

# “Royalty is no longer quite royal”: word and image in the children’s tales of Queen Marie of Romania

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## *Abstract*

This paper explores the role played by the children’s tales of Queen Marie of Romania in the construction of a distinctive vision of royalty between 1913-29. Straddling the First World War, from which Romania emerged enlarged and unified, the tales reflect the changing status of their author: from Crown Princess to wartime saviour to ‘Mother of all the Romanians’. The relationship between word and image is thus a complex one, involving not just interpretive correspondences between the Queen’s stories and the drawings of a range of international illustrators, but also the careful crafting of an idiosyncratic image of monarchy that presented Marie as figurehead of the young country, both at home and abroad. Within this wider iconography, the children’s tales became an effective vehicle for her self-portrayal as mother and nurturer of Greater Romania.

Core to the relationship was the way her tales appeared to give privileged insight into her own understanding of her changing role, breaking the boundary between fiction and lived reality. Conversely, they also became part of the performative nature of her public image, contributing to a theatrical vision of monarchy consciously enacted on the domestic and international stage. As such, this paper argues that there are identifiable links between the settings of the tales and Marie’s unusual interior design schemes. Bisected by the creation of Greater Romania, these related projects can be divided into two clear groups, each offering unique insight into the self-image of one of the most charismatic players in the early twentieth-century emergence of nations.

## *Résumé*

Cet article explore le rôle joué par les contes d’enfants écrits par la Reine Marie de Roumanie dans la construction d’une vision bien spécifique de la royauté entre 1913 et 1929. En enjambant ainsi la Première Guerre Mondiale, dont la Roumanie est sortie plus étendue et plus unifiée, les contes reflètent le statut changeant de leur auteure, de Princesse héritière à Sauveuse d’un pays en guerre à “Mère de tous les Roumains”. La relation entre mots et images est donc complexe, car elle n’implique pas seulement les correspondances d’interprétation entre les contes écrits par la Reine et les dessins réalisés par des illustrateurs venus du monde entier, mais aussi l’élaboration soigneusement calculée d’une image bien particulière de la monarchie, présentant Marie comme la figure de proue de ce jeune pays, tant sur le plan national qu’international. Dans cette iconographie plus large, les contes pour enfants devenaient un médium très efficace pour véhiculer cet auto-portrait de mère

nourricière de la Grande Roumanie.

Au cœur de cette relation se trouvait l'accès privilégié que semblaient donner ses contes à la façon dont elle-même concevait ce nouveau rôle, en effaçant la frontière entre la fiction et la réalité vécue. A l'inverse, ces contes faisaient partie de la nature performative de son image publique, en contribuant à une vision théâtrale de la monarchie mise en pratique tout à fait consciemment sur la scène domestique et internationale. C'est ainsi que cet article se propose de montrer la présence de liens identifiables entre le décor des contes et les projets de décoration intérieure très originaux de Marie. Coupés en deux par la création de la Grande Roumanie, ces projets intimement liés peuvent être divisés en deux groupes bien distincts, chacun offrant une perspective exceptionnelle sur l'image d'elle-même qu'avait celle qui a été l'une des figures les plus charismatiques dans le jeu de l'émergence des nations au début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle.

### ***Keywords***

Romania, Queen Marie, national identity, children's tales, interior design, word and image

So I began to write fairy-tales. They were not wonderful literature; I knew nothing whatever about writing, about style or composition, or about the “rules of the game,” but I did know how to conjure up beauty, also at times emotion. I also had a vast store of words.

— Marie, Queen of Roumania 1934, 578.

## I: INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the interaction between word and image in the children’s tales of Queen Marie of Romania (1875–1938). Daughter of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, and of Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna of Russia, Marie came to Romania as Crown Princess in 1893, becoming Queen Consort in 1914 on the ascension of her German-born husband, King Ferdinand I. Her children’s tales, which drew on the talents of a range of European and American illustrators, engaged with the broader construction of royal public image and thus could be argued to serve not just aesthetic, but also didactic and propagandist aims. The iconography is generic (monarchy as an institution), but also personal, using the imagery of “Maria” and “mother” on several metaphorical levels. At times the stories function as thinly disguised autobiographical commentary, at others as a persuasive platform for the Queen’s national and artistic agenda. In particular, the later tales’ engagement with Romanian folk culture and with the relationship between the “people” and the “monarchy” offers telling evidence of Marie’s efforts to shape public perception of the royal house and to raise international awareness of the new country of Greater Romania that had emerged from the First World War. In effect, the tales participated in a wider project of royal image creation, offering an engaging verbalisation of what the Queen was seeking to express visually in her unusual palace interiors and rural retreats. This paper will argue that the children’s tales and the Queen’s design schemes worked in parallel, that they evoked and reinforced each other, and thus provided the setting for a theatrical vision of monarchy and country that proved particularly effective in Greater Romania’s political efforts to forge a strong international identity after the 1920 Treaty of Trianon.

Writing mainly in English, Marie published extensively: as well as children’s stories, she produced novels, articles, travelogues, memoirs and a three-volume autobiography.<sup>1</sup> Although an amateur author, her writings engage the reader through their humorous characterisation and candid insight into royal life. Virginia Woolf, reviewing Marie’s 1934 autobiography *The Story of My Life*, commented: “she is royal [...] she can write [...] no royal person has ever been able to write before; and [...] the consequences may well be extremely serious” (1979, 193). Woolf compared Marie to her grandmother, Queen Victoria<sup>2</sup>, between whom

and the English language lay an abyss which no depth of passion and no strength of character could cross [...] But now by some freak of fate, which Queen Victoria would have been the first to deplore, her granddaughter [...] has been born with a pen in her hand. Words do her bidding. [...] It is true; she

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1 Marie published over thirty books in her lifetime, some translated into a range of languages, including Japanese. See Mandache 2004, xv and Appendix.

2 Marie’s father, Prince Alfred (Duke of Edinburgh and later Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha) was the second son of Queen Victoria. On her mother’s side, she was a granddaughter of Tsar Alexander II of Russia.

knows nothing about “the rules of the game”; words descend and bury whole cities under them [...] she ruins her effects and muffs her chances; but still [...] because she rides after her emotion fearlessly and takes her fences without caring for falls, she conjures up beauty and conveys emotion (194–6).

In particular, Woolf praised Marie’s ability to open a door to the real life of royalty, to give colour, character and comical insight to these “effigies bowing and smiling” (197). Woolf reflected laconically on the peculiar nature of monarchy, “an experiment in the breeding of human nature”, likening royalty to animals in a zoo: “worshipped, stared at, and kept shut up, as lions and tigers are kept, in a beautiful brightly lit room behind bars” (193). It was a metaphor already articulated by Marie herself in her 1922 children’s tale *The Story of Naughty Kildeen*: “Princesses are little animals made to live in golden cages and the sooner they learn to like them the better!” (11). Nevertheless, Woolf felt that “by virtue of her pen [Marie] has won her freedom” (197). She “has done what had never been done before; she has opened the door of the cage and sauntered out into the street” (194). But this has implications for the divinity of royalty: “we begin to wish that the Zoo should be abolished; that the royal animals should be given the run of some wider pasturage – a royal Whipsnade [...] Words are dangerous things, let us remember. A republic might be brought into being by a poem” (197–8).

Warning that “royalty is no longer quite royal”, Woolf saw the Queen’s familiarity as both engaging and injurious to the necessary aloofness of monarchy (197). Marie, on the other hand, had no time for such formalities. Romania was a young country at the edge of the Balkans with only a recent history of European-style institutions and manners. External threats and internal political instabilities, coupled with a predominantly peasant population and a rich cultural tapestry of Byzantine, Greek Phanariot, French and German influences, allowed Marie to break out of the gilded cage and craft an idiosyncratic form of royalty. During the difficult years of the First World War, and the tentative early stages of Greater Romania in the 1920s, her distinctive public image and hands-on approach helped foster the ideal of national unification and raise international awareness of the new country. In order to understand the particular role played by her children’s stories in this process, some brief historical context is necessary.

## The Romanian Situation

Prior to the First World War, Romania was a young, fragile entity striving to carve out political and cultural independence at the fractious junction of the Turkish, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. The arrival of the German Prince Karl (Carol) of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen in 1866 gave international visibility to efforts to shake off the Ottoman yoke, and the independent Kingdom of Romania was recognized in 1881. Shrewd dynastic manoeuvring brought about the marriage of Crown Prince Ferdinand to Princess Marie of Edinburgh in 1893; as a daughter of both the British and Russian imperial families, Marie’s arrival turned an international spotlight on Romania. As well as dynastic clout, she brought charisma and a lively interest in the visual arts. With King Carol’s death in 1914, she became Queen Consort at the outbreak of the Great War. Despite the German origins of Carol and Ferdinand, Romania remained initially neutral and then, in 1916, declared on the side of the Entente. Military defeat, followed by German occupation of Bucharest, led to royal exile in Iași and a crippling peace deal, signed in May 1918. Barely six months later, Romania took advantage of the collapse of the Central Powers to re-enter the war and send troops into Habsburg-ruled Bucovina and Transylvania. By

the spring of 1919, ethnic Romanians of both regions, together with Bessarabia, had declared a union with the “motherland”. Ratified after fraught negotiations at the 1919–20 Paris Peace Conference, Romania’s national dream became a political reality, symbolically and literally “performed” in the elaborate Alba Iulia coronation of Ferdinand and Marie as King and Queen of Greater Romania in 1922. Romania won a disproportionate share of the territorial spoils of the war, more than doubling its geographical area and population. Importantly, one third of its inhabitants were now non-Romanian (compared to only eight per cent before the war), with significant Magyar, Jewish, Saxon, Ruthenian and Turkish minorities.

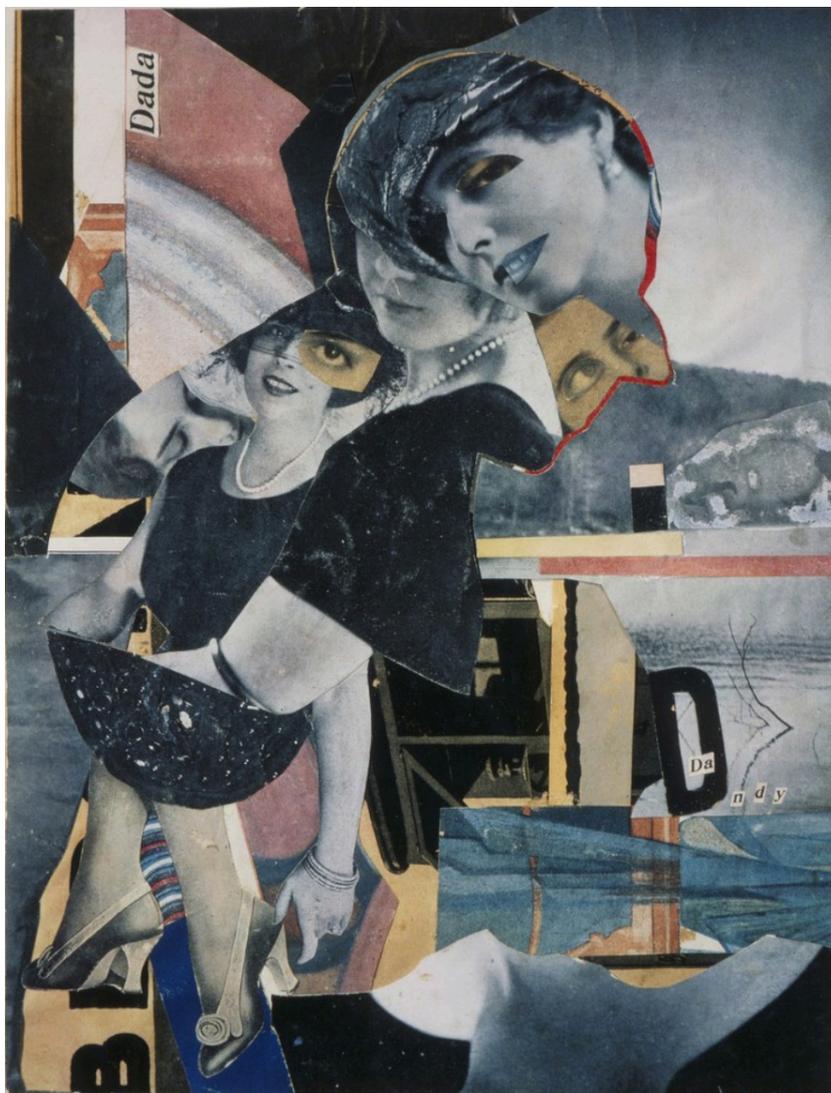


Fig. 1: Hannah Höch, *Da Dandy*, 1919, collage and photomontage. © DACS 2018

## Myth and Gender

During the War it was British-born Marie, rather than her slightly awkward German husband, who became the safe public face of the monarchy. With characteristic energy, she took a proactive approach, visiting the troops in the trenches, nursing the wounded and distributing aid. She wrote a travelogue, *My Country* (1916), to raise money in Britain for the relief effort, and petitioned her wider family, including cousins Nicholas II of Russia and George V of Britain, for help. The image of Marie as “mother” emerged with force in the war press: as *Mama răniților* (Mother of the wounded), she was portrayed as a surrogate mother to young soldiers far from home. Historian Lucian Boia has argued that this mythologising went deeper still:

The grandeur of the national ideal which had suddenly become tangible, the disaster of defeat in 1916 [...] the need to keep up hope in difficult times – all led inevitably to the mythical formula of the *savior*. [...] [Marie was] the living consciousness of Romanian unity, the symbol of confidence in final victory (Boia 2001, 208).

According to Boia, this was remarkable in a country that traditionally distrusted women in power; he attributes it to the Queen's "remote origin", to the timidity of the intellectual but shy King, and to the context of war. To this could be added the Queen's forceful, charismatic nature and her indomitable, almost narcissistic, self-belief.

Marie's talent for galvanising public support was harnessed by Romania's ministers during the difficult negotiations of the Paris Peace Conference, when she was sent in an unofficial, but much publicized, capacity to plead her country's cause with Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George. Her success appears to have taken everyone by surprise, President Poincaré himself telling the Queen that "Clemenceau has much changed towards Roumania since Your Majesty has given a face to Her Country" (Pakula 1996, 278). Her public visibility and her role as the mind behind the throne were pithily captured the same year in Hannah Höch's Dada photomontage *Da Dandy* (1919, private coll.; Fig. 1). A witty commentator on the role of the "new woman" in post-war Europe, Höch presents a montage of cut-out images of fashionable women, circumscribed by a border that outlines a male bust in profile. It is telling that the image that constitutes the man's brain, the driving force behind his decisions, is a photograph of Marie. Far from the common interpretation that this work shows women "not as active, independent subjects, but as fragmented objects of titillation for the man in whose head they exist" (Makela 1996, 64), Höch's clever visual paraphrase of Marie's media presence in 1919 comments on the ability of a well-placed and determined woman to influence the decisions of male statesmanship.<sup>3</sup> Höch's sentiment was echoed by the French Minister to Romania at the time, Count Charles de Saint-Aulaire, who reportedly stated, "There is only one man in Roumania and that is the Queen" (Pakula 1996, 227). *Da Dandy* succinctly captures this gendering of discourse: while fêted throughout Europe for her beauty, fashion sense and charm, Marie's real achievements in the field of diplomacy could only be couched in masculine terms.

The Queen herself was clearly aware of the gender expectations attached to royalty: in *The Story of Naughty Kildeen* she explains to her child readers,

It is not expected of a Queen to be intelligent; she must be pretty, she must wear fine clothes, she must know how to smile even when she is feeling sleepy, she must be gentle and kind, but it occasionally happens that by the force of circumstances she learns to become the King's understudy and that at hours of weariness it may sometimes be her wits that save a situation (Marie 1922, 14).

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3 Most scholarship on *Da Dandy* reads its portrayal of the Weimar "New Woman" as subtly cynical, a commentary on continued male control of the female space and appearance. Makela (1997), for instance, views it in terms of misogyny, while Huyssen calls it a "subtle critique of the representation of women in the fashionable media" (Huyssen 2015, 167). The recognition of Höch's statement that Queen Marie was literally the "brain" of the "man" (the latter a collective sign for male politicians and the King himself) would suggest a more positive view.

The false modesty of her reference to her own war-time role is disingenuous; in Paris she embraced the way in which the peculiar condition of royalty freed her from the restrictions of her gender and allowed participation in affairs of state. As Boia points out, “A queen is not an ordinary woman, but a figure who shares in the sacredness of the function, regardless of her sex” (Boia 2001, 207). Woolf, writing in the left-wing feminist magazine *Time and Tide* in 1934, noted how this de-sexing of a female ruler adds to her royal infallibility; she commented that the emotional sterility of Queen Victoria’s writing actually enhanced her prestige as a monarch: “The majority of her subjects, knowing her through her writing, came to feel that only a woman immune from the usual frailties and passions of human nature could write as Queen Victoria wrote. It added to her royalty” (Woolf 1979, 195). Marie, on the other hand, could not afford such aloofness; there was hands-on work to be done in Romania after the war and she had to be both its symbolic and practical “mother”. In creating a distinctive relationship with her “children”, new and old, her pen became her ally. While (as she recounts) her tales were initially invented for her own royal offspring in the pre-war years, they soon began to target a wider readership at home and abroad (Marie 1934, 578). They were simultaneously entertaining – with their vicarious glimpses of royal life – and didactic in the way they set out to publicize Romania’s rich folk culture and the relationship between *Regina* and *popor* (people).

## II: THE CHILDREN’S TALES

Marie’s children’s tales can be loosely divided into two groups: before and after national unification, with a noticeable change in aesthetic practice and subject matter. While the early tales show little interest in her adopted homeland, those written after unification are increasingly self-conscious in their picturesque evocation of Romanian customs and settings. The books were published during the golden age of illustration in the second two decades of the twentieth century; the most luxurious, such as the large-format, lavishly illustrated *Story of Naughty Kildeen*, were produced in Britain or America where the new three-colour separation printing process allowed faithful reproduction of tones. Those published in Romania continued to use older methods, with inserted colour plates or monochrome wood engraving. As children’s books represented the main field for illustration in the period, they were able to attract leading artists. Marie’s tales drew on the skills of an impressive range of international illustrators, including the Frenchmen Edmund Dulac and Job (Jacques Onfroy de Bréville), the English artists Helen Stratton and Mabel Lucie Attwell, the German Sulamith Wülfing, the Americans Maud and Miska Petersham, and the Romanians Ignat Bednarik, Nicolae Grant and Nadia Grossman-Bulyghin.

It is likely that Marie was involved in the choice of illustrators; she invited Mabel Lucie Attwell to visit her in Bucharest in 1922 and she certainly had personal working relationships with the Romanian artists. Grant, for example, was a founder member of the independent group of artists *Tinerimea Artistică* (Artistic Youth), set up in 1901, with which Marie was actively involved. Its patron until her death, she exhibited her own watercolours and applied art at its annual exhibitions, even lending furniture and hangings for the decoration of the exhibition hall in the early years.<sup>4</sup> From 1898, when she invited the British Arts and Crafts architect Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott to design her a tree-house in the hills above Sinaia, Marie established herself as a leading promoter of new trends in art, building up rich collections of international Art Nouveau, as well as

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<sup>4</sup> Bachelin 1904, 171. For further details, see Kallestrup 2006, 128–9.



Fig. 2: Crown Princess Marie on the drawbridge of Baillie Scott's tree-house, "Le Nid", c. 1901–2 (destroyed). Coll: Peleş National Museum

the work of young Romanian artists. Through her *Domnița Maria* (Princess Marie) Society, she also made efforts to encourage traditional peasant crafts, perceived as threatened by foreign imports and industrially produced materials. In 1906 the decorative arts section of the Bucharest School of Fine Art was founded under her special protection.<sup>5</sup> Marie's artistic ideas took most vivid form in the unusual palace interiors and country



Fig. 3: Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott, sketch for the "salon of the sun and sunflower" in "Le Nid", 1898. Source: Baillie Scott, *Houses and Gardens. Arts and Crafts Interiors* (London: George Newnes, 1906), frontispiece

<sup>5</sup> See Kallestrup 2006, 137–43 ("Craft Societies and the Bucharest Decorative Arts Section").



Fig. 4: Ignat Bednarik, cover design for the Romanian version of *Crown Princess Marie's Lily of Life (Crinul Vieții)* (Bucharest: SOCEC, 1913)

retreats she created throughout her life. These bear a clear relationship to the settings of her children's tales: the escapist, fairy-tale rooms of the pre-war period offered a performative space for her romantic stories, while her post-unification retreats – with their deliberate “local” character – not only found an echo in the conscious Romanian tenor of the later tales, but also featured as literal settings within them.

## The Early Tales

Marie's early stories, such as *The Lily of Life* (1913), *The Dreamer of Dreams* (1915) and *The Stealers of Light* (1916), offer a partial nod to the earnest romanticism of her predecessor, Carmen Sylva (Queen Elisabeth of Romania, Consort of Carol I).<sup>6</sup> To modern eyes, they can appear contrived and laboured, laden with themes of exoticism, love, self-sacrifice and longing. Their genesis can arguably be traced back to the literary sources underpinning the Princess's early design schemes, to which they are linked. There are two important influences: firstly Baillie Scott's use of verse by Rossetti, Swinburne and Coleridge in his design for the tree-house and,

<sup>6</sup> Queen Elisabeth authored over fifty volumes of stories, poetry and plays. Representative of a heavy Germanic romanticism, she was an important conduit for the flow of international talent into Romania.

secondly, Edmond Rostand's 1895 play *La Princesse Lointaine* whose exoticism permeated the Golden Salon (1900–1) and Silver Bedroom (1904–5) in Cotroceni Palace, Bucharest.

The idea for the tree-house, known as “Le Nid” or “Juniperus”, was Marie’s own, inspired by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poem and painting “The blessed damosel leaned out/ From the gold bar of Heaven”. Baillie Scott quoted the poem in his description of the tree-house, which was perched high in a pine forest above the royal palace of Peleş (Baillie Scott 1906, 138–9); surviving photographs in the royal collection show Marie posed on its wooden balcony in attitudes that evoke Rossetti’s damosel (Fig. 2). Baillie Scott conjured the “dim pine-wood” itself through lines from Swinburne’s 1893 poem “The Palace of Pan”: “Tall column by column the Sanctuary stands/ Of the pine-forest’s infinite aisles”. Further lines from Rossetti were chiselled above the oratory alcove: “We two will stand before that shrine/ Occult, withheld, untrod”, while the bedroom was entered under an inscription from Coleridge’s “The Ancient Mariner” that provides one of the earliest examples of Marie’s use of “Mary as mother” imagery: “To Mary, Queen, the praise be given/ She sent the gentle sleep from Heav’n/ Which slid into my soul.” The design for the interior is powerfully articulated through symbolic flower motifs: the sun and sunflower for the main salon, the sleep-inducing poppy for the bedroom and the lily for the oratory (Fig. 3). The stylized lily, which Baillie Scott first used in interiors for Marie’s sister and brother-in-law, the Grand Duke and Duchess of Hesse, in Darmstadt the previous year, became a leitmotif of Marie’s artwork at this time, reappearing in her drawings, watercolours and furniture designs. It also inspired her first fairy tale, *The Lily of Life*, published in 1913 (Fig. 4). With Marie’s high public profile at the time of the Paris Peace Conference, the tale garnered a fair level of international interest: Loïe Fuller, the innovative American dancer and close friend of the Queen, reinterpreted it, first as a ballet in 1919, and then as an early experiment in impressionist cinema (starring a young René Clair) in 1921 to raise money for Romania’s war orphans.



Fig. 5: Helen Stratton, “The Wise Woman”, illustration from *The Lily of Life. A Fairy Tale by the Crown Princess of Roumania* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), facing p. 40

*The Lily of Life* tells a simple – if at times laboured – story of a princess’s quest to find a magical lily to restore her dying love (its themes of sisterly affection and search for unattainable happiness in a distant kingdom are not without discernible autobiographical reference). The distinctive aspect of this and other early tales is the emphasis on visual description: Marie uses her pen as a paintbrush, presenting a sequence of richly coloured, jewelled scenes that find easy counterpart in the delicate Art Nouveau transcriptions of Helen Stratton or Edmund Dulac (who illustrated *The Dreamer of Dreams* and *The Stealers of Light*). Take, for example, this literal marriage of text and illustration (Fig. 5):

she found herself in a small, dark room, a single candle burning beside her; and all around her were fishing-nets, and shells the colour of butterflies on the shelves and walls; and a wonderful bunch of strange tinted seaweed was on a small table, in a bowl of rarest workmanship (Marie 1913, 37).



*Fig. 6: Crown Princess Marie, Golden Salon, Cotroceni, 1900–1 (destroyed). Period photograph. Coll. Cotroceni National Museum*

Kensington-based Stratton’s illustration, with its delicate handling of natural motifs and colour harmonies, suggests an awareness of Glasgow School graphic design. More tellingly, its vision of the interior space, with an inbuilt box bed, distinctive painted stool, stylized rising sun, creeping tree, seaweed forms and the cornice frieze of repeated aquatic motifs, evokes familiarity both with the watercolour interior designs of Baillie Scott and with photographs of the Queen’s own palace rooms. Variants of the furniture in this scene had been realized by Marie in her Cotroceni interiors. Her Golden Salon, probably executed by the court architect Karel Liman, boasted a cornice frieze of stylized lilies, a fireplace hood with blazing sun rays and a built-in day bed

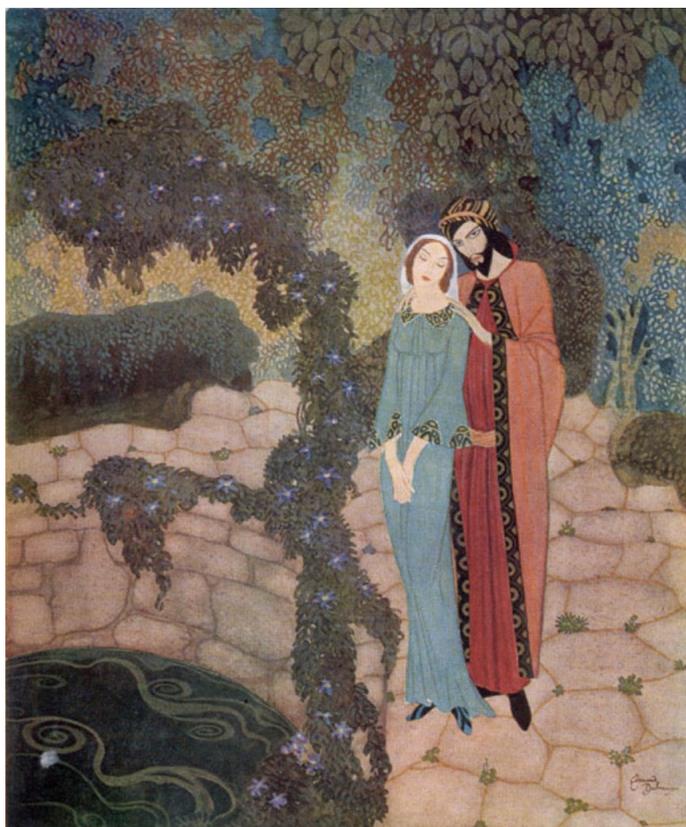


Fig. 7: Edmund Dulac, “The man had his arm lightly laid across the tall girl’s shoulders; they might have been lovers, so tender was his touch”, illustration from *The Stealers of Light* (London, New York & Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), p. 23. © The Estate of Edmund Dulac. All rights reserved. DACS 2018

with similar tree-like forms (Fig. 6). But while the illustration’s refined rusticism recalls Baillie Scott’s tree-house, the Golden Salon, with its walls of burnished gold and shiny blue floor tiles, marked a new foray into “Byzantine” exoticism, opening the door to the eastern themes developed in *The Stealers of Light*.

The literary inspiration this time seems to have been Edmond Rostand’s 1895 play *La Princesse Lointaine*, and its performance by Sarah Bernhardt (who had toured Romania in 1889 and whom Carmen Sylva unsuccessfully tried to persuade to perform one of her own plays<sup>7</sup>). Marie designed elaborate pokerwork frames for Alfons Mucha’s lithographic posters of Bernhardt and was photographed, together with her sister, the Grand Duchess of Hesse, in Bernhardt-inspired *Princesse Lointaine* costumes in the late 1890s. In the young court of a Balkan country recently freed from Ottoman control, Marie “performed” in the language of western Orientalism, using a vocabulary of eastern exoticism that had little to do with the Byzantine traditions of her adopted country. In 1904–5 she remodelled her bedroom in Cotroceni: its richly carved and burnished silver walls, round-headed arches and peacock-blue floor tiles provoked one underwhelmed observer to describe it as “reminiscent of both a church and a Turkish bath” (Callimachi 1932, 124). Marie even sent royal fan mail to Rostand himself; in his reply he thanked her for sending photos of her “*Princesse Lointaine décor*” (Rostand 1913). While his letter betrays no intended double meaning, it seems that Marie viewed herself in this period as a “*princesse lointaine*”, a far-away princess removed from the mainstream European courts in which she had grown up to a remote eastern land whose veneer of imported western civilisation

<sup>7</sup> See Badea-Păun 2007, 176–7.

barely suppressed the orient simmering beneath. Certainly she revelled in the freedom to reinvent royal image offered by the lack of tradition in Romania. It allowed her to “perform” the role of princess in her follies and interiors, creating a romantic vision of royalty that was disseminated in photographs and later informed her stories. Dulac’s delicate, detailed and richly coloured illustrations for *The Stealers of Light* reflect some of this generic exoticism. Dulac had trained as a painter in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts and Académie Julian; he was a bold colourist and, after he moved to England in 1904, won a reputation for combining fairy-tale charm with a distinctive exoticism in illustrations for books like Lawrence Housman’s *Stories from the Arabian Nights* (1911). This is probably what earned him Marie’s commission; certainly both works are articulated in a similar visual language of lyrical form, jewelled detail and sinuous linearity that suggests the formal influence of Persian miniatures (Fig. 7). The *Stealers of Light* itself displays the prejudices of the age: the heroine, Ilona, with her Pre-Raphaelite hair and pale skin, radiates light, while the brooding, cruel Luath and his frightening black servant Kuskan move in dark settings. Once again, Marie’s descriptions of her heroine might easily be read as ekphrastic accounts of her own carefully constructed, costumed and photographed self-image in the period:

a radiant apparition stood facing him, her arms full of long branches of foamy blossoms [...] Her veil, supple and white, was held on her head by a narrow wreath of blanched violets, framing in her perfect face with snowy softness [...] And what beautiful eyes she had! Strangely large and wide apart, clear and grey, with a curiously intent look (Marie 1916[b], 9–10)

Marie was clearly aware of the power of the photographic image right from her earliest days in Romania. The carefully posed shots in her interiors, by studios such as Julietta, Alfred Brand and Franz Mandy, construct an iconography of the “artistic” or “fairy-tale” princess (and, as such, stand in distinct contrast to the informal family photographs in her private albums). Word and image (illustrated and photographic) reinforced each other and, although boasting no great literary merit, the early children’s tales opened a side door to the seeming lived reality of Marie’s world, where she “performed” the role of princess in an environment where imagination could be made material.

## The Later Tales

In her 1934 autobiography, Marie recognized the change in her writing caused by the war. The fanciful escapism of her years as Crown Princess gave way to real purpose: “the seriousness of life rose up and was there, not to be denied, not to be put aside; reality, not dreams, dark events which were to overthrow the peace of the world” (Marie 1934, 580). Although she wrote three further fairy tales with an international character – *Peeping Pansy* (1919), *The Lost Princess* (1924), both illustrated by Mabel Lucie Attwell, and *The Story of Naughty Kildeen* (1922), illustrated by the French artist Job – her writing showed a new maturity. The heavy romanticism of the earlier tales was replaced by humorous detachment and moments of philosophical reflection. *The Lost Princess*, for example, offers an apparent parody of her earlier work. Following a similar conceit of a princess undertaking a difficult journey in search of a noble goal (in this case, the rescue of her sister carried off by a monster), it seems written with a nod to Lewis Carroll in its tongue-in-cheek humour built on nonsense rhymes and word play. The heroine, Princess Dorina, is frequently the butt of jokes by her



Fig. 8: Job (Jacques Onfroy de Bréville), untitled illustration from *The Story of Naughty Kildeen* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1922), p. 90

two impish companions who tease the peculiarities of royalty:

“I shall get very tired,” sighed the little princess. “I am not accustomed to walking, I generally ride on a beautiful piebald pony, or I drive in a little red carriage with four high-stepping blacks.”

“Your father must be very rich,” mused Jonky.

“He is king.” Dorina thought her declaration was conclusive.

“Is he nice?” asked the other imp.

“But he is a king!” repeated his royal daughter.

“That does not particularly mean that he is nice,” insisted Jenky.

“Well, it ought to,” declared Dorina, rather offended (Marie 1924, 28)

There are also more serious references to the threat to monarchy brought by the war. Marie’s first cousins, the Russian imperial family, had been executed by the Bolsheviks in 1918; Austro-Hungarian and German imperial rule had also collapsed that year and King Ferdinand now found himself the last Hohenzollern in possession of a throne. *The Story of Naughty Kildeen* contains a standoff between the eponymous child princess and the embodiment of the “people”, Mrs Populi, depicted by Job with her sleeves rolled up, wearing the Phrygian cap of liberty (Fig. 8):

I believe in the rights of the people, and I shall bow down to no crown and no purple. The sun was made for me as well as for you. [...] One trade is as good as another, ’tis only a freak of fate that puts you on a throne and me under an umbrella in the street! (Marie 1922, 91)

Inevitably, royal dignity overcomes plebeian hostility: “the former foes faced each other and suddenly the old revolutionist made a strange movement that might have resembled a curtsy” (93).

The precariousness of the Romanian royal family's own position during 1916–18 should not be underestimated. It was defeated, in exile in Moldavia, and its crown jewels (that had been sent to Russia for safekeeping) appropriated by the Bolsheviks, who had also encouraged the mass desertion of Russian soldiers defending the Moldavian front. King Ferdinand, although struck from the House of Hohenzollern in 1916, was still too closely associated in the popular mind with the hated invader. Crown Prince Carol had deserted his military post and eloped to marry a commoner. The need to create a strong public face for the monarchy was urgent. Marie's effective canonisation as "Mother of the wounded" was magnificently magnified after unification to "Mother of all the Romanians" (*Mama tuturor Românilor*). At the same time, her successful matchmaking efforts for her children with the royal houses of Greece and Serbia earned her the further moniker "Mother-in-law of the Balkans".

Marie's imagery, in both her writing and interior decoration projects, now adopted the role of educator, nurturer and diplomat. She faced the tough challenge of Romania's myriad of new ethnic minorities through a carefully constructed iconography, beginning with the symbolism of the 1922 coronation at Alba Iulia and continued in a new round of picturesque rural retreats which turned away from international Art Nouveau towards a pseudo neo-national style. Fusing the forms of Romanian Orthodox and Brâncovenesc architecture with vernacular elements, Marie called this the "Regina Maria style", ingenuously claiming that "it needed the eye of the princess come from far to bring before their eyes the beauty of their national art" (Marie n.d., 22–3).<sup>8</sup> These picturesque retreats were situated across the new territories of Romania. Many were owned personally by the Queen: Castle Bran in south-eastern Transylvania, for example, was gifted to her by the town of Braşov, while Tenha Yuvah, her "Solitary Nest" on the Black Sea Coast of the Dobrudja, was paid for with the proceeds of her writings. She designed each to capture the local flavour of the area. Bran, although restored in an Arts and Crafts spirit by Karel Liman between 1920–9, preserved the whitewashed irregularity of the medieval interior and was filled with antique furniture, Transylvanian vernacular ceramics and traditional stoves. When staying in the castle, Marie and her daughters wore richly embroidered peasant costumes. Tenha Yuvah in Balçic (1925–6), on the other hand, with its cantilevered first floor and truncated minaret tower, embraced the colourful Turkish character of the Silver Coast.<sup>9</sup> Here, Marie, dressed in "an 'absurd' sort of Turkish dress" of her own invention, became known to the local population as "The Sultana" (Marie 1926). This was a visible playing-out of her role as "Queen of all the Romanians", widely disseminated in photographs and postcards.

Like her homes, the Queen's children's tales now became a means of educating the world about the customs and charms of this new large country in south-eastern Europe. They were also explicit vehicles of royal propaganda. Marie's stories are at their best when she writes about Romania. She injects them with first-hand insight into the life of the peasant, and conveys humour and affection in the portrayal of customs, superstitions, distinctive costumes and quirks. In design terms, it is like the shift from her gilded interiors to her more earthy Regina Maria style of the 1920s: the latter's combination of a "peasant" aesthetic with Orthodox elements is reflected in the tales' constant leitmotifs of peasants and white monasteries. This final section will discuss two important books from this period: *The Queen of Roumania's Fairy Book* (1925), illustrated by the young Bessarabian artist Nadia Grossman-Bulyghin, and *The Magic Doll of Roumania* (1929), with drawings by the

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<sup>8</sup> In fact by this stage Romania had a well-established neo-national style in architecture, developed by Ion Mincu and his followers. See Popescu 2004.

<sup>9</sup> For further details, see Kallestrup 2006, 172–86.

established American illustrators Maud and Miska Petersham. The books adopt distinctly different approaches to the visual interpretation of text: while the Petershams draw heavily on photographic images of the Queen and her residences, transcribing Romanian scenes in an international graphic language, Grossman-Bulyghin offers an original and poetic response to Romania's own visual traditions.

Unlike the successful international illustrators Stratton, Dulac, Attwell, Job or the Petershams, Grossman-Bulyghin was primarily a studio artist: she trained in Petrograd with Ivan Bilibin from *Mir Iskusstva* and later in Paris.<sup>10</sup> A casualty of socialist-period art history, her painted works are intriguing in the way they move from a richly coloured Cubism to an original painterly language that reinterprets old Romanian frescoes and decorative form. She executed Marie's book illustrations relatively early in her career;<sup>11</sup> her engravings were published first in the 1921 Romanian version of the tales, with extra colour plates produced for the 1925 English version.<sup>12</sup> Her work for the Queen was clearly admired, as she went on to illustrate the writings of the historian and politician Nicolae Iorga who provided a scholarship for her to study the Moldavian painted monasteries (Iancu 2015, 88). Her search for a distinctive "Romanian" language of form must have chimed well with the "Mother of all Romanians", then in the process of rediscovering a "national style" in her own residences. Certainly this book, particularly its Romanian version, reads more clearly than any other as a joint artistic endeavour between writer and illustrator.



Fig. 9: Nadia Grossman-Bulyghin, "...with her tender hands ... the little girl caressed the weeping woman...", illustration from "Copila Soarelui" ("The Sun-Child"), *Povești de Maria Regina României* (București: Fundația Culturală "Principele Carol", 1921), p. 39

10 Today, very little is known about Grossman-Bulyghin (1891–1930). The few facts cited here come from the recent short entry in Iancu 2015, 88.

11 According to Iancu (2015, 88), she showed at the official Salon in Bucharest for the first time in 1924 and did not hold an individual exhibition until 1928, just two years before her early death.

12 See *Maria, Regina României* 1921 and *Marie* 1925. The versions differ significantly: the Romanian publication has fewer tales but a greater range of illustrations.

The English version contains eleven fairy tales, penned by the Queen, but with debts to traditional Romanian tales, to literary classics like Mihai Eminescu's *Luceafarul* (1883), to pan-European archetypes and to Christian iconography. Although dealing with princesses in high towers, enchanted princes and treasure at the end of the rainbow, every story is given a distinctive Romanian setting: in gipsy camp, peasant hovel, shepherd's pasture, mountain monastery or Turkish *conac*. The tales are picturesque, pathetic and humorous. Many deal with the relationship between peasant and ruler, passing satirical comment on the self-important pretension of acolytes ("Conu Ilie's Rose Tree"), or even giving thinly veiled references to members of Romania's own royal court. In "The Seed of Knowledge", King Demetrius is a recognisable caricature of King Carol I: "King Demetrius was not very amusing or exhilarating company for the young [...] [he] was a great stickler about form. His court was a very self-respecting court, where simple things were complicated indefinitely" (Marie 1925, 112–13). The iconography of Marie as "mother" also appears in several forms. In "The Shepherd and the Princess", Bulyghin depicts Princess Marioara by a cradle in a setting recalling Castle Bran; "A Christmas Tale" centres on a peasant boy's love for his mother, Maria; while the illustration of the queen in "The Sun-Child" clearly evokes Marie herself (Fig. 9).



Fig. 10: Nadia Grossman-Bulyghin, "‘What are those bottles?’ asked her mother", illustration from "Copila Soarelui" ("The Sun-Child"), *Povești de Maria Regina României* (București: Fundația Culturală "Principele Carol", 1921), p. 35

Just as Marie's writing has an eye for the picturesque – her colourful observations about peasant and monastic life flavoured with the use of Romanian terms – so Bulyghin's printed illustrations adopt a faux-naivety of handling, with flattened perspective and schematic form, that recalls vernacular art and historical church frescoes. The stylized, elongated figures in "The Sun-Child", for instance, bring to mind the Byzantine pictorial conventions of Romanian church murals. This local flavour is enhanced by Bulyghin's attention to details of peasant costume and accoutrements, such as the *ie* (embroidered blouse) or *carința* (apron) (Fig.

10). The 1921 Romanian edition carries this further, using a Slavonic-inspired typography and neo-Romanian ornamental decoration. Dedicated, in the Queen's hand, to "all the children of Greater Romania", the book offers a graphic counterpart to wider artistic efforts to bind the regions together through the neo-Romanian style.<sup>13</sup> It also mirrors the new interest in vernacular culture that followed unification (the peasant was now regarded as the common denominator of ethnic Romanian society), encouraged by the research projects of Dimitrie Gusti and the Bucharest Sociological Society. As such, Bulyghin's illustrations are a valuable example of an attempt to create a national idiom in graphic art before the peasant was appropriated in a very different way by socialism.

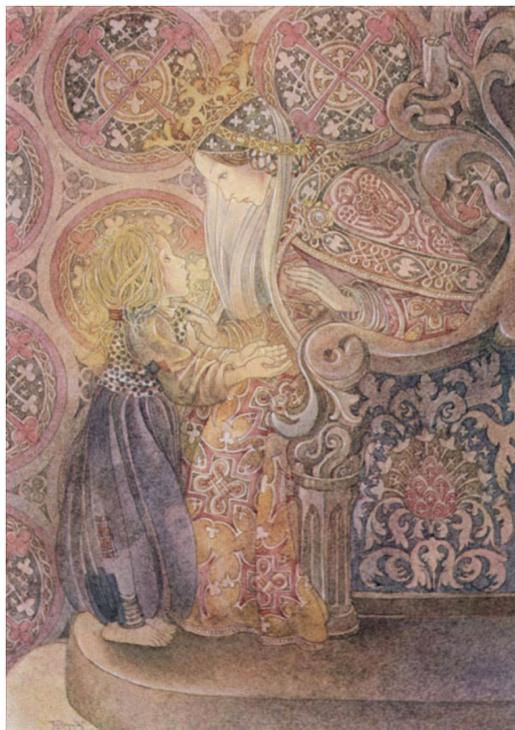


Fig. 11: Sulamith Wülfing, "Die Königin", illustration from *Maria von Rumänien, Vom Wunder der Tränen* (Wuppertal-Elberfeld: Sulamith Wülfing-Verlag, 1938). © 2018 Aquamarin Verlag GmbH

Her originality is enhanced by the contrast with Sulamith Wülfing's illustrations for a 1938 German edition of "The Sun-Child", *Vom Wunder der Tränen* (Fig. 11). Wülfing, a theosophist who graduated from the Art College in Wuppertal in 1921, developed a distinctive illustrative style for her ethereal and fairy-tale subjects. As she and her husband self-published most of her albums (including Marie's tale), she maintained artistic autonomy over her work, which changed little throughout her career. Her illustrations for "The Sun-Child" make no attempt to create a Romanian context. One might argue that the scene of the Queen and the Sun-Child loosely draws on the iconography of the 1922 coronation, yet there is nothing in setting or formal handling that explicitly references the Romanian origin of the tale or its author. Even the background patterns are of a generic exoticism, markedly different from Bulyghin's creative reinterpretation of neo-Byzantine and vernacular motifs.

*The Magic Doll of Roumania* is a very different kind of children's book. It was written following the Queen's much-hyped tour of North America in 1926 and was dedicated to the boys and girls of America. In

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion of the neo-Romanian style in architecture and the applied arts, see Kallestrup 2006 (Chaps. 4 and 6), and Popescu 2004.

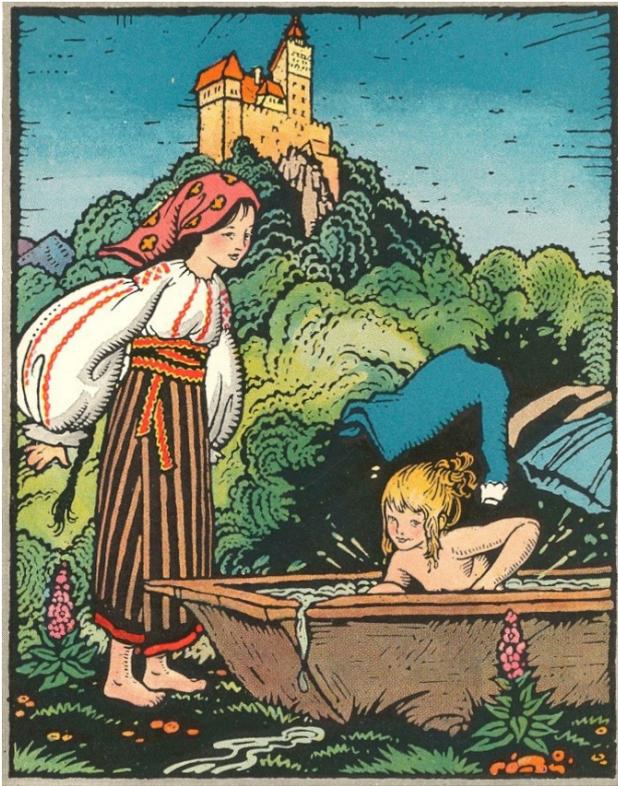


Fig. 12: Maud and Miska Petersham, “If I visit the Queen to-morrow, I must be clean”, illustration from *The Magic Doll of Roumania* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929), p. 183. © Mary Reinhard



Fig. 13: Queen Marie wearing traditional costume in the park at Castle Bran. Photograph from the Queen’s diary, 1926. Captioned in her own hand “excellent [sic] view of the dahlia garden”. Coll: National Archives of Romania

1929 it was reviewed, not entirely favourably, in *The Saturday Review of Literature* which called it “out and out propoganda to acquaint the children of America with the customs and doings of children in [Marie’s] own country” (Field 1929). The narrative turns on the story of a Romanian peasant doll which comes to life and magically takes a small American girl, Nancy, to Romania to meet the Queen. They travel from the plains to the mountains to the sea, making friends with colourful characters on the way. The journey format provides an effective foil for picturesque discussion of peasant customs and crafts, although the *Saturday Review* complained of the “shadow of information falling across the page too often” (Field 1929). This didacticism is reinforced in the Petershams’ illustrations, which clearly model their settings on photographs of the Queen and her country retreats (Figs 12 & 13). Nancy takes a bath before the unmistakable silhouette of Castle Bran; Florica, the magic doll, stands in the marble colonnade of Balcic; one dramatic dream scene of the enthroned queen borrows from the official coronation images of 1922 (Figs 14 & 15). An even stronger rhetoric of unabashed self-propaganda is conveyed by the text. Nancy’s meetings with the Queen provide a platform for Marie to extol the virtues of her Regina Maria style, to promote her relationship with the peasants (who call her “Our Mother” [Marie 1929, 197]), and to offer a surprisingly frank reflection on the desertion of Crown Prince Carol and the passing of King Ferdinand (whose death, two years before the book’s publication, becomes part of the narrative itself).<sup>14</sup>

The choice of the Petershams not only reflected their growing reputation as pre-eminent illustrators of

14 In 1925, Carol provoked a dynastic crisis when he renounced his succession rights and moved to Paris with his mistress, leaving  
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Fig. 14: Maud and Miska Petersham, “Sitting there on a rock, as if it were a throne – the Queen!”, illustration from *The Magic Doll of Roumania* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929), frontispiece. © Mary Reinhard



Fig. 15: Julietta, 1922 Coronation photograph of Queen Marie. Period postcard

children’s books, but was also likely due to their sensitive understanding of East European folk costume and settings.<sup>15</sup> Hungarian-born Miska (Petreszelyem Mihaly) had spent his formative years (1906–11) at the Royal National School of Applied Arts in Budapest producing richly coloured illustrations inspired by Magyar folk embroidery and painted furniture. In 1924, the Petershams created lively interpretations of Russian-American folk culture for Margery Clark’s *The Poppy Seed Cakes*; in 1929, they wrote and illustrated their own first children’s book, *Miki*, which follows a similar format to *The Magic Doll* and tells of a little boy who travels from America to Hungary. Its visual language delights in the stylized rendering of carved and embroidered vernacular motifs and recalls the search for a “national” graphic form in the designs of Pál Horti or Lajos Kozma. *Miki*’s cheery, child-friendly, folk style is also felt in *The Magic Doll*; nevertheless, its evocation of Romanian culture is limited to pattern and motifs, in contrast to Bulyghin’s efforts to create a stylized, neo-Romanian *language* of form.

With books such as these, Marie had a dual purpose: raising awareness of Romania abroad, while at home attempting to foster a sense of national unity as “mother” of enlarged Romania. After 1929 she stopped writing children’s tales; with the coup d’état that returned her son to Romania as King Carol II in 1930, she gradually retired from an active political role and focused her last years on her autobiography and memoirs. Her own children had grown up, while her other “offspring”, Greater Romania, was moving from adolescence to maturity. Increasingly sidelined by her authoritarian son, her role as nurturer of the new country was coming to

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his young son Mihai as heir.

15 The American Maud Fuller and her Hungarian husband Miska Petersham were a productive, Woodstock-based partnership, recognized for their collaboration with innovative editors and printers, and for their technical strength and exuberant colour. See Webster 2012.

an end. Popular memory of the distinctive form of royalty that she created was further erased by the historical silence of nearly half a century of communism. The same was true for Romania's lively art scene of the period, today still little acknowledged by the western canon. With their fertile integration of word and image, Marie's children's stories remain valuable, if largely forgotten, documents of her efforts to craft an aesthetic vision of monarchy within Romania, as well as serve as its propagandist for the outside world.

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