In many ways, Dumitru Tsepeneag’s disparate but oddly provocative novel, *Pigeon Post*, painstakingly translated by Jane Kuntz, can be read as an amalgamation of 20th century avant-garde fiction stylistics, which may either delight or infuriate the reader, depending on their default state of literary malleability. The story is about absolutely nothing, or at least nothing that thrusts itself into the forefront like a conventional novel would. “Words are powerless… words are to erase” claims the narrator, and the subject of erasure crops up throughout a narrative that begins with Valery’s contention that “thinking is an indefinite deletion.” In more poignant moments, *Pigeon Post* becomes a treatise on how the mind works (or doesn’t), or as the author queries, “how to rid the pure ore of its slag?” The question itself seems purely proverbial as Tsepeneag proceeds to burn off any remnant of ore with a marked and practiced preference for slag. He embraces constant uncertainty, the dissipation of the subjective thread, and the immediate annexation of narrative development upon its detection. He declares rather emphatically: “Randomness as a catalyst, fine! But as an effect, no!” But the effect, through sheer repetition, will serve to bludgeon the reader for an excess of a hundred and fifty pages, to where only the most ardent of Borgesiana enthusiasts might comply.

But what of the subject were we to go searching for one? Loosely, the novel augurs around carrier pigeons and the game of chess, albeit in its shaded metaphoricity. Tsepeneag admits to offering a “shadow of a theme,” where the pigeon carrier and the chess player serve as rudimentary examples of attempting to co-author a message, thus illustrating the flimsy but “didactic project” that we call writing. Worried about finishing or even constructing anything of structural integrity, the author erects a series of fragmentary walls as a “building site.” Following the central tenets of Écriture, or Todorov’s contention that “the meaning of the work lies in the telling itself,” Tsepeneag discovers that writing is totalitarian and is of the immediate and present tense. He enlists characters and readers alike to make sense of his fragmentary projections, to complete his tenuous sense of identity. Writing is the “permanent slippage from within to without,” the co-inhabitation and rescuing of shared memories. Whether real, imaginary, or constructed, the main characters Edmund, Edgar, and Edward serve (along with the willing reader) to shape the author’s endless anecdotalisms and thus the final fiction. In essence, the characters are useless without their own intervention in the story. In a text that is continually self-abridged, erased, and re-written, Tsepeneag states that he constructs the few spindling edifices he can simply to “conceal the poverty of (his) present.” Writing thus becomes self-stylized paucity.

Perhaps this question of finding identity in a state of fragmentation comes from the writer’s unique background. Born in Ceaușescu’s Bucharest, Tsepeneag became a target of the totalitarian regime and had cause to relocate to Paris for political reasons. Similarly, on the artistic front, he left the strictures of Breton’s ‘surrealisme’ enclave to found a restorative nationalist movement now known as ‘Onirism.’ He returned to Romania after the revolution in 1989 to begin work on revitalizing new Romanian literature abroad, which he believed had lost its soul.

To merely dismiss this clever novel of self-stuntery as an oft-played card would be doing it a slight disservice in that it offers one last respite—humor. If one is to answer the collaborative
call of the author for “domestic help,” one might assemble the mélange of aborted quips, homilies, conjectures, distortions, merely for comedic value alone. The location of identity in a labyrinthine cul-de-sac is an old game—and it’s entirely up to the reader whether it’s still a postmodern playground or just a flown coop.