

RHEINTOCHTERS DONAUFABRT – CARMEN SYLVA’S TRAVELOGUE: A HISTORICAL PERIOD AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A QUEEN

Maria SASS

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
E-mail: maria.sass@ulbsibiu.ro

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Abstract: Elisabeth of Vienna (1843-1916) (penname Carmen Sylva), was the queen of Romania between 1869 and 1916. She authored a comprehensive oeuvre with a clear pro-dynastic tendency that is highly relevant from the point of view of cultural history and collective memory. The present study is focused on the analysis of the travel journal *Rheintochters Donaufahrt*, which will be discussed with the help of a cultural studies methodology, namely Clifford Geertz’ concept of “dense description.” When read through this conceptual lens, the text appears multidimensional, the traveler/narrator does not merely observe geographical and historical landmarks but undertakes a cultural journey with multipronged implications. We do not encounter mere culturalist descriptions, but rather a network of symbols implying interculturality, imagology, and the staging of a multicultural world with which the contemporary globalized world is increasingly confronted.

Keywords: Carmen Sylva, Carol I, Kingdom of Romania, cultural studies, New Historicism, dense description, culture as text, imagology.

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Preamble¹

From a 21st century perspective, travel is part of our lives, without being just a privilege of the elites. As a cultural phenomenon, the historical depiction of the journey, researched from an anthropological perspective, offers interesting data. Especially since Carmen Sylva’s text, riddled with cultural and historical particularities, was published in the early twentieth century, i.e., over a century ago, and depicted a small kingdom that had not yet become the United Romanian State² and, needless to say, a century before its integration into the European Union,³ i.e., before Romania was assimilated

into the globalized world. As the travel journal discussed throughout this study was published in 1905 by Carmen Sylva,⁴ it provides the contemporary readership with relevant, yet little known or often misinterpreted information.

The diary of the queen-poet was based on a real journey undertaken by the royal family (Carol I of Romania and Queen Elizabeth). Its main trait is authenticity, with the journey itself set during the present, but offering insights into the past by employing various literary procedures – which we will refer to during the stage of text analysis –, and therefore somehow prophesying the future. The queen-poet highlights the qualities of the Romanian



people, as well as its history and culture that grant it the right to belong to the great European family.

One of the basic characteristics according to which a literary text must be analyzed is its degree of fictionality. It is therefore we start, on the one hand, from the journal's importance as literary text,⁵ while on the other hand, we highlight the role of all travel writings to convey practical, objective knowledge. And if we accept the cognitive function of the literary text, in the present case that of the travel diary, a question inevitably arises regarding the existence of a certain – distinctly *literary* – original perspective of the world, which differs from the logical, rational one. The answer would be the following: since the modern era, the world has been described increasingly more based on scientific knowledge and reason, while the mythological conception of the world has often been neglected. This perspective has changed, in part, due to the proliferation of travel literature in the early history of literature, being regarded as a turning point between science and literature, bringing to the fore the study of reality from an empirical, as well as imaginary perspective.

Since the end of the twentieth century, the mere thought that reality could rely on reason alone has lost its credibility. New Historicism supports the reciprocal relationship between history as a description of real events and literature as a narrative possibility. According to New Historicism, history makes its mark on every literary text which, however, does not represent a faithful copy of reality, but must be integrated into a dynamic network consisting of various socio-cultural and aesthetic elements.⁶ The takeaway is the “textualization”, i.e., the literary reworking of history as innovative rendition of cultural studies,⁷ according to which historical reality and literary representation require mutual support in order to function.

The starting point of this study is Clifford Geertz's concept of “dense description.”⁸ The travel diary in general and Carmen Sylva's diary in particular is presented from the perspective of the new paradigm equating literary research to cultural study, as an object of research for both disciplines (literature and history), owing to the fact that the depictions alternate between actual facts of life and their literary reworking. In *Rheintochters Donaufahrt*, the reader bears witness to a permanent relationship between subject and object, as well as between the constellations of literature as a fictional world and of a reality presented as a real world, respectively. From a literary point of view, the travel diary is also interesting as a kind of hybrid text, because it combines the factual with the fictional: while travelling, one writes about travel. When one writes, one travels across an imaginary world. Carmen Sylva always refers to her role as writer, the essence of her diary being that of self-discovery and subjective self-staging, while the transmission of factual information is pursued only in the background. The literary quality of the diary resides, beyond the descriptive language, in the use of narrative

elements: storytelling, recollection, and staging. The main objective of the present study is an analysis of the travel journal through the prism of cultural studies, following cultural-historical aspects, as well as poetic ones. Although the starting point is in the empirical reality, it is organized according to cultural categories, as the interpretation of symbols and rituals used in the cultural (re)presentation will take centerstage.

For a correct understanding of the analytical approach to *Rheintochters Donaufahrt*, which will be related to the cultural-historical context of its era, but also to its author, it is appropriate to first describe the historical context of the reign of Carol I and the beginning of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Romania, as well as to synthesize the literary activity and the role of Romanian-German cultural mediator of the queen-poet.

The historical context

Starting from 1866, the monarchy was established in Romania⁹ by the accession to the throne of a German prince, Carol I of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen. Among the events leading up to this historical act, the Union of the Romanian Principalities on January 24, 1859, is of utmost significance. The Union was based on the strong cultural and economic rapprochement of the two countries and carried by means of electing the Moldavian colonel Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler of both principalities: on January 5, 1859 in Moldavia and on January 24, 1859 in Wallachia, respectively. The union of the Principalities triggered the establishment and consolidation of the modern Romanian state. However, just seven years following his enthronement, a plot was organized against Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and on February 11, 1866, he was forced to abdicate. The coup plotters voiced the need to bring a foreign prince to the throne, since the current regime was corrupt and inefficient. Choosing Carol was not at random, his descent from a ruling Prussian family and its kinship with Napoleon III recommended him as prince of Romania in the eyes of Romanian politicians. His military and political training, disciplined character, and culture made Carol suitable to occupy the Romanian throne. The establishment of the constitutional monarchy by introducing Prince Carol I, born Karl Eitel Friedrich Zephyrinus Ludwig von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1839 – 1914), led to the gradual stabilization of Romanian political life, together with the outlining of new foreign policy objectives. Taking the crown in 1866 as ruler of Romania, Carol I. maintained this title until 1881, when he was proclaimed the first king of Romania.

Carol I. was the son of Josephine and Carol Anton of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen,¹⁰ he stemmed from the old German nobility that had provided him with an education in the German military spirit, which was held in high esteem as a model of order and punctuality at that time. When he occupied the throne, the prince's

main objective was to redress the country, which was facing difficulties in almost all respects, managing to rule not with arrogance, but demonstrating a great deal of wisdom and impartiality instead. Adopting the first Constitution in 1866 led to the development and modernization of the country. In the 48 years of his reign (the longest in the history of the Romanian states), Carol I achieved a very important foreign policy objective by obtaining the country's independence.¹¹ In battlefields on the territory of modern-day Bulgaria, the Romanian army was led to victory by the king, who was personally present at Plevna, Smârdan, and Vidin. During this war, Bessarabia was lost, but instead, Dobrogea was conquered and annexed to Romania's territory. The king later ordered the construction of the bridge over the Danube, between Fetești and Cernavodă, in order to connect the new province with the rest of the country. Carol had proved to be an excellent military strategist, and the Treaty of Berlin (1878) acknowledged not only Romania's absolute independence from the "Sublime Gate"¹² but Romania's importance on a European level. Carol's long reign and the immense prestige he accrued through his measures allowed for the economic rehabilitation of the country, its endowment with a series of institutions necessary for the functioning of a modern state, and the establishment of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Romania. As a symbol of the dynasty, he built the Peleş Castle in the Carpathian Mountains, which has remained one of the most visited tourist attractions in the country to this day. Although under his successful leadership, Romania became a modern state enjoying European-wide acknowledgement, Carol I was also faced with the shortcomings of predominantly agrarian countries, as the Romanian population consisted preponderantly of peasants. Although he initiated a program of agrarian reforms, there were many social upheavals throughout rural areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The consequence was that the main sector of the Romanian economy, in which the vast majority of the population was active, remained in a rudimentary state.

King Carol I of Romania, despite his German roots, was devoted to the Romanians, being permanently concerned with the prestige of the dynasty he had founded. His wife, Queen Elizabeth – who brought immense services to the Kingdom of Romania both culturally and socially¹³ – characterized him as "someone who wears his crown in his sleep".¹⁴ For all the services brought to the Romanian state, he was named Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy in 1867, and between 1879 and 1914 he was the protector and honorary president of the same institution.

Carmen Sylva and her work

The author of the journal *Rheintochters Donaufahrt* must be placed in the abovementioned context, that of the Romanian monarchy. She is Queen Elizabeth, wife

of Carol I of Romania who, since 1880, wrote under the pen name Carmen Sylva. Born in Germany as Princess of Wied, Carmen Sylva (1843-1916) became queen of Romania through her marriage, in November 1869, to King Carol I. She received a top education, unusually inclusive for those times, and acquired several foreign languages; among others, she learned Romanian even before reaching Romania.

As early as 1875, Carmen Sylva began her activity as a translator of Romanian poetry, mainly popular poetry, to German, encouraged by Mite Kremnitz¹⁵ and on account of her friendship with the canonical poet, playwright, and politician Vasile Alecsandri. She, therefore, became a mediator of Romanian culture abroad, through translations at first and ultimately through her own work. The queen's literary activity stretches from 1880 to 1912, a period during which she publishes poetry, plays, fairy tales, prose, showing an inclination for a variety of literary genres and alternating between realistic details and the fabulous folk tale. Although she has attempted to fully assimilate her new nation, an attempt most visible in her poetic texts, especially in *Poveștile Peleşului* [The Tales of the Peleş Castle], a successful convergence of folk tale motifs and German and Romanian cultures is clear in her works. In the chapter "The writing activity of Carmen Sylva in historical-literary context (1880-1912)",¹⁶ Silvia Irina Zimmermann distinguishes two stages in the literary career of the queen-poet, the first one of which took place between 1880 and 1890 and is indebted to a classical-romantic tradition. During this stage, the author dedicates herself to the intense promotion of the Kingdom of Romania, with a repeated emphasis on autobiographical writings, the most important volumes being *Poveștile Peleşului* (German edition, 1881) and *De prin veacuri* [From the Ages] (1885). The second period, from 1891 to 1912, represents a break in the literary activity of the queen-poet, an interruption caused by her exile, following interferences in court politics. The writings of the post-1891 period are thoughtful, focusing on religious and melancholy issues. We mention the volumes *Patrie* [Motherland] and *Cântecul mării* [Songs of the Sea]¹⁷, both published in 1891, as well as the play *Meșterul Manole* [The Master Builder Manole]¹⁸ (1892). Carmen Sylva then continues her activity with occasional love poems. A complete description of the queen-poet's work has no place in this study, but it must be emphasized that it is very comprehensive and illustrates a wide range of styles and facets, a symptomatic aspect for the period between 1880 and 1912 in literary history. At the European level, there were several parallel developments (realism, naturalism, symbolism, art nouveau, decadence, impressionism, etc.), and her conception of literature was not limited to the artistic content of the writings, but also included other principles, such as cultural, Christian-religious, and educational values, among others.



Uneven in regard to aesthetic value, but very comprehensive, Carmen Sylva's work was known only at the time it was created and was later forgotten due to the ideological climate allowing for her work to be researched in Romania only after 1990, given that the very access to documents (manuscripts, typescripts, and letters) in the Romanian archives was forbidden during communism. The works of the queen-poet were republished or translated into Romanian only at the end of the twentieth century. During this period, there have been some biographical studies or studies dedicated to her work. We find the Sibiu-born Germanist Silvia-Irina Zimmermann worth mentioning, given that she dedicated several studies to her and edited several volumes on her works.¹⁹ For the present study, the activity of promoting the Romanian popular culture is relevant, an activity that can be pursued in *Rheintochters Donaufahrt* (1905) as well. For this reason, some aspects will be highlighted in the following.

Since coming to Romania, Elisabeth of Wied has been preoccupied with becoming familiar with her new country, its culture, and customs, and she has worn the Romanian folk costume herself. In poems, stories, and folk tales, she described histories and customs, in images often presented in an idyllic fashion, portraying a Romanian landscape of exotic beauty. In the queen's opinion, the "Romanian specificity" is embodied by three great Romanian artists: the poet Vasile Alecsandri, the musician George Enescu, and the painter Nicolae Grigorescu. The closest to Carmen Sylva was the poet Vasile Alecsandri, to whom the queen-poet owes much of her knowledge of Romanian legends and popular poems. A mutual sympathy developed between Vasile Alecsandri and Carmen Sylva, as the queen-poet translated several Romanian folk poems and ballads collected by Alecsandri into German, which she published under the title of *Romanian Poems*.²⁰ Through the volume *From the Ages*, published in Germany in 1885, Carmen Sylva managed to illustrate the history and legends of the Romanian people, from Decebalus to Carol I, including rewritings of Romanian legends and folk songs. Beyond this anchoring in Romanian culture, Carmen Sylva's transcultural outlook must also be highlighted; in her work, a rich imagination is masterfully intertwined with themes pertaining to Romanian culture, history, and folk tales, as well as with motifs from German and European fairy tales. While in the Romanian context, the author often pursues educational ambitions, such as cultivating patriotic feelings among local youth, beyond the borders of her Kingdom she portrayed the exotic and mysterious beauty of the Carpathians and the Romanian people. The geographical and cultural surroundings of Peleş Castle, the peasants and the shepherds from Piatra Arsă, Vârful cu Dor, or Ialomiței Cave,²¹ resemble the idyllic figures of Romanian popular literature, and nature, in its turn, often takes on a mythical appeal. These aspects are

complemented by the promotion of folk culture through translations –*Romanian Poems* (1881) – but also by the translation into German of contemporary Romanian poetry (Vasile Alecsandri, Mihai Eminescu, Costache Negruzzi, Dimitrie Bolintineanu, etc).

Travel diary: *Rheintochters Donaufahrt*

The travel diary *Rheintochters Donaufahrt* begins like any other description of travel, with the main train station in Bucharest as starting point for a journey to Turnu-Severin. But after the first paragraph, the description of travel is already abandoned: "Thoughts fly in the face of this journey, and in the quiet running through the night, image after image perishes before my mind's eye."²² From the beginning, two great rivers are evoked, the Danube and the Rhine, which are endowed with a particular symbolic value throughout the narrative.

The Danube occasions the recollection of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen and von Wied families – "I let the past pass me by"²³ – and the past encompasses both German and Romanian history. The threads of German history, more precisely that of the Sigmaringen family, lead to the coronation of Charlemagne, and a descendant of this family arrived in "distant Romania."²⁴ The multiple Romanian historical events referred to in Carmen Sylva's diary start by evoking the battles between the Dacians and the Romans, because the "enigmatic Dacians"²⁵ ignite the writer's imagination. But beyond sheer creative fantasy, the Danube acquires the rank of a great symbol of distance, of a diversity of peoples, of cultural interferences, but also of the Habsburg Empire. Relevant is also the historical and cultural importance of the river – as an artery of circulation and trade, as a gateway for ideas, as a pathway for armies, as a bridge between east and west – often invoked by remarkable poets, such as Fr. Hölderlin or J. von Eichendorff – and symbolizing the tumultuous journeys across both space and time. The Danube connects the principality of Sigmaringen, situated at the river's headwater, to Romania, the country lying at the very end of the river's course. The King crossed the Danube for the first time in 1866 into his new country, and in 1869 together with his consort Queen Elizabeth of Wied. Thus, the river becomes the very embodiment of predestination, because the Danube was present during the most important historical act of King Carol I, the gaining of the State Independence of Romania in 1877. Compared to the Danube in terms of economic and cultural relevance is the Rhine, a symbol of the greatness of German culture, of romantic and sentimental feelings, anthropomorphized and raised by Hölderlin at the level of a demigod, present in German legends about Lorelei or the Song of the Nibelungs, symbolizing hope and forgiveness in Gottfried Keller's poetry *Rhine Paintings*. The Rhine is present throughout Carmen Sylva's entire oeuvre, occasioning nostalgic

evocations of the birthplaces of German culture. The analyzed text suggests a lasting connection between the Danube and the Rhine, the latter of which is symbolically represented by the Romanian royal couple.

The travel diary is, as Alfred Öpitz puts it, a “space in which certain themes and figures are staged and, last but not least, the traveler and the narrator himself are being staged.”²⁶ Carmen Sylva renders the Romanian and Balkan reality in a very particular manner, every detail perceived subjectively leads to meditation, reflection, and recollection, three literary procedures that, together with the hybrid character of the text – understood as interference of the factual with the fictional – recommends Carmen Sylva’s diary as a literary text. The depiction of reality is based on long-gone images and literary vision. What the reader perceives as still-images of the present throughout the journey are, in fact, mere glimpses that, in connection to past images, give meaning to a certain context. *Rheintochters Donaufahrt* encompasses a whole range of relevant traits for cultural studies. They are not simple descriptions of culture, but also display elements of interculturality, imagology, and the staging of a multicultural outlook with which the contemporary globalized world is increasingly confronted.

From an imagological point of view, the most significant aspect is the shaping of the identity of true Romanians, land-loving peasants who want to pass this attachment to the land on to their children and grandchildren, something that presumably represents an obstacle to progress; the latter could be achieved through foreign investment, but this would go against the “popular sentiment”: “we would be better off if we had industry and factories, but the Romanian hates factories, he wants to earn only so much as to make a living.”²⁷ The greatest danger facing this land-loving peasant is alcohol, a danger not quite as stringent in Dobrogea, where Turkish and Bulgarian influence is more palpable. But beyond the aspects that may overshadow the ideal of traditional Romanian culture, rendered by descriptions of folk costumes (peasant men and women in festive attire, women donning traditional shirts and scarves, men wearing long, white shirts and white pants, wide belts in red and black, and lambskin hats), folk dances and fiddlers – brings to the fore an exotic beauty. For example, the traditional folk dance, present in several texts by Carmen Sylva, is a popular Romanian art form with no corresponding Western rendition. Therefore, it expresses a certain Romanian specificity, to which “the legends [...], true, if you know how to read them” and the symbolism are subordinated – “everything is a symbol.”²⁸ One of the symbols that attract attention in shaping the identity of Romanians is the eye: “My greatest joy in Romania are the eyes of children [...] Such eyes are not seen anywhere, of a deep black, with glimpses of brown and green turning blue [...] big eyes, huge big, unnatural big [...] Romanian

beautiful eyes,”²⁹ but in the children’s eyes, the “sadness of a nation” is to be found. The eye symbolizes thinking, but also contributes to the beauty of a visage.

In the Metzler dictionary of symbols,³⁰ the eye is characterized as an embodiment of human essence, of soul and beauty, of spirit and knowledge, as well as of the Divine. Since antiquity, the eye symbolizes the Divine, being linked to light, as the sun signifies the celestial eye (i.e., in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), in which light originates. At the same time, the sun as the “eye of the world” symbolizes the happy relationship between the terrestrial and the divine, both a symbol of the spirit and of knowledge, whereas big, wide-open eyes designate the elevated spirit, but also represent an open gate to the soul. Unlike the spiritual and physical beauty of Romanians – strong people living in nature³¹ – in the description of the Balkan peoples settled along the Danube River, the author often uses stereotypes: Serbs are characterized as very self-enclosed merchants and are seen as cruel, because they assassinated their monarch, while the Bulgarians are worthy gardeners, about whose culture little is known.

The text addresses political and historical issues, but also current socio-cultural events (poverty and wealth, problems related to agriculture, such as drought), heroic deeds from the War of Independence. Romanian history is described as being as wild as the nature around the Danube. Through her artistic sense and knowledge of cultural contexts, the author constructs an imaginary topography. And by interweaving the factual with the fictional, she creates a new dimension of reality, wherein the observed world is related to a possible one. Actions are replaced by reflections, memories, and impressions, but the referential aspects offer only a starting point. The narrator does not leave the space of the real, but constantly pushes the boundaries trading on imaginary spaces and offering magical glimpses of reality. Looking at the journey as a point of intersection between time, space, and subjectivity, we accept the exchange between autobiographical, topographical, and historiographical elements combined in the text. Its hybrid character appears as an alternative way of perceiving reality, also a feature of *literarity*. Thus, the full meaning of the text can only be constructed through an interaction between author and receiver.

“Our journey is not akin to that of a tourist,”³² writes the author – warm welcomes everywhere, bread and salt, food and music, in Romanian tradition, emphasizing Romanian hospitality – all are accurate depictions; she then continues with what concerns her as a writer, namely to dedicate herself to her “thoughts,” to recall with her eyes closed, undisturbed by anyone, the separation from her parents in Neuwied on the Rhine, in order to enter “our country”³³ together with “the grizzled man”³⁴ with whom she faced her fears and worries. Like in Marcel Proust’s *In search of lost time*, paintings and sensations occasion the process of recollection. Following the “road



of Trajan,” carved into rock 2000 years ago, and the ruins of Trajan’s bridge, emerging out of the water and signifying the Romans’ desire to make the connection to the Mediterranean easier, the author thinks about the need to rebuild the country’s infrastructure for the future progress of the Romanian people. In this context, she also criticizes the Romanians’ desire to conserve and emphasize their Roman descent, neglecting their Dacian origin, although the Dacian ancestors were, in the author’s opinion, much nobler and more interesting.

The diary presents to the reader as a multidimensional text and “appears as a fabric of signs and quotes of diverse cultural origin.”³⁵ The traveler/ narrator does not actually insert geographical and historical references but makes a cultural journey that can be analyzed on several levels simultaneously. According to Gerard Genette, there are three perspectives through which the transcendence of boundaries can be presented: the spatial, the temporal, and the boundary between reality and fiction.³⁶ In *Rheintochters Donaufahrt*, there is a permanent interchange of the temporal and spatial plans: Rhine / Danube, Trajan / the current king, as well as the German and Romanian Danube landscape: “The mountain formations are the same as at the upper end of the Danube, so that the offspring of the Sigmaringen feel like home.”³⁷

The travel diary *Rheintochters Donaufahrt* is a homage to King Carol I around the fortieth anniversary of his reign (1906). In the queen-poet’s text, he appears as a mythical hero, whereas Lucian Boia argues that in his construction as a historical figure, two myths are intertwined, the Germanic and the dynastic one.³⁸ The Germanic myth is based on the German cultural model, dominant in Transylvania during the second half of the nineteenth century and is assimilated and widely adopted after 1866 throughout the Kingdom (the period coincides with the reign of Carol I) by a part of the Romanian elite, for instance by the “Junimea” society and its important representatives, such as Titu Maiorescu and Petre P. Carp, among others. Renowned for its rigor and effectiveness, German culture had to offer solutions that were suited to the aspirations of the Romanian nation.

In his work, Boia considers the impossibility of nations to renounce their heroes, saviors, both in everyday life and in the sense of remembering the historical tradition, as a universal and archetypal feature. These heroes, belonging to the “mystical area of the imaginary,”³⁹ are transformed into symbolic characters and depend on the historical context. Only noble and royal characters are part of the Romanian Pantheon of the nineteenth century, and “the ideal prince [...] had to be an exponent of Romanian spirit, a European spirit and a firm ruler, capable to ensure the social balance and prosperity of the country.”⁴⁰

The national and European dimension finds its first

embodiment in Trajan, the central figure of “the great founding myth, the birth of the Romanian people,”⁴¹ from which a line is drawn over time to Carol I who “maintains a true dialogue over the centuries,” since “at Nicopolis, in 1396,” the then-ruler of Muntenia, Mircea the Old, and Frederic von Zollern (the ancestor of Carol, the founder of the Hohenzollern family) fought together. Symbolically, this juxtaposition illustrates the association of Prince Carol with the destiny of the Romanian nation, Nicopolis being mentioned in the context of 1877 as well (during the War of Independence). Also, “Carol, like Mircea, assimilated the Dobruja region into the country, Carol marking with the seal of eternity what the comrade-in-arms of his ancestor had temporarily achieved.” Carol I was “a great sovereign, a respected arbiter of a half-century political balance, he favored the emergence of the myth.” With his reign, “a new era in the development of the Romanian state begins,” he is “the initiator of all the great evolutions of modern Romania.” Even the flourishing of Romanian culture is largely related to the interest the Royal Family has displayed towards this issue. Traits attributed to Carol I, such as “thoughtful and unsurpassed householder,” “man of vast culture and great universal consideration,” “one of the wisest and most authoritative rulers of the time,”⁴² contributed to the transformation of the historical character into a myth. The king came from a developed country and belonged to a renowned culture, bringing to his new homeland a modern vision of society and a different *Weltanschauung*, aiming to link the Kingdom of Romania to Western Europe from a cultural and economic point of view. By the same token, Queen Elisabeth brought her contribution by noticing the richness of the popular culture, highlighting and promoting the beauty of the Romanian tradition after arriving in Romania. In the travel diary, Carmen Sylva presents herself as a writer who identifies with the Romanian people and expresses her attachment to her new homeland: “Ah, the Rhine, the Rhine! I’ve missed it my whole life. And yet, today I would miss Romania if I had to leave it. I miss her sun, her ox carts, the Romanian language, the oriental heat, and the people I lived with for thirty years.”⁴³

Conclusions

The travel diary *Rheintochters Donaufahrt*, analyzed by employing strategies pertaining to cultural studies, more precisely in the spirit of “dense description,” the concept consecrated by Clifford Geertz, allowed the reconstruction of a long period in the history of the Romanian people, the reign of Carol I and the beginning of the constitutional monarchy in Romania, as well as the transmission of important aspects related to the culture and identity of this people. The themes drawn in the text are arranged in a certain way, so as to provide a certain perspective, wherein the literary text can

be seen as an environment that contains condensed forms of ethnographic descriptions. And by applying narrative strategies, the author transforms facts into symbols and the memorable figure of King Carol I into myth. Given that symbols and rituals that constitute cultural (re)presentation are present in the foreground, therefore empirical reality is organized according to cultural categories, Carmen Sylva's travel diary can be characterized by the metaphor of "culture as text."⁴⁴

From a contemporary perspective, the symbolism of the cultural and historical elements in the text is significant. The multitude of cultures presented by

Carmen Sylva is the same as the one disputing its presence in the pluricultural and globalized world of today, itself not foreign to stereotypes and prefabricated ideas, despite a plea for tolerance and the respect reserved for the cultural specificity of each country.

On a subjective level, the journey on the Danube represents the self-representation of the subject – "a dream that, in the dream life, goes further, as if it would never end"⁴⁵ – but also "the achievement of a lifetime."⁴⁶

Translated into English by Ovio Olaru

Note:

1. This article concerns Carmen Sylva, *Călătoria făcei Rinului pe Dunăre*, translated by Maria Sass. See Silvia Irina Zimmermann, ed., *Das Königsbild im Werk Carmen Sylvas und in Fotografien des Fürstlich Wiedischen Archivs* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), 113–171. Page 111 refers to the existence of a Romanian translation from the same year, *On the Danube*. Apud. Silvia Irina Zimmermann, *Unterschiedliche Wege, dasselbe Ideal. Das Königsbild im Werk Carmen Sylvas und in Fotografien des Fürstlich Wiedischen Archivs*. (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), 111.
2. The Romanian State was officially established on December 1, 1918.
3. Romania is part of the European Union since January 1, 2007.
4. Queen Elisabeth of Romania (1843–1916), penname Carmen Sylva ("the forest's song," suggesting a symbolic interference between her German origin and the Latin roots of the Romanian people, whose queen she becomes. Her penname pursued the delimitation between her duties as queen and her literary activity).
5. The concept of literature that we make use of is an extended one, widely accepted by cultural studies and one that is not limited to established writings but comprises all types of texts, from travelogues, essays, pamphlets, and other forms of popular literature.
6. Thomas Anz, ed., *Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. Methoden und Theorien*. Vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007), 354–57.
7. *Ibid.*, 361–69.
8. Clifford Geertz: "thick description" designates an in-depth analysis of texts, including the cultural signs and the network of symbols underpinning them, as well as their origin and employment as means of cultural commemoration and the building of collective identity. Clifford Geertz, *The cultural geography reader* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2008), 41–51.
9. Romania should not be understood in contemporary terms, but only as the Romanian Principalities united on January 24, 1859. The following Principalities were acknowledged on the current territory of the Romanian state: Transylvania (historical region bordered on all sides by the Carpathian Mountains; it was part of the Habsburg Empire until 1867, then of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918), Moldova (region located in the East, bordered by the Eastern Carpathians in the West and by the Dniester in the East), Wallachia ("Țara Românească"/"The Romanian Country," is a historical region located in the South, bordered to the North by the Southern Carpathians and bordering the Danube to the South) and Dobrogea (located between the Danube and the Black Sea). The United Principalities bear the name of Romania since 1862.
10. Karl Anton, Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1811 – 1885) was the last prince to rule Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen from 1848 to 1849. He became Prince of the entire House of Hohenzollern in 1869.
11. The Romanian War of Independence designates the participation of the United Principalities in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 – 1878. Following this war, Romania gained independence from the Ottoman Empire.
12. "The Gate" – the dependency on the Ottoman Empire..
13. Queen Elisabeth of Romania (married to Carol I in 1869) was dedicated to charitable activities and the preservation of culture and the arts. She was known for the literature, music, and painting societies organized at the royal court.
14. Grigore Antipa, *Câteva amintiri despre Carol I*. Apud. Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*. Revised and illustrated edition. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017). Quoted on page 382.
15. Mite Kremnitz was a German writer and translator of Romanian literature, the wife of the Royal Physician at the court.
16. Silvia Irina Zimmermann, *Die dichtende Königin. Elisabeth, Prinzessin zu Wied, Carmen Sylva (1843–1916). Selbstmythisierung und prodynastische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit durch die Literatur* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2010), 321–31.
17. *Heimath and Meerlieder*. See Zimmermann, *Die dichtende Königin*, 323.
18. *Meister Manole* in the original, a play based on a Romanian legend centered on the artist sacrificing his loved ones for his art.
19. See the list at the end of the present article for further reference.



20. Carmen Sylva, *Rumänische Dichtungen*, first German edition, edited together with Mite Kremnitz, is published in 1881 (Leipzig, Friedrich), whereas a second, expanded edition appears in 1889 (Bonn, Strauss).
21. Silvia Irina Zimmermann and Carmen Sylva, eds., *Poveștile Peleşului* (Bucharest: Corint, 2016), 10, 25, 44.
22. Carmen Sylva, *Călătoria fiicei Rinului pe Dunăre*, in Zimmerman, *Das Königsbild*, 113.
23. Sylva, *Călătoria*, 116.
24. *Ibid.*, 115.
25. *Ibid.*, 119.
26. Alfred Opitz, "An den 'Grenzen der irdischen Schöpfung': Raumerfahrung und Subjektkonstitution in der europäischen Reiseliteratur des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Actes du XIIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée*, vol. 2 (München: Iudicium, 1988), 349-54. Quotation from page 334. Apud. Sinae Lee, *Wolfgang Koeppens Reiseessays im Spannungsfeld zwischen Fiktionalität und Faktizität. Studien zur hybriden Textsorte als Möglichkeit einer ästhetischen Wirklichkeitserfassung*. Public Ph.D. defence in philosophy at the Ludwig-Maximilian University Munich, 2008. https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/8755/1/Lee_Sinae.pdf (Last accessed 19.02.2019).
27. Sylva, *Călătoria*, 130.
28. *Ibid.*, 120.
29. *Ibid.*, 134.
30. Günter Butzer and Joachim Jacob, eds, *Metzler Lexikon literarischer Symbole* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2012), 32-34.
31. Sylva, *Călătoria*, 131.
32. *Ibid.*, 130.
33. *Ibid.*, 123.
34. *Ibid.*, 124.
35. Ansgar Nünning, ed., *Metzler Lexikon. Literatur- und Kulturtheorie* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1998), 534.
36. Gerard Genette, apud. Ansgar Nünning, *Metzler Lexikon*, 494.
37. Sylva, *Călătoria*, 125.
38. Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (Bucharest, Humanitas, 2017).
39. *Ibid.*, 358.
40. *Ibid.*, 362.
41. *Ibid.*, 362.
42. *Ibid.*, 379-382.
43. Princely Archive of Wied, Elisabeth of Wied Fund, file 113-121. Apud Zimmermann, *Poveștile*, 222.
44. Doris Bachmann-Medick, ed., *Kultur als Text. Die anthropologische Wende in der Literaturwissenschaft. Kultur & Medien* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1998), 10.
45. Sylva, *Călătoria*, 170.
46. *Ibid.*, 168.

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