Toward a Polyglot Paradigm of Planetary Translation: Reconsidering the History of Comparative Studies with *Acta Comparationis*

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Abstract: This essay discusses *Acta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum's program of global comparatism by considering its three programmatic texts, which include Hugo Meltzl's notes on "decaglottism," a concept that undermines the initial polyglot, anti-imperial spirit of the journal. Within the context of nineteenth century Transylvania, which practiced what Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă call "interglottism," *Acta* was geared both against methodological nationalism and the hegemonic perspective of great-powers model in comparative studies. Foreshadowing what David Damrosch calls a true "rebirth of the discipline" of comparative literature in the post-theory age, *Acta* stimulates fertile, unexpected alliances with contemporary scholars of créolité, translation, and comparative studies, unveiling new paradigms of planetary relationality. In the wake of comparative scholarly work by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Emily Apter, Mary Louise Pratt, and Christian Moraru, this article considers the praxis of "translation as reparation" and "gift," as a mode of fostering a "planetary" approach to comparatism by favoring translation from cultures which for centuries have existed outside canonical circuits of exchange promoted by dominant cultures.

Keywords: polyglottism, decaglottism, interglottism, planetary translation, créolité, inter-imperial translingualism, planetary.

Citation suggestion: Guran, Letitia. "Toward a Polyglot Paradigm of Planetary Translation: Reconsidering the History of Comparative Studies with Acta Comparationis." *Transilvania*, no. 5 (2025): 81-93. https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2025.5.07.

Change your thoughts and you change the world! (As the world changes first through ideas, not actions.)
Norman Vincent Peale

Like many origin stories, the birth of comparative literature as described by three programmatic texts of the first journal of the field, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (*Acta*, 1877–88), is steeped in controversy.[1] Despite David Damrosch's 2006 celebratory essay,[2] which redraws attention to the existence of the journal[3] that launched the project of global comparatism, recent studies[4] about Hugó Meltzl, one of its founders, raise questions about the truly polyglot profile of the publication. Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, authors of a

1. The three articles appeared in *Acta Comparationis* 9 (May 1877), 15 (October 1877), and 24 (February 1878). The first two articles were translated in 1973 for *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schultz and Phillip H. Rhein (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1973) as "I. Present Tasks of Comparative Literature (1877)" and "II. The Principle of Polyglottism." These texts were reproduced in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, ed. David Damrosch, Mbongiseni Buthelezi, and Natalie Melas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 42–44; 44–47. Angus Nicholls translated the third part in "Three Translations from the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*: 'Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature, Part III: Decaglotism;' 'Laws of Comparative Literary Research;' and 'Goethe's World Literature'," *Comparative Literature* 76, no. 3 (2024): 285–293.

2. David Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative Studies," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3, no. 1-2 (2006): 99-112.

3. Copies of *Acta* can be found in in the library of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg's Babeș-Bolyai University and at similar institutions in Vienna and Budapest. http://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/osszehasonlitoirodalomtortenelmi/1877.html.

4. See Anca Parvulescu's and Manuela Boatcă's *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania Across Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 91–114.

substantial book on Transylvanian interglottism,[5] conclude that "To celebrate ACLU's polyglottism, as we should, we need to acknowledge that its desire for the global also yielded a failure to engage with the contemporary debate on Transylvanian interglottism."[6]

As it turns out, polyglottism, which was supposed to be the cornerstone of the comparative approach to world literatures, is undermined very early on by Hugó Meltzl[7] himself who, in his article about decaglottism, suggested that the initial welcome to contributions from all cultures in their original languages would be modulated by the editors' preference for only ten languages, which, in Meltzl's estimation, had attained (or were on the point of attaining) "classical" status. These ten languages and cultures were ultimately considered foundational for a world literature canon. The discrepancy between the initially generous principle, aimed at granting all languages and their literatures an equal status, and its actual, narrower application in the journal, in which, de facto, only ten languages were used, relates to the history of the comparative literature itself, which, since its inception has attempted to be all-inclusive and polyglot, only to grapple constantly with the challenge of maintaining such high, perhaps utopian standards.

To reapproach today the cultural profile of Meltzl (1846-1908) and reconsider the ambitious project of global comparatism[8] that he and his colleague, the polymath Sámuel Brassai[9] (1800-1897) launched with *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–88) is thus not only a way to engage with the state of our discipline by interrogating its origins, but a manner of opening the door to innovative, possibly insurgent *epistemological alliances* to be established from here on. Contemplating the future of the field, whose death she herself foretold in the 2003 *Death of a Discipline*,[10] in 2015 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak outlines such alliances as "a joining of worlds which were hitherto separated by class, geography, and sensibility."[11] This terminological clarification sends us back to Meltzl's polyglot project, whose principle was more inclusive than the Europocentric model attempted in the American universities from the 1960s on until Spivak bid it such a sonorous farewell.

Far from a pious revisitation of a forerunner, the rereading of Metzl's programmatic texts about the principle of polyglottism and his global conception of comparative literature has already yielded illuminating epistemological alliances within the global field of world literature. Damrosch cites Meltzl as one of the forerunners of global comparative studies, who refutes the foretold "death of the discipline"[12] *avant la lettre*, by proposing an alternative model of comparatism to both cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Meltzl's endeavor also re-launches the old dispute between *world literature* and *comparative literature* in as much as *Acta Comparationis* was indebted both to Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and to the idea of polyglottism which envisioned rendering texts in their original languages, accompanied by translations, and providing comments and analyses in these original languages, even those of smaller nations, with less established literatures than, say, France and Germany, the two dominant continental powerhouses in the nineteenth century.

In reconsidering *Acta*'s role in the (re)birth of comparative literature, it is worth noting that in 1877, when Meltzl and his co-editor launched the journal, they were responding to cultural and geopolitical circumstances for which the Transylvanian multilingualism of today was hardly the norm. As Parvulescu and Boatcă demonstrate when

5. A definition of interglottism, seen as the coexistence and use of languages of unequal status, could start from Parvulescu's and Boatcă's observation that "[b]ecause Transylvania's inter-imperial history includes multiple empires, its linguistic landscape involves multiple languages—both multiple imperial languages and multiple and unequal local vernaculars." Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 93.

6. Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern,* 114.

7. For an overview of Meltzl's career, see Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 99–100. For the role of Samuel Brassai consider Parvulescu and Boatcă's note: "Brassai, who was a prominent theorist of foreign language acquisition, is often unjustly neglected in accounts of the journal, including accounts of polyglottism. On this neglect, see Levente T. Szabó, "À la recherche … de l'éditeur perdu: Samuel 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); Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 207.

8. In his 2006 essay "Rebirth of a Discipline," David Damrosch refers to Hugo Meltzl and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett who "both in their complex personal positions and in their intellectual agendas […] offer important early models for a genuinely global comparatism, even as the eclipse of their projects offers cautionary lessons we should still heed today." David Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative Studies," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3, no. 1-2 (2006): 89.

9. According to the Introductory note to the translation of Meltzl's programmatic essay of *Acta Comparationis*, published in the *Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2012), Meltzl's and Brassai's intention was that a total of "ten languages were to be the 'official' languages of the journal, but in practice most articles were written in German or in Hungarian, with some contributions in English, French, Italian, and Latin" (48). Moreover, the contributors to the editorial board were coming from India, Australia, the United States, and Iceland, along those from European countries.

10. In the present volume, in "*Ansatzpunkt* Transylvania," Christian Moraru takes issue both with Spivak's pronouncement about the dire future of the discipline and with her erroneous attribution of its inception to the post World War II generation of American emigrées from Europe.

11. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "World Systems and the Creole, Rethought," 27.

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

adopting the concept of interglottism for the inter-imperial linguistic dynamics of 1877 Transylvania, at the time, Hungarian and German were the two dominant languages and cultures in the area. This explains in part why Meltzl considered them fitted to be included among the languages of world literature, while Romanian, though spoken by a majority of the inhabitants in Transylvania, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was deemed only an idiom of folkloric productions.[13] It is within the context of this dynamic that early on, after launching *Acta Comparationis*, Meltzl concedes that the project to stimulate interest in those languages and literatures "often overlooked from great-power perspectives,"[14] was rather quixotic. At the time, in Transylvania, Hungarian was the official languages of administration, German was holding a significant cultural clout, while Romanian and other idioms were mostly spoken by underrepresented populations and were used for specific purposes.[15] A visionary project in 1877, Meltzl's principle of "polyglot anticosmopolitanism"[16] provided an unexpectedly strong starting point for a discipline which, over the past century, has struggled to escape the challenges of geopolitics, while carrying on constant struggles for self-definition and legitimacy. Judging by the initial intentions of *Acta Comparationis*' program,

> "Meltzl's journal, then, oppose[d] great-power hegemony and sought to protect the literatures of smaller nations and less commonly spoken languages, promoting contact and mutual appreciation of traditions whose distinctness should be preserved and even enhanced in the process. He was particularly concerned to distance his project from a leveling cosmopolitanism that would ultimately overwhelm smaller literatures."[17]

In line with this generous program and as a rebuke to neighboring Russia's cultural imperialism, which censored "minor literatures" like Ukrainian and Kirgiz, Meltzl rejected Russian as one of the ten major languages in which contributions to *Acta Comparationis* were published. That did not mean, however that he did not succumb to the nationalist stance of "advocating Hungarian literature as a visible but subordinate strand within Austro-Hungarian culture, while implicitly furthering the empire's suppression of Croatian, Czech, Romanian, Serbian, and Slovakian, none of which figured among the journal's many official languages."[18] David Marno interprets this obvious incongruency by noting that *Acta Comparationis* was, in fact promoting "a last position accessible to someone who wants to advocate the literature of a country that had lost its war for national independence just two decades earlier."[19] After all, within the wider Austro-Hungarian empire, especially after the unsuccessful Hungarian revolution of 1848, but also due to the incomparably larger prestige of the German culture, Hungarian was not an imperial language, outside specific areas, such as Transylvania. Meltzl's efforts to promote it, especially through Sándor Petöfi's poetry, are consistent with his program of providing more visibility to smaller cultures, though no other language of the many ethnicities, future nations, included in the Austro-Hungarian empire enjoyed the treatment reserved for Hungarian, one of the principal languages in which *Acta Comparationis*[20] was published.

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13. In "Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature, Part III: Decaglottism," Meltzl writes: "The literatures of the Danes, the Norwegians, the Latvians, the Finns, the Estonians, the Basques, the Irish, the Bretons, the Poles, the Czechs, the Slavonic peoples of western central Europe [Wenden], the Serbs, the Russians, the Modern Greeks, the Albanians, the Romanians, the Turks, as well as of the remaining smaller tribes [*Volksstämme*] of Europe, are either still only literatures of the folk song [*Volksliederlitt*.], or rather, if they are artistic literatures [*Kunstlitteraturen*], then mainly of recent emergence and of thoroughly naturalistic, in the best case Romantic, coloring. The Hungarian is perhaps the only non-Germanic literary area among the smaller literatures to have fundamentally broken with Romanticism and to have ascended toward a true classicism, admittedly through a slow process of around 500 years, but also only recently in its most modern publications, with Petöfi at its peak, who, alongside Goethe, is the greatest and most universal artistic poet [*Kunstlyriker*], at least of this century." Angus Nicholls, "Three Translations," 286.

14. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 102. The argument is made by David Damrosch in two essays: "Rebirth of a Discipline," cited above and "Hugo Meltzl and "The Principle of Polyglottism" (2012). What neither of them discusses is that the Austria-Hungarian empire which included the province of Transylvania at the time espoused a similarly "great power perspective" when it came to geopolitical and cultural dominance.

15. See Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016), and Borbala Zsuzsanna Torok, *Exploring Transylvania: Geographies of Knowledge and Entangled Histories in a Multiethnic Province, 1790–1918* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016).

16. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 111.

17. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 104.

18. Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in the Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 38.

19. Marno, David. "The Monstrosity of Literature: Hugo Metzl's World Literature and its Legacies." *World Literature, World Culture*, eds. Karen-Margrethe Simonsen and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008), 37–50.

20. As it turns out, Czech, Slovakian, Croatian, Serbian, and Romanian, though represented in the journal, were not considered languages of world literature. By contrast, German, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Dutch, Latin, and Hungarian, were since their literatures, in Meltzl's estimation, featured "classical" texts of universal value. Meltzl provides this classification in his article about Decaglottism; see Nicholls, "Three Translations"; for the Romanian translation and scholarship see *Caietele Echinox*, no. 6, 2004. https://caieteleechinox.lett.ubbcluj.ro/germanistica-si-comparatistica-cuprins/?lang=en.

***Acta Comparationis*:**
A Project at the Crossroads of Polyglottism, Decaglottism, and Interglottism

Meltzl's project of a multilingual journal is remarkable nowadays not so much because of its plea for a linguistic and ethnic *creolization* so desirable in a multiethnic society like that of Transylvania and of the Austro-Hungarian empire at large, but due to its visionary nature, which opened a space for a mutually-beneficial cross-cultural cooperation among Hungarians, Germans, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Armenians, Jewish, and Rroma people, who inhabited Transylvania.[21] Starting from 1784, when emperor Joseph II replaced the use of Latin in administration, the judicial system, and culture with that of German in the Habsburg empire, and continuing with 1843, when the Hungarian parliament abolished the use of Latin in its deliberations and imposed Hungarian as the language of parliamentary communications in the eastern part of the empire, there were instances when German and Hungarian fought for linguistic supremacy.

Parvulescu and Boatcă, who provide a detailed overview of the steps that led to interglottism in Transylvania, point out the 1863 declaration of the Transylvanian Diet which identified the three languages of the region, Hungarian, German, and Romanian, which should have shared equal rights in official public communication but did not, especially after the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary. In fact, this event led to the increased sedimentation of Hungarian monolingualism in Hungary and, partly in Transylvania, more so than was the case with German on the Austrian side which had a more open linguistic policy. The result of these historical occurrences was that "Hungarian policies, especially Hungarian policies in Transylvania, could hardly be described as cosmopolitan or multicultural"[22].

Acta Comparationis' foundation takes place against this background, which in Mary Louise Pratt's terms would be called "inter-imperial translingualism."[23] "Translated" into the imperial languages of Latin, German, and Hungarian, and subject to inter-imperial pressures, the local cultures of Transylvania adopted interglottism as a strategy of survival, if not resistance. This amounted to functioning *between* imperial languages and *along* them, alternatively, in a mode that attempted to withstand and respond to the imperial linguistic and cultural hierarchies. The reaction exemplified by Parvulescu and Boatcă with the case of Romanian novel *Ion* by Liviu Rebreanu recalls Pratt's model: "Empire produces layered linguistic scenarios in which subjugated languages become vernacularized, localized, indigenized, and resistant. Those [...] are the forms linguistic subjugation commonly takes."[24] Yet, despite their similarities, interglottism, vernacularization, and creolization are different strategies of withstanding the pressures of imperialism and/or colonization, though, paradoxically, their adoption can lead to nationalism and monoglottism.[25] Rebreanu's novel engages with such a scenario, only to also suggest that there are ways to avoid it:

> "In resistance to the Transylvanian inter-imperial linguistic hierarchy, numerous characters in Rebreanu's novel proudly declare, in Romanian, "I don't speak Hungarian!" On his way to Romania, Titu [an educated, young Romanian man, an alter-ego of Rebreanu—my note] declares his independence the same way. Clearly, Titu does not mean "I cannot speak Hungarian," since he has spent most of the novel bragging about his proficiency in the Hungarian language; instead, he means "I won't speak Hungarian any longer." Monolingualism has become an agenda. Note the irony of a trajectory from multilingualism to monolingualism as a return to one's native language in an inter-imperial context."[26]

The way out of this vicious circle consists in the critical distance that the readers of the novel and possibly its author exercise with respect to Titu's life choices. Whether we call this "irony," as the authors of the chapter about Transylvanian interglottism do, or not, it is less important than the acknowledgment that the novel does not

21. In their essay about interglottism in Transylvania, Parvulescu and Boatcă mention Alexandru Mocioni's interventions in the Hungarian Parliament on the debate of the 1868 law of nationalities. Speaking on behalf of the non-Magyar population of Hungary, including Transylvania, Alexandru Mocioni/Mocsonyi Sándor, who participated in the heated debates of 1867–1868, claimed that since there were six nationalities on the territory of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, each with its own language and cultural traditions: Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, and Germans, "the Hungarian state thus had to be polyglot; there could be no one state language." According to Parvulescu and Boatca, "[i]n terms of linguistic rights, Mocioni posited the principle of the equality of languages (egală îndreptățire a limbilor). He envisioned two possible methods of implementation: The first, based on the Belgian model, was to use all languages everywhere and at all times. The second possibility, which Mocioni explained against the background of booing in the Budapest parliament, was the use of language territories—the languages spoken in each administrative unit would be official languages." Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 96–97.

22. Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 95.

23. Pratt develops the theory of linguistic interimperiality in "Language and the Afterlives of Empire," *PMLA* 130, no. 2 (2015): 351.

24. Pratt, "Language," 353.

25. According to Parvulescu and Boatcă, "As interglottism spurs monoglottism, regional inter-imperiality breeds nationalism and spurs global coloniality." Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 113.

26. Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern*, 110.

embrace monolingualism as a solution to inter-imperial dynamics.

Concurrently, it is worth noting that the kind of linguistic creolization that led to the emergence of *patois* and other creole languages of the multi-lingual societies from Jamaica, Martinique, the Antilles, Haiti, and other Caribbean islands mentioned by Stuart Hall's "Creolité and the Process of Creolization,"[27] never happened in Transylvania.[28] Inasmuch as interglottal Transylvania, like those cultures mentioned by Hall, entailed "inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance,"[29] they were *translated* into *Acta Comparationis*' decaglottism.

Conversely, when connecting the post-2000 rebirth of comparative literature to its global outreach, Damrosch makes the case that if *Acta* "had truly been written in so many languages, [as Meltzl intended, my note] the journal could not, after all, have been comprehensible to more than a handful of readers."[30] In the end, its working languages were German and Hungarian, which for the articles published between 1879-82 meant that they were unevenly divided as such: "half of all the articles (76 out of 156) were written in German, while other twenty percent were written in Hungarian. The remaining thirty percent of the articles were written mostly in three languages (English, French, and Italian), with also a handful of short items in Latin."[31]

This makes apparent the fact that *Acta Comparationis*, though a step towards a democratic cultural project when it opened its pages to texts of the non-dominant cultures of Transylvania and the world, was not meant to counter the post-1867 tendencies of the Hungarian administration toward monolingualism and Magyarization.[32] Still, since the two main languages of the journal were Hungarian and German, this ended up providing a counter model to the increasingly prevalent monoglottism of German, which even in comparative undertakings was advancing a type of linguistic imperialism in tune with August Wilhelm Schlegel's and other Romantics' idea that German should become a major language of civilization.

In this sense, Damrosch is right when arguing that "Where August Wilhelm Schlegel—and indeed Goethe—had looked forward to German as taking a prominent or even dominant role in cultural exchange, Meltzl and Brassai sought to showcase languages and literatures usually overlooked from great-power perspectives."[33] Meltzl's choice, which today may seem prescient, was however imbued by both Hungarian nationalism and nascent German cultural imperialism, which is what Damrosch calls "the great-power perspective." Such a perspective would remain dominant for the nineteenth and most of twentieth century, as *Acta*'s competitor, a journal, published in Berlin by Professor Max Koch of Marburg starting in 1887,[34] demonstrates. In Damrosch's estimation[35] it was Koch's *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte* that provided *Acta* with "the death blow."[36]

Tellingly, such a journal seemed to Meltzl "to represent a real step backward, as well as a personal affront. Written entirely in German, its articles were contributed almost exclusively by German scholars, and their emphasis was heavily on German literary relations."[37] The dispute between Meltzl and Koch seems to replicate in the nineteenth

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27. Stuart Hall, "Creolité and the Process of Creolization," in *Creolizing Europe. Legacies and Transformations*, ed. Encarnatión Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Shirley Allan Tate (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015). A version of this chapter was first published in O. Enwezor et al., *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta 11 Platform 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003).

28. The Hungarian, Saxon, and Romanian languages co-existed under Hungarian administrative control from the eleventh century until the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 which, along with the kingdom of Hungary's sovereignty in the dual monarchy, instituted Hungarian as the official language in Transylvania and launched the explicit process of Magyarization.

29. Stuart Hall, "Creolité and the Process of Creolization," in *Creolizing Europe. Legacies and Transformations*, ed. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Shirley Anne Tate (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 16.

30. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," 108.

31. Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline," *108*.

32. Mihaela Ursa's essay, "(Anti)Imperial Narration in the Mock-Epic Form: Ioan Budai-Deleanu and the Transylvanian Project," included in this issue, draws attention to the fact that, "despite its multilingualism, diversity, and anti-imperial stances, ACLU fails to mention Şcoala Ardeleană (SA, The Transylvanian School) which was active in Cluj about eighty years before Acta. The group of Romanian intellectuals associated with SA were also struggling to "open up a place for the Romanian elites to intervene in the transactional relations between the imperial authority and the regional [Hungarian and German, my note] elites."

33. As Damrosch infers, "This desire led to their most dramatic editorial decision: to admit no fewer than ten 'official languages' for their articles, with the journal's title printed in all ten languages. In a concession to identifiability, the Latin title is printed in large type, along with the German title (*Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteratur*), followed by seven others in smaller type; last comes the Hungarian title, in medium-sized type, "like a modest innkeeper following his guests" as Meltzl later put it - in German - in a note "An unsere Leser" in the first issue of the New Series in 1879" ("Hugo Meltzl and the Principle of Polyglottism," 14).

34. "As Meltzl himself complained, this new and better-placed journal seemed intended to siphon off readers and contributors from Meltzl's journal, as Koch's title, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*, was suspiciously close to the *Acta*'s own German title, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteratur*." Damrosch, "The Global Origins,"109.

35. This estimation was based on the research by Árpád Berczik about *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte,* which Damrosch mentions in "Rebirth of a Discipline."

36. Damrosch. "Rebirth," 109.

37. Damrosch. "Rebirth," 110.

century the recent debate between a *comparative* literary model which welcomes an even, reciprocal practice of multilingual comparative literature, displacing the hegemony of a couple of dominant European national literatures and their implicit linguistic imperialism, and that of *World Literature*, which, even when it encourages comparative approaches of world sources, still privileges English as main global vehicle for its institutionalization and dissemination. For what it's worth, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Meltzl's work has become acknowledged among comparatists as an example of polyglottism where "Transylvania, offers a critical analytical framework that effectively *creolizes* the predominantly 'ethnic lens' of methodological nationalism."[38] Inasmuch as the programmatic essays and the texts in *Acta Comparationis* demand a comparative framework of analysis, away from both the ethnic lens of methodological nationalism and the hegemonic perspective of great-powers model in comparative studies, they also provide an insightful standpoint for considering the current debates in the field.

In his programmatic essays about the preliminary tasks of comparative literature, Meltzl draws readers' attention to a changed motto for the second volume. "Instead of the beautiful one taken from Eötvös which is, after all, limited to the principle of true translation, we have found in Schiller's dictum a more precise and at the same time more universal expression of the tasks of this journal."[39] The initial motto from József Eötvös,[40] the Hungarian minister of religion and education in 1867, outlined his credo in originality supported by rigorous education: "Let us study but not imitate the great authors of other ages and nations. The seed which grew into a tree elsewhere may sprout in our soil also, but the full-grown tree, if transplanted, would wither and perish the sooner and the more certainly the greater and more splendid it was in its original place."[41]

In the spirit of the flourishing nationalism of the 1840-1848 revolutions, Eötvös was advocating for a Romantic rebirth of every culture, inspired and nurtured by the ethos of other (ancient) cultures, but not in a sterile, imitative fashion. *Acta*'s own ambition was to be the host for the development of a new science, sister to comparative philology, but not by imitating it, since the methodology of comparative literature was to be geared not only toward identifying original/ancient sources for contemporary texts, genres and ideas, but by affirming the originality and value of various modern cultures, which through exceptional artefacts had reached the status of *classicism*. For these reasons, Meltzl maintained that "[t]rue comparison is possible only when we have before us the objects of our comparison in their original form,"[42] which makes necessary the polyglottism of scholars of comparative literature and, ideally, their involvement in translating from literatures in languages of no international circulation.

In this sense, the new motto[43] from Schiller was meant to suggest the expansion of the purpose of the journal from originality as a strategy for culture-building to transnational communication as a means for a truly global, planetary vision of culture: "It would be a pitiful, petty ideal to write for one nation only; for a philosophical spirit this limitation would be unbearable. He could not confine himself to such a changeable, accidental, and arbitrary form of humanity, a fragment—what is the greatest nation but a fragment?"[44]

To say that, in expanding the goals of the journal, Meltzl was abandoning the frames of nationalism, imperialism, and hegemonic multilingualism is to miss the revolutionary amplitude of his initial project, impossible and utopian as it may have been. In claiming that the secret motto of the journal was that "nationality as individuality of a people should be regarded as sacred and inviolable," and that "[t]herefore, a people, be it ever so insignificant politically, is and will remain, from the stand point of Comparative Literature, as important as the largest nation,"[45] Meltzl was advocating for a more democratic concept of comparative literature than even most of the twenty century would advance.

In affirming that, even though the art of translation "remains one of their main tools of the journal, its guiding principle will be that of polyglottism (the reproduction of texts in many of the original languages)," Meltzl was doing more than agreeing with Schopenhauer's claim that "even the best translation leaves something to be

38. Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern,* 3.

39. Meltzl, "Present Tasks." *The Princeton Sourcebook,* 44.

40. Parvulescu and Boatca draw attention to József Eötvös's role in advocating for the law of nationalities, along with the law of Transylvania's Union with Hungary, and the law of education. "The heated debate around the law of nationalities revolved around its invocation of a unitary and indivisible Hungarian political nation. Supporters claimed it was a progressive law that included all citizens in a political community and aimed to work in an Enlightenment spirit toward political inclusion and centralization. A distinction was drawn between Magyars—an ethnic group—and Hungarians—members of a nation composed of many ethnic groups. Eötvös [...] believed that nations were slowly becoming anachronistic." Parvulescu and Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern,* 95-6. The motto appears cited in Eötvös's autobiography *Gondolatok* (*Thoughts*).

41. József Eötvös apud Meltzl, "Present Tasks," 48.

42. Meltzl, "Present Tasks," 44.

43. From a letter to Gottfried Körner, October 13, 1789.

44. Meltzl, "Present Tasks," 48.

45. Meltzl, "Present Tasks," 45.

desired and can never replace the original."[46] He was accrediting the idea that the new science of comparative literature should use a different kind of measuring stick, if any at all, in service of a welcoming cultural universalism.

Furthermore, in advocating for literary analyses written in the language of the original literatures, as in the case of a hypothetical "Hungarian contribution to Camões scholarship [which] would be written in Portuguese while a German contribution to Cervantes criticism would appear in Spanish,"[47] Meltzl was making the case for intercultural dialogism. Was he hoping to change the world by changing its ideas first, as Norman Vincent Peale, whom I cite in the motto of this essay, claimed? Possibly, but in all likelihood he was hoping to establish the kind of *epistemological alliances* that Spivak defines as a "joining of worlds which were hitherto separated by class, geography, and sensibility."[48]

Remarkably, the worlds Spivak had in mind in 2012, when her article was first published, were similar to those Meltzl must have envisaged when inviting scholars from all five continents to contribute to *Acta Comparationis*. In both cases, such contributions engaged with texts from beyond the European continent, including, in Spivak's text, India, with its extraordinary variety of languages, along with the Chinese, African, Brazilian, Japanese literatures, and those from smaller European cultures like Romanian and Armenian, and the folk songs of the Rroma populations of Transylvania,[49] in *Acta Comparationis*' case. According to Horst Fassel,[50] in the end the journal published texts in twenty-one languages while Meltzl himself, in the spirit of polyglottism, wrote about "Dante in Italian, about Shakespeare in English, about Goethe in German, about Petofi and Lenau [...] in Hungarian, and about the reform of contemporary literatures in French, as he believed French literature to be the most innovative."[51] Meltzl also translated Romanian folk ballads into German and, according to Fassel, published a vast study about the enduring tradition of the Romanian ballad and its remarkable value.

That since its inception *Acta* was a journal intended to promote an innovative view of comparative literature is demonstrated, among others, by the fact that in 1878 it featured the Romanian *poet en titre*, Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890) who, that very same year, had won the award "for the best song of the Latin race," during the great *Fêtes Latines*[52] [Latin celebrations] which espoused a pan-Romance world view, quite innovative at the time and even revolutionary, if we consider that both Romanian and Provençal literatures and languages featured in Montpellier were considered "minor" in the Romance-speaking world. The award must also have had a wider geopolitical significance, as Alecsandri won it only one year after Romania had declared independence from the Ottoman Empire,[53] and was deeply involved in the process of nation-building. Exemplary for its pan-Romance view, in which Latin, the so-called *queen* of the Romance-speaking world reigns supreme,[54] Alecsandri's poem[55]

46. Meltzl, "Present Tasks," 44.

47. Meltzl, "Present Tasks," 44.

48. Spivak mentions this concept in her 2015 article "World Systems and the Creole, Rethought," which I mentioned earlier.

49. According to Fassel, "Romanian literature has manifested itself mostly through folk poetry. Meltzl translated Romanian folklore from the Bistrita area and analyzed the multiple versions of the ballad narrating the wedding between the sun and the moon in an extensive study which affirmed both the antiquity and the special relevance of Romanian folk ballad. In June 1878 he published Vasile Alecsandri's "Song of the Latin Race," both in the original and in German translation. Collegues from Cluj and Meltzl's students have also contributed articles about Romanian literature and translations. For example, the Cluj-based professor Grigore Silași, Chair of the Romanian Department had translated from Schiller and goethe, and also wrote about Ileana Cosânzeana. One cannot ignore Heinrich von Wlislocki, who collected Romanian folklore from around Cluj and translated it into German. Petre Dulfu, another student of Meltzl's translated into Romanian the parable of the three rings from Nathan, the Wise. ("Literatura română a fost prezentă mai ales prin poezia populară. Meltzl a tradus folclor românesc din zona Bistriței, a analizat versiunile baladei despre nunta soarelui cu luna într-un studiu vast, în care a afirmat atât vechimea, cât și importanța deosebită a baladei populare românești. În iunie 1878 publicase "Cântecul Gintei Latine" al lui Vasile Alecsandri, atât în original, cât și în traducere germană. Colegii clujeni și studenții lui Meltzl au contribuit și ei cu articole despre literatura română, cât și cu traduceri. De exemplu, profesorul clujean Grigore Silași, șeful Catedrei de română, a tradus din Schiller si Goethe, dar a scris și despre Ileana Cosânzeana. Nu poate fi trecut cu vederea nici Heinrich von Wlislocki, care a cules folclor românesc din zona Clujului, pe care l-a și tradus în germană. Petre Dulfu, alt student al lui Meltzl, a tradus în limba română parabola celor trei inele din *Nathan Înteleptul*.") În "*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*": prima revista de literatură universală din lume." *Philologica Jassyensia*. Iasi, vol 20, Issue 2. (2014) 155-159. https://www.proquest.com/docview/1691010918?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals.

50. Fassel, "*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*."
https://www.proquest.com/docview/1691010918?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals.

51. Fassel, "*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*," n.p. My translation.

52. According to Francesca Zantedeschi, "Cântecul Gintei Latine: Vasile Alecsandri, 'Race' Connections and the Latinity of the Romanians (1850s–1870s)," *Nations and Nationalism*, 28, no. 3 (2022): 909–923. The celebrations were held in Montpellier from May 22 to 29, 1878.

53. See Zantedeschi, "Cântecul Gintei Latine,"n.p.

54. The Romanian text of Alecsandri's song and an unattributed English translation can be found at: https://lyricstranslate.com/en/c%C3%A2ntecul-gintei-latine-song-latin-kind.html-0.

55. "//The Latin kind[family] is blessed/With all the treasures of this world/And she gladly shares them/ With her other sisters./ But she's frightful when she's angry/When her liberator arm/ Strikes the cruel tyranny/And fights for her dignity.//" https://lyricstranslate.com/en/c%C3%A2ntecul-gintei-latine-song-latin-kind.html-0.

affirms the equal cultural status of the Latin-family literatures, including those less known among them, such as Romanian, in relation to the more powerful houses, dominant in the geopolitical arena of the late nineteenth century.

According to Francesca Zantedeschi,[56] it is equally relevant that "Alecsandri's poem was widely acclaimed, in particular by writers and philologists actively involved in the linguistic and literary revival of Provençal,[57] "who had come together through the Félibrige," an association devoted to this culture, most famously represented by Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914), and who recognized in Alecsandri a kindred spirit.[58] The fact that *Acta Comparationis* included this pan-Romance world event in its issue suggests acknowledgement for its legitimacy and support for its claims. At the time, Provençal, as a "minor" Romance language, must have seen itself in a situation somewhat similar to Romanian, which, despite being spoken by the population of the Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia, and by the so-called Vlachs in Transylvania, became widely acknowledged as a Romance language around 1830 when the linguist Friedrich Christian Diez included it his comparative work *Grammar of the Romance Languages*. By 1830, Romanians themselves, especially those from Transylvania, who were seeking recognition from the Hungarian crown, had made sustained efforts to have the Latin origin of their language acknowledged. Școala Ardeleană/ The Transylvanian School was such a cultural initiative which in 1791 and 1792 sent a series of appeals, known as *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*[59] to Emperor Leopold the Second (1747-1792), Holy Roman Emperor, king of Hungary, and Archduke of Austria. These initiatives were accompanied by the decision to replace the Cyrillic script of Romanian with a Latin one (finalized in 1862), followed by the 1825 printing the first quattro-lingual Romanian dictionary, *Lexiconul de la Buda*,[60] in Romanian, Latin, Hungarian, and German.

Living and teaching college in the capital of Transylvania, Kolozsvár/ Klausenburg/ Cluj, Meltzl must have known about this publication and *Acta*'s openness to pan-Romance world initiatives proves that programmatically, at least, the magazine was as progressive as the most can hope even in this day and age. The fact that *Acta* does not mention or engage with the ideas of the Transylvanian School is surprising, to say the least. Mihaela Ursa's essay, included in the present thematic issue[61], provides an insightful interpretation of why this was the case. In line with a critical re-reading and recontextualizing of *Acta*'s significance, let me add that the close connection one can establish between Meltzl's programmatic texts and concepts of comparative literature outlined in a couple of recent studies by contemporary scholars like Spivak, is both remarkable and disheartening.

Unexpected Alliances and Misadventures in the Plea for Global Translations

The second part of my essay will focus on the fertile, though unexpected, alliance between some of Metlzl's and Spivak's concepts and projects for comparative literature, which illuminate the planetary dimension that relates them. First, let me suggest that, by re-establishing the ignored connection of Romanian to Latin by the eighteenth century Magyar authorities, and by reintroducing Latin words into popular Romanian, which, according to Spivak's argument about popular Italian, could be regarded as creolized Latin, the Transylvanian scholars of *Școala Ardeleană* (SA), and, to a certain extent, Romanian poets like Alecsandri and the Romantics were engaging in a unique process of getting Romanian recognized as another version of Latin Creole.

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56. Zantedeschi, "Cântecul Gintei Latine: Vasile Alecsandri."

57. Zantedeschi includes the following note about the term "Provençal": At the time, the term 'Provençal' was generally used to define the *langue d'oc* as a whole (i.e., in all its 'dialectal' varieties), facilitated by the national and international success of the literary works of the renowned Provençal poet, Frédéric Mistral. However, the use of this term was soon contested by writers and scholars who did not belong to the purely Provençal historical and linguistic area and who wanted to restore linguistic and literary dignity to the other varieties of *langue d'oc*. The creation of Félibrige, meanwhile, dated back to 1854, when seven young Provençal poets gathered in Font-Ségugne, near Avignon, to lay down the foundation stones of an association that would become the symbol of the Provençal literary revival in the second half of the nineteenth century. The poetic association later rose to national (French) and international fame thanks to the writings of Mistral, who became its undisputed leader until his death, in 1914." Zantedeschi, "Cântecul Gintei Latine: Vasile Alecsandri."

58. See Levente T. Szabó, "Egy kapcsolat története és miértjei. Frédéric Mistral és az *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*," *Korunk*, no. 11 (2019).

59. *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* was a series of letters in 1791 and 1792 to Emperor Leopold the Second, in which Romanian authors associated with Școala ardeleană (Transylvanian school) were asking that he acknowledges the Romanian nation as part of the Principality of Transylvania. The authors of this veritable political manifesto were: Gheorghe Șincai (1754-1816), Petru Maior (1756-1821), Samuil Micu-Klein (1745-1806), and Ioan Budai-Deleanu (1760-1820). Mihaela Ursa's "(Anti)imperial narration in the Mock-Epic Form: Ion Budai-Deleanu and the Transylvanian Project" in the current of *Revista Transilvania* discusses *Supplex* in the context of Ion Budai-Deleanu's "Țiganiada" (The Gypsiad). As a starting point she notes that "in spite of its multilingualism, diversity, anti-imperial stance and multiculturalism, *Acta* fails to mention this former influential school of thought (Școala ardeleană—my note) born in the same place. The Școala ardeleană (SA) projects, works, or representatives are not referenced at all, not even historically, critically or as counterpoints to the *Acta* endeavors."

60. The complete Romanian title is: *Lesicon románescu-látinescu-ungurescu-nemțescu quare de mai multi autori, in cursul' a trideci, si mai multoru ani s' au lucratu.*

61. Mihaela Ursa, "(Anti)Imperial Narration in the Mock-Epic Form: Ioan Budai-Deleanu and the Transylvanian Project," *Transilvania*, no. 5 (2025): 13-27.

In her argument about Dante's use of "vulgar" Italian along Latin in the *Divine Comedy*, Spivak advances the idea that modern, "creolized idioms" deserve equal status to the latter. *Mutatis mutandis*, Romanian, Provençal in the late 1800s, and all the other idioms that Meltzl welcomes in *Acta Comparationis* between 1877-1888, entertained a similar claim to their own cultural legitimacy, whether that was based on their créolité in relationship to a "major" culture or not. But was *Acta* as progressive in its ideology as this contemporary argument may make it to be, or was its theoretical progressivism moderated by its actual publication practices? The major culture argument is, after all, only espousing cultural imperialism and a great-power, colonial mentality.

It is undeniable that by publishing and translating folk ballads, legends, and other oral and performative productions of less-known European cultures, Meltzl was helping preserve and promote the "vulgar, popular speech" of Romanians, Rromas, Armenians, and other so-called "minor" peoples living within the administrative constraints of various empires during the nineteenth century. This attitude meets Spivak's advocacy for a planetary kind of comparative literature which was launched, by her 2003 manifesto, *Death of a Discipline* where she presciently championed the idea of expanding the European-centered profile of the field to a truly world-encompassing frame. Away from the model outlined in the 1965 ACLA Report which recalls the founding years of the discipline of comparative literature in the United States, originating with the multilingual, post-World War II wave of Eastern European and German Jewish academic émigrés, Spivak insists on a planetary model, which embraces *creolity*. Since "[c]reolity assumes imperfection, even as it assures the survival of a rough future," we can hope that "[i]n the creolization of the world's past, comparativists of all stripes can hang out together."[62] What this "hanging out" implies is the cultivation of non-traditional, trans-cultural comparisons, able to bring together Indian scholars with American Dante scholars, for example, inasmuch as they recognize similar patterns of language creolization between Latin and vernacular Italian in the fourteenth century Dante, as between Sanskrit and the various Prakrts included in Indian epics.[63] The pre-condition for such world-wide comparisons to take place is, necessarily, the teaching and learning of a plethora of previously neglected languages, most of them considered "vulgar," "creolized" versions of some canonical idiom. In her plea to reconsider creole cultures, Spivak takes the principle of polyglottism even further, and advocates for the non-pragmatic teaching and learning of so-called "dead languages", whose purpose cannot, by any means, be communication.

In learning a language completely unrelated to one's world, a language that one may never use, after the model of the old Babylonian schools, where "the students were not simply learning the technique of calligraphy but were also studying Sumerian, a language that had long ceased to be spoken and that bore no resemblance to the Akkadian they spoke at home,"[64] one may learn to re-negotiate the idea of the *foreign* [language] by applying the model of the *creole* [language], which Spivak sees as instrumental in undoing the pernicious binary between native and foreign.[65] Such an undertaking would encourage scholars and students, in particular, to learn more "foreign" languages and thus help them see beyond the dichotomy between "foreign" and "native" language by providing them with the ability of immersing themselves in multiple and diverse cultural paradigms, which in Spivak's view is the necessary precondition of planetary comparatism. In view of *Acta Comparationis'* polyglot program, it is clear that this standard, which challenges the Eurocentric model of the discipline, is by no means new.

As a matter of fact, one may argue that the 1993 Bernheimer Report about the State of the Comparative Literature discipline already forcefully advocated for the essential knowledge of foreign languages. For students in the graduate programs of elite American institutions that can afford strong language departments, adequate libraries, and top comparative literature programs, the Report maintains that "knowledge of foreign languages is the *raison d'être* of comparative literature"[66] and thus suggests that graduate students in this field engage with "the study of two literatures in their original language and the reading knowledge of two [other—my note] languages, plus a classical language (if studying 'old' cultures)."[67] Such requirements are necessary since, as the extensive Report and the responses from

62. Spivak, "World Systems and the Creole, Rethought," 28.

63. Spivak, "World Systems and the Creole, Rethought," 33.

64. J. Aruz, and R. Wallenfels, eds., *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium BC from the Mediterranean to the Indus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003, 455. Quoted in Spivak, "World Systems and the Creole Rethought"

65. J. Aruz, and R. Wallenfels, eds., *Art of the First Cities*., 36–37.

66. Charles Bernheimer. "A Report to the ACLA: Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century," 40. https://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title/1342/comparative-literature-age-multiculturalism

67. Bernheimer. "A Report to the ACLA," 43.

over twenty scholars acknowledge[68], "the field has entered a new era during which "comparative literature should play an active role in furthering the multicultural recontextualization of the Anglo-American and European perspectives."[69]

To be able to provide such contextualization, its practitioners should have in-depth knowledge of a couple of other cultures apart from their native ones, and be able to engage in interdisciplinary study with "the sister arts" and/or fields in the humanities and sciences. Responding to what he perceives to be the "restrictive Eurocentrism" of the post-World War II years, which only advanced an apparent "internationalism" in comparative literary studies, Bernheimer insists that "the old hostility toward translation should be mitigated" and in the case of less known languages and cultures, it is "better [to] teach a work in translation than neglect marginal (cultural voices)."[70] Simultaneously, the multicultural recontextualization of the Anglo-American and European perspectives "does not mean abandoning those perspectives, but rather questioning and resisting their dominance."[71] Confirming its openness to the challenges of a new, global era in culture, communication, and, economy, the Report also registers the emergence of cultural studies as coterminous with that of traditional comparative literature.

As one can easily see, some of these issues are far and beyond the goals and interests that Meltzl outlined for *Acta Comparationis*, a journal in which juxtapositions (see lat. *comparationes*) of texts from all over the world allow the scholar to compare literary works by "placing them together" (see lat. *comparō*). I borrow this clarifying etymology from Christian Moraru's essay "'World,' 'Globe,' 'Planet': Comparative Literature, Planetary Studies, and Cultural Debt after the Global Turn,"[72] which explores the ways in which comparative studies could both exist in the world of globalization with all its shortcomings, while also initiating an ethical, *planetary* approach able to institute its own reality, standards, and ideals. Separated from Meltzl's by more than a century, Moraru's project for the field reinforces the calls for polyglottism and translation when defining the "planetary ethics of relationality" in opposition to globalization, which in Moraru's view "falls under the purview of economics, finance, technology (primarily informatics), media, and communication." Driven by profit-making, the global handling of relation is "orchestrated and understood in terms that rationalize the relational by subordinating it to a lucrative rationality," which is the opposite of what a planetary cultural perspective entails. What Moraru proposes instead is to "rethink being-in-relation beyond the nationalist, imperialist, and, of late, globalist nexus, beyond the relational logos that, for such a long time, has underlain the main form of mapping and linking up here and there, self and other, ours and theirs." The generous spirit of such a project evokes a possible *epistemological alliance* with Meltzl's calls for polyglottism and translation, especially when defining the "planetary ethics of relationality" in opposition to globalization, which in Moraru's view "falls under the purview of economics, finance, technology (primarily informatics), media, and communication." Driven by profit-making, the global handling of relation is "orchestrated and understood in terms that rationalize the relational by subordinating it to a lucrative rationality," which is the opposite of what a planetary cultural perspective entails. What Moraru proposes instead is to "rethink being-in-relation beyond the nationalist, imperialist, and, of late, globalist nexus, beyond the relational logos that, for such a long time, has underlain the main form of mapping and linking up here and there, self and other, ours and theirs."[73]

Back to the Task of the Translator in a *Planetary* Culture

The project seems utopian, but one can easily see that it answers and amplifies Spivak's call for "a curriculum in which all students would already know or study a non-European language"[74] in the hope that such standards would increase the visibility of literatures from other parts of the world, including South Asia. This potential requirement hints at another Spivakian imperative: "never translate from an imperial language!"[75] which, though drastic, acknowledges the

68. In the 1995 *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, Charles Bernheimer, ed. Johns Hopkins University Press. Among the respondents are: K. Anthony Appiah, who writes about Geist stories, Mary Louise Pratt who approaches comparative literature from the perspective of global citizenship, and Michael Riffaterre, explores the complementarity of comparative literature and cultural studies. Emily Apter, Rey Chow, Jonathan Culler, David Damrosch, Margaret R. Higonnet, Francoise Lionnet, and Marjorie Perloff are among those who write Position papers. The topics of these vary from redefinitions of the functions of criticism and the promise of comparative literature (Ed Aheran and Arnold Weinstein), to discussions about "exile," "margins" and "marginality" (Apter), elitism versus populism/cultural studies (Fox-Genovese), Feminism (Higonnet), and redefinitions of "literature" (Perloff).

69. *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, 44.

70. *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism,* 45.

71. *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism,* 44.

72. Christian Moraru, *The 2024 Report on the State of the Discipline. Paradigms.* "'World,' 'Globe,' 'Planet': Comparative Literature, Planetary Studies, and Cultural Debt after the Global Turn." https://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/%e2%80%9cworld%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%9cglobe%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%9cplanet%e2%80%9d-comparative-literature-planetary-studies-and-cultural-debt-after.

73. Moraru, "'World,' 'Globe,' 'Planet,'" n.p.

74. Emily Apter, "Tasks of the Spivakian Translator," *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 55, no. 1 (2022): 4.

75. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 21.

long-lasting advantage in resources and visibility that such languages/cultures—have enjoyed.

To avoid what Apter calls "translation as violation or cultural appropriationism," especially with respect to idioms that don't have many practitioners among the most visible (North American) comparatists,[76] one needs indeed "a pedagogy that fastens on the singularities and withholdings of each and every idiom. In preserving such singularities through rigorous and creative translations, the critics, the comparatists, and the literary historians should engage in translations that are both adequate to the originals and creative in their ability to rewrite the original in another idioms. In "The Task of the Spivakian Translator," Apter refers to "Spivak's initiation of a Bengali bilingual series with Columbia University Press, with glossary and critical introduction" as "proof of another kind of institution-building,"[77] to be emulated by a discipline with a planetary scope. With such praxis, one may hope to counteract what Apter calls the *untranslatability* of marginal(ized) idioms, which have existed for centuries outside the canonical circuits of translation promoted by the dominant European cultures.[78] The task of the translator, and by extension of Comparative literature programs, becomes thus to promote translations from previously marginal(ized) literatures of the world and, in so doing, promote *planetarity* as a paradigm set out to counteract the effects of *de facto* globalization. Spivak, Apter, and Moraru all consider the imbrication of globalization and the logic of capitalism, originating from decades, if not centuries of colonialism and great-power imperialism. Great-power monolingualism is only one symptom of this pervasive paradigm, at work in Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean, and the Global South.

Drawing creatively on the insights of Viennese psychoanalyst Melanie Klein,[79] with whom she agrees that "the work of translation is an incessant shuttle," Spivak seems to embrace the paradox that "[i]n every possible sense, translation is necessary but impossible,"[80] only to later arrive at the redefinition of translation as "a peculiar act of reparation toward the language of the inside."[81] This is the reparation of "reality-testing," where each language, the one we translate from and to one we translate into, "becomes the guarantee of the other" since "[e]ach is assumed to be or to possess the generality of a semiotic that can appropriate the singularity of the other's idiom by way of conscientious approximations."[82] A translator from Bengali herself, after famously rendering Derrida's *Of Grammatology* from French into English in 1967, Spivak sees her responsibility at the present time along the lines of taking "from my mother-tongue and giv[ing] to the 'target'-language through the ethical concept-metaphor of *matririn* (mother-debt)—a debt *to* the mother as well as a debt (that) the (place of the) mother *is.*"[83] Translation, seen as an act of gift-giving, of attempting to give back, becomes an ethical event trying to replicate the mother's gift of birth (and childrearing) with accountability, even though such gifts "cannot be repaid, and should not be thought of as repayable."[84] According to Spivak and Apter, the ethical imperative deriving from such a genealogy dictates that one needs to work toward "translation as reparation."[85] Spivak herself states as much, and her position may sound parochial, if it were not assumed in a post-colonial context: "[…] for me it [translation] is the shuttle between the exquisite guilt of finding that one can treat one's mother tongue as one language among many […] and the reparation of reality-testing, where each language becomes the guarantee of the other. Each is assumed to be or to possess the generality of a semiotic that can appropriate the singularity of the other's idiom by way of conscientious approximations."[86]

To transform the "singularity" of one's mother tongue into an idiom of the world of culture, one may need to undertake

76. Especially those who coordinate book series at major publishing houses.

77. Apter, "Tasks of the Spivakian Translator," 4.

78. These cultures, according to Apter and Spivak, are responsible for benefitting, when not promoting the imperialist and colonial ideologies of European powers.

79. See Spivak's "Translation as Culture," *Parallax* 6, no. 1 (2000): 13–24. reproduced in *Translation—Reflections, Refractions, Transformations: Reflections, Refractions, Transformations,* ed. Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar (Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 263–276.

80. Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 263.

81. Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 265.

82. Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 265.

83.Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 266.

84. For contextualization purposes, it is worth citing Spivak's genealogy of translation as gift-repaying in full: "The mother-debt is the gift of birth, as it is imaged to be, but also the accountable task of childrearing (literally *manush kora* = making human, in my mother tongue). One translates this gift-into-accountability as one attempts to repay what cannot be repaid, and should not be thought of as repayable." Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 265.

85. In *Living Translation* (2022), a collection of articles Spivak published on the topic, including her landmark 1976 "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, she employs the idea of translation as reparation. Apter notes that, in coining the concept, Spivak draws on the work of Melanie Klein, who also inspired Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick when creating the concept of "reparative reading" ("Task," 8).

86. Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 265.

the translation, in the sense of Euclidian geometry, of the former into the latter by transferring (from the Latin *transferre*) one into the other. While moving every point of a figure, shape or space by the same distance in a given direction may prove a useful metaphor for the overall goal of cultural translation which undertakes the metamorphosis of the literal, metaphorical, and intimately cultural senses of texts from one idiom into another by transmuting linguistic artefacts through "conscientious approximations," this geometric translation provides some sense of the methodology at work in comparative studies. In her essay about the task of the Spivakian translator, Apter expands on what the program of translation as reparation should actually entail for the individual translator and for the institutions involved.

> "[…] to effectively translate into and from little-taught languages, often of 'the Global South' while addressing, indeed repairing, those weaknesses in contemporary liberal education that hail from North America, specifically curricula that promote packaged sound-bites, standardized deliverablesfrictionless learning processes based on supposedly value-neutral data and monocultural accessibility at the expense of plurilingual difficulty."[87]

To repair is thus to supplement, to increase the corpus of existing translations and, most importantly, in the sense of Meltzl's program for *Acta Comparationis*, to prepare and encourage polyglottism in new generations of comparatists. Meltzl's understanding of the concept, however, may at first surprise contemporary practitioners in the field. By claiming that one of the goals of polyglottism was to "cultivate the pure essence of each nation," *Acta* seems to slide into nineteenth century nationalism, which may seem self-contradictory and even self-defeating for a planetary paradigm of comparative literature. In as much as *Acta*'s nationalism was not reinforced by monoglottism, however, one needs to consider a different interpretation of polyglottism, which appears in the third text about the intended profile of comparative literary studies.

Conclusions

In the text dedicated to "Decaglottism," translated into English for the first time in 2024 by Angus Nicholls, Meltzl states that in his estimation there are ten European literatures that have attained the status of universal classicization, but nevertheless comparative literature scholars should not ignore literatures of less numerous European peoples, or pretend that the ten European literatures should claim any superiority over the great cultures of Asia.[88] Such a direction would be an unconscionable faux-pas that would bring back into the practice of comparative literature the extraneous criteria of international politics, which, at least programmatically, Meltzl was trying to keep at bay. In order to bring all these literatures in dialog, apart from their actual historical connections which depend on geopolitical considerations, *Acta Comparationis* wouwwld print texts both in the original languages and in translation from all literatures, "small" or "great," "classical," or still in their Romantic, naturalist, or folk stages. This welcoming standpoint, infused by an equalitarian idea of universal value for all nations and their unique forms of expression is, however undermined by the conceptual distinctions associated with each of them, which have embedded in them hierarchies favoring "classical" over "Romantic" stages and written versus folk/oral cultures.

Nowadays, pronouncements like these, despite their intended open-mindedness, may strike us rather as unwittingly imperialist. Nevertheless, one is equally compelled to note that when considered within the larger context of the journal's initial, generous program, *Acta* shares with contemporary approaches in the field the ideal of equal cultural representation and a visionary openness to alterity, which deserves note and critical consideration.

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87. Apter, "Task," 4.

88. Among these, in the same article about Decaglottism, he includes the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese literatures. Still, unless Asian literatures transliterated their texts into Latin script, Meltzl notes that *Acta* could not consider them for publication, if only for technical reasons.

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