

There were one or two others whose writing impasses were minor  
But none of them had engaged in expanding words into prose  
Or attempted to put words into mouths of dramatis personae

These reducers of speech into syllables, metres, rhythm  
Had essays to write to identify mechanisms of reducing prose into poetic  
diction.

I babysat them for two hours and concluded:  
Fathers should not reproduce their kind  
Poets should teach prose  
And let their wards become poets  
In revolt.

## Parents Among School Children

*Part One: (1993, Unity High School, Khartoum, Sudan)*

We accompanied our children to their qualifying exams  
And dressed so nicely as if we were to be examined.  
The children were gloomy, infected no doubt  
By our fears of their failure which would reflect on us.

Upon our arrival at school, the kids scampered away  
Went in twos or threes to share sweets and the week's events  
Leaving the empty parents loudly greeting each other  
Or trying to curry favour with the dutiful teachers.

When the bell rang, the teachers shooed the children away  
And the women amongst us felt the emptiness in the womb  
And the men smoked and worried of failure or fees to be paid.  
After a while we all settled glumly to bear our trial:

Some child came out after a few moments and the mother—  
Well, because the child was older, he was taken to his age group  
Unfortunately he had started school a few years too late—  
The mother took home the child who had wasted no time in examining  
the test.

Why fiddle, doodle, and make graffiti when at home  
There were cookies to eat, videos to watch, pranks to play?  
Another child came out—she had forgotten her foot rule  
Another was led to the loo, apparently the porridge had been too much.

Eventually they all got out, with their different answers  
To every question. Making us want to zero in on the teachers.  
But each parent wished his child had shut his mouth  
And not budged out a different answer to 70 times 325.

*Part Two: (1994, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Australia)*

Today is the twenty-sixth of September in '94  
It is the examination and registration of Curtin Tech  
I chanced upon a Chinese-Indonesian supported by a Malay  
Whose daughter had come to try her luck to join Curtin U.

The mother looked blue and walked in a daze.  
As if her daughter was to be married tomorrow.  
Woman, it is not you who will live the life here  
Leave it to the kids, they'll integrate: the womb is too small.

Maybe the Chinese mother had foreseen a greater integration  
And the chance of her daughter never returning to Java again  
Having been seized by some heavy Caucasian drunk  
Or perhaps the low Malay, or even lower Africa-man . . .

This parent sure  
Was on trial

It comes out in the first place  
Of giving birth;  
It comes out in the second place  
Of mothering in perpetuity.