



POETRY

## The Border of My Body

Dubravka Djurić



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[www.youtube.com/channel/  
UCyoyQDnud4pDMCq11Linwag](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyoyQDnud4pDMCq11Linwag)

With my husband Miško Šuvaković, I spent October 1998 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. It was a time when Serbia expected a NATO intervention, which happened in the spring the following year. I was intensively reading the selection of Slovenian poetry translated into Serbo-Croatian by the Slovenian-Bosnian poet, Josip Osti. As someone raised as a Yugoslavian by nationality, the wars in Yugoslavia were a personal drama. Inspired by Osti's translations and the political situation, I wrote fourteen poems titled "Eseji o slobodi kretanja" ("Essays on the Freedom of Moving"). At the centre of most of these poems were the questions of borders in materiality and in our minds, and of the impossibility of moving through the new countries' borders that appeared during and after the Yugoslavian wars. The emotional relationship to the war as well as the geopolitical and geocultural changes in this region are at the center of these poems. The two poems presented here were published in my collection of poetry, *All-Over* (Belgrade: Feminist 94, 2004).

**Dubravka Djurić** (1961, Dubrovnik, Croatia), lives in Belgrade, Serbia. She received her M.A. at the Department of General Literature, Faculty of Philology and Literary Theory, University of Belgrade, and her Ph.D. at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. She is Professor at Singidunum University's Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade. With Miško Šuvaković she co-edited the critical book, *Impossible Histories: Avant-Garde, Neo-avant-garde and Post-Avant-Garde in Yugoslavia* (The MIT Press, 2003). She is co-editor and translator with Vladimir Kopicl, *Novi pesnički poredak: antologija novije američke poezije* [*New Poetry Order: An Anthology of New American Poetry*] (2002). With Biljana D. Obradović she co-edited *Cat Painters: An Anthology of Serbian Poetry* (Dialogos Press, 2016). She was a co-founding co-editor of *ProFemina: Magazine for Women's Literature and Culture* (1995-2011). She writes and performs poetry and has published eight collections of her own poetry. Her poetry has been translated into English, Polish, Italian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Slovenian, Albanian and Hungarian languages. With Biljana D. Obradović she is working on an English translation of her selected poetry. She translates American poetry, with her primary focus on Language poetry. She has translated books of poetry by American poets Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Rosmarie Waldrop and Jerome Rothenberg, as well as Canadian poet Joe Blades.

## Border

Everything is in perfect order—it is not in order  
Sea within easy reach of the index finger  
—salty, sweet, unpleasant, tiring  
Within reach—Fiume<sup>1</sup>  
In the curvy ride of the Istrian karst  
—pathways and smells  
    grass, feces, bug, dog  
a crowd can be anywhere  
it waves in the wind  
Izola<sup>2</sup> exposed in its wasted wandering  
immediate experience of branching  
Borders that are not crossed  
Of brain curvatures  
Within reach—Fiume  
On the flying aerojet without a helmsman  
on the ship released down the water  
it's gone—the memory of the present  
eats its very own existence—  
the stone sways, gives way  
to pressure  
Dizziness of a glamorous inscription  
Mystic night drinks  
Confronted with transience—the body gr(l)ows  
A movement, throaty sounds  
Scream on the stage  
for you

Translated by Biljana D. Obradović

## Notes

1 Poem is written in Ljubljana in 1998. *Fiume* or *Rijeka* (depending on the local or Italian spelling)—a city on the Istrian Coast of the Adriatic Sea, in Croatia. Author's note: The poet uses the Italian name for a Croatian city pointing how the city she came to for her

teenager time became a foreign city, because of the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

2 *Isola* or *Izola* (depending on the local or Italian spelling)—a city on the Istrian Coast of the Adriatic Sea, in Slovenia.

### The Border of My Body<sup>3</sup>

I ask myself what happened with the European Heritage  
and the Latin Middle Ages by Ernst Robert Curtius<sup>4</sup>  
as I sit in the studio apartment on the outskirts of Ljubljana,  
reading Bodies of Modernity by Tamar Garb  
and Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry in the Material World by Michael Davidson

I think of Nostalgia<sup>5</sup>  
about the passage of time  
about the welfare of moments  
in which the body and mind are relaxed  
of the synthesis of points of view  
of the broken mirror into which  
a Narcissist-woman looks at herself  
about the calmness and speeding up of changes  
of stasis that constricts us

The body of the hypertext

Friends, old and new

Cryptotext in the background of a different culture

Theat deals with pornography, with interruptions and details  
with continuity, with new beginnings with  
the newly constructed “pasts”

In anticipation of Kulik’s<sup>6</sup> performance

In anticipation of Vlasta’s<sup>7</sup> performance

While speeches are being made one after the other, monologues, dialogues  
in which the quiet female poet paints reality  
without stress, without fear

Pyrotechnicians still are doing their jobs well

And that’s not yet the end

Nor is that the end of meticulousness

Translated by Biljana D. Obradović

### Notes

- <sup>3</sup> This poem refers to a University Law from 1998 by which Milošević’s government intended to abolish the autonomy of the university and to remove all nonobedient professors. All of Djurić’s professors that taught at the Department of General Literature and Theory of Literature were suspended, with some even fired.
- <sup>4</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius (1886–1956) was a German literary scholar, philologist, and Romance language literary critic, best known for his 1948 study *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*, translated in English as *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. The reference to Curtius’s book is the reference to the socialist time when Djurić studied General Literature and this book was an important for that program. In the new political circumstances of the 90s, this book for the poet referring to the European heritage became even more important than ever before. Garb’s book refers to her feminist position, and Davidson’s book, she bought at Ljubljana’s University used bookstore, and refers to her interest in Language poetry.
- <sup>5</sup> *Nostalgia*—a café in the center of Ljubljana.
- <sup>6</sup> Oleg Borisovich Kulik (b. 1961) is a Ukrainian-born Russian performance artist, sculptor, photographer and curator. He is best known for his controversial artistic performances in which he acted like a dog.
- <sup>7</sup> *Vlasta Delimar*—Croatian performance artist.