

## Politics of Memory in Andrea Tompa's Novel *Fejtől s lábtól* ['Head to Feet']

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I examine the narrative of national belonging in Andrea Tompa's *Fejtől s lábtól* ['Head to Feet'], a 2013 pseudo-biographical novel about two Transylvanian doctors from the 1910s. My main focus is on how micro narratives can both contradict and complement the master narratives of history that had been written within a political framework unable to process the loss of Transylvania. The life histories in *Fejtől s lábtól* illustrate the dynamic ethnic diversity of the Carpathian Basin and contradict the narrow Hungarian ethnic nationalist view that Transylvania is primarily or even purely Hungarian. At the same time, these biographies also provide deep insight into the personal experiences of the Hungarian historical traumas of the twentieth century, such as the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the territorial losses after World War I. I also analyze how contemporary Hungarian politics of memory attempt to construct a new Hungarian collective national identity by using and abusing ethnic myths and cultural mystification and ignoring reflective historical criticism. One of the reasons behind such non-academic methodologies might be to create a fictional homogeneous ethnic national unity for all ethnic Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin that reaches beyond the current borders of the country but at the same time excludes from the nation other ethnicities within the country itself.

**Keywords:** *Trianon, Transylvania, Politics of Memory, Ethnic Nationalism, Hungarian Nationalism, Biography, Pseudo-Biographical Novel, Life History, Cluj, Andrea Tompa*

**Biography:** Kata Zsófia Vincze teaches at the Department of Ethnology at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. She was born in Cluj, Romania and graduated from Babes Bolyai University. She received her Ph.D. in Contemporary Jewish Studies in 2006 from Eötvös Loránd University. She has co-authored *Beszélgőkönyv az irodalomoktatásról* ['Dialogues on Teaching Literature'] (2003) and has two single-authored books, *Tradíció, emlékezés, identitás. Az egyiptomi kivonulástörténet mint alapítómítosz* ['Tradition, Memory, Identity: The Foundation Myth of Exodus'] (2004), and *Visszatérők a tradícióhoz* ['Return to Tradition'] (2009). She has also published several articles on medieval literature, ethnology, and cultural anthropology.

In this paper, I examine the narrative of national belonging in the pseudo-autobiographical novel *Fejtől s lábtól. Kettő orvos Erdélyben* ['Head to Feet: Two Doctors in Transylvania'] written by author and university professor Andrea Tompa from Kolozsvár [Cluj], who attempted to reconstruct the life histories of two doctors (perhaps her own grandparents)



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from the beginning of the 1910s to the end of the 1920s based on real diaries, letters, contemporary university speeches, medical school essays, textbooks, and contemporary newspapers. In the novel, the life histories of the two protagonists are articulated in first person through two anonymous narrators, a male and female, except for the last few chapters, where the two narrations come together in a shared voice. However, until the novel arrives at a shared "we" story, the two individual life histories unfold through fragmentary details, omissions and gaps of silence, and it is up to the reader to organize these fragments in order to construct coherent life histories.

The two protagonists of Tompa's novel *Fejtől s lábtól* both hail from Transylvania, formerly a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and currently part of Romania, but they are from dramatically different backgrounds that had a major impact on their resulting character, both in their individual lives and in the creation of a shared history alluded to by the title. The male protagonist hails from a Szekler and Csango Christian family near Brassó [Braşov] and his father is a vice-notary and hunter, while the woman comes from a non-Orthodox conservative or "neolog" Jewish family of traders from Nagyenyed [Aiud]. In the first part of the novel, the two protagonists talk about their lives as students in pre-World War I Kolozsvár [Cluj], the tolerant, multiethnic and liberal capital of Transylvania, and the meaning behind the title of the novel, *Fejtől s lábtól* only becomes apparent on page 300, where the two narrators meet for the first time as they are accidentally thrown together in 1918 to assist in the birth of twins requiring a Cesarean section. During the operation, the illegitimate twins of a young girl were found lying head to feet, and later that night, the two doctors end up sleeping together in the same position. However, on the morning following the romantic night they spent together, they are torn apart due to the occupation of Brassó by the Romanians, after which the Austro-Hungarian Empire falls apart and Transylvania is annexed to Romania by the Trianon Treaty in 1920. Due to these events, the two protagonists continue their lives separately for several years until they once again meet by mere chance at the very end of the novel, when they board the same train in Kolozsvár to attend medical training in Budapest organized by Hungary as a form of compensation to Hungarians who became stranded in Romania after Transylvania was annexed from Hungary. We learn that until this fated encounter, each protagonist thought the other was long gone and we also find out through scattered hints that the woman aborted the baby that was conceived on the one night they had spent together. During their playful conversation on the train, the woman initially thinks that the man does not recognize her, but in a sudden twist, the man invites her to spend her life with him "for the rest of eternity." The protagonists then spend the final chapters expressing their love to each other and exploring on this short holiday the post-Trianon Hungary that now has new borders and no longer incorporates Transylvania, a reality that both protagonists accept as they will continue their lives as Hungarian-Romanian doctors in Transylvania, as well as revive and keep their habit of sleeping head to feet.

One possible interpretation of Tompa's novel is to consider it an attempt at articulating the historical traumas of twentieth century Central and Eastern Europe as well as ways of coping with and processing said trauma, primarily through the narration of individual life histories. Coping with historical drama is key to reestablishing the self-definition of post-dictatorial societies such as post-1989 Hungary, which requires the adoption of a new political system, accommodation to new economic policies, and the development of new administrative measures. Moreover, one of the most basic means of achieving ethical reform and an ethically responsible society is coming to terms with past traumas by studying and reevaluating them as well as correcting certain historical fabrications that originated during the dictatorship. However, even

after the fall of Communism, Hungarian politics of memory continued to falsify and manipulate Hungarian history, especially regarding sensitive historical events such as the Trianon Treaty. Biographies, family histories and life narratives are important sources as they help facilitate the articulation and processing of the past (see also Louise Vasvári's article in this issue). Such narratives can be considered organized contemporary articulations of the past in a deeply personal manner. This is why biographies and other forms of life narratives are often used in cultural studies, as testimonies. In this sense, the referentiality and authenticity of individuals' statements are defined not by their realistic objectivity or factuality regarding the past, but by their participation in history and culture, and especially their attitude towards past experiences and the intentions behind these individual representations (A. Assmann 1999, J. Assmann 1999, Lejunne 1975, Gyáni 2000). In the case of individual life narratives, the communication of the past is merely one level of referentiality since the authenticity of such narratives is defined by their use and function as testimonies as well as their perspectives, including their horizon of expectations and the reasons behind the need to articulate these narratives in the first place (Keszeg 2002: 44; 2011: 87).

When we analyze processes of coping with the historical trauma of the Trianon Treaty in the context of individual narratives, we need to look at Hungarian politics of memory that emerged after the fall of Communism and which continue to inform current Hungarians discourses of Transylvania and its relation to individual life histories. Therefore, my aim is to focus on how the pseudo-biographical narratives of the two protagonists of *Fejtől s lábtól* resist political interpretations that often operate with mystification, omission, suppression, and romanticization to promote a past suited to current Hungarian political interests. When "official" Hungarian history is tantamount to nationalist state propaganda, can a recently written pseudo-biographical novel revolving around the subject of Trianon serve as a counter-narrative? What motivates the articulation of life histories and biographies that do not correspond to the myths of "imagined Transylvania" perpetuated by prevailing Hungarian politics of memory (György 2013), and what new meanings and details can personal narratives offer to supplement or deconstruct existing theories? In what ways do more recent personal narratives defy the nostalgic emotional euphemisms and historical fabrications of official politics of memory fueled by simplified nationalistic ideologies (György 2013, Pozsony 2008, Tánzos 1996, Visky 2009)? Finally, and especially regarding the issue of the Trianon Treaty, how can these biographical reports and testimonies inform, be inserted into, or contradict Hungarian nationality politics that perceives the state of Hungary as mutilated and still considers Transylvania a virtual part of Hungary?

According to Imre Zsolt Lengyel (2013), the title of Tompa's novel *Fejtől s lábtól* expresses the parallel yet opposite lives of the two protagonists and functions as a quasi-symmetrical metaphor of their relationship since aspects of their separate but parallel lives as children, university students, and adult doctors intersect in a variety of ways. For instance, both characters came to attend university in Kolozsvár, but while the wealthier male narrator would have preferred to go to university in Hungary, he ends up choosing the Transylvanian university to comply with his father's wishes whereas the female narrator's decision to attend university at all was an act of rebellion against her family's wishes. While her brothers were encouraged and supported to pursue higher education after secondary school, the girl's parents did not allow her to enroll in medical school despite her excellent grades. As a result, the female narrator radically breaks her ties with her family and their Jewish traditions and goes to Kolozsvár, where she starts attending medical school while supporting herself. Such parallel differences are also

present in other aspects such as gender, lifestyle, and life philosophy. According to the gender role expectations of the time, the rebellious, intellectual, and rational female protagonist would have been considered a "masculine woman." Due to the lack of support from her family, she was forced to work hard and lead a life of lonely asceticism during her student days. Her openness to new ideas allowed her to become a consciously liberal cosmopolitan. She becomes involved with socialist ideologies and movements, believes in materialism and the rational sciences, and dedicates herself to public matters such as alcoholism, caffeine addiction, workers' health, women's rights, women's welfare and emancipation, new ideas of nationalism and social revolution. However, while she expresses liberal views on such matters, including gender and sexuality, her private life (with the exception of the one night she spends with the male protagonist) is chaste and lonely. In contrast, the more submissive and sensitive male protagonist would have been considered a "feminine man," who always had great respect for authority and accepted the existing social and familiar hierarchies. Just as he attended the university his father designated for him, he also became a balneologist at his father's bathhouse once he graduated, where he proceeded to treat patients by means of diets, life style changes, and what the medical profession would consider quackery. He also maintained his conservative views both during his university years and in his adult life, but spent his university days in hedonism and went on to solicit prostitutes in Budapest. It is also interesting to note that the male protagonist's only act of rebellion within his own family was becoming a vegetarian despite the fact that his father was a hunter.

One of the most poignant aspects of Tompa's novel is how the two protagonists relate to their Hungarianness in the multiethnic environment of Transylvania before, during, and after World War I, and how their narratives clearly contradict prevalent Hungarian historical narratives that perceive Transylvania not only as part of the Hungarian nation but also as the authentic continuation of traditional Hungarian culture. The novel published in 2013 can be read as a narrative that speaks against the present deeply seated political Transylvania nostalgia. Hungarian ethnographic research on the multiethnic society of Transylvania first began with nostalgic mythicization such as Ferenc Kazinczy's letters from 1821 (published in 1979) or the travel narratives of Sándor Petőfi. Such works were eventually followed by János Kriza's (1863) research on diverse Hungarian ethnic groups and the detailed descriptions of Transylvania by Balázs Orbán (1868), and then culminated in organized institutional academic research from the twentieth century onwards, what we know as Transylvania Studies today that clearly distinguishes the emotionally-charged Transylvania-nostalgia and the historical narratives. However, in spite of one hundred and fifty years of meticulous ethnographic research that shows how Transylvanian society, language, and culture are multiethnic, dynamic, and heterogeneous, current Hungarian ethnic nationalist politics of memory still continue to articulate Transylvanian society, history, and culture as equivalent to Hungarian society, history, and culture. Transylvanian developments and diversity are blatantly rejected by Hungarian politics of memory that continues to present Transylvania as mythically ancient, romantically archaic, and resistant to modern European trends, and not only "purely" Hungarian but also the pure authentic source of Hungarianism that still preserves the "original" Hungarian traditions. In considering Transylvania inherently Hungarian and as belonging to Hungary, Hungarian politics of memory has fabricated what Róbert Keményfi refers to as a national "amorous geography" that seeks to expand itself beyond historical and current borders to create a cultural and ethnic Great Hungary (2003: 127-163; 2007: 179-199). In this framework, adapting to the Romanian state is considered

a Romanian "threat" that will inevitably lead to the loss of the "pure Hungarian" character of Transylvania.

The novel de-mythicalizes Transylvania by giving an insight into Transylvanian society. The falsifying and manipulative attempts of contemporary Hungarian politics of memory to virtually and culturally annex Transylvania are by no means a recent development (Pál 2010: 191), and it is very evident that such mythicizing cultural politics prevents the progressive processing of historical trauma (György 2013: 86). The dangers of an ahistorical politics of memory also include fabrication and delusion through cultural exoticism and esotericism, as well as the alarming potential of turning the pain and rage of those affected by historical trauma into conceptions of collective hatred towards the "enemies" who took Transylvania and "polluted" the purest source of Hungarian culture. Within this ideological framework, collective hatred quickly develops into a sense of cultural superiority over the new country's ethnic majority, which in the case of Hungary is Romanians and Romanian culture (see Gáldi and Makkai 1942; Makkai 1943, 1944). The novel shows that the attempts of Hungarian politics of memory to fuel the symbolic illusionism of Hungarian nationalist discourses with a sweet, nostalgic myth of Transylvania has become increasingly uncomfortable not only for Hungarians but in Transylvanian intellectual circles as well (on this see further Gagyí 2004, Pozsony 2008: 639-652; György 2013: 18; Visky 2009). Nevertheless, Hungarian politics of memory continues to uphold its view of the perceived unjustness of the Trianon Treaty and the cultural superiority of Hungarians over Romanians.

Despite the insistence of prevailing Hungarian politics of memory that Transylvania has always been purely and virtually Hungarian, Transylvanians have long embraced their multiethnic diversity through tolerance policies and did not view Hungary as their mother country or Budapest as their capital. Albert Jakab and Vilmos Keszeg (2007: 199-232) provide a rich bibliography of Transylvanian life histories and autobiographies. When coupled with micro historical approaches, these narratives are a testament to a diverse and multiethnic Transylvanian environment and the fact that Transylvanians always emphasized the independence of Transylvania. If we were to examine the memoirs of Transylvanian nobles, peasants, priests, teachers or travelers from the seventeenth century onwards, we would find a richly layered, contradictory and dynamic image of Transylvanian society and a diverse, pluralistic culture in constant change. Tompa's novel reflects these Transylvanian attitudes. One example is a letter written by the male protagonist's father, in which he forbids his son from attending medical school in Vienna or Budapest and tells him to instead go to the capital of Transylvania, Kolozsvár [Cluj]. In his letter, the father presents Kolozsvár as a true liberal city where after the Compromise of 1867 between Budapest and Vienna, "seven nationalities and seven religions may study at the university" [*hét nemzetiség és hét vallás tanulhat ezen az egyetemen*] (17). The father writes that women, Romanians, and even Jewish women are admitted to the university, and though he considers the latter an exaggeration, he is proud of the liberal-minded and tolerant nature of the university in declaring that the university of Kolozsvár is "their" university, not Budapest or Vienna.

The male and female protagonists in Tompa's novel are both Hungarian speakers, but due to their different ethnic background, socialization and gender, they have very different experiences and react differently to issues that supposedly divide ethnic Hungarians and non-ethnic Hungarians, such as contemporary nationality politics, Hungarianization policies, and what it means to be Hungarian (on this see Gáldi and Makkai 1942; Makkai 1943, 1944; Száraz 1988, Szabó 2011: 223-236, Davis 2014: 337-56). The male narrator was born into an ethnic

“tradition” and has internalized its values while for the female narrator to be Hungarian is a desire or longing to be part of the Hungarian nation. For instance, the woman’s family originally wanted to Hungarianize their last name to Nyári but didn’t do so for fear of being ridiculed for their pretentiousness. The female narrator describes her feelings regarding the assimilation strategies of Hungarians as follows:

Here in the new and strong Hungarian nation of today, those who have Hungarianized their name count also. ... For those who are smart know you can advance, study and work better with Hungarians than with other nationalities. On the other hand, if someone wants to remain a Vlach, or a Slav, or a Jewish peddler with earlocks, they won’t get ahead. ... In the end, we didn’t Hungarianize our name and not due to the expense, for the book said the Hungarian National Assembly had voted for its price to be reduced from 5 crowns to 50 deniers per person. So in actual fact, this is very cheap to do. ... But at school such people are taunted by being called “one crown Hungarians.” ... They called Vlachs, Saxons, Jews and Armenians that, too. I thought they would say the same to me if I became Nyári. Oh, how much it would have hurt! Because at school we learned such beautiful national things: poems, writing, historical stuff, patriotism, and the revolution. Everybody there felt Hungarian. That’s the job of schools in my opinion, to teach us to be Hungarians. ... At home they are so confined, they know nothing, they only live among themselves, the family they are locked into their little town with relatives and acquaintances, they have the shop, and stuff like this doesn’t matter as much. But here in the big city, all you have is knowledge and progress, development. In places like that, people feel more keenly that they have to be Hungarian, that they have to be transformed in every atom, every limb, in their entire bodies (50-51).

*[Itten ebbe a mostani nagy és erős magyarságba belészámít az is, ki magát magyarította név által. ... mert ki okos, tudja, hogy a magyarsággal jobban előre lehet jutni, tanulni és dolgozni, mint más nációkkal. De viszont, ha valaki oláh akar maradni, vagy tót, vagy pájeszes házaló zsidó, nem fog előbbre jutni. ... Végül nem lettünk megmagyarosítva a neviünkben, s nem mert drága lett volna, mert a könyv írta, hogy le lett az ára szállítva 5 kr-ról egészen 50 krajcárig személyenként, ez meg lett szavazva a magyar Országgyűlésben. Szóval ténylegesen nagyon olcsó az ilyesmi. ... De iskolába úgy mondták az ilyenekre, hogy Egy koronás magyar. ... Mondták az oláhnak is, szásznak, zsidónak, örménynek. Gondoltam, nekem is fogják mondani, ha már Nyári leszek. Jaj, be fájt volna az nekem! Mert az iskolában mi oly gyönyörű nemzeti dolgokat vettünk fel, verseket, írásokat, történelmi dolgokat, hazafiságot, a forradalmat, hogy ott mindenki úgy érezte magát egyenlően magyarnak. Ez az iskola dolga szerintem, a magyarnak nevelés. ... odahaza úgy be vannak zárkózva, nem tudnak semmit, csak egymással élnek, ők ottan a család be vannak csukva abba a kicsi városkájukba a rokonokkal, ismerősökkel, megvan a bolt, ott az ilyesmi nem számít úgy. De itt a nagyvárosban csak a tudomány van, meg az előre haladás, fejlődés. Ilyesmi helyen az ember jobban érzi, hogy neki magyarnak kell lenni, minden ízében s tagjában, egész testében, ki kell cserélődjék.]*

The protagonists relate to Romania differently not only before and after Transylvania's annexation to Romania, but also compared to each other. At first both appreciate the idea of living in a multiethnic region affected by strong assimilation and Hungarianization policies coming from the Hungarian administration of Budapest. They agree, for instance, that minorities should change their names to Hungarian sounding ones, but later their views will start to differ on the multiethnic environment and about the new Romania. Once World War I began, the protagonists started viewing Romanians with condescension and then with anger, but by the 1920s, they were forced to adjust to the new Romanian administration and both learned Romanian well to make integration easier. Since the man based his practice on not just rich boyars but also a rapidly growing Romanian bourgeoisie, he had to learn to communicate and coexist with the new Romanian population. Similarly, the woman ended up staying in Cluj where half of the population was Romanian and so she was required to learn Romanian as the new official language of the area. However, their attitudes are once again different since the man learns Romanian to further his medical career in accordance with his father's wishes, while the woman learns the language to prove her "tolerance" as a liberal socialist. Nevertheless, while the female narrator wants to accept in theory that the new Romania is made up of different minority groups, her supposedly humorous description of the complex linguistic situation shows the deeply rooted prejudices of her surroundings, including the use of *Vlach* ['oláh'], that by this time was used as a pejorative term meaning "primitive Romanians":

There are also a lot of Vlachs in Zajzon [Zizin], Romanian and Moldavian nobles and nabobs keep coming here. And of all foreign languages, it's the Vlach that hurts people's ears, the way they stare haughtily like they own the place. And the croaking the Saxons do! ... All the Zizin Vlachs know Hungarian, too, but of course they muddle the languages together. ... No matter that half the village is Romanian, those speak Hungarian, not the other way round. Hah, you'd be thrown out of the Club for talking like that. You see, internationalism is the rule there, you're not allowed to speak against any nation. Not against Russians, Brits, Jews, or Romanians. They would immediately jump at you for giving chauvinistic speeches or making bad jokes. I was overjoyed at the many languages spoken in the bath at Előpatak [Vilcele] for stuff like that only happens in a worldly bath place. But the Szekler language! It's like they're not even speaking Hungarian. It's so rural, unrefined (221-222).

*[Zajzonban is sok az oláh, errefelé is jönnek a romániai és moldovai nemesek, nábobok. A külföldi nyelvek közt éppég az oláh az, mi az embernek sérti a fülét, ahogy itt dölyfösen néznek, mintha sajátjuk volna a hely. Meg a szász vartyogás! ... A zajzoni oláhok is mind tudnak magyarul, persze összevegyítik a nyelveket. ... Mert hiába hogy a fél falu román, azok beszélnek magyarul, s nem megfordítva. Na az ilyen beszédért a Körből kitzáítanak. Ugyanis ott a nemzetköziség van elfogadva, s nem szabad egyik nemzet ellen sem beszélni. Sem orosz, angol, zsidó vagy román ellen. Ott rögtön felugranak, ha valaki kezd chauvin beszédet mondani, vagy rossz vicceket csinál. Az előpataki fürdő sokféle nyelvét örvendezve hallgattam az utcán, mert az ilyesmi csak világfürdőben lehetséges.*

*De a székely nyelv! Mintha nem is magyarul beszélnének. Olyan parasztos, műveletlen*].

When we compare the life narratives of Tompa's pseudo-biographical novel to prevailing Hungarian discourses of the Trianon Treaty we find that the two are strikingly different. We may well ask if Tompa's text could be considered a supplement to historical narratives as an authentic life history. The novel is based on extensive library research and a myriad of contemporary documents from playbills, medical and public life publications to letters, which allowed Tompa to incorporate actual events, speeches, and even textbooks into her narrative. For instance, the male narrator travels to Budapest to learn psychoanalysis from Sándor Ferenczi, a Hungarian disciple of Freud. The female narrator meets József Brenner (who later changed his name to Géza Csáth and was a well-known Hungarian poet), and their professors are also real historical persons.

While I have been referring to Tompa's *Fejtől s lábtól* as a pseudo-biographical novel, other scholars suggested different categorizations with regard to genre and the way the life histories of the two protagonists affect our perception of the past. I consider it a pseudo-biographical novel because it has two narrators, and features the once-separate and then conjoined life narratives of two protagonists. Furthermore, the story may have been based on the author's own grandparents, who were themselves doctors living in the period the novel describes. However, categorizing the text as a novel should not be understood as considering it to be merely fiction without any impact on the past. In his book *Le pacte autobiographique* ['The Autobiographical Pact'], Philippe Lejeune says that autobiographies construct the past explaining how we have become what we are and how we have arrived at where we are now (Lejeune 1975, 88). Similarly, Paul Ricoeur and Smaranda Vultur argue that the confessional modality of biographical texts allows them to participate in history and historical memory (Ricoeur 1983: 85), and their rhetorical and narrative strategies facilitate the incorporation of experiences into public memory through narrativization (Vultur 2007: 111). In Tompa's novel the confessional character of these life narratives do make them similar to autobiographies in this sense. However, other scholars have different views, such as Kata Evellei, who considers *Fejtől s lábtól* a cultural-historical "essay" (Evellei 2013), while according to Mihály Szilágyi-Gál, Tompa has not written fictionalized accounts of reality as others do *ad nauseam* but a real story that many can relate to (Szilágyi-Gál 2013).

Regardless of scholarly interpretations of Tompa's novel as pseudo-biography or cultural-historical, the author herself emphasizes the fictional aspects of her work, not as historical novel or biography but as literature. She carefully omitted any genealogical traces that could link it to her own family history or her previous novel, *A hóhér háza* ['The Executioner's House'], which features remarkably similar characters. *A hóhér háza* could be considered a sequel to *Fejtől s lábtól* since that it is about a girl from the third generation since Trianon, who had grown up in Communist Romania and whose paternal grandparents were also doctors (and the grandmother Jewish). In this sense, *Fejtől s lábtól* would be a reconstruction of the life histories of the grandparents briefly mentioned in *A hóhér háza*. According to Krisztina Vagdalt, based on interviews with the author, Tompa's original plan might have been through the entire twentieth century. However, once the author had finished writing the life histories of the two protagonist during World War I, she realized that to include both world wars would have been too taxing and thus widening the temporal scope of the novel remained an unfulfilled wish (Vagdalt 2013). It is also important to note that the author mentioned in several interviews and



book launches that her grandparents were doctors and since little remained of their legacy besides a few photographs and vague stories, part of her research was concerned with who they really were.

The fact that *Fejtől s lábtól* can be used in ethnology as a biographical novel due to its wide variety of historical sources and their different articulations resonates greatly with the argument of Vilmos Keszeg that in critical historical times, the desire to communicate one's identity grows stronger and will find a form and genre to express itself no matter how diverse these forms and genres may be (Keszeg 2007). Accordingly, in ethnology the articulation of a life history can assume many different forms and structures to capture various biographical moments, such as that of a presidential biography, a funeral oration, a toast by the groomsman, or even the form of memorial plaques, epitaphs, or a commemorative Facebook page (Voisine 1963: 278-286; Hoppál and Küllős: 284-292; Niedermüller 1989: 376-389; Keszeg 2007: 182; Gráfik 1998; Jakab 2012; Fejős 2003). The fact that life histories can serve as guides to ethnological or historical research it is confirmed by the way Tompa's novel was widely received and read as a micro-history, and how the life histories of her grandparents (even if these life histories were "only" literary fiction) were perceived as a window to grand chapters of history as experienced by individuals (Pogrányi 2013). In this sense, these life histories can be considered sources of history even if they are highly subjective sources in comparison to *Annales history* and *oral history*, both of which are accepted in academic analysis (Lévi 1989: 1325-1337). Life histories are also "uniquely personal" and "collectively typical" (Mohay 2000: 771-773) inasmuch as the articulation of biographical narratives in an individual and historical life stream allows narratives such as Holocaust histories or kulak histories to construct collective identities and help form communities of memory. Based on social consensus, socialization, shared knowledge, and mutual experience, such communities are then able to assign conventional meanings to historical traumas, which in turn allows them to cope with and process these traumas (for the particularities of the genre, intentionality, and reading texts as referential micro-histories, see novels such as Péter Nádas's *Egy családregény vége* ['The End of a Family Novel'] (1975); Imre Kertész's *Sorstalanság* ['Fatelessness'] (1975); Pál Závada's *Kulákprés* ['Kulak Presser'] (1986) and *A fényképész utókorá* ['The Posterity of a Photographer'] (2012); or Tibor Cseres's *Hideg napok* ['Cold Days'] (1964); among many others). Within ethnological narratology, biographies and life histories are especially important to collective communities of memory since they may harmonize, build upon, or incorporate elements from or into official politics of memory, but the general tendency appears to be that such communities and the official politics of memory contradict each other and often react aggressively to one another (A. Assmann 1999; J Assmann 1999). For instance, the life histories of the two doctors clearly do not overlap content-wise or even in their most fundamental experiences of the Trianon trauma, and yet both stand in stark contrast to official Hungarian historical narratives of Trianon.

From a socio-historical perspective, the life histories of the two protagonists in Tompa's novel are an excellent example of cultural discontinuities and contradictions in harmonious change, as well as the coexistence of ethnic groups and differences brought on by major historical shifts. These life narratives also show how complicated one's relationship to their Hungarian identity could be despite the simplifying discourses of Hungarian politics of memory. For instance, the Jewish female narrator with a German name might have longed to be part of the Hungarian nation and internalized the idea of Hungarians being culturally superior over "backwards" and "undeveloped" minority cultures like Romanians, Jews, or Slovaks, but at the same time also firmly believed in a global revolution and participated in socialist political

movements. Her relationship with her environment was also complex as she adjusted to narrower boundaries and changed ethnic power structures after the Romanian annexation of Transylvania, but was able to commute to Hungary for courses or medical training offered by the new Hungarian state as compensation to Hungarians living beyond the "mutilated" borders of Hungary. It is also important to note that the situation of Hungarian-speaking assimilated Jews was especially complicated after World War I due to their Hungarian identity being questioned by the Hungarian state after 1920, even when they still lived within the reduced borders of the Hungary and had Hungarian citizenship. Consequently, those who ended up in Romania after a long and arduous process of Hungarianization, which included the change of their names, were even more confused regarding their national culture (see Lővy 1998 and Gidó 2009). However, some scholars blame not the changed status quo after 1920 but the pre-World War I assimilation policies that dictated Hungarian cultural superiority over other cultures and then blamed the minority politics of successor states for the total devastation of people outside of the new borders after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (György 2013: 107).

One metaphor often used by contemporary Hungarian politics of memory to denote devastation over the loss of former Hungarian territories due to the Trianon Treaty that appears in Tompa's novel is the idea of *csönkamagyarország* ['mutilated Hungary']. In this metaphor, the loss of formerly Hungarian territories is likened to the trauma of losing body parts and connected to the health and illness of the body of the nation, which is also reinforced by the Nietzschean motto on the cover of the novel: "I wish to be as healthy as a Hungarian" [*Szeretnék oly egészséges lenni, mint egy Magyar*] (Székely 2013). The body of the nation also emerges as a central topos in the life narratives of the two protagonists in several instances with regard to physical trauma. For instance, while war casualties are being carried to the male narrator in baskets because they were missing every limb except their head and part of their torso, the man compares the suffering of dismembered war victims to the state of Transylvania detached from Great Hungary, a heart left without a brain:

But it is certainly true that it is not only hands and feet that you can mutilate, countries can be mutilated too. And then, who knows, we can only watch if the remaining limb will bleed to death or heal. If you sew it to another body, can it still be used? Because we haven't really heard of cases where a hand would be sewn onto another body and then able to grab or hold. [...] The body of the Hungarian nation suffered the greatest possible mutilation, to be cut off our mother, our home, and thrown to another country (230-231).

*[De az már igaz, hogy nem csak kezet s lábat lehet csonkolni, hanem bizony országot is. Aztán nézhetjük, hogy a maradék testrész vajjon kivérezik-e, vagy még erőre kap, ki tudja. Mert ha másnak a testéhez lessz varrva, akkor lehet-e azt használni. Mert nem igen hallottunk olyasmit, hogy egy kezet másra varrnak s az fogni tudna vele. [...] A legnagyobb megcsonkítás esett meg, mi csak a magyarság testén eshet, hogy le legyünk vágva az édesanyjáról, a mi hazánkról, s oda dobva egy másik országnak.]*

The perception of the Trianon Treaty as historical trauma and the metaphor of mutilated Hungary is so pervasive in Hungarian politics of memory and nationalist discourses that for most of Tompa's text, the two protagonists suppress any mention or hint of the Trianon Treaty that

each attempts to cope with in different ways. When the protagonists learn of the Trianon Treaty, they can hardly believe it and are convinced at first that the detachment of Transylvania from Hungary is merely one of the absurd but temporary results of the shocking brutality of war. However, while the male protagonist reacts with complete denial, isolation, withdrawal, and anger to the new political situation, the female protagonist is able to act in a more proactive way and sets out relatively quickly to find new viable survival strategies. Meanwhile, the male narrator is unable to recover from the shock and tries to observe the new situation from a distance, regarding it as a temporary crisis:

But the temporariness of this situation teaches us to naively imagine it would last forever. How it might be if it were to be like this always. Which it obviously isn't, because, first, the world won't let such an injustice go by, second, the Hungarian nation will fight itself out of it because it is a strong great nation, it won't let itself be trampled. We have to work, there's nothing else to be done (Tompa 2013: 365).

*[De az ideiglenesség arra megtanít, hogy kisdég elképzeljük, hogy az örökké fog tartani biza. Hogy milyen volna, ha mindég így lenne. Mi nyilvánvaló, hogy nem, mert ad egy, a világ nem fogja hagyni az igazságtalanságot, ad kettő, a magyar kiküzdí magát, hiszen erős nagy nemzet, nem fogja magát eltiportatni. Dolgozni kell, nincsen amit csinálni.]*

Nevertheless, in spite of the historical trauma of Trianon, the male protagonist of Tompa's novel eventually adjusts to his new situation, as shown by his learning Romanian to help his medical practice. In his words, "...our bath still won't move anywhere else on the map, and to be sure Old-Romania is still close to us, and in Transylvania there's plenty of Romanians" *[...a mi fürdők a térképen akkor sem fog odább költözködni, s biza Ó-Románia akkor is közel van hozzánk, s nálunk Erdélybe is épen elég a román]* (365).

In addition to the effects of Hungarian assimilation policies discussed above, Tompa's novel also explores the impact of Romanian assimilation policies on the lives of Hungarian-speaking Transylvanians. After 1920 the idea of "standing your ground" [*helytállás*] or "remaining home" in Transylvania [*otthon megmaradás*] and condemning voluntary emigration to Hungary became the main values and the pillars of the Hungarian identity in Romania that was phrased in the ideology of Transylvanism (Cs. Gyimesi 1985: 49-54; Pomogács 1973: 8; Pomogács 1983; Tóth 1974: 54-57; Tóth 1996: 114-128). For instance, in *Fejtől s lábtól* the two protagonists talk in great detail of how the National Theater, the university and the medical faculty had come under Romanian control and those who did not swear loyalty to the King of Romania were dismissed. After the Romanian occupation, the entire university, formally called *Kolozsvári Magyar Királyi Ferencz József Tudományegyetem* ['Hungarian Royal József Ferencz University of Cluj'] was relocated to Szeged and the university community was brutally divided in the prolonged uncertainty of who would stay and who would go, who would survive and who would not. Different ethnic groups faced different opportunities as most Jewish doctors preferred to stay or rather were not invited to "escape" to Hungary, Christian Hungarians were demoted and several leading doctors attempted or committed suicide. Doctors who had come from Budapest were sent back to Hungary, with some put on trains by force while others who left

voluntarily soon became jaded once they arrived in Hungary and found they had no opportunities for work. While pre-World War I Great Hungary needed the (Hungarianized) Jews to balance its own extremely diverse ethnic composition, after the Trianon Treaty in 1920, the smaller Central Hungary became much more homogeneous and ethnically Hungarian and had no more need of its Jewish populace. Moreover, after the first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in the new smaller Hungary, the numbers of Jews were forcefully reduced in certain fields (medicine in particular) and the positions were to be filled by ethnic Hungarians, which in turn boosted support for the immigration of ethnic Hungarians from former Hungarian territories. At the same time, the new Romanian Kingdom preferred to get rid of its ethnic Hungarian intellectuals and (still) preferred Jews over Hungarians.

The aggressive assimilation politics of the new Romanian state and the suppressive strategies of Hungarian politics of memory both influenced the way life histories of affected individuals were articulated through omissions, suppressed information, gaps and fragments as shown by the life narratives of *Fejtől s lábtól*. When experiences cannot be told due to official suppression, histories and life narratives must be told using silent strategies that speak through the conspicuous absences they produce. For example, euphemistic language is often used in texts that are forced to undergo severe censorship. When talking about certain experiences is officially prohibited because of restrictions, circumlocution and other methods might be used to circumvent these restrictions. Historically, communism and socialism are considered periods of several decades of terrifying silence and taboos, or as referred to in Romania, the "period of being afraid to speak" (Bíró 1998: 206; Tóth 1974: 54-57). However, despite suppression from above, in situations where individuals are vulnerable against coercive structures of power and become victims of incarceration, exile, labor camps, deportation, forced removal, or border disputes, the need for a diary, memoir, or biography tends to intensify, leading to the emergence of alternative personal histories (for a bibliography of memoirs emerging from collective trauma, see Ferencz 1997; Keszeg 1997; Jakab and Keszeg 2004, 2007, and Vasvári 2009; on the memoirs of female doctors at labor camps, see Vasvári 2013). It is always the direct victims of history who are in the greatest need of writing down their life narratives since facing the facts through confessions is therapeutic for not only the individuals themselves, but also their respective communities of memory. In this sense, life histories can contribute to the processing of social trauma since one of the key stages of processing trauma is the communication of trauma through language and recovery from politically enforced historical amnesia. As Vultur puts it, "What is at stake is not loyalty to the past but rather rendering that past comprehensible and communicable" (Vultur 2007: 110).

In light of the romanticizing and mythicizing tendencies of contemporary Hungarian politics of memory, it is not surprising that most critics of Tompa's novel interpret the two protagonists finding each other in the last few chapters of the novel as a union that transcends all boundaries and heals all wounds. For instance, according to Örs Székely, the novel arrives at a joint "we-narrative" that steps out of the spaces and experiences of mutilation in a way that renders further mutilations or separations impossible since they meet again on a Kolozsvár-Budapest train ride where the boundaries of the two countries and the two narrators are symbolically blurred and joined together (Székely 2013). Similarly, Bea Kovács argues that, in the last chapter, "I" and "you" become "us" and the two narrators begin to experience a joint story in which the sleeping position of lying head to feet invokes the union of bodies and individuals, the harmony of yin and yang (Kovács 2013). Finally, Mihály Szilágyi-Gál also argues that *Fejtől s lábtól* is a story of two people seeking the natural unity of lying head to feet

from the beginning to the very end, whether they are separate or together, or are in two different countries or two phantom bodies of the same country (Szilágyi-Gál 2013). Unfortunately, it is no coincidence that the life narrative of two individuals in a novel revolving around Trianon comes to be understood by many Hungarian critics as a love story that ends with "unification." If we were to map these interpretations onto the geopolitics of post-Trianon Hungary, it would resonate with the strategies of Keményfi's "amorous geography" that aims to unite Hungary with Transylvania virtually and spiritually by presenting their history as a love story of two souls forcefully separated (Keményfi 2003: 127-163).

Even though the romanticizing discourses of contemporary Hungarian politics of memory insist on interpreting Tompa's novel *Fejtől s lábtól* as a metaphor for the union of separated bodies, many have welcomed it as an un-nostalgic survival story that ends with the acceptance of the reality of post-Trianon changes. The novel itself is a thematization of the different stages of actively processing the trauma of Trianon: shock, numbness and paralysis, hatred of Romanians and the fear of assimilation followed by paranoid cultural isolation and the construction of defensive cultural boundaries, developing a dual inferiority complex towards Romania and Hungary, then a very gradual adaptation, slow normalization, and finally acceptance, coexistence, and even integrating into a rapidly mobilizing Romanian society (Cs. Gyimesi 1992, 2004; Hadházi 2000: 162-169; Davis 2014: 337-56). Beyond processing trauma, however, these stages also entail the processing and communication of the idea that no matter what the ethnic background of Hungarian-speakers is (whether they are Hungarian, Szekler, Csángó, or Jewish Hungarian), those from Romania do not consider themselves as belonging to Hungary. According to professor and author András Visky, "my home is not Hungary" is simply an objective statement, a reality that is not a matter of individual decision (Visky 2009: 211). However, in order to maintain the image of "mutilated Hungary" and the myth of the lost paradise of a past-oriented, romanticized Transylvania as the authentic source of Hungarian identity, official Hungarian politics of memory continues to ignore the rich Romanian layer of Transylvanian culture and the "Romanianness" of Hungarians from Romania. Nevertheless, after reading countless life narratives such as *Fejtől s lábtól* that support Visky's argument about the acceptance of Romania and Romanianness, we may well assume that most Transylvanian intellectual circles have long abandoned the tired and self-destructive romance imposed on Transylvania by expansive Hungarian nationalism, which needs to face and recognize the political and academic responsibilities of Hungary if it ever hopes to develop a critical and reflective historical approach that is open to dialogic analysis and cross historical examination.

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