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—Review by Mekiya Walters

**AMERICAN FICTIONARY BY DUBRAVKA UGREŠIĆ, TRANSLATED BY CELIA
HAWKESWORTH AND ELLEN ELIAS-BURSAČ**

Twenty-four years after its debut in English, a new edition of Dubravka Ugrešić's 1993 essay collection *American Fictionary* is here. Previously published as *Have A Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream—Ugrešić's American Fictionary* displays the darkly comic, genre-bending prose that has long established her as a commentator on the breakup of Yugoslavia, the rise of mass consumerism, and the plights of displaced persons. Celia Hawkesworth and Ellen Elias-Bursać, established Ugrešić translators, offer English readers a deft rendering of her prose, marked by wry observations and a dizzying associative capacity.

Ugrešić presents each essay as an entry in a fictional dictionary, but her organizing principles are poetical, not alphabetical. Careening through, we swerve from tyrannical hairdressers to Bollywood television to the degeneracy of muffins and the supremacy of bagels. En route, we pass a smorgasbord of mundane objects imbued with insidious meaning (instruction manuals, closet organizers, Coca-Cola bottles). Between these pages, “white is black” and “loss is gain,” New York collapses into Zagreb, and the homeless mingle with the bourgeois. *American Fictionary* captures not only the chaos of war-torn Yugoslavia—which “transforms its history into senselessness”—and American capitalism—which “transforms its senselessness into history”—but also the yawning space between, a realm inhabited by those like Ugrešić: lost, seeing double, born in a place that no longer exists.

In the years since Ugrešić penned these essays, they've only grown more relevant. The chaos of the Balkans has sprouted tendrils in Syria, Myanmar, Iraq, and the White House. Reality television continues to remake reality. The phrase *have a nice day* has gone global, but Americans have dropped “that exaggerated yodel at the end of the phrase” and now utter it “with far less feigned enthusiasm than before.” As Ugrešić writes in “P.S.,” “the point of republishing this book is to encourage a new reading of the earlier text, a dialog between two moments that are a quarter century apart.” We can hardly imagine a more opportune time to revisit *American Fictionary*.