

## Henry Fielding's review of *The Female Quixote* (*Covent-Garden Journal*, n° 24, 24 March 1752)

Proceedings at the Court of Censorial Enquiry, &c. The Censor was pleased to deliver himself as follows.

I have perused a Book called, THE FEMALE QUIXOTE, or THE ADVENTURES OF ARABELLA; and I shall give my Opinion of it with no less Sincerity than Candour. This is an Imitation of the famous Romance of Cervantes called The Life and Actions of that ingenious Gentleman l Don Quixote of the Mancha, &c. A Work originally written in Spanish, and which hath been translated into most of the Languages, and admired in most of the Countries in Europe.

I will here very frankly declare my Opinion in what Particulars the Imitation falls short; in what it equals, and in what it excels its illustrious Original.

In the first Place, Cervantes hath the Advantage of being the Original; and consequently, is intitled to that Honour of Invention, which can never be attributed to any Copy however excellent. An Advantage which Homer will always claim, and which is perhaps the only one that he can claim, over Virgil and Milton.

In the next Place Cervantes is to be considered as an Author who intended not only the Diversion, but the Instruction and Reformation of his Countrymen: With this Intention he levelled his Ridicule at a vicious Folly, which in his Time universally prevailed in Spain, and had almost converted a civilized People in a Nation of Cut-throats. In this Design he imitated the three glorious Poets I have mentioned. The first of whom placed the particular Good of Greece, the second the Honour of Rome, and the third the great Cause of Christianity before their Eyes, when they planned their several Poems. And the Success of none of them was perhaps equal to that of Cervantes. Here again the Spanish Romance hath the Advantage of the English.

Thirdly, the Character of Don Quixote himself, as well as that of Sancho Pancho, are superior to those of Arabella and her Maid.

Fourthly, some of the Incidents in the Original are more exquisitely ridiculous than any which we find in the Copy. And those I think, are all the Particulars in which an impartial Critic can give the Preference to the Spaniard.

And as to the two last, 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. In the former Case, the Ridicule hath all the Force of a Representation; it is in a Manner subjected to the Eyes; in the latter it is conveyed, as it were, through our Ears, and partakes of the Coldness of History or Narration.

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. Again the Fidelity and Simplicity of Sancho Pancho, are well matched by these Qualities in Arabella's Handmaid. Tho as I have before observed, I do not think the Character of Sancho is here equalled. It is perhaps a Masterpiece in Humour of which we never have, nor ever shall see the like.

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There are probably more Instances under this Head, which I shall leave to the discerning Reader. I will proceed in the last Place to 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 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. This will undoubtedly be the Case between a **beautiful young Lady** and an old Fellow, where equal Virtues in both become Candidates for our Favour.

Thirdly, the Situation of Arabella is more interesting. Our Hearts are engaged very early in **good Wishes for the Success of Mr. Glanville**; a Character entirely well drawn, as are indeed many others; for in this Particular, the English Author hath doubtless the Preference.

Fourthly, **here is a regular Story**, which, tho possibly it is not pursued with that Epic Regularity which would give it the Name of an Action, comes much nearer to that Perfection than the loose unconnected Adventures in Don Quixote; of which you may transverse the Order as you please, without any Injury to the whole.

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. Such are the Stories of Cardenio and Dorothea, Ferdinand and Lucinda, &c. **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 Conditions 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.**

I might add more on this Subject, but I will pursue it no further; having already, I apprehend, given a larger Dose to Malice, Envy, and Ignorance, than they will care to swallow; but I cannot omit observing, that 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.*