

A CONCISE PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST LITERARY MAGAZINES PUBLISHED BY WOMEN WRITERS IN ROMANIA BETWEEN 1878 - 1947

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Abstract

In its early days Romanian feminine writing was influenced by the ideals of emancipation that animated the female population of our country. These ideals were shared and spread not only by feminist supporters, though this happened to a large extent, but also by outstanding men of letters (Eugen Lovinescu, Garabet-Ibraileanu and Tudor Vianu and others), who were receptive to the changing status of women in their contemporary society and encouraged it as such.

The present paper focuses on what we are going to call “early feminine writing in Romania”, whereby we understand the early days of literature created by women in this country.

Our goal is to identify the literary publications that gathered for the first time in Romania women writers who paid a particular interest in literature. Thus, our paper has a documentary value: it presents the main Romanian literary publications edited by the first women writers in our country, the aesthetic ideals promoted and shared by these magazines and the contribution brought by female authors to the wakening and shaping of the taste for writing and for literature amidst Romanian women in general.

Keywords: *Romanian feminine writing, the first feminine Romanian literary magazines, feminist propaganda, aesthetic value, cultural emancipation of Romanian women.*

1. Introduction

If one intended to label the first literary publications edited by women in Romania, the phrase *literary creation and emancipation* would synthesize their initiative to open a new direction in our country's culture, i.e. *feminine writing*.

In the present paper, we are going to use the phrase *feminine writing* to refer to *literature created by women* in general and to the literary publications edited by women and for women, refer, in particular. The reason for which we do not use the phrase *feminist writing* for depicting this new literary trend is that not all women writers who published for the first time in Romania were animated by feminist ideals and, vice versa, not all feminist supporters manifested an interest in literature. In consequence, out of the long list of publications edited by women in Romania, we have selected only the magazines that exclusively contained literary columns.

When discussing about feminine writing, one has to underline the importance which the feminist ideology had in our country in the intellectual affirmation of females, including in the realm of letters. Thus, it was this ideology which awoke in women their long-time yearned aspirations towards self-improvement and personal development and which could not be fulfilled due to the faulty legislative system that did not provide rights and freedoms whereby women could have access to their emancipation. From this point of view, the echoes

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of the French Revolution, of the First Wave of Feminism¹, of the socialist ideology had a serious impact on the Romanian feminine population's wish to enhance its social and political status. The wish to be enfranchised, better educated, socially and politically involved had the effect of a "revolution", as Estelle B. Freedman points out: "In the past two centuries, a revolution has transformed women's lives. Unlike national revolutions, this social upheaval crosses continents, decades and ideologies. In place of armed struggle it gradually sows seeds of change, infiltrating our consciousness with the simple premise that women are as capable and valuable as men."²

2. Content

The feminine aspiration towards emancipation was doubled and encouraged by the actual implication of women in various areas of activity ranging from the hard physical work performed by female citizens for the army during the war time to the subtle activity of writing. In fact, the wish to emancipate characterising Romanian women gradually determined them to set up their own organizations, associations and councils, as well as their own literary, social, educational, cultural and political magazines in an attempt to present, support and enforce their ideals and to illustrate their active participation in key sectors of social life. Of the large number of feminist organizations set up by women, we mention: "Liga Femeilor Române de la Iași" (1894) [*The Romanian Women's League from Iași*], "Unirea Educatoarelor Române" (1908) [*The Union of Romanian Educators*], "Uniunea Femeilor Române" (1913) [*The Union of Romanian Women*], "Asociația pentru Emanciparea Civilă și Politică a Femeilor din România" (1918) [*The Association for Civil and Political Emancipation of Women in Romania*], "Consiliul Național al Femeilor Române" (1918) [*The National Council of Romanian Women*], "Societatea Scriitoarelor Române" (1926) [*The Romanian Women Writers' Society*]. A part of these organizations had their own publications, e.g., *The Union of Romanian Educators* (1908; President: Emilia Humpel) edited the magazine: *Unirea Femeilor Române* [*The Union of Romanian Women*] in Iași, between: 1909-1916, while *The Romanian Women Writers' Society* edited the most important literary feminine magazine: *Revista Scriitoarei* [*The Woman Writer's Magazine*] between: 1926-1943.

When referring to the birth of feminine writing in our country we cannot fail to mention the contribution brought by two women writers, Mărgărita Miller-Verghy and Ecaterina Săndulescu, who, in their book *Evoluția scrisului feminin în România*³ [*The Evolution of Feminine Writing in Romania*], depicted the first wave of Romanian female authors. This was a singular attempt in the history of Romanian literature. In fact, the two authors engaged in an original literary approach by systematically presenting the literary activity performed in Romania by women writers from the second half of the 19th century up to 1935⁴.

As one could expect, literary critics did not remain silent to this new phenomenon. Naturally, their reactions were different. Thus, in the opinion of Tudor Vianu, the birth of Romanian *feminine writing* was a consequence of her improved social condition, which he

¹ See feminists of the First Wave: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Dover Publication Inc., 1996; John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2001; Harriett Taylor Mill, *Enfranchisement of Woman*, London: Trübner and Co., 1868 a.o.

² Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back. The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, New York: The Random House Publishing Books, 2002, p.1.

³ Mărgărita Miller-Verghy, Ecaterina Săndulescu – *Evoluția scrisului feminin în România*, Bucharest: Bucovina Publishing House, 1935.

⁴ Some of the most important names included in this book were: Sofia Nădejde, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Elena Văcărescu and Matilda Cugler-Poni.

praised as a new stage in the evolution of women and which he regarded as being different from the concept of feminism (depicted by the famous critic in a negative way).⁵ Other important literary critics who supported feminine writing in Romania were Garabet Ibrăileanu and, primarily, Eugen Lovinescu.

We appreciate that the appearance of gifted women writers owed a lot to the publication of the first literary magazines and newspapers which were edited by and for women. Thus, the first wave of Romanian women writers was offered the chance to publish in a large number of magazines⁶, of which we enumerate two: *Revista noastră* [*Our Magazine*] and *Revista scriitoarei* [*The Woman Writer's Magazine*] as being the most important literary magazines; in their columns there published writers who enjoyed considerable appreciation at the time (Elena Văcărescu, Iulia Hașdeu, Agatha Grigorescu-Bacovia, Coca Farago, Claudia Millian, Adela Xenopol, Sofia Nădejde, Maria Baiulescu, Maria Cunțan, Elena Farago and others) and who actively supported women writers and women's emancipation in general.

However, one has to underline the fact that the birth of feminine writing was from an aesthetical point of view a feeble beginning that did not produce significantly valuable works of art. Thus, the importance of these first magazines lies in creating and preparing the proper ground in which the seeds of creative writing were to grow and flourish during the 20th century, especially starting with the interwar period.

In Romania the number of feminist magazines⁷ is much higher in comparison with literary magazines which supported feminine literary creativity. Nevertheless, both categories of publications were in general much indebted to the socialist ideals, as Ștefania Mihăilescu also noticed: "The large number of documents published at the time ascertains the role which the socialist movement played in helping women reunions and associations reach maturity in the last decades of the 20th century."⁸ (my translation)

However, most of the feminist magazines had a short existence. From 1878 to 1947, feminist literary magazines brought together authors like: Sofia Nădejde, Constanța Hodoș, Matilda Cugler-Poni, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Ticu Archip, Lucia Demetrius, Claudia Millian, Lucreția Petrescu and others.

The role played by *Sburătorul* Literary Society, coordinated by the outstanding literary critic, Eugen Lovinescu (who managed to gather the most important women writers at the time), in discovering and promoting young gifted writers, including women writers, was fundamental.⁹

⁵ Tudor Vianu, „O ideologie feminină – Noua feminitate”, in *Sburătorul*, Year I, no. 3, 3rd May 1919, p. 68.

⁶ *Amicul familiei. Litere-știință-arte-pedagogie-industrie*, Bucharest, published twice a month: 15th March 1863 – 31st October 1865, published once a month (1st January – mai 1868), editor-in-chief: Constanța Dunca-Schiau; *Rândunica*, 1893-1894, editor-in-chief: Elena D. Sevastos; *Dochia*, 1896-1898, editor-in-chief: Adela Xenopol; *Revista noastră*, 1905-1907, editor-in-chief: Constanța Hodoș; *Românca*, 1905-1906, editor-in-chief: Adela Xenopol; *Revista scriitoarei*, 1926-1943, editor-in-chief: Adela Xenopol until 1928 and Aida Vrioni until 1943.

⁷ See, for example, the following feminist propaganda publications: *Munca* [*The Labour*], *Drepturile Omului* [*Human Rights*], *Lumea nouă* [*The New World*], "*Femeia Magazin: Revistă a Familiei*" [*The Woman Magazine: Family Magazine*] (1868, Bucharest; new issue: 1993, Bucharest), "*Buletinul Ligii Femeilor*" [*The Newsletter of Women's League*] (Iași, 1895-1896), "*Acțiunea Feministă: Organ de Propagandă pentru Emanciparea Civilă și Politică a Femeii*" [*The Feminist Action: Propaganda Organ for the Civil and Political Emancipation of Women*] (Piatra-Neamț, 1919 – Decembrie 1921/January 1922), "*Buletinul Secției Juridice*" [*The Legal Section Newsletter*] (Bucharest, 1920), "*Cuvântul femeilor*" [*The Women's Word*] (Bucharest, 1933), "*Femeia satelor*" [*The Village Woman*] (1935), "*Almanachul nostru*" [*Our Almanach*] (Bucharest, 1936), "*Mariana: revistă feminină*" [*Mariana: A Feminine Magazine*] (Bucharest, 1943) etc.). Similarly, many see the conferences organized by Constanța Dunca-Schiau for a period of almost 50 years: *Femeia Femeii* [*The Woman's Women*], 1863, *Femeia în familia* [*sic!*] [*The Woman in the Family*]. *Conferință publică, Feminismul în România. Conferință, 1904* [*Public Conference, Feminism in Romania. Conference*], *Educațiunea copilului nostru. Conferință, 1906* [*The Education of Our Child. Conference*], *Fiii și fiicele poporului* [*The People's Daughters*].

⁸ Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte*, Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2002, p. 26-27; original text: „Numeroase documente ale vremii certifică rolul mișcării socialiste în maturizarea reuniunilor și asociațiilor de femei în ultimele două decenii ale secolului al XIX-lea.”

⁹ In Romania, literary criticisms - during the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century - was still the creation of men; of the most representative Romanian literary societies that were active at the end of the 19th century and during the first

As Constantin Ciopraga¹⁰ pointed out, the beginning of the 20th century was a prolific literary period thanks to the coexistence of various aesthetic directions revealed by the large number of literary publications printed at the time. Most of these publications followed three key directions: a classical one (see “Convorbiri literare” and “Convorbiri critice” magazines), a modern one (see “Literatorul” magazines) and a populist direction (see “Viața românească” and ‘Sămănătorul’ magazines). Adriana Iliescu (*Reviste literare la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea*) completes the three above mentioned literary directions with the socialist Magazine “Contemporanul”, edited by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. We suggest that the above classification can be completed with literary feminist magazines, coordinated by: Adela Xenopol, Matilda Cugler-Poni, Constanța Dunca, Ana Ciupagea, Sofia Nădejde, Maria Flechtenmacher, Smaranda Andronescu, Aida Vrioni, Mărgărita Miller-Verghy, Constanța Hodoș and others.

According to Adriana Iliescu, at the beginning of the 20th century, the largest category of readers was represented by women, a fact which, according to this literary critic, was due to their education (women who had a thorough education could speak French and were eager to read in this language) and to their longer time spent within the household space.¹¹

In the next lines we are going to chronologically enumerate literary publications edited in Romania from 1878 to 1947 by women and basically with a view to encouraging feminine writing, in general:

1. *Femeia Română. Ziar social, literar și casnic* [*The Romanian Woman. Social, Literary and Household Newspaper*]

This is the first publication edited in our country. The newspaper was published in Bucharest (between 1878 and 1881) by a woman who reserved a special place for a literary column in the pages of her publication; the editor-in-chief of this newspaper was Maria Flechtenmacher. Literary columns were signed both by female and male writers: Vasile Alecsandri, Ronetti-Roman, A. Macedonski, I. Vulcan, C.C. Bacalbașa, Sofia Nădejde, C. Mille etc.

2. *Rândunica* [*The Sparrow*]

This magazine was published by Elena D. Sevastos in Iași from January 1893 – December 1894. Elena D. Sevastos was one of the most active feminist authors in Romania. Of the collaborators to this magazine we mention: Matilda Cugler-Poni, Ada Culianu, Emilia Sevastos, Constanța Dimitriadă, Maria Angelian, Adela Xenopol, Stanca Fulger, Virginia Micle Gruber.

The first issue of this publication focuses on its goal, i.e. the promotion of *feminine intelligence* and gifted writers: “...this magazine is basically meant to encourage feminine intelligence while providing in its columns space for any talented writer /.../.”¹² (my translation)

3. *Dochia*

This eclectic publication was edited by Adela Xenopol from 1896 to 1898 and it was meant to promote feminine writing and feminist propaganda: “The *Dochia* Magazine is meant to defend, support and to observe women’s rights. I am going to firstly deal with women’s economic emancipation, which they need so much today. /.../ The Romanian woman is going to play the key role in this publication. First of all, I am going to refer to the role played by women in Romanians’ history to prove that they have been active at all times, no matter their

half of the 20th century, we mention: *Junimea*, *Literatorul*, *Sburătorul*, *Cercul literar de la Sibiu* and *Convorbiri literare*. *Sburătorul* was the publication that brought together the most talented women writers at the time (Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Ticu Archip, Lucia Demetrius).

¹⁰ Constantin Ciopraga, *Literatura română între 1900 și 1918*, Iași: Junimea Publishing House, 1970.

¹¹ Adriana Iliescu, *Reviste literare la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea*, Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, 1992.

¹² *Rândunica*, Year I, 1893, no.1, January. Original text: „...scopul acestei reviste este mai cu osebire de a încuraja inteligența femeiască, punând la dispoziție coloanele revistei oricărui talent/.../.”

social statute, i.e. the higher or lower one. Then I am going to refer to the fields of literature, music, theatre, science /.../”¹³ (my translation)

The *Dochia* Magazine had poetry columns (signed by Smara, Maria Cunțanu, D. Karr, Stanca, Teodor L., Virginia Micle-Gruber, Cincinat Pavelescu), prose columns (signed by Yna Bucov, Oscar V., D’Elgard) and proverb columns (signed by Smara). The magazine also published French translations from feminist French magazines and feminist propaganda articles (signed by Valeriu Hulubei, V.A. Ureche, Adela Xenopol, Sylvia M. Drăgoescu). This magazine had a modest literary value. It was mainly a propaganda publication, as Ion Hangiu also outlined in “Dicționarul Presei Literare Românești” [*The Dictionary of Romanian Literary Magazines*].^{14 7}

4. *Revista noastră* [*Our Magazine*]

This is one of the most important Romanian feminist literary magazines. It was edited in Bucharest in two series: March 1905 – April 1907, respectively from April 1914 – June 1916. The editor-in-chief of this publication was Constanța Hodoș. This magazine gathered active Romanian women writers, like: Sofia Nădejde, Elena Văcărescu, Maria Baiulescu, Maria Cunțan, Elena Farago, Ana Conta-Kernbach, Iulia Hașdeu etc. However, well-known male authors also published literary texts in this magazine: George Coșbuc, Ion Minulescu, G. Topârceanu, B. Fundoianu and V. Eftimiu.

Literary criticism articles (signed by Nely Cornea and Ion Gorun) are rare and have a modest value.

Feminist articles are signed by Constanța Hodoș and Sofia Nădejde; they are written in a concise style and in a balanced way. The first issue of this publication explains the main goal of this magazine in the article entitled *Primul cuvânt* [*The First Word*]¹⁵, signed by Constanța Hodoș: “*Revista noastră* [*Our Magazine*] is /.../ basically aimed at women readers. We do hope that this publication will not confine itself to this goal, but we trust that our special mission is to endeavour to address the feminine soul first of all and to trigger in women’s mind and heart the love and appreciation for spiritually higher concerns, besides their special ordinary occupations that are linked to her human condition. /.../ First of all, what we wish and try to achieve is for our publication *Revista noastră* to become a faithful mirror of feminine intellectual contribution to our common national cultural patrimony.” (my translation)

Some remarks made by Sofia Nădejde¹⁶ in the columns of the magazine illustrate that Romania must “fill in” the forms of civilization that it borrows from the Western world reminds us of Titu Maiorescu’s theory regarding forms deprived of substance: “But the hundred-year long humiliation to which our country was subjected to had consequences that are hard to eradicate and with every step we make we feel that, while preserving the good

¹³ Adela Xenopol, *Dochia*, no.1, July, 1896, p 1. Original text: „Revista Dochia e menită să apere, să susție și să cerceteze drepturile femeii. Mă voi ocupa în întâiul pas de emanciparea sa economică, de care e atâta nevoie astăzi /.../ Femeia română va avea rolul principal în această foaie. Încep cu femeia în istoria românilor, pentru a dovedi că a fost vrednică în toate timpurile și în toate treptele sociale de la doamnă la opincă. Voi păși apoi în literatură, muzică, teatru, știință, și, pentru a împlini întregul acestui cadru, voi da luminei rând pe rând, toate frumusețile din trecut și actuale.”

¹⁴ See Ion Hangiu, *Dicționarul Presei Literare Românești, 1790-1990*, Bucharest: the Publishing House of the Romanian Cultural Foundations, 1996.

¹⁵ Constanța Hodoș, „Primul cuvânt”, in *Revista noastră*, Year I, no. 1, 15th March 1905. Original text: “*Revista noastră* se va adresa /.../ mai ales publicului cititor femeiesc. Sperăm negreșit că interesul pentru această încercare nu se va mărgini aici, dar avem încredințarea că misiunea noastră deosebită trebuie să fie a căuta să ne adresăm în primul rând sufletului femeiesc, să ne dăm silința a aprinde mai ales în mintea și inima femeii dragostea și prețuirea îndeletnicirilor mai înalte ale spiritului, pe lângă interesarea pentru cele mai strâns legate de menirea ei specială în viața omenească. /.../ În primul rând însă, ceea ce dorim și vom urmări este ca *Revista noastră* să devină o oglindă credincioasă a colaborării intelectualității femeiești la patrimoniul comun cultural național.”

¹⁶ Sofia Nădejde was an important collaborator of *Contemporanul*, where she wrote feminist texts: “Către femei” (1881) [*To Women*], “Despre egalitatea celor două sexe” (1881) [*On the Equality of the Two Sexes*], “Emanciparea femeii” (1881) [*Women Emancipation*] and “Educațiunea femeii” (1881) [*Women Education*].

features that our people have, we must work harder every day so that, besides the form of civilization, we may also acquire its substance, i.e. the mentality, the manner of feeling and working that are characteristic of the advanced countries.” (my translation)

5. *Românca* [*The Romanian Woman*]

Monthly literary magazine, published in Bucharest, from November 1905 to October 1906. Adela Xenopol was the editor-in-chief of the magazine.

6. *Revista scriitoarei* [*The Woman Writer's Magazine*]

This is the most important literary magazine published by women and for women writers, but, however, not restrictively; the activity of this publication was constant and consistent, a fact which was due to the large number of authors with whom it collaborated. The magazine was set up in Bucharest, in November 1926; its editor-in-chief was Adela Xenopol until 1928 and later on the new editor-in-chief became Aida Vrioni (up to December 1943). In 1929, the magazine modified its name, which became: *Revista scriitoarelor și scriitorilor români* [*The Magazine of Romanian Female and Male Writers*]. Its domain of interest covered the following areas: *literature, art* (1934-1935), respectively: *literature, ideology, literary criticism* (1936). This publication was supported by the Romanian Women Writers' Society, as Adela Xenopol underlined in the first issue of this magazine: “This magazine is not, however, my property; it belongs to the *Romanian Women Writers Society*, which I founded on 19th February 1924 and it became a legal entity on 31st March 1926.”¹⁷ (my translation)

The poems columns of this magazine were signed by women writers (Agatha Grigorescu-Bacovia, Lucia Demetrius, Coca Farago, Maria Cunțan, Adela Xenopol, Aida Vrioni, Cornelia Buzdugan, Ana Conta-Kernbach, Claudia Millian), as well as by famous male writers (George Bacovia, Tudor Arghezi, Ion Minulescu, Ion Pillat).

The prose columns gathered short stories (signed by: Ticu Archip, Lucia Demetrius, Bucura Dumbravă, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Aida Vrioni, as well as by the famous writer Tudor Arghezi) and novel excerpts (of Camil Petrescu and Panait Istrati), as well as fragments of plays (by Ticu Archip, Adrian Maniu, Claudia Millian).

Book reviews were numerous and were signed by: Teodor Scarlat, Agatha Grigorescu-Bacovia, Mărgărita Miller-Verghy, Aida Vrioni and Claudia Millian.

In the pages of this magazine, Adela Xenopol militated for setting up a feminist literary movement that was supposed to grant its supporters a feeling of belongingness; hence her conviction that by no longer being considered ‘a woman’, but rather ‘an intellectual’, it would be simpler for any woman to be accepted as a natural voice in the realm of creative writing:

“A woman writer needs a centre of activity of her own, she depends on all the others’ collaboration for widening the path which leads to a more fruitful work; she should no longer be regarded as a woman, but rather as an intellectual /.../ In all her intellectual manifestations, a woman is in *a state of siege*, being confined and secluded like in a circle, no matter how capable she is. Our wish is for this obstacle to fall, we yearn for freedom, not a relative one, but an absolute form of freedom with all the superior rights that it may ensure.”¹⁸ (my translation)

¹⁷ Adela Xenopol, *Revista scriitoarei*, Year I, no. 1, November, 1926, p. 1. Original text: “Această revistă, însă, nu e proprietatea mea, ci organul *Societății Scriitoarelor Române*, pe care am înființat-o la 19 februarie 1924 și a fost recunoscută persoană juridică la 31 martie 1926.”

¹⁸ Adela Xenopol, *Revista scriitoarei*, Year I, no. 1, November, 1926, p. 1. Original text: “Scriitoarea are nevoie de un centru al ei de activitate, are nevoie de colaborarea tuturor pentru a putea deschide mai larg drumul către o muncă rodnică; are nevoie să nu mai fie privită ca femeie, ci considerată ca intelectuală /.../ În toate manifestările ei intelectuale, femeia se află de-a pururi în *stare de asediu*, limitată, închisă într-o orbită, oricât de capabilă ar fi. Dorim să cadă această stavilă, vroim libertatea, nu realtivă, ci absolută cu toate drepturile superioare.”

3. Conclusion

The first feminine literary publications edited in Romania are seriously impregnated by feminist and socialist ideology and maintain this direction throughout the 19th century, as well as during the first half of the 20th century.

Only one of the literary magazines that we enumerated in the present study has literary value, *Revista scriitoarei* [*The Woman Writer's Magazine*], which later became *Revista scriitoarelor și scriitorilor români* [*The Magazine of Romanian Female and Male Writers*].

However, none of the magazines that we have consulted for drawing up the present paper has a purely artistic value due to the propaganda texts that it included alongside with the literary ones. Similarly, the aesthetic value of the literary creations published by women in these magazines is modest in comparison with the consecrated male writers. Yet, the collaboration between the two 'categories' of writers (women and men) announced, in fact, the acquiring of a natural state of balance as regards the mutual contribution of males and females to the development of literature as a universal realm of creation.

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