



P.I.E. Peter Lang

# **PARADOXES DU PLURILINGUISME LITTÉRAIRE 1900**

**Réflexions théoriques et études de cas**



**BRITTA BENERT (DIR.)**

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# The Subversive Politics of Multilingualism in the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies<sup>1</sup>

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Different histories of the first international journal of comparative literary studies, the *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* (*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, or *ACLU*, from 1879), circulate different round figures when they count the many languages the journal used. The confusion arises not only due to the occasional shifts in the status and the number of official languages on the title sheet, but especially due to the huge number and diversity of the languages that were part of this review founded in Kolozsvár/Klausenburg/Cluj (today, Cluj, in Romania; hereinafter simply Kolozsvár, its 19<sup>th</sup> century official name) in 1877. It is not easy to determine the exact numbers, since the decade-long history of the review is poorly documented. There are only a few complete collections of *ACLU*; the “Fontes” series interconnected with the review fell into oblivion<sup>2</sup>, and the archival materials have been scattered. New archival research, reissuing and reinterpretation of the review from the perspective of a new philological endeavor will probably bring answers to several urgent questions (T. Szabó, 2013b: 177-178). But the state of the art already opens the door to a series of unanswered or even surprisingly missing questions regarding *ACLU*. At the head of the list is certainly the largely missing empirical and, at the same time, methodological issue of the multilingualism of this pioneering review.

<sup>1</sup> This essay is part of my book project with the tentative title *Entangled Literary Histories and Multiple Modernities: The History of the First International Journal of Comparative Literature*. The paper was supported by Babeş-Bolyai University under grant No. 34069/2013 (*Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum și aspectele multiculturalismului*).

<sup>2</sup> The so-called “Fontes” series is a completely forgotten supplement of the journal; it published either offprints the founders thought extremely important for comparative literary studies or papers written on demand, requested by the editors.

How did this multilingualism work in practice? How was it perceived within and outside the community that edited, published and wrote the journal? What types of poetics and politics did it imply? Was there only one type of multilingualism, or should we rather speak of coexisting and sometimes colliding multilingualisms, implying divergent theories and practices? All these questions are fundamental to understanding the role that multilingualism played in *ACLU*, but for the sake of methodological clarity and efficiency, I will deal here only with the conceptualization of multilingualism by the founders of the review, Sámuel Brassai and Hugo von Meltzl/Meltzl Hugó. Let me recall the most important focal points around which the question was thematized by the founders and editors of *ACLU*. In the end, I will sketch a possible explanation that could shed light on both the conscious and hidden motifs Brassai and Meltzl were so attached to with respect to the idea of multilingualism in literature in general and both national and world literature, in particular.

### 1. Between National Vindication and the Polyphony of Comparative Literature: the Principle of *Decaglotism*

The concept of polyglotism as one of the pivotal concepts of *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* as well as the review's practice of multilingualism were probably the most eye-catching features of the first international journal of comparative literary studies. The criticism received from the Hungarian national literature of the late 1870s mostly found fault with the horrible "Babel of languages" that was expected to be tolerated only if the review was to popularize Hungarian literature in an alleged global struggle and vindication of national literatures (T. Szabó, 2013a: 47-49). Even if there are large and obvious differences among them, the huge network of collaborators of *ACLU* accepted and, in most of the cases, praised this type of multilingual literary and scholarly communication. But it still awaits further research to determine whether these scholars, writers and translators accepted or supported multilingualism for the very same reasons or whether all of them shared exactly the same nuances as those of the ideas the founders propagated in *ACLU*.

Even though the multilingualism of *ACLU* has been somewhat the focus of its reception, paradoxically, the reflexive comments and arguments of the founders regarding the use of literary and social polyglotism have never been collected and studied together. This corpus would lead to an overview of the inner dynamics of the reflexive literary multilingualism of the first international journal of comparative literary studies, also revealing the conscious politics of polyglotism that was proposed as a new founding principle of modern comparative literary studies.

In the thirteenth issue of *ACLU*, its founders were already forced to argue with their own readers about the multilingual character of their review. In temperamental invective against a letter received from their readers, the founding editors were forced to further outline the role and importance of the “new scholarly polyglotism” they employed. “You are completely wrong,” they testily wrote back to some of their readers:

Az értelmes sajtó Élíteje (Ellenőr, Vasárnapi Újság stb.) nálunk is igen kedvezően nyilatkozott polyglottismusunkról. Ellenben a journalistikai rőf és olló bizonyos lovagjainak s egyéb naturalistáknak természetesen semmi fogalmuk a tudományos polyglottismus elvéről; fontos elv, melynek ma már Németországban még – matematikai szaklapok is kezdenek hódolni; oly elv, mely legközelebb többek között az *Anglia* (Halle) c. folyóiratot, valamint a *Zeitschrift für roman. Philologie* (Boroszló) címűt arra indítá, hogy többrendbeli modern nyelvnek engedjen tért. Mióta megszűnt a latin nyelv szerepe lenni az universalis tudományos par excellence nyelv, mi marad egyéb hátra? Talán költséges monoglott (és monoton) “*literarische Berichte*”, melyekkel a külföld itéletét praecoccupálni véljük – a muszka “Statist. u. andre wissenschaftl. Mitteilungen” (St. Petersburg).

[The elite of our whole sensible press (see for instance, *Ellenőr*, *Vasárnapi Újság* etc.) had a fair and favorable opinion about our polyglotism. But the lower journalistic world, that begrudged us its praises, has no idea of the principle of scholarly polyglotism. This is a principle venerated even by mathematical learned and specialized journals in Germany, a tenet that made reviews like *Anglia* (Halle) and *Zeitschrift für roman. Philologie* (Brestov) concede space for several modern languages. What else could we do since the role of Latin ceased as the universal common language of science? Should we desperately hold to monolingual (and monotonous) *literarische Berichte* through which we only delude ourselves with the false hopes that we would pique the interest of foreign nations with unilingual press like the “Russian Statist. u. andere wissenschaftl. Mitteilungen” (St. Petersburg)].<sup>3</sup>

Brassai and Meltzl portrayed multilingualism as the vibrant, colorful and efficient future for the true internationalization of literary scholarship, as a possible scholarly framework and platform that would take over the role of Latin, the former *lingua franca* of the sciences. It is noteworthy that in the heyday of the various monolingual 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarly nationalisms, they still viewed the dominance of the national languages as transient and ephemeral. However, this was not a negation of the role and status of the various national languages, but their recontextualization. According to this view, the various languages and the different literatures associated with them should fall back on one another; otherwise, they

<sup>3</sup> “Correspondance,” *ACLU* 1.13 (1877): 279.

would necessarily become penurious. From the applied perspective of the status of Hungarian literature, this seemed also to be a deeply political issue, since they perceived polyglotism as the only possibility of a true cross-cultural encounter through which the lesser known cultures and literatures could make themselves known to those who were geopolitically better situated. That is why in the first years of *ACLU*, the founders repeatedly emphasized this perspective that portrayed modern, conscious, scholarly multilingualism as a chance for all national literatures to latch on to a global flow of literary life.

But it was the very same angle of multilingualism that some of the first readers of *ACLU* perceived as a purely propagandistic tool for overemphasizing the role of national literatures in the new international world literary system.<sup>4</sup> This was the type of propagandistic use of multilingualism from which the founders distanced themselves, even though, as we saw, they were proud of having made a slice of Hungarian literature more accessible to foreigners.

On the other hand, the founders and editors of *ACLU* repeatedly stressed the idealistic and principled view of their multilingualism, and these programmatic essays, comments, and scattered reflections make visible an important part of the politics of the emerging discipline they imagined. But their practical idea of restraining the major literary flow of the review to ten languages of international literary circulation, including the overfavored Hungarian, also led to numerous misunderstandings, even though in the third part of his famous programmatic essay, "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Literatur," ("The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature") Meltzl spoke about the *ineluctable* prioritization of ten highlighted primarily European languages for the sake of fluent literary communication within the review. The third part of the essay bore the title, "Decaglotism," and followed a second item entitled, "Polyglotism," introducing the general principle of the equality of languages and then reducing them to ten in number for practical reasons. Meltzl wrote the following in an extensive explanation regarding the status of the different languages in *ACLU*:

Dekaglott nennt [...] gerade *zehn* moderne Literaturen (!) mit wahrhaft weltliterarischen Erscheinungen in Europa giebt, u. zw.: neben den Literaturen der 3 grossen europäischen Sprachen, der *deutsche, französischen und englischen: die italienische* (mit Dante u[nd] Leopardi), die *spanische* (mit Cervantes etc.), die *portugiesische* (mit Camoens), die *niederländische* (mit Reinaert de Vos), die *schwedische* (mit Tegnér), die *isländische* (mit der Edda) und

<sup>4</sup> For this vindictive and highly ideological use of multilingualism in nineteenth-century Hungarian literature, see Dávidházi (2004, esp. pp. 57-224).



schliesslich diejenige, welcher unser Literaturblatt in allerster Linie angehört: die magyarische (mit Eötvös und Petöfi).

[Decaglotism means that [according to our minds,] there are ten literatures in Europe with a world-literary status. With the exception of the three great European languages, the German, the French and the English, we have the Italian (with Dante and Leopardi etc.), the Spanish (with Cervantes etc.), the Portuguese (with Camoens), the Dutch (with Reinaart de vos), the Swedish (with Tegnér), the Icelandic (with the "Edda"), and finally the one, to which our journal belongs above all, i.e. Hungarian (with Eötvös and Petöfi)]. (Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben", 1878: 494)

But this hierarchy was certainly not only a practical tool for him but also a conceptual toolkit, since he perceived this framework as being the result of a most contemporary *avant la lettre* aesthetic vision in matters of world literature. Consequently, he spoke of languages and literatures with more or less aesthetically valuable literary results and masterpieces and mapped the trajectory of a literature that led from folklore to aesthetically valuable literary masterpieces. He saw Hungarian literature itself as a prime example of a literary culture that had reached this point through a several century-long process that culminated in Petöfi:

Die Literaturen der Dänen, Norweger, Letten, Finnen, Esten, Basken, Iren, Bretonen, Polen, Czechen, Wenden, Serben, Russen, Neugriechen, Albanesen, Rumänen, Türken, sowie der übrigen, kleineren Volksstämme Europas sind entweder nur noch Volksliederli[eraturen], oder aber, wenn Kunstliterat[uren], so meist jüngeren Datums u[nd] von durchwegs naturalistischer, besten Falls romantischer Färbung. Das magyarische ist vielleicht das einzige nicht-germanische Literaturgebiet unter den kleineren Literaturen das mit dem Romantizismus bereits gründlich gebrochen u[nd] zu wahrhaftigem Klassizismus sich hinaufgeschwungen hat, allerdings in etwa 500 jährigem langsamen Prozesse, aber auch nur erst in seinem allernmodernsten Erscheinungen, mit seinem Petöfi an der Spitze.

[The literature of the Danish, Norwegian, Latvian, Finnish, Estonian, Bask, Irish, Breton, Polish, Czech, Wend, Serbian, Russian, New Greek Albanian, Romanian, and Turkish communities like that of the other, smaller people of Europe, are either only folklore literatures, or they have naturalistic or romantic shades even if they have turned into aesthetically valuable literatures. Perhaps the Hungarian is the only non-Germanic literature that completely broke away from Romanticism, and rose to a true Classicism as the result of an altogether four-hundred-year process. But this is still valid only for its most modern phenomena, like Petöfi, who is probably the greatest and most universal poet of this century – of course, besides Goethe.] (Meltzl, "Vorläufige Aufgaben", 1878: 495)

Brassai and Meltzl regarded the fate of languages and literatures as a natural process that would slowly bring all languages and literatures to

the level at which they produced aesthetically valuable masterpieces that could be benchmarked against the entirety of world literature. Since they assumed that this aesthetic development would be a natural ("literary") one, he rejected everything he felt to be a geopolitical manipulation of the value of a certain language. This was why, surprisingly, he failed to recognize Russian language and literature, regarding the language as overpoliticized and bearing the signs (and burdens) of geopolitical games and stratagems: "Fiel doch unter den slavischen Sprachen der Russischen eine sehr bedeutende politische Rolle anheim: aber diese ist gänzlich irrelevant in reinliterarischer und vergleichend-literarhistorischer Beziehung." ("Out of the Slavic languages the Russian one has acquired a leading political role; but from a comparative literary perspective this political role is completely insignificant and irrelevant.") (*ibid.*)<sup>5</sup>

So *decaglotism* was not only a practical issue for the founders of the first international journal for comparative literary studies, but it was also a conceptual framework through which they could do justice to the many problems multilingualism brought about in the context of comparative literature. Firstly, while they stressed the equality of all languages and literatures, they still had to account for those languages' uneven status and for the huge differences among them in matters of internationally recognizable masterpieces. Secondly, while accounting for these differences and inequalities among the various literary cultures, they still had to sketch a historical model that made palpable how all the historically accumulated differences among these literatures and languages would completely disappear in a near or far future, due to the alleged intensive multilingual interference and contact of the languages and literatures that was proposed in and by *ACLU*. This was not an easy task; it was no marvel that the founders had to return and stress again and again their basic idea of a multilingualism that gave equal chances to all the languages. Meltzl repeatedly emphasized that in this special, early paradigmatic comparative literary idiom, the terms "small" and "large languages" would refer not to the number of speakers or to the political status of a certain nation but to the alleged masterpieces a language and a literature might bring forth.

### 1.1. *A Subversive Strategy of Critical Literary Multilingualism in ACLU: Empowering the Dialect*

While the founders of *ACLU* tacitly admitted that there was a palpable inequality among the different languages and that a perfect, symmetrical

<sup>5</sup> Of course, this argument can be understood fully if we see it in the context of another decision of *ACLU*: following the ban of Ukrainian language by the Russian authorities, as a sign of symbolic protest, *ACLU* refused any piece written in Russian.

multilingualism was hardly possible in the near future, they aimed at creating a scholarly space and frame for a type of multilingualism they thought would reform a literary world dominated by harsh monolingual literary nationalisms. One of the truly subversive practices introduced into *ACLU* was not only the multilingual translations but the practice of making use of substandard linguistic variants and including these variants in the series of translations along with canonized and standardized national languages. In an epoch when, in most national cultures, the nationalization of languages also meant a strong hierarchy among the standard ("national") and the nonstandard or substandard idioms, the latter, which had not fit into the making of the national linguistic canon, were often reduced to stigmatized "local" and "regional" variants (Benes, 2008: 51). Since both of the founders were also speakers of regional linguistic variants – Meltzl spoke the Saxon dialect of German, while Brassai often used a Transylvanian dialect of Hungarian and repeatedly stood up for an allegedly more democratic construction of the new national linguistic standards<sup>6</sup> – they both had a high responsiveness and reflexive critical attitude regarding the matter of the construction of the new national linguistic ideal.

This was not only an early ideal, but it was also safeguarded in the early 1880s when the founders and editors of *ACLU* tried to establish both a Hungarian and an international comparative literary association. In September 1881, a Hungarian communiqué of *ACLU* spoke about the institutionalization of an already founded folklore society around the journal, and this society's transformation into the first official Hungarian folklore society, not long after the founding of the pioneering (English) Folklore Society and South African Folklore Society, took place in 1878.<sup>7</sup> In this appeal for the official founding of the *Összehasonlító Irodalmi Társulat* [Society of Comparative Literature], or *Societas Comparationis Literarum Universarum Hungarica*, the Comparative Literary Society also included a memorable and essential paragraph on the role of all the dialects to be found in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungary, since it embraced the use of dialects as variants with added literary value. This appeal rethought the

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, his famous *Magyar Nyelv Ellenőre*, a journal founded after he retired both from his university chair and from *ACLU*.

<sup>7</sup> For the role these societies played in the sketching of a future Hungarian Society of Comparative Literature and Folklore, see: "Magyar Folklore Társulat alapítása ügyében/Összehasonlító Irodalmi Társulat" ["Relating to the institution of a Hungarian Folklore Society/Comparative Literary Society"], *ACLU* 10.97-100 (1881): 1858-1860. [Signed: the editorial staff of *ACLU*.] On the English Folklore Society, see: "The Folk-Lore Society for Collecting and Printing Relics of Popular Antiquities. London." *ACLU* 9.87-88 (1881): 1698-1700.

language(s) of folklore texts, viewing them as Cinderella languages that should be empowered in order to be able to foreground their literary value and help suppressed literatures emerge. Thus, the position of the various Hungarian dialects was rethought. But Hungarian literary and cultural life was also subversively regarded as a fundamentally multilingual culture, including the role of dialectal forms in the linguistic and literary patterns that should be paid attention to, especially in Transylvania:

Az Ö.I.T. célja (haszonlóan a modern angol és amerikai Folklore Societyékhez) a néphagyományokat elsősorban a Szt. István korona területéről [...] bármely csekélynek tetsző idiomában (cigány, zsidó, magyar, német, erdélyi százsz, örményben stb. is) összegyűjteni, megőrizni és tudományos összehasonlítás végett a külföld hasonló társulataival közölni.

[The goal of the future Society of Comparative Literature, alike to the modern English and American folklore societies, is to gather, to preserve any kind of folk tradition in the realms of St. Stephen, and to inform the similar scholarly societies from abroad about these. [...] The society should be interested in any linguistic idiom, however small and seemingly unremarkable; for instance, also in any type of Rroma, Jewish, Hungarian, German, Saxon, Armenian etc. dialect.] (Brassai & Meltzl, 1881, 1860)

In an editorial comment preceding the ambitious plan to institutionalize the new society in Hungary, the editors presented Transylvania as the most prominent example and native land of such a folklore/literature that flourishes in a multilingual environment.

It is no wonder that *ACLU* failed to centralize the already prolific Hungarian folklore movement; since the 1840s, the latter had defined itself as a monolingual and ethnically monolithic phenomenon and had viewed the contact of languages as a fearful peril faced by the "purity" of the ethnonational folklore.<sup>8</sup> This vision described any contact with various folklore traditions as fearful "contamination" and imagined folklore, like modern national literary texts and languages, as having clear-cut ethnic and national boundaries.<sup>9</sup> But this is one of the traditions compared to which we can grasp the uniqueness and subversive innovative nature

<sup>8</sup> Certainly, one of the most clear-cut cases, which made this vision palpable, was the so-called *Vadrózsa-pör* (*Eglantine Suit*), when Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals fought for the alleged ethnicity and "national rights" of a famous and extremely popular folk ballad. In 1864, Iulian Grozescu, a Romanian intellectual, writer and publicist living in Budapest at the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, accused János Kriza, editor of the famous folklore collection entitled, "Eglantines," of plagiarism, due to two ballads that were also to be found in Romanian folk communities. The fierce debate also shed light on the consequences upon folklore of the ethnonational type of vision.

<sup>9</sup> For a substantial critical analysis of this vision, see Leerssen (2006).

of the vision of *ACLU* regarding the role of the multilingual framework of folklore traditions. According to this vision, folklore, as the first step toward aesthetically measurable, autonomous literary culture, is always similar to every type of valuable literature; the more languages interact, the better it becomes. Moreover, in this peculiar vision, every variety of a language, be it national or not, is able to polish and to improve the literary work till it becomes a masterpiece.

This viewpoint on the literary masterpiece did not fear the multiplicity of languages or their interaction and contact, but made the thriving linguistic, cultural and literary contact the fundamental premise of every masterpiece. For the "national" vision on the "purity" of languages, literatures and folklore, this was not an easy task to accomplish, since it subverted the basics of the various ethnonationalisms and foregrounded and valued a series of literary and linguistic mechanisms and phenomena that were perceived as dangerous, or at least, as doubtful in the heyday of modern literary nationalisms. For instance, translation was often regarded by these nationalisms as a two-edged literary mechanism. It is no wonder that the term, "national translator," is typically missing from the terminology of classic 19<sup>th</sup> century literary nationalisms, while cultic terms like the "national poet," "national bard," "national novel," "national literary history" and the like are constant occurrences in these vocabularies. When the founders of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* also centered the literary world around translators and the act of translation, while emphasizing that great literary works have always emerged from the interaction of several languages and literatures, they not only reinterpreted the figure of the literary writer but also contested the ethno-Romantic image of the ethnically and nationally isolated literary genius who rises above any influence. This was the reason why some of Meltzl's university courses on the history of German literature and the ideas also expressed in several of his essays on the origins of the national literary epic were so shocking for some of his fellows in German studies. For instance, in several of his university lectures and essays upon the origins of the German national epic, he vehemently criticized Gervinus and accused him of a much too narrow interpretation of the national literature when the latter failed to notice the non-Germanic origins of the *Nibelungenlied* and the alleged role of the multicultural and multilingual frameworks in the formation of the national epic in world literature. When commenting upon the missing Hunn epic from his comparative literary point of view, he also emphasized a vision of the national epic that made use of multilingualism.

This understanding suggested that a proto-multilingualism is to be found around every national epic, which thus becomes the result of the



interaction of several, sometimes antagonistic, linguistic and literary traditions:

Nézetem szerint ez az elveszett óf(el)n(émet) eposz nem csakhogy trilógia volt, [...] hanem az elveszett óriási költemény – valóságos magyaró-hunno-german Mahabharata – egyes foszlányait fenntartotta a magyar nép is, ti. a Lehel-mondában stb.) Igen természetes dolog, hogy a két nagy szomszédnak vezer antagonizmusát mgörökítő nemzeti eposz minden egynyelvűség és természetesen egyoldalú felfogás dacára, csak két rendbeli nép tradícióiból nőhetett ki magát.

[According to my mind, this lost Old High German epic poem was not only a trilogy [...], but bits and pieces of this colossal epic, a real Hungarian-Hunnish-German Mahabharata, had survived in sagas like that on Lehel. It is the most natural thing that *the national epic poem immortalizing the millennial conflict of the two neighbouring communities could grow only from both traditions. Any one-sided position, suggesting that this epic grew out from a monolingual tradition, is clearly biased.*]<sup>10</sup>

According to this perspective, multilingualism and cultural interaction were the standard conditions for the emergence of literary masterpieces. Neither a literary masterpiece nor a literary tradition were “born” thanks to a genius or several excellent writers, nor were they produced by large and wealthy literatures having many speakers. Instead, they arose by intense, long-term and diversified literary and cultural interactions. This is why the founders and editors of *ACLU* not only theorized, but protected, promoted and experimented with even the tiniest linguistic idioms, including the smallest dialects.

This idea of the *protection of the languages, especially the endangered ones, and the revival of imperiled languages in the process of disappearing* was taken to its extreme in proposing a series of translations of masterpieces of 19<sup>th</sup> century world literature into Transylvanian dialects, and vice versa. For instance, in March 1882, as a preparation for a larger supplement of the “*Fontes*,” *ACLU* published a collection of translations in honor of Goethe, remembering his death, which had occurred exactly half a century before. The “*Nordtransilvanische Polyglotte zur Semisaecularfeier des Todestages Goethe's*” assembled seven translations of the famous “*Gleich und gleich*” by Goethe, and as a bonus, the

<sup>10</sup> “Az Atlamál álomjelenete különös tekintettel a gót-óizlandi hagyományok magyar tanulságaira” [“The dream scene of the *Atlamál in grænlenzku* with a special regard to a Hungarian perspective of the Gothic-Old Icelandic traditions”]. *ACLU* 8.79-80 (1880): 131. [emphasis mine – L. T. Sz.].

editors completed it with a Japanese translation of the poetic text.<sup>11</sup> The standard Hungarian translation was accomplished by a young, talented disciple of Meltzl, Dezső Farnos. His text was followed by translations into the vernacular/folk-speech of the region of Szolnok-Doboka and then into Romanian, Transylvanian Saxon (from the environs of Bistritz/Beszterce/Bistrița, the town in which Meltzl and his family permanently lived from the 1870s onwards), Transylvanian Armenian, Transylvanian Yiddish, and the Rroma dialect from the environs of Koložsvár. The two Hungarian variants were not similar at all; the aim was to reshape the original text as well in a folkish context, remodeling it along the rhythm, tonality, vocabulary, characteristic tropes and atmosphere of the Hungarian living folklore as known from the popular folklore collections of the age. Thus the local linguistic idiom became a critical revision and reinterpretation both of the original text of Goethe, and also of the Hungarian standard literary variant.

The local Transylvanian Saxon dialect of Bistritz, the Transylvanian Armenian dialect, the Hungarian variant of Northern Transylvanian Yiddish, not to mention a local version of the Rroma dialect, were absolutely nonstandard language idioms, having few written records to legitimate them. Thus, Brassai, Meltzl, their university students, disciples and colleagues, and even Meltzl's wife made an attempt to revitalize the local ethnic linguistic variants, presenting them as the equals of Goethe's German and of any other "literary" language. Moreover, the regional, i.e., the Northern Transylvanian concentration of the translations, suggested that the cluster of isolated and disappearing multilingualisms of Northern Transylvania could serve as a prime example of how the revitalization and protection of every type of living language could enrich both the local communities and world literature.

This linguistic protectionism of Brassai and Meltzl was fourfold. Firstly, it aimed at revitalizing these languages, adding status and value to them and making them fulfill the same literary roles that standard linguistic variants were able to perform. Thus, literary value was set free from national language, loosening a connection that was so insisted upon in 19<sup>th</sup> century literary nationalisms. Secondly, multilingualism was extended to local and regional linguistic variants, and this added a new twist to the global vision of the role and working of literary multilingualism that *ACLU* designed.

Thirdly, "larger" and "more influential" literatures and languages were presented as if they themselves had been in need of the influence of, the

<sup>11</sup> "Nordtransilvanische Polyglotte zur Semisaecularfeier des Todestages Goethe's." *ACLU* 11.105 (1882): 78-80.

contact with, and the perspective of the "smaller," noncanonical literatures and languages. And last but not least, this type of protectionism imagined a special *social* place for comparative literature in the lives of local linguistic communities, where literary translations were thought to revitalize the life and self-esteem of the speakers of endangered/"nonstandard"/local linguistic varieties. This was a truly anthropological aim and nuance of the comparative literary project of *ACLU*, and it can also be seen from the usage of the dialects and the local linguistic variants in the review.

### 1.2. *The Roma Language and Culture as a Challenge to Literary Nationalisms and a Prime Example for the Emerging Comparative Literature*

The real background to the fraternization of the oldest and the youngest professors of the newly established university of Kolozsvár<sup>12</sup> is still unresearched. According to the bulk of recently systematized and explored archival material, it seems that it was their radical republicanism that bound them together from the first, even though they might have disagreed on important nuances of the ideas of political republicanism. Already by 1834, Brassai had founded *Vasárnapi Újság* (*Sunday News*), the first Hungarian popular journal for the people; it was a vivid expression of the somewhat radical democratization he imagined and also wished for in the fields of sciences and scholarly research. He demanded that erudition be freely accessible to all the layers of society. On the other hand, he also imagined the scholarly world itself as the place of democratic communication, where the results would rely solely on solid knowledge and persuasive arguments and not on social position, academic rank or any other factor. This type of reflexive social criticism of the scholarly field made both Brassai and Meltzl slight outsiders in the Hungarian literary and cultural field. Their numerous clashes with authoritative argumentation, including that of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, partially explains their attachment to and mutual esteem for each other. In part, this radicalism arising from, among other things, their democratic views and their flirting with republicanism led them to a subversive position regarding languages without a nation, especially that of the Roma community. In this respect, Brassai is frequently remembered due to his polemical book from the early 1860s, in which he violently refuted the theses of Franz Liszt.<sup>13</sup> Liszt assumed that the genius of Hungarian music originated from

<sup>12</sup> The university was established in 1872 as the second such Hungarian institution. Upon its foundation, Brassai was already (allegedly) 75 years old and Meltzl only 26, they being the oldest and the youngest professors of the newly founded university.

<sup>13</sup> The book was originally published in French (Liszt, 1859).

Roma musicians who inspired and preserved it. Based on this controversy, Brassai is often viewed as a scholar who was on unfriendly terms with the Roma culture, even though in the original polemics, there was no real sign of this. Moreover, Brassai often underlined the equality of the languages, drawing attention to languages in peril of disappearing for various reasons. On the other hand, Meltzl was always an impassioned advocate of Transylvanian multilingualism, maintaining that the disappearance of even the smallest spoken language variant is an irrecoverable loss both for the local social micro-milieu and for the scholarly world.

That is why for both of them, the Roma culture, language and alleged literary forms proved to be a good ground for discussion of the role and possibilities of comparative literature, and both of them used Meltzl's idea of employing the local Roma language and culture in their projects as frequently as possible.<sup>14</sup> The excellent, provocative translation and rewriting of Goethe's "Gleich und gleich" (Like to Like) into local Roma dialect and cultural traditions was far from the only such venture of *ACLU*.

The so-called "Petőfiana" was planned as a translation of a single canonical lyric poem by Sándor Petőfi into all the languages of the world. This future chrestomathy was expected to constitute a systematic corpus based on which emerging comparative literature could experiment. The unexpected success of this early project, which lasted over the entire decade-long lifespan of *ACLU* and even outlived it in the form of a few later publications, gave a boost to a noteworthy attempt that turned out to be a fiasco, the (book) project of *The Encyclopaedia of the Poetry of the World*. This extraordinary venture was planned to embrace samples from all the languages of the world whose literature could make up the polyphony that *ACLU* attempted and imagined mirroring.

Both of the projects included Roma language, culture and literature that clearly stood out even from the most uncommon languages and literatures *ACLU* usually referred to. The Roma case was certainly not the customary case – a community far from the 19<sup>th</sup> century visions and realities of nationhood, split into many local groups without real contact even within the same countries, where most of these communities spoke completely different languages and variants of languages. Even though the attempts to codify the Roma language came from various sides (in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the most famous of these being the grammar and political reform program of Archduke Joseph Karl of Austria,

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the letter written by Brassai Sámuel to Hugo von Meltzl on April 7, 1878, The Archives of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church, The Literary Remains of Sámuel Brassai, Kolozsvár/Cluj, Romania.

Erzherzog Josef Karl von Österreich<sup>15</sup>), these scholarly works brought about neither the spread of a codified language variant nor the alleviation of the social conditions of the Roma community at large. Long before these famous attempts, *ACLU* opened the eyes of the general public to the linguistic and "literary" potential of the community. By suggesting that the language and folklore texts of the unfairly treated Roma community could be a most valuable asset of world literature, they made many scholars and readers frown. But in spite of this reluctance, one of the first translations from the "Petőfiana" came to be a Roma one.

In the second volume of *ACLU*, the famous "Reszket a bokor" ("The Quivering Bush") by Petőfi was translated into a local Roma dialect. The editors of *ACLU* insisted on entreating a Roma to translate the poem, and they finally found one: "Herr J. Boldizsár, (früher Musiker, jetzt Gastwirt) seiner Nationalität nach Rom, ist bedeutender Autodidact und Naturdichter." ("Boldizsár J[ózsef], formerly a musician, nowadays a landlord, is a Roma person. He is an autodidact and a natural poet [Naturdichter].")<sup>16</sup> This attempt to recover "the voice" of a suppressed and hidden culture made *ACLU* formulate one of the basic assumptions of the comparative ethnology the founders saw as intimately connected to comparative literature.

The series entitled, "Volkslieder der transylvanischen Zigeuner," (Folksongs of the Transylvanian Roma) which was later published as an offprint in the "Fontes" series under the title, "Jile romane. Volkslieder der transilvanisch-ungarischen Zigeuner," was entirely based on the folklore repertoire of a Roma woman, Teréz Tini. Meltzl was extremely proud of the fieldwork he had done. This idea of fieldwork as a long-time, intensive process of observation and of the literary comparatist as an anthropologist embedded into the local community brought a deeply anthropological nuance into the vision of comparative literature devised by the founders of *ACLU*. It is no wonder that some of the disciples of Meltzl who started with comparative literature ended up doing comparative ethnology. For instance, Henrik Whislocki, who began by learning Icelandic literature with Meltzl, turned his comparative literary ambitions into impressive fieldwork that made him one of the most pioneering but also intriguing figures

<sup>15</sup> *Cigány nyelvtan. Romane Csibákero Sziklaribe [Roma grammar]* Budapest, 1888; *Fundamentum language Zingaricae*. Budapest, 1888. His later famous, synthetic work was written together with Henryk Whislocki, a disciple of Meltzl and a former collaborator of *ACLU*: *A cigányokról. A cigányok történelme, életmódja, néphite, népköltése, zenéje, nyelve és irodalma [On the Roma. The history, way of life, beliefs, music, language and literature of the Roma]*. Budapest, 1894.

<sup>16</sup> "Petőfiana XI. Petőfi cigány nyelve. Izdral o czino ruk, ke," *ACLU* 2.21 (1878): 440-441.



of modern scholarship on the Roma.<sup>17</sup> The other outstanding example is clearly Herrmann Antal/Anton Herrmann, who also began his academic career with a strong affection for Roma culture in the sense that he learned it from *ACLU*, and he came back to Kolozsvár to found the first chair in ethnography and comparative ethnology in Central and Eastern Europe.

Obviously, the interest in and the research into Roma language, folklore and "natural" poetry was not an incidental and minor trend in the conceptual framework of *ACLU*. It brought into the foreground the role of "minor languages" and their relationship to the literary and linguistic landscape of the world. According to this vision, world literature would necessarily be unacceptably poor without them, but the task of "excavating" or recovering these languages and literatures meant new, pioneering methods for literary research. But it was the same master example of the Roma language and culture that also foregrounded for the founders of *ACLU* the paradoxes of multilingualism, including the issue of asymmetry and power inside literary multilingualisms.

Thus the long-term presence and legacy of the Roma language and "natural literature" in *ACLU* brought about three distinct, interconnected and similarly weighty issues linked to its vision of literary multilingualism. Firstly, the Roma "connection" helped the founders of the journal refine and redefine their vision of comparative literature from the perspective of the belittled, "small," "disappearing," non-national, nonstandard type of languages and literatures, and this in turn brought early comparative literature into a position of comparative ethnology involving thorough, mindful and sympathetic fieldwork. Secondly, through the Roma case, the first international journal of comparative literary studies brought back the (political, social and anthropological) problem of language and literary communities without a nation, which had been belittled in the heyday of literary nationalisms. Finally, the Roma case showed how the multilingualism perceived by *ACLU* thus became a truly complex phenomenon, possibly encompassing languages and literatures that had come to be erased by virulent literary nationalisms and their methodologies.

## **2. The Beginning of Comparative Literary Studies and a Reinterpreted Alternative Politics of National Identity**

The complex, consciously devised, often theoretically formulated politics of multilingualism of *ACLU* and the provocative positioning of multilingualism at the very heart of global literary studies in the age of modern literary nationalisms obviously demands explanations. How and

<sup>17</sup> On his career, see Wlisslocki (1994).

why did Meltzl and Brassai, and also many of the standard and temporary collaborators of *ACLU*, insist on multilingualism? And why were the founders and editors so apprehensive of literary monolingualism? What were the possible identifiable reasons and motifs that led these scholars to see the literary world in such a subversive way, which attracted a considerable number of collaborators but also critical attention? What are the possible conceptual frameworks that would coherently explain the vision of this type of politics of multilingualism by the founders of *ACLU*? Let me propose an historical explanation that seems able to account for the phenomenon and which can become a starting point in reading the phenomenon of literary multilingualism in *ACLU*, not only from the point of view of the founders but also from the perspective of many of the collaborators.

There is a telltale sign that can provide a lead on a larger identity politics that, in a certain manner, seems to frame the vision of multilingualism described in the previous chapter. In Hungary and in the Hungarian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is hardly any identity framework except one that would not exclude the Roma culture, language and alleged literary works from the field of national literature. The canonical ethnonational notion of literature that had emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century adopted an unsympathetic attitude toward anything that was not innately ethnically Hungarian. The same culture was also doomed to remain outside the horizons of the slowly disappearing vision of the nation as the community of all those who had a common noble origin.<sup>18</sup> The only nation-building process present in Hungarian culture in the middle and second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that not only tried to integrate the Roma community but also made it an experimental case was the so-called supranational identity of (Habsburg) patriotism. This supranational identity, revived in Hungary after the 1867 *Ausgleich*, thanks to the so-called *Kronprinzenwerk* and a series of literary and cultural ventures intimately connected to it, had a long history of dynastic efforts to create loyal identities for the empire. It is Joseph von Sonnenfels who is usually identified as the intellectual behind the early phase of this practical effort. From 1771 onward, his treatise on loyalty and love for the homeland ("Über die Liebe des Vaterlandes") framed this type of supranational discourse about the fatherland in a decisive way. Sonnenfels gave an extremely vague answer to where exactly this *patria* of the different people was, but it was precisely this loose definition that allowed the notion of *Patriotismus* to be so easily domesticated and revived in the lands of the Habsburg Empire,

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent overview of the various (and actually, three main) national narratives in the Hungarian literature of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see S. Varga (2005).

including Hungary, throughout the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The same permeability, pliability and conceptual porosity often made it possible for the ideas incorporated into this supranational patriotism and identity politics to be compatible, rewritten, incorporated and domesticated in many types of identity forms, including various Hungarian ethnonationalistic literary poetics (Trencsényi & Zászkaliczky, 2010: 1-74).<sup>19</sup>

From the 1870s onward, several enthralling literary and cultural ventures of the Habsburgs and their scholarly circle repositioned this supranational identity framework, and many of these included the Roma community as a gesture of exemplifying how all languages and cultures were able to coexist within this type of patriotism. The projects already mentioned that were linked to Roma culture by Archduke Joseph Karl of Austria, along with the *Kronprinzenwerk*, all flagged the Roma as the discharged, reinterpreted, revived and revalued community. That is why Meltzl and Brassai's provocative gesture to highlight multilingualism as the basis of all (national) literatures, and to revalue Roma culture within this provocative framework, cannot be seen only as a provocation for the sake of provocation. It also must be seen as an outcome, a reflection of and an answer to a supranational model of identity as well as an indirect criticism of the rising nationalism of literature and literary studies in the 1870s-1880s.

This identity politics sketched a form of "national" identity that surprisingly stressed the multiplicity of languages and cultures and portrayed ethnic identity as being in *a ceaseless and fruitful negotiation among these languages and cultures*. Of course, this was originally a genuinely political idea to make the empire politically appealing for all its citizens, but now it was turned into an identity politics that stressed tolerance and mutual dependence among the cultures and languages of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Let me recall the concept as foregrounded in Crown Prince Rudolf's introduction to the *Kronprinzenwerk* (1885), the monumental multilingual cultural-literary work that aimed at exemplifying this inspiring presence of the different cultures, folklore communities and literatures:

Az ezen monarchia határain belül élő népfajok tanulmányozása nemcsak a tudós elé tár tágas mezőt, hanem egyúttal az általános hazaszeretet emelésére sem csekély gyakorlati jelentőségű. Mennél behatóbban vizsgáljuk az egyes

<sup>19</sup> Probably the most famous example is Mór Jókai, the prolific Hungarian writer of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who coquetted with many of the ideas expressed in the revived supranational patriotism of the Habsburgs in the 1870s-1890s, and at the same time, remained fully integrated into a prominent role in the ethnonationalist type of literary writing.

népcsoportok jó tulajdonságait és sajátságait, úgyszintén azoknak egymástól szellemi és anyagi tekintetben való kölcsönös függését, annál nagyobb mértékben fog erősülni azon összetartozandóság érzete, melynek hazánk népeit egymással össze kell kapcsolni. [...] Van-e állam, mely egy ily nagy műhöz a talajalakulás ellentéteiben oly gazdagságot, természetrajzi, tájképi és égálji tekintetben oly nagyszerű változatosságot egyesítve határai közt, a különböző népcsoportok néprajzi összetételében oly nagy mértékben nyújthatná a legérdekesebb képeket, mint monarchiánk?

[The study of the people living within the borders of this monarchy highlights excellent possibilities not only for the scholar, but it has quite an important practical role in improving general patriotism. The more we study the good qualities of the groups of people, respectively their mutual dependence on one another, the more we will strengthen their feeling of being together, a feeling that should connect the people of our country [...] that is the way the image of our present days, the image of a huge and powerful Austro-Hungarian monarchy (the Patrie [homeland] of all of us) will reveal itself.]<sup>20</sup>

The *Kronprinzenwerk* seemed jubilant at the multiplicity of languages and cultures, and it imagined an alleged fair and equal relationship among them. It is no wonder that this form of (supra)national identification was so appealing for the large groups of people who had multiple ethnic or regional identities or who were bi- or trilingual, like Hugo von Meltzl, or who were critical toward immoderate ethnonationalisms, like Sámuel Brassai. So it is understandable why the founders of *ACLU* were so attracted to this seemingly democratic and tolerant way of perceiving language and culture when facing the more and more restrictive forms of Hungarian and German national literary identities of the 1870s and 1880s. The vision of crisscrossing languages and mutually fertile connections among various languages, cultures and literatures, and intermingled (national) literatures was thus a primary identity experience for Brassai, and especially for Meltzl, and this became reinforced by a supranational identity politics that provided a frame, a vocabulary and a tradition to rely on.

However, this certainly did not mean that they took over the political and cultural concept in a rigid and mechanical manner. As a republican, Meltzl was avowedly critical of the monarchy, and he also admittedly preferred the *Heimat*, Transylvania, to the monarchy as a state. He was in fact critical of political categories in general; his most fervent criticism with respect to national literary histories dealt with the failure of such literary interpretations. This makes even more enthralling the way Meltzl critically reinterpreted the idea of supranational patriotism, making out of the political idea of mutual

<sup>20</sup> My quotation comes from the Hungarian variant of the *Kronprinzenwerk: Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild*, Budapest, vol. I., 1887, pp. 5-9.

loyalty between the monarchy and its subjects a provocative cultural-literary idea that put the multiplicity of languages and their ceaseless contact, interaction and negotiation at the heart of the new discipline.

On the other hand, even though he was not struggling with Hungarian and (Transylvanian) German ethnonationalist identity politics that pushed him to identify himself either as “a German” or “a Hungarian,” Brassai still had his own identity dilemmas. These arose mainly from two sources. Firstly, they arose from his denominational affiliation, which made him and his fellow Unitarians a minority amidst the majority of Hungarians, and similarly, a minority within the Transylvanian Protestant community. It is telling that he constructed a new point of view for this minority identity when, in complete disagreement with traditional Hungarian Protestantism, he redefined Unitarianism as a cosmopolitan denomination *par excellence*, singling out the Scandinavian and American Unitarians and emphasizing the transnational connection with them, to the detriment of the other Hungarian Protestant communities. Secondly, he had always been a strong critic of exaggerative (literary) nationalisms, and therefore, in spite of his enormous knowledge and his position as a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, he remained outside the canon of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian literary mainstream.

Therefore, to put it in another way, Brassai and Meltzl solved their own personal identity dilemmas by subtly writing their notions of literature into a historical, revived and enlarged identity model, i.e. that of the revived supranational patriotism. They not only reinterpreted it but even turned it upside down and used it as a model of world literature, depriving it of its historical-political overtones and partly ascribing a new politics to it. For instance, they not only admitted the inspiring role of linguistic and literary contacts in the emergence of the national literary canons, but they also overemphasized the role of this intermingling, making it the center of every national and transnational literary masterpiece. Or they not only admitted the value of nonstandard language variants, but they suggested that even regional and local languages could have the same role, value and status as the national ones.

This interplay of *the regional and the supranational vs. the national* also resulted in a radical methodological consequence in dealing with the first international literary journal of comparative literature. For a long time, methodological nationalism seemed to dominate the reconstruction of the history of this journal, inventing the national self in and within the journal, whereas it might have been more appropriate to assume hybrid identities or not to raise questions in ethnic or national terms.<sup>21</sup> For

<sup>21</sup> For such literary cases in historical perspective, see Amsler (2011); Forster (1970); Miller (2011).



instance, the collaborators of the very large network of the "Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok/Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum" have often been characterized along national and ethnic patterns, even though this hinders the understanding of their roles in the life of the journal. The "Hungarian" Podhors(z)ky Lajos writes about Bulgarian, Albanian and several Oriental languages and literatures, the "Romanian" Dora d'Istria's interests go to Greece, Albania, the United States and Russia, and their logic and arguments can hardly be correctly perceived when linked exclusively to a single ethnic group.

Nor did the founders themselves succeed in escaping this narrow vision. One of the founders of the polyglot review, Hugo von Meltzl, has usually been said to be either a German or a Hungarian. Moreover, from an Orientalizing perspective, the figure of "the German" Meltzl has often been considered to be "more foundational" and even more exclusively important as compared with "the Hungarian" Sámuel Brassai. There has been a tendency to tell the whole story of the review as basically a German or a Western story, a West-in-the-Easternmost-parts-of-Europe type of narrative, reducing the story to the personality and œuvre of Meltzl and simply assuming that his alleged "Germanness" is the sole key to the innovative idea of the journal and the large network around it. This hidden methodological nationalism has made the other founder and editor of *ACLU* almost invisible in the histories of the journal, but at the same time, it has also made invisible the local embeddedness of the central concept of multilingualism in comparative literature. Acknowledging the role of the hybrid identities of the founders may also open up our perspectives on the role and dynamics of multilingualism. And our focus on the politics of multilingualism in *ACLU* could lead us to understand why these scholarly figures were so attached to the idea of world literature based on the entanglement of languages.

As can be seen, the multilingualism of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* was not a purely formal and shallow mechanism at all, but it was founded on an enthralling theoretical and practical framework, the politics of which becomes visible the moment we decipher the numerous theoretical and practical texts on multilingualism in and around *ACLU*. Recovering the multiple identities of the founders and their complex identity politics in the face of the nationalizing literatures could reveal the fascinating story of identity politics of an emerging discipline and paradigm of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Die vergleichende Literaturgeschichte ist bekanntlich noch keine fertige Wissenschaft. Es handelt sich also *vorderhand* mehr nur darum, dass man ihr die Wege ebene,"<sup>22</sup> they were saying in 1878, and they undoubtedly also referred to

<sup>22</sup> A call for subscriptions in the form of an unnumbered separate supplement of "*ACLU*," published in a limited edition as an appendix to its issues in early 1878.

the intimate and fascinating story and highly conscious vision they were to propose in *ACLU* regarding the relationship of comparative literature and multilingualism in the long term.

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