Unraveled and Rewoven Ties: Women (Proto)comparatists in the Networks of the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

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Abstract:The article uncovers a previously neglected network of early women comparatists whose contributions to *Acta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum fundamentally shaped the emerging discipline of comparative literature. Moving beyond tokenistic recovery, it highlights the intellectual agency and methodological innovations of figures like Dora d'Istria, Lucy Lloyd, Teréz Tini, and Helene von Meltzl. By applying an intersectional lens, it reveals how gender, ethnicity, and class structured both visibility and exclusion in the journal's transnational network. The study also reframes the *Acta Comparationis* not as a solitary intellectual endeavor but as a dynamic interface of weak ties that catalyzed comparative thought across cultural peripheries. This approach not only challenges foundational myths of the discipline but also proposes a new, networked understanding of early literary comparatism.

Keywords: *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, early women comparatists, Dora d'Istria, Helene von Meltzl, Teréz/Theresie Tini, Lucy Lloyd, early networks of comparative literature

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1.1. Uncovering a Hidden Intersectional History of Early Comparative Literature

The founder of the first international comparative literature journal listens to his wife as she reads her latest translation from Ukrainian. He is also equally captivated by a Romani woman acquaintance as she translates Goethe into Romani. The same foundational figure is impressed by the work of one of the first female anthropologists of South Africa and writes to her, seeking permission to correspond on matters of comparative literary studies and comparative folklore. His mentor, friend, and co-founder of the journal travels to Florence solely to meet one of the most exuberant and brilliant female scholars of the time—a long-standing collaborator and intellectual hub of the journal—and seeks her advice on issues concerning Central and Southeastern Europe. These patterns are completely absent when the history of the first international journal of comparative literary studies is recounted. They remain overlooked, in part, because of the numerous untold stories of how the discipline's history is indebted to women comparatists.

Although Madame de Staël represents a pioneering female voice in the early stages of comparative literature studies,[1] the discipline's narrative has traditionally been shaped through the lens and legacy of key male figures and their theoretical contributions. However, incoporating intersectionality into the history of the field can illuminate previously hidden dynamics and highlight significant, yet often overlooked, contributors. Intersectionality, a concept articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a nuanced lens for understanding of how gender, class, ethnicity, and other identity markers interact to produce distinct experiences of privilege and marginalization. This approach fundamentally

1. On her work as a protocomparatist, see Simone Balayé, *Madame de Staël*; Angelica Goodden, *The Dangerous Exile*; Ann Jefferson, "Literary History and the Biography"; Gerhard Kaiser and Olaf Müller, *Germaine de Staël*; Udo Schöning and Frank Seemann, *Madame de Staël und die Internationalität*. Germaine de Staël is the only woman comparatist to be included in the nineteenth-century section of *The Princeton Sourcebook of Comparative Literature* with a chapter of her, *De la Littérature, considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) translated by David Damrosch: David Damrosch et al., *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*, 10–16.

reshapes our understanding of the early history of comparative literature, particularly regarding the role of women comparatists, the networks they were included in—or excluded from—and the startk inequalities among them.

As exemplified by the case studies to be discussed in this paper, early female intellectuals such as Dora d'Istria, Lucy Lloyd, Juliette Adam, and lesser-known figures like Meltzl and Teréz Tini played vital yet frequently obscured roles in the formation of the discipline. Moreover, this study goes beyond merely identifying these women as early comparatists; it critically examines the internal hierarchies and disparities among them, shaped by their differences in social status, ethnic background, linguistic access, and intellectual networks. Highlighting these internal inequalities provides a deeper understanding of how intersectional dynamics operated within early comparative literature—emphasizing not only the presence of women scholars, but the complexity and diversity of their professional roles and the recognition they received. Acknowledging their contributions, alongside the structural barriers they faced due to their diverse ethnicities, class positions, and linguistic contexts, not only reveals a hidden chapter in the history of comparative literature but also calls for a critical reassessment of the field's foundational narratives.

Over the past few decades, intersectionality has become central to contemporary literary and comparative literary studies, significantly reshaping analytical frameworks and methodologies. Originating in Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational work,[2] intersectionality emphasized the simultaneous and intertwined effects of gender, race, class, and other social categories—prompting scholars to rethink how texts and cultural contexts are analyzed. This multidimensional framework has challenged the single-axis focus of traditional literary criticism on either gender or race, instead emphasizing the complex, overlapping identities that shape both the production and reception of texts. Within feminist literary criticism, intersectionality disrupted earlier approaches focused exclusively on gender, drawing attention to how race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity intersect to influence women's lived experiences and textual representations. Seminal works by bell hooks, Barbara Smith, and later, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have been instrumental in highlighting the multiplicity and complexity of identity categories.[3] For instance, Spivak's influential reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* alongside Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* illustrates how an intersectional analysis can uncover previously unnoticed colonial and racial dimensions within canonical literature. This approach has enriched the discipline by revealing the previously silenced voices and exposing the hidden power structures that inform literary texts.

Comparative literature, traditionally concerned with cross-cultural dialogues, has similarly embraced intersectional insights. Scholars such as Shu-mei Shih have argued for relational comparative approaches that critically engage with the power dynamics of race, ethnicity, and global imperialism, calling for a shift away from Eurocentric and universalist perspectives.[4] As Susan Stanford Friedman and Susan Sniader Lanser have demonstrated, the field increasingly foregrounds intersections of gender, diaspora, class, and linguistic diversity, thereby reshaping both its canon and its analytical priorities.[5] The discipline now often explores texts across previously marginalized cultural contexts, highlighting the interactions of empire, migration, diaspora, and gender. Furthermore, intersectionality has encouraged scholars to re-examine disciplinary histories, questioning how race and gender hierarchies have shaped the evolution of literary criticism. Researchers have increasingly brought forward the contributions of marginalized figures and non-Western scholars, challenging the long-standing perception that comparative literature emerged solely from the Western intellectual tradition. The work of Françoise Lionnet, Susan Lanser, and Susan Stanford Friedman illustrates the extent to which gender and cultural hybridity have become integral to the analytical vocabulary of the discipline.[6]

Ultimately, integrating intersectionality into comparative literary studies has expanded both the scope and critical depth of the field, compelling scholars to approach literature as a site where multiple forms of identity and power intersect. The recovery and reassessment of early women comparatists, as demonstrated in this paper, exemplify the transformative potential of intersectional analysis. By revisiting neglected figures and texts, this approach not only diversifies the literary canon but also prompts scholars to recognize the deep entanglements of literature with glocal historical and cultural processes. In this sense, a glocal intersectionality both broadens scholarly perspective and revitalizes comparative literature's foundational commitment to understanding the complexity and diversity of the origins of the discipline.

Research on women comparatists—and the potential networks and collaborations among them—remains limited. These women are nearly invisible in accounts of the early professionalization of the discipline. The first international journal of comparative literature, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum,* holds a unique position in the field, having drawn in approximately half a dozen female translators, essayists, and thinkers between 1877 and 1888. Naturally, this raises questions: Who were these women? What were their contributions? In what

2. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."

3. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*; Barbara Smith, *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds*; Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason.*

4. Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity*; Shih, "World Studies and Relational Comparison."

5. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings*; Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority.*

6. Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices.*

sense can they be considered comparatists? However, before addressing these specifics, we should begin with a broader perspective by asking three interrelated questions: Why does the way we view *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* matter and why are its collaborators significant? Why are the women collaborators of the ACLU fundamental? Finally, we must consider a third question concerning the fundamental methodological implications that reveal a structural pattern within *Acta Comparationis* itself.

1.2. The Myth of the Lonely Atlas and What It Concealed in the History of *Acta Comparationis*

The reception of the ACLU has long been shaped by a romantic myth surrounding its "founding father." In this narrative, Meltzl emerges as a lone, almost mythical figure—a solitary Atlas.[7] Yet, complicating this portrayal, the story has often been infused with Orientalist, Occidentalist, or other such overtones. For example, Brassai's editorial contributions are sometimes diminished by emphasizing Meltzl's German origins and Western European education, as if his knowledge and insight were purely Western imports. Conversely, the journal itself is occasionally trivialized by an implicit assumption that scientific knowledge and innovation must flow from West to East, not the other way around. As a result, Meltzl remains the central, idealized hero in these accounts, overshadowing his editorial partner, Samuel Brassai —nearly fifty years his senior and arguably more esteemed.[8] Similarly, the journal's many contributors often receive only passing mention or are reduced to statistics, leaving unanswered questions about who they were, how they thought, what they contributed to the journal's work, and whether they shared the founders' perspectives.

The presence of the collaborators of ACLU in the journal, along with their diverse perspectives on comparative literature, is notably varied. Let me illustrate this with three brief examples. The Chinese contributor to the journal, China's military attaché in Berlin and later Paris, was an accomplished diplomat. He appeared in the journal only once, when invited to translate a poem by Petőfi. This poem, first translated into German and French and then into Chinese, was re-translated into Hungarian by the editors and published alongside the Chinese translation. All three versions (the original, the Chinese translation, and the re-translated text) were then sent to the translator. This individual would later emerge as a pioneer of comparative literature in China, recognizing translation and literary exchange between Asia and Europe as a vital dimension of comparative literature.[9] In contrast, Frédéric Mistral, the journal's Occitan collaborator and future Nobel Prize-winning poet, engaged with *Acta Comparationis* in a markedly different way. He used the journal's core concept of comparison to critique the centralization of French literature and to advocate for the Occitan revival and regionalism, aligning himself with the goals of the Félibrige Circle.[10] Meanwhile, the Albanian contributor Thimi Mitko saw the journal as a platform to advance Albanian nationalism and supporting nation-building efforts.[11]

I am not suggesting that a greater number of contributors necessarily implies a greater diversity of interpretations of comparative literature within the journal. Rather, I propose that by attentively listening to these contributors, we can view *Acta Comparationis* as a medium through which, simultaneously, a range of perspectives on comparative literature—sometimes divergent, sometimes parallel, sometimes contradictory, sometimes harmonious—were being actively developed.

2. Women Protocomparatists in *Acta Comparationis*

It is, therefore, unsurprising that the status of female contributors has not yet been fully examined, given that the status of male contributors has also received limited attention. However, it is notable that existing literature on the ACLU rarely mentions female authors and collaborators, despite their numbers and the significant roles many played in the journal's history. The high regard in which Meltzl and Brassai held women authors is striking, as is the fact that numerous female collaborators found the journal appealing, regarded it as a valuable professional platform, or even identified with its mission to some extent. But who, precisely, are these women?

Dora d'Istria is clearly the most well-known protocomparatist to work closely with the journal. As a member of the Ghica family of Macedonian origin, she was deeply connected to Romanian, Albanian, and Greek cultures, the Russian milieu through her brief marriage, and, of course, the Italian intellectual environment—primarily in Florence, where she spent most of her life. She achieved extraordinary professional recognition at an early age, becoming a celebrated writer for several prominent international newspapers.[12]

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7. In the reception history of *Acta Comparationis*, this perspective has maintained a continuous tradition, which understandably persisted when the journal was recently rediscovered in an international context. In their pioneering and indispensable interpretations, Damrosch and Saussy similarly approached Meltzl's role in a comparable manner: David Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline"; Damrosch et al., *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*; Damrosch, "Hugo Meltzl and 'The Principle of Polyglottism'"; Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*.

8. For a revision of Brassai's contribution to the journal, see my article: Levente T. Szabó, "À la recherche… de l'éditeur perdu."

9. See a sketch of the case in Junjie Yang, "Tcheng Kitong und *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*."

10. Levente T. Szabó, "Frédéric Mistral és az *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*."

11. Levente T. Szabó, "Negotiating World Literature in the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies."

12. Antonio D'Alessandri, *Il pensiero e l'opera di Dora d'Istria fra Oriente europeo e Italia*.

Her presence and influence serve as a reminder to those who might dismiss the ACLU as an obscure, exotic, eccentric, and underappreciated Eastern European experiment. From the outset, around August 1877, she showed strong interest in the journal, contributed regularly to it, and maintained close professional and personal relationships with both editors. Meltzl and Brassai each met her in Italy. We know of these connections thanks to a small, cohesive set of Meltzl's letters, acquired and published by the renowned Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga during the interwar period, which documents the regularity and nature of her interactions with the journal and the intensity of the scholarly exchanges with Meltzl.[13] Several aspects of this relationship underscore its importance for the journal. There is evidence that Giuseppe Cannizzaro—a friend of Meltzl and one of the first Italian translators of Sándor Petőfi—acted as an intermediary between the journal and Dora d'Istria during an early translation project in 1877. At that time, Meltzl's expressed enthusiasm in the journal over having established contact with a "brilliant" scholar who was a polyglot, wrote insightfully about Hungarian folklore, was familiar with Petőfi's poetry, and held it in high esteem. Remarkably, this initial enthusiasm, partly rooted in ethnic pride, evolved into professional admiration within a few months after Dora d'Istria's first publications in the journal. Meltzl and Dora d'Istria corresponded on scholarly matters for nearly a decade, and it is illuminating to consider what topics they found important, what elicited strong reactions, and what they chose to overlook.

It is immediately thought-provoking that *Les Femmes en Orient* and *Des Femmes par une Femme* are not referenced in the ACLU, nor does Dora d'Istria herself appear to consider the journal as reengaging with these works. Nevertheless, Meltzl's genuine curiosity is evident; following their first meeting and exchange of letters, Dora d'Istria quickly became a touchstone in one of the ACLU's foundational theoretical texts. Notably, in the second part of *Vorlaufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Literatur*, Dora d'Istria is cited as an example of the journal's ideals of comparatism and multilingualism.[14] Just weeks earlier, she had published *La Poésie des Ottomans*, in which she passionately exclaims in the preface: "Nous vivons en effet dans une époque fort peu littéraire, et l'Europe livrée aux haines des partis, aux luttes des races, aux querelles des sectes, aux rivalités des classes, n'attache qu'une médiocre importance aux questions qui semblaient, il y a quelques années, capables d'occuper tous les esprits cultivés."[15] This statement, recalled by Meltzl, closely aligns with the journal's mission, and appears in the same issue that features Dora d'Istria's inaugural publication—where she also references Louis Benloew's *La Grèce avant Les Grecs*, a work highlighting the Albanian community. She argues that pan-Slavic rhetoric has obscured the histories of various Balkan communities, especially the Albanians, rendering them particularly vulnerable.[16]

This initial publication by Dora d'Istria initiated a series of significant, densely reference studies and essays on the nature and importance of Albanian literature and culture for comparative literature. Furthermore, it immediately positioned the "Albanian question" as a central issue for both Brassai and Meltzl, who, from the first year of the journal, began to consider Albanian language and literature essential elements to their arguments concerning "endangered cultures." Thus, attention is directed to Albanian literature and folklore because Dora d'Istria asserts its eminently ancient origins. At the same time, through Albanian texts, comparative literature takes up the broader mission of documenting—and thereby preserving—world languages and literatures as part of the universal heritage. This is how the Albanian epic rises to prominence, with Dora d'Istria facilitating a connection with Thimi Mitko, an influential figure in the Albanian community in Egypt and a key player in Albanian nation-building. She expresses gratitude that her publication in the ACLU has finally brought Albanian literature into the international literary mainstream, strenghtening her advocacy for Albanian nationalism. For Brassai and Meltzl, then, the "Albanian case" becomes an early and formative example of comparatism, thanks to Dora d'Istria. Simultaneously, the same publications in the ACLU emerge as powerful tools for nation-building within the Albanian diaspora in Egypt. They express deep appreciation for Dora d'Istria's efforts, viewing her as a hero, while she, in turn, takes pride in her contribution to the revival of Albanian culture.

This situation is both compelling and complex, revealing at least four interconnected aspects. First, it shows how, from the beginning, Dora d'Istria was invested in the journal and its vision of comparative literature—finding herself represented within it, inhabiting it, and actively shaping it. Second, the founders of *Acta Comparationis* saw her as a model and an inspiring collaborator, someone through whom they could showcase, test, and deepen their conceptual framework: for Meltzl and Brassai, she embodied a prototype of the comparative scholar. Third, she served as a crucial intermediary, linking the journal to new professional networks that the editors enthusiastically embraced and wove into the journal's intellectual fabric. Fourth, these networks sometimes worked at cross-purposes with the journal's own principles. For instance, Thimi Mitko used the attention generated by Albanian texts to promote Albanian nation-building, introducing new texts into the journal that the *ACLU* then recontextualized for its own comparative objectives. What emerges, then, is a highly complex intellectual ecology shaped by the presence, texts, and arguments of Dora d'Istria.

13. Nicolae Iorga, "Lettres de Dora d'Istria."

14. Hugo von Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Literatur II. Das Prinzip des Polyglottismus," 313.

15. „We live in an age of not very literary times, and Europe is filled with hatred, the struggles of races, the quarrels of sects, class rivalries, attaching little importance to questions which, a few years ago seemed to occupy all educated minds." The original text is part of D'Istria, *La Poésie des Ottomans*, IX.

16. Dora d'Istria, "La Grèce avant les Grecs."

It is no surprise, then, that many issues of the journal features major essays or studies by Dora d'Istria, and that the *Fontes* series—the *Acta Comparationis* collection of special prints—highlights her work.[17] Additionally, she had several personal interactions not only with Meltzl but also with Brassai. Her presence is truly essential to the journal: she was one of its most active contributors and and played a key role in shaping both its development and its conceptualization of comparative literature. However, what is especially intriguing is that she was far from being the only female contributor to hold such importance for the journal's founders. In 1880, the journal published a compelling and significant study on the Icelandic heroic epic, in which Meltzl remarks, among other things:

> "Fehérrel fehérre nem lehet festeni. Az Eddával is csak úgy van az irodalomtörténelem, mint hajdanában volt a nyelvtudomány bármely nyelvvel. Összehasonlító elv alkalmazása nélkül semmit se látunk. Csak most, midőn már lassacskán az összehasonlító irodalomtörténelem is kezdi kinőni magát, s mindaz, mit az angol *folklore*-nak nevez kezdik alaposan az Eddát is érteni. You cannot paint white on white [i.e., it is not effective to use things as a reference point for understanding the same things; the key always lies in comparison with something else - T.Sz.L.]."[18]

Meltzl makes this statement in his major study, *The Dream Scene of Atlamal*, with special reference to the Hungarian lessons of the Gothic-Icelandic tradition. This is particularly noteworthy because Meltzl reinterprets the concept of folklore, moving it away from the nationalistic approaches that aim to isolate national folklore from other cultures, and instead situaties it within the emerging field of comparative folklore studies. However, this passage is also significant for the footnote accompanying it, which praises the work of a South African female scholar and highlights the connectivity and networking integral to the *Acta Comparationis*—in this case, how the ACLU relates to other journals it viewed as models. The footnote states: "Utóbb ez új tudománynak külön orgánumai keletkeztek Angliában, Amerikában, valamint Déli-Afrikában [!] is. (Capetownban a Miss Lloyd szerkesztette „Folk-Lore-Journal".) Parisban szintén egy évvel a miénk, (Ö.I.L.) után 1878-ban a Rolland E. alapította *Melusine* kitűnő szaklap, mely fájdalom, ugyanaz év végén megszűnt."[19]

Miss Lloyd refers to the now-renowned Lucy Lloyd, then living in South Africa, sister-in-law and indispensable collaborator of Wilhelm Bleek. Bleek was the author of the pioneering two-volume *Comparative Grammar of South African Languages*, first published in 1862 and again in 1869, which laid the groundwork for the celebrated Bushman (now known as San) folklore and linguistics project.[20] Initially, the study of these South African aboriginal languages was entangled with colonial aims, with early interviews conducted in prison settings. Over time, however, the approach shifted: indigenous participants were increasingly treated as full collaborators. Lucy Lloyd emerged as a key figure in this later phase, conducting extensive interviews and, after Bleek's death in 1875, building an extraordinary archive of Khoesan languages.[21] In 1986, thanks to Roger Hewitt's advocacy, attention was once again drawn to the nearly 13,000-page archive at the University of Cape Town, which documents an important disappearing language in remarkable detail.

Lucy Lloyd was one of the founders of the South African Folklore Society and established the *Folk-lore Journal* in 1879. While Wilhelm Bleek was primarily interested in the structure and function of language—largely overlooking the social contexts of its speakers—Lloyd took a different approach, exploring the community's social relations, environmental history, creation of hunting and household tools, poison-making, belief systems, and cosmology. The close relationship between Lloyd and her data subjects is evident in the fact that, although some were released from prison, she later lived with them as if she had adopted them into her family. We now recognize that the exemplary status of the Bushman material in the history of anthropology is due to Lucy Lloyd. She was also instrumental in Wilhelm's final work, *A Brief Account of Bushman Folk-lore and Other Texts* (1875), which examined language within its cultural context.

It is characteristic of *Acta Comparationis* and Meltzl's depth of knowledge that he was well-informed about the publication and operation of the *Folk-lore Journal*, as well as Lucy Lloyd's pioneering solutions and innovative anthropological approach to the Bushman project, despite the South African journal's brief run of only 12 issues in 1879 and 1880. Moreover, this was the first scholarly journal ever published in South Africa. Its slogan, *Semper novi quid ex Africa*, represented a particularly critical gesture of patrimonialization: it aimed to document disappearing

17. Dora d'Istria, "La Poésie des Persans sous les Khadjars"; Dora d'Istria, *La Vie Klephtique dans l'Empire Persan*; Dora d'Istria, *Vevey et l'Abbaye des Vignerons*; Dora d'Istria, "La Grèce avant les Grecs."

18. Hugo von Meltzl, "Az *Atlamál* álomjelente különös tekintettel a gót-óizlandi hagyományok magyar tanúságaira," 129–146. "Literary history is to the *Edda* as linguistics was to any language in earlier times. Without applying the comparative principle, we see nothing. Only now, as comparative literary history slowly begins to grow into what the English call *folklore*, does the *Edda* begin to be thoroughly understood."

19. "Later, separate organs of this new science were created in America, as well as in South Africa. In Cape Town, the *Folklore Journal*, edited by Miss Lloyd, and in Paris, also a year after ours, in 1878, the excellent journal *Mélusine*, founded by E. Rolland, which—regrettably—ceased to exist at the end of the same year" Hugo von Meltzl, "Az *Atlamál* álomjelente különös tekintettel a gót-óizlandi hagyományok magyar tanúságaira," 137.

20. On the Bushman project and its afterlife, see Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World: The Remarkable Story of the Bleek-Lloyd Collection of Bushman Folklore* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2006); Hermann Wittenberg, "Wilhelm Bleek and the Khoisan Imagination: A Study of Censorship, Genocide and Colonial Science," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 667–679.

21. See Pippa Skotnes, *Claim to the Country: The Archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007).

languages and cultures that were "rapidly passing away under the influence of European ideas, and the spread of European civilization." The recording methods used are also noteworthy, especially in light of the practices and interests of Meltzl, Wlislocki, and their colleagues. Lloyd advocated for bypassing the mediating institutions of traditional folklore and anthropological collection, emphasizing that "specimens of Native literature" were "drawn directly from the lips of the aborigines, written down in their own language and words, and accompanied by a translation into English" (*Preface* 1879: II-III). Like the ACLU, Lloyd's journal pioneered the side-by-side columnar printing of orally transcribed material with translations—a format that became familiar through the later publication of her *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911). The journal emerged during the brief period of the so-called Cape liberal enlightenment, when colonial intellectuals used science to express more tolerant attitudes toward indigenous people.

However, the short-lived journal edited by Lucy Lloyd had a fascinatingly complex relationship with *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. Lloyd's journal not only treated the languages of local indigenous communities as valuable, irreplaceable, and worthy of preservation for universal culture, but also recognized indigenous stories as essential to global literary culture. Furthermore, Lloyd envisioned that these stories could only be collected through a form of empathetic anthropology—one meant both to strengthen the local community's self-awareness and to integrate these narratives into global cultural circulation through comparative folklore. Comparative mythology was a new field in the 1870s and 1880s, yet comparative folklore—and Lucy Lloyd's interpretation of it—appears to have significant connections to the *Acta Comparationis*. The concept itself was partly promoted internationally by the journal and linked to the emerging discipline of comparative literature. It is also significant that Meltzl advocated for the establishment of such a chair at the University of Cluj. Following Kaarle Krohn's appointment in 1888 as lecturer in Finnish and comparative folklore, one of the earliest such chairs was established there in the 1890s. This position was filled by Antal Herrmann (or Anton Herrmann), a student of Meltzl's and by then an internationally recognized expert in Romani studies.[22]

Thus, the references to Lucy Lloyd, her journal, and her early work—along with the connections between the ACLU and the South African journal and the comments related to comparative folklore studies—all suggest that, even though Lucy Lloyd did not publish independently in the ACLU, the relationship between the two journals and their founders significantly shaped the ACLU's perspective on the social role of comparative literature. Both journals and their founders emphasized the peripherocentrism of anthropology and comparative literature, treating peripheries as essential centers of anthropological knowledge capable of transforming global perspectives. The world was conceptualized as a network of entangled cultures, with ethnographic fieldwork excavating and reconstructing languages and cultures that could serve as reflective forms, deepening the understanding of global cultural flows.

The cases of Lucy Lloyd and Dora d'Istria provide a nuanced perspective that illustrates how *Acta Comparationis*'s engagement with female researchers went beyond treating them as equals. While women students were admitted to universities in Cluj and throughout the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy only as auditors starting in 1878, the editors had, from the outset, regarded women scholars as equal partners. But the significance extends further: these women scholars played a specific and essential role in shaping the journal's approach and perspectives on comparative literature. The dynamic becomes even more complex, as the journal itself appears to have influenced some of these scholars to adopt and apply this methodology in their own research. Lucy Lloyd's involvement with the formation of the South African Folklore Society and its *Folk-lore Journal* is a compelling example; they began emphasizing the importance of comparative folklore just as their contact with Meltzl and the *Acta Comparationis* was forming. These prominent women scholars are noteworthy not merely because their contributions are now gaining academic recognition, but because they reveal that the journal's history and principles represent a true *histoire croisée*—an entangled history marked by complex dynamics.

The line of women associated with the *Acta Comparationis* does not end with Dora d'Istria or Lucy Lloyd. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the presence of different female collaborators raises identical methodological questions. Examining each woman's relationship with the journal may provide insight into the various forms of relationality/connectedness possible within the journal's framework. Consider, for instance, Juliette Lambert (also known as Juliette Adam), a well-known figure in French literary culture in the 1870s and 1880s. By that time, she was already hosting one of Paris's most influential literary salons, attended by major figures such as George Sand, Alphonse and Julia Daudet, Camille Flammarion, Georges Clemenceau, Sully Prudhomme, Flaubert, Gaston Paris, Victor Hugo, Guy de Maupassant, and Ivan Turgenev. Following the death of her second husband, she founded *La Nouvelle Revue* in 1879, around the same time the ACLU embarked on a new phase of activity.

Whatever the specific reason behind Meltzl and Brassai's invitation to Lambert to join the ACLU's collaborators, it is particularly notable that they selected such a proto-feminist figure. As early as the 1850s, in response to Proudhon's anti-women remarks in *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, she wrote one of the major

22. Levente T. Szabó, "Az innováció egy rejtett szakmai hálózata," 145–158.

early feminist manifestos, *Idées anti-Proudhoniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage*. She joined the *Suffrage des femmes* movement in 1880 and later co-founded and served as a jury member of the *Prix Vie Heureuse*, the precursor to the *Prix Femina*, established in 1904. Remarkably, this background attracted the journal rather than deterring it. Although the first international comparative journal does not explicitly feature proto-feminist ideas, these connections suggest a sometimes surprisingly radical orientation on the part of its founders.

Of course, another significant question is why Juliette Adam agreed to be listed by the *Acta Comparationis* as a permanent contributor, thereby promising the journal either her own articles or to transmit works by others. What did she see in the journal? Let me offer a hypothesis on this point. At its founding, *La Nouvelle Revue* aimed to be a modern, pioneering publication reporting on the latest, even experimental, literature. Perhaps Juliette Adam, as founding editor-in-chief, found Meltzl and Brassai's initiative resonant, and saw in it something she could either identify with or take an interest in. In any case, this relationship reveals much about the journal's values, its global connections at the time, and the reasons an organic circle of collaborators ultimately proved difficult to sustain. It would be misleading to look solely at the official list of contributors to the journal to understand the role of female contributors and the impact of women scholars on the development of early comparative literature. If we were to rely only on this list, we would find names of those nominally connected to the journal and its ethos, but we would overlook individuals who contributed regularly through their work without being featured on the front page. Let me illustrate this point with two instructive examples.

One such example is Hugo von Meltzl's wife, Hermine von Meltzl, a regular translator for the journal. Since the journal considers translation a core activity of comparative literature and literary studies more broadly, the individuals who undertake translation (or re-translation) play an important role. Some scholars have raised skeptical questions about Meltzl's linguistic competence—particularly regarding his knowledge of Romanian—though these doubts lack any concrete basis. Today, archival sources make it clear that Meltzl was highly literate, well-read, and likely had some command of Romanian. However, Hermine's own knowledge of languages highlights the importance of local languages and dialects within the Meltzl household and may shed new light on Meltzl's view of comparatism, which emphasized understanding, supporting, and use of regional and, at times, non-standard or non-canonical language varieties. Hermine's linguistic abilities and translation work may explain her husband's decision to focus on the Romance dialects around Cluj/Kolozsvár and Bistritz/Beszterce/Bistrita, rather than learn another major "world language," as part of his broader vision for comparative studies.

One of Hermine's most notable independent translation projects, credited under her own name, involved Ukrainian[23]—a language recently banned in the Russian Empire. In the journal's context, this translation represents a profound political gesture, as the journal announced in protest that it would not publish Russian-language texts, drawing attention to the oppressed status of the Ukrainian language. Beginning in 1884, Meltzl amended this policy by publishing the title of *Acta Comparationis* in Russian but using Latin script. Meltzl also appears to have had considerable familiarity with Ukrainian folklore and literature, as demonstrated in one of his later major studies, *Das ewigweibliche in Goethe's Faust*, published in one of the last issues of the ACLU. In this work, he comments on *Faust* through the lenses of comparative folklore and religious studies and includes a Ukrainian example—a poem by Taras Shevchenko—translated by Meltzl himself and compared with two Romanian ballads about the sun.[24] Furthermore, Hermine was one of the founding members of the planned Comparative Literary History Society (ICLA/along with Dora d'Istria), though she never appeared on the front page of the journal. One might suggest this omission was to avoid potential backlash, but the situation is likely more complex—especially given that Meltzl's brother, Oskar von Meltzl, a prominent intellectual, parliamentarian, and lawyer in the Saxon community in Sibiu/Hermannstadt, was listed as a permanent contributor despite never contributing to the ACLU.

Another example is Teréz (or Theresie) Tini, who assisted Meltzl in collecting Romani folklore and translating poems into the local Romani dialect, serving both as an informant and translator. According to records from the town of Cluj, she appears to have been a member of one of the city's Romani musician families.[25] Meltzl's inclusion of Romani informants and translators as "comparatists" and his treatment of them as respected professional partners marks a significant step forward. Later, his student Wlislocki continued this approach, developing close relationships within these communities. I have previously written about Meltzl's friendship with another Romani translator and informant, József Boldizsár, whom he helped secure medical assistance through his contacts in Germany.[26] Wlislocki even went further, moving beyond mere data collection by marrying into one of these communities—a decision that met with the disapproval from many of his contemporaries.

Yet, despite her contributions, Teréz Tini does not appear on the list of contributors—a fact that reminds us to avoid

23. Hermine von Meltzl, "Kleinrussiche Volkslieder," 30.

24. Hugo von Meltzl, "Das Ewigweibliche in Goethe's *Faust*," 52–54.

25. State Archives of Cluj, Fond: Municipality of Cluj, II/9. 172.

26. Levente T. Szabó, "Az innováció egy rejtett szakmai hálózata," 147–148.

relying solely on the listed names when evaluating the impact of essential contributors. This case also underscores the need for attentiveness to internal inequalities in the journal's production of knowledge (also with regard to women).[27]

3. World Literature Networked:
The Loose Network as a Structural Mechanism of *Acta Comparationis*

What is the relationship among these female collaborators? Is there any contact, exchange of ideas, or professional solidarity among them? The answer seems straightforward—apparently, there is none beyond the fact that they are women. However, the journal unites them by presenting them not as women, but as comparatists, just as it does with most of its contributors. This shared role within the journal highlights how, although there is a close personal and professional relationship between the founders and some of the collaborators, a different type of network connects the broader community of contributors to one another and to the founders.

How, then, can we conceptualize the interactions among the majority of these collaborators? In his influential, now-classic work *The Strength of Weak Ties*, sociologist Mark Granovetter emphasized the remarkable effectiveness of weak ties in facilitating diffusion processes.[28] While strong ties are often celebrated as "real," "essential," and "palpable," presumed to foster long-term relationships, Granovetter argued that weak ties, rather than strong ones, serve as "bridges" in social networks, enabling the spread of information. According to Granovetter and subsequent scholars, weak ties allow networks to expand by interconnecting smaller communities based on strong ties, such as family relationships and close friendships. Recent researchers in network studies, including Albert-László Barabási, have highlighted weak ties as frameworks that compress society to a level where the global flow of information becomes both rapid and efficient, fostering innovation. Although interconnected networks with numerous weak ties are not exclusive to modern societies, some scholars identify them as key drivers of modernity, creating conditions in which innovation thrives.

Instead of viewing *Acta Comparationis* as the product of a singular founding "genius," it is important to recognize the extraordinary methodological power of the community it fostered. This was not a homogeneous group centralized in one location but rather a loose network of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, united by a traveling concept of literary and cultural comparison and world literature. These individuals engaged with these ideas in diverse, often surprising, and occasionally conflicting ways. Thus, one of the primary outcomes of *Acta Comparationis* was not merely the involvement of a large number of collaborators but the extensive and varied types of weak ties it managed to forge through and around the idea of literary comparison. These loosely connected networks functioned as a kind of nineteenth-century "Twitter/X," setting intellectual trends in literary comparison without the constraints of centralized control.

From this perspective, the ACLU and Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg (and, more broadly, Transylvania) can be seen as successful scholarly interfaces. The concept of Meltzl or *Acta Comparationis* as an early literary center of emerging comparative literary studies is better understood as an interface of powerful loose networks, in contrast to the cultural capitals described in Christopher Charle's seminal work, which defines such capitals as concentrated hubs of institutions and strong cosmopolitan scholarly and artistic networks usually in Western European metropolises.[29] In the case of *Acta Comparationis*, its strength and comparative literary legacy derive from a unique form of glocality—the ability to forge and coalesce a vast network of loosely connected individuals and groups composed of scholars from diverse cultural, literary, and intellectual backgrounds.

As we have seen, it would be misleading to assume that all women collaborators of *Acta Comparationis* were treated equally, as the journal itself engaged with them in markedly different ways. Some women, despite their strong personal and professional ties to the journal's founders, were marginalized, while others were positioned as key figures in shaping the journal's intellectual network. This uneven treatment reveals the complexity of the multiple overlapping networks in which these women operated and the intersectional constraints—of gender, class, and ethnicity—that influenced their visibility and roles within this major early comparative literature community.

Hermine Meltzl, despite being the wife and close professional partner of Hugo von Meltzl, was never fully integrated into the network of official collaborators. While it could be argued that this exclusion was a strategic move to avoid accusations of nepotism or editorial bias, such a rationale becomes less convincing when considering that Hugo von Meltzl included his brother—a legal scholar and Transylvanian Saxon politician—on the list of permanent collaborators, despite his negligible scholarly contributions to the journal. This suggests that

27. See also in this issue Luiza Medeleanu's article.

28. For revised perspectives on network theory in general and the role of loose networks in particular, see Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties"; Albert-László Barabási, *Linked*; Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*; or Damon Centola, *How Behavior Spreads*.

29. Christophe Charle, *Capitales culturelles, capitales symboliques*; Christophe Charle, *Théâtres en capitales*; Christophe Charle, *Paris, „Capitales" des XIXe siècles*.

Hermine Meltzl's exclusion was shaped less by concerns about family favoritism and more by broader cultural and institutional barriers that systematically sidelined women from formal recognition within academic and literary institutions in Transylvania and East-Central Europe.

Similarly, Terézia Tini, a Romani woman who played a significant role in translating and collecting Romani folklore for the journal, was omitted from the list of permanent collaborators. Her exclusion highlights how gender, class and ethnicity intersected to restrict access to formal intellectual acknowledgment. Unlike the journal's foreign women contributors—figures such as Dora d'Istria and Helen Zimmern, whose international stature granted them visibility within *Acta Comparationis*—local women scholars and translators were more readily overlooked. The journal relied on them for essential linguistic and cultural mediation, yet it systematically withheld institutional validation, reproducing broader patterns of exclusion characteristic of both regional and global academia at the time. In contrast, Dora d'Istria exemplifies a case where a woman contributor functioned as a central node in the *Acta Comparationis* network. An aristocrat and already a well-established intellectual in multiple European literary circles, she played a vital role in expanding the journal's reach, particularly in Italian and Southeastern European scholarly communities. Her influence extended beyond her own contributions, as she actively recruited collaborators and forged connections between the journal and broader transnational intellectual currents. This dynamic underscores how transnational status, class, and nationality played decisive roles in determining the extent of a woman's influence within *Acta Comparationis*.

The journal's network, characterized by its reliance on weak ties, functioned as a crucial mechanism for fostering innovation and cross-cultural exchange. Mark Granovetter's seminal concept of "the strength of weak ties" is particularly useful for analyzing the structure of the *Acta Comparationis* community. While strong ties—such as familial relationships or long-term academic collaborations—often result in insular networks, weak ties create bridges that facilitate the rapid exchange of ideas across diverse intellectual and cultural spheres. This principle was central to the journal's success, allowing it to operate as an early model of decentralized, globally interconnected scholarship. However, the efficacy of these weak ties was not uniform across all participants. While they enabled the participation of women comparatists who otherwise would have been excluded from formal institutions, they also reinforced existing hierarchies. Women such as Dora d'Istria and Helen Zimmern benefited from these structures, leveraging their established reputations to exert influence within the network. Others, such as Hermine Meltzl and Terézia Tini, remained in the journal's periphery despite their substantial contributions. This uneven dynamic reflects broader patterns in emerging modern literary scholarship, where gendered and ethnicized structures shaped the visibility and authority of women scholars.

Ultimately, *Acta Comparationis* played a paradoxical role in the history of women comparatists. On one hand, it provided a space where female scholars, translators, and thinkers could engage with comparative literary studies at a time when institutional opportunities for women were severely limited. On the other hand, it replicated many of the same exclusionary mechanisms that pervaded the intellectual landscape of the late nineteenth century. The journal's reliance on weak ties facilitated an extraordinary level of cross-cultural intellectual exchange, yet it also produced disparities in recognition and authority among its female contributors. By critically examining these dynamics, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how *Acta Comparationis* functioned not only as an incubator of comparative literary thought but also as a site where the intersectional inequalities of gender, class, and ethnicity were both challenged and reinforced. Recognizing these complex patterns compels us to reassess the foundational narratives of comparative literature. It is not enough to simply recover the names of forgotten women comparatists; rather, we must interrogate the structures that determined their participation, visibility, and exclusion. The case of *Acta Comparationis* illustrates both the potential and the limitations of early scholarly networks, offering critical insights into how intellectual history has been shaped by the entanglements of power, gender, and cultural capital. Through this lens, the history of comparative literature emerges not as a linear progression but as a contested and multifaceted field in which women played integral, yet unevenly acknowledged, roles.

The first female comparatists of *Acta Comparationis* played a crucial role in shaping world literature and comparatism as traveling and open concepts. This opens genuinely exciting and entirely new professional perspectives for understanding the micro-networks and professional relationships in which individual contributors—including female contributors—independently enriched the journal's central concepts, particularly the field of comparative literature. Moreover, investigating the journal's potential contemporary readership reveals new horizons. It appears that among its readers were broad-minded and highly educated women who took notice of *Acta Comparationis*. It is particularly illuminating to examine where and in what contexts they encountered the journal, what aspects they highlighted, and what elements they chose to emphasize. The voices and perspectives of women who appreciated *Acta Comparationis* were not confined solely within the boundaries of the ACLU. For instance, one notable English female traveler of the 1880s engaged uniquely with the ACLU while in Transylvania—reading it and incorporating it into her widely popular travelogue published in 1888. Emily Gerard, in *The Land Beyond the Forest: Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania*, recalls one of Meltzl's significant collections

and publications during her visit to Transylvania in the year of the ACLU's dissolution:

> "Very little genuine Tzigane poetry has penetrated to the outer world, and many songs erroneously attributed to the gypsies (by Borrow[30] among others) are proved to be adaptations of Spanish or Italian canzonets picked up in the course of their wanderings, while of those few which are undoubtedly their own productions hardly any exceed the length of six or eight lines. (...) Nor have there been wanting ardent folk-lorists (if I may coin a word) who have gone this length; so, for instance, Dr. Heinrich von Wlislocki, who, in the summer of 1883, spent several months as member of a wandering troop of tent gypsies in Transylvania and Southern Hungary, and has lately published a volume of gypsy fairy tales, the fruit of his laborious expedition. Yet on the whole the harvest is a meagre one, if we take account of the time and trouble spent on its realization; and even this energetic collector has declared that he would hardly have the courage a second time to face the deceptions and fatigues of such an undertaking. To his pen it is that we owe the first poem contained in this chapter; the second one, entitled, *The Black Voda*, interesting as being an almost solitary instance of a consecutive gypsy ballad, was communicated to me by the courtesy of Professor Hugo von Meltzl, of Klausenburg, another Transylvanian authority in the matter of folk-lore, who, in his *Acta Comparationis Literarum Universum*, has given many interesting details bearing on these subjects. The other sixteen specimens of the Tzigane muse are so simple as to call for no explanation, though in one or two cases not wholly devoid of poetical merit."[31]

Helen Zimmern, Käthe Freiligrath-Kroeker, Helene von Meltzl, Dora d'Istria, Aubertine Woodward, Teréz/Theresie Tini, Lucy Lloyd, and Selene A. (a local Jewish translator, possibly a pseudonym)—all these women collaborators and early comparatists of *Acta Comparationis*—serve as cultural brokers whose contributions shed invaluable light not only on women's roles in the field but also on the importance of rediscovering the relational nature[32] of how the first international journal of comparative literary studies conceptualized and organized emerging comparatism.

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30. "Borrow" here refers to George Henry Borrow, the 19th-century writer and linguist.

31. Emily Gerrard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, 273–274.

32. Shu-mei Shih, "World Studies and Relational Comparison."

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