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The World in a *Zeitschrift*

The relaunching of the Jahrbuch *Komparatistik* in 2015 takes place at a time of ferment in comparative literary studies, as a discipline long focused primarily on Western Europe seeks to reconsider its position in a global landscape, and in the process to rethink the contours of European literature itself. Here I would like to discuss one new manifestation of this rethinking: the founding of the *Journal of World Literature*, which will be debuting in 2016. Published in Amsterdam by Brill, with its managing editors located in Leuven and in Göttingen, the *JWL* represents a European initiative in comparative and world literary studies, and the journal has a global presence as well. It is overseen by an international board of editors (myself among them), and it has an association with the Institute for World Literature, a Harvard-based program supported by five dozen institutions around the world, which will be responsible for one of its quarterly issues each year.

Global in outlook and outreach, the *JWL* can equally be thought of as carrying on an originally German project: to embody the potentially vast field of comparative and world literature within the pages available in a scholarly journal. To this end, very different approaches were tried in the last quarter of the nineteenth century by two foundational journals: the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, published in Cluj from 1877-88 by the Transylvanian scholars Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, and the *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*, founded in 1886, published in Berlin under the editorship of Max Koch. Probably the very first journals in the field – the French *Revue de littérature comparée*, for example, dates only from 1921 – these pioneering journals divided up the literary territory in very different ways. Meltzl and Brassai's *Acta* reflected an idealistic globalism grounded in a radical multilingualism, whereas Koch opted for a more pragmatic but markedly nationalistic conception of the field. The new *Journal of World Literature* will need to draw on the strengths of each approach even as its editors seek to avoid the pitfalls of both.

In keeping with its global emphasis, the *Acta* had a board of editors from eighteen countries, including not only the predictable countries of Hungary, Germany, England, France, and Italy, but also Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Holland, Iceland, India, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States: an extraordinary reach for the time. But Meltzl and Brassai went farther, and based their journal on the “Prinzip des Polyglottismus.” The journal's very title was given in six languages: *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok / Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteratur / Journal de littérature comparée*, followed in smaller type by versions in Italian, English, and Spanish. The journal boasted no fewer than ten “official languages,” including Dutch, Swedish, Icelandic, and Latin in addition to the six titular languages; Portuguese was later added, and by 1883 the masthead featured the title in all eleven languages, now headed by the Latin title by which the journal is best known. When possible, articles were

to be written in the language of whatever literary text was under discussion, and works in many more languages were discussed in one or another “official” language, including translations of lyrics by the Hungarian national poet Sandor Petöfi into thirty-two languages.

Raised in the German-speaking minority in the Transylvanian region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Meltzl learned Hungarian and Romanian only in school, then received his PhD in Germany before returning to Cluj to teach, where he teamed up with his senior colleague Sámuel Brassai (1800-1897), a polymath who was a professor both of mathematics and of Sanskrit. They collaborated on the journal until Brassai’s retirement in 1883, with Meltzl as sole editor thereafter. Brassai’s wide international network was essential to the journal’s formation, but Meltzl took on the bulk of the editing duties, and it was Meltzl who wrote the programmatic opening essay for the journal’s first issue, “Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur,” with a continuation in the second issue.¹ At once a Hungarian patriot and a confirmed internationalist, Meltzl was deeply imbued with the German spirit of *Wissenschaft*, and German itself carried substantial weight within the journal’s pages. In the issues I’ve examined, roughly half of all articles are in German, followed by twenty percent in Hungarian, with most of the remainder in English, French, Italian, and Latin.

As Horst Fassel has emphasized, Meltzl and Brassai combined a Herderian interest in *Volkspoesie* with an emphasis on masterpieces of established literatures, though not only those of the major Western European powers.² The *Acta* had a strong commitment to the promotion of “minor” literatures, notably including Hungarian but also many more; hence the inclusion of an Icelandic scholar on his board. In his inaugural essay for the journal, Meltzl became perhaps the first person ever to compare less-spoken languages to endangered species: “Und ein Zeitalter, das selbst gewisse Tierspecies, wie Gemen u. Auerochsen, vor Ausrottung mit sorgfältigen u. strengen Gesetzen schützt, sollte doch der Ausrottung einer Menschenspecies oder was auf Eines herauskommt: einer Volkslitteratur wahrlich nicht für fähig gehalten werden können.”³

The *Acta* provided a lively forum for early comparative analysis, with particular attention to issues of translation, aesthetics, and orality. Yet the journal never reached a wide readership. Few were the readers who would have been prepared linguistically for the *Acta*, even if they were sympathetic to its aims, and its circulation rarely topped a hundred. According to Árpád Berczik, the “Todesstoß” to the struggling journal’s existence came with the publication of Max Koch’s *Zeitschrift* in 1886.⁴ Meltzl himself must have been wounded to learn of the rival

1 Hugo Meltzl. “Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur.” *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 1/1 (1877). S. 79-82, and 1/2 (1877). S. 307-315.

2 Cf. *Hugo Meltzl und die Anfänge der Komparatistik*. Ed. by Horst Fassel. Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005.

3 *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 1/2 (1877). S. 311. Repr. in Horst Fassel, ed. *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum, Jahrgang 1* (1877), Cluj-Napoca: Institutul German al Universității Babeș-Bolyai, 2002.

4 Árpád Berczik. “Hugó von Meltzl.” *Német Filológiai Tanulmányok* 12 (1978). S. 87-100.

journal not from his German associates but from newspaper reports, and he wrote a plaintive note on the contents page of his next issue, urging to his readers not to abandon him:

Aus Zeitungsnachrichten erfahren wir soeben, daß in Berlin demnächst eine Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte ihre Laufbahn eröffnen soll. So sehr wir uns freuen, daß jener große Ast der vergleichenden Litteratur (oder Litteraturforschung, welcher übrigens keineswegs „vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte“ werden kann), auch in Goethes Vaterland ein selbständiges Heim sich erwirbt, so sehr bedauern wir die wohl (!) nur zufällige Wahl des Titels, der hinfort manche Verwechslung mit dem deutschen Titel der *Acta Comparationis* nach sich ziehen dürfte; worauf wir eben hiermit im voraus aufmerksam machen wollen, bittend, daß wenigstens ein gelehrtes Publikum den Unterschied zwischen „Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteratur“ (seit Januar 1877) und der „Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte“ (seit Sommer 1886) genau beachten möge.⁵

It is certainly possible to see Koch as the villain in this scholarly drama, as I myself have previously done⁶; Koch appeared deliberately to be stealing Meltzl's thunder with essays in his early issues on Hungarian and Romanian folklore, even as he studiously ignored the *Acta* in the extensive inaugural essay for his *Zeitschrift*, in which he traced the history of comparative literary studies up to his time. Unquestionably, Koch's journal represented a very different approach, one that Meltzl must have seen as a real step away from his polyglot internationalism. Koch's inaugural essay speaks of cosmopolitanism and the universal values of literature, whereas Meltzl had inveighed against great-power cosmopolitanism, which he saw as swallowing up the distinctiveness of smaller literatures. As Meltzl says in the second part of his inaugural essay, on “Das Prinzip des Polyglottismus,”

Das aber diese polyglotten Bestrebungen nicht das Geringste zu tun haben mit “Menschenbrüderschaftschwindel” (J. Scherr's Wort) oder ähnlicher *νεφέλοκοκκυγία* [Cloud-Cuckoo-Land]; das bedarf wohl keiner weiten Auseinandersetzung. Mit kosmopolitistelnden Nebeltheorien haben die Ideale vergleichender Litteratur gar nichts gemein. . . . Die Ziele der vergleichenden Litteratur sind wohl etwas solider. Ist es doch grade das *Rein-Nationale jeder Nation*, das sie liebevoll cultivieren möchte. . . . Unser geheimer Wahlspruch lautet im Gegenteil: Heilig u. unantastbar sei die Nationalität als Volksindividualität! . . . Denn eine Menschenrace, u. wäre sie politisch noch so unbedeutend, ist u. bleibt darum von vergl.-litterar. Standpunkt immerhin so wichtig als die grösste Nation. (1:2, 310-11)

By contrast, Koch's universalism was grounded in a single major European language, his own. Almost all of the articles in his journal were written in German

5 *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. Novissimae Series 1 (1886), quoted in Berczik. “Hugo von Meltzl” (wie Anm. 4). S. 98-99.

6 Cf. David Damrosch. “Hugo Meltzl and ‘the Principle of Polyglottism.’” *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Ed. by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir. London: Routledge, 2012. S. 12-20.

by scholars based in Germany or Austria, and the great majority of the articles center on German writers, either as they used foreign sources or as they were seen abroad.

Yet even with these differences, the *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte* was working from its German base to open out to a broad European and even global conception. Koch's interest in Hungarian and Romanian folk-songs wasn't merely strategic but stemmed from his own Herderian enthusiasm for the world's literary expression. As Koch says in his introductory essay, Herder understood Volkspoesie "in ihrer weder durch Zeitalter noch Grenzen beschränkten Gesamtheit".⁷ Koch praises Karl Goedicke's mid-century study *Every-Man, Homulus und Hekastus: Ein Beitrag zur internationalen Litteraturgeschichte* (1865) for revealing deep connections between Asian and European literature and thought, likely transmitted orally as well as through lost literary means, whereby Buddhist and Persian materials came to infuse medieval European legends and tales. A major essay in the first issue discusses an eight-part Tamil tale, "Die Abenteuer des Guru Paramärtan," and follows the analysis with a translation of the story (1:48-72). Another article in the inaugural issue, "Über den Refrain" by Richard Meyer, is an essay in comparative poetics that presents the refrain as the kernel of all poetry, drawing on Sanskrit, Arabic, and African traditions as well as classical Greece.⁸ In the context of today's interest in animal studies, it is noteworthy that Meyer goes so far as to discuss the proto-poetry of great apes' cries of greeting to the rising sun, though he leaves the connection an open question – not wishing, he says, to seem "ultradarwinianisch" (36).

Granted that Koch's journal was produced by and for German scholars, it nonetheless promoted an internationalized vision of German culture, in sharp contrast to many literary studies in Bismarck's newly unified Germany. Implicitly breaking with the nationalistic emphasis inaugurated in Georg Gottfried Gervinus's *Geschichte der poetischen Nationallitteratur der Deutschen* (1835-42), Koch opens his introductory essay by asserting that "Von der deutschen Litteraturgeschichte könnte man sagen, sie sei bereits in ihren Anfängen als vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte hervorgetreten" (1). He notes that as early as 1682, a study by Daniel Georg Morhof of "teutschen Poeterey" included discussions of Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, English, and Dutch poetry, and he emphasizes that German literature has always been in dialogue with the wider world, often through the medium of translation. The *Zeitschrift* regularly featured essays on poetics, aesthetics, and translation, occasionally providing a venue for debate among its contributors. Thus in 1887, J. Kirste and W. Wollmer disputed the question of whether translators should seek to present works of importance in their culture of origin or only those that would read effectively as literature for their own audience; as Kirste asks, "wo liegt der Maßstab zur Beurteilung eines

7 Max Koch. "Zur Einführung." *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte* 1 (1886). S. 1-12, 4.

8 Richard Meyer. "Über den Refrain." *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte* 1 (1886). S. 34-90.

fremden Geistesproduktes? Bei den Deutschen, bei dem Übersetzer, bei den Fremden?“⁹

If Koch's journal had a more global reach than has sometimes been supposed, Meltzl and Brassai's journal, conversely, had nationalist tendencies of its own. Though many of the journal's hundred or more contributors were committed internationalists, others were far more concerned to find a venue for promotion of their own national tradition. T. Levente Szabó has emphasized the nationalism of many of the journal's essays in a valuable recent article focused on the journal's Albanian contributor, Thimi Mitko, a committed ethnonationalist whose perspective became softened in the journal's cosmopolitan framing. As Szabó says, "the Albanian case is one of the instances which can show the diverse (and often divergent) strata and the composite, sometimes eclectic nature of *ACLU* that often makes binary terms like nationalism and cosmopolitanism come together in less binary, but more fragmented, intricate and complex ways".¹⁰ And as David Marno has shown, Meltzl and Brassai themselves not only promoted Hungarian literature (especially in the person of Petöfi) but also tacitly accepted the Austro-Hungarian Empire's marginalization of minority languages within its borders: though the *Acta* did include translations of Romanian poetry, neither Romanian nor Czech, Slovakian, Croatian, or Serbian figured among the journal's ten or eleven "official languages".¹¹

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Building on the legacy of these foundational journals today, the *Journal of World Literature* can be as polyglot as Meltzl could have wished, at least in the materials discussed, and modern computerized typography makes it much easier for us than for Meltzl to print texts in any number of scripts. Like Koch, however, we intend to publish most if not all of our essays in a single language. Koch solicited German contributions not only on nationalistic grounds but because he thought of German as the "allgemeines Organ der Mitteilung für die gebildeten Nationen" ("Zur Einführung," 8, quoting A. W. Schlegel). Similarly, we recognize that English now serves as the most accessible international language of scholarship, reaching readers far beyond the limited club of "gebildeten Nationen" envisioned by Schlegel and Koch.

Like Meltzl's *Acta*, the *JWL* has an international editorial board – as it happens, also coming from eighteen countries around the world – and we anticipate contributions from many more countries as well. The journal also seeks to

9 J. Kirste. "Zur Frage der Übersetzungs-Litteratur." *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* 2 (1887). S. 89-90, 89.

10 T. Levente Szabó. "Negotiating World Literature in the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies: The Albanian Case." *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai – Philologia* 2 (2012). S. 33-51, 44.

11 David Marno. "The Monstrosity of Literature: Hugo Meltzl's World Literature and Its Legacies." *World Literature and World Culture*. Ed. by Karen-Margrethe Simonsen and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002, S. 37-50, 40-41.

combine a broad global outlook with sustained attention to individual countries and regional cultures. Special issues are currently planned on Persian literature and on Romanian literature, while other issues have a broader regional focus, including issues on Scandinavian literature; on Arabic literature; and on the Chinese “scriptworld.” Other special issues take up general topics in translation studies and narratology, and an issue will be devoted to “ultra-minor literatures,” a concept presented at a session of the Institute for World Literature in Hong Kong by the Faroese scholar Bergur Moberg.

Even as the *JWL* freely mixes national, regional, and global perspectives, its editors have to be aware that the landscape of literary studies remains an uneven one. As of this writing, we have no editors at all from sub-Saharan Africa; none from the Caribbean; none from South America apart from Brazil; none from Southeast Asia. Our reliance on English may help us reach a worldwide audience, but at the expense of restricting our contributions to essays written by people fluent in this particular language. This is an issue faced by the Institute for World Literature as well; our month-long summer sessions rotate on a three-year basis between Asia, the USA, and Europe or the Middle East, with participants from two dozen or more countries, but again our sessions take place under the ambiguous aegis of global English. Yet when we met in Hong Kong in 2014, with many Chinese participants among the group, our host Zhang Longxi (also a general editor of the *JWL*) opted not to have some sessions in Chinese, not wanting the Mandarin speakers to be isolated in a separate group.

Like Meltzl and Brassai's *Acta* and Koch's *Zeitschrift*, both the Institute and the *JWL* intend to highlight translation, both in theory and practice. Thus the first issue of the *JWL* includes a translation of the inaugural essay written for a new Korean journal of world literature. Its author, Kim Jae-yong, makes a powerful case that comparative and world literary studies need to move beyond the Eurocentrism that has been endemic in the field.¹² Ironically, it will be thanks to English translation that “From Eurocentric World Literature to Global World Literature” will now reach a global audience, well beyond the circles that could read the original “Yuröp chungsimjök segye munhak e sö chigujök segye munhak ü ro” (유럽 중심적 세계문학에서 지구적 세계문학으로). This irony is one that Meltzl and Koch alike would have appreciated, and the *Journal of World Literature* will continue to draw on its German predecessors in reshaping comparative study in global terms.

12 Kim Jae-yong. “From Eurocentric World Literature to Global World Literature.” Forthcoming in *Journal of World Literature* 1/1 (2016).