The Parodic Mode and the Patriarchal Imperative: Reading the Female Reader(s) in Tabitha Tenney's "Female Quixotism"

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THE PARODIC MODE AND THE 
PATRIARCHAL IMPERATIVE: 
READING THE FEMALE READER(S) 
IN TABITHA TENNEY'S 
FEMALE QUIXOTISM 

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Tabitha Gilman Tenney's novel Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon, first published anonymously in 1801 and widely reprinted thereafter, is underestimated by twentieth-century scholars of early American literature. Only two recent studies offer readings of the novel—one as social satire, the other as collusive criticism of the novel as genre. While both of these readings of the novel are useful for their study of its extratextual implications, neither addresses the ways in which the text's radical and conservative tendencies interplay within the text itself; that is, neither interpretation accounts for the ways in which the novel both conforms to and deviates from the conventional norms of the romance novel and what is gained by this duality. Moreover, Cathy Davidson's classification of the novel as "the female picaresque" effectively marginalizes this "revolutionary" novel and perhaps secures its position outside the canon of early American literature. At second glance, Tenney's novel, like its prototype Don Quixote, appears more parodic than "picaresque" or satiric, for it seems to appropriate conventions of the romance and to invert them only to reinscribe them differently. In A Theory of Parody, Linda Hutcheon distinguishes between parody, "an 'intramural' form with aesthetic norms," and the "'extramural' norms" of satire that are "social or moral" (Hutcheon 25). This is a crucial distinction that sug-

*I wish to thank Carla Mulford, in whose graduate seminar the essay began, for her comments on early versions of the text and for her support and inspiration during its revision.
gests that parody implies a relationship between one text and another, while satire implies a relationship between a text and the world. Since Hutcheon’s theory posits a relationship of art to art, parody becomes characterized by intertextuality. But parody is not simply imitative or derivative; it forces an awareness of the difference and the distance between art and experience. Hence, parody is characterized by a “doubleness of form” that arises out of its “transcontextualization” of aesthetic norms (Hutcheon 32) in a text that always implies its original. The dual nature of parody, its “complicity and distance,” underlies its apparently paradoxical nature. Read as parody, Tenney’s novel perpetuates continuity of the novelistic genre through, in Hutcheon’s words, “repetition with a difference” that derives from the “critical distance” between the work in question and the text, or genre, that it implies (Hutcheon 32). In other words, Tenney’s novel seems, primarily, to “inscribe the mocked conventions [of the romance novel] onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence” (Hutcheon 75). Working within a form that is not highly regarded in order to re-form it, Tenney’s novel parodies the romance by calling attention to its aesthetic norms and marking the difference between her novel and its implied text, or texts. By deviating from its norms, Female Quixotism dispels the mythical truth of the romance which its authors claimed, its readers invested in, and its critics repudiated.

Consideration of the adverse critical climate in which Tenney wrote and published ought to demonstrate that the novel’s double-edged, satirical indictment of both its readers and its critics would not have been a viable primary aim. The mimetic imperatives of the eighteenth-century literary aesthetic had prompted early novelists to fashion prefatory truth claims. But critics of the new genre saw the novel’s lack of truth, or worse, its artifice, as a threat to social and political stability. Moreover, the new genre was thought to reflect social conflict between the classes in its dramatization of “man in the contemporary scene” (Beasley 13). The English romance, in particular, promulgated a vision of Christian heroism in an evil world and thus, from the perspective of the dominant culture, was accused of presenting its readers with a “dangerous vision of life” (Beasley 42). Tenney’s parody of the romance, however, allowed her to satirize both contemporary criticism of the novel—the prevailing, misconceived attitudes toward fiction that her “real” and “implied” readers knew too well—and the conventions of the genre from which these criticisms derived. As Davidson has suggested, the novel is best read as an “allegory of reading,” a phrase which implies its self-reflexive, intratextual elements and parodic inversions.

My reading of Tenney’s novel begins with the dedicatory preface “To
All Columbian Ladies, Who read Novels and Romances” (1:iii). These implied readers are addressed “Dear Girls” by an anonymous “Compiler” who claims to be their “Friend and Admirer” (1:iv) and whose persona betrays a certain masculinity.5 As dictated by eighteenth-century novelistic convention, the preface describes the novel as a “true history of a romantic country girl” (1:iv)—not a “mere romance” (1:iii) such as the heroine herself reads, but a “true picture of real life” (1:iv). The claim to truth is presumably authenticated by the promised similarity to “the most extravagant parts of the authentic history of the celebrated hero of La Mancha, the reknowned Don Quixote” (1:iv). Tenney’s allusion to Cervantes locates the novel’s parody in its allegory of reading or interpreting texts, particularly romances. Her allusion is a parodic gesture that implies complicity between her novel and Cervantes’s, but also distance, or difference, from it.6 The similarity between Dorcasina and Don Quixote is that both are “readers,” or “misreaders,” of their experience because of their previous encounters with romantic texts. Saturated with the values and conventions taught by the romances they have read, both readers attempt to impose their own textually constituted romantic visions upon a recalcitrant reality. Their respective impressions of experience are thus fictionalized, textualized, not only in obvious ways by their authors (Tenney and Cervantes), but by the codes and conventions of the romantic texts with which they as readers are inscribed. The crucial difference between Quixote and Dorcasina, however, may be expressed in terms of their gender, and herein lies the novel’s satiric impulse which we may be tempted to privilege in our reading. For while Quixote is depicted as an errant knight who actively seeks adventure far from home, Dorcasina is portrayed as a young, marriageable woman, and this entails her clinging close to home, practicing domestic “virtues” and waiting for her “adventures” (if she has any) to “happen to” her. If Tenney’s parody of the romance also intimates criticism of women’s roles in eighteenth-century American culture, her textual inversion of Cervantes works intertextually first by drawing on reader’s and writer’s shared knowledge of the codes and conventions of the novel’s parodic prototype as well as of the romance in general. That is, the novel’s “story” is primarily that of woman as reader, not simply as “woman.” Satire intervenes only after this bond has been established in order to address “the text’s situation in the world” (Hutcheon 116).

The compiler’s prefatory appeal to the novel’s implied readers situates the text within the world of its readers: “I hope you will be induced to read it, as well for my sake, who have spent much time in compiling and cash in publishing it, as for your own, for whose particular use it is designed” (1: iii). Implicit in his appeal is the implied author’s identity as
a “compiler,” not a “novelist.” This work is “truth” not fiction. But Tenney undermines her implied author’s credibility in his commitment to the veracity of Don Quixote. The compiler seems to be no better reader than either the subject of his study or her male predecessor whose exploits are invoked, yet the voice of the compiler is undoubtedly manipulative, both seductive and authoritarian. The preface thus seems to invite a certain skepticism about reading not only romantic novels but purported histories as well, which can be just as corrupted by the lack of perception or the mercenary ends of their authors as novels may be by sentimentality. Moreover, the skeptical reader will observe that the two genres—history and romance—are elided in the connection made between Female Quixotism and Don Quixote, the latter of which Tenney’s reader knows to be more romance than history. Another strategy Tenney employs which provokes a reader’s skepticism and supports the author’s deployment of irony later in the text is to distinguish herself (the text’s “real” author) from its “implied author” (the compiler), who is further distinguished from the narrator.7 With this move, Tenney accomplishes two things. First, the distinction among authorship, implied authorship, and narrative persona exempts Tenney herself from complete authority over what happens in the narrative. This strategy calls attention to the fictionality of her text and frees her from responsibility for judging Dorcasina’s character or moralizing about the novel’s parodic ending. Second, this distinction allows Tenney to invest her implied author’s persona with the conventional attitudes toward reading that the novel then calls into question. The strategic use of an implied author thus enables subtly subversive references to Dorcasina’s passion for romances— the novel’s parodic focus.

For example, in the novel’s early pages, the narrator explains that prospective suitors who knew of Dorcasina’s reputation for novel reading were put off, “notwithstanding the temptation of her money, and her agreeable person, [and so] were too prudent to think of seeking her in marriage; wisely foreseeing the inconveniences which would result from having a wife whose mind was fraught with ideas of life and manners so widely different from what they appear to be on trial” (1:17). There were other men, too, “who understood only that she spent much time in books, without any knowledge of the kind which pleased her” (1:17). And lest the observation be taken optimistically, the narrator informs the reader, “it was sufficient to keep them at a distance, to know that she read at all” (1:17). Through the unallied voice of the narrator, Tenney presents a view of women’s reading upheld by Dorcasina’s male peers—a view that does not even distinguish among genres, but which assimilates and condemns women’s reading of all kinds of texts. In a shift in persona
from narrator to author, Tenney then denigrates "those enemies of female improvement" who "thought a woman had no business with any book but the bible, or maybe the art of cookery" (1:17). The author’s intrusive criticism runs the risk of redirecting the text toward social satire. But Tenney immediately retreats after this and relies instead on the narrative itself and its various disclosures of misreading to challenge her own reader’s interpretive judgment.

Throughout the novel, Dorcasina’s misreadings of her relationships with men are lamented by her widowed father whose “taste in books” is precisely the opposite of his daughter’s, for “novels were her study, and history only her amusement” (1:7). That Dorcasina was raised from the age of three solely by her father is implicated as an indirect cause of her unhealthy proclivity toward sentimental fiction, for had her mother lived, the narrator suggests, she would have “pointed out to her the plain rational path of life; and prevented her imagination from being filled with the airy delusions and visionary dreams of love and raptures . . . with which the indiscreet writers of that fascinating kind of books, denominated Novels, fill the heads of artless young girls, to their great injury, and sometimes to their utter ruin” (1:13). This “historical” note helps establish a basis for Dorcasina’s naïveté and for her reluctance to take advice, for with the figure of maternal authority absent from her life, she is in some sense on her own in a men’s world; she is her own mother. Her father blames himself, in part, for “having indulged her in perusing those pernicious books, . . . that seemed to have, beyond cure, disordered every faculty of her mind” (1:39). Sheldon thus represents the voice of the eighteenth-century novel’s contemporary critics who lamented the “dangers of novel reading” (Petter 52). His own reading of novels, therefore, implies a double standard, one which is expressed in the novel’s preface by the condescending voice of the compiler: men are better readers than women. Hence, men can read novels without damage to their minds; women cannot without committing intellectual suicide. What becomes apparent as the novel progresses is that Dorcasina is doomed not only because she is motherless, not simply because she reads novels, but also because she misreads them by taking them for truth. Because her whole identity is consumed with “the etiquette and ritual of the romance novel” (Petter 52), she is a poor reader, even of her own experience, which is inscribed by the textualized “reality” of the romance. But the reader of Tenney’s novel soon recognizes better “readers” than Dorcasina among the novel’s other characters.

Betty, Dorcasina’s maid and confidante, who plays “Sancho” to her “Quixote” and whose own reading competence is a mystery, echoes Sheldon’s complaint that his daughter has read too many novels for her
own good. By the astute judgments of character which Betty and other female nonreaders of novels repeatedly level against Dorcasina’s false suitors, Tenney’s reader is perhaps persuaded that novel reading is indeed detrimental to the female mind. But the reader is also acutely aware that Dorcasina tends to fictionalize, to contextualize her experience within the panorama of the sentimental novel, and to project a textualized identity upon an incongruous reality. Dorcasina, because of her novel reading, cannot make as accurate judgments (or “readings”) of character as the women in the novel who do not indulge in fiction or the women readers of Tenney’s book who do. Although this gesture exposes the novel’s satiric undercurrent, it is secondary, I want to suggest, to the text’s parodic impulse which discloses its textuality and which renders specious any criticism of fiction’s lack of truth.

Among the readers in the novel who turn out to be more expert than Dorcasina are its two most literate men. They are also the most vicious impostors she encounters and better readers of her than she is of them or even herself; and they soon know her “like a book.” In book one, “the scholar” Philander, alias Mr. Smith, poses as “the scoundrel” O’Connor, the first fortune hunter to win Dorcasina’s heart and nearly her hand.8 Philander exchanges love letters pinned to a tree in the grove where the lovers used to meet, abducts Dorcasina (much to her ambivalent fear and delight) when she refuses to “leave” O’Connor for him, and involves her in one scheme after another only to beat a hasty retreat to Connecticut when his own exposure is threatened. Throughout book one, verbal irony, in the form of sentimental language spoken or written, mocks Dorcasina’s romantic blindness, her “quixotism.” Disguise and mistaken identity provide instances of dramatic irony that distinguish Tenney’s novel from the romance by providing comic moments at the expense of the norms of her own text.9 Thus, the novel becomes, at times, almost self-parodic. For example, O’Connor first poses as Dorcasina’s lover. When O’Connor flees, Smith appears in his place, first posing as O’Connor, then disguising himself as Philander and concocting plot after plot entailing still more fraud and deceit. Dorcasina herself, in O’Connor’s absence, enlists Betty (her maid) to dress in Sheldon’s clothes and to pretend to woo her in O’Connor’s place. One important instance of mistaken identity occurs when Dorcasina arrives at her father’s summer house in the middle of the night, intending to meet O’Connor there but finding Scipio, the family’s black servant, instead. Dorcasina mistakes him for O’Connor and kisses him while he sleeps. At the same time, O’Connor, encountering Miss Violet on her way to Scipio, mistakes her for Dorcasina. When Scipio awakens, he takes O’Connor for a thief, and chaos briefly ensues.
The tone of the novel is more serious, however, in the second book where conventional expectations of the romance are inverted. Mr. Seymore, having abandoned his wife and family in Charleston to avoid debtors' prison, is posing as a teacher when he is introduced to Dorcasina by well-intentioned friends. Described as amiable enough on the outside but "all manner of vice and hypocrisy" within (2:170), Seymore hopes to marry Dorcasina and then commit her to an asylum. He is the last of her fortune-hunting seducers and comes along when she is well into her fifties. It is Seymore who confronts Dorcasina with the pathetic truth about herself in his parting words to her as he is hauled off to prison:

[I]t was your money, and my necessities that induced me to deceive you; and you credulous old fool, so greedily swallowed the grossest flattery, that it would have been difficult to avoid imposing on you. Ridiculous vanity, at your age, with those grey locks, to set out to make conquests! I... advise you to give up all thoughts of that kind, and... assure you that any man would be distracted to think of marrying you except for your money. (2:201)

Seymore is exactly right about Dorcasina; he "reads" her correctly. He makes ill use of what he has gained through his "reading" perhaps, but had Dorcasina been a better, more critical reader, she would not have needed his revelatory remarks. Tenney's novel, then, warns less against the "dangers of reading" than against the dangers of reading uncritically, and offers other, more legitimate readers—both of books and of character—besides the fortune-hunting dissemblers. These include Dorcasina's father, Betty, Scipio, and the Stanlys, family friends who look out for Dorcasina, coddling her, humoring her, and keeping her from the hard truth about herself by engaging her in what they consider to be playful deceptions. Because there are so many levels of reading in the novel, so many "texts," and so many kinds of readers, if the novel is a satire on reading or interpretation, then it implicates and condemns itself as well. If we read Tenney's novel as parody, however, it unmasks its own texuality, suspending satiric judgment, deferring moral didacticism, and leaving its readers to judge the text on its own terms. The novel's intertextual nature and intratextual ironies divert it from satire and deflect any ameliorative aim its readers may apprehend.

"Dorcas" Sheldon is eighteen at the beginning of her story when she decides to change her name to suit her romantic inclinations, a gesture towards self-definition that her father finds whimsical but harmless. In her twentieth year, she receives a proposal of marriage from the son of Sheldon's "old esteemed friend in Virginia" whose "ideas of domestic..."
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happiness were just and rational” (1:8), in obvious contrast to Dorcasina’s, and so the two are never married. Dorcasina’s commitment to romance persists almost to the novel’s end and is gradually rendered more and more absurd by the pitiful facts—physical, emotional, and social—of her predicament. She is not the epitome of feminine beauty even in her youth, but neither is she wholly unattractive. The narrator concedes: “She had received from nature a good understanding, a lively fancy, an amiable cheerful temper and a kind and affectionate heart” (1:6). In short, she is rather “like the greater part of her countrywomen; such as no man would be smitten with at first sight, but such as any man might love upon intimate acquaintance” (1:6–7). This narrative ploy effectively identifies the novel's implied readers with Dorcasina, intimating these readers’ own susceptibility to sentimentality, both in novels and in men. But the endorsement of mimesis implied by the narrator as well as the implied author is suspect, given Dorcasina’s own all-too-trusting approach to a “text.” For Tenney’s narrator to seduce his readers into investing themselves in his text would be to commit the same crime against them of which novelists are implicitly accused in the novel’s preface and throughout its story. The text’s solicited reader-identification thus undermines the intentions of both the implied author and the narrator and ultimately subverts the mimetic implications of the text.

Tenney partially redeems Dorcasina at the end of Female Quixotism by relegating her to the margins of society in the role of a philanthropic spinster, a rather conventional fate. She is thus rescued from her pathetic state—“sallow and full of wrinkles, [her] front teeth . . . all gone, and her hair . . . quite white” (2:103)—but is still in vicarious pursuit of dreams of connubial bliss through her continued, though now changed, reading of romances. The novel’s final pages consist of a letter to Harriet Stanly, now Mrs. Barry, in which Dorcasina blames her father’s ineptness as well as her own ignorance and romantic “turn of mind” (2:210) for her situation. Her suggestion that all young women are “ignorant of the world” and “naturally” romantic echoes the novel’s prefatory warning to its implied readers. The implied author’s double-edged indictment of reading and readers resurfaces in Dorcasina’s wistful allusion to the disparity between the real and the ideal. Yet, the ending of the novel seems also to suggest that there is a sense in which what is “untrue” is not inherently bad or necessarily dangerous, or that what may make fiction so is not its lack of truth. If (mis)taken for truth, fictions are dangerous, but they can also be playful amusement; they may even be benevolent. But perhaps never to be deceived is preferable, Dorcasina ponders at the novel’s close, and she advises Harriet that her daughters might be better off never having the opportunity to confront the difference between the
real and the imagined. The ending, however, seems also to attribute some value to reading, even novel reading, at the same time that it criticizes, or cautions, the would-be reader. For in the end, although Dorcasina has learned to separate art from life, she continues to retreat to the visionary world of the romance novel, a world which she knows now does not exist, not even for Harriet whose marriage to Captain Barry suffers early from the death of her mother and soon after from the stillbirth of the Barrys' first child. The elimination of the novel's only chance for the conventionally "happy" ending reinforces Dorcasina's altered perspective and resituates the role of fiction in the world.\footnote{11}

Female Quixotism, then, may be regarded as a satiric parody of the eighteenth-century romance that is also a parody of a parody, \textit{Don Quixote}. The text imitates the romance, working within its boundaries, both including and excluding its conventions, conserving and subverting its form. What is gained by this intertextuality is the creation of a new genre, as Hutcheon suggests, "out of the questioning of the very act of aesthetic production" (Hutcheon 10), a genre that self-consciously and self-critically "satirize[s] the reception and creation of [a] certain kind of art" (Hutcheon 16), namely the romance or sentimental novel. If parody is a "symptom of historical processes which invalidate the normal authenticity of primary forms" (Kiremidjian 241), Tenney's novel demonstrates parody's both nostalgic and revolutionary impulses, for it glances backward in order to rehabilitate the novelistic form. We ought to resist, then, the temptation to see the novel as a "female picaresque," for to do so is to relegate it to the margins of the patriarchal tradition whose conventions it seems to challenge successfully. To claim a place for the novel at once within and outside of the picaresque tradition is to situate our reading of the novel \textit{within} that tradition instead of along side of it. Such a reading threatens to limit the scope of the novel's indictments to satire. Consequently, such a reading disregards the dissonance between form and content that is the essence of parody as a "revolutionary" form and ultimately dismisses the novel's radical critique of traditional theories of representation.

\textbf{NOTES}

1. There are five editions of \textit{Female Quixotism}. The first four two-volume editions were published in 1801, 1808, 1825, and 1829. One three-volume edition was published posthumously in 1841. All references to the text are to the 1801 edition printed in Boston by Thomas and Andrews.
2. In Revolution and the Word, Davidson identifies Tenney's novel as a subgenre of the picaresque tradition that she names "the female picaresque." For Davidson, the novel is a satire on women's education and conventional attitudes towards novel reading in the early national period. Conversely, in Early Novel, Petter deems the novel an indictment of the new genre itself which reflects Tenney's sensitivity to and complicity with her contemporary critical climate. Thus, Davidson foregrounds the novel's subversive impulses while Petter emphasizes its conservatism, but both scholars address the novel's extratextual, or "extramural," context and aim.

3. Beasley explains that ethical and mimetic imperatives of the times led to these early texts' prefatory "claim of truth" but that these were "usually only subterfuges" (6). He attributes this tactic to the influence of French and Spanish novels in translation, citing Don Quixote ("Cervantes' great assault on the idealized nonsense of chivalric romance") as most important (10).

4. Beasley identifies two subgenres of the English romance: the heroic and the didactic (25). He claims that the former was "dead" by the early eighteenth century, and that while both "types of avowedly invented narrative exploit unashamedly the chivalric conventions of noble action and inflated sentiments," the "primary reason why the didactic romance enjoyed an open respect . . . lies in the different degree to which they emphasize a moral function" (25). Major (i.e., canonical) writers (Richardson, Smollett, Fielding), however, exploited and mocked the conventions of the English romance, including its sentimentality, and created parodic romances that served to indict contemporary perceptions of fiction in general and the novel in particular. My contention is that Tenney's method is akin to that of these canonized authors.

5. I am suggesting that Tenney strategically employs a male persona for the dedicatory preface who voices eighteenth-century attitudes toward women's novel reading and patronizes, even attempts to seduce, his readers.

6. Hutcheon reminds us that the etymology of the term "parody" implies duality. The Greek prefix para means not only "counter" or "against"—the meaning which informs the common view of parody and which leads to its confusion with satire. Par, she points out, also means "beside" and suggests "an accord or intimacy instead of contrast" (32). Thus, she suggests, parody is "double-coded," "double-directed," and so "double-voiced" (70–72).

7. Taking a cue from Booth, Chatman further delineates levels of authorship and readership. The "real author" (the writer who sits down to write), the "implied author" (the "posture" or ideology that the real author assumes or adopts to write and which changes from one text to another), and the narrator (the storyteller) have their counterparts in the reader who plays the roles of "real reader," "implied reader," and "narratee" (148–52). The implied author, Chatman suggests, is "reconstructed by the reader from the narrator" (148), for "unlike the narrator, the implied author . . . has no voice" (148). I am suggesting that in Tenney's novel, as in many early novels, the prefatory "voice" is distinguishable from the voice of the narrator as that of a disembodied implied author. The real author and real reader are, of course, absent from the narrative exchange in the presence of the implied ones (151). This technique draws attention to the text as a text and thus a fiction.

8. Tenney's choice of an Irish pseudonym for the impostor shows her sensitivity to the prejudices of her contemporary sociopolitical milieu, as does her characterization of the Sheldons' black servant and his lady love.

9. Hutcheon suggests that the deployment of irony in a parodic text is a "conservative" strategy that helps to establish the necessary "critical distance" between the parodic text and its "target" (68). "Parody, like irony," she writes, "can be said to require a certain institutionalized set of values—both aesthetic (generic) and social (ideological)—in order to
be understood, or even to exist” (95). That is, a reader has to understand what a romance is, for example, in order to recognize a parody of one, just as a reader (or auditor) must believe she knows a writer's (or speaker's) intention in order to suspect irony. In a vivid analogy, Hutcheon reveals the distinction between the object of satire and the object of parody. She explains that “the mock-epic did not mock the epic: it satirized the pretensions of the contemporary as set against the ideal norms implied by the parodied text or set of conventions” (44). Similarly, Tenney's novel does not satirize the romance any more than the mock-epic satirized the epic. The text primarily parodies the conventions of the romance, imitates them “with a difference,” but secondarily satirizes its contemporary readers’ attitudes towards fiction.

10. Chatman distinguishes between “story” (content) and “discourse” (form) in narration (154). Point of view, he suggests, resides in the story, voice, or expression in the discourse (154). In parody, however, the distinction between form and content is obscured, for parody “separates form and content to demonstrate their relatedness and even their identity in the primary work, and, in the parody itself, to dramatize the pathos of their dissonance” (Kiremidjian 241–42). Parody is thus characterized by an “instability” that reflects its role as “a major mode of expression for a civilization in a state of transition and flux” (Kiremidjian 242).

11. The rather harsh, “realistic” impulse behind this somewhat melodramatic depiction of Harriet's marital woes marks the parodie distance between the world of the romance novel and the world outside of it. Kiremidjian explains that since “parody acknowledges the recalcitrance of matter to form,... it is used by . . . artists not as a sign of resignation but as the only means of expressing modes of experience that will otherwise not yield to form” (240) because of the dissonance between primary aesthetic modes and the experience to be represented to an audience. Tenney's abrupt defiance of the mythical image of the happily ever after effectively “expresses the inexpressible” and, from the perspective of an American woman at the turn of the nineteenth century, raises to a whisper, at least, women's perhaps otherwise silent skepticism toward the romance novel.

WORKS CITED

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