3 O'CLOCK MAGAZINE

No. 1

"Three o'clock is always too late or too early for anything you want to do"—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

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QUEEN MARIE OF ROMANIA

100 YEARS SINCE HER HISTORIC VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES



HONORARY CONSULATE OF ROMANIA TO CONNECTICUT

3 o'clock MAGAZINE

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Prepared by Corina Crișan, Ana-Maria Hojbotă, Nora Vasilescu and Daniela Sovea Falco
Assembled by Ioana Barac

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QUEEN MARIE OF ROMANIA

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Queen Marie the Diplomat: When Image Became Power

BY NORA VASILESCU

On the morning of March 5, 1919, Queen Marie of Romania stepped onto the platform at Paris's Gare de Lyon. She had not arrived on a royal train. Such luxuries would not become available to the Romanian royal household until many years after the war. Nor had there been much time for elaborate preparations. The Paris Peace Conference had opened in January, and by early February the Romanian delegation, led by Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, had already clashed with the representatives of the great powers.

Brătianu had intended to invoke the secret 1916 treaty with the Entente, which had promised Romania Austro-Hungarian territories inhabited by ethnic Romanians, and he was determined to see its provisions implemented as broadly as possible. Paris turned out to be a different world. The great powers made decisions among themselves, while the smaller states were heard but not treated as equals. The conference was dominated by the "Big Four"—France, Great Britain, the United States, and Italy—who controlled the decisions that truly mattered.

Queen Marie arrived in Paris in March 1919 with no publicity, and no official reception waiting for her. And yet, the platforms were packed.

The Romanian prime minister sought international recognition of the unions of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania with Romania, along with favorable settlements on sensitive issues regarding Romania's future frontiers. But, in the eyes of the Allies, Romania's position was not above reproach. A year earlier, after the collapse of the Russian front and in the face of military disaster, Romania had signed the separate Treaty of Bucharest with the Central Powers. King Ferdinand had refused to ratify it, but the episode still weighed heavily on the negotiations.

On February 1, 1919, the Conference agreed in principle to award Transylvania to Romania, leaving the details to a subcommittee under André Tardieu. It was precisely here that the fundamental dispute emerged. Brătianu—already temperamentally at odds with the French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau—insisted that Romania's claims should be judged according to the 1916 treaty. Any commission empowered to reexamine or reassess those claims struck him as an unacceptable imposition. The Romanian delegation walked out of the talks and threatened to withdraw from the Conference entirely.

This is the context in which Queen Marie reached Paris with no official reception waiting for her. She traveled "incognito," at the suggestion of a trusted French diplomat. She was not a head of state entitled to the customary honors, nor could she undermine her own government by officially negotiating on Romania's behalf. There had been far too little time to prepare any sort of publicity campaign around her visit. At Gare de Lyon, Queen Marie was, quite literally, a nobody.

And yet the platforms were packed. Photographers, journalists, diplomats, French and Romanian spectators—there was hardly room to move. Magnesium flash powder filled the station with smoke and its sharp, distinctive smell. "From the moment I stepped off the train, I was caught up in a wild whirlwind. … Faces, faces, and flowers …" she later wrote



H.M. The Queen of Romania in uniform. (National Library of France, Dept. of Prints and Photography, EI-13 (1006))

in her diary[1]. All the way to the Ritz, crowds gathered and tossed flowers in her path.

Let us pause here to take stock. Marie had been born in 1875. This was no young Cinderella finally arriving at the ball. She was a forty-four-year-old woman who had given birth at least six times, who had endured the trauma of losing her capital city and being forced into exile, and who, throughout her reign, had struggled to carve out a place for herself beside a husband who was shy, emotionally reserved, and almost entirely lacking in social charm.

On the other hand, the Paris through which her automobile now made its way had, for centuries, been accustomed to the most celebrated figures in the world. By 1919, its citizens were equally familiar with the constant parade of political celebrities. The Peace Conference had gathered in the city virtually every person who could claim a share of global power.

The object of all this fascination was a queen from Europe's periphery, a woman with no vote at the Conference, no official mission, and no power to sign so much as a single clause of the peace settlement. Paris—a city not known for sentimental attachment to royalty—could not seem to get enough of her. Why?

#

The beginning of the twentieth century revealed the gradual erosion of a ruler's ability to command the masses through authority alone. Public opinion was hardly a new phenomenon in what was then the most urbanized region of the world. For centuries, even rulers who claimed divine right had relied on printed materials to persuade their populations of the legitimacy of their causes. Yet even after the French Revolution—and in some ways especially after it, when the doctrine of divine right was dealt its most serious blow—the voice of a leader still retained enormous mobilizing power. The Napoleonic Wars demonstrated that a ruler's call could still move entire populations, particularly when the prospect of war loomed.

The First World War, however, exposed how much that influence had weakened. Obedience to laws, payment of taxes, respect for institutions, even loyalty to one's ruler or their family—these could still be expected. Marching into an army and facing death on command became something else entirely.

The public's resistance to the idea of risking one's life began to make itself felt almost from the very beginning of the conflict. The most famous example is the Christmas Truce of 1914. British and German soldiers spontaneously ceased fire

1 Marie, Queen of Romania, "Later Chapters of My Life: The Lost Memoir of Queen Marie of Romania", ed. Diana Mandache p. 21 (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

across numerous sectors of the Western Front. They emerged from their trenches, exchanged cigarettes, food, and small souvenirs, buried their dead, and in some places even played soccer. Military commanders were alarmed and took steps to ensure that it would not happen again.

The other side of the ocean, when Woodrow Wilson was elected in 1916, his campaign slogan was "He kept us out of war." Barely a year later, when the United States entered the conflict, his administration created the Committee on Public Information to persuade the public of the war's necessity. That same year, 1917, events on the European continent revealed similar tensions. Following General Nivelle's disastrous offensive, roughly half of the French Army's divisions were affected by acts of indiscipline and mutiny. The soldiers had not become absolute pacifists. Most remained willing to defend France, but they refused attacks they regarded as pointless and sacrificial. The citizen-soldier of the twentieth century demanded a credible justification, not merely an order.

In Russia, after the fall of the Tsar, millions of soldiers simply began leaving the front. There was no single decisive military defeat sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Traditional authority had simply ceased to command automatic obedience.

Before the war, European socialist parties had proclaimed that workers belonged to no fatherland and should not kill one another for the interests of elites. The socialist anthem *The Internationale* itself embodied this principle. Yet in August 1914, most socialist parties voted for war credits and rallied behind their own governments. Conditional obedience was not so much a political statement as a state of mind.

One year later, in 1918, this reality would be demonstrated within what was widely regarded as the most disciplined army in the world. When Germany's naval leadership ordered a final sortie against the British fleet, sailors stationed at the port of Kiel concluded that the operation was both futile and suicidal. They refused the order. The mutiny quickly spread and contributed directly to the collapse of the German Empire.

#

Of course, in 1919, Queen Marie lacked the conceptual framework needed to understand the changing relationship between rulers and the governed in the terms available to us today. Born and raised as a respected member of the British royal family and the granddaughter of two empresses, she grew up much like any other child of her social standing, with an early sense of duty instilled in her toward whichever crown she might one day be called to serve.

Having arrived at the Romanian court at the age of seventeen, the first phase of her life in Romania—when her youthful beauty was rightly admired—was a subdued one. It was overshadowed not only by the shyness of a young woman uprooted from her homeland and married for reasons of state, but also by the commanding personalities of her royal in-laws.

Marie passively drew the interest of photographers and of those concerned with the future of the dynasty. Between 1896 and 1904, her image became increasingly familiar in the illustrated

H.M. the Queen of Romania at the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, 10 April 1919 (National Library of France, Department of Prints and Photography, EI-13 (636))



magazines of the day, but only as a member of the family of Carmen Sylva and King Carol I. People would talk about her gowns, her hairstyles, and her equestrian outfits. Otherwise, the Crown Princess was either pregnant or recovering from childbirth. Marie had a face, but not yet a voice.

Beginning in 1904, however, something changed. The Crown Princess started writing children's stories, memoirs, and allegorical plays. The latter, in particular, gave her an opportunity to begin constructing herself—or at least the version of herself she wished to present to the public. Marie conceived and staged allegorical productions based on her own texts, taking an active role in both their direction and performance. One such production, known in Romanian as *Visul unei domnițe* (The Princess's Dream), was an Edwardian fairy-tale play: a romanticized medieval tale populated by fairies, elaborate costumes, and a richly romantic, Symbolist atmosphere.

The work itself possessed little literary merit, but we shouldn't imagine these productions as slightly ridiculous school-pageant affairs. They were major social events in Bucharest. Tickets were sold. Newspapers reported on the sets, costumes, and participants. Aristocrats and diplomats competed to attend. By then, her presence had become the principal attraction, while the charitable causes supported by these events shielded her from any accusation of vanity.

During the same period (1902–1912), Marie began designing the interiors of Cotroceni Palace and Pelișor Castle according to her own tastes, creating small aesthetic worlds that reflected her personality. Following a similar formula, she organized charity balls, patronized art exhibitions, and published her fairy tales. She developed a taste for photo sessions and befriended Ferenc Mandy, the official photographer of the Royal House. Most importantly, she gave her first interviews to the British press.

Princess Marie, until recently occupied almost exclusively with motherhood, was discovering that she could become a public figure who could shape and control her own image. Cotroceni Palace evolved into a laboratory for her public persona. In 1912, with *The Lily of Life*[2], she entered the English-speaking literary world. The book appeared under her full royal title and was illustrated in the Art Nouveau style by Helen Stratton, an artist already well known for her work.

Before 1904, Marie had a public face, but not yet a public voice.

#

Between 1914 and 1916, Marie's psychological evolution—as it emerges from contemporary documents—has taken another turn. The Crown Princess, a consummate master of what we would now call the art of being a socialite, began to discover her political vocation. Her support for the Entente stemmed not simply from her English upbringing or Russian family ties: Marie genuinely embraced the aspiration of bringing Transylvania into her adopted kingdom. Her transition from British aristocrat to active Romanian patriot was gradual, and its consequences would shape the rest of her public life.

In 1914, however, the only realistic hope of seeing Transylvania united with the kingdom depended on an Entente victory. The year unfolded with breathtaking speed. In January, Marie gave birth to Mircea, her youngest child. In June came the assassination at Sarajevo. In July, the conflict that would become the First World War erupted. Meanwhile, her father-in-law, King Carol I, regarded Romania as bound by its secret alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Crown Council of August 3, 1914, decided in favor of neutrality. But on October 10, Carol I dies, and Marie becomes queen consort.

By that time, she had become nothing like today's princesses, so often overwhelmed by the public life demanded by their rank. Long before ascending the throne, Marie had embraced being the

2 Marie, Crown Princess of Roumania, "The Lily of Life: A Fairy Tale", preface by Carmen Sylva, illus. Helen Stratton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913).

center of attention. She may have inherited none of the instinct for power associated with figures such as Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, or the Medici women. While in her journal she wished she was a king[3] or a man[4], she never sought to seize visible authority for herself. Instead, she learned to work with the instruments available to her from within the patriarchal society into which she had married. She unquestionably exercised considerable influence over her husband; she was an intimate presence within the highly political Știrbey–Brătianu circle, yet she never attempted to play the kind of political role they held.

Between 1914 and 1916, the new queen consistently advocated Romania's alignment with the Entente, but it was the Prime Minister Brătianu who controlled the timetable. He negotiated, delayed, demanded territorial guarantees, and waited for what he believed would be the right moment. Marie's role—at least the obvious one—was limited to shielding her husband from the Germanophiles' pressure. She herself described the balance of power in cooler, almost clinical terms "The King was the symbol, the standard. Brătianu was truly the head, the power, the one who knew what he was doing, who pulled the strings. He is gone.[5]"

After the war, two opposing myths emerged. One, popular during the interwar years, claimed that Romania entered the war because Queen Marie was a Francophile. The other, cultivated by the Communist regime's anti-monarchical historiography, portrayed her as little more than a decorative figure with no historical significance. None captures the complex reality in which she evolved.

By 1916, neutrality had become politically untenable. On August 17, Romania finally signed both the political and military conventions with the Entente. Marie played no formal role in those negotiations. Yet within the royal court—in conversations with Ferdinand and within the narrow circles where power was exercised—she helped make the Allied cause appear not only legitimate and emotionally compelling but, for the Romanian state, virtually inevitable. On August 27, she wrote that she had been one of only a handful of people who had known for weeks that Romania was about to enter the war. The remark suggests that she had access to the innermost circle of decision-making.

Even more revealing—and far more characteristic of Marie herself—was another event that took place that same August: the publication of *My Country*[6]. "The Queen of a small Country! Those who are accustomed to see rulers of greater lands can little understand what it means. It means work and anxiety and hope …"

The cover reads: Published for The Times by Hodder & Stoughton. London. 1916. The imprint indicates that The Times was institutionally involved in the project, not merely that it reviewed the book. "All profits from the sale of this book will be paid to the British Red Cross for work in Rumania." The volume simultaneously served as: a pictorial introduction to Romania, a work of wartime propaganda, a fundraising campaign for humanitarian relief, and an editorial project backed by a prestigious newspaper. Queen Marie was laying the foundations of what we would call *a national brand*.

3 "Oh, why am I not the king?" Marie, Queen of Romania, Jurnal de război: 1916–1917, vol. I, trans. Anca Bărbulescu, ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2022), p. 165, diary entry for September 25/October 8, 1916.

4 "Oh God, if only I were a man, with a man's rights and the spirit I have in my woman's body! I would rally them to a desperate, glorious resistance, coûte que coûte!" ibidem, vol. II, p. 294, diary entry for November 21/December 4, 1917.

5 Marie, Queen of Romania, Însemnări zilnice, vol. IX, 1 ianuarie–31 decembrie 1927, trans. Sanda Ileana Racoviceanu, ed. Olga-Silvia Turbatu (Iași: Polirom, 2012), 392, diary entry for November 24, 1927.

6 My Country. London: Published for The Times by Hodder and Stoughton, 1916. https://archive.org/details/mycountry00mariuoft.

#

She threw herself into the war effort without sparing herself. Marie visited the wounded, worked tirelessly for the Red Cross, made endless rounds of hospitals, raised funds, and used every tool at her disposal to make that carefully cultivated public persona a palpable presence among civilians and soldiers alike.

But 1916 did not end as she had hoped. On November 2, her youngest son, Mircea, died. As if that were not enough, Romania's initial offensive into Transylvania had collapsed, while the Central Powers' counteroffensive drove the Romanian army steadily eastward and southward. Bucharest was on the verge of falling. On November 11, the High Command convened a council of ministers that decided to evacuate the government ministries, central authorities, Parliament, and the diplomatic corps to Iași. Queen Marie was about to lose her capital city. Alexandru Marghiloman noted he has seen: "The Queen, very grave, weakened, yet completely self-controlled."[7] He was the head of the opposition and consistently argued that Romania should remain aligned with the Central Powers, hardly one of her admirers.

On November 13, the Queen wrote in her private diary: "The unknown has begun: where am I going, for how long, and for what purpose?... The train is terribly crowded…"[8]

After the fall of Bucharest, Romania virtually disappeared from the Western press. French and British newspapers devoted coverage to Verdun, the Somme, and later America's entry into the war. Romania surfaced only occasionally, usually in connection with the devastating typhus epidemic disease.

In Iași, however, Marie regrouped and recovered her full arsenal. In the hospitals, she worked as a nurse in the literal sense of the word; then she traveled almost to the front lines, driving her own automobile. Above all, she made certain that none of these activities went undocumented. She had long understood the power of photography. She is the woman dressed in the flowing white uniform of a Red Cross nurse, complete with veil and crimson cross. She is the mother in mourning. She is the woman on horseback, wearing the honorary uniform of a colonel, with military tunic, broad belt, epaulettes, and peaked cap. Nor was it mere performance: some of these photographs were taken at Mărășești, within earshot of the guns.

Yet there were very few war correspondents in Iași. How did these images and stories reach the West?

Here, Marie's determination to document her own wartime role was joined by something else: the extraordinary admiration she inspired locally. Romanian soldiers adored her, and their admiration proved contagious among the roughly 1,200 officers of the French Military Mission. General Berthelot, Marcel Fontaine, and numerous junior officers wrote home about her. Many of their letters were eventually published.

Because it was not only Romanians who needed courage and inspiration during the war. The royal figure embodied by Marie perfectly suited the Allied cause as a whole. Foreign accounts merged with the steady stream of photographs supplied by the Romanians. Newspapers in France, Britain, and the United States compared her to Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc. Agencies such as Underwood & Underwood and Central News distributed her photographs internationally. *L'Illustration, Le Miroir, Excelsior, The Illustrated London News, The Sphere, The Times, The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* represent only a fraction—perhaps thirty percent—of the Western publications that celebrated the "nurse queen" and "the soldier queen."

7 Alexandru Marghiloman, Note politice, 1897–1924, vol. 2, 1916–1917 (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice "Eminescu," 1927), entry for November 11, 1916, p. 297.

8 Marie, Queen of Romania, Jurnal de război: 1916–1917, vol. I, trans. Anca Bărbulescu, ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014, 2022), 237, diary entry for November 13/26, 1916.

It would be difficult to argue that Marie consciously devised a strategy by which a monarch deprived of traditional authority could regain it by becoming an influencer. Yet it is equally difficult to deny her instinctive grasp of the new realities of the modern age unfolding around her. Marie was no suffragette campaigning for women's rights, nor another Catherine de' Medici pulling the strings of high politics. She was, in many ways, more modern than the suffragettes and every bit as effective as the Serpent Queen because, through a combination of talent and determination, she instinctively mastered the instruments history had placed in her hands.

#

At five o'clock in the morning on March 5, 1919, the train stopped at Laroche-Migennes station, where the locomotive took on water. Colette, then a reporter for Le Matin, arrived during the night, waited at the station, and at dawn, when the Bucharest express pulled in, simply boarded the royal carriage with an enormous bouquet of orchids. Presenting it to Marie, she declared, "À la plus belle reine d'Europe."[9]

The Queen replied, "What are you doing here instead of writing a novel? It feels as though centuries have passed since you published one." For Colette was one of France's literary celebrities. The exchange perfectly captures the queen's instinctive gift for human connection: with a single sentence she recast herself into a fellow writer rather than the subject of an interview. The conversation appeared the following day under the headline *Ainsi parla la reine de Roumanie*.

Even this small episode, taken on its own, makes one thing abundantly clear: a few hours later, when the train finally arrived at the Gare de Lyon, the woman stepping onto the platform was a legend.



Queen Marie visiting a hospital in 1917 (National Military Museum of Romania, 1924)

The very next day, Queen Marie's suite at the Ritz became an improvised press room. Interviews, photographs, and statements filled every available minute. "Who am I, if not the first civil servant of my country… and not the best paid?" she joked with the reporters, with just enough humor to put everyone at ease.

On March 7 she held her first meeting with Georges Clemenceau, most likely at the Ministry of War. "I do not like your prime minister," Clemenceau reportedly told her. "Perhaps you will find me more agreeable," she is said to have replied.

No transcript of these meetings survives. We cannot point to any particular argument or decisive exchange. Hours of conversation have been reduced to Marie's own recollections—inevitably polished, and published many years later. Yet Raymond Poincaré noted in his diary that Clemenceau's attitude toward Romania changed markedly over the following days[10].

On March 8 Marie was received at the Élysée Palace by President Raymond Poincaré, in the

9 Colette, "Ainsi parla la reine de Roumanie," Le Matin, March 6, 1919.
10 Raymond Poincaré, Au service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs, vol. 11, « À la recherche de la paix, » 1919.

presence of Marshal Ferdinand Foch and Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon, with full military honors and an official luncheon. Newspapers also recorded her visit to the Institut de France and to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, of which she was an associate member. "Wherever I go, the public runs after me. They even run out of the shops, the *vendeuses* pursue me and flowers are continually pressed into my hands. The weather is beautiful; I was much too hot in my coat and had to take it off."[11] The following day she toured the ruined battlefields and laid flowers on the graves at Noyon. Back in Paris, she expanded her network of informal contacts within diplomatic and military circles. A second visit to the Élysée, attended by Poincaré and senior representatives of French diplomacy, appears to have been a genuine working session, although no transcript survives. She departed for England on March 12.

Returning to Paris on March 30, she channeled her political capital once again into the moral and humanitarian sphere. She made a charitable donation to children in the regions devastated by the war, attended an opera gala organized for their benefit, and visited Reims Cathedral. At the same time, French newspapers carried Romanian communiqués and accounts of Romania's suffering. She lunched with Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon at the Quai d'Orsay, visited the Hôtel de Ville, and finally met Woodrow Wilson. On April 18 she left Paris; soon afterward, the Romanian delegation resumed its place at the center of the peace negotiations.

#

The image of Queen Marie sweeping into Paris, dazzling every statesman she encountered with irresistible charm until they simply handed Romania Transylvania, Bukovina, and whatever else the beautiful Cinderella might have wished for—is undeniably seductive. But the political calculations behind those territorial decisions were numerous and overwhelmingly reflected the strategic interests of the four major powers.

It would be unfair to overlook that, remarkable as her personal charisma undoubtedly was, it did not work on everyone. Her meeting with President Wilson was a mutual disappointment. Marie softened the episode in her memoirs, but it was almost certainly the least productive—and certainly the least pleasant—of all her encounters in Paris.

Would Romania have received Transylvania without her visit? The Bolshevik threat emanating from Russia, the need for a buffer zone in Central Europe, France's determination to strengthen the new nation-states emerging from the collapse of Habsburg rule, and Wilson's cherished principle of national self-determination—all these factors existed independently of Queen Marie. In all likelihood, Transylvania would still have become part of the Kingdom of Romania, though perhaps not with the same borders, not as quickly, and not under the same political circumstances.

Originally cultivated as a form of self-expression—and, fundamentally, a pleasure—Marie's public persona was redirected during the war into an instrument for sustaining Romanian morale in the face of military catastrophe and devastating epidemic. In Paris, however, it reached its fullest potential by thawing the diplomatic freeze and helping bring the Kingdom of Romania back to the negotiating table.

To understand how such a phenomenon became possible in Paris—and later in the United States—her charm, her political instincts, her patriotism, and even her royal rank are not, by themselves, sufficient explanations. To understand, we must do what Marie herself did: use the tools of our own age to trace how, year after year, she patiently laid one brick upon another in the construction of her public image—first at court, then as a national symbol, and finally as an international one.

By the time the train finally arrived at the Gare de Lyon in May 1919, the woman stepping onto the platform had become a legend.

11 Marie, Queen of Romania, "Later Chapters of My Life: The Lost Memoir of Queen Marie of Romania", ed. Diana Mandache p. 26 (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

Queen Marie of Romania: The 1926 North American Tour

Building a Political, Cultural and Economic Bridge

BY IONEL DRAGOȘ HĂU

In October 1926, the year the United States was celebrating the sesquicentennial of its *Declaration of Independence,* a ship named the SS Leviathan steamed into New York Harbor carrying a remarkable guest from across the Atlantic Ocean: Queen Marie of Romania.[1] A granddaughter of Queen Victoria and a first cousin of both Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and King George V of Britain, Queen Marie was related to most of Europe's royal houses. As the queen consort of King Ferdinand of Romania,[2] she was the woman who had personally lobbied the great powers at the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919 to secure territorial gains she believed her battered country had earned through devastating sacrifice. Now, seven years later, she came to America on a very different mission—not to negotiate, but to give thanks. And in thanking, she would build.

The tour served multiple purposes, including to strengthen diplomatic and commercial ties between Romania and the United States, to dedicate the Maryhill Museum of Art in the state of Washington (a project of her American friend Sam Hill), and—as the Queen herself candidly acknowledged—"to put Romania on the map." But the most touching, consistent and emotionally charged aspects of the journey were Queen Marie's deliberate efforts to meet the Romanian immigrant communities scattered across North America. Meeting the Native American tribes of the Sioux and Blackfoot nations in their homeland in North Dakota added a particularly soulful dimension, one worthy of a compassionate queen who showed genuine interest in alleviating the suffering of those around her.

The visit—which stretched across six weeks and covered more than 10,000 miles by rail from New York to the Pacific coast and back through the United States and Canada—offers an example of extraordinary political shrewdness, cultural generosity, and economic calculation, a journey whose full significance has long been underappreciated. The 1926 royal tour was more than a celebrity spectacle—though it was certainly that; it was a deliberate act of statecraft. Queen Marie had come to honor those who had kept Romania alive during its darkest hours in WWI, and in doing so, she set out to deepen ties that she hoped would secure her nation's place in the emerging postwar world order.

The events that led to the 1926 visit across America started ten years earlier. Romania had entered WWI in August 1916 on the side of the Allies, believing the territorial gains promised in the secret Treaty of Bucharest (1916). The consequences were catastrophic. Within months, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Bulgarian forces overran two-thirds of the country, including the capital Bucharest. The royal family and government fled to Iași, situated in the northeast

1 Marie (Romanian: Maria), born Princess Marie of Edinburgh (1875 – 1938) was the last queen consort of Romania.

2 Ferdinand I the Unifier (1865 – 1927), King of Romania between October 1914 - July 1927. Ferdinand was the second son of Leopold, Prince of Hohenzollern, and Infanta Antónia of Portugal.



Cover page of the Society of Friends of Roumania Bulletin dedicated to Her Majesty, Queen Marie of Roumania, issued in New York in October 1926

province of Moldova. During those terrible years of occupation, until November 1918, it was largely American humanitarian organizations—above all the American Relief Administration and the American Red Cross—along with a network of wealthy private donors energized by Loie Fuller, that provided food, medicine, and moral solidarity to a Romania on the edge of annihilation. During the war, Queen Marie was present on the front lines, encouraging the troops and serving as a nurse in the field hospitals. Her presence uplifted morale and inspired the Romanian soldiers to give their best. She emerged from that ordeal not broken but strengthened. At Versailles in 1919, she charmed and persuaded the Allied leadership with such effect that Romania secured international recognition for its greatly enlarged territory—incorporating Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina, and regaining Southern Dobruja. She had done so, through a combination of diplomatic brilliance and sheer personal force.

By 1926, Romania's debt of gratitude to America was genuine and pressing. It was Loie Fuller—an American-born avant-garde dancer who had befriended the Queen during her pre-war Paris years and had spent WWI crisscrossing the United States rallying wealthy donors to Romania's cause—who first suggested that the Queen visit America in person. Prime Minister General Alexandru Averescu authorized the trip, the Romanian government provided initial travel funds, and West Coast millionaire Sam Hill, a pacifist visionary who had met the Queen through Fuller in Paris during the postwar peace negotiations, agreed to cover all American expenses.

The Queen sailed to America with a party of seventeen, including her son Prince Nicholas, 23, her daughter Princess Ileana, 17, her close friend and de facto impresario Loie Fuller, and a special aide, Major Stanley Washburn. The visitors arrived in New York on October 18, 1926, and were welcomed by the city mayor, a large number of journalists, and crowds of ten to fifteen people deep lining the sidewalks amid falling confetti. In New York, Constance Lily Morris, the daughter of Victor Henry Rothschild, joined Queen Marie's entourage and published a detailed eyewitness account of the tour in her book "On Tour with Queen Marie."[3]

The day after their arrival, the visitors traveled by train to Washington, D.C., where an official party was held at the Romanian Legation. The Romanian Legation on Embassy Row—a mansion on Sheridan Circle on Massachusetts Avenue purchased years earlier by the previous minister, Prince Antoine Bibesco—became the stage for royal receptions attended by Secretary of State Kellogg and other senior officials. The Queen's ability to draw these figures to the Legation reinforced Romania's standing as a serious diplomatic interlocutor at a moment when the smaller "new nations" of postwar Europe were still competing for recognition and investment from the great power that had emerged from the war as the world's dominant creditor nation. While

3 Constance Lily Morris, "On Tour with Queen Marie", Robert M. McBride & Co, New York, 1927.

The diplomatic status of Queen Marie's visit was deliberately ambiguous, and that ambiguity was itself a mark of political sophistication

in DC, the Queen visited Arlington Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and followed with a trip to George Washington's 150-year-old home at Mount Vernon, offered by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

On the political side of this visit, the diplomatic status of Queen Marie's visit was deliberately ambiguous, and that ambiguity was itself a mark of political sophistication. The Romanian government had authorized the trip but declined to classify it as a state visit—partly to avoid triggering protocol obligations on the American side, and partly because the Queen's objectives were as much personal as governmental. This ambiguity created an awkward situation for President Calvin Coolidge. An old-school Vermonter who had never received a king or queen at the White House, he was reportedly uncertain about how to proceed. As one newspaper noted, the President "announced that he was looking forward to her visit, but added: *"It's all right, so long as she thoroughly understands she has to pay her own expenses."* [4] Nonetheless, the White House meeting took place on Tuesday, October 19, 1926. It was a brief thirteen-minute visit, of which only four minutes were the formal part. "President Coolidge, reticent, almost austere on formal occasions, standing beside his wife, a former schoolmistress, both bowing, and shaking—not kissing—the hand of the studiedly impulsive Queen Marie."[5] The visit was reciprocated twenty-five minutes later by the President and his wife coming to the Romanian Legation. The same evening, a White House reception counted only forty-six governmental invitees, each having American, Romanian, or British connections.

The meeting in Washington D.C. mattered. In 1926, Romania was a new and assertive democracy—it had adopted a new Constitution in 1923, which John Foster Dulles, a member of the Society of Friends of Romania's board of directors, described as "a constructive and forward-looking document" showing Romania had "the genius to adapt to modern use the finest concepts of Roman, Greek, and French jurisprudence."[6] For a country still establishing its international credibility, having its queen received at the White House, however informally, was a visible signal of American goodwill.

On October 21, battling a cold, Queen Marie visited the Romanian immigrant community in Philadelphia, starting a pattern she would maintain throughout the tour. She visited the local Romanian Orthodox church—a small wooden building in the heart of a poorer section of the city, founded by Transylvanians who had fled oppressive Austro-Hungarian rule before WWI—for what she described as "an impressive religious ceremony." Apparently, it was always the intention of the Romanian Queen to first pay special attention to her compatriots, establishing a protocol that would be repeated in virtually every major city. At the Philadelphia church, the devotion of the priests and congregation more than compensated for the modesty of the building. Only after this gesture of solidarity with her compatriots did the Queen proceed to the official civic banquet given by the Mayor of Philadelphia.

Back in New York, the Queen attended a grand reception given by the Society of Friends of Romania, the American organization headed by the distinguished lawyer William N. Cromwell, a Wall Street titan who had done charity work connecting him to the Romanian Relief Committee during the war. The Society, established under the patronage of Queen Marie in 1920, operated with the declared goal to further and strengthen the existing

4 https://www.baltimoresun.com/1997/11/09/marie-was-citys-queen-for-a-day-majesty-romanian-royals-visit-was-baltimores-first-by-a-reigning-monarch.

5 Dan Dimancescu, Queen Marie in America: My Glorious Adventure (2019), 52, quoting "A Queen Among Us Taking Notes," The Literary Digest, November 6, 1926, vol. 91, no. 6, 12.

6 The Society of Friends of Roumania, Bulletin dedicated to Her Majesty, Queen Marie of Roumania, October 18, 1926.

friendship between the peoples of the Kingdom of Romania and the United States of America.

In honor of the Queen's arrival, the Society published in October 1926 an elegantly designed 110-page special edition of its *Quarterly Journal*, with contributions on Romanian law, culture, and economy from many of its distinguished members. The Society was not a social club. It was, in effect, a formal American support for Romanian interests at the highest levels of government, finance, and media—built on the goodwill that the Queen's wartime suffering and postwar statesmanship had generated and made permanent by the 1926 visit.

Perhaps the most substantial political achievement of the royal visit was the formalization of a powerful American advocacy network for Romania. What gave the Society of Friends of Romania real weight was the caliber of its twenty-one-person board, which made the economic agenda explicit. Roger Farnham's position as vice-president of the National City Bank of New York connected the Queen's network directly to the dominant American investment bank of the era—the institution through which most American foreign lending to European nations was conducted. Among its members, the Society listed Frederick H. Allen, former aide to General Pershing, John Foster Dulles, future Secretary of State under President Eisenhower, Allen Dulles, future head of the CIA; and also, the Romanian diplomats Radu Irimescu and Serban Drutzu.

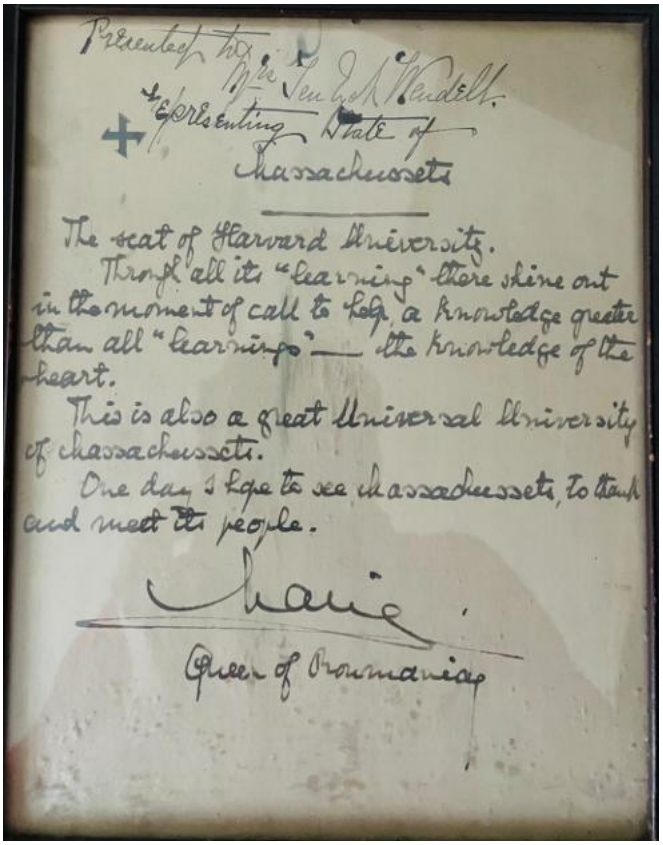
In 1926, Romania was a country of enormous natural promise but considerable financial need. Rich in oil—the Ploiești fields were among the most productive in Europe—as well as salt, wheat, and fertile land, postwar Romania presented major economic opportunities that Queen Marie wanted to bring to the attention of American decision-makers, investors, and opinion leaders. The trip was intended to place her in contact with some of the richest and most influential men and women of the time, people who could fund, invest in, and advocate for Romania's economic development. The oil dimension was real. American



The arrival in New York, where the Queen received the key of the city from Mayor James Walker (reginamaria.org)

companies were actively competing with British and Dutch interests for concessions in Romanian and adjacent fields. Having a Romanian queen personally connected to American millionaires, who had dined with Rockefeller allies and sat on the boards of banks with Romanian portfolios, would lead to a favorable environment for American commercial interests in the region.

On Saturday, October 23rd, at an event organized at the Capitol Theater, Marie appeared in Romanian national costume, simple and symbolic, and was greeted by young girls in similar dress. The program included songs, a ballet, motion pictures of Romanian Red Cross activities during the war, and a presentation of Romanian Girl Scouts. Princess Ileana addressed the audience first in Romanian and then in English, expressing gratitude and promising to carry the greetings of American children back to Romania. As a reminder of this short encounter, Queen Marie published in 1929 at F. Stokes & Co in New York a storybook addressed specifically to the children



Hand written note offered by Queen Marie to Mrs. Wendell, representing the state of Massachusetts at the women's meeting on October 24, 1926 in New York

of America, including those of Romanian origin.[7]

On Sunday, October 24, the Queen attended services at the Church of England in New York, in keeping with her British upbringing and then, following teachings from her Russian mother, at a church offering both Romanian and Russian Orthodox services. That afternoon, after meeting women representing all the American states and gifting them handwritten impression notes of their states, based on her lectures aboard SS Leviathan, the Queen prepared to board "The Royal Roumanian." The elaborate luxury train offered by Baltimore & Ohio railway company for the royal tour would take her and her entourage through Canada, the Midwest, all the way to Seattle and back.

The next day, the train set off to Canada. Along the way, they stopped at West Point Military Academy, where the Queen reviewed the cadets in a heavy autumn rain. After that, the town of Buffalo offered a red-carpet reception and a royal dinner party. Crossing into the Dominion of Canada included a mandatory stop at Niagara Falls, where the waterfalls rainbow was admired from the Canadian side. The reception of the Queen in Toronto was worthy of a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. At the Town Hall, groups of Romanians, as well as a Rabbi and Jewish émigrés were there to meet her. At the Government House, Lieutenant-Governor Henry Cockshutt, appointed to represent King George V, Queen Marie's uncle, organized a stylish dinner. The next day, in Montreal, the reception was equally majestic. A brief tour of Montreal included McGill University, the French-speaking Université de Montreal, and a Catholic school for girls. In the local Romanian Orthodox church of the Annunciation, the Queen met the local congregation.[8] In a new world so alien to their spirits, the immigrants displayed a "submissive, serf-like air" as they kissed the Queen's hand—a gesture that carried pathos and great depth of feeling. The physical presence of their sovereign was the closest thing to home these transplanted Romanians had encountered in Canada. The next day, at the Parliament building in Ottawa, Lord and Lady Willingdon hosted a banquet to which Canada's political, business, and social élite were invited.

Back on the train, Winnipeg, still a typical frontier town, was the next destination 1,200 miles away to the west, which was reached on October 29, on Queen's 51st birthday. At the Manitoba Legislative building, a delegation of 75 Romanians dressed in traditional costumes was allowed in first; they brought flowers and read a declaration in front of the

7 Queen Marie of Roumania, "The magic doll of Roumania, a wonder story in which East and West meet, written for American children", F. A. Stokes Co, New York, 1929.
8 Constance Lily Morris, "On Tour with Queen Marie", Robert M. McBride & Co, New York, 1927, p. 87.

Queen, followed for a few hours by thousands of other locals willing to greet the Queen.

On October 31st, The Royal Romanian train turned back south to the USA, headed to Minnesota. At St. Paul station, facing the huge crowd and receiving the addresses of a group of her compatriots, the Queen was invited into the radio room where she delivered a short address, inviting the farmers of North Dakota to come aboard the train with their wives and children to meet her when the train was to stop at the various cities along the way the next day. At each stop, two farmers and their wives were invited to come on board the train and ride with her and to chat with her informally as she asked about their homes, their schools, and their farming operations.

A similar thread ran through the western portion of the tour: the Queen's fascination with American farming life and her sustained effort—conceived and launched from St. Paul, Minnesota—to meet ordinary North Dakota farm families face to face. This initiative, carried out through the Great Plains, reflected a practical concern for Romania's own agricultural future as much as any ceremonial duty. Together, the encounters with Romanian immigrants and with American farmers form two of the defining human stories of the 1926 tour.

In the Midwest, Queen Marie visited farms, attended a rodeo, and met with the chiefs of the Sioux and Blackfoot native American tribes, the most important of whom was the great chief Red Tomahawk, in the localities of North Dakota and Mandan. The natives of the Blackfoot Tribe named Queen Marie *"Morning Star,"* while the Sioux Indians named her *"Winyan Kipanpi Win,"* which translates as *"The Woman You Call For."* As the highest sign of respect and of adoption into the tribe with the rank of chief, the Natives presented the Queen with a crown of eagle feathers—a very rare distinction not granted to women unless they distinguished themselves through courage and sacrifice during wartime. The Natives gave speeches and danced around the Queen, calling her *"Warrior Woman."* The eldest among the Indian tribal chiefs, Red Tomahawk, delivered a speech before the Queen conferring upon her the title of honorary chief. With these words, Queen Marie was gifted the eagle feather crown. The Queen gave Chief Red Tomahawk a Romanian *ie* (traditional blouse) and pieces of folk art, while the Natives in turn presented her with traditional gifts from their tribes. By pin pricking their thumbs and mixing drops of blood, Queen Marie became a tribal chief and sister of the Natives of the Wild West. "I have lived a whole lifetime of love today. To love is to live," she told reporters, "and this reception by the primal sons of the great continent is more to me than all the silk hatted wealth that is continually pouring in on me."[9]

"I am here to be Romanians' face, to make it more personal than statistics and a map."

On November 2nd, several thousand people gathered to greet the Queen in Helena, Montana. At the next stop in the town of Avon, four Romanian shepherds who walked for miles from their farm, thrilled by the thought of seeing the Queen, asked for permission to address her in their native tongue. At the end of the day, the train pulled into Spokane, WA, where a crowd of over 40,000 people were expecting the Queen.

The inauguration of the Maryhill Museum on the spectacular Columbia River was the emotional centerpiece of the 1926 tour, and its most concentrated act of cultural bridge-building. Sam Hill had conceived of the site and had filled it with art objects, many contributed by Queen Marie. At the ceremony, attended by some two thousand people in the dramatic landscape above the Columbia gorge, the Queen gave the most moving speeches of her visit. She spoke of the cause that had brought her across the ocean, and of the need for peace between nations. She released a white dove. Many people in the audience were moved to tears by the sincerity and weight of her words. Maryhill remains, a century later, a monument to the transatlantic friendship among an Oregon millionaire, a Romanian queen, and the network of

9 "Queen Marie's Royal Progress Through the West," New York Times Mid- Week Pictorial, November 25, 1926, Vol. XXIV, No. 14.



Art by Manuel Rosenberg for Cincinnati Post newspaper, 1927 (Wikimedia Commons)

European and American cultural figures that Loie Fuller had spent two decades weaving together.

They could "be good American citizens and still remain loyal to the country of their birth."

On the way back from the West Coast, on November 10th in Denver, Colorado, at a public auditorium where thirteen thousand people had gathered, a large group of Romanians occupied the front rows. The Queen delivered her address and then advanced to the very edge of the platform and leaned forward to speak to the Romanian group personally and with great intensity. She told them they should not forget their fatherland; that they could be good American citizens and still remain loyal to the country of their birth. Children in Romanian costumes brought her baskets of flowers. The next day in Omaha, NE, and St. Joseph, MO, Romanian communities had assembled on the platforms, headed by priests in their vestments and peasant women in costume who waited for the Queen to speak to them in their own tongue.

In Springfield, Illinois, the Queen visited the state arsenal, where the Romanian national anthem was sung in Romanian by her compatriots gathered there, before proceeding to visit Lincoln's home and tomb. At the University of St. Louis in Missouri, following a speech and tour, the Queen personally met with a group of Romanians gathered at the university. She then proceeded to the university chapel to serve as godmother to the baby of a former Romanian Red Cross worker who had requested this favor. This christening ceremony illustrated the depth of the Queen's personal bond with those who had served Romania in the war. It was one of the few entirely private, non-ceremonial encounters of the tour.

The visit to Chicago, from November 14th to 16th, included a Romanian orthodox church and a children's school in the West Side. In a gesture with significant diplomatic implications, the Queen then visited a prosperous Romanian Jewish congregation. The Rabbi welcomed her; the Governor praised the congregation's citizenry. An elderly man rose, displaying a Romanian decoration he said he always wore over his heart, and presented the Queen with a souvenir book. The Queen declared that the King would hear of the honor shown to her, at which the hall erupted in applause. This congregation had maintained loyalty to Romania during recent Jewish political controversies, and the Queen's visit was a deliberate reciprocation of that loyalty. Later in the day, at the Congress Hotel, the Queen was welcomed by a vast crowd of Romanians who filled the ballroom to the doors, requiring a company of soldiers to open a passage. Speeches were given by community leaders, and the Queen responded to loud spontaneous applause. At the Union League Club, the Queen gave an ardent address, the best in the tour, in which she told of how she,

an English Princess, had been called to be the Queen of Romania, of the enormous suffering she had endured through the war alongside her nation, and that she came to America "to put Roumania on the map." And since "Every country needs a face, I am here to be Romanians' face, to make it more personal than statistics and a map," the Queen stated. The same evening, she received worrisome news of the bad health of King Ferdinand, who had been ill for a while.[10]

The Queen decided to cut short the tour by several days, canceling events prepared in her honor in a few other major cities on the East Coast. Sailing from New York aboard RMS Berengaria on November 24th, 1926, she attracted large crowds to whom she thanked, with deep sorrow for the early departure. I thank you, great America, for the love you showed me, for the eagerness with which you received me, took me up in your hearts from one side of the country to the other."

Queen Marie was acutely aware of the resonance of her visit for the American people. Her autobiography emphasizes the visit to America as a high point in her life.[11] In her remarks at New York City Hall, standing beside Mayor Jimmy Walker, she said: "I know all that you can teach old Europe. It is a greeting from the whole of Europe that I bring you, because I think that both Europe and America must stretch out hands one toward the other, and that great force of love which the world ought to be full of will perhaps be brought over to you a little bit through me." It was the language of a diplomat who understood that soft power, deployed with sincerity, can accomplish what formal negotiations cannot.[12]

Queen Marie never returned to America. She departed this world in 1938, at the age of 63. However, her daughter, Princess Ileana of Romania, came to America in 1950, after being exiled by the Communist government of Romania; she settled first in Newton, MA. She later moved to France to become a nun (by the name of Mother Alexandra) and returned to the U.S. in 1967 to found the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, PA, where she passed away in 1991 and was interred.



Queen Marie welcomed in New York in October 1926 (NHMR Patrimony)

10 King Ferdinand died in July 1927, eight months after Queen Marie ended her American tour
11 Queen Marie of Roumania, "The Story of my Life", C. Scribner & Sons, New York, p. 193.
12 For further reading, we recommend the book by the late Dan Dimancescu, which offers an excellent overall review of Queen Marie's tour; see Dan Dimancescu, "My glorious adventure, Queen Marie in America, 1926", BTF Press, 2019.



Queen Marie with Samuel Hill (left), Prince Nicholas, Princess Ileana, and a Washington State dignitary



Queen Marie with New York Mayor James J. Walker and other officials in front of the City Hall
(Photos from NHMR Archives unless otherwise noted)



"Queen Marie of Romania sends an autographed photo to Her Sioux Brothers from their Sister using her Sioux name (Wiakipampiwin)" (Source: Welch Dakota Papers)



Queen Marie in Gary, Indiana



Queen Marie of Romania, Prince Nicholas and Princess Ileana with U.S. President Calvin Coolidge and First Lady Grace Coolidge at the Romanian Legation in Washington, D.C., October 1926



Queen Marie welcomed by Romanian-Americans in traditional Romanian dress



Greeting of Queen Marie by Chief Red Tomahawk in Mandan, North Dakota



Queen Marie welcomed in New York City (All photos from NHMR Archives)

Queen Marie's Literary Negotiations in an Age of Democratic Change

Structure and Moral Ethos

BY ANA MARIA HOJBOTĂ

My first encounter with Queen Marie came through my grandmother when I was a child, during a summer vacation. In the early 1990s, soon after the fall of communism, the Queen's memoir, *The Story of My Life*, was published in Romanian. When my grandmother finally got hold of a copy, I watched her lose sleep, turning page after page late into the night, only to wake before sunrise and continue reading. During the day, with deep reverence and delight, she recounted passages to me. Only now, looking back, do I realize that she was not merely telling me stories; she was reclaiming a part of our country's past that had been concealed for decades. Through her personal act of recovering an erased chapter, I first discovered the kind of passion for reading that only a truly compelling story can inspire.

Born into the British royal family, Marie, Romania's last queen, was a prolific writer who understood the power literature has in shaping public and international perceptions. Through rich memoirs, extensive travel writing, essays, and children's stories, she invited foreign readers into her world and, by extension, into Romania itself, a country she loved dearly, even if her adjustment to the new home and role was not exactly a fairy tale.

Her writings served as a means of reflection and communication, helping the Queen make sense of the new world in which she found herself: new because, on the one hand, she slowly became acquainted with this novel culture she was writing about as a foreigner, and on the other hand, the historical context was changing and offered enough lessons which, as she put it in her memoirs, "made of me something of a philosopher in my own small way."[1] Her difficult position as both an outsider and a ruler, combined with her creativity, gave her the tools to challenge rigid understandings and representations of monarchy. The Queen's memoirs capture royal life of Romanian monarchs in times of political upheaval, translating political events into human experience accessible to her readers. Writing extensively in English through travel narratives, autobiography, and stories published in popular periodicals, she acted as an interpreter between East and West, Romania and the United States of America, monarchy and democracy, by promoting national culture and heritage at home and abroad. In assuming this symbolic role, she first translated this culture to herself, by putting it into writings, especially fairy tales, among other forms.

Just like children, cultural newcomers are naïve anthropologists who learn by observing the world around them and acting within it. Entering unfamiliar social worlds, they are gradually acculturated, learning primarily through observation, imitation, and, above all, through stories. The tales they hear, read, and invent become both the medium through which they interpret reality and the means by which they acquire moral languages and emotional expectations—form conceptions of heroes and villains—and learn

1 Marie, Queen of Romania, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 559. Retrieved at https://dn721807.ca.archive.org/0/items/storyofmylifebym00mari/storyofmylifebym00mari.pdf p. vii.



Marie, Princess Ferdinand of Roumania, 1893 [in Portraits of Royal Children Vol.41 1893-1894] Sep 1893 Royal Collection RCIN 2905181 - Wikimedia Commons

either to uphold or to challenge their community's social norms. As Frevert, Eitler, and Olsen show in their volume *Learning How to Feel: Children's Literature and Emotional Socialization, 1870–1970,* stories constitute a critical vehicle for the emotional socialization of the youth, and amply reflect conceptions about autonomy, selfhood and power relations in the context of emotional development in a specific space and period.[2]

Queen Marie deeply understood this pedagogical and cultural power of storytelling. Her writings reveal an intuitive awareness of the changes monarchy would soon undergo—and would continue to undergo over the following century. Her diplomatic and humanitarian work offers further evidence of this awareness. The Queen's children's stories are considered more than literary works: they are vehicles for translating cultural differences, fostering empathy across national boundaries, and negotiating competing visions of identity and belonging. Queen Marie's choice of fairy tales, *"a literary genre that opens hearts at all ages and all social levels,"* can be considered an instrument of cultural diplomacy[3]. At the same time, the stories allowed the writer-Queen to map metaphorically a political landscape in which monarchy itself was undergoing profound transformation. In an age when hereditary authority could no longer rest on tradition alone, Marie recognized that the monarchy's legitimacy increasingly depended on its ability to tailor its traditional roles and assume new ones. She set a personal example by portraying Romania as culturally rich—modern yet rooted in tradition, European yet distinctive, cosmopolitan yet unmistakably Romanian, qualities worthy of international recognition. Her writings celebrated the country's folklore, enchantment, and sense of the marvelous, drawing on fairy tales, legends, and magical landscapes without reducing Romania to an exotic frontier. Unlike many Western writers who orientalized Eastern Europe as mysterious, primitive, or irrational, Marie presented the fantastic as an organic expression of Romanian cultural imagination.

Through creatively crafted characters and plots, the queen explored political authority and the changing relationship between rulers and their subjects in an age of liberal politics and emerging emancipation movements. These themes appear to reflect her own questions about the foundations of dynasties and hereditary privilege, particularly

"Having learnt what it was to serve […] it changed my conception of things and roused in me the desire to be of real national utility."

2 Ute Frevert, Pascal Eitler, Stephanie Olsen, Uffa Jensen, Margrit Pernau, Daniel Brückenhaus, Magdalena Beljan, Benno Gammerl, Anja Laukötter, Bettina Hitzer, Jan Plamper, Juliane Brauer, and Joachim C. Häberlen, *Learning How to Feel: Children's Literature and Emotional Socialization, 1870–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

3 Vanoaga, C. M. (2023). The fairy tales of Queen Marie of Romania as cultural diplomatic instrument in the U.S.A. In S. D. Andraș & R. Mihaly (Eds.), Creative negotiations: Romania–America 1920–1940 (pp. 255–266). Presa Universitară Clujeană.

after the recent collapse of the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian monarchies. While seeing the figure of the Queen as a writer, it is worth noting that monarchs have historically faced significant constraints on their freedom of speech. Public addresses by sovereigns and members of royal families have often been carefully vetted—first by court advisers, and later, in constitutional monarchies, by elected officials. Even today, while some monarchs enjoy greater latitude than others, official speeches are frequently drafted or approved by the government. Such restrictions, however, can carry political costs. Although carefully scripted public remarks minimize the risk of controversy, they may also become so cautious and formulaic—or, put more plainly, so dull—that they fail to inspire the expected public engagement or simply articulate a compelling message.

Against this backdrop, Queen Marie's plays, memoirs, and fairy tales can be read as an alternative and less constrained space for political reflection and expression. Through fictional characters and allegorical narratives, she explored dilemmas, voiced cautions, and pushed for an institutional change that would have been difficult—or inappropriate—to voice directly in official channels and settings. Building a literary identity was not itself unusual among royal women. Marie's predecessor, Queen Elisabeth of Wied (also known by the pen name Carmen Sylva), had established an influential model through her poetry, fairy tales, children's stories, and literary patronage. So did Marie's grandmother, Queen Victoria, who wrote memoirs to make the sovereigns' lives more relatable. Queen Marie, however, infused her literary works with qualitatively different layers of meaning and purpose.

One of her popular fairy tales, *The Story of Naughty Kildeen*[4], can be interpreted as a political allegory about the moral responsibilities of monarchy in an age of democratic politics and revolutionary change. The main character wrestles with concepts of paternal authority,



Kildeen looking out from the tower window after the first night alone (p. 15)

discipline and autonomy, thus drawing parallels between monarchic and parental powers over a child, a domain whose attached social norms were also shifting at the time. Through a series of

4 Marie, Queen of Roumania, The Story of Naughty Kildeen, illus. Job (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922). Retrieved at https://archive.org/details/storyofnaughtyki00mari

events, Kildeen learns through shame, boredom, fear, and homesickness, reflecting on her own identity and duties towards herself and others.

The political unrest and upheavals spreading across Europe must have sharpened Queen Marie's awareness that monarchy urgently needed to adapt to new sources of political legitimacy. Royal authority could no longer rest on dynastic inheritance alone, but had to be earned through public service, engagement in social reform, and particularly through its identification with national aspirations. When other claims to power lost credibility, moving closer to the people and employing charisma seemed to offer a solution that came easily to the Queen. One of the characters featured in the story, *V. populi*, an old lady who denies the royal family the ceremony and respect usually paid to monarchs, embodies the challenges to the monarchic power existing in the day. At the same time, the main character's misadventures and her royal parents' reaction to them (misadventures) unavoidably point out to the Queen's dilemmas around sources of power and the deprivation of royal family members of basic human rights.

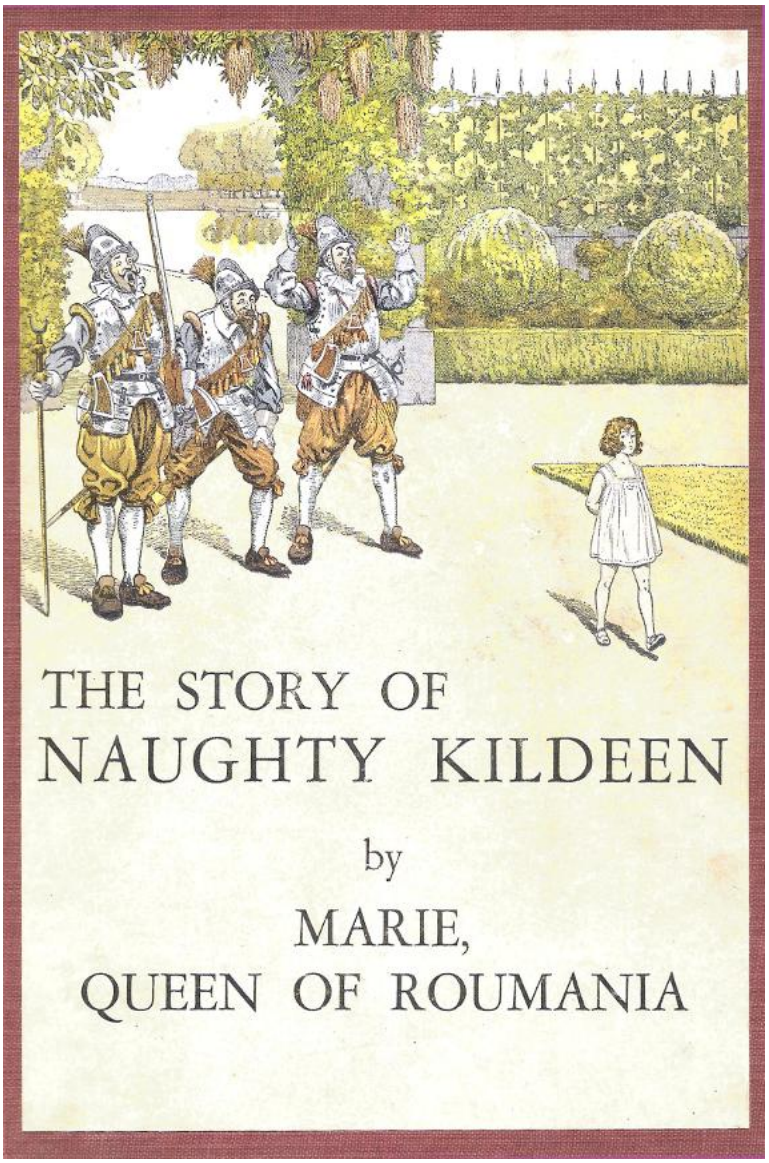
The story of naughty Kildeen reflects a belief that rulers do not simply inherit kingship; they need constantly to prove their deservingness through displays of moral worth, ethical leadership, or service to the monarchy. The young princess at the beginning of the story is a caricature of the ways in which privilege and power can corrupt (with the help of overindulgent parents) and make one lose track of a sense of one's powers and limitations: *"Kildeen was a year old when she began to have a too high opinion about herself. When Kildeen began to walk, one might have imagined that she had invented something very marvellous, something that no one else had ever been able to do before."*[5] Committing mischief after mischief, the girl culminates in stealing the king's crown, so she is sent away by her parents to learn discipline and limit the sense of hubris. The monarchy crisis that the child stages by losing her father's crown in the park gives the readers the opportunity to reflect on the power of the symbols of monarchy, and what happens when they are removed. The King *"felt so helpless and the loss of his crown was a cruel humiliation, especially as he had been snubbed by his daughter. When he had tried to use his authority, the child had simply replied that if a King could not be a King without a crown on his head, then he had better not be a King at all; and the worst was that the King kept thinking of those words, wondering if they were true."*[6]

"Princesses are little animals made to live in golden cages."

Through the voice of the child princess, the author-Queen is exposing uncomfortable truths reminding the readers of "The Emperor's New Clothes." The child is a philosophical critic of the institution of which she is a part, engendering a crisis of conscience within the king, who feels humiliated and forced to reflect on the right granted him by birth, and the paradox revealed by the absence of his crown. However, for daring to undertake this challenge, the child is removed from her comfort and privileges, sent away, and shut in a tower with 21 eagles, to *"realize how precious had been the things that once had been hers."*[7] Slowly and paradoxically, it is in the wilderness, and deprived of human presence, that the child tames herself through a process of self-transformation, becoming amiable and polite, and finally understanding the effects of her questioning authority and right as she bows in front of a swan: *"Suddenly she felt very shabby in her dusty, crumpled clothes, and bitterly did she long for one of her most beautiful dresses' so as to stand more worthily before this creature of light; then, rather tardily remembering her manners, Kildeen made a curtsy, holding a fold of her dress at each side."*[8]

Kildeen's exile from the palace prophetically prefigures Marie's gradual exclusion from

5 Marie, Queen of Roumania, The Story of Naughty Kildeen, p. 12.
6 Ibidem, pp. 28-29.
7 Ibidem, p. 74.
8 Ibidem, p. 101.



The cover of the New York Harcourt, Brace and Comapny edition, illustrated by French artist and illustrator Jacques Marie Gaston Onfroy de Bréville, known by his pen name Job. Source: Internet Archive

political influence by her own son Carol II. It is outside the palace walls that her transformation happens. Kildeen's redemptive journey is long: the child is to learn that symbols and ceremony don't replace virtue, but they express it, manifesting nobility. The feelings of wonder and awe the child experiences when she encounters the swan seem to be unfamiliar to her; she did not accept and obey power in her parents, nor did she consider the ceremonies and pomp displayed at the court to be as moving as the graceful creature she met in the wilderness. Removed from their inherited privileges and comfort, both Marie and Kildeen are transformed by encounters outside the palace's walls, which inspire a new type of reverence in them. Kildeen learns to observe the world around her; its beauty and majesty seem to enliven and ennoble her. Queen Marie also recounts in her memoir the profound transformations brought by serving on the front: *"Reality had come to me in a way I should nevermore forget, and having learnt what it was to serve, in the broader sense of the word, it changed my conception of things and roused in me the desire to be of real national utility,"* she notes in her memoir.[9]

In the story, when his crown is returned by one of the eagles, *"the King found himself once more the possessor of the symbolic circle without which he had felt so small."*[10] The crisis solved, Kildeen's parents fetch the royal princess back. She is now ready for a life at court, impressing her mother by *"remembering the vows she had made during her solitude, dropped such a low curtsy that no dame of the court could have equaled its perfection, no! not even after a study of years."*[11] Dressed in her royal attire, the little girl is presented to the people, and meets again V. Populi, the skeptical voice defying royalty and aristocratic privilege.

"One trade is as good as another, 'tis only a freak of fate that put you on a throne and me under an umbrella in the street!"[12] Once again, the woman refuses to bow before her satins and silks, purple and crowns, and asks her to *"respect her beautiful apples"* and get along out of her road. To her challenge, Kildeen apologizes for her own past irreverence towards the old woman: *"'I am no more as I was, Mrs. Populi,' she said in her sweetest voice. 'There was a day long ago when I maltreated your apples, but then I did not know how to behave!*

9 Marie, Queen of Romania, The Story of My Life (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 559.
10 Marie, Queen of Roumania, The Story of Naughty Kildeen, p. 123.
11 Ibidem, p. 135.
12 Ibidem, p. 142.

Today I have come to 'Oh! say that I am sorry and to ask that the sins of the past should be forgotten, because from this day onwards I am always going to be good!'"[13] The king follows the girl's example and acknowledges the old lady for her admirable fruit and her work's worth, making the "old revolutionist" execute a bow that resembles a curtsy.

What makes this story special is that the misbehaving child, who in the traditional structure of children's stories, would undergo humiliation before earning redemption, is – in this case, - also inflicting these emotions on her father, by stealing his crown. As historian of emotions Ute Frevert points out (2014*), "children's books and advice manuals are brimming with references about shame,"* [14] in which adults are guardians of moral conventions and virtue, inflicting it downward inside asymmetric power relations. Hence, shame usually flows from top to bottom; however, the reverse direction is present in this particular story. The double authority figure -father and king- is subjected to humiliation by losing the very symbol of his power and pride. The child's transgression is a test of the limits of his power and dignity, a test which he doesn't seem to pass very well, as he disengages from public life as long as his crown is absent.

The story suggests that in an era of shifting political authorities, Queen Marie was consciously engaging with democratic and republican critiques of monarchy and inherited privilege rather than ignoring them. Although the immediate context is her own royal family, the tale also invites a broader reading, reflecting on the transformations that were reshaping monarchy as an institution across Europe. In this light, the following passage from *The Story of Naughty Kildeen* is especially revealing: "A Princess must not be given imprudent ideas about freedom; liberty, equality, fraternity were not words invented for her. Princesses are little animals made to live in golden cages and the sooner they learn to like them the better!"[15] Ironically, the very act of writing *The Story of Naughty Kildeen* subverts the ideal of conduct articulated in the passage, in which the narrator presents princesses as passive beings whose intellectual and moral horizon is deliberately confined. While the narrator insists that princesses should be shielded from "imprudent ideas about freedom" and content themselves with life in "golden cages," Marie's authorship demonstrates precisely the opposite. Read against the backdrop of Marie's own life, the story shows that it is hard not to associate the frustrations she experienced during her early years at the austere court of King Carol I with the narrator's deliberately oppressive views of a princess's duties and rights. The narrator's voice defends unquestioned authority, but the plot itself is far less accommodating. Rather than presenting monarchy as immune to modern political currents, Marie's story acknowledges that even those born to rule must confront the changing expectations of their age.

The legitimacy of the future sovereign is therefore established not through ceremony or lineage alone, but through the exercise of humility, repentance, concrete interpersonal encounter that centers on mutual recognition, and the respect of the worth and dignity of those beyond the palace walls. Having learned to see the riches of the world outside the court, human and nonhuman as well, Kildeen returns transformed, able to understand that royal authority carries obligations as much as privileges. Authority is seen as something that must be justified through service, humility, connection to nation, and personal virtue, in ways similar to those that made her known as the "Mother of the Wounded." However, Marie did not, fundamentally challenge either the institution of monarchy or social hierarchy itself. Instead, in her writing, she envisioned a monarchy in which rank does not confer greater human worth or dignity, and rulers have a duty to recognize the

If a King could not be a King without a crown on his head, then he had better not be a King at all

13 Marie, Queen of Roumania, The Story of Naughty Kildeen, pp. 141-142.
14 Frevert, U. (2014). Piggy's shame. In Learning how to feel: Children's literature and emotional socialization, 1870-1970 (pp. 134-154). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 135.
15 Marie, Queen of Roumania, The Story of Naughty Kildeen, p. 20.

Royal authority could no longer rest on dynastic inheritance alone, but had to be earned through public service.

equal dignity of all. As history was unfolding fast in the 20th century, royalty "witnessed a growing gap between the formal political power conferred on them by the constitution, and the actual power they wield in reality. Allowing their political power to shrink virtually to zero has been the secret of their survival," with "new roles justifying their existence have emerged," (…) "helping countries rebuild, not in the material sense, but rebuilding their sense of nationhood, through the monarchy's classic role of representing unity and national identity, as well as its ceremonial and welfare role." [16] 100 years later, far from being relics of an undemocratic past, constitutional monarchies remain prominent among the world's highest-performing democracies. In the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2018,[17] four of the top five and nine of the top fifteen democracies were constitutional monarchies. Ironically, the metaphor and moral of Kildeen's story prefigured the fate of Marie's own family: while King Carol II possessed the crown and sought to strip his mother of political authority, Romanians continued to regard her as their representative. After spending years concentrating power under a royal dictatorship, which attracted public hostility, he was eventually forced to abdicate.

The choice of the character's gender is not arbitrary either; atypically defiant and unruly for a girl, Kildeen challenged what was to define her behavior along femininity and royalty-defined expectations. Like many of her female British ancestors, Queen Marie tried to expand the repertoire of political roles and authority usually considered acceptable to women, claiming them even though they were not easily granted. Without the formal authority to influence internal politics, she exercised tremendous soft power through symbolic leadership, humanitarian work, international lobbying, and diplomacy.

Now, 100 years after her visit to the United States, the echoes are faint. Except for a short revival after the death of King Mihai, the popularity of the monarchy has also faded in Romania.[18] Why is the symbolism of monarchy evoking so many mixed reactions today, and what should we do with its legacy? For some people, monarchy represents continuity, a sense of national identity, but also public service, cultural memory, and institutions that aspire to stand above partisan politics. For others, it represents inherited privilege, social hierarchy, patriarchy, imperialism, and exclusion. In recent years, some reactionary movements have gone further, proposing monarchy as an antidote to pluralism, liberal democracy, and political equality, a model of unquestioned sovereignty capable of restoring a supposedly lost social order. This tendency is particularly visible among some contemporary Orthodox convert communities in the US, who idealize the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire and elevate the Tsar as the divinely appointed embodiment of legitimate political authority. Within these circles, the Tsar has become more than a historical figure: he symbolizes certainty in place of democratic disagreement, sacred hierarchy instead of political equality, and organic unity rather than the compromises of pluralistic societies. Such visions often present liberal democracy as spiritually bankrupt and depict monarchy as the only political form capable of restoring moral coherence and social stability[19] (see more on the allure of monarchy in the United States in Sarah Riccardi-Swartz' 2022 book *Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia*).[20]

16 Hazell, R., & Morris, B. (2020). *Towards a new theory of European monarchy*. In R. Hazell & B. Morris (Eds.), The role of monarchy in modern democracy: European monarchies compared (pp. 269–284). Hart Publishing. p. 270.

17 Hazell, R., & Morris, B. (2020, November 12). *European monarchies: Guardians of democracy?* Political Quarterly. https://politicalquarterly.org.uk/blog/european-monarchies-guardians-of-democracy/

18 https://media.dcnews.ro/other/202306/raport-national---perceptii-asupra-monarhiei_18328100.pdf

19 Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, "Seeking a Sovereign for the End of Democracy: Monarchism and the Far Right," *Canopy Forum*, August 10, 2021, https://canopyforum.org/2021/08/10/seeking-a-sovereign-for-the-end-of-democracy-monarchism-and-the-far-right/.

20 Riccardi-Swartz, S. (2022). Between Heaven and Russia: Religious conversion and political apostasy in

Queen Marie's vision of monarchy stands in contrast to these authoritarian appropriations and misinterpretations of monarchic authority, as it rejects the pursuit of power as an end. Rather than celebrating domination or absolute authority, she cultivated an ideal of service, emphasizing care, responsibility, and personal sacrifice. She sought legitimacy not through coercion but through moral example; not through aristocratic distance, but through emotional connection with ordinary people; not through cultural imperialism, but through representing Romania as a nation worthy of respect within an international community. Her public persona presented monarchy as a vocation of public responsibility.

In the first half of the twentieth century, European monarchies faced an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy and were compelled to adapt to profound social change. As formal political power diminished, to justify their continued existence, monarchies expanded their welfare and symbolic functions, a transformation that some scholars have described as the "feminization of monarchy" (Prochaska, 1995).[21] Read allegorically, "The Story of Naughty Kildeen" could be seen as a plea for such an ethical reform to preserve its legitimacy. Even the title signals the shift: Kildeen is introduced first and foremost by her disobedience rather than by her royal status, which is not mentioned at all. By questioning authority, the young princess inoculates both herself and her father against the complacency of inherited privilege. Her mischief forces themselves and the readers to confront a deeper question: what remains of monarchy when its robes, crowns, and palace are stripped away, and rulers must justify themselves beyond the symbols of their rule?

The restraint that lends official royal communication its dignity and stability can also diminish its persuasive and emotional force. Marie addressed this paradox by building a particular literary persona. Through fiction, memoirs, and essays, she explored ideas that exceeded the limits of official royal discourse while avoiding the appearance of indiscretion. In her story, Marie does not resolve the ethical and political tensions surrounding monarchy, nor do we expect her to. The story of Kildeen resists reduction to a single moral lesson. Rather than accepting either nostalgic idealization or wholesale rejection, we can ask what symbolic resources remain valuable in democratic societies. Can ideas such as service, stewardship, continuity, and cultural responsibility be preserved while abandoning inherited privilege and political inequality?



"[...] only the Queen had her crown on the table beside her, the King's alas was somewhere out in the park." -(page 30, illustration by Job)

Appalachia. Fordham University Press.

21 Frank Prochaska, R*oyal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

Queen Marie as a Cultural Catalyst—George Enescu and the Sound of Modern Romania

AN INTERVIEW WITH VIOLONIST MIRELA PANAITIȘOR—by A.M. Hojbotă

Few partnerships shaped Romania's cultural image abroad as profoundly as the parallel work of Queen Marie and George Enescu during the first decades of the twentieth century. With a talent as dazzling as his, both as a violinist and a composer, one might expect George Enescu to have achieved universal recognition entirely on his own. Perhaps he would have. Yet the generous patronage he received from the Romanian royal family is a well-documented fact. Nor was this simply a matter of his marriage to Maruca Cantacuzino, one of Queen Marie's closest friends. Enescu's musical gifts were first recognized before Marie's reign, by Queen Elisabeth, who brought him into the sovereigns' intimate circle while he was still very young. "The Queen adopted me in spirit," he would recall decades later.[1]



*Queen Marie in her Red Cross uniform**

Enescu's closeness to Queen Marie, however, was forged during the most dramatic years of her life. With half the country occupied by the Central Powers, the royal court and the Romanian authorities took refuge in Iași. The city was flooded with refugees and tsarist troops alike. Trains continually brought in the wounded from the front. By the winter of 1916–1917, hunger had gripped the city, and epidemic typhus was sweeping through it, spreading like wildfire amid the general squalor.

Queen Marie worked feverishly to organize triage stations for the wounded, shelters for retreating soldiers, orphanages, food distribution centers for the impoverished population, and hospitals for infectious diseases, the severely wounded, and convalescents. Pinx—the affectionate nickname by which Enescu was known in royal circles—was everywhere: he played for soldiers and for the wounded; in the evenings, he performed for the Queen and her guests. We find him playing the liturgical music at the wedding of a French radiologist and a Romanian lady.[2] Even the negotiations over the Peace of Buftea in 1918, with terms so disastrous that they drove the Queen to despair, unfolded to the unbroken accompaniment of Pinx's music.[3]

1 George Enescu, "Amintiri despre Carmen Sylva," *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* X, no. 12 (December 1, 1943), p. 504 ff.

2 "…in the quiet church of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion—Pinx played divinely during Mass, and someone (a French officer) joined him with a very fine voice." Marie, Queen of Romania, Jurnal de război: 1917–1918, vol. II, trans. Anca Bărbulescu, ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015), p. 408.

3 "Pinx," Queen Marie writes, "remained calm in the midst of the storm and played, like a god, one of the most magnificent pieces of music ever composed; it seemed to me that he had gathered up from my soul all the agony to which I could not give voice and was sighing it out into the night—sighing it out and telling the whole tragedy of a dying country…." Ibidem, p. 447.

By following her into wartime refuge and supporting her efforts, Enescu did far more than make art during those painful years, when no one could be certain that Romania would still exist on any map by the time the war ended. He firmly chose the Ententist camp. He was not simply a court musician; he became the Queen's comrade in a common struggle. That is why, after the war, helping him become a familiar name in artistic, aristocratic, and diplomatic circles abroad was more than patronage bestowed on a gifted musician: it was a continuation of a partnership devoted to Romania. Queen Marie was not promoting a favorite; she was opening doors for another ambassador of Romanian culture.

More than a century later, Romanian artists continue this tradition of bridge-building in new forms. Enescu's music, in particular, has reached Connecticut audiences well beyond his own Hartford appearance in April 1938, when he performed in Hartford at a concert co-sponsored by the Musical Club of Hartford and the Bushnell Memorial. His work later returned to Connecticut through events such as a 2010 Yale School of Music tribute in New Haven and a 2018 New World Trio program in West Hartford. In September 2025, Romanian-American violinist Mirela Panaitișor carried the tradition forward by organizing and performing in a Connecticut concert featuring works by Antonin Dvořák and George Enescu.

We spoke with Mirela about music, memory, cultural diplomacy, and the enduring dialogue between Romania and America.

Art is not a luxury; it is nourishment for the human spirit.
-M. Panaitișor



George Enescu among Romanian and Russian officers in a military hospital in Moldova (NHMR Patrimony)

Royal patronage and the making of an artist

At the beginning of the twentieth century, royal patronage could transform the trajectory of a young artist's career, offering visibility, credibility, and access to international artistic circles. From the perspective of a musician today, how important is this kind of institutional support in helping an artist become not only a performer, but also a cultural representative of their country?

There is really no such thing as "too much support" when it comes to art—especially today, when so many people are struggling simply to make a living and increasingly turn a blind eye to careers that are not perceived as financially worthwhile. My favorite saying in this regard is: "The more supporters, patrons, and sponsors, the merrier!"

As a first-generation immigrant in the United States, I have experienced firsthand how important institutional, community, and leadership support can be for an artist. My path has been a winding one, with many ups and downs, moments of doubt, and periods when I questioned whether I would ever be able to resume my artistic career after crossing an ocean, building a new life, and raising children. Community support has meant far more than professional encouragement—it has given me the confidence to remain connected to my roots while finding my place in a new cultural landscape.

I don't see my role as a musician as simply performing Romanian music or representing a particular image of Romania. My Romanian heritage and American experience have intertwined to create a unique tapestry of memories, emotions, influences, and perspectives—a new "me." I believe this is what an immigrant artist can offer: not simply the culture we left



George Enescu in his youth at Peles Castle, in the music room with his "vice-mother" Queen Elizabeth, Dimitrie Dinicu, and Eufrosina Baicoianu (NHMR patrimony).

There is no such thing as "too much support" when it comes to art -M. Panaitișor

behind or an assimilation into the culture we entered, but a living dialogue between the two.

Romania's own history offers a powerful example. Queen Marie helped open diplomatic doors and present a new Romania to the world, while George Enescu translated that spirit into music, becoming an artistic ambassador for a modern and vibrant Romania. I believe we can replicate this strategy today. With meaningful institutional and community support, Romanian artists in America can open cultural doors that diplomacy alone cannot, making Romanian culture more accessible, contemporary, and meaningful to American audiences.

Our goal should not simply be to preserve Romanian culture within the Romanian–American community, but to share it with the broader American public. Through music, we can create genuine human connections and invite audiences to discover Romania's history, beauty, complexity, and emotional richness. Art is not a luxury; it is nourishment for the human spirit. Those who never stop to listen to music, admire a painting, experience a theatre performance, or follow the graceful movements of a ballerina may be saving time or money, but they are also starving their souls. This is precisely why artistic patronage and cultural leadership matter so deeply: they help ensure that art continues to exist, thrive, and reach people even when the market alone cannot sustain it.

Music and diplomacy in modern Romania

Queen Marie understood that, in a Europe reshaping itself after the First World War, a monarchy's legitimacy could no longer rest on tradition alone — it had to be built through visibility, culture, and personal presence on the world stage. Enescu offered her exactly that kind of visibility, carrying Romania's name and folk tunes to the greatest concert halls in the world, all while remaining, as the Queen herself described him in her memoirs, "the most modest person that ever existed on this Earth." Do you see them as partners in a broader project of presenting modern Romania to the world?

I think Queen Marie and Enescu were driven by the same profound love for Romania. Their mutual respect and deep admiration for one another allowed them to form an extraordinary partnership—an unbeatable team that helped spearhead Romania's evolution as a country in the post-war period.

Music at Peleș and the memory of place

Enescu frequently performed at the royal residences, including musical gatherings at Peleș Castle that brought together artists, intellectuals, diplomats, and members of the royal court. You have visited these places yourself and shared them with your family. What emotions or reflections do places like Peleș evoke for you as a musician and as a Romanian living abroad?

For me, Peleș carries an especially powerful symbolism because my connection to it began long before I ever imagined living abroad. As a middle school student at one of the most prestigious music schools in Bucharest, I visited Peleș on a field trip with my class. I remember vividly telling my best friend that I would love to spend an entire night there, walking in the footsteps of kings, queens,

royalty, and the phenomenal artists who had been invited to perform in its exquisite concert halls. Even then, I imagined the gowns, the curtsies, the carefully arranged hairdos, the perfumes—all of it unfolding against a soundtrack of classical music that was playing entirely in my head. Peleș was not simply a castle to me; it was a stage where history, music, beauty, and imagination came together.

Years later, returning to Peleș with my family and experiencing it as a Romanian living abroad gave that memory an entirely different dimension. I found myself looking at it not only with the eyes of the music student I once was, but also with the perspective of someone who had left Romania and built a life across the ocean. It reminded me that the cultural heritage we carry with us does not disappear when we leave home. In fact, distance can sometimes make us see it more clearly and appreciate its meaning more deeply.

As a musician, Peleș also reminds me of the extraordinary relationship between art and cultural identity. The music performed in those halls was not merely entertainment; it was part of how Romania presented itself to the world. Standing there with my family, I felt connected to that continuum—to the musicians who came before me, to the audiences who listened, and to the generations who continue to carry Romanian culture forward.

So yes, Peleș still evokes the same symbolism for me, but on a much deeper level. What began as a child's romantic fantasy about kings, queens, beautiful gowns, and music has become a personal reminder of where I come from, what shaped me as an artist, and why I feel such a strong responsibility—and privilege—to help carry that cultural legacy into the world.

Enescu arrives in America

When Enescu made his American conducting debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in 1923, he personally introduced American audiences to a musical voice that was simultaneously rooted in Romanian traditions and fully engaged with the broader European classical canon.[4] We can mention that American music lovers were already familiar with his music, namely the Rhapsodies, the First Symphony, and Suite no. 1, performed by Mahler in 1911.

A century later, how do you think American audiences respond to this kind of musical encounter? How are immigrant communities themselves influencing this "musical soul-searching"?

I think it is fair to consider Enescu one of Romania's earliest and most successful cultural ambassadors to America. What makes his example so powerful to me is that he never seemed to believe that embracing the world required him to diminish where he came from. He brought Romanian music onto the international stage with extraordinary pride and authenticity, and he did so through the universal language of music.

This is an especially important lesson for diaspora communities today. Many immigrants struggle with the feeling that they have to deny or minimize their origins in order to become "more American." I have never felt that way. I don't believe my Romanian roots have to yell at my American-born wings. They can coexist, strengthen one another, and ultimately create something more complete. My Romanian heritage is not an obstacle to being American; it is part of what makes my American identity uniquely mine.

Enescu was, in many ways, a cultural ambassador long before that term became ordinary. He shared with the world various works that he understood from the inside, with a depth and authenticity that few could ever match. He didn't simply tell people about Romania—he allowed them to feel Romania.

I experienced a glimpse of that power myself when I performed the Romanian Rhapsody No.

Enescu brought Romanian music onto the international stage with extraordinary pride and authenticity, and he did so through the universal language of music.

4 https://www.georgeenescu.ro/expozitii-temporare_doc_2235_expozitia-george-enescu-pe-continentul-american_pg_0.htm

1 with my group at West Hartford Town Hall. There was not a single soul in that room who remained indifferent. For those few minutes, it felt as though the audience and performers were breathing together. People seemed to synchronize their heartbeats with ours, and the energy in the room was electrifying. We felt it as performers—the chills, the heightened emotion, the extra power that seemed to come from somewhere beyond us.

That experience reinforced for me what contemporary artists and diaspora communities can learn from Enescu: we don't have to choose between the culture we inherited and the culture we have embraced. When we share our heritage with pride, generosity, and artistic excellence, we don't ask others to become Romanian—we simply invite them into our world. And sometimes, through music, they discover that a part of that world already speaks to something universal within them.

Continuing the conversation across generations

Your September 2025 concert in Connecticut brought Enescu's music to Romanian-Americans and to audience members encountering his work for the first time. In many ways, this echoes Enescu's own efforts to build bridges between cultures through artistic excellence.

As a member of the public I was struck by the emotional immediacy of his work and by its ability to speak across cultural and historical boundaries. Judging by the audience's response, many others appeared equally moved. When did this idea of bringing Enescu's work to Connecticut arise and how did you make it happen?

Since I rejoined the music world, after raising my two boys to an age when I could finally afford to leave them for a couple of hours, I had always fantasized about performing a Romanian piece—either with an orchestra or in a chamber setting. I had the enormous pleasure of playing works by Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Gershwin, and so many other great composers, but I never gave up hope that one day I would convince someone to make room for a Romanian work on the program.

That opportunity finally came in 2025, when my beloved orchestra was looking for ways to raise funds. That is how the "An Afternoon Abroad" concert and art show was born. I pitched to the Board of Directors the idea of partnering with the Honorary Consulate of Romania in Connecticut and Romanul Corp., organizations that helped spread the word and bring together Romanian artists and musicians eager to share their original works and interpretations.

The response from the Romanian community was incredible. West Hartford Town Hall sold out. What began as my personal dream of bringing Romanian music into the concert hall became a much larger celebration of Romanian culture—one that brought together music, visual art, community, and the American audience.

For me, that experience was deeply emotional because it proved that the dream I had carried for so many years was not only possible but could resonate far beyond myself. It was a beautiful reminder

Mirela Panaitișor at the end of the sold-out September 2025 performance



that sometimes all an artist needs is the courage to say, "What if we tried this?"—and a community willing to say, "Yes, let's do it."

Did the reception of the concert surprise you, and do you feel that artists working in the diaspora today are continuing a tradition that figures like Enescu helped establish? Please talk about your collaboration with Ioan Dobrinescu as well.

While living in the United States and searching for Romanian arrangements for my students, I came across a platform where, for just a few dollars, I could download some of Ioan's arrangements. Seeing his name and an email address, I decided to reach out and try to reconnect. To my great surprise, he replied almost immediately. When he learned that I wanted to introduce Romanian music to my American students, he generously sent me a substantial collection of famous Romanian works, arranged for different instruments.

Ioan refused to accept any monetary compensation. He understood that I was trying, in my own small way, to continue the cultural diplomacy that Enescu had pioneered. In fact, he thanked me for doing it—and that moved me to tears. His generosity made me realize that cultural ambassadors simply recognize one another and say, "This is worth doing."

Among the works Ioan sent me was his arrangement of Enescu's Romanian Rhapsody No. 1 for violin, clarinet, viola, cello, and piano. Suddenly, I was much closer to the fantasy I had carried for years. I asked four of my dear musician friends if they would join me in what I jokingly called a crazy musical adventure—and they said yes.

We had so much fun putting it together. What started with a few emails, a shared love of Romanian music, and a leap of faith eventually found its way onto the stage of West Hartford Town Hall, where the music created a connection between performers, the Romanian community, and an American audience that I will never forget.

What was the West Hartford Symphony Orchestra's (WHSO) members' reaction to Enescu's work? Has any of the members played his works before? You played the Rhapsody in public in this format at least twice. Do you think this piece will be incorporated into the orchestra's repertoire?

The WHSO members were thrilled by the piece. They immediately recognized the wide range of emotions it evokes and the imaginary places to which it transports the listener. Just as importantly, they appreciated the intricate writing and the remarkable instrumental virtuosity required to bring the piece to life. For many of them, it was a wonderful discovery—not only of Romanian music, but of the richness, complexity, and extraordinary musicianship it can demand.

I hope that one day the orchestra will be able to add and perform the full symphonic score to its repertoire. That would be an extraordinary moment to witness—a Romanian work taking its rightful place alongside the great symphonic repertoire on the orchestra's stage. Until then, the quintet version that my friends and I brought to life will continue to echo across Connecticut, carrying with it a little piece of Romania and the story of how it found its way here.

Hartford Symphony Quintet peforming the Romanian Rhapsody on the stage at West Hartford Town Hall in September 2025



The music of our souls

Queen Marie has written of Enescu that he "awakes the music of our souls."[5] Beyond his extraordinary accomplishments as a composer, violinist, conductor, and teacher, what qualities do you think inspired such admiration and affection?

I think Queen Marie, just like anyone who had the privilege of hearing Enescu perform, was deeply touched by his originality and his genuine love for music and for the people listening to it. There was something profoundly human about the way he connected with an audience. His extraordinary talent was accompanied by a humility and a down–to–earth, unpretentious quality that made him approachable.

I believe those qualities are precisely what continue to resonate with audiences today. Technical excellence can be taught, practiced, and perfected, but genuine humanity cannot be manufactured. You cannot teach someone to truly love music, to care about the people in front of them, or to communicate with such sincerity that an audience feels personally connected to the performance.

That kind of authenticity is felt immediately. It cannot be copied, rehearsed, or pretended. I think this is what made Enescu so special—and why, decades later, his music can still make a room full of people feel that they are experiencing something unique.



Enescu conducting the Cleveland Orchestra in 1939, photo by Geoffrey Landesman

5 Queen Marie of Romania, inscription on a photograph presented to George Enescu, Sinaia, 1908, quoted in Noel Malcolm, *George Enescu: His Life and Music* (London: Toccata Press, 1990), 91.

* Photographs from the National Museum of Romanian History (NHMR Patrimony) unless otherwise noted.

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS:

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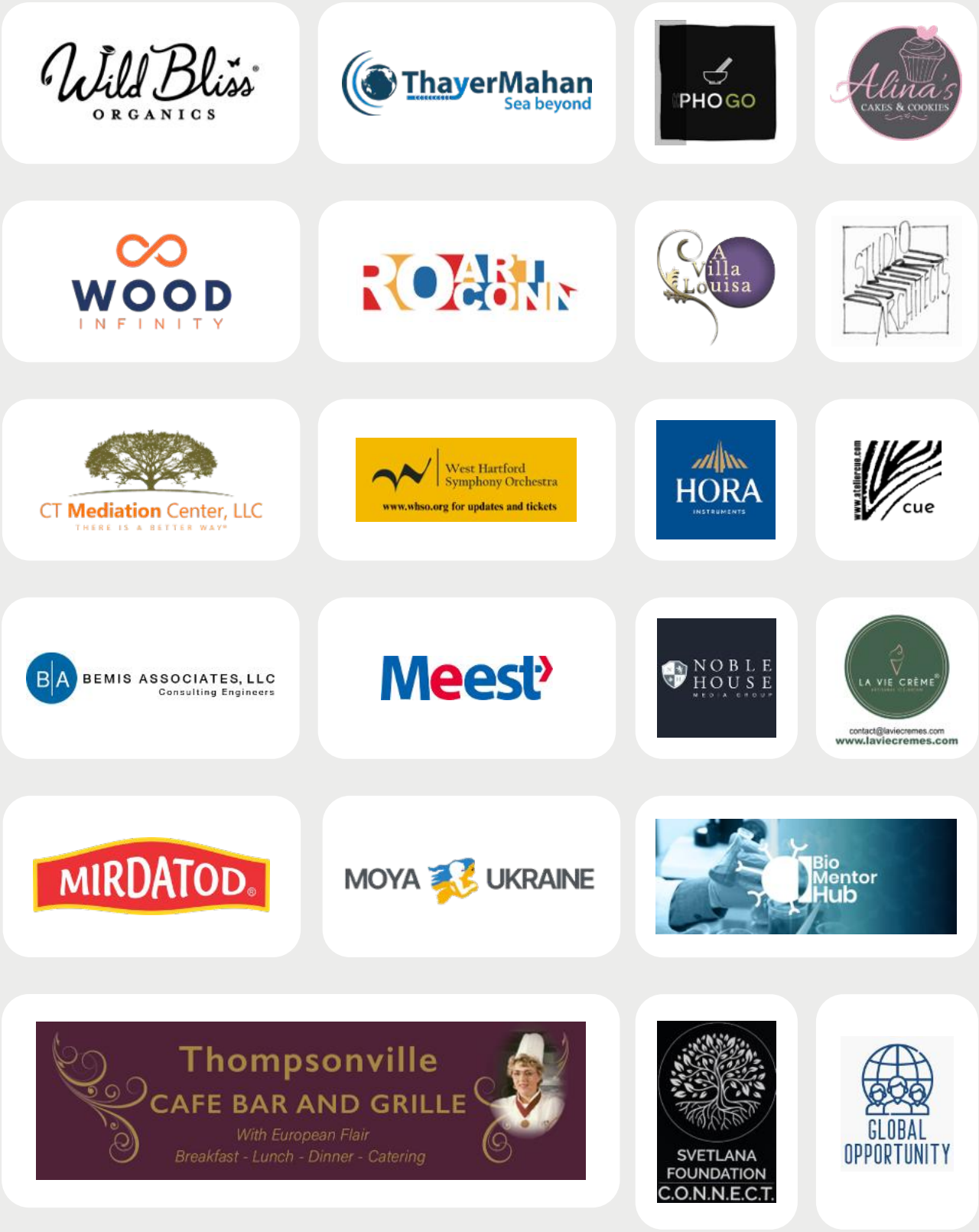
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Românul Corp is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit independent organization.



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Dana R. Bucin, Esq.

- Partner, International & Immigration Law
- Co-Chair, Council on Inclusion & Engagement
- Honorary Consul of Romania to CT
- Founder, CT for Ukraine Refugee Matching Program

dbucin@harrisbeachmurtha.com
(860) 240-6081

Related Attorneys

Tatyana Voloshchuk, Esq.
International Intellectual Property
tvoloshchuk@harrisbeachmurtha.com
(203) 653-5447

Ryan E. Dunn, Esq.
International Taxation
rdunn@harrisbeachmurtha.com
(203) 772-7737

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