

## Siddhartha Menon

### Coming in to land

When the cabin lights were turned off  
the outskirts began to flicker  
as if the dark had thrown a master switch  
but somewhere in miles of insulation  
was a loose contact.  
There were broken lines of headlamps  
that followed distantly upon each other  
and searched out ways on unlit roads.  
Scattered lights were embers glowed  
to tremulous existence by a wind.  
And then a convergence of thoroughfares,  
a concentration of naked points.  
Some were a glare  
in large and well-spaced grids, and some  
were multicoloured and intermittent,  
flashing attention to themselves as you  
were being smoothed above them  
as a daily whine a passing thing.  
Then you were eased to a great darkness  
untouched by the binary beam rotating at its edge,  
and you were slowing across it,  
being given a view, being tilted sharply towards  
this that you could not see:  
seat-fastened to an incline  
suspended as if the circuit had tripped  
you had no choice but to gaze at nothing.  
And just when you thought it could not go on  
you found yourself being evened out  
positioned by sturdy circuitry to face  
the spangled continent.  
It seemed that the bottom dropped:  
you juddered towards a black pathway.

## Inner eye

*obey the counsels*

*of the inner eye*

Zbigniew Herbert 'Another Look'

I cannot quite tell what you mean  
by the inner eye  
whose counsels must be obeyed.  
Protected from dust from tears  
and free of all expression:  
is that what you have in mind?  
I wouldn't trade for it the outer ones  
though I know they're vulnerable short-sighted  
in servitude to the naive heart  
to redness and going blind.  
The eye of imagination  
only blends what it has seen  
so I cannot imagine  
an eye that sees so differently  
that it surfs the rollers of death  
and tides us over necessity.  
If you mean the tenderness that stings  
your eyes like a sea wind  
let's call it that.  
Who knows why it stays untouched  
as you make your way through briars  
and traffic snarls to a vacancy  
at the heart of a continent  
but as you watch reflections  
sky and overhanging stems  
that ripple each other on this risen pond  
strangely it is here  
to drive the lighthouse sweep of attentiveness.

## The Idiot

Yes you are idiotic:  
for all your stammered goodness  
self-destruction was what they best did.

Each was drawn to you like a moth  
but backed off into darkness  
compassion-singed.

They could not countenance  
the anguished eagerness  
your eyes gave out in ornate rooms.

What foil have you ever been  
for a guilt-edged meanness  
impelled to have its pages turned?

No matter the cross  
no time could measure Prince the largeness  
of your convulsive illogic.

Fishes have never, nor loaves  
filled our gnawing nothingness  
in which is lost

the silence of a stone not cast.

## Uttaran Das Gupta

### Eight More Lives

While returning home, we stop the taxi  
At the place we had abandoned the car  
After crashing into a road block.  
We've returned to recover my friend's purse,  
Her shoes, cell phone cover—things we forgot  
In the jumble of pain, adrenaline,  
And my friend screaming: "Get an ambulance!  
Get us to a hospital! I can feel  
The bone through a tear in my knee!"  
Now, silence shrouds the atavistic ruin  
We left behind on the lonely highway.  
It's almost dawn. Two friendly constables,  
On duty at the check post, enquire:  
"Are you okay? You were driving too fast."  
We're okay: A few stitches here and there  
For my friend, now stretched out on the backseat  
Of the taxi, her leg in a white plaster.  
No broken bones though my ribs hurt like hell,  
And I'm so overtired I could sleep  
Curled up like a mongrel near the fire  
Of the policemen. But I keep my wits,  
I pick up everything we came back for.  
As the taxi starts to take us away,  
I look back at the car sinking into  
The February mist, like a monster  
Denied its prey, vengeful, patient, hungry.

## II

My friend is too cheerful for tonight.  
She keeps up a tireless monologue:  
“I saw this film—a man got a cat’s heart  
During a transplant, along with its lives,  
And he made a fortune by performing  
His deaths in spectacular shows.  
But he miscalculated the number  
Of lives he had acquired from the cat,  
Which had to die once to give our hero  
Its organ. How tragic, isn’t it?” I doze.  
Perhaps it’s the adrenaline they pumped  
Into her at the hospital, maybe  
She’s just too young, careless, or lightheaded.  
But even when they were cleaning her wounds,  
Stitching them up, she said to me: “We must  
Go shopping tomorrow, they’re cutting up  
My favourite pair of jeans.” The dreadful  
Hospital corridors, the policeman  
Waiting to take her statement—nothing could  
Prevent a smile from escaping my thoughts  
Like bats from a sudden assault of light  
On the roof of a train tunnel, like zombies  
From a sanitised containment area.

Joshua Willey

Solstice

Maybe I was light on my feet  
They were singing, those kids  
Drunk in the gloaming on  
The wrong side of the street

There was a goat beside the banya  
Where the navy once assembled ships  
Pleather recliners, heavyweight championship  
On some cut rate flatscreen

We broke down around the medical school  
Something about the hybrid drive  
Old timers said you should've seen it when

Cabbage soup and an extra cigarette  
Sometimes the fog is only for you  
And sometimes it's for everyone

The Disintegration Loops aren't exactly  
Monster truck jam material but  
We still manage to marry high and low happily  
Or at least, healthily, which is better or at least

Once upon a time people spent half the day  
Fetching water and doing laundry

Now we can learn a new language or  
Watch the days grow longer as people  
Tell themselves that this is gonna be the year  
That things finally get really real

## April Showers

In the morning

Bums are smoking crack by city hall

And the fog is thick upon the tourists watching them

The Bangladeshi bodegarista is watching protests from home

By the time I get to the fourth floor with my sharp pencils and empty pages

There is a game on

But I won't feel the thrill of the grass

From this quarter of neck tattoos and broken shoes

Fast foods lines psychotic with song and dance improvisations

Cops in the subway station fathoming new forms of service and protection

Squinting north mine

Eyes can see the silent clearings

Where someone sometimes sows wild oats

And the tall pines offer neither questions or answers

But there is in gloaming a wee sense that the best is yet to come

Passing pickups bump

A little nineties drum and bass

When was the last time you took a walk

Without a route or destination or purpose in mind

Like making out with a stranger who you will never see again

Next time

Everything will be perfect

The sidewalks will sparkle and

Even the birds will call me by name

While all the flowers bloom before we die

Catherine Owen

## Harvest

Waiting for life to bite with its 'thisness' – the cornflowers only sprockets of blue,  
the fuschia odd brackets of exoticism – it is time, says old Hayden Carruth,

to cease practicing the “will to dominate through more and more human impositions,” among these:  
metaphor. And so I try to write it all as this is this, this is that, like in the best

Frank O’Hara poems where epiphany is justly achieved through such methods. But I end up  
seeing a silk-skirted hedgehog in the poppy plumping & furling

from its silver-bristled pod and, bringing it to my daughter to show her, as we haven’t spoken  
for days (the rage of differences between us), hope still for some connection

in this act, yes utilitarian but also, transcendent, though she continues to paint her nails  
indifferently while watching 16 & Pregnant, announcing only to her friend

on the phone wedged between her reddened ear and shrugged-up shoulder that I have  
interrupted to show her a “thingie.”

### 3 conversations among women

1

I notice her cold; this is the opening – the Canada Post woman weighing my envelope, suggesting a padded one would be preferable – she snuffles, tells me how rarely she’s ill, her health beading back to the sicknesses of others, their injuries, and mostly her son’s: the choked whoop of his impossibly awful cough, the day he yanked a scalding cup of coffee towards himself, wore a chest of red for weeks, her fear at this, her guilt –it all bears itself towards me – “so much is a miracle!” – she exclaims in a voice weary with joy, passing me my receipt, and I think she would spill over forever if she could, in this flood spurred on by my minor solicitousness on a sluggish afternoon.

2

At the fashion show for the mature woman, butterflies of fabric pass before us, the dowdy announcer’s mic doesn’t work & she must yell against the trip-trop of models on the catwalk, a provisional one at the local community centre – women murmur here like the clothes – subtle, inoffensive, motile –so many silver-sleek heads, hands whose skin has folded itself, eyes swallowing the sensuous parade –that when the question pipes up– “would you like to touch?” – how the arms all ray out, fingers hungrily brailling the crepe, the silk, voices still weaving their hope that this, this time, will serve as the transfiguring.

3

Even though we aren’t strangers, it’s amazing how much we tell each other – my sisters & I – immediately diving into old rapes before the aperitifs are eaten – “he told me to open my legs wider,” I reveal, she that she never saw her rapist’s face, she that there was blood after, hours upon hours of vomiting – then, only moments later we cry – “what terrific bacon-wrapped scallops!” turn to issues of interior decorating, toilet training, clinking our cheap wine glasses together, the night straying sweetly on.

Joy Goswami<sup>1</sup>

From *Surjo-Pora Chhai* (1999)

Ashes, Burnt by the Sun

\*

Under the gooseberry tree my mother's white shell bangles  
Lie broken—the new schoolhouse rises next to it

The joint family comes home from the burning ghats, last  
rites done

The ancient husbandless peek from behind the fence —  
Whose newly widowed face is that?

A chameleon runs. Ahead—the carcass of an old house  
A dead tree, columns of poisonous ants crawl on its body, too

The crematorium came up there ten years ago

Fallen acacia blooms on the path, blankets and rattan baskets

Under the gooseberry tree new students engrossed in sums

On the grass

My mother's broken shell bangles—

On which a clear white sun falls

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<sup>1</sup> This poem has been published in *Selected Poems* by Joy Goswami; translated by Sampurna Chattarji; Harper Perennial 2014  
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## Interview

Eunice de Souza

### *What's to Finish?*

*You've been staying here for a while?*

The building was supposed to go in for redevelopment. Thank god it hasn't happened. An aunt lived upstairs. She was 96. I wouldn't know where to take her. Plus the dogs refuse to leave. I'd have to give them tranquilisers. They associate taxis with going to the vet. Nothing is going to go away. There are suddenly three parties, and they're all in law suits with each other.

(Referring to the journal) You mainly publish poetry?

*Yes.*

Which for lots of people is simply...very few people will buy poetry. They read it if it's easily available. I use quite a lot of it in my column in the Mumbai Mirror. That's the only way to do it. I don't know why it is, but maybe because while a lot of us were in school, poetry was such a bore. It was badly taught, there were poems that didn't appeal.

*Do you think that's how it is even in universities?*

You know something...Writing is, you know, for people...like you know these Urdu mehfiles... Everyone's high on Urdu mehfiles. Wow... the most simplistic verse. I watched a program the other day; someone had sent me a video clip. It was some Pakistani woman talking about the similarity between Indian fundamentalism and Pakistani fundamentalism. It was a translation. It was so banal. But everybody was delirious with happiness. I think, we're used to that kind. In the middle of a discussion suddenly someone quotes a ghazal. But when it comes to poetry that's printed, that has to be read and understood, it's a different thing altogether. This other kind of thing, this easy stuff. Lots of it around.

*You've taught for a while, how was it then?*

I had some very good students. And if you made any effort for them, they were wonderful. They may have come having read only James Hadley Chase or something, but they learnt very fast. If you could make sense of the text for them. For instance take somebody like Plato who has no relevance apparently to their lives, and you have to make sense of it. That's the point usually of teaching, to make sense of bad texts. If you don't do that then you might as well forget the whole exercise. You know, what can it say to their lives? Don't you agree?

*Is it because of this condition that a lot of poets stopped writing in that period?*

Which period?

*When you were teaching, do you think there were a lot of talented people?*

Plenty. We used to have plenty of poetry readings. They may not have kept on writing. There were lots who were poets at some point, who wrote some poems. But the fact that you start writing makes you stay in writing, whether you continue to write or not. We used to have lots of readings in the 70s and so on, with established poets, new poets. There were many new groups. They formed co-operatives and publishing houses, they produced beautiful books, very inexpensive. So there was, besides Adil (Jussawalla) and Arvind (Mehrotra) and all those who started Clearing House, Melanie Silgado, Santan Rodriguez, Rao Da Gama Rose who started Newground. They published several books, and they were always very well produced.

*Melanie was your student, right? And Newground published your first book?*

Yes, but it wasn't their first book. Their first book was the three poets. And there was me, there was Saleem Peeradina. My book was being sold at an advanced rate of 6 Rupees. The official price was 12. But nowhere could you get a book of that quality. The cover was designed by (Arun)Kolatkhar, the paper was beautiful. I have a few copies today, from 1979.

*Were there other women poets at that time? Because it seemed difficult anyway to get published as a poet.*

There was Kamala Das.

*I mean here, in Bombay, in this local scenario.*

You mean poets who sustained themselves. There were many who published a few poems just for the fun of being part of the scene, but people who sustained their writing, mainly Melanie and me. We still work together. You know that anthology, *These My Words*?

*You've worked on many anthologies. Women's Voices...*

That was prose, but much earlier I did *Nine Indian Women Poets*, and then a book of writings on Purdah and also an Anthology of Early Indian English Poetry. Most people assume it started with Sarojini Naidu. But there was excellent poetry and experimental too. There was Kapil Thakkar from Gujarat who was writing a long epic poem about Hitler, called "Hitler's Tears," and he was talking about the whole episode. It's amazing stuff. I don't think anybody today could be said to have experimented the way they did. I mean there was a Jewish poet called Samuel Solomon, who was an ICS officer in Bihar. I couldn't get much information on him. I got it through the University in Israel. I really had to search for him. And again he has an experimental poem, a long experimental poem about the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. You know that stuff is really amazing. Nobody knows it. Everybody thinks things started with either Sarojini Naidu or with Nissim Ezekiel or Tagore. And believe me all these guys are far more interesting than Tagore. Tagore is very bland in comparison.

*People have begun to complain a lot about Tagore. Do you think he's lost in translation?*

I don't believe this business about lost in translation. Half the time they gain in translation. You know for *These my Words* we looked through literally 1000s of poets. Millions of Radha-Krishna poems. And the really good poems are good in English. If they are feeble, they're feeble in the original. We're reading everything in translation. I find that a very feeble excuse.

*What have you been up to? Are you writing any poetry?*

I was about a year ago, but not at the moment.

*You've also written a couple of novels..*

Two. Have you read them?

*Yes, Dangerlok.*

I'm quite fond of the other one, but nobody reads it. It's got some very good reviews.

*How was it like earlier? Were you reading a lot? Were you travelling with your work?*

In the 90s, quite a lot. Several times to England and Scotland. After that, no. I mean I do the occasional reading in Goa, but I say no to most readings. It's too hot, it's too tiring.

*You don't step out much?*

Not anymore. I've said no to readings at the Prithvi. I cannot do it anymore. I find it too exhausting.

*Do you keep in touch with people?*

Sort of, quite a number of people, those who are my friends. But you know what South Bombay is like...nobody wants to come this side. Let's meet, they say and mention some South Bombay restaurant. Just yesterday I went to meet a friend, and I spent exactly half an hour there (guess I'm getting old). I just don't have that kind of energy. I am nearly 74.

*You're fond of animals, there is the odd cat poem, but they don't feature much in your work as subject matter?*

No. I spent about 10 or 15 years looking after dogs on the street. Used to cook for them, take them to the hospital, get lots of abuse for feeding them. Oddly enough when Ravi Singh, my editor, asked me to write a memoir, the only thing I could think about was dogs.

*So have you progressed from that?*

No. They're most adorable.. Street dogs...

*Yea they're great. Does that mean you absolutely have no new work?*

I have. I wrote quite a number of poems in the last year. I don't know how many there are, about 25 or so. But they're all short poems. Ranjit (Hoskote) wanted me to read them at the Prithvi. I said these short poems don't work in a reading. By the time you've begun them, they're finished. You know what I mean... And I love writing brief poems. How I came to write them is my dog used to insist on going down for a walk at 4 in the morning. And 4 in the morning my mind was blank except for taking him around. That's when all the poems occurred. It's usually when I'm ill or my mind is totally blank, you know that I write...

*You have been writing this column for a while.*

Yes, that takes up a lot of energy and time because I have to find a subject that would interest people.

*Are you reading a lot now? Has it come down? Do you read a lot of stuff that's been sent to you?*

Yes, but I don't use all of them (for the column).

*(On the corner table) We see that Ranjit (Hoskote's) new book is here. And Joy Goswami.*

*You're interested in Joy Goswami?*

I've read some of it... You know the column I write, it's for the newspaper. It has a very general readership, and I don't think Goswami's surrealistic poems will make too much sense... a couple of them might.

*I'm reading him in Bengali.*

It's okay, but the average person who wants to be in poetry is not going to be attracted to him. When you read them they look very striking, but it's difficult to know what they might mean. Difficult to know what the fellow wanted to say. Some of the poems, yes. But surrealism has its limits. In a painting, okay, it may work. This sense of disturbance, and things in the wrong place, but I don't find it working here. I'd have written about it, but it's the kind of book that doesn't make sense to a general audience. I try to keep to subjects that'll make sense.

*But then do you think a poet should aspire to write things that make sense to a general public?*

They should write whatever they want. My point of view is only that because I'm writing this column, and I have to keep the kind of audience in mind. If I were talking to academics I'd talk differently. But over here these are general sort of people interested in literature, not necessarily very knowledgeable, but I want to make things accessible. So it's that you know, I would choose the kind of work that would make sense. Most people think I'm writing a review column, but I'm not.

*Was it different before, when you were starting out?*

Yes it was much more open.

*But even in Arvind's anthology you're the only woman poet, which appears like a conscious move on his part?*

Yes, because his main focus is on language. And he felt I had...

*You were the only one who could be represented?*

Yes, in terms of language, because I was using that sort of local lingo.

*What do you look for in a poem ? A good poem?*

Maybe when you feel something or see something for the first time. A critic talked about "Feeling the stoniness of a stone." Something has to come to life. Almost as if you were experiencing grief or joy or whatever for the first time.

*Your work is so intimate, and yet open. And you had students. Did you ever get strange questions from them about your personal life?*

No. It was funny. There were people who knew Melanie, and knew she was a friend of mine. They wanted to know very ordinary things, like does she wear a nightie? That kind of thing.

*It's very hard to restrain oneself from finding autobiographical strains in your work, there seems to be no other way, and there are poems where you're directly speaking to that idea that people might have, or you're warning them against it. Does that annoy you?*

Because everyone wants to read it, any damn thing. Even the novel I wrote, *Dangerlok*. I don't care one way or the other. I just feel ...My question is always, is it well written or badly written? Otherwise in a sense, everything one does is autobiographical, though it may not appear so.

*So you've had that question coming a lot of times?*

Relentlessly. Of course if it's autobiographical, they think it's personal. Then poetry shouldn't be about personal things. It should be about history and myth, you know. It may have been because of T S Eliot who said something about poetry being impersonal. So they attack Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton...

*People would be tempted to liken you to Plath...*

Two totally different people. They use the word "confessional."

*What collection of poems in the recent past have you really liked?*

I always liked Manohar Shetty's work. He's a very fine poet. Melanie's writing very well, but she hasn't got enough to publish a new book. Even Jeet Thayil's work is very solid.

*Do you read younger writers who send in their work to you?*

Sometimes, but I've stopped reading things on request because it's a bit painful. If it doesn't work, it's very hard to tell young people that it's not working, but if you tell them about language or growing up or any damn thing, it's way patronizing. So now I say no to almost all writing. It's too painful.

*Are you working on anything now, other than poems?*

My ambition now is to do nothing, absolutely nothing. So many years of teaching and this and that, so many volumes and anthologies, it's exhausting. I'd love to do more research, but I don't have that kind of stamina now, to go to the university every day. They have some wonderful poetry. Some very good underestimated work. It's a very good library.

*But they aren't really updating it now, are they?*

They update mostly at Kalina. But whatever they have of the old books, it's a wonderful collection. But you can't take books out. You have to photocopy or sit there and read. I love it there. I spent so much time while doing my PhD.

*Why did you publish your collected so early?*

I didn't think I would write any more.

*Do you think if the scenario were different, if people were constantly asking you for work, if the environment was different, you'd have written a lot more? Because you have a small, very concise, body of work.*

Mine is small. I'm not at all prolific.

*You also say you started late. But it wasn't late enough. You said you started at 30.*

39. Well I published at 39. I was writing before. But I'm not as prolific as, say, someone like Keki Daruwala, for example. But if I do have enough new poems, maybe I will have another book out.

*You should.*

You like my work?

*Why are we here?*

Among my unpublished poems, I forgot to publish a lot of them. I just forgot to include them.

*What fiction are you reading now?*

For a very long time, I used to read a lot of detective fiction. Then I went off it. Now I've started again. I really like it.

*You mentioned in an earlier interview that your father wrote. That he may have wanted to become a writer?*

Yes, I have his notebooks. He had written stories and verse. But he died too young, he had no time. He was 33. He was in those tribal areas, in Chhattisgarh. He and two of his friends caught this thing called Blackwater fever, a lethal fever, and he died.

*Were you too young to remember him, to know if you were close to him?*

I was three. I have only one or two vague memories. Beyond that, nothing.

*Is it because you have his notebooks and whatever's remaining that you feel...*

No... I remember, it must have been in the Chhattisgarh area, him taking me up to ride an elephant, or just jogging me on his knees or something. I wasn't taken to his funeral so I have no memory of that. I just didn't know what had happened.

*Did you grow up in a joint family?*

No. My father, when he was dying, suggested to my mother (he was in Pune for his treatment) that she stay on with her family. So that's what we did. He parents, brothers. So I grew up with them. My father's family wasn't really around. They were in the army and the Air force and in the NEFA region, so there was nobody around really.

*So you grew up with your mother.*

My mother and my aunts. One aunt lived upstairs here but she died about 2 years ago. It was fine. The uncles varied, they tended to be quite strict, except one of them. I was made to learn the piano, and one of them insisted, and I practiced, and the other one used to say, take it easy.

*Was it difficult with your mother? Was it a normal relationship?*

When I was young, it was okay. I was very close to her. When I started growing up I found her very authoritarian. She wanted to know everything. What I studied, where I went, who I wrote for, who my friends were, everything. On her own she was a lovely person.

So this entire business of looking after her fell on me. And when I was even quite young, 12 or 13, I used to go out and buy her saris. I was very protective. I thought it was okay for my aunts to be washing dishes and so on, but not my mother. So I think that protectiveness made it difficult for me later, I used to sort of fight her off, because I always felt some compassion for her. But it was very different. Not fun at all.

*Was she alive when you got into teaching?*

Yes, she was living here with me. First we were living in Borivali for about 10 years, and then we moved here. She died in 1992 or so.

*We read somewhere that you also directed a play, acted in a few?*

Just ignore that. That was just a very short phase when I suddenly felt like doing these things. So we did a play about TS Eliot and his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Tom and Viv. I did that and one other play. But it wasn't serious. Just for the heck of it. I tried so many things for the heck of it. When I lived in London for two years I tried silk screen painting, pottery. I used to go to the Museum of Natural Sciences, and read on evolution and so on. Because as a student at school, we never studied any of these things. The year after I left, the sciences were introduced for girls. But when I was there, there was nothing. So I was endlessly curious. From the public library, I used to borrow books that teach you to draw. I couldn't draw, but it was just for the fun of it that I did a lot of these things. Because over here everything was so strait-laced.

*You're very prolific with anthologies.*

I love research. I really love it. Everything written in English in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century is sort of forgotten work. I don't have the energy now. I used to spend about 15 hours a day on research. I discovered all sorts of people who no one remembered, ICS officers, people from remote places.

*But these books are hardly available any more. Why do you think this is happening, Eunice? You have so many anthologies, it's essential work. Is it because you don't talk about them enough?*

You mean, why aren't they well known?

*Yes. People are still publishing anthologies, winning awards.*

Sahitya Akademi has awards for contributions to literature. I think I've made quite a lot of contribution to literature, but no award is going to come my way. Like I may have said earlier, you have to be networking.

*Have you ever been involved with the Academy in any way?*

Yes, I was on a panel once, but they're godless specimens. They don't take any stance. If you go to a Sahitya Akademi reading, the entire audience looks as though they've been dug up archeologically. They have mud coloured skin, mud coloured caps, mud coloured trousers, mud coloured socks. There's something special about these Delhi guys, they're totally non-human. Honestly, not an expression. Once when I was asked to read there,

it's okay, it's at Delhi and you stay at the international centre, this guy writes to me and says, "Madam, I must tell you, you have no idea how to read a poem." He told me about a 100 things I'd done wrong.

*What were they?*

I don't remember.

*What do you think is happening?*

It depends. There's government money, and loads of bureaucracy.

*What panel were you on? Reading manuscripts?*

Yeah, something like that. What to publish, what to suggest... They were the dearest of dead people I've ever met. They would not take a stand about anything. I wrote a review once for Biblio, they never asked me to write again, and they didn't pay. I don't know why all these guys think we're in it for charity. Once I conducted a panel discussion, and once I planned an event, three evenings of poetry. Not a penny. They give you those satchels which somebody's given them. Like dove shampoo, talcum powder. I mean, come on! That's not the way you pay professionals, is it?

*Have you ever considered working on longer poems?*

If it is a long poem, I break it up into sections. No I can't write longer poems, I don't even want to. Can't write longer novels. Novellas.

*Yes, your poems are getting shorter and shorter.*

Yes they are. These were just little imagistic poems, images that turned up in my head during those 4 am walks with my dog.

I don't read them out ever. I can't. They're over before they start. Somebody once asked me if they're unfinished poems, and I said "what's to finish in a two line poem?"

## Eunice de Souza: New Poems

### Compound Life

1

The first-floor procuress  
takes the air.  
Her bosom precedes her.  
Ditto the pigeon  
that follows her.

2

She has a quacking voice.  
He has duck-tailed hair.

3

Mrs P's daughter never smiles  
never talks  
walks with her head down  
looking for potholes and pitfalls.

4

Mrs V beats her husband.  
The churchman says:  
Into every life  
a little rain must fall.

5

What can trees do in such a place  
except light their own fires.

6

The night watchman  
sleeps through the night.  
Opening his tiffin he says  
This is a good job.  
The best I ever had.

7

A compound full of silver cars.  
The sky with not a single silver star.

8

A bird hovers.  
A word hovers.  
A word is a bird  
is a bird is a bird

9

Hot, still, dawn air.  
A rat, condemned to gnaw,  
the only sound.

10

The downstairs neighbours sing:  
Yes  
Yes Yes Lord  
Yes

## Earth

The earth is restless tonight,  
beyond our power to assuage.  
Our knowledge comes too late.

She is victim, judge and jury.  
She is the avenging angel.

Pray that our deaths  
be quick and merciful.

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