

Literary Review

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Literary Review, 1st November 2006

Mike Stocks' assured *White Man Falling* (Alma 285pp, £12.99) homes in on the South Indian town of Mullaipuram, where retired police Sub-Inspector R.M. Swaminathan carries a morbid fame 'for having once attempted suicide using only a puncture repair kit'.

The unfortunate policeman was forced to retire after administering 'a mild custodial beating' to a Very Guilty Suspect'. Whilst the suspect escaped with a cracked rib, Swami had a stroke that left him unable to walk or speak properly – which makes supporting his wife (Amma) and six dancing daughters rather tricky: 'How could anyone find dowries for six daughters, let alone a cripple like me on a half-pay pension?'.

One day, Swami's fortunes change. As he's being wheeled to a family matchmaking session (his eldest is on the point of being accepted by a rich computer geek) he is nearly struck by a white man falling from the balcony of his hotel. At first ridiculed, he then comes to be seen as a spiritual leader, touched by the divine.

Stocks crams an impressive amount of jokes into his satire, essentially an exploration of how meaninglessness can come to impart meaning. Often, it seems as if the characters – many of whom drift perilously close to stereotype – are merely there for the author to poke fun at. However, his elegant turn of phrase (he has a book of sonnets out this month, incidentally) and cool command of plot are highly impressive.

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