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Tracing Female Quixotism from a Gendered Stereotype into a Heroine: Lady Errants and Quixotes in Petticoats

Cinsiyetçi bir Stereotipten Kahramanlığa Kadın Kişotluğun İzini Sürmek: Kadın Şövalyeler ve Etekli Kişotlar

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ABSTRACT
Although *The Female Quixote* (1752) is widely regarded as one of the corner stones of quixotism studies, a retrospective analysis of Arabella's antecedents is crucial to understanding its evolution until the end of the eighteenth century. Dating back to the first quarter of the seventeenth century, female quixotism, as a topos, was considered and employed as a means of laughter and a light-hearted subject for the readers. The first examples of women quixotes were identified with the habit of excessive romance reading *Don Quixote* had originated. Early poetic depictions, such as Thomas Overbury's *Characters* (1615) and Wye Saltonstall's *Picturæ Loquentes* (1635), feature maids aspiring to be lady-errants. Later, women characters in William Cartwright's *The Lady-Errant* (1651) and Richard Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705) reinforce comic stereotypes, emphasizing their absurd expectations and idiosyncratic use of language. Until Lennox's Arabella as the female quixote, these pioneering characters function as the preliminary elements defining the contours of the stock type, soon to be a character. Within the context of the development of a character that peaked in the eighteenth century, this study aims to trace back this progress to study the cultural and literary evolution that enabled the birth of a heroine. It offers a comprehensive insight into how a conventional stock type evolved into more complex female characters, ultimately leading to the development of more multifaceted and unconventional heroines.

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Introduction

In March 1752, a decade after the publication of the first quixotic novel in English, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Henry Fielding wrote an appreciative review of another quixotic novel, Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote,* in his *Covent Garden Journal*. He asserts that the author "hath excelled the Spanish writer" and adds his views about the work:

> First, . . . 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

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> of Brain in Arabella is accounted for by her peculiar Circumstances, and Education. To say Truth, I make no Doubt but that most young 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. (1752, p. 173)

Fielding makes a witty yet essentialist remark on the gist of quixotism by attributing it to female (in)experience, which he considers more susceptible to deception and likely to embody the principles of quixotism. As to Fielding, compared to a frail-minded elderly Don Quixote, a young girl's mind serves as a more suitable ground to grow possible wrong judgements about life. While his commentary displays positive remarks for the novel, it reveals the deep-seated gender roles and their attributions in the literature of the period. At the end of his review, persisting in the gender question, he evaluates the work as a helpful conduct book for young ladies in that it "expose[s] all those Vices and Follies in her Sex which are chiefly predominant in Our Days" (Fielding, 1752, p. 174). Assuming that women are inherently more predisposed to quixotism, Fielding recommends that they read Lennox's novel to learn lessons and avoid the fate of Arabella. Likewise, female quixote figures portrayed in works produced in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were also shaped by the same perspective adopted by their male writers. Addressing the alleged harm caused by the reading habits of women, they associated quixotism with them to ridicule the reading frenzy of the so-called "weaker" sex. Therefore, this study aims to examine the development of female quixotism through its definition and practice before Lennox's seminal work in order to provide a broader understanding of how quixotism was appropriated to female characters who follow a pattern of excessive reading.

Although the method of quixotism provided a vast source of inspiration for literary production in different genres, the burgeoning popularity of the novel in the eighteenth century led quixotism to become a term that was closely associated with this new form. Nevertheless, during the heydays of the novel, the most popular of many quixotic emulations followed the original example set by *Don Quixote* and these works featured male quixotes with their unique or whimsical dispositions and obsessions. Even though the national quixote concept was established as a masculine figure in its early examples, the link between quixotism and masculinity "was complicated by the potential passive penetrability of quixotism and the proliferation of narratives about female quixotic readers" (Dale, 2017, p. 5). Considering the same views Fielding put forward in his commentary, the feminine quixotic candidate was seen as a more fitting figure for her malleable subjectivity and mind. In the same vein, Dale points out the gendered nature of quixotic qualities and links it to the patriarchal perspective that regards feminine "as soft and penetrable" (p. 7) creatures that can easily be "molded, imprinted and formed" (p. 7) by the materials they read and are exposed to. Despite the derogatory view, the emergence of female quixotism in literature was not propelled by contempt for women. As Amelia Dale notes, there was a noticeable rise in its employment with the increase of women writers and works about female romance readers with quixotic dispositions. Within the scope and selection of works focusing on female quixotism, Lennox's novel is treated as a cornerstone by many scholars in terms of its innovative approach, subversive method and skilful emulation of the concept of quixotism. However, upon closer examination, the precursors to female quixotes written before Lennox's Arabella present a significant literary and cultural framework regarding the gender norms of the time and how female quixotism was defined vis-à-vis quixotism.

From a retrospective angle, up until the point of *The Female Quixote*'s publication, the quixotic characters created in the period were the British ones with their domestic problems and criticisms. Within this view, the ways of anglicizing Don Quixote into a British figure offer such a wide variety of choices that each one of the writers was able to create their exclusive and topical quixotes. The characterization of a British quixote, with a problem rooted in one or more institutions of eighteenth-century Britain, is woven around the fundamental realities of his/her temporal, spatial

and social background. The reason why these writers feel the need to design a whole new quixotic character rests on the issues that the authors especially focus on in their works. The issues problematized in each British quixote are the components of the unique quixotic combination of the writers.

Despite the lack of literary attention given to the earlier emulations of female quixotes, the advent of Cervantic and quixotic studies has provided a platform for their recognition and exploration. The emergence of the trope of female quixotism dates back to the early seventeenth century (Borham-Puyal, 2012, p. 177) when *Don Quixote* was published and eventually reached England. In the early phase of the novel's impact on national literature, the prevalent perspective treated Don Quixote and his adventures with a light-hearted and humorous approach. The core of this approach fundamentally stems from Don Quixote's excessive immersion in romance reading, which leads to the deterioration of his mental faculties and distorted perception of the real. Both his wit and madness accommodate this entertaining tone in the initial reception. Thus, the earlier representations of both female and male British quixotes were frequently portrayed as unreliable and exaggerated characters, contributing to the overall comical effect with their eccentric dispositions. Being the early experiments with quixotism, these characters lacked depth and subtlety in their character formulations, making them akin to the stereotypical figures that can be identified with oversimplified traits. Therefore, the early emulations of quixotic characters were often depicted as bookish individuals who espoused the ideals of the romance universe while remaining oblivious to the ways of the world. By the same token, Don Quixote's devotion to his books also resonates with certain social and gender issues prevalent in eighteenth-century England and the previous age, particularly in its representation of literary engagement and societal expectations.

In order to explore female quixotism with a deeper understanding, it is vital to designate the gendered perception of reading and romances in the period. Because, as it will also be observed in other female quixotes, the act of misguided reading is the first and foremost common feature they share. Therefore, the concept of female readership in the period demonstrates the socio-cultural foundation that links women with the prejudice of unrestrained reading. Within the discourse of British quixotism, the socio-cultural fact of "reading woman" had been employed in literature as a trope and male writers found a chance to lampoon these women who lend themselves to overindulge in reading romances and novels. Glancing at the data given the female reading culture, the rate of female literacy witnessed a radical improvement, rising from 1% in the sixteenth century to 25% by 1714, largely due to the growing availability of printed materials (Brewer, 2013, p. 141). Especially the second half of the century reached higher figures up to 40% of aristocratic members of the society (Brewer, p. 141). As the ubiquity of books of different sorts increases, aristocratic female readers who lead monotonous domestic lives are involved in reading as a recreational activity. Due to the fact that "[n]o one need[s] the services of the well-to-do young women" for economic and domestic work, novel-reading evolves into a new leisure activity for young women along with "paying visits, playing cards, drawing or performing on a musical instrument . . . dancing, and flirting" (Meyer Spacks, 1978, p. 426). However, young ladies who develop reading mania are also warned against the detrimental effects of over-reading by the prominent writers or the conduct books of the age.

Enlightenment philosopher David Hume exhorts that novels and romances are harmful to the minds of the fair sex for their "false representation" and he is "sorry to see them have such an aversion to matter of fact, and such appetite for falsehood" (1987, p. 564). To that end, in a conduct book titled *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), the author, priest Thomas Gisborne carries this warning further with his delineation of the possible progress of female reading frenzy.

> [T]he perusal of one romance leads, with much more frequency than is the case with respect

> to works of other kinds, to the speedy perusal of another. Thus a habit is formed, a habit at first, perhaps, of limited indulgence, but a habit that is continually found more formidable and more encroaching. The appetite becomes too keen to be denied; and in proportion as it is more urgent, grows less nice and select in its fare. What would formerly have given offence, now gives none. The palate is vitiated or made dull . . . Hence the mind is secretly corrupted. Let it be observed too, that in exact correspondence with the increase of a passion for reading novels, an aversion to reading of a more improving nature will gather strength. (1797, pp. 206-18)

Examining the progression of an indulgence into a monomania, Gisborne emphasizes the impending hardships of growing a passion fuelled by unrestrained reason. The corruption of the mind along with passion leads to the agitation of emotions, causing young girls, in particular, to end up in unhappy marriages. Since didacticism is inherent in the conduct books, Gisborne frames his advice in the form of a cautionary tale illustrating how passion for reading can cause the demise of women, even resulting in wrong marriages. In line with this attitude, the eighteenth-century view on romance and its effects often received backlashes that even carried the matter to definitive gendering of the act of reading.

Apart from the debilitating side of romances, reading itself as an activity for women is considered to have inferior features compared to male reading. Though reading is accepted as essential for both women and men, Pearson notes that based on the "blatantly gendered" features of the act of reading, "male reading. . . evoke[s] to represent civilized values" (2000, p. 4) that are endorsed by canonical, classical and more reasonable texts which contribute to their mental advancement. Furthermore, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu also posits that while reading is crucial for the "Reputation of Men" it should be for "the Amusement of Women" and as the inferior type of readers, women should "[l]et their brothers shine" and "content themselves with making their lives easier by it" (1803, p. 85). This double-standard approach to reading stems from the view that men, with their innate intellect, are capable of comprehending and interpreting the material correctly. The reason why women fail to live up to the standards of ideal reading experience arises from the fact that they lack "the formal training and education that men received" (Kvande, 2011, p. 222) and for this very reason, they are often interested in novels or romances, not the sophisticated works requiring higher intellectual levels. To that end, reading is considered to be an intellectual activity for men, whereas for women, it is assumed to be more of a hobby or entertainment, based on the assumption that they lack the discipline or endurance for serious reading. Disciplined reading refers to the ability to mentally benefit from the act of reading while maintaining an emotional detachment, preventing oneself from becoming overly absorbed in its effects, and keeping a critical distance from the material. Evidently, this type of reading is seldom linked with female experience, which in contrast, is often depicted as uninhibited, emotionally driven and lacking the critical detachment deemed vital for intellectual engagement.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, excessive and improper reading was not merely dismissed as a harmless habit but was regarded as a legitimate medical concern, particularly in relation to female quixotism. The frequency of reading among female patients was considered so high that it was sometimes diagnosed as monomania—a condition believed to trigger various physical symptoms, including insomnia, breathlessness, trembling, upset stomachs, vertigo, headaches, ringing ears, rising sensations, and swooning (Johns, 1998, p. 408). Associating femininity with the body and irrationality and masculinity with mind and reason, the eighteenth-century attitude towards reading cannot detach itself from the deeply-rooted gender issues. While confining women into domestic spheres and limited knowledge opportunities, the dominant patriarchal discourse of the age consequently offers men unlimited access to their needs and wishes. Thus, the prevalent gender norms of the time create a dilemma for women, preventing them from

fully exercising their agency and stigmatizing them as inadequate or irrational based on their so-called inherent feminine qualities. When the eighteenth-century physiological and psychological theory of reading is projected on "Don Quixote's malady" (Kvande, 2011, p. 223) which renders him unable "to distinguish between true and false knowledge," (p. 223) this new combination opens up a space for the writers to display the reverberations of the cultural and sexual anxieties of reading in their works.

Female Quixotism as a Topos

The emergence of female quixotism as a topos could be traced back to the previous century, in which quixotism was considered and employed as a means of laughter and a humorous subject for criticism. This early perception of quixotism as a source of comedy laid the groundwork for later literary depictions of women whose excessive reading shaped their behaviour and understanding of the world. One of the earliest examples of romance-reading women in British literature appears in Thomas Overbury's *Characters,* which is a compilation of satirical portraits of various personalities. Written ten years after the release of *Don Quixote*, Overbury describes the Chambermaid as a lower-class character who muses to be like the romance ladies she reads. In the first lines of the poem, the maid is described as having "green-sickness" (Overbury, 1614) also known as "the virgin's disease" (Loudon, 1984, p. 28) that presents an "irritable mood" that thrives on "gloom, despair and melancholy" (Loudon, 1984, p. 29). However, it is also highlighted that provided she sleeps at the feet of her master's bed, "she is quit of green-sickness forever" (Overbury, 1614), implying she is freed from her melancholic state as long as she keeps close proximity to her master, also suggesting sexual intimacy. She dreams of being free like the romance ladies and finds solace in reading: "…Greenes works over and over, but is so carried away with the *Mirror*[1] *of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to runne out of her selfe, and become a lady errant" (Overbury, 1614) with the intent of searching chivalric love adventures like the knights, yet as a female. The dream of freedom and love tempts her to be like these figures roaming on horseback for romantic adventures. She longs to be loved but finds herself in an illicit relationship, impregnated by the "pedant of the house" (Overbury, 1614) and carries her ideas of lady-errantry to another level rather than being courted and revered like the romance ladies. However, upon the pattern of unguided reading like the mad knight, the Chambermaid is employed by Overbury to illustrate the detrimental effects of romance reading on women. According to the writer, Nameless Chambermaid's wish to be a "lady-errant" is caused by the romantic and inappropriate urges she developed by reading.

Given the association of exciting romantic stories with women and the lower class, maids constitute a particularly receptive target audience for the genre and a similar case was introduced in "A Mayde" featured in Wye Saltonstall's *Picturæ Loquentes, Or Pictures Drawn forth in Characters* (1635). Similar to Overbury's work, the poem portrays a maid while interweaving warnings and moral lessons for women throughout the text. The relevant part of the poem is a speech by Saltonstall concerning the dangers of romance reading. As to the poet, these romances can spoil the maids' minds and can jeopardize their chastity and virtue.

> Nor should they read books which of some fond Lover,
> The various fortunes and adventures show;
> Nor such as natures secrets do discover,
> Since still desire doth but from knowledge grow:
> These bookes if that within the brest remaine,
> One sparke of ill will blow't into a flame. (Saltonstall, 1631)

[1] *A Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* (1578) by Margaret Tyler is the first English romance written and translated by a woman writer.

Though indirectly, Saltonstall's warning about romances highlights the notion that the knowledge acquired from the books poses a danger to the codes of male hegemony, which suppresses women under the yoke of virtue, propriety and beauty. Hence, reading was deemed to be an activity reserved especially for men. Even though the illustration of these reading maids may not fit the definition of a female quixote, they are significant in terms of tracing the trope and establishing its fundamental early formations. Due to the early phases of female quixotism in literature being constructed upon the false assumptions of gendered reading practices and patriarchal norms, it offered a skewed portrayal of women and their social roles.

Despite the common trait of bookishness, each type of quixote develops their own idiosyncrasies, and a female quixote represents "what [her] male counterparts do not" (Newman, 1995, p. 134) or cannot be within their scope. Considering the common points among the previous female quixotes, the chief idea of "the serious consequences of engaging in quixotic fantasies" (p. 134) constitutes the common fulcrum of their diverse experiences. A staunch belief in what they read as the "models of the world" (Kvande, 2011) leads all of them to their quixotic problems, as these stem from their misguided reading habits. Living in a world of fantasy and twisted judgements; female quixotes, like male ones, are considered outlandish to their own society and time (Borham Puyal, 2016, p. 175). Yet their eccentricities escalate to such a position that they evoke pity in the readers for their foolishness and despise for their poor judgements. Gillian Brown terms this reciprocal alienation process a "quixotic fallacy" and explains it as follows: "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. The quixotic reader fails to conform with the local standards by which an individual lives as a member of a given society-she doesn't share the same sense of reality" (1999, p. 259). This misalignment between individual perception and societal norms not only isolates the quixote but also highlights the tension between personal idealism and collective reality, which also reveals the consequences of an incoherent worldview.

Lacking the cultural or conventional filter in her learning process, a female quixote's brain is imprinted with the knowledge she acquires from the romances and these ideas are transformed into her behaviours structuring her personality. The heroine perceives herself as a romance lady and adopts the manners and speech to fit the idealized image in her constructed universe. However, in the reality of the period, this imitation is seen as the affectation of the individual which ends up being labelled as a ridiculous and disagreeable example. Nevertheless, the idealization of a literary model is not the main problem in her attitude; the problem is that she lacks the "mental discipline of selectivity" (Kvande, 2011, p. 226). Instead of choosing the most suitable parts of the romances, they slavishly absorb them as a whole. Therefore, due to their incompatible perception of reality, British female quixotes are at times discussed as the characters who are closest to madness. Though they are not pathologically insane, the phenomenological frame of how they experience the world and life differs from those of others and their stories.

By ascertaining their voices and stories, female quixotes began to be a part of the mainstream literature of their periods. Given the stereotypical representation, the character's comic attitude, the absurdity of her expectations and the misunderstandings caused by her language rightly corresponded to the stage of the period. As a minor example from the pre-*Female Quixote* period, William Cartwright's play *The Lady-Errant* (1651) is set in the court of Cyprus, where men left the country because of the war with Crete. Women who remained in Cyprus took this as a chance to take control of the government to help the king and his army financially. Machessa is the titular heroine lady errant, "who is sworn to succor distressed men" (Farnsworth, 2002, p. 383). In the absence of men, Machessa realizes her wish to be a female knight by shifting the gender roles. Besides, Machessa's female quixotism seems to be reproduced from the particular qualities of Alonso Quijano, who decides to call himself Don Quixote, the knight. Defined as a burlesque figure

and a woman warrior by Farnsworth (p. 383), Machessa, like Alonso Quijano, decides to call herself "Monster-quelling-Woman-obliging-Man-delivering Machessa" (Cartwright, 1651) to increase her imaginary heroic reputation. In a similar vein to Don Quixote and Sancho's master-side kick relationship, Machessa has a page called Philaenis and due to their heroic delusion, the pair dream of vanquishing the Amazons and Pigmies to be the queens of both. Although the main theme of the play is the Cyprus-Crete war, Machessa, as a preliminary representation of a female quixote, finds a chance to bring forward her own issues of being a female knight and gaining independence. Taking the lead in representing female quixotism on the British stage before its heydays in the eighteenth century, *Lady-Errant* can be regarded as a figure that sketches out the female quixote character in a period of low literary presence.

Prior to the publication of Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote* in 1752, the quixotic character Biddy Tipkin in Richard Steele's *The Tender Husband: Or, the Accomplish'd Fools* (1705) stands as a noteworthy precursor of the women quixotes in the early eighteenth century. Biddy, the niece of a wealthy merchant, is a young girl preoccupied with romances, imitating and believing in the disposition of romance ladies whom she idolizes. Discontented with the arranged marriage forced by his uncle to a country bumpkin, Biddy is swayed into a secret marriage by Clerimont Junior, a needy aristocrat pretending to be a romantic suitor. Similar to the former examples of female quixotes and Don Quixote, Biddy is an ardent romance reader and she is under the influence of the imaginary worlds depicted in the hefty romances. She lives in utter oblivion of the ways of the world as her existence is dedicated to solitary immersion in romances. In her daily life, she behaves as if the romances are the door that opens to reality, hence she creates a world of her own that is made up of elements, references and expectations of romance ladies.

She is deeply fascinated with the idea of being a romance lady, which often leads her to challenge her life and personality in pursuing this dream. She believes that a lady's name should signify her beauty and coyness and her origin should be of an extraordinary one. In a conversation with her aunt, she expresses this frustration upon having an ordinary birth as follows:

> *Niece*: . . . I must needs [sic] to tell you that I am not satisfied in the point of my nativity. Many an infant has been placed in a cottage with obscure parents, till by chance some ancient servant of the family has known it by its marks. (Steele, 1791, p. 37)

In an attempt to live by instruction she learnt from the books, Biddy cannot but slavishly follow the conventions and patterns of these fictional ladies. As a typical trait of quixotism, she not only desires to change her birth but also her name into a heavily romanticized one of Parthenissa[2] (Steele p. 45). In the discussion about the naming issue, the libertine Captain Clerimont gently, yet rather prematurely, implies that he can change her and her future children's surname if she marries him. Biddy retorts fiercely:

> *Niece*: O fie! Whither are you running? You know a lover should sigh in private, and languish whole years before he reveals his passion; he should retire into some solitary grove, and make the woods and wild beasts his confidants. You should have told it to the echo half-a-year before you had discovered it, even to my handmaid. And yet besides—to talk to me of children! Did you ever hear of a heroine with a big belly? (Steele, 1791, pp. 45-46)

At this point, Biddy's answer to this untimely offer raises the issue of inspiration/influence that Lennox might have acquired from the play. The apparent similarity between Biddy and Arabella's attitude towards romance rules and their incorporation into daily life make Biddy a much closer representation. In a small network of female quixotes created up to Lennox's work, it was

[2] Probably inspired by the heroine of Roger Boyle of Orrey's *Parthenissa: That Most Fam'd Romance: The Six Volumes Compleat* (1676).

unavoidable that the authors would draw inspiration from a plethora of sources, including other works and theatre productions. Like every other topos, female quixotism flourishes through imitation and the appearance of various representations in literature and every work is significant in illustrating the evolution of female quixotism through its developmental stages to the present day. Although some earlier examples depict these young women with a tone of ridicule, these works are loaded with sociological and cultural implications, offering insights into the progress made in their agenda.

Despite how happily she lives with her ideals, people around Biddy are often left appalled at her peculiarities and out-of-context utterances. Similar to the book-burning scene in *Don Quixote* where his niece and priest destroy the romances that Don once read, Biddy's family blames books for her unstable condition and tries to prevent her from their detriments. Her aunt accuses her of filling her head with "thousands of foolish dreams" (Steele, p. 219) and deems her head is quite turned because of them. Furthermore, later in the play, her suitor Clerimont calls Biddy "quixote in petticoats" for the same reasons she was accused of. At this stage, Biddy's quixotism is diminished into a vulnerability that Clerimont exploits for his own advantage. Her eccentric personality transitions from a challenge to a vulnerable spot that could be manipulated.

> *Clerimont:* A perfect Quixote in petticoats! I tell thee, Pounce, she governs herself wholly by romance—it has got into her very blood. She starts by rule, and blushes by example. Could I but have produced one instance of a lady's complying at first sight, I should have gained her promise on the spot. How am I bound to curse the cold constitutions of the Philocleas and Statiras? . . . (Steele, 1791, pp. 47-48)

As defined in Samuel Johnson's dictionary, a petticoat denotes "the lower part of a woman's dress," (1755) and an underskirt adding volume and layers to the dress. However, the deliberate use of the word petticoat to address women is an expression of the patriarchal discourse which reduces women to a clothing item. In specific contexts like *Tender Husband,* the word suggests a patronizing attitude for females who aspire to break free from the confines of societal and traditional gender norms, implying that such ambitions are not fitting for women and this use leads to a derogatory synonym for women (Lorenzo-Modia, 2006, p. 107). In this context, the pervasive patriarchal tone sensed in the works that involve female quixotes can deservedly be called the chief problem in the agenda of female quixotism. In this gender-prejudiced socio-literary atmosphere of the age, avid female readers are directly associated with socially misfit characters. Women who are marginalized as readers are further stigmatized as eccentrics, deemed incapable of following proper reading practices, and thus seen as losing both their sense of reality and expected social respectability. From another angle, these misfits, either intentionally or unintentionally, hold forth the points of how women should not behave. Being the anti-portrayal of a marriageable lady, female quixotes represent the other unwanted party of women who are regarded as rather odd, at times lacking sanity.

Despite its single use in *The Tender Husband*, the expression "quixote in petticoat" can be traced in various European works. Since the female quixotes in literature were seen as national types, the expression makes a sweeping generalization regardless of their diversity. Akin to the stereotypical characters of comedy of manners, quixote in petticoat was used as a category encapsulating all its representatives, still in a deprecating tone. In her article, Lorenzo-Modia points out that Lennox's *The Female Quixote* was translated into Spanish by Bernardo Maria de Calzada in 1808 with the title of *Don Quijote con faldas* [Don Quixote in petticoats] (2006). Following the example of the same novel's German translation of *Quixote in Reinfrocke* (1754), Calzada was most probably aware of Steele's phrase and by his choice, he helped the use of the expression to stretch over time and places (Lorenzo-Modia, 2006, p. 106). Thus, the prolonged use of this expression over periods and locations suggests language can preserve and reinforce a patriarchal tone. Furthermore, it is also

meaningful to note that all the female quixote characters preceding Lennox's Arabella were either written or translated by a male figure. Although Lennox's novel brought about a different perspective on female quixotism, the deliberate use of petticoats instead of the literal translation of the title highlights the prejudiced perspective of the subject matter. By adopting Steele's phrase, translators and writers like Calzada contributed to the endurance of the sided perspective, demonstrating how linguistic choices shape cultural perception over time.

Even after the publication of *The Female Quixote,* the very phrase was still used in the title of the play *Angelica; or Quixote in Petticoats* (1758). Similar to the other plays examined, *Angelica* concentrates on the clash between reality and the illusions of a young girl named Angelica who loves to read. Although the play does not introduce any innovation to the established thematic convention, the anonymous playwright corroborates this fact in the Advertisement of the work stating: "The author of the following sheets thinks himself under an indispensable obligation to inform the public that the character of Angelica and the heroic part of Careless is not only borrow'd, but entirely taken, from the female Quixote, of the ingenious Mrs Lenox" (Anonymous, 1758). It is also evident in the play that the titular character Angelica is modelled upon Arabella in her romance mania, unhinged behaviours and fear of persecution that her father "Sir William is of opinion that she is a little crack brain'd; and has advis'd with a mad doctor what is best to be done with her" (Anonymous, 1758). However, a character who cannot help but be a sketchy adaptation of Arabella, Angelica falls short in representing her distinct quixotism effectively. Thus, rejected by theatre manager David Garrick for not being authentic, the play shows great similarities to *The Tender Husband* regarding the courting scenes between Careless-Angelica and Biddy-Clerimont. In terms of the comedy of manners elements, the play lacks intrigue and multifaceted plot construction. As the anonymous playwright also expressed, the focus of the play is to transfer Arabella to the stage and in his attempt, he reproduces certain parts from *The Female Quixote*. Particularly in demeanour and language, Angelica copies Arabella's tone when with similar wording as she commands her lover Careless to live; "No! Live Careless! and if possible, forget a weakness, I cannot but condemn – But remember that your death will be a fault which I cannot resolve to pardon. – Adieu! I stay for no thanks, neither presume to follow me!" (Anonymous, 1758). Though the playwright achieves his goal, the play cannot escape being an unfavored and poor imitation of not only Arabella but also Steele's Biddy Tipkin. Furthermore, female quixotism in this context seems to stem from the same qualities of over-reading, romantic delusions and expectations. Evidently, like her predecessors Biddy, Machessa and the maids, the characterization of Angelica fails to be a refined example of quixote and only imitates Lennox's characterization in dramatic form. Ostensibly, the set of defining traits and behaviours of the discussed female quixotes was treated like a formula to create a female character who resembles a quixote. As the title suggests, the play also steers a steady route in terms of representing a quixote in petticoats, a stereotype who is an eccentric female, eventually reformed by marriage. Therefore, as the authors implemented this imitative but superficial strategy, some examples were bound to have less depth, but still significant in terms of representation and diversity.

The duplication of these features inevitably transforms the character into a rather ridiculous type full of whims and irrational behaviours. The deliberate lack of subtlety and depth in these characters is intended to emphasize the notion of how unfit and problematic figure a female quixote is. Additionally, it reinforces the idea that female quixotes are located in the context of comedy, suggesting that their actions and aspirations are often seen as facetious and absurd by social norms. Because of the patriarchal voices in the literature of the era, certain quixotic traits of these heroines are accentuated and even exaggerated to the point of caricature. However, with the advent of the novel genre, the trajectory of female quixotes took a new turn in their representations and with the turn of the new century, the novel genre became adept enough to deliver upgraded and enriched literary works. Although the female quixotes before Lennox's Arabella were not many, with the

subsequent examples in literature the group of female quixotes reached a considerable number across two and a half centuries with the help of George Coleman's *Polly Honeycombe* (1760), Maria Edgeworth's "Angelina" in *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801), Eaton Stannard Barrett's *Heroine or: Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813), Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1813), Sarah Green' *Scotch Novel Reading or; Modern Quackery* (1824) and American writer Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism, -Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon* (1801) and also Seth Kaufman's *The Seductive Lady Vanessa of Manhattanshire* (2022).

Ultimately, Charlotte Lennox makes a daring manoeuvre by changing the gender of the quixote, shifting the context to female quixotism and transforming her into a full-fledged character, much more than a stock type. Even though her work has been accepted to be the most acclaimed narrative of a female quixote, her novel does not represent an endpoint for the topos but a pivotal shift toward a more sophisticated character and dynamic story. Inspired by real women who loved reading romances, these female figures were later exaggerated into stereotypes by male writers, transforming their passion for literature into a mark of excessive and misguided sensibility. By covering the early representatives of the type, this study expands the scope of quixotic studies in order to allow a more nuanced and egalitarian appreciation of the early examples and their progress. Therefore, before their rise to prominence, early female quixotes also laid bare the prolonged trials and tribulations that the reading women and also their literary representations were exposed to. Although the examined works reinforce a problematic approach and a degrading attitude to the characters, a concentration on the so-called problematized behaviours call the gendered nature of quixotism into question to illuminate its cultural function and perception spanning across centuries. Furthermore, the recovery of overlooked literary figures within the research agenda, along with the critical gender inquiry into the intersection of gender, reading, and quixotism, enriches the discourse on female literary representations and their cultural implications. Being one of the literary contributions to the patriarchal concept of "quixote in petticoats" or "lady-errants" each and every early representation of reading women holds the potentially subversive power to change the route of their narratives that seek to confine them. Thus, as the literary examples of female quixotes increased over the centuries, their subversive potential continued to unfold, forming new narratives and redefining their roles in literature.

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