

Title: Puma on a Rope: Utopian Tensions in Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*
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Milorad Pavić's structurally ingenious *Dictionary of the Khazars* has been hailed as a post-modernist novel *par excellence* and a seminal work in the widely acknowledged South Slavic Magic Realist tradition. It has also been read as a chilling portent of nationalist/particularist discourses that led to Yugoslavia's breakup. I choose, instead, to analyze *Dictionary of the Khazars* according to the Ricoeurian notions of utopia and ideology. In the current paper, I argue that both Pavić's inventive narrative style and his manner of political engagement stem from a type of utopian thinking that is, at its root, ideological.

Insofar as the novel's outer frame narrative raises the possibility of a complete reconstruction of the original "Khazar dictionary" and provides detailed instructions for the reader, *Dictionary of the Khazars* contains at its outset both the search for, and the promise of, absolute truth. Within the body of the dictionary, however, this quest for completeness of text, wholeness of vision, and perfection of knowledge leads only to danger and to death. In the process, text, vision, and knowledge themselves become implicated in the profoundly dark side of Pavić's utopian thought, one that I identify as ideological.

The same grandiose utopian vision that gives rise to the seemingly infinite creativity with which Pavić spins the elaborate *Dictionary* motivates increasing reliance on a series of thinly-veiled political metaphors. Ultimately, Pavić chooses what John Huntington calls utopia's merely "imaginative solutions" as opposed to a radical *anti-utopia* that allows for the possibility of "powerful and disturbing ambivalences" (142-43). And, thus, *Dictionary of the Khazars* can only collapse *out* on itself, banally gesturing towards a lackluster image of our familiar world as the culmination of a utopian dream.

Works Cited

Huntington, John. *The Logic of Fantasy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.