Performance Matrix for Image, Roles and Status of the Women in Late 19th Century Romanian and American Society

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Abstract: - The latter half of the 19th century in the U.S. and Romanian Principalities was a time of unprecedented change and emancipation for American and Romanian women regarding their political engagement, legal status, access to higher education, entrance into the professions and public life and their visibility in the professional world of literature and arts where they started to forge a tradition of their own. Women were challenging the foundations of a patriarchal society where they had to face the most difficult problems for the nineteenth-century women: women’s independence, especially the economic one, women’s right to labour (the wage-earning options available to women were quite limited and domestic service was the single most important source of women’s paid unemployment) or to vote, their domestic roles. It is important to notice that from the 1880s the “New Woman” in theory and fact changed the canon of American and Romanian literature, affecting writers’ lives and invigorating the literature with new fictional design in character, form and theme.

Key-Words: Matrix Image Woman, Model of the New Women, Woman Greatness Formula

1 Introduction
The latter half of the 19th century in the U.S. and the Romanian Principalities was a time of unprecedented change and emancipation for American and Romanian women regarding their political engagement, legal status, access to higher education, entrance into the professions and public life and their visibility in the professional world of literature and arts where they started to forge a tradition of their own. Marginalized or totally ignored by the classical literary canon, late 19th century American women writers have been “recovered” and “rediscovered” in the decades following the social and political upheavals of the explosive 1960s. From 1865 to 1910, an estimated 70 women writers (Knight) produced the most widely read literature of the time and an unmatched cultural impact on the growing readership which was largely female. Their reappraisal (Tomkins, Davidson, Radway, Baym) has been part of the major revision of the literary canon which started in the 1980s; The Columbia History of American Literature (1988) dedicated a whole chapter to the “Women Writers and the New Woman” of the post-bellum period (1865-1910), and their cultural work was justly acknowledged in the multicultural canon institutionalized by the Heath Anthology of American Literature in 1989. Among the late 19th century women writers that marked a major development on the literary scene by “entering professional authorship in ever-increasing numbers” and forging a new, female tradition, Heath includes nine authors (Julia Foote, Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Constance Fenimore Woolson, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps). Together with Susan Warren (see Tompkins), Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Harriet Beecher Stowe, they are going to be in the focus of our research.

2 Woman Greatness Formula
Is 21st century woman as good as 19th century woman? Is 21st century woman better than 19th century woman? And how will woman relative greatness be viewed in the future, say, fifty years from now? Are any questions so dumb as these? Well, this one: Why don't we answer them? We chose a dozen generally acknowledged living masters of their field. We develop an algorithm to quantify and rank their relative current and future greatness. This is the formula:

\[ D = \text{Directorships, boards} \]
\[ \text{BAT} = \text{Google hits: "full name" + average of "best all time," "greatest," and "preeminent"} \]

*KEY
- **D** = Directorships, boards
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Apart from attention paid to women fiction writers, the US-based scholarship on late 19th century women authors has been invigorated lately by important studies of women's political discourse, journalism (Evé's Century, 1999), collected letters and memoirs as well as sociological studies concerned with 19th century women's roles and their impact on the social environment (Wayne, 2006).

Our approach is based on the observation that the mid-century was marked by turning-point events involving the (re-)unification of the country (the Great Union of 1859 in Romania), The War of Independence in 1877. They opened the road for important social, economic and cultural changes and left their unmistakable marks on literature creating the conditions for the late ascendancy of realism. The representation of what was considered a successful woman changed accordingly. We intend to explore the changes at the level of the traditional roles performed by women, especially those of wife, mother and “love provider” as well as in respect to those qualities that women had to emulate in order to be considered “successful”, such as purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness (Barbara Welter).

The women writers explored the changes of the traditional roles performed by women, especially those of lover, wife, mother, as well as those qualities that women had to emulate in order to be considered “successfully”, such as purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness. It is important to observe that, starting with 1880, the New Woman changed – in theory and in reality – the canons of the American and the Romanian literature, influencing the lives of the writers and strengthening the literature with feminine characters, as well as with new forms and themes.

The appearance of women as writers in the Romanian society was a slow process that became clearer at the end of the 19th century. The first novel written by a woman was published under the pseudonym Doamna L (Maria Movila) – Omul muntelui [The Man of the Mountain] (1858). Other women writers also used pen names: Dora d’Istria (Elena Ghica) –Smara (Smaranda Gheorghiu) and Carmen Sylva (Queen Elisabeta). At the beginning of their career, most of the Romanian women writers were journalists: Sofia Nadeje, Maria Flechtenmacher, Eugenia Ianculescu de Reuss like their opposite numebrs in America, Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern.

A comparative study of late 19th century American and Romanian women’s writing, would address changes, diversification and conflicts in women’s roles as part of a slow but steady process of emancipation—the move away from the Victorian cult of domesticity to a new awareness of the opportunities offered to women by the rapid pace of the country’s modernization and economic growth. At the literary level, the study aims to connect the representations of women’s roles with the idiosyncrasies of the transition from romanticism to realism generated by the endurance of the tradition of romance and the persistence of the deeply rooted cult of domesticity. It also aims to draw attention to the impact of women’s presence on the literary scene, and to the emergence of a women’s literary tradition like the fiction writers, local colourists (mentioned above as well as feminists and abolitionists like Lydia Child, Margaret Fuller, Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth.

Our taxonomy of women’s roles is based on the eight role-generating areas suggested by Tiffany Wayne in her book Women’s Roles in Nineteenth-century America (2006): 1) "Marriage and family life" (women as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters), divorce - Constanta Marino-Moscu, Ada Lazu, abortion - Sofia Nadeje, Patimi [Passion], prostitution (Elena Vacarescu, Vraja [The Spell] or
Smara, Fata tatii [The Daddy’s Girl], domestic violence (Constanta Hodos, Trei surori [Three Sisters], incest (Constanta Hodos, Din acelasi sange [From the Same Blood] and Smara, The Ice Floe), interethnic marriages Lydia Maria Child, Hobomok, Constan
ta Hodos, Evreica [The Jewish Girl]; 2) "Work" (women in the paid workforce and women’s unpaid work in the household economy), financially independent woman Loïsa May Alcott’s Work, Sof
ia Nadejde’s Robia banului [The Slave of Money]; 3) “Religion” (women as churchgoers, reformers, missionaries, and preachers); 4) “Education” (from women with almost no access to formal education to women in leading roles as teachers and college administrators, and women in professions such as medicine, the law and the ministry) or deficiencies of the girls’ education (Constanta Hodos, The Little Hand), lack of sexual education (Constanta Hodos, The Bracelet); 5) “Politics and Reform” (women’s active roles in politics and reform); 6) ”Slavery”: (women slaves, the experience of freedom); 7) “The West” (the westward movement featuring pioneer women who settled in the West and native women who were confronted with the advance of the frontier); 8) “Literature and the Arts” (an increasing numbers of women writers and artists who laid the foundations of an American women’s tradition of literature and the arts).

The advantage of these role-generating categories is that they apply, with several significant differences, to Romanian women’s writing of the same period; therefore we can use them as the locus of our comparative project.

The non-literary texts are taken from newspapers, speeches, memoirs, letters and critical work. (Catharine Beecher, Fanny Fern, Sarah J. Hale and Margaret Fuller) and they are juxtaposed with literary texts dealing with the same role-generating area. In the case of the “Literature and Arts” role-generating area, for instance, the literary texts will include short stories and novels in which the main characters are women artists (Harriet Prescott Spofford’s Circumstance, Louisa May Alcott’s Work or A Modern Mephistopheles), writers (Constance Fenimore Woolson’s Miss Grief, Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women, Eugenia Lanculescu de Reuss, Spre dezrobire [Toward Emancipation], or newspaper columnists (Fanny Fern’s Ruth Hall) while the non-literary texts will be selected from materials I hope to find in American archives.

The article will analyse the modelling factors in constructing the identity of women in the 19th century Romanian and American society approaching this issue from three main perspectives: a socio-cultural and historical one, dealing with the transition from rural/agrarian to urban/industrial ways and values of life; an aesthetic one, dealing with the erosion of conventions and stereotypes and the mutations produced in the representations of womanhood by the transition from romanticism to realism and a comparative one, engaging a parallel between Romanian and American society and culture: comparative perspectives on various writers on issues such as: strategies of feminist discourse, women’s economic independence, women in transcultural representations of slavery, social conformity and individual fulfilment in society novels, female characters and the rural environment in 19th century fiction.

The 19th century Romanian patriarchal society was characterised by deep social divisions between rural and urban population, ethnic groups, educated and illiterate people, landlords and peasants. It was forbidden for women to step into the public, civil or economic spaces considered as belonging traditionally to men. The only space attributed to woman was the private space of family, but here the woman had only commitments towards her parents, husband, and children. Man’s authority and woman’s submissiveness were considered as social and human rules. This clear division of responsibilities suggested different codes of behaviour. The man had to be resistent, rational and superior while the woman had to be affective, sensitive, and compassionate. She had to obey her husband and her mother-in-law. In his story Soacra cu trei nurori [A Mother With Three Daughters-in-Law], Ion Creangă defines the prototype of the Romanian mother-in-law who checks her daughters-in-law all the time with a third Cyclopic eye:  “I’ll keep a strict eye on the daughters-in-law, I’ll make them work, and keep a tight rein on them, not letting them out of doors when my sons are away. That’s how my mother-in-law, may God rest her in peace!, behaved towards me. And my husband, may God forgive him!, could not complain I deceived him or squandered things...although at times he did suspect me and kicked me some...but now it’s all water under the bridge!” [Creangă, 1881], and Sofia Nadejde wrote many short-stories in which she uses irony to caricature this type of character Soacră, soacră, poamă acră [Mother in Law, Mother in Law, You Sour Fruit], Sfârșitul unei iubiri [An End].

The woman’s juridic-civil status and her inferior role were emphasized by the adoption of the The •

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Napoleonean Civil Code in 1865 that granted men a superior position and limited women to a passive role of being only a mother, tutor and administrator of the family’s income. The adoption of this code meant a regress for the woman’s civil role in Romanian Principalities. Even if The Calimach Code in 1817 in Moldavia and The Caragea Code in 1818 in Wallachia situated the family under man’s authority, they also granted women little autonomy in family.

Taking account of the era’s novel and short story separation of home and production, of public and private life, the doctrine of separate spheres sought to restrict women’s rights while simultaneously glorified them and praised the family in an era of individualism. Although the women’s movement of the late nineteenth century contributed to the transformation of women’s social roles, it did not reject a separate, unique female identity.

Most American feminists did not adopt the radical demands for equal status with men that originated at the different Convention of 1848. Rather, they preferred to retain membership in a separate female sphere, one which they did not believe to be inferior to men’s sphere and one in which women could be free to create their own forms of personal, social and political relationships. The achievements of feminism at the turn of the century came less through gaining access to the male domains of politics and the professions than in the tangible form of building separate female institutions. At work, in social life, and in politics, middle-class women hoped to become equals by adopting men’s values and integrating into their institutions.

Except for the field of medicine, where women’s institutions served the needs of women physicians and students, talented women were blocked from entering legal, political, and academic professions by male-dominated institutions and networks. In the 1890s the social settlement movement supplied a perfect structure for women seeking secular means of influencing society because it collectivised their talents; it provided them with access to the male political arena while preserving their independence from male-dominated institutions.

From the juridic-economic point of view, the situation of working class women was similar to those belonging to high society, but their situation differed significantly from the economic point of view. The bourgeois women, who did not have personal income or could not dispose freely of their dowry, were economically dependent on the members of their family. Even if the working women were economically independent, they were inferior to men because they got less money while having performed the same work. They did not have access to an educational institution in order to be able to make commercial transactions. It was impossible for them to make deals or to buy shares on the Stock Exchange. Always considered as a supplement to the family’s budget, the women’s salary was inferior due to its status.

The housewife was the only woman considered to have a social status. Her ideal was to be a good wife and a perfect mother. She did not distinguish herself due to her personality but to her love for her family. She belonged to others and her home was her vital space. A housewife’s main activities were going shopping, saving money, cleaning, and taking care of her husband and children. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story If I Were a Man, the main female character turns into her husband, and she discovered in her pockets some money: “All at once, with a deep rushing sense of power and pride, she felt what she had never felt before in all her life – the possession of money, of her own earned money – hers to give or withhold, not ot beg for, tease for, wheedle for – hers.”

In rural society, the woman is the one that keeps the house in good order and manages the little income. The domestic violence represented the main feature of a marriage in the peasantry class (as in the working class); this is the main reason women set forth by when they chose to divorce. It was admitted the man’s total control over the woman who was considered a simple object. A wife permanently lived being afraid of her husband. Sofia Nădejde draws the readers’ attention towards the peasant woman’s life “who suffers for herself and for her children while her husband often makes her suffer for imaginary reasons. Together with her children she suffers from hunger and cold. Because her husband comes home late and he finds only poverty and hunger in the hut, he looks for a victim to revenge his misfortunes. He sees his wife. And starts beating her. As we can easily notice she suffers because the society’s tyranny but also the despotism her husband shows towards her.”

The mainstream 19th century culture focused on an ideal woman in the family. Anxieties about political upheaval, the psychological implications of secularization, and the radical transformation of

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5 Nădejde, Sofia. “Starea femeii si mijlocul prin care se vor putea emancipa” (“The Woman’s Status and the Way Through Which She Will Emancipate”). Femeia româna [Romanian Woman], anul II, no. 122, 31 mai 1979: 12
work and life style appeared in the form of a quest for control and purity staged within the family around a cult of domestic woman. When the doctrine of the separate public versus private spheres (Locke, Rousseau, or John Stuart Mill) was launched, the work was attributed to the man, while the woman was given the private space. In 1854, the English poet Coventry Patmore published *The Angel in the House*, describing an idealised family life. This normative model of the demure wife who creates a haven for her husband in a well-ordered home is present in poems, novels, magazines for women. Thus, in their writings, the 19th century authors idealized the image of the devoted, home-loving woman and often militated for a united marriage, thus, as a result of this mentality, there are very few short stories or novels that present aspects of divorce and its consequences.

Until the end of the 19th century, the divorced woman appeared very seldom as a character. The divorce is a subject that will be approached later by the women writers in their writings while they started a powerful women’s rights crusade that challenged the cult of domesticity. Their novels, short stories or articles raised the consciousness of many women who had long suffered being trapped in their domestic roles.

In accordance with the two Codes the ecclesiastic instances pronounced many divorces that were solved later by the civil Court Laws. The highest rate of the divorce cases are registered among the high society members, when new marriages were already settled. In accordance with art. 385 of *The Civil Code*, there was some dignity in the widows’ dower rights acknowledged by common law which recognized the right of married women to acquire a separate estate, over which the husband’s customary common-laws rights did not extend. When the *Napoleonic Code* became the constitutional law in Romanian Principalities women’s rights were left in a position of inferiority as compared to men, not only with regard to political rights, but also with civil rights.

In Great Britain, United States and the Romanian Principalities, married women received priority in the agitation for property law revision, single women in the push for employment and educational gains.

In the manifest article “Ce voim” [“What We Want’"] of the weekly magazine *Revista noastră [Our Magazine]*, Sofia Nădejde promises to analyse the celibacy issue “a serious matter from the social, economic, and moral points of view”. The women’s right to celibacy will be claimed later due to feminist writers. Some women said they had chosen the celibacy because the men were not good enough. Their choosiness was possible, however, because the new opportunities for women to work.

The first women struggling to establish themselves in professional careers immediately ran into problems over how to balance the demands of career and the desire for a family. Romanian feminists, like French, British or American ones, saw educational advancement as a key to their emancipation, and stressed the need for new employment opportunities for women as a right, an alternative to marriage, and a means of alleviating hardship among women who lack male support. Even so, it is plain that whereas the right to paid work beyond the home was especially important to middle-class feminists, working-class women had their own priorities and might be more sceptical about its intrinsic value.

Political life becomes the organization of the society and distribution of power between men who are heads of families. The ultimate goal of political life is the production of good men. Women and children have only defective reason, therefore it is proper, according to Aristotle, that husbands should rule over their wives and children within the household. Men participate in the public sphere of politics, women are relegated to the private sphere of the household. This way of constructing the relationship of women and men to private and public life respectively has remained ubiquitous for the last two thousand years. It is the only recently that feminism has begun to challenge it.

For a variety of reasons, partly because of their exclusion from male organizations and partly because of cultural beliefs that emphasized the differences between women and men, women’s political culture flourished in separate institutions. A major strength of Romanian feminism prior to 1938, (1920 in United States, 1928 in Great Britain) was the separate female community that helped sustain women’s participation in both social reform and political activism.

It also can be determined the extent to which women’s political power and activities flowed from their collective life as coresidents and friends and the degree to which this power was attributable to their close affiliation with male reformers and male institutions.

### 4 Conclusion

The women are excluded from any political right. Their role is to be a muse or an ideal. The French people had their Marianne, whose presence revives the Revolution. The Republic is represented as an energetic young woman, flagship for vestals and
Roman Charity. Influenced by the Revolution, the Romanian painters will often follow the French paradigms, C. D. Rosenthal—România revoluționară [The Revolutionary Romania]. România rupându-și cătușele pe Câmpia Libertății [Romania Breaking off Her Chains on the Field of Liberty]. In the basic norms of their lives, Romanian and other European or American women were essentially alike: excluded from politics, accorded an inferior education, leading domestic lives, uncomfortably placed if single, and taking pleasure in their children, family, friends and religion.

The year 1848 represents the beginning of a new era for Romanian women. They involved in politics and fight for their social emancipation taking part actively into the historical events, the Revolution of 1848, the (re)-unification of the country (the Great Union of 1859 in Romania), the War of Independence 1877-1879, Romanian Unitary State in 1918.

In July 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention drew up a Declaration of Sentiments based on the U.S. Declaration of Independence that had, in 1776, separated the United States from Britain. The Declaration stipulated: the right of women to their children in a divorce case, the right to testify against a cruel husband in court, the right of women to enter various kinds of jobs and to keep their salaries instead of turning money over their husbands and the right of women to vote.

The feminism appeared as a consequence of the women’s need their personal identity to be taken into account on the social stage. Constanța De Dunca–Schiau affirms that “the feminism must be considered as the most important social issue for a state. Each nation will become smaller or bigger due to its women. For a nation, the feminism represents a matter of life and death”.

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