

Round Table 2: *Mioritic Space of the Romanian in Exile*

The 39th Congress ARA, 2015, Frascati/Rome, Italy

Plenary Session

July 29th, 2015

11:55AM – 13:10PM

Moderator: Ileana Costea, Los Angeles, USA

Members of the Discussion Panel present in person at Frascati/Rome:

Doina Uricariu, New York, USA

Ileana Costea, Los Angeles, USA

Members of the Discussion Panel present on Skype:

Ben Todică, Melbourne, Australia

Ion Lazus, București, România

Present with a short video:

Petra Vlah, Los Angeles, SUA

Description of the Plenary Session “*Mioritic Space of the Romanian in Exile*”

The refuge is a tear of profound self ... the person in exile must survive the vicissitudes of detachment from his familiar environment, of living among strangers ... must use their patience and wisdom to adapt to living among other ethnic groups, in an environment with other customs, traditions and demands (Ileana Costea about the novel “The Newcomer”/“Veneticii” by Ion Lazus).

The Romanian in exile is living all one’s life, consciously or subconsciously, in the “Mioritic space”.

The “Mioritic space” is a concept introduced by our great poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga to succinctly capture in only two words the Romanian national spirit. The well-known Romanian thinker wondered what actually defines the Romanian nation, what distinguishes Romanians from their neighbors, the pragmatic and liberal West Europeans, and the fatalistic Slavonic people of Eastern Europe. (Ion Lazus)

The five members of the round table at the plenary session “The Mioritic Space of the Romanian in Exile” present this topic from various points of view: Ileana Costea (Los Angeles, California, USA) presents her observations made from the self-imposed mission to discover “surprise-Romanian-presence abroad”; Doina Uricariu (New York) about the importance of the recovery of the values of Romanian exile after 1990; Lazus Ion (Bucharest, Romania) focuses on the many Romanian writers living in exile whom he knows well from the presentations he made over the years in his Writers Calendar of his blog; Ben Todică (Melbourne, Australia) talks from his rich experience of many interviews he made at Radio and TV stations in Romanian and about living “in the Romanian language”; and Petra Vlah (Los Angeles, California, USA) presents the Romanian exile from her own perspective of living for over 30 years in America and now determined to return home to her country of origin.

Presentations of the Round Table “*Mioritic Space of the Romanian in Exile*”



Ileana Costea

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Presentation Title: Living in Exile and Observing the Romanian Presence Abroad

Presentation Description – Ileana Costea, PhD

The presentation begins with a brief explanation of the difference between the notions of "exile" and "emigration", which actually others understand better than the author. In an extreme simplification "exile" is imposed/forced, and "emigration" is voluntary. Actually everything is much more complex. Ileana presents her observations from numerous discussions with Romanians established in various parts of the world whom she has met and about many of whom she wrote in articles published over the years on the theme "Romanian surprise-presence abroad". Then an attempt to define the concept of the "Mioritic Space of the Romanian in exile". Is made. The author explains her self-imposed mission of discovering the Romanian surprise-presence abroad. Those who left Romania to live somewhere else are of different kinds: some deny their country of origin, some express total indifference towards it, others became directly involved in Romania after '89, and some, like the author, try their best to bring their contribution to make the world aware of the beautiful things Romania and Romanian culture and science have. Some of us, Romanians in exile, live their whole life in one world only, in a "virtual Romania", even if they left from it long ago, since they are unable to feel at home in foreign lands, and since they have never really integrated themselves into their adoptive country, others live only in the adoptive country world, avoiding to look back, others live in two worlds, being well adapted where they are, but also being proud of their Romanian roots, and yet others, after long years of living in a foreign country, go back to live in Romania ...

What appears certain to the author is that wherever we place ourselves on this spectrum of attitudes and feelings, of longing and nostalgia for our country, or lack of these sentiments, Romanians living abroad, without exception, if conscious or not about it, we all, carry with us, wherever we are in the world, the "Mioritic Space".

Short bio – Ileana Costea, PhD

Ileana Costea was born in Bucharest and studied architecture at the "Ion Mincu" Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning and obtained a Master Degree. She left Romania immediately after graduation in 1972, for a 7-day trip on Loire Valley in France. Those seven days outside Romania were extended until today. After a year in Paris Ileana came to Los Angeles, in February 1973, where she married Doctor Nicolas V. Costea, MD, hematologist-oncologist and Professor of Medicine at the

University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Her Master Diploma being kept behind the Iron Curtain, and needing to have a doctorate in order to fulfill her dream of becoming a university professor, Ileana studied for another Master in Industrial Design at UCLA. After this, in 1982, she earned a doctorate (PhD) in "decision theory" from the Department of Systems Engineering, UCLA. For a few years she worked as a research engineer at several Californian companies, and then she was hired at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) where she obtained "tenure" and taught for 33 years. Her fields of interest have been the use of computers in engineering, focusing on CAD/CAM (computer-aided design and manufacturing) and Artificial Intelligence. She wrote numerous articles in these areas, organized and led scientific technical sessions at American national as well as at international conferences. Her passion has always been and remains art and culture. Since 1998, based on her self-imposed mission to make known Romanian-surprise-presences abroad she has written over 40 articles on this theme and published them in various newspapers and magazines in Romania and abroad. Ileana has participated over the years at numerous conferences on Romanian topics, initiating and moderating sessions and making presentations. Ileana organized numerous Romanian events: painting, sculpture, design, and book exhibitions, literary meetings, and the 1992 American-Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences (ARA) Congress at CSUN. She is an ARA member and had various roles in ARA and other Romanian organizations.



Dr. Doina Uricariu

Poet, writer, editor, and publisher

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Title of Presentation: **Recovery of the values of Romanian exile after 1990**

Presentation Description – Dr. Doina Uircariu

"I travel between two continents and I am at home in each of them. But in a different way. Home is where we are born and we respect our history and graves. At home we are also where we have our family and we are pursuing our projects. Ion Pillat was no less at home in Florica, in Bucharest, Romania Miorcani or while representing Romania at the Paris Peace Conference. Among our greatest artists in exile, I admire the way in which Brancusi chose to live and create. He felt at ease everywhere in the world and created anywhere, at table with the millionaires who collected his work and to those, when he invited them to his studio, he served soup in a pot and the traditional Romanian polenta/"mămăligă" ... But mostly, he was at ease with freedom and hard work. There is no work of art by Brancusi in which one cannot find this "I feel at home", admired and coveted by all. I respect him for his imponderable source of wisdom and love that never ran dry, the self-healing goodness and beautifully emanating from his works.

Being "at home" is not necessarily sitting with one's feet and hands crossed over the furnace (in your place of origin)" ... Doina Uricariu has chosen to live in the United States where she continues to write. One finds her listed among the Romanian poets in exile in the book "Time - bleeding wound: Romanian Poets in the New World (2006), edited by Stephen Stoenescu and Gabriel Stanescu.

"I do not believe that nostalgia is the only thing that stimulates one's projects" ... "The purpose of writing one's memoirs, beyond data and personal history, is soul-healing." "I wanted to write two books of memoirs (*The Lower Jaw/Maxilarul Inferior* and *Lions' Ladder/Scara Leilor*) to advocate the reconstruction of unfalsified memory ... Recounting about my mother and her Bessarabia, about kings and queens, about the great personalities of culture and the places where the fate of our world was decided I rebuilt for my readers truths they have forgotten or which they never were aware of, which were hidden from them, minimized or distorted. I write because I would wish the human being will not get estranged and believe one's strength lies in isolation and cynicism and must be based on servility towards those in power. "

Dr. Doina Uricariu is convinced that the most important deed after 1990 in the culture and consciousness of the Romanians has been and continues to remain valuing creativity, important personalities, and documents present in exile and censored before.

Short Bio – Dr. Doina Uricariu

Doina Uricariu is an important contemporary Romanian writer with an unmistakable lyric voice born out of a generous sensuous universe, intersected by constant moral, philosophical, and political questioning. She started out in poetry with the volume *Healings*, published in 1976 after a seven-year wait in the hands of the Communist censorship. Eight other volumes of poetry followed: *Jugastru Sfiala*, *Happy Beings*, *The Hand-covered Face*, *Atrocious Eye*, *The Heart Institute*, *The Power of Leviathan*, *The Axonometric Heart*; three volumes of poetry published in Italy; a bi-lingual German-Romanian volume of poetry *Das Herzzinstitut / The Heart Institute*; and recently, in English, *The Glass book*, a volume of poems never published before which will be published in Romanian this year.

Mrs. Uricariu's poetry has been translated in anthologies and individual volumes in French, German, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Serb, Macedonian, Albanian, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Turkish, Greek, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, as well as in numerous other languages.

She published volumes of criticism and literary history, monographs dedicated to some visual artists (Maria Pilat-Brateş, Constantin Antonovici). Doina Uricariu prepared and edited reference editions on Emil Cioran, Dominic Stanca, Jeni Acterian, Emil Botta, and *The Podrom Filokalia* (two volumes); she published books of memoirs, *The lower Jaw/ Maxilarul Inferior* (two volumes), and *The Lion's Ladder/Scara Leilor* (two volumes).

Dr. Doina Uricariu is a member of several national and international organizations, Romanian Writers Association, European Cultural Society, International PEN CLUB. Knight of the Order of Faithful Service of Romania conferred by the President of the country. Knight of the Order of the Romanian Crown conferred by the Royal House of Romania, and founding member of the Civic Academy Foundation / Fundația Academia Civică. Doina Uricariu a primit numeroase premii naționale și internaționale, Premiul Uniunii Scriitorilor din România, Premiul Asociației Scriitorilor din București, Premiul Uniunii Scriitorilor din Republica Moldova, Premiul Fundației din Haifa, Israel, Premiul Americii Latine, Premiul revistei Manuscriptum pentru ediția Emil Botta, Premiul revistei Luceafărul pentru critică literară, Premiul revistei Convorbiri literare pentru proză și memorialistică, Premiul publicului acordat de

revista Observator cultural, Premiul de excelență pentru editarea antologiei poeziei românești, ediție în zece volume, îngrijită de Laurențiu Ulici.



Ion Lază

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Title of the presentation: **Romanian Writers in Exile**

Presentation Description – Ion Lază:

The presentation starts by explaining the concept of “Mioritic Space” introduced by our great poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga in his “Trilogy of Culture”/”Trologia culturii”, 1936. Then a brief review of exile in history, the 50 years exile of Jewish people in Babylon, that of some famous Ancient Greek citizens exiled for political reasons, who sometimes became enemies of the city which punished them, symbolizing their own value which was not justly appreciated. In closer history, we can refer to Ovidius's exile in Tomis, Dante's exile, to that of Napoleon, of Pushkin, of Bălcesu, of Cuza, as well as the exile of his own will of Caragiale. The author then presents the situation of the self-imposed exile during and after the war, when all Romanians who were studying or on mission abroad have decided to not risk to return home, knowing what awaited them. Things were quite different in the communist period when the ruthless exile was applied following the Soviet model: the expulsion of undesirable persons, imprisoning “enemies of the state”, especially the Bărăgan deportation of entire communities. Ion Lază mentions his novel “Veneticii” about his family’s refuge in their own country, sent, by order of eviction from Bessarabia to Oltenia. Those living in the regions of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, when these territories were taken by the Soviet Union, also became exiled, since they were detached by force from the nation to which they belong historically. After briefly presenting the situation of Romanian world-class creators in exile (such as Brâncuși, Enescu, Celibidache, Perlea, Eliade, Apostu, who categorically refused to return home in spite the insistence of the government (given their organic repulsion for the communist regime), the author addresses more at length the exile of Romanian writers.

The two postwar periods of exile are presented: 1945-1949, when 50 writers were in exile; 1975-1989 when 200 other writers were able to escape the communist terror by leaving for “the West”. A simple counting shows that, at the time, nearly 15% of the Romanian writers were living in exile, a figure higher than for any other country. The same situation was to be found in other creative fields: musicians, actors, directors, artists, in-fashion singers, athletes. The way in which the writers found in exile reacted is then presented.

Some continued to write in Romanian aware of the fact that there is no hope that they will be published in Romania: Paul Goma, Caraion Ion, Ion Negoitescu, Bujor Nedelcovici; others went to the hard process of learning to write in the language of their adoptive country: Emil Cioran, Petru Dumitriu, Petru Popescu, George Astaloş, Constantin Ilie. And some of them, like Eliade, wrote their scientific works in the language of the adoptive country, but continued to write literature in Romanian, since it was closer to their soul. It must be stressed that Romanian intellectuals in exile tried their best to raise the awareness of the Western World to the most valuable aspects of the Cultural identity of the Romanians, feel somehow the duty to act as our ambassadors.

Short bio – Ion Lazu

Born in Bessarabia, Ciubârciu town, Bender County. Parents, Gregory and Vera (born Ciobanu) - landowners, small merchants. On the mother side, Ben is related to Ştefan Ciobanu, teacher of history of old Romanian literature, director of the "Al. Russo" Science High School. Chisinau, one of the leaders of the 1918 Great Union (of Bessarabia and Bukovina with the Romanian Kingdom), subsequently Minister of Culture.

In March 1944, the writer's family took refuge from the war front-line, settling in the town of Cireasov, Olt County, in Southern Romania. Ion started studying geology and geography at Bucharest University. In 1961, immediately after graduation he was hired as a geologist-prospecter by a company specializing in this domain, with headquarters in the capital city, from which he retired in 1999 after 38 years of uninterrupted activity on terrain, in all regions of Romania.

Ion Lazu made his start in poetry in the Ateneu magazine in December 1964, and continued to publish poetry and short prose sporadically. He has never published articles in the Communist press. With long delays, sometimes for decades, some of his volumes of prose, poetry, and memoirs were published by the best-known publishing houses, Eminescu Romanian Paper and Minerva: nine novels (including *Badger fur/Blana de viezure*, *The Bet/Rămăşagul*, *Rock trap/Capcana de piatră*, *The Newcomers/Venticii*, *The Wild one/Sălbaticul*, and *The Tear/Ruptura*; three volumes of short stories, several journals; several volumes of poems: *Museum of the Poet/Muzeul Poetului*; several volumes of poetry: *Words beside the wall/Cuvinte lângă zid*, *I write in the light of my hand/Eu scriu la lumina mâinii mele*. He edited an anthology of Valeriu Ciobanu's poetry *Coat of Mist/Haina de brumă*; he published children literature: *Stories from the forest/Întâmplări din pădure*, and *Andrei's book/Cartea lui Andrei*. He also published two albums of photographic art. He organized several exhibitions of photographic art in Romania and Luxembourg. He wrote screenplays which since they have been made into movies he rewrote as novels. He is the initiator and implementer of several cultural projects: "Memorial plaques for great writers who passed away" (200 memorial plaques were placed on houses in Bucharest, 2007-2009) and "Memorial of Romanian Writers imprisoned under the Communist regime", 2008, which was taken over by the Union of Romanian Writers (Uniunea Scriitorilor din Romania) and was not completed. He won awards for his literary work and for photography, and the first prize for the screenplay for the movie *Vestea/The News*, 1970, which was never made into a movie. Author of a Calendar of Romanian Writers in 3 volumes, about 1900 pages, totaling 600 writers living in Romania and in exile. Based on his writer diary, kept with consequence over 4 decades, he is currently working at editing a series of memorialistic volumes, of which the following were already published: *Scenes from literary life/Scene din viaţa literară*, *Literature Chimera/Himera literaturii*, *Odyssey of memorial plaques/Odiseea plăcilor memoriale*, *Covered Weather/Vreme închisă*, *Friends through books/Prietenii prin cărţi*. His name is present in various anthologies: *Poetry Forest/Poezia pădurii*, 1999; *Lyrique Spectra/Spectre Lyrique*, 1999; *Arges*

Library/Biblioteca Argeş, 2007, *The Anthology of Romanian Sonnet/Antologia sonetului românesc*, 2009. He was made Honorary Citizen of the city Slatina.



Ben Todică

Independent Artist (cinematographer, TV produces, broadcaster-journalist, sound engineer, writer)

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Title of the Presentation: **The Miorița Echo**

Presentation Description – Ben Todică

Reminders of childhood: the hills and the mountains with valleys and sheep, the voices of people mixed with animal sounds or birds chirping. He presents the idea that we, Romanians, lived for thousands of years in harmony with the land and recalls the words Lucian Blaga told Eliade: "The Romanian Culture is a minor culture, adopting childhood as its age. Today it seems like the society pursues to cut this umbilical cord by turning the new generations into avid consumers of goods. Todică reminds us that in the well-known Romanian Miorița ballad the shepherd does not respond to violence with violence, to the contrary he is showing great maturity and human wisdom. One can observe this maturity in the homes of Romanian emigrants of the diaspora. These have carried with them the Mioritic Space through their native language, traditional food and music, the way they dress as well as by the contributions they make to the adoptive country in which they live. For Ben the Mioritic Space is in every Romanian word he pronounces, by which he feels protected, which for him seems to be connecting the sky with the earth. The Mioritic Space is a lullaby, a wind breeze, the fragrance of a flower, and the strong longing/"dor" one has for things left behind in one's country of origin. Todică concludes his presentation by saying that if it were not for the Romanian language he would have died in exile a long time ago.

Short biography – Ben Todică

Ben was born in the village Ezer, Puiestii Vaslui, Romania, son of Aurica and Gheorghe Todică. After 1950 his parents settled in the Banat region in Southern Romania, where his father worked in the coal mines of Ocna de Fier, then in the uranium mines Ciudanovița. It is then that his passion for film begins, succeeding with a slide projector to project movies and draw photograms. When he was 12 years old he bought a projector, a Meopta camera made in Czechoslovakia, and two films, and with these tools he will make his first film, entitled *Childhood*. While working he continue high school. He made films for training workers and about safety and participated in a competition for amateur

filmmakers, learning on this occasion the ABC of film production, directing, sound and image aspects, visual effects, how to develop and process film, editing.

While employed at the Pioneers' House in the town of Oravița he creates the movies:

Perseverance/Perseverența (1978) which won the grand prize at the National Festival of filmmakers in 1979: Nera Keys/*Cheile din Nera* (1976), Meditation/*Meditație* (1976); The Dream (1975), which was nominated for the third prize at the State Filmmakers Festival; The First Steps/ *Primii pași* (1979); Oxygen/*Oxigen* (1976), and The Chain/1976) *Lanțul* (1976).

He arrived in Australia (Melbourne) in 1979. He worked as a welder, then as a subcontractor and operator-programmer for the big company NATRA. The battle for existence did not kill his lifelong love for film and mass-media. He took courses in professional writing and editing at Monash University; he went to the sound school and took singing lessons, and became part of a vocal group; he completed a course for broadcasters, offered by the radio station 3zzz in Melbourne; he studied directing, movie shooting, and film production with known American specialists in the field of movie production and screenplay writing. When pilot programs began to appear for different ethnic groups which included Romanians, Ben Todică started working at the Romanian television station. He distinguished himself by his show called Romanian Mosaic (investing over \$20,000.00 in broadcasting equipment). In 2004, at the "Artholes in Melbourne" Festival the Romanian TV program was nominated among the top five "Best Arts Program" with two of Ben Todică's creations. Ben was nominated as the "Australian of the year 2007" for his exceptional contributions in the Romanian-Australian community.

Ben published essays, reviews, articles in numerous magazines in Romania, Australia and around the world. He published two books he edited: "Inbetween two worlds", Atticea, Timișoara, 2009; " In two worlds", Singur, Târgoviște, 2011 which appeared in a second edition, Mușatinia, Roman, 2012. Mușatinia published also the volume in honor of Ben as a writer, entitled: „Ben Todică- Honorary Ambassador of the Romanians”.

Ben also created numerous movies, including "Our Journey" about the exploitation of uranium under communism in Banat, Romania, which received a lot of appreciation and is used for teaching film in an American university.



Petra Vlah

Poet and essayist

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UydErbBWGvE&feature=youtu.be>

Presentation Title: "So I wouldn't long ... but long I did"

Presentation Description – Petra Vlah

(present via a short video by cinematographer Marius Neacșu, Los Angeles, USA)

Petra Vlah shares her experience of living most of her life in a foreign land while longing for the places of her youth that have shaped her personality. Her poetic confession is that despite all the precautions she took at the time of her departure, by burrowing deep in her soul the beauty of Romania, did not help much and she has always missed the wavy hills and winding roads through broad valleys as well as everyday life and traditions.

“When I left home/ I took with me/ all that was mine/ never to long for it/...but still, forever I did long” (from the volume “Cape of Good Hope”). Now she is ready to return to Romania, the only home she ever had and once again embrace its beauty and its people.

Short Bio - Petra Vlah

Born in Romania, Petra Vlah graduated from the University of Bucharest with a degree in Romanian Language and Literature and a specialization in Italian. In 1979 she immigrated to the United States as a Romanian citizen with permanent residence abroad.

While still a student, she wrote and read her poems in numerous literary circles. As a new immigrant, her daily efforts were focused strictly on survival and that meant a period of creative stagnation. After her first return home in 1990, the poetic levee burst and by 2000 she was hosting a quadruple book launch. Held at the Writers Union in Bucharest, it was attended by the Minister of Culture Ion Caramitru, the Cultural Attaché of the United States and many personalities of the Romanian cultural world.

The following volumes were launched in 2000: "Cape of Good Hope" (Crater Publishing House), "At the outskirts of dawn" (*Signata* Publishing House), "The eye of the net" (*Augusta* Publishing House) and "Relevant encounters" (The Time Publishing House). Due to the great reviews of her first published books, the *Cotidianul* newspaper offered her a double weekly column ("Diaspora" and "Writer's voice"); some of these essays were then collected in the book "The Morning Coffee" published in 2001, *Signata* Publishing House). In the same year two more volumes "The Barbed Perimeter") and "The veiled eye" (*Signata* Publishing House) were published, and in 2003 came the autobiographic volume "Princess of Zanzibar" (*The Typewriter* Publishing House).

Since 2007, Petra has been active and published on various English writing sites: "Writer's Café", "Hubpage", "Helium", "Divine Carolyn" and "Eye on Life."

Presently, Petra is finalizing the novel "Disposable People", a sad revelation that all political regimes are inevitably the same Procrustean bed, intending to level the collective human personality to the lowest common denominator, and transform it into an amorphous mass that can be easily manipulated.