

**QUEEN MARIE OF ROMANIA AND THE CANADIANS:
A MEETING OF IDENTITIES**

**REGINA MARIA A ROMÂNIEI ȘI CANADIENII: O ÎNTÂLNIRE
A IDENTITĂȚILOR**

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Abstract

Queen Marie of Romania and Colonel Boyle were at the same time developing identities pertaining to that their own young nations, Marie as a part of the Romanian people's struggle in the Great War for the national unity, against immensely more powerful enemies; Boyle as a Canadian who was part of the great effort and sacrifices made by the Canadian soldiers fighting on Europe's bloody battlefields. Those developing national identities although separated by geography and historical experience, had nevertheless common features brought about by the epic struggles in the First World War and made possible that meeting of identities between Queen Marie as a representative of the Romanian people and the Canadians.

Key words: Queen Marie of Romania, Colonel Joseph Boyle, Queen Victoria, Arthur Duke of Connaught, First World War.

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Formal bilateral relations between countries are in many aspects the concluding official recognition that those nations share common values and ideals, which first started at the level of individuals and progressed in time and magnitude to that between states.

Romania and Canada are celebrating 90 years of bilateral relations initiated in the aftermath of the Great War by the excellent rapport between Queen Marie and many Canadian soldiers, officials and ordinary persons that so selflessly contributed in diverse ways to the relief of the Romanian people at that very difficult moment in their history.

That rapport and its far reaching practical results were overseen and facilitated by the outstanding work of Colonel Joseph Boyle and had at its basis the

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great understanding and collaboration between him and Queen Marie, two complex and remarkable personalities.

There is a multitude of views and written analyses exploring this relationship, emphasizing the diverse aspects of their personality, mutual respect or friendship. However, these accounts almost always overlook as something minor or self-explanatory the essential feature of their shared values as individuals formed and educated in the Victorian era, sharing an identity forged within the confines of the British polity and its dominions, of which Canada and Newfoundland were then integral parts.

In my view the shared identity and values of Marie and Boyle are the true background of their fruitful collaboration, embodied in Queen Marie's excellent relations with the Canadians in the war relief effort. It is a meeting and overlap of identities that made their joint effort efficient and productive at a time of great need for Romania.

I was born in Victorian days and have been part of the transition to what we call Modernism' is how Queen Marie of Romania in her own words encapsulates the spiritual milieu of her eventful life¹.

In her autobiography "The Story of My Life" we can get glimpses of this identity when she describes the predicaments and dealings with everyday problems during her first years in her adoptive country, pointing out that: 'I am an Anglo - Saxon, [...]. I am fundamentally a believer; I believe in good, in God, in Justice, in Love and Pity. [...] I came to Romania like a young and joyous warrior ready to enter your ranks, to salute your colours, to march bravely in your lines, a song on my lips, glad of any adventure, any effort, daring, perhaps unconventional, but yours, heart and soul²'. That is precisely the typical doer attitude cultivated by the Victorians in their quest for new opportunities and enterprise in the then globalised world of the British polity.

Colonel Boyle was also a true product of that great epoch, of men of action, path openers and independent adventurers that can be traced back since the Elizabethan age that put the basis of the British overseas settlements and states. I found a fitting parallel with Boyle in a similar early example from the 16th century's Captain John Smith, the founder of Virginia who had part of his early military career in what is now the Romanian provinces of Transylvania and Wallachia and fought for the Prince Michael the Brave, the first Romanian ruler to achieve the unification of lands inhabited by Romanians, circumstances that happened again over three centuries later in the midst of the Great War under King Ferdinand and Queen Marie for whom Colonel Boyle did his outstanding faithful service and contribution.

¹ Diana Mandache, *Marie of Romania. Images of a Queen*, Introduction, p. 3, Rosvall Royal Books, 2007.

² Queen Marie of Romania, *The Story of My Life*, London: Cassell, Vol. II, 1935, pp. 156-157.

Boyle's universe and mentality were well understood by Marie who aptly says about him that 'made all wailing seem paltry, almost cowardly... In times of depression he was an extraordinarily refreshing and invigorating companion, and an unexpected touch of early Victorian Puritanism added much to his quaintness³'.

There is also another less obvious and more convoluted aspect of these two personalities' shared identity, namely that both were at the same time developing identities pertaining to that their own young nations, Marie as a part of the Romanian people's struggle in the Great War for the national unity, against immensely more powerful enemies; Boyle as a Canadian who was part of the great effort and sacrifices made by the Canadian soldiers fighting on Europe's bloody battlefields such as Vimy Ridge or Passchendaele, forging the modern identity of Canada. Those developing national identities although separated by geography and historical experience, had nevertheless common features brought about by the epic struggles in the First World War and made possible that meeting of identities between Queen Marie as a representative of the Romanian people and the Canadians.

Case in point is Marie's description in her last memoirs of her unofficial, but crucial participation at the Paris Peace Conference, noticing from the position of a person with multiple identities how the small nations such as Romania were treated and regarded by the Western powers 'Having myself been born in a 'Great Country', I could only too well comprehend their mentality, but through long years and uneasy learning, I had also come to understand the mentality of the 'small' ones, and was today even the defender of one of those. The situation was not without humour, as I smiled inwardly, while retaining the attitude expected of me⁴'.

She continues in another passage: "I had an uncomfortably clear perception of how indifferent they really were to the anxious hopes of 'those Balkan' countries, which is certainly the name they gave us when we were not in the room⁵".

Marie became fully identified with her own people, as can be seen from the notes of the sharp royal scene observer Hector Bolitho after a visit to Romania, during which he made caustic observations about what he saw. The Queen wrote back to him pleading to 'Always write kindly of my adopted country. Come often and try to understand it⁶'.

There is also a third dimension of this auspicious meeting of identities between Marie, Boyle and countless other Canadians that I would like to highlight, namely the powerful attachment to the symbols and values represented by the sovereigns of the British polity of that time. Queen Victoria and her descendants

³ Hannah Pakula, *The Last Romantic*, Phoenix, 1996, p. 245.

⁴ Diana Mandache, *Later Chapters of My Life, The Lost Memoir of Queen Marie of Romania*, Sutton, 2004, pp. 38-39.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Hector Bolitho, *A Biographer's Notebook*, London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1950, pp. 16-17.

have been the focus of that frame of mind that glued together the immense and diverse polity of which Canada was a part.

Canadians were well aware that Marie was a direct descendant of Queen Victoria who as the consort of King Ferdinand steadfastly cultivated and upheld the values and alliance with her mother country and its dominions.

A glimpse of that mindset was recorded by Constance Lilly Morris when she accompanied Marie on a visit to Canada in 1926 at a Toronto Town Hall reception: '[The Queen]' told them about her childhood's dream to come to Canada, since the early days when she had listened to stories of their great county from her grand-mother Queen Victoria. That name was all that was necessary among these loyal subjects. The icy crust of things was broken. [...] the audience seemed genuinely affected by her address⁷.

The familiarity with the country was also underlined by the role of Marie's close relatives in Canada's affairs, when she wrote in her diary about a visit during the same 1926 tour, in Ottawa at the Governor House: 'It is an old but comfortable house which Aunt Louise and later also Uncle Arthur and family inhabited when he was governor. It was all very nice and I felt delightfully at home ...'⁸.

The high position in which fate put her was not always an enviable circumstance, as was chronicled by Hector Bolitho in an interview with Marie: 'we talked [...] of the history of the monarchy and of the evolution of divine right. Queen Marie said: 'It is something bred into us and we feel it, but it makes a barrier between us and other people. The most terrible price we have to pay is that we can seldom show gratitude. Our relationships remain impersonal, and we must treat people according to their value to the State'⁹.

That barrier was often successfully and graciously breached by Marie in many circumstances of her encounters with ordinary people, sharing their pain during the great conflagration or visiting wounded soldiers close to the frontline. Her work and friendship with Colonel Boyle and rapport with the Canadian servicemen and officials are a supreme example in that regard. I found mentioned in her last memoir "The Later Chapters of My Life" a telling sample of that human empathising, when in 1919 Marie visited London, saying that: 'Among the several receptions given in my honour was a tremendous tea party offered by the Canadians at the Ritz. From the first, under the enthusiastic leadership of my faithful friend Colonel Boyle, the Canadians had been eager to help Romania through her Queen. Boyle had been able to paint a vivid picture of our country's distress and my efforts to help my people. This had fired their imagination and they

⁷ Constance Lily Morris, *On Tour with Queen Marie*, New York: Robert McBride & Co, 1927, pp. 82-83.

⁸ Romanian National Archives, Queen Marie's diary, Microfilm 479.

⁹ Hector Bolitho, *A Biographer's Notebook*, London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1950, pp. 16-17.

came forward in more ways than one, among others offering me enormous provisions out of their Red Cross depots¹⁰.

The connection between Queen Marie and Colonel Boyle was thus in many aspects the first articulation point of Romanian - Canadian relations, a fortunate meeting of multiple identities that spanned Victorian values, national identities and homage for monarchy, which gave the initial impetus of our bilateral relations.

¹⁰ Diana Mandache, *Later Chapters of My Life. The Lost Memoir of Queen Marie of Romania*, Sutton, 2004, p. 58.



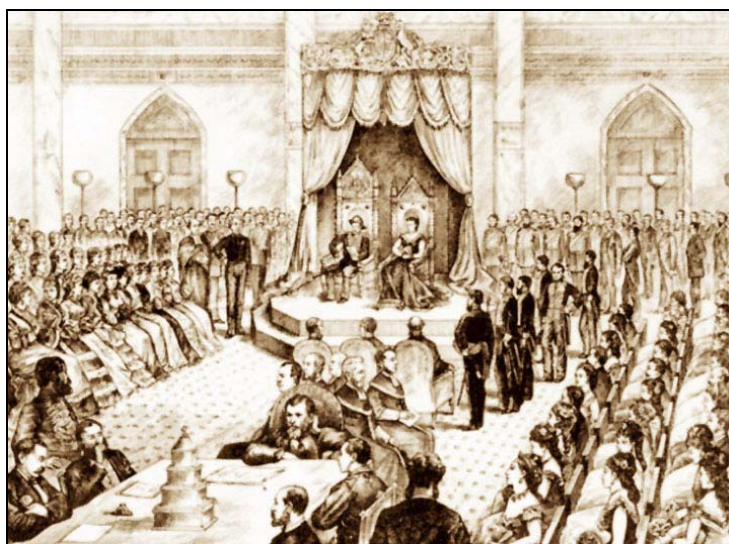
Queen Victoria, Queen Marie's grandmother.
Regina Victoria, bunica Reginei Maria



Louise Marchioness of Lorne (Marie's aunt), who was married with the Marquess of Lorne, Governor of Canada (1878-1883).
Louise, Marchiză de Lorne (mătușa Mariei), care a fost căsătorită cu Marchizul de Lorne, Guvernator al Canadei (1878-1883)



Princess Louise and her husband Marquess of Lorne,
the Governor of Canada (1878-1883).
Prințesa Louise și soțul său Marchizul de Lorne,
Guvernator al Canadei (1878-1883)



The Opening of the Canadian Parliament, 1879 - the Governor, Marquess of Lorne
is reading the speech of the Throne.
Deschiderea Parlamentului canadian, 1879 - Guvernatorul, Marchizul de Lorne
citește mesajul din partea Tronului



Arthur Duke of Connaught, the Governor of Canada (1911-1916),
Queen Marie's uncle.

Arthur Ducele de Connaught, Guvernator al Canadei (1911-1916),
unchiul Reginei Maria.



Colonel Joe Boyle.
Colonelul Joe Boyle



Queen Marie of Romania.
Regina Maria a Romaniei



The Marquess of Willingdon, the Governor of Canada (1926-1931).
Marchizul de Willingdon, Guvernatorul Canadei (1926-1931)



Queen Marie with Marquess Willingdon, the Governor of Canada, 1926.
Regina Maria împreună cu Marchizul de Willingdon, Guvernatorul Canadei în timpul vizitei din 1926.