REPRESENTATIONS OF PLAY IN QUEEN MARIE'S WRITINGS

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Abstract: *This article explores the diverse representations of play in the autobiographical and literary writings of Queen Marie of Romania, highlighting its symbolic, emotional, and cultural functions. Far from being trivial or nostalgic, play emerges in Marie's work as a narrative and aesthetic strategy—one that bridges memory, identity, and imagination. Drawing from Johan Huizinga's concept of Homo Ludens (1949), the study approaches play as a formative cultural act, deeply embedded in Marie's construction of self and world. Through analysis of scenes involving childhood games, creative expression, travel, and feminine rituals, the article reveals how play functions as a form of soft power and symbolic authorship. The narrative structures of Marie's writing resonate with Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1991), where the self is poetically configured through storytelling. Furthermore, her engagement with aesthetic and emotional expression—particularly in domestic, artistic, and natural spaces—aligns with the feminist theory of écriture féminine, as formulated by Hélène Cixous (1976). The article also integrates the lens of social representations (Jodelet, 1989) to understand how objects, gestures, and symbolic rituals within her texts carry shared meanings, rooted in both cultural tradition and individual imagination. Ultimately, play is portrayed not merely as recreation, but as a generative language of presence, resilience, and poetic resistance.*

Keywords : representations, play, Queen Marie, literary writings, cultural functions, narrative identity

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1.Introduction or play's implications

Play is not a marginal phenomenon or a secondary activity, but a fundamental component of the development of culture writes Huizinga (1938), in his classic work, *Homo Ludes*. Play, he argues, precedes culture and is present in all expressive forms – from myth, art and law, to ritual and literature. He defines play as a free, conscious action, carried out in a delimited time and space, according to freely accepted rules, which has a symbolic function and produces a reality of its own, separate from everyday life. Very interestingly he underlines that "play was older

than culture" since animals have not waited for man to teach them how to play. Huizinga (1977:5) defines play as a freely chosen activity, carried out within the limits of a determined time and space, having its own order, precise rules and a symbolic character. More than entertainment, play is, in this perspective, a force generating meaning and form, which crosses domains such as religion, law, art and literature.

In a critical and creative continuation of Huizinga's theory, Jacques Ehrmann proposes in his study *Homo Ludens Revisited* a more subtle interpretation of play, centered on modern literature as a space for constructing meaning through tension, inversion, and symbolization. Ehrmann states that play "is not the opposite of reality, but a form of it" and that literature becomes "a playful extension of existence" (Ehrmann, 1968:33). Thus, the literary text is no longer just a vehicle for a content, but a dynamic field in which the author and the reader participate in an act of co-creation, under the sign of the game of language and the mobility of meanings. For him, play becomes a way of understanding textual construction, a framework in which meaning is constantly negotiated, inverted, or undermined. Play is no longer just an activity separate from reality, but an essential mechanism of meaning-making, a space of aesthetic freedom and reconstruction of the world.

Recent research on play, especially in the context of postmodernity and new narrative forms, emphasizes its cognitive, reflexive, and identity-building function. Brian Edwards, in his volume Theories of Play and Postmodern Fiction, shows that play has become an essential hermeneutic key to understanding contemporary fiction, which is "founded on paradox, irony, and self-referentiality—all expressions of textual play" (Edwards, 1998:12). The author insists that in postmodern literature, play is not only a theme, but also a narrative strategy, a way of interrogating reality and constructing alternative worlds. In this paradigm, play becomes a form of knowledge and self-creation, and literature is transformed into a space of interaction between author, reader, and text, governed by fluid rules and multiple meanings.

Marie-Laure Ryan emphasizes that play should no longer be seen as a mere theme, but as an emergent narrative form in which the reader or player is invited to participate in the construction of meaning. In her work *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, Ryan shows that interaction, randomness, and exploration are central elements in new forms of literature and play, in which the boundaries between author, text, and receiver become fluid (Ryan, 2001:105).

In the context of comparative literature and poetics of reading studies, Karin Littau proposes in *Theories of Reading* a reconnection between play, reading and the imaginary of childhood. She argues that reading itself is a form of play, in which the reader simulates, projects, interprets and plays with fiction, not just passively decodes it (Littau, 2006:66). Furthermore, in children's literature or in literature with dreamlike and symbolic dimensions, play becomes a mechanism for initiation into possible worlds, with a formative and cathartic function.

In the field of aesthetics and performative theory, Erika Fischer-Lichte argues in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance* that play must also be understood as an act of performative meaning-making. She emphasizes the ritualistic and liminal dimension of play, where participants (actors, spectators or readers) are transformed through active participation in a symbolic space (Fischer-Lichte, 2012:88). Thus, play is not only a "content" of a work, but also the way in which meaning is generated through gesture, symbol, action and emotion.

Recent research on play in a digital context highlights how video and interactive games contribute to the formation of fluid and participatory identities. James Paul Gee, in his volume *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, shows that digital play is a space of complex exploration, where the player assumes narrative roles, moral decisions, and higher-order thinking strategies (Gee, 2003:48). In this sense, play is not just a passive activity, but an active form of learning, reflection, and meaning-making.

Thus, in the context of Queen Marie's writings, literary and symbolic play can be interpreted as a form of access to the sacred, to poetry and to the expression of identity outside the constraints of reality. In her works, meanings are often ambiguous, poetic, symbolic and in which the text seems constructed as a playful space in itself. In her literature the child-reader is called to enter a poetic, symbolic universe, where learning is done through fascination and playful participation. Even though Queen Marie does not belong to the postmodern era, many of her writings, especially fairy tales and mystical fragments, prefigure modern play structures and techniques, with a poetic and formative role.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design, as defined by *Sampieri et al.* (2014), which focuses on exploring and systematizing existing phenomena in order to provide a structured understanding of them. Rather than aiming to establish causality or predictive models, descriptive research seeks to answer questions of *"what"* and *"how"*, offering a detailed portrayal of the subject under investigation.

In this case, the research seeks to explore the representations of play in Queen Marie of Romania's autobiographical and literary writings. The objective is twofold: on the one hand, to identify recurring symbolic patterns through which play is represented (as imagination, cultural mediation, feminine authorship, etc.); on the other, to analyze the aesthetic and emotional functions that play fulfills within her narrative construction of identity, space, memory, and femininity.

The methodological approach combines textual analysis and symbolic interpretation, within a qualitative framework. Primary sources include Queen Marie's autobiographical works (*The Story of My Life*, *Later Chapters of My Life*, *My*

Inner Life, etc.), with a focus on passages where play is evoked directly (childhood games, fairy tales, costumes, gardens) or indirectly (travel, creativity, diplomacy). The analysis draws from literary theory, feminist cultural studies, and semiotics.

3. Representations. Theoretical background

In this section, we propose a critical examination of the notion of *representation*, contextualized within the broader theme of play. Drawing on social psychology, we consider how play is not merely a personal or spontaneous activity, but a socially constructed and symbolically charged practice, whose meanings and functions are shaped by collective representations.

The concepts of *representation* and *attitude*, both central to social psychology, are deeply interwoven and often coexist. As *Jodelet* (1989) explains, a social representation is "a form of socially elaborated and shared knowledge, with practical implications, that contributes to the construction of a common reality within a social group." Applied to play, this implies that our perceptions of what constitutes "play" — its forms, functions, and value — are neither neutral nor universal, but socially situated and culturally encoded.

In this perspective, play is not simply an individual act, but a phenomenon embedded in shared knowledge systems, norms, emotions, and symbolic frameworks. A representation of play thus results from a complex interplay between the object itself (e.g. the activity of play), the individuals or groups who attribute meaning to it, the emotional and cognitive responses it elicits, and the broader cultural or societal context in which it is enacted.

As *Abric* (1994) defines it, a social representation is "an organized system of knowledge, beliefs, opinions, images, and attitudes shared by a group in relation to a specific social object." When applied to play, these representations serve as "common-sense theories" (*Moscovici*, 1988) that enable individuals to understand and interpret the diverse roles that play may assume—whether as a form of education, socialization, transgression, resistance, or even ritual.

According to *Moscovici* (1961), two key processes underlie the formation of social representations: anchoring and objectification. Anchoring involves inserting a new or unfamiliar phenomenon into pre-existing categories of thought. For instance, a society may anchor digital or adult play into childhood categories, thus preserving the idea that "true play" belongs to children. Objectification, meanwhile, transforms abstract notions into concrete images. In the case of play, this could mean visualizing play through fixed symbols—such as toys, games, laughter, or chaos—thereby solidifying certain cultural expectations and norms around what play *should* look like.

It is therefore crucial to understand social representations of play as both a *process* and a *product* of collective meaning-making. Through the representational

act, play is continuously interpreted, reinterpreted, and redefined. The image of play we inherit or reproduce is not static—it evolves as society changes, and with it, the symbolic and practical place of play in daily life.

The relevance of this theoretical framework becomes evident when examining the diversity of meanings attributed to play in different contexts—be it in childhood development, in artistic or literary creation, in rituals, or even in diplomacy or political performance. As *Apostolidis* (2006:212) states, social representations theory enables us to explore *"the articulation between systems of thought and systems of behavior"*, and thus to understand how collective beliefs and implicit attitudes toward play influence how it is practiced, valued, or marginalized.

In sum, play—far from being a trivial or purely individual phenomenon—is deeply embedded in a matrix of social representations. It reflects a society's values, anxieties, hierarchies, and desires. Studying these representations thus offers a privileged entry point into understanding how cultures imagine joy, freedom, imagination, and even power.

The representations of play in Queen Marie of Romania's writings reveal a multifaceted and deeply symbolic understanding of leisure, creativity, and personal identity. Play in her literary and autobiographical texts often transcends the notion of mere entertainment, becoming a vehicle for imagination, emotional release, and spiritual reflection.

4. Representations of play

Using a lexicometric approach, we analyzed the frequency and contextual use of the word *game* in Queen Marie's autobiographical writings. The term appears 24 times across varied narrative contexts, primarily in relation to childhood, imagination, and symbolic action. A co-occurrence word cloud revealed a lexical field dominated by terms such as *children*, *joy*, *freedom*, and *rules*, reflecting the hybrid function of play as both cultural ritual and personal expression. This aligns with Johan Huizinga's (*Homo Ludens*, 1938) vision of play as a formative cultural act.

Representations of play go far beyond the notion of simple amusement or leisure; they carry deep symbolic, cultural, psychological, and aesthetic functions. From a social and anthropological perspective, play has been interpreted as a space of suspended rules, a "liminal" zone where ordinary structures of time, hierarchy, and identity are temporarily dissolved or inverted. In what follows we present the representations of play in Queen Marie's writings as escapism and imaginative freedom, as artistic and literary expression, as memory reconstruction, as performance and identity and as creative discovery by travelling.

4.1. Play as escapism and imaginative freedom

In Queen Marie's writings, play emerges as a powerful medium of liberation, imagination, and emotional autonomy. Far from being a mere pastime, play is portrayed as an essential inner territory, where the rigidity of royal protocol is momentarily suspended, and where the child-spirit expresses itself in creative, bold, and poetic forms. "Our games were dreams in motion, stories spun with golden thread, in which we were queens and warriors, far from adult sternness." (Queen Marie, 1934:30)

The invented characters of her games—queens, warriors, ogres—become alter egos and narrative avatars, through which Marie rehearses her future roles and displaces the constraints of real life into symbolic adventures. Queen Marie often viewed play—especially in her childhood memories—as a form of liberation from societal constraints. In *The Story of My Life*, she describes the gardens, woods, and make-believe games of her youth with vivid detail and emotional nostalgia. These scenes are infused with a sense of childlike wonder, but also a latent desire to escape the rigid formalities of royal life.

This representation of play resonates with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's vision of childhood as a state of natural freedom, unspoiled by the artificialities of society. Likewise, it evokes Romantic and Edwardian ideals of childhood play as both a moral training ground and a site of emotional authenticity. But Marie goes further—she elevates play to a realm of sacred memory, an echo of paradise lost, imbued with longing and grace. One of the most telling episodes is the "tea-tray sliding game," in which Marie overcomes shyness and prohibition to engage in a physically liberating act of rebellion:

> Amongst others, a splendid game was invented; sliding down the back-stairs on a tea-tray. This was too wonderful! Overcoming all shyness, and ignoring strict prohibition, I sidled up to the handsome Stephen and begged him to let me ride down with him on a tray. (Queen Marie, 1934:33)

Marie's games were not solitary but communal, often shared with her beloved sister, Ducky. Their play was marked by solidarity and mutuality, a shared narrative space where competition gave way to communion:

> Ducky and I were scrupulously fair towards each other: we always played the game and never wanted to have separate successes; we could not conceive of a life where we should not be side by side. (Queen Marie, 1934:5)

Play also included the adults around her, particularly her father, who took on imaginative roles and participated in theatrical games. The "ogre game" he invented reveals another dimension of play: its capacity to simulate danger in a safe space, to awaken the thrill of fear while remaining protected:

> He left that to Mamma, but occasionally he would, so to say, discover us and then he would invent some game or amusement that he seemed to enjoy as much as we did. He invented a thrilling game for the winter evenings; the lamps were all put out and Papa would hide in a dark corner pretending to be an ogre. We never knew in which room he was. With fearful trembling we would crawl through the ink-black chambers and suddenly, when all danger seemed over, he would spring out from somewhere and catch us whilst we screamed as though he were really going to eat us up. (Queen Marie, 1934:11)

Thus, for Queen Marie, play is not only escapism, but also a complex form of emotional education, identity rehearsal, symbolic resistance, and imaginative agency. It meant also a pure development.

> Great games were played in this fortress. Brother Alfred was the principal leader. Alfred played a great part during these Osborne holidays and was the leader and instigator of most of our games. During the "learning" months of the year we saw less of him.(Queen Marie, 1934:36)

Through play, she navigated fear, intimacy and rebellion. Her writings, decades later, still preserve the wonder and poetic logic of those childhood moments, not merely as memories, but as foundational myths of the self.

4.2. Play and Creativity: Artistic and Literary Expression

Queen Marie's play did not end with childhood—it simply evolved. In her adult life, playfulness took the form of artistic expression and creative experimentation, becoming a dynamic outlet for emotion, intuition, and imagination. Her engagement with painting, costume design, interior decoration, garden planning, and especially writing, can all be seen as manifestations of aesthetic play, where duty and decorum gave way to spontaneity, fantasy, and poetic freedom.

She crafts in many of her writings highly stylized narratives, reshaping real experiences through metaphor, rhythm, and visual detail. One such example appears in her evocative recollection of Mount Edgcumbe, a place that transcends its geographical identity and becomes a fantastical playground of the senses and the spirit:

> Beyond Devonport harbour lay Mount Edgcumbe, a marvellously beautiful country seat… a shady retreat full of poetry... secret-looking pools… the classical 'orangery.' … I have an enchanted remembrance of how they grew in pale, fragrant clumps all over the banks and up in amongst the century-old trees.(Queen Marie, 1934:195)

Here, landscape becomes narrative; memory becomes myth. Her prose is laden with symbolic vegetation, enchanted remembrances, and secret spaces—elements that turn physical gardens into inner gardens of the soul. The Italian Garden,

the laurel walks, the orangery—each is transformed into a stage for contemplative play and poetic self-reflection. Nature, in her hands, is not static; it is a participant in the creative game, mirroring the richness of her imagination. This artistic fluidity also appears in her self-declared naïve beginnings as a writer:

> 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.(Queen Marie, 1934:578)

Her phrasing is telling "*rules of the game*." Marie positions literature itself as a playful terrain, one in which she may not follow conventional grammar or structure, but where she brings a rare emotional intelligence. She embraces a form of literary playfulness that allows her to conjure beauty intuitively, outside of academic conventions.

Through artistic and literary play, Queen Marie cultivates a world where emotion, beauty, and memory are ritualized into stories. These stories do not merely recount life—they *re-enchant* it. Play, for Marie, becomes a sacred act of symbolic authorship, where inner life is offered to the world as both testimony and vision.

4.3. Play and Memory Reconstruction: The aesthetics of childhood

In Queen Marie's autobiographical works, play is not only a recurring theme but a narrative lens through which memory is shaped and reimagined. Her recollections of childhood games, enchanted gardens, and imaginative adventures are often filtered through a poetic sensibility that transcends literal recollection. In this process, memory becomes performative and symbolic, a form of playful reconstruction where past experiences are emotionally re-authored.

> We were imaginative children and each had a part which we played as conscientiously as possible… if there was a queen in the plot I always played that role. (Queen Marie, 1934:50)

Such passages highlight the creative continuity between remembered play and adult identity. The child who plays at being a queen becomes the queen who remembers playing—a narrative loop that reveals how play structures memory and, in turn, memory sustains identity.

Childhood is evoked not only through events and characters, but through a rich material and sensory language that elevates toys, clothing, rooms, and handmade objects into powerful symbols of affect and interiority. These objects are not passive elements of the narrative, but rather sites of memory and emotional condensation, revealing the intimate texture of her early life. In this way, Marie constructs a semiotic

world, in which objects become bearers of memory, identity, and emotional resonance.

For example, Marie often describes her dolls not as inanimate objects, but as companions infused with character and narrative potential. In *The Story of My Life*, she recounts scenes of shared play with her sister Ducky, where dolls were assigned roles and personalities, and childhood bedrooms transformed into miniature stages for emotional storytelling. These objects served as early expressions of empathy, projection, and relational imagination—what Winnicott would later call "transitional objects", mediating between the child's internal world and external reality.

> Wonderful games were played in those two drawing-rooms before the guests came up. Here was a moment when I could be a queen to my heart's content. I would find some bright-coloured curtain or tablecover, which, fastened round my waist, would trail gorgeously behind me over the ground, and for some reason I liked to call myself the Queen of Spain : that name had about it something both historical and adventurous, which sounded well in my ears—it was grand and dignified, and had a smack of les chateaux en Espagne. Ducky usually played the part of my husband, my son or my horse, or all three in turn, according to the necessities of the game. (Queen Marie, 1934:11)

Childhood spaces, too, are rendered with extraordinary emotional and sensory depth. Marie often describes her rooms, beds, and play areas not merely as physical settings, but as containers of emotion, textured with fabrics, colors, scents, and light. Her recollection of a beloved toy, a particular embroidered dress, or even the creak of a floorboard, is never neutral; each detail becomes a symbolic node in a network of memory, anchoring her identity to moments of tenderness, loss, or transformation. These descriptions invite a material culture approach, where things are read as archives of affect and personal meaning.

Clothing, especially, occupies a dual role in her narrative: as a marker of social identity and as a tactile, intimate surface where play, femininity, and imagination converge. Dressing up, both in childhood games and later court rituals, becomes an act of creative self-fashioning. Her memories of playing "queen" as a child, complete with invented costumes and theatrical postures, prefigure her adult awareness of identity as performance, where garments are not just worn but inhabited as roles.

In sum, Queen Marie's childhood is constructed not as a chronological past, but as a sensory world of meanings, where play objects and spaces are charged with symbolic life. Through this lens, the aesthetics of childhood in her writings reveal a profound capacity for emotional insight, creative agency, and the poetic transformation of ordinary materials into carriers of memory and self-expression. This deeply material imagination enriches our understanding of play not merely as action, but as an embodied, textured, and symbolically potent way of being in the world.

4.4. Play as Performance and Identity

As a queen, Marie was highly aware of the performative aspects of her public life. She used costume, gesture, and narrative to craft herself as royal consort, mother of the nation, diplomat, and artist. Her writings sometimes reflect on this as a kind of self-conscious play, balancing authenticity and role-playing.

She understood the symbolic power of appearance, of being seen and interpreted—whether in a garden, a hospital, or an international court. Her memoirs often describe "playing a role" in diplomacy or motherhood with deep emotion, but also with ironic detachment.

> It was difficult to realize that they were all mine. It was rather the same feeling that we had had in those far-off days when playing with old Hutchins, when I liked to imagine I was the Queen of Spain. It was difficult to realize that they were all mine. It was rather the same feeling that we had had in those far-off days when playing with old Hutchins, when I liked to imagine I was the Queen of Spain. Several times a day I could put on a new dress, but often when particularly smart I felt excruciatingly shy and ridiculously self-conscious, like a child dressed up. (Queen Marie, 1934:264).

This kind of reflection closely aligns with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model of the self (1959), which views identity as a performance enacted on various "stages" of social life. Marie's writing reveals her acute awareness of the symbolic scripts and costumes that define public identity, especially in royal or diplomatic settings. Her self-consciousness as a "dressed-up child" is not mere modesty—it reflects a profound understanding of the mechanics of role-playing and the tension between appearance and essence.

This is evident even in her childhood games, where she was already staging her identity as a sovereign figure:

> We were imaginative children and each had a part which we played as conscientiously as possible. I must confess that I never accepted a minor part… if there was a queen in the plot, I always played that role. (Queen Marie, 1934:50)

Her insistence on playing the "queen" even in childhood signals not just a personal preference, but an early internalization of symbolic power and gendered expectation. Here, Marie prefigures Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1990), according to which gender and identity are not innate essences but reiterated acts, culturally scripted and socially maintained. The queenly role is not imposed on her—it is rehearsed, played, and eventually embodied, becoming part of her public and private identity.

> Now that I was ready, I felt as though dressed up for the sacrifice. Mamma had said: "Clothes play a great part all over the world and more especially in Southern countries, so never forget to dress carefully for festive occasions, it belongs to a princess's duties. (Queen Marie, 1934:279)

Clothing, in this context, becomes ritual attire, part of what Pierre Bourdieu might call the *habitus* (1977)—the socially acquired disposition that governs behavior and taste. Marie's costume is not just decorative; it is a symbolic investment, reinforcing her place within a system of expectations, images, and meanings.

Even in moments of subtle rebellion, Marie frames her attire within aesthetic discourse: "I also see myself, slightly rebellious in periwinkle-coloured moire, considering this festive attire unsuitable for a game of skittles, except perhaps in a Watteau picture." (Queen Marie, 1934:453)

Play, then, becomes the mode through which Marie constructs, explores, and negotiates her multiple identities. From childhood games to diplomatic receptions, from fairy-tale writing to national mourning, she consistently stages her presence through a blend of spontaneity, theatricality, and symbolic literacy."Ducky and I had dressed as showily as possible so as to attract all attention away from the box to ourselves." (Queen Marie, 1934:374)

Such deliberate acts of visibility echo the logic of carnival and spectacle—of embracing role and costume not just for concealment, but for transformative expression. Marie's performance of queenship is not hollow ceremony; it is a creative reinterpretation of power, one that embraces the play of identity as a form of cultural authorship.

4.5. Play and Travel: Wandering as creative discovery

In *The Story of My Life* and her other autobiographical writings, Queen Marie consistently frames travel not as a mere act of displacement, but as a playful and poetic encounter with alterity. Movement through space becomes, for her, a stage of wonder, symbolic re-enchantment, and self-discovery. The landscapes she describes, whether Devonport gardens, Balkan Mountains, landscapes in Malta or Eastern palaces, are not rendered through political or geographical registers, but through the imaginative lens of play, transforming reality into a dreamlike scene charged with symbolic resonance.

These journeys are steeped in childlike fascination, emotional curiosity, and aesthetic delight, suggesting that for Marie, travel was both a creative and transformative act. This imaginative cartography aligns with Gaston Bachelard's (1958) reflections on the *poetics of space*, where the act of moving through the world reawakens the capacity for reverie and symbolic projection."I have travelled much and never lost the childlike wonder of discovering a new place. It is as though one steps into a story where everything is waiting to be named again." (*Later Chapters of My Life*, Queen Marie, 1934:60)

Her descriptions often oscillate between external landscapes and internal moods, merging them into scenes of playful exploration. She does not simply observe;

she wanders, dwells, invents, and interprets—turning even the most foreign setting into a personal, symbolic domain. This is especially true in her travels through the East, which are depicted through emotional proximity and sensory immersion."We floated by in silence, the hills leaning closer as if to whisper. The smell of strange flowers and incense mixed with the sea air, and I thought: this too, is a kind of fairy-tale." (Queen Marie, 1934)

Through such passages, play becomes a method of cultural mediation, a form of emotional translation that enables the queen to reframe the unfamiliar through the poetic codes of childhood, myth, and storytelling.

> Every nook was like fairy-land, and one day to our joy we discovered a wee rounded hut of porous stone, very much the shape of the bee-hive grottoes in Mamma's garden, only large enough to harbour us all and entirely overgrown with bush ivy. This adorable little building was probably a shelter for those working in the fields or amongst the orange groves, but it was always empty when we were there and became the basis of all our rambles. On my return to Verdala, forty years later, I still found this enchanted shelter exactly as it was then! For thus do even the simplest things men build outlast the hands that built them. There is something about Malta which was, so to say, in touch with my inner being. Somehow I felt it, was one with it, and when returning after so many years, a whole lifetime lying between, it clutched at my heart exactly in the same way. It was ecstasy, almost pain ; something in the line, the colouring, the way a thorny cactus grew like a spiky monster beside a square, flat-roofed house where orange pumpkins lay drying in the sun ; the way a carob tree would lean over a wall, the way the water in a wee aqueduct would run with a little gurgling sound under the shade of an orange grove with the sea shining blue beyond, the glimpse you would catch of a garden all white with huge round daisy bushes. And everywhere that strange feeling that there was something hidden, not yet explored, worlds of beauty, gardens of enchantment you could stumble upon at any moment. Nothing that I have seen in later life has ever had exactly that same charm, has ever meant quite as much to me ; it is pure bliss even to live it over all again in my mind. (Queen Marie, 1934:135).

In this passage, Queen Marie transforms travel into a poetic form of play, where landscapes become enchanted spaces of emotional discovery, memory, and imaginative immersion. Landscapes are never passive—they respond, echo, and enchant. As such, Marie's representations of travel re-enchant the act of wandering as a form of symbolic authorship. She "plays" with the world as one might with stories or gardens: arranging, feeling, and giving new names to what is seen. This playful mode of travel-writing not only softens cultural boundaries but reclaims the freedom of feminine movement—not as escape, but as expansion. In doing so, Marie anticipates modern theories of travel as subjective mapping, where identity is shaped not by static belonging but by fluid encounters and affective geographies (Kaplan, 1996). "The world is full of corners waiting to be loved. I loved them through the eyes

of a child—even when I was grown." (*Later Chapters of My Life*, Queen Marie, 1934:86)

Travel, then, is not opposed to rootedness. In Queen Marie's writing, to travel is to play, to imagine, and to enter history with poetic grace.

5. Conclusions

In Queen Marie's oeuvre, play is not trivial or childish—it is a rich symbolic act, weaving together imagination, performance, memory, spirituality, and beauty. It appears in her prose as both act and metaphor, always pointing toward a deeper yearning for unity, freedom, and poetic truth.

Thus, play is never merely entertainment—it is a symbolic language, a method of narration, and a tool for emotional and cultural self-construction. Whether evoked as imaginative freedom, artistic creativity, identity performance, feminine expression, or memory reconstruction, play serves as a generative force at the heart of her worldview. Queen Marie used travel to represent play—not just as physical movement but as a deeper symbolic journey of discovery, where imagination shapes memory and identity.

Far from being confined to childhood, play in Queen Marie's texts becomes a lifelong structure of meaning, allowing her to articulate emotion, beauty, spirituality, and power outside conventional systems. As Huizinga, Ehrmann, and Ricoeur have argued in their respective frameworks, play can serve as a foundation of culture, of narrative, and of identity. Queen Marie's work embodies this truth with rare poetic clarity.

Ultimately, her representations of play reveal a complex and profound interplay between personal memory, cultural identity, gendered expression, and literary imagination. Her writing invites us not only to read, but to *play*—to enter a symbolic space where language becomes ritual, memory becomes myth, and the imagination becomes a path to inner freedom.

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