

Dan Sociu Translated by Carla Baricz
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NTM is proud to present a new installment of contemporary Romanian poetry: the well-known poet Dan Sociu in wonderful new translations by Carla Baricz. Sociu is one of the most powerful voices in a generation that focuses on the bleak everyday life. His dark visions in urban settings are heartbreaking and authentic, and they will certainly resonate with many of our readers.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*



Dan Sociu (b. 1978) is a member of the younger generation of poets, the so-called “2000 Generation,” a movement sometimes called “Miserabilism” by Romanian literary critics. His published works include: *well-stopped jars, cash for one more week* (poems, 2002; 2003 Mihai Eminescu Prize and 2003 Romanian-Canadian Ronald Gasparic Prize); *brother louse* (poems, 1st edition: 2004; 2nd edition: 2007); *eXcessive songs* (poems, Cartea Românească, 2005; the Romanian Writers’ Association Best Book of the Year 2006); *Urbancholia* (novel, Polirom, 2008); *Special needs* (novel, Polirom, 2008); *Night Terrors* (poems, Cartea Românească, 2011); *The Scheme* (novella, Casa de Pariuri Literare, 2012); *Naive and Sentimental Poems* (poems, Cartea Românească, 2012; the “Radio România Cultural” prize); *Mouths dried with hatred* (poems, Longleaf Press, 2012); and *Come with me, I know exactly where we're*

going (poems, Tracus Arte, 2013; the "Radio România Cultural" prize; the *Observer Cultural* prize). A selection of Dan Sociu's poems has been translated in German and English anthologies such as: *New European Poets* (Graywolf, 2008), *No Longer Poetry* (Heaventree Press, ed. David Morley, 2007), *hat jemand 'twas gefragt* (Versus, 2003), *Ozone Friendly* (T. Publishing House, 2002), *Club 8 Poetry* (T Publishing House, 2001). Translations of his poems and articles have also appeared in literary magazines in Austria (*Wienzeile*), Sweden (*Ord & Bild, Lyrikvännen*), Poland (*Lampa*), and the United States (*Circumference*, Columbia University). These poems were selected from *Vino cu mine știu exact unde mergem: Antologie 1999-2014*, (*Come With Me, I Know Exactly Where We're Going: Anthology 1999-2014*). More about him here. <http://www.methodist.edu/longleaf/mouths.htm>



The Hatch

I dig around in my pockets for a pen and I come across the small toothbrush
this too is a way of conquering a city
sleeping in a different bed each night
two days ago for example through the goodwill of a security guard
I slept in a gynecologist's office among
white coats and scales among table stirrups and drawers
full of forceps and syringes!

table stirrups!

her Chinese feet hanging in table stirrups

she who purchases shoes from the children's department
ransacked by a guy whose precise gestures
so professional
are the exact opposite
defiant image of my inept caresses
of my tormented explorations

I look for a sheet and the only piece of paper I find
I decide to put under my ass because the sidewalk is cold
and I'm too tired to drink standing up again
what I wanted to write
a verse about table stirrups and love
I think I've read it somewhere it doesn't matter how often
it's a good verse I continue to ruminate on it
like a tiny hard candy I've been given instead of my change
at the 24/7 on the corner

the bottle of vodka is nearly gone the taxi drivers
sleep in their colored boxes
the man with the tambourine went off cursing me
I asked him to play for me one last time
the only song he knew, which in fact
he had begun learning just an hour ago
I explained to him that I'm not sleepy that I don't have anywhere to be
that in the end what the hell it was I
who bought him the tambourine in the first place
from the 24/7 on the corner
hoping to make an artist out of a wretch of a taxi driver

5 O'Clock Poem

1. last winter
a sordid winter like a newspaper headline

my mother's lover threatened me with an axe
my lover hated me

for the first time I thought about death with joy
scared exalted sort of like a fourth-grade brat thinks
about fifth grade
with the impatience of childhood
when I tried to get the train to move by sheer will

stretched out on the floor
with an empty potato sack in my arms
I would tell myself I

am nothing but
a turd in the rain
that speaks
I won't make money and neither
will I make people
suffer like they do with bregović
when they read my poems

they'll never give my name
to a charming little alley
on which I'd like to be mugged
I won't tremble for her any more
when I'll read the newspapers the stories of kidnappings
traffic of live flesh
like I trembled
when for a moment her flesh
was living flesh
on my Auschwitz body

2.
three days in unirii square
I moved from one frozen bench to another
calculating optimal angles distances
I didn't know which window was her window
I would grow hysterical
she had told me her lessor of a man wouldn't let her
let me into the house
he'll kick the bucket soon I hissed through my teeth
and two weeks later he died
three days from one frozen bench to another
I read the same book with gloved hands
my ears buzzed from the cold
but I didn't take my hat out of my pocket
I knew that from up there only by the hair
could she have recognized me
I even wore the same clothes
from our last date

3.
the neighbors all former secret police
watched me with suspicion
now I stand at the corner of a street with my feet in the slush
I pretend to be waiting

I bite my wrist deeply
I make myself a watch
I look at the watch
Now I'm alone in my room

I clink a glass of rum
with the jar with the mouse
he shudders scratches the glass
he hides his head under the sawdust

it's dark in the room
somewhere a locomotive whistles at the edge of the city
like always
that prolonged sound makes me hunch up

I dream myself with a handicap
and a little whore feeding me in bed

God give me strength

like the keys of a poker machine.

I drank my ticket money
and the rain ruined all the cigarette butts.

To get up the courage
to walk out of the bus station crapper
and smile at a driver:
brother, truly, I tell you –
today you will pass with me through Hlipiceni.¹

Minutes

My mom. When I finally landed a job
I kept thinking of getting her an automated machine
for everything she'd washed for me by hand.
Actually, I only thought about it for a few days:
I flipped through brochures, I added up rates.
Then I forgot.
My wife, a credit score reviewer, worked at Altex.
She looked people in the eye
and decided whether or not they deserved a TV.
She wouldn't have sold me a washing machine,
and she would have been right not to.
She would tell me on the phone that she's sad,
that she works 14 hours a day, Saturdays and Sundays as well,

¹ A small borough in Botoşani County, north-eastern Romania.

and only sees our daughter very rarely,
almost as rarely as I used to see her.
She would say: last weekend
she barely even looked at me,
she played with an annoying retard
kid from the neighborhood the whole time.
My wife wanted to be a psychologist
for children with special needs,
a special kind of psychologist – enthusiastic,
one who puts her whole heart into interpreting drawings –
but in the end the kids seemed annoying to her.
She loved me too,
and then she no longer loved me,
and I only had simple needs.
I loved her,
and then I didn't love her,
and she only had the usual needs.
I love my mom, too,
and she loves me, that's the design. In the meantime,
she's bought a washing machine,
she's alone and she calls me a couple of times a day
to recount what she sees on TV.
In the meantime, I've gotten divorced, with papers too,
with minutes, God, how we came across
in the minutes, *you people*, they said,
are confused beings, confused.

The Dead Art of Comparisons

Her skin would grow rosy,
and her breasts would bounce when I moved inside her,
and at night, in bed, she would tell me in the dark
her medical student horror stories.

I wanted then to make her my wife
and see her breasts bounce her whole life,
her skin flushing beneath me,
but it didn't work out.

Before hitting the road,
she told me something very beautiful from symptomatology:
that in asthma the wheeze of the lungs is like the wind whistling under doors,
in pneumonitis it's like the creak of the snow aerated under your soles,
and that lungs that are sick with bronchitis flutter

frantically like doves hemmed in mews for the winter.

Once, I stayed in the hospital – a pancreatic drama,
and in my room there was an old driver,
his lungs had shattered under a bus
when he'd tried to fix its engine.

A little old lady waited all night
on a chair by his bedside. She slept little
and lay in wait for his breath,
like a weather instrument forgotten up in the mountains
which analyzes for signs of the avalanche. The old man was
finished but the old lady was
an inspiration to our women,
in fact they needed something like this:
20 impotent men (and a girl with an ectopic pregnancy),

tubes in their urethras, exploded intestines, broken bones,
their minds marked forever by horror,
around them young and cock-sure surgeons and outside
sunlit streets, life. It's always so in clear-cut
dramas, an angel of inspiration appears,

but otherwise, we are alone and lost
in the banality of our days, not even patient like the doves
that listen to the thin bars of their mews shake in the wind,
because you can't compare nothing with nothing,

because you are the first man in the world,
the first one to live, the first to make a mistake.

If I were to choose an inspirational model,
it would be the dwarf in the Comedia underpass –
last winter, one evening someone asked him
why he didn't join the circus, he would have lived differently,
he would have had a place of his own and an interesting life.

The dwarf growled in his leather overcoat
and refused to answer. I liked
that he held his own, even if sometimes he sleeps
on the stairs at Control Club, and the girls in colored dresses
step over him. I had meant life model
in this respect – how I would have wanted
to be if I hadn't left with the circus.



Carla Baricz is a doctoral candidate in the English Department at Yale University <http://english.yale.edu/people/student/carla-baricz>, where she specializes in early modern British and European literature. She is also the assistant editor and translator of *Romanian Writers on Writing* (Trinity University Press, 2011). Some of her recent translations have appeared in *World Literature Today*, in *National Translation Month*, and in Norman Manea's *The Fifth Impossibility: A Collection of Essays*. Carla has reviewed for *Words Without Borders: International Literature in Translation*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, and *Observator Cultural*. Her poems have appeared in *Euphony*, *Foothill*, *Scrisul Romanesc*, *Apostrof*, and *Alpha*. She is the author of the chapbook *Timp Rotitor* (Iași: Junimea, 2001). Her work has also appeared in *Joyce Studies Annual*, *Magyar Lettre Internationale*, and is forthcoming in a Punctum Books collection about the humanities under terror. Carla is currently completing a U.S. Fulbright Research grant to Bucharest, where she is preparing a translation and critical edition of Ion Budai-Deleanu's *Țiganiada*, Romania's earliest known epic. See more of her work here. <http://wordswithoutborders.org/book-review/contributor/cb2453>