

## Weightless Road

VINCENT DE SOUZA studied English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia. He worked for several years in London as an advertising copywriter. He set up and ran the 1980s experimental London workshop Physical Poets which took as its inspiration the work of Jack Kerouac and the American Beats. His early work was influenced by motorcycle journeys in the UK and abroad, culminating in a ten week ten country European tour from Scandinavia through to southern Europe. He now divides his time equally between South London and Hastings on the East Sussex coast where he co-hosts the poetry workshop and performance group Mariners.



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VINCENT DE SOUZA



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*For Rachael, Rebecca and Imogen*



## Contents

Against Adam	1
Existence of Paint	2
Equal Rights Talk, the Lost Biker	3
Towards the Abattoir	4
Slave to the Mistral	5
Getting it From the Mirror	7
Wash the Cadillac	8
On the Move with Medusa	9
Ocean Wolves	10
My Discipline Beach	12
Shooting on a Moment	14
Breathing Defect	16
Place of Forgiveness Somewhere in a Child	17
Doll's Cannibal Friend	19
Softness and Fever	20
Various Angels	21
Lost Shopping List	22
Planned Out-Takes	23
Hideaway	24
Tigers	25
Devil's Wood	26
Reindeer Death Threat	27
Flight of the Fall	28
Nevada, There	29
Ghosting of Her Love	31
Weightless Road	32
Kicking Cars	33
Presence of <i>Locki</i>	35
Rings Surviving at Rest	37

Sol Sun, Mijas Rain	38
Meaning Silence	40
Heroine of the Butterfly Effect	41
Prayer for Ray-Bans	43
Lightness of Death	45
Syntax Breakdown Saying Name's Name	47
Damning the Sea	48
Stateside Current	49
Tears Return in Blue	50
Row Boat to a Self	52
Shaper's Remorse	53
Yours Faithfully, Sincerely	54
Language Line	55
Colonel Lucifer and Agent Hades	56
Alive	57
Good Old Churches	58
Crystal Rafters	59
Reincarnation Gossip in the Salon of Spirituality	60
Heights	61
Sugar Mountains	62
Derelict	63
Rural Double Bind	64
Sunset Tang	65
Bloodstains on Sheets, Carpets, Shower, Basin etc. and Layers of Emotional Paint in the Mind and a White-on-white Wedding Dress Packed Away in a Clear Plastic Zip Bag Under the Bed . . .	66
Birthday Assassins	67
Demons Walk from Love	68
Goliath and Goliath and Goliath	69
Genet Greeting	70

X Number of Smiles	71
Rough diamond	72
Aftermath of a Mountainous Decision that Wasn't Made at a Watershed He Intuited as a Plain	73
Gunfire of a Coward	74
Throw it Away	75
Home is Fire	76



## Acknowledgements

I began sending poetry to high street motorcycle magazines and against their editorial policy they took them. Following that I submitted to a wide range of publications, mainly small press and a few outside the view of the general poetry audience. As I carried on writing, I then widened the net to include more known publications in the UK poetry world. My gratitude goes to several editors, many of whom work for little profit or gain and like guardian angels support so many writers looking simply to create poems in their own way, with no intention of following any style or trend. Thank you editors of *Motor Cycle International*, *Poetry Nottingham*, *Braquemard*, *Navis*, *Fire*, *Rustic Rub*, *Psychopoetica*, *Vigil*, *The Swansea Review*, *Seam*, *Terrible Work*, *Odyssey*, *New Hope International* and *Krax*. Thanks to Elaine Feinstein for including a poem in *PEN New Poetry II 1988* (Quartet) and Simon Rae for including one in *The Orange Dove of Fiji 1989* (Century Hutchinson). Special thanks to Esther Morgan for including five poems in *Reactions 2* anthology 2001 (University of East Anglia, Pen & Inc Press).



“Some people never go crazy, what truly terrible lives they must lead”

— CHARLES BUKOWSKI

“Punk is musical freedom. It’s saying, doing and playing what you want”

— KURT COBAIN, *Diaries*



## Against Adam

I wasn't.

When he crashed his motorcycle  
his skull caved, the helmet shell  
capped on vanity and persisting youth;  
still in control, he slipped it off  
and blacked-out in hospital,  
brains spilling from the alarming hole;  
how he loved to recount  
the way they patched his head,  
inserting an imperfect length of his rib.

After whiskeys, he treated his Eve like shit;  
taking the turn of a reptile deviant,  
he did stuff to her, demonic slithers,  
the tame or angelic avoid in sex;  
she lived alright, grew near his thinking,  
curled in the chamber of dented bone;  
furious lover, she left and returned to abuse,  
she couldn't move a limb before she died;  
I need nothing to do with hate,  
I saw him visit her, kind as any Satan.

## Existence of Paint

*God, what else  
have I done to myself?*

It is ridiculous  
that I am not interested  
in the hidden drift of change;  
once my whole attention  
was there in my love  
of the motorcycle's paint,

the variance of blue glitter  
in a coat under pervious black.  
Now I see worn reds and greens,  
the mesh and octagonal bolts  
rusting on the railway bridge;  
I find half-words, in spellings

on vans, billboards and crates;  
in the ninety-degree heat,  
a girl leans from a ladder,  
guiding a scraper and blowtorch;  
she burns the window frame  
to reach the bareness of wood.

## Equal Rights Talk, the Lost Biker

It is possible to praise  
the virtues of a woman  
and ridicule her in private,  
choose a random behaviour  
of looseness and poor logic.

*When I kill the engine,  
the heat of the crankcase  
contacts with jean and calf,  
control is the boot flick  
locating with neutral,  
a stimulus of road signs  
cools with the lashing of oil.*

Is a value real because of its opposite,  
is that why cruelty is so compelling?  
Sexual intercourse is the fair beasts  
in a sparring of tensile abandon;  
on balance, I'm reliable and a rat.

*The best bit is when  
you stop at the lights,  
feet planted on either side  
of octane in a cavernous tank;  
they all heed the voice of revving  
and you look at drivers or riders  
as background of a speed to come.*

See me as a delegate on behalf of buses,  
infatuated with a stunning motorcycle;  
why do I have incredible questions?  
In truth I say my character has worsened,  
on suicide and football, I'm biased or wrong.

## Towards the Abattoir

The two-foot wooden fence  
is fair at being itself,  
just as grass  
consumes the space  
needed by a mass of nettles;  
down the road  
is the abattoir gate,  
the stench is thick enough  
to cut like cake;  
I am inclined to feel sick,  
but this day  
the disgust has its place,  
it belongs with  
the boredom of girls,  
their laughs in line at the bus stop;  
I can see a silver Audi  
with a window one-third down,  
from where I sit  
the unit of steel, chrome and plastic  
is tremendous as any living form;  
a woman walks her Highland terrier  
to and from the abattoir,  
she moves with a lilting balance,  
her steps neat as those of her dog;  
no other moments will work like this.

## Slave to the Mistral

A backdrop of burnt foothills,  
vines placed in parallel, oak trees  
harbour a mass screech of crickets;  
this Mistral has been on at me  
for more than four days now,  
whipping over dust and dogs,  
a line of poplars blown sideways  
into giant irregular quills;

then the entrance of a proud mother  
with her pushchair on the farm track,  
red skirt ignited under blonde hair,  
leading a set of featureless figures,  
they give off the scent of a family,  
three pairs of legs, a shuffling group  
pulled forward by the pushchair.  
Along with this sighting

is a link to an earlier laughter;  
the scene is a local refuse tip  
and Shelley is driven down here,  
the Romantic and his life's work  
squeezed into a supermarket bag,  
nudging biographies and collections  
by some other greats of literature;  
as the rear door of the van opens

the carrier bag falls and splits,  
Shelley drops neatly onto concrete,  
his intuitive face on a jacket cover;  
then looking back past the poplars  
the mother is here on her return walk;  
more laughter can be traced with ease  
past the dumping of innocent Shelley  
or the public stroll of the new mother.

## Getting it From the Mirror

Soho bar people, sliding in a still life,  
walkers cross the screen in my head;  
full frontal, the illuminated street,  
an evolving copy of the same view  
kept in motion on the wall mirror.

In ornate gold and virtuously clean,  
at an angle of ten degrees to the eye;  
each pelvis is dressed, limp arms hang,  
a shaft of light points down at shoes,  
smoke gets blown at a haze of gender.

Males kiss cheeks, exaggerate embraces;  
a drinker with a leg in plaster is flirting,  
eyes widen, ovals of an expanding mouth;  
most of us stare at the jeep parked outside,  
the one in full leathers, easy at the entrance.

## Wash the Cadillac

It moves along, a next day  
as I wait and dream it to be,  
events cling to their reasons;  
within a stage, freedom built  
on my unknowing happiness,

growing light, an open vision,  
last chances to be unaware;  
so it's time to wash his Cadillac,  
sun making jewels of water spray,  
my wipes round on chrome wheels;

but he drags me on gravel and dirt,  
I scrape along, numb behind him,  
a sack with limbs, mime of shouts,  
blood and dirt, blotches on my knees;  
it hurts—fear for a torn summer dress;

to a little bed in the pool house,  
teeth define the lasting of his grin,  
touches on me, undressing to skin,  
thoughts fail, tears fill the scene  
I refuse to present to my eyes,

my lungs burn, his rough hand  
squeezes my mouth open wide,  
I swallow, sick runs from my nose,  
forced to dress, hold on a future,  
it's safe to drown in this pool.

## On the Move with Medusa

*His facial expression cast forward,  
arrangement of cheekbone, lips,  
with links to a method of feeling,  
a rumble glows in elemental eyes . . .*

I am still as a statuette, snapped  
into the shape of a seated woman;  
little to hear in this crowded space,  
make this airport my journey's end,

travellers shaped as moving shadows,  
luggage rolls, chained to their sides.  
Was it really him on the walkway,  
his profile turning to a loaded plane?

I suddenly wish I am here and waiting,  
astounded, I glare towards his table,  
piece together the aspects of a being,  
he looks back, my fury falls in shame;

as I board, I fix my eyes calmly ahead,  
in each set moment I am mostly afraid,  
I turn and soften with some walls down,  
what's there is left, it can only happen.

## Ocean Wolves

All those phrases,  
worn soundtracks  
still in his sour head,  
a forgotten hunger,  
desires plain as  
a cracked fingernail  
and the promise  
of the next ring pull,  
a novice bank robber,  
tale of an armed heist,

his role with a fake gun,  
night raids and brawls,  
baseball bats and revenge;  
when he enters a house  
drums and lead guitar  
pulse into his stare,  
he's back in a scene  
of waiting beer cans;  
he cracks one open,  
points his sullen eyes

at the manic dance,  
as lads leap at walls,  
speakers firing bass;  
calm in early hours,  
last bodies curled  
on cleanest carpet;  
Jimmy prods them  
with the toe end of  
a motorcycle boot,  
grabs a bread knife,

loaf and slab of cheese,  
heads off with a gang  
to sunrise on a beach;  
he spins the blade in air,  
a flash of karate skills,  
feet crunching on shale;  
he shares out the food  
some yell as juveniles,  
wail as mock wolves;  
Jimmy raises a boot,

stamps through the hull  
of an upturned boat;  
they follow as clones,  
break planks into missiles,  
arms flay, hurl at the sea,  
laughs in the wreckage,  
turn of clouded dawn,  
he slows into silence,  
while day washes over,  
real as remains of guilt.

## My Discipline Beach

*(Stuck on Jimmy, the Metaphor Kid)*

As ever, nothing much to begin with,  
though things to say of some worth;  
these days I'm doing my best  
to suppress the impulse of expression,  
when the words are hot coals  
in the background of broad disinterest,  
when the moment is there  
to try some actual description:

*Trust in the source of early energy-  
Jimmy says that's the line  
of the arsehole advisory council,  
which is why he blanks them,  
starts in a way worse than possible.  
Jimmy says art should eat holes  
in the bighead system, and Jimmy says  
stuff is radical when it feels physical,  
breathing down the neck of false order;  
he's like his namesake, the filmic Dean,  
the James with a sub-current of self evasion,  
a vitriol about acting, seared on screen in Rebel,  
such a ridiculous love for what he was doing,  
he had few rules, or reasons for being correct;  
in my Jimmy's book, many call themselves writers  
and they have such an obvious offspring of work;  
nine times out of ten, the force that makes it  
drowns in the wash of an ego's technique,  
the first weirdness smeared by judgement,  
by a writer's fear of sidestepping skill;  
it's always "see how good I've become",  
a weapon dulled by social nicety.*

I celebrate on the rim of negatives;  
do not read and do not write,  
don't absorb from the reflection  
of what your passion is probably like;  
one hour is addictive alone in a pub  
and I use the experiment of drink  
to tip forward into the night,  
swerve driving with a parcel of chips,  
I pull over, drawn by the sound of sea;

I swing my legs on the end of the jetty  
and I can stuff these fried shapes  
into the column of an empty throat;  
the planks beneath me are punctuation  
and ideas are trapped in their dream.  
I am now misusing sense and meaning  
to find ghosts in the substance of my text;  
in the interest of my poor intentions,  
I need to be fickle, moderately observant,  
take heart in calm and old sterility;  
a language failure is excitingly final,  
your words are generally no-one's words.

## Shooting on a Moment

*(tribute to Kurt Cobain)*

This song fuels its sound,  
rolls in a reel of images:  
crystal glass and hammer,  
a run of childbirth blood  
there in its darkened reds,  
shifting on a whitest clean,  
a vocal of what emotions  
may seem in a fiercer plane,  
so easy to mock the pitch,

name a pure primal scream;  
it all needs to save intensity  
so the power's not hooked  
to a lesser string of moments;  
when did anyone who means it  
get the Harpies of revenge  
to wear veils and skirts,  
tramp in worn silk slippers  
on a lava of male anger?

At each and every point  
the OK sun is asked  
to numb-out land and sea,  
memories in a broken cry  
are passed like a soft toy  
to each failure of a parent,  
poor gods who aren't there  
to welcome home a child;  
it is so great that venom

can burn in a pointlessness,  
there is never any need to be  
who reality implies you are,  
you sense this in shed-loads  
as nights throw tattered nets,  
while wire webs are spun  
on a failing chain of days,  
all crass and truly grand,  
more than was ever wanted.