

Emil-Iulian Sude

Selected poems from *Paznic de noapte*
(*The Night Security Guard*, Bucharest: Anticus Press, 2022)

Translated from the Romanian by Diana Manole



We're thrilled to share **five new poems by one of the first award-winning poets of Roma ethnicity in Romania, Emil-Iulian Sude, beautifully translated by the accomplished poet and translator, Diana Manole**, who also included an insightful translator's note, providing additional details about the poet and the translation process. These visceral poems will grab and rattle you with their surreal details, leaving you shaken and wanting more. We look forward to the upcoming Sude's collection in Manole's masterful translation.

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

—Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman

Translator's Note

In May 2021, Emil-Iulian Sude contacted me on Facebook and sent me the link to one of his magazine publications. We had never communicated before. He did not know about my work as a translator, but only as a poet from my online profile, and I learned much later that he was one of the first award-winning poets of Roma ethnicity in Romania. Yet, I was fascinated by his poems and the out-of-the-blue message from a stranger marked the beginning of a long-term collaboration. I am now translating his fourth poetry collection, *Paznic de noapte (The Night Security Guard)*, Bucharest: Anticus Press, 2022), after also working with him on this project as a book editor.

Sude's poetry is defined by an organic mixture of existential reflection, search for identity, human rights concerns, and self-irony. It is informed by his life experience as an impoverished night security guard at a public school in Bucharest and a Romani man facing ethnic discrimination, as well as his spiritual beliefs and integrated influences of other writers. Drawing on his overflowing imagination and acute sense of reality, Sude invents an aesthetics, which I have previously identified as magic naturalism in my note on his first ever publication in English in the Winter 2022 issue of [Asymptote](#).

Surrealist images are built with everyday and often visceral details, abolishing the laws of nature, as well as punctuation and capitalization rules. The speaker in the poems I have translated for the 2022 *National Translation Month* publication is an eternal security guard, who does not turn grey or get old, but who aspires to an upper social status, love, and spiritual enlightenment. Stationed on the third floor, he dreams of the attic and of being "a preschooler // loved by the missus teachers." In one of the poems, the speaker is pregnant with a ladder, while in another his fellow guards and he are trapped inside a "static belly on top of which another / bigger belly spun," like Jonah in the whale but as an act of social exclusion, not salvation. Yet, God visits them, though in a form fitted to their needs, as soup "in white casseroles // of porcelain."

The differences between Romanian and English, especially the lack of declension of nouns and adjectives in English, make translating poetry quite difficult in general. Sude's lack of punctuation and capitalization, surrealist images, and occasional made-up idioms, inspired by Romani expressions and Romanian vernacular, add to the usual challenges. Finding the best solutions is a fascinating task, while introducing English readers to Roma literature from Romania, in general, and Sude's poetry, in particular.

—Diana Manole, translator

They still didn't transfer me from the third floor

i'm the same
security guard as last year. i don't turn grey i don't get old.
the floors still
go to the sky. i'd like to go up to the attic.
a heartfelt reason. to go up to the attic. maybe next year.
i'll be lighter. i'll lift myself onto my heart.
i'll break the floor with what little i am
so hard to carry it
to have
a look at how the
kindergarten teacher
explains the game.

the missus teachers ask me what floor this is.
i tell them i don't know. for me
nothing's changed.

how hard it is to carry a ladder in your belly
to force a ladder to climb up another ladder. oh how dear
the missus teachers are to me when i see them open-
faced an untouchable floating
love on the third floor
they ask if there are many more floors to climb up.

i put on a helpful face. this might be the classroom,
i tell them. this one or that one might
be. i don't know time anymore.
i probably keep talking to them don't let them go
out of my chest. the third floor's getting closer i tell them.
they smile at me.
as if we'd had met in different context.

they're all dear to me as if we had
the same shape. please take care of
my classroom too. of course.
i am very nervous on the first day of school
my soul a preschooler

loved by the missus teachers.

Încă nu m-au mutat de pe etajul trei

sunt același
paznic ca anul trecut. nu albesc nu îmbătrânesc.
deocamdată etajele
sunt spre cer. la mansardă aș vrea să urc.
un motiv de inimă. să urc la mansardă. poate anul care vine.
o să fiu mai ușor. o să mă ridic pe inimă.
am să sparg podeaua cu puținul care sunt
atât de greu de purtat
să mă
uit cum predă
jocul doamna educator.

mă întreabă doamnele profesor ce etaj este acesta.
le spun nu știu pentru mine
nu s-a schimbat nimic.

ce greu este să porți o scară în burtă
să oblige o scară să urce altă scară. ce mi-e drag
de doamnele profesor când le văd deschise
la față o plutire nepalpabilă
dragostea de la etajul trei
să întrebe dacă mai sunt multe etaje de urcat.

mă arăt binevoitor. le spun clasa asta
s-ar putea să fie. asta sau asta s-ar putea
să fie. nu îmi mai știu vremea.
probabil le țin de vorbă nu le dau drumul
din piept le spun etajul trei se apropie.
ele îmi zâmbesc.
parcă ne-am fi cunoscut într-o altă conjunctură.

toate îmi sunt dragi de parcă am avea
aceeași formă. să aveți grijă și de
clasa mea. bineînțeles.
sunt foarte emoționat în prima zi de școală
sufletul meu un preșcolar

iubit de doamnele profesor.

**In the school's belly there were loads of
stairs and a few steps.**

a butterfly swam sometimes it took a breath
a prefab whale twirled through the air
yet again splash! into the ocean

we the night security guards good friends
with Ion from the courtyard
his home had no fence
not 'cause he was a deadbeat
he had something against
fences that hold even the gaze
inside a small horizon.

he said man a fenced house
doesn't let the eyes go
to find out where they came from.

we patrolled among the questions in a
static belly on top of which another
bigger belly spun
the belly of the waves rocked us
the blue belly freshened us up.

other night guards stumbled upon us
as we were on the phone some bellies
of the hidden light just about lit up other bellies
we didn't dream of anything else
only of the fish hidden in the bosom. only of how
to get out of the bellies whole and unharmed
spit out by the school onto the shore
barefoot on the sand.

**În burta școlii erau o sumedenie
de trepte și câțiva pași.**

înota un fluture mai lua aer
se răsucea prin văzduh o balenă din prefabricate
iar pleosc în ocean

noi paznicii de noapte cu Ion din curte
prieten bun
nu avea gard la casă
nu de puturos avea ceva împotriva
gardurilor ce rețin până și privirea
într-un orizont micuț.

zicea el că o casă cu gard
nu lasă bă privirile să se ducă
să afle de unde sunt de unde vin.

patrulam printre întrebări într-o
burtă statică peste care se rotea
o altă burtă mai mare
burta de valuri ne legăna
burta albastră ne primenea.

dăduserăm de noi alți paznici de noapte
cum stăteam noi pe telefon niște burți
ale luminii ascunse mai să lumineze alte burți
despre peștii ascunși în sân
la altceva nu visam. numai cum
să ieșim din burți întregi și nevătămați
scuipați de școală pe țărni
cu tălpile goale pe nisip.

**On the third floor the problem child doesn't
have a seat in the classroom anymore.**

the missus teachers and mister parents gave him about thirty
years of age
his own family and many responsibilities. missus
parent is discharging guard duty with me.
he's the most watched child in the school.

missus parent is all smiles
a big heart like you've never seen before. she has
a little purse full of grudges against
the problem child. she shows them to us one by one
some sheer scarves. cock-a-doodle-doo a mom
has lost her shoe. she tells me.
she had only one
child in her old age. she doesn't want the problem child
to ruin hers too.

missus parent takes the problem child's seat in the
classroom to watch him closer. she lights a cigarette downs a vodka
and starts bad-mouthing women
i'm ashamed to put my thoughts into her mouth.
i pretend i don't care

she grabs our tongues with her padded hand and
pulls like crazy
to bring out the problem child's little mischiefs
to have him transferred
from one class to another. from one school to another
from one realm to another. down our tongues
the other children slide
just as naughty.

La etajul trei copilul-problemă nu mai are niciun loc în clasă.

doamnele profesor și domnii părinți i-au dat o vârstă
de treizeci de ani
o familie proprie și multe responsabilități. doamna
părinte execută cu mine serviciul de pază.
este cel mai urmărit copil din școală.

doamna părinte este toată numai un zâmbet
o inimă mare cum nu ai mai văzut. ea are
o gentuță plină de motive împotriva
copilului-problemă. ni le arată pe rând
niște eșarfe străvezii. numai mamă să nu fi. îmi spune.
a făcut un singur
copil la bătrânețe nu vrea să îl strice
copilul-problemă.

doamna părinte ia locul copilului-problemă în
bancă să îl urmărească mai bine. aprinde o țigară bea o votcă
și se dă la bârfă despre femei
mie îmi este rușine să stau în gura ei cu gândurile mele.
mă dau nepăsător.

ne pune mâna ei pernoasă pe limbă și trage
ca o apucată să scoată la lumină micile năzbâtii să mute
copilul-problemă de la o clasă la alta. de la o școală la alta
de pe un tărâm pe altul. de pe limba noastră alunecă ceilalți copii
la fel de zurbagii.

God comes to us in white casseroles

of porcelain
from far away. nesting. a few polystyrene
pigeons spread their wings.

we no longer have room on the metal benches
we lie down facing the sun
the sea's waves in the park
where a violin rusts vertically

to stop God's soup from spilling out
we'd hold it in our cupped hands
a fount of vitamins and tablespoons of meat

now and then we toss curses back and forth
from what we don't have we'd give away colossal portions
of bread

we hug each other tight and pretend we share the same calling
God smaller and smaller in the glasses

we pull our hats over our eyes so people think it's cuz of the sun. so those outside
could see us like a park like a Bach symphony

only a cockier one shows us God near the pots fat with kindness. to boost our
lipidy sugary awe, smelling of smoke.

Vine pe la noi Dumnezeu în caserole albe

de la depărtare
de porțelan. cuibărit. se desfac
niște porumbei din polistiren.

nu mai avem loc pe băncile de metal
ne punem cu fața la soare
valurile mării în parcul
unde o vioara vertical ruginește

să nu se verse ciorba Dumnezeiască
suntem în stare să o strângem în căuș
un izvor cu vitamine și linguri de carne

mai aruncăm câte o înjurătură de la unul la altul
am da din ce nu avem porții colosale
de pâine

ne strângem la piept ne facem că avem aceeași chemare Dumnezeu tot mai micuț
în pahare

tragem șapca pe ochi să zică lumea e de la soare. să ne vadă cei din afară un parc
o simfonie de Bach

numai unul mai cucurigat ni-l arată pe Dumnezeu pe lângă oale gras de bun. să ne sporească
uimirea lipidă glucidă mirosindă a fum.

We're amazed it doesn't fit

in its well-known place
she tells us she keeps moving
along and across 'cause she has
no more room for it. we keep telling her
to take off from hers to put some
of ours.

we sometimes find ourselves with one
hell of a heart. next to us.
and we play like we're falling behind
to tie our shoelaces. it walks away
keeps growing. we leaf out on the trees
for the sake of our colleague's heart and
tell it hello.

Ne mirăm că e nepotrivită

într-un loc al ei știut
se tot mută de-a lungul și de-a latul
că ne zice nouă nu mai are
loc de ea. noi tot o sfătuim
să mai lase de la ea să mai pună
de la noi.

ne trezim câteodată lângă noi.
cu ditamai inima. și ne facem
că rămânem în urmă să ne legăm
la șireturi. ea se depărtează
tot crește. înverzim prin copaci
de inima colegei noastre și îi
zicem bună.



About the author

Emil-Iulian Sude is one of the first award-winning poets of Roma ethnicity in Romania and a third-year student at the University of Bucharest, majoring in Romani and minoring in Romanian languages and literatures. He published three collections of poems and earned 18 awards, including the 2018 Diploma of Excellence for his contribution to the development and promotion of Roma culture and identity.



About the translator

Diana Manole is an award-winning Romanian-Canadian academic, writer, and literary translator. She published nine books (poems and drama) and thirteen scholarly articles/book chapters. She also translated or co-translated seven poetry collections, and, independently, two Roma plays from Romania, published in the English-language anthologies *Roma Heroes* (Hungary, 2019 & 2021). Diana co-won 2nd prize in the 2017/18 John Dryden Translation Competition.