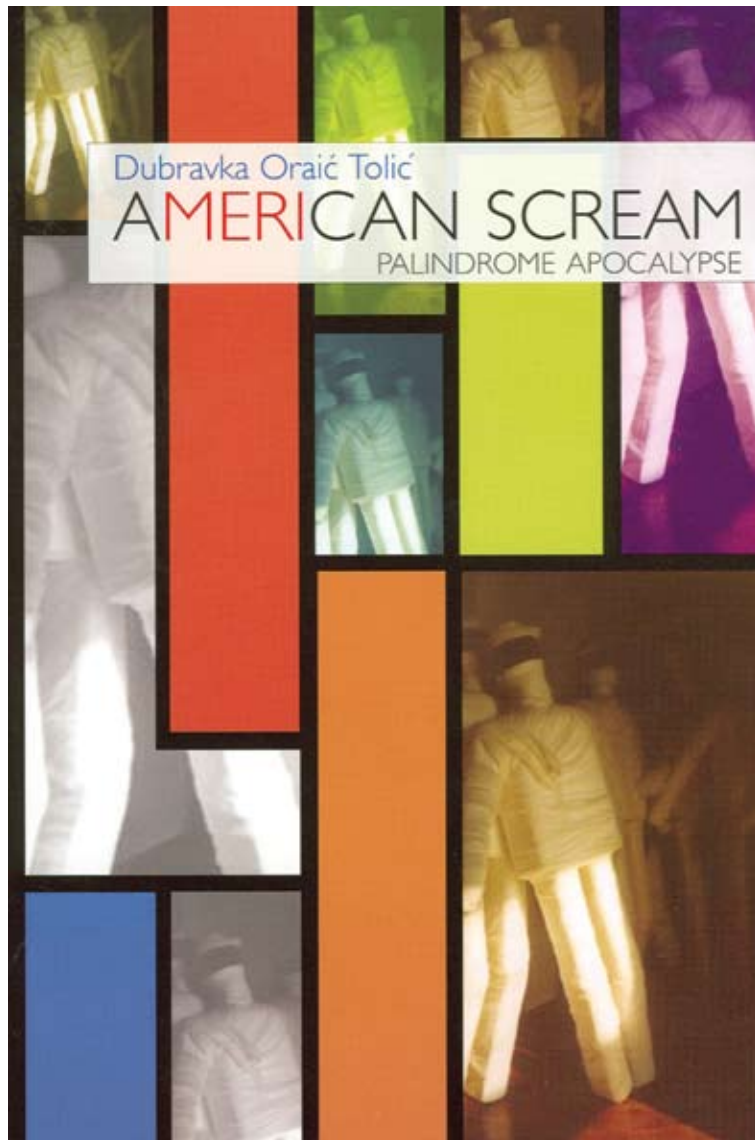


Stone Table," we hear in a characteristic natural setting the poignant lyricism of someone who has learned to live quietly and beautifully: "I, who so often used to wish to float free / of earth, now with all my being want to stay, / to climb with you on other evenings to this stone, / . . . like scions of Sheffield Seek-No-Furtherers / grafted for our lifetimes onto paradise root-stock." In "Everyone Was in Love," a poem in which his two little children, Maud and Fergus, appear naked in a doorway with garter snakes draped over them like clothes, we find this startling passage: "Inside the double-hinged jaw, a frog's green / webbed hind feet were being drawn, / like a diver's, very slowly as if into deepest waters. / Perhaps thinking I might be considering rescue, / Maud said, 'Don't. Frog is already elsewhere.'" Also, don't miss the poem "It All Comes Back," perhaps the best poem in the book about his relationship with his children. There are so many passages of scintillating beauty in this book that it simply must be read.

Finally, "When the Towers Fell," first published in the *New Yorker*, is vintage Kinnell and superbly written. "Occasional" poems are notably difficult to write, particularly when the occasion is simultaneously deeply traumatic and recent. Kinnell attempts (and succeeds in my opinion) to achieve a persuasive rendering of this world event by mixing journalistic particularity with imagistic and metaphorical resonance. Although some



readers may resist any poem, no matter how well written, this soon on *this* subject, those who are ready will experience a communal expression of grief that could only have been written by a poet of Kinnell's experience and rare gifts.

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Dubravka Oraić Tolić. *American Scream: Palindrome Apocalypse*. Sibelan Forrester, William E. Yuill, & Sonja Bašić, trs. Portland, Oregon: Ooligan. 2005 (released 2006). iii + 227 pages. \$14.95. ISBN 1-932010-10-6

THE CROATIAN POET Dubravka Oraić Tolić is also a literary theorist. A scholar of twentieth-century Russian and Croatian literature, she applies her extensive knowledge of literary devices to her own lit-

erary practice. The book contains two lengthy poetry cycles, *American Scream* and *Palindrome Apocalypse*, as well as two prose pieces, one with a political orientation, the other in the style of an autobiographical literary analysis that provides the theoretical-historical framework for the author's own experiment in poetry.

Oraić Tolić conceived *Palindrome Apocalypse* in the 1980s, but with the 1991 attack of the Yugoslav Army on Croatia, she was reminded of disturbing visions from her poem again. A clash between East and West on a global scale, the author maintains, would erase all oppositions, imposing on humanity and art alike the language of palindrome or utopia. The unfinished poem, it turns out, foreshadowed a war on a smaller scale that also involved a clash between East and West, between the Serbian and Croatian models of the state, of society, and, ultimately, of language. As the country was dissolving, the author, now from a different moment in history, reached the same conclusion: that a forceful erasing of differences can result only in an apocalypse.

Oraić Tolić's other postmodernist project, *American Scream*, came out in Croatian in 1981 and appears as part 1 of the English volume. Both poetry cycles have been masterfully translated by Sibelan Forrester, who won an award from the Association for Women in Slavic Studies for this collection. *American Scream* consists of a series of ninety-nine poems plus one epigrammatic piece that opens the cycle. This structure not only evokes Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*; it also creates an epic metadiscourse with two great works from the Croatian

literary tradition, Gundulić's *Tears of the Prodigal Son*, and Mažuranić's *The Death of Smail-aga Čengić*. This entire work could be viewed as a practical execution of the "citation theory" on which the author wrote extensively in the 1990s. Verbal and stylistic quotations abound, not only encompassing the sphere of the literary and linguistic but also extending to philosophy, history and politics. Starting with the Bible, Homer, Archimedes, and Xenon, through to Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Gogol, Majakovskij, and Mandelstam, to Columbus and Vespucci, to Marx, Stalin and Tito, the author, using the device of citation, compresses a picture of Western civilization into her metaphorical vision of America. On a stylistic level, the influence of Russian poets such as Khlebnikov and Majakovskij is particularly visible. Although Oraić Tolić departs in many ways from notions of "trans-mental language" and "agit-prop" as practiced by these two writers, her playfulness with and politicizing of the language, her attempt to turn it inside out and chisel new meanings out of lexical mazes is a direct echo of their quest for a redefinition of language, one which early-twentieth-century literati deemed necessary, for one reason, and those living in its final decades have sought, for another.

*American Scream* is as much about what America is (and is not), as it is about the human condition in the contemporary world. America is a specific geographic determinant, but it is also the locus we reached while searching for something else. As such, it is both a disappointment and a victory. In broader terms, the work examines the position and role

of art, the concepts and misinterpretations of history, the supremacy and failures of political systems, idealism and the quest for the new. The cycle is self-referential in both meaning and style in the sense that its subject deals with a journey to and examination of a continent, but this is also a literary journey that exploits an array of writing styles, thereby reflecting on the very process of writing. The path to discovery, both geographic/historical and literary/artistic, entails a redefinition of human values, prompts the appearance of new symbols and meanings, and causes shifts in our cultural templates.

From this cacophony of voices and modes of thinking, it emerges that the principal hero of Oraić Tolić's work is language itself, and that her most visible stylistic technique is a play with the world-defining semes contained within it. The linguistic world that Dubravka Oraić Tolić construes is constantly falling apart at the seams as she uncovers the processes that create meanings and redefine them. This fluid picture of a collective cultural consciousness in which all diachronic levels are collapsed into one moment (now) leaves the individual at a clearing, exposed to the winds of history and without a compass to find "the right way." When all spatial and temporal spheres merge into one, and all meanings exist simultaneously and in collision with one another, the only option for modern man, if he is to hear his own voice and find his own self, is to scream.

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