

## The Glocality of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum*. Local Interpretations of Educational Freedom, Coercive Innovation and Comparative Literature<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT:

*The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature (Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur)* is the most often-cited essay of the first international journal of comparative literature, the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. The article proposes a revision of the generally established explanations of this pioneering text, and traces back the microcultural genealogy of the idea of freedom and autonomy associated with the emerging modern discipline of comparative literature in the essay. In this new intellectual framework both the essay and its broad horizon are interpreted as a glocal interplay of recycled and enthrallingly reinvented transnational ideas.

**Keywords:** *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, Hugo von Meltzl, Sámuel Brassai, history of comparative literature, transnational, academic freedom, *Lern- und Lehrfreiheit*, autonomy of the universities

There is a long and outstanding international tradition of dealing with *The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature (Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur)* as the programmatic and especially the most representative text of the first international journal of comparative literary studies (cf. Berczik, "Lés débuts hongrois"; D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History*; Fassel, *Hugo Meltzl*; Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline"). Of course, this has as much to do with institutional inertia of perpetuating the only major text from the ACLU that has had English translation (Damrosch, *The Princeton Sourcebook*) than with a series of other considerations. The figure of Hugo von Meltzl was overemphasized as the sole "founding father", suggesting that it was his Western European

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written in the framework of the MTA-BTK Lendület / Momentum Political Economy of Hungarian Literature Research Group (34080 LP 2019-10/2019) funded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

peregrination and his Germanness (including the Western character of the language in which he wrote) that should be considered decisive in founding a seminal literary journal and establishing a methodology for emerging global comparative literary studies against / to the backdrop of parochial Eastern European or local knowledge (Fassel, Horst. “Hugo Meltzl von Lomnitz“). That is one of the reasons why this text has always seemed more substantial than a series of other essays that could have been similarly spotted as programmatic and representative.

To name just a few such texts; the very first introductory 1877 essay of the ACLU, written in Hungarian and authored by both of the founders, including the unworthily forgotten Sámuel Brassai, the acclaimed doyen of the founders (cf. T. Szabó, “À la recherche...”). But essays like *Zur vergleichenden Aesthetik der Lyrik* by Meltzl, *Cannizzaro. In solitudine. Carmine vol. I. Zur vergleichende Lyrik* by Ig. Em. Wessely, the blurb of the ACLU from January 1879 signed by the coeditors (Brassai, Meltzl, “Összehasonlító Irodalmi Társulat”), *Zur vegleichenden Geschichte der Philosophie* by Brassai. Or should we forget other major texts that are not in the ACLU, but precede it, recur, and are seldom echoed by the founders from 1877 to 1888. One of these is the 1876 university public lecture of Meltzl published under the title *A kritikai irodalomtörténetírás fogalmáról* (*On the notion of a reflexive literary history*), critically commenting upon the (German interpretations) of (the notion of) literary history from the sensitive position of the recently appointed professor of German studies (Meltzl, *A kritikai irodalomtörténet*). A similar seminal text cited many times in the ACLU is programmatic essay of Brassai on translation as a method of comparative literature, entitled *Aesthetische Kritik als Beitrag zur Theorie der Horaz-Übersetzungskunst* (Brassai, *Aesthetische Kritik*). This was published originally in the ACLU, but republished as part of the much lesser known comparative literary series entitled *Fontes* that collected a series of text meant to be foregrounded by the founders of the ACLU. And should we take into consideration the not-so-famous, but extremely important calls for the launch of the first international association for comparative literature or the calls for thematic collections of comparative literary thesauri?

All these texts are formally or in a figurative sense programmatic since they capture in a certain moment the essence of what the founders and / or the collaborators of the first international journal of comparative literature thought about the fundamental methodological tendencies to be followed. Of course, leaving them aside was also a typical *pars pro toto* gesture in a situation where few collections of the ACLU were available and the multilingualism of the journal proved to be highly perplexing for the comparative literary profession. But it is clear that the overpresence / predominance of a single text, selected by Wellek more than half a century ago to represent the ACLU was also a kind of methodological globalism.<sup>2</sup> We came to automatically associate the ACLU to

2 On the interpretive problems of methodological nationalism, see: LEERSEN 2006.

the global literary and cultural scene even when part of the explanations would or could have linked the journal (also) to the local. Based on this often-cited fragment, the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* seemed a successful intellectual flight of a cosmopolitan founder, namely Meltzl, from the local constraints to global problems, places and solutions, and less a journal that is a proactive response to and embedded in local institutions. Since we are used to imagine the geographical and geopolitical flow of innovation and disciplinary knowledge from the West to the East, and less from the East to the West, for many the ACLU seemed a mainly global phenomenon constituted against the parochialism of the East or the local cultures, therefore it seemed to ask for global explanations.

Therefore, let me relocate both *The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature* (*Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur*) and its usual interpretive contexts by positioning it at the interface of the local and the global literary cultures. In my view, *The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature* (*Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur*) is a *glocal* text that is able to show the complex and often surprising negotiation of the journal among the various levels and forms of knowledge from the most local to the extremely transnational.

*The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature* and those key texts I mentioned earlier, view comparative literature as discipline-in-the-making, an in-between area of knowledge without stable borders, above the practical and useful disciplines that can and are used to certain purposes, and thus lose their freedom that leads to higher truths. For instance, not only *The Present Tasks* begins with a fierce criticism of all the literary, artistic and scholarly knowledge that is too applied and useful (including for nation-building practices), but the very first, introductory essay of the *Acta Comparationis*, the famous open lecture of Metzl on the notion of critical literary history, or several essays of Brassai. And it is telltale that even though Meltzl was appointed professor of German studies in 1872 (and later, in the 1890s, of French and Italian studies), some of his major conflicts with Budapest-based Germanist and some of his colleagues were related to his criticism of German studies. He often accused his own discipline of not being independent, being a kind of *ancilla nationis* as *The Present Tasks* and the similarly famous introductory essay label it.

That is why he called the discipline he taught *critical literary history*, and from 1877, *comparative literature*. The term comparative literature itself in *The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature* has the aura and vision of disciplinary autonomy and open-endedness arising from social freedom and independence, and the avoidance of any type of practical usage and subalternation. So the term itself is not a neutral one at all, but channelled and fuelled by extremely strong and well-focalised feelings and presuppositions. Usually this term from the ACLU is contextualized and linked immediately to Goethe, Schlözer and all the cosmopolitan and Western European literary contexts and heritages that

suggest the ACLU chose this – and only this – common (Western) European scholarly playground when Meltzl introduced the term (cf. Kerekes, *Lomnitz Meltzl Hugó*). And yes, this common scholarly playground is evident; *The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature* speaks of the precarity of the term in the global literary scene and proudly accentuates that the Hungarian coining of the term is one of the first in the world, the references to Goethe and Schläözer are recurrent.

But these does not explain everything, and especially not the notion of autonomy (and freedom) used in connection with comparative literature. Why were these notions (that pop up exclusively in the articles, essays and comments authored by Brassai and Meltzl, and never in the texts of the most frequent collaborators, like E. D. Butler from London, specialized in Central and Eastern European languages and literatures, the multilingual Sicilian translator Cassone, the first Italian translator of Petőfi, the Provençal writer, Frédéric Mistral, later Nobel-prize winner, the famous Icelandic literary figure, Thorsteinsson from Reykjavik or the profeminist Dora d'Istria. On their turn, all of these collaborators speak about comparative literature, but none of them would stress those elements the founders are recurrently speaking about when they define their scholarly framework. So what is with this obsession of autonomy based on freedom and all the other elements associated with the emerging discipline of comparative literature by the founders?

### **Coercive innovation, the recycling of academic freedom, and the programmatic essay of the first journal of comparative literary studies**

To answer the question posed earlier, we have to do what methodological globalism rarely does: i. e. go local. (What I call methodological globalism is a counterpart of methodological nationalism. And if methodological nationalism implies that national literature can be explained from inside the national frame<sup>3</sup>, methodological globalism usually explains through global cultural tendencies, categories and labels, and the transnational flow.)

So, let us go local. When in September 1885 Ágoston Trefort, the Minister of Education relocated Ede Wertheimer, professor of the Academy of Law from Szeben / Sibiu / Hermannstadt, the body of professors at the Faculty of Humanities were surprised and angered.<sup>4</sup> They articulated their protest in the name and through the vocabulary of the *freedom of teaching and learning* and framed it as an offense towards the autonomy of the university. They explicitly fronted the Minister in a semi-public letter that was even harsher and more resolute than the

3 On methodological nationalism and its criticism, see Leerssen

4 57/1885–1886/BTK, The Archives of the Kolozsvár University. The archival material of the Faculty of Humanities, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch

decision of the council of the Faculty preceding the letter.<sup>5</sup> „The decision of Your Excellency – they wrote – is disquieting for our community since it sets a dangerous precedent for the future infringements both of our academic freedom, and the little, but still existing autonomy of our university.” The Faculty of Humanities also pressed for a common university-level decision, picturing a dark future “when similar surprises may occur” unless immediate action is taken.<sup>6</sup>

This vision of academic freedom was based on the generalities of an 1872 law. But the heated debate around the notions of academic freedom and the autonomy of the university suggests that these were axiomatic concepts, and the intervention of the Minister brought to the surface all the things hidden, unspoken and taken for granted in Kolozsvár / Cluj/ Klausenburg.

This debate and conflict with the Minister was not an exception in the life of the university in the 1870s and 1880s. In April 1886, after the suspension and removal of Grigoriu Silași, the chairholder of Romanian linguistics and literature (T. Szabó–Zabán, *Dokumentumok*), the Minister appointed Grigoriu Moldovan to the chair. Even though almost the whole body of professors kept a distance from the former professor Silași charged with a seditious act against the Hungarian state, all of them contested the way the new professor was appointed without the consultation of the Faculty of Humanities, and interpreted this as an assault against the autonomy of the university. “[T]he Faculty of Humanities can consent to no measures that would harm the principles of the position of university professorship and the freedom of teaching and learning”<sup>7</sup> – said one of the most influential professors of the period.

Neither of the debates came as a surprise since the midst of the 1880s brought a much-contested ministerial suggestion to introduce a disciplinary procedure regarding the university professors. This led to an outcry of most of the faculties since they experienced the proposed new procedure as an ethical stigma and a deep ethical crisis. They evoked that the University of Budapest needed no such a procedure in his long history, and not even the absolutist government tried to introduce one. University professors „may not allow the violation of their rights [...] The Faculty of Humanities considers that there is no need of a disciplinary

5 The Faculty of Letters decided to protest against the decision, stressing that the minister did not ask their opinion beforehand. They also forced their new colleague to discuss the details of his disciplines with all the faculty having more or less similar specializations, while deciding that the new member of the community was not a full professor, but only an „adjunct” who could not take part at the regular meetings and decision-making.

6 121/ 1885–1886/BTK, The Archives of the Kolozsvár University. The archival material of the Faculty of Humanities, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch

7 328/1885–1886/BTK, The Archives of the Kolozsvár University. The archival material of the Faculty of Humanities, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch

procedure. There is no freedom of research without the independence of the position of university professorship.” – went the indignation of Meltzl and his colleagues.

And even when they were forced to sketch a document, they stucked firmly to the view that it should not be vexatious: „a disciplinary action triggered against an innocent professor could lead to irreparable moral damage. While the obligations of the other types of civil servants are clearly regulated, there is no such a set of rules that describes accurately the duties of the university professors. [...] There is room for uneasiness if we look at the possible involvement of the party press in cases of public scandals, and therefore this may lead easily to dragging someone’s reputation in the mud without any hope of a future moral reparation in case he proves innocent. [...] We also object to the suggestion that enables a disciplinary action against colleagues who become physically or mentally challenged. Such cases could have been and could be solved without filing an official indictment.” – argued the professorial body against a first sketch of the document conaining the new rules and regulations (T. Szabó–Zabán, *Dokumentumok*).

It is obvious that academic freedom and the autonomy of the university became notions that, in the 1870s and 1880s, underpinned and framed university professorship, teaching, research at the newly founded university of Kolozsvár. For local university staff and students, academic freedom became a useful conceptual and practical framework in interpreting and assessing a series of problems, from the strengthening of the symbolic status of university professorship at a new and underfinanced ”provincial” university to the interpretation of the role the state came to play in a new educational system.

The notions of freedom and autonomy employed in these debates were deeply embedded in the huge changes of the 1870s and 1880s that led to the emergence and control of the state in the whole field of education. And while the 1868 reform of the primary school system was greeted wholeheartedly as a much-awaited and modern transformations that offers solution to the integration of the whole young population into the modern Hungarian nation, the later reforms that focused on the tailoring of the secondary and higher education, led to huge dilemmas and debates. What should the role of the state be in the management and control of these insitutions? What kind of employer is or should the state be, especially in the field of higher education? What should be the relationship between state-funded and -controled education and the educational institutions that are under the tutelage of the Churches? How should the secondary education be crafted; what happens with the humanities, especially with the obligatory presence of Latin and Greek in the schools? Are these part of a general culture, or should they be partially/completely elkiminated? (cf. T. Szabó, ”Gyulai Pál görögségideálja...”) How many universities should Hungary have and what is the ideal form of their financial background? What is the administrative, financial and symbolic

status of the second Hungarian university, the Kolozsvár-based one, founded in 1872? What is the role of the Minister and the Ministry Education, and what is he entitled to do in relation with the universities? All these questions were new and vital in the successive legal and administrative transformation of the Hungarian educational system that produced deep traumas and fierce debates on innumerable educational and social issues. These debates had many vocabularies and conceptual frames (Rüegg, *A History of the University...*), educational freedom (Lehr- und Lernfreiheit) and the autonomy of the university being (only) one of these.

The University of Kolozsvár used the vocabulary and frame of university autonomy and educational freedom to construct a strong professional ethics. That is why these notions pop up in various circumstances regarding the alleged social and professional roles of the university professors and their institution. First and foremost, they were recycled and reinterpreted to debate the growing precarity of the university intellectuals at an underfinanced university. The swift establishment of the second Hungarian university, the financial and administrative underplanning of the future of the institution, the postponement of the state investments into (new) university buildings, university hospitals and university library up till the 1890s, opened up huge cleavages between the central government and the local university, and reinforced the idea of university self-governance.

Secondly, the framework of academic freedom was an answer and conceptual tool of the local university staff to face up to and interpret the two decades of the Hungarian educational reform that broke the hegemony of the only Hungarian university, but also brought about major changes in the role the state played in the educational field. The eroding of the educational right and privileges of the major historical Churches and the reinvention of the state as *the* major player in the elementary and secondary education was greeted by many as a sign of modernization, even though the professionalization and homogenization of the curriculum, the creation of new types of schools and educational structures led to more questions than answers. But the fiercest debates came when universities and university professors felt the state went beyond the bounds of its rights. Sometimes, the Ministry of Education seemed to be more than the guaranty of lawfulness for them, especially when trying to make decisions that were against the standpoint of the local professors and university institutions.

Therefore, the emergence and appeal to the vocabulary and conceptual toolkit of university meritocracy, professional autonomy, the freedom of learning, teaching and research was both the consequence and at the origin of these structural educational changes and very practical issues. It is no surprise that this vocabulary recurred and organized the way the newly established university of Kolozsvár / Cluj imagined (*local*) *knowledge-production* and *scholarly innovation* including innovation in the literary field.

As we already saw, 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. One of them quoted even Brassai when he said in his programme speech at the beginning of the university year: "The whole modern culture and scientific progress is based on the idea of the free cultivation of the sciences and on free education [...] Excessive credit should be given to the individuality of the professors. Innovation is the key to win our race with other universities." – uttered the first rector of the university, addressing to the students along the same line of thoughts: 'use the opportunities fully [...] to try not only to have a look at the sciences, but also to improve your knowledge to perfection so as you should finally become the upholders and specialist of the sciences, and future chair-holders of our university."

So the newly established university of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg conceptualized and reinterpreted its *alleged periphery* as an *excessive freedom* to innovate. This coercive pressure of innovation on the chair-holders and the reinterpretation of periphery made possible a structure of the curriculum that revolutionized the humanities' disciplinary frame: it contained several avant-garde disciplines that were to appear much later at European universities. Just to recall two of them that are of special interest to us: comparative literary history and (comparative) ethnography.

This local context of excessive (*paradoxically, even forced*) freedom of innovation as the answer of the periphery to reinvent and reconceptualize itself as a potential centre sheds a new light not only on why the founders conceptualized comparative literature as a progressive, bold, open and global discipline, even the most free and open-ended of all, but on many other aspects of the story. This can be the explanation why the founding of the new journal was greeted by the university, while harshly criticized by Budenz, the chair of German studies at the



University of Budapest. And this is why the founders and the disciples of the two founders took it seriously disciplinary innovation when they periodically announced new and new new disciplines (like comparative ethnology) or methods (like the potential innovative usage of the phonograph in comparative literature). And this could explain also many decisions or gestures of the founders.

Brassai, the first to teach Hungarian national history in Hungarian at the Unitarian College in 1844, after the language reform found way to his former project to teach comparative linguistics, and Meltzl, the youngest professor of the university, felt free to step outside the borders of German studies. All of these seem not to have been possible, either at the University of Budapest, or at any other older university with strong disciplinary traditions and more well-defined borders of the university chairs, not stressing the academic freedom in matters of teaching and learning.

But there is a new twist of the local component of this history. Research, in the sense of systematic investigation in order to reach new and innovative conclusions was a fairly new idea in the Hungarian university system of the 1870s. It was exactly in the year of the establishment of the new, the second Hungarian university and Brassai and Meltzl's appointment to professorship to this university when the Hungarian parliament discussed, juridically framed and canonized the notion of educational freedom. Of course, the legal framing of this idea and term, and also the fierce debates on it show that these idea had already been present in the institutional and scholarly Hungarian world – of course, not independently from highly debated and interpreted mid-nineteenth century ideas and terms like the freedom of press and the freedom of speech. But on the other hand the need to institutionalize and guarantee them through state-level laws and regulations suggests that it was something new to be asserted or to be regulated. For the state the main question was whether universities were allowed to apply *Lehr und Lernfreiheit* (the freedom of teaching and learning) *ad litteram*. For instance, were professors completely free to establish their curricula and methods? But then what about the chosen future profession of the students (especially the public professions) that cannot be properly targeted should the professor decide to go against the expectations of the state on what a proper state professional should know and do? Should the idea of the *Bildung* of the students be stronger or the expectations of the different professions? And how should and could be the independence of the professors assured? Were consistent salaries enough to offer them the autonomy the ideal of *Lern und Lehrfreiheit* needed? And what about their failures? How to measure when they fail to innovate properly if *Lehrfreiheit* is interpreted in a completely radical way. To cut a long story short, the fierce discussions on the freedom of university-level education articulated not only the ideal of the *autonomous modern intellectual*, but also the idea of the *autonomy of scientific research*, the dilemmas on the interdependence of innovative research and

teaching, and last, but not least, they raised serious questions regarding the role of the universities. What was their role in society? What did their alleged independence mean?

It is enthralling to follow how the university of Budapest resisted in implementing the majority of these ideas, and how the tiny and under-financed university of Kolozsvár not only implemented them immediately, but also interpreted them sometimes in a most radical way.

Let me recall just one such situation intimately linked to the Acta Comparationis. In 1884 the first public interethnic conflict broke out at the University of Cluj. Grigoriu Silași, the acting dean was provoked and an information was brought in against him by radical Hungarian students since he allegedly taught Romanian language and literature for Romanian students *in Romanian* (T. Szabó–Zabán, *Dokumentumok*). In spite of his protest, he was immediately suspended by the Ministry of Education, and after almost two years of uncertainty and precariousness, he was dismissed from service without any chance of retiring on old-age pension. Meanwhile, it was Meltzl and the *Acta Comparationis* that gave commissions for several translations to him, which was not only a practical, but also a highly symbolic gesture. All the other professors thought Silași was a nationalist figure who had gone too far in supporting his students' actions against the Hungarian state. But when the secretary of state for education wanted to replace him with a "loyal" Romanian, Gergely Moldován, as we already saw, the whole faculty resisted the state and petitioned the ministry referring to their radical interpretation of *Lernfreiheit*, the autonomy of the universities and freedom and autonomy of the university professor as public intellectuals to even criticize the state and its policies. Moreover, Meltzl reinterpreted and reframed the idea of academic freedom *against* his own colleagues when he tacitly refused to interrupt his relationship with his suspended colleague and implicitly supported Silași to continue publishing in the Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum.

So the borderless freedom and the autonomy of comparative literature as portrayed in the *Present Tasks of Comparative Literature* and elsewhere was not just the original Humboldtian or German idea of *Lern- and Lehrfreiheit*, but a locally embedded and powerfully interpreted concept that had both global and local resonance. The founders of the ACLU took it over, recycled, reinterpreted, recharged and reintroduced it into a complex cultural, institutional and literary ecosystem that resonated to the way they perceived their *glocal* scholarly goals.

If viewed not only from the perspective of the global, but also from viewpoint of the local, the ACLU is at the crossroads of many such entangled histories (Werner–Zimmermann, *De la comparaison*; Werner–Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison") full of surprising reinterpretations that reveal the many layers of global literary and cultural modernity behind its vision(s) of comparative literature. Let me show in a nutshell one of these entangled histories and radical reinterpretations

that would open up another important notion used in *The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature*.

Ethnography is a key-word of many texts in the ACLU – at first sight it seems to allude to a truly transnational form of cultural nationalism in nineteenth century, to Volkskunde as the depository of national essence, and spirit that preserves historical knowledge and forms of ethnicity. But for this type of ethnology and folklore only one's one pure folklore is truly important. From this perspective, one can and should not share two or more traditions at once, or one's shared tradition should always be purified (even diachronically), and kept away from other ethnic or national traditions. In Romantic European nationalism the recurrent question is always vindictive, asking who has purest, the earliest, the most beautiful, most intangible, most authentic *text and tradition* that can prove the superiority of that ethnic tradition.

The founders of the ACLU, and especially Meltzl experienced this in a completely other way. For them global literary flow could be understood only through the reconstruction of the multiplicity of direct or indirect contacts and similarities among various literary cultures. From this perspective all the languages and literatures are equal, since the disappearance of even the tiniest one could lead to the impossibility of understanding the global networks (T. Szabó, "The Subversive Politics"). The most local is indispensable in understanding the complexity and beauty of the global. There is a mutual interdependence in this system also because for the founders of the ACLU the masterpiece is always a result of this flow, so any missing piece of the puzzle would diminish the chance of its emergence or our chance to understand it. From this perspective, for this type of comparative literature, ethnography is always comparative ethnology, since it is always interested in the *foreign*, the *belittled*. Just one example for this radical reinterpretation of Romantic ethnography: the essay I am discussing, recalls many "small" languages and cultures that are considered extremely important to be analysed and preserved. One of them is the Romani, a language without nation, without Romantic type of linguistic standards, spoken by legally outcast communities in the nineteenth century. For Meltzl and his disciples, like Anton Hermann or Heinrich Wlislöcki, the Romani languages and communities became crucial scholarly case studies for comparative literature. ACLU had a foundational role in shaping an idea of anthropological/ethnological fieldwork for the sake of preserving and reviving "endangered languages and literatures" and literary cultures without a nation or state. But all of these interesting and influential figures of the ACLU seemed to reframe ethnography exactly in the global logic of university freedom. While this type of ethnography had no chance to be included into the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Budapest, Meltzl put pressure on his own university and colleagues to accept the foundation of the first such ethnographical department in Central and Eastern Europe. It was his idea and initiative that his former disciple and collaborator at the ACLU, Anton Hermann

to be invited as a chair of this department of *comparative* ethnography that revolutionized ethnocentric national ethnography of his time.

*The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature (Vorläufige Aufgaben der Vergleichenden Litteratur)*, the much-cited programmatic essay of the ACLU framed and transposed the fascination with Goethe's view on comparative literature with the much-disputed and recycled concept of academic freedom of the local scholarly world. Therefore, the text created an ethos of early comparative literature by stressing the freedom of research in the face of various nationalisms and utilitarian usages of the humanities, and imagining literature and the study of literature as a form of social freedom. The view of the founders, Meltzl and Brassai on university self-governance enforced this idea of professional independence, and resulted in a vision of comparative literature free from political and economic constraints. For them, comparative literature came to equal the ideal discipline of the humanities, a research field that was the epitome of the *free university* and *Humboldtian Bildung*. This leads to a series of new enthralling questions, from the curriculum and teaching methods of the founders of the journal to the alleged disciples of Hugo von Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai or to the loose network of the local university students around the ACLU, not to speak about the innovative afterlife of the first international journal of comparative literature in the local literary and cultural field. The *glocality* of the *Acta Comparationis* is essential since it opens up a whole new agenda of research that spots on the complex relationship between the microcontexts of the journal and its global and transnational horizons.

The *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* has mainly been interpreted as a cosmopolitan journal with cosmopolitan founders even though the founders often criticized cosmopolitanism. It had usually been thought as a journal with a truly global frame, and less attention has been paid to the local. But it is not only the local from Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg that can be extremely interesting and telltale in this type of narrative. My broader proposal is to rethink the way the founders and the collaborators negotiated their locality with others', and how all of them negotiated the transnational and global, but also one other as part of the transnational and global. From this angle the ACLU is neither a local, nor a global phenomenon for me, but an interface of these; a *glocal medium* and its complexity is intimately linked exactly to this identity. This is a state of truly being in-between many languages, literary cultures, geo-cultural layers, and being both overwhelmed and fascinated by it.

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