

Vigh Bence:

Crisis management in literature, or *I'm going to Paris, where I have never dying before and other solutions*

When we talk about crisis, the majority of cases are of an ontological kind: it signs such a state from which the sufferers must escape as soon and as effectively as it is possible because their existence is threatened – moreover there is always a requirement of an adequate response from the individual to the question “What’s next?”, whether it is existential, emotional or any other kind of crisis. This is a universal experience and cannot be abstracted from the everyday life, which means that the state and/or possibility of crisis is more natural than the absence of it. Literary history with its real figures (writers) and even with their creatures (characters) shed light on the fact that change and development are indispensable in order to succeed: crises, and many times their solutions too, are clearly detectable from the folk tales to the authorial works.

One of the most interesting literary figures of crises is unquestionably Rejtő Jenő – the writer and the hero of the *I'm going to Paris, where I have never been dying before* titled “travelogue-novel” as well, who, similarly to the folk-tales’ poor man, gets on the road to Europe to try his luck. The work is a strange and frightening concentration of the various crises of human life: disappointment, starvation, loneliness, marginalization, political and economic defencelessness, the complete poverty are shown in a way that they reinforce each other – and the conclusions of this work can be found in Rejtő’s other works too, in a slightly different genre. And it is also true that the writer himself is known to be a unique character in Hungarian literary history who probably consciously uses these aspects and emphasis of crises as crisis management device, because

[m]aybe that was his destiny, to perform and create an example for the great modernist dilemma of being an Artist and a Citizen in the most brutal and earth-bound way, namely with pulp novels, card game, poverty and shoes with detached sole His life was a terrible and bizarre allegory, something that is actually pre-written in this book: he was Rejtő who is an agent for needlework in the rich Switzerland, and who is looked down by the citizens and despised by the proletarian[...]¹

¹ TAKÁCS Ferenc, *Who was born to be behind the counter*, Mozgó Világ, 2001. február 8., <http://epa.oszk.hu/01300/01326/00014/feb8.htm>, 2013.05.03.; translation by me.

The result of a conscious choice is the response to that state: “I choose that way.” But this is a kind of subordination not only to the state but also to the governing force of superiority: the ideology.

But not that kind of crisis management is chosen by the characters of Rejtő. For example the heroes of the legionary novels choose the foreign legion as a solution to their own crisis, but they are unwilling to be subjected to the regime, although it would require it, because the first task to do for the subjects of the legion is to get rid of their civil identity and to become soldiers who obey the commands and whose lives belong to the legion – they have to take a new identity on and transform into another subject. The heroes of the legionary novels, however, do not let this conversion mechanism work – and the most important device for that attitude is the believed or real identity change. Because an army (and the foreign legion as well) must be able to identify clearly the elements of its ‘body’, namely the people, the soldiers, and that identification is done by the civil name, the identification numbers and the rank of the soldier. But while the changed identity of the legionnaire is on his help in solving his own crisis, in the same time it also creates the crisis of the legion because of the caused confusion in its operation.