Desire and reality in charlotte lennox’s the female quixote

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Study on the misunderstood concept of ‘ desire’ and its effect on ‘ reality’ in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*

The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella was published in the year 1752. Written by Charlotte Lennox, this novel turned out to be one of her most famous works which was widely read and appreciated. Lennox was inspired by Miguel de Cervantes' work, *Don Quixote.* Lennox's work was considered to be a discourse as well as an impersonation of Cervantes' book. *The Female Quixote* is regarded as an investigation of Cervantes' optimism and a valuation of his humour, and his incongruity. Although *The Female Quixote* has been popularly read as a parody of historical romances, it was by a long shot the most mainstream and continuing of its kind. The novel has likewise been perused as a discourse of women's activism and the ramifications of female alienation in a patriarchal society.

The Female Quixote follows the story of Arabella who is brought up by her widowed father in a remote castle in England. Arabella's life is governed by the semi-historical seventeenth-century French romances which constitute as ‘ history' for her (Lennox, 1752). ‘ *The Female Quixote* reminds readers of novels that desire is framed historically and that the kinds of desire they find in novels are as much a matter of convention as anything else' (Watson, 2011, p. 32). Arabella's retreat into the world of historical French romances influences her perception of ‘ truth' and ‘ reality.' Arabella, being the daughter of a disillusioned marquis leads a secluded life in her father's estate which is far away from the actuality of the world, and therefore, has a poor idea of the reality of an English society. She grows up reading the books of her dead mother which are ‘ badly translated French romances.' Her

interpretations of the books that she reads can be understood as her reaction to the submissive and passive lifestyle in her father's estate. Much similar to her mother, Arabella reads these books to pass her time, but unlike her mother, Arabella creates an ' alternate reality' for herself by withdrawing into the world of these romances. She insists on following the ' laws of romance' in her life, particularly in love, which makes her the subject of mockery in the society; however, this also allows her to make her way around her relationships with those around her until she is re-educated by the doctor who shows her the errors in her ways and thus, Arabella enters into the socially normative world of eighteenth-century marriage and domesticity.

The romances which Arabella reads are replete with the chivalric codes of conduct and these goals progress towards becoming Arabella's own. Arabella sets out on a series of adventures in the countryside. When she visits Bath and London, she discovers suitors for herself in the false knight Sir George Bellmour and in her cousin, Sir Charles Glanville. She regards them as occupants with her in the French romances which she read as a child. Glanville is privileged, modern, and focused on Arabella all through the novel, while on the other hand, Bellmouris ridiculous, strange, and distracted —who reads romances like Arabella gluttonously. Lennox provides an opponent to Arabella in Sir George's sister, Charlotte who is quite coquettish by nature. Although Arabella leans towards Sir Bellmour at first, but when the educated doctor, or ' divine' encourages her to discern reality from dream, Arabella marries her patient and adoring cousin, Mr. Glanville (Lennox, 1752). All through, the novel is scattered with Arabella's invoking

long sections from the romances that have twisted her perspective of the real world.

' In the book's penultimate chapter, Arabella meets a " good Divine" whose conversation helps her recover from her delusions about reality. Many of the novel's critics hail Arabella as a protofeminist figure who seizes power and wields it to fulfill her desire; some also see her renunciation of quixotism at the novel's end as some degree of failure. These critics see Arabella's transformation as a taming of her wild desires. On the contrary, I argue that Arabella is taught to desire, to align her desires and self-interests, and it is her lesson in desiring that is at the heart of her transformation and the book's transition from the rules of romance to the rules of the novel' (Watson, 2011, p. 31-32).

In order to obtain valuable contextual information regarding the plot and workings of the novel, it is important to understand the French romances which Arabella reads as they affect the character of Arabella as a whole, and thereby, drive the novel towards its end. These romances provide insight into Arabella's charater and the reason why she insists o controlling the discourse on love and marriage. By perusing these romances, Arabella thwarts and challenges the patriarchal assumptions, authority and the set standards of the men around her. Arabella insists on remaining single and continues to think about the requisites for love. Although it sounds silly; however, the language and laws of romance help Arabella to negotiate her relationships with those around her and in addition, allow her to articulate her desire for marriage until she finds a man who is truly worthy of her love and respect.

" Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* " (n. d), describes an example where Arabella imitates her romances, especially Clelia, to challenge the cultural assumptions about love and marriage comes close to the beginning of the novel. Like Clelia and several other romance heroines, Arabella finds herself under pressure from her father to marry her cousin Mr. Glanville. Arabella responds with indignation to her father's statement. She refuses to marry her cousin against her will, but promises at least to make an effort to accept Mr. Glanville and see where circumstances are taking her. But, Mr. Glanville proves to make her unhappy with his misunderstanding of romance conventions. This causes Arabella to ' banish' (Lennox, 1752) him, and he actually leaves the estate, which sends Arabella's father to a state of fury because his patriarchal authority was challenged and thwarted. As contended by " Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* " (n. d) and quite rightly, Arabella, although irrational and illogical, makes strong points. Why should she marry someone based merely on relationships? Mr. Glanville has not done anything to deserve her love. These seem like perfectly fair and reasonable oppositions to her father's design, and perhaps he realizes this, because his immediate response is to silence her, to stop her from speaking. Here Lennox seems to mimic what she reads in *Clelie* . Both heroines voice sensible objections to their fathers' arranged marriages and both are silenced.

Arabella also draws inspiration from *Cassandra* and *Pharamond* to dictate the terms of her marriage. Arabella holds the Melisintha (of *Pharamond*) of La

Calprenède as a model woman, worthy of great admiration for her courage in rejecting an unwanted marriage. As cited by " Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* " (n. d), Chrstine Roulston explains, ' as an ideological tool, the code of courtly love, in turn, allows the female subject to possess political agency through sexual power.' Early in the novel, Arabella takes inspiration from Statira, Parisatis and Mandana, who refuse to have discussions of love from unworthy men or those who have not proven their mettle. She goes as far to forbid conversations on marriage and gets incensed when they do not obey her command which leads to Arabella banishing them from her sight. As mentioned by " Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* " (n. d), La Calprenède's *Pharamond* is filled with examples of women who punish or banish men for being too forward with their feelings and men who are afraid of angering the women they love by sharing their feelings too early. While she seems over-zealous in her refusal to discuss marriage, in this way she also delays a future that she is not ready for and in forbidding the conversation, shifts the balance of power. Near the end of the text, too, Arabella banishes Mr. Selvin from her presence because he lets his feelings for her be known. Roulston sees this desire for discursive power as central to the idea of female agency in the novel, explaining that ' the language of the romance therefore allows the possibility of an alternative " reality," one which reveals that the struggle for agency is a struggle for language, and for who can control the way actions are to be read and interpreted' (" Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote,"* n. d.).

Arabella's desire to control the course of her romantic life extends to her relationship with Mr. Glanville as well. She rejects his advances and requests him to leave the manor. Additionally, she commands Mr. Glanville to keep a conscious and respectful distance from her for a while. As explained by " Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* " (n. d), however, when Mr. Glanville annoys Arabella by being excessively blunt with his adoration and feelings for her, Arabella requests that he comply with the laws of romance and treat her with ' distance and respect'. Although, Arabella seems quite satisfied with his new conduct, yet at the same time she does not trust Mr. Glanville to be genuinely atoning for his actions.

" Literary Musings: Arabella's Power in *The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lenox" (2013) mentions that a scene that was exceptionally abnormal in the novel was during the discussion between Arabella and her father. It was common for courageous women in trouble to take their own lives in eighteenth-century writing. Arabella knows about this and wants to ' imitate' these ladies of ' courage' to abstain from getting married to Mr. Glanville. Arabella discovers control in taking her own life, guaranteeing that she is similarly as ' capable' in doing as such as the romantic champions she peruses. At the point when her dad debilitates to consume her books, Arabella mourns the destiny of the champions who ' were going to be cast into the merciless flames'. Arabella's creative ability is strong to the point that she trusts the characters in her books to be genuine and endure a genuine destiny caused by occasions outside the books themselves. The way that Arabella sees control in choosing to take her own life away, and regrets

the feebleness of her champions or ' innocent victims' who will endure because of another person, is an interesting and peculiar piece of the novel.

" Literary Musings: Arabella's Power in *The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox" (2013) and Clark (2014) argue that an intriguing extension to this is Arabella's imaginative thought that the men who cross her way will submit to suicide upon her dismissing them. She tries to reveal to her dad if Mr. Glanville has ended his life, she didn't ' desire' for him to do as such. She really trusts she has the ability to push men into suicide over their alleged sadness; she has faith in her capacity to order men to live—for instance, she directs Sir George, who plays alongside Arabella's extravaganza, to live as well. According to " Arabella's Romances: Exploring the use of romance in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* " (n. d), Roulston insists that ' Arabella redefines the position of the feminine by assuming the female subjects absolute and unquestioned
centrality, while male figures revolve around the margins'. Clark (2014) argues that, it is, in fact, Arabella's absence of presentation to society and an overindulgence in romances that persuade that women should oppose men's advances to the extent that she does. However, she likewise profits by complying with these traditions since they allow her a feeling of intensity, writes Clark. Despite the fact that she probably is not be aware of her motivations in assuming the job of a romantic courageous woman, at some level she keeps up these traditions since they make her feel empowered. In her desire for agency, Arabella has erroneously trusted that romantic traditions of gender roles will give her a feeling of power and control, when in fact they restrict her by making her the object as opposed to the subject.

Clark (2014) insists that Arabella has the methods for a lot of influence through her economic well-being and fortune.

Gans (2015) writes that Arabella is impermeable to enticement. The romances ensure her safety from all temptation by ‘ bad desire.’ And given her own desirability and attractiveness, Arabella’s eccentric framework is clearly of down to earth esteem. It both obliges
a genuine partner to demonstrate his warmth by enduring with exceptionally little support, and secures her against allurement by a contact or
a hurried marriage. Arabella’s mixed up doubts of male desire, such as those with respect to Sir Charles or Edward, are indications of a
submerged libido that might somehow endanger her ideals and virtue, writes Gans. Alternately, when she realizes that she feels, in spite of herself,
a developing affection and tenderness for Glanville, it is certain that it is
a true fondness that reacts to the genuine cherish of her great cousin.

All through *The Female Quixote* , we see Arabella squeezing against societal traditions with respect to love and marriage, declaring her own power in these issues, and applying the lessons gained from her romances to her own love life. By clinging to the guidelines set by her romantic courageous women, Arabella challenges her father—the male-centric expert overseeing her choice to marriage and sets the terms for talk regarding this matter. As cited by Schmid (1997, p. 31): Spacks understands Arabella as the ‘ active signifier of a female desire for things historically reserved exclusively for men: fame, power and influence, heroic status’.

Set in the eighteenth century, it is visibly obvious that the novel's most important concern is the negative impacts of romance books on Arabella's moral and ethical sense. She is restored back to good sense only when she is purified of her deceptions regarding love and romance, and thereby, awarded with joy in her marriage to Mr. Glanville. Arabella encompasses within herself the virtues and social etiquette of the eighteenth-century romance heroines. The lack of realism in Arabella's behaviour provides her with a transitory cure to her subdued life in the patriarchal setup. It offers the adventurous woman a chance to act, presenting the topic of female access to personality and power. The state of a proceeding with strife about the ethical estimation of a scholarly mode questionably balanced among truth and lie. The contention fixates on desire. Fiction has the ability to claim its perusers, as an enticing lady may. As Arabella's desire responds to that communicated in the romances, making its own sophistries, so every reader conveys his or her own longing to the content, repeating in unforeseen ways the desire of the novel.

Arabella can make her own personality and build up her own feeling of self-esteem and requirement for insurance. A standout amongst the most essential ways that Lennox takes into account female office through the romantic world is Arabella's capacity to make her very own personality and, from numerous points of view, keep in touch with her very own history. Through perusing these romances, Arabella builds up an exceptionally solid thought of her own significance on the planet and she appears to have high confidence. Along these lines, Arabella regularly directs her expertise and controls the men around her, testing social models and acknowledged jobs

for women. Arabella continually challenges these social conditions and ' legitimate' ideas of womanliness by the way that she makes and possesses a world administered by the strictures of the romance book and elegant love, rather than one represented by financial trade of ladies through marriage. Arabella's desire for such undertakings, anyway incredible its appearances, vouches for her assurance to make importance.

While persistently recognizing the comic absurdity of Arabella's fixation on romances in *The Female Quixote* , Charlotte Lennox utilizes this distraction to demonstrate the adventurous woman's confused power associations with the opposite sex. This desire for organization and disarray regarding whether she has a satisfactory measure of it tends to be seen first with her father. For the vast majority of Arabella's life, her dad was liberal, maybe unreasonably so. The power dynamics of their relationship change, however, when Arabella ends up mature enough to wed.

Arabella's over the top modesty and her dread of forced entries into her apartment welcomed a Freudian perusing in which the courageous woman's extremely dynamic sexual desires could be emblematically or symbolically uncovered. Arabella is in reality a kind of the tease: a lady who likes amatory conquests. Watson (2011, p. 32) writes: ' Although the workings of desire in most novels may strike readers as realistic enough not to call attention to themselves, Lennox's genre mixing foregrounds competing ways of understanding how desire relates humans to their world. Reading *The Female Quixote* through this lens urges us to rethink the ethical implications of understanding desire as a motivator of plot.' He insists that the novel is a '

landmark in thinking about how realistic discourse represents reality and interprets desire' (Watson, 2011, p. 32).

Watson argues that ' the tendency shared by critics to read the expression of desire as power, as a movement toward a goal, or as a pleasure-seeking endeavor is of a piece with Peter Brooks's understanding of the workings of plot. For the Freudian Brooks, narrative is a means to an end, a struggle toward a conclusion. Even if that struggle is sometimes interrupted and sometimes given up as impossible, it is still the structure of all narrative. Like an interpretive horizon, the pleasurable conclusion functions for Brooks as a structuring limit. In the absence of ends, "[O]ne is condemned to playing . . . in anticipation of a terminal structuring moment . . . that never comes". Plots that cannot reach a satisfying conclusion are still to be read within the structure of phallic pleasure and orgasm, according to this scheme. Characters are eudemonic motors, generating their own steam as they hunt for the objects that will satisfy their desires' (2011, p. 32).

As mentioned by Spacks (1988, p. 535): ' Peter Brooks has recently restated the essential connection between fiction and desire. In a chapter called " Narrative Desire," he argues that plot is " perhaps best conceived as an activity, a structuring operation elicited in the reader trying to make sense of those meanings that develop only through textual and temporal succession…. We can, then, conceive of the reading of plots as a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text" (Brooks, p. 37).' Brooks contends that, a long way from being a regressive remnant of more crude levels of narrating, plot is an inevitable and ubiquitous influence of human mind, basic to the mind's organizing of the real world and, more

essential, a model of the structure of the mind itself. People can just comprehend the world, Brooks states, by making up anecdotes about it, sorting out the mayhem of experience into organized stories with beginnings, middles, and closures. Indeed, even reactions of those accounts are themselves advance stories. Everything, for Brooks, is story. The genuine focus of his worry is mental. Plot is a widespread, as a matter of first importance, since its essential instrument copies the elements of the mind. Freud's hypothesis of oneself, Brooks finishes up, is likewise the ' masterplot' (1984, p. 6) of human account. In this novel, the plot comes to look like an excessive territory of Arabella's thoughts made up for lost time in the hardware of want which should in the end be disavowed.

Newman (2013) quotes Brooks as: ' Plot … is the organizing line and intention of narrative, thus perhaps best conceived as an activity, a structuring operation elicited in the reader trying to make sense of those meanings that develop only through textual and temporal succession [i. e., through elements of the proairetic and hermeneutic codes]. Plot in this view belongs to the reader's " competence," and in his " performance"–the reading of narrative–it animates the sense-making process…. Desire is always there at the start of a narrative, often in the form of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun.' To Brooks, a plot is an outline or direction of want: a starting requires excitement, something to destabilize a balance or the standard (he says the ' typical' can't be portrayed); the end is a discharge from want, a release and come back to rest or ordinary that Brooks analyzes to both passing and climax. The center is an arrangement of

deferral, reroute, tension, desire, disappointment, and so on, that postpones the end and in this way heightens it (Newman, 2013). Newman (2013) insists that Brooks' model is useful, however there is much to reprimand or if nothing else be suspicious of: critics have properly called attention to that his model of plot is comprehends want in male terms as it were.

According to Felluga (2011), with the end goal to comprehend the manners in which that plotting and story are personally attached to our feeling of the human life-world, Brooks swings to Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* , particularly Freud's enunciation of man's battle between the passing drive and the delight or reality standard. Brooks contends that we are headed to peruse on account of our drive to discover significant, limited, totalizing request to the turmoil of life; nonetheless, that drive for request is most satisfying after the temporary routes or expansions that we connect with plot. On the off chance that the request of conclusion comes too early, it can feel like a short out, as though we were conned by one means or another.

The heroes of stories could be called '" desiring machines" whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire, projecting the self onto the world through scenarios of desire imagined and then acted upon' (Brooks, 1984, p. 39); be that as it may, a definitive objective, as per Brooks and Freud, is to satisfy want, to achieve the peacefulness of conclusion.

Narrative desire is, in this manner, at last, ' desire for the end' (Brooks, 1984, p. 104). In such a comprehension of plot, all activities have a tendency

to be adapted towards a foreseen conclusion, when every single last detail will be tied. Brooks's ' deep understanding of psychoanalysis informs his demonstration of how the " epistemophilic urge"—the desire to know—guides fictional plots and our reading of them. The novel is so singularly powerful an art form because it plays on our deepest yearnings, including the desire to penetrate the most private of realms. In modern art and literature, the body as object of curiosity has been predominantly that of a woman. Brooks shows that the female body has become the field upon which the aspirations, anxieties, and contradictions of a whole society are played out. And he suggests that writers and artists have found in the woman's body the dynamic principle of their storytelling, its motor force' (1993, summary).

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