

Representations of the Danube in Queen Marie's Writings. Elements of Identity and Self-identification

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Abstract

Social geography is attached to territory and emerges from social relations and links that people weave with places. A geographical reading of literary works allows us to discover and outline representational strategies for a regional space. It is in this sense that this paper proposes to focus on the representations of the Danube River that Queen Marie of Romania revealed in her writings. Marie, like many other cartographers and scholars, was attracted by the Danube region, and, in her books, the Danube had a specific place. She evoked all her wanderings from plain to mountain, from hill to sea, leading us down to the banks of the Danube (with all its canals and lakes) and to the sea. We followed the itineraries of everyday life, both social and spatial, that the queen traced according to her position in society, her cultural model and imagination. It was a means, among others, of deepening the phenomena of identity (Bratosin 2007: 79) and her works are very rich in this sense, since they give us examples of values associated with these places. At this point, important aspects related to identity will be explored. Phoenix (2010: 298) suggests that "identities are socially constructed, multiple, potentially contradictory and situationally variable".

Identities are, in this sense, processes of becoming rather than of being (Hall 2006). Specific lexical and functional items are used for this purpose, both consciously and unconsciously (Lotte Dam 2015: 31). This paper tries to illustrate how personal pronouns, possessive determiners and pronouns and different adjectives, verbs or structures contribute to the construction of attached identities, all in connection with the way the Queen described the Danube River.

Keywords: *representation, identity, Queen Marie, self-identification, Danube*

Introduction

Social geography is attached to the territory, which emerges from social relations and the links that people weave with places. It strives to retrace the itineraries of everyday life, both social and spatial, that individuals invent according to their position in society, the cultural models that feed the collective memory and the imagination secreted by a socialized conscience. It

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is a means, among others, of deepening the phenomena of identity (Bratosin 2007: 79). Literary works are very rich in this sense, since they give us examples of itineraries and values associated with places.

For centuries, the Danube was an untamed natural space. The river and its banks obeyed the dynamics of water and the changing seasons, occasionally flooding several times a year.

Queen Marie of Romania, like many other cartographers and scholars, was attracted by the Danube region. Whereas Strauss succeeded in making it famous – Beautiful Blue Danube – by associating it with a colour it never had, the Queen described in her writings the Danubian beauty and its geocultural richness and also its strategic position for the Romanian people. In order to grasp all the representations of the Danube River found in her literary works, this study relies on a corpus selected from three of her most important books:

A. *The Country that I Love*, an entire book dedicated to Romania under German occupation during the First World War, which she wrote whilst in exile in Iași, encouraged by Nicolae Iorga;

B. *The Story of My Life*, a novel written in the first person – a type of diary of love, patriotism, faith, and life. Having an intradiegetic focus, the action is based on a single point of view, that of the narrator, and the text is constructed by a dominating “I”. In the story of her life, she described in a charming, profound and exuberant way, the crucial years in the history of the world, of Europe and of Romania in particular, bringing to light an authentic document of historical, political, literary, religious, psychological and human importance.

C. *My Country*, a hymn like not many others in our beautiful literature, devoted to the splendours of Romania, was widely considered a magnificent evocation of the natural and cultural beauties of Romania, so that the Western reader would get to know and relate to the Romanian tragedy, and would adhere more intimately to the cause of the Romanian nation.

The Country that I Love and *My Country* highlight the main themes of love for nature, peasants, the authentic countryside, the nation, friendship, poverty, and the commune living in early twentieth-century Romania.

The reason for choosing these books as a background for us to catch a glimpse of the Danube in the way it was perceived by the Queen, is that the *Story of My Life* represents her masterpiece, and the other two books specifically depict Romania from the mountains to the coast, from the Danube to hills, plains and towns. This study aims to explore important aspects related to identity, but it also seeks to illustrate the symbolism and the different facets or representations of the Danube River as the Queen envisaged or transmitted it to the reader.

Identity. Theoretical background

This section includes a review of the notion of identity as found in several relevant contemporary works.

For Douglas (2009: 11-19), identity is a complex and fascinating phenomenon. At a basic level, identity is about who we are, and who and what we identify with. However, identity is also about who we want to be, and how we wish to be seen by others. Michael Bamberg (2013: 75-87) offers an even more complex definition, suggesting that identity “designates the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions such as gender, age, race, occupation, gangs, socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, nation states, or regional territory”.

Many narratives have focused on issues of identity, the national and ethnic identities being at the core of social identifications. A “social identity” is “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain groups. These identities result from social groups together with some emotional and value significance to them of the group membership” (Tajfel 1978: 63).

More specifically, the social identity theory proposes that individuals seek a positive social identity, a positive self-concept based on their membership through social comparisons between their own and other groups. The individuals’ self-conceptions of who they are, and how they relate to others, is greatly influenced by the interpersonal and intergroup context in which they evolve and in which social comparisons are made (Kessler et al. 2000: 96-97).

Recent research suggests that “identities are never fully and finally “established”. Thus, apparently, they are seen always in process, always in a relative state of formation (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005: 105). So, these writings enable us to examine whether these identifications are changing or fixed.

According to Lucy Bagnat (1998), social identity, closely linked to personal identity, is analysed at four levels of explanation: the intra-individual level, the interindividual level, the positional level, and the ideological level.

The theoretical point of departure for our study is the sociological conception of identity, according to which identity is described by Hall (2006) as “a ‘moveable feast’; formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us”. Identities, according to this perspective, are stories that we tell ourselves and others about who we are and who other people are. These narratives are often related to our own or to others’ perception of being a member of a collective (class, national, ethnic or religious). These stories can change, shift and be contested and are often multiplied.

We can talk about a *process* of identification rather than identity as a fixed essence, claims Stuart Hall (2017), because identification is never complete but

is always in the process: “Identity cannot be a fixed essence at all, as if it lay unchanged outside of history and culture, and this is so for one principal reason: identity is not given once and for all by something transmitted in the genes we carry or in the colour of our skin, but is shaped and transformed historically and culturally” (Hall, 2017: 127).

The external definition is part of our internal self-definition, actively constituting our identity. Jenkins (2008) considers that external labelling is more effective if the process is endowed with institutional legitimacy and governmental authority. Classification of the population and the categorization of people by state agencies is a clear example of such external defining.

Phoenix (2010: 298) suggests that “identities are socially constructed, multiple, potentially contradictory and situationally variable”. Identities are, in this sense, processes of *becoming* rather than of *being* (Hall 2006).

The construction of the individual’s identity is complex because it is far from being strictly defined. The process plays on both the desire to stand out, or differentiate, but also relying on the need for recognition of a group to which one would like to belong.

The *relational* character of any identity plays an important role. The identity of an individual only acquires meaning and significance in relation to what it is *not* – i.e., in relation to other identities (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005). “Identity is never unilateral; what other people around me think about who I am is no less important than what I think about myself”. As Jenkins suggests, “Others don’t just perceive our identity, they actively constitute it” (2008: 96).

Individuals are *structurally positioned* within hierarchic economic, political, social and cultural systems. These structural positions shape a person’s life opportunities by locating him/her within certain networks of power relations with various resources. When a society is divided by class, gender and ethnic distinctions, individuals find themselves already positioned within a discursive field that is never entirely of their own choosing.

Therefore, we need to talk more about identity construction since identity has transformed into a process. Apparently, this theory fits very well with our Queen’s view, because her identity has been a “becoming” all her life. In her writings, Regina notes that she was “happy” in her childhood in the lands of Kent, Malta, or at the court of Tsar Nicholas II but she felt as happy in Romania in her youth.

The functionality of pronouns, verbs, adjectives and other structures in constructions of attached identity

Research regarding identity has shown that communities and identities connected to these are not given by nature, but are constructed socially between human beings through acts and speech. Specific lexical and functional

items are used for this purpose, both consciously and unconsciously (Lotte Dam 2015: 31). One such item is the personal pronoun. What follows illustrates how personal pronouns contribute to the construction of attached identities.

Possessive determiners and pronouns (1st-person singular form)

Possessive determiners either introduce situationally identifiable referents or textually identifiable referents. The former type is marked by first- and second-person possessives, expressing a possessive relation held by the text producer or text recipient. The latter type manifests in third-person possessives pointing to a possessor that is expressed in some previous span of texts (Kunz 2009: 305).

The speaker and the addressee of a communication situation are often marked linguistically by the first- and second-person pronouns. The reference of the singular first - and second-person pronouns is very simple as the referents are normally the speaker and the addressee, whereas the reference of especially the plural first-person pronouns is more complex (Lotte Dam 2015: 34).

Goddard (1995: 99) points to the fact that “the term ‘plural’ is not used in a clear and consistent way: *you* pl may perhaps represent a plurality of *you* s, but *we* does not present a plurality of *I* s”.

This section contains an overview of personal pronouns (possessive adjectives) 1st-person singular form and their identity-constructing functions, using illustrative examples from the two books Marie wrote exclusively about Romania. I will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on singular first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives and pronouns.

My Country and people have passed through the fire (Queen Marie 1925: 138, henceforth QM).

Once I was a stranger to this people; now **I am one of them**, I had just become Queen, and **my people** looked up to me as a great promise, as a hope they believed in (QM 1925: 64).

Little by little I am wandering through every corner of **my country** (Queen Marie 1925: 151).

To put myself entirely at the disposal of **my people**, indeed **my troops** were a Godly sight (QM 1934: 474).

My people, reiterated several times in the text, becomes the leitmotif of the book being also the reason and purpose of her writing. Why could not Marie have used only “the Romanian people”? It is for sure the strong feeling that overwhelmed her, pushing her in, identifying with the fate of this people. So,

it is not any people, but her people, the one she intensely loves, adopts and stays with them till the end of her time (Ungureanu 2022: 53).

Possessive determiners and pronouns (1st-person plural form)

According to Brown and Yule (1983), language has two main functions: transactional (i.e. to communicate information) and interactional (i.e. to socialise). Considering this, it would be interesting to show to what extent language can mirror the kind of social relationship held among members of a community. Therefore, community and identity are important.

The idea of a common identity is not only related to oneself (i.e., identifying oneself with a specific group), but also to other individuals (i.e., constructing identity for other people).

Most recent research in sociolinguistics, social psychology and cultural studies is based on a constructionist view of identity: rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is constructed in discourse (Benwell & Stokoe 2006). According to this theory, people assume or are imposed different identities on different occasions. Thus, identity is not static.

Identity is as much a social and cultural phenomenon as an internal and psychological one, and, as Barker & Galasinski (2001: 1) suggest, language does not mirror an independent object world, but constructs and constitutes it.

The meaning structure of *we* has more complex referential presuppositions than *I*. The pronoun *I* does not imply that the addressee has to do some work to figure out who is meant; it is a pure index. The pronoun *we* at least invites the addressee to think of who else other than *I* is being talked about (Goddard 1995: 107).

We constitutes a metalinguistic act of “same-saying”, by which one applies the same proposition to a set of people one has in mind, one of whom is oneself (Dam 2015: 35).

Let us have a look at all the forms (“we”, “our”, “us”) found in the selected texts. Depending on the speaker’s intention, “we” is the only personal pronoun that can (a) be inclusive and exclusive and (b) claim authority and communality at the same time.

When Queen Marie utters all the sentences listed below, she speaks as a representative of a group, so the pronoun she uses has an inclusive function. Our text underlines however a very accurate and special meaning whose purpose is the real identification of the Queen, with everything that surrounds her in Romania: our people, our regions, our heroes, our mountains, our hearts, our land, our convents, our situation, our sea-coast, our country, our souls, etc.

We would set on **our Danube yacht** disobeying the order that no woman might go over the Danube, I paid a flying visit to the Bulgarian side, crossing on one of the boat bridges erected by **our troops** (QM 1934: 537).

Adjectives, verbs or particular structures

Keily et al. (2001: 36) identified ten identity markers that people use to claim or attribute identity: place of birth, ancestry, place of residence, length of residence, upbringing and education, name, accent, physical appearance, dress and commitment to place. It is the moment to see an important marker of Marie’s identity in her commitment to the place she cherishes. The table below features a collection of adjectives, verbs and particular syntactic structures used in relation to the river.

Verbs	Adjectives	Structures
That was the Danube I loved (QM 1925: 44).	If you are not yet weary of my wanderings from plain to mountain, from hill to sea, I would lead you awhile down to the banks of the Danube, that great and noble river which is one of the prides of our land (QM 1925: 37).	We remembered here a church and there a ruin, tiny hamlets by the edge of rivers, undulating plains leading towards the banks of the Danube, long , long roads passing many villages, shady corners of peaceful “Luncas” ¹ where shepherds guarded their flocks. It was all infinitely dear to us and doubly dear when we felt danger so near (QM 1925: 14).
No one loved the Danube trips more than... (QM 1934: 539).	In our yacht we would steam down the Danube, passing many places more prosperous, to halt here where the world was so quiet that you had the sensation of having reached its end (QM 1925: 37).	We were allowed to depart accompanied by many a blessing, the black-robed women standing in a line to bid us farewell. Then back over the long, dusty roads we raced back to our yacht on the Danube (QM 1925: 43).
I came back to Cotroceni, Copaceni, Sinaia, Horez; I sailed again up and down on the Danube , took possession anew of mountains, hills and plains. I rode once more on my long sea shores – I watched the sunsets, the harvests, the	You followed me in my many wanderings through the country I love; I have led you from plain to mountain, from mountain to sea, from the broad Danube to the hills of Vâlcea, where I lingered in the quiet monasteries so dear to my heart, and now I feel that so as not to weary you with too many	Our dearest companion on these Danube trips was Dr. Antipa, for years head of the State fisheries. He was a man unusually short of stature, round, jovial and full of wisdom. Educated in Germany, he spoke German as fluently as his own language and there was nothing that he did not know about water, fishes and birds.

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<p>deep winter snows; I have been covered with the dust of our long, endless Romanian roads, now become ever so much longer still (QM 1925: 65).</p>	<p>pictures, I must close these pages. Indefinitely could I go on writing, for rich and wonderful is this country, picturesque, poetical, full of penetrating charm, and doubly precious at its hour of distress (QM 1925: 154).</p>	<p>Antipa was everybody's friend and a trip on the Danube without Antipa lost half its charm (QM 1934: 359).</p>
	<p>I have come upon lovely little places hidden amongst giant pines. On forlorn seashores I have discovered humble hamlets where Turks dwelt in solitary aloofness; near the broad Danube I have strayed amongst tiny boroughs inhabited by Russian fisher-folk, whose type is so different from that of the Rumanian peasant. At first sight, one recognises their nationality – tall, fair-bearded giants, with blue eyes, their red shirts visible from a great way off. (QM 1954: 9).</p>	<p>These troops knew me well because I had been with them on the day when they had recrossed the Danube into Romania. I stood on the home side shore. I witnessed scenes of mad elation when the men, eager to feel their native soil again, actually rolled in the dust. I received their first cheers and it was my voice which called out to them the first welcome home. (QM 1934: 555).</p>
	<p>Limpid waters of the Danube (QM, 1934: 212).</p>	<p>At the end of the day, she would sink into her deck chair and gather her ladies around her to rave about the charms of the great river (QM 1934:539).</p>
	<p>The Danube question... So important to us... (QM 1934: 568).</p>	<p>Occasions had to be exploited to the utmost. The Danube trips were no exception to the rule (QM 1934: 538).</p>
	<p>I remember a wonderfully picturesque reception somewhere in these dreamy parts of the Danube (QM 1925: 38).</p>	<p>One of the most important finds is the remnants of a town with the poetical name of Istros, lately brought to light between Constantza and the mouth of the Danube (QM 1925: 33).</p>

All of the above are wonderful descriptions of Romania, showing the Queen not ceasing to discover the country. All these structures emphasise not only the beauty of this country she cherishes so much but also the strong connection she has with this land, this territory, and this river, constituting at the same time real markers of identification. A princess born to British and Russian parents becomes a queen who identifies herself with everything that means Romania.

Representations of the Danube – Romanian land

When the Queen evokes towns, she does not consider all the categories enumerated by the urban sociolinguistics proposed by Calvet (2005), such as the history of the city (i.e. the types of population, their origin (endogenous or exogenous, population growth figures, the status of the city – capital, etc.), the names of neighbourhoods (language trends for new neighbourhoods, etc.), the natives, i.e. the way the inhabitants of the city and possibly those from different neighbourhoods are named, neighbourhood groups (ethnic, linguistic, professional, religious, etc., first languages: number, transmission, etc.), languages spoken on the markets, graphic environment, or urban linguistic forms, such as youth language or slang, or attitudes and representations. She pays, however, special attention to some dear cities with direct connection to landscape, geographical position, cultural heritage and historical events, all having made a deep impression upon her.

For instance, many places in Romania are presented in all their splendour and misery. Among those places, the Danube has a special role. All the Danube images depicted by Marie turn into representations for us, the readers. We, therefore split them into several categories: bond and attachment, beauty of nature, feeling of freedom and recreation, sense of courage and determination, importance and strategic location. In what follows, each division will be revealed using relevant quotations from her texts.

Bond and attachment

When it comes to the Danube depicted by Queen Marie, the positive symbolism of this river in terms of strong attachment is obvious from the very beginning: “a ribbon binding the old home to the new” or “the beginning and the end”. Symbolically, her way through life has been traced by the flow of the Danube River, which connected Germany, the home of her studies and of her husband, to Romania, her dear new and last home. There were important stays for Marie in Coburg, Germany. She stayed there regularly in a castle, in Rosenau, another childhood paradise. It was the place where she studied History, Geography, Arithmetic, Botany, Literature, Religion, Natural Sciences, Painting, French, Music and Gymnastics and the place where, every

Sunday, she went to the theatre where opera, operetta, comedy, drama, classical plays took place. This is how she got to know Wagner, Shakespeare, Bizet, Mozart, Verdi, Meyerbeer, or Donizetti. Then, it was Emperor William II who would decide the fate of Marie in 1891. He who organized the first meeting in a castle near Kassel between the 16-year-old princess and the heir to the throne of Romania, Ferdinand de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. The first time she met her future husband was at Wilhelmshöhe, near Kassel, a beautiful 18th-century castle, where Emperor Wilhelm II received people during imperial manoeuvres. This is how the two young people, Marie and Ferdinand, met for the first time at the Kaiser's table.

Several centuries old, this ancestral stronghold mirrors its walls and towers in the limpid waters of the Danube. Here but a small stream, quite near its source, it is nevertheless the selfsame river which rolls its mighty waters through that far-off country over which one of Sigmaringen's children was called upon to rule. From west to east, through several lands and over thousands of miles, it is an ever-broadening ribbon binding the old home to the new. A curious coincidence, the beginning and the end ... almost symbolic, in fact, to those who like to ponder over the intricacies of human destinies (QM 1934: 213).

These troops knew me well because I had been with them on the day when they had recrossed the Danube into Romania. I stood on the home side shore: four hours I stood there, as they came tramping over the pontoon bridge. I witnessed scenes of mad elation when the men, eager to feel their native soil again, actually rolled in the dust. I received their first cheers and it was my voice which called out to them the first welcome home (QM 1934: 555).

These vivid descriptions suggest that the shore of the Danube is also the queen's home. Many paragraphs in her books show her real identification with the Romanian land, forests, rivers, mountains, flowers, etc. and, last but not least, with the irresistible Danube.

Beauty of nature

Marie evokes all her wanderings from plain to mountain, from hill to sea, leading the reader down to the banks of the Danube with all canals and lakes and to the sea. Apparently, when it comes to the Danube and the seashore, she uses adjectives that make one want to visit those places: they are *attractive, full of charm, picturesque, peaceful, tumbling into the sea, with houses scrambling down the steep slopes into the sea, delightfully perched little build, etc.*

The country around Sigmaringen is varied and attractive and the rocky valley of the Danube is even very beautiful (QM 1934: 90).

The culminating phase of excitement was reached when from afar the visions of the beautiful Cernavoda bridge would appear painted against the horizon, looming larger and larger as the yacht approached (QM 1934: 539).

Freedom and recreation

The Danube flows southeast for many kilometres passing through or bordering several countries but together with the beauty it creates it gives also a sense of freedom, well-being, recreation, etc. This freedom seems to offer a spiritual dimension, allowing her to escape from reality. For the Queen, the Danube represents a therapeutic realm of dreams, liberty, and magic. She remains loyal to the green space woven with a large spread of water.

Very characteristic of old King Carol's ideas of recreation were our excursions on the Danube. These were carefully planned with the idea of giving us all a restful holiday (QM 1934: 194).

For several years in succession, in late spring or early summer, we would set out on our Danube yacht, the Stefan-cel-Mare; Uncle and Aunty, my husband and myself, the elder children, ladies-in-waiting, military followers, an occasional guest and of course a Minister or two, for these in Romania are unavoidable appendages when a sovereign moves about his country or undertakes anything out of the ordinary (QM 1934: 538).

Courage and determination

The dream of all Romanians was also the dream of our beloved Queen: the Union of all Romanians! But courage and determination were required, and these are traits that characterize our Queen. This time, courage is related to crossing the Danube, even if that was illegal. Marie identified herself with the Danube shore because the Danube shore was the home shore.

Disobeying the order that no woman might go over the Danube, I paid a flying visit to the Bulgarian side, crossing almost secretly on one of the boat bridges erected by our troops (QM 1934: 553).

Several of my acquaintances had gone out with the Red Cross to organize hospitals and to nurse what they imagined would be the wounded, but they had received the order not to cross the Danube (QM 1934: 552).

I hurried to Sinaia to talk with Uncle, pleading my cause so urgently that I won from him permission to take over the cholera camp of Zimnicea, one of the principal points where our troops were to recross the Danube (QM 1934: 553).

Importance. Strategic Location

Springing in Germany, the Danube flows eastwards to connect ten European countries and passes through four capital cities, more than any other river in the world. It provides water for irrigation, domestic supply, power generation and industry, and many ecosystem services. But these are not the only benefits. The Danube is more than that. Not only does the Danube connect the Dobruja area and the Black Sea with the rest of the country and also with Western Europe, thereby drawing much traffic and commerce down towards Romania and its only sea port, Constanta, but it has also provided a strategic position for the defence of the country. Therefore, the Danube has always been a strategic location when it came to conflicts and war.

Unfortunately for the Triple Alliance, Austria-Hungary had two faces, the German and the Magyar; the latter was hated by the Romanians. In spite of repeated warnings sent by King Carol to Vienna, the persecution of our people under Hungarian sway never lessened and this filled Romanian hearts with bitterness. Besides, Hungary invented every possible economic and administrative chicane against our country and was insufferable on the Danube question, so important to us but too lengthy to relate here (QM 1934: 568).

When King Carol undertook either an excursion or a journey through his lands, even when recreation was the pretext, it was never for pleasure, but always for duty, and as he moved very rarely, these occasions had to be exploited to the utmost. The Danube trips were no exception to the rule (QM 1934: 538).

Romania considered she had a historical right to the Rustchuk- Varna line in Bulgaria, and if she had entered as an ally, she might have raised her voice, or if she could not stand for her larger demands, have at least become possessor of the Silistria-Balcic line so essential to her for the defense of her great Danube bridge (QM 1934: 549).

I was brought into sudden contact with this terrible scourge when I went to visit the troops and the Red Cross hospitals scattered along the Danube (QM 1934: 552).

Conclusions

Queen Marie's writings express her own search for identity, her readings of herself and of her life. The theme of identity is a leitmotif in all her works, as she expressed it openly in the foreword to *The Story of My Life*: her private and her public identity are profoundly related to one another. She continually searched within her memory and displayed images and narratives of herself, in her private and public works, fictional or nonfictional (Duna 2021: 93).

Marie identified herself with Romania since she adopted this country, she loved the Romanian people and lived so many moments of grief, sorrow, tranquillity, serenity, unicity, and victory together with them.

Not only does she identify herself with Romania, but she also declares this identity and assumes it in all her actions, without hesitation. As this study has attempted to show, she had a connection with the Romanian land, especially with the Danube region, and the river had a great significance for her. The Danube represented the queen's bond with the home shore. Besides, it was one of her ways of escaping from reality, transporting her to another world, a realm of freedom, of beauty, of magic moments. Last but not least, the reader can discover in Marie's writings the importance of the Danube, its strategic location and the sense of courage and determination that this river inspired in her. The Danube emerges thus both as a physical and a spiritual corridor.

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