

Special Guest:

Domnița Dumitrescu



Domnița Dumitrescu (Diploma in Spanish from the University of Bucharest; MA and Ph.D in Hispanic linguistics from the University of Southern California) taught at California State University, Los Angeles from 1987 to 2016. She is currently an emerita professor of Spanish linguistics. Before coming to the US, she was a tenured associate professor of Spanish at the University of Bucharest, Romania, and she also taught, as an invited lecturer, at the University of California at Irvine and the University of Southern California. She was a Fulbright scholar in Argentina, in 1993, teaching at several Argentinian institutions of higher education, including the Universities of Buenos Aires, Tucumán, Del Comahue, (in Patagonia), and San Juan, and she lectured at several universities abroad, including the University of Costa Rica, the University of Alicante, Spain and the University of Stockholm, Sweden, as well as in the United States.

Her areas of expertise are Spanish pragmatics, language contact between English and Spanish in the US, socio-pragmatic aspects of Spanish politeness, and comparative studies between Spanish and Romanian, her native language. For example, she recently published an article about the influence of English on both the Spanish and the Romanian languages spoken in the US.

In Romania, she published, among other things, two books, one on the grammar of Spanish (*Gramatica limbii spaniole prin exercitii structurale*, Bucuresti, Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1976) and the other one on translating from Romanian into Spanish (*Indreptar pentru traducerea din limba romana in limba spaniola*, Bucuresti, Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1980) that enjoyed a big success. In fact, the former book was republished in Romania, with the addition of practical exercises by Dan Munteanu (professor at the University of Las Palmas, Spain), under the title: *Limba spaniola: 1850 de exercitii rezolvate & explicatii gramaticale*, Bucuresti, Editura Niculescu, 2005.

Her US publications include several scholarly books, the most recent of which are *Aspects of Spanish Pragmatics* (Peter Lang, New York 2011), *El español en los Estados Unidos: E Pluribus Unum? Enfoques multidisciplinarios* (co-edited with Gerardo Piña-Rosales, ANLE, New York, 2013) and *Hablando bien se entiende la gente* (Santillana 2014, in co-autorship). She has also authored almost one hundred and fifty book chapters and scholarly articles in peer reviewed journals, in her areas of expertise, as well as numerous literary translations (from Spanish into Romanian), and book reviews. Her editorial work includes being first an Associate Editor (in charge of the section on Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian world) and since 2011, Book/Media Review Editor for *Hispania*, the scholarly journal of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). She is also on the editorial boards of *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching* (Routledge), *Pragmática sociocultural/Sociocultural Pragmatics* (De Gruyter) and *Language and Dialogue* (John Benjamins).

She participated in hundreds of professional conferences in the United States, Canada, Europe and Latin America, reading papers, and/or organizing and chairing panels or whole conferences. She is a member of the most prestigious scholarly organizations in her field (often holding elected offices in these organizations, such as, for example, President of the Romanian Studies Association of America, President of the AATSP

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Southern California chapter, and President of the Linguistics Association of the Southwest).

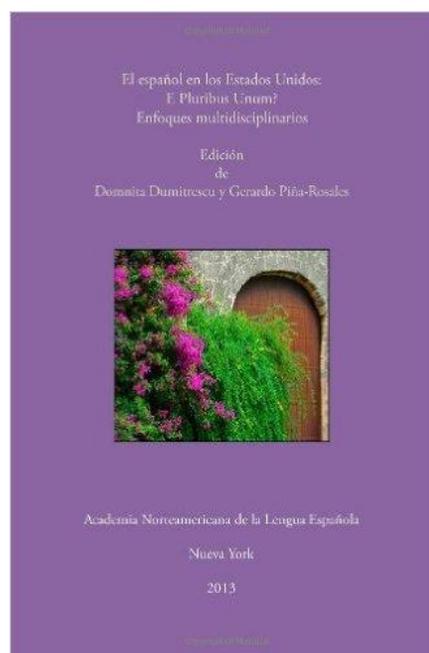
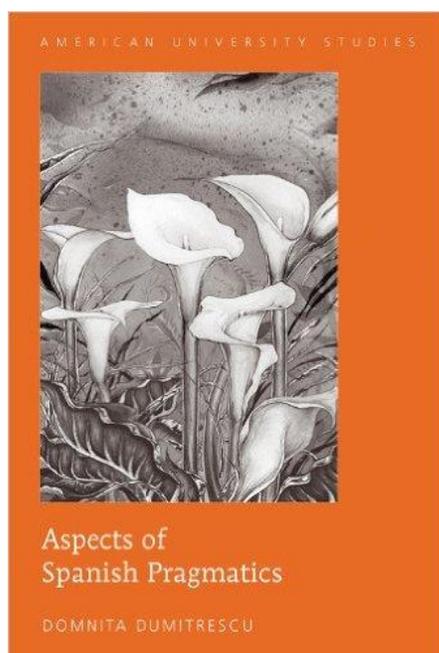
She received numerous recognitions and awards, including the highest awards from Cal State LA (Outstanding Professor and President's Distinguished Professor in 2004 and 2008), the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (Outstanding Teacher of the Year in 2000) and the Hispanic Honor Society Sigma Delta Pi (the Orders of the Discoverers and of Don Quijote). Her name is included in several *Who's Who* reference works, and she is a Full Member of the North American Academy of the Spanish language and a corresponding member in the United States of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in Spain. She is currently a member of the inter-academic commission working on the next (24th) electronic edition of the *Dictionary of the Spanish language* (DLE), representing the North American Academy of the Spanish Language, and a member of the

commission working on the *Glossary of grammatical terms*. She is also actively collaborating with the Cervantes Institute's Observatory of the Spanish Language and Hispanic Cultures in the US, at Harvard University, where she recently co-directed the creation of an electronic bibliography of all the linguistics publications in US Spanish.

At the moment, she is co-editing (with Patricia Andueza, from the University of Evansville, Indiana) a book titled *The Learning of Spanish Pragmatics: From Research to Practice*, to be published by Routledge (UK); and with Diana Bravo (from the University of Stockholm, Sweden), *Roles situacionales, interculturalidad y multiculturalidad en encuentros en español*, to be published at Editorial Dunken (Argentina).

For more information and a list of her publications, see her homepage at:

www.calstatela.edu/faculty/domnita-dumitrescu



For this first number of the *RSAA Journal*, Domnita Dumitrescu has translated a 2013 interview with Romanian -Argentine writer Alina Diaconu. Born in 1945, Diaconu and her family left Romania for Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1959. She has also lived in Paris between 1968-70.

The interview was originally published in Spanish as “La profundidad de una vocación más allá del idioma” in *Revista de la ANLE (RANLE)*, Vol. III, No 6, 2014: 373-379.

The depth of a vocation beyond the language (1)

Interview with Alina Diaconu (I)



Romanian-Argentine Writer Alina Diaconu

Domnita: Dear Alina, we met exactly 20 years ago (which, according to the tango, "aren't anything") when I arrived in Argentina as a Fulbright Senior Scholar at the end of August 1993. Since then, we have only met one year later, in 1994, on two occasions: when I went back to Buenos Aires, also in August, returning from Montevideo, for a brief period, and stayed in your studio in the center of the capital, and in November, when you traveled to the United States, to participate at Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts) at the Romanian-American Academy Congress which awarded you the Literature Prize for that year. It was an honor to introduce you to my Romanian-American colleagues on that occasion, and write several texts about you that were published subsequently in the United States and in Romania. (read endnotes 2, 3)

What memories did you bring back from the United States, a country where you spent several months in 1985 (as a Fulbright scholar participating in the famous International Writing Program at the University of

Iowa and giving lectures at several American universities) and where you returned, as I have just mentioned, in 1994?

Alina: The experience in the United States with my Fulbright grant was really interesting because, thanks to it, I have not only discovered Iowa and met poet Paul Engle, the founder of the program, but also because we were all living together in one building, writers from around the world, from Ireland to Nigeria, from China to South Africa and France. I noticed that all of us had more or less the same questions about literature and life, irrespective of one's culture, ethnicity, etc. And it struck me how well known Borges was, already, in those years, in very diverse countries around the globe. The scholarship allowed me to visit places in the USA where I had not been before, to lecture in different universities: from the University of Chicago, to Tempe, Arizona or Charleston, South Carolina. I found a very authentic enthusiasm not only for the literature by women, but also for Latin America and, above all, for Argentina that was leaving behind its terrible military dictatorship, and where my novel, *Buenas noches, profesor* (*Good Evening, Professor*), had been censored.

Domnita: In an article published in *Cultura* (issue 52, 1995) on the occasion of the death of Cioran, you wrote, addressing the famously departed: "I had three Masters in literature and life: Alberto Girri, Eugène Ionesco and you, Cioran. Where am I? And you... where are you? How orphan I feel, here and now. What a terrible loneliness begins... Perhaps similar to yours, when you chose to become stateless. In other words, a free spirit." Tell me about your relationship with these two great compatriots of ours, Eugène Ionesco and Emile Cioran, and about the ten years you spent in Paris, when you met them, being you too, like them, "a free spirit."

Alina: I met Eugène when I was 17 years old, in Paris, at the house of the art critic Ionel Jianu.

Interview with Alina Diaconu (2)

He was with his wife, Rodica. I chatted a lot with him; the next day he received me at his home and listened with inordinate patience to the poems I used to write at that time in French. After, he greatly encouraged me, praising the vocation I already had. Much of what I did afterwards, I owe it to him, because he was very generous with me, and I was heavily influenced for a while by his humor and the literary style he invented, "the theatre of the absurd." Then, over the years, whenever I went with my husband to Paris, we visited him and he always motivated me to continue with my literary work. (2)

Cioran, I met him later; I visited him frequently in his attic on Odeon Street. Ricardo, my husband, accompanied me from time to time and it was a spiritual feast to speak with him, because of his bonhomie, his histrionics, and the brilliant reflections he made. His personality had nothing to do with the negativity that permeates his essays and aphorisms. Ionesco, in contrast, was a quieter, more introverted man, but – oh, yes!-when he threw a phrase, it was like an arrow hitting the target.

I owe so much to both of them; so much that I will never be able to thank life enough for the privilege of meeting and befriending them for so many years. My gratitude is expressed in my book *Los ojos azules* (*The Blue Eyes*), a novel dedicated to both for being "my Masters in perplexity."

Domnita: In the "Autogeografía" ("Autogeography"), the essay that opens the book edited by Ester Gimbernat González and Cynthia Tomkins –*Utopías, ojos azules, bocas suicidas: La narrativa de Alina Diaconú* (*Utopias, Blue Eyes, Suicidal Mouths: The Narrative of Alina Diaconú*), Buenos Aires, 1993—, you wrote: "My existential itinerary has had, in sum, three centers that make up my emotional geography: *Romania* (the country of my birth, of my childhood and puberty, of the contact with nature, of my first language); *France* (the country whose culture has marked my education and tastes in defining ways, whose language was, since I was 4 year old, my second language; and in whose splendid capital I tried several times to settle down forever, with almost immediate regrets); and finally, *Argentina*: the country I adopted and that adopted me; it helped me heal the wounds of exile and initiated me into the adventure of the Spanish language, better said, this fascinating Castilian of the Río de la Plata,

which became the language of my daily reality, dreams and literature."

You arrived in Argentina in 1959, with your parents, at the age of 14, having Romanian as your mother tongue. How did you become such a valued Spanish language writer? When did you start writing in your adoptive language and why?

Alina: I think that all is due to a clear, well-defined vocation that goes even beyond the language itself. Keep in mind that I came to Buenos Aires without speaking a word of Spanish (I only knew French and Romanian). But in Bucharest, at the age of 10, I was already writing poems; then, when I came to this continent (i.e., South America), for a couple of years I wrote in French (theater, poetry, reflections), and only when I was proficient enough in Spanish, I started with fiction in that language (novels, short stories and later, essays). The fact that Spanish is a Romance language also may have helped a little, but I think everything is actually based on the depth of my vocation.

Domnita: Your novel, *El penúltimo viaje* (*The Penultimate Trip*), also translated into Romanian, deals, in a metaphorical way, with your country of origin under the Stalinist dictatorship (a metaphor that could be extended to the dictatorship of the military governments in Latin America), and with the exile into which you and your family were forced. How did the experience of exile mark you, as you fully lived it as a teenager? In addition to this book - one of my favorite of all your writings because I identify very much with its subject (3) -, are there echoes of this vital experience in your other works?

Alina: I think that even though this is the only book where I touch in a direct way upon the issues of Communism in Eastern Europe, all others reflect experiences that originate in my childhood and puberty in Romania. They feature the violence of power, the authoritarianism, the lack of freedom, the discrimination (for any reason), the persecution, the fear, the denunciation, the hypocrisy, etc.

Domnita: When I met you, in 1993, you were already an established writer, author of seven novels: *La señora* (*The Lady*, 1975); *Buenas noches, profesor* (*Good Evening, Professor*, 1978); *Enamorada del muro*

Interview with Alina Diaconu (3)

(*In Love with the Wall*, 1981); *Cama de ángeles* (*Bed of Angels*, 1983); *Los ojos azules* (*The Blue Eyes*, 1986); *El penúltimo viaje* (*The Penultimate Trip*, 1989) and *Los devorados* (*The Devoured*, 1992); you also edited a collection of tributes to Girri – you were in charge of selecting and compiling 28 texts in which his fellow writers honored his memory after his death. Your work was discussed in symposia (for example, at the University of Missouri, or the Montevideo Congress of the Literary and Cultural Hispanic Institute), books and dissertations were written about you, and I know that you have been awarded several literary prizes in Argentina (among others, the “Faja de Honor” from the Argentina Society of Writers, the “Meridiano de Plata,” and the 2nd National Prize in Cultural Journalism). What have you published since 1993?

Alina: Well, a book of short stories, *¿Qué nos pasa, Nicolás?* (*What’s Happening to Us, Nicolás?*, 1995), and two more novels: *Una mujer secreta* (*A Secret Woman*, 2002) and *Avatar* (*Avatar*, 2009). In addition, I started to publish poetry. My first book of verses came out in 2005 and is titled *Intimidades del ser: Veintisiete poemas y algunos aforismos* (*Intimacies of the Being: Twenty-seven Poems and Some Aphorisms*). The second came out in 2007, under the title of *Poemas del silencio* (*Poems of the Silence*). In addition, in 1998, I published *Preguntas con respuestas* (*Questions with Answers*), a book of interviews with Borges, Cioran, Girri, Ionesco and Sarduy, and two books of essays.

Domnita: What can you tell about the reception of these books abroad?

Alina: In Romania, my native country, three of my novels have been translated, and I received several recognitions from the Romanian Government for promoting the Romanian culture in the world. At the same time, several of my poems were translated into English by Victoria Livingstone and published in 2008 (in a bilingual edition) in the North American magazine *Metamorphoses*. Likewise, my narrative texts are included not only in Argentinian anthologies –such as *El libro del padre* (*The Book of the Father*), *Cuentistas argentinas de fin de siglo* (*Argentinean End-of-century Female Storytellers*), *Antología del erotismo en la literatura argentina* (*Anthology of Eroticism in Argentine Literature*), etc.–, but also in US anthologies, such as *Short Story International*, *Secret Weavers*, *Contemporary*

Argentinean Women Writers, *Steams of Silver*, *Women and Power*, etc. In France, my book, *Jorge Luis Borges - Entretiens avec Alina Diaconú*, was published in the translation of Annie Rodríguez (Éditions Le Capucin, 2002).

Domnita: Do you continue, in parallel with your literary work, your journalistic endeavors? You were a frequent collaborator of the periodicals *La Nación*, *Clarín*, *La Prensa*, *Cultura*, *Vigencia*, and, at one time, you published in *Vuelta sudamericana*, the journal co-directed by Octavio Paz. Do you continue with cultural journalism?

Alina: Yes, I do; I am currently writing columns and notes (both on literary themes and on daily life) for the daily newspaper *La Nación* (Buenos Aires) and its literary supplement, for the literary supplement of *Gaceta de Tucumán*, and for some other literary publications in Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. And, as you can see, some of these items, together with recent conferences presentations are collected in the book I just gave you, *Ensayo general: Reflexiones sobre la literatura, Borges, los mitos, los maestros, las pioneras, el más allá* (*General Essay: Reflections on Literature, Borges, Myths, Masters, Female Pioneers, and the Other World*).

Domnita: Yes, published by the International Foundation Jorge Luis Borges in 2009. Thank you so much. And I know that it is not your only book of essays, since you have published in 1998 *Calidoscopio: Notas acerca del amor, el poder, el tiempo y otros espejismos* (*Kaleidoscope: Notes about Love, Power, Time and Other Mirages*). I also appreciate that you have given me your last novel, *Avatar*, which I look forward to reading in the plane, in my way to California tomorrow. But, what are you writing now? Do you have some fiction book in preparation, or do you believe that you have reached the peak of your career and prefer to take some distance?

Alina: No, I'm still writing, it could not be otherwise. I have two books ready: one of poems (provisional title: *Aleteos* (*Flapping*)) and another one of aphorisms, so far called *Relámpagos* (*Lightning*), both of which (I hope) will come out some day. For now, they are in a drawer...

Domnita: If you do not mind, let me ask you a somewhat personal question, that you may not

Interview with Alina Diaconu (4)

answer, if you so prefer: You were married for a long time to Argentine poet Ricardo Cordero, whom I also had the pleasure of meeting in 1993, but who passed away recently. Tell me a little about him, his work, and the collaboration you had in his "simultaneous poems" book of 1971.

Alina: I can hardly talk about Ricardo, my husband, because his death is very recent and the void he left behind is huge. We lived together for 43 years. He was a writer, he published not only a book of poems, but also six novels: *Día matador (Killing Day)*, *Bulevar Utopía (Utopia Boulevard)*, *Temporal (Storm)*, *El contratiempo (The Setback)*, *Días inciertos (Uncertain Days)*, and *Se llamaba Juan Esteban (His Name Was Juan Esteban)*; and also a book of short stories, *Mis películas en el tintero (My Movies in the Pipeline)*. In addition, he made documentaries, he painted; he was very talented. Each one of us was the first reader of the other's works.

Domnita: It is quite clear that both of you are outstanding names in the Argentine literature of recent decades. But the literary landscape is in constant motion, and new generations and new artistic concerns rise. Could you tell me something about the current Argentine literary landscape, from your personal perspective? Do you think that it measures up to the great masters with whom the literary histories identify the literature of your country?

Alina: I am not very aware of the current Argentine fiction, because in recent years I devoted myself more than anything to re-reading old books I love from my library; and when it comes to recent literature, I read especially essay. It is what interests me most at this moment.

Domnita: To conclude, is there anything you'd like to tell the readers of *RANLE*, the newly created literary magazine of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language? It includes among its members many of yours compatriots from Argentina who live in the United States and strive to promote the use of Spanish in this great country which is home to over 50 million Hispanics (even the general editor of the magazine is Argentinian).

Alina: Yes, I'd like them to do whatever is possible (and even impossible) to put Argentine literature on the map of the United States. I am referring to names such as Roberto Arlt, Manuel Puig and Silvina Ocampo in fiction. And in poetry, Alberto Girri, Olga Orozco, Enrique Molina, and Ana Emilia Lahitte.

Domnita: May I communicate to the readers of the magazine your website's url so they can read more about your work?

Alina: Yes, it is www.alina-diaconu.8k.com.

Domnita: Since I know you still speak Romanian - and very well, indeed!-I'll thank you in our mother tongue: *Mulțumesc!*

Domnita Dumitrescu, Buenos Aires, July 21, 2013

Addendum:

Alina remains very active, more active than ever, and she is gaining even more recognition. For example, her novel *Avatar* won the second Municipal Prize, for the literary production of the biennium 2008-2010. In 2015, she published *Aleteos (Flapping)*, a book of poems illustrated by Guillermo Roux; and in 2016, *Relámpagos- Máximas y mínimas (Lightning – Maxims and Minims)*, a book of aphorisms, was published by Galáctica Press. Currently, she is preparing a volume of her articles published in Argentine newspapers and magazines in the past 20 years, provisionally titled *Gritos y susurros (Cries and Whispers)*.

Endnotes:

1. Re-published by permission from *Revista de la ANLE (RANLE)*, Vol. III, No 6, 2014, pp. 373-379, where it appeared as "La profundidad de una vocación más allá del idioma." (English translation by the author, D.D.)
2. Domnita Dumitrescu translated into Romanian two essays on Ionesco by Alina Diaconú, published in the *Bulletin of the Romanian-American Academy*: "Scrisoare lui Ionesco" ("Letter to Ionesco"), *American Romanian Academy Journal* 19 (1994), pp. 37-41, and "Ionesco –

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pictor" ("Ionesco-painter"), *American Romanian Academy Journal* 20 (1995): 85-90. Both were republished in *Confluente româno-americane (Romanian-American Confluences)*, ed. by Carmen Maria Andraș, Târgu-Mureș: Mica Doris, 1995, pp. 34-42.

3. Domnita Dumitrescu published an essay about this book entitled "Realidad y metáfora del exilio en la obra de Alina Diaconú" ("Reality and Metaphor of Exile in the Work of Alina Diaconú") in the scholarly journal *Alba de América* 15.28-29 (1997): 236-245. This essay was translated into Romanian and published as "Ecouri ale exilului în opera Alinei Diaconú" in *Confluente româno-americane (Romanian-American Confluences)*, ed. by Carmen Maria Andraș, Târgu-Mureș: Mica Doris, 1995, pp. 43-54. This interviewer also published an entry about the writer in an encyclopedia of Romanian personalities abroad: "Alina Diaconú" in *Români în știința și cultura occidentală (Romanians in Occidental Culture and Science)*, 2nd ed. București: ARA, 1996, pp. 123-24.

