Transnational Routes and National Constraints of Transylvanian Comparatism: A Portrait of Grigore Silași

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Abstract: This portrait focuses on Grigore Silași's educational background and institutional activity, aiming to delineate the influence of the socio-political context of Transylvania prior to and following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise on comparative practices. The article primarily covers the documentary restitution of Silași's intellectual biography, moving beyond the oversized clichés that shaped his place in Romanian cultural memory, as the first university professor of Romanian language and literature in Transylvania and as an advocate for Romanian rights within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In order to attain a more nuanced comprehension of Silași's turn to comparative literature, this biographical restitution examines the influence of the Greek-Catholic Church in nineteenth-century Transylvania, the academic profile of the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, and the political initiatives employed by the cultural organizations largely supported by young Romanian Transylvanians.

Keywords: Grigore Silași, Greek-Catholic church, University of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, national identity, multiconfessional Transylvania.

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Who was Grigore Silași/Szilasi Gergely and what is the relevance of revisiting his biography and work today, in the context of a discussion about the origins of comparatism and the practices of comparative literature prior to its institutionalization as an academic discipline? An answer to these questions was provided in this thematic issue, starting from Silași's dual status during the period when *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–1888) was developing its comparative program.[1] On the one hand, Silași emerged as a notable figure of the Romanian intellectual elite from Transylvania, who cultivated a militant nationalist cultural and political discourse. Hence, his work reflected the highly conflictual interethnic context in which *Acta Comparationis* developed and was received. On the other hand, Silași served as a professor of Romanian language and literature, a linguist, and a literary historian who employed comparative methods to engage in a perceived competition of national languages and literatures. The main aim of these comparative endeavors was to protest against the subordinate condition of the Romanian nation and culture within the Austro-Hungarian empire—a stance that appeared to contradict the "preliminary tasks of comparative literature" outlined by *Acta Comparationis*.[2] The portrait we develop presents an alternative facet of Silași's identity as a Romanian Transylvanian from the second half of the nineteenth century, who engaged with and partially embraced the principles of comparative literature. We specifically refer to Silași's intellectual formation and institutional activity, which help clarify the extent to which the inter-imperial context of Transylvania, prior to and

1. See Cosmin Borza, "Peripheral Nationalism, Interimperial Comparatism: The Case of Grigore Silași," *Transilvania* (2025).

2. See Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur. II. Das Prinzip des Polyglottismus," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, no. 15 (1877): 307–315; Hugo Meltzl, "Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," translated by Hans-Joachim Schulz and Philip H. Rhein, in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongsieni Buthelezi (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44–47; Hugo Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur. III. Der Dekaglottismus," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, no. 24 (1878): 494–501; Angus Nicholls, "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.

following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, served as both a catalyst for and a constraint on comparative practice.[3] Such an approach is all the more relevant given that, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Silași has been largely overlooked or acknowledged solely within a patrimonial and nationalist framework: as the first professor of Romanian language and literature at the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg and as an advocate for the rights of Romanians in Transylvania within the empire, respectively.

The Multiconfessional Education of the Nation

The first significant component of Silași's portrait is the multilingual and multiconfessional environment of his formative years. Silași was born on January 27, 1836, in Beclean/Bethlen, in the northern part of Transylvania, a small town with a mixed Romanian, Hungarian, Jewish, Roma, and Armenian population. From 1711 until 1867, Transylvania was an autonomous region of the Habsburg monarchy/Austrian Empire; however, it remained mostly under the influence of the Kingdom of Hungary, which regarded this territory as part of the "Lands of the Hungarian Crown."[4] Silași began his education in Hungarian at a confessional (Evangelical Reformed) elementary school. Nonetheless, he grew up bilingual and most probably received an education rooted in Romanian national and Greek-Catholic tradition. His mother, Cristina (Linca) Moisiu, was the niece of Alexandru Sterca Șuluțiu, a Transylvanian Greek-Catholic archbishop. His father, Vasile Silași, was the Greek-Catholic protopope of Beclean/Bethlen; he was renowned for his patriotic initiatives, including the founding of Romanian rural schools in the region.[5] It is also important to note that the Greek-Catholic Church was established in the late seventeenth century as an initiative by the imperial court in Vienna to curtail Calvinist influence in Transylvania. It underwent substantial expansion in the early nineteenth century when it equaled and, in many aspects, even surpassed the Orthodox Church's impact within the Romanian Transylvanian community. This advancement is all the more significant as, throughout the eighteenth century, for the Romanian community of Transylvania "the terms 'nation' and 'Orthodox' were synonymous."[6] As Keith Hitchins explains, the main reasons for such a reversal of influences were the financial support and the educational access provided by the Roman Catholics to their Greek-Catholics peers:

> "For the first time young Romanians in large numbers were encouraged to attend Roman Catholic schools in Transylvania. [...] The best among them were sent for advanced theological studies to the Jesuit university in Nagyszombat, the Collegium Sancta Barbara and the Pazmaneum in Vienna, and the College for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. [...] In Roman Catholic gymnasia and universities they came into contact with Europe for the first time. Their exposure to new currents of thought and to the spirit of progress substantially altered their perspectives on life in general and social change in particular. In time they became the bearers of a new conception of nation and the formulators of a secular dogma to explain the position of the Romanians in the European community. They were thus drawn mentally, if not always physically, out of the patriarchal village, which continued to rely upon religious tradition to explain the past and regulate the present."[7]

What Hitchins calls the "new conception of nation" manifested as a political platform designed to inform and promote within the empire the idea that "the Romanians were a Latin people with roots traceable back to ancient Rome"—a conception that relied on securing the support of the Austrian Court, whose emperor held the title of "Roman Emperor."[8]

Young Silași took advantage of his privileged position as a child of the middle ranks of the Greek-Catholic clergy. After finishing elementary school in his hometown, his education was pursued in ecclesiastical schools of various denominations. This was due to the fact that, in the nineteenth century, the educational system was largely composed of denominational educational institutions; a comprehensive state-run school system in Transylvania and in Hungary was not generally established until the last quarter of the century.[9] Silași attended a

3. On the concept of inter-imperiality, see Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

4. Bálint Varga, "The Two Faces of the Hungarian Empire," *Austrian History Yearbook*, no. 52 (2021): 118–130.

5. See Gregoriu Silași, "Autobiografie," *Tribuna*, XIV, no. 8 (1897): 30.

6. Keith Hitchins, "Religious Tradition and National Consciousness Among the Romanians of Transylvania, 1730–1780," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10, no. 3–4 (1986): 542.

7. Hitchins, "Religious Tradition," 543–544.

8. Ciprian Ghisa, "Not a Bulwark, but a Part of the Larger Catholic Community: The Romanian Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania (1700–1850)," in *Rampart Nations: Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism*, ed. Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019), 61–80.

9. Joachim von Puttkamer, "Framework of Modernization: Government Legislation and Regulations on Schooling in Transylvania 1780–1914," in *Cultural Dimensions of Elite Formation in Transylvania (1770–1950)*, ed. Victor Karady and Borbála Zsuzsanna Török (Cluj-Napoca: EDRC Foundation, 2008), 15–23.

secondary school in Dej/Dés, where he was educated by Franciscan monks. In the academic year 1847–1848, Silași transferred to a long-established, high-quality educational institution in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, the Roman Catholic lyceum, which was operated by the Piarists, a teaching order dedicated to the education and upbringing of children. The Piarists played a significant role in the dissemination and nurturing of Hungarian national culture and science. Nonetheless, one-third of the pupils enrolled at this high school were of Romanian origin.[10] During the Revolution of 1848, Silași had to return home and completed a year at the school in Năsăud/Naszód, where he deepened his knowledge of the German language. Subsequently, he resumed his studies with the Piarists in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg and graduated in 1855, obtaining his high school diploma. In his "Autobiography," Silași expressed a desire to pursue further studies in medicine or engineering; however, his father's death in 1854 brought financial constraints that limited his career options. As a result, he conformed to a typical trajectory for Greco-Catholic intellectuals in Transylvania, specifically by enrolling in Saint Barbara Seminary in Vienna (Collegium Graeca-Catholicum ad Sanctum Barbaram), founded in 1775 for the instruction of young priests from the Habsburg Empire's provinces. After completing his theological studies in 1859, Silași was ordained as a priest and appointed as the proctor of exams at the seminary. He also became the priest for Romanian-speaking parishioners of the Saint Barbara Church. In April 1862, he earned the title of Doctor of Theological Sciences from the University of Vienna. In 1865, he was granted the honorary title of Archdeacon, and in 1868, he was appointed Deputy Director of the seminary.

During his academic studies and subsequent teaching or ecclesiastical activities in Vienna, Silași beacame increasingly involved in Romanian nationalist movements. This compliance might seem intriguing in regard to Silași's multiethnic and multiconfessional intellectual background. Nonetheless, Vienna served not only as a hub of higher education for Transylvanian Romanians, but also as a centre for organizing formal and informal advocacy at the imperial court for the rights of Romanians from Transylvania.[11] In addition to serving as an emissary for the petitions of the Romanian intellectual elites of Transylvania, Silași assumed in 1861 the leadership of an organization of Romanian priests, which he renamed as Societatea bisericească-literară a teologilor români [Religious-Literary Society of Romanian Theologians].[12] In 1865, Silași founded and edited the bi-monthly magazine *Sionul românesc* [Romanian Sion], which covered a wide range of topics (religion, politics, economics, history, literature) and sought to inspire Greek-Catholic priests to act as Enlightenment-style guides for Transylvanian Romanians. The term "Sion" in the journal's title underscored its primary goal: the promotion of the unity of Romanians, irrespective of the states they belonged to during that era.[13]

A Transylvanian Romanian at the "Concert of Nations"

Following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, when Transylvania was incorporated into Hungary, Silași's actions took an even more overtly nationalist turn. At that historical moment, the Transylvanian Romanian intellectual elite divided into two factions: political activism vs. passivity. The former group, led by Andrei Șaguna, the bishop of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania, opted for full participation in the political and social life of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The latter, comprised primarily of Greek-Catholic representatives, advocated for the boycott of Hungarian state institutions and for the confinement of public actions to petitionary interventions. Silași strived to navigate between these two factions and even contributed to the union of two opposing Romanian cultural societies in Vienna: Societatea literară și științifică a românilor [Literary-Scientific Society of the Romanians] and Societatea literară socială *România* [Literary-Social Society *Romania*]. Following their merger, a new society arose in 1871, Societatea academică social-literară România Jună [România Jună Social-Literary Academic Society]. In the same year, România Jună organized the first congress of Romanian students from all regions at Putna, a location of notable historical significance situated in Bukovina, a region in many aspects similar to Transylvania: Bukovina was predominantly inhabited by Romanians until mid-nineteenth century and was under Habsburg rule from 1774 until 1918. At this congress, acknowledged as a national celebration of Romanians, Silași delivered a speech that "elicited loud cheers," after which he "was hoisted on the shoulders of the audience."[14] Silași's militant

10. Nicolae Albu, *Istoria școlilor românești din Transilvania între 1800–1867* (București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1971), 122–125.

11. Eugenia Glodariu, *Asociațiile culturale ale tineretului studios român din moharhia habsburgică 1860–1918* (Cluj-Napoca: Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis XVII, 1998).

12. On Silași's role as political and cultural emissary at the imperial court, see Borza, "Peripheral Nationalism."

13. In the mid-nineteenth century Romanian-speaking population was prevalent not only in the Romanian Principalities of Moldova and Walachia (which were unified under the name Romania in 1859), but also in Transylvania and Bukovina, regions incorporated into the Habsburg Empire, and Bessarabia, a territory of the Russian Empire.

14. *"urări intusiastice, oratorele fu rădicatŭ pe umere de către mulțimea auditorilor."* Quoted in "Serbarea de la Putna," *Românul*, September 10, 1871, 778.

discourse from 1871 relied on the notion of the "concert of nations," a popular concept in the nineteenth century within the Habsburg Empire, promoting harmony among peoples.[15] Nonetheless, Silași also emphasized that only vigorous states, aware of their identity and global influence, can be admitted into this "concert":

> "[Our great former leaders] have worked tirelessly to restore our Romanian legacy to that position in the concert of nations, which it rightfully deserves, based on its size, significance, and the many chosen qualities that we can proudly claim. […] Never has a people lived any other life than a national life. A people, to whom any fatal circumstances of time have managed to obscure the consciousness of nationality, that people has either been erased from the book of the life of nations and gradually extinguished from the face of the earth, or if it has survived somewhat, this life has been nothing than an unfortunate slumber, a prelude to death."[16]

This conception, prioritizing competition over the claimed harmonious collaboration, would underpin his cultural, institutional, and political actions in the following years, when Silași left Vienna and moved to Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg. In this city, considered the informal capital of Transylvania, the Royal Hungarian University (renamed Royal Hungarian Franz Joseph University in 1881) was established in 1872.[17] The university was divided into four scientific faculties, namely the Faculty of Law and Political Science, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Philosophy, Linguistics, and History, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences.[18] Silași was appointed professor of Romanian Language and Literature. Because each department was assigned a single instructor, Silași simultaneously held the position of department head.

At its inception, the Faculty of Philosophy, Linguistics and History had its curriculum composed of three structural parts, reflecting the three primary specializations indicated in its title. In the first academic year, the institution was unable to recruit suitable professors for the instruction of English and French; however, from the 1873 academic year onward, these languages were incorporated into the curriculum. The philosophical lectures included courses such as an introduction to philosophy, the history of ancient philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy; the historical lectures comprised subjects on medieval state history, the states of Europe in the sixteenth century, the era of Hungarian leaders along with the cultural history during the time of Saint Stephen, and the science of chronology. The philology lectures covered the history of Hungarian literature in the sixteenth century, the history of the Hungarian language, the history of Latin literature, the exegesis of Demosthenes' *Third Philippic*, an interpretation of Homer's *Iliad*, the Latin language, Greek syntax, an exegesis of Plautus' *Pseudolus*, an interpretation of Cicero the Orator, Greek grammar, instruction at the German Literary Conservatory, Romanian grammar, the history of Romanian literature up to the early eighteenth century, and the origin and development of the Romanian language.[19] In the following academic year, 1873–1874, the curriculum was restructured, and the number of proposed lectures increased considerably. Following the German model, many of the new lectures were designed to provide an in-depth interpretation of a single work over the course of an entire term, employing what would now be known as the close reading method. Accordingly, in the fall of 1873, the more consolidated teaching community proposed a different range of lectures. For the philosophical component, topics included ethics, an

15. See Jennifer Mitzen, *Power in Concert: The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Global Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

16. "*au năsuitŭ a re'nălța ginea nóstră românéscă la acea posițiune în concertulŭ popórelorŭ, ce-ĭ compete după numĕrulŭ, după însemnătatea și multele însușirĭ eminenți, ce cu frunte 'nălțată putemu dice că le posede. […] Nici uă-dată vr'unŭ poporŭ n'a trăitŭ altă viéță, de câtŭ uă viéță naționale. Unŭ poporŭ, la care orĭ-ce împregiurărĭ fatale ale timpului a reușitŭ a întuneca consciința naționalității, acelŭ poporu ori s'a ștersŭ din cartea vieței popórelorŭ și 'ncetŭ pe încetŭ s'a stinsŭ de pe facia pămêntuluĭ, séŭ décă a mai viețuitŭ câtŭ-va, viéța acésta n'a fostŭ de de câtŭ uă nefericită dormitare, unu somnŭ premergĕtorŭ alŭ morțiĭ.*" Quoted in "Serbarea de la Putna."

17. "Kolozsvár/Cluj was the biggest town in Transylvania […] an ethnically and socially rather homogeneous, Magyar dominated settlement (contrary to most sizable townships in the region – or, for that matter, Hungary as a whole), thus lending itself for purposes of symbolic identification as a regional capital of the Hungarian nation state. As concerns religion, the population was divided between the main denominations active in Transylvania. At the 1880 census the town recorded a total population of 32,831 inhabitants, out of whom the Roman Catholics and the Calvinists were almost equal in number (11,127 for the former, 11,071 for the latter); there were also 5,529 Greek Catholics, 1,299 Evangelical Lutherans, 1,010 Greek Orthodox, 1,047 Unitarians, and 1,639 Israelites. The latter were actually almost entirely assimilated Hungarians of the 'neolog' (reform) persuasion – though, for political reasons, even ethnic Romanians were willingly considered at that time as 'Hungarians of an eastern religion.' As to mother tongue, the census recorded an overwhelming majority of Hungarians (23,676), as compared to 5,618 Romanians and 1,437 Germans, the rest being made up of Slovaks, Ruthenians, Serb-Croats, etc.;" Lucian Nastasă, "University Education and Culture in Kolozsvár/Cluj," in Victor Karady and Lucian Nastasă, *The University of Kolozsvár/Cluj and the Students of the Medical Faculty (1872–1918)* (Budapest/Cluj-Napoca: Central European University, 2004), 24.

18. See *1872-ik évi XIX. törvénycikk. A kolozsvári magyar királyi tudományegyetem felállításáról és ideiglenes szervezéséről = Képviselőházi irományok*, 1872, vol. I, doc. no. 95, 395–397.

19. See *A Kolozsvári Magyar Királyi Tudomány-egyetem Tanrendje, az 1872/3. tanév téli szakára*, Cluj/Kolozsvár, 1872, 6–8.

analysis of Imre Madách's drama *Az ember tragédiája* [The Tragedy of Man], Aristotle's philosophy, comparative pedagogy, and Herbert Spencer's philosophy; for the historical component, lectures covered seventeenth-century European state history, the foundation of Rome, practical exercises for teacher training students, the early periods of Hungarian leaders and king Saint Stephen, the history of Hungary between 1114 and 1222, the origin of local chronicles, as well as subjects relating to tenth-eleventh century Byzantine literature with Hungarian connections, medieval Latin literature, the system of ancient measurements and coinage, and the chronology of Eastern peoples. The linguistic component included courses on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungarian literary history, the history of the Hungarian language and philology until the eighteenth century, the history and critique of language reform, Latin syntax, an interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Tacitus' *Annals*, alongside Greek grammar, the theory of criticism, an interpretation of Terence's *Andria*, Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, a critical history of German literature, an interpretation of Lessing's *Nathan*, the life, works and position of Sándor Petőfi in world literature (for German-speaking students), an interpretation of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Romanian etymology, the Macedonian dialect of Romanian in parallel with the Romanian language of the Transylvanian Basin, the history of Romanian literature during the Renaissance, French grammar, French literature, English grammar, and the history of English literature.[20]

Reading this list one can infer that the university's curriculum and methodological approach were primarily conservative. However, it is undeniable that, despite designating Hungarian as the sole language of teaching, the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg showed a commitment to European polyglottism (with Latin, Greek, Hungarian, German, Romanian, French, English languages and literatures), and even to comparative teaching methods. We already mentioned courses such as comparative pedagogy and the life, works and position of Sándor Petőfi in world literature (held by the youngest professor of the university, Hugo Meltzl, the future editor of *Acta Comparationis*). In the forthcoming years, the curriculum of the Faculty of Philosophy, Linguistics and History also included comparative geography, comparative ethnography, comparative linguistics, comparative morphology.[21] Silași himself held in 1875, 1877, 1884 lectures on "The Romanian language in Istria and the Rhaeto-Romance language in parallel with the morphology of their sister languages," while in 1878 he delivered the course titled "A comparative analysis of Western and Eastern Armenian in relation to other Semitic languages."[22] Moreover, courses on comparative anatomy, comparative histology, comparative economics were offered at various faculties of the university. This situation prompts Levente T. Szabó to highlight the inclination of this small, underfunded, and peripheral university towards the promotion of academic freedom and innovation:

> "the major debates at the university of Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg in the first years after the foundation were linked to the self-definition of the university and to the role and duties of the newly appointed university professors. On the one hand, the university was a newly established one with poor infrastructure and neglected financially by the Hungarian government in the first decades after 1872. This led to bitter anti-Budapest criticism directed also against the only other Hungarian university, of course, the Budapest-based one with long and established traditions. On the other hand, this was one of the reasons why the new university defined itself against its "Western" counterpart, and responded to the ironic comments on its provincialism with finding in its own *niche*. The programme speeches of the first two rectors not only imagined Transylvania as the land of excessive freedom (of course, with an ironic blink towards the other Hungarian university, which seemed to have not only much more money, but also much more rules, regulations and conventions), but made out of this imagined history a duty for each and every professor of the university – subtly forcing them to innovate. Innovation and provocative thinking seemed to be the keywords and a potential trademark for the newly established institution in the vision of its first rectors."[23]

Silași was effectively integrated into this academic milieu. Upon his employment in 1872 as professor of Romanian language and literature, he also served as a member of the university's teacher certification committee and played a notable role in drafting the institution's rules and regulations, as well as in initiatives aimed at revising the faculty's areas of study.[24] In 1878/1879, he served as Vice Dean of the faculty, and in 1879, upon the recommendation of the

20. See *A Kolozsvári Magyar Királyi Tudomány-egyetem Tanrendje, az 1873/4. tanév téli szakára*, Cluj/Kolozsvár, 1873, 7–9.

21. See Levente T. Szabó and Márta Zabán (eds.), *Dokumentumok a kolozsvári Bölcsészet-, Nyelv- és Történettudományi Kar Történetéhez (1872–1892)* (Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca: Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012). See also *A Kolozsvári Magyar Királyi*.

22. Gabriel Vasiliu, "Păreri despre limbă ale lui Grigore Silași," *Cercetări de lingvistică* XVIII, no. 1 (1973): 11–19.

23. Levente T. Szabó, "The Glocality of the Acta Comparationis Litterarum: Local Interpretations of Educational Freedom, Coercive Innovation and Comparative Literature," *Hungarian Studies Yearbook* 2, no. 1 (2020): 67.

24. T. Szabó and Zabán, *Dokumentumok*.

Minister of Culture and Public Education and the Emperor, Silași was awarded the title of Licensed Instructor of Semitic Languages, delivering lectures for two semesters, albeit to a very small audience. Furthermore, in 1881, the Faculty awarded him an honorary doctorate (Doctor Honoris Causa) and in 1883/1884, he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Linguistics and History. Even though he was aware that "in terms of political symbolism, the new University was based on the idea of national emancipation and unity [and] was conceived in the framework of [Transylvania's] integration into and harmonization with Hungary proper," Silași used the academic affiliation to develop his own national(ist) agenda.[25] Within the university, Silași effectively sustained professional and institutional relationships. This explains why he garnered full backing from his colleagues when he was charged in 1876 with instructing in Romanian, which contravened the requirement that all courses be conducted in Hungarian.[26] Moreover, Meltzl considered him suitable to represent Romanian language and literature in the *Acta Comparationis* project; thus, his name was listed on the front page, among the regular contributors of the journal, beginning with issue 3, dated February 15, 1877. Nonetheless, outside the university, Silași exercised significantly less caution in displaying his nationalist cultural and political initiatives. In 1872 he established The Iulia Reading Society of Romanian Students at the University of Cluj, conceived as a Romanian alternative to the Hungarian state university. The 1848 Romanian Revolution was commemorated annually, and Romanian students received awards for their literary, historical, legal, or economic research. The Iulia Society organized scientific lectures, balls, concerts, and fundraising events to support various Romanian cultural and educational institutions. One of its most significant initiatives was the founding of a Romanian high school for girls in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg.[27] In 1874, he endorsed the organization and assumed leadership of the Reuniunea sodalilor români din Cluj [The Assembly of Romanian Craftsmen from Cluj], building upon an ideological and cultural agenda that garnered the support of the local intelligentsia, which posited that the national struggle of the Romanians had largely ignored the nascent middle class, primarily consisting of craftsmen.[28] Silași also made repeated attempts to create a Romanian bank in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, an establishment he finally succeeded in opening in 1886 under the name Economul Bank, with the support of the Greek-Catholic Church. Throughout the 1870s, Silași actively participated in city and county councils, putting forward legislative suggestions concerning elections, education, and legal rules for the running of the state, the majority of these measures aiming at the rights and liberties of the Romanian community.[29]

Closely related to the aforementioned institutional, cultural, social, and political initiatives, Silași was actively engaged in research and popularization endeavors in the domains of linguistics, folklore, and literary history. Several of these works employed comparative approaches, though they all ultimately served the overarching goal of celebrating the antiquity and uniqueness of Romanian culture on a global scale.[30] These efforts granted him notable recognition, as evidenced by his admission in 1877 as Honorary Member of the Romanian Academic Society in Bucharest (renamed Romanian Academy in 1879). Moreover, in late 1870s and early 1880s, he was increasingly seen as a spiritual leader by the majority of Romanian students in Cluj.[31] This status, however, also drew growing hostility from Hungarian nationalist circles, culminating in the interethnic scandal of 1884. Silași faced public allegations of hostile conduct towards the Hungarian state, his lectures were subject to a boycott, and – in contrast to the previous scandal in which he was involved (in 1876) – his university peers did not offer any support this time.[32] Following his suspension from teaching, Silași was ultimately forced to retire in 1886 by the Hungarian Minister of Religion and Education, prompting his gradual withdrawal from public life. He persisted in publishing, though sporadically, and attended significantly fewer public meetings. In 1884, the Iulia Society was dissolved by the Minister of the Interior for being deemed unpatriotic, and in 1885, Silași resigned from the leadership of the The Assembly of Romanian Craftsmen from Cluj. In the last years of his life, suffering from a nervous breakdown, he withdrew to his sister's residence in Năsăud/Naszód, where he passed away on January 17, 1897.

25. Nastasă, "University Education," 25.

26. See Márta Nagy Zabán, "The Relationship Between National Identity and Literature Education in Cluj in the Last Quarter of the 19th Century," in *Storia, identitá e canoni letterari*, ed. Ioana Both, Ayşe Saraçgil, Angela Tarantino (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2013), 208.

27. George Andrei Iavorenciuc, "'Societatea de lectură *Iulia*' a studenților români de la Universitatea din Cluj," *Caiete de antropologie istorică* XIV, no. 1–2 (2015): 142–157.

28. Ioan Lupaș, "Profesorul Grigore Silași – o victimă a intoleranței ungurești," in *Comemorarea prof. dr. Grigore Silași* (Biblioteca Centralei reuniunilor de meseriaşi, comercianți, industriaşi şi muncitori români cu sediul în Cluj, 1937), 7–14.

29. See "Kolozsmegye bizottságának rendesközgyűlése," *Magyar Polgár*, no. 104 (1873): 1; "Kolozsmegye bizottsági gyűlése," *Magyar Polgár*, no. 293 (1874): 1–2; "Kolozs megye most folyó közgyűlésének első napján," *Ellenőr*, no. 113 (1875): 2; "Kolozs vármegye közgyűlése," *Magyar Polgár*, no. 293 (1874): 1–2.

30. On Silași's works and his comparative approaches, see Borza, "Peripheral Nationalism."

31. Gabriel Vasiliu, "Primii profesori de limba română de la universitatea din Cluj (1872–1919)," *Acta Mvsei Porolissensis* XIX, no. 444 (1995): 443–444.

32. See T. Szabó and Zabán, *Dokumentumok*, and Nagy Zabán, "The Relationship."

Conclusion

In a scene—familiar to Romanian readers—from Liviu Rebreanu's 1922 novel, *Pădurea spânzuraților* [The Forest of the Hanged], set during World War I, a lieutenant praises the international composition of the Austro-Hungarian army.[33] Very proud of his military unit, he enumerates its diverse nationalities: Jews, Czechs, Germans, Ruthenians/Ukrainians, Romanians, Hungarians, Croats, Poles, Serbs, and even Italians. Nonetheless, this episode fulfills a tragic-satirical function within the narrative, as the novel's title alludes to the execution by hanging of soldiers who desert when the imperial army is deployed against their ethnic homelands. The Habsburg Monarchy/Empire and, later, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, may indeed be portrayed as a Europe in miniature, performing a "concert of nations." Nonetheless, the portrait becomes bizarrely stylized if it fails to capture the myriad disharmonies arising from the hierarchies assigned to the respective nationalities. In a similar manner, the education and intellectual pursuits of the Transylvanian Silași within a transnational, multicultural, multilingual, and multiconfessional environment provides the required data to accurately delineate the profile of a comparatist. Such an imagined portrait of a Romanian Transylvanian comparatist must inevitably account for the harsh interethnic tensions and conflicts that defined the region in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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33. On the inter-imperial entanglements of Liviu Rebreanu's novels see Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022).

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