

COUNTERFACTUAL HISTORY IN ROMANIAN
FICTION: OVIDIU PECICAN, *LUMEA CARE N-A FOST.*
O ODISEE ÎN SCRISORI ȘI DOCUMENTE
MOLDOVENEȘTI DIN PRIMA PARTE A SECOLULUI AL
XVII-LEA

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Abstract:

*If history is a matter of narrativity, then counterfactual histories are nothing but the evolving of plots which work out hypotheses about the nature of society and the condition of man, dystopic predictions, parallel narrative trajectories launching speculations about possibilities rather than actualities in the world around us. Ovidiu Pecican, a distinguished Professor of History, affiliated with the Babeș-Bolyai University, and a writer who got several awards from literary societies has managed to fuse history and fiction into a type of discourse which a reviewer (Doru Pop, see Annex 1) unambiguously associates with New Historicism. Ovidiu Pecican is a historian of the relativist school, who sees his discipline as being permanently in the making, depending on the discovery of other historical traces, as he says in the Introduction to his alternative history, **Lumea care n-a fost (The World that Never Was, 2018)**. The statement is true in itself, but Pecican engages here in a playful, mock academic comment on the possibility of getting a more relevant picture of the past through insights into the private lives of the people who lived back then.*

Keywords: New Historicism; literary studies; counterfactual histories; metalanguage; letter-writer.

Niall Ferguson alleges that a historian is actually producing a narrative, while Hayden White published a

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persuasive argument (*Tropics of Discourse*, 1978) supportive of the rhetorical relevance of historiography. Ovidiu Pecican, a distinguished Professor of History, affiliated with the Babeș-Bolyai University, and a writer who got several awards from literary societies has managed to fuse history and fiction into a type of discourse which a reviewer (Doru Pop, see Annex 1) unambiguously associates with New Historicism. Pecican feels that one cannot get a full picture of a community's historical experience without appealing also to that community's imaginative processing of its existence. His book on *Legends of Cluj* (*Clujul în legende*, 2010) is the fruit of such an attempt of bridging documented reality and fiction.

Ovidiu Pecican is also convinced that what counts in mankind's history are not "cancelariile voievodale și câmpurile de luptă" (royal chanceries and battlefields) but the polyphony of commoners' voices. This polyphony is not the kind of music whose score is known. It is a quasi music, that is, an invention of records which are assigned a real existence, they being analogous to other documents of the age in point of language, style, and historical context. Pecican follows here in the footsteps of D.R. Popescu, who, in his 2012 novel, *Simonetta Berlusconi. Călugărul Filippo Lippi și călugărița Lucrezia Buti* (*Simonetta Berlusconi. A Monk Called Filippo Lippi and a Nun Named Lucrezia Buti*), opens his novel, whose action is set at the time of the Renaissance, with a pseudo-introduction in academic style claiming the novel to be a manuscript found in Vienna by Cecilia Zammit, a graduate of the Sorbona School for Art History. D.R. Popescu employs postmodern concepts self-consciously, the mock-exegetic pages including the hesitation of the historian whose findings are not completely elucidating the mystery surrounding the artefact, a cast of characters belonging to different historical ages (the Renaissance and the present), the so-called transhistorical parties, postmodern textual tropes, such as the scribe. Andrei Cârțu's authorship is doubtful, the origin of writing always being uncertain. Cârțu is a calligrapher, a scriptor (scribe, as Roland Barthes calls this function of authoring, which is not out of nothing but as a tissue of quotations, a text emerging at the intersection of other

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texts (intertext).¹ Pecican's textual trope for this emptiness at the heart of a text which is subject to many interpretations and rewriting (often of rewriting wrong) is the palimpsest. The texts sent down to us let us suspect the existence of others in the gaps among them –new ones might be discovered some day, and, besides, there is a layering of meanings attributed to them by successive generations. Being a professional in the field, Pecican reverses Ferguson's description of history as a narrative, rhetorically constructed. This time we are reading a novel written in the manner of a piece of historiography, with academic jargon and characteristic topoi (incomplete manuscripts, deteriorated manuscript, authored or anonymous, list of documents, author index, index of obsolete words, etc.):

„Unele dintre texte s-au dovedit, la analiza lor cu mijloace tehnice avansate, doar fața vizibilă a unor palimpseste. În lipsă de suport pentru noi înscrisuri, oamenii vremii răzuiau, nu o dată, straturi mai vechi, socotite, de-acum, nefolositoare, de scriitură, așternând deasupra acelora conținuturi noi. Așa se explică în ce fel, alături de scrisorile publicate aici, se pot găsi, în chip neașteptat, și fragmente din alte texte, necunoscute (cronici, profeții etc.)” (Pecican, 2018: 6)²

Why an epistolary novel consisting of imaginary letters exchanged by characters supposed to live in the early

¹[...] linguistically, the author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I: language knows a “subject,” not a “person,” and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language “work,” that is, to exhaust it. The Death of the Author 4
The Death of the Author — The absence of the Author (with Brecht, we might speak here of a real “alienation:” the Author diminishing like a tiny figure at the far end of the literary stage) is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or — what is the same thing — the text is henceforth written and read so that in it, on every level, the Author absents himself) (Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, Ubu Web: 3-4)

² Some of the texts proved, in their analysis with advanced technology, to be only the visible part of some palimpsests. In the absence of support for new writings, the people of the time scraped, more than once, older layers, considered, from now on, useless, for writing, laying over those new contents. This explains how, along with the letters published here, fragments of other unknown texts (chronicles, prophecies, etc.) can be found, unexpectedly. (our translation)

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seventeenth century?

For historicist writers, the past is a succession of styles rather than of events. In 1960 John Barth published a novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, imitating the picaresque novel which was the characteristic genre at the time of the action. The American novelist became famous for several reasons, one of them being his authorship of an essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion", where he claims that everything had been invented in the history of writing, and, therefore, all that had been left for writers to do was rewriting. The rewriting of tradition, or the reinscription of a text (J.-F. Lyotard) were to become the characteristic act of writing in postmodernism, also conceived of as the end of history, the end of man as the agent of his own making, and the post-truth age, when the images disseminated by the media take priority over the corresponding things and beings in the real world.

Ovidiu Pecican will choose an epistolary novel because that genre emerged at the time of the unfolding of the plot, and letter writing was also the common pursuit of the courtiers, Pecican's characters being close to the Prince (*Vodă*), offering him military service in the battles against Turks, Poles or Hungarians, but also accompanying him into the woods for hunting and feasts:

His endeavor may be regarded from the perspective offered by Singer (1933: 20), according to whom, alongside the inclination of men of letters and courtiers to write letters, one can remark yet another propensity, just as important in the increasing spread of the letter as a literary tool (and, eventually, fictional) . This can be dubbed as the didactic "letter-writer", who aimed at instructing and all in the manner people should actually write letters. The earliest identified English letter is *The Enimie of Idleness: Teaching the maner and stile how to endite, compose and write all sorts of Epistles and Letters*, authored by William Fulwood, and issued in 1568. (Singer, 1933: 20)

The pastiche will also include characteristic motifs: adulterous love, obsessive sexuality, aristocratic debauchery, emphasis upon bodily parts and physiology which were present in seventeenth-century French romances.

The letter-writers address relatives, lovers, masters, disciples, while the content concerns resistance to invaders,

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treacherous acts, robbery, rape, attack on households and inns, sometimes with the owner found hanging dead on the precincts, the war over the crown among several competitors.

Amorous intrigues involve boyars, big landowners, a hierarchy of the prince's retinue or servants entrusted with various errands.

Boyar Costandachi is a womanizer, he is courting the wife of Chancellor (logofăt) Ilie, while addressing her as Her Grace, as kind-hearted as Saint Mary, and informing her that her husband was killed in battle. He also promises her a young colt which he sends to her in due time. Maria is writing love letters to her new lover while also sending out a servant to inquire into the whereabouts of her husband who had been reported dead by Costandachi. He revises his piece of news later saying that, if Chancellor Ilie had departed to Poland in the company of a passionate Polish woman, he could be considered as good as dead. Maria also sends her brother in search of her missing husband, thereby infuriating her brother's lover who is concerned about his safety in times like those of permanent warfare for a people caught among several empires. The story is all parody, playful style in a rich, flavoury language, full of obsolete words and turns of phrase.

The insertion of professional jargon amplifies the distinction between then and now, between the epistolary chronodiegesis and the metalanguage of the scholar: "Fragment nedatat de scrisoare, adresant necunoscut, autor: Vasilie sânt Timofte, ot Cricalau i Mașnița, sub Sarău, cămăraș de-al triilea." (Pecican, 2018: 17)³. Or: "Document lacunar, cu urme de arsură pe marginea inferioară." (Pecican, 2018: 18)⁴.

The referential background of the letters are Biblical, mainly, some passages sounding like the prophecies in *The Revelation*. Maria has her hands full writing appreciative letters to Boyar Costandachi concomitantly with consulting a monk in connection with her husband's disappearance. Monk Pahomir replies in an enigmatic idiom which reminds one of the auguries of ancient Roman prophecies:

³ Undated fragment of a letter, unknown addressee, author: Vasilie sânt Timofte, ot Cricalau i Mașnița, under Sarău, third chamberlain.

⁴ Documents with missing text and burnt marks on the lower edge.

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„Fi-va volbură de steale și pică-va vulturii den noriu cel de aur de-acum într-o mii de șteie. Culca-să-vor stârvurilii unul pre altul la o groapcă sângură ce șiroi-va dă lacrimi că n-are ce îmbuca. Aurul deveni-va floare de mărăgună iară peatra lucitoare s-a scurge în ape împetrite. Logofeteasa să știe că mersul roții pe urma soarelui s-a plini” (Pecican, 2018: 21)⁵.

The chancellor's wife sensuality is suggested by her affection for animals: a colt, a cat with two kittens, named after the emperors of master nations, whose fall from the bushel is interpreted, also in imitation of old Roman prophecies, as signs of impending attack of the Turks from the Germans:

„Ci cum șădeam și ieri ca n verișcare zi în cerdac și cu luare aminte numai ce m căzură de subt obroc Vâșca și chisoii ei Carul și Suliimen, ce am zâs că i oi boteza cu nume de crai nemțâsc și de împărat turcesc și dumnia ta ai zâs că nu, iar în celi din urmă, ca să nu fie pe voia liubovnicului ce pliacă și lasă cășile pustii, tot le am zâs cum am vrut eu. Mai mai să m cază în sân, nu alta, că sâ giucau așe di ghini de m au podidit lacărimile. Și unde dădea unu cu lăbuța, iar celalat să împungea în dânsul cu botul și mi ți l dădea d a rostogol, să ti prapadești de dragul lor, nu alta... Iar Vâșca șădea și mai îndirepta ce și cum să putea, iar să îi dispață nu, că bag di samă că așe să învați mărtanii di mici la volniciie. Ș apoi mi am zâs că poati că să hii un sămn cum mi a căzută toți de sub obroc asupra mé i m au spăriet, că daca ar hi sămn atunce ar puté fi că și nemții să mișcă asupra” (Pecican, 2018: 32)⁶.

⁵ There will be a whirlwind of stars and the eagle will fall from the golden cloud into a thousand bits. Carriages shall want to lie down next to each other in a bloody pit that will make you cry because it has nothing to swallow. Gold will become a blooming mandrake and the shining stone will flow into hardened waters. Let the lady know that the turning of the wheel along the path of the sun has come full circle.

⁶ But as I was sitting yesterday in the porch, and minding everything around, here were Vâșca and her kittens, Carul and Suliimen fell from under my roof, which I baptized with the name of a German king and a Turkish emperor, and you said no, and I wouldn't comply with the will of the lover who leaves the houses empty, I still named them as I well liked. I held them against my bosom and they were

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Boyar Andrusco, Costandachi's father, seems to be familiar with his son's vices, advising him in his letter to get rid of his obsession with women and wine...

Impressive is also the letter written by Miholiac sânu Naom ot Cărășăuț to his brother-in-law and sister in which he tells them about his confrontation with the soldiers, both of the ruling prince and of a pretender, who attacked peaceful people dining at an inn, and the musicians who had been enticing him with their songs. Her says it was not them but their beautiful music that he felt he could die defending and exposing his own life, as the incident forces him into exile. Maria's brother is also a poet, his idealist character contrasting with Costandachi's sagacious nature, who fights like a lion in the service of the prince:

„Căm păre asuprală mai mare ca vieța și mortea să taie și să pungă cu sulițele viers și muzici ca acelia numa că așe le vinea socotiță. Și acmu mă ascund pin râpi și în coturi di apă volburată, cum vine la rând, și mă socot să tai muntile cătră Ardialu crăiăscu” (Pecican, 2018: 35)⁷.

The list of goods brought to Kir Capsalie also serves the sense of authenticity, Pecican proving in this way his resources, well-studied and documented, for world-building:

„15991Domnii Sali Preabunului și BlagoslovituluiKyr Capsalie Să se știi cum ni fu înțălesul. iară după ce am dăstupat toate ceali treizăși și șasă di care vinite de la Citate, gășătam după cum arăt aice:o butie cu brândză di Putinei, cam râncedă,o butie cu brândză tot de

playing so hard that my eyed filled with tears. And I saw the one threatening the other with its paw, and they rolled down making me feel as if I could have perished with love for them. ... And Vășca sat there impassive, letting them fight each other, and I realized that was the way kittens got experience ..And then I also thought their fall might be a sign of a future advance of the Germans over the Turks. (our translation)

⁷ It seemed to me above life and death was their appetite to cut and stab with spears that music and poetry only because they felt like it. And now I am hiding in the ravines and in the bends of turbulent water, as they show up my way and I think I'd better cross the mountains towards royal Transylvania.

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Putinei, la fel di bună,o butie cu brândză iarăș di
Putinei, aidoma celorlalti,o butie cu herinci uscați puși
la sare, ce să spulbera și puțau deț luau nasul,o butie
cu iarbă di pușcă, plină ochi,Un lădoi cu sânete unse
cu său și gata să ochiaști cu ele,o butie cu vinișor roșu,
cam poșircos, nau vrut a spuni di undi,o butie cu alt
vinișor roșu, acrit cu totul, bun di dat la porci au la pi
cine urăști mai cu temei,Un sipet cu scule di preț, ca de
cneghină ori di doamnă a țării,o butie cu pastramă
ațoasă din vânat (bună di nimică, abia ce am mâncat-
o),o [...]” (Pecican, 2018: 46)⁸.

The double vision of then and now is conveyed by a language which is itself double-voiced, a linguistic hybrid, as M.M. Bakhtin says in “Discourse in the Novel”. Parody, irony, mock-heroic effects distance the author from the letter writers. The language they speak was never part of what Raymond Williams calls ‘lived experience’. In *The Analysis of Culture*, Williams distinguishes between the high art position of Matthew Arnold, to whom culture meant ‘intellectual and imaginative work’, and the ‘social definition of culture’, including historical criticism in which the intellectual and imaginative work is related to society, institutions, ways of life, etc. (Williams, 1998: 48) Whereas the rise of the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century, such as *Pamela, or Virtue rewarded* and *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* by Samuel Richardson allowed the reader to get access to the inner lives of the characters, this faked epistolary novel opens a window to seventeenth-century courtly life, the boys’ domestic conflicts and tensions, the ceaseless warfare between the Romania and neighboring empires. Furthermore, Bakhtin identifies the metalinguistic element present in any kind of

⁸ May you know that, according to our agreement, I uncorked all the other thirty-six chests that came from the Stronghold. I found, as I show here: a barrel of Putina cheese, a bit rancid, a barrel of Putina cheese, just as good, a barrel of Putina cheese again, like the others, a barrel of dried, salted herring, which would shatter and stink awfully, a full barrel of gun powder. A chest for health with anointment, a barrel with a red vine, a bit shabby, they didn’t want to say wherefrom, a barrel with some other red vine, completely sour, good for pigs or for those you hate like hell. A precious toolkit, fit for a countess or a princess, a barrel with big game pastrami (good for nothing, I hardly ate it), a [...]

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fiction, because an individual work means an individual use of a public good – language. Pecican’s language has seventeenth-century Romanian as its model. This artificial idiom is not the intellectual and imaginary work of an author who lived in that century, but a construct born of the mix of words and turns of the phrase made up by a twentieth-century author. The intellectual and imaginary capital is derived from other texts through an imitation of a pattern and the inclusion of vocabulary from other generic forms which are available in Romania where that age knew of no epistolary novel. What Pecican achieves in the end is an atmospheric concoct, a generic hybrid. The characteristically new historicist double temporal scheme (past seen from a present perspective by a double consciousness) is reinforced by “two language-intentions, two voices and consequently two accents participating in an intentional and conscious artistic hybrid”. (Bakhtin, 1981: 358):

“The artistic image of a language must by its very nature be a linguistic hybrid [an intentional hybrid]: it is obligatory for two linguistic consciousnesses to be present, the one being represented and the other doing the representing, with each belonging to a different system of language. Indeed, if there is not a second representing consciousness, if there exists no second representing language-intention, then what results is not an image [obraz] of language but merely a sample [obrazec] of some other person’s language, whether authentic or fabricated. The image of a language conceived as an intentional hybrid is first of all a conscious hybrid (as distinct from a historical, organic, obscure language hybrid); an intentional hybrid is precisely the perception of one language by another language, its illumination by another linguistic consciousness. An image of language may be structured only from the point of view of another language, which is taken as the norm.” (Bakhtin, 1981: 359).

In Pecican’s novel, we hear the letter writer’s voice, but that voice was never heard. It was abstracted from readings of the texts of that age, which means that the idiom is the emanation of several consciousnesses:

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“Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (regardless of the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It is of use to two speakers at the same time and expresses concurrently two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions” (Bakhtin 1981: 324).

Moreover, whereas these two voices mentioned above are dialogically interrelated, they have knowledge about each other (for example, two exchanges that are part of a dialogue are aware of each other and are organized reflecting this reciprocal knowledge of each other); we may envisage them having a conversation with each other. Bakhtin further asserts that

“Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized. Examples of this would be comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre—all these discourses are double-voiced and internally dialogized. A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages.” (Bakhtin, 1981: 324).

The appropriateness of the Bakhtinian description of narrative voice in novels has been put to the test in a comparison between Pecican's novel and a seventeenth-century text, *Istoria Țării Rumânești de când au descălecat pravoslavnicii creștini* (*A History of Wallachia since the Settlement of Slavic Christians*) by Constantin Cantacuzino. Common to both sets of texts are the political and military context, the means of persuasion, the obsolete words (*înțăles*, *boiari*, *sân* for the son of, *vezir*, *liuboc*, *iznoavă* ...)

„[Cantacuzino] Iar Mihnea, deaca au înțeles că au

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fugit acești boiari, foarte s-au întristat. Atuncea au luat turcii cetatea Enăul, și Caravansebeș, și Logojul. Și multă pradă și robie au făcut în Ardeal. Iar după ce au isprăvit acolo, venit-au și Mihnea în țară, în scaunul Bucureștilor. Și ce gândise asupra turcilor nu să mai părăsise, ci mai vârtos să întărise. Strângând oști de **iznoavă** și cu meșteșug mare, lucruri de taină făcea: cătră Racoți Gheorghie-craiu scria oști să vie oști ajutor, unгурii, iar cătră turci plecăciune mare făcea. Și lua bani ...

[**Pecican**] Ci gândit-am tăicuță să spui că n-aș ști câți i-am trecut în raiul lor de **iznoavă** și câți am pus pe fugă, că io fugeam mai tari ca ei și nu mă lăsam la ei, ce o apucam în celaltă parte, să nu stricăm socotelile și să ne dăm prinși la plasa soltanului.

[**Cantacuzino**] Deci trimise pre Radul clucerul Buzescul sol la Batâr Jicmon, ca să se **înțaleagă** una cu dânsul și să-i dea ajutor oaste, ca să să poată bate cu turcii.

[**Pecican**] Când cu ultima năvală a busurmanilor m-au trimes părintili cu turma schitului preajmă di spahii și așe dă bini li-am știut voroavele, fără a pricepe limba lor busurmană, că pi urma a ce am dzâs, tălmaciul domnului di la cetatia di scaon au **înțalesu** cum umbla pi gios și d-ancălarea oștile ce năpârlea la Muldova.

[**Cantacuzino**] Iar apoi, cunoscând ficleşugul lui, ce va să facă asupra împărăției și, văzând că au făcut moarte boiarilor țării, de mare frică, au fugit la Țara Moldovei. Și îndată rămăseseră acei **boiari** ai Mihniei de judecată

[**Pecican**] Și pe noi cu boiarii au cercat să ne mântuie de pe fața pământului, dară ne-am tras den lumină la umbră și n-au izbândit.

[**Cantacuzino**] Iar Curt Celebi grecu tot au umblat pre ascuns la **veziriul** și s-au ispitit în multe chipuri. Și au adus la viziriul greci, grece, turcoalice, de au pârât cum le-au pierit bărbații, și frații, și feciorii la războiul lui Matei-vodă. Și nimic n-au folosit.

[**Pecican**] Audzim pe aice ca vâltoarea aiasta nu au

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pornit-o la porunca Stanbulului, din voia **veziriului** nesațiosu de galbeni, ci den driapta stăpânului nostru domnul de scaon.

[**Cantacuzino**] Ivașco sânu Dumitru ot Fălceni,

[**Pecican**] Todie, sânu Costa, ot Căpităști

[**Cantacuzino**] Iar Antonie-vodă domniia foarte bine și cu pace dăspre toate părțile și avea **liubov** cătră toți boiarii. Iar vrăjmașul diavolul nu putu răbda, ci-și află lăcaș în inimile unor boiari, anume: Gheorghe dvornicul Băleanul și cu ginerisăi Hrizea vistierul, i Staico păharnicul sin Bărcan ot Bucșani, i Radul Știrbéiu ot Izvor și cu alții mai mărunți.

[**Pecican**] Iară 106 asemenea vorbe mii să nu-m mai trimeț de mai vrei să ai masă și **liubov** di la mine. Auzătu-m-ai oare?"

Ovidiu Pecican is a historian of the relativist school, who sees his discipline as being permanently in the making, depending on the discovery of other historical traces, as he says in the Introduction to his alternative history, *Lumea care n-a fost (The World that Never Was, 2018)*. The statement is true in itself, but Pecican engages here in a playful, mock academic comment on the possibility of getting a more relevant picture of the past through insights into the private lives of the people who lived back then. Before the eighteenth-century historiography used to focus on the major figures of the age – kings, leaders of men – and the momentous events in the life of the nation. It was the luminaries (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Johann Martin *Chladenius*) who turned away from front-stage figures exploring the elements of civilization, such as institutions, manners, legislation, civil life: Pecican explores an insignificant history, a level of the infrahistorical, in an ideational approach to the new historicism.

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ANNEX I

Doru Pop **A literature as it could be (Ovidiu Pecican)**

The most recent novel published by Ovidiu Pecican (*The world that was not. An odyssey in Moldovan letters and documents from the first part of the seventeenth century*. Polirom, 2018) is set, as the title shows us transparently, approximately at the time when European literatures have generated great works. While Shakespeare and the Elizabethan theater appeared in England, when Cervantes wrote about Don Quixote de la Mancha and his bookish adventures, our culture was based on the dispatch of a prisoner who wrote letters of denunciation from a sordid prison. The fact that the local literary civilization begins with Neacșu, a prisoner who performs a foundry, is revealing. We see how the impact of this "cultural" moment is reverberating today. It is not surprising that we are where we are, if the first text kept in Romanian represents the "work" of a "criminal", and the literary act is connected with a whistleblower.

But the title of Ovidiu Pecican's novel reveals a much deeper congenital defect. We can call it the anxiety of absence, a cultural neurosis of inconsistency. We know that we have, at the level of collective psychology, an older syndrome, an enormous inferiority complex. This cultural anxiety is best exposed in the cry of despair of Emil Cioran, stated in the *Change in the Face of Romania*: "Lord! what will we have done a thousand years?! Our whole life for a century has been nothing but the process by which we have come to realize that we have done nothing".

Cioran talks about a great "historical sleep" of the Romanians, hence our desire to always fill this cultural void, to reconstruct what does not exist, to make nothingness speak. Of course, the anguish of the thousand years of silence of the Romanian people led to multiple reactions, some of the most abracadabrante being the hypothesis of "boycotting history", supported by Eliade or the "Romanian miracle" Blagian, who wants to convince us that Romanians do not have "Silent", that in fact they formed a kind of anti-historical resistance movement, being preoccupied for a millennium with metaphysics.

This anxiety, I think, has turned into a literary syndrome, a

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virus whose name could be Hasdeism, or the phantom of a non-existent culture. Because finding no documents and having no factual evidence, we had to invent them. From Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, who created several monumental forgeries, writing himself deeds and other invented notes, to *One Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient*, the ironic novel by Ioan Groșan, or *Teodosie cel Mic* by Răzvan Rădulescu, we invented stories.

This kind of rewriting “History”, however, is not necessarily counterfactual, as Pecican's novel was erroneously described. The events rewritten by the prose writer-historian are not discordant with the factuality of the past time, on the contrary. The author contradicts another commonplace of Mioritic anistorism, that of the fact that we are an eminently popular, or peasant, culture. Here we have a novel of the Romanian medieval urbanity (absent by the way), populated by educated people, who know how to write and read. Pecican explores an insignificant history, a level of the infrahistoric, in an ideational approach to the new historicism. History does not speak to us (in capital letters), but small stories.

In fact, *Lumea...* is a pseudo-epistolary novel, also referring to a European literary genre that developed during the period when Pecican's text is placed. Written in a postmodern style, in a parodic key, where the episodic, fragmentary and self-referential dominate, the text of the Cluj historian and essayist is directly inspired by chroniclers, but especially by Cantermir's *Hieroglyphic History*, all mixed with sweet Moldavian words with inflections from Creangă and Sadoveanu.

Of course, these stories told in multiple narrative voices, with an apparent lack of common intrigue, have the charm of a huge social, political and historical puzzle. His plays are placed in front of the random reader, as an incentive both for understanding the past and as a pretext for the present. Many of the episodes that take place in seventeenth-century Moldova, where dignitaries, thieves and bribes, monks, priests and merchants, teachers and young people in love speak are easily recognizable in 21st century Romania.

With this book, Ovidiu Pecican proves that he is not only a polymorphic prose writer, who plays freely with various narrative techniques, from epistolary to police-type intrigue,

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but also that he represents a re-inventor of the Romanian literary language. [translated by Maria Mureșan]

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