



Master's Degree in
Women's and Gender
Studies

Decease of our colleague Dubravka Ugrešić

17/03/2023

We are deeply sorry to announce that our colleague and prominent writer Dubravka Ugrešić passed away last Friday, March 17th, 2023.

We want to share with the GEMMA community [the obituary that our colleague Prof. Jasmina Lukić has dedicated to her:](#)

One of the most important European writers, Dubravka Ugrešić passed away on March 17, 2023 in Amsterdam. An unexpected, shocking news for many, myself included. Dubravka Ugrešić was my friend and a part of my life for many decades, and it will take me a lot of time to get used to the idea that that she is gone.

Born in Kutina in 1949, Ugrešić worked as a literary scholar at the University of Zagreb's Institute for Theory of Literature, parallelly establishing a successful literary career. She was one of the first postmodernist writers to play with genres, write metafiction (*Life is a Fairytale*), and mix high arts with popular culture. She created unforgettable characters like Steffie Speck from *In the Jaws of Life*, or Pipo Fink from *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*.

With the rise of nationalism and the beginning of the wars for Yugoslav succession, Ugrešić stood out as a strong antinationalist and antiwar public voice, which led to prolonged media lynching and social ostracism directed against her. Under this extreme pressure Ugrešić left Croatia in 1993, moving at first to Berlin and later to Amsterdam, where she has permanently settled. She soon became an icon of freethinking, antiwar and antinationalist people in the former Yugoslav region.

Refusing all imposed identity categories, Ugrešić ferociously fought for her right to be "nobody", and to speak from the margins. Always taking a stance, she took responsibility for every word she uttered, deeply convinced that the first and most important task of a writer as a public intellectual is to speak truth to power. At the same time, she argued equally fiercely for her right as a writer to be known by her name only, and not by her ethnic origin or any other external labels. As a result, she remained an outcast of institutionalized national literary canons.



Besides her works of fiction Dubravka Ugrešić published several volumes of sharp, witty, engaged and engaging essays on various aspects of war and post-war realities of former Yugoslavia, on the post-socialist transition of Eastern Europe, on life in migration, and on Europe and European fears and hopes. Her essays are one of a kind, beautifully bitter observations, and yet each of them is a chiseled piece of fiction. From the first volume of essays, *Have a Nice Day*, to *Nobody's Home*, *Karaoke Culture*, *Europe in Sepia*, and the most recent, *The Age of Skin*, her essays uncover, reveal, provoke, and change the way we see ourselves and others. Particularly important is *The Culture of Lies*, a collection of essays in which she called out her colleagues, writers and intellectuals, for their responsibility in creating and sustaining the war culture in former Yugoslavia, a call which resonates beyond the borders of the region.

Since 1991 Dubravka Ugrešić wrote several novels, each of them a masterpiece. The first two, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, and *The Ministry of Pain* speak of refugees and migration, memory and forgetting, right to justice and its loss. *Baba Jaga has Laid an Egg* is a novel about old age, but also a literary manifesto of women's strength, as well as a call for women to reveal and use their hidden and neglected powers. And finally, *The Fox* speaks about her greatest topic, literature, and reveals once again Dubravka Ugrešić as a grand maestra of words, a writer for whom life first and foremost represents material for a good story. Wrapped up in red foxtails – “the fox is the writer's totem” says one of the characters – the narrator disappears at the novel's end “swallowed by darkness”. At the time I thought it was an effective narrative closure. Now I know that it was a real disappearing act.

It is hard to accept it. Dubravka Ugrešić is the one who taught me that literature has a life of its own, and a power over reality. So, I will keep on searching for her there. Because as she put it in her latest novel, “if we don't believe in the magic of literature, it is just a meaningless string of words.”

You can start by exploring her site: <https://www.dubravkaUgrešić.com/books/>. The red tail is waiving.

Jasmina Lukić