

# RSAA NEWSLETTER

Romanian Studies Association of America

August 2014

Volume XXV, Issue II

## Special Guests of the RSAA Newsletter: Domnica Radulescu & Benoni Todica



Domnica Radulescu immigrated to the United States in 1983 after she escaped from her native Romania into Italy. Presently she is the Edwin A. Morris Professor of French and Italian literature at Washington and Lee

University. She is the author of two best-selling novels: *Black Sea Twilight* (Doubleday 2010 & 2011) and *Train to Trieste* (Knopf 2008 & 2009). *Train to Trieste* has been published in twelve languages and is the winner of the 2009 Library of Virginia Fiction Award. Radulescu's play *The Town with Very Nice People*. *A Strident Operetta* has been chosen as a runner up for the 2013 Jane Chambers Playwriting award and her most recent play *Exile Is My Home*. *An Immigrant Fairytale* has received Honorable Mention at the Jane Chambers Playwriting award given by the Association of Theater in Higher Education. Her play *The Virgins of Seville* has been translated into Spanish and presented as a staged reading at the University of Alicante in May 2014. Her play *Naturalized Woman* was presented at the Thespis Theater Festival in New York City in 2012 and at Nora's Playhouse in 2010. => 10



Son of Moldova and inheritor of its soul treasures, Ben Todica is a titan among the Romanian cultural ambassadors abroad. Born in Vaslui, just to become an adopted child of Banat, Benoni Todica's artistic talent showed early in life. He made short films, joined an amateur theater group, played music as a DJ in a night club, tried the sweet taste of poetry, but no prize or success could stop him from pursuing even more adventurous roads.

His life trips took him to Australia where he studied acting, music for stage and cinematography, becoming in 1994 a producer and filmmaker for ARCTV, the channel for the Romanian and other ethnic communities in Melbourne, Australia. In 2004, at the national festival of TV community channels, the Romanian program classified 4th among over 500 programs.

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## Romanian Studies Association of America

### World Premier:

### *On the Threshold of Winter* adapted from Marin Sorescu's "The Bridge."

World Premiere of Michael Hersch's opera, *On the Threshold of Winter*, based on Marin Sorescu's *The Bridge*, took place at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York City on June 25, 2014.

Michael Hersch's libretto adaptation was based on an English translation by Adam J. Sorkin and Lidia Vianu (*Bloodaxe*, 2004, winner of the 2005 Poetry Society [UK] biennial Corneliu M. Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation).

Music organization Nunc, founded/directed by violinist Miranda Cuckson, presented the premiere of a new monodrama by American composer Michael Hersch on June 25,

2014. Featuring soprano Ah Young Hong and a stellar array of instrumentalists, the production was directed by Roger Brunyate and conducted by Tito Muñoz.

The Nunc Ensemble counted among its illustrious performers violinist Miranda Cuckson; Julia Bruskin, cello; Susan Palma Nidel, flute; Arthur Sato, oboe; Vasko Dukovski, clarinet; Benjamin Fingland, bass clarinet; Michael Sheppard piano; Matthew Gold, percussion.

This performance was named Event of the Month by *Gramophone Magazine* and was featured in *Opera News*.

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### Summer News

Anca Luca Holden taught a three-week course at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. The course was titled "Making Waves: Contemporary Asian American Women Writers."



## The RSAA Grant

The first recipient of the RSAA international grant is **Catalina Iliescu Gheorghiu**, Ph.D, an English lecturer at the University of Alicante. She presented the paper "The Presence of Romanian Characters and Cultural Elements in Spanish Contemporary Literature" at

the 2014 RSAA session ("The Reciprocal Gaze between Romania and Spain") in Chicago. The author of the first Romanian-Spanish automatic translation system, she has also introduced the teaching of Romanian, in 2005, at the university of Alicante. Read more about this

dedicated cultural ambassador at:

<http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/06/27/romanians-in-spain-portraits-catalina-iliescu-gheorghiu-thinks-to-country-works-from-passion-and-longing-16-32-16>



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Anca Luca Holden with students in South Korea where she taught a course in Asian American women writers (left) and with son Daniel (right).



### GENDER AND TRANSFORMATION: WOMEN IN EUROPE WORKSHOP

#### NYU CENTER FOR EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES

The GENDER and TRANSFORMATION: WOMEN IN EUROPE Workshop - a joint project from New York University and the Network of East-West Women – organizes ***Friday afternoon talks*** in Fall 2014 at the NYU Center for European and Mediterranean Studies.

This fall marks yet another commemoration in Europe: twenty-five years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent collapse of socialist states. We would like to use this moment to

consider both how “revolution” is gendered and how feminist scholarship of this process has evolved in the last two decades. In other words, we are interested in analyzing the relationship between gender and revolution from many directions: not only how is revolution gendered, but also how can gender change itself be revolutionary? Further, how can gender analysis itself of the last twenty-five years in Europe revolutionize scholarship. Finally, to what extent was there a “revolution”?

Speakers will discuss gender, gender and class, sexuality, or

women in Europe or Eurasia.

Topics will be: the role of gender in the democratization process; gender and state socialism, the recent reemergence of gendered, nationalist politics; the role of women in post-socialist revolutions, such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine; the gendered impact of economic collapse; campaigns against feminism and gender studies; gender, immigration, and integration.

The focus is on the postcommunist countries of East and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, including

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### **GENDER AND TRANSFORMATION: WOMEN IN EUROPE WORKSHOP (cont.)**

focus is on the postcommunist countries of East and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, including the Baltic countries and Central Asia, and in Europe and the European Union more widely.

The workshop is an informal and friendly group of about 20 feminist scholars, activists, and journalists who have been meeting for more than 20 years and are knowledgeable about the region.

For any questions please contact:

Mara Lazda ([maralazda@bcc.cuny.edu](mailto:maralazda@bcc.cuny.edu) <<mailto:maralazda@bcc.cuny.edu>>) or

Janet Johnson ([johnson@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:johnson@brooklyn.cuny.edu) <<mailto:johnson@brooklyn.cuny.edu>>)

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### **Romanian Avant-garde Cinema**

Thursday, May 22, at the Eforie Cinematheque (Room "Jean Georgescu", Str. Eforie 2, Bucarest), took place the 6th session dedicated to the Romanian avant-garde film. The club projected a digital version of Isidore Isou's film *Traite de bave et d'eternite* (120min) showed by the filmmaker at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival.

The projection was possible through Catherine Goldstein's generosity, the filmmaker's daughter, and through Mr. Pip Chodorov, director of *Re:Voir*, who produced the DVD version.

More information can be found at: [igormocanu.wordpress.com/2014/05/08/isidore-isou-la-avangarda-revizitata-iv-6/](http://igormocanu.wordpress.com/2014/05/08/isidore-isou-la-avangarda-revizitata-iv-6/)

### **MLA Presidential Theme Panels**

Two RSAA panels were included in the MLA Presidential Theme *Negotiating Sites of Memory (Vancouver 2015)*:

#### **Negotiating Memory: Contemporary Romanian Culture in Translation**

organized by Anca Luca Holden (Mount Holyoke Coll.) and Domnica Radulescu (Washington and Lee Univ.) examines Romanian works of art in translation as sites of international cultural exchange and renegotiation of cultural memory. Speakers discuss the authors Herta Müller, Paul Muldoon, Marin Sorescu, Medbh McGuckian, Mircea Cartarescu, Saviana Stanescu; the playwright Matei Visniec; the film directors Cristian Mungiu and Calin Peter Netzer.

The speakers are: Florina Catalina Florescu, Wagner Coll.; Margaret Greaves, Emory Univ.; Anca Luca Holden; Domnica Radulescu, Washington and Lee Univ.

**Post-Colonial Shadows on Post-Socialist Skies**, organized by Letitia Guran features speakers Noemi Marin (Florida Atlantic University), Oana Chivoiu (Purdue University), Letitia Guran (UNC Fayetteville State University, NC) and Lenuta Giukin (SUNY Oswego, NY).

The panel proposes a discussion on communism as a different type of colonialism and analyzes the dialogue between the legacies of both communism and colonialism at personal, institutional, communal level.

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### Roundtable proposal: Invitation to join a research collaboration

During the summer of 2014, we formed a research collaboration of scholars from Romania and North America to create a research agenda around the topic of Academic Dishonesty (AD) in Romania. Our goals are to: 1) publish scholarly work on AD in peer-reviewed journals, and 2) provide share findings that may inform academic policy and practice. Proposed research projects in Romania include surveys of students to answer the following questions about AD:

- ◆ What is the prevalence of AD?
- ◆ What are student perceptions of the seriousness of AD?
- ◆ How often students get caught committing acts of AD?
- ◆ What are the consequences of getting caught?
- ◆ What students know about the AD behaviors of other students?
- ◆ What are students' reasons for engaging in AD behaviors?
- ◆ How well do students know the AD policies of their universities?
- ◆ What do students believe about the AD of instructors?
- ◆ We are also discussing other topics related to AD for additional research proposals, including:
  - ◆ A comparison of AD policies and how those policies are implemented across universities.
  - ◆ A review of the training provided to students, and instructors, about AD.
  - ◆ Instructor involvement in AD in their own work.
  - ◆ AD reflected in grant applications to Unitatea Executiva pentru Finantarea Invatamantului Superior, a Cercetarii, Dezvoltarii si Inovarii (UEFISCDI).

If you interested in joining us or learning more, please contact **Bob Ives: [rives@unr.edu](mailto:rives@unr.edu)**

#### Research in Romania

In May and June of each year university students from the USA spend four weeks in Romania earning graduate credits in quantitative and qualitative research methods. The Research in Romania (RIR) program is based at the University of Nevada, Reno, USA, and has been running for ten years. Students gain applied research experience in the field at the same time that they participate in more traditional class activities. In addition, weekend trips give students the opportunity to explore the country. Past trips have included Cluj, Iasi, Bucuresti, Timisoara, Brasov, Suceava, Sighisoara, Constanta, and more. If you interested in joining us or learning more, please contact Bob Ives.

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



Recently published: *Anthropology of East Europe Review*

Vol 32, No 1 (2014)

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[http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aer/  
issue/view/1120](http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aer/issue/view/1120)

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### CFP

## World Words: The 1st Graduate Student Conference on Translation Studies TRANSLATION & NETWORKING

School of Translation and Interpretation, University of Ottawa

November 14-15, 2014

Key-Note Speaker: **Sherry Simon** (Concordia University)

The School of Translation and Interpretation and its Graduate Student Association (STIGSA) at University of Ottawa have the pleasure to announce World Words: The First uOttawa Annual Graduate Student Conference in Translation Studies, to be held on November 14-15, 2014. Our purpose is to provide emerging researchers of various backgrounds with an opportunity to share the results of their work on translation and its power of bringing people together.

In its delicate, yet privileged position as an interdisciplinary field, translation studies has been looked at through various lenses for a long time, while research has been impacted by a wide range of theoretical and empirical perspectives: from post-colonialism to sociology, from anthropology to socio-cognitive science, etc. But the encounter between people, communities, societies, and cultures has been at the core of the field at all times. It is through communication that Translation Studies has always related to other disciplines, positioning itself in a wide network of practical and theoretical knowledge. In 1999, Bruno Latour argued that the older usage of network involved a series of transformations (traductions), but that a more recent one came to express exactly the opposite—that is, transport

without deformation. Fifteen years later, we endeavor to examine more closely how the theory and practice of translation position themselves in relation to such a complex concept.

We invite submissions addressing diverse topics, with a focus on the networks of translation and translation studies and how they connect with other areas of knowledge, as well as with various industries. The conference themes will revolve around, but will not be limited to, the following issues:

- ◆ Connectivity through translation: how and why translation networks develop?
- ◆ Translation and influence: the role of translation in advocacy, governance, and management networks
- ◆ Textual networks in literary translation
- ◆ Choosing, producing and marketing the text for the publishing network
- ◆ The network of disciplinary discourses in translation / translation studies
- ◆ Translation and new media sociology
- ◆ Translation and (academic) research networks
- ◆ Professional translation and institutional networks =>

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### CFP

#### World Words: The 1st Graduate Student Conference on Translation Studies TRANSLATION & NETWORKING (cont.)

- ◆ Teaching translation and the network of institutional policies
- ◆ Translation and cognitive networks
- ◆ Channels of communication between translation studies and the translation industry
- ◆ The impact of networks on term usage
- ◆ Peer networks for language technology learning
- ◆ Professional networking through language technologies

#### Abstract submission

300-word abstracts (excluding references) are due September 1 and should be submitted by e-mail to:  
[sti.gradconference@uottawa.ca](mailto:sti.gradconference@uottawa.ca)  
Also cc Raluca Tanasescu: [rtana014@uottawa.ca](mailto:rtana014@uottawa.ca)).

Please make sure to include:

the title of your presentation  
your name  
affiliation  
e-mail address  
6 key-words  
an 150-word bio

Each presentation will be allotted 20 minutes, followed by a 10-minute question period. The working languages of the conference are French and English.

Please use "UO-STI2014" in the subject field. We will notify participants of their acceptance on September 15. Selected papers will be published on the conference website. More information on this topic will be provided at a later date.

#### Fees

Early registration (before Oct 1, 2014): CAN\$30  
Registration after Oct 1, 2014: CAN\$50

For more info, questions, and comments, please do not hesitate to contact Raluca Tanasescu at:  
[rtana014@uottawa.ca](mailto:rtana014@uottawa.ca)

We look forward to your submissions!

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#### DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS EXTENDED:

The SRS has extended the deadline for accepting proposals for papers, panels, roundtables, and book presentations to **September 15**. For our call for papers, and instructions on what to include in and how to submit your proposals, see the call for papers posted on our website at <http://www.society4romaniastudies.org/#!2015-conference/c1p14>. Applicants who submitted their proposals by August 1 will be notified of their acceptance/rejection by October 15, while later applicants will be notified by November 15.

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



**CFP:**

### **Subversive Practices and Imagined Realities in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe since 1945 (Norwich, UK, April 9-11, 2015)**

**Deadline:** November 10, 2014

**Session Convenors:**

Amy Bryzgel, University of Aberdeen,  
[a.bryzgel@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:a.bryzgel@abdn.ac.uk)

Andrea Euringer-Bátorová, Academy of Fine Arts and  
Design, Bratislava, Slovakia,  
[euringer-batorova@vsvu.sk](mailto:euringer-batorova@vsvu.sk)

AAH2015 41st Annual Conference & Bookfair  
Sainsbury Centre for Art, UEA, Norwich, April 9-11,  
2015

In communist Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, the building of socialism had as its final endpoint a utopia that provided the ultimate motivation: sacrifice now, reward later. In its sheer impossibility, it was an elusive and illusory dream that formed the foundation for everyday life under totalitarian regime. Within this visionary world, artists such as Alexander Mlynarcik (Slovakia), Marko Kovacic (Slovenia) or Mark Verlan (Moldova), created their own parallel worlds, utopias, dystopias, and fantastic domains. In many cases, alternative and nonofficial artists' works served to carve out a unique space in the so-called "grey zone" of Europe, which offered an alternative not only to state-sponsored socialism, but also to Western capitalism, both of which many artists and dissidents viewed with equal suspicion.

This panel will examine a range of artistic ideas, participative strategies, subversive practices, networks and projects (imaginary or real), which

demonstrate an alternative sphere of thinking and modes of creative living, and which possibly attempt to move beyond the classical binary systems of West and East - all from within an everyday world order that seemed to be set in stone.

We also invite papers that offer a more differentiated view, even extending to the post-socialist period, aiming to re-evaluate the nexus of aesthetics and politics and produce new interpretations and analytical approaches regarding counterculture and censorship, which explore the relational aspects of following binaries: official and unofficial, political and apolitical, permitted and prohibited - under totalitarian rule.

If you would like to offer a paper, please email BOTH session convenors directly, providing an abstract of a proposed paper of 30 minutes. The deadline for abstracts is November 10, 2014.

Your paper abstract should be no more than 250 words, and include your name and institution affiliation (if any). You should receive an acknowledgement of receipt of your submission within two weeks from the session convenors. Unfortunately no fee is payable to speakers; all speakers must register and pay to attend the conference.

See more at: <http://www.aah.org.uk/annual-conference/2015-conference> and <http://www.aah.org.uk/annual-conference/sessions2015/session27>

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### Special Guest: Domnica Radulescu (USA)



Domnica Radulescu during a book tour for the launching of the Lithuanian translation of *Train to Trieste. Lithuania*, 2014.

(Author's pictures)

She has authored, edited and co-edited numerous scholarly books on theater, exile and representations of women. Her latest scholarly book titled *Theater of War and Exile from Eastern Europe and Israel* is forthcoming from McFarland Publishing.

Radulescu received the 2011 Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. She is also a Fulbright scholar and is presently completing her third novel titled *Country of Red Azaleas*.

More on Domnica Radulescu: <http://www.aripi.es/index.php/dosier-de-actividades/18-novedades/248-domnica-radulescu-ua-2014>

### *Dream in a Suitcase, or How Theater Saved My Life*

Keynote Address, Women and Theater Program,  
July 23rd, 2014

By Domnica Radulescu

Bucharest, Romania 1983. During the day I attend my courses in English Literature at the University. At night I go to the theater: *The Master and Marguerita*, *Iphigenia*, *The Tempest*, *Caligula*, or just a good old Romanian comedy of mistaken identities and purloined letters. After the theater I go to the theater. I go to the theater in the Attic of the Headquarters of the Communist Youth. The theater is called the Attic. On the first floor the halls are studded with large portraits of the Communist Gods: Marx, Engels, Lenin and the Romanian Dictator with his touched up lips that make him look like a dreamy pig. I rush up the stairs all the way to the top of the building and open the door to the Attic. No portraits of any of the Gods here. Only the spirit of Jerzy Grotowski, the brooding theater director and my theater comrades practicing their different parts in the hallway or in the theater. I realize that once I enter this space I start breathing at a steady pace. I get into my practice clothes which are also our costumes for everything. At first I didn't like the gray and black costumes, the wood and canvas gray stools that serve as set for every show depending on how we set them up or stack them up or line them up.

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**Domnica Radulescu:**

***Dream in a Suitcase, or How Theater Saved My Life (cont. 2)***

At first I thought: “hell, isn’t everything gray enough in this stupid country, aren’t our clothes drab enough, and our food lousy enough?” But the director told us we needed to learn to create something out of nothing in theater: that was the great secret. It was in the acting, in the mind-body wholeness, the breathing, the authentic gesture, the truthful voice that the colors emerged. That made sense to me. Particularly since we had plenty of nothing in our country, we might as well make it into something. Once during a theater exercise my arms lifted up like wings of their own will guided from a point in the center of my being just as he had taught us. The exercise worked. I was an eager bird ready for takeoff. That was when the colors emerged too. I was mauve and vermilion, the colors of my favorite candy that was sold in the corner shop when I was a little girl. I was all candy, I wanted to eat myself. Now I love the gray of our costumes and furniture, there is gray and there is gray. This gray turns into myriads of colors and makes you fly. The other gray outside these doors brings you down into a pile of shit. A group of the women actors and I are working on a surprise show of Beckett’s *Happy Days* that one of us found in a recent Romanian translation. The woman with the most years of experience in the theater is the director of the surprise show. We divide Winnie’s monologue into four parts that represent her different sides and voices. We free her from her suffocating mound of earth trapping her to her waist and then to her neck. We take liberties, we can do whatever we want in this gray Attic space. Here we live in a free country. I am the poetic Winnie, the one who burns love letters and

fantasizes about going up in flames herself one day in a spontaneous combustion. I mutter my lines all throughout the day: on the crowded smelly trolley busses, in line for our monthly ration of bread, or on my way home as the steps of the secret police man who has been following me for a few months hit the pavement like a bad omen behind me. Every time the director of the theater makes the schedule for the week he says with a mischievous smile: “we have to leave this block of time for the girls’ rehearsal.” He asks the guys to help us with the lights. We are in the clouds with our *Happy Days*. When I get home really late after rehearsals, my father is waiting for me in his trench coat smoking one cigarette after another, ready to call the police, thinking I’ve been kidnapped by the secret police, or cut to pieces by a serial killer, run over by a car or taken advantage of by an evil boy. I tell him “Dad, I’ve just been at the theater, we are practicing a women’s show.” “There must be boys in it too,” he says. “No, there aren’t, just girls.”

After everybody calms down we plan for my escape to Italy. If my passport arrives and when it arrives, I have to buy my plane ticket right away, “because the bastards might change their mind and take it away, and then you’ll never leave, and you’ll be stuck in this hell hole forever” says my father. He is the one with the positive thinking in our family, my mother just writes poetry about death and the meaninglessness of life. If and when my passport arrives I have to get my plane ticket right away, meet with such and such a person as soon as I get to Rome, in case I can’t find her, call this other such and

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**Domnica Radulescu:**

***Dream in a Suitcase, or How Theater Saved My Life (cont. 3)***

such a person. Go to such and such organization for political refugees and ask for asylum. I'm not really listening, Winnie has taken possession of me and is combusting in mauve and vermilion. Why am I planning my escape just now when I got this fabulous role and the show will premiere in a month? Our director will be blown away by our modernist women's show and next I'll play Gertrude in *Hamlet*.

Miracle of all miracles, my passport arrives. We make more plans late at night with the curtains pulled and talking in whispers in case they are tapping our house. I get the passport, I pack my suitcase. I go to rehearsals. Winnie is all over the city uttering her happy sad vermillion lines, opening her umbrella on a sunny day, putting on makeup before going to sleep, trying to breathe in a regular rhythm. And sometimes she sings just for the sheer joy of singing. I don't tell any of my theater friends that I'm leaving the country. If I did, you never know, one might be an informer and then I'll never leave. The opening night comes and goes, and two more performances and then I'll be gone. Forever. Full house and I'm burning the stage with Winnie's burning lines and am floating above the ground like a mythic bird. Now I know what they meant with that Phoenix bird: that's what I want to be, a birds that puts herself on fire and molds herself back to life out of her goddam ashes. I know I want to do this for the rest of my life. But the suitcase for my big escape is waiting to be packed. My mother and I pack at night, with curtains pulled, "cause you never know," they might be watching us. Clothes for all weather, the volume of short stories I wrote, a volume of Romanian poetry, two black and

white pictures from the opening night of *Happy Days*, a handful of family pictures, my grandmother's silk kimono with the multicolored peacock on the back that was my Winnie costume and a fancy silk paisley dress in case I go to the theater, out there, in the unknown where I'm about to plunge. "Yes, mama I'm sure there will be a Shakespeare play in the refugee camp in Rome." "You never know," my mother says as she is carefully packing the dress. It turns out that in Rome, I will see not Shakespeare, but Pirandello and Machiavelli. I will wear the silk paisley dress that my mother had packed for me.

At the airport it all goes fast with the exception of the episode with the border police woman that seems to take forever. She checks my luggage and asks questions about each single item in the carefully packed suitcase: "What are you doing with a winter coat in the summer?" "I'm going on a trip in the Alps." "What are these typed pages doing here?" "They are school work for when I come back." "Where are you going to stay while abroad?" "At youth hostels." "Are you carrying any foreign currency?" "Only the allowed sum of 50 dollars." I have planned it all and anticipated all the questions. This is my hardest exam ever. Only I haven't anticipated the knot of fear in my chest and my mind racing: "What if she stops me, what if she stops me, and I'll never leave again?" Then I think to myself: "So what if she stops me, what the fuck, I'll just go back to the theater. They'll be happy to see me back." And the knot of grief in my chest is chocking me as I see my mother and father wait behind the line to see me go and my mind is racing:

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**Domnica Radulescu:**

***Dream in a Suitcase, or How Theater Saved My Life (cont. 4)***

“For the last time, for the last time, for the last time.” The customs police woman looks at the pictures of me as Winnie and laughs mockingly. She leafs through the typed volume of short stories and talks to her colleague that is standing a few steps behind her. I pray to Winnie to send me a good thought from her house of happy days. Tonight is the fourth performance and I will not be there to play my beloved role. What will they think? They’ll wait, then call me, then panic, then try to find a replacement. I don’t have an understudy so one of the other girls will have to take my part. They’ll think I’m sick, dead or just not to be trusted. The customs woman looks at me, talks to the other customs police, looks at me again and says “Go.” I stand and stare at her. My mother with oceans of tears in her eyes, behind the line says: “Go.” I stand there. Then Winnie says “Go, go for Godot’s sake!” I walk towards the plane at a steady pace without looking back at my suitcase or at my parents, not knowing if my luggage even made it on board the plane. I don’t care about the suitcase. I am my one and only suitcase.

I am now the same age that Winnie was/is when I played her thirty years ago. I knew then that we’ll grow old together. Throughout the thirty years of my American adventure, dream, sometimes nightmare, Winnie in the Attic has often guided me towards new discoveries, has given me comfort and strength in trying times. She has showed me the way towards the formidable and magnificent women of Ancient Greece: Clytemnestra, Medea, Andromache, or the whimsical and cunning women of the Italian

Renaissance: Isabella, Flaminia, Vittoria, Lucrezia, Vincenza. Caterina, Colombina, Veronica. I got on the wagon with their commedia troupes for a while and discovered the little known secret that they are largely responsible for the beginnings of modern Western theater, for the sophisticated art of stage improvisation and collaborative theater creation. They were the first devisers. The bold and sassy theater women artists of five hundred years ago travelling across European countries with their children and theater properties, managing the troupes of actors, their finances and traveling schedules, acting in public plazas, improvising in verse, creating unprecedented female characters enchanted me and brought laughter into my life. I carry all of them with me wherever I go, both the ancient and the Renaissance ones: the angry and melancholy lovers, grieving mothers, vengeful wives, the mischievous daughters, the treacherous widows, the lustful concubines, they are always crowded in my carryon luggage ready to burst out of it upon arrival in different cities of the world: Seville Spain, Vilnius Lithuania, Bucharest Romania or Scottsdale Arizona. Sometimes they complain about the long trip and the security checks at the airport which, they point out to me, are quite similar to the security check I went through decades ago when I escaped my Communist dictatorship. But they are always ready to bewitch me with their well-crafted roles. When I’m desperate about the state of the world and wonder whether anything I do will ever make a difference, they tell me: “don’t worry about it, just

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### Domnica Radulescu:

### *Dream in a Suitcase, or How Theater Saved My Life (cont. 5)*



“don’t worry about it, just do it!” When I’m sad and confused about where I belong, where is my home, or when I miss everything they tell me: “Go to the theater and see a play, preferably one with smart women characters.” When I’m angry at discrimination, violence and religious fanaticism in the adoptive country where I came running away from dictatorship, they tell me: “Go do some theater, one of your weird immigrant plays and don’t forget to give us a part in them.” The dark and suicidal ones: Jocasta, Ophelia, Phaedra, Silvia Plath, Sarah Kane tell me whenever I stop making sense of life and the world around me: “Stop it with the dark thoughts, suicide isn’t all that glamorous you know, just go to the theater.” When I am weighed down with worry about my children, the Medeas, the Phedras, the Isabellas, they all tell me: “You’ve raised them,

they’re grown up, just love them and let go, they’ll figure it out. And don’t eat them all right! And by the way, good job with the single mother thing. We too were single mothers, our brutes of husbands were good at making wars and chasing other women but really lousy at home.” Above all though, Winnie thrones amidst the ashes of burnt love letters and sometimes she thanks me for having freed her from her gruesome tomb with my Romanian Attic student production of thirty years ago. Then she says: “This too will have been a happy day!” Then I open my magic suitcase, put on the silk paisley dress that my mother had packed for me and I go to the theater.



Pictures: Domnica Radulescu during her book tour for the launching of the Lithuanian translation of *Train to Trieste*. Lithuania, 2014.  
(author’s pictures)

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### Special Guest: Ben Todica (Melbourne, Australia)



In this stimulating environment, Ben Todica found his true vocation. His encounter with the artistic medium was crucial for expressing his own talent... No venue remains unexplored: film, radio theater, poetry, prose, music.

He finds time to repeatedly travel the world, from China, to America, to Europe and back to Australia, to document the past and present, to meditate on the future, to interview some of the best known personalities of Romania and of the Romanian diaspora, to publish his own books and to film...to film...in a style that became his own, without rules, without censorship....just pure rivers of images.

This is how I would like to introduce Ben Todica. As an artist of the spontaneous, of instinct, of live poetic image. Ben opens his soul to everyone: on youtube, on his blog, in other people's blogs, in magazines and reviews, on Radio Melbourne....and to everyone who wants to hear about Romania, the longing for ancestral home, and the paradoxical condition of living between worlds...

By Lenuta Giukin

To learn more about Ben Todica visit:  
[youtube.com/user/inonebt](https://www.youtube.com/user/inonebt)  
<http://bentodica.wordpress.com/>  
<http://bentodica.blogspot.ro/>



Ben Todica's book *In doua lumi*



With poet Ioan Miclău

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## Benone Todica: *Drumul nostru/Our Journey* (2010)

A commentary by Lenuta Giukin

<<At the foot of a glen, at Heaven's gate...>> once upon a time there was a heavenly place called Ciudanovita. *Our Journey*, Benoni Todica's documentary, reveals the story of this place and gradually transforms itself into a ballad dedicated to the "uranium children." Twenty years later, Benoni, a uranium child himself, currently residing in Australia, revisits old places now mystified by the distance of exile, sanctified by memory and yearning, lost yet rescued by surrealist hazardous circumstances. His fate becomes profoundly connected to this place where, back in the seventies, he filmed the uranium mine and its people. At the miraculous intersection between the past and the present, Benoni manages to create a multidimensional cinematographic masterpiece, to give life to "emptiness" and, above all, to make heard once again the voices of thousands of immortal anonymous people who lived their lives in camp-like barracks "at the mercy of radiations."

A nostalgic trip to the springs of yesterday's history, *Our Journey* invites the viewer, through the use of anamorphic lenses, into a monumental landscape dominated by fading winter colors and the eerie silence of the space. In cosmic silence, under the gaze of the celluloid screen that caresses the round contours of the mountains, the voices of two travelers, Benoni and Deluta, guide us through the labyrinth of time like Ariadne's thread.

Gradually, this almost unreal journey reveals its secrets: the facets of the past are resuscitated into a symphony of life. Galleries of deserted slopes, dilapidated buildings, empty bunkers, and deserted streets are now animated by the camera that once

made immortal the activities of a not-too-long-ago prosperous community. With the help of these witnesses of the past and survivors of uranium radiation still living in Ciudanovita, Benoni reconstitutes the genesis of a "heaven's gate." The merriment of Ciudanovita's children, "who never go on vacation," but whose playground is "everywhere," intertwines with different stories about the former local mascot, Mihutz, as well as about the history of the place and its people. Nostalgic voices, an old woman's tearful glances, happy reunions, a retiree dressed up as a miner wearing his old helmet and mine lamp, faithfully preserved, a re-celebration of communal holidays through the power of words, all these miraculously blend into new images carved by the force of memory.

The camera freezes obsessively over today's phantasmatic buildings or over the timid faces of people stranded in a corner of a world where in the seventies there still arrived an imposing fairytale-like steam engine. The contrast between the two worlds occasions a reflection upon the role of this place in national and contemporary history, as the present "does not live up to the past." *Our Journey* becomes an opportunity for meditation not only on human existence, but also on the role of diaspora's memory in defining identity values. Benoni recreates Ciudanovita with the passion of someone who has for a long time fed himself on sacred memories through an invisible umbilical cord. In returning home, he literally drinks the milk-like water of Ciudanovita River and eats the barbeques of Tibi the retiree, temporarily transformed into a miner for the camera. The act of eating becomes a way of asserting

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## Benone Todica: *Drumul nostru/Our Journey* (2010) - cont. 2

history as well as one's own existence.

*Our Journey* is a monument against time, this "monster" that cannot counter the camera's testimonies. Benoni proposes this film as a way of setting ourselves free from "anonymity" and from the "hell of forgetfulness," as an irrepressible reality, obsessive and powerful, born out of deep nostalgia, which can be seen in every image. A metaphor of life indeed, Benoni Todica's documentary reaches everyone through those banal things that we all carry in our souls and which are essential and profoundly human.

Translator: Rodica Ieta, SUNY Oswego



Still frame from *Our Journey*: The arrival of the locomotive at the Ciudanovita Halt  
(from Ben Todica's blog)

### *Drumul nostru* (2009)

«Pe-un picior de plai, pe-o gură de rai...» a fost odată un loc paradisiac numit Ciudanovița. Povestea lui ne este revelată de Benoni Todică în documentarul *Drumul nostru* care treptat se transformă în balada copiilor uraniului. După douăzeci de ani în Australia, Benoni, el însuși un copil al uraniului, revizitează locuri mistificate de distanța exilului, sfințite de memorie și dor, pierdute și totuși salvate prin coincidențele suprarealiste ale hazardului. Destinul său devine profund legat de acest loc unde în anii șaptezeci a filmat exploatarea uraniferă și oamenii ei în scopuri documentare.

Din intersecția miraculoasă a trecutului și prezentului Benoni reușește să creeze o capodoperă cinematică multidimensională, să dea viață „pustiului” și mai ales să redea voce miilor de anonimi



Still frame: Ciudanovita miners walking out of a gallery  
(from Ben Todica's blog)

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### Benone Todica: *Drumul nostru/Our Journey* (2010) - cont. 3

nemuritori care și-au trăit viața în barăci-lagăr „la mila radiațiilor.”

Voiaj nostalgic la izvorul istoriei de ieri, Drumul nostru transportă spectatorul, prin intermediul lentilelor anarmofotice, într-un peisaj monumental, dominant prin culorile șterse ale iernii și strania liniște a spațiului. În tăcerea cosmică, sub privirea peliculei ce mângâie formele rotunde ale munților, vocile călătorilor Benoni și Deluță ne călăuzesc precum firul Ariadnei în labirintul timpului.

Treptat, acest parcurs aproape ireal își revelează secretele: fețele trecutului sunt resuscitate într-o simfonie a vieții. Galerii de coastă părăsite, clădiri ruinate, buncăre goale, străzi pustii se animează prin intermediul camerei de filmat care a immortalizat activitățile unei comunități cândva prospere. Prin intermediul acestor martori ai trecutului, precum și a supraviețuitorilor uraniului care au mai rămas în Ciudanovița, Benoni reconstituie geneza unei „guri de rai.” Veselia copiilor Ciudanoviței „care nu pleacă în vacanță,” dar a căror loc de joacă este „peste tot,” se

împletește cu evocările diferite despre fosta mascotă a locurilor, Mihuț, precum și despre istoria locurilor și a oamenilor săi. Voci nostalgice, priviri lungi și pline de lacrimi ale unei bătrâne, sărutări de regăsire, pensionar redevenit miner prin îmbrăcarea căștii și lămpii de mină păstrate cu sfințenie, recelebrarea prin puterea cuvântului a sărbătorilor comunitare, toate acestea se îmbină miraculos în noi imagini sculptate prin forța memoriei.

Camera se fixează obsesiv pe clădirile fantomatice ale prezentului sau pe sfioasele fețe ale celor pierduți într-un colț de lume unde în anii șaptezeci încă sosea, feerică și impunătoare, o locomotivă cu aburi.

Contrastul realităților devine pretext de reflecție asupra rolului acestui ținut anonim în istoria națiunii și a prezentului care „nu trăiește la nivelul trecutului.” *Drumul nostru* se transformă în spațiu de meditație asupra existenței, dar și a rolului memoriei diasporice în definirea valorilor identitare. Benoni recrează Ciudanovița cu setea celui care s-a hrănit îndelung printr-o invizibilă coardă ombilicală din



“Neagra,” the last preserved steam engine locomotive that can make the trip Oravita-Ciudanovita-Anina, the first high elevation railroad in Romania.

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## Benone Todica: Drumul nostru/Our Journey (2010) - cont. 4

trupul memoriilor sacre. Reîntors acasă, el bea literal din râul Ciudanovița apa „ca laptele” și mănâncă grătarele lui Tibi pensionarul transformat temporar în miner pentru camera de filmat. Actul de consum devine modalitate de afirmare a istoriei, precum și a propriei existențe.

*Drumul nostru* este un monument ridicat împotriva timpului, acest „monstru” care nu poate contesta mărturia camerei de filmat. Benoni ni-l propune ca pe o „eliberare din anonim”, „din iadul uitării”, o realitate de nerepudiat, obsesivă și puternică, născută din forța nostalgiei care se citește în fiecare imagine. O adevărată metaforă a vieții, documentarul lui Benoni Todică se adresează tuturor prin acele elemente banale pe care le purtăm cu toții în suflet, dar care sunt esențiale și profund umane.

Comentariu de Lenuța Giukin

State University of New York at Oswego



Still frame: The unfrogettable faces of the past  
(Ben Todica's blog)

Ciudanovita of the past and present (still frame and contemporary picture; Ben Todica's blog)



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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### World Premier: *On the Threshold of Winter* adapted from Marin Sorescu's "The Bridge." (cont. from page 2)

#### 21C Media Group press release:

Hailed as "a natural musical genius who continues to surpass himself" (Tim Page, *Washington Post*), Michael Hersch achieved another major career milestone when his first opera, *On the Threshold of Winter*, received its world premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on June 25. Marking the American composer's long-awaited stage debut, his two-act monodrama offered what David Patrick Stearns calls "an unflinching, fearless portrayal of the pain and terror amid the onset of death" (WRTI's *Creatively Speaking*).

Inspired in part by his own experiences, Hersch adapted his original libretto from *The Bridge*, the harrowing final poetry collection of Romanian author Marin Sorescu (1936-96), who wrote it during the last five weeks of his own unsuccessful battle with cancer. Scored for soprano and eight-piece ensemble, *On the Threshold of Winter* starred soprano Ah Young Hong in a fully staged production by Roger Brunyate, supported by Tito Muñoz leading the Nunc ensemble, with the composer himself in attendance.

Musically, the project was bound to prove a perfect fit; as the Philadelphia Inquirer observes, "Hersch's language never hesitates to leap into the abyss – and in ways that, for some listeners, go straight to parts of the soul that few living composers touch." Addressing the way, as *The Bridge* puts it, "the

instinct of life battles against the genius of death," *On the Threshold of Winter* juxtaposes intense, unsparring contemplation of mortality and loss with lullaby-like interludes depicting those moments when imagination ranges free. As the *New Criterion* noted last fall, when the composer presented a suite of these interludes in a concert version for voice and piano, "Though it may sound macabre to say, Hersch is very good at writing about death."

Writing for voice is something the composer undertakes only rarely (a recent song cycle, *Domicilium*, commissioned by Thomas Hampson, was Hersch's first vocal work in over a decade), because he considers it such a particular medium. "For me there is something about the human voice which cuts to the marrow like nothing else," he explains. Finding the right project for his first stage work took the best part of two decades, but as soon as Hersch discovered *The Bridge* – likened by co-translator Adam J. Sorkin to "a dance of death arranged as a procession of still living poems" – the composer knew his search was over. "I read a page and was really taken aback," he recalls.

"Regarding text of any sort, when something strikes me it's usually only a word or phrase, but in this case it was line after line. *The Bridge* is written in poetic form, but it's essentially a diary of Sorescu's life written while the poet was dying of liver cancer.

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### World Premier: *On the Threshold of Winter* adapted from Marin Sorescu's "The Bridge." (3)

It is a fascinating combination of the graphic and fantastical, the clear-eyed and the delusional. From the moment I read it I wanted to draw from these texts to create something for the stage."

The special immediacy with which *The Bridge* affected Hersch owes in large part to the constellation of ways cancer has impacted his own life: "My closest friend received a cancer diagnosis in her late 30s and died of the disease a few years later. The experience of witnessing what she went through is something far from resolved in me. The horror of the entire thing still haunts. Most unexpectedly, while she was in the midst of her fight I then received a cancer diagnosis myself, at age 36. For that period while I underwent my own surgeries, radiation, indignities...the roles were reversed, and she was there for me. Ultimately, I was left cured to go on with my life and she was gone."

Hersch's libretto represents a pared-down restructuring of Sorescu's text. "I stripped away what didn't resonate and essentially created a narrative within a narrative," he recounts. Despite being a monodrama, with a single soprano embodying a whole cast of characters, his opera also features a nurse and patient, played by two actors who do not sing or speak. From its opening lines, "Why am I the one who must enter this hospital / While that man passing by / At this very moment / Can proceed on his way?" to its close, "Terrible is the passage / Into the fold / Both for man / And / Animal," his libretto pulls no punches.

For the premiere of *On the Threshold of Winter*, the composer took care to assemble an artistic team in which he could place complete confidence, turning first to his frequent, trusted collaborator, violinist and violist Miranda Cuckson, who is the founder and artistic director of the new-music ensemble Nunc. One of the leading exponents of Hersch's music, her account of his 14 Pieces prompted the *New York Times* to declare:

"Ms. Cuckson was in her element here. It would be hard to imagine this music played more vividly."

Nunc was led by Tito Muñoz, recently appointed as music director of the Phoenix Symphony, who also conducted a performance of Hersch's piano concerto *along the ravines* this season. Of all the sopranos under consideration it was Ah Young Hong – whose "silvery voice and emotive phrasing" impressed the *Baltimore Sun* as "touching the heart of the music" – who stood out as best able to capture the particular sounds Hersch had in mind. "From her first audition, she seemed uniquely capable – she seems to intuitively understand the terrain of the material and has the vocal flexibility to achieve it," he explains. *On the Threshold of Winter* was directed by Roger Brunyate, a champion of new opera.

Text provided by Adam Sorkin

Marin Sorescu, *The Bridge*

<http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/titlepage.asp?isbn=1852245778>

Performance video excerpt::

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXoL3KNnB8I>

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## Romanian Studies Association of America



### World Premier:

### On the Threshold of Winter adapted from Marin Sorescu's "The Bridge." (4)

Review of the premiere in the *New York Times*:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/27/arts/music/michael-herschs-new-opera-on-the-threshold-of-winter.html?ref=music>

Review from the *New Criterion*:

<http://www.newcriterion.com/posts.cfm/A-wintery-night-in-late-June-7513>

Review by Doina Uricariu in *Cotidianul*:

<http://www.cotidianul.ro/opera-americana-in-premiera-mondiala-pe-versuri-de-marin-sorescu-242420/>

Interview with Miranda Cuckson:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk-9cgXEU7I>

Michael Hersch website:

<http://www.michaelhersch.com/>

### Recent publications:

Adam Sorkin

*A Sharp Double-Edged Luxury Object. 20 poems by Rodica Draghinescu* (translated with Antuza Genescu). West Somerville, MA: Červená Barva Press, 2014. 45 pp.

*Gold and Ivy/Aur și iederă. 54 poems by George Vulturescu* (translated with Olimpia Iacob). Dual-language, tête-bêche. Cluj-Napoca [Romania]: Editura Eikon, 2014. English, 129 pp./Romanian, 118 pp.

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