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Research Essay Abstract

Charlotte Lennox's novel *The Female Quixote* chronicles the adventures of a young woman who, like Don Quixote, has derived her worldview from reading romances and resultantly misinterprets the world around her. On its face, the novel may seem like a straightforward warning against the potentially hazardous effects of fiction, and much previous criticism of the novel has interpreted it as such; however, reading this novel purely as a cautionary tale risks overlooking some of the nuances present in Lennox's narrative, and I sought to avoid this reduction in my approach. Indeed, I argue that the novel may be read as an endorsement of reading—and, more specifically, of reading fiction.

Released in 1752, *The Female Quixote*, Lennox's second novel, debuted against the backdrop of changing expectations regarding prose fiction. Among literary elites, the esteem of the romance genre was waning, and the novel was emerging as an important genre, with its increased emphasis on putatively realistic events and characters separating it from the more fantastic and fanciful romances that had engaged the imaginations of both readers and writers in prior eras.

In researching the novel, I consulted several books about the history of novels, including Ian Watt's seminal text *The Rise of the Novel*, as well as scholarship pertaining specifically to Lennox, including works by Margaret Anne Doody, found through the databases available to UNG students. In writing my paper, I sought to position *The Female Quixote* within the larger conversation about the history of novels and to fill an interpretative gap insufficiently addressed by existing scholarship on *The Female Quixote*, a novel that can provide readers with a more actionable look at literacy than some critics have historically presumed the novel to possess.