



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network



Open Library of Humanities

Article

How to Cite: Rokolj, T 2018 Many a Footnote and Afterword: Dubravka Ugrešić and the Essay. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(1): 31, pp. 1–30, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.202>

Published: 07 June 2018

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Open Access:

Open Library of Humanities is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

ARTICLE

Many a Footnote and Afterword: Dubravka Ugrešić and the Essay

Téa Rokolj

University of Ottawa, CA

trokolj@uottawa.ca

A widely translated author, and a prominent voice from post-communist Europe, Dubravka Ugrešić has published a variety of literary forms in addition to literary criticism and translations. Playful experimentation with language, boundaries between texts, and literary conventions as well as an acute awareness of the contemporary socio-political context in which her own texts come to be are among the notable features of her writing. It is her essays, however, that invite a closer look at the interstices between the author and the narrator, the world and the text(s). From her early-1990s essays that were critical of the nationalist discourses of former Yugoslavia and which precipitated her exile through her more recent writing that engages with broader political and cultural questions, Ugrešić has come to embody a public intellectual and transnational writer. I argue that her choice of the essay as the literary form allows her to transcend these two identities, however fluid, and provides her with discursive authority and agency. Cognizant of its legacy and its expressive possibilities, Ugrešić continuously revisits the essay, and, at times, moves it into the realm of theoretical fiction. I shall focus on Ugrešić's more recent work – the essays from *Karaoke Culture*, *Europe in Sepia* and *Peščanik*.

Introduction

While she no longer lives in the country of her birth – Croatia (then Yugoslavia) – and now resides in Amsterdam, Dubravka Ugrešić (b. 1949) continues to write in Croatian. Her works have been translated into over twenty languages, and she is the recipient of numerous literary awards. A literary scholar and translator with a specialization in comparative and Russian literature, Ugrešić emerged on the literary scene of her native country in the early 1970s with books for children, novels, and short stories. Her first book, *Mali plamen* [*Little Flame*] (1971), was praised for its unconventional style, specifically its disregard for established forms of expression in Yugoslav children’s literature such as didactic intonation or educational purpose (Skok, 1971: 39).¹

This playful, experimental approach to literary creation, and an import of Russian formalism are evident in her subsequent work – both the short stories and the novels.² For instance, Viktor Shklovsky’s conception of art as the means of creating ‘the sensation of seeing’–prolonging the process of perception and living through ‘the making of a thing’–finds its playful expression and application in Ugrešić’s first novel (Shklovsky, 2015: 162), *Štefica Cvek u raljama života* [published in English as *In the Jaws of Life*] (1981): a take on the genre of romance fiction. Assembling excerpts from women’s magazines; references from literature and popular culture; and combining sewing patterns as a conceptual framework with sewing jargon as an inexhaustible source of puns, Ugrešić creates a patchwork story of a typist who is yearning for love, and the author who, akin to a tailor, ‘sews’ the story together. The author continuously draws attention to the discourses surrounding and entering her own novel as well as the act of creation. The analogies to sewing and patchwork are also a nod to early women novelists and an awareness of an attendant genderedness at the heart of literary production and reception. For instance, in the last section

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

² Ugrešić published two collections of short stories: *Poza za prozu* [*The Prose Pose*] (1978) and *Život je bajka* [*Life is a Fairy Tale*] (1983). Most of the stories from both collections were translated into English by Celia Hawkesworth and Michael Henry Heim, and are included in either *In the Jaws of Life and Other Stories* (1988) or *Lend Me Your Character* (2005).

of her novel, titled 'Završna obrada modela' ['Finishing Touches'], the narrator acknowledges the tradition of unofficial, subversive, feminine writing, stating that her choice of sewing terminology was not ironic but rather profoundly appreciative of such skills that, in a sense, make Penelope and Scheherazade literary sisters (Ugrešić, 2005: 101).

Ugrešić's second novel, *Forsiranje romana-reke* [published in English as *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*] (1988) turns to questions of authorship, and national and literary networks against a backdrop of the polarities between the East and the West during the last chapter of the Cold War. Published soon after the Yugoslav war, the essay-novel *Muzej bezuvjetne predaje* [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*] (1997) and the novel *Ministarstvo boli* [*The Ministry of Pain*] (2004) touch on the themes of exile, nostalgia, identity and displacement. Intertwining autobiography, history and fiction, Ugrešić dissects the fall of communism, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the attendant traumas of those caught in the whirlwind. Her novel *Baba Jaga je snijela jaje* [*Baba Yaga Laid an Egg*] (2008) constitutes a departure from the themes of war and exile; and touches on aging and gender. Ugrešić weaves a tale of aging women and an academic who, in the final chapter, disassembles the story to place it into a larger context of Slavic mythology, literature and authorship. Ugrešić's most recent essay-novel *Lisica* [*The Fox*] (2017) is a meditation on literature and storytelling.

In the early 1990s Ugrešić also began publishing collections of essays. *Američki fikcionar* [published in English as *Have A Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*] (1993) brings together the columns written for a Dutch daily newspaper during Ugrešić's sojourn in Amsterdam; Middletown, Connecticut; and New York from October 1991 until June of the following year. The columns encompass anecdotes, playful observations on American popular culture and society, and at times harrowing remarks about the war unfolding in her country of birth. Published soon after, *Kultura laži* [*The Culture of Lies*] (1995) is a penetrating examination of the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and the nationalism and conformism of Yugoslav intellectuals and artists. In her subsequent essay collections – *Zabranjeno čitanje* [*Thank You for Not Reading*] (2001), *Nikog nema doma* [*Nobody's Home*] (2005)

and *Napad na minibar* [published in English as *Karaoke Culture*] (2010) – Ugrešić turns her attention to the publishing industry, politics and culture, migration, gender and identity in a globalized, post-Cold War world. The essays in these collections include columns for various European newspapers (e.g. Switzerland's *Die Weltwoche*) and longer articles for numerous literary periodicals. Finally, *Europa u sepiji* [*Europe in Sepia*] (2013) explores post-communist, multicultural Europe; and questions of gender and the literary canon, identity, authorship, and exile—or what the author terms 'out of nation' writing.

In his supranational study titled *Remaining Relevant after Communism*, Andrew Wachtel expresses regret that Ugrešić has given up 'fiction to produce journalism' (2006: 151). Ascribing this 'choice' to 'the need to earn a living' and the 'deeply held desire to be relevant' due to a limited readership base for postmodern fiction and international newspapers' demand for 'experts' on the Yugoslav war, Wachtel observes that the author 'is not comfortable with the genre' (2006: 152). He only considers Ugrešić's first two collections of essays in English—*Have A Nice Day* and *The Culture of Lies*. Omitted from his analysis are *Thank You for Not Reading* and *Nobody's Home*, which encompass a thematic spectrum well beyond the Yugoslav war. More than a decade after the publication of Wachtel's book, it is evident that Ugrešić has not given up fiction. Furthermore, even her earlier work—to which Wachtel refers as 'journalistic prose'—resists an easy identification with non-fiction or non-literary. In 'Fictionary', the introductory essay to *Have a Nice Day*, whose original title in Croatian is *Američki fikcionar* [i.e. American Fictionary], Ugrešić draws attention to the genesis or, rather, making of the book—an attempt to assemble her 'scattered words (and scattered worlds) into some sort of order' (1993a: 9). The result is a catalogue of observations and remembrances hovering between different languages, places and realities. Similar to sewing in/of *In the Jaws of Life*, Ugrešić draws parallels between knitting up a pullover in an improvised bomb shelter and 'knitting up the reality that others are violently unravelling at the same time' (1993a: 17).

In her study of representations of nationalist kitsch in *The Culture of Lies*, Dragana Obradović rightly points out that criticisms of Ugrešić's essays, including

those by Wachtel, 'stem from the general pitfalls of the essay genre, which these scholars subsume into journalism' (2016: 72). By design, the essay is subjective, lacks established conventions or comes across as the 'solipsistic' writing exercise of an all-knowing self. As I will discuss shortly, Ugrešić is well aware of the pitfalls and the possibilities of the genre when it comes to the representation of reality and performance of identity. Yet, I would argue, more than a performance of a self or an identity, cultural critique or commentary, the essay offers to Ugrešić possibilities for agency – positioning herself and responding from within, without and between the texts. More than a meditation on her identities or materialization of authorial imprint, the essay constitutes her claim for discursive authority in an expansive global literary system that admits some, and slights many.

Ugrešić's more recent essays represent a compelling subset of her oeuvre for more than one reason. Going beyond columns, reflective pieces, anecdotes, glossaries or critiques, some of these essays are hybrid creations that subsume and assay fiction, nonfiction prose and literary criticism. Nowhere is this more evident than in the essay 'Manifesto' from *Europe in Sepia*, which constitutes a multilayered study in narrative strategies. As it explores thematic links with Yuri Olesha's novel *The Envy* and the essay collection as a whole, the essay complicates the interface between the narrator and the author. I would argue that, in this instance, Ugrešić is a writer-critic who takes the essay into the realm of theoretical fiction, which Mark Currie characterizes as a performative rather than a constative narratology that 'enacts or performs what it wishes to say about narrative while itself being a narrative' (2011: 59). Moreover, examining the English language translations of Ugrešić's two latest collections of essays, *Karaoke Culture* and *Europe in Sepia*, one observes a lack of author's notes, prefaces or afterwards that had been an integral part to her earlier works in translation. These addenda informed the readers of the texts' temporal, geographical or cultural coordinates; allowed the author to revisit a particular question; or conveyed the idea of a conversation between the author, her readers and her texts. Instead, *Karaoke Culture* includes an afterword by the translator and a concise note on the copyright page stating that all changes and

revisions to the original edition originated with the author. *Europe in Sepia* contains no such contextual information. While this absence of addenda could, among other factors, be ascribed to quick translations of the originals into English, or the author's renown rendering explanation superfluous, one should not disregard other ways in which the contextual information resurfaces in Ugrešić's recent work. The essays 'A Question of Perspective' from *Karaoke Culture* and 'Esej koji putuje već pune 23 godine' ['The Essay That Has Been Travelling for Twenty-Three Years'] from *Peščanik* are a case in point. They are the instances in which the author revisits and rewrites her earlier essays. In addition to responding obliquely to her critics, these essays allow the author to address the context in which her texts are read and received from within the texts. Through a closer examination of Ugrešić's recent essays, I shall point out the ways in which this literary form allows the author to realize various forms of agency.

The Essay and Rupture

It is not possible to clearly delineate lines of separation between Ugrešić's short stories, novels and essays. Her oeuvre resides in a continuum that is marked by metafictional narrative techniques, intertextuality and continuous experimentation with genres and literary forms. For instance, 'Slučaj Harms' ['The Kharm's Case'], the afterword to her translation of Daniil Kharms' short stories *Nule i ništice* [*Nulls and Zeroes*] (1987), takes the form of an epistolary short story.³ The story is a humorous commentary on the experience of literary translation: over the span of ten years, a translator named Vavka Ušić sends follow-up queries, research notes, literary exercises and, at one point, love notes to a literary editor who is slow to acknowledge her unsolicited manuscript on an obscure writer named Daniil Ivanovič Kharms. Similarly, Ugrešić's essays, though varied in form, length, scope and themes, often foreground a woman narrator who straddles multiple texts, the fictional and the factual, the biographical and the literary.

In addition to recurring motifs, a common thread through much of Ugrešić's writing is a personal bibliographic universe – the references to authors and works

³ The story is included in *Lend Me Your Character* (2005).

that occasionally move from the margins of one text to the margins or the centre of another. For instance, 'Baba Jaga je snijela jaje' – the epigraph by Alexei Remizov to her short story collection *Život je bajka* (1983) – resurfaces as the title of her novel *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg* (2008).⁴ Yuri Olesha's novel *Envy*, mentioned in the essay 'Comforter' from *Have a Nice Day*, becomes the focal point of her latest essay collection, *Europe in Sepia*.

Notwithstanding the stylistic and thematic continuity of her oeuvre, the essays changed the course of Ugrešić's literary career. Following the 1992 publication of her essay 'Saubere kroatische Luft' in the German magazine *Die Zeit* and, shortly after, its English translation 'Clean Croatian Air' in *The Independent*, Ugrešić became the subject of public ostracism and media attacks in her native Croatia due to her criticism of nationalism, censorship and propaganda during the Yugoslav Wars, including the Croatian War of Independence. For instance, the Croatian weekly *Globus* published an article on December 11, 1992 titled 'Hrvatske feministice siluju Hrvatsku' ['Croatian Feminists Rape Croatia'] in which Ugrešić was labelled a 'witch', along with four other prominent Croatian female intellectuals. The article refers to the wartime rapes in Croatia and, to a much greater extent, in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav wars. While wartime rapes had been committed by all three ethnic sides in the conflict (i.e. Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks), Serb forces are documented to have used rape as a strategy for the intimidation and forceful impregnation of non-Serb, predominantly Muslim women.⁵ The aforementioned intellectuals considered these acts of sexual violence as the manifestation of a patriarchal war on women, rather than an act of war along strictly ethnic lines and, as a result, were seen as being complicit with 'the enemy of Croatia' – i.e. the Serb military forces. In his critical study on Ugrešić, David Williams provides an excellent

⁴ Translated as 'Baba Yaga hatched an egg', the epigraph is attached to the short story 'Who Am I?' in *Lend Me Your Character*.

⁵ To date, thirty-two men of all three ethnicities charged with the acts of sexual violence have been convicted by the The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The cases involved sexual enslavement and torture, rape and the forceful impregnation of women; as well as sexual violence against men in the detention camps.

overview of the political climate at the time and traces cultural ostracism and media attacks on the author that led to her 'voluntary' exile (2013: 46–57).

The circumstances surrounding Ugrešić's place of birth and her exile frequently surface in the extratextual context within which her work is assessed. Obradović observes that Ugrešić's 'competency as a writer has taken second place to her biographical legend' (2016: 68). Similarly, in *Writing the Balkans*, a special issue of the literary journal *Wasafiri*, Vedrana Velickovic points out the paradox with regard to Ugrešić's international literary stature: she has become one of the most renowned Croatian writers in the 'West' even though she refused to identify with any of the national or ethnic labels after the disintegration of Yugoslavia (2014: 13).

While much has been written about Ugrešić's novels and essays, her concerns with the moral responsibility of the writer and the autonomy of literature, and the links between her biography and her writing, little attention has been accorded to Ugrešić's use of the essay as a literary form in her capacity as a literary scholar and writer. For instance, in addition to thematic analyses of Ugrešić's essays and the discussions about their biographical dimension (Lukić, 2006; Craith, 2009; Vanuska, 2009), critics have also looked at the questions of identity, including the reception of Ugrešić's essays abroad and her positioning vis-à-vis cultural, national and literary networks (Kolanović, 2008; Kovačević, 2013; Velickovic, 2015). David Williams, who in addition to authoring a critical study has translated the most recent two collections of Ugrešić's essays, acknowledges the importance of literary and cultural essays by East European writers such as Ugrešić, Milan Kundera, Christa Wolf or Joseph Brodsky.⁶ He observes that they 'have all written of east European literature and culture with an intellectual firepower and aesthetic élan often unrivalled by literary scholarship itself' (2013: 26).⁷ Such a statement, however, suggests a view of the essay as a self-explanatory, argumentative or nonfiction text rather than a literary form that warrants closer attention.

⁶ Some of the essays in *Karaoke Culture* were translated by Ellen Elias-Bursać and Celia Hawkesworth.

⁷ By not capitalizing the word east, Williams follows in the footsteps of scholars and writers, Wendy Bracewell, Alex Drace-Francis and Drago Jančar, in a sense that the term 'east Europe' constitutes an approximate geographical term. Williams suggests that the term east Europe is also preferred by Ugrešić herself (24).

Ellen Elias-Bursać, who has translated several of Ugrešić's works into English, touches briefly on the form of Ugrešić's essays, referring to them as 'an in-between genre peppered with juxtapositions, intertextual references to other literatures and film, social commentary' that take Ugrešić 'to the brink of fiction' (2010: 137). Similarly, Velimir Visković remarks that for Ugrešić the essay has become 'her basic form of expression' through which she speaks about politics and her personal experience in a literary style, but notes that it is difficult to decipher where 'documentary expression ends and fictionalization begins, where essay turns into a story' (2004: 133). Finally, in her study on authors as public intellectuals, Odile Heynders perceives in Ugrešić's work a plurality of voices that encompass a conscious enactment of self and a disruptive style that result in a deliberate ambiguity: 'what is expressed of the author as self is not immediately the "truth"' (2016: 71). What emerges is an admixture of 'the sulky public intellectual, moraliser as well as an ironic observer' (2016: 72). It is certainly the case that Ugrešić's narrative strategies continuously stretch the boundaries of the essay as a literary form, and challenge an attendant biographical determinism that might saturate the readings of her texts.

Ugrešić herself has expressed reservations about reading of her opus strictly through the lens of biographical positivism. For instance, discussing her first novel in an interview with Priscilla Meyer, she expresses a concern about what she sees as the division between literature and women's literature, which constitutes 'vulgar sex labelling' (Meyer, 1993: 199). Similarly, in an interview with Nataša Kovačević, Ugrešić maintains that she is 'against all types of categorization' as they constitute 'a form of anticipatory interpretation' (2007: 309). An echo of this conviction resurfaces in the author's note to the English version for her collection of essays *Nobody's Home*: 'I stumbled on a quote of Virginia Woolf's ...: "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world". The manifest power of the statement took my breath away' (Ugrešić, 2008a: 296).⁸ Ugrešić's distaste for identitarian labels is indicative of her desire for particularity with regard to authorship and literature. While she rejects essentialization and the

⁸ The quote is taken from Woolf's book-length essay 'Three Guineas' (1938) in the context of author's pacifism, critique of nationalism, and concern with the economic emancipation of women.

reading of her work within the context of gender, Ugrešić, nonetheless, positions herself as a woman writer/narrator and engages with the questions of identity both in her work and the public arena. In that, she is similar to an extent to Woolf who, as Toril Moi (2009) points out, has been perceived by feminist critics as contradictory due to her concern with women's access to literature and, on the other hand, her desire not to write explicitly about her gender.

Ugrešić's Take on the Essay

It is important to consider interviews, public talks, footnotes, author's notes and epigraphs in Ugrešić's texts as they frequently illuminate, update, complicate or, paradoxically, steer the readers toward particular reading(s) of her texts. For instance, the aforementioned quote by Woolf surfaces in Ugrešić's essays 'Women's Cultural Canon?' in the journal *Aspasia* (2008b); as well as in 'No Country for Old Women' in *Karaoke Culture*, and 'What Is an Author Made of?' in *Europe in Sepia*.⁹ While the narrator expresses her uncertainty about the original meaning behind Woolf's words, all three essays consider the position of authors in the system or marketplace of literature that is seen as laden with pre-packaged labels and values. The notion of paratexts is particularly apposite in this case. Defined by Gérard Genette as the elements that may be attached to a text or exist separate from it – titles, epigraphs, notes or interviews – paratexts constitute the conveyors of authorial commentary and a zone of transaction; 'an influence on the public... at a service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it... in the eyes of the author' (1997: 2). Ugrešić's epigraphs, afterwords, authorial notes and, above all, interviews often encompass commentary on her literary texts, her narrative strategies and literary criticism; forming a thematic continuum with her essays. Of note are the interviews in which, in addition to biographical details, political observations and literary influences, Ugrešić touches on the historical legacy of the essay, and her adoption of it.

⁹ An amended version of the essay from *Aspasia* was republished under the title 'A Women's Canon?' in *Europe in Sepia*.

For instance, in an interview for the Serbian daily *Danas* in 2013, she observes that the persona in her essays functions as an unreliable narrator; a narrative mask or a prop that prevents her from slipping into an authoritarian speech that characterizes the writing of male essayists who assume omniscient, preaching, moralizing or aggressively monologic forms of narration. For her, the essay is the most unconstrained literary statement, but it can be easily compromised when the essayist slips into authoritarian speech that is employed by religious and authority figures, politicians or dictators (Ugrešić, 2013a). In an interview with Krunoslav Juračić and Ivana Perić for the Croatian journal *Jat* in 2013, Ugrešić admits that even though the essay has become a comfortable literary form for her it is nonetheless demanding, as she aims to make her writing readable to international audiences. This is not to say that her authorial freedom is curtailed—she chooses the themes and decides how she will write about them. She characterizes her essayistic work as a blend of feuilleton, short story, and essay that bears her own authorial imprint or handwriting. The fact that a reader could recognize the author's imprint in all of their writings should, in her opinion, be the foundation of a renewed literary and theoretical interest in authors and authorship (Ugrešić, 2013b). In an interview with Daniel Medin for *Music & Literature*, Ugrešić states that she turned to the essay when 'things desperately... needed to be explained' having lost her 'familiar addressee' and her 'familiar cultural environment' (Medin, 2015). Furthermore, she references Theodor Adorno's claim that the essay's form is 'heresy.' Finally, in her interview for *Wasafiri*, Ugrešić characterizes the narrator of her essays as 'some kind of a nomad', who changes locations but whose geographic position is not important. Rather than focus on the perspective from any given geographic location, Ugrešić is interested in the perspective afforded by subjectivity. As she states: 'I do not care much about objectivity; rather, I insist on subjectivity. Everything is perceived and told from my own perspective. My perspective is marginal, floating at the surface, melancholic' (Velickovic, 2014: 15).

Ugrešić's insistence on the immediacy of personal experience and the constructedness of the self in her essays bring to light an inherent tension within the act of writing. Expression of one's thoughts and ideas interacts with the artifice

and the literary conventions that the act of writing may afford to an author. Ugrešić is aware of the legacy of the essay as a genre that emerged in the Renaissance and is ascribed to Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), who gave expression to his sensations and observations in a new literary form. Montaigne inserted his personal voice among quotations from classical writers, which were treated as other voices in a conversation rather than sources of ‘authoritative support’ (Good, 1988: 1). Ugrešić’s second collection of essays, *Culture of Lies*, provides a literal example of such an insertion. The essay collection is introduced by three epigraphs: nested between quotes by the East European essayists and novelists, György Konrad and Miroslav Krleža is a quote from Ugrešić’s article for the now defunct Yugoslav political weekly *Danas*. With this epigraph, Ugrešić, to paraphrase Genette, chooses her peers and her place in the pantheon (Genette, 1997: 160).

Furthermore, the etymology of ‘*l’essai*’, a term employed by Montaigne to characterize his writing, points to the methodology and the intellectual underpinnings of this literary form. The word comes from the French *essayer* (to attempt, to experiment) and the Latin *exagium*—weighting an object or an idea, but ‘never exhaustively or systematically’ (de Obaldia, 1995: 2). It disorients the reader’s horizon of expectations as it claims no responsibility for ‘what is after all only ‘tried out’ and which is therefore closer, in a sense, to the ‘as if’ of fiction’ (de Obaldia, 1995: 3). This relationship between the reader and the author is further complicated by the essayist’s attention to the projection of personality or the persona within the essay.

In her playful, polysemic essay, ‘f Words: An Essay on the Essay’, Rachel Blau DuPlessis presents a personal treatment of the essay as a literary form that, in many respects, parallels Ugrešić’s poetics of the essay. To DuPlessis, the essay constitutes an instance in which ‘the untransparent situated subject explores (explodes) its material in unabashed textual untransparency, conglomerated genre, ambidextrous, switch-hitting style’ (1996: 25). She rejects readings of the essay as a message due to an inherent paradox within this literary form, which she terms ‘antiauthoritarian authority’, arguing instead that it is ‘a way of representing struggle, crossings, and creolized exploration’ (DuPlessis, 1996: 28). For DuPlessis, the personal, the

autobiographical and the feminine are the facets that need to be always addressed in any reading of the essay, but in conjunction with the broader context within which they exist and operate. As she concludes, '[t]he essay is the form in which material sociality speaks, in texty texts, forever sceptical, forever alert, forever yearning' (1996: 37). In other words, the essay is inextricable from both experience and art.

Authorship, Authority and the Essay

The nomadic, marginalized persona that Ugrešić assumes in her essays and theorizes in her interviews is frequently equated with the author. It draws considerably on literary and cultural references from (post)-communist Europe, yet it claims a citizenship and an authorial standing in the world rather than a specific nation or diasporic community. While it rejects authoritarian positioning in favour of dialogic narration, Ugrešić's essayistic self nonetheless places a claim to discursive authority – an intention to influence or to be heard. As Susan Sniader Lanser points out, even the women writers who have challenged or rejected the idea of discursive authority as hegemonic, ideological or male-centered are, nonetheless, constrained to adopt 'the authorizing conventions of narrative voice in order, paradoxically, to mount an authoritative critique of the authority that the text therefore also perpetuates (1992: 7). It is a position that she describes as 'standing on the very ground one is attempting to deconstruct' (1992: 7). In other words, as they dissect or bare the mechanisms of authority within a text, authors in such a position may end up re-establishing that very same authority. Self-authorization, as Lanser reminds us, is 'implicit in the very act of authorship' (1992: 7). Furthermore, extrarepresentational acts such as direct address to readers, self-reflexivity or generalizations about the world outside the fiction, among other elements, may expand the sphere of fictional authority and allow a writer to engage in social or intellectual debates from within fiction (1992: 17).

In Ugrešić's case, the adoption of the essay entailed introducing elements associated with other literary forms such as dialogues, drawing attention to the constructedness of the narrative persona and discouraging an unequivocal identification with the author. Moreover, self-reflexivity, intertextuality and her

tendency to directly address her readers, as in her essay 'Manifesto' from *Europe in Sepia*, expand her sphere of authority as they superimpose different layers of text and allow her to engage with broader questions of identity, authorship and the world outside the text. Alternately taking the forms of fiction, editorial, speech and personal reflection, the essays in *Europe in Sepia* delve into multiculturalism and nationalism in Europe, world literature, identity, authorship and gender, to name a few prominent themes. The essay collection is introduced by an epigraph from Yuri Olesha's Soviet-era novel *Envy* (1927): 'We are a breed of men that has reached its upper limit, he would say, banging his mug on the marble like a hoof' (quoted in Ugrešić, 2014: 3). These are the words of Ivan Babichev, an idealistic engineer and a dreamer who is contrasted in the novel to his brother, Andrei Babichev, an ambitious and pragmatic industrialist. Mediating between the two men is Nikolai Kavalero, an envious young man described as 'a loser' who observes the two men and is the narrator in the first part of *Envy*.

Olesha's novel is the focal point of the essay titled 'Manifesto', which in many respects can be viewed as a microcosm of *Europe in Sepia*. Ironically titled 'Manifesto', the essay is at once a poetic record of the manifestos from the recent European past, a rereading of Olesha's novel, and a reflection on the act of storytelling. The essay opens with an anecdote about the narrator's acquaintance from Croatia who watches communist-era videos on YouTube with acute nostalgia. Comparing the Internet to the ocean that continually washes new debris upon the shore, the narrator describes Europe as 'a ruin', 'littered with graveyards of progress, of communist and capitalist utopias alike' (2014: 84). The Internet is yet another medium, akin to sepia prints, newsreels or written records, offering possibilities for re-contextualizing the past. The present-day Europe is seen as ominous, much like the rest of the world in which words like 'hope', 'dreams' and 'curiosity' are conspicuously absent, dispersed by the 'threatening clatter of money' (84). The past, though easy to idealize, is a lens on the present. Coupled with the reference to Miroslav Krleža's essay from 1935, 'Europe Today', which expressed a similar disdain for a money-oriented society, are the translations of the opening line of the 19th century socialist anthem, 'L'Internationale'

– ‘Debout, les damnés de la terre’ (85). Punctuated by ellipses, the lines from the anthem are an obtuse refrain: they leave in suspense any possibility for change and highlight the irony that is contained in the title of the essay.

It is within this setting that the narrator introduces Olesha's novel, which, like Ugrešić's Croatian acquaintance's YouTube video, elicits re-examination of the past in view of the present. Combining personal reflections with Olesha's biography, historical context and literary criticism on the author, the narrator renders an incisive analysis of Olesha's narrative strategies, characters and motifs. Especially telling is the narrator's introduction to Olesha's novel. As she inserts herself within the sphere of literary critics, to whom she refers as ‘arbiters of literary values’, the narrator levels criticism at the notion of literary canon: ‘the protective embrace of the literary canon is often where thickest dust settles. Once it settles, literary kitsch fused with artistic mythologization is as hard to get rid of as dust’ (85). The novel of her choice is unfettered by predetermined labels, easy canonization, or the context in which it was created. It invites re-readings from a distance in time, and the vantage point of one's own experience. The bitterness and the envy of Nikolai Kavalerov are paralleled to the sentiments of present-day outsiders with whom the narrator identifies. Once again readers are made aware of the irony in the essay's title. As she concludes the analysis of Olesha's novel, the narrator refers to a recurring motif, as marked by another literary critic: ‘We're caught in the same trap Olesha was in not even a century ago: ‘We know what was, we don't know what will be’ (94). This inability or unwillingness to articulate a vision, except to express an affinity with the ‘losers’, dilates in the last section of the essay where the multiple narrative strands converge.

The narrator returns to her impoverished acquaintance from Zagreb and tries to imagine several happy endings for him and his family, drawing attention to narrative artifice and the anecdote that triggered the entire essay. She declares that she is with Nikolai Kavalerov, whom she considers her brother, and many other ‘loser’ literary characters, authors and their faithful readers. The contemplation on illusions and betrayed expectations of the post-communist Europe is transposed to the world of literature. ‘Our faces write a manifesto, bristling, unsettled, and shimmering like a

fish hatchery' (96). In the absence of an overarching proclamation or consolatory answers, it is individual experience that takes primacy, and this includes that of the readers of a literary text. As she concludes the essay, the narrator addresses her own readers, asking them where they stand. Alternating between participation, observing and commenting, the narrator simultaneously engages with the cultural and political discourses, the world and the text. The essayist is at once a protagonist, storyteller, commentator, reader and literary critic. As such, Ugrešić's essay traverses into theoretical fiction that, to borrow from Currie, dramatizes the boundary between fiction and criticism, using it as 'an energy source' (2011: 60). The implication is that not only are the borders between multiple texts or the world inside and outside a text permeable but the acts of writing and reading a text are deeply interwoven.

The similarities between the narrator and the author – their common national origin and background in Russian literature – add a layer of complexity to 'Manifesto' and many other essays in *Europe in Sepia*. There is a temptation on the part of the reader to equate or conflate the two, yet the structure and the writing style of the essays continuously render that identification elusive. In other words, the constructedness of the narrating persona or the literariness of the text discourage the reading of Ugrešić's essays in a strictly autobiographical or nonfictional key or, to paraphrase DuPlessis (1996), finding agreement on the consumption of the essay. Furthermore, when discussing Olesha's *Envy* in 'Manifesto', the narrator states that the character of Kavalero, with whom she shares similar sensibilities and a bond, is Olesha's alter ego in spite of the author's efforts to 'avoid detection' (2014: 88). She maintains that Kavalero, narrator of the first part of *Envy*, sees the world through a 'defamiliarized', 'deautomaticizing', 'deformed optic' (88) and that Olesha, the author, 'draws the reader into a dramatic polemic of opposing concepts, yet nowhere does he offer final answers' (93). These statements operate on multiple levels of reading. The narrator, herself a reader, is susceptible to equating the author with the narrator of the novel that she is discussing. Her self-reflexive remark is amplified by the use of literary terminology with which the author of the essay herself is intimately familiar in her capacity as a scholar of Russian literature. For

instance, the terms 'defamiliarization' and 'deautomaticization' call to mind the work of the Russian formalist critic Victor Shklovsky. The style and the narrative structure of Ugrešić's essay are evocative of Christine Brooke-Rose's 'plea for the unsplitting of... Splitlitcrit' by which she means an ideal form of literary criticism that combines the critic's enthusiasm with imagination and a sound theoretical footing; a 'a "gift outright" of ourselves, and the compliment of careful reading' (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 35).

The aforementioned epigraph from Olesha's novel positions the author within a supranational, if not Anglo-American literary discourse. With regard to literature, as I discussed earlier, all of Ugrešić's writing to date engages with other literary texts by way of direct citations and explicit or implicit references to authors, their texts and their literary contexts. 'Author's Note' in her collection of essays *Nobody's Home* provides an insight into the intertextuality inherent to her writing: 'I feel that every writer should pay some sort of symbolic literary 'tax', because writing is not the humblest of vocations. A tax, hence, on narcissisms... I do this in hopes that the reader will decide to read unduly neglected or underrated books' (Ugrešić, 2008a: 297). In her interview for *Wasafiri* she acknowledges her literary training and scholarship, stressing the importance of 'literary apprenticeship', that is, doing 'something for literature in order to gain the right to write yourself' (Velickovic, 2014: 14). Similarly, in a more recent interview for the literary magazine *Versopolis*, Ugrešić describes her literary apprenticeship as a combination of 'some theory, some translating, some digging out of forgotten authors' providing her with the right to her own voice (Slapšak, 2016). This simultaneously self-effacing and self-affirming gesture – recognizing that writing is a claim to discursive authority within a vast cultural system that favours some but suppresses others – is indicative of Ugrešić's concern with authorship and identity. Moreover, as an act of self-authorization and an expression of 'antiauthoritarian authority', it encapsulates an inherent paradox at the heart of literary production by marginalized, subversive or counterhegemonic authors.

Ugrešić's essays 'A Woman's Canon', 'What is an Author Made Of?' and 'ON-Zone' from the last section of *Europe in Sepia*, especially, throw into sharp relief the

questions of authorship and identity in the global literary system. Combining personal reflections, humorous anecdotes and references to literary studies, the narrator presents her own experience as evidence, an object of study and reflection. It is by drawing from these different texts that she constructs the vocabulary and a working definition of her identity – i.e. writing from ‘a nowhere zone’ (175); an ‘out-of-nation’ or ON-zone (215); and in a state of (self)-estrangement from the maternal literature, but not the maternal language (218). It is a position that makes a writer vitally dependent on translators as well as vulnerable to misunderstandings. ‘As an ON-writer I always feel obliged to explain my complicated literary passport to an imagined customs officer.... And although it would never cross our minds to self-designate so, we readers – *we* are those customs officers’, observes the narrator in ‘ON-Zone’ (Ugrešić, 2014: 218). Avoiding the slide into pathos and deflecting her complaint, the narrator endears herself to readers, and, at the same time, deconstructs the very ground on which she is standing. A similar narrative strategy is evident in Ugrešić’s most recent work, the essay-novel *Lisica*.¹⁰ Reminiscing about the invitation to a Naples conference on migration that she ended up attending not because of its theme, but because she had never visited that city, the narrator describes herself and her fellow exiled writers as entertainers. She observes with self-irony, stating that ‘we were masters of migrations, acrobats of exile, contortionists, tightrope walkers (who had managed to stretch the tightrope and walk on it from Africa to Europe) – writers likely to have something to say about emigrant life first-hand’ (Ugrešić, 2017: 56).¹¹

As it engages with the questions that the author herself addresses in her interviews (e.g. ‘out-of -nation zone’ authorship or the reductionism of the global literary market) and experiments with narrative techniques (e.g. direct address to readers), Ugrešić’s essayistic self draws attention to the very act of artistic production and her own writing self. Her engagement with the extratextual as well as her

¹⁰ An English language translation by Ellen Elias-Bursać and David Williams will be published on April 17, 2018.

¹¹ Original text: ‘Mi smo bili majstori migracije, akrobati egzila, ljudi od gume, hodači po žici (koji su znali rastegnuti žicu i po njoj iz Afrike stići u Europu), pisci za koje se pretpostavljalo da će znati nešto reći o emigrantskom životu iz prve ruke.’

insistence on paying a 'literary tax' by mentioning 'unduly neglected or underrated books' in her texts can be perceived an attempt to influence by way of her writing. For instance, her frequent mentions of Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov's *The Golden Calf* (1931) in her essay collections such as *Nobody Home* were decisive in bringing to English-speaking readers the third and the most complete to date translation of the novel in 2009 (Espenschade, 2010). In her more recent interviews, in fact, Ugrešić characterizes herself as a literary activist (VP Editors, 2016).

The Essay Against Time

In the author's note to her translated collection of short stories, *Lend Me Your Character* (2005), originally published in 1983 in Yugoslavia, Ugrešić addresses the dramatic political changes that took place in the intervening years and the necessity of repeatedly explaining things by means of footnotes and afterwords. As she observes, '[t]ime revises faster than I do' (Ugrešić, 2005: 232). This practice of adding to, revising or commenting from the margins of the text extends to Ugrešić's essays as well. As noted above *Karaoke Culture* and *Europe in Sepia* are the only essay collections that do not have the accompanying author's notes. Rather, revising or commenting occurs from within the texts. For instance, in the essay 'A Question of Perspective' from *Karaoke Culture*, Ugrešić revisits the events that led to her exile, including her account of the prominent individuals who were involved and continue to exert influence on Croatia's cultural life. The trigger for the essay was a *Globus* interview from 2010 in which Ugrešić's former colleague and fellow Slavist, Aleksandar Flaker, claimed that Ugrešić was not forced to leave and that her essayistic work constituted a self-proclaimed 'war' in the interest of self-promotion.

Composed of fifteen fragments, 'A Question of Perspective' does not name Flaker; rather, in a tone equally bitter and humorous, it combines personal anecdotes and observations along with press clippings from the early 1990s, allegorically told stories of Croatia's nouveau riche class, and citations from her favourite authors. It cites one of Ugrešić's last texts in Croatian press prior to her permanent departure from the country – 'Pravo na kolektivnu cenzuru' ['The Right to Collective Censorship'] – published in 1993 in the now defunct Croatian weekly *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*

[*Dalmatia Weekly*]. In that text Ugrešić refers to herself as an 'outsajder' ['outsider'] and states that her essay 'Kultura licitarskog srca' ['Gingerbread Heart Culture'], which the well-known University of Zagreb academic Viktor Žmegač criticized as anti-patriotic in the Austrian magazine *Literatur und Kritik*, was not a political pamphlet but a reflection on both communist and nationalist kitsch (Ugrešić, 1993b). In 'A Question of Perspective', Ugrešić describes her article from *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* as a final attempt to initiate public dialogue that was greeted with silence or, rather, did not result in a direct confrontation with the author. This impossibility to establish a dialogue or to prevent one's writing from being misconstrued by media is compared to the 'broken telephone' game. In other words, a sender's message is never received in its original form. As she unpacks the *Globus* interview with Flaker, the author characterizes the text as 'deeply contextual'; as a translator of its intricate linguistic, historical and political context, she 'masochistically agrees to losing in advance' (207). The *Globus*, which, in addition to the interview, published the infamous article that labelled Ugrešić and four other women witches in 1992, is seen as one of the key actors in the broken telephone game. For 'narrative pleasure', Ugrešić includes in her essay the relics of that game—a list of insults and accusations that had been directed at her in print (218). This juxtaposition of epithets, as humorous as it is grievous, evokes the political context and foregrounds the deeply sexist language of the denunciation. The invective 'baba koja progoni Hrvatsku' is translated by Williams as a 'broad persecuting Croatia' (Ugrešić, 2010: 172; Ugrešić 2011: 219). Though not inaccurate, in this case, the translation dims the intensity of the insult. The term 'baba' (i.e. old woman or grandmother in Croatian) derides the age of the accused and connotes unattractiveness or wickedness that might have been encompassed by the word 'hag'.

The last on the list of insults is the one that has had the strongest repercussion: 'witch.' Ugrešić likens her treatment in Croatian media at the time to the present-day practice of witch-hunting in poverty-stricken regions of the world. In an imagined dialogue with her detractors, she dramatizes the broken telephone game and finds poetic justice in the garbled message. In fact, Ugrešić re-appropriates the witch label

that had been attached to her by nationalist critics in the 1990s. As she concludes her essay 'A Question of Perspective', she writes wryly:

The wind gently licking my face, I take my broom and silently steal away. I look down and my countrymen wave happily, their smiling leaf-like faces turned skywards. From this height they look like cabbages left to grow in an abandoned field. Beneath them, in the dirt, human corpses are rotting. They help the cabbages grow bigger and shinier. Or is that just how things appear to me? I admit, it's all a question of perspective, and we're all responsible for our own. And, light as a feather, I ride the wind. (Ugrešić, 2011: 245)

This poignant image encapsulates the tenor of many of Ugrešić's essays – a crystalline language imbued with irony, humour, and an aversion to cliché. She has adopted and adapted the essay in a manner that simultaneously reflects her aesthetic and moral concerns. In other words, she has found a literary form that accommodates pithy commentary; linguistic and narrative inventiveness; as well as a fruitful intersection between art and reality, the fictional and the factual, the personal and the political.

Similarly, Ugrešić's essay 'Realizacija metafore' ['The Realization of Metaphor'] from the collection of essays *Kultura laži* (1995) consists of three fragments: (1) an analysis of the Yugoslav wars as a literary text, (2) the aforementioned essay 'Clean Croatian Air' from 1992, and (3) a postscript written five years after the publication of that essay. Prefaced by an epigraph from Danilo Kiš's essay 'Saveti mladom piscu' ['Advice to a Young Writer'] (1984), which cautions against perpetuating an obsession with the haste of history ('trains of history') and faith in any such metaphors, Ugrešić's essay catalogues ominous and inciting metaphors embedded within folk song, material culture, media, and nationalist rhetoric in former Yugoslavia. The postscript recounts the reception of 'Clean Croatian Air' and the ensuing harassment that led to Ugrešić's exile. More than an update or coda to her essay, the postscript revisits the recurring metaphors, prolonging the conversation, and calling attention to permutations and literal manifestations of these figures of speech – from souvenir cans of clean air to political purges and ethnic cleansing, crowned by then President

Franjo Tuđman's ride on the so-called *Vlak slobode* (Freedom Train) across the newly independent Croatia in 1995.

'The Realization of Metaphor' was republished on the web site of Serbian NGO *Peščanik* in 2015 under the new title: 'Esej koji putuje već pune 23 godine' ['The Essay That Has Been Travelling for 23 Years'] with two additional segments. With a touch of self-irony, Ugrešić (2015a) highlights a feature story from Croatian news portal *24sata* about a Russian woman who decided to market souvenir cans filled with Adriatic air. Dissociated from cans with clean Croatian air that were on the market in the late 1980s and termed a 'political prank', the second iteration of souvenir cans is perceived as a patented commercial product. Inseparable from the cans are the tropes of cleanness and cleansing. These resurface in a controversial speech by the head of Croatian Conservative Party and European parliamentarian, Ruža Tomašić, who suggested that Serbs living in Croatia might need to leave for Serbia.¹² Relating these metaphors to Serb and Croat nationalist discourses, Ugrešić ironizes their difference and sameness. The new title of the essay hints at its continuing relevance: the author's desire to continue engaging with the questions that brought about the initial text. Once again Ugrešić intermingles personal anecdotes, snippets from local media, and wordplay. This last tactic revolves in particular around the word *ruža* [rose], which besides a female first name alludes to 'Ruža hrvatska' ['Croatian Rose'], a popular love ballad released by the Croatian rock band Prljavo Kazaliste in the late 1980s amid growing political and ethnic tensions in Yugoslavia. Thus, her essay brings into focus the recursive nature of symbols and language on which nationalist discourse operates.

Finally, the essay is for Ugrešić also a means of responding to literary critics and media debates that take place in Croatia and neighbouring regions in whose language she continues to write while living abroad and self-identifying as a transnational, out-of-nation zone author. In the essay 'My Ear the Chauvinist, My Eye the Misanthrope' from *Karaoke Culture* the narrator mentions that a blogger accused her of exaggeration in her writing, while the essay 'Žene Europe' ['Women

¹² See the article by Ivana Nikolic and Sven Milekic on *Balkan Insight* news website (7 May 2015). Available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatian-mep-s-serb-statements-sparks-anger>.

of Europe] from *Peščanik* includes a comment to a review of her essay collection *Europe in Sepia*, which was published in a Croatian weekly following the author's reception of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2016.¹³ While she does not name the publication or the author, Ugrešić (2015b) cites directly the words of the literary critic who remarked that the Neustadt prize was, by extension, a prize to the forgotten Croatian essay to which the author owed both the form and the expression. Dissecting the words of the critic, especially his usage of the verb *dugovati* (to owe), Ugrešić responds to what she perceives as a deeply ingrained chauvinism in the contemporary cultural environment of the region.¹⁴ This essay, akin to the aforementioned 'A Question of Perspective', also highlights the author's positioning vis-à-vis the country of her birth: it is an observation from a distance, almost exclusively from within the texts.

The notion of perspective equally permeates Ugrešić's last collection of essays. The essay that shares the title with the book, 'Europe in Sepia', makes a reference to an internal camera with which the narrator records her observations about the continent and, then, akin to photography editing software, promptly applies a uniform filter. 'It's as if the surrounding reality is a screen, stuck to my hand an invisible remote with three options: past, present, future. But only one of them works: past, *sepia*' (Ugrešić, 2014: 19). While observing the reality as a screen implies a sense of distance, indirectness as well as amusement or facile consumption, the sepia filter conveys a sense of nostalgia and blurred vision. After her visit to Slovakia, the narrator, 'incapable of finding pleasure in the beauty of small differences' in Central Europe, chooses to save only two pictures on her internal camera (Ugrešić, 2014: 21). In 'Wittgenstein's Steps', reflecting on what she sees as irreparable tribalism in Europe, a constant possibility of a new war and failed promises of

¹³ An amended version of 'Žene Europe' was published in September 2016 issue of *World Literature Today*. Translated by Ellen Elias-Bursač as 'The Scold's Bridle', the essay is available at <https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/september/scolds-bridle-dubravka-ugresic>.

¹⁴ The literary review in question, titled 'Kroćenje zvjerčice' ['Taming the Little Beast'], was written by Nenad Rizvanović for the Croatian weekly *Novosti* in November of 2015. Published by the Serb National Council in Croatia and funded by Croatia's Council for National Minorities and the National Endowment for Democracy, *Novosti* features columns from prominent journalists in the region. Rizvanović's review is available at <http://www.portalnovosti.com/krocenje-zvjercice>.

various ideologies, the narrator expresses a fear of 'the empty screen, of the absence of future projections' (Ugrešić, 2014: 35). In the essay 'Bad Pupils', on the other hand, the narrator adds eavesdropping to her repertoire. 'Spying on the everyday is half a writer's job; the rest is creative filtering of the information gleaned' (Ugrešić, 2014: 111). This idea of mediated experience and selective attention, as represented by the screen metaphor, dovetails with the underpinnings of the essay as an exploratory, provisional literary form.

Conclusion

As she engages with questions of representation of reality and the representation/performance of identity, Ugrešić opts for a literary form that, from its very origins tends toward experimentation and self-reflection. In her essay 'ON-zone' from *Europe in Sepia*, Ugrešić the essayist observes that 'somewhere on a distant shore a recipient awaits our message. To paraphrase Borges, he or she exists to misunderstand it and transform it into something else' (Ugrešić, 2014: 221). As she experiments with the container of her message(s) and the identity of the messenger, Ugrešić pushes the boundaries of the essay and, at times, challenges an attendant biographical determinism or mis-reading of her work. This is not to say that Ugrešić subscribes to the theories of the death of the author heralded by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault in the 1960s who claimed, respectively, that there were as many meanings to a text as there were readers and that reading a text in connection with its author (i.e. author-function) limited the full range of its meanings (1977: 142–148; 1979: 141–160). Both in her interviews and her essays Ugrešić acknowledges the dictates of the literary market and attendant biographic determinism that encroach on her texts; nonetheless, she accords importance to personal agency and authorial imprint in her writing. From her earlier essays that dissected the political discourses of communism and nationalism through her more recent writings on globalized markets and the precarious identities of those who do not fit the reductionist and exclusionary labels, Ugrešić has placed her personal experience and position at the centre of her writing and the claim for discursive authority.

In her interview in *Wasafiri*, she states that, though not numerous, there are some 'wonderful readers' of her texts in the world, including literature students, critics, researchers and translators (Velickovic, 2014: 16). While such a statement may be taken for elitism – the likes of which Levy (2014) alluded to in her review of *Europe in Sepia* – it also emphasizes Ugrešić's concern with the study and reception of literature outside the commercial dictates as well as her acknowledgement of the importance of authorial imprint and agency.

It is important to note that Jorge Luis Borges, whom the narrator of *Europe in Sepia* quotes, was also a prolific essayist. In his essay collection *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*, Borges assumes a conversational tone as he mediates on literature, books, authorship and solicits his readers' opinions. He acknowledges the vast system and the inherent intertextuality of literature, but simultaneously expresses an ambivalence regarding notions of limitlessness imagination and individual genius. For instance, in his essay 'The Flower of Coleridge', Borges meditates on the idea of the unity of literature (the so-called 'Spirit') whereby individual authors and writing careers do not count much in the grand scheme since they all partake in one single text. As he states, tongue in cheek, in the 'Epilogue' of his book, his essays have a 'tendency to presuppose (and to verify) that the number of fables or metaphors of which men's imagination is capable is limited, but that these few inventions can be all things for all men, like the Apostle' (Borges, 1964: 189). Ugrešić's attention to the very act of literary creation, her insistence on particularized authorship and experimentation, I would argue, challenge to an extent Borges' conception of literature as a vast, yet finite and, one might add, androcentric system in which ideas count more than individual agency.

Lidia Curti reminds us that one way to deny 'the rigidity of the law of genre' or avoid 'assimilation to the same' is to cross over and over again the borders of genres, resurrect and erase them or rewrite them continually (1998: 53). Ugrešić's own voice, and metafictional narrative strategies, as evident in her writing and her interviews, demonstrate an intent to continually explode universalist narratives of nation and literary canon. This tension between the texts, perspectives and re-readings is also

evident in Ugrešić's latest work, the essay-novel *Lisica*. As the narrator remarks, 'literary footnotes struggle for survival like roosters bred for fighting; at a given moment, it all boils down to who will turn whom into a footnote; who will be the text and who its footnote' (Ugrešić, 2017: 241).¹⁵

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers as well as the editors, Caroline Edwards, Martin Brown and David M. Bell, for their comments and suggestions. For their feedback on an earlier version of this paper, I am grateful to Agatha Schwartz and J. Douglas Clayton. Finally, this research would not be possible without the extensive collection and an excellent interlibrary loan service of the University of Ottawa Library.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Barthes, R** 1977 The Death of the Author. In: Heath, S (Ed. and tr.), *Image, Music, Text*, pp. 142–148. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Borges, J L** 1964 *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*. Translated by R. C. Simms. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Brooke-Rose, C** 2002 *Invisible Author: Last Essays*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Craith, M N** 2009 Writing Europe: A Dialogue of 'Liminal Europeans'. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 17(2): 198–208. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2009.00069.x>
- Currie, M** 2011 *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-26812-9>
- Curti, L** 1998 *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation*. New York: New York University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26207-6>

¹⁵ Original text: 'Književne fusnote bore se za opstanak kao pijetlovi priučeni za borbu, sve se u nekom času svodi na to tko će koga pretvoriti u svoju fusnotu, tko će koga *pofusnotiti*, tko će biti tekst, a tko fusnota.'

- de Obaldia, C** 1995 *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism and the Essay*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DuPlessis, R B** 1996 f-Words: An Essay on the Essay. *American Literature*, 68(1): 15–45. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2927538>
- Elias-Bursać, E** 2010 Translating Dubravka Ugrešić and David Albahari. In: Agoston-Nikolova, E (Ed.), *Shoreless Bridges: South East European Writing in Diaspora*, pp. 133–148. New York: Rodopi.
- Espenschade, L E** 2010 Translator Q&A: Gurevich & Anderson and Ilf & Petrov. Available at: <http://lizoksbooks.blogspot.ca/2010/01/translator-q-gurevich-anderson-and-ilf.html> [Last accessed 1 March 2018].
- Foucault, M** 1979 What is an Author? In: Harari, J V (Ed. and tr.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, pp. 141–160. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Genette, G** 1997 *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by J. E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511549373>
- Good, G** 1988 *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay*. London: Routledge.
- Heynders, O** 2016 *Writers as Public Intellectuals: Literature, Celebrity, Democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137467645>
- Kolanović, M** 2008 Patchwork identitet: esejistika Dubravke Ugrešić. [Patchwork Identity: Essays of Dubravka Ugrešić.] *Ulaznica*, 211–212: 153–165. Available at: <http://www.zrbiblio.rs/images/ulaznica/Ulaznica-211-212-web.pdf> [Last accessed 8 April 2018].
- Kovačević, N** 2007 Yugoslavia, an ‘Almost Forbidden Word’: Cultural Policy in Times of Nationalism – Interview with Dubravka Ugrešić. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 17(3): 299–315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407700701621533>
- Kovačević, N** 2013 Storming the EU Fortress: Communities of Disagreement in Dubravka Ugrešić. *Cultural Critique*, 83: 63–86. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5749/culturalcritique.83.2013.0063>
- Lanser, S S** 1992 *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Levy, M** 2014 Dubravka Ugrešić. Europe in Sepia. *World Literature Today*, 88(2): 78.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7588/worllitetoda.88.2.0078>
- Lukić, J** 2006 Poetics, Politics and Gender. In: Lukić, J, Regulska, J and Završek, D (Eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, pp. 239–257. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Medin, D** 2015 A Conversation with Dubravka Ugrešić. *Music & Literature*, 6. Available at: <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/5/12/a-conversation-with-dubravka-ugresic> [Last accessed 8 February 2017].
- Meyer, P** 1993 Scholarship and Art. Interview with Dubravka Ugrešić. *Cross Currents*, 12: 189–203. Available at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/crossc/ANW0935.1993.001/197> [Last accessed 16 July 2017].
- Moi, T** 2009 'I Am Not a Woman Writer.' About Women, Literature and Feminist Theory Today. *Eurozine*. Available at: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-06-12-moi-en.html> [Last accessed 15 January 2017].
- Obradović, D** 2016 *Writing the Yugoslav Wars: Literature, Postmodernism, and the Ethics of Representation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Available at: <http://www.open.org/search?identifier=625680> [Last accessed 11 July 2017].
- Skok, J** 1971 Iskre tematske i stilske vještine. [Sparks of Thematic and Stylistic Mastery.] *Umjetnost i dijete*, 21: 39–40.
- Shklovsky, V** 2015 Art, as Device. Translated by A. Berlina. *Poetics Today*, 36(3): 151–174. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-3160709>
- Slapšak, S** 2016 As a trained writer, I had to rethink fiction. Interview with Dubravka Ugrešić. *Versopolis*. Available at: <http://www.versopolis.com/interview/217/as-a-trained-writer-i-had-to-rethink-fiction> [Last accessed 20 February 2017].
- Ugrešić, D** 1983 *Život je bajka*. [*Life is a Fairy Tale*.] Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske.
- Ugrešić, D** 1993a *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*. Translated by C. Hawkesworth. New York: Viking.
- Ugrešić, D** 1993b Pravo na kolektivnu cenzuru. ['The Right to Collective Censorship.'] *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, pp. 22–23. 16 June.
- Ugrešić, D** 1998 *The Culture of Lies*. Translated by C. Hawkesworth. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

- Ugrešić, D** 2005 *Lend Me Your Character*. Translated by C. Hawkesworth and M. H. Heim. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press.
- Ugrešić, D** 2008a *Nobody's Home: Essays*. Translated by E. Elias-Bursać. Rochester: Open Letter.
- Ugrešić, D** 2008b Women's Cultural Canon. *Aspasia*, 2: 169–174. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2008.020110>
- Ugrešić, D** 2010 *Napad na minibar*. Zaprešić: Fraktura.
- Ugrešić, D** 2011 *Karaoke Culture*. Translated by D. Williams. Rochester: Open Letter.
- Ugrešić, D** 2013a Evropa se sve više pretvara u muzej. [Europe Is Turning into a Museum.] Interview with Ivana Matijević. *Danas*, 18 October. Available at: http://www.danas.rs/dodaci/vikend/knjiga_danas/dubravka_ugresic_evropa_se_sve_vise_pretvara_u_muzej.54.html?news_id=269552 [Last accessed 11 February 2017].
- Ugrešić, D** 2013b Ovo je mala sredina i sve kulturne poruke nabijene su skrivenim sadržajima. [This Is a Parochial Environment and All Cultural Messages Are Packed with Hidden Meanings.] Interview with Krunoslav Juraić and Ivana Perić. *Jat*, 1(1): 271–277. Available at: <http://hrcak.srce.hr/11318918> [Last accessed 11 February 2017].
- Ugrešić, D** 2014 *Europe in Sepia*. Translated by D. Williams. Rochester: Open Letter.
- Ugrešić, D** 2015a Esej koji putuje već pune 23 godine. [The Essay That Has Been Travelling for 23 Years.] Available at: <http://pescanik.net/esej-koji-putuje-vec-pune-23-godine/> [Last accessed 4 March 2017].
- Ugrešić, D** 2015b Žene Europe. [Women of Europe.] Available at: <http://pescanik.net/zene-europe/> [Last accessed 12 March 2017].
- Ugrešić, D** 2017 *Lisica*. [*The Fox*.] Zagreb: Fraktura.
- Vanuska, K** 2009 Citizen of Literature: Dubravka Ugrešić. *The Quarterly Conversation*, 17. Available at: <http://quarterlyconversation.com/citizen-of-literature-dubravka-ugresic> [Last accessed 15 January 2017].
- Velickovic, V** 2014 *Europe in Sepia: An Interview with Dubravka Ugrešić*. *Wasafiri*, 29(2): 13–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2014.885306>
- Velickovic, V** 2015 'Justabit-Racist': Dubravka Ugrešić, Cosmopolitanism and the Post-Yugoslav Condition. In: Platt, L and Upstone, S (Eds.) *Postmodern Literature*

and Race, pp. 145–159. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107337022.013>

Visković, V 2004 About Dubravka Ugrešić. Translated by M. Kovačiček. *Relations*, 1–2: 129–134.

VP Editors 2016 The Exhaustion of Literature: An Interview with Dubravka Ugrešić. *Verbivoracious Press*. Available at: <http://www.verbivoraciouspress.org/the-exhaustion-of-literature-an-interview-with-dubravka-ugresic/> [Last accessed 20 February 2017].

Wachtel, A 2006 *Remaining Relevant after Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, D 2013 *Writing Postcommunism: Towards a Literature of the East European Ruins*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137330086>

How to cite this article: Rokolj, T 2018 Many a Footnote and Afterword: Dubravka Ugrešić and the Essay. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(1): 31, pp. 1–30, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.202>

Published: 07 June 2018

Copyright: © 2018 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Open Library of Humanities is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS The Open Access logo, which is a stylized 'A' inside a circle.