Ansatzpunkt Transylvania: Worldbuilding Method and Method-Building World in Hugo Meltzl and the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* Project

Christian Moraru
University of North Carolina, Greensboro
Corresponding author email: c_moraru@uncg.edu

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Abstract: The essay seeks to assess the contemporary epistemological and political benefits of revisiting the *Acta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum archive, in particular Hugo Meltzl's more theoretical contributions to it. Simply speaking, the central objective here is to think "with" Meltzl's world about the twenty-first-century world. Mapping the former onto the latter, Christian Moraru proposes, may potentially invigorate our efforts as comparatists and even citizens at present. Following some deliberately presentist methodological clarifications and loosely in dialogue with recent interventions in world theory, actor-network analysis, and agential-speculative realism, Moraru wonders about the extent to which what he calls the "Meltz world" may afford less hierarchical world- and earth systems, ontologies, and attendant critical insights, probing angles, and Auerbachian Ansatzpunkte. Further, if such affordances obtain in Meltzl and elsewhere in the *Acta Comparationis*, then how might one deploy them methodologically today? How about Meltzl's Transylvania as "method," as "Transylvanianism"? And how about the world-reading and worldbuilding possibilities they open up or foreclose? The paper concludes with a decalogue—a rejoinder of sorts to Meltz's "decaglotism"—answering these and related questions.

Keywords: Hugo Meltzl, Sámuel Brassai, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Erich Auerbach, Ansatzpunkt, A*cta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum, comparatism, World Literature, world theory, world-reading/worldbuilding, presentism, Transylvania as method, "Transylvanianism," nationalism, imperialism, epistemology, ontology

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While[1] most genealogies of comparative literature trace it back ritually to early-mid-nineteenth-century *loci classici* in Johann Peter Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, Haun Saussy reminds his fellow comparatists in the 2006 collective volume *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* that the actual "field was to be initiated with the founding of the *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literatur* (with renditions of its title in eleven other languages on the front cover) by Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz in 1877."[2] Technically, the journal's original title was Hungarian (*Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*).[3] Hugo (Hugó) Meltzl launched and, for a while, ran the publication with the great polymath Sámuel Brassai, his mentor and senior colleague at the newly established Hungarian Royal University (after 1881, Franz-Joseph-Universität) in Transylvania's cultural and administrative center Koloszvár (Klausenburg in German and Cluj in Romanian). At the time, the province was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire

1. I am grateful to Cosmin Borza, Rareș Moldovan, and Anca Parvulescu for the criticisms and suggestions offered on earlier drafts of this essay.

2. Haun Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 6.

3. Originally, the main title of Meltzl's biweekly, or this title's main iteration, if we must choose one—and a quick glance at the first issue's front page might persuade us to do so—was Hungarian. It came first, in large print spread across the top, with the German, French, Italian, English, and Spanish versions stacked underneath one after another, in smaller and smaller font. The title page David Damrosch describes in his 2007 article "Global Regionalism" is not that of the launching issue but of the fifth volume, the first in the *Acta Comparationis*'s new series, as the critic's reference to Meltzl's 1879 note might suggest. "Meltzl and Brassai," Damrosch writes, "printed the journal's title in all ten languages, although in a concession to identifiability, they printed the Latin title in large type, along with the German title (*Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literatur*) and then seven others in smaller type. Last of all came the Hungarian title, in medium-sized type, 'like a modest innkeeper following his guests' as Meltzl put it – in German – in a note 'An unsere Leser' in 1879." David Damrosch, "Global Regionalism," *European Review*, 15, no. 1 (2007): 136.

or Dual Monarchy, whose founding "compromise" (*Ausgleich/Kiegyezés*), the history buff will recall, had been struck a mere nine years before the *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*'s maiden issue came out. The next *számok* ("numbers") would follow fortnightly initially, with 9 and 15 carrying in May and October 1877, respectively, parts I and II of Meltzl's agenda-setting article "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur" (Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature). A third, less-known part would appear in *szám* 24 in February 1878,[4] only a few months before the Hungarian title yielded pride of place to the *Lapok*'s "Latin moniker,"[5] *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*.[6] Whether it conveyed solely Meltzl's views or Brassai's as well,[7] "Vorläufige Aufgaben," Saussy aptly comments on the piece's first two installments, "announces the name and predicts the institution."[8]

"Amended"[9] by Meltzl[10] or not, Goethe's augural glosses on *Weltliteratur*, on its "inevitab[ility] given the ever[-]increasing rapidity of human interaction,"[11] and on cognate matters were the lynchpin of Meltzl and Brassai's venture, through which, Meltzl himself proudly acknowledged in December 1886, "European comparatism identifies with the Goethean ideas of World Literature."[12] But he also points out[13] that the famous pronouncements had not defined comparative literature, nor had they outlined its methodology; Saussy is right to insist that these groundlaying operations were "initiated" in the *Acta Comparationis*.[14] According to the standard birth story of comparatism, however, they basically had to wait for the outbreak of World War II. Witness, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's version in the still influential *Death of a Discipline*, where the author confidently informs us that "Comparative Literature was a result of European intellectuals fleeing 'totalitarian' regimes."[15] More annoying than the scare quotes around such a history-vetted term as "totalitarian" is the claim itself, to say nothing of the book's overarching contention. For it is abundantly clear in hindsight that the dawn of the third millennium did not mark the demise of the discipline but in fact quite the opposite, its "rebirth"[16] as World Literature, controversial as the latter has remained in terms of object, scope, modus operandi, links to capital, globalization, and so on. To appreciate the rebirth, though, one must be mindful of comparative literature's biography, y compris the birth, and that is hardly the one logged by Spivak. Undeniably, Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, René Wellek, Horst Frenz, Henry H. H. Remak, and others of their generation were instrumental to the setup

4. "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur" consists of three parts. The first two were printed in *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* vol. 1, no. 9 (May 1877): 179–82; *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* vol. 2, no. 15 (October 1877): 307–15. A third and last part, "Der Dekaglottismus," was published in vols. 3-4, no. 24 (February 1878): 494–501 and made available in English by Angus Nicholls in "Three Translations from the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*: 'Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature, Part III: Decaglotism;' 'Laws o Comparative Literary Research'; and 'Goethe's World Literature'," *Comparative Literature* 76, no. 3 (2024): 285–89.

5. Angus Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology in the Early Years of Comparative Literature: The *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*," *Comparative Literature* 76, no. 3 (2024): 294.

6. Beginning with vol. 41. nos. 5-6 (January 1879), *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* would take a back seat to the publication's Latin title, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, or "Journal for the Comparison of the Totality of Literature" in Saussy's translation. Damrosch calls this English rendition "apt" in "Hugo Meltzl and 'The Principle of Polyglottism'," an essay included in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 14. "Journal for the Comparative Study of Worldwide Literature" may be an alternative to consider.

7. "When referring to the 'Preliminary Tasks,' I heuristically regard it as expressing the joint views of Meltzl and Brassai," writes Nicholls in "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 303. All three parts of the essay are signed "Meltzl."

8. Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 6.

9. See Horst Fassel, "Hugo von Meltzls komparatistische Entwürfe im Spannungsfeld von Regionalismus und Universalismus," in *Hugo Meltzl und die Anfänge der Komparatistik*, ed. Horst Fassel (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 25–38. According to Fassel, Meltzl "modifies" or "amends" the Goethean "*Weltliteratur* concept" ("nimmt eine Korrektur an Goethes Bgriff der Weltliteratur vor" [29]) insofar as he views national literature as a receptacle or melting pot (Sammelbecken) of outside stimuli and material.

10. Meltzl tweaks Goethe's *Weltliteratur* concept not so much in articles such as the 1882 "Goethes Weltlitteratur: Neun Thesen zur Semisaecularfeier des Todes Goethes," as one might expect, but in his work as a comparatist and editor of *Acta*. The English version of the "theses" is included in Nicholls, "Three Translations," 291–293. The original came out as the lead piece of an 1882 issue, see *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* issue 11-12, no. 105 (March 1882): 67–69.

11. Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 6. The critic reproduces a passage translated by Hendrik Birus: "After all, from 1827 on Goethe asserts in the most varied ways that 'such a world literature will soon come into being, as is inevitable given the ever-increasing rapidity of human interaction' ('eine solche Weltliteratur, wie bey der sich immer vermehrenden Schnelligkeit des Verkehrs unausbleiblich ist, sich nächstens bildet') (WA I, 42.2, 502]." See Hendrik Birus, "The Goethean Concept of World Literature," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2, no. 4 (2000). https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1090&context=clcweb (accessed on December 25, 2024).

12. Hugo Meltzl, "Rückblick auf das erste Decennium der *Acta Comparationis* (1877-1886)," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 19, nos. 191-192 (April 1887): 3. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

13. Hugo Meltzl, "Goethes Weltlitteratur: Neun Thesen zur Semisaecularfeier des Todes Goethes," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, 11-12, no. 105 (March 1882): 67. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

14. Goethe's celebrated 1827 comments on the "inevitability" of *Weltliteratur* "soun[d]," writes Saussy, as "distribution strategy, not an academic field; like a description, not a methodology" ("Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 6).

15. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 3.

16. See David Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative Studies," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3, nos. 1-2 (2006): 99–112.

of the "American school" in comparative literature and, in that, to the modern field as we know it. But comparatism did not exactly "result" from these and other scholars' fleeing Europe before and during the Cold War.[17] Ignored in Spivak and other quarters of our profession, a—if not *the*—truly foundational chapter of, at least, the Euro-Atlantic story of the discipline qua discipline coincides with the Transylvanian *Anfänge* unearthed by Horst Fassel's milestone essay collection on Meltzl and "the beginnings" of comparatism, as well as by Saussy, David Damrosch, Levente T. Szabó, Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, Angus Nicholls, and others on whose illuminating yet sober canvassing of the *Acta Comparationis* corpus I am drawing throughout.

Now, getting your history right is always a good idea, hence my opening paragraph's rehash of what should have been common knowledge by the time Spivak started circulating her exaggerated rumors; after all, research on the *Acta Comparationis*, complete with some bold attempts to ascertain the journal's role in the early stages of several philological specialties of local and broader import, predates the Cold War. But getting our history right, as postmillennial comparatists, by working Meltzl, Brassai, and their undertaking back into the disciplinary narrative where they belong ought to be more than setting the record straight, perchance duly noting the Transylvanian antecedent. As I will elaborate momentarily, this is not just a question of precedent, "true origins," or "firstism." Nor is it simply a matter of history, insofar as we tend to equate the historical with the bygone. In this vein, I argue that circling back to Meltzl, Brassai, and their impressive lineup of editorial board members and contributors is worth our while most of all because their insights—and their shortsightedness too every now and then—may boost our abilities to deal with our own world and even open new windows into its intertwined, literary and nonliterary ecosystems. What piques my interest in Meltzl, Brassai, and the *Acta Comparationis* project, and what I am here focusing on, is a certain *world picture*, at times no more than a coarse-grained sketch, in which I discern, however, "facts" and "concerns" of the twenty-first-century world as well as "worldbuilding" tips, pointers for tackling these problems afresh. In revisiting the *Acta Comparationis* body of work, mainly some of Meltzl's more theoretical contributions, my aim is not solely, or chiefly, to give credit where credit is due, deserved as it may be. I want, instead, to think "with" Meltzl's world about ours.

To clarify, what I mean by "Meltzl's world" or by "the *Acta Comparationis* world" is a world of many worlds. Across my presentation, this "world" is shorthand for a multiform ontological aggregate with two principal, quasi-symmetrical, and mutually imbricated aspects. One is Meltzl and Brassai's actual, late-nineteenth-century imperial, many-sided world, primarily its regional core and linguistic-cultural matrix, Transylvania. The other is the homologously composite world model or *Weltbild* one glimpses in or infers from Meltzl's texts and other material the *Acta Comparationis* put out irrespective of subject but occasionally on topics tied into the thematics of worldliness, such as geography, geopolitics, empire, the environment, zoology, technology, travel, commerce, communication, the media, language, and comparison itself, to list but a few. Specifically, what I pursue in this essay, following a preamble on my overall "presentist" take on things and loosely in conversation with recent developments in world theory, actor-network analysis, and agential and speculative realism, is the extent to which the Meltz world affords complex, sometimes less hierarchically set up world- and earth systems, ontologies, as well as concordant methodological elements and probing angles, all of which may be better articulated at our end in planet and comparative literature history, but whose earlier, *Acta Comparationis* affordances, tentative and ambivalent as they were, make for the bonus of competent historicism in general and of scrupulous disciplinary history in particular.[18]

I may sound as though I am hedging my bets, but I am only factoring in the dimness, fragmentariness, incongruities, and inequalities of Meltzl's world. The historical, Central and East European zone of it was indubitably less democratic than post-Cold War "Visegrád" and other pre-World War I imperial nostalgias are fancying it, and, for good measure, the *Acta Comparationis* facet of this world—the scholarship and the *Weltbild* carved into it—also looks spottier and blurrier than one would like it, especially if one purported to put forth grand, cut-and-dried claims about it. To be sure, Meltzl, Brassai, and their cohort theorized their worlds, works, and attendant approaches neither thoroughly nor consistently. Extrapolating from them can be tricky because we do not get full-dress descriptions but mostly inklings. These often come in bits and pieces, do not constitute a rigorous system, and are a mixed bag to boot, notably when one weighs the "principles" of the *Acta Comparationis* against their applications in its own pages. The cosmopolitan vibes we get in this or that contribution are dampened elsewhere by the very nationalism and nationalist pseudocosmopolitanism Meltzl and Brassai's comparatism professes to push back against. In some places, the driving forces of this geocultural dynamic seem to be horizontalizing vectors if not entire ontologies, both linguistic and material, "cultural" and "natural," human and not, and hinting at yet another world, rooted in Meltzl and Brassai's ambient but gesturing to a nascent yet, at times,

17. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 317.

18. For world theory, the world-planet-globe trifecta, and the vast literature around them, see Jeffrey R. Di Leo and Christian Moraru, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022). For actor-network theory, agential realism, speculative realism, flat ontology, and the like, I refer the reader to household names in twenty-first-century philosophy and theory such as Bruno Latour, Sara Ahmed, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Ian Bogost, Levi R. Bryant, Graham Harman, and Timothy Morton.

"prescient"[19] vision of a richer, more kinetic, and more polycentric planet; in others, not so much. That said, the Meltzl world shows off, both in what it does show and in what it does not, more structure than the fuzzy *Weltanschauungen* we are wont to invoke in our work every so often. Not only that, but it prompts us to tussle with issues and raise questions the populist tide currently sweeping national and international politics is rendering urgent. Of course, urgent issues need not be new too. Neither do the questions. Posed in what follows, some of them, I would like to think, will sound fresh, and perhaps offbeat; others will just rekindle old queries. Whatever the case, mapping Meltzl's world onto ours has the potential, I propose, to reenergize and orient our efforts as comparatists and even citizens at present.

Critical Presentism and the Futurality of "Present Tasks"

I write "at present" advisedly. I do so because I am a student of the contemporary and, more importantly, because in this situation as in others, going back to centuries past may accrue us, in our historical moment but especially for the future, benefits of critical, theoretical, and possibly other nature—all the more reason to remember that comparative literature is older and sprang from a geography vaster than Spivak and others would have us believe. To rehearse my central point, retelling, in one form among a few imaginable, comparative literature's textbook origin story makes sense on grounds that may have to do less with the past, its "revisionism," and a "truer" story, and more with the present—with the present world and the imperative of understanding and engaging with it in certain ways. There is in fact wide agreement among today's comparatists that a correct assessment if not a "correction," scholarly and otherwise, of our present rides on our capacity to connect with the past; what comparative literature means as World Literature, where it is headed, what it can achieve, and how it might make a difference in the world borne by the field's twenty-first-century name also hinge on our access to and willingness to learn from the history of our discipline. On this account, there is nothing abusive about returning to the world of Meltzl with ours in mind either, although, as mentioned earlier, what I am making here is the roughly opposite move of taking another look at *our* world through his.

Would my move still smack of much-maligned "presentism"? To me, the question is moot at this juncture in intellectual history, when it behooves us to welcome presentism instead of feeling apologetic about it. For one thing, a growing number of critics have been disputing of late François Hartog's presentist theory,[20] whether they advocate a "post-presentism"[21] of sorts or just rehabilitate good old-fashioned presentism to lay bare and wield cognitively deeper, more variegated, and interleaved spatialities, temporalities, and epistemologies, as I strive here myself in the margins of the Meltzl and *Acta Comparationis* archive.[22] For another thing, several distinguished students of the publication belong to this cohort. What is more, they have joined it to enter their various pleas for the relevance of Meltzl and Brassai's initiative to the present-day world and its comparative studies. So has, for instance, Damrosch in his 2006 refutation of *Death of a Discipline*'s basic thesis when, after a perfunctory nod to Spivak and her distinction between "globe" and "planet," he proceeds to rebuke the obituary by leaning on "pioneering comparatists"[23] from Europe's internal imperial outskirts such as the *Siebenbürgen-Sachse* Meltzl and the Irishman Hutcheson Macauley Posnett and on the "important early models" they provided "for a genuinely global comparatism."[24] "My argument," Damrosch says, "will be that the present expansion to a global or planetary field of vision does not represent the death of our discipline so much as a rebirth of perspectives that were already present in the formative early years of comparative literature as a discipline."[25] In his turn, Nicholls quotes both Damrosch and Saussy and goes on to allow that "one could be forgiven for seeing the journal's early mission statement as prefiguring later critical interventions, from Erich Auerbach's utopian/dystopian vision of world literature in 'Philologie der Weltliteratur' (1952) to Emily Apter's critique of world literature (2013)."[26] Since I will come back to Auerbach's work in a bit, noteworthy is for now that in his own take on the *Acta Comparationis*, Nicholls is both more overtly and more guardedly presentist. "When it comes to the *ACLU* [*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*]," he cautions us, "a presentist approach—and arguably here

19. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, Mbongiseni Buthelezi, introductory note to Hugo Meltzl, "'Present Tasks of Comparative Literature' (1877)," in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the Enlightenment to the Global Present*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 42.

20. See François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

21. Bogdan Crețu, "POST-PRESENTISM: The Past, the Passed, and 'Now' as Critical Operator," in *Theory in the "Post" Era: A Vocabulary for the 21st-Century Conceptual Commons*, ed. Alexandru Matei, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), 175.

22. On this operation, see Wai-Chee Dimock, "Historicism, Presentism, Futurism," *PMLA* 133, no. 2 (March 2018): 257–63.

23. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 99.

24. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 100.

25. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 99.

26. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 301.

presentism is not only unavoidable but also to be encouraged—must proceed in a highly differentiated way when evaluating this most complex of literary artifacts."[27] Nicholls adduces Parvulescu and Boatcă's field-shaping 2022 monograph *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* as a major step in this direction,[28] and indeed, the book's fourth-chapter comments on the degree to which the *Doppelmonarchie*-era Hungarian nationalism colors the *Acta Comparationis* platform put a much-needed check on unqualified celebrations of Meltzl & Co.'s multiculturalism, polyglotism, "universalism," and the like.

In the spirit of such caveats, it bears underscoring that presentism, or *critical* presentism, to be more specific about the presentism I am pressing into service, has nothing to do with ahistoricism. Far from disregarding historical difference, the ontology of "what was," this presentism renegotiates it with an eye to the now *and* its transformation, perhaps betterment, in a future liable to assert eventually its own difference from what will have been our own time. It is out of consideration for "what was" that such a critical presentism, to which, incidentally, *Acta Comparationis* scholars are no strangers either, "looks back" on it when seeking to grasp not only the realm of "what is," the present itself, but also its prospects in a future where restored disciplinary memory (*Rückbesinnung*) will have given Meltzl's "forgotten approaches"[29] a new lease on life if not the full "significance" they never had;[30] it is for the same reason that a critical presentist tack would ground itself effectively in the *Acta Comparationis* and in the actuality of Meltzl's world and worldview and then work from them rather than from our retroactive constructions thereof when wrestling with twenty-first-century problematics and trying to imagine a world in which they would have been addressed. Such a bona fide attempt to look from inside Meltzl's world out toward ours so as to get a new purchase on the latter does not leverage the former and the *Acta Comparationis* episode to amend the master origin narrative, or not for that purpose alone. In a way, that origin, that "prehistory"[31] and its twice-passed past, is not even the point; the point, a critical presentist might submit, is that which the beginning in question points to, namely, the future: a *Zukunft*, Meltzl himself observes, behind the nationalist horizon clouded by "monoglottism" "at present" (*heutzutage*), at and in his present, as well as a future beyond our own present troubles, monolingual or of other kind.[32] This is entirely in keeping both with his view of comparatism as eminently futural, an "edifice of the future which may be of profit only to future generations,"[33] and with his relatively successful and, in any event, disciplinarily pathbreaking bid to pivot away from national philology—a "science of origins," as Saussy puts it—to " comparative literature,[34] "our science of the future," as Meltzl himself calls it.[35] For "philological study that incorporates both German and Hungarian," Saussy explains, "cannot plot its course on cognates and common ancestors" since Hungarian is not an Indo-European language. Meltzl's "inclusion of Hungarian in an otherwise unremarkable list [of idioms] opens comparative literature to being something other than a science of origins." And "[b]y not being a science of origins," Saussy concludes on an even more presentist note, Meltzl's *vergleichende Litteratur* winds up "establish[ing] an indefinite task for itself."[36]

Most significantly, this inde-finition activates in Meltzl and Brassai's comparatism new temporal and spatial scales and logics. On one side, that of time, the "task" (*Aufgabe*), at once laid down in Meltzl and Brassai's 1870s and "in-defined" in them, is no longer con-fined to that history or just geared to uncovering discrete national ancestries. Instead, it avails itself of and by the same token makes itself available to times to come. In other words, it is *of* the present in which it *was* assigned, as well as *for* our own; it is concurrently circumscribed by one and a lead-in to the other, "preliminary" to future tasks and to the future *tout court*. In that, the title of Meltzl's best-known piece strikes me as felicitously amphibological: where Damrosch, Saussy, and others reproduce the English translation supplied

27. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 301.

28. See Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), especially 91–114 (chapter 4, on Meltzl and Liviu Rebreanu).

29. Hugo Dyserink, "Die Notwendigkeit der Rückbesinnung. Vergessene Ansätze: eine Chance für die Zukunft?" in Fassel, *Hugo Meltzl und die Anfänge der Komparatistik*, 15.

30. Timothy Morton draws from Hegel to argue that the true meaning ("significance") of any object is in the future, hinging as it does on the relation of that object with another. See Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities, 2013), 90.

31. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 294.

32. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46. The original passage can be found in Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlitó Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1, no. 15 (October 1877): 313. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

33. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 47. The original is in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlitó Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1, no. 15 (October 1877): 314.

34. Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 8.

35. Meltzl, "Goethe's World Literature," in Nicholls, "Three Translations," 293. See the original in Hugo Meltzl, "Goethes Weltlitteratur: Neun Thesen zur Semisaecularfeier des Todes Goethes," in *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, no. 105 (March 1882): 69.

36. Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 8.

by Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip H. Rhein in their 1973 *Comparative Literature: The Early Years. An Anthology of Essays* and thus refer to *Verlaüfige Aufgaben* as "present tasks,"[37] Nicholls's more recent and, as it happens, preferrable rendition designates these "tasks" as "preliminary."[38] In terms of Meltzl's intuitive "protopresentism," however, both are on the mark—Meltzl's present brief, it seems to me, is prefatory to ours and, in a sense, *is* ours too, part and parcel of our ambitions, conundrums, and shortcomings as World Literature-era comparatists.

On the other side, the side of space, or of cultural-material geography more precisely, in stepping back from origins-obsessed "genealogical reasoning,"[39] the philological discipline repositioning itself to tackle both Hungarian and German together with other languages, cultures, and places had to and did switch to a more "horizontal" modality; it had to move and ended up moving laterally at the same time as screening the environs of that movement for their own lateral moves, deviations (*dérives*), and derivations, scanning the surroundings for meaning-making transfers, transactions, and juxtapositions, and otherwise "tak[ing] its bearings from reports of contacts and similarity."[40]

Transylvania as *Ansatzpunkt*

Comparative literature did take its bearings *from* Transylvania, and literally so—from it, not just "in" it. Thus, the province was disciplinarily foundational twice: established there, the *Acta Comparationis* program also borne out and, after a fashion, "emulated" the place's geocultural ontology to a degree and with ramifications that have yet to be sorted out. The work of Meltzl, Brassai, their pointedly international editorial board, and many of their contributors conveyed and, in a manner of speaking, *performed* what Transylvania was and "was like" at the time and largely still is, its history or its interwoven and competing histories and traditions rather, as well as their outcome, to wit, the intricately "hybrid" existence and expression modes the region made available to those inhabiting it and jockeying for its control in the second half of the nineteenth century.[41]

Differently put, the Transylvanian world as such warranted and likely spurred Meltzl and Brassai's World Literature iteration. The latter was germane to the former and in certain respects shaped by it. In any case, it would not be too much of a stretch to suggest, as I am, that in all its biocultural multiformity *and* political lopsidedness, the Transylvanian *Weltlichkeit* of uneven yet combined worlds made for a "natural" hotbed of Goethean *Weltliteratur*-inspired comparatism. I maintained above that the *Acta Comparationis* reenactment and methodological outfitting of Goethe's World Literature were *of* Meltzl and Brassai's time as much as *for* ours; I am adding here that they were also of Meltzl and Brassai's place as much as for other, bigger places, for whose comparative surveys the same Transylvanian world of worlds furnished, as it still does, linguistic, socioethnic, historical, and other symbolic and material "incentives" and cognitive blueprints. What the *Acta Comparationis* and obliquely, through it, Transylvania allowed and allows for was and is a certain geocultural cartography, an explicit or implicit protocol of "world facing," as Sara Ahmed might phrase it.[42] This consists in the barebones of a methodology of critical orientation in the world, of seeing and understanding—of reading, ultimately—not only Transylvania and its circumimperial adjacencies, but also other, far-off, and more expansive spaces. One would not have to be a dyed-in-the-wool positivist to entertain the idea that the *Acta Comparationis* enterprise was emboldened by its editors' "looking around" and learning from their kaleidoscopic yet overlapping milieus and *Umwelten*, by a sort of "existential" reading or experiencing of day-to-day Transylvania with its own "foundational hybridity"[43]—with itself essentially; one *would* have to be, however, an inveterate isolationist not to appreciate what I would call the *epistemological fungibility* of this reading, the critical payoff of reading other, remote or greater worlds "with" Transylvania and its world.

Granted, cavalier dispensations of "hybridity" have all but rendered the term an annoying cliché in *Acta Comparationis* studies too. Thus, Ildikó Tóth-Nagy has every right to suspect that the notion of Transylvania as an appositely multilingual and multicultural "breeding ground" (*Brutstätte*) for the *Acta Comparationis* and comparatism has become something of a "platitude."[44] Besides, old chestnuts of this sort rarely bear the fruit of real historical knowledge. The shadow they cast may be actually dehistoricizing, and Tóth-Nagy's truism may not even be as true

37. Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," in Schulz and Rhein, *Comparative Literature: The Early Years. An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip H. Rhein (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), 53–66.

38. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 285.

39. Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 8.

40. Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," 8.

41. In his article "Cultural Brokers, Forms of Hybridity, and the Emergence of the First Comparative Literary Journal," Levente T. Szabó dwells at length on the *Acta*'s "foundational hybridity." See his essay in *Philobiblon* 22, no. 2 (2017), especially 69 and 71. He also mentions the "everyday hybridity" from which, one might say, Meltzl and Brassai's project, in an important way, derived. Also see Nicholls's glosses on Szabó's hybridity comments. See "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 299.

42. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 118–19.

43. Szabó, "Cultural Brokers," 69.

44. Ildikó Tóth-Nagy, "Zwischen Provinzialität und Universalität. Hugo von Meltzl als Vorlaufer der vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft," in Fassel, *Hugo Meltzl und die Anfänge der Komparatistik*, 62.

as most assume. This is not to say, however, that Transylvanian "hybridity" circa 1877 is just our rosy, backdated fiction, but only that it was, in that place and time, a state of affairs whose complexities we would be remiss to sell short. In fact, we would do well to remember that post-*Ausgleich* Transylvania had witnessed some notable setbacks to minority rights, never mind the rights of the Romanian majority. Consequently, local communities were far from equal, nor did they live in complete harmony under the thumb of rising Hungarian nationalism, which Meltzl and Brassai handled in ways themselves complex, by riding its tide when it was convenient or by charting a more independent, "worldly" course when it was possible. Did the journal make it through the Scylla of nationalist cultural politics and the Charybdis of genuine comparatism unscathed? The bruises are visible on the *Acta Comparationis* corpus, but so are the jumbled marks, traces, and patterns for which "hybridity" all too often serves as a hackneyed placeholder. At the end of the day, the risks of scholarly bathos should not deter us from forging on and attending diligently, in more granular language, to the slanted and conflicted yet real and distinctively cross-pollinating common places such academic commonplaces may prevent us from grasping, retrieving, and availing ourselves of—to Meltzl and Brassai's culture-and history-rich Transylvania, to what it meant as the *Acta Comparationis*'s birthplace, and especially to what it may offer contemporary comparatists methodologically.

"Transylvania as method," then, in a nutshell. What I am talking about, in a way systematically charted in my work on geomethodology[45] and not incompatible with recent hypotheses on "Eastern Europe" and even "Asia" as "methods,"[46] is an inquiry apparatus already embedded in and loosely modeled on the material and cultural Transylvanian world ensemble and on its *Acta Comparationis*'s refractions in Meltzl, Brassai, and those whose work they brought out. This apparatus inheres in a reading algorithm that lends itself to reliable, "true" rescalings, to "scale variation[s] *without* scale effects,"[47] in other words, and worlds, to outside if not "outlandish" applicability, beyond its original scope, purview, and outcomes within its native land and the *Acta Comparationis* material, to other, sometimes more voluminous world-objects and bodies of work and oftentimes with unanticipated results.[48] Where Damrosch builds his rationale for a presentist recovery of the Cluj periodical on the latter's instantiation of and interest in "the global penetration of regional culture,"[49] I am contemplating the practicality of a different, more emphatically presentist gambit. That is, I am inclined to think of the *Acta Comparationis* output, of the pioneering editorial, publishing, managerial, and marketing energies feeding into it, and of their Transylvanian context at large as human and nonhuman scriptors or, with another vocabulary, actors and actants assembling and delivering, directly and indirectly but always together, trailblazing knowledge scripts and holding them up to future comparatists as Baedekers for potential forays into other world precincts and domains. Those areas may range from regions arguably comparable in size and ethnocultural-linguistic makeup to scaled-up, physical and cultural zones such as vaster subcontinental swaths, inter-continental corridors, continents, and imaginably the planet itself. "Transylvanian comparatism," as I would dub certain analytical and theoretical intuitions flashing across Meltlz's texts and *Acta Comparationis* issues, and the configurations of worldliness subtending these critical exploits may be approached as both place-based and *deontologically displaceable*, that is, ethically employable in other places and cultural archives. This is why I am tempted to look at this assemblage of imperfectly integrated scripts, maps, and other sensemaking operators built into the Meltzl world as a reasonably transferrable interpretive model consisting in a toolkit of worldliness elements susceptible to afford exploratory "angles" on the wider world. In instances such as those reviewed in the last section of my contribution, those vantage-, or better still, starting points present us with a comparative—World-Literary—potential similar to Auerbach's *Ansatzpunkte*.

As is well known, Auerbach specifies in his "Philologie der Weltliteratur" article[50] that an *Ansatzpunkt*, a "point of departure" or "handle" "by which the subject [matter] can be seized," "must be the election of a firmly circumscribed, easily comprehensible set of phenomena whose interpretation is a *radiation out from them* and

45. This is a reference to my book *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

46. See Anca Parvulescu, "Eastern Europe as Method." *The Slavic and East European Journal* 63, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 470–81; Khuang-Csing Chen, *Asia as Method: On Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

47. See Eva Horn's discussion of "scales" in Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller, *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), 148.

48. Transylvania as "apparatus" and other worlds as the latter's object allude to Karen Barad's apparatus theory in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 141.

49. Damrosch, "Global Regionalism," 140.

50. Erich Auerbach's "Philologie der Weltliteratur" was translated into English first by Maire Said and Edward Said. Their version came out under the title "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," *The Centennial Review* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1969): 1-17. A more recent rendition into English, in which *Weltliteratur* becomes "world literature," is by Jane O. Newman and has been included in Erich Auerbach, *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, ed. and with an introduction by James I. Porter, trans. Jane O. Newman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 253–65.

which orders and interprets a *greater region* than they themselves occupy"[51] (italics mine). As a map, tack, angle, or whatever other metaphor may come in handy when elaborating on the knowledge apparatus under scrutiny here, "Transylvania"—once again, the place as well as the *Acta Comparations* critical-theoretical resonances and projections of mundaneness—would then supply methodologically a jumping-off point, but at the same time, this originating spot capacitates its own de- and re-territorialization, opening up an entryway into other "regions," bigger or not. Epistemologically galvanized by its intrinsically relational if politically "tilted" communality and "lateral" mobility of objects, values, and representations, the *ab quo* pulls double duty as an *ad quem*. One begins with or from Transylvania and the "Transylvanian" picture Meltzl and others alongside him painted of the world, yet the same picture, the same structural and theoretical *Bild*, is a comparatist's ticket to other worlds and works, few of which, if any, may have been specifically or sufficiently addressed in the *Acta Comparationis*, but whose understandings potentially "radiate out" from the structure of worldliness formulated or just implied by some of the journal's texts and contexts; one begins, in terms of my own analysis, not so much from a "protohistory" as from a "protomethodology"—not or not solely from Transylvania as a "cradle of comparative literature," but from Transylvania as a critical springboard into other worlds, as *Ansatzpunkt* or cluster of *Ansatzpunkte*.

Below, I tarry around those departing points that seem to speak to us more compellingly, and I pose, sometimes not in so many words, questions such as: Which components and aspects of the Meltzl world can function as this sort of epistemological launch pad today? Where might they take us geographically, culturally, aesthetically, and otherwise? Which worlds, worldviews, ontologies, or ontological features would they help bring to light? Further, if, as Michel Foucault "reveals, [...] different epistemes disclose different worlds,"[52] then how might one deploy the Transylvanian "episteme" not only descriptively but also normatively? How might one harness "Transylvanianism" to what one might call progressive worldbuilding? And would all Transylvanian starting points serve this purpose? What about the false starts? The dead ends? Incomplete as it is—a tentative decalogue to Meltz's foundational "decaglottism"[53]—the roster that follows lists some of them too.

***Terra comparationis:* A Schedule of Departures**

***i. onomastics and* trans*its: "portable" Transylvania*.** What's in a name? What's in a placename like "Transylvania"? What's in the title—in the slew of titles—of the *Acta Comparationis*? What's in the nobility title of Hugo/ó Meltzl de Lomnitz, a Transylvanian Saxon "who regarded himself as a polyglot Hungarian"[54] and may have appeared, to some, to be more than one entity, as may have been his location and surrounding region, what with the different, related or unrelated German, Hungarian, Latin, Romanian, and other names under which and idioms in which they were and continue to be known?[55] What's in the title of another blue blood, Meltzl's contributor, Romantic cosmopolite and Romanian (Wallachian)-born Albanian nationalist, feminist, polyglot writer, erudite, traveler, and alpinist Elena Ghica/Dora d'Istria aka Duchess Helena Koltsova Massalskaya?

Well, what's *not* in them? Whole worlds lie inside these names—and as many points of comparative departure. For in turn nested within those worlds are "metaworlds" of sorts, marginalia to the ontology of those worlds: to what they consist of, how they came into being, and most notably, how this onto-logic is epistemologically *portable*, that is, how it might trans-port us to other worlds and their mysteries, carrying us across or "trans" ("Transylvanian style"), to those places of discovery, self-discovery, and, ideally, self-transformation. Might then one indulge the notion that for Transylvania, toponymy is destiny or, less hyperbolically, comparative destiny? Whatever is in the placename, might it be prone—because it is in the place in the first place—to lure comparatists like Meltzl from Heidelberg back to Koloszvár/Klausenbug/Cluj (but also to Napoca, Castrum Clus, Claudiopolis, as the *Acta Comparationis* itself reminds us on its front page, and officially Cluj-Napoca after 1974) and incite them, "model" their endeavors? And might this model postulate, however evasively, a linguistically grounded comparative onomastics, perhaps even an onomastic or names-oriented comparatism?

Wary as one may be of waxing etymologically and of overstating one's case in the bargain, one cannot help noticing that the historically fluid *nomina loci* foreground here the "organic" *trans*movement, the transports, transits, and morphings making and remaking Transylvania across millennia: Überwald and then Siebenbürgen in German and

51. Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," 14. On Auerbach's *Ansatzpunk* and World Literature as the latest avatar of comparative literature, see my essay "Worlding Comparative Literature," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory*, ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo and Christian Moraru, 101–18 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), especially 103–104.

52. Susan Hekman, "Constructing the Ballast: An Ontology for Feminism," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 111.

53. Meltzl, "Decaglotism," 494.

54. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology" (299-300), which mentions the additional evidence provided in Gertrud Lehnert, "*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*: Eine komparatistische Zeitschrift des XIX. Jahrhunderts," *Arcadia* 17, nos. 1-3 (1982): 16–36.

55. See, for instance, Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 101.

back to Überwald (Uberwald) in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* comic book series, Erdélyi in Hungarian, Transilvania and Ardeal, and thus back to Erdélyi ("beyond the woods," "trans-silvanus") and Hungarian, *in* Romanian, Transylvania has been successively crossed, settled, and unsettled by Romans, German *Sachsen*, *Donauschwaben*, Magyars, Roma, Armenians, Jews, and other transients and *Siedler* more than once, and often in a very colonial and imperial way, as it has been in a broader sense by other human and nonhuman forces participating in the trans-dynamic flaunted by its name and by the plethora of toponyms, anthroponyms, taxonomies, and linguistic and cultural catalogs associated with it. Small wonder that Transylvania is poised to travel well, as we say of certain wines. If it does so methodologically, as an *Ansatzpunkt*, a world territory and world map both rolled into one courtesy of Meltzl, Brassai, the *Acta Comparationis*, and its local and international contributors and correspondents, that is in no small part because, as historians never tire of telling us, Transylvania is and has always been a well-traveled place itself, in all senses, its borders and political affiliation shifty, its geography counterintuitively "runny." Territorially bound, Transylvania has been also unbound for millennia, set in motion, as it were, and relentlessly worlded and reworlded by its position as a world crossroads, junction of worlds, and world arena abuzz with associations, exchanges, and maneuvers of all kinds.

ii. traffics and assemblies, relations and comparisons. In the same vein, the *Acta Comparationis* and the "Transylvanian" scholarship in it may be place-based, but they are not place-bound. Absolutely keen on distances and modern-era technologies of suspending them, on recording, researching world-literary archives, and communicating across continents by mail, including a *Weltpost* system,[56] as well as by telephone,[57] telegraph, photography, and phonogram,[58] on people's fast-expanding abilities to come together, associate, and deliberate in world fora such as publications, organizations, congresses, and fairs despite differences in location, language, or background, Meltzl advertises his journal as a world pit stop and, by virtue of its dynamic, "assembly" site: way station for "authors, translators, and philosophers of all nations,"[59] as well as converging point (*Vereinigungsort*) of "international traffic" (*internationale Verkehr*)[60] and the dynamic scholarly sodality and political assemblies (*Parlament*)[61] obtaining through it, *trans*nationally. Stemming from a high-traffic region of Europe, the *Acta Comparationis* and the work in it thus further enable us to mobilize that origin epistemologically so as to trace other, neighboring or at-a-distance repositories and circuitries of texts, styles, and symbolic-material energies.

This positional dialectic of onto-epistemological location-cum-dislocation is paramount. The twofold significance of this "Transylvanianism," where the rootedness and *trans*-portability of the Transylvanian method work as the two arms of a cognitive scissors, takes nothing away from "outside influences" such as that of "the greatest instructor of humanity" on Meltzl, as he himself refers to Goethe in an 1882 *Acta Comparationis* "thesis" on "Goethes *Weltlitteratur*;[62] in implying, in the third installment of "Vorläufige Aufgaben," that comparative literature's job is to examine the "aesthetic-literary role" played by a wide spectrum of languages in "the literary traffic of Europe"[63] and presumably of other continents as well, Meltzl did echo Goethe's understanding of *Weltliteratur* generally as a "marketplace of international literary traffic."[64] But then again, neither Meltzl nor his homeland was a passive receptacle of Goethe's *weltliterarische* foresightedness, a blank surface patiently awaiting the inscription of "Goetheanism"'s deep wisdom. Far from it. Conceivably, it should come as no great surprise that comparative literature got its disciplinary bearings and the *Acta Comparationis* was born in a sui generis *terra*

56. See the unsigned (but most likely authored by Meltzl) opening article of the *Acta Comparationis*'s 155-158 numbers, see "Die erste Decennalfeier der Idee der Weltpost" (15-16 [October 1884]): 67–72.

57. Hugo Meltzl, "La réforme littéraire en Europe: Quelques observations à propos de l'ouverture du Congres Littéraire International à Paris in Juin 1878," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 3-4 no. 32 (June 1878): 45–46. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

58. Hugo Meltzl, "Das Phonogramm in seiner Bedeutung für die Vergleichende Litteraturkunde und Sprachforschung," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, 5-6, no. 45 (March 1879): 73–79. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

59. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 43. The original is in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1, no. 9 (May 1877): 182.

60. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 44, 45. The original is in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 308, 309. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

61. Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 314.

62. Meltzl, "Goethe's World Literature," in Nicholls, "Three Translations," 291; See the original in Hugo Meltzl, "Goethes Weltlitteratur," 67.

63. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 287. The original can be found in Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. *III. Der Dekaglottismus*," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 3-4 no. 24 (February 1878): 496.

64. Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip H. Rhein, introductory note to "Johann W. von Goethe: Some Passages Pertaining to the Concept of World Literature," in *Comparative Literature: The Early Years. An Anthology of Essays*, 3.

comparationis[65]—in a high-traffic "comparison land," to paraphrase Rebecca Walkowitz's "comparison literature" definition.[66] Complete with its "comparative audiences,"[67] Transylvania was and has remained such a site, an intricate, material and cultural comparative assemblage "predisposed" to comparative flights and allegorizing this predisposition toponymically and, more largely, onomastically; a relatedness-based ethnocultural ecosystem, Transylvania endorses an analogously relational and trans-lational comparatism and holds it up to other worlds, including ours.[68] In Transylvania, literary, academic, and other "beginnings" were and are characteristically attributable not only to the "several national geographies,"[69] languages, and traditions that happen to share it, but also to the plethora of com-parisons, collocations, collations, parallels, and contrasts leaving their imprint on cultural production across those traditions, on the world picture discernable in it, and on the *Ansatzpunkte* the picture provides to other worlds. Apposite both to the place itself and to the *Acta Comparationis* project, the multitudinous nomenclatures swirling around them encapsulate histories, cultures, as well as scripts of enduring relevance to an onomastically minded comparatism curious about other names and trained to pinpoint and parse the worlds inside them.

iii. the locational and the locutional. As with the names, so with the idioms? It is the case, at any rate, that in Transylvania, and in Transylvanianism no less, location and language—languages, mind you—go spectacularly if ambiguously hand in hand. A main driver of Transylvanian history, their Escherian feedback loop arguably also informs an *Acta Comparationis* concept of comparatism for which *genius loci* sponsors a *trans*ferrable—methodologically "exportable," as Andrei Terian might correct me[70]—plurilingualism. Meltzl labels it the "principle of polyglotism." *Das Prinzip des Polyglottismus*[71] is as significant as, if not more significant than, "the principle of translation" (*das Prinzip der Übersetzung*), the other major tenet of his comparative approach.[72] Polyglotism, or respect for and expertise and research in the original and its language, whatever they are, is the bedrock of Transylvanianism—might then reading the Poetic Edda in Old Norse be a "Transylvanian" reading no matter what else it may be? In any event, on the world-literary roadmap drawn up by Meltzl and Brassai, as few of their critics fail to notice, this principle or procedure is a major if not *the* passageway to sites, literary patrimonies, and national cultures far and near and regardless of status or prestige—at least in theory, as we will see presently.

***iv.* Verkehr, *mercantilisme, and* wahre Vergleichung: *form as method, method as form*.** Meltzl and Brassai's commentators also acknowledge, as I would, that said sponsorship is more than symbolic. There is a substantial existential and material dimension to it as well. In its private and public spheres alike, in its households, garrisons, notary offices, convents, churches, playgrounds, schools, workplaces, and marketplaces, Transylvania was and to some degree still is a Babel—if a "leaning" one, unevenly occupied—of designations and idioms, a thriving and raucous, workaday glosso-ecology nurturing multiple if, as I elaborate below, politically unequal linguistic competencies and fostering an openness to similarly complex environments.

There is a method to this Transylvanian cacophony. Or, suggests Meltzl, the cacophony, the polylogue, *is* the method, the approach (*Ansatz*) to other, linguistically different worlds. If the place is one of intensive traffics and transactions, and if the transaction of goods, symbols, and words entails translations and other kinds of exchange, then multilingualism (access to the original items and ability to deal with and "in" them) must "accompany" the skill to convert one item to another (to trans-fer them to other value systems, codes, and locales) both in "regular" trade and in the literary commerce to whose pursuit the *Acta Comparationis* commits itself.[73] As Meltzl also explicates, the "tool" (*Werkzeug*) of polyglotism must be plied alongside the "art of translation" (*Übersetzungskunst*) for "translations facilitate" the "traffic" or "distribution" (*Absatz*) of "literary products" "indirectly," and there can be

65. *Terra comparationis* is a phrase circulating in comparative law. See, e. g., Lukasz Jan Korporowicz, "Roman Law Tradition in Three Cases of First Impression," *RIDROM: Revista Internacional de Derecho Romano* 21 (October 2018): 190.

66. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 127.

67. Parvulescu and Boatcă make a similarly "comparative" point about Transylvanian publics by adducing Walkowitz's notion of "comparative audiences" (*Creolizing the Modern*, 103).

68. On comparison, translationality, and relatedness as defining logic of the post-Cold War era, see my book, *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2011), especially 15–66.

69. Walkowitz, *Born Translated*, 127.

70. See Andrei Terian, *Critica de export. Teorii, context, ideologii* (Bucharest, Romania: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2013).

71. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 44. The original is in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 309.

72. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 44.

73. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 44.

no substitute for "*direct* commerce itself" (*der* direkte *Verkehr selbst*), that is, for "traffic" in originals.[74] But, and we should take this caveat too back to our own world, the case for commerce is not one for "utilitarianism" or "mercantilism." By Meltlz's "reformist" lights, both marred the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, and both are symptoms of "pseudoaesthetic" transactions.[75]

As far as genuinely aesthetic trade goes, an in-kind *Ansatz* to the *Absatz* of world *Literaturprodukte* is de rigueur. Therefore, Meltzl, Brassai, and their editorial policies situate polyglotism front and center to their comparative trade—no doubt, another lesson to relearn at a time most postcolonial scholarship is done on English translations and in English, and cuts in the humanities target foreign languages obsessively while English-only policies keep popping up outside the American academy. Moreover, Meltzl and Brassai insist that as a hallmark of "true comparison" (*Wahre* Vergleichung), *der Polyglottismus* should shape comparatism all the way through, as both method and presentation. One should handle "literary products" in the very languages of their production: if the linguistic form of the original calls for an approach to *that* form or language, then the approach or method should also be plied in the same form or language. Accordingly, not only should a comparatist worth his or her salt study Luís Vaz de Camões's *Os Lusíadas* in the original, but he or she should also write about it in Portuguese. This is, the founders assure us, both highly "desirable" and "practical."[76]

v. comparative commerce and nationalism. But practice is where the rubber of principles hits the road of political reality, threatening to render the comparative ideal as disingenuous as those "foggy 'cosmopolitanizing' theories" guilty of "infring[ing] upon the national uniqueness of a people."[77] This sort of practice or "pragmatism," if not the priorities of "state-sponsored Hungarian ethnonationalism,"[78] of which the *Acta Comparationis* never quite shook free, is in essence responsible for the publication's awkward dance with national idiom, national literature, and nationhood. Their "uniqueness" is both "cultivated"[79] and held at arm's length by Meltzl, who is appreciative of nations and, almost in the same breath, critical of their cloistering and jingoist proclivities, whether these involve "monoglottism"[80] or "pulping"[81] the books of foreign writers such as Madame de Stäel. A sine qua non balancing act in the age of burgeoning nation-states? At all events, the more saliently *csárdás* moments of the dance—no pun intended—have not escaped critics, including those ready to make allowances for the "practical" strictures of Meltzl and Brassai's operation. As Nicholls points out, "[a]lthough the ACLU purported to treat all literatures as being of equal worth, in practice this claim proved to be a utopian one that could not withstand local political pressures and the pragmatic compromises involved in running a journal."[82]

A matter of compromise or not, polyglotism becomes "restricted to "decaglotism,"[83] the third major principle of Meltzl and Brassai's methodological trifecta. But this is a slippery slope for *der Dekaglottismus* subsequently boils down to the dynamic duo of *kaiserlich-königliche* fame, German and Hungarian, with the philological tradition built into the former playing second fiddle to the politics embodied by the latter. The otherwise diverse and informative column "Bulletin polyglotte" is far less true to how "decaglotism" plays out in the *Acta Comparationis*'s pages than the other regular sections, "Schopenhaueriana" and "Petöfiana."

The initial, "principled" inclusion in Meltzl and Brassai's comparative portfolio of "the 3 great European languages"[84] plus seven others, with "that language to which our literary journal first and foremost most belongs:

74. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 44-45. The original is in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 308–309.

75. Hugo Meltzl, "La réforme littéraire en Europe," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*, vols. 3-4, no. 31 (June 1878): 13. Such "transactions" are discussed at some length by Teona Farmatu in an essay also present in this issue of *Transilvania*.

76. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 45.

77. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 45.

78. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 304.

79. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 45.

80. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46. The original is in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 313.

81. Hugo Meltzl, "Goethes Weltlitteratur," 67. See the translation in Nicholls, "Three Translations," 291.

82. Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology," 304.

83. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 287. See the original in Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. *III. Der Dekaglottismus*, *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 3-4, no. 24 (February 1878): 496. Meltzl and Brassai also talk about "hexaglossia" in their "Introduction," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 1 (January 1877): 1–4. Translation by Levente T. Szabó. https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

84. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 286. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. *III.* Der Dekaglottismus," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 3-4, no. 24 (February 1878): 496.

the Hungarian"[85] among them, is thus belied and risks being cancelled out by a raft of exclusions. Kicked out the abstract door of *Prinzipen*, the pecking order of languages, literatures, and nations sneaks back in through the window of the principles' implementation in the *Acta Comparationis*.

vi. protectionism (I): free trade, linguistic tariffs, and comparatism's national brief. Perhaps tellingly, the "pragmatic" balancing act de facto tilts the *Weltbild* of tongues, literary traditions, nationalist narratives, and countries to Hungarian, Hungary, and its putatively better contoured worldly stature at the very moment Romania enters its post-imperial phase by declaring its independence from the Ottoman Empire (May 1877), eyeing neighboring territories where ethnic Romanians were in the majority, and thus asserting itself not only as a player to reckon with in Central and Southeastern Europe but also as one of Hungary's adversaries; perhaps inevitably, the Romanian language, Romanian literature—which had by then surely boasted accomplishments and followed trajectories comparable to Hungarian and other literatures in Central and Eastern Europe—and Transylvania-based Romanian cultural-political movements such as Școala Ardeleană (the Transylvanian School), became the main casualties of a comparative free trade the protectionist relapses of which betray the coeditors' acquiescence to the Hungarian nationalist agenda. One should not forget, however, that Meltzl and Brassai thought from the get-go of the *Acta Comparationis* as a Hungarian outfit with an audience and "focus" that were also, if not exclusively, domestic. On the first issue's front page, they introduce their "Hungarian journal" to "the Hungarian readership—a readership necessarily characterized by higher, that is, polyglot, education." "Considering the public utility of th[e] foreign ideas" "altruistically offered" in its pages, they continue, "it would be tactless to alter the[se concepts] for the sake of uniformity or other superficial considerations. Moreover, the principle of comparative analysis inherent in modern science naturally leads to a scientific polyglottism. Thus, alongside its Hungarian focus, our journal will also, when the opportunity arises (and we sincerely hope it will), feature polyglot content."[86] Whoever puts in the time to comb through the *Acta Comparationis*'s treasure trove of two hundred and twelve issues, should agree that Meltzl and Brassai, their parti pris notwithstanding, were successful on both fronts.

vii. deep-time and modern imperialities. In a sense, Școala Ardeleană is the elephant in the *Acta Comparationis* editorial boardroom, program, and table of contents, though. Its publications were of indisputable linguistic, philological, and multicultural pertinence to Meltzl and Brassai's, including the articles the journal featured regularly on comparative scholarship broadly and especially on comparative linguistics, as well as on classical studies and philology, Roman and Romance literature and history, and so forth.[87] An Enlightenment offshoot, the movement advocated for the rights of Romanians as descendants of the Romans who conquered Dacia at the beginning of the second century AD and made the land of modern-day Transylvania into a province of the Roman Empire. Ancient Rome's legacy would be claimed, however, both by the Holy Roman Empire (*Heiliges Römisches Reich*) and its various avatars, including *Die Kaiserliche und königliche Monarchie Österreich-Ungarn*, and by Romanian nativism, nationalism, and România Mare ("Greater Romania") regional expansionism inside and around Transylvania, ever since the Revolution of 1848.[88] On a collision course with other Transylvanian nationalisms on several levels, Școala Ardeleană was admittedly political. But so was the "execution" of *Polyglottismus* in the *Acta Comparationis*, despite Meltzl's disparaging references to "those who," while "appl[ying] this important principle," nevertheless "uncritically sacrifice the purely literary interest for the sake of interests that are political, national, and of completely ephemeral importance."[89] If, on one hand, a certain anti-imperial politics is at play—and of immediate and broad interest today—in the pot shots Meltzl takes, only a few sentences apart, at Czarist Russia's oppressive anti-Ukrainian language *ukaz* and, less forthrightly, at "the 'national ethic' of a Viennese high-school teacher who exhibits little satisfaction with his achievement,"[90] on the other hand, nationalist politics or, at least, nationalist bias

85. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 286. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. III. Der Dekaglottismus": 496.

86. Meltzl and Brassai, "Introduction," 2–3.

87. In an article also featured by this *Transilvania* issue, Mihaela Ursa focuses more extensively on the glaring absence of Școala Ardeleană from the *Acta Comparationis*.

88. Transylvania's inter-imperiality has been extensively tackled of late, among others by Caius Dobrescu, in "'Soft' Commerce and the Thinning of Empires: Four Steps Toward Modernity," in Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian, eds., *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 77–94; and especially by Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă in *Creolizing the Modern*.

89. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 288. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. *III. Der Dekaglottismus*, *Összehasonlitó Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 3-4, no. 24 (February 1878): 499.

90. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlitó Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 311–313.

fuels his "prudent[ly] and carefu[lly] selecti[ve]" polyglotism.[91] Yet again, on the whole, this does not derail the *Acta Comparationis*'s comparative project.

viii. protectionism (II): Hegel versus Darwin, or toward a flatter ontology of comparatism. In support of his "selection," Meltzl offers something like a two-pronged evolutionary rationale. Aligned with the German literary history and aesthetics of the time, one track of his reasoning is normatively Hegelian and exclusionary: literary cultures, Meltzl contends repeatedly, develop and come into their own as they leave behind their folk infancy and Romantic adolescence to peak in a "classicism" where they at long last give the true measure of the human spirit (and of *Geist* no less). Capitalized aesthetically and thus really equipped for worldwide circulation and trade on the *Weltliterarische* stock exchanges are those national literatures that have reached their classical pinnacle; the rest are still in the limbo of "evolution." The other track is Darwinian, inclusionary, and considerably more instructive for us and our planet at this stage in Anthropocene history. It tends to flatten the verticalized, human-centered ontology of the world's linguistic, cultural, or political ecologies and biomes by spotlighting, if sometimes also exoticizing, what Meltzl, Brassai, and others certainly more than them tend to also leave out, discount, marginalize, and animalize: ethnic groups such as the "obscure horde of Kirghizes,"[92] the "small tribes of Europe," and "the savages of exotic countries," "small and minute folk literatures," less-spoken dialects and tongues, and more-than-human existents.[93] "In a time when certain animal species such as the mountain goat and the European bison are protected against extinction by elaborate and strict laws," we read in "Vorläufige Aufgaben," "the willful extinction of a human species (or its literature, which amounts to the same thing), should be impossible."[94] And Meltzl adds immediately: "In this sense we want understood the term 'world literature."[95]

ix. human and animal, animate and inanimate: comparisons without borders. The specification is most remarkable, and Meltzl will reinforce it in his 1880 *Acta Comparationis* essay "Laws of Comparative Literary Research," where he expounds on the ontological "priority" of poetry. Unlike prose, which resembles a "mechanism" (*[M]echanismus*), poetry is, he details, an "organism" (*[O]rganismus*) and circulates ("wanders") like one.[96] Biosystems' diversity, dynamism, and overall welfare model in Meltzl literary and cultural world-systems—"historical forces are already biological," he might have stressed by following Karen Barad's lead.[97] At this point in his argument for *die Weltliteratur*, *die Umwelt* shows the way, its eco-logic inspiring, in Meltz's vision, world-literary practices across the human-nonhuman, human-animal rights, and cultural-natural divides. As in Darwin, the same "logic operates, whether it is the matter of biology or of spoken and written languages."[98] Mapping the zoological onto the philological, Meltzl sets up the Anthropogenic extinction of species and the "laws" for their protection as illuminating homologies for thinking in more concrete and "relatable" ways about less-known languages, literatures, cultures, and peoples as endangered life forms and about the "principles" of World Literature as modalities of "cultivating" them in ways that anticipate modern interdisciplinarity by crossing into religion, philosophy, anthropology, folklore, and the performative arts.[99]

x. transylvanianism and non-metropolitan comparatism. It bears emphasizing, in closing, that valiant as they may strike us, Transylvanian epistemological transfers to other worlds should not be construed, let alone practiced, as aspirations to "totality" in the sense in which "globality," or its global studies doxa rather, ever so often is—hence my steering clear, here and elsewhere, of the off-the-peg globalization lexicon, as well as of

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91. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 288. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. *III. Der Dekaglottismus*, *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*, 3-4, no. 24 (February 1878): 499.

92. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 311.

93. Nicholls, "Three Translations," 287. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. *III. Der Dekaglottismus*, *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*, 3-4, no. 24 (February 1878): 496–497.

94. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46. See the original in Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben den vergleichenden Litteratur," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* 1-2, no. 15 (October 1877): 311.

95. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46.

96. Hugo Meltzl, "Laws of Comparative Literary Research," in Nicholls, "Three Translations," 290. See the original in Meltzl's "Gesetze der vergleichendes Litteraturforschung," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 7, no. 70 (May 1880): 150.

97. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 65.

98. Elizabeth Grosz, "Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance," in Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 39.

99. Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," 46. It is also worth mentioning here Dora D'Istria's extensive study "Danses and Chansons Nationales des Roumains," published in several installments in the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 15-16, nos. 145-150 (April-May 1884). https://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/ (accessed on March 5, 2025).

any suggestion that Transylvania and Transylvanian regionalism qua episteme, knowledge tactic, or *Ansatzpunkt* may be instrumentalized or are somehow haplessly bound to do globalism's dirty work by default;[100] none of the possibilities to read other worlds with or through Transylvania and its Meltzl and *Acta Comparationis* reiterations should be taken as universalist, holist, or imperialist, and they should not be seen as purporting to monopolize an approach either: the Transylvanian method cannot be applied indiscriminately—Transylvanianism does have, as I have argued, ecumenical purchase as analysis unit and world-analytical *dispositif* on non-Transylvanian sites, but its serviceability positively flounders in certain contexts; Transylvania does not have a stronghold on the *Ansatzpunke* above—one could imagine similar regions, such as Bukovina, Galicia, the Balkans, or farther away, Alsatia (to limit my examples to Europe), as providing similar cognitive and comparative benefits; further, the method is unlikely to deliver exhaustive, totalizing readings of other places, explain them away, and so forth—Meltzl's work itself and the *Acta Comparationis* corpus overall, much less the method scattered across it, hardly form a coherent totality for it teems with inconsistencies, incomplete thoughts, and suchlike, as my earlier disclaimers already cautioned; and most importantly, the method should not be viewed as doing the empire's bidding under the guise of a non- or sub-imperial knowledge production that in reality would only reproduce other cultural geographies and traditions in the assimilationist likeness of the imperial hegemon.

One would have to make provisions, I suppose, for situations justifying apprehensions of Transylvanian trans- and re-scalings and corresponding applications in literary and cultural analysis, as one would for cases bearing out the heuristic rationale of such critical maneuvers. Projecting the former Austro-Hungarian province and by extension the whole Meltzl world onto other worlds, big or small, brings into play a geocultural isomorphism and, based on it, a set of comparative reasonings the politics of which is not a foregone conclusion by a long shot. The more apprehensive among us may worry that such critical procedures may restage Transylvania's well-documented imperiality and the nationalist logics brewing underneath, whether it is the modern inter-imperiality that has served as both foil and vehicle of Hungarian nationalism in the post-1848 and especially post-*Ausgleich* era or Roman imperiality, whose legacy in modern Romania is equally problematic. The rest of us, however, may see here another opportunity to turn the tables on Berlin, Paris, New York, New Haven, and other Western hubs of comparative literature so as not only to rewrite the history of the discipline but also to retheorize comparatism in and from non-metropolitan, regional locations and traditions such as Transylvania.

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100. I have theorized an entire set of sharp distinctions between "globe" and "planet" at length in a series of books and articles, more recently in "Planetary Poetics," in *Globalization and Literary Studies*, ed. by Joel Evans (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), especially 305–309.

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