

The Critic in his Natural Habitat

Vahni Capildeo

“You seem to be serious about literature. Have you ever considered writing up some of these thoughts of yours? A poet like you could bring a fresh perspective to criticism. People would appreciate that. You needn’t worry: they wouldn’t expect scholarship. My book came out last year. You don’t want me to bore you with that. It’s just an in-depth study of darkness and the imagination in the seventeenth century. The seventeenth century might not be your cup of tea. Oh, is that your book? I’m afraid I don’t read much contemporary poetry. Will you give me a copy? Only if you have one spare, of course. Sultry photo! I’m never *sure* about books-with-author-photos. The rail station photobooth? Really? You don’t write for *The Times Literary Supplement*, do you? Dorina recently did a brilliant review of Winsome’s edition¹ of Gussie’s translations of Brazilian slum poetry composed in Spanish by a French guy who taught on an art history course here, oh, donkeys’ years ago. I don’t remember his name. He lived in one of those nice houses.

Haven’t you read them? You read Italian don’t you? I’ll send you the reference if I can remember to find the time to send it. You wouldn’t believe how busy I am. End-of-term exams bang in the middle of barbecue duty. And the family insists on their five days in Cornwall. I’m so desperate to get back to my research. Madness! A nightmare! Merciless. But I’d like to See You Again...May I See You Again? (Gracie! Put on the wash, I need my brown corduroy trousers for tomorrow). Sorry. Oh. You’re going away?”

¹ *Snottings and Jottings: Fables Lifted from the Favela* (Winnersh Triangle: Black Poodle Editions, 2009)