

# THE ARTIST'S VOICE SINCE 1981

## BOMBSITE

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Dubravka Ugrešić  
by Svetlana Boym  
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Courtesy of New Directions.

I met Dubravka Ugrešić in 1996 at an orientation session at the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College, where we were asked to sit in a close circle and tell our life stories in front of perfect strangers. Somehow, under the pressure of collective expectations, our short confessions began to resemble one another's, acquiring an uncannily similar emotional pitch and literary shape. Ugrešić's, however, was

different. Even though she had been recently exiled from Croatia, accused of being one of the five “Croatian witches” (a nickname for women writers and journalists who ridiculed the nationalistic propaganda of President Franjo Tudjman), she did not present her life as a heroic tale of traumas and hardships. Instead, she told a few jokes about the pleasures of losing, and finding, one’s identity, and about the difficulties of being a writer, regardless of context.

We soon discovered that we loved the same old movie, Michelangelo Antonioni’s *The Passenger*, which is the story of a man who takes on another man’s identity and proceeds to live, and then die, carrying a false passport. The film had famously long, wistful takes that spoke to both of us of a certain freedom—the freedom to detach oneself from one’s immediate surroundings and choose one’s own fate.

Yet the luxury of detachment is not always possible, especially for a person who comes from a country like the former Yugoslavia, a place that Ugrešić puts in quotation marks. In one of her books, she recalls being stopped at customs in Western Europe and asked to fill in the blank for “nationality.” She wanted to be called “a-national” or at least “other,” but such a category was not part of the bureaucratic repertoire. Moreover, during the breakup of Yugoslavia, such non-identification with a specific ethnic group was perceived as an affront to all sides.

In the 1980s, Ugrešić was one of the prominent women writers in Yugoslavia, known for experimenting with artistic forms and gender conventions. She wrote “patchwork fiction” in which references to Kafka, Gogol and Nabokov were interwoven with recipes and quotes from women’s magazines and children’s books. In the 1990s, she found herself displaced from her readers and from her country, in the solitude of exile, writing a different kind of patchwork literature—constructed of war documents and personal tales that, with uncompromising lucidity, addressed what nobody wanted to address: the violence, nationalist betrayal and banal sort of evil unleashed by the war. For a while she persisted in being a “writer from the former Yugoslavia,” clinging to the common cultural memory of multiethnic coexistence and a great literary culture—one that was now committed to forgetting. Her most recent books, *The Culture of Lies* and *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, do not fit into the Procrustean bed of well-packaged genres. They hover between fiction, autobiography, political satire and literary criticism, and present variations on the theme of displacement, confiscation of memory, lost loves that float light as angel feathers and the ruins of former utopias. After Tudjman’s death, Ugrešić left Croatia and has not returned, but her work is now published in the three ex-Yugoslav capitals: Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb. She has made a home in Amsterdam, the city of many islands, and remains a frequent visitor to the United States.

In spite of her personal history, Ugrešić does not accept the glamorous self-definition of “writer in exile.” As a writer, it is not exile that presents a challenge to her, but the survival of any kind of serious literature in a monopoly market. This is the theme of her most recent collection of essays, *Reading Is Forbidden*. Sometimes the challenge that a writer from “another part of the world” faces, be it Eastern Europe, India or Latin America, is that she doesn’t want to be “other.” For better or for worse, she may just want to be a writer, with no exoticizing adjective.

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**SVETLANA BOYM** Dubravka, are you still smoking? Do you think it’s a cultural symptom?

**DUBRAVKA UGRESIC** Yes, I do light a cigarette or two in this land of nonsmokers. I just finished reading Eve Ensler’s book *The Vagina Monologues*, the one that caused a recent, global “vaginomania.” At this moment women in American culture are welcome to talk publicly about their liberated vaginas, but to smoke publicly is not acceptable. In his movie *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, Buñuel uses an inversion that shows his sense of absurdity. People sit on toilets around the dinner table and hold conversations. When one of them feels like having a bite of food, he/she goes to a private, secret place. We also live out a good deal of absurdity, taking it, as always, as normalcy.

**SB** I can see that smoking for you is a form of radical critique. Smokers are indeed a silent minority in America; they survive mostly in the cinema.

**DU** Do you remember the American movie *The Devil's Advocate*, with Al Pacino playing the devil? The devil and his crew (mostly women) disguise themselves so well that it is difficult to tell who is who. Soon the viewer learns how to identify the "forces of evil": they speak languages other than English (they are polyglots) and they smoke! In a culture where forces of evil are depicted in such a way I do feel tempted to smoke a cigarette or two.

There is an old Soviet movie *Forty-One*, based on the Lavrenev novel. It's a story about a young woman—a Red Army soldier—who takes a captive, a handsome White Army officer. She falls in love with her prisoner. He's a smoker, and at one point he doesn't have any paper to roll a cigarette, so she generously offers him the only paper she has, a small notebook of her poems. He will make ashes out of her poems and literally transform her poetry into a smoke. Can you imagine the opposite scene?

**SB** To play the devil's advocate, Dubravka, I am noticing that your examples are American and Russian, from the nostalgic Cold War repertoire. You know, as a child growing up in the Soviet Union, we used to love Yugoslav cowboy movies—I think they were joint GDR -Yugoslav coproductions—where the Last of the Mohicans, the Great Serpent, was played by a handsome Bosnian actor with lots of makeup. Unlike you, we didn't watch many Hollywood movies. Our America was made in the former Yugoslavia. I know that you once considered yourself a writer "from the former Yugoslavia" with many quotation marks around the word "Yugoslavia." Yet curiously, in your first collection published in English, *In the Jaws of Life and Other Stories*, there were very few local references. It might have easily taken place in any Central European capital. Your references were international and your work was more about world literature than about Yugoslav or Croatian literature. How do you see it today?

**DU** In a way, you are right. Before, when I was "local," I tried to write "globally." Now, when I am not "there" anymore, it appears that my themes are more connected with "local." I think that we all, travelers, nomads, expatriates, repeat Columbus's mistake in a way. Let me answer your question. In reference to *In the Jaws of Life*, I was so excited by the fact that my writing was going to appear in English that I greedily smuggled two and a half of my books into one. Now I am sorry I did that, but at that time a fuller English volume was more important to me than the neatness of it. As a result, that collection consists of a short novel, *Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life*, a collection of short stories, *Life Is a Fairy Tale*, and a novella, *A Love Story*. Each is a special writing project, a literary realization of some consistent literary-theoretical idea. Why is that so? At the time I wrote those little books, I was obsessed with the "literariness of literature," and which literary texts result in an art of literature.

**SB** Yet you wrote what you called a "patchwork fiction" that sews together high and popular culture. You didn't see them in opposition at that time, right?

**DU** *Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life* is a patchwork novel—which is not only its subtitle, but a name of the genre I tried to construct. Like a real patchwork, the novel is made of different parts, which, when put together, are supposed to make a cheerful, warm and "beautiful" piece of art. The word *patchwork* suggests other meanings as well: the triviality of the everyday patchwork, as a craft, does not belong to so-called high art; communality—if it is not made by a female collective, as in my case, it presupposes "women's world"; tradition—in making patchwork we respect and follow traditional patterns, done before us; and the old formalist rule of making the device bare—one can clearly see how patchwork is done. It's a story about a young typist, Steffie Speck (the author picked her name from a "Dear Abby" column), who searches for Mr. Right. The author plays with her female hero as with a doll. She makes a parody of Steffie's romances, but at the same time she is enchanted by the naivete of the romances. The author tries to deconstruct the kitsch, but she is at the same time fascinated by the magnetism of kitsch. In putting different patches together the author combines fragments from high literature (from,

say, *Madame Bovary*) with fragments from trivial literature, from women's press, advice about cooking, dieting, et cetera.

At some point *Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life* is a literary sister of Milos Hrma, a hero of Bohumil Hrabal's short novel *Closely Watched Trains*. At another level it is a literary response to feminist literary theories, which were in fashion at the time when the book was originally published, some 20 years ago. But the most interesting point is that in spite of all authorial stitches, in spite of all her attempts to make the device bare, to deconstruct, to make her hero funny, as a hero Steffie Speck wins. She is stronger, more authentic and alive than all authorial attempts and intentions. She, not the author, conquers the hearts of the readers. It is the author who tries to infiltrate the story, to break the illusion, to explain all the tricks of her craft. *Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life* is my biggest literary achievement, I guess, because of the way in which the hero of the novel defeats its author.

**SB** I am very fond of your novellas *A Love Story* and *Lend Me Your Character*, which are perfect examples of what can be called aesthetic therapy. They are parables about writers in love. There is the literary stereotype of the writer's beloved or wife who is at once muse, cook, nurse and typist. Your heroine is a woman writer who first acts as a muse and then lends one of her female characters to her lover, Bublik, who is experiencing writer's block. But in the end she takes revenge for herself and her female creations. Is this a good prescription for ending a bad love affair—as well as writer's block?

**DU** *A Love Story* is a story about how to write a story—and why. As a trigger I used a thought by Gabriel García Márquez: that writers write in order to be loved. *A Love Story* has a Scheherazade frame: it is told by a female narrator who tries to seduce a young man named Bublik, a self-proclaimed literary arbiter. In order to please him, she brings him pieces of her own writing—a kind of literary romantic proposal. As Bublik is tragically worried for literature, which is, in his words, "dying," she tries to give that dying literature a transfusion. She thinks that writing is the way to please Bublik and win his heart. It appears that Bublik is much more persuasive in dead literature than in love matters. Disappointed, she leaves him, but also gets rid of him—as a figure of the impotent male—symbolically. She eats Bublik. You would know, of course, that *bublik* is a Russian word for pretzel.

**SB** Excuse me, Dubravka, but *bublik* in Russian is a bagel and not a pretzel! Bublik has a long literary tradition from Mayakovsky to Mandel'shtam. It rhymes with republic and public.

**DU** As a Russian scholar I know what *bublik* is. But a pretzel is more offensive, don't you think? It's almost nothing...

**SB** I won't argue with you about pretzels. Literature—Russian, American, European—in short, world literature, has always played an important part in your writing. Why has it been so important to you to rewrite the key stories of world literature?

**DU** It was probably more of a liberating and playful act as a reader, which I used to be, than a Postmodern gesture. *Life Is a Fairy Tale* is a collection of short stories relating to the idea that great literary pieces are great because, among other things, they are in permanent polemics with their readers, some of whom are writers, and who are able to themselves express creatively their sense of this literary affair. Great literary pieces have that specific magical quality of provoking readers to rewrite them, to make a new literary project out of them. That could be the Borgesian idea that each book should have its counterpart, but also a Modernist idea of literature which is in constant dialogue with its literary, historical past. In *Life is a Fairy Tale* I play with literary material such as Gogol's short story "The Nose," Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata," and *Alice in Wonderland*, but also with a popular genre like *A Christmas Story* or the anecdotal absurdities of Daniil Harms. Although playful, and hopefully funny, all three parts of *In the Jaws of Life and Other Stories* deal with implicit literary questions of genre, intertextuality, metatextuality, tradition, and so on.

**SB** Do you think your writing changed dramatically during the war? Did you feel an imperative to write more directly, abandoning fiction, at least for a short period of time?

**DU** Everyday life around me changed and became threatening; when reality became morally and emotionally unacceptable, I spontaneously started to protest. At that time the genre of essay seemed to me the most appropriate literary form for expressing my thoughts, my anger and my despair. That's how I wrote, within several years, a book of essays, *The Culture of Lies*.

You are right, my writing has changed, it changed its color, it's darker now. My thematic preoccupations changed. But my literary standards, my taste and ideas about what literary art is supposed to be stayed unchanged.

**SB** Do you feel now that you cannot avoid the question of nationality? You might wish to be just a writer, but you are inevitably classified as a writer with a nationality adjective.

**DU** Unfortunately, it's a fate of writers coming from so-called small literatures. I deleted my ethnic, national and state identity because there was nothing much to delete there. But I found myself in a very ironic position: in Croatia I am not a Croatian writer anymore, but abroad I am always identified as a Croatian writer. That means that I became what I didn't want to be and what I am not. Still, what I can't delete as easily is my experience. Even if I could, I would not erase it or exchange it for a less traumatic one. That experience is rich and enriching, as well as pretty unique. Not so many people in the world were born in a country that doesn't exist anymore. I got a flavor of Eastern Europe and of the Balkans. I got more than a flavor. My mother is Bulgarian. We used to spend many summers at the coast of the Black Sea. I learned the Bulgarian language. Being a scholar of Russian literature, I spent sometime in Russia—the Soviet one. I learned that language. I experienced the taste of life under communism. Later I experienced a war and fascism, because it was fascism. The word *nationalism* is just a euphemism. I also experienced life in Western Europe and the United States. For the several years I have lived abroad, I have had the experience of dislocation, call it exile or something else. I have had the experience of the disappearance of one's own environment, the destruction of the basic values of human life. I also experienced the process of reinventing and reconstructing one's own life in a new environment.

By the way, it is interesting how people in power, Western European and American politicians, the media and even academics accepted a brutal ethnic divorce between the former Yugoslav republic as "unavoidable," almost as a "natural" end to the "communist federal state." At the same time nobody noticed that a whole population—of a million Yugoslavs either ethnically indifferent or with multiple identities or from mixed marriages—silently disappeared. Nobody offered them any rights or supported their voice in the least.

**SB** Are you nostalgic for some aspects of life in the former Yugoslavia?

**DU** I am much too angry to be nostalgic. For all those years I couldn't find an answer to some simple questions—how it's possible that people could allow themselves to be so manipulated as to go killing people with whom they lived side by side, and destroying everything they had built together.

**SB** Another ex-Yugoslav writer, Danilo Kis, who was exiled from Belgrade in the late 1970s, defined nationalism as a form of kitsch and a sort of paranoia based on the idea that whoever is not with us is against us, a formula that was favored by Lenin, and more recently used by U.S. Attorney General Ashcroft. In this formulation, the other can only be another paranoid nationalist and not an "a-national" or simply a human being. Do you have a definition of nationalism? What in your view was responsible for producing the "culture of lies" that you describe in your book of essays written during the war in Yugoslavia? How are we to distinguish between nationalism and the preservation of cultural memory?

**DU** Nationalism is first and foremost individual and collective paranoia, as Danilo Kis

wrote. As such, nationalism is as dull as a toothache. It is terribly boring because it sings the same song, always. However, at certain moments nationalism could become irresistibly attractive for the masses. It becomes an ideological refuge for those who do not have anything else. Nationalism is also a collective therapy, it boosts individual and collective self-esteem. No wonder some propagators of nationalism, as well as war criminals, were psychotherapists, like Radovan Karadzic. Furthermore, nationalism is a pleasant activity: there is nothing sweeter than having the power to exclude somebody who doesn't belong to "us" because "we" said so. Nationalism also means being in power to change cultural memory, to rewrite it touch it up, falsify it and construct it, all in order to preserve the "truth" and "history." Nationalism is like a virus spread by doctors for doctors' exclusive profit. Because in the end it is only a very profitable business for those who introduced it and who control it. That is why, when the virus is gone, ordinary people claim they can't remember how it happened and why, and what's gotten into them.

**SB** Would you make a clear distinction between the preservation of what you call "confiscated memories" and a nationalist reconstruction of the past?

**DU** Nationalism is also a struggle for the control of collective memory. As a result of the war, Croatian rulers prohibited a so-called Yugoslav past—in other words, a recent past. That meant that the majority of the people were suddenly deprived of something that was their everyday life: TV shows, music—in a word, the whole sphere of popular culture. Suddenly, listening to Lepa Brena, a Yugoslav pop singer, became a subversive activity directed against the new Croatian government. Now, some ten years later, there is a nostalgic wave all over the former Yugoslavia—performed, surprisingly, by young people. Young people started to travel and after ten years of brainwashing they are surprised to see that from the other side, as in the looking glass, there are the same young people and the world looks the same and the language they speak—wow—is the same.

**SB** In the 1990s you traveled frequently between Europe and the United States. During the war in Yugoslavia and the growing nationalism in the former Eastern Europe and the Balkans, here in the United States there was a growing interest in identity politics and multiculturalism. How do you see differences and similarities in one's ethnic and cultural identity in Europe and in the U.S.?

**DU** I think that those interests match, because they are the opposite sides of the same coin. Nationalism is basically an "identity policy," isn't it? I don't think that ethnic identities were suppressed, as nationalists like to claim today, but the opposite. I remember that in school we were supposed to know all the songs and dances of all the different peoples of Yugoslavia; we learned both alphabets, Cyrillic and Latin, we spent years in school learning the cultural histories of Slovenia, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and other regions of Yugoslavia. What was prohibited in the former Yugoslavia was nationalism, and the idea of having status as an independent state. All in all, identity policy is a toy; it could be benign, it could be dangerous, it could be liberating, it could be enslaving. When people realize that they were given a cheap toy identity—and that the real problems are somewhere else, maybe they will start to search for ways to be equal, not different. Because perpetuating the trauma of repressed ethnic and other identities produces a thick and manipulative ideological fog. Today's world is like a global psychotherapeutic resort. And there are, as always, invisible forces who are using the moment and making their own profit from it.

**SB** It is narcissism of a minor difference, to use Freud's term, isn't it? It seems you object most to the manipulative construction of a pure national or ethnic identity that results in a manipulation and disfiguration of the language itself. By the way, in what language do you write your books now? You haven't yet stitched into a global pidgin English, have you?

**DU** Probably the best name of *that* language was coined by translators who work at the Hague Tribunal. It appears that the Yugo-criminals insist on having their own translators. And furthermore, it appears—imagine!—that those Yugo-killers are extremely sensitive to language nuances; they are offended if a translator translates

a prosecutor's question, "How many people did you kill?" into a dialect that is not their own. That hurts, man—hearing the question in a "foreign" language. So the translators, as their internal joke, decided to call that language "BCS," Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian. I agree with them—there is no better coinage. I write my books in BCS. Maybe one day I will switch to BE, Bad English. An Austrian fellow writer, a friend, once said, "One day we will all speak one language, a bad English."

**SB** In your book *The Culture of Lies* you develop a very interesting conception of what you call "language in reverse or palindromic language" that I understood as a kind of perversion of language, in which peace might mean war, love hatred, and so on. You say that during the war the media in the former Yugoslavia felt justified telling lies simply because the other side lied more. And you remark that perplexed Westerners gave up on any attempt to find out what was really going on. What, in your view, is an antidote to this devil's verse that produces the circles of paranoia and indifference?

**DU** During the war, palindromes, which read equally from left to right and right to left, were not merely a linguistic device, but reality itself; war, madness and paranoia are palindromes. Even the year in which the war in Yugoslavia started was a palindrome: 1991. I don't know what could be the antidote: we live in the time of media, we think media, we breathe media, we are because media wants us to be, our beginning and end is marked by the media. It seems to me that there is no end and there is no exit. Besides, our civilization began with a palindrome. Introducing himself, Adam said, "Madam, I'm Adam." She replied, "Eve."

**SB** We are presuming that both Adam and Eve were speaking BE—bad English, right? By the way, we live in another palindromic year, 2002, a decade after 1991, the year of the unfolding Yugoslav war and the end of the Soviet Union.

But let me press you on that question a little more. Mythically, it's true that the fall into language was the first exile, yet surely you as a writer wouldn't insist on the diabolic nature of language. It seems that there are specific methods of PR and propaganda media that create pseudo-environments and manipulate actual events. At the same time, for a writer, language is a tool against this kind of clichéd devil's verse manipulated from above. She looks for a different kind of playful palindrome, a form of critical rereading or reflection. Do you think the writer still has a capacity to oppose the devil's verse through literature?

**DU** Yes, I think so. Although a writer reaches a small audience, that audience is important. Let me tell you a funny anecdote. A few years ago I gave a reading in Germany. A man came to me after the reading and said, "if your book were published before the war, I am sure that you would have been able to stop it." That was so sweet and naïve—besides which, my book wouldn't have been written if it were not for the war. This is the simplest answer to your question.

**SB** Your last novel, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, begins with the description of the objects discovered inside the stomach of a gigantic walrus named Roland. These things—a pink cigarette lighter, a small doll, a box of matches, a baby's shoe, a little plastic bag containing needles and thread—are like a museum of confiscated memories. In this respect, the contents of Roland's stomach are similar to your own text that follows, which is itself a collection in the broadest sense of the word—of memories, photographs, angel feathers, immigrant experiences. Do you think an exile has a special propensity to become a collector?

**DU** It only seems so. In exile, it becomes clear that our emotional property changes its value, and with time it tends to lose it, like an old currency. It also becomes clear that one can't reconstruct a lost home, a past life. The job of collecting is a nostalgic and consoling activity, but it can't bring to life what is lost.

**SB** Your stories and essays are often about inevitable misunderstandings and miscommunications between East and West. In one story you compare an Eastern European to the sleeping beauty, who looked very lovely from afar and deep asleep. When Easterners come westward, they appear much less attractive. What in your

view, are the most significant misunderstandings between East and West?

**DU** It is a long story of mirroring of two halves, Eastern and Western, a story of production of stereotypes, of love-and-hate relationships, of injustices. It is not easy to answer your question. 57 years ago, after the Second World War, Europe was equally destroyed and wounded, millions of people died, millions migrated. The wall was built between two halves and they were separated for almost five decades. That wall was the border: one half was poor, the other rich, one was stigmatized and despised, the other desirable.

Communism and the Wall disappeared only 13 years ago. The euro is the youngest currency in the world. Some new states appeared, another war managed to happen—that one in Yugoslavia. In a very short time a lot of “history” has happened. Consequently, there is a big job to be done—by historians, sociologists, intellectuals, politicians, a job of reconciliation, of de-stigmatization (of Eastern Europe), a job of de-stereotypization. Because such a job was never done. What was done is a bit of diplomacy, a bit of business, a bit of regulations, a bit of openings, a bit of promises.

**SB** Dubravka, we spoke a lot about images of the Balkans and the exoticization of the former Yugoslavia and its “tribal” ethnic conflicts, which was a form of Orientalism. Recently, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit have coined the term *Occidentalism* to describe the opposite phenomenon of anti-Americanism or anti-Westernism, that is a form of exoticism in reverse. It originated with the 19th-century Slavophiles in Russia, many of whom traveled or even studied in the West. Is there a similar phenomenon of Occidentalism in the former Yugoslavia? Or is the West sometimes forgetting its own Occidental values?

**DU** I think that at the moment the whole world resembles a global resort for traumatized people. If we go on with that collective and personal trauma approach, we will finish in the Third World War. Maybe we will finish there, anyway. It’s about time to forget about the traumas, at least for a while, and rationally see what we are going to do about our world.

**SB** We began with smoking and we should end with writing. Your last book, which came out in Dutch but is not yet published in English, was entitled *Reading Is Forbidden*. What do you mean by that?

**DU** It’s a pun, that title. In European public spaces warnings against smoking usually are “Smoking Prohibited,” “Rauchen Verboten.” In America it would be “Thank You for Not Smoking.” That’s why a more appropriate English translation of the title would be “Thank You For Not Reading.”

The theme of the book is a search for an answer to what happened with the status of literature and literary taste in today’s consumer culture. I, as a writer and former scholar, have an experience of different cultural environments: Russian, East European, West European, American, one of non-marketing culture and one of marketing culture; I was able to “surf” cross-culturally. These essays and stories are quite funny, I guess. They talk about editors, agents, writers, about literary values, publicity, marketing, about globalized culture, mass culture, about cultural wars, pessimists and optimists, and so on and so forth.

The title suggests that the content of a book is something decent writers are not expected to write about and readers who have illusions about literary justice are not expected to read.

**SB** In that case, I plan to read it. When reading is forbidden it can become desirable again. So I think you can make a good advertisement for literature this way, via negativa. You’re becoming very media savvy!

**DU** Thank you. In spite of my newly developed skills, I haven’t managed to find an English/American publisher.

**SB** Well, I know that one of your own favorite readings is *The Wizard of Oz*. In Russia they translated *The Wizard of Oz* but called it *The Wizard of the Emerald City*



and gave the book a Russian author, Volkov. It became a Russian story, which doesn't end with a return to Kansas and demystification, but in the land of utopia, in the land of Oz (as far as I remember). So do you believe that there is no place like home, or should we all stay in Oz as long as we can?

**DU** *The Wizard of Oz* is one of the best bildungsromans, a fairy tale about growing up. One can't grow up within one's own home. That's why "There is no place like home" could be read as a bitter irony. Dorothy pronounces that sentence only when it becomes clear that nobody wants to listen to her exciting story about Oz. In order to please elders and their small, isolated, gray world, she pronounces that consoling little thought.

To answer your question: We should, if we can, of course, go back and forth. Because both places, home and Oz, exist only while connected.

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