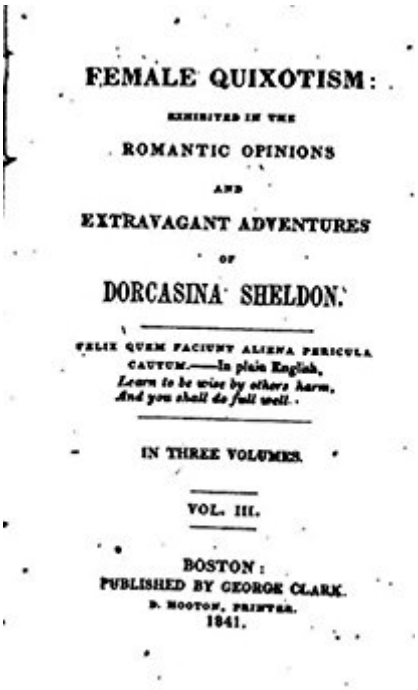
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EXHIBITED IN THE

ROMANTIC OPINIONS

AND

EXTRAVAGANT ADVENTURES

OF

DORCASINA SHELDON.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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Synopsis

Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldonby Tabitha Gilman TenneyPublished 1841

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Wonderful timing, quick and professional. I highly recommend anyone this seller. No complaints. Very quick and diligent. I ordered these for my classes and it all worked out for the best. Thank YOu

"Female Quixotism" takes on directly the problem of women's literacy and the question of marital choice, in this instance via satire rather than sentimentalism. Its story of Dorcasina, a woman whose head is turned by reading novels and who has repeated hair's-breadth escapes from disastrous marriages as a consequence, is about the novel as a genre, and its relation to questions of sexual and social choice. Dorcasina the heroine, wiser and sadder at the end, quite explicitly links reading and sexual conduct. Her father's love of novel-reading, harmless to him as a man, could only mean

danger "in a young girl like me, ignorant of the world, and of a turn of mind naturally romantic. I was therefore left to gratify my taste for this kind of reading, without restraint; and this imprudent indulgence has been the cause of my ruin. I now find that I have passed my life in a dream ..." (p. 323). Jean Nienkamp and Andrea Collins, in their introductory essay, analyze the role of Dorcasina’s servant Scipio as a commentary on the status of slavery in the new republic.Of course there are the predictable themes of disguise and mistaken identity, and the non-utility for women of marriage: "However unjust and indelicate may be the opinion, that matrimony is essential to happiness, it is perhaps the first that a romantic girl forms" (p. 324). Most of Dorcasina’s suitors are deceivers. The class structure of republican America is remarkably striated in this book, frequently depicted as a rational, polite upper class and a comic, misguided, and misspeaking lower one. "Female Quixotism" is well worth reading once and the careful editing, undertaken or overseen by Cathy N. Davidson, is exemplary, with good introductions and notes.

Published in 1801, Tabitha Tenney’s novel, "Female Quixotism" is at times an amusing, satiric, and profoundly melancholic work. Written in the popular 18th century strain of novels with a moral aesthetic, whose purpose is social and moral corrective, "Female Quixotism" positions itself in the discourse of the dangers of novel reading, especially for young women. While this is its primary function, the narrative also engages with its historical moment, just a few years after the birth of the American nation, "Female Quixotism" addresses America’s relationship to increasing numbers of ’foreign’ immigrants, the ’problem’ of the Native American, and strikingly, the issue of abolishing slavery."Female Quixotism" takes place over fifty years, from about 1750 to 1800. Dorcas Sheldon is an only child, who early on loses her mother. Raised and educated by her father, she is entranced throughout her life by British novels, particularly those of Samuel Richardson and Tobias Smollett. This ’turns her head,’ if you will, making her believe that the passionate, spontaneous expressions of love and desire found in these novels are the only legitimate basis of love and marriage. She even goes so far as to change her name on her 18th birthday to Dorcasina, thinking it far more romantic. Her father and her neighbours, the Stanlys, along with her waiting maid Betty all try to argue Dorcasina to a more rational kind of love, but are forced to watch her repeatedly make a fool out of herself while men who are either interested in sport or money take advantage of her delusions.Dorcasina’s ’lovers,’ particularly O’Connor, James, Philander, ’Montague’ and Seymour all use Dorcasina’s predilection for high-flown courting language and ridiculous sentimentality against her to achieve their own purposes. As Dorcasina gets progressively older, she begins to appear more and more ludicrous and shameless, a sore trial for her father, one of L____, Pennsylvania’s

most wealthy and respected inhabitants. Contrasted throughout the novel is one of Dorcasina's neighbours, Harriot Stanly, a bright young woman, who is sent away to study in a private school, with an injunction from her mother never to read a novel, citing Dorcasina as a prime negative example. In the fine picaresque style, following such romps as the immortal "Don Quixote," or Goldsmith's "The Vicar of Wakefield" and so on, "Female Quixotism" lampoons the heroine's wild notions of novels as patterns for life.Ironically, unlike her male predecessors, Dorcasina and her sidekick, Betty do very little traveling, moving primarily in the novel between their house and a wooded grove in which many of her amorous misadventures begin. The novel's isolationism follows from it's uniquely early-American context. One of the more important issues that "Female Quixotism" handles is the question of marginal people in the new United States, and as in Charles Brockden Brown, one of Tenney's contemporaries, particularly Irish immigrants, while also tackling the Constitution's fictional notion of equality in terms of African-American slavery. Also as in Brown's novels, "Female Quixotism" takes place in an agricultural area outside of Philadelphia, the hub of national activity in the late 18th century. In many ways, "Female Quixotism" can be read as a commentary on the socio-political options and choices facing the new republic - in imagining a household without a male authority figure, "Female Quixotism" tests the viability and vulnerability of a Lockean government though a wholly domestic arena.A fascinating, entertaning, and often pitiful heroine, cleverly managed anti-romantic storylines, and urgent historical questions make "Female Quixotism" a pivotal early American work of fiction. Tenney's novel is delightful and seriously engaging and should be read by anyone interested in the development of the 18th century novel in general, American fiction in particular, as well as the history of women's education.

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