

Literary Detectives: How a Multimillion PNRR Project at ULBS Uses Code to Decode Classical Drama

METRA: A Research Project Reshaping the Study of European Tragedy

SIBIU, TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA, June 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- At the conclusion of its two-and-a-half years of implementation, the METRA project – Measuring Tragedy: Geographical Diffusion, Comparative Morphology, and Computational Analysis of European Tragic Form – stands out as one of the most ambitious research initiatives in the field of literary studies hosted by "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu.

The project spans from January 1, 2024, to June 30, 2026, and is coordinated by Professor Emeritus Franco Moretti, one of the most influential figures in contemporary literary criticism. Funded through a [PNRR](#) 1.8 grant and implemented at ULBS, METRA aims to investigate the forms of European tragedy through an innovative combination of comparative literary analysis, cultural mapping, and computational methods. The project stems from the hypothesis that European tragedy internalizes collective conflicts in the form of family conflicts, tracking how this structure transformed and circulated across different European cultural spaces.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

The specificity of METRA lies in bringing together perspectives that, until recently, operated separately: literary theory, cultural history, comparative analysis, and digital methods. The



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researchers involved analyze both the morphology of tragic forms and their geographical and historical diffusion, utilizing tools such as natural language processing and the computational analysis of texts. The project thus continues the research direction associated with the concept of "distant reading" developed by Franco Moretti, which allows for the investigation of vast literary corpora and the identification of cultural patterns that are difficult to observe through traditional reading.

First Results

A significant milestone of the project was the publication of the thematic issue *The Limits of Tragedy* in the journal *Transilvania*, launched in August 2024. Co-coordinated by Prof. Emeritus Franco Moretti, one of the most influential contemporary literary theorists, and Prof. Dr. Andrei Terian, professor of Romanian literature and Vice-Rector for Research, Innovation, and Internationalization at "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, the volume brings together the contributions of ten researchers and offers a preliminary mapping of the concepts of "tragedy" and "the tragic" across various European cultures. The studies explore the relationships between the tragic and other forms of discourse—the novel, poetry, private diaries, political or philosophical discourse—as well as the historical transformations of these concepts from Antiquity to the contemporary era.

The project's results have already expanded beyond the publishing sphere. In November 2024, the METRA sub-team dedicated to natural language processing presented partial results at the EMNLP international conference in Miami, one of the world's most important events in the field of artificial intelligence and natural language processing. This presence confirms the relevance of the methodologies developed within the project and its openness to dialogue between the humanities and digital technologies.

Impact and Perspectives

METRA contributes to consolidating ULBS's position as an internationally recognized research center in the field of literary studies and digital humanities. Through collaboration among researchers from various disciplines and the integration of computational methods into literary analysis, the project provides a research model adapted to contemporary challenges of knowledge. As it nears completion, the project continues to produce relevant results for understanding how tragic forms circulated, transformed, and shaped the European cultural imagination.

The international conference dedicated to tragic forms, announced for the year 2025, along with the publications resulting from the research, complete an endeavor that transcends disciplinary boundaries and contributes to redefining how literature can be studied in the 21st century. METRA is a research project implemented at "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu between 2024–2026 and funded through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, under the component dedicated to attracting internationally excellent researchers.

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