, in *The Spectator* no.413, writes:

> In short, our Souls are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing Delusion, and we walk about like the Enchanted Hero of a Romance, who sees beautiful Castles, Woods and Meadows; and at the same time hears the warbling of Birds, and the purling of Streams; but upon the finishing of some secret Spell, the fantatick Scene breaks up, and the disconsolate Knight finds himself on a barren Hearth, or in a solitary Desart. [….] tho indeed the Ideas of Colours are so

> pleasing and beautiful in the Imagination, that it is possible the Soul *will not* be deprived of them. [309]

Arabella and her fellow Quixotic-readers may be under a secret spell, a laughable delusion, and can very well be wrong, while the rest of the people right. They may also abjure and reenter the ordered world, but they leave to the reader a spark of their fallacy.

[309] Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, Vol.3, edited by Donald F. Bond, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1965, pp. 346-7.

ABSTRACT

The thesis carries out an analysis of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752). Picking from the Quixotic vogue, which was flourishing in eighteenth-century England, the protagonist, Arabella, is a fervent reader, with her head turned by books. If Don Quixote mistakes himself for a knightly hero, Arabella thinks herself a courtly heroine of a romance and expects her life to conform to that of a French seventeenth-century romance. The aim of the thesis is to establish the existence of a topos, that of the Quixotic-reader, with formulaic characteristics, intrinsic ambivalences and connections with the cultural and historical background.

The thesis is developed in three chapter, which proceeds from the particular to the general. The first chapter takes into consideration *The Female Quixote* and addresses its multilayeredness. Arabella can be the vehicle of a laughable parody toward romances and of an unsettling satire toward contemporary society. Romance's ambivalent position fosters a metafictional consideration about genres. Romance and novel, their dichotomy and interdependence, are reflected upon in *The Female Quixote*. Moreover, the friction between romance and novel, reality and imagination, has provided fertile ground for the feminist criticism, that identified romance as the female pole of the binary opposition and the novel as the male. The second chapter considers historical romance-readers. Arabella appears to be representative of an anxiety that characterises the age: popular fiction seems to be sprouting everywhere and readers, especially women readers, cannot be counted on to disengage themselves from their readings. The chapter exposes the

stereotype and addresses the alleged dangers of romance-reading. Finally, the third chapter proposes a theorisation of the quixotic-reader. Drawing from the Quixotic trend and from the anxieties surrounding women's reading in the eighteenth century, Quixotic-readers are usually female character, who grow up in relative isolation and have an unregulated and unsupervised access to books. They read, imitate, are ridiculed and, lastly, cured. The books they usually read present a romance-like plot, where a heroine undergoes perils and suffering, until a comforting marriage ending. Quixotic kind of reading further complicates things. Quixotic-readers have no control over their empathic relation to the tex and enters the world of the book completely, so that their mimetic attitude needs to be redirected in order to bring them back to reality.

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