Introduction: *Acta Comparationis*—An Alternative Genealogy of World Comparatism

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Abstract: This Special Issue re-examines *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–1888), celebrated in recent years as the first journal of comparative literature. It resists a hagiographic recuperation of its editor, Hugo Meltzl, to reveal the journal's entanglements with the political, epistemological or linguistic structures of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its wider inter-imperial context. The essays in the Special Issue cast new light on subaltern literatures and neglected individual contributors—women, Romani, Jewish—and foreground the journal's clash between an all-encompassing archiving ambition and its hierarchical presumptions. We foreground both the journal's indebtedness to nineteenth century epistemology (stadial change, organicism, racialization) and its pivotal role in shaping future comparative literature.

Keywords: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum, Hugo Meltzl, Austro-Hungarian empire, comparative literature, multilingualism, archive.

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The scene unfolds at Sans-Souci, the residence of the Prussian emperor. The latter, known for gathering artists and men of science around him, is enjoying the company of linguist and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt. On this occasion, he is asking Humboldt to decipher a Greek inscription on a recently acquired sculpture. Humboldt excuses himself saying he cannot do so in the presence of one of the most distinguished Hellenists of the time. Humboldt walks to a young woman and asks her to translate from the Greek, which she does, fluently. Astonished, the emperor asks for the name of the remarkable woman. She is Elena Koltzoff-Massalsky, Humboldt replies, born Wallachian princess Elena Ghika, who publishes under the pen name Dora d'Istria. The story is recounted in *Celebrated Women Travellers of the Nineteenth Century*, published in London in 1883.[1] W. H. Adams borrows it, almost *mot-à-mot*, from an earlier book fascinated with Dora d'Istria, Charles Yriarte's *Portraits cosmopolites* (1870).[2]

Both Adams and Yriarte describe the anecdote as a *tableau de genre*.[3] Its composition centrally frames a tension between gender and scholarship in the second half of the nineteenth century. A woman thought to be an "ornament of the higher society" displays the "fever of study" considered the sign of genius. Adams's text is centrally concerned with Dora d'Istria's extensive travels, especially her mountaineering, against a historical background that severely limited women's movement. Adjacent to it, however, Dora d'Istria is theorizing of a different kind of mobility: "'It has always seemed to me,' she one day observed, 'that women, in travelling, might complete the task of the most scientific travellers; for, as a fact, woman carries certain special aptitudes into literature'." What a scholar needed, among other things, she continued, is "a knowledge of languages and of history."[4] Dora d'Istria would self-fashion into such a "scientific traveller," who brought her talents to the comparative study of literature. This is a scene in the early history of the discipline of

1. William Henry Davenport Adams, *Celebrated Women Travellers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: WS Sonnenschein & Company, 1883), 21.

2. Charles Yriarte, *Les portraits cosmopolites* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1870).

3. Adams, *Celebrated Women*, 22; Yriarte, *Les portraits*, 168.

4. Adams, *Celebrated Women*, 22–23.

Comparative Literature. The anecdote points to the exoticism that attached to Dora d'Istria's predicament. The *tableau* vividly captures the stir caused by a Wallachian princess of Albanian descent who had lived for a few years in Russia and travelled extensively—and who speaks nine languages. Her knowledge comes across as surprising, to this day, on account of how the emergent history of comparatism has been told, from the beginning. This history sometimes mentions women scholars like Mme de Staël, but rarely Dora D'Istria. And it remains confused about the place of East European comparatism—Dora d'Istria's combination of languages—in the global story of its emergence.

One contemporary scholar was not surprised by Dora d'Istria's extensive knowledge, because he knew in what category of inquiry she would have liked to be placed—he recognized her as a fellow comparatist and was flattered that she, in turn, acknowledged him as a comparatist. Hugo Meltzl published Dora d'Istria in the first journal of Comparative Literature, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–1888), which he co-edited with Sámuel Brassai, at the newly founded university in the multilingual city of Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg—the historical capital of Transylvania, at this time part of Hungary, itself part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Meltzl offered no gender qualifications of Dora d'Istria's scholarship; to him, she was not a lady scholar. Indeed, he unequivocally referred to her as a genius.[5] Meltzl and Dora d'Istria engaged in a long-term collaboration, which constituted one of the central pillars of *Acta Comparationis* and the early days of the comparatist discipline it inaugurated. This collaboration was anchored in an extensive, long-term correspondence, in French.[6]

The collaboration between Meltzl and Dora d'Istria offers one example of the kind of work *Acta Comparationis* did that still *feels* fresh, forward-looking. The window within which this collaboration flourished soon closed. In the age of nationalism, Dora d'Istria would be claimed as an Albanian, Greek and Romanian icon.[7] Meltzl's reception placed him within the Hungarian school of comparatism, while internationally his work for *Acta Comparationis* was primarily framed within German Studies.[8] In other words, national identifiers that Dora d'Istria and Meltzl spent their careers avoiding would come to define their reception—until recently, when Meltzl's name has become associated with the global turn in Comparative Literature, within an English-language debate.[9]

The essays in this Special Issue aim to frame a different *tableau* of early comparatism. We engage *Acta Comparationis* as a microcosm of nineteenth century Comparative Literature. The journal was in a metonymic relation to early comparatism—with its promises and limitations. Highly curated, it functioned as a stage for its emergence and cultivation. We understand the project of the journal as an open-ended experiment, a work-in-progress, a mode of performance art dramatizing the predicament of literary comparatism in the late nineteenth century. Revisiting *Acta Comparationis* and its collaborators, the articles in this Special Issue foreground a constellation of neglected texts, issues and figures; and they reframe the theoretical questions pertaining to the comparatism performed in and by the journal.

"The First Journal of Comparative Literature"

For a few decades, comparative literature, especially its US version, has been deemed to be in crisis. In 2003, Gayatri Spivak declared the demise of the discipline—or rather, of a certain Comparative Literature, dedicated as it was to what she called "the colonialism of European national-language based Comparative Literature and the Cold War format of Area Studies."[10] In response to this obituary, a number of voices have attempted to resuscitate Comparative Literature. Not the old colonial Comparative Literature, which was tacitly allowed to die its rightful death (while remaining the

5. Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 1, no. 9 (1877): 313.

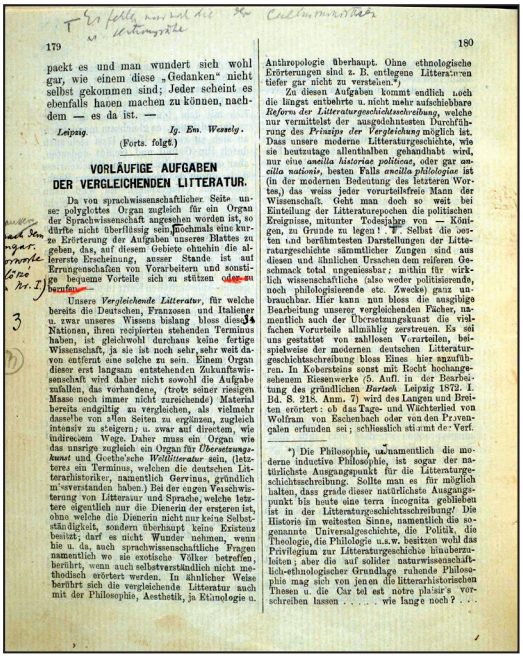
6. Their letters would be published by historian Nicolae Iorga in the 1930s. N. Iorga, "Lettres de Dora d'Istria," *Revue historique du Sud-Est européen*, no. 4–6 (1932): 134–209. Iorga also included Dora d'Istria in a book documenting travel to "Oriental Europe"; Nicolae Iorga, *Une vingtaine de voyageurs dans l'Orient européen* (Paris: Librairie J. Gamber, 1928).

7. On Dora d'Istria's work, see Antonio D'Alessandri, *Il pensiero e l'opera di Dora d'Istria fra Oriente europeo e Italia* (Roma: Gangemi, 2007); Liviu Bordaş, "Dor de Dunăre şi alte nostalgii cosmopolite," *Observator cultural*, no. 437 (2008): 16–18.

8. The Hungarian-language scholarly literature on *Acta Comparationis* includes Sándor Kerekes, *Lomnitzi Meltzl Hugó (1846–1908)* (Budapest: Minerva, 1937); György Mihály Vajda, "Összehasonlító *Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*," *Helikon. Világirodalmi Figyelő*, no. 1 (1964): 115–117; Összehasonlító *Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok,* ed. György Gaál (Kolozsvár: Kriterion, 1975); István Fried, "Auf den Spuren der *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*," in *Kultur in Reflexion. Beitrage zur Geschichte der mitteleuropäischen Literaturwissenschaften*, ed. E. Kulcsár Szabó and D. Oraić Tolić (Wien: Braumüller 2008), 59–74; Péter Hajdu and József Pál, "Introduction: The Fifty-year History of *Neohelicon*, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* and Beyond," *Neohelicon*, no. 50 (2023): 413–422. The reference text for Romanian-language comparatism discusses Meltzl succinctly in a section titled "Contributions of Hungarian comparatists." Al. Dima and Ovidiu Papadima, *Istoria* şi *teoria comparatismului* în *România* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1972). German-language scholarship has followed in the footsteps of Horst Fassel, ed., *Hugo Meltzl und die the Anfänge der Komparatistik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Ferlag, 2005). Contributions in French include Árpád Berczik, "Lés débuts hongrois de l'histoire littéraire comparée," *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, no. 2 (1959): 215–249.

9. Haun Saussy, "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2006), 3–42; David Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative Studies," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3, no. 1–2 (2006): 99–112; David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

10. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 28.



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packt es und man wundert sich wohl gar, wie einem diese „Gedanken" nicht selbst gekommen sind; Jeder scheint es ebenfalls haben machen zu können, nachdem — es da ist. —

Leipzig. *Ig. Em. Wessely.*

(Forts. folgt)

VORLÄUFIGE AUFGABEN DER VERGLEICHENDEN LITTERATUR.

Da von sprachwissenschaftlicher Seite unser polyglottes Organ zugleich für ein Organ der Sprachwissenschaft angesehen worden ist, so dürfte nicht überflüssig sein, nochmals eine kurze Erörterung der Aufgaben unseres Blattes zu geben, das, auf diesem Gebiete ohnehin die allererste Erscheinung, ausser Stande ist auf Errungenschaften von Vorarbeitern und sonstige bequeme Vortheile sich zu stützen oder zu berufen.

Unsere *Vergleichende Litteratur*, für welche bereits die Deutschen, Franzosen und Italiener u. zwar unseres Wissens bislang blos diese 3 Nationen, ihren recipierten stehenden Terminus haben, ist gleichwohl durchaus keine fertige Wissenschaft, ja sie ist noch sehr, sehr weit davon entfernt eine solche zu sein. Einem Organ dieser erst langsam entstehenden Zukunftswissenschaft wird daher nicht sowohl die Aufgabe zufallen, das vorhandene, (trotz seiner riesigen Masse noch immer nicht zureichende) Material bereits endgiltig zu vergleichen, als vielmehr dasselbe von allen Seiten zu ergänzen, zugleich intensiv zu steigern; u. zwar auf directem, wie indirectem Wege. Daher muss ein Organ wie das unsrige zugleich ein Organ für *Übersetzungskunst* und Goethe'sche *Weltlitteratur* sein, (letzteres ein Terminus, welchen die deutschen Litterarhistoriker, namentlich Gervinus, gründlich missverstanden haben.) Bei der engen Verschwisterung von Litterarur und Sprache, welche letztere eigentlich nur die Dienerin der ersteren ist, ohne welche die Dienerin nicht nur keine Selbstständigkeit, sondern überhaupt keine Existenz besitzt, darf es nicht Wunder nehmen, wenn hie u. da, auch sprachwissenschaftliche Fragen namentlich wo sie exotische Völker betreffen, berührt, wenn auch selbstverständlich nicht methodisch erörtert werden. In ähnlicher Weise berührt sich die vergleichende Litteratur auch mit der Philosophie, Aesthetik, ja Etimologie u.

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Anthropologie überhaupt. Ohne ethnologische Erörterungen sind z. B. entlegene Litteraturen tiefer gar nicht zu verstehen.*)

Zu diesen Aufgaben kommt endlich noch die längst entbehrte u. nicht mehr aufschiebbare *Reform der Litteraturgeschichtsschreibung*, welche nur vermittelst der ausgedehntesten Durchführung des *Prinzips der Vergleichung* möglich ist. Dass unsere moderne Litteraturgeschichte, wie sie heutzutage allenthalben gehandhabt wird, nur eine *ancilla historiae politicae*, oder gar *ancilla nationis*, besten Falls *ancilla philologiae* ist (in der modernen Bedeutung des letzteren Wortes,) das weiss jeder vorurteilsfreie Mann der Wissenschaft. Geht man doch so weit bei Einteilung der Litteraturepochen die politischen Ereignisse, mitunter Todesjahre von — Königen, zu Grunde zu legen! — Selbst die ersten und berühmtesten Darstellungen der Litteraturgeschichte sämmtlicher Zungen sind aus diesen und ähnlichen Ursachen dem reiferen Geschmack total ungenissbar; mithin für wirklich wissenschaftliche (also weder politisierende, noch philologisierende etc. Zwecke) ganz unbrauchbar. Hier kann nun blos die ausgibige Bearbeitung unserer vergleichenden Fächer, namentlich auch der Übersetzungskunst die vielfachen Vorurteile allmählig zerstreuen. Es sei uns gestattet von zahllosen Vorurteilen, beispielweise der modernen deutschen Litteraturgeschichtsschreibung blos Eines hier anzuführen. In Koberstein's sonst mit Recht hochangesehenem Riesenwerke (5. Aufl. in der Bearbeitung des gründlichen *Bartsch* Leipzig 1872. I. Bd. S. 218. Anm. 7) wird des Langen und Breiten erörtert: ob das Tage- und Wächterlied von Wolfram von Eschenbach oder von Prywalen erfunden sei; schliesslich stimmt der Verf.

*) Die Philosophie, namentlich die moderne inductive Philosophie, ist sogar der natürlichste Ausgangspunkt für die Litteraturgeschichtsschreibung. Sollte man es für möglich halten, dass grade dieser natürlichste Ausgangspunkt bis heute eine terra incognita geblieben ist in der Litteraturgeschichtsschreibung! Die Historie im weitesten Sinne, namentlich die sogenannte Universalgeschichte, die Politik, die Theologie, die Philologie u.s.w. besitzen wohl das Privilegium zur Litteraturgeschichte hinüberzuleiten; aber die auf solider naturwissenschaftlich-ethnologischer Grundlage ruhende Philosophie mag sich von jenen die litterarhistorischen Thesen u. die Car tel est notre plaisir s. vorschreiben lassen . . . . . wie lange noch? . . .



Fig 1. A Work-in-progress: Annotated manuscript of *Acta Comparationis*.

Fig. 2 Co-editorship across two generations: Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai in a rare official photo of the editorial team. Image courtesy of the Petőfi Literary Museum, Budapest (PIM F3101). Photographer: Ferenc Veress.

institutional reality in many classrooms). Scholars wanted to resuscitate a new, always-already global Comparative Literature. *Acta Comparationis*—and especially the name of one of its editors, Hugo Meltzl—has been invoked in the service of this narrative.[11] Embedded in this exercise is an account of *Acta Comparationis* as tied to small languages and small literatures, if not the epitome of the minor/ultraminor. That Meltzl's journal emerged in Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg, within the Austro-Hungarian empire and its heated debate about languages and the rights of "nationalities," was conveniently left aside, minimized, or sometimes misunderstood.[12] Meltzl-style polyglottism became the foundation for a new origin story of a now-global discipline.[13]

In the following pages, you will read different accounts of *Acta Comparationis*—anchored in an expanded archive and cultural memory. The renewal of scholarly thinking about the journal—as an institution of global early comparatism—can only occur through an expansion of the narrow and distorted set of texts currently used in accounts of the journal. The large majority of existing accounts focus on a handful of texts. A translation into English of two programmatic texts written by Meltzl (originally published in May 1877 and October 1877), appeared in *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*.[14] The same texts were republished in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*.[15] Angus Nicholls recently translated the third programmatic text in this series (originally published in February 1878). Nicholls shows how the long omission of the concept of decaglottism from the critical conversation had skewed it in consequential ways.[16] We argue that the journal can only remain an inspiring resource for contemporary comparatists if we move beyond the programmatic texts currently in circulation and engage a larger and more complex archive.

The essays in this Special Issue, therefore, consider all issues of the journal, as well as texts adjacent to it, including

11. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline."

12. For this argument, see Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022); Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizarea modernului. Transilvania la răscrucea imperiilor*, translated by Ciprian Șiulea (Sibiu: ULBS, 2024).

13. We have decided to spell *polyglottism* in this Special Issue in a form close to its original *Polyglottismus*, in order to distinguish the concept from other modes of multilingualism.

14. Hans-Joachim Schultz and Phillip H. Rhein, eds. *Comparative Literature: The Early Years* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1973).

15. David Damrosch, Mbongiseni Buthelezi, and Natalie Melas, eds., *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

16. Angus Nicholls, "Three Translations from the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*," *Comparative Literature* 76, no. 3 (2024): 285–293; Angus Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology in the Early Years of Comparative Literature: The *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*," *Comparative Literature* 76, no. 3 (2024): 294–335.

the foundational *Fontes* book series published by *Acta Comparationis* editors (thirty-three publications based on articles in *Acta Comparationis*).[17] We consider additional programmatic writings published in the journal, as well as its comparatist practice, especially through its translation projects. We consider the work of collaborators, in the journal and outside it, to be part of this archive. We take the larger cultural geography of nineteenth-century Transylvania and the region (the Habsburg empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire, Romania) as the matrix from which the journal emerged. We place texts in the journal in relation to other comparatists in the region—theorists and writers alike. Finally, we consider an archive of both textual links and absences, eloquent silences—questions the journal and its editors could have engaged with but did not, or not thoroughly.

How to Read a Journal

It has been common for *Acta Comparationis* to be treated as a unified medium, with a cohesive theoretical stance expressed consistently, and with one of its founders, Meltzl, as its spokesperson. Critics often searched for—and unsurprisingly did not find—the outlines of a unified, robust comparatist approach in the journal, perhaps a counterpoint to the strong presuppositions characteristic of nineteenth-century literary nationalisms.[18] From its inception, however, under the direction of Meltzl and Brassai, the journal defined itself as the "science of the future": an open, exploratory medium that emphasized flexibility. As an experimental journal, it oscillated between theory and practice; on the one hand, articulating normative theoretical positions, while, on the other, searching for practical solutions to the dilemmas of the newly founded discipline. The theoretical and the practical projects of the journal were often in tension.

Our Special Issue frames the journal as an unstable object of study. The editors recruited contributors and collaborators from a broad range of backgrounds—locally, regionally and around the world. Their voices coalesce as a complex soundscape of heterogeneous, often contradictory positions. Most important to its self-contradiction, the journal accommodated imperial/anti-imperial, nationalist/anti-nationalist, capitalist/anti-capitalist perspectives. Its editors belonged to two generations of scholars and public intellectuals, with vastly different life and career trajectories; in itself, their co-editorship marked a split in the journal's project.[19] There are multiple versions of texts published in the journal, which were often revised for publication in book form in the Fontes series.[20] Nor is the journal a stable object of study over time; its final issues differ significantly from the early ones, even from the perspective of its editors, with Brassai stepping down from his editorial role in 1884. Comparative religion becomes a more central preoccupation in the last issues of the journal. Instability and self-contradiction are themselves symptoms of a historical period that accommodated multiplicity and contradiction. The essays in this Special Issue thus aim to retain and critically frame *Acta*'s challenging instability and slipperiness as an object of study.

How does one read a journal? The sociology of literature teaches us that a range of paratexts become crucial as framing devices. First come the titles of the journal: the switch, in 1879, from the Hungarian title (Összehasonlító *Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*) to the Latin (*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*), reflecting a shift in perspective.[21] The listing of the title in ten languages and the fonts used for these languages are highly consequential. So is the manner of presentation of the

17. Titles in the Fontes series include: Steingrímur Thorsteinsson, *Isländische Volkslieder: Proben einer grösseren Sammlung Inedita* (Kolozsvár, Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Litteratur, J. Stein, 1879); Dora d'Istria, *La poésie des persans sous les Khadjars* (Kolozsvár: Journal de littérature comparée, J. Stein, 1878); Lomniczi A. K., *A műfordítás alapelvei Petőfire való tekintettel* (Kolozsvár: J. Stein, 1879); Sámuel Brassai, *Aesthetische Kritik: Als Beitrag zur Theorie der Horaz-Übersetzungskunst* (Klausenburg: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum, J. Stein, 1879); Wilhelm Berger, *Beiträge zur Armenischen Folklore* (Kolozsvár and London: Trübner et co., 1879); Hugo von Meltzl, *Jile Romane: Volkslieder der transylvanisch-ungarischen Zigeuner* (Klausenburg: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Litteratur, J. Stein, 1878); Svend Grundtvig, *En märkelig vise om de söfarne mänd: An Old Danish Ballad* (Kolozsvár: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum, J. Stein, 1880); Henrik Wlislocki, *Hapaxlegomena az Atlamálban* (Kolozsvár: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum, J. Stein, 1879); Hugo von Meltzl, *Goethes Weltliteratur: Neun Thesen zur semisaecularfeier des Todes Goethes* (Kolozsvár and London: Trübner et co., 1883).

18. Theo D'haen's *A History of World Literature* runs this risk. The analysis is based on Meltzl's programmatic texts and relies on a limited secondary literature. While framing Damrosch and Saussy's hyperbolizing rediscovery of the journal as an origin story of comparative literature, D'haen offers a cursory account of Transylvania's asymmetric multilingualism and risks reproducing the perception of Meltzl's marginality ("one has to admit that Koch was probably simply more in tune with the way comparative literature in Europe was developing than Meltzl"). Theo D'haen, *A History of World Literature* (London: Routledge, 2024), 59.

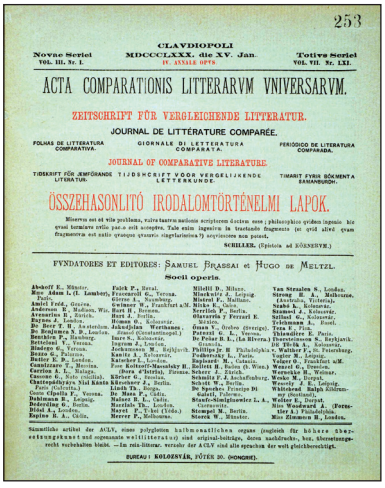
19. Meltzl translated and re-published some of Brassai's work, in an effort to introduce him to a new generation of readers. An innovator in what would become comparative linguistics and translation theory, as well as the initiator of several earlier journals, Brassai lent legitimacy to Meltzl's early initiatives. This was particularly significant when, starting in 1872, with the founding of the university in Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg, Meltzl established an unconventional Germanic Studies department. On Brassai's neglect within the critical literature on *Acta Comparationis*, see Levente T. Szabó, "À la recherche… de l'editeur perdu: Sámuel Brassai and the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies," in *Storia, Identita`e Canoni Letterari*, ed. Ioana Both, Ayşe Saraçgil, and Angela Tarantino (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2013), 177–188.

20. See, for example, the difference between the framing of *Black Wodas* in the journal and as a book; Hugo Meltzl, *The Black Wodas: An Inedited Gipsy Ballad* (Kolozsvár: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum, J. Stein, 1879).

21. Latin remained the language of science and politics in the region until mid-nineteenth century. Gábor Almási and Lav Šubarić, eds., "Introduction," in *Latin at the Crossroads of Identity: The Evolution of Linguistic Nationalism in the Kingdom of Hungary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

names of the two editors.[22] Crucial is the makeup and placement of the editorial board, which foregrounds collaboration and sometimes co-authorship; it includes many collaborators and it eloquently excludes others. The board becomes a particularly significant paratextual indicator as the work of board members/contributors is included in the Fontes series—a space for revision, reframing and sometimes republishing of key articles from the journal. Then, there is a motto, which changes authors and languages. And there is a place of publication, which changes from Kolozsvár, sometimes spelled in French, to London. Finally, the journal consists of various sections, each with its weight within the journal's theory/practice dynamic: the *Symmikta* (*Varia*) heading hosts translations of modern and folk poetry from around the world (usually in German or Hungarian); the *Petite Revue Polyglotte* (*Little Polyglot Magazine*) registers the latest cultural events from different national literatures; *Irrodalmi Szemle* (*Literary Review*) places special focus on books informed by comparative practices. Under the *Correspondence* heading, Meltzl initiates dialogues with fellow scholars or weighs the echoes of *Acta Comparationis* around the world. The *Bibliography* heading lists the latest critical or comparative production. A section situated at the core of *Acta Comparationis*'s programme is *Petőfiana*, through which Meltzl tries to install Sándor Petőfi as a world literature poet by extensive translation of his lyric in both "major" and "minor" languages.

Once one frames the journal through a reading of these paratexts, one zooms in and out of various texts within the journal—like Dora d'Istria's contributions. One might cross-pollinate this reading with an echo or a counterpoint in another text in the journal—like the expanded network of women collaborators traced by Levente T. Szabó in his contribution to this Special Issue. Or Dora d'Istria's reflections on Romani women, which can be placed in dialogue with Luiza Medeleanu's contribution. Or, indeed, an eloquent silence in the journal—like the history of the


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ACTA COMPARATIONIS LITTERARVM VNIVERSARVM.

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR VERGLEICHENDE LITTERATUR.

JOURNAL DE LITTÉRATURE COMPARÉE.

FOLHAS DE LITTERATURA COMPARATIVA. GIORNALE DI LETTERATURA COMPARATA. PERIÓDICO DE LITTERATURA COMPARADA.

JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE.

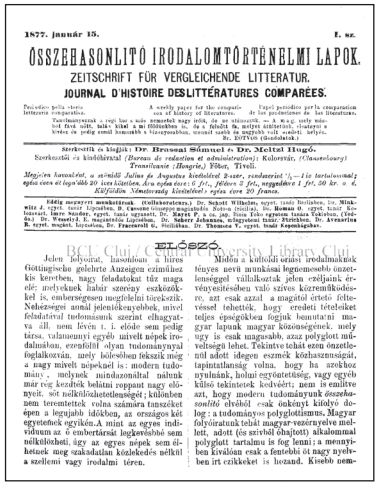
TIDSKRIFT FÖR JEMFÖRANDE LITTERATUR. TIJDSCHRIFT VOOR VERGELIJKENDE LETTERKUNDE. TIMARIT FYRIR SÖKMENTA SAMANBURÐAR.

ÖSSZEHASONLITÓ IRODALOMTÖRTÉNELMI LAPOK.

SCHILLER. (Epistola ad KÖRNERVM.)

FVNDATORES ET EDITORES: SAMVEL BRASSAI et HVGO DE MELTZL.

Socii operis.


1877. január 15. I. sz.

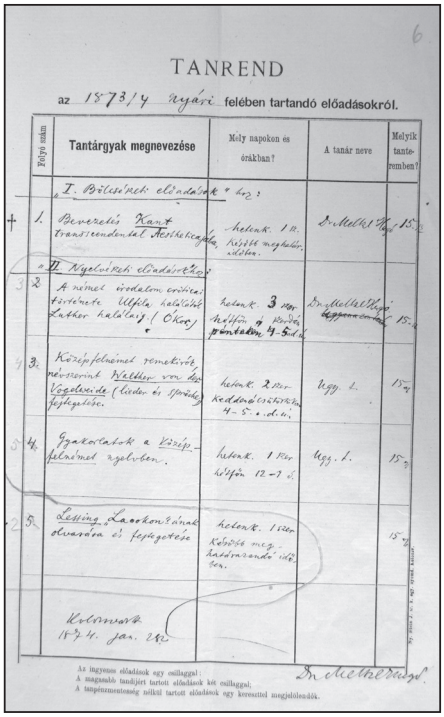
ÖSSZEHASONLITÓ IRODALOMTÖRTÉNELMI LAPOK.

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR VERGLEICHENDE LITTERATUR.

JOURNAL D'HISTOIRE DES LITTÉRATURES COMPARÉES.

Szerkesztik és kiadják: Dr. Brassai Sámuel és Dr. Meltzl Hugó.

ELŐSZÓ.


TANREND

az 1873/4 tanévi felében tartandó előadásokról.

Folyó szám	Tantárgyak megnevezése	Mely napokon és órákban?	A tanár neve	Melyik tantermében?
	I. Bölcsészeti előadások.			
1.	Bevezetés Kant transcendentál-filozófiájába.	heteink. 1 h. Késő megbeszélés szerint.	Dr. Meltzl Hugó	15
	II. Nyelvtudományi előadások.			
2.	A német irodalom története Lessingtől Goethe haláláig. (Okay)	heteink. 3 h. Kedden, Pénteken, Szombaton.	Dr. Meltzl Hugó	15
3.	Középfelnémet remekírók, nevezetesen Walther von der Vogelweide (Lieder- és Spruchdichter).	heteink. 2 h. Kedden és Szombaton 4–5. d. u.	Ugy. I.	15
4.	Gyakorlatok a középfelnémet nyelvben.	heteink. 1 h. Hétfőn 12–1 d.	Ugy. I.	15
5.	Lessing Laokoon-jának olvasása és fejtegetése	heteink. 1 h. Később meg-határozandó idő-ben.		15
	Különvál. 1874. jan. 24.			

Az ingyenes előadások egy csillaggal!
A magasabb tandijjal tartott előadások két csillaggal.
A tanpénzmentesség nélkül tartott előadások egy keresztvel megjelölvetnek.

Dr. Meltzl Hugó

Fig. 3-4. Paratexts: The title of the journal appeared in ten languages and changed over time.

Fig. 5 The archive is fragmented. Image from the rediscovered archives of the University of Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg: Meltzl's courses on Icelandic literature.

Transylvanian School (Şcoala Ardeleană) traced by Mihaela Ursa's article.

Across the journal's instability, however, the articles in this Special Issue collectively identify five interrelated structural dimensions. First is its production within an **empire**, the Hungarian side of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The journal carries complex traces of this production, in need of elaboration both in relation to the new historiography of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the comparative study of global empires. Second is a particular form of East European **Occidentalism**, produced within an inter-imperial field on the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian empire. This Occidentalism interlocks with varieties of Eurocentrism in the emergence of comparatism—and contestations thereof. Third is the journal's selective and asymmetric **multilingualism**. This multilingualism needs to be historicized, both as a problem and a normative ideal, within Transylvania, Hungary, the Austro-Hungarian empire. It, too, feeds into other modes of selective multilingualism in the global emergence of comparatism. Fourth is the interdisciplinary crosspollination of early literary comparatism performed by the journal with anthropology and a particular practice of

22. Meltzl signed his name Hugo von Meltzl, Hugo Meltzl von Lomnitz, Hugo de Meltzl, or Hugo Meltzl. On the frontispiece of the first issue of the journal, Brassai and Meltzl listed their family name first, following the Hungarian convention.

ethnography, often with extractivist dimensions, which results in the focus on **oral literatures**. These oral traditions are framed as folklore, within an evolutionist understanding of literary development from primitive to complex forms. Fifth is the journal's **collaborative** platform. The material infrastructure on which the journal engages with "the world" is that of collaboration, especially through correspondence.

Looking Back

Let us begin with a few observations on what we do *not* take to be our stakes. The project here is not primarily philological. It is, of course, *also* philological, in that we hope to offer more granular analyses—an attentive mode of reading a journal *as* a journal. We reproduce and translate additional programmatic texts in this Special Issue and we aim to offer patient, inquisitive, in-depth, archive-driven readings of the journal and its conditions of production. With a few notable exceptions, not enough archival research has been done on this material. Without such research, we risk pointing to its Eurocentrism without sufficiently exploring its collaborators around the world. We risk pointing to the journal's insufficient attention to local Transylvanian communities without a thorough analysis of its Romanian, Romani, Armenian, and Jewish contributors. We risk critiquing its politics without a nuanced account of the journal's political intervention in its contemporaneity. To be sure, archival research is not always easy. Archival material related to *Acta Comparationis* is multilingual, fragmented and spread across multiple archives (Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, Szeged, Budapest, Vienna). There are untapped documents in archives that do not offer easy access to researchers.

Likewise, our stakes are emphatically not hagiographical. Against the tendency to mythologize Meltzl, in particular, we collectively demonstrate that, while there many things to admire and study, there are no heroes here, just complex, often messy histories. Sometimes, one might pick up on a promising term—polyglottism has been a favorite. Sometimes, one might return to one of the principles that still anchors the pedagogy of comparative literature, especially the idea that "true comparison" is possible only when "we have before us the objects of our comparison in their original form."[23] We are still using this sentence when we advocate for the funding of language programs, or for the value added of a degree in comparative literature. Or, sometimes, one might pick up on a certain collaboration and thus frame the extensive network of collaborators and the heterogeneity of relation within it. Alongside Meltzl's collaboration with Dora d'Istria, the focus of this Introduction, one can point to the work of other collaborators of the journal. Thimi Mitko, for example, saw *Acta Comparationis* as a tool to bring the ultra-minor Albanian community into focus, place it on the international map, and lay the foundation for its national literature. In contradistinction, the journal's editors viewed the Albanian epic texts Mitko contributed as an opportunity to foreground a lesser-documented literary culture. In turn, the future Nobel laureate Frédéric Mistral had another type of relationship with *Acta Comparationis*; he saw it as a forum in which to advocate for Provençal regionalism in opposition to a monolithic French nation-building project (Mistral's *Provençal-French Dictionary* held a prominent place on Brassai's bookshelf). Alternatively, one might point to Meltzl's publication of some of the only surviving texts in the Romani language from the nineteenth century, for which he commissioned the first translations into English and other languages. One of the founders of ethnographically-grounded Romani studies, Heinrich Wlislocki, stands out as a key collaborator of *Acta Comparationis*.[24]

Alongside the journal's multilingual ideal and its collaborative reach, these are fascinating facets of early comparatism. They are worthy of attention, but not in a hagiographic mode. Indeed, as soon as one is tempted to project Meltzl as the agent behind the publication of Romani-language texts, one needs to draw out their complex co-authorship—both with the Roma people who shared them and the translators with whom he collaborated. Instead of a tacit hagiography, then, the desire to retrace alternative genealogies of comparatism pertains to an effort to expose the historical conditions that allowed not only for the emergence of comparatism but for the performative declaration and early theorization of its emergence. What institutions, locations, positionalities authorize what Shaden Tageldin calls "acts of origination"?[25] In what situations are such acts occluded? How might they become legible again and to whom? What facilitates their belated "recuperation"? What are the politics of such recuperation? In other words, as we conceive them, the stakes we pursue in this Special Issue pertain to the politics of knowledge production *about* comparatism at the global scale. They concomitantly pertain to the sociology of comparatist institutions, where *Acta Comparationis*, as the first journal of Comparative Literature, is one early institution.

A World of Collaborators

If one of the central concepts theorized by the journal is "world literature," what concept of "world" did *Acta Comparationis*

23. "*vergleichenden Objecte in möglichst unverfälschtem Zustande vor uns haben.*" Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichen den Litteratur," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 1, no. 9 (1877): 308; Hugo Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*, ed. David Damrosch, Mbongiseni Buthelezi, and Natalie Melas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44.

24. Wlislocki envisioned an anthropological foundation for comparative studies, adopting a strongly anti-capitalist perspective that rejected the utilitarian application of the sciences and the concept of ethnic hierarchies. He lived for an extended period in a Romani community.

25. Shaden M. Tageldin, "One Comparative Literature? 'Birth' of a Discipline in French-Egyptian Translation, 1810–1834," *Comparative Literature Studies* 47, no. 4 (2010): 417–445.

imagine? The answer to this question usually points to Meltzl's revision of Goethe's concept. In this framework, world literature is tied to translation. The editors of *Acta Comparationis* indeed commissioned a range of translations; they fantasized about an *Encyclopedia of the Poetry of the World*.[26] Central was a project of translating Petőfi Sándor's work into more than thirty languages. Embedded in this exercise was an awareness that works of literature that otherwise meet the criteria for inclusion in world literature (a certain classicism as a category of value) often do not find themselves in it. They can enter it, however, if assisted by budding institutions like *Acta Comparationis*. Embedded in it was, likewise, a stadial understanding of world literature, anchored in the premise that literatures develop from simple forms (folklore) to complex forms (poetry, the novel).[27] Finally, embedded in it was a critique of a capitalist understanding of literary circulation, which risked the flattening of the literary field into uniformity.[28]

Another answer to the question "What is a world?" points to the infrastructure of collaboration that sustained *Acta Comparationis*. The network of collaborators the editors assembled created its own "world." This world was far reaching and highly heterogeneous. In material terms, it was anchored in the postal system. Like Goethe, Meltzl understood that the scholar/editor need not leave Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg in order to communicate with writers, scholars and translators from around the world. The World Postal Union was founded in Bern in 1874; it created a communication infrastructure for world literature.[29] Meltzl engaged in a complex mode of correspondence with his collaborators. He sent them copies of *Acta Comparationis* and books published in the Fontes series. In return, they sent him contributions to the journal and informed him about comparatist projects around the world. Through this extensive correspondence, *Acta Comparationis* thus positioned itself as a hub, constellating comparative projects originating from vastly different languages, cultures, and assumptions.

A few of Meltzl's correspondents/collaborators were European scholars in exile: Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari was a Spanish scholar in Mexico; Paul Mayet was a German scholar in Japan; Herbert Augustus Strong was a British scholar in Australia. Olavarría y Ferrari shared his knowledge of Mexican theater. Mayet sent Meltzl Japanese folklore. Strong sent Australian indigenous poetry. If these are some of the first comparatists, their comparatism developed on an infrastructure of higher education that was already increasingly global at the end of the nineteenth century. This educational infrastructure mapped itself on an existing colonial infrastructure. In other words, the exilic imaginary of Comparative Literature does not originate with scholars like Eric Auerbach during and in the aftermath of WWII, as Emily Apter has argued.[30] It was already at work in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its positioning within the Austro-Hungarian empire, as well as its collaborations, reveal *Acta Comparationis* as always already entangled with coloniality.

A Relational History of Comparatism

An attentive, historical engagement with *Acta Comparationis* entails a revaluation of its relationship with the local. This includes the journal's conditions of production in Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg and within the institutional parameters of the Hungarian Royal University, later named after the Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz Joseph.[31] The first journal of Comparative Literature emerged out of a deeply comparative local field. At least six languages were spoken in Transylvania in the second half of the nineteenth century: Romanian, Hungarian, German, Romani, Yiddish, Armenian. As one produces this list, as a list, one is immediately reminded of the messiness of this linguistic landscape, the multiplicity and asymmetry of multilingualism, its entanglements with race, ethnicity, gender and religion. Alongside this complex local multilingualism, we need to assess the position of individual contributors, texts, and contexts. And then weigh the particular way this "multilingual local" in Francesca Orsini's vocabulary, was entangled with "the world." Importantly, *Acta Comparationis* not only reflected a world; it created micro-worlds through its connections with global institutions and individual contributors.

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26. "Encyclopaedia of the Poetry of the World," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 2, no. 9 (1879): 148.

27. Joep Leerssen, *Comparative Literature in Britain: National Identities, Transnational Dynamics 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Legenda: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2019); Nicholls, "Aesthetics and Anthropology in the Early Years of Comparative Literature."

28. Hugo de Meltzl, "La réforme littéraire en Europe," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, 1878. Meltzl anticipated, on the one hand, concerns about the increased uniformity of the literary field, later expressed by Erich Auerbach; and the distinction between a spatially-anchored globalizing concept of world literature and its endurance as a normative ideal, later expressed by Pheng Cheah. Erich Auerbach, "Philology of World Literature," in *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2016); Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

29. On literature and the post, see Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

30. Emily Apter, "Comparative Exile: Competing Margins in the History of Comparative Literature," in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 86–96 ; Emily Apter, "Global *Translatio*: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933," in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 76–109.

31. Meltzl served as chair of the German Literature Department, dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, and rector of the university. Relevant institutional documents pertaining to *Acta Comparationis* have been published by Levente T. Szabó and Márta Zabán in *Dokumentumok a kolozsvári Bölcsészet-, Nyelv- és Történettudományi Kar Történetéhez (1872–1892)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012).

In this Special Issue, we resist the exceptionality attached to the rhetoric of "the first."[32] The re-evaluation of *Acta Comparationis* must occur in conjunction with other narratives about the beginning of comparatism, in other parts of the world.[33] We place our Special Issue within a *relational* history of comparatism, itself framed in world history.[34] From this perspective, *Acta Comparationis* constitutes *one* node in the emergence of comparatism globally.[35] It is, however, in *relation* to other such nodes—in this Special Issue, we draw out a few such modes of relation. *Acta Comparationis*, then, has indeed announced a global discipline, but not in the redemptive sense David Damrosch attributes to it.[36] Rather, like other early comparatisms around the world, the journal inaugurated a global discipline because it was entangled with and responded in a range of ways to colonial and inter-imperial pressures.

Thus positioned, we ask a series of questions on the margins of *Acta Comparationis*: What working definition of literature and the literary field is at work in the journal? How does the distinction between folklore and "world literature" shape this definition? What is the relation between "world literature" and a discourse of Occidentalism as seen from "Oriental Europe"? What role does the strategic use of classicism play in the definition of "world literature" and decaglottism? What impact does the invocation of the Latin alphabet as an infrastructure for "world literature" have on the emerging discipline? What are its politics of translation (in many cases of "indirect translation," when texts are not translated from the original but from other languages, therefore carrying traces of multiple languages)? What is the relation between the conceptual beginnings and institutional beginnings of comparatism (between Goethean "world literature" and Meltzl's journal; or between *Acta Comparationis* and the politics of the university in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg)?

The Special Issue

Collectively, the essays in this Special Issue bring a series of methodological frameworks to bear on the journal—the sociology of literature; postcolonial studies; world-systems analysis and decolonial theory; Jewish studies; Romani studies; mobility studies; critical studies of nationalism; linguistics. While we strive to make a coherent intervention, we value the difference each of these perspectives brings; we do not aim to smooth over differences.

Each in their own way, the three articles in the first section, "A History of the Present: Comparative Literature and Its Pasts," raise the question of why and how we revisit *Acta Comparationis* today. Christian Moraru's "*Ansatzpunkt* Transylvania: Worldbuilding Method and Method-Building World in the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* Project" makes a forceful case for reading the journal in a purposefully presentist key: a project echoing our time's comparatist challenges. Moraru proposes Transylvania as an *Ansatzpunkt* for comparatism, in the sense Auerbach gave to the term, an entry point or handle onto a discursive field. The essay develops the argument along ten axes pertaining to Transylvanian comparatism: proper names; modes of traffic (*Verkehr*); multilingualism; form and method; nationalisms and other exclusions; capitalism and its dues; empires and inter-imperiality; flat ontologies; non-human agents; scales. Although each comes with risks, particularly in Transylvania, *Acta Comparationis*, Moraru argues, is not defined by these risks; as such, it continues to prefigure a comparatism to come.

The article written by Alex Goldiș, "Meltzl and World Literature Studies: A Case of Mirrored Colonialism," traces the narrative embedded in Saussy's and Damrosch's recuperation of Hugo Meltzl as an inaugural figure for the discipline of Comparative Literature, on account of *Acta Comparationis*'s non-Western, polyglot credentials. Goldiș firmly places the journal within the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its afterlives. Most importantly, polyglottism, one of the two principles of the discipline inaugurated by *Acta Comparationis*, was the policy of the empire and materialized in its bureaucratic infrastructure. Goldiș emphasizes that this polyglottism was both an ideal and an unevenly implemented practice—in the journal and in the broader empire alike. Mirrored colonialism is our inheritance in Comparative Literature, whereby the discipline continues to obscure subaltern literary traditions, if *Acta Comparationis* is not understood as a product embedded in the political project of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

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32. On the rhetoric of the first, see Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

33. The literature on the beginnings of comparatism in various parts of the world is extensive: Harry Levin, "Two Romanisten in America: Spitzer and Auerbach," in *Grounds for Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 110–130; Leerssen, *Comparative Literature in Britain*; Apter, "Comparative Exile;" Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures*, Tageldin, "One Comparative Literature?;" Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Nergis Ertürk, "Baku, Literary Common," The State of the Discipline Report, accessed May 4, 2023, https://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/baku-literary-common; Bhavya Tiwari, "Rabindranath Tagore's Comparative World Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London: Routledge, 2011), 41–48; Shu-mei Shih, "Decolonizing US Comparative Literature: The 2022 ACLA Presidential Address," *Comparative Literature* 75, no. 3 (2023): 237–265; Waïl S. Hassan, "Geopolitics of Comparison: World Literature Avant La Lettre," *Comparative Literature* 73, no. 3 (2021): 255–269.

34. Shu-mei Shih, "Comparison as Relation," in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

35. Anca Parvulescu, "Histories of Comparative Literature: The Last Decade," in *Worlds of Comparative Literature: The ACLA State of the Discipline Report*, ed. Waïl S. Hassan and Shu-mei Shih (New York: Fordham University Press, 2026).

36. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline."

Finally, Manuela Boatcă's contribution to this section, "Subjects, Disavowed: Romani Europeans and the Challenge of Unthinkable Histories," places *Acta Comparationis*, especially its texts in Romani and about Romani literary traditions, within the contemporary politics of memory at the European scale. Boatcă argues that, in order for Europe to continue to identify with the promise of the Enlightenment, modernity and Christianity, it actively forgets the history of Roma enslavement in the European East. Such interested forgetting positions the Roma as the Other of the European and, simultaneously, East Europe as one of Europe's Others. Boatcă shows that, in framing Romani texts as folk literature, *Acta Comparationis* is complicit in this dynamic. Boatcă argues that *Acta*'s ambivalent role with respect to Romani knowledge production is an instance of Occidentalist construction of Europeanness. This Occidentalism travels the arc between the late nineteenth century and today's politics of memory at the European scale.

The archive thought to pertain to *Acta Comparationis* has been painfully limited. The four articles in the second section, "Occluded Voices and Archival Silences," identify and frame different nodes of archival silence. Levente T. Szabó's "Unraveled and Rewoven Ties: Women (Proto)comparatists in the Networks of the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies" challenges the traditional interpretation of *Acta Comparationis* as solely linked to Meltzl, proposing instead a network-centric perspective. It argues that the journal's professional network—particularly the contributions of women comparatists—provides a richer understanding of its contributions to global comparative literature and opens new avenues for research. Historically overlooked, women played pivotal roles in shaping the journal's intellectual framework, even though the discipline rarely acknowledged female comparatists in the nineteenth century. Figures such as Dora d'Istria, Lucy Lloyd, Hermine von Meltzl, Juliette Adam, Teréz Tini, Käthe Freiligrath-Kroeker, Helen Zimmern, Aubertine Woodward, and Selene A. exemplify the transformative influence of women in forging connections across cultures, languages, and literary traditions. These contributions demonstrate that *Acta Comparationis* functioned as a "loose network," characterized by weak ties that connected diverse collaborators and fostered innovative ideas.

Maria Luiza Medeleanu's article, "Absence and Presence of Rromani Voices in *Acta Comparationis*: Early Roma Comparatists," historicizes the Romani-language texts for which the journal has been celebrated in recent years. Medeleanu places the Romani oral literature collected, published and translated by the editors and contributors to *Acta Comparationis* within the broader framework of nineteenth-century Gypsylorism. A racialized discourse, Gypsylorism included figures like Heinrich Grellmann and George Borrow, but also Mihail Kogălniceanu. The work in Romani folklore Meltzl undertook, alongside his collaborators in this endeavor, especially Heinrich von Wlislocki and Antal Herrmann, tapped into this broad intellectual tradition. The Roma were an exotic object of study in *Acta Comparationis*, while Romani collaborators (poets, researchers and translators) were not interpellated as producers of knowledge and theory. Medeleanu frames the long-term effects of the focus on orality and the figure of the "authentic Roma" on Romani literature.

Many texts published in *Acta Comparationis* can be grouped under the umbrella of "comparative folklore," a thriving comparatist subfield in late nineteenth century. Maria Mădălina Irimia's article, "Moses Schwarzfeld: Between Jewish Studies and Literary Comparatism," builds an arc of relation between *Acta Comparationis* and comparative work on Jewish folklore in Romania. Given the prominence of Jewish culture in late nineteenth century Transylvania, as well as complex contemporary debates about Jewish multilingualism, its limited representation in *Acta* is surprising. Irimia draws out the inherently comparatist dimension of Jewish folklore studies during *Acta Comparationis*'s years of publication, by focusing on the work of Moses Schwarzfeld, who theorized the collection of Jewish folklore and folklore about Jews in Romania. Irimia shows how the methods developed at this time in Jewish studies contributed to the development of early comparatism and helped advocate for the rights of Jewish people in a profoundly anti-Semitic environment.

Emanuel Modoc's contribution to the Special Issue, "Nationalizing Meltzl: Thomas Frühm's Concept of *Weltliteratur*," unearths the immediate reception of *Acta Comparationis* in Transylvania in the generation following Meltzl. The essay frames the work of Thomas Frühm, a Transylvanian Saxon scholar and Meltzl's student. Frühm's work exemplifies a nationalistic reinterpretation of *Weltliteratur*, rooted in German-centric ideals. Frühm's 1932 monograph, *Gedanken* über *Goethes Weltliteratur*, draws heavily on Meltzl's intellectual legacy, including the library and archives he acquired from Meltzl's family. However, Frühm's work reflects the ideological tensions of the early twentieth century, blending a nationalist idealism with declarative cosmopolitanism. By examining the ideological transformations of Meltzl's ideals within the context of early twentieth-century nationalism, Modoc sheds light on the complex interplay between local identity, global literary aspirations, the instrumentalization of *Weltliteratur*, and *Acta Comparationis*. The article makes a forceful case for the Transylvanian reception of the journal to be included in its extended archive and folded into the early history of comparatism.

The following section, "Inter-imperiality, Nationalisms, Polyglottism," gathers four articles that weigh the impact of nationalism on early comparatism, in an inter-imperial, polyglot cultural space like Transylvania. Cosmin Borza's article, "Peripheral Nationalism, Inter-imperial Comparatism: The Case of Grigore Silași," analyses the position of the journal's primary Transylvanian Romanian collaborator, Grigore Silași / Szilasi Gergely. Silași, who contributed as a translator and commentator on the Romanian folk character Ileana Cosânzeana, developed a comparatist yet nationalist intellectual career. In his comparatist work published outside the purview of the journal, Silași protested what he saw as the subaltern

status of the Romanian language in the Austro-Hungarian multilingual field. As a counterpoint, he foregrounded its comparative proximity to Latin, a position it shared with Provençal. The article historicizes the journal's principle of polyglottism within late nineteenth century Transylvania (especially the founding of the Hungarian-language institution, the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg) and frames Silași's comparatism as a form of peripheral nationalism seeking recognition within transnational networks, particularly through Romance-language philology.

Mihaela Ursa's article, "(Anti)Imperial Narration in the Mock-Epic Form: Ioan-Budai Deleanu and the Transylvanian Project," explores the historical, ideological, and inter-imperial entanglements between two influential cultural movements in Transylvania: Școala Ardeleană [Transylvanian School] of the late eighteenth century and *Acta Comparationis*. Despite emerging from the same multicultural and geopolitical context of the Habsburg Empire, Școala Ardeleană's national emancipatory mission and *Acta Comparationis*'s globalist ambitions have never been analyzed in relation. Ursa's comparative analysis of key figures—Ioan Budai-Deleanu and Hugo Meltzl—shows that the two movements, while seemingly antagonistic in their stated aims, often engage in similar inter-imperial strategies of cultural legitimation and resistance. The case study of the article, Budai-Deleanu's mock-epic *Țiganiada* [*The Gypsiad*], is interpreted as a politically charged allegory, built on the equivalence between the subaltern position of Transylvanian Romanians and that of the Roma population. This allegory not only critiques imperial oppression but also reveals Budai-Deleanu's own complicity in reproducing ethnic hierarchies. The article forcefully demonstrates that Școala Ardeleană functions as an important precedent for *Acta* in that both schools of thought advocate for the rights of the excluded while simultaneously excluding others.

Rareș Moldovan's article, "Early Spectra of Comparatism: Meltzl and Maiorescu," investigates the dynamics of comparatism in the writings of two foundational but ideologically divergent figures in the development of Eastern European comparative literature. Moldovan places Meltzl's Kantian-inspired prolegomena for a future polyglot comparative literature emerging from the Austro-Hungarian Empire against Titu Maiorescu's model of literary nationalism shaped by selective foreign reception and stadial evolutionism. Despite epistemic and geopolitical differences, both thinkers' writings display an oftentimes similar doctrine that blends universalist aspirations and nationalist embeddedness, while also revealing the volatile intersections of cultural ideology, literary form, and institutional practice. Through their engagement with conceptual hybridity, disciplinary futurity and tradition rebuilding, Meltzl and Maiorescu foreshadow the way comparative literature engages with theory today. The article suggests that the discipline's future was always already entangled with its spectral past.

Mircea Minică's "Poly- or Decaglottism? On the Hierarchization of Languages in Nineteenth-Century Comparative Linguistics" revisits the linguistic foundations of Hugo Meltzl's manifestoes, foregrounding the tensions between his declared commitment to polyglottism and the restrictive framework of the decaglottism ultimately adopted by the journal. By exploring the work of key figures in linguistics, such as Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Heymann Steinthal, Franz Bopp, and August Schleicher, the article reconstructs the epistemological field in which languages were evaluated—not only morphologically but also in civilizational and political terms. Particular attention is given to how inflectional structures were labeled as signs of intellectual and cultural superiority, establishing the Indo-European family (especially Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin) as normative model. Meltzl's editorial decisions, including the languages selected in the decaglottist canon, reflect this legacy of linguistic hierarchy, even as his discourse simultaneously gestures toward inclusiveness. Ultimately, Minică's study concludes that nineteenth-century comparative literature cannot be fully understood without accounting for the ideological pressures carried by the linguistic theories that informed its foundational principles.

The last section of this volume, "Comparatist Institutions: Mobility, Copyright, Translation," consists of articles on three key concepts in the emerging discipline of Comparative Literature. Mihnea Bâlici's essay, "For a Post-Imperial Discipline: On Dora d'Istria and Hugo Meltzl's Travels," foregrounds mobility as a structuring mechanism of early comparatism. Bâlici traces the mobilities (international education, research travel, elite cosmopolitanism) that functioned as an infrastructure for the development of the comparatist positions of two scholars associated with *Acta Comparationis*: its editor, Hugo Meltzl, and one of its central contributors, Dora d'Istria. The article demonstrates that, long before the "invention" of Comparative Literature in Istanbul, 1933—the narrative about the origins of the discipline put forth by Apter—comparatism was anchored in the transnational mobility of its proponents. A materialist analysis of Meltzl's and Dora d'Istria's travels reveals a tension between their internationalism and their respective fall back onto nationalism.

Letitia Guran's article, "Toward a Polyglot Paradigm of Planetary Translation: Reconsidering the History of Comparative Studies with *Acta Comparationis*," revisits the promise of a democratic concept of comparative literature promised by the discipline's first journal. Acknowledging the interplay between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the journal, Guran amplifies Damrosch's statement that *Acta Comparationis* sought to include languages and literatures neglected by "great-power perspectives." The article builds an arc between the journal's advocacy of translation from small languages and Apter's theory of translation as repair. Guran argues that *Acta Comparationis* carries the promise of surprising epistemological alliances in a comparative literature of the future.

Teona Farmatu's article, "Copyright and the Emergence of Comparative Literature: Between Hugo Meltzl and Victor Hugo," argues that the focus on translation in *Acta Comparationis* needs to be placed in relation to the period's debates on copyright. Farmatu retraces one such debate, which took place at a literary studies congress in Paris. The two sides of the debate were represented by Meltzl and Victor Hugo. Reading Meltzl's neglected essay, "La réforme littéraire en Europe," Farmatu argues that the evolution of copyright law at the end of the nineteenth century was deeply intertwined with a concept of cultural "protectionism" advocated by the editors of *Acta Comparationis*. Farmatu forcefully shows how heated debates about copyright galvanized reflections on the literary market, authorship, translation—and the emergent discipline of comparative literature. Meltzl's position in the theoretical field of the end of the nineteenth century crystalizes anew when seen from his ambivalent position on copyright.

Finally, Shu-mei Shih's afterword draws attention to the comprehensive, collaborative account of the Special Issue's analysis of *Acta Comparationis*. Shih emphasizes, in particular, the dynamic between *humanitas* and *anthropos* at work in the journal, which she places in a broader European context. Building on Sylvia Wynter's theorization of the relation between Man and the less-than-human, which came to ground the humanities and anthropology, respectively, Shih argues that the hierarchy of languages, literatures and races embedded in the journal belongs to a "colonial-cum-ethnographic frame." The specific form of East European Occidentalism attending this dynamic was born out a desire for the East European comparatist to become a subject of knowledge.

In the next volumes of this special issue, we include a dossier, assembled by Levente T. Szabó, with an expanded archive of programmatic texts from *Acta Comparationis*. The dossier consists of translations of these texts into a few languages: Romanian, Hungarian, German and English (depending on its original language). This section's multilingualism is selective and asymmetric—a function of our practical constraints. The short fragment published by Meltzl and Brassai in the original Hungarian as "Bevezetés" is translated by Levente T. Szabó as "Introduction" into English; "Einleitung" into German by Jakabházi Réka; and "Introducere" into Romanian by Anamaria Codău. The original Latin "Lectori Salutem" is translated into Romanian as "Cititorului, salutare!" by Bogdan Harhătă; into German as "Grüße an den Leser!" also by Bogdan Harhătă; and into English as "To the Esteemed Reader" by Levente T. Szabó. The well-known programmatic text written by Meltzl in German, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Literatur" ("Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature"), is translated by Ovio Olariu into Romanian as "Sarcinile preliminare ale literaturii comparate"; the Hungarian translation by Gaál György et al. is revised and supplemented by Levente T. Szabó as "Az összehasonlító irodalom előzetes feladatai." The announcement originally published in English as "Encyclopedia of the Poetry of the World" is translated by Rareș Moldovan into Romanian as "Enciclopedia poeziei lumii"; into German by Jakabházi Réka as "Enzyklopädie der Weltdichtung"; and into Hungarian as "A világ költészetének enciklopédiája," by Levente T. Szabó. The important, but little-known essay by Meltzl, originally published in French, "La réforme littéraire en Europe" is translated by Levente T. Szabó into English as "The Literary Reform in Europe: Some Observations on the Opening of the International Literary Congress in Paris, June 1878"; and into Romanian by Teona Farmatu as "Reforma literară în Europa. Câteva observații cu privire la deschiderea Congresului literar internațional de la Paris în iunie 1878."

In juxtaposition to these programmatic texts, the dossier reproduces two sets of exemplary translations from *Acta Comparationis*, likewise assembled by Levente T. Szabó. The first set of translations consists of the renderings of the poem "Reszket a bokor, mert..." by Sándor Petőfi into ten languages: Romanian, Italian, German, French, Romani, Swedish, Armenian, Japanese, the Rromani dialect from Bistriz/Beszterce/Bistrița, and Chinese. The second set consists of a reproduction of *Nordtransylvanische Polyglotte zur Semisaecularfeier des Todestages Goethes* from *Acta Comparationis*, with translations of Goethe's "Gleich und Gleich" into seven Transylvanian languages (Hungarian, a Hungarian dialect from Domokos, Romanian, Transylvanian Saxon, Transylvanian Armenian, Yiddish, the Romani dialect from Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg) and into Japanese. We include the paratexts that accompanied these translations in the journal, in the original and in Levente T. Szabó's translation. In juxtaposition to the programmatic texts in our dossier, these translation projects undertaken by the editors of the journal perform a theory of translation that has remained opaque to most readers and scholars of *Acta Comparationis*. They dramatize the journal's curation of the Transylvanian "multilingual local" and the aspirational reach of the journal into Asian languages and literary traditions, mediated by the practice of direct and indirect translation.

The last section of this volume, "A World of Collaborators: Comparatist Portraits," gathers shorter biographical sketches of six late nineteenth century comparatists. What might the portrait of the comparatist at the end of the nineteenth century, as seen through *Acta Comparationis*, look like? This section consists of a series of comparatist portraits, intellectual profiles of collaborators of the journal. Although heterogeneous, they collectively raise questions about the comparatist's multilingualism; comparatist educational infrastructures; mobility; networks of collaboration; aesthetic theory; the practice of translation. Together, these portraits gesture towards a

global network of collaboration and translation in early comparatism.[37] This network spanned the globe—from Transylvania to Australia, India, Mexico, the US (via Norway), and Italy.

In "Herbert Augustus Strong: The 'Other' World Literature and Ethnographic 'Salvage'," Angus Nicholls sketches a portrait of *Acta*'s collaborator in Australia. Born in Britain, Strong was Professor of Classical and Comparative Philology at the University of Melbourne. Aiming to contribute to the journal's planned "Encyclopaedia of the Poetry of the World," he sent Meltzl an Indigenous Australian "song" collected by the Anglican missionary John Bulmer. Nicholls builds on his previous work to argue that European ideas about world literature emerged concomitantly with the rise of ethnology and anthropology, especially through the work of missionaries. Mediated by the collaboration with Strong, *Acta Comparationis* subscribed to the logic of what Jacob Gruber called "ethnographic salvage" (if imperial agents cannot save the people, they should try to save their culture). All in all, Nicholls's portrait offers a nuanced view of what "world literature" meant in Europe during the 1880s, foregrounding *Acta*'s growing skepticism towards the concept.

In "Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, Hugo Meltzl, and the Scandinavian New World," Gianina Druță retrieves the profile of one of Meltzl's most prolific collaborators: Rasmus Bjørn Anderson. The Norwegian-American scholar, the first professor of Scandinavian studies in the US (University of Wisconsin, Madison), was part of the editorial board of *Acta Comparationis*, to which he contributed articles and translations. Druță foregrounds Anderson's advocacy for Scandinavian mythology as an alternative to Greek antiquity in the European literary imagination and of Nordic literatures as a counterpoint to the centrality of Romance languages and literatures in the literary system of the late nineteenth century. In turn, within the US, Anderson's *America Not Discovered by Columbus* claimed that Vikings "discovered" what came to be known as the New World in the tenth century. This is not an argument against colonialism; rather, Anderson enlisted this alternative mythology in his advocacy for Norwegian Americans as a minority group.

Jey Sushil, in "A Portrait of Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya: The Quintessential Indian Comparatist before Tagore," traces *Acta Comparationis*'s network of contributors to its Indian collaborator. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya, who appears on the journal's editorial board, was a scholar of comparative religion. He studied in Edinburg, Leipzig and Zurich, and lived for a while in St Petersburg, before returning to India to teach. The portrait offers an expanded genealogy of comparatism in India, before Rabindranath Tagore's essay, "World Literature." It concomitantly helps explain the interdisciplinary nature of the early comparatism espoused by Meltzl, especially in relation to comparative studies of religion, to which the journal turned in its last issues.

Sarah María Medina Pérez's article, "From Mexico City to World Literature: Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari's and Hugo Meltzl's Global Literary Projects," sketches a portrait of the journal's collaborator in Mexico City: Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari. Alfred J. López has drawn attention to the fact that the languages included within the purview of decaglottism were framed as European languages, despite the fact that in late nineteenth century they also functioned as languages of literature in the colonial world, especially in the Caribbean and Latin America. There were two 1877s, López has argued: the year the first issue of *Acta Comparationis* was published; and the year José Martí wrote a prospectus, which remained unpublished, for a global literary project in Guatemala. Medina Pérez's essay reframes the status of Spanish in *Acta Comparationis* through the triangulation of three figures: Meltzl, Olavarría y Ferrari and Martí. Olavarría y Ferrari, Meltzl's collaborator and member of the editorial board of *Acta Comparationis*, published Martí in one of the journals he edited in Mexico City. The arc of relation between Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg and Mexico City positions the Spanish language as entangled in a multilingual linguistic landscape that includes Indigenous languages, albeit often invoked in an extractivist key.

The portrait co-authored by Cosmin Borza and Márta Zabán, "Transnational Routes and National Constraints of Transylvanian Comparatism: A Portrait of Grigore Silași," frames the particular position of the main Transylvanian Romanian collaborator of *Acta Comparationis*. The authors detail Silași's background in the Greek-Catholic church in Transylvania, which facilitated his education in Vienna, his affiliation with the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg as the chair of Romanian literature, and his leadership in organizations for Transylvanian Romanian students. Silași was one of Meltzl's immediate colleagues and collaborators in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, a member of the editorial board of *Acta*, and translator from Romanian. Borza and Zabán's portrait helps explain the background against which Silași was forced to retire from the university, after being accused of teaching in the Romanian language.

Krisztina K. Nagy's "Giuseppe Cassone and the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*" offers a portrait of a comparatist who functioned as a mediator for the journal—in Italy and internationally. He invited and encouraged a number of writers and scholars to collaborate with the journal. Profoundly polyglot (Latin, Greek, German, French, Russian, English), he developed a profile as a translator. Nagy details Cassone's correspondence with Meltzl, who sent him translations of Petőfi's poetry into German. Cassone subsequently learned Hungarian

37. While these portraits offer an expanded picture of early comparatism, this picture remains incomplete. A Digital Humanities project could assemble the network of the journal and its collaborators, on the model traced for Goethe's network. David D. Kim and Nickolas de Carlo, "WorldLiterature@ UCLA Tracking International Publics with Goethe," *Transit* 10, no. 1 (2015).

so he could translate Petőfi into Italian. Nagy argues that Meltzl and Cassone shared a sense of Petőfi as a poet whose work exceeds the patriotic themes usually projected onto his poetry, as well as a deep faith in translation as a vehicle for transnational literary exchange, including translation into smaller dialects.

We hope this Special Issue reopens vivid discussions about *Acta Comparatonis*, both by revealing its pioneering gestures and by signaling its limitations, most of them indebted to the epistemic contradictions of the European nineteenth century. Its main intention is to challenge the presupposition that the aims of *Acta Comparationis* are reducible to the polyglottism or decaglottism defined by Meltzl's "Preliminary Tasks." A closer look at the archive of the journal uncovers political and cultural tensions lying underneath the transnational agenda celebrated by contemporary scholars as a foundational gesture of comparative literature. The *Acta Comparationis* project is a symptomatic artifact, but one—we state firmly—that remains unexhausted by research due to its performative nature and all-encompassing ambitions. A journal written in several languages, with the aim of defying strict localization and strongly committed to building a network of collaborators around the world, each with its own tentacles, is still a tough nut to crack not only for individual research, but also for a team of researchers. Our Special Issue is just a beginning.

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