

Sophie von La Roche, *Pomona. Zeitschrift für Deutschlands Töchter* [*Pomona. Magazine for Germany's Daughters*] (1783)

Abstract

Pomona was the first magazine that was explicitly aimed at German women. The magazine was edited by Sophie von La Roche (1730–1807) and appeared monthly for two years. The topics included, among other things, women's education, the proper upbringing, and household tasks; it featured reading suggestions specifically for women, and translations of modern English and French literature. The magazine was part of an early group of German women's magazines that addressed a female readership from the upper middle class and the nobility. In the preface, the editor described the purpose of the magazine—to teach German women how to be useful and pleasing to German men. She thus connected a specific form of “femininity” with German patriotism or nationalism.

Source

A. *Pomona for Germany's Daughters*, by Sophie von La Roche

First issue.

January 1783.

To my readers.

The *Magazine for Women* and the *Yearbook of Memorabilia for the Fair Sex* show my readers what German men consider useful and pleasing in us. *Pomona* will tell you what I as a woman think about it. But I will also give you excerpts and reports from writings that were composed for us in England, Italy, and France, and what new information my correspondence with various people who reside in those countries provides to me, so that an issue, like this first one, always speaks of German thought and matters, then of pleasant French news, and then again of English and also Italian news that can bring my sex some pleasure. However, I would be delighted if, after this first issue has been read, I were to be told what my readers desire from *Pomona*.

Sophie von La Roche

B. *Pomona for Germany's Daughters*, by Sophie von La Roche

Eighth issue.

August 1783.

On Germany

Now I have come to the month that is to be dedicated to the homegrown merits of Germany's daughters. *Pomona* once said that, in accordance with the rules of courtesy, she spoke first about foreigners. But I wish here to make known another reason. I hoped, through this delay, to gather more names and reports about German women: but the lovely profusion of outstanding persons of our sex is the reason why the men to whom I turned for these reports answered me [as follows]:

I know many women with excellent minds; I have seen many of their works, but I may neither name them nor make anything about their papers known.

As I received this kind of answer from various regions of our Germany, this lofty trait, modesty, must constitute a part of the national character and must be counted among the national blessings, because modesty is always the companion of greater virtues.

Hail to my fatherland for its noble daughters, who help establish this important part of the general happiness with their agreeable characteristics!

A sensible and fine man wrote to me in response to the reproach that “the German is not as fair about the merits of his wife as the men of other countries are about their wives”—and that was the reason why I did not receive a list of deserving names:

“The list became too long, and still many were forgotten.”

At that point, my beloved [Anne-Marie Fiquet] du Boccage again came to mind. When she, on the way to Italy, read the words of praise written on the stone wall of the Alps to honor the King of Sardinia for widening the road and providing it with railings, Boccage said very nicely:

Good actions of princes are etched in stone and bronze—ours are written in sand. But our merit is greater because we do good without seeking praise or reward.

I dedicate the application of this thought to every daughter of the Teutons who remains hidden out of modesty. May she perceive it as a reward and view it as a flower that I would have woven with pleasure into the wreath which should include her name.

Most of the admirable people whom I know myself, the tone and contents of the large number of letters that I received with and without signatures from all parts of Germany because of *Pomona* convince me that the true merit of good thinking and the charming gift of expressing oneself delicately and gracefully is [sic] generally widespread.

The size of my readership is invaluable to me, not only because of the honor my readers pay me, not because of the remuneration for my pages, but because of the delightful feeling that filled me at the thought that:

So many hundreds of persons believe good things so easily, so gladly, on the reassurance that a single creature gives them. May the best spirit guide my heart and my pen, in order to maintain this high-minded belief in my merit—in order to fulfill the hope which in the host of beautiful, good souls looks to *Pomona*!!

My readers have raised my belief in people’s inherent goodness, and this makes me so happy that I thank you for it. The letters so beautifully written in German prove to me at the same time that you love our mother tongue. And you also made me happy because I know many German families in which the children learn the French language earlier than that of their fatherland; the latter is still necessary in any case, not only to be able to explain their views to their friends and their wishes to servants, but also with it to understand workers and merchants and to read our own good authors. Madame [Anne-Thérèse Marguenat de Courcelles, Marquise] de St. Lambert says,

It is entirely reprehensible when a person does not know the history of their fatherland.

How much more sharply would she have judged the lack [of knowledge] of one’s mother tongue? How strange it

must seem to foreigners, as well as to natives, to hear it said in old German households in the middle of Germany:

I want to believe that the book you are speaking of is good, but I do not understand the German language well enough.

Or if the request is made of a person:

Speak French—I cannot express myself in German—French is easier for me and I am more fluent.

No other nation has the same degree of indulgence, and self-degradation, as we do. To favor oneself above everyone else is both unfair and foolish, but to always slight oneself in the end produces a kind of slave mentality that leads far beyond the bounds of modesty to debasement. The perpetual doubt in oneself prevents one from performing thousands of good and nice things which moderate confidence in oneself would have brought about and carried out. Our princes and other men of letters have provided proof of the German mind's capabilities. Our [Gottfried Wilhelm] Leibniz is on equal footing with England's greatest philosophers, and what nation has a king like Friedrich [II] of Prussia? Why wouldn't we have achieved just as much excellence in matters of taste, if we had made an effort to do so?

But at this very moment I am struck by a very likely supposition that provides the reason for our love of imitation:

“Shouldn't the Germans have thought: If we find and develop what is great and important on our own soil, we can always have the dainty playthings delivered from abroad.”

Now it seems to me that everything is in order, and I feel very well at this thought. As it is generally said that the human race retains something of the child, the true devotees of all the new fads seem to me to be good children of my fatherland who like to have new playthings, and I only wish that at the same time they will sometimes think about the ingenious diligence of the people who produce the adorable items of attire and tasty morsels.

[...]

Source: I. *Pomona für Teutschlands Töchter*, edited by Sophie von La Roche, First issue, January 1783, pp. 2–3. Available online at: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10614952-3>; II.: *Pomona für Teutschlands Töchter*, edited by Sophie von La Roche, Eighth issue, August 1783, pp. 725–30. Available online at: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10614954-4>

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Recommended Citation: Sophie von La Roche, *Pomona. Zeitschrift für Teutschlands Töchter* [Pomona. Magazine for Germany's Daughters] (1783), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-299>> [July 08, 2025].