

The Bodies That Never Fit Us Well:
New Poems by Daniel D. Marin

Translated from the Romanian by Liana Andreassen



We're excited to share with you today **an excerpt from the poetry collection *the bodies that never fit us well* by the Romanian poet and editor Daniel D. Marin, translated by Liana Andreassen.** These poems introduce the reader to the mysterious Mr. R and other misfit characters who populate an imaginary world of the “bodies that never fit us well,” dreaming of being accepted in society or of escaping the bleak everyday reality. We're sure you'll find these poems both unsettling and unforgettable.

We'd love to hear what you think! Find us on twitter [@TranslateMonth](#) [#TranslationMonth](#), join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](#) page. We hope you'll join us and celebrate your favorite translations in September and beyond.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

The Bodies That Never Fit Us Well:
New Poems by Daniel D. Marin
Translated from the Romanian by Liana Andreassen

winter. deep snow. colorful lights
flicker. a snowman
in the middle of town. we will take care
of you, just make sure you have wonderful dreams!
our minds those of children who grew up
too late now watch in wonder
their adult bodies. our thick
clothes rubbing on each other making sparks to keep warm
these bodies that never fit us well.

from Mr. R.'s dilemmas

to Mihai Ursachi

mister R. seems very agitated today. he repeats to himself
complicated polite phrases and none of them
seems good enough to him. he could say timidly:
"I'm honestly pleased, miss, to say good afternoon to you!",
but it could sound fairly empty if you think about it,
you can say "good afternoon!" to just about anyone and it wouldn't mean much

he could say boldly: "you have a magnificent dress,
its color and design really flatter your body!",
but this would sound as if her body were imperfect
(oh, god, what a gaffe!) and that a stupid dress could remedy
such an unfortunate defect

or he could tell her with the air of being inspired:
"you are a wonderful creature, much more wonderful
than I imagined you to be during all my sleepless nights!",
but would this not mean that he imagined her
many times in many different circumstances
and she might think that he is obsessed
or, who knows, something even worse

but he could say just this: "pardon my ignorance,
miss, I've been thinking all day
about what I should say to you and I haven't found anything suitable!",
and then, ashamed of his ridiculous helplessness,
he would probably disintegrate in an instant in myriad
infinitesimal particles of matter and, with immeasurable
regret, he would scatter all over the Universe

the spider

every time he's dead tired
mister R. does not rest.
he walks with small, lazy steps
to the kitchen and makes himself a coffee
with just a bit of sugar,
he comes back with the same small
lazy steps to the bedroom. he sits down
on the bed, holding the coffee to his chest with both hands

the coffee warms his chest
and his cold hands. mister R. savors it
taking small, frequent sips,
watching from the corner of his eyes
the spider web on the ceiling,
observing how the spider descends slowly
on a silvery thread right down his nose

mister R. looks at the spider carefully

a favorable alignment of stars

mister R. puts his glasses on the worktable,
he rubs his tired eyes. he smiles mysteriously.
he puts his glasses on again and talks to the telescope:
“tonight these planets will be aligned,
maybe that will be astrologically favorable
to romantic encounters, although”, he scratches his beard,
“women are creatures more unstable
than weather conditions on the moons of Mars”

mister R. goes for a walk and around his head
there's a sort of aura. mister R. talks to the birds
and the birds talk to mister R.
mister R. talks to people and people
don't talk to mister R., who takes out his pipe from his pocket,
fills it with tobacco and puffs gazing with his eyes
big as two half-moons toward the place far away where he knows
the Andromeda galaxy pulsates

an incunable

mister R. makes an inventory of all the objects
in his house dusting them and sighing:
“this is an incunable,
my mother received it as a gift from
an uncle who emigrated to America between the two World Wars,
it seems it had belonged to an Austrian nobleman”

mister R. carefully turns the pages of the book
reading with extreme interest over the glasses that have slid down his nose:
“alas, nowadays people no longer appreciate
an incunable, how terribly sad
to enjoy alone the beauty of an old book,
maybe it would be better if I went to the park and sat down
on a bench where many people pass by and read

because that way it wouldn't be unreasonable
to expect to see some other gentleman or even an elegant young lady
expressing their curiosity if only out of politeness
and, of course, I will be glad, and I will explain to them in detail
what this is, although”, mister R. contemplated dreamily,
“this joy doesn't seem quite complete”

mister R. the sleepwalker

mister R. wakes up exactly at midnight without realizing it
and sleepwalks around town, gets on
night buses, watching side by side with
sleepless passengers the mostly deserted streets of the city

from time to time, he casts a bold meaningful glance
at a young lady dressed a little awkwardly
(which mister R. would never have attempted while awake),
she answers mister R. with an equally meaningful glance
and they leave the bus together at the next stop

mister R. and the young lady dressed a little awkwardly
walk on the mostly deserted street, lit only by streetlamps,
a little clumsily and silent, but they hold
each other's hand tightly, each concentrated on thinking
what kinds of things to ask
the other one so they would receive a more or less pleasant answer

the somewhat awkwardly dressed young lady finally
gets bored and pretends so well that she
is crying, that it seems she is suffering some unimaginable pain,
so that mister R. feels instantly moved
and, not knowing what else to do, gathers her tears

in his palm one by one and looks at them through his glasses,
foggy from such emotions, like a kid who has discovered
for the first time small pearl-like pebbles in the sand

hard times

“hard times are coming!”, mister R. sighed one marvelous evening
bringing his handkerchief to his eyes
to wipe away a non-existent tear

“I will have to buy a real firearm.
true enough I don’t know how to use a thing like that,
I could say I’m afraid of these weapons
with their impeccably killer appearance,
but everyone says hard times are coming
and I, too, have to prepare for them somehow!”

“I wonder”, mister R. thought touching
his slightly furrowed forehead with his hand, “if these hard times
could maybe change their mind and, instead of coming here where we are,
stay where they are right now
and possibly meet, one wonderful evening,
other hard times
and have dinner together on a terrace lit only by candles
then walk together hand in hand
in the park or on the main boulevard”

“eureka!”, mister R. jumped up and down with joy,
tipping over his worktable and all the papers he had been working on,
“this would mean that the hard times
would no longer have a good reason to come here
and then why would I buy a firearm,
especially since I can’t even stand these things,
I’m clumsy with them and I can’t possibly use them?”

a walk by the sea

mister R. is strolling in his elegant trousers of white fabric
rolled to his knees and with his feet he digs
into the fine sand and watches the fomenting sea

from time to time, he closes his eyes imagining
that he has reached a fairly respectable age and he is strolling
by the sea to recall,
with indescribable pleasure, the memories of his youth
which to his chagrin don’t seem to be nearly
as spectacular as he would like them to be

mister R. looks down at his feet covered in wet sand
and whispers to himself: “luckily, I am still young,
so I have some time left to create spectacular memories
for later, though I don’t know how it always seems to turn out
that everything that happens to me is so peaceful that it’s troubling,
and what is more, I am terribly afraid of a risky adventure
no matter how much I may crave it”

mister R. bends down and picks up a few white shells:
“even these white shells fill me with wonder – I could gaze at them for hours on end
without getting bored, but this, in fact, means that as far as my”,
and at this point mister R. became gloomy, “old age is concerned
I am doomed to enjoy only such peaceful memories
and never spectacular ones, though I will admit with a modicum of modesty
that in my imagination sometimes the things that take place
are by far more spectacular than the life
of any given adventurer who left the shore on his ship to face a stormy sea,

therefore”, now mister R. became carried away with enthusiasm and his face lit up,
“I could even say, without exaggeration,
that these memories that I only imagined will stay hidden
in my mind like shipwrecks long fallen
to the bottom of the sea, which will be discovered by chance by an old explorer
who will follow all along an indecipherable map.”

at the opera

tonight mister R. will go to the opera,
he bought two tickets for the first row,
he is very nervous and about three hours before the show he gets dressed
in a black tailcoat with a cane
and he sits on an armchair
looking at the two tickets with curiosity:

“if I invited a good friend, man or woman,
maybe I would enjoy a conversation, slightly personal,
but delicious, during the break between the acts, about the slight mistakes
to a tone-deaf person listening to the singers

but if I invited a stranger, man, or woman,
then everything would be radically different,
and the result would be unforeseen”,
mister R. looks at his watch, he stands up from his old armchair
with its worn plush edges, he dials a number,
calls a cab and arrives at the opera alone

he sits in the first-row places, the cane on the empty chair next to him,
and while he wipes his glasses he thinks:

“this cane has seen so many operas
it will surely prove to be my best conversation partner,
the only problem is the fat lady with the thick make-up
who looks at my cane and frowns as if it was an intruder
that has to be kicked out of the hall and shamed for its great impertinence”

the incision

I told them I didn't have a heart,
I had a drawer full of my old pictures instead

I picked up the scalpel from the table
and with a steady hand I slit my chest

they gathered around my chest
and looked inside through the perfect incision

curious, they looked at every photograph,
they turned it this way and that,
then asked me when and where I had taken it,
pleased I gave them every detail
and they nodded with admiration,
rummaging for hours with febrile fingers
through my photographs, until they finally got bored
and left

the body that does not fit me well

my deflated body of soft pliable latex
that anyone can inflate
exactly as you would a balloon
letting it float on the stale air
to fly over the buildings over the clouds
toward a faraway land
where bodies fit perfectly over people
and that silence
of a world's beginning
when no one knows yet
anything about despair
where innocence takes sometimes brutal shapes
where I cry and deflate
slowly, ever so slowly, until my body
reaches negligible dimensions
and I disappear for good in the hot air
my heart as small as the tip of a needle

About the author



Daniel D. Marin (born in Romania, living in Italy) is the author of the poetry volumes *Peak Hour*, 2003, which received the Prize for Poetry at the National Duiliu Zamfirescu Festival, 2003; it was nominated for the Mihai Eminescu National Prize for Poetry – Opera Prima, 2004; *As It Was*, 2008; *I Took Him Aside and Told Him*, 2009, which won the Marin Mincu National Prize, 2010; and *Poems with Spectacles*, 2014, which won the George Coșbuc National Prize for Poetry, 2015. In addition, he is the author of the small Sardo-American journal *Only I Am from Romania*, 2018. He put together a retrospective anthology for the 2000 generation of Romanian poetry, *Antiutopian Poetry: An Anthology of the Romanian poetic twothousandism*, 2010. Between 2013 and 2016, he made the selection of texts by Romanian authors for the Poesia a Strappo Festival, in Alghero (Italy). He edited poetry columns, interviews, and literary inquiries for several cultural journals in Romania and he participated in public

readings in Spain, Germany, and Italy. He is currently Associate Editor at the journal *Zona Literară*, where he edits a section of contemporary Italian poetry.

About the translator



Liana Andreassen came from Romania to the United States for graduate studies in English (she received an MA from Salisbury, MD and a PhD from Binghamton, NY). She has published many translations of poetry, such as *Somewhere in a Different Realm*, a bilingual poetry collection by Elena Stefoi, co-translated with Adam Sorkin, and various poems also in *Faultline—Journal of Art and Literature*, *Romanian Poets of the 80's and 90's*, *Day after Night – 20 Romanian Poets*. Her book of literary criticism, *The Fall of Literary Theory*, was published by BrownWalker Press in 2017. She received Pushcart nominations from *Turbulence Magazine* and *The Raven Chronicles* and published short stories in *Fiction International*, *Calliope*, *Lumina*, *Scintilla*, *The Quail Bell*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, among others. She teaches English at South Texas College and her middle grade fantasy novel, *Diamond Mountain*, awaits representation.