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## MYTH AND THEATRICAL PRAXIS IN THE CAREER OF A FAMILY OF ACTORS

My paper focuses on a family of Hungarian actors, the Komlóssy family from the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Ferenc and Erzsébet Komlóssy, their daughter, Ida Komlóssy, and granddaughter, Ilma Kövér. I would like to briefly present how they promoted a set of ideologies and values in order to create and maintain a family legend, a metanarrative fitted into a wider, myth- and biblical-based self-perception of Hungarian history and culture. The biblical-mythological patterns of this legend deeply impacted (and gave a post-factum interpretation to) the personal lives of the family members, their relationships and theatrical careers. The components of this metanarrative include human sacrifice given for the Hungarian nation and theatre, a certain type of elitist posing, a virtuously restrained way of life, and a highly competitive attitude.

This study is part of a wider body of research regarding the Komlóssys' theatrical career in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. My reference sources include writings on theatre history and women's history, memoirs, private and public letters, newspapers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and also the research material (manuscripts, playbills, theatrical almanacs, etc.) kept in the National Széchényi Library (OSZK), the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute (OSZMI–PIM) and Budapest City Archives.

### *Careers in context*

Their lives had been dedicated to a paragon of Hungarian Theatre that was shaped up through “so many bitter struggles and delusions”.<sup>1</sup> The inauguration of the National Theatre (1838) was celebrated as a dream coming true. This Institute had the ‘duty’ to save the Hungarian nation and language from the upcoming annihilation – foretold by a widely promoted scientific thesis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Emese Egyed, theatre historian observed, it had to be the place-based home for a community, a citadel of culture and patriotism.<sup>2</sup> Also as Mihály Vörösmarty, the poet laureate of that period, the writer of the dramatic prologue for the opening gala performance sustained, the Schillerian idea of the theatre: a cultural state should be founded on shared theatrical experiences provided by the national theatre, creating and fostering its own interpreters.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Vörösmarty's letter to the procurer of the dramatic prologue for the opening gala performance. EGYED 2013.

<sup>2</sup> EGYED *ibid.*

Even though the critics from Pest-Buda criticized the praxis of travelling theatrical companies harshly, they couldn't deny their contribution to the embodiment of the concept of the national theatre's ideal since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their theatre and the contribution from the towns' magistracy via certain forms of subvention for the creation of a permanent, stone theatre kept the thought of the one-and-only National Theatre alive in the public. The travelling troupes, the so-called "veterans" (Déryné, i.e. Mrs Déry, the great actress of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) hardly had any qualifications for playing, yet they were the catalysts in the process. The Komlóssy's self-definition as reflected in their written legacy as well as in the memoirs of their contemporaries and family members are inseparable from their theatrical career and its cultural-historical context.

### A short biography

I would insist that they are among the most outstanding personalities of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian theatre history. Their theatrical careers mirror the history of the nascent theatre, its failures and achievements, and the process of professionalization.

Ferenc Dániel Komlóssy (1797–1860) has a very impressive curriculum vitae: actor, theatre entrepreneur, playwright, and stage director. He first played on stage in 1813. He quit his studies in law in order to become an actor in rural theatres, and he was acknowledged for his comic and scheming roles.<sup>3</sup> He was the founding member of the theatre company from Székesfehérvár (1818). He was also its co-director (1824–1826), the director of the Transdanubian Theatre Company (1828–1834), the tenant and director of the theatre in Kassa (1834–1837), the chief director of the Pest Hungarian Theatre (1838–1840), and the theatre and opera director (1841–1845) staging in Szeged, Kolozsvár, Miskolc, Győr, Debrecen, etc. From 1845, he worked as a taskmaster and administrator of the National Theatre in Pest, soon becoming a key-member of the institute. He had worked there until the very day of his death. Aladár Schöpflin, theatre historian considers him as one of the most significant personalities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian theatre history, "a role model of rural theatre directors".<sup>4</sup> Mrs Déry<sup>5</sup> describes him as a composed, honest man, a loving husband and father, who always focused upon his duties.<sup>6</sup> He wrote several

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<sup>3</sup> SZÉKELY 1994, 401.

<sup>4</sup> SCHÖPFLIN 1931, III./4.

<sup>5</sup> Déryné is her married name: it stays for Mrs Déry. Actresses were often called by their married names in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mrs Déry née Róza Széppataki [Róza Schenbach] (1793–1872) actress, who became a symbol of the Reform Age Hungarian theatre. Her memoirs are a prominent feature of the Hungarian Biedermeier prose. She was a talented, devoted actress. SCHÖPFLIN *ibid.* I./341–342.

<sup>6</sup> DÉRYNÉ 1900, 156–159.

plays, and translated 197. After his death, the *Vasárnapi Ujság* newspaper dedicated a solemn eulogy to the “master of the Hungarian theatre”, to one of the most productive theatre founders.<sup>7</sup>

Both his wife, Mrs Komlóssy, Erzsébet Czégényi (1805–1855) and daughter, Mrs Kövér, Ida Komlóssy (1822–1893) dedicated themselves to theatre at a very early age (14 and 11). Without being an outstanding talent or having any theatrical background, Mrs Komlóssy still was a dedicated and creative actress. She built up her career thoroughly following the greatest divas of the Reform Age theatre. All written sources highlight her public debate with Mihály Vörösmarty in 1839 about aesthetic and moral demands of theatre in practice. Ida was a talented, qualified, and popular actress of the National Theatre. She made her performance debut as a child at her father’s theatre companies. Both Mrs Komlóssy’s and Ida’s theatrical career had been inspired and promoted by their “manager”, Ferenc Komlóssy.<sup>8</sup> The Komlóssy couple belonged to the young actor generation that provided the greatest personalities of almost three decades of Hungarian theatre history.<sup>9</sup> Ida’s career is marked by the professionalization process of actors, and we can also observe the radical changes of women’s history in her career.

Ilma Kövér (1858–1928) is the last member of the family. She had lost her father at an early age (5), and her mother wanted her to be an actress. She had some roles on stage as a child, but later, she became a writer and a journalist. She dedicated her life to the memory of the “golden age”<sup>10</sup> of her family.

### Commitment and principles

The whole family had committed their lives to the art of theatre. The parameters of their commitment are revealed in their textual legacy, memoirs, theatre criticism, letters, and their literary works. Their mentality rooted in the Hungarian national consciousness representing a particular version of Hungarian history. This historical

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<sup>7</sup> *Vasárnapi Ujság*, January 22, 1860, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Actually Ida had an elder sister, Paulina, who was praised for being a talented singer. Later critical reviews mentioned her incapability of progressing. After the Komlóssys’ return to the National Theatre, we find her on stage sporadically but soon disappears. We hardly know anything about her. She died in a public hospital in 1888. She did not have a family of her own, and probably was very poor, as reflected from an appreciation letter written by Ida to Ede Paulay, director of the Hungarian National Theatre. See: Ida Komlóssy, Kövérné to Paulay Ede. Budapest, September 22, 1888. OSZK, MS, LT.

<sup>9</sup> The beginning of their career: 1807 – István Balog, 1809 – István Déry, 1812 – Pál Szilágyi, 1813 – Alajos Kőszeghy and Ferenc Komlóssy, 1815 – Miklós Udvarhelyi, Dávid Kilényi, Sándor Újfalussy, Zsigmond Szentpétery; Kántorné, Anna Engelhardt – 1809, Mrs Déry – 1810. *Magyar színház-történet 1790–1873*, 133.

<sup>10</sup> KÖVÉR 1910, 8–9.

approach arises from the alleged similarities to the transcendent historical drive in Jewish history. This concept had pervaded the collective memory of the nation since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and had a strong impact upon the history of ideas constituting a very important element of Hungarian collective identity: the fate of the Hungarian nation coheres with the history of Jews, God's chosen people. Note that the Jewish–Hungarian parallel shares the same framework of the narrative of sufferings, and focuses on finding the Promised Land – Canaan / Pannonia and includes the transcendent / mythological thought of a history guided by God according to the sins or repentance of the chosen community.

This perception represents a mentality that assumes that the art of theatre is a tool to educate and save the nation from the annihilation (apocalypse). Thus, standards for art and social life cannot be detached from each other. While acting represents a patriotic deed (it is a moral matter), critics' aesthetical and theoretical objections are an illegitimate way of judging it. Dezső Tóth highlights that such intermingling of ethic and aesthetic paradigm was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse.<sup>11</sup>

### **An actor's fate: sacrifice and martyrdom**

This kind of cultural frame had been applied to actors too as it is reflected in panegyrics written to Mrs Komlóssy. Until 1838, the year of her scandalous failure on the stage of the Pest Hungarian Theatre, she was a prima donna of her husband's companies. She was a celebrated actress, whose pure morals, gentle femininity, enthusiastic, devoted performance, "Hungarian generosity"<sup>12</sup> were highly praised. Gergely Czuczor, an erudite priest and professor dedicated a poem<sup>13</sup> to her, which denotes the general expectations that shaped and prescribed the role as an actress devoted to patriotic theatre in accordance with the above-mentioned historical concept. In the poem, she is depicted as a guiding angel, as a priestess of Thalia, who, by the means of art, leads the nation to a utopian land of Hungarian Canaan (depicted with a biblical set of metaphors) where national culture and heroic patriotic deeds are held up. This tribute suggests women's moral superiority, and it describes her as she<sup>14</sup> embodies moral virtues, beauty, temperance and wisdom. Her actress-role is described by a mixture of aesthetic ideals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century sentimental theatre (natural, authentic and ethical) with a new, romantic view of women's ethereal transcendence.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> TÓTH 1958, 202.

<sup>12</sup> *Honművész*, September 26, 1833, 410–411.

<sup>13</sup> CZUCZOR 1833, 332–333.

<sup>14</sup> PAPP 2014, 146.

<sup>15</sup> VADERNA 2013–4, 468.

Later, in 1839, in her public letter to Mihály Vörösmarty, she evoked this “definition” and mission attributed to her. What happened? After more than 20 long, eventful years of theatre career, the Komlóssys’ were offered a contract by the board of directors of the Pest National Theatre in 1838. The experienced Ferenc Komlóssy had multiple assignments (administrator and director). His wife also got the opportunity to act in lead roles, which led to a prompt failure for her. Her acting and speaking techniques were strongly criticised<sup>16</sup> because they were deemed as the so-called “crying-singing school”, which seemed anachronistic on the stage of the Pest Hungarian Theatre.<sup>17</sup> Mihály Vörösmarty denounced her “outrageous performance” over and over again: “It is excruciating for herself and her spectators. I admit that she is a skilful actress. But hearing that duck-voice while she quacks her role pathetically! She does not fit this Theatre.”<sup>18</sup>

Mrs Komlóssy (possibly with the help of her husband) published a letter in Vörösmarty’s newspaper<sup>19</sup> in response. This letter offers us a synthesis of what travelling theatre companies and rural theatres had given to Hungarian theatre history; they developed the cultural and aesthetic sense of the public and cultivated patriotism and language. Moreover: the letter offers an alternative (subjective) perception of Hungarian theatre history – shaped by the need for survival. Its biblical frame shows actors carrying the duty of creation, shaping the promised land from a culturally deprived desert into a golden age (Eden) marked by cultural institutions, education, cultural democracy, and great theatre-based achievements inducing martyrdom, personal sacrifice, and a certain messianic elitism: “When there weren’t any scientific societies, nor Athenaeum,<sup>20</sup> nor Pest Theatre, I’d already sacrificed my youth to struggle with prejudices and indifference for the Hungarian theatre. I tried to kill the weeds and thorns, so as to plant little delicate flowers. My success is proven by the existence of stone theatres in the cities of Szabadka, Füred, Kecskemét, where travelling companies could find home and relief, and receive the power to lead the poor and illiterate Hungarian people to the majestic court of Thalia making them ea-

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<sup>16</sup> As a result her husband applied to the theatre management for her exemption from playing on stage. See: Jegyzőkönyv az 1839. április 18-i ülésről. A részvényes társaság színészeti választmányának ülései. Jegyzőkönyvek és jegyzőkönyvi kivonat, 1838. OSZK, SzT, Nemzeti Színház iratai, Fond 4/10. [Meeting Report, April 18, 1839]

<sup>17</sup> The old acting school, characterized by solemn theatricality and grand rhetoric. The new acting school aimed naturalism and simplicity in accordance with the romantic style revolution.

<sup>18</sup> *Athenaeum*, December 16, 1838, 799–800.

<sup>19</sup> *Athenaeum*, January 6, 1839, 28–32. The poet published an answer to this letter. This duel of them is entitled the ‘Caligula-debate’ in the history of Hungarian theatre.

<sup>20</sup> “Scientific societies”: she refers to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Athenaeum: Mihály Vörösmarty’s famous liberal progressive newspaper that strongly criticised Mrs Komlóssy, and had serious theoretical duels with the theatre management about the high-standard requirements of the National Hungarian Theatre.

ger to visit Her palace when coming to Pest in order to sell wheat, bacon, and poultry – thus becoming susceptible for arts...”<sup>21</sup> Mrs Komlóssy continues the biblical discourse by identifying her critic with a serpent (a hint to Vörösmarty’s supposed moral and aesthetical competence), who corrupts the process of the birth of a nation, and by allocating herself the role of a martyr. Self-sacrifice for national concern (theatre) is shown as a religious and romantic truth, which is beyond any theoretical (yet true) objection in this aspect. It’s a particular fact that almost 30 years later, when Ida felt more and more neglected, she mourned her career with almost the same words as her mother: more than 20 years of self-sacrifice for the holy art of theatre, struggling with good and evil for the national theatre.<sup>22</sup>

The letter points out the fact that Mrs Komlóssy’s motherhood is also a national-cultural achievement, and it is inseparable from her being an actress and wife.

### **Theatre: mythology in numbers**

Ferenc Komlóssy began to write his memories a few weeks before his death on the request of Gábor Egressy, a great actor and theatrical theorist.<sup>23</sup> Gábor Egressy shared years of destitution and success with him, whom he named “the hardest working outpost warrior” of Hungarian theatre history.<sup>24</sup> What do the confessions of an old actor and theatre director of almost 50 years of experience communicate to us?

We should rather call them the mixture of a report and a series of anecdotes. He offers an interesting mix of precise list of the heroes of the first times and heart-wrenching details of how these actors tried to serve art and culture. He avows the merits of the first Hungarian professional company, but he states that the second theatre company, which performed in the Rondella in Pest from 1807 is “the real mother company”<sup>25</sup> of all in Hungary. He presents the members of this company as forming an epic fellowship unified by their quest for social and national happiness, being the heroes of the dawn of Hungarian theatre. Theatre depends on numbers: “Majestic art of theatre has a great impact on noble souls” – states Ferenc Komlóssy in 1839 in his report to the management – “but we have to seek a balance of incomes and expenses, so we should give bombastic food to the ears and eyes of common people.”<sup>26</sup>

The director’s vision about theatre represented extensive views; European cultures are merged by theatre in a mythical way. The eloquent texts of the playbills that

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<sup>21</sup> *Athenaeum*, January 6, 1839, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Hölgyfutár*, February 27, 1864, 198–199.

<sup>23</sup> KOMLÓSSY 1860.

<sup>24</sup> EGRESSY 1860, 43.

<sup>25</sup> KOMLÓSSY *ibid.* 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ferenc Komlóssy’s report. May 9, 1839. OSZK, SzT, Nemzeti Színház iratai, Fond 4/25.

announce his company's upcoming theatrical performances suggest a special, mythological concept of geography: outlining a transcendent map of Europe marked by cultural-theatrical events. For example, Kolozsvár, Pest, London and Paris are put on a theoretical axis mundi of an idealistic-mythological space marked by the unity of taste and culture. Furthermore, this ideal of moral and patriotic theatre needs human sacrifice, and epic deeds. It is somehow 'measurable' by venues, performance, the number of original dramas and translations, and it is established by a whole community (including common people).

### Devotion and self-interpretation

Ida's self-definition always carried her parents' legacy. Furthermore, she could never truly escape the role of Mihály Vörösmarty's<sup>27</sup> sweet, sentimental, naïve, and talented disciple – and once she was forced to do so (by getting married, having a child, probably gaining weight, and getting older) – she switched roles and philosophy. She soon became the first actress of provincial theatres, and later in Pest, she became an “essential member” of the Hungarian National Theatre. The key elements of her success were: literacy, ambition, talent, youth, having good self-advocacy skills, better protectors (her father and her husband), and a well operable social network. “She fulfilled high hopes,” agreed the *Jelenkor Encyclopedia* in 1858.<sup>28</sup>

She attempted to define herself as someone who had become an actress by the will of transcendent fate. The facts of her life were post factum aligned in a way that portrayed her and her career as a result of divine logic and insuperable talent. In a private letter to Gábor Egressy in 1851, she confesses: “I had to fight and suffer a lot being tormented by hesitation and discouragement, I had to fight with myself and the world, antagonized by intrigue and criticism – a stressful burden for me! but a foreknowledge of my soul, called god by the ancients gave me strength and courage, consolation and hope, so that me – the persistent fighter would get a little rest on the land of beautiful arts”.<sup>29</sup> This thought comes forward again in 1856 in a letter to Béla Tárkányi, an erudite catholic priest.<sup>30</sup> Here, Ida gives practical insight into her vision of acting. She interprets one of her favourite roles (Adrienne Lecouvreur) taken for

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<sup>27</sup> In his answer to Mrs Komlóssy's above mentioned letter Mihály Vörösmarty writes a beautiful parainesis to Ida about the attributes of the ideal actress (giving a rather modern, up to date definition). Ida is described here as „sweet Ida ... whose young voice evokes in my soul all the songs of a bygone spring, whose ethereal, slender, graceful figure instantiates the Hope itself before us, whom we love despite of her mistakes, because we see her talent.” *Athenaeum*, January 6, 1839, 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Jelenkor. Politikai és társas élet ENCYCLOPEDIAJA. Különös tekintettel a hírlapok olvasóira.* Pest, 1858, 191.

<sup>29</sup> Ida Komlóssy to Gábor Egressy. Pest, January 29, 1851. OSZK, MS, LT.

<sup>30</sup> Ida Komlóssy to Béla Tárkányi. Pest, May 30, 1856. OSZK, MS, LT.

an alter ego. She states: an actress is a “sublime soul, noble and sophisticated, refined by high poetry”, “loving and pure, who craves for love and glory” – but doing it on her own way.

This unapproachable virginity, fragile yet strong goddess(or angel)-like image was emphasized by her lifestyle. She was an extravagant woman, who “devoted her life to theatre”, and had only a few friends. Zsuzsanna, the wife of Gábor Egressy, also an actress, who knew her well, wrote in a private letter to her daughter, Etelka in 1854: “you know her and her family, she is eccentric in a very strange, bad and grotesque way. She is not natural at all, she is a rigidly sentimental girl with incredible manners.”<sup>31</sup> Ilma, Ida’s daughter also remembers her mother living a lonely, restrained, socially withdrawn life. Also Ida’s decision of never getting married was widely known. She preserved the image of the distant actress, who makes expensive journeys in Europe in order to become an outstanding performer. She mostly dated liberal-thinking journalists and writers, excellent but rather scandalous personalities of public life, whom she mostly rejected: the two liberal-thinking publicists, János Török and Lajos Kövér (her later husband) had chivalrous ‘duels’ in local newspapers with theatre critics in order to promote Ida’s talent.<sup>32</sup>

Her youthfulness associated with beauty, innocence, and purity was a key element of this image. Age had always been a sensitive trigger point for her. The *Jelenkor*’s article – based on data provided by her – presented her at least 5 years younger than she actually was (30 instead of 35).<sup>33</sup> Her short biography enhances the fragile age at which she achieved her first success: being only 12 years old (a Christian allusion), when she overcame the scepticism of critics who had offended her parents so cruelly, taking her audience by a storm on the stage of the Hungarian National Theatre.<sup>34</sup> In fact, she had already played in her father’s former travelling companies, and she was 17 years old by that time. Her later wooer, János Török alluded ironically to this weakness calling her “my old sister” (she was 34).<sup>35</sup> This narrative remained valid even until she quit her career: she stated that having a child offered her a new perspective on life – while in fact she could not accept the roles of elder women on stage (in 1863, she was only 41!).

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<sup>31</sup> Zsuzsanna Szentpétery to Gábor Egressy. Pest, October 21, 1854. SZALISZNYÓ 2017, I./255.

<sup>32</sup> “I dedicated so much time, illusion and high hopes to her [...] if she rejects me again, I will turn my beautiful illusions into savoury Hungarian food and dedicate myself to journalism” – wrote János Török to one of his friends about his ‘love-affair’ with Ida. Letter to Aurél Kecskeméthy, Pest, May 30, 1855. ANGYAL 1926, 553.

<sup>33</sup> This „mistake” can be detected in their marriage certificate, too. According to this Ida is only 30 years old in 1857. The register book does not publish her accurate date of birth, only her fiancé’s. Budapest City Archives, Church Register Books, HU\_BFL\_XV\_20\_2\_A122\_0537.

<sup>34</sup> *Jelenkor* *ENCYCLOPEDIA* *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> ANGYAL *ibid.*



Ida bequeathed her version of the past, her retrospective interpretation of her career to her daughter, Ilma. This metanarrative offers us a Christian pattern of the story, a reverse reading of the past that created an alternative biography of hers, – arranging the facts of her life according to a supposed transcendental logic. One’s (auto)biography is magically, mythically bound to the individual, claims Vilmos Keszeg, ethnographer.<sup>36</sup> And our particular stories that represent us, confer status, they are able to idealize the person.

**“You holy dead! watch us with your otherworldly eyes and let your motherly heart rejoice...!”<sup>37</sup>**

This inherited narrative, the reverse reading of Ida’s life story became a specific mission for Ilma. Being a writer and journalist, she would constantly add commentaries and interpretation to this narrative using the publicity of contemporary media in order to recreate her parents’ and her own personal history. Her unjustly persecuted mother’s portrait is significantly altered by her affectionate memories. “What might my unworthy pen add to the glorification of her art?” – she asks herself constantly while visiting the witnesses of old times. She kept on recollecting textual and oral personal memories of elder, often neglected actors – trying to nurture the reputation of her parents – trying to find her own identity in the ever-changing and inimical world. “Her love rejected the real world, and depicted a beautiful one for me” – writes about her mother, Ida Komlóssy – “I could not comprehend them, and they did not understand me.”<sup>38</sup> Her articles and novels envision the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its theatre with a nostalgic sorrow. Her actress-protagonists evoke the memory of a never-existent, idealised, past golden age.

In the biography of Lajos Kövér<sup>39</sup> (Ilma’s father), Loránd Prém unfolds the story of their marriage. This becomes much more interesting, if we come to know that the source of this story was Ilma, their only begotten daughter, years after both parents were dead. Ilma states that she tells the story *exactly as it was* – Ida becomes the embedded narrator of this personal history. The memories of the writer reflects a kind of double cult: behind the story of the ardent, hot-blooded husband one may sketch the portrait of the wife (Ida Komlóssy) via the memories of the daughter sympathizing with her mother. Ilma becomes a *résonateur* as the narration mentions again the biblical pattern of the family legend: Ida is shown as a virtuous angel who sacrificed herself on the altar of marriage, helping her husband overcome public and financial

<sup>36</sup> KESZEG 2002, 208.

<sup>37</sup> KÖVÉR 1900-1901., 39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>39</sup> PRÉM 1915, 15.

fiascos. The scene of the playwright's death is retold with a graceful didactics, the story of Lajos Kövér's last hours on earth reuses the components of the Good Friday story, and gives Ida a glorious glaze. The moribund man suffering from a high fever began to curse fate and people. Then Ida "held up their baby girl crying: Don't leave us, Lajos! The man then whispered – his eyes focused upon the heavens: I will stay with you... up there!" And so he died.

Ilma resonates to what she believes is a story of heroic deeds and affection, which are the genuine values of the Hungarian nation. She endeavours to create and recreate her family's history – this being an opportunity for her to create an identity for herself, by recreating an acceptable version of the past, and to relieve herself and reframe her constant solitude. She would conceive a much more intelligible and transparent 19th century, modelled and mapped by theatre, so that her knowledge of the theatre (and actors) could be easily translated to reflect the laws of an idealistic reality. This recreated/rewritten mythology gave a new interpretation to the world she had been forced to live in.

### **Conclusion**

This study would mention only some key elements of the family legend, the meta-narrative that summed up and framed their career. They all were the bearer of the same concept of nation and art: this gave a biblical-mythological frame to their identity-forming career and ambition. They considered themselves Thalia's consecrated priests, so their careers connote a paragon they would identify themselves with. This metanarrative provided the key arguments in the Caligula-debate about the high theoretical and aesthetical standards of theatre versus morality; served as the coordinate system for a new history of Hungarian theatre; reframed the ineligible destiny; and finally gave a mythological interpretation of fate and life as articulated by Ilma, the last promoter of the family's particular cultural–moral induced philosophy. We saw how the cultural–social background of their literacy brought up new and more refined elements in the narrative. This myth-based narrative associated with often bombastic and dramatic gestures can be traced from the first member of the family until the last one (3 generations) giving them a genealogical success.