"Memory, Though, is as Strong as Hope". Queen Marie of Romania and her War Literature

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Queen Marie of Romania is acknowledged nowadays both by researchers and public opinion as one of the most important personalities in the Romanian history of the first half of the twentieth century, especially for the prominent role she played during First World War. Marie's father, Prince Albert of Edinburgh, was the second son of famous British Queen Victoria, while her mother, Great Duchess Maria, was daughter to the Russian Tzar Alexander II. It was quite natural for Queen Marie to encourage her husband Ferdinand, King of Romania, to enter the war on England and Russia's side. Marie believed that England could never be defeated, but her political choice expressed also the attachment to the Romanian national ideal. For Ferdinand, joining the Entente and fighting against his native country was a hard moral choice. On the contrary, for Marie this war was her chance to become a real queen, the one who shared the cause of her people: "At the Great Hour my country and I were one", she confessed in *The Story of My Life*. And indeed, during the war, many people reportedly wished her to become the "empress of all Romanians". Marie devoted herself to the ideal of Great Romania and acted during World War I like no other modern queen before, at the same time conscious of the difficult position she assumed. Her steady opposition to the separate peace with Germany, decided by the Romanian government in the spring of 1918 was the outrageous peak of her political commitment, but also her winning card at the Peace Conference in Paris, where the Queen had been dispatched in order to plead for Romania's claims. Undoubtedly, it was exceptional for a royal woman in a conservative country to be involved with the politics of war, with public administration or war propaganda. She took an active part in the building and organizing of war hospitals and facilities (an ambulance service, sanitary trains, refugee shelters), in the providing and distribution of medical or food supplies for the army and for civilians (Ciupală 2017: 97–105, 199–225)[1]. She performed military, political, diplomatic and charity duties,

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[1] In *Bătălia lor. Femeile din România în Primul Război Mondial* [Their battlefield. Women in Romania during First World War], first book in contemporary Romanian historiography on the subject, Alin Ciupală mentions Queen's many initiatives and activities during the war.

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apart from royal official responsibilities. Her intimate war diary recently published for the first time by historian Lucian Boia proves she was the heart of a network made of people and institutions which tried to manage those difficult situations and problems where state policies and government's actions failed. An innate perception of life, typically English, made her prefer taking action instead lamenting over tragedies: "My English blood refuses disaster", she proudly admitted in her autobiography. Marie's empathy, generosity and faith, probably inherited from her Russian mother, convinced people to share her own feeling that hope can never be abandoned.

Literature played an important part in Queen Marie's life, public and private. On one side, writing, as well as reading, riding horses or gardening has been a lifelong pleasure for her. She enjoyed telling stories, first to her siblings, later, to her children. She took to writing when one of her daughters encouraged her to put down the "beautiful pictures" she made up for them. During the war, Queen's "beautiful" literature acquired a new moral and political meaning. The books and articles published during the First World War established a relationship of empathy with her people, which doubled the effect of her daily activities: her written words could touch the "hearts" she couldn't reach – she confessed openly this target of her first non-fictional book, *My Country*, in the preface to its post-war 1925 edition[2]. In Romania, she addressed a large audience, from combatant soldiers and officers to women serving in the Red Cross or mothers who lost sons at war. Queen Marie wrote and published between 1917 and 1918 a literature which primarily shared emotions, brought hope and offered an example of resilience to her people. She also addressed an international audience in order to advertise Romania and get support for her country during the war. This article will try to reconsider the literature of Queen Marie, starting from a short summary of its blurred reception. I will try to provide an overview of her war literature and biographical writing with a focus on her autobiography *The Story of My Life*.

Nowadays literary historians scarcely showed any interest in her literary production, probably due to the local lack of interest in the genre of war literature, even if remarkable diaries and memories related to The First World War have resurfaced recently, some of them written by women connected to the Royal Court. On the contrary, Romanian historians who dedicated books or studies to Queen Marie praised her literary activities: Alin Ciupală noticed the significant place her literature hold throughout her life and underlined the importance of her literature during the war. Some historians also advanced a critical judgement on its literary value: Ion Bulei considers *The Lily of Life* and *My Country* her best books (Bulei 2019: 32), while Lucian Boia, editor of the war diary appreciates its remarkable novel-like qualities (Boia 2015: 12–13). Alin Ciupală also quotes one of Marie's

[2] *My Country* appeared for the first time in an English edition of 69 pages, at London, New York, Toronto in 1916; it was translated into Romanian and published by Nicolae Iorga with his newspaper "Neamul românesc" ("Romanian Folk"), numbers 3–4, in 1917. At his suggestion, Marie wrote other chapters related to the exile experience. Part I together with Part II, also translated by Iorga, were published in a Romanian edition in two volumes at Jassy in 1917; a third edition appeared in 1919 at Sibiu. The new English edition of *My Country* (Part I and II) was released in 1925 with Duckworth (London) and Brentano (New York) under a slightly changed title: *The Country that I love. An exile's memories.*

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articles issued in "Le Figaro", praised at the epoch by the French for its elegant style (Ciupală 2017: 273).

The earliest mention of her literary activities comes from a female writer, Argentina Monteoru, editor at the popular newspaper "Adevărul". She authored in 1915 a booklet which celebrated the first poem published by Queen Marie (unfortunately with no reference on the poem itself). Beside the eulogy of the queen's artistic achievements, Monteoru hoped that Marie of Romania would be an example for all Romanian women artists. Twenty years later, in 1935, Queen Marie was indeed one of the authors selected in the first anthology of Romanian women writers, *Evoluția scrisului feminin în România* [The evolution of women's writing in Romania], where her autobiography, the "only story of a royal destiny" ever published until then was highly praised for its "truth" (Miller-Verghy, Săndulescu 1935: 130). It's no coincidence that many women closely connected to the Court have been authors of diaries and memories: Irina Procopiu, Arabella Yarka, Sabina Cantacuzino, Alexandrina Falcoianu or Jeana Fodoreanu (Procopiu, Yarka and Fodoreanu closely connected to Marie herself). The Court of Romania, even from the beginning of the twentieth century, nourished a cosmopolitan cultural milieu where diary and biographical writing was at great esteem, encouraged by the example of the first Romanian sovereigns. King Carol I released the first German edition of his memories in 1903, followed by other German and Romanian versions[3]. Queen Marie openly admitted she had been encouraged to become a writer by her aunt, Queen Elisabeth of Romania, a prolific author under the pseudonym Carmen Sylva, but she may have found the proper source of inspiration for her non-fictional work in the more objective memorial literature of the king, *Memoriile Regelui Carol, de un martor ocular* [Memories of King Carol. By an eye witness]. At her turn, Marie inspired a trend in feminine diary and memorial writing during and after First World War. For example, Jeana Fodoreanu, chief-nurse on one of the queen's sanitary trains, will dedicate to Queen Marie her diary published in the aftermath of the war, while Neli Cornea, a volunteer Red Cross nurse who released a few editions of her diary during the war, made references in her writing to Marie's personal texts she had read in the newspapers.

On the occasion of her coronation as queen, Nicolae Iorga published an encomiastic monograph on Marie (1923), overflowed with quotations from her literature, but with no critical commentary on its literary value. In 1919 E. Lovinescu had dedicated to the Queen of Romania an enthusiastic article in his *In cumpăna vremei* [In the balance of time], but again with no reference to her war literature, even if war literature was one of the volume's topics. For the champion of modernism in Romania, Marie's greatest "merit" was to have nourished faith and hope in her people, but she accomplished her mission only by crying – because of the passivity of her gender: "The Queen cried, because she was a woman" (Lovinescu 1919: 97). A noteworthy and probably unique critical acknowledgement

[3] Vasile Docea, editor and translator of the intimate diary of King Carol I, considers diaristic and memorial writing a usual habit in the Royal House of Romania. In his *Introductive study* to the first volume of Carol's *Diary*, he delivers an overview of the royal family's literary production and legacy (Docea 2007: 5–28).

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of Marie's literature may be found later at Octav Şuluţiu. An independent critic and iconoclastic novelist, himself a diarist, Şuluţiu wrote in 1935 about the newly released Romanian edition of *The Story of My Life* [Povestea vieţii mele]. The two articles, first published in the literary review "Familia" (numbers 7–8 and 9–10), reprinted in the 1938 volume *Pe margini de cărţi* [On some books] provided a short survey of the autobiographical genre in Romania, with King Carol, Al. Marghiloman, C. Stere, E. Lovinescu and N. Iorga as only local representatives (Şuluţiu 1938: 65). Şuluţiu asserts the literary value of Queen Marie's autobiography within this new autobiographical genre. He noticed the refined sensitivity of her memories (Şuluţiu 1938: 74), the evocative power of senses, especially of smell, which reminds him of Proust. He appreciates both the documentary value and the deep psychological insight of the *Story* (Şuluţiu 1938: 77).

Abroad, Marie entrusted her manuscripts to famous publishing houses like Scribner's, Hodder and Stoughton, Duckworth, Cassell or Plon. The project regarding an edition of her memories developed in time, at the suggestion of her editors and somehow as a result of a growing celebrity, especially in the American press. Since the 1920's, a few memories were published in international magazines like Parisian "Excelsior" or "Hearst's International – Cosmopolitan". In 1925 an enlarged edition of *My Country* was printed in London and New York with an explanatory preface and a new title drawing attention to the book's memorial target: *The Country that I love. An exile's memories*. Before *The Story of My Life* appeared in three volumes between 1934–1935 in The United States and Great Britain, excerpts from the first two volumes appeared in a serial in the American magazine "Saturday Evening Post", in 1933–1934. When the autobiography was finally released in English (Romanian, French and Italian editions followed), Marie of Romania was considered, at least in the international media, one of the most famous and "talked-of" women of her time, as the New York editor Charles Scribner put it on the back cover of his edition of *The Story of My Life*.

The best critical tribute from a contemporary voice came from the British writer Virginia Woolf. In December 1934, in the London review "Time and Tide", she wrote an article about the autobiography just released in London that autumn. Her article *Royalty* is the first review by a famous world writer dedicated to a literary work produced in Romania. Of course, the native English language of the *Story* mattered a lot for a reviewer like Virginia Woolf. She was impressed first of all by the challenge of a "royal animal" which broke down the bars of its inherited cage. And Queen Marie managed to escape her golden cage by the force of her writing. Even if Marie was not a Saint-Beuve or Proust, she was definitely "born with a pen in her hand". Virginia Woolf quotes Marie's own confession: even if she knows not the rules of the literary game, she "conjures up beauty and conveys emotion"[4]. *The Story* expressed exactly what she wished: herself.

The autobiography is only part of her life-stories, of a complex work in continuous progress. Through writing, Marie tried to read and reread herself, to put down her memories and rewrite them in new, meaningful stories. Still a Crown

[4] Virginia Woolf, *Royalty*, "Time and Tide", December 1934, available at www.tkinter.smig.net/QueenMarie/VirginiaWoolf/index.htm.

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Princess, in 1912, Marie published her first book, *The Lily of Life*, at Bucharest, in the English language she never abandoned, while in 1913 the important publisher Hodder from London released an edition prefaced by Queen Carmen Sylva and beautifully illustrated by British artist Helen Stratton in the style of Art Nouveau. The same year, a Romanian translation (*Crinul vieții*) taught the readers of her adopted country a lesson on love and sacrifice, truth and purity, which could have been deciphered in a personal, but also national key. Even if a fairytale with symbolical characters, the main symbol of the book – the lily – is nevertheless very personal, related to her childhood and to her earliest memories, as we learn later from *The Story of My Life*:

> It was here in the gardens of the Swiss Cottage that I discovered for the first time the tall Madonna lily (*Lilium Candidum*). It was a revelation to me. Never in memory had I seen flowers more perfectly beautiful; noble, stately, with that something almost sacred about them, probably because of their association with holy pictures. And then their scent! Penetrating beyond words, a heady smell that almost made you a little dizzy or faint. There is a whole world in the perfume of the Madonna lily, something biblical, legendary and almost too good to be true. Besides, they are so tall, so graceful and so shiny that their petals seem to exude light.
>
> Ever since I discovered the marvel of those lilies in the Swiss Cottage garden I have tried to plant them wherever I made a garden. Sometimes I succeeded, and sometimes I failed. Quite lately I have succeeded far beyond my dearest expectations, and that is at Balcic, on a terrace overlooking the Black Sea. Here to my infinite joy they sprang up gloriously, white miracles of light. But although a whole lifetime lies between that lily walk in far Dobrogea and those first lilies I ever saw, in Papa's little garden plot, the scent of the Madonna lily always carries me back to the Swiss Cottage in the Isle of Wight.
>
> How astonishing is the strength of memory! I mention it again, because it is so haunting, that strange force that scent possess, conjuring up as with a magic wand long-forgotten pictures. Pictures of places, of faces, of words spoken, of thoughts thought… Visions, beauty, delight.
>
> The charm of memory – but also its sadness and nostalgia for all that is past, irrevocably past, never to come again, and yet alive in one's heart, unforgettable, a treasure one lives with all the days of one's life (Queen of Roumanie 1934 I: 38–39).

Her debut tried to put into a convenient literary discourse (for that epoch) her inner struggle for self-representation, public and private. Between 1907 and 1923 she displayed herself in photos or postal cards in the company of these flowers, Marian symbols of purity, but also leitmotifs of her own identity. At Balcic, her favourite home built a decade later, a terrace overlooking the Black Sea was bordered with Madonna lilies, and the photo included in the English illustrated edition of 1934 visually recreates the setting. This "lily walk in far Dobrogea" "carries" her back to the Swiss Cottage in the Isle of Wight, where she experienced the first revelation of beauty. *The Lily of Life*, her first book, plotted a romance around a symbol whose personal meaning would be revealed to readers only later, in the autobiography. This fragment about memory's "astonishing strength" proves crucial: memory holds a "treasure" within one's soul – "pictures" which may come to life again through writing. Her memory is her self, an identity discovered, recovered and displayed through writing, as St. Augustine professed in his own *Confessions*.

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As a writer, in search for self-expression, Marie tried various literary discourses: stories for children, novels, short stories, memories, letters, diary and autobiographical writing. She published some books before the war, all, allegorical stories and romances, a kind of fairytales for adults: *Visătorul de vise* [The Dreamer of Dreams, 1913], *Ilderim* (1915), *Patru anotimpuri* [Four Seasons. Out of a Man's Life, 1915], *Regina cea rea* [The Naughty Queen, 1916], *The Stealers of Light. A legend* (1916). She wrote a few diary pages in 1914, when King Carol I died, but she began to write daily in her intimate diary in 1916, on August 14th/ 27th, the day Romania entered the war. She continued to write almost every day during the war and afterwards, with some interruptions in the last years before her death in 1938. A turning point in her life and political career, the year 1916 brought also a change in her literary profile with *My Country*, a book about Romania. First published in English language at London, then in a French edition at Paris in 1917, *My Country* tried to get the sympathy of the allied countries towards Romania. On the cover of the English edition Queen Marie showed up in her regular Red Cross uniform she used to wear during the war, with the announcement that the money from the sales would go to the British Red Cross working on Romanian frontline. Even if it had utilitarian and political targets, *My Country* was the first of her books to talk about herself and her adopted country, in a hybrid literary formula which mixed memorial and travel narratives, emotional confession and picturesque description, documentary and personal literature – in a word, private and public types of literary discourses. Translated into Romanian by historian, writer and politician Nicolae Iorga and issued (first part) with his newspaper "Neamul românesc" in 1917, the book addressed an encouraging message: Romania is the beautiful old country Queen Marie fell in love with, a country which deserved to fight and dream for. In 1917, between mid-February and April 1st, during the exile at Iași, she also published in "Romania", the Army's propaganda newspaper, five "personal" texts, asked for its editor in chief, poet Octavian Goga (also their translator). The five articles were reunited the same year in a low-cost booklet, *Din inima mea la inima lor* [From my heart to theirs], which retained the inspiring title of the first article. She dared to share in these texts very personal emotions: the loss of her little son Mircea and of her home in Bucharest or the overwhelming duty towards the wounded. She shared her human sufferance with them, but the voice of the queen had to reach every heart with a message of hope and redemption. In the diary, she confessed why and how she wrote these texts: the first three resumed fragments from the days of her son's illness and death. She rewrote them into a narrative suitable for the public, which still retained the passion and urgency of the original notation. She declared herself satisfied with the reception of these "personal" texts entrusted to the Army's newspaper, as they built a "real bridge" between her and the soldiers (Regina României 2014: 387). On Wednesday 8th / 21st March 1917, at Yassy (Iași), she wrote in her war diary:

> I receive so many telegrams of thanks from all the regiments. Only then I really realise how many things I have sent and what makes the telegrams touching is that in many of them they make allusions to the articles I wrote which shows me that they have been read everywhere. One so prettily telegraphed that my presents spread joy & enthusiasm where-ever they came and that all my soldiers were eager to begin to fight

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> once more and each hoped to be the first to enter Bucharest so as to be the first to lay flowers upon Mircea's grave (Regina României 2014: 385)[5].

Her literature "touched" the people, shared herself to them, exactly as her gifts to soldiers. If some historians admitted she has won the war for Romania, it should be acknowledged that first she had won people's hearts. Her literature published during the war was a means to get into "direct contact" with masses and "reach" people's hearts, as she put it in the foreword to the 1925 volume *The Country that I love*. *An exile's memory*. She recounts in this foreword that "old friend" Nicolae Iorga urged her to add new chapters to the 1916 *My Country* and spread it with his newspaper to Romanian trenches and villages, so that people "will feel your heart beating with theirs, your soul suffering with theirs". Her words would cherish her motherly love to her people and restore faith to the "broken ones".

If *My Country* – with its 1916, 1917 and 1925 versions – shared the readers only a limited perspective on herself, the later autobiography would offer the chance to (re)construct a coherent mature image, together with a symbol of power, hope and resilience for the Great Romania. She admits it took time until she felt relieved from the emotional burden of the past. *The Story of My Life*, as Marie underlined in the *Foreword*, was perceived as a moment of rereading the past from the distance she always longed for:

> The story of my life! I have often been asked to write it, and I have always hesitated to do so for many reasons.
>
> With the death of my dear husband, King Ferdinand, a certain chapter of my life closes, and I feel therefore that I can more easily look back upon that way, the long way, already pursued; I can look at it from farther away, less personally, and that is perhaps what I have always been waiting for.
>
> I have always wondered from what angle I should relate my own story, knowing that to a certain degree I must weigh my words, and yet I want to be as accurate, as truthful as possible; I do not want to be too dry, but I also do not want to be too passionate: feelings must not run away with me.
>
> In a way I want to look back upon it as though I were relating to someone else's story: I would almost prefer to write it in the third person, but that would be like pretending, and I have never pretended. All my life I have been almost dangerously sincere and I cannot depart from that absolute sincerity.
>
> I think to-day I have found the angle from which I want to write my story, the angle which represents me in relation to Romania. Let it be Roumania and I, or I and Roumania – it comes to me the same thing, and have patience with me if many thoughts, many inferences and conclusions are woven in among the facts I have to relate, for life has already been long enough and events plentiful enough to have taught me many a a lesson, and to have of me something of a philosopher in my own small way.
>
> Roumania and I – but of course I shall have to return to the far, far past, because no life can be completely told without telling also of childhood and youth,

[5] The manuscript page is printed at the end of the first volume of her *War Diary* [Jurnal de război 1916–1917]. I quoted from the English original whose photocopy is reproduced in the volume, but I gave the page of the Romanian edition. Luckily there are a few such photocopies included in the volume – the only publicised fragments from the manuscript of the private diary (now in The National Archives of Romania).

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> which are such factors for the forming of character, and my childhood was a happy childhood, upon which I love to look back (Queen of Roumania 1934 I: vii).

The autobiography was a project Marie had been contemplating for years. Between 1910 and 1916 she had begun a memoir which remained unfinished. In July 1913 she wrote there was almost "cruel"[6] to remember herself as a seventeen years fiancée, destined to precocious marriage to an almost unknown man. To write down these memories would have "crushed" her soul ten years before. This emotional reload of the autobiographical writing explains why she postponed (re)writing her life. Her editors from New York urged her to deliver an autobiography after her fulminate six-months trip to the United States and Canada. One year later, in 1927, her husband Ferdinand died and the Queen felt she could turn back to the past with the serenity she lacked before. An epoch was gone with Ferdinand, and she was now able to write down its story with the objectivity she always wanted. Her perspective is related from the start to her identity: "it is about me and Romania, or about Romania and me – it is almost all the same", she assures the reader. *The Story of My Life* told a story about identity, about the English roots and the difficult transition towards a new identity and country to belong: Romania.

First volume describes her childhood in England with an immense pleasure, like an immersion in an ocean of sensations and images. Earliest memory, as in Proust, is related to smell – the smell of the autumn leaves at Eastwell Park, the castle where she was born. She describes with great pleasure the places of her childish memory: Osborne, a name which itself is "a joy", Queen Victoria's summer palace at the seaside, with terraces bordered by magnolias (whose smell is again remembered), the chalet of the family on the Isle of Wight, the blue Brazilian butterflies from the collection of curiosities gathered here (another leitmotif of her future books). The parcel her parents took care themselves on the island is probably the original *topos* of her future gardens, image of those earthly paradises she enjoyed to discover or build whenever she went. Malta, a place where she spent time in her childhood, adored for its mysterious beauty, is called the "garden" of "my paradise", a metaphor later used in her diary to describe her last and most beloved residence at Balcic. She revives landscapes, gardens, trees, castles, rooms, flowers, smells or tastes (the strawberry candies she devoured at the Russian Court or Queen Victoria's Sunday brown cake). Also horses, famous relatives and friends, servants close to her heart or unknown picturesque people. All detail is precise and sensitive; she feels "joy" as she lives again the past when writing. If Malta attracted her for the deep consonance between her soul and the landscape inviting discovery, Russia, on the other side, fascinated her and her young sisters for the fabulous luxury of the Imperial Court. First volume ends with her engagement to prince Ferdinand of Hohenzollern, their wedding to Sigmaringen Castle and the desolate honeymoon days – in fact the crash of a happy childish universe. A second volume deals with her early life in Romania, the arrival in Bucharest, her perception of this alien world. Here, she says, politics is always in an "acute" state of affairs, people get sunk into politics with the passion of their Latin blood, state politics rules everyday life at

[6] These notes written during 1910–1916 were published in the first volume of *Jurnal de război* [War Diary], as a compact corpus, in front of the diary itself (Regina României 2014: 21–92).

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Court, possible trips and entertainments, convenient friends or even the doctors who assisted her in childbirth. In a word, everything was "forbidden" to her at the court of the "Uncle". Her love for Romania grew slowly, withhold by her rebellion against the foreign rules imposed on her. She wrote she had no identity here, no profound connection to reality or to the people around her. Her heart started to vibrate in front of the landscape and of the simple people she met in her trips around the country:

> Cernica: a monastery built in the middle of vast swamps all a-flower with wild yellow irises. A curious, rather unsafe-looking wooden bridge, very long, flat, half-rotting away, (…)
>
> I loved the mellowness of the shady sanctuary, its dim light, its papers and swaying silver lamps, its half-effaced frescoes; here was a certain poetry about it, something primitive, "Eastern". It was a picture in half-tones, it took hold of my imagination, it touched some chord within me, awoke the artist slumbering in my soul There was poetry also in the little white habitations where the monks lived, tiny little houses whith thatched or shingled roofs, their small gardens running down towards the reed-filled swamp; and everywhere yellow irises, sun-coloured and slim, giving colour to the water, greatly adding to the simple charm of the place. . An old monk offered me a humble nosegay of sweet-scented cottage flowers, pinks, pansies, sweet basil, and little tufts of verbena. (…) I looked longingly over this wide, somewhat melancholy water-world; great peace lay over this lonely place, peace and deep, dreamy but very simple beauty which somehow my soul understood. For the first time since I had come to my new home something awoke within me, something began to stir, something like a faint hope. (…)
>
> But looking back upon my life, absurd as it may sound, that visit to Cernica was the first awakening of that deep love and understanding which gradually grew up between me and Roumania; therefore I cannot help looking upon that unimportant little drive into the swamps as a date which counts in my life (Queen of Roumania 1934 II: 39–40).

This first "awakening" comprises a deep "understanding" of Romania. The "dreamy", "simple" beauty of Cernica "stirred" something in her soul, it touched her in a familiar way. It compelled a kind of reinvention of herself in relation to her new home. The moment is perceived in the *Story* in its relevant "unimportance". Of course, she recounts afterwards how she gradually got involved into politics and public life, she introduced important men and women from the Court on the stage of her narrative, each with his or her idiosyncrasies, significant historical events (like the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II), also particular situations, with a taste for the humorous and glimpses of irony. But she never forgets the "little unimportant" moments which changed her life. After the discovery of Romanian landscape at Cernica, another turning point comes up at the end of the second volume, with her implication in the Red Cross charity work, during the Balkans wars. At Zimnicea, in the cholera camp, she lived a new experience which changed her life and prepared her for the major trial of the future war:

> I cannot help looking upon that sudden contact with cholera as a turning-point in my life. It was my first initiation into suffering on a large scale (Queen of Roumania 1934 II: 304).

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Also at the end of the second volume (chapter *1914*: *National and Domestic*) as a prelude to the war literary experience which was to come, we find the story of another relevant self-discovery: how she became a writer. She recounts she thought herself capable of putting down only fantastic stories, made up of beautiful, but unreal stuff. After she discovered and "absorbed" within her soul a different reality, the places and people of Romania, she was finally able to write differently. Even if she does not mention any title, no doubt this is the history of her first book on herself and on Romania: *My Country*.

The third volume brings another notable change, now at the literary level: the autobiography aspires to transform itself from a narrative story into a diary-like "document". The author tells the readers from the beginning that this volume focused on the war years 1916–1918 will differ from the previous two regarding its form and perspective: memories will be replaced by quotations from her diary. She unveils her narrative method: she selected fragments from a huge amount of diary pages recording each day's hopes, fears and turmoil, but also important letters she sent or received during the war. She sometimes quoted whole diary entries, with their places and dates, sometimes introduced short retrospective narrations which condense certain periods of time and relate disparate cluster pages to each other. It is obvious she cut from the intimate diary sharp commentaries on people or situations, that she rewrote some notations overwhelmed with heavy emotions like disdain or despair. She committed herself to a kind of self-censorship in order to deliver a well-balanced, objective and coherent story of the war years. She introduced into *The Story of My Life* diary pages which would not "shock" the reader, but which still preserved the truth. She reveals secrets from the backstage war politics before and after 1916: how she silently prepared Ferdinand to enter the war during their solitary summer evenings at the countryside home in Copăceni, the huge pressure over her from the Central powers propaganda, the "rivers" of money which overflowed from both sides to Romania, the damages produced in Moldavia by the allied Russian troops and the tragic isolation of the country following the Bolshevik Revolution. Impressive pages describe the *devotement* of the Army for their Queen, the precious help of French and British doctors, the military involvement of France, the only trustful friend of Romania. One of the letters included in the narrative is the last letter sent to her cousin George, King of England, after Romania signed the separate peace with Germany:

> MY DEAR GEORGE,
>
> (…) I for one did all that was in my power; your Englishmen will tell you how I struggled to the last, even when everyone else had given up, trying to save what could not be saved, how I never lost faith and was ready to accept every sacrifice and face any danger; but it was all in vain. (…)
>
> Rather would I have died with our army to the last man, than confess myself beaten, for have I not English blood in my veins?
>
> Your loving cousin, MISSY
>
> (Queen of Roumania 1935: 348)

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This is the ultimate truth about her activity during the war: the Queen tried to save what others did not save, what in fact could not be saved in Romania. In the private diary she spoke plainly about the political "gangrene" of a system which ruined many people's lives during the military, economic and sanitary crisis of The Great War. In *The Story of My Life* she just hints at the tragedy of Romanian people, ruled by indifferent politicians:

> People in official positions do not seem to have much heart. We have learnt much, but not yet enough. Some are still too comfortable, and will not open their souls and minds to the fearful suffering of the people. Those at the head of things have not seen people die, nor the heart-breaking misery in the villages amongst the women and children. If they had seen it as I have they would be more eager to help; efficiently, I mean, not only on paper (Queen of Roumania 1935: 313).

The Story of My Life rounds up with the return to Bucharest, to her home at Cotroceni. In a way, she says, her story ended here: the story of the war years, the *Buildungsroman* of a victorious queen. After the war, Marie continued to write and over time her writing has gradually changed. Her interest moved from political life towards cultural, familial and personal life: her children, her trips abroad, her architectural projects at Bran Castle or Balcic, reading and writing, riding, gardening. Her posthumous diary published in ten volumes for the years 1918–1928 together with her last memories (1937–1938), recently released in Romanian, exhibit her joy of life and a deep understanding of people and things. *Însemnări zilnice* (*Daily Notes*) and *Insemnări din ultima parte a vieții* (*Last Notes*) add a kinetic perspective on herself and on the world around her, on people from the royal family, on various political personalities, events or places. Her diary, together with her autobiography offer the reader her experience of life and of a whole epoch. Her literature as a whole is not only a public lesson on resilience during hard times, but also an intimate (re)reading of her memory within time which nurtures further rereading and researching.

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Abstract

This study aims to reconsider the literature of Queen Marie of Romania, a personality acknowledged nowadays for the major role she played during First World War in Romania. I start from the assumption advanced by Romanian historians that the literature of the Queen played an important part in her political commitment to the national ideal. Apart from its ideological and moral value during the war, her literature deserves a fresh view from the perspective of literary studies. Her work, comprising fiction, memories, an autobiography

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and a private diary of over two decades proves a complex corpus of literary texts that needs to be re-examined. Marie of Romania was a successful writer for a contemporary international and national public and I tried first to outline a short history of her reception pointing to a few important moments and names. Her autobiography was appreciated by Virginia Woolf in a 1934 review totally unknown to Romanian criticism, while in The United States Marie was probably our most famous writer during the 1930s. In Romania, Marie's biographical literature was one of the pioneers of the genre, perceived as such by an independent critic like Octav Şuluțiu. She actually encouraged a whole trend in feminine diary and memorial writing which also needs researching within Romanian literary studies. She was perceived by women and by the whole Romanian society as a model during the war, but I approach her literature as her special means to construct this model and pursue her public mission. Her literature continued her many charity, social and political activities, it created a "bridge" of communication between herself and her people. Literature made her voice sound in the ears of the "broken ones" to bring them a message of resilience and hope during hard times.

My aim was to reconsider her literature diachronically, with a focus on the literature she published with the advent of the war: *My Country*, with its English and Romanian successive editions (until the 1925 edition *The Country that I love. An exile's memories*), the "personal" articles published in the Army's newspaper and gathered in the volume *From my heart to theirs* (1917) and finally her autobiography. *The Story of my Life* fulfilled her memorial project and offered an image of herself from her childhood until the end of the war. Her literature as a whole was intended to express her own search of identity, her (re)readings of herself and of her life. The theme of identity is infused in all her literature, as she put it openly in the foreword to *The Story of My life*: her private and her public identity are profoundly related one to another. She continually searched within her memory and displayed images and narratives of herself, in her private and public works, fictional or non-fictional. Her writing is defined by recurrent memorial leitmotifs, by the circulation of texts from private to public and by their continuous rewriting. This overview on Marie of Romania's literature tried to grasp the meaning of her war literature, its evolution and functions during the war and after. My aim was also to enhance the literary virtues of an autobiographical writing which captured the author's self and her sensitive experience of life.

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