

## **SCRIBING AND DE-SCRIBING HISTORY: MARIE, QUEEN OF ROMANIA, THE STORY OF MY LIFE (1934-1936)**

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**Abstract:** By considering “subjective” literature to be a “factual story” that transforms existence into a conscience and biography into a destiny, the present study focuses on the memoir *The Story of My Life*, written by Marie, Queen of Romania (1875-1938), translated into Romanian and published between 1934 and 1936. In order to favour a dialogue with history, the narrator, as a credible witness to history, by raising the great issue of the meaning of History to the level of the personal story, slides across the borders between the narrative texts claimed by the “biographical” genre and the memories give way to journal-type insertions that are autobiographical in nature. As an apologetic discourse, a historical story and an anthropological act that can resuscitate the mythical thinking, this memoir is also the space of a hermeneutical fiction in which different interpretations of the text can be identified: *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris*. However, we will also support the interpretive conjecture of the retrospective narration with an applied poetical analysis, in order to identify and decrypt the autobiographical pact, the historical pact and the reading pact. By entering the field of literarity through a “quota of aesthetics” conditioned by the circumstances, the discourse of the factual story *The Story of my Life* realises and favours the relation between the time lived and the time of the confession-narration or, in other words, between scribing history (the narrative past) and de-scribing history (the commenting present).

**Keywords** Queen Marie of Romania, World War I, memoir, autobiographical pact

To transform a personal experience into a conscience and to transform a biography into a destiny can undoubtedly be said to represent expectations of the subjective literature. However, an experience transformed into an act of the conscience, together with the feeling

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and the reflection on the feeling, bring into the spotlight an individual who knows herself as a deep self and recognises herself in an autobiographical self,<sup>1</sup> and the chronicle of the personal experience also becomes the chronicle of the century in which one lived, since the couple intimate-time and historical-time are continuously connected.

If the object of the discourse offered by subjective literature is the individual herself, although the autobiographical voice favours the private field, the remembrance becomes, to her, the restoration of a meaning of the more or less distant past which, on the one hand, subjectively belongs to her exclusively, but in which, on the other hand, since it contains significant details that had been overlooked by the history books, the minor personal history intertwines with the great history of the social group, of its habits, mentalities and, in the end, of the century. The inscriptions in the creation of a destiny, the different forms of subjective literature, such as the journal, the autobiography or the memoir, as evidence in the search for an identity and as testimonies of this search, attempt to offer not only a synthesis-story of a personal life, “on the outskirts of truth”, but also a narrative on History, since a personal history is inevitably included in the general, objective history<sup>2</sup>.

As a self-referential genre that aspires to transparency<sup>3</sup>, although it had initially been marginalised, subjective literature has recently been “homologated” as a literary genre<sup>4</sup>; the autobiography, the memoir and the journal seem to be recognised, through the poetics of “spontaneity”<sup>5</sup>, as non-literary writings in the field of the great literature. If the interest in this type of literature is motivated largely by its documentary nature, as a direct testimony,<sup>6</sup> the reader response to this type of texts is decisively determined by their “aesthetic degree”<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, is there an art of writing memoirs, autobiographies or journals? And, do they impose a reading “contract”?

By accepting the fact that the autobiographical genre is “contractual”<sup>8</sup>, the memoirs and the autobiography could be defined as retrospective stories in prose<sup>9</sup>, in which a real

<sup>1</sup> See Eugen Simion, *Genurile biograficului*, Vol. I (Bucharest: Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2008), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> See Doru Radosav, “The Ground-Level Memory of War. A Cultural Reading,” in *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities*, XXIII (2018), No. 1, 5-37.

<sup>3</sup> See Philippe Lejeune, *Pactul autobiografic*, transl. by Irina Margareta Nistor (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 2000), 399.

<sup>4</sup> See Simion, Vol. II, 156.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> See Smaranda Ghiță, *Lumi interioare. Jurnalul între document și ficțiune*, preface by Dumitru Irimia (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2009), 111.

<sup>7</sup> Umberto Eco, *Limitele interpretării*, transl. by Ștefania Mincu and Daniela Buță (Constanța: Editura Pontica, 1996), 183.

<sup>8</sup> See Philippe Lejeune, *Pactul autobiografic*, transl. by Irina Margareta Nistor (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 2000), 46.

person writes about his own existence, emphasising his personal life, particularly the history of his personality (autobiography) or the role his own character played in the history of the respective time period (memoirs). One can thus immediately observe the formal characteristic that differentiates them from a fictional story: the identity of the author (the name on the cover refers to a real person), of the narrator and of the main character, marked by the use of the first person, who retrospectively tells his life story. The voice of the story is therefore “self-narrative<sup>10</sup>” and, if this *self* is usually associated with a name, the connection between the name and the social space is crucial. The author, simultaneously a real person and the producer of a discourse, although initially unknown to the reader, becomes known through the produced discourse that expresses both his own story and the story of his time. The issue of fidelity, in this case, becomes an issue of authenticity<sup>11</sup>, and the issue of the identity configured around the name makes the referential pact coextensive with the autobiographical pact<sup>12</sup>, so that the life story of the author-narrator-character is assumed with a meaning and embedded in a synthesis. The autobiographical pact is thus the assertion, in the text, of the identity of the name between the author-narrator-character, which ultimately refers back to the name of the author on the cover<sup>13</sup>. In addition to the autobiography, memoirs seem to more strongly reconstruct a personal history within a greater history of the epoch, in an attempt to convince the reader that the role played by the author was essential in this turbulent and hostile history. However, is there such thing as a clean, typically memorial discourse?! Usually, the memorial discourse is continuously cut and the author-narrator-character introduces other discourses in his interstices: (strictly) autobiographical, journal-like, political, memorial, erotic discourses.

Thus, memoirs can be subjected to multiple interpretations<sup>14</sup>. They can be easily approached from an interpretive-historical perspective, since writing the self is an act of civilisation. An analysis from a psychological viewpoint of the memorial narrative is also at hand through the issues of memory, the construction of a personality and the self-assessment it raises. Last but not least, the memorial discourse can naturally impose a poetic and critical approach, if it is considered to be a literary text. As such, this “biographical” genre seems to be defined not only by the formal elements, but also by the “reading contract”<sup>15</sup> which becomes a sort of applied poetics that focus on the order in which the autobiographical story is told and on the relation between the narrator, the narratee and his “hero”, in the larger context of history.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>10</sup> Gérard Genette, *Introducere în arhitext. Ficțiune și dicțiune*, transl. and preface by Ion Pop (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1994), 137.

<sup>11</sup> See Lejeune, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.

A genre that was delayed in Romanian literature in the absence of an audience prepared to expect it, subjective literature seems to have been most often regarded with mistrust<sup>16</sup>. By responding to the horizon of expectations of the 1930s, filled with social turmoil and historical upheaval, but also placed within the tradition of religious confessions and fuelled by the passion for sincerity that characterised society at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a passion that lasted until the 1930s<sup>17</sup>, *The Story of My Life*, authored by Marie, Queen of Romania (1875-1938), despite the fact that it is a subjective version of her experiences, gains the validity of a historical document, thus showing the way in which a life story transforms into a living testimony to how History can be *scribed* and *de-scribed*.

Having been raised in an aristocratic environment in which subjective literature (especially the journal) was, for young girls, a widespread educational instrument, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom and Tsar Alexander II of Russia, Marie Alexandra Victoria, Princess of Edinburgh and future queen of Romania knew that the subjective literary genres contribute not only to the apprenticeship into writing, but also to the moral formation (as a test of conscience)<sup>18</sup> of an individual, so that on 14/27 August 1916, the day Romania entered World War I, she began to keep a journal “without faltering” and “steadfastly”. Although she had already attempted to entrust her privileged and assumed experiences to certain daily notes two years prior, once she was crowned Queen of Romania after the death of King Carol I of Romania (1839-1914), she abandoned the initiative after only a few days. However, she resumed her diary notes on the day she felt that the personal history started to merge to the verge of identification with the history of the people to whom she was queen, and she continued these notes with the strictest discipline for twenty years, until 11 July 1938, when they were interrupted a week before her death. Written in English, Queen Marie’s 101 notebooks of daily entries represent perhaps the most comprehensive journal known in Romania.

The first 14 notebooks of this journal, covering the first part of the war, were later transformed by the Queen of Greater Romania into a memoir entitled *The Story of My Life*, published in three volumes, first in English, in London, between 1934 and 1935. However, the book was also published in Romanian shortly after, in three volumes, between 1934 and 1936, translated by Margarita Müller-Verghi, entitled *Povestea vieții mele*, and it was reprinted after 1989 – among the first republications were those made by the Moldova Publishing House (Iași, 1990-1991) and the Eminescu Publishing House (Bucharest, 1991).

Somehow located on the borderline between autobiography and memoir, since, in this case, the autobiographer focuses not only on herself, but also on the history she traversed, and, from the position of an important actor on the stage of the history, operates the

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<sup>16</sup> See Eugen Simion, *Genurile biograficului*, Vol. I-II (Bucharest: Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2002), 7-9.

<sup>17</sup> See Lejeune, 378.

<sup>18</sup> See Ghiță, 81.

selection, omission and guidance of the events that activate the “testimonial function<sup>19</sup>”, as it often happens in the case of memoirs, *The Story of My Life* also contains a distance of decades between the moment lived and moment recounted. According to the autobiographical pact, the memorial narrative uses a self-referential first person discourse, in which the narrator (= Queen Marie) coincides with the author on the cover, thus creating the illusion of a direct communication between the narrator and the reader, which, while reading, makes the latter feel like time had been abolished.

Written during her final years, *The Story of My Life*, since it does not represent the memories of a “common” life, gains the value of a historical document in which the author-narrator-character enters a dialogue with History. The memorial narrative thus became a historical text, a dated document that reflects the efforts of an epoch to fulfil a historical ideal. And the historical narrator, a crowned head whose family tree makes her related to all of the other crowned heads of Europe at that time, actually actively *writes (scribes)* History, after which, as the current witness to it, readdresses it in order to passively *de-cribe* it. Simultaneously a memoir and an autobiography, *The Story of My Life* reassesses the time lived during a time of recount-testimony, thus creating a dialogue between *scribing* history, or the narrative past, and *de-scribing* history, or the commenting present. In an attempt similar, at times, to that used for a historical biography, the memorialist-autobiographer tells the story of her self as a biographer would tell the story of a historical character: "Într'o oarecare măsură vreau să privesc înapoi la viața mea ca și cum ași povesti întâmplările altuia<sup>20</sup>" ["In a way I want to look back upon it as though I were relating someone else's story<sup>21</sup>"], and the historicism (understood as the historical method applied to the history of the self) is inevitably combined with the involuntary memory, offering the affective memory a dominant role<sup>22</sup> and giving way to oblivion to do its triage work. Although the affective memory seems to be the binder between writing (the work of the present) and history (the sum of the past events, filtered through the fickle memory): "Dacă aceasta e să fie povestea vieții mele...<sup>23</sup>" ["as this is the story of my life...<sup>24</sup>"], in an attempt to understand the experience of life, rather than to judge it, giving way to the couple intimate time-historical time, the modulations of this permanently shifting relation are, in a memorial volume, constituent and relevant, both on a documentary level and on the artistic level. Perhaps proving the same admiring distance as that of the individualism characteristic to the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>, *The Story of My Life* is, in fact, the image of

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<sup>19</sup> See Simion, *Genurile biograficului...*, 22-25.

<sup>20</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele [Copilăria]*, Vol. 1, second edition (Bucharest: Editura "Adeverul" S.A., 1934), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, *The Story of My Life* (New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), *Foreword*.

<sup>22</sup> See Jacques Le Rider, *Jurnale intime vieneze*, transl. by Magda Jeanrenaud (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 173.

<sup>23</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1934), 27.

<sup>24</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, *The Story of My Life...*, 188.

<sup>25</sup> See Lejeune, 382.

the monarch strongly connected to that of society: on the level of the personal narration, the great issue becomes that of the meaning of history, since the memoir is not the story only of one life, but also of the history of the Great Union.

If it is unanimously accepted that, in confession writings, what is truly important is not the *truth*, but the *authenticity*<sup>26</sup>, Queen Marie assumes not only the responsibility of work and of its public appearance, without pursuing the commercial exploitation of what had been lived, but also the truth of the events recalled. Although one cannot ignore the fact that there is an ensemble of impersonal schemes that deform reality between the one who writes and his image<sup>27</sup>, thus creating a hypertrophy of the self, the memorialists often having been suspected of insincerity, of posing, of compiling an image inconsistent with reality, the criteria for authenticity, sincerity, plausibility and accuracy are not in the least threatened in the volume under scrutiny. And, despite the appearance of a progressive idealisation, in the retrospective story of the formation of a personality assumed by the self of the narrating 'I', the autobiographical voice creates an autobiographical space in which an autobiographical story *stricto sensu* is cast<sup>28</sup>:

"Eu văd, în oameni, binele mai degrabă decât răul; mila și durerea, în răutate și în păcat, mai degrabă decât greșala; și mult mai drag mi-ar fi să ajut cu cuvinte milostive, decât să pedepsesc cu varga! Dacă această ciudățenie a mea va supăra pe cititori, atunci să pună jos cartea, chiar de la început, căci vor întâni acest duh de optimistă iertare dealungul filelor ei... pînă la capăt, - așa cel puțin nădăjduiesc.<sup>29</sup>"

[I see the good in people rather than the bad, the pity and pathos in wickedness and sin, rather than the crime; far rather would I help with kind words than punish with a rod.

Weakness some may declare, but I would rather call it strength. Severity? Yes, when absolutely necessary, but seven times at least, if not seventy times seven, would I give my criminal the benefit of the doubt.

If this speciality of mine is going to be an irritation to you, then throw down my book straight off, because you will meet this spirit of optimistic tolerance all through its pages, till the very end, I hope!<sup>30</sup>]

This memorial narrative was *de-scribed* just so that the reader may discover a history seen by an individual and a life recounted by the one who lived it. The plausibility of both<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Simion, *Genurile biograficului*, Vol. I..., 135.

<sup>27</sup> See Ghiță, 98.

<sup>28</sup> See Lejeune, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Maria, *Regina României* (1934), 26.

<sup>30</sup> Marie, *Queen of Roumania*, 13.

depends, in the end, on the coherence and expressivity of the story within. In other words, as is the case at hand, a memoir seems to transform a life into a destiny through a story that does not respect the rules of literary fiction per se: it does not strictly create characters, but can transform them into memorable characters, which is specific to literature. This is why it is no coincidence that the memoir *The Story of My Life* is littered with personal photographs, or photographs of the family; the first and the last volumes contain, after each title page, a portrait of the memorialist narrator; the first volume contains a photograph of a little girl holding knitting needles and the explanation: <"I", after a portrait by Sir J. E. Millais, from Windsor>, and the one from the third volume depicts Queen Marie as a nurse, together with the explanation "My nurse garments that have since become a symbol".

In the memoir *The Story of My Life*, the narrator took it upon herself to *narrate*<sup>32</sup> history from her own viewpoint, and the character is always accompanied by the historical events. However, complete sincerity cannot be possible in a confession, since the act of narrating already implies a fantasy<sup>33</sup>, therefore history is continuously challenged by the narrative. If we were to emphasise the poetics of this "factual story"<sup>34</sup>, we could assess that it aims to tell the truth (the clause of sincerity), that it selects the memorable events (the clause of the significance of symbolic acts) and, last but not least, that it follows the aesthetic clause of unity, cohesion and fluidity of a story. The addressee-reader is, first and foremost, a semantic one that was transformed into a credible witness who can test the veracity of the facts, within the parameters of certain "limits of interpretation"<sup>35</sup>, of course.

The chronology of a destiny, given that organising one's memories is an extremely difficult process, hinders the hierarchy of the avalanche of memories even further, and the memorialist can only be guided by *nostalgia for the integrity of the meaningful course of the life* in the name of which one organises the selection. The autobiographical voice, with the consciousness that organises the autobiographical space,<sup>36</sup> naturally calls upon chronology in order to establish the relations between I and the other, tracing the progression from the sentimental life to the social role, but also bringing balance in the relations with herself. The chronological order and the course of one's life, which is in this case identical to that of history, organise the story, the memories grouped in accordance with their themes in a chronological relation, in an attempt to mask the difficulty of organising one's own life. If the usual rhythm of an autobiography is that of a feuilleton<sup>37</sup>, the anticipation of the future and the premonitions being damped by the pleasure of storytelling, the rhythm of the memoirs signed by Queen

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<sup>31</sup> See Simion, *Genurile biograficului*, Vol. I..., 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>34</sup> See Genette, 135.

<sup>35</sup> See Eco, 35-37.

<sup>36</sup> See Lejeune, 205.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

Marie is dynamic, similar to that of a play subjected to the imperatives of the stage representation: limited time, clearly outlined characters, avoiding ambiguity. Aiding in an existential "self-analysis" with the sight set on herself and on the world, the queen probably reassessed her own life in order to somewhat also reconcile it with herself:

"Povestea vieții mele! Adesea mi s'a cerut s'o scriu, și am stat în cumpănă dacă s'o fac din multe pricini. Cu moartea scumpului meu soț, regele Ferdinand, se încheie un anumit capitol al vieții mele – și simt că pot mai ușor să privesc la calea, la lunga cale ce am străbătut-o până acum. Pot s'o privesc de departe în chip mai puțin părtinitor și, poate, tocmai aceasta am așteptat mereu.<sup>38</sup>"

["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 the 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.<sup>39</sup>"]

However, a return to the past is tributary to the moment reached by the memorialist-autobiographer in her becoming, and a reassessment of the past seems to be located on the borderline between mythicization and mystification. At times an apologetic discourse, a historical tale and an anthropological act, the memorial narrative can resuscitate mythical thinking, in which, regardless of the author's will, the writing as "mythistory"<sup>40</sup> stands out – the truth seems to also be accompanied by "the utopia of man". Thus, we believe that the structure of these three volumes is important: the first (*Childhood*) tells the story from the age of childhood until marriage and the moment she leaves her home in Coburg, headed towards Romania (1893); the second volume (*Early Wedded Days*) covers the period of her youth, between the arrival of Princess Marie in Romania and her proclamation as queen (1914), after the death of King Carol I; the third volume (*Roumania at War*) evokes the heroic age of maturity in the life of the narrator. However, since after twenty years memory can deform the recollection of the facts, the third volume greatly exploits the journal written between 1916 and 1918, and Queen Marie prefers the "passionate page" and the "tension" of those days. The memorial narrative unexpectedly ends with the events of December 1918. Could we identify in this organisation of the memorial text a particular view on her own existence, whose mile marker is placed on 1 December 1918?! The narrator orders her memories-testimonies in accordance with the climax given by the Unification of Greater Romania, preceded by an

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<sup>38</sup> Maria, Regina României (1934), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, in *Foreword*.

<sup>40</sup> See Simion, *Genurile biograficului*, Vol. I..., 70.



upward trajectory (childhood, youth, heroic maturity) and followed by a downward trajectory (old age), covered in silence, a course to which both the minor history and the major history seem to be subordinate. Since the narrator sees herself as a witness placed at the centre of this world, the memoir *The Story of My Life* brings an epoch back to life, it revives an entire society caught in the whirlpool of history, not merely an individual existence, which undoubtedly proves that the narrator lived her own time as a historical event. Furthermore, in the structure of this memoir, we can identify the outlines of the ancient myth of the four ages of man – disassociated from the cyclic doctrine –, as it had been presented by Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> century BC) in *Works and Days* and resumed by Ovid (40BC-17AD) in *Metamorphoses*.

In Hesiod<sup>41</sup>, the myth of the ages of man begins during the golden age, when the sky was governed by Chronos. The gods of Olympus then created the race of golden people who lived as the gods, knowing no suffering, toil or old age, and death was as sleep to them. However, one day, the earth hid these people away and, in their place, the gods created another race, in no way similar in size or mind to the ones before, a race that suffered the anger of the gods because they would not give them their proper praise. After the earth swallowed these people as well, Zeus put together from bronze a race of people who were fierce and wild, with stone hearts in their chests and prone to lawlessness; they destroyed each other with the weapons they made out of bronze. The fourth race was made of iron and they added certain good passions to the bad ones, although they still seemed to be governed by "the desire for evil", the law of the fist. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*<sup>42</sup> resume Hesiod's ages of man with no significant modifications. In this case as well, the golden age appears first, with no laws or judges, cultivating trust and justice. With no armies, the people were safe, leading pleasant and peaceful lives. The earth, unplowed and unstruck by pickaxe bore fruit by itself, offering the people food without diligence, in an eternal spring. But Saturn is thrown in dark Tartarus and Jupiter takes over the kingdom of the earth, thus giving way to the silver age. The eternal spring shrunk and was divided into four seasons, which compelled the people to take shelter in houses and to hide Ceres's seeds underneath the furrows. The bronze age that followed brought men more violent in nature, interested in weapons, but not yet criminal. The iron age, like the ordinary metal that gave its name, brought to light all of the human lawlessness, like deception, guile, ruse, violence and the desire for lawless wealth.

In a dynamic century, marked by speed, the memorial narrator, a figure who takes over the equation of her time, seeks her origins and continuity, and Queen Marie begins to remember the wonderful time of her childhood, showered with endless pampering from her family. These are not stray recollections salvaged from an unfaithful memory, and the state of mind of their recount in a narrative discourse is lively, creative: "[...] Sunt imagini și senzații care au rămas întipărite în mintea mea, în mod deosebit. Le voi purta în mine până la sfârșitul

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<sup>41</sup> Hesiod, *Opere*, transl. by Dumitru T. Burtea (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1973).

<sup>42</sup> Ovidius, *Metamorfozele. Cărțile I-V*, transl. in Romanian by Traian Lazarovici (Constanța: Editura Europolis, 2007), 49-50.

vieții, laolaltă cu amintirile care îmi sunt scumpe<sup>43</sup>.” [“Certain pictures and feelings have remained specially imprinted upon my mind. I shall carry them with me to the end of my life, stashed away with all the memories I love<sup>44</sup>.”]

The memorial narrator openly admits that her childhood was the *golden age* of her life: “Copilăria noastră a fost o copilărie fericită și fără griji, copilăria unor copii bogați și sănătoși, feriți de loviturile și asprele realități ale vieții.<sup>45</sup>” [“Our childhood was a happy, carefree one, the childhood of rich, healthy children protected from the buffets and hard realities of life.<sup>46</sup>”] Similar to a fairytale world, the *golden age* of childhood, filled with “memories enveloped as if by the rime of a wonderful spell”, is marked by the magic of fantasy and dreaming: “Eu aveam o închipuire bogată. Puteam născoci minunate povestiri pentru fratele și surorile mele; darul de a romanța îmi umplea sufletul și în toate lucrurile vedeam mai mult decât ceea ce percepe ochiul singur.<sup>47</sup>” [“I had an imaginative turn of mind. I was the one who could tell wonderful stories to my brother and sisters, romance lived in my soul and in all things I saw more than the naked eye could perceive.<sup>48</sup>”] The autobiographical self lent her self-portrait to the characters with which she populated her stories and narratives, as is the case, for instance, of the young Zuleika from the story *Insula șerpilor* [Snake Island] (in the attempt to explain the name of the island from the Black Sea): “Locul acela era posomorât și dezolat, dar sufletul Zuleikăi era prea vesel pentru a simți tristețe. Și, în plus, imaginația ei debordantă o ajuta să treacă peste multe lucruri în viață<sup>49</sup>.” [That place was bleak and desolated, but Zuleika’s soul was too joyful to feel sadness. And, moreover, her overactive imagination helped her get over many things in life]

In addition, the love for nature (“lines, colours, sounds, fragrances”) and animals must have given Princess Marie the feeling of a hidden closeness to the world around her, so that an immense cedar tree becomes, for the child enjoying her childhood, a cathedral in which the brambles could be seen as “frânghii de clopot întrebuițate de zâne la lumina lunii<sup>50</sup>” [“bell-ropes used by the fairies in the moonlight<sup>51</sup>”] and, for a child spoiled by childhood, a well and a ladder transform into places full of “înfricoșător și netălmăcit mister<sup>52</sup>” [“a terrible and

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<sup>43</sup> Maria (1934), 11.

<sup>44</sup> Marie, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Maria (1934), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Marie, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Maria (1934), 18.

<sup>48</sup> Marie, 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Însemnări zilnice – Anul 1919. Povestii. Insula șerpilor. Sămânța înțelepciunii. Poveste de Crăciun*, transl. by Georgiana Țuguran (Bucharest: Editura Sigma, 2014), 63.

<sup>50</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1934), 18.

<sup>51</sup> Marie, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1934), 18.

unexplained mystery<sup>53</sup>]. Ever since then, horseback riding, always practiced with unsheathed joy, must have given the princess the feeling of freedom and of dissolution of the conscious self, and it is thus understandable why, later, in times of great hardship, she wished she would ride – somehow, galloping stirred something in her freedom, released from the reins of any morals; the queen thus probably escaped the state of “fragmentation” in order to feel whole, like a person who had not been specialised in a particular social role, unsubordinated to a finality, a person who can enjoy life as an “unmotivated” celebration. Last but not least, as proof of both her kindness and her “natural inclination towards the social”, ever since her childhood, the often heroic friendship that she had shown those around her was one of the queen’s most important values, and a prime example in this regard is, despite the hardship of her fate, her lifelong friendship with her sister Victoria Melita.

However, little by little, the child discovers the outside world, as the passing of time inevitably implies a gradual distancing from the beginnings and, with it, a loss of the initial perfection.<sup>54</sup> And yet, from this crumbling of the ages of life that she unwittingly becomes receptive to, Queen Marie manages to salvage the innocence of childhood unaltered, an innocence which, in time, transformed into an incurable romanticism that, until the end of her life, helped her see the beauty of this world even when the steamroller of history seemed to have covered her with the veil of violence and death that brought her to the brink of what, according to Hermann Broch, seemed like “the final days of humanity”:

“Dar ceva din darul copilăriei de a desluși vedenii în alte vedenii, adâncimi în alte adâncimi, taine și închipuiri în zilnica realitate, a rămas în mine în toată calea vieții. Este o binecuvântată însușire, de a înfrumuseța orice, de a face mai atrăgătoare întâmplările și ființele și de a scoate la iveală mai mult lumina decât umbra.”<sup>55</sup>

[“But something of that child-faculty of seeing pictures within pictures, depths within depths, mystery and romance in the every day, has been mine all along my road. It is the blessed faculty of beautifying things, of rendering more interesting events and people, of drawing out light rather than shade.”<sup>56</sup>]

The story of one’s childhood is an individual myth<sup>57</sup> built by the adult in order to understand herself, just as the religious myths are, on a collective level, answers given by different groups to their unrest, bred by a desire to explain the current decay and to further

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<sup>53</sup> Marie, 9.

<sup>54</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *Aspecte ale mitului*, transl. by Paul G. Dinopol, preface by Vasile Nicolescu (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1978), 49.

<sup>55</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...*, (1934) 25.

<sup>56</sup> Marie, 13.

<sup>57</sup> See Lejeune, 94.

the possibility of salvation, of a return to the original perfection. But, since history is irreversible, the perpetuation of a historical moment is a contradiction in terms. Not even Queen Marie could do it.

The anecdotal life inevitably transforms into... a history that brings a progressive degradation and decay in relation to the perfection of the origins, and the narrator leads the reader to the second volume that begins with the arrival in Bucharest, in 1893, of Princess Marie recently married to Prince Ferdinand of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1865-1927), the Crown Prince of Romania, and ends with the death of King Carol I (1914). The young lady who had recently entered this world takes part in worldly entertainment, trying to carefully forge herself on the outside and within. Aware of the initiation stage just about to become activated, the memorialist narrator, through the self-portrait and the portraits of those around, begins to theme the transition from depth to appearance, from the soul to the exteriorisation, and the search and record of the self are stimulated by the historical mutation in which the individual finds herself caught. Encouraged by the self-witnessing process, the narrator gradually emphasises the slow deterioration of the connection to reality<sup>58</sup>, and this seems to be proven by the memory of the first contact with the people whose queen she would one day be:

“Trenul se oprise. Muzica și uralele ajuseseră asurzitoare. Soldații mai ales făceau cel mai mare sgomot. Cum mai strigau cu gurile larg deschise, arătând șiruri de dinți albi și puternici, și cum le mai străluceau ochii! Dea lungul vieții mele, mereu i-am auzit astfel strigând urale, chiar în acea cumplită iarnă din 1916-1917, când nu mai erau decât umbra tragică a ceia ce fuseseră înainte și când, flămânzi și sdrențăroși, parcă erau niște sperietori, biete rămășițe a mândrelor noastre regimente, cu uniforme peticite și pe picioare cu bandaje în loc de cisme. [...] Da, chiar și atunci strigau ‚ura‘ și ochii lor care văzuseră moartea în felurile ei chipuri, care priviseră toate grozăviile războiului și ale retragerii, se ținteau într’ai mei și tot încredere citeam în privirea ce-mi trimiteau, un fel de nădejde mută pe care nici suferința, nici înfrângerea nu o puteau desrădăcina.<sup>59</sup>”

[“The train had stopped. The music and the cheering had risen to a deafening din. It was especially the soldiers who made the most noise. How they cheered! Their mouths were wide open showing rows of strong white teeth, and how their eyes flashed! All throughout my life I have heard them cheer thus, even in that terrible winter of 1916-17 when they were but tragic ghosts of their former selves, ragged, starved scarecrows, poor remnants of once proud regiments, with tattered uniforms and on their feet bandages instead of boots. [...] Yes, even then they cheered and their eyes which had seen death in every form, had

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<sup>58</sup> See Ghiță, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele [Tânără soție]*, Vol. 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bucharest: Editura „Adeverul”, 1935), 21.

contemplated every horror of war and retreat, stared into mine, and there was still confidence in that look they sent me, a sort of dumb trust which suffering and defeat could not uproot.<sup>60</sup>”]

The memorialist narrator therefore realises the entry into the *bronze age* of youth, when the moral and aesthetic concepts seem to still hold certain stability. And since everything that lasts crumbles, the narrator self, fully aware of it, also made the transition from eternity to history. The gun salute heard after the birth of her first child, kept in the affective memory, brings the confirmation:

“[...] iar această simțire de iubire deplină și de unire cu poporul meu era pentru mine o simțire sfântă care dădea strădaniei, jertfei și abnegărei, adevăratul ei înțeles. Eram și eu o fărmă în marele plan al lumii, o entitate necesară [...] Eram, din pornirea mea, nechibzuită, mânată de imbolduri, pripită, dar legea din mine era legea dreptății, legea cumpănirii și a bunului simț<sup>61</sup>.”

[“and that feeling of love and unity with my people was for me a holy feeling which rendered true meaning to all the effort, sacrifice, and abnegation with while. I was one in the great plan of things, a necessary entity, and, being as I am, the consciousness of this fact meant much to me. I was fundamentally rash, impulsive, uncalculating, but the law was with me, the law of equity, the law of just common sense.<sup>62</sup>”]

As opposed to most memoirs that try to depict the inner and outer portrait of the autobiographer, *The Story of My Life* is not a “traditional” memoir in this sense, since it can be read, according to the hint present in the Preface of the first volume, as a self assessment of the awakening, in the soul of the narrator, of the Romanian national feeling, of the assimilation and identification with the national idea and with the national ideal that then bore the name of Transylvania, the ancestral dream of the land she befriended and, when it was necessary, she bravely fought for it to be fulfilled. Queen Marie wished to know her adoptive country and the long horseback rides helped her see its beauty, helped her find soul soothing places that, little by little, taught her the love for the nation:

“Când privesc însă înapoi spre viața mea, trebuie să mărturisesc, oricât s’ar părea de absurd, că acea vizită la Cernica a însemnat prima deșteptare a adâncii iubiri și înțelegeri ce s’a desvoltat treptat între mine și România; iată de ce nu mă pot opri de a

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<sup>60</sup> Marie, 280.

<sup>61</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1935), 74.

<sup>62</sup> Marie, 315.

privi această nebăgată în seamă, scurtă plimbare printre bălți, ca o zi însemnată din viața mea<sup>63</sup>.”

[“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.<sup>64</sup>”]

Thus, the memorialist-autobiographer now understands, by browsing the memories of that time, that only the good waiting can prepare you for the great encounters of destiny and that, if will is the guarantee of future acts, a well exercised will is one that is kept in check, that must not be allowed to prevail over the other faculties of the spirit, like intelligence and feeling. By retrospectively describing that age, the queen becomes aware of the fact that it must have been the moment when she understood that only by contemplating the (unapparent) novelty of each day could she one day see how a miracle is born.

The years pass and the décor changes before the eyes of the memorialist who enters a new stage of existence, an ambiguous and complex age, similar to the *bronze age* invoked by the Greek and Latin poets, in which her personal life shifts more and more towards living and making history. But the filter through which the memory is interpreted now gives way to direct notation and the third volume of the memoir *The Story of My Life* contains approximately half of the daily notation from between 1916 and 1918, selected by the queen from the intimate river-journal that doubled her life. The reproduced fragments that debut with 14/27 August 1916 were, however, subjected to self-censorship, as the queen eliminated or tacitly diminished the impressions, the sincere outbursts, the dissatisfactions regarding the king’s attitude, the attitude of the crown prince or of the Romanian political elite that she believed should not become public knowledge:

“Volumul de față al amintirilor se va îndepărta întrucâtva, ca formă, de cele două dintâi, deoarece numeroase capitole vor fi citații luate din jurnalul meu zilnic, scris fără răgaz de când am intrat în războiu. [...] Pagini pătimeșe în care mă regăsesc cu toate avânturile și toate sbuciumurile fiecărei stări sufletești. Ce greu e să aleg din ele! Trebuie să nu-mi pierd firul povestirei.<sup>65</sup>”

[“This book will deviate somewhat in style from the earlier one, as much of it will be quoted from the diary I kept ever since we entered the war. (...) passionate

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<sup>63</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1935), 63.

<sup>64</sup> Marie, 307.

<sup>65</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1935), 10.

pages in which I read myself with all the ups and downs of my every mood. The difficulty is selection. I must not lose the thread of my story.<sup>66</sup>”]

By understanding that nothing is immutable, that everything is subjected to change, that man is subjugated by the passing time, in a becoming that is continuously subjected to the time that wears out, alters and transforms, the memorialist analyses the bronze age through voluntary and involuntary leaps back in time, caused by the transcription of the journal kept during those days. The final lines, as the memorialist narrator confesses, reproduce the words of one “who knows much of the pain of kings”, the timeless present of the citation somewhat subduing the planes of the accounts: “< Am văzut toate muncile ce se fac sub soare și iată: toate sunt deșertăciune și sbuciumare a gândului ><sup>67</sup>.” [“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of the spirit.”<sup>68</sup>]

The intrusion of the time lived into the written text results in the circumscription of the narrator’s view on World War I in particular and on history in general. The past was transformed into a succession of present moments (our past is what survives in the present), since the journal notes had been written while the events were lived, respecting the law of simultaneity and of the calendar. The memorial narrator pours pathos into her gestures and does not seek theoretical instruments to define a moral, but she has the strength to transform a common moral into a royal political practice that confers her a strong touch of heroism. It is thus not by chance that Queen Marie was named “the last romantic”:

“În timpul verii anului 1916 clipa cumplită se apropia din ce în ce mai mult, mai ales de când începuseră Rușii să înainteze; era semn că venea ceasul, ceasul nostru cel mare. Atât de mult fusese amânat încât nimeni nu mai credea în el, dar eu știam; știam zilele hotărâte, știam învoielile, așa încât zi de zi nădăjduiam și mă temeam.<sup>69</sup>”

[“All this summer of 1916 it has been coming nearer and nearer, especially since the Russian advance; it was the sign that our hour was approaching, our great hour – but it had so often been put off, no one believed in it any more, but I knew. I knew the dates, I knew the conventions, so day by day I hoped and feared.<sup>70</sup>”]

If the addressee of the diaristic message is usually the author herself, in this case, the reproduction of the daily notations on a memoir makes them available to a public to whom, we believe, they had actually been addressed from the very beginning. Queen Marie made a

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<sup>66</sup> Marie, *Ordeal...*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Maria, *Povestea vieții mele...* (1935), 593.

<sup>68</sup> Marie, *Ordeal...*, 416.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>70</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, *Ordeal. The Story of My Life* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 49.

date in the future with her own daily notations, she read and reread her journals and re-copied them as if for an early or posthumous publication and their message can evade the pragmatic intentionality of the discourse. Although they are different discursive structures, the autobiography-memoir being the writing after the memory, while the personal journal is the immediate writing<sup>71</sup>, in *The Story of My Life*, by anchoring the personal time in the social, everyday time, the couple personal time- historical time is thus created, materialised in the opposition memory / oblivion, the paradoxical alloy between historicism and amnesia. Aware of the fact that any “historical actuality” rapidly becomes ephemeral, by inserting certain sections of personal journal in the memoir the narrator transformed her narration not only into a “storage space”, but also into a “preservation”<sup>72</sup> space for the affective memory. Usually an “archive” of interiority, the journal thus exploited became the silent witness of history. The chosen grammatical time of the journal is the present, just as the time of the autobiography is the past, salvaging both a past of evocation, and a future of prospection and dream. The occasional detail accurately captured by the hand of the narrator can metonymically reconstruct an entire atmosphere, an event or an epoch, like, for instance, the (dramatic) conflict present in King Ferdinand’s soul before Romania’s entry in the war, when he ended up granting the name of Hohenzollern only the second position, after the “honour” of King of Romania:

“Căutam atunci să-l fac pe Nando (Regele Ferdinand) să-și ușureze, prin cuvinte, inima apăsată. [...] Gândurile noastre atârnau greu în aerul de vară înăbușitor și prăfuit; aproape auzeam cum ni se băteau inimile, vorbele însă ne veneau cu greu; parcă ar fi trebuit să le smulgem din adâncul durerilor noastre deosebite.”<sup>73</sup>

[I was then trying to help Nando (King Ferdinand) ease the burden, getting it off his chest through words. [...] Our thoughts were weighing heavily in the stifling and dusty air of the summer; we could almost hear our hearts racing, but the words did not come easily; it was as if we had to rip them out of the deep core reared by our exceptional hardships.<sup>74</sup>]

As an ego-document that is of interest to a historian who wishes to evoke the experiences of those times, it has often been emphasised that the diary represents a genre connected to certain crisis situations, existential changes that caused a fracture in the inner balance. In the case of this memoir, however, we seem to be dealing with an interiorised historical crisis as a crisis of one’s own identity. Since it covers years of war, the journal has the

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<sup>71</sup> Jacques Le Rider, *Jurnale intime vieneze*, transl. by Magda Jeanrenaud (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 52.

<sup>72</sup> See *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Maria (1935), 10.

<sup>74</sup> Translation ours.



appearance of an external chronicle intertwined with personal notes. Suffering has been in immediate proximity to monarchy, diplomacy, glory, enthusiasm, death and world history. The narrator's choice for inserting journal notes in the memoir is probably due to the fragmentation of the journal that gives way to focusing on details, on elusive nuances and on instantaneous impressions, through which the endorsement of authenticity is streamed. In the absence of a consistent coherence of the journal, a "subtle coherence"<sup>75</sup> is inserted, given by the one who writes by transforming his biography into a destiny. However, the fragmented nature of the journal, which gained an epistemological status in the romantic aesthetics<sup>76</sup> strongly connected to the emergence of the journal, seems to have adeptly aided the narrator, who was thus able to capture the sinuous motions of the lived history so that, when read, the disparaged fragments are articulated in a configuration endowed with the form of a mosaic, a tapestry, or shaped like musical variations. The ethics of the narrator consist in her love of life, her fidelity to sincerity, her respect for friendship and the acknowledgement of human freedom, by defending and protecting the weak; the memorial narration outlines the moving (self)portrait of a queen who, through her gestures, seems to have victoriously passed "the true moral test of humanity"<sup>77</sup>. Therefore, it cannot have been an accident that the narrator, a political figure invested with the historical importance of her mission, chose to end her memoir with the journal note dated 18 N-brie/ 1 Dec. 1918, which records the return of the royal family to Bucharest, after their exile in Moldova:

"Iar acum după acești doi ani cumpliți, ne întorserăm biruitori în ciuda nenorocirii și a umilinții, iar visul de veacuri a României era acum împlinit. Nu e de mirare că-și ieșise din fire poporul de atâta bucurie, nu e de mirare că până și pietrele de sub picioarele noastre păreau că ne aclamă și că se îmbată de gloria întoarcerii."<sup>78</sup>

["And now, after these cruel two years, in spite of misfortune and humiliation, we had come back victorious, and Roumania's age-long dream was fulfilled. No wonder that our people were frantic with joy, no wonder that even the stones under our feet seemed to acclaim us, to glory our return."<sup>79</sup>]

As a "concurrent" chronicle of the events that marked "the end of the world of yesterday", the notes from the journal inserted in the memoir *The Story of My Life* are not "acts parallel" with history; they constantly intersect and intertwine with the historical time which, in its turn, almost identifies with the personal time. The queen's destiny became the

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<sup>75</sup> Ghiță, 130.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>77</sup> Milan Kundera, *Insuportabila ușurățate a ființei*, transl. by Jean Grosu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 316.

<sup>78</sup> Maria (1935), 591.

<sup>79</sup> Marie, *Ordeal...*, 415.

direction of history, even more so as she understood that the present was turning into a historical event that led Europe to modernity, on the basis of the premonition of the end of a world. If modernity could be defined, for the old continent, as a representation and interpretation of the cultural crisis<sup>80</sup>, in the eastern part of the continent it was seen as a representation of the national-identity crisis. From a political viewpoint, ever since the French Revolution, the meaning of modernity had been the affirmation of the nation-state. However, this inevitably created a hiatus<sup>81</sup> between Western Europe, where the concept of nation was associated with emancipation and democracy, and Central and Eastern Europe, where the “nationalities” were in conflict with the multi-national states. The case of Transylvania makes no exception. Thus, the Habsburg myth of a federative and universalist empire was threatened by the emancipation of the united nations, an emancipation that would, in the end, cause the dislocation of the Danubian order and upheavals with unpredictable consequences. Acutely feeling the anxiety of modernity, Queen Marie, through her diaristic practice, managed not only to create a refuge self, but also to internalise the crisis of that time as a crisis of her own identity engraved on the national one. Ever since her youth, she had demonstrated quite a rebellious spirit that refused the rigidity of the royal life imposed at the royal court by King Carol I of Romania, but she respected the cultural beliefs and ideals of her adoptive country; Queen Marie was up to any form of heroism and sacrifice: during the war, she was apparently the only one who almost blindly believed in victory, even when fate seemed to have been set against Romania or when the Romanians seemed to no longer be able to face the difficult challenges of war. Moreover, the narrator of the *Story of My Life* memoir proved to be an important representative-promoter of the “emancipated woman” trend that manifested in Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>82</sup>, surpassing the barrier posed by the aristocratic traditionalism and entering European cosmopolitanism. The queen’s (self)portrait is also confirmed by other war journals of that time:

“[...] Iată, trenul se oprește și strălucitoare de frumusețe și mărire scoboară Stăpâna din vagonul regal. Pare mai tânără ca la plecare și ochii îi strălucesc în lacrimi de bucurie că vede cu ce dor e așteptată de ai Săi, că citește în ochii celor adunați acolo admirația și dragostea sinceră. Nici cel mai mare diplomat nu ar fi putut face cea ce a făcut Stăpâna pentru Țară, pentru noi.”<sup>83</sup>

[Behold, the train stops and, radiating beauty and greatness, the Mistress descends from the royal car. She looks even younger than when she left and her eyes glow in

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<sup>80</sup> See Le Rider, 25.

<sup>81</sup> See *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>82</sup> See *ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>83</sup> Jeana Fodoreanu, *Femeie-soldat*, with the approval of her R.H. Queen Marie of Romania (Oradea: Tipografia Adolf Sonenfeld Societate pe acțiuni, 1928), 78.

tears of joy for seeing the passion with which she had been awaited by her own, for seeing in the eyes of the people gathered there sincere admiration and love. Not even the greatest diplomat could have done what the Mistress has done for the Country, for us.]

In order to diminish the distance between history (the act of living) and narration (*describing* history) and to generate the illusion of the clause of simultaneity, even only in part, the narrator prefers, as much as possible, to salvage the epoch document that is the journal, not by recounting it, but by reproducing it. The diary insertions (the history of the events that take place) in the memoir (the fragmented history of the events that took place) thus confer the narrator the possibility of controlling the recalled, registered and analysed past. The careful mention of the final moment of the journal note give the memoir an open ending:

“Aici las să-mi cadă pana din mână. Nu e sfârșitul povestei, căci numai basmele se sfârșesc cu ‚fericire și veșnică fericire’ și aceasta nu e basm, e povestea vieții mele. Ceea ce a urmat apoi e lung, foarte lung, vrednic poate de luare aminte, dar totuși mai bine să sfârșesc aici cartea [...] Într’o zi voi scrie poate ce-au urmat. Aceasta rămâne de văzut.<sup>84</sup>”

[“And here I let the pen drop from my fingers. It is not the end of my story, for it is only fairy tales which end in being ‘happy ever after’ – only fairy tales; and this is not fairy tale, but the story of my life.

What came afterwards is long, very long and interesting no doubt, but all the same this book had better end here (...). One day, perhaps, I shall write ‘what came after’ – this remains to be seen.<sup>85</sup>”]

Although it was written between 1934 and 1935, the memoir ends with a journal note made almost twenty years prior. What could have happened meanwhile to the queen who had placed her life under the sign of destiny, who at some point seemed to be an adequate embodiment of her time?! Could she have understood that history is not a finite reality, that royalty is not merely a destiny, but also a capital that must be protected and exploited?! So that she took on the role in an offensive manner and tried to postulate a single past in itself, turning the year 1918 into the threshold that split her life into a *before* and an *after*, retroactively imposing a new view upon her own existence?!

*The iron age* that the memorialist lives in the present seems to challenge her system of values, giving way to a discretely veiled disappointment, inevitably drawing her into a chain of degradation, irreversibly transforming her... The royal society, in its turn, seems to

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<sup>84</sup> Maria (1935), 593.

<sup>85</sup> Marie, *Ordeal...*, 416.

disintegrate under the pressure of the liberal individualism. Always considerate of the *life-style* codes, the former soldier-queen turns to the self, fully aware of the fact that the gesture is a final recourse for the surviving monarch, particularly now, when the personal aspirations and the direction of the evolution of society seem to be in discord.

How can Queen Marie's memoir be read? As a present that tries to speak of the past or as a past that speaks in the present? More than a simple autobiographer, the memorialist lives and shares the calling of the history she wrote and which she feels the need to describe. As a memoir-autobiography-journal, *The Story of My Life* depicts not only the uniqueness of an individual caught at the turn of the ages and the way in which the historical time moulded her destiny, but also the opposite, the role she played in History. In the antiquity, the representative type was the hero-soldier, the wise-man-priest and the farmer, the Middle Ages brings forth the saint and the knight, the Renaissance promotes the traveller who knocks at the gates of knowledge and the creator who discovers and cultivates his self, his individuality. The 20<sup>th</sup> century modifies the idea of man and his view on the inner-outer relationship, thus offering, in the dialogue with himself and with history, a fragmented portrait, greatly distanced from the unity that seems to have become a simple illusion. This is probably how Queen Marie's (self)portrait could also have been read if the memoirs had not ended in 1918 and had continued until the years of their writing/publication. By choosing to end *The Story of My Life* in a peak year of the minor and greater history, the narrator chooses to sign her memoir in the spirit of a *uomo universale* – a daring spirit in a tumultuous history that gathered the freedom of the spirit, the pleasure of living, the force of creation and the responsibility of making history.

Translated from the Romanian by Anca Chiorean