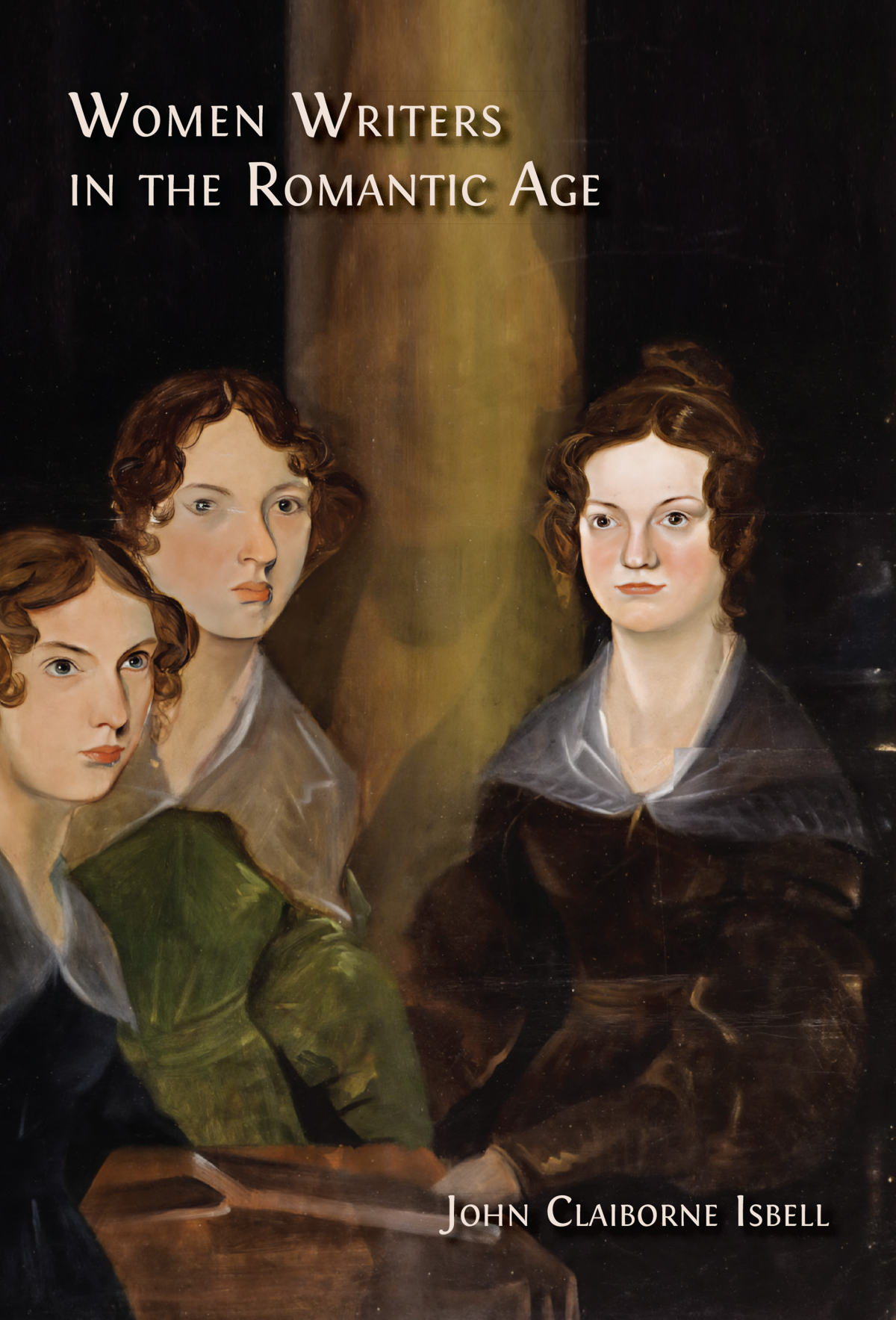
Women Writers in the Romantic Age



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Cover image: the Brontë sisters (Anne, Emily and Charlotte) by Patrick Branwell Brontë, oil on canvas, ca. 1834. ©National Portrait Gallery, London

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6. Writers from Ottoman Europe

As we have seen in Latin America, this study traces stories of national independence. The Ottomans took Constantinople in 1453, but they had occupied Bulgaria since 1396. Ottoman Europe was a reality into the twentieth century: the Greeks attained independence in 1821–1832, the Serbians in 1804–1835, the Romanians in 1877, the Bulgarians in 1878–1908, and the Albanians in 1912. In the period 1776–1848, only Serbia and Greece attained independence; it is perhaps indicative that my English-language sources revealed no Albanian or Bulgarian women writers during the period, and few elsewhere—one Greek, one Romanian, three Serbian. One would imagine that more are waiting to be rediscovered.

Greece (1 writer)

Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou

Αυτοβιογραφία (1821)

Εἰς τοῦτον τὸν καιρόν, δηλαδὴ τῇ 25 Μαρτίου 1821 τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ, ἔρχεται ὁ ποτὲ διδάσκαλός μου, Θεοδόσιος Δημάδης καὶ μᾶς κάμνει γνωστὸν μὲ πολλήν του χαράν, πῶς οἱ Γραικοὶ ἀνήγειραν τὰ ὅπλα ἐναντίον τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν, πῶς ἡ Πάτρα καὶ οἱ πλησίον της χώραις ἤδη εἶχον σείσει τὸν ζυγὸν τῆς σκλαβίας, καὶ πῶς οἱ ἐπίλοιπαις χώραις, κατὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν ἴσως, εἶχαν τότε καμωμένον τὸ ἴδιον, ἀλλὰ ὡς πλέον μακράν, ἀκόμη ἡ εἴδησις δὲν ἦτον φθασμένη εἰς τὴν Ζάκυνθον. Οὕτως εἶπεν ὁ μαῦρος, διότι τέτοια ἦτον ἡ φήμη ὀποῦ παρευθὺς ἐτρεξεν. Ἐγὼ εἰς τὰ λόγια του ἄκουσα τὸ αἷμα μου νὰ ζεσταίνη, ἐπεθύμησα ἀπὸ καρδίας νὰ ἤθελεν ἠμπορῶ νὰ ζωστῶ ἄρματα, ἐπεθύμησα ἀπὸ καρδίας νὰ ἤθελε ἠμπορῶ νὰ τρέξω διὰ νὰ δώσω βοηθειαν εἰς ἀνθρώπους, ὀποῦ δι᾽ ἄλλο (καθὼς εφαίνετο) δεν επολεμούσαν, παρά διά θρησκείαν και διά πατρίδα, καὶ διὰ ἐκείνην τὴν ποθητὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡ ὁποία καλῶς μεταχειριζομένη, συνηθᾶ νὰ προξενῆ τὴν ἀθανασίαν, τὴν δόξαν, τὴν εὐτυχίαν τῶν λαών. Ἐπεθύμησα, εἶπα, ἀπὸ καρδίας, ἀλλὰ ἐκύτταξα

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τοὺς τοίχους τοῦ σπητιοῦ ὁποῦ μὲ ἐκρατοῦσαν κλεισμένην, ἐκύτταξα τὰ μακρὰ φορέματα τῆς γυναικείας σκλαβίας καὶ ἐνθυμήθηκα πως είμαι γυναῖκα, καὶ περιπλέον γυναῖκα Ζακυνθία καὶ αναστέναξα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔλειψα ὅμως ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ παρακαλέσω τὸν Οὐρανὸν διὰ νὰ ἤθελε τοὺς βοηθήση νὰ νικήσουν, καὶ τοιούτης λογῆς νὰ ἀξιωθῶ καὶ ἐγὼ ἡ ταλαίπωρος νὰ ἰδῶ εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐπιστρεμμένην τὴν ἐλευθερίαν καὶ μαζὺ μὲ αὐτὴν ἐπιστρεμμένας εἰς τὰς καθέδρας τους τὰς σεμνὰς Μούσας, ἀπὸ τὰς ὁποίας ἡ τυραννία τῶν Τούρκων τόσον καὶ τόσον καιρὸν τὰς ἐκρατοῦσε διωγμένας.[1]

My Story

At this time, that is, on the 25th of March, 1821, the day of the Annunciation, my teacher, Theodosios Dēmadēs, comes and with much joy makes it known to us that the Greeks had raised arms against the Ottomans, that Patras and the nearby towns already had shaken off the yoke of slavery, and that the remaining towns, perhaps according to an agreement, had done the same, but, since Zakynthos was far away, the news had not arrived here yet. This is how the poor man spoke, for that was the rumor, and, upon hearing it, he ran to tell us. Hearing his words, I felt my blood warming up, I wished in my heart that I could take up arms, I wished in my heart that I could run to give help to those people who (apparently) did not fight for anything else but for their religion and their country, and for that longed-for freedom which, when used well, brings immortality, glory, and happiness to people. I wished, as I said, in my heart, but then I looked at the walls of the house which kept me confined, I looked at the long dresses of women's slavery, and I remembered that I am a woman, and, furthermore, a woman of Zakynthos, and I sighed, but I did not fail to ask God to help them win and thus even I, miserable as I am, would be able to see freedom return to Greece and, along with it, the modest Muses, whom the tyranny of the Turks kept away for such a long time.[2]

It seems illustrative of the challenges facing women authors that Moutzan-Martinengou's more than fifteen plays, in addition to her autobiography, have been erased from the record. Her one surviving comedy is absent in the major libraries of Europe and America—Paris, London, Berlin, Washington D.C.; Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, Berkeley, Harvard—and the fragmented autobiography that survives has been heavily edited by her son.

So, is her redacted autobiography any good? Well, this extract is

1 Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou, *Αυτοβιογραφία*, ed. K. Porphyrēs (Athens: Keimena, 1983), pp. 59–60.

2 Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou, *My Story*, tr. Helen Dendrinou Kolias (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 30.

memorable for a couple of reasons. First, it relates a Greek's first reaction to news of the Greek uprising against the Turks—that quintessential Romantic struggle which Delacroix painted and for which Byron gave his life in 1824. Second, that Greek citizen is a woman, clad in "the long dresses of women's slavery." The text interests then both from a revolutionary and a feminist perspective. One might call it thrilling; based on this extract, it hardly seems to merit near-universal oblivion.

Let us look at the passage more closely. In it, Moutzan-Martinengou situates her narrative: she is off the west coast of the Peloponnese. Greece has 227 inhabited islands, to which news of necessity came more slowly than to the mainland—"since Zakynthos was far away, the news had not arrived here yet." The year is 1821, and the day, rather fittingly, that of the Annunciation; Turkey had occupied Greece since the fall of Constantinople, or some four hundred years, and now, freedom was coming. The male announcer of this news runs in, and the author focuses on her female reaction. Her blood warmed, she says, thinking of a people at war for religion, for country, for liberty, source of "happiness to people." In other words, the author, kept shut up in her island home in Turkish-occupied Greece, is at ease with Romantic talk of national self-determination. That in itself is newsworthy, as is the mention of the author's domestic prison and her opinion of it. Her conclusion is curious—her desire to see restored to their seats the modest Muses, to see Greek art flourish again. One may recall that the nine Muses are all female, and that writing has a preponderance among them.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of this text is the contrast between the teacher, who runs in to give the news, and the female pupil, who cannot leave the house. She wished, she tells the page four times in this brief extract, to run help the cause. But she could not. She could only write about it. Moutzan-Martinengou, in conclusion, is the only Greek woman writer my initial search revealed for the Romantic period 1776–1848. There are surely others—other women who put pen to paper during those seventy years in which Greek independence was forged. One wonders what their texts might have to say.

Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou (2 October 1801–9 November 1832), born in Zakynthos, was pressured by her aristocratic family to marry. After a failed attempt to leave the island, she accepted marriage to Nicholas Martinegos in 1831, after long negotiations about the dowry.

She died in childbirth the following year. Besides her autobiography, published heavily redacted by her son in 1881, Moutzan wrote more than fifteen plays in both Greek and Italian, also translating from *The Odyssey, Prometheus Bound*, and *The Suppliants* and writing poetry, works on economics and on poetic theory. Of these, one comedy, some letters and poems, and various fragments have survived.[3]

Romania (1 writer)

Dora d'Istria [pen name of **Duchess Helena Koltsova-Massalskaya**, née **Elena Ghica** or **Gjika**] (22 January 1828–17 November 1888), born in Bucharest, was the niece of the then reigning Prince of Wallachia. She was educated in Vienna, Venice, and Berlin. Returning to Wallachia in 1849, she married the Russian Duke Alexander Koltsov-Massalski. After some years in Russia, Dora d'Istria traveled to Switzerland, Greece, then Florence where she settled. After 1855, her voluminous writings—on monastic orders, on the emancipation of women, on Ottoman poetry, on her travels—showed her proficiency in French, German, Romanian, Italian, Ancient and Modern Greek, Latin, and Russian as well as her grasp of science and her progressive views. After 1866, she was also a leading spokesperson for the Albanian nationalist cause.[4]

Serbia (3 writers)

Eustahija Arsić (14 March 1776–17 February 1843), born in Irig (then part of southern Hungary), spoke Serbian, Hungarian, German, Romanian, Church Slavonic, Italian, Latin, and some English. She was married and widowed three times: to a Mr. Lacković, to Toma Radovanović, then to Sava Arsić, at which point she began her literary activity. Her salon in Arad welcomed Dositej Obradović, Joakim Vukić, Vuk Karadžić and other Serbian nationalist writers; she also translated the Enlightenment writers Voltaire, Wieland, and James Thomson. Arsić was the first female member of Matica srpska and contributed to its

3 Elisavet Moutzan-Martinengou, *My Story*, tr. Helen Dendrinou Kolias (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

4 Antonio D'Alessandri, *Il pensiero e l'opera di Dora d'Istria fra Oriente europeo e Italia* (Roma: Gangemi, 2008).

periodical *Letopis*. Her works appeared in 1814–1816 and 1829.[5]

Ana Marija Marović (7 February 1815–3 October 1887), who lived in Italy and Montenegro, was a Serbian writer and painter. She spoke Serbian and Italian. In 1952, a cause for her beatification was opened by the Catholic Church, and she was declared a Servant of God.[6]

Princess Anka Obrenović, later **Anka Konstantinović** (1 April 1821–10 June 1868), born in Belgrade, was the niece of Serbia's first Obrenović ruler. Known as *Anka pomodarka* [Anka the fashionable], she played the piano and did not wear Turkish garb. Obrenović published in periodicals including *Danica ilirska*; her volume of translations in 1836 was the first literary work published by a woman in Serbia. The Croatian poet Antun Mihanović asked for her hand but was denied. In 1842, she married Alexander Konstantinović, establishing a salon in 1860. That year, her cousin became Prince Michael III of Serbia; Obrenović lived at court. The two were assassinated together in 1868. The modern pretender to the Montenegrin throne is her descendant.[7]

Albania (0 writers)

I have identified zero Albanian women authors in this period. Further research clearly remains to be done.

Bulgaria (0 writers)

I have identified zero Bulgarian women authors in this period. Further research clearly remains to be done.

5 Živan Milisavac, ed. *Jugoslovenski književni leksikon* [Yugoslav Literary Lexicon], 2nd edition (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1984).

6 Vlatko Perčin, *Ana Marija Marović - Monografski prikaz života i rada* (Zagreb: Bogdan Malešević, 1997).

7 Celia Hawkesworth. *Voices in the Shadows: Women and Verbal Art in Serbia and Bosnia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000).