

**NEW  
CEYLON  
WRITING**





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NEW CEYLON WRITING

1971

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symbol of artistic discrimination  
in Sinhalese art and literature.  
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Cover printed by  
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DRAMA AND DIALOGUE

Shelagh Anghie	OUR STAGE, THEIR WORLD: Irangani Serasinghe and Winston Serasinghe talk about the theatre	36
Karan Breckenridge	A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY JAYASENA	14
Ernest MacIntyre	THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT - DISTANCE TRAVELLER: A play	23

ARTICLES

Philip Coorey	PRESENT CONTINUOUS: RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA	8
James Goonawardene	THE CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES, JAMAICA 1971	73
Yasmine Gooneratne	ERNEST MACINTYRE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE	41
E.F.C. Ludowyk	THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON	1
K.S. Sivakumaran	ADAPTATIONS AND THE TAMIL STAGE	21

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Karan Breckenridge	DANCE, THE RESCUED ART	51
Wimal Dissanayaka	A NOTE ON MODERN SINHALA POETRY	63
H.A.I. Goonetilleke	PABLO NERUDA AND CEYLON: A BRIEF NOTE	53
G.K. Haththotuwegama	CENSORSHIP AND THE SINHALA FILM	48
Shiranthi Jayamanne	THE KALAKENDRA RANGA SHILPA SHALIKA: ART CENTRE THEATRE STUDIO	55
Claudette Taylor	RADIO THEATRE	51

STORY

Indrancee de Silva	THE BIRD WITH THE CLIPPED WINGS	67
Basil Mendis	A FABLE	70
Kris Rezel	DAY	81



POETRY

Jean Arasanayagam	AFTERNOON PICTURES	46
George Claessen	VOICES	13
Rienzi Crusz	REMAINS OF AN ORIENTAL POET WRITING IN CANADA	76
Alfreda de Silva	GRASS FIELDS IN SUNLIGHT	46
D.M.de Silva	LATE CALLER	80
Lakshmie de Silva	TANGALLA, APRIL 9TH 1971	83
Basil Fernando	AN ENCOUNTER	80
Patrick Fernando	OBSEQUIES OF THE LATE ANTONIO POMPIRELLI, BISHOP	61
Rosanne Gomez	FUTILITY	47
Yasmine Gooneratne	FOR VAJIRA, DANCING MORNING AT THE OFFICE	57 79
Suvimalee Gunaratna	VESAK 1971	82
Khalida Lebbe	OUR KIND	78
Anne Ranasinghe	ON THE BEACH SINHALA NEW YEAR 1971	77 82
Kris Rezel	PRETTY PEOPLE	78
Peter Scharen	FATHERS	71
Maureen Seneviratne	BLOOD GUILT REQUIEM	83 84
Gamini Seneviratne	SONG FOR THE NEW ERA	84
C.V. Velupillai	NEW ANURADHAPURA	45
Lakdasa Wikkramasinha	IF THE MONSOON IS A TIGER FROM THE LIFE OF THE FOLK POET, YSINNO THE POET	66 66 67

REVIEWS

<u>Fiction:</u>	GIRAYA (Punyakante Wijenaike), OF LOVE AND SQUALOR (Mark Bartholomeusz), THE CALL OF THE KIRALA (James Goonawardene), COMMONWEALTH SHORT STORIES (ed. A. Rutherford and D. Hannah), Children's Fiction	
<u>Poetry:</u>	WORD BIRD MOTIF (Yasmine Gooneratne), POEMS (Anne Ranasinghe), CARIBBEAN VOICES (ed. J. Figueroa), NEW SHIPS (ed. D.G.Wilson), THIRTY POEMS (Balamani Amma)	
<u>Anthology:</u>	NEW CEYLON WRITING 1970 (ed. Y. Gooneratne, with M. Pieris)	
<u>General:</u>	A RETURN TO KANDY (Vesak Nanayakkara)	
	REVIEWED BY: 'D.F.', T.Kandiah, Patrick Fernando, Claudette Taylor, Y. Gooneratne	85
	CEYLON THEATRE: A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	58
	OUR CONTRIBUTORS	98

THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

E.F.C.Ludowyk

London  
10th September 1970

My dear Shelagh,

Now that the sadness of Arthur's death weighs heavy on my heart, I feel that writing about him and the Dram Soc, with which we were associated, will ease some of the burden. I don't suppose that what I write will interest many beside people like yourself. Still I'd better do it while I can, for the number of those who can write about what became the Dram Soc will surely diminish very fast.

The Dramatic Society was the creation of Leigh Smith who was Professor of English in the old University College. It was founded, so far as I remember, in 1922, and its first secretary was Reggie Enright. We used to meet on Monday afternoons at 4.15 and read plays. Our choice was necessarily limited to what was available in as many copies as could be assembled out of the resources of the library, the collections of Leigh Smith, Marrs, Hussey and anyone else obliging enough to help. This limitation - to Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Moliere, Galsworthy, Goldsmith, Sheridan - was not without its nosological gains. Those who read - they were a surprisingly large number when the time which went into the activity and its infrequent solaces are considered - did benefit from the acquaintance they made with international literature. Few women were members of the University College, yet they were active too. I remember Dorothy Anghie, Laurel Tambimuttu, Catherine Paulusz and Miss Naeken taking part in the readings. In front sat Leigh Smith, occasionally "harumphing" in satisfaction, throwing out a correction of pronunciation, and naturally spreading through his enjoyment of the proceedings a similar pleasure in the small group gathered there.

Readings of plays went so well and became such an institution that we hoped we could proceed to performing a play in public. L.McD. Robison, who was then in the Education Department, promised to help, and we launched into a few preliminary rehearsals of Captain Brassbound's Conversion. It was a lively and amusing play, it was by Shaw and Shaw was in fashion, and - best of all - it called for only one woman in the cast. However nothing eventually came of these rehearsals. Perhaps it was as well, for the more we went into it the more daunting seemed the difficulties.

I left University College in 1928. The interval between that year and 1932, when I returned, can be filled in now by Justin la Brooy, Travice Peiris, Hans Lourensz, Sidney de Zoysa and my brother, Vyvil, in Australia. Arthur, alas, is no more. I do know that not only did play-reading continue most successfully, but the first public performance given by the Dramatic Society took place at College House. A.A. Milne's The Princess and the Woodcutter was given with much acclaim and great success. It was a short play, but it called for delicacy of touch, skill in music and good comedy.

I came back to Ceylon after three years at Cambridge. No one with the slightest interest in plays up at the university at that time could have failed to have been educated and inspired by the Festival Theatre.



THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

Much has been written about it and the work done by Terence Gray, Anmer Hall and Tyrone Guthrie in educating the taste of a generation of Cambridge theatre-goers. The Festival was one glorious episode in the history of the small repertory theatre in England, soon to be dealt a body blow by the talkies. It never recovered, and now the Festival in Newmarket Road no longer exists. But while it lasted it gave Cambridge - and England - a model of what intelligent theatre could achieve. The names of those who appeared on its boards would read now like a citation of the awards of an academy to those it honoured: Tyrone Guthrie, Robert Donat, Flora Robson, Ninette de Valois, Clinton Baddeley, Rupert Doone etc. etc. If one had spent all one's time at Cambridge at the Festival one would at least have acquired a liberal education.

In 1932 Leigh Smith had retired from University College. The Dramatic Society was flourishing and when I resumed my membership of it naturally I tried to take over at the point where years previously we had failed: performing a play in public for the benefit of an audience not confined to the university. It had already been done, so the task was much easier. Very soon Bert Amerasinghe, who had also been up at Cambridge, came into the society himself and that lightened the burden still more. There was a group of highly intelligent and keen students, themselves aware of the function of a university society, ready to launch out into public, but conscious that the roots of the society were in its university membership.

The great good fortune of the Dramatic Society when it did first launch out into the wider public in 1933, was its possession of a small membership, large enough to include some of the best spirits of the college and not so small as to be a clique. The play chosen was a translation from the contemporary Spanish - the Quintero brothers' Where Women Rule. It had charm, perhaps a little more sweetness than light; it had to do with getting married - an interest of young students everywhere - and in some respects Andalusia was very much like Ceylon. The very title of the play indicated that the Society had taken on and tackled manfully the thorniest of all problems besetting university societies at the time: the relationships of young men and women in the early thirties in Ceylon, and that of getting them to act in public. I suppose in a sense Christobel and Monica Gunasekara and the other girls who appeared in that production were pioneers, and perhaps it was something of that pioneering effort that made the play the success it was. I remember that a second performance was called for, and it was given in aid of the Hatamune Dry Zone Colonisation Scheme - another pioneering venture of the early thirties. I remember Kenneth de Lanerolle, Muthubanda Dissanayake and S.P. Amarasingham. They rose to the occasion remarkably finely and well.

The thirties were the years of the growing expansion of University College, when the millennium - the fully fledged University - seemed just round the corner, however divided opinions might have been about the site. There were more and more young men and women coming into university education from secondary schools - the English-educated 'elite' about whom such hard feelings are entertained now. It is not for me to investigate their shortcomings. Most of them were well aware of these themselves. They were anxious to make the most of their opportunities, however limited and restricted they were in the system of that time, and some of them found their way into what was coming to be called the Dram Soc.

I think it is well to repeat here that it was - even in those University College days - a university society. Of course most of its members

THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

were Arts students, of them many were reading English. But there were always others from other disciplines interested, and the Society could count on the interest and help of other Departments. I remember with what keenness Professor Whiteley of the Classics Department - the best of men - and J.L.C. entered into a production of Sheppard's translation of Euripides' Cyclops, for which Dido Caspersz of the Department of Mathematics produced music of his own composition. On another occasion, one of the end of term jollifications of the Society, the Rev. P. Lucien Jansz wrote a little sketch in Spanish, which went down very well with both actors and audience who, though they did not know the language, were diverted by the bravura of the quarrel in the dialogue.

Where Women Rule and the next two plays: The Rivals (1934) and The Imaginary Invalid (1935) were given in the Royal College Hall, acoustically not the happiest of choices, yet the only 'stage' (if one can call what it provided that) available. There was a great deal of talent however, so the shortcomings of auditorium and stage were not of great consequence. In The Rivals Erica Christoffelsz and Bonnie Beling played the main roles. Raju Coomaraswamy and Phyllis Dickman were the youthful leads. Doric de Souza played one of his three or four small roles for the Society, and I remember that it was at a performance of The Rivals in Panadura that we had the news of his First and his winning of the University Scholarship to England.

Of these three plays given at Royal College I feel that The Imaginary Invalid provided the best example of the great resources of talent available to the Society. Even in those early days there were performers - like Kenneth de Lanerolle and Muthubanda Dissanayake - who were more than ordinarily gifted. But the playing of Bonnie Beling as Argan in the Moliere was so sustained and controlled that it was impressive in its range and finish. He entered so fully into the role that he seemed not to be the young man we knew but somebody else. With hindsight now one recalls the evidence of the completeness with which Bonnie engaged himself in the world of unreality and made it real. This was the highlight of a play that had on its credit side the remarkable diverting talents of Audrey de Silva as Toinette, David Pate and Yvonne Poulrier as the young lovers, and two excellent cameos provided by Pieter Keuneman as Beralde Argan and Sam Kadirgamar as the lawyer.

I suppose 1935 must be reckoned a date of some significance in the history of the Dram Soc and other university societies, because the PWD in that year began the building of a hall which was, in the confident expectation of Professor Marrs, going to provide us with 'a first-rate stage'. Knowing how specialized the task of providing first-rate stages was, and happening to have a few books on the subject, I took them to Professor Marrs. But neither he nor I (absolutely indirectly though I was concerned) reckoned with the inertia of bureaucracy. King George's Hall, when it was ready, was a monument to everything but theatre and stage. It gave us an ungainly platform at an awkward height in a large hall. At the rear was a smaller area which could, after an army of assistants had struggled with the heavy planks which bureaucracy ordained, be used as an inner stage. Acoustically - though this was not, I believe, deliberate intention on the part of the PWD - it was fair.

What the PWD provided, unsatisfactory as it was, was further complicated by an enormous and heavy blackboard, of fearsome proportions, on which the Mathematics Department worked out for the benefit of its



THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

students complicated problems, most of which dealt with the vagaries of a piece of string to which a weight was attached. Whether this blackboard still exists I do not know, but it remained on the stage of King George's Hall for twenty years thereafter. Pushed by main force into the curtained wings, it stood guard, unseen, over numerous productions of university societies. A little later a grand piano - on which rugger enthusiasts danced on Colours Nights - came to join it, standing mute and invisible in the opposite wings. These two objects played some part in productions of the Dramatic Society. These were objective reality, of which the producer and designer of sets had to take note. What was put on the stage, how the actors entered and made their exits, were frequently dictated by blackboard and piano. I do not suppose, however, that this was a great handicap. The PWD and University College undoubtedly believed in Dumas' maxim that all one needed for drama was three boards and a passion.

From the members of the Dram Soc we had all the passion that was required - sometimes more of it, sometimes less, but by and large we could, as a university society, carry through most of what we attempted to do. The first of the shows at K.G.Hall was The Lady from Alface - a return to the Quinteros. I mention it because, once again, some of the characteristics of a university society production were in evidence in it. We had a strong lead in Laurel Nathanielsz, she continued the tradition established earlier of the player or players who could, whatever the end result, please and reward audiences. We always had such players, on whom we could depend and who could make up for deficiencies elsewhere. (I remember Dick Daniel in a role he made all his own in the same play.) Like Laurel in later years came players like Simplicius Crusz, Ellis Grenier, Irma Nathanielsz, Roland Sri Pathmanathan, Rene Caldera, Osmund Jayaratne, Jeanne Pinto, Henry Ernst, Jan Modder, Irangani Meedeniya - the list is very long and to it one should add, too, the equally long list of those who played secondary roles superlatively well - Douglas Amarasekara, Celia Arnolda (she came in at 24 hours' notice to play a part she had watched in rehearsal), George Fernando, Carmen Mendis, Saliya Parakrama, Tony Gabriel, Percy Colin Thome, Shanti and Duleep Kumar with Tissa Devendra - and so on. Then there were all those whose roles for the Dram Soc earned them a soubriquet by which they were better known thereafter. I think of Krupp - and hope he will turn up some time.

Arthur van Langenberg came in to help us in 1937. With all his talents, his wonderful equanimity of character and his loveliness, he was a strong support. He dressed The Servant of Two Masters. I shall never forget the wonderful costume he gave Kumudini Bhonslay. She played her role with spirit, and her voice - with an accent which might have been Italianate - seemed just right. Arthur was more than a single helper - he was a host in himself, and behind him were the various members of his family: Dolly, who scoured the Pettah shops for materials, did wonders with a sewing needle and always got things absolutely right; Trixie, who was a good practical critic, and helped in the most unimaginable ways. I remember how one afternoon between 4.15 and 5.30, when the Hall gradually began to fill, she came in with a sewing machine, placed it on the stage, and attached a long hem to the curtain which had shrunk. All of it was done with such good humour and dispatch that you scarcely realised how hard she was working till it was all over. Etta was there helping in a hundred ways. I do not think they ever realised how much we owed to them. I am certain that to them, as to most of us, it was a joint enterprise in which we were all involved.

THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

In 1940 Edith took over the decor of The Merry Wives of Windsor and did a superlative job. I remember The Merry Wives for two other reasons: Merle van Langenberg gave us her help at rehearsals, and lent the comedy a verve that belonged, at times, to the old Keystone days. For the first time older members of the Society played in the production - and Bert Amerasinghe was a terrific Dr Caius, with Bala Tampoe Phillips tumbling at his heels. That was the first of many extraordinary performances he gave on the stage. He is an actor of uncanny insight into the role he plays and, in addition, has remarkable versatility. Audiences of older years will remember his Tobit, the old father in The Sulky Fire, and his playing of Creon in Anouilh's Antigone.

From 1937 onwards we had been spending some of our takings on a lighting set and with Strand Electric to help - they were extremely useful and practical - we were building up the nucleus of a small set of battens, spots and dimmers for a repertory stage. As these things go, it was fairly good. The best use was made of it by P.A.S. Perera and Bunny Ludekens, who brought some of the people they had trained. They contributed a great deal to the final effect, so it became more and more the kind of joint enterprise which involved as many in greenrooms and off stage as on it.

In 1941 Edith and I were married, and her first connection with the Dram Soc in 1940 became a permanent involvement. She brought professional expertise into costuming and decor, having worked at both in Berlin in the twenties. Of all the shows the Dram Soc put on, two which linger long in my memory are Marco Millions and The Good Woman of Setzuan. Both of them were taxing undertakings, possible only because the joint enterprise involved so many talents and so much hard work. We had to cut down O'Neill's play to dimensions capable of interpretation on an amateur stage without losing everything that gave it meaning. The first part of the task was solved by the Sprach-Chor which Edith trained, and for which bits of the impressionistic text came from Canon Jansz. The rest was done by sticking close to the text, and having actors who rose nobly to the occasion. I remember how pleased Lionel Wendt was with the whole show, and how on a very hot night he made numerous pictures of it in his own inimitable style.

The Good Woman of Setzuan was memorable as the first Brecht play to be put on the boards in Ceylon. It had - as was necessary on our 'stage' with its blackboard and grand piano in the wings - logistic problems of its own. These were remarkably well solved by Edith and P.A.S. Perera. For the rest Jeanne decided, in spite of lots of difficulties and the stupid way she was badgered by oafish students at the university, that nothing would stop her and she played Shen Te with magnificent verve and spirit.

We extended the usual programme of one play every year to two, or even three, having so many past members of the Dram Soc to depend on. The latter gave a memorable performance of Anouilh's Antigone, Irangani Meedeniya and Bert Amerasinghe playing Antigone and Creon, and Johann Leembuggen bringing into his playing of the soldier incredible reserves of power. To these older members and others, we owed later on the great success with audiences of Pirandello's Naked, in which Winston Serasinghe for the first time gave the Dram Soc the satisfaction of counting him among its players.



THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

Looking back on it now I remember a few chance remarks or brief encounters, which as they remain in my memory belong here since they did have point. I remember Robert Nicholl Cadell telling me, as we talked on the lawns of King George's Hall after a performance of Lady Precious Stream, that he'd have been better pleased at seeing something written by a contemporary playwright in Ceylon. He was right. I remember his remark with keen regret, because our friendship was so short, and I learned to value it all too late. I think this was something which the Dram Soc should have tried to do. It has, I think, to be put down to the debit side.

Then I remember Ralph Keene. He, too, is dead. He liked the plays he saw, but he remarked quite rightly that it was good, very good perhaps, amateur work. Of course it was. That was - in the cliché - the defect of its quality.

I remember Dr Amarasinghe - the father of Upali and Anoja. I remember a conversation I had with him. He liked what the Dram Soc was doing, and he supported it because he felt it educated. That was a very great compliment to its work, and however much result tended to fall short of intention, some such moral aim as Dr Amarasinghe had in mind belonged to the purpose of our playing.

The reactions of audiences and the press - for very often the press provided the audience with its reaction - were on the whole sympathetic and appreciative. So, too, was the attitude of the Vice Chancellor and of the University. In 1950 it was the University which sponsored the visit of Robert G. Newton, under British Council auspices, to Ceylon. I think you must have seen his production of Twelfth Night, in which a number of public figures in the world of amateur drama in Ceylon took part. Robert had lots of experience in production and those who played with him did learn a great deal. I remember Dennis Bartholomeusz's good performance in the play, and Sonnie Wijeyesinghe. Had he not fallen ill, Robert would have done Synge's The Playboy of the Western World with Dennis as the Playboy. It would have been a very interesting experiment.

The rest of it you probably know as much of as I do. Jubal, who was in Perth, Australia, at the time, and was well known to Professor Allan Edwards, came to Ceylon in 1951 as guest producer for the University. He had been trained by Reinhardt, had his own very successful and well known theatre in Vienna, and gave a much needed professional touch to the plays he did for the Dram Soc, for the Sinhalese Society, and for other groups. He had a wonderful extrovert personality, and made easy contact with people. But he was a sick man, and pushed himself too much in the work he did.

You probably saw Liliom, which had some very memorable things in it. Sera was as usual a magnificent figure, Ranjani was very sweet and winsome in the main female role, and all along the line there were little gems of small parts. Edith did the sets and costumes, and it was a great success. I remember the absurd song, or lilt, which opened the play - worked out by Edith and myself in a car travelling from Colombo to Menikdiwela.

In the same year, or it could have been a year later, Jubal opened (I expect that would be the right term) the Lionel Wendt Theatre with a truly moving production of The Lower Depths. Not everybody's cup of tea, but extraordinarily well done, and mounted on the stage against - I

THE UNIVERSITY DRAM SOC: A LETTER FROM LONDON

suppose that would be the word - odds that were almost insuperable (chief among these the rush to get the theatre ready). I remember how hard actors had to work; how Jubal fluctuated between the extremes of delight and despair; how manfully Harold came into it to get things smoothed over and onsure that everything would finally be ready; and how Edith and Gunadasa nearly killed themselves with the set.

To my mind the best of the shows Jubal did for the Dram Soc was The Insect Play. He worked on it at Peradeniya for two and a half months. I well remember going to a rehearsal at the end of that time, hearing Gehan's ringing laugh which opened the play, and knowing how wonderful the transforming power of a good producer could be. That was a very good show, and a very happy one. Once again right along the line there were fine performances given in it - by Francis Pietersz, by Frederick and a wonderful onsemble by the 'ants'. I remember going with the show to Jaffna and trying to get the stage ready - we did it, but what a strain it was - between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. on Friday night and Saturday morning. The Town Hall was then being used by the Supreme Court of Ceylon, and nothing could be touched until its sittings were over on Friday. Our bus reached Jaffna at 10 p.m. and then we set to work: Bunny Ludekens, Gunadasa and scores of other helpers, literally making a stage out of a platform. Edith did some wonderful sets, specially designed for travelling. They were all made at Menikdiwela and transported to Colombo.

You know all about Androcles, because you did such a fine role in it. It was a play I had long wanted to do, because I thought it offered so much to actors and had the right proportion of jest and seriousness which Shaw rarely succeeded in getting in most of his other plays. I wish I could have done it with a clearer mind. I think you will remember how hard we worked, and how tired we were. That Doric, Roland, Thambi and Dissa were ready to come into it was very great kindness and a gesture of friendship which I appreciated. (I wonder whether you saw Thambi in Tobias; he was great, and he was even better in Androcles.) I think the show had some good, quite good things in it: I remember the scene between yourself and Unamboowe as the Captain, Roland's emperor, and Thambi and Frederick. Francis's performance was full of charm, I thought. Once again Edith did some fine sets and costumes.

This has been an extremely long letter. It was something I wanted to write a long while ago. I am sorry that it was Arthur's death which prompted me finally to it. I don't know what I should say at the end. As you will see I have referred only to Dram Soc shows I worked on - Bert did an excellent The Second Mrs. Tanqueray in which Chandi Meedeniya first showed her mettle, and the year before that Ibsen's Pillars of Society, in which Jeanne Pinto first appeared. Looking back on it all, I remember such fine and moving things on the stage as Chandi in Naked, Yvonne Dabrera and Malcolm Wright in Right You Are, Roland and Rene in Marco Millions, and so forth. If I could do it again, of course I think I would do it better. What it meant most of all was working on a creative activity with a group of people, most of them young, and having the feeling that it was worth doing. Perhaps there was some snobbery, some arrogance and some narcissism involved, but I still think that it is worth keeping the lines open for internationalism. After all that is, by definition, one of the functions of a University, and we were a University society.

I am sure I have forgotten much and remembered what is not so important. Yet here it is.

Yours,

Lyn Ludowyk



## PRESENT CONTINUOUS: RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA

Philip Coorey

September 1970 was a memorable month in the Sinhala theatre. Two short plays, and one man's performance in both scored a new high. This, of course, has nothing to do with the fact that during the previous months, maybe during an even longer time, Sinhala theatre was practically dead.

Dayananda L.S. Pathiraja's production, Kavuruth Enne Ne (Nobody Will Come) is a 2-act play that lasts about one and a half hours, and is a haunting study of old age, of isolation, of abandonment and the fear of death. An old couple celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary wait for friends to arrive, and that long wait is punctuated with incessant quarrels, reminiscences and the obsessive fear of death which may come at any time - which may, in fact, leave the living worse off than the dead. The playwright has caught brilliantly a certain milieu: the world of the Kotahena Catholic. I do not use the term in a derogatory sense: but that world has its own attitudes, its own standards, sometimes its own language. It is a world which is fast dying, but one which can be recognised immediately. Wimal Kumar de Costa and Mercy Edirisinghe inhabit that world as if they had both belonged to it for the 75 years of their 'stage life'.

One blunder, however, reduced the total impact of the play. The first act ends with a long mime sequence, during which the old couple greet the arriving guests, bring in chairs, serve refreshments and so on. That sequence as it was played gave the audience the impression throughout that it was all a fantasy, merely the visible proof of the breakdown of the old couple. This was really the climax of the play, which could have ended there. But there was another act to come, and this gave the impression that the earlier festivities had, in fact, taken place. The play ends with the old man's death; but the end is an anti-climax, and the imagined horror was far more powerful.

Dhamma Jagoda's production of Kora saha Andaya (The Lame Man and the Blind Man) made no such mistake. The blind man (Wimal Kumar) carries the lame man on his back as they wander, desperately seeking a cure. When the "miracle" happens - or, in other words, when the goal is reached - the ties that of necessity have bound them are broken, and the lame man strangles the blind man.

As a production lasting 30 minutes, this was one of the finest I have seen on the local stage. Two superb performances, perfect timing, lighting and stagecraft used very evocatively - this is a chilling bit of work which one can't easily forget. Of course Jagoda has tried to present the play as a parable: but that, to my mind, failed. For one thing the script did not have that interplay of meaning. Again, I feel that the audience is so fascinated by what is presented on the stage that it is unlikely to pay much attention to deeper meanings.

Both plays have Wimal Kumar in common; also, mime. Neither are the two strangers to each other, for Wimal Kumar sometime ago presented an interesting mime performance at Vidyalkara University, and the emphasis on mime sequences in both plays suggests that they were show-cases for his talent. But Mercy Edirisinghe in Kavuruth and Daya Tennekoon in Kora also went beneath the skin of their characters. The party sequence in Kavuruth had high points, although it went on a trifle

## RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA

too long. In Kora the lame man's physical effort in moving his withered legs could be felt by the audience. This was mime at its best, and mime is essentially the refinement of the actor's art.

But Wimal Kumar dominated both plays: the old man clinging to the fabric of respectability, screaming in fear at one moment and willingly deluding himself at the next, hamming the grotesque death scene - he fitted perfectly into the black comedy of the play. As the blind man, he was equally impressive, and the physical strain on him here must, surely, have been enormous. It is the blind man's behaviour which defines the relationship between the two men - linked by their necessity and by their hate of one another, and physically by the long stick carried by the blind man.

In one amazing piece of stagecraft, the blind man runs round and round the cripple who in turn spins on his belly, clinging to his end of the stick. At this point, in their words to one another ("I ran and ran, but I was always running round you," says one; and the other replies "And I was always spinning round myself") the play approximates to a genuine parable.

Perhaps at the moment Wimal Kumar is limited by his extraordinary talent for mime; yet in both plays he showed flashes of brilliance in 'straight' acting. He could, indeed, develop into one of our finest stage actors, given the opportunity to widen his range. I can think of his hilarious playing of the dramatist in Namel Weeramuni's Nattukkari - but he must not concentrate only on the mime or the caricature. Sinhala theatre today deserves the best it can get.

A play of a very different kind was Chandrasena Dassanayake's Mage Rankanda (My Lovely Lady), which was presented by the Aanditika in March this year. If there is one devastating argument against the folly of prejudiced censorship, it is the production of Rankanda. This superbly theatrical, hilarious satire exposes public postures maintained for private motives: no doubt it may have pricked a few on the board of censors.

It is not easy for a production to fulfil expectations raised by its press publicity. Rankanda, it will be remembered, got more than its share of the latter. If the production had been only fairly good, it still would have been a let-down for expectant audiences. But it was so enjoyable that had we been deprived permanently of the play, the Censor Board would have been responsible for a national disaster. All the private sacred cows would have been enthroned for ever - and the first serious step would have been taken in this country to stifle the gift of laughter.

The story of Rankanda is well known by now. Based, like the musical My Fair Lady, and its parent, Shaw's Pygmalion, on the myth of the sculptor whose beautiful creation came to life, the play has four men - three of them representing definitive (and warring) schools of the Sinhala language, the other an experimenter - try to transform a prostitute's gutter speech. Their failure is a savage comment on their divisive professional jealousies. Dassanayake's play is first-class theatre. He has a special talent, which was shown, one recalls, even in his earlier plays. To take the seminal idea from Pygmalion, to adapt and integrate it fully into the local setting, and keep it going at a robust pace for two hours - this requires a certain touch of genius. Some of his most telling satiric



RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA

comments are worked out through pure theatre: when the Hela character loses the literature he lugs around with him, his speech reverts to 'normal'; the prostitute is able to hit the correct vowel sound only when she produces a terrified scream!

The choreography, with an occasional western touch - there's no harm in that - is worked out satisfactorily. And Austin Munasinghe's score is a treat. He relies on basic, folk-type melodies, and they have a gusto which keeps the play alive and moving. In the opening sequence, the 'rain song' is very fine indeed; and again, two beautiful melodies were sung clearly and delicately by Mercy Edirisinghe.

Among the actors, Upali Attanayake as the Hela character had a sense of timing, a mastery of the fluctuations of language, and a somewhat goofy look that contributed in various ways to the total success of the production. In a demanding role, Mercy Edirisinghe gave one of her best performances to date: it's not easy to make the whore funny, pathetic and sympathetic at the same time, but she did it. Wijeratne Warakagoda seemed to relish his role as the bumbling M.P. He was certainly hilarious in the part.

The timing of the other principal actors needs tightening up, and the slight pauses which sometimes break the intricate pattern of words need to be removed. There was hesitancy on the cues - and in the second half of the play, perhaps a touch too much buffoonery. The situation was amusing enough without the clowning needing to be overdone. I have nothing but praise for the Chorus, which functioned smoothly as a unit.

Rankanda attracted some unwarranted notoriety on account of its alleged attacks on the Hela school. This was hardly justified: Hela, Peradeniya, and the Sanskrit schools, plus inept parliamentarians, untutored newspapermen - all are targets for the play's hardhitting satire. If the Hela character is the most amusing, it is because his is the best part and among the best acted. But he is lampooned no more than others of the different schools, who are equally rigid in their self-righteousness. The playwright asserts that any 'school' of language isolated from the living language of the common people has its ridiculous side; and he has an unerring knack of pricking the balloon of pomposity. Surely the final argument of the play is also a plea for unity among men who can contribute so much to the country's cultural life, but are prevented from doing so by their dogmatic belief in the absolute rightness of their respective schools. Rankanda, for all its satire, is a plea for sanity.

Two important revivals attracted playgoers' attention in 1970 and 1971, the first being a new version of Dr. E.R. Sarachchandra's Maname and the second Henry Jayasena's Janelaya (The Window), in which the playwright nine years after the play's first appearance, 'updates himself rather than the play'. It is fifteen years, on the other hand, since Maname revitalised the Sinhala theatre, and it is surely time that a re-assessment of both plays as theatrical productions is made.

To begin with, the theatrical climate is now very different to what it was fifteen years ago, when Maname first appeared. The play retains its historical value; it has in a sense achieved the status of a myth, a legend, perhaps the yardstick against which subsequent productions in the same genre are measured. On the debit side, it must be remembered that it has spawned a host of bad imitations, and a few, very good ones; and it has, unfortunately, also achieved the dubious status of a

RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA

sacred cow. Perhaps this is bound up with the personality of its author-producer. Only a few would dare to oppose Dr. Ediraweera Sarachchandra, but that few is increasing. If they are not exactly against the learned doctor, at least they do not want to be tied down by him, his views, or his production style.

That, to my mind, is excellent. We have to find new forms, new experiences in the theatre, new ways of saying things. Thus, though the theatrical experience of Maname may last for many more years, its function is ended. Perhaps this idea has influenced Dr. Sarachchandra, too. His new production has sought to add an external gloss here and there. In the main, these fail. In the new costumes and the design I miss that quality of roughness that seemed so right for Maname earlier. Perhaps the gloss suits Prince Maname's companions - but in the chorus, in this new, almost spick-and-span chorus, there is an alienation of sympathy. The same is true of the Veddahs. I do not mean to be facetious, but they do create images of whooping Red Indians.

For Maname, although stylized, has also to create a dramatic world where disbelief is temporarily suspended. In the new production the alienation goes too far, so far indeed that it relies mainly on the familiar words and melodies to wrench it back to some form of dramatic reality. The Brechtian tightrope must be walked confidently.

What about the characters and the actors? It is hard to step into the shoes of a predecessor whose memory rules an audience's imagination through a combination of emotion, sentiment and admiration. Ben Sirimanne had a smooth, golden voice; Upali Attanayake has a robust one. The latter's stage personality is more magnetic than was his predecessor's, but his choreography falters. Edmund Wijesinghe, the Veddah King, and Charmon Jayasinghe, the Pothe Gura, are still as good as they ever were. But Trilicia Gunawardena does not satisfy. Her voice gives way far too often, and within the plot's lightly sketched characterisation, her personality rings false. The civilised world of the Maname Prince and Princess falls apart when confronted with primitive forces. The Princess reacts to these forces so spontaneously that the characterisation of the part must seem convincing and plausible. Trilicia Gunawardena is unsuited to that characterisation. The latent sensuality, the seeming affection - these must form an integral part of the role, and if they are not there the character must become a mere operatic puppet.

In the play itself there is a strict division between the moods and tensions of the first and second halves. The 'action' occurs in the second, thus the pace needs to be a little faster in the first. This fault, if I may call it that, was not confined to the present production. Dr. Sarachchandra seems to have solved all the technical problems except one - and that creates a sudden credibility gap. No doubt it is bridged very quickly, but it is still there. In the single combat sequence, Prince Maname and the Veddah King go through the ritualistic dance with their bows and arrows. Then they go to the wings, divest themselves of their weapons, and return to battle with their bare hands. The break here is a dash of cold water in the face of the audience. Of course there is the argument that the play does not attempt 'realism'. But the fact remains that by the time the incident occurs, the audience is thoroughly involved with the 'plot'; its emotional response is high - and it is that response which provides the counterpoint later on, when the Princess hesitates to kill the Veddah King.



## RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA

If I have given here the impression that the total impact of Maname is now minute, then I must hasten to correct it. That is not so. In its basic love story, its long sweeping melodies, its occasional witticisms, in its firm roots in tradition, it must continue to be appreciated where ever it is shown. But that is not enough: I feel the time has come for the script of Maname to be taken over by other producers. Their interpretations might be different, might be revolutionary, but they might give new insights into the play and - who knows, change once again the direction of Sinhala drama. The story of Maname has varying parallels in folk tradition. Rashomon derived from one. So there are possibilities. Dr. Sarachchandra has always remained the master of his own productions and plays. Yet there is nothing to prevent Sarachchandra the playwright bowing to another producer. There might even be some financial benefit to be derived from selling the production copyright for a specified period.

Let us see Maname in other hands, produced by men who have their own dramatic vision and who will not necessarily be tied down by the playwright's own interpretation of his play. Till that time, perhaps, what about the good doctor reviving Rattaran or Kada Valalu, or Elova Gihin?

Henry Jayasena's attitude to social change, and his view both of it and of himself, are at the core of the new production of Janelaya. In 1961 Mr S.F.de Silva, then Director of Education, told Jayasena that his play was untimely, that it should be produced 10 years hence, that the problems thrown up in the play were not pervasive in Ceylonese society. What Jayasena presented in Janelaya nine years ago is a daily fact of life now.

The characters in Janelaya are in the City, but they are not of the City, being young men of the villages who have come to the City in search of their El Dorado. They are cloistered in a boarding-house room, and the one window in the room becomes a symbol, a different one to each person. The older residents have lost their illusions, even their identities (their very names are symbolic), and the younger newcomers cannot understand why this should be so. But the window has a significance greater than that identified with the aspirations of each character. For they are all searching for happiness, for a kind of solace, and what goes on outside that window is life as it is. "Happiness is not an ideal to be gained after a desperate search," the playwright seems to be saying, "happiness can be grasped from what is there, here and now."

When the play was first presented, the rage was for stylization. His was a realistic, radical departure, yet he tried to fuse music and song with his message, and he brought in a chorus as well. At that time few people were really aware of what he was trying to do, evolving a spoken language that could create different moods. There is a pattern in the words, that phonetically and with appropriate stress, creates these different moods. But it would seem that Jayasena believes the theatre-going public of today to be more understanding of his purpose; certainly the fusion itself works much better, and he has dropped the chorus.

Only Santin Goonewardena, from the original cast, remains in the present production. Three of the new players are very well known to playgoers: Upali Attanayake, Wijeratne Warakagoda and Douglas Ranasinghe. Others include Jayantha Karunaratna, Iranganie Jayasundara, Gunawathie Goonewardenam Mallika Bodaragama and Sunil Abeysekera.

## RECENT PLAYS IN SINHALA

VOICES: poem

Over the years members of Henry Jayasena's theatre group have improved their skills, widened their range enormously, and have begun to specialise in various aspects of theatrecraft, set construction, costume design and so on. Although, like other groups, they are dogged by their inability to get a proper stage for rehearsals - the rehearsals for Janelaya have been, I understand, held in a downstairs room in the house of Chitrasena and Vajira.

If one cares to hunt for solutions to the problems posed in Henry Jayasena's Janelaya, one would probably find them in his Apata Puthe Magak Nathe, which, the playwright points out, is in a sense the sequel to his earlier play. But Apata Puthe does not provide easy solutions: it is a different facet of the same problem. Jayasena should know what he is talking about; it is clear that he draws to a large extent from his own experience of life. Encapsulating the problem, he points out that there are many, many places where two people share the same bed - one working during the day, the other during the night. The tragedy is that in the past (and this was applicable when the play was originally produced) people could work hard and get what they want. Today (1961 and now) they work hard, and yet do not get what they want. The fault must lie somewhere: is it with the people, or with the system?

This production has been geared to the pulse of the times, where people everywhere are truly aware of the voice of the playwright. Henry Jayasena tries out at the end a certain shock effect, an attempt to catapult his play at the last minute to a different dimension. Today's audiences, he believes, can grasp what he is getting at.

Henry Jayasena is one of our few totally dedicated artists. But he is, at times, a misunderstood man. The fact that he is not a camp-follower gives him a dubious status among the politically inept. Henry Jayasena's commitment is only to the Theatre.

(Based on articles published in the Ceylon Observer on 15th September and 7th October 1970, and on 8th and 11th March 1971)

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## VOICES

George Claessen

I shape my words to silence  
In the conch of your ear.  
Nothing the ocean, the sky,  
In a listening shell;  
From its spirals, the wind  
Always tells of nothing.

In the fission of knowing,  
When mirrors tilt inwards,  
No more intercept, dissolve  
Into a visionary dimension,  
Voices of words would reiterate  
My silence, in your ear.



## A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY

## HENRY JAYASENA TALKS TO KARAN BRECKENRIDGE

- BRECK: Henry, I can't go back all the way. But let me take you back to Hotel Budapest (1), and the many hours spent on drama, theatre and things theatrical. What were you thinking of, then?
- HENRY: That was about 7 years ago. I was hopeful then. Ambitious. Ambitious, not in any bad way. Hopeful, in the way that I thought that when I get back, things would have been in a shape that could give us a base for professional theatre. I thought - 'There will be others who would have had similar experiences,' we could start with a kind of group togetherness ... I wasn't sure where I would fit in this.
- BRECK: But by 1964 you surely had some programme, some definite feeling, of where you were going? Quveni (2) was already behind you.
- HENRY: I had instinct.
- BRECK: Are you saying that you work by instinct?
- HENRY: Let me elaborate. I don't have to think deeply. For example, when I cast somebody in a role, I have instinctively solved certain problems. I may lay off for two or three years. That laying off is instinctive. And then I don't think, consciously, 'I have written no play for two or three years', and go to work again!
- BRECK: You've helped me there by getting on to the business of writing. How do you see yourself - Actor? Writer? Producer?
- HENRY: I wasn't sure in 1964. I don't think I am now. Given a choice, I would prefer working to merely acting.
- BRECK: Quveni established you as a writer-producer?
- HENRY: Not quite like that. I was recognised as a man for writing and producing! The audience would have thought that we had a new writer. I wasn't sure that I would be a successful writer. Quveni was a long time developing. I had a sympathy for the woman, as a victim of man's injustice, it was a matter of the heart, and so when I came to do theatre ...
- BRECK: That's interesting - what do you mean by 'when I came to do theatre'?
- HENRY: Well, it's just how you come in, and what you do after that! I had a fascination for theatre. There was my experience as an English Assistant in a village school ... The books were obsolete - so why not write a play? Incidentally, it was the first time that it struck me you needed 'lights' for a play!... It did not strike me then that theatre could say anything significant. It was group entertainment, we enjoyed our fun. We didn't think it was work.
- BRECK: But there must have been this point when you felt you were doing theatre?
- HENRY: Well, as a clerk in Colombo I suppose there were those early signs of what you want to know - this doing - I did Manamalayo (3) with the drama section of the PWD recreation club. That was an adaptation of Sheridan's play, The Rivals. This led to my own

## A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY

- group, and I think it was with Pauvkarayo(4) that I felt you could share an experience. Since then theatre has meant not only fun or a means of entertainment. Since then I began to think it is conveying what you think that matters. That's how Quveni came in 1963.
- BRECK: I always felt that Quveni had some special significance for you. I may be wrong. It's just that, maybe, I met you for the first time too soon after Quveni!
- HENRY: In 1956 Maname (5) had come, and the younger people were wondering what we could do next. Up to that time it had been dialogue drama (6). We had to re-orient techniques. Janelaya (7) was staged in 1961.
- BRECK: This talk of techniques. Weren't you in films by 1961?
- HENRY: Yes. In 1958, I think.
- BRECK: What took you there? What did you get out of it?
- HENRY: Glamour, perhaps. Money, certainly, to use in theatre. I didn't turn out to be the hero they wanted; something went wrong!
- BRECK: What did you get out of it? How did it relate to theatre?
- HENRY: Acting-wise, the art of reducing for the camera. Being smaller than life, less exaggerated.
- BRECK: Technically?
- HENRY: I haven't brought across anything, except in acting. Frankly, I was disillusioned with it. I was there as an actor, and therefore the appeal went away fast. The truth is that cinema gave me up, rather than that I ...
- BRECK: You couldn't be manipulated into being a star?
- HENRY: I couldn't fit in.
- BRECK: Did you see a fundamental divergence between the cinema industry and Theatre?
- HENRY: Certainly. Well, take a simple thing. When I start a play I don't have to bother so much about the budget - a film man most certainly must.
- BRECK: But what if the theatre were professional, if there were money in it, commercially. What if someone hired you as a director?
- HENRY: Well, I don't know. I'd do Mother Courage! (8) But don't you forget that what you call 'professional', the amateurs have done already. We have looked into these professional aspects of theatre.
- BRECK: Do you then see this Professional Theatre happening?
- HENRY: I can't see it. Not in the near future. Just look at the equipment we'll need, alone!
- BRECK: Well then, is the theatre sufficiently effective as it is? Is it getting across?
- HENRY: It is. People are concerned. At least, they are in the metropolis. It may not be so among people outside the towns. The cinema could command much more attention, but it has not. The theatre has, in the history of its experiment, succeeded.



## A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY

- BRECK: What is this experiment?
- HENRY: I mean that the theatre artist with no given norms has tried to react to the world around. This may not be true of most of the work if you take in all its history - apart, of course, from rituals, the folk drama, and the Tower Hall (9) as entertainments that helped to revive a national consciousness. The issues, however, were very simple.
- BRECK: This theatre you speak of - would you say it reflected the people?
- HENRY: Yes. The majority would still come to be entertained. But we are building an audience that thinks of theatre as something relative to society, where questions are asked, problems posed.
- BRECK: How would you react if I said you were a playwright?
- HENRY: I can't write plays just for the sake of writing plays. This is what I like about the amateur situation here.
- BRECK: But, Henry, what about a necessary division of labour?
- HENRY: Well, master! I'll ask you a question. In other countries, how does this come about? They evolved it.
- BRECK: Will that happen here?
- HENRY: It's a theory I developed after I returned from the UNESCO Fellowship (10). You have to accept theatre as a part of community activity. Like drainage, health, education. People are appointed to do these things. Each municipality must have, each community must have its theatre activity.
- BRECK: Do you mean that theatre must cease to be a mere phenomenon - at the best a tolerable phenomenon?
- HENRY: Yes. You talk about a division of labour. But, master, are we accepted as labour? Right now we survive on our own enthusiasm, on our own foolhardiness!
- BRECK: The way I see it - this matter of evolving a system - in most places I think the money went where an entertainment need was crying out to be met. Then you had the state moving in to correct a situation, maybe to actively engage itself in this activity. Like your drainage inspectors and health supervisors, it appointed men for theatre, too. Would you then say that Commissarism in theatre will be unavoidable? How will a balance be struck? How will it be done here?
- HENRY: I can't see this ... it becomes pure surmise -
- BRECK: You mean we ought to stop the scene here!
- HENRY: No. Take the present. You get this all-purpose man! There's no one else to do it for you. There are good playwrights, actors, producers, but each one can't do everything. So you get a breakdown -
- BRECK: And possibly unique situations where one man does everything. Where do we go from there?
- HENRY: I can give you an answer for the future of air pollution, but not for theatre.
- BRECK: Henry, we've been using the word 'theatre'. What do you think it really means? To me it's a broad concept not confined to drama as

## A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY

- we understand it. Would you understand by 'theatre' theatrical modes, presentations of dance, song, mime, the lot?
- HENRY: You are right. Theatre is all this.
- BRECK: What I want to ask is, are you in favour of breaking down narrow and confining divisions? When one says 'theatre', one just doesn't have to see only this drama thing!
- HENRY: Right. Theatre is many disciplines.
- BRECK: If this is so, how does the fact affect you when you create for the theatre? As a writer for theatre: a writer of plays?
- HENRY: Some things are given. Then I want to say something - shout it out! A seed's there, and it grows. The core may not be in the centre. The central point of a play might be at the beginning, or in the middle and yes, at the end. The play's shape comes out in words. The theme decides the theatrical patterns it takes - song, mime, dialogue ... But somehow, I think you've asked me only half a question, and I've given you half an answer.
- BRECK: I was trying to get at you, the writer.
- HENRY: I cease to be a writer at some point, it's only a part. In that way I am not a writer: if I were, I'd be filling pages of magazines, newspapers and all that with just writing!
- BRECK: Yet, somehow, you do sound literary, Henry! I've wondered whether you're not interested in your playwriting as literature.
- HENRY: Not as literature. Not that bookshelf stuff, master! If that's what you mean. The written word's only incidental.
- BRECK: Are you then in fact, constructing for theatre? Are you able to keep yourself from getting too involved with the words? As a man sensitive to the use and effect of words, you might suddenly see your work as good literature!
- HENRY: It happens. You get this. But you work on it because the theatrical aspect is uppermost. And in this way, you're not the best judge of your own work. I went back to Janelaya later on, and had to cut out a lot of what I'd originally written.
- BRECK: Presumably this happens to most men who write for the theatre. Tell me, does the material on hand set the patterns?
- HENRY: There are practical problems of theatre. I hope I've answered your question about losing interest. I do act, and sometimes even if as producer I'd like to change myself, you can't change actors in midstream as it were. Over the years I've seen other actors come up, and so you can start afresh.
- BRECK: I've always wanted to see you play Hamlet...
- HENRY: What attracted me at the start was acting, but even then, in my first production, I didn't act (11).
- BRECK: What about Hamlet?
- HENRY: Right now, no. I just don't see my acting as the primary thing. If the six women in my present production fell ill, or got pregnant or something all together, and I couldn't replace them, well may be then I'd have the time to just act. But I take great plea-



## A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY

- sure in managing - not just the play, but the group.
- BRECK: But wouldn't you want to impart the art of acting to those who are going to enter the theatre?
- HENRY: Yes. But by producing, not by acting. If someone follows my acting he'll only become imitative. I've never learnt acting in any school, I can't teach it in a vacuum. I've never won an award for acting, you know, not on the stage - though I got one for a film! (12)
- BRECK: O.K., then. What sense of purpose do you have as a writer and producer?
- HENRY: Doing theatre, I see a more meaningful world. Life's scattered, in the theatre I try to bring it together more forcefully, pointedly precisely. You can let people see themselves on the stage; I would like to think that the experience makes their reactions towards other people more meaningful. I'm not saying this for the sake of what you might call 'higher art' -
- BRECK: You mean the 'Higher Art' philosophy!
- HENRY: I'm no politician, or publicity writer ... I don't write articles I'm a theatre man. Using the medium for what it's worth. Let's put it this way, master - every human being, 'baas unnehe', trader, etcetera, etcetera likes to do something beyond himself. They start hobbies, social service ... I do theatre! It's the best way I can do something greater than myself. I could be a novelist, or write verse. I've tried my hand at both, and I'm not good enough for either ...
- BRECK: What do you do for the audience? We are taking the audience for granted -
- HENRY: Don't ever say that! We created the audience ... hard work, luck ... I'm sure it's due to our hard work. When I wrote Quveni or Janelaya I could count the heads. But now I can think of an audience; we have created it, good or bad. An audience could condition us ...
- BRECK: Well, now that you have the audience, what are you doing?
- HENRY: The responsibility grows on you. You try to fathom the audience. Don't fool them, don't go over their heads. Be honest with yourself, honest to the purpose in hand. Believe me, it doesn't matter that I do something and the audience doesn't like it, I accept defeat -
- BRECK: Defeat?
- HENRY: Well, I accept non-acceptance!
- BRECK: Does that influence the subjects you choose?
- HENRY: Yes, I've erred.
- BRECK: Erred? In what way?
- HENRY: Why do you write a play, or work on producing one? For an audience. Now ...
- BRECK: Are you influenced by the consideration of whether an audience would like it or not?

## A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY

- HENRY: That's so unpredictable. Sometimes a play clicks. Janelaya didn't in 1961. In 1970 it did ... it's as simple as that!
- BRECK: How do you react to the old maxim that the box-office never lies?
- HENRY: Audience reaction never lies! A blurb can win you an audience, but if you don't live up to it they never come back. When you are called upon to perform your play here, there and everywhere you feel you've done something. (13)
- BRECK: What about the development of a man in theatre, through theatre and beyond it? What has theatre meant in your life?
- HENRY: I'll put it this way: I've been at it -
- BRECK: In it -
- HENRY: O.K., in it too, and gone and on. It must influence ... my friends, my family life, my sense of what's just and unjust. I don't know whether this is a result of our own particular situation here, but when you go on the work you do instills certain values, standards, levels in yourself. Otherwise you couldn't go on. On the stage you can show conflict, but for yourself you cannot -
- BRECK: Do you mean that you can't afford not to learn from what you do on stage?
- HENRY: Yes. If you've just done one or two plays, or done one by some accident, your attitude's probably different. I've never missed a single performance, of a play of my own or a play of someone else's that I'm taking part in; this develops something in one, a conditioning, a discipline -
- BRECK: And does this become a part of your personal life?
- HENRY: Yes. You know how it is. We don't have to go into it.
- BRECK: I suppose it depends on the seriousness with which you approach the theatre - not as something outside yourself.
- HENRY: Yes. But you can still feel you're shifting roles ...
- BRECK: Is theatre a world of make-believe then, Henry?
- HENRY: Which is the make-believe world, master? Your social conduct outside the theatre is often make-believe! If you must talk about make-believe do you often see a demarcation? The theatre world itself creates your world, and to maintain this world you see everything as a whole world. If you live with anything long enough it becomes a part of your life.
- BRECK: Well, it's so with most things!
- HENRY: Let's not glorify this thing called theatre as -
- BRECK: Unique?
- HENRY: Yes, unique. It's the same with your job, anything. In the theatre life you can't say the rehearsal's over, we can all go home!
- BRECK: It's something we can't programme -
- HENRY: It goes beyond pleasure, and the kicks. It throws up a challenge, a responsibility. Your pleasure becomes a very involved thing. The time isn't ripe for conclusions yet, I'm just beginning my work. Maybe this is far too untimely, but you wanted it, master! Let's



say that what we call work others call pleasure ...

December 13, 1971.

## NOTES

- (1) Henry Jayasena resided at the Hotel Budapest in Moscow in 1964, while on the USSR leg of his UNESCO Fellowship in drama. Karan Breckenridge was at that time attached to Ceylon's embassy in Moscow.
- (2) Jayasena's award-winning original play, 1963.
- (3) Jayasena play, 1954.
- (4) Jayasena original play, 1958.
- (5) and (6) Professor E.R. Sarachchandra's play based on the folk-drama of Ceylon broke the tradition of dialogue drama that had held the stage until its appearance in 1956, and won nation-wide acclaim as breaking new ground in national theatre.
- (7) Jayasena original play, 1961.
- (8) Brecht's play, which Jayasena is currently producing as a Sinhala adaptation. In 1967 Jayasena played the role of Azdak in his own Sinhala adaptation of another Brecht play, The Caucasian Chalk Circle.
- (9) The Tower Hall, no longer functioning today, was the centre of Sinhala drama in the 1930's and 40's.
- (10) See Note (1) above.
- (11) Pauvkarayo, 1958.
- (12) Jayasena won an award for his acting in the Sinhala film Dahasak Sithuvili, 1968.
- (13) Jayasena's group, The Actors, was founded in 1967.

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## ADAPTATIONS AND THE TAMIL STAGE

K.S. Sivakumaran

Although the Tamil Stage in Ceylon has a long way to go before it catches up with the strides the Sinhala theatre is making, at least a dozen plays have recently attracted the notice of discerning theatregoers. As in Sinhala, the majority of the successful plays have been adaptations. Adaptation is not the answer if we are seeking real movement in drama, but it certainly prompts and assists original playwrighting, and brings discipline and organic construction to the writing of plays as well as to their production.

Among the plays recently presented in Tamil were the following: Martin Wickremasinghe's Mama, Dayananda Gunawardane's Ibikatta and Nari Bena, Anton Chekhov's The Bear, Synge's Riders To the Sea, Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine, Leslie Sands' Something to Hide, Nott's Dial M For Murder, Oscar Wilde's Salome and Lady Windermere's Fan, Ibsen's Doll's House, Somerset Maugham's The Sacred Flame, and a Bengali original titled Coffin. A varied list! - and not all the adaptations were equally successful, or equally meaningful to Tamil audiences.

Inspired by reading Ionesco's The Bald Soprano and The Chairs, a Tamil actor wrote a play titled Apasuram in conventional and concrete terms, although the dialogue was in a style akin to the Theatre of the Absurd. Among serious original plays that have been presented recently are Matha Matram, Vidivai Noakki, Veedu Yarukku, Codai, Vadahaikku Veedu, Sumathi, Nanjil Nirainthaval, Chanakyan, Avanukenna Thoongivittan, Sadurangam, Gnamam, Vedalam Sonnakadai, Kadooliyum, and Puthiyathor Veedu. There have also been produced a number of satiric and humorous skits, and the very successful comedy, Broker Kandiah.

This list is limited, necessarily, to plays that have been presented in Colombo, and I am not in a position to make any value judgment of provincial Tamil plays, not having seen any of them. But of the plays that I, and many other playgoers have seen, it is surely necessary to inquire, 'Why are they so amateurish?'. However sympathetic one might be to the difficulties of amateur theatre, it has to be said that the Tamil theatre is not yet theatrically satisfying, and that production and acting lack finesse.

The reasons are not really difficult to find. Certain influential factors exist among Tamil writers and artists that condition them and do not permit them to think anew. Political parties, newspapers, conservative popular magazines, film stars, the film world, purists, pundits, and philistines of Tamilnadu work in concert to ensure a continuance of a romantic tradition of idealistic celebration of a long past Tamilian civilisation. Artists and writers brood over a vanished culture, and forget to re-think their position in new and universal terms.

What is happening in South India has had its repercussions in the North and East of Ceylon, and in the hill-country. A new Tamil intelligentsia has begun to emerge, to break this outdated, unrealistic tradition, but its efforts cannot bear fruit overnight. A phenomenal change is required and change can come about only by a re-orientation of the thinking of present and future generations. To do this, the local press and radio, together with the artists and writers of this country, should inject new ways of thinking into our society; new approaches to the arts and to culture generally should be made.

The reasons for the failure of local Tamil drama to make a mark are







THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

SILVA: What else can we do?

PERERA: Just keep silent. Somebody is making fools of us all. (Train)

Even at this late stage, I'm not allowing them to fool me any more, so, if you don't mind, just shut up. Can I see your newspaper? (softly)

(He reads for a moment)

Here they try to make even bigger fools of you, apart from a never ending war in Vietnam, it's either a ceasefire here or a flare-up there. All the ceasefires are at the top of the page, and all the flares-up at the bottom. When a flare-up becomes a ceasefire they move it up, and when a ceasefire gets kindled again, it's vice versa. And every day, they tell you that there will be slight showers in the Western Province, and the sun set at 6.55 p.m. or thereabouts.

(Tears up the paper and throws it down)

This is the last newspaper I'll ever buy.

SILVA: I bought it .... (Perera is still tearing)

PERERA: Shut up! (After realization, he gives Silva two 10-cent coins and then they stare at each other in embarrassed silence, while the train continues to judder and hoot. The train slows down, and halts. They are joined by a third person. He sits, looks at them, and lights up a cigarette as the train begins to move)

3RD MAN: Is it true that the price of cigarettes is going up? Even Three Roses!

(Silence, no response)

I'll never forget, ten years ago when I joined the public service, Three Roses were four cents, we had a joke about it, one and one-third cents a rose, they laughed at the canteen, they laughed a little less next year when it quietly slipped up to five cents. Luckily I got my first increment the year after, when it piled up to six cents, but everyone at the canteen felt that the cigarettes had got shorter. But Sugathapala, the Chief Clerk thought we were only smoking it faster. Sugathapala passed away the next year, it will always be in my memory because Three Roses suddenly became ten cents on the very same day. Of course there was no connection between the two events. The office Union could never decide which was the sadder event. At the funeral they talked about Three Roses as much as they talked about the vacancy created by Sugathapala - in the public service ...

(He notes the tension for the first time)

Sorry, maybe you are non-smokers.

(Silence. Train, hoot, hoot)

My name is -

PERERA: Please don't!

3RD MAN: What?

PERERA: I said, please don't give us your name, because the chances are that it will be either Silva, Perera, Fernando, Goonewardena, Goonesekera or Jayatilleka.

THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

3RD MAN: As a matter of fact ...

PERERA: Please don't ... and any bet some Government Department or Mercantile House feeds you, and clothes you and your kind.

3RD MAN: Where else is ...

PERERA: Shut up! you certainly got married some time in your life, your children must belong to one of two sexes ...

3RD MAN: Naturally, I mean ...

PERERA: Don't! Your sitting hours are 8 to 5, your sleeping hours are 10 to 6.

3RD MAN: There I think ...

PERERA: I gave you a warning, don't make a fool of me, and I won't make a fool of you (Hoot, Hoot) I'm extremely grateful that all I know about you is that you are a keen enthusiast about the rise and fall of Three Roses.

3RD MAN: It never fell ...

PERERA: That's enough, one more word from you, and there's a possibility of violence. (Silence, except for the train's juddering)

4TH MAN: (entering) I have a seat in the next compartment, but they're talking so loud and so much. I notice it's quiet and relaxed, here. I like peace and quiet.

(He sits, and begins reading a newspaper.)

The reaction on Perera is noticeable, but he restrains himself. The 4th man laughs)

I can't help sharing a joke, with my fellow-travellers. I mean, I have always been interested in international affairs. You might say I'm guilty of poking my nose into other people's affairs, but, well, if they publish it in the newspapers, one presumes the invitation. But that's not the point, really. Really, it's that I'm equally interested in cricket. I mean, that's natural considering we played ball with the British for over one and a half centuries, and my birth place being Moratuwa. But that's not the point either, really. Really, it's that the joke springs from the, I mean, continuous flow of ideas between the centre page and the back page.

(He indicates the two pages in the newspaper)

What I mean to say is that, now, there is no serious objection, or should I say, logical reason, why the foreign news should be on the centre page, and the sports news on the back page, and you can imagine the contradiction - I've read Lenin on contradictions - as I said the contradiction when you are faced with the fact that the big sporting events are mostly foreign, and of course it's news, well, foreign news! ..but, well, and though I must concede that there is no possibility the other way around. I mean, you know, the big international affairs on the centre page, hardly a sporting flavour about them, at least, I don't think, or perhaps, I mean, you know, clearing hundreds of dead bodies off the fields in the Middle East, not quite the same thing as, you know, clearing the field of stumps and wickets and all kinds of balls and all that, for souvenirs. And when you think of the Swedes, the boys from Stockholm, you be-



gin to wonder. I mean, they'd never consider going on the back page, though, with nothing else to do they're very good, excellent, Umpires. I mean, their contribution has been deadly considering one stood the first test match in Palestine at the cost of his life, and the other flying over to see that there was no foul play in or around Katanga, never reached the spot. Of course time is another factor, that contributes to the flow. I mean one can't escape the conclusion considering Emile Zatopek, who later fell into some sort of trouble and had to be moved over to the centre page .. page. It all began on the back page. And of course it can happen the other way around, too. I mean, his countryman, Alexander Dubczek is doing the long distance between the centre page and the back page, though I'm told he keeps looking back the whole time while running, because he knows the Russians always win the Throwing the Javelin event in international affairs, and sports. Though I must say, the British attitude to the Russians is remarkable indeed! I mean the time the Mexicans proposed that Throwing the Ice-pick should be made an event in the 4th International Modern Olympiad. Funny, the Russians showed no resistance, or perhaps they saw a few more gold medals in the bag, but the British vetoed it on the grounds of bad taste. I mean that seems to be their ultimate criterion. Perhaps they thought it's tastier to cut off the thumbs of hundreds of Indians, than crack the skull of a fellow European with an ice pick. I mean, to cap it all there's something in the fact that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, that's where it all began, on the back page. Though in the case of some of our own senior politicians, they started on the front page - and you know when it was all over and they were playing in the Oxford-Cambridge Old Boys' Match - they came to rest, on the back page ...

(Slight pause)

The point is, both these pages, whether you like it or not, are pages from history!

(Silence. Perera is about to explode, as can be seen from the heaving of his chest)

I hope I have established my point, clearly that is to say, I expect to provoke some comment from you gentlemen, any moment, now. Perhaps you are arranging your thoughts.

(Silence. Perera nearer explosion)

At least from even one of you gentlemen. (He sits)

PERERA: (Explodes! Snatching newspaper from him) Circulation 100,000! Now you know what I mean, between the centre page and the back page, his dormant idiocy (the man gets up) has been made a standing joke. Thank God you skipped the other pages. Circulation 100,000. Can you see, they're making fools of hundreds of thousands of people. Don't talk, don't read, and the chances are you won't go insane.

4TH MAN: There may be something in what you say when I think of the matinee yesterday - I took short leave - suddenly, on the screen I saw "Smoke Three Roses".

3RD MAN: It's 12 cents, now!

PERERA: Shut up!

4TH MAN: And then suddenly again I see "You are kindly requested not to smoke". I mean ... anyway, I was coming to the main point...

PERERA: You make one more point and you'll end up on the Obituary Page.

(He tears the paper up into small pieces, gives the 4th man 20 cents, and makes him sit down)

I'm no anarchist, I respect the right to private property, in reasonable quantities. Make no mistake about that. But there's a limit to anybody's energy and patience, so (he closes the door) that's enough. We'll make this an experimental compartment. You'll be at perfect peace with yourself and the world, when we reach Maradana.

(He sits. Hoot, hoot, the train judders)

4TH MAN: (Suddenly) Excuse me, sir.

PERERA: Shut up! and I don't want to be called "Sir". Keep up the experiment, you goat, aren't you interested in finding out?

4TH MAN: I'm interested, but you'll have to excuse me for a moment, actually a few moments. I'll come back to the experiment.

PERERA: If you get out now you don't have to come back.

4TH MAN: No, I'm interested, because I'm also confused. But, what I mean to say is, that my problem just now is not, mental, what I mean to say is not Psychological ...

PERERA: Don't you use big words, that's another trick!

4TH MAN: No, no, no trick, this trick is a daily matter, in the mornings, sometimes it's late.

PERERA: What?

4TH MAN: I mean, I don't think, there's water, now. That was in the old days, of the C.G.R., the British days, when the infra-structure was going tickety-boo. I mean that's a contradiction, in fact they did not use the water, they stuck to paper, I mean, but now we have no water, in the train, only the tradition, handed down, of alternate possibilities, I mean you'll excuse me a moment ..

(He takes a small piece of the torn paper, and moves out. At the door - )

because, whatever you may say about the mind, the body can become noisy, I mean, that is the core of the truth, or in our particular, immediate case, now, the bowels of the matter, in a manner of speaking. But I'll be back in a moment, I mean a few moments, till then, consider, our little community, enormously lucky ...

(He tries to return) I mean the main point

PERERA: Get out quickly, I see the point. (He pushes him out)

4TH MAN: I'll be back, in a moment, I mean a few moments.



## THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

SILVA: That was touch ...

PERERA: Shut up!

(Silence. Hoot, hoot, juddering of the train. The 3rd Man lights a cigarette, offers one to Silva who accepts and lights up. He tries to offer one to Perera, who shows hostility. He withdraws. They smoke a while, in silence. Suddenly -)

WOMAN: (Bangs on the door, shouting) Help! Help! Please, anybody here? Please! Open!

(Perera opens the door. She stumbles in, flustered, closes the door hastily)

You people look like human beings. That is, people who talk to each other like civilized people. But he was terrible. That is, it was an animal. The Ladies' Only compartment, most dangerous compartment, because the animals know, that there are only ladies there, and I was the only lady there. That is, I don't mean anything snobbish, that is, I was the only female, that is, I was the only one there, I mean, only till the animal came in. He was a real animal, that is, if he came in on all fours I would have known immediately, but he came in on two legs, that is, standing and walking. He lowered his loins, by my side, like this (she sits) and was silent, not dead silent, that is to say, he was throbbing, silently, like an animal. It wasn't the throbbing that drove the fear of Moses into me. That is, I'm no chicken, I mean, I've had my fair share of cock fights, in my time. It was the silence that frightened me. With a man who talks, whatever else he is doing at the moment, you feel safe. That is, you realize immediately that he, like you, is the inheritor of an ancient civilization. That is, he is part of the main stream of the grand story of Homo Sapiens. But there, in that deathly, throbbing silence of his, with his tongue hanging out, I knew, that it was some ox-bow lake, a muddy pool. I knew, had I encouraged him, as I normally might have done with a civilized, English or Sinhalese-speaking man. That is, it's nothing snobbish, I mean any language on earth as long as he spoke. That is, I never hit below the belt, racially, I mean I don't care a fig-leaf for racial differences. That is, at least, you'd like to know, from curiosity, whether your mate is from Madras or Mozambique. In all probability this animal was from Hunupitiya, but that's not the point. The point is, simply, that once they don't use some language, once they stop talking, they're animals, and all they want to do is degrade you, silently. There was a Russian, once, a real brute he was, a tourist, not a diplomat, a brute as I said, but at least he kept on saying "Mir dush wa", "Mir dush wa" all the time, later I learnt it meant "Peace and friendship". I mean, we were not entangled, politically, in any way, but still it meant something, civilization! All in God's image, as long as they say something. You mustn't degrade human beings, whatever else you do. I mean ... had I closed the door and encouraged him, I would have been in for something, like in the Zoo, after the visitors have gone. Suddenly his throbbing increased, his tongue dropped a few more inches, I rushed out and here I am. The animal must be stalking, somewhere in the corridor.

SILVA: You'll be quite safe here. (Perera makes a move). You mustn't pounce on her.

## THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

WOMAN: As long as he says something, it doesn't matter.

SILVA: A fellow human being in trouble, it's different from your experiment, just an appeal for help.

PERERA: (Subdued) It could have been shorter.

WOMAN: And it could have been true. That is, such things are possible. That is, I was alone in the Ladies' compartment; not a soul else, believe me. Then in my loneliness I suddenly thought, that is, suddenly got scared, that such things can happen to human beings. I got the feeling it was about to happen to poor me. It was a nightmare, in fact such things are possible, that is, it is probable, so I came rushing in here, in case, I mean prevention is better, than ... getting messed up with a pure animal.

SILVA: You mean it was all ...

PERERA: Can't you see, that time and time again we're being made fools of?

WOMAN: Such things are possible, I shudder to think of undiluted, animals.

PERERA: Madam, if you'll remain here, keep your trap shut; or you'll bring the animal out, in me.

(She is scared, and remains silent. A knock on the door. Perera opens it, and the 4th Man comes in)

4TH MAN: I'm relieved, to see that our experiment is still intact, and a little omission has now been corrected, I mean, one must not exclude the women's page, from anything that claims to be comprehensive. I'm grateful to you, for this opportunity, I already feel better, I'm thankful to you. Your name is ...?

PERERA: Even that doesn't matter, and don't talk about it - just be silent. You'll all be grateful to me when we get to Maradana.

(Silence)

WOMAN: What is this ...

PERERA: Shut up.

(Silence, the train, hoot, hoot, the silence begins to tell on the Woman's nerves)

WOMAN: (Getting up, in fear) All, pure animals, say something, I'm in a den, a whole den of pure animals.

PERERA: Unlike Daniel, Madam, unless you keep your trap shut, I'll murder you.

(In fear she sits. Train, hoot, hoot. After a while ...)

And then we will all be at peace, with ourselves and the world. No one will make fools of us, any more. You'll forgive me if I speak to you, for the last time: but briefly, to impress on you the fact that we cannot be selfish. Peace must flow, outside this laboratory, into the world. You and I, and these two men whose names I'll never know, and my dear Madam, when we get off, in



THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

that great mass of chattering people, take your connecting bus in silence. Pay your fares to the conductor, with no words exchanged. A difference of opinion may arise, with the C.T.B. fares between A and B. Don't argue, pay up the extra cents in silence, it's worth the while. That will be only a fragment of our work, but let's begin. At home tonight, recruit the loved ones, with the children it can be difficult, but let's be charitable, first in our own homes. But that's thinking ahead, on the way home we'll meet tonight, on the night train, in the same compartment, and compare notes, silently.

(Silence. The train, hoot, hoot. Darknes  
The train stops. Sound of the multitud  
Fade off gradually, on the first part  
the play)

(A night train, moving slowly at first, one compartment of which we see. The lighting is the blue of night. The sole occupant of the compartment is Madam, alone with her thoughts and fears. In a moment or two the 4th Man comes in)

4TH MAN: Oh! (He sits. He starts reading a newspaper, the back page a little later, the centre page. In a few moments in comes the 3rd Man. He sits, lights up a Three Roses cigarette, offers some to the other two, who refuse politely. He continues smoking. The next entrant is Silva, who, unlike the others, visibly uneasy. After a few moments, Silva speaks)

SILVA: (To 3rd Man) ... must have been working late in office, missed the 5.55?

3RD MAN: In fact we were rushing to catch the usual 5.55, but missed, smoked a cigarette and waited for the 6.10.

4TH MAN: The 5.55 is not always easy to catch, and here (indicating newspaper) they say that the times might be changed.

SILVA: You too hoped to be on the 5.55?

4TH MAN: Got held up in office, tried, but missed, and read the paper till 6.10. Might have caught the 5.55, but also stopped to buy the paper.

SILVA: So, then, here we are, and Madam too.

WOMAN: I don't have an office, so that I can't be held up, in office but I did get held up.

SILVA: All got held up, funny, even I couldn't make the 5.55, just one of those odd days, I suppose. (Silence - the train)

But Perera, my friend, Perera, could not have got held up, he must have made the 5.55, alone. (Silence - train)

4TH MAN: Here it says that the World Cup will be difficult this year, because they don't think the Portuguese very sporting, playing the devil in Angola, it's going to be very difficult .. but ..

3RD MAN: Smoking, is going to be even more difficult, as far as I can

THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

see, I mean ...

WOMAN: What is not difficult these days, they don't even offer a preliminary remark, unlike in those days.

(The lights start fading fast)

4TH MAN: The morning's paper was torn to pieces, but ... (lights fade completely, and we hear a babel of confused noises - sections from the 'back page centre page' passage of that morning, the story of 'the Three Roses' of the morning, and from the 'pure animals', also of the morning. While this is spoken, the 4 actors vacate the compartment quickly in the darkness. The noises fade as the lights come up again. We see Perera seated alone in the train, another train, another compartment, the 5.55 speeding in the night)

PERERA: They have all ... nobody came. I suppose it's the same thing. I mean, if we all remained silent, well, it doesn't matter if you're alone, or with other people. Of course, it's the same thing.

(The train thunders on, hoot, hoot)

And, of course, I'm talking. But it's not the same thing, either, because I'm talking to nobody, so I can't be fooling anybody, it's not the same thing. (The lights begin to fade) What's more, it doesn't matter.

(Lights go out, and as Perera leaves the compartment in the dark, he repeats snatches of the morning's conversations. The lights come on again, and reveal the 4 others in the 6.10. They have faded in with a repetition of the device of confused scraps of the morning's speeches, as Perera's voice dies down in the dark. Silva is talking loudly)

SILVA: Let's face up to it, there's no point. You all, we all, kept away from the 5.55 cold bloodedly. Nobody got held up, we just kept away, and it's a damned mean thing to do, to have done, because ... well ... you people wouldn't care, at least not very much, but it's not the same thing with me. I have known Perera for 20 years, my friend Perera, and really I have known him, he doesn't know really, we all don't know, (Train) that we know (Train) one another. Of course, in time you would have got to know him, as well as I do, but really, it's not important, because, in fact, you know - have known him, I mean known all of us (Train) everyone (Train) for a long time, now.

(Train thunders, hoot, hoot)

Now I can say quite surely, it's a damned mean thing, not for myself alone, for all of us, to have done.

4TH MAN: Here, look, I don't know your name, but I know you, and so I can say, it does not look damned mean to me. I mean, he didn't want us, if he wanted us why did he ...

WOMAN: That is, if he wanted me, all ...

SILVA: How do you know he didn't want ... because ... (Lights fade, and on a babel of voices as before, the actors change places. Perera is seated in the compartment when the lights come on again)



## THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

PERERA: (Looking at the opposite seat) .. and of course, there's no harm, if I just imagine a fellow-traveller ... companion, in the opposite ... seated there and just keep talking, because in fact there is no one, so I'm not trying to fool anyone. Hallo? must have been my imagination ... thought I heard ... someone ... but as I was saying to you ...

(He begins miming, as if he is conversing with someone seated on the seat opposite, while the train thunders. Soon, we can hear his voice again)

...I mean, you agree with me, don't you, that my proposition is viable, also feasible, because things are so confused, I mean, complex, these days. To put it like ... I mean, you can't do those grand, Shakespearean things these days. Don't you agree? Because the certainty of grandeur or the grandeur of certainty - what the hell! - is suffering from cracks, or as they say in the papers, shows fissiparous tendencies, these days. It all comes off in little caked pieces. You see my point?

(He listens, as if to a response from the seat opposite, and nods his head as the train thunders)

Well, you may be right, but I still can't see why they keep each prisoner in a different cell (He listens again) May be you're right, but it's worth experimenting, keeping them all together. On the whole, I think ...

(The train thunders, and he begins to mime again, but we soon hear his voice)

If we all remained silent, it doesn't matter if you're alone, or with other human beings, like you. Of course, I'm talking, but it's not the same thing either, because I'm talking to nobody, sorry, I mean you must be somebody. Of course, you're a stranger, but it doesn't really matter because you look like the others. I mean like Silva and the others, my friend Silva, and the others, and Madam, but (he looks around) ... you like to meet Silva and the other two? and dear Madam? ... I mean, they're ordinary people, just ordinary talkative people, even mad people. People, and multi-racial people, some may even be bad people, but the main thing is, they are people. So excuse me a moment (He moves) I can see you're longing to be with them all. Silva is sure to be in the next compartment, maybe the others too, and Madam of course, and if they're not there, there's sure to be Fernando's, Jayatilleke's, or Goonewardenas, or Jayewardane's, or somebody ... a moment.

(He moves out to stage right. As soon as he turns the lights fade, and the voices of the other 4 return, as the lights come up)

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(When we see the other four now, they are all standing, they appear to be agitated, their bodies rocking to and fro with the unsteadiness of

## THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

their feet. The train thunders on through the night, hooting in the great distance. It is as if, by some strange means, Perera's agitated and frightened state - the last time we saw him - in the other train is being communicated through the darkness to these people, in their compartment on the 6.10. At first we see only the mime, of Silva speaking desperately to the others. Soon we can hear what he is saying)

SILVA: Don't say that I'm unfair ... I appeal to you. I mean we're all sinners. Madam, you will not deny that fact.

WOMAN: I ... will never! ...

SILVA: It is not small or petty hypocrisy that makes me single you out, I mean we're all sinners, but you're exemplary in that you're classical, in the Biblical sense, sorry, Madam, that's beside the point, the point is that it was a sin to have coldbloodedly chosen the 6.10 and left Perera, my friend Perera, severely alone in the 5.55 ... while we're all sitting or standing, waking or sleeping, silent or talking, in the comfort of the company of one another.

4TH MAN: He wanted to be alone, but -

SILVA: How would you know, anybody wanted to be alone! I have known Perera, for 20 years, my friend Perera, in a sense we all have known him, much longer than we all know each other, now, for a very long time ...

(Silence. The train thunders, they rock in non-speech)

It was a sin.

WOMAN: I'm sorry ...

4TH MAN: Well ...

3RD MAN: Can make amends, but it's dark, and very late.

SILVA: Yes ... it's very dark, but it's not ... the 5.55 is speeding ahead ... in the dark, but we're not far behind, and we're speeding too ... in the dark, we can make ...

4TH MAN: Not far behind, but we're still behind ... in the dark.

WOMAN: But there are other trains, express connections, and there are other stations, I know them all, lonely unknown connections and lonely express connecting trains ... and there are lights in the dark, suddenly sweeping across, criss-crossing like long flashes, a jungle of criss-crossing ... possibilities ... in the night .. I mean .. that is ... there is a chance.

SILVA: Thank you, Madam, thank you all, let's move, as Madam says there are lights, in the dark, a criss-crossing ... of possibilities .. he's speeding ahead, our friend ... Perera ... before ... it's too late ...

(They begin to move out as the lights fade. In the dark we hear the thundering and hooting of many trains. If the resources are available, the criss-crossing of lights, sweeping across the bare stage, very fast, in time with the trains' thundering. All of a sudden, a single train thunders, lights come on in the compartment. Perera returns, from the right, much more frightened than before)

PERERA: (To his imaginary travelling companion) Funny, Silva, our friend



THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

Silva is not in the next compartment, I mean, on the right. There is no one in any compartment on the right. I mean, you and I seem to be quite alone, alone. Of course it's logical, that if they're not on the right, they must be on the left. A moment, please (He moves) but don't go away, in case ... I mean ... wait here, please.

(He moves to the left of the corridor, as the train thunders, and it becomes dark. The thundering increases in volume, as a pool of light suddenly appears - or grows slowly, this is to be decided at production - downstage, or upstage left in which, as the thundering of the train swells we see Perera's four friends, with right hands outstretched in the direction of the audience, as if reaching out for the tubular grips on the outside of a passing train, as if to climb on)

SILVA: It's slowing down!

WOMAN: We can make it!

4TH MAN: Now!

SILVA: Our friend Perera! (As they lurch forward, the lights go off suddenly while the train thunders on. The lights come on in Perera's compartment. He enters from the left still frightened, and looks at his imaginary companion)

PERERA: No one, none of my friends, in fact, no one at all, in any of the compartments. I looked out of the windows, I mean in a parallel sort of way, within my reach, to my right and to my left. No lights in any of the carriages, you and I seem to be quite alone. Of course, there must be up there, the driver of the engine, I mean, so we have always been told, the great helmsman, so to speak, the master of our fate, but that's such a long way off, and he just keeps thundering along. We can't get through, to the driver of the engine, but of course, he keeps taking us, along.

(Split second silence)

Excuse me a moment, while I look out of the window, I mean not right or left, I've done that before, but up and down.

(He moves towards the 'OUT' door of the compartment - rocked by the train's juddering - downstage, that is just outside the audience side line of the two benches. He mimes opening a door, while continuing to face the audience)

Of course, this time I won't hold you, I mean, ask you to stay any more, stay if you like to, otherwise don't bother about me, any more ... What? Don't be pessimistic, I won't fall. That wouldn't be fair, I mean the driver of the engine would have to stop, and pick me up, that happens I'm told whenever we, fall, that is if the driver knew, otherwise, they disappear ... into the night ... I must look out ...

(Here the actor can mime his leaving the compartment, and descent downwards onto the footboard of the moving train - or - if the two benches were on a platform, then the descent does not require mime. In either case, what would require mime is the holding on, with hands outstretched on either

THE LONELINESS OF THE SHORT-DISTANCE TRAVELLER

side, to the compartment behind him, with a slight leaning forward of his body. He looks up) There are the stars, shining, I see them clearly, but that's such a great distance away. (He looks down) There is the ground, the earth, so close, but it's very dark, I cannot see, and it's slipping away so fast ... underneath. But I can remember, grass, rocks, land, undulating, insects, flowers, I can almost smell it ... all ... but it's slipping away ... very ... fast ...

(Suddenly his body tilts forward, still with hands outstretched on either side that are just losing their grip as the lights suddenly go out. We hear the train's thundering, unusually loud, and hooting in the distance. Slowly the lights return, and the train's sound sinks to its normal volume. A little later Perera's friends enter the compartment - not quite inside, but from the corridor just outside, upstage, they look in for a little while, their bodies gently rocking to and fro, with some suggestion of the movement of mourners at a requiem)

SILVA: The train ... slowed ... a little ... maybe I'm mistaken, not in the middle, maybe, further up ...

4TH MAN: Maybe he was in the same train as we are, I mean, we were in the same boat as he is ... I mean ...

WOMAN: ... the next compartment, let's move on ... and search ..and search

3RD MAN ... and the next ..

4TH MAN: ... and the next ...

SILVA: (as they move on) .. and so on (the lights begin to fade) .. and so forth ... (Dimly we see the empty compartment as the train's thunder increases, hoot, hoot, thunder, the curtain begins to fall)

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Author's Note: The short play-script you have just read is the result of someone's sitting down with pen and paper and 'writing a play'. This does not mean that the words you have read are the words you will hear spoken on the stage, for the real play will only emerge gradually from the vital clash of what has been written down with actors, scene designers and the friends who will watch the first rehearsals. When this first draft is read aloud by an actor, we shall be able to detect false notes which might lead to a total re-thinking of the play; alternatively, very strong true notes might be heard which may even blow a one-acter up into a full-length play. Play-writing (at any rate for me) isn't a strictly literary activity, it's a theatrical activity; which means that even after over 3,000 years it still remains, fundamentally, a ritual. I haven't, as a matter of fact, titled the play yet, but perhaps we could call it 'The Loneliness of the Short-Distance Traveller', as something to start from. E.M.

TO: Yasmine Gooneratne, Editor, NEW CEYLON WRITING  
Dept. of English, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya.

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OUR STAGE, THEIR WORLD: Winston Serasinghe and Irangani  
Serasinghe talk to Shelagh Anghie

In separate interviews, given especially for NEW CEYLON WRITING's Theatre Number, Winston and Irangani Serasinghe talked to me about the Ceylon stage, the acting profession and the roles they have played. Two artistes who approach their work in strikingly different ways, they have often been linked in complementary roles, so that their divergence of attitude and approach has contributed in practice a rich complexity to the productions in which they have taken part.

Irangani Serasinghe occupies a unique place in our theatre, combining in herself many of the significant elements in our dramatic tradition. She has had access to a professional training in English Speech and Drama, yet this has not cut her away from her native roots but rather, has enriched and strengthened them. An actress who invests the stage with dignity and meaning, whose performances fascinate an audience and instruct her fellow-actors simultaneously, she is one of the most completely dedicated and professional personalities of the Ceylon theatre, yielding performances that are at once technically assured and perfectly natural.

Winston Serasinghe I have come to regard, from the experience of acting with him in MacIntyre's production of Miller's Death of a Salesman in 1966 and from an intimate and concerned viewing of local theatre over many years, as 'The Actor - par excellence'. There are other distinguished names in our theatre - of men who have written plays, directed and acted in them, but the essential fact about Sera is that all his strength is directed into one clear channel of communication between himself as an actor and the audience that watches and listens to him. All his energies seem to me to be concentrated with intense simplicity and great feeling in clearing that channel of all obstructions, all that is irrelevant, so that the communication may be as clear and pure as possible. When he is on the stage, he projects his own understanding of a human character in all its complexity to the waiting audience, and to perfect himself in the performance of this function he has devoted over two decades of his life.

The individual answers they gave to certain questions illustrate, I feel, what being a stage artist in Ceylon today really means, and help to relate our own local experience to its background of world theatre.

Q: What does acting mean to you, personally? Is it an essential part of your life?

IRANGANI: Being an actress means being involved in the destiny of mankind - of animals, of plants, of rocks and water and earth - the sun, moon and stars. It means an awareness of everything around you, perception.

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OUR STAGE, THEIR WORLD

sensitivity. Personally, I feel most of the time that my nerves are almost on top of my skin and I suck in life from second to second, and on the stage I feel I give out what I have sucked in. Yes, it's an essential part of my life - I'd burst if I were to suck in and in and in, and not give it out!

SERA: I'd like to think of myself as an actor for all seasons, of all parts. There isn't a role I wouldn't like to attempt, though when I first start on any part it seems impossible, I think I'll never get it right. It seems to have happened that producers have given me more serious or tragic type roles than straight comedy - Shylock, Willy Loman, Othello, Hassan - and even in some of the minor roles I've played, like Giles Corey, the touch of tragedy was there. The truth is that any type of role, if it's a good one in a good play, attracts me.

Q: When did you discover your feeling for the theatre?

IRANGANI: As a child - 7 or 8 years old, perhaps - when a group of travelling actors pitched their tent in my village, Ruanwella. It was a kind of variety entertainment. I remember the famous Lakshmi Bhai very clearly. I came home and imitated some of the acts. I was a great hit with the family, and soon with friends and relations, and my repertoire increased! Afterwards came school plays, and University. A sophisticated attitude to theatre came only during my studies at Bristol and London. Till then I wasn't conscious of acting as an art - I just acted. My whole career seems to have been one of chance and of pushing by other people. As an actress, I think the earliest influence was opera on the radio. I didn't know they were called operas, or what they were about, but they excited me enormously - not so much musically, but dramatically, emotionally. Also films. I didn't see plays till much later on. As for people, many people influenced me, but chiefly Dr. Lyn Ludowyk, in such a subtle way, and Edith with her decor. It was Lyn who insisted that I go to Drama School in England. I'd never heard of Drama Schools till then - I wish we had them here, to give me confidence and guidance.

SERA: It was something I stumbled on, the theatre. At first it seemed as if other people were more aware of me - as an actor, I mean - than I was. The only time I remember acting in a school play was in a production of Julius Caesar, when I was the voice of either the Second or the Third Citizen. I confess I played the part for just one day - I made everyone laugh, and the producer didn't ask me to appear for a performance after that first one. But for some reason people seemed to think I could act, and someone even referred to me as an 'actor of skill' in a magazine piece around that time. Then, many years later, at a party in Kandy a production of The Merchant of Venice was discussed, and I said I'd play the role of the Duke - I never expected I'd be taken up on it! But the play's producer didn't forget, and when actual readings for the production started I was asked to read various parts, and finally I was cast as Shylock! I became nervous about the part, and about 3 days before the first performance I went to R.R. Breckenridge of Trinity, whose reputation in the field of drama was known to us all, and asked him for a few tips. Of course he told me that by then it was too late to learn anything! But after the performance was over, I found he had come to see it, and he sought me out to tell me he had liked it. After that I took part in - I think - four of his own productions, among them The White Steed by Paul Vincent Carol, where he and I played the



roles of the Old Priest and the Young Priest, and Metterlich's Mary Magdalene, which I remember very vividly. Those were controversial and exciting plays at that time. R.R. Breckenridge taught me the importance of being absolutely word-perfect in your part. I learned something from every director I worked with, from then onwards, but the real impact came with Jubal. He changed what was play acting for me, to playing theatre. He showed his actors that a part must be played from the inside, and that you have to give yourself to it wholly and truthfully. There were no shortcuts, no cheating, no slacking possible with Jubal. Once you understood the character you were playing there was no fooling the audience by using bits of stage business to cover up being unrehearsed, or anything like that - you had to play with concentration and absolute consistency.

Q: What are your favourite roles? Why do you remember them?

IRANGANI: Antigone - I wasn't conscious of anything called technique. I just poured my soul into that part - lived and died with her. Then, Lady Macbeth: there I was very conscious of technique, and it was a very exciting experience learning to apply it. And what a character! What a writer! I was discovering things even on the last day of playing. It's a play you can read hundreds of times and still find something new in it. Also Kumari, in Ves Muhunu, another fantastic character, with a great range of emotion.

SERA: Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman. Shylock, of course. I've played the part in two different productions of The Merchant of Venice, and it remains one of my favourite parts. Luca in The Lower Depths, and Porisadya, which I enjoyed very much. I like them because I felt I'd mastered them, and got them completely in control.

Q: How do you approach a part, Sera? From my own experience of acting with you, I feel one of the most important things for you is the way a character sounds, and you have one of the keenest ears in the business! Am I right?

SERA: I study the play first, and especially my own part in it, very thoroughly. To tell you the truth, the first thing I do is to read what will eventually become my own lines because I want to see how I will fit in. I read any background material about the play that comes to hand, but I don't just accept the opinions of writers, however eminent they may be - I think everyone has to work it out for himself. I feel any part has to be approached afresh by the actor with his own understanding, his own sensitivity - his own imagination and feeling must be fully brought to bear on the character he's going to play. I suppose that's why every part seems frighteningly difficult to do when I first start on it. Sometimes I feel I can play any part in the play but the one I've been assigned! Sometimes I grapple with a character almost to the rising of the curtain on opening night - I think, for instance, that it was the day before The Caucasian Chalk Circle's first night that Azdak really clicked into place for me. And yes, I think it's important for a character to sound right, and I do listen very carefully for false notes in my own speeches.

Q: What do you feel is the essence of the acting experience, Irangani? Do you think it is in some way unique?

IRANGANI: I think it's to be found in the establishment of a supreme rapport with your audience, and with your fellow-actors. It's like

lying in complete silence with a lover who is totally "with" your silence. Perfect! And I think it's an experience that's not only unique but essential, since films, television and the rest haven't yet managed to knock theatre out completely. I feel it's because actors are alive. It's something like the difference between hand-made and machine-made things, you can feel the heart-beat.

Q: Sera, are you ever overcome by sadness when the final curtain falls on the last night of a play? Do you feel reluctant to part with the character you've been playing?

SERA: Sadness? Oh, every time. Often, of course, you're detached from the roles you play, and yet there are some which you can't detach yourself from, like Willy Loman. I've had to go to my office the day after a performance and sack a man who is echoing Willy Loman's words, and probably his feelings.

Q: Irangani, do you feel that there are any specific problems as regards acting in Sinhala for an actor who is accustomed to working in English, and the other way around?

IRANGANI: I think it depends on one's background, how easy one is with the idiom. If you're not at ease with the language it can become a trial, and who enjoys a trial?

Q: Do you feel that it's possible for a lively theatrical tradition to develop in the English theatre, though the language of the country is Sinhala?

IRANGANI: Yes, indeed - as long as it's our English, and not that abomination which some people imagine is the Englishman's English. What makes it so interesting and rich listening to a play involving English actors is that they're blessed with a medley of accents. I pray it will never be levelled to 'Kensington' or 'Mayfair' or whatever. Anyway, for us English is a world language and our own second language, we feel the pulse of the world through it. And again, English literature is so rich, it expresses the personality of a people who have been free to express what they think and feel. I think that kind of richness will appear in English theatre in Ceylon, besides the fact that Sinhala theatre itself has influenced the English theatre in a subtle way. Don't you see a difference in English theatre today?

Q: Well, I'd say that the theatre is one branch of the arts in Ceylon where the dividing line between those who work in the Sinhala theatre and their counterparts who work in English, is not quite so distinct or all that dividing. There seems to me to be a firm common ground on which they meet, and a genuine understanding of and sympathy for their respective problems. Would you agree?

IRANGANI: If what you say is correct - and it is, I think, almost - then it's a dream that has come, or is coming, true. As far back as 1965 when I was directing Rama and Sita, I gave a press interview on the subject of the synthesis of the three cultures. I should have said four, to include the Muslim also. We don't realise how fortunate we are as a nation to have so many great cultures right on our doorstep - but how many of us reach out for their riches?

Q: After more than 20 years of acting, Sera, you are still a dominant figure on our stages. My own experience of local theatre has taught



me that there is no producer who, when considering his next play, does not first think - Can I ask Winston Serasinghe to play - ? So I'd like to ask, what advice would you offer a young, ambitious actor?

SERA: First, he must have great respect for the stage. He must also have respect for his director, and give him his full attention. He must be obedient, punctual, know his words before he is ready to set a foot on the stage, and be very well prepared - he must really rehearse before he goes to a rehearsal. He must think of the character he is playing practically every moment of the day, and it's probable that he will even dream of him at night. For any actor to begin, it is essential that he has talent, imagination, and feeling for what he is doing, but he must also have guts, because what he creates has to stand the test of many performances, not any longer of a single lucky or brilliant one. He's got to be able to sustain what he does, and that means learning and working hard at it all the time.

Q: Do you think acting calls for great deliberation, discipline and precision, or is it spontaneous and inventive, the actor improvising from moment to moment?

SERA: I'd say that these are not in opposition. Acting is spontaneous and inventive, the actor improvises, but once the character has formed it's got to be grasped and fixed with deliberation, precisely, so that it can be given out effectively at each performance....

December, 1971

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Yasmine Gooneratne

Since Ernest MacIntyre's The Education of Miss Asia has now won itself such popular acclaim that nothing a critic might say can either advance or diminish its reputation for wit, flair and professional playing, a salutary exercise for critic and theatre-goer might be the examination of what precisely MacIntyre's new play means in the context of our theatre.

Some years ago, in the course of an article on the 2-day theatre workshop conducted at Peradeniya by the British producer, Peter Potter, the obvious ineptness of our players in getting at anything in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story that could be considered relevant to a society outside Albee's own, together with their failure to convey the American idiom adequately or make real people of the stage characters, led me to suggest that producers and directors should adopt sounder principles in the selection of plays for presentation in the English-language theatre. If I may be allowed to quote from what I wrote then,

'Our actors can only work part-time, and they cannot afford to waste time, money, or energy unnecessarily. What are needed now, in the way of foreign plays, adaptations and translations from European, or Oriental dramas for use in the local English theatre, are essentially plays that relate in theme to matters that actors and audience can identify with local or general human dilemmas. They must also give adequate opportunity to Ceylonese actors to develop the resources they already have, rather than demand abilities and talents that they cannot, in the present circumstances, command. It is only through careful selection of plays for public performance that are of high quality and at the same time answer our special needs at the moment, that local writers can be stimulated to the writing of English plays that can be a living part of a national dramatic tradition'. (1)

The plays that have been, from time to time in recent years, written in English by Ceylonese authors, have only served to pinpoint the reluctance or inability of the English-educated to exploit fully the resources of English as it is spoken in Ceylon. Gamini Gunawardhana's Rama and Sita made use of a thin, 'poetic' prose that echoed Anouilh in translation, and had nothing whatever in common with the local idiom. Plays such as Lucien de Zoysa's Fortress in the Sky, or V. Ariaratnam's Christopher Columbus and The Sigiriyan King do little to break away from the traditional clichés of costume drama. Until comparatively recently it seemed that directors, actors and writers working in English had been completely untouched by the influence of the new and original things that have been happening in the Sinhalese theatre.

The actual situation in the English-language theatre was described in an article in the Journal of Commonwealth Literature, which is quoted from below for the sake of what light it sheds on theatre activities after the departure from Peradeniya and the University Dramatic Society, of E.F.C. Ludowyk:

'There are signs, however, that a year or two will produce good English plays using a local setting, that will be as much a part of the national cultural tradition as the best plays written today for the



ERNEST MACINTYRE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE

Sinhalese theatre. I risk saying this because I believe that very gradually, the attitude of 'serious theatre' people towards the reasons for choosing a play for presentation is changing. An acting tradition exists, maintained by a small nucleus of enthusiastic, trained amateurs who passed through the hands of Professor E.F.C. Ludowyk in the forties, or of Jubal in the fifties, and who guide the activities of a handful of amateur acting groups in Colombo, Kandy, and Jaffna, and the Dramatic Societies of the University of Ceylon and of Aquinas University College. There is also, less fortunately, a tradition that it is the mission of the serious theatre to 'expose' local audiences to the civilising influences generated by the masterpieces of the European stage. This tradition had its beginnings in the totally different theatre situation of twenty years ago, when an inspired producer such as Ludowyk found he could rely on his audience to appreciate every aspect, literary or dramatic, of the language they heard in the theatre; he could choose pretty much what he liked to work on, and be certain of an interested, intelligent response. A performance by the University of Ceylon Dram Soc in the forties was an exciting experience, in which actor and audience were equally involved. The same cannot be said of the English theatre in Ceylon today. Actors are largely untrained, standards of competence in the use of the language have fallen, an unfamiliar importation must be introduced in feature articles in the local press if an audience is to attend in force on the first night, and a poor review can kill a production with a speed and efficiency that would have been impossible some years ago. And yet trained theatre people still strive vainly to make bricks without straw, to repeat the brilliant successes of the past without the essential requirements of actors trained in the fluent and expressive use of English, and audiences capable of feeling at home in the translated literature of any country.' (2)

The results of such a situation were pathetic, and as a University production of The Infernal Machine at about the same time served to confirm sometimes acutely embarrassing. But complacency has still been possible at least for those who can convince themselves that these defective and ill-conceived essays in theatre belong to the tradition of the University Dramatic Society under Ludowyk, which has 'never - neither at the beginning nor in its leanest years - been interested in the purveying of slick entertainment.' (3)

The single cultural event that showed a way out of this impasse was a production of Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle by Ernest MacIntyre under the auspices of Stage and Set, that gave a timely demonstration of the fact that 'serious theatre' is not synonymous with boredom and incompetent staging. Drawing on elements in the Chinese theatre that influenced Sarachchandra in his work for the Sinhalese stage, it was an illuminating instance of how a responsible choice of play can fructify a dying tradition. 'English theatre' had become a kind of cult, and a dying one, entirely remote from the everyday life of Ceylonese people. This single production established a connection between the worlds of the Sinhalese and the European drama, for it inspired the fine Sinhalese version of Brecht's play by Henry Jayasena that followed it, and it has brought about an increasing joint participation in stage activities by representatives of the different traditions. It also, as well-chosen, perfectly presented

ERNEST MACINTYRE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE

plays have frequently done, had creative results: MacIntyre followed the play's direction with a first attempt at writing for the theatre, his The Full Circle of Caucasian Chalk.

And now, Miss Asia, 'a play about the theatre'. How much of MacIntyre's dazzling display of the range of theatrical choices open to the uninhibited local playwright, how much of the educative effect of his contrast of them with the vapid beauty-contests to which large segments of our society annually dedicate themselves, did get across in production? It is hard to tell, merely from an audience reaction however warmly appreciative. How much of his overt 'message' got across? More, probably. Dunstan Taylor and Chris Greet rammed home with equal efficiency the cruel truth that the stability of the Asian cradle is menaced by its own overloading, missing no nuance of the more general truth of (Asian) man's inhumanity and indifference to (Asian) man. All this made palatable with a delectable coating of the domestic comedy that has delighted Ceylonese audiences since E.F.C. Ludowyk got the genre going with He Comes From Jaffna, and H.C.N. de Lanerolle laced it with an acceptable, titillating, entirely Ceylonese salaciousness with his Well, Mudaliyar! and the other plays of that series. It is amusing to consider that MacIntyre's play will be remembered as 'good entertainment' pure and simple by some, (and even perhaps, conceivably, as 'slick entertainment' by others!) when it is really so much more. But in the context of the Ceylon stage it is no doubt a good thing. Education for most of us is so fraught with defeat and disappointment that none of us, probably, would go cheerfully to see a play that threatens to 'educate' us further. As the audiences laugh, and laugh, and continue to come in force to see Miss Asia educate herself, no doubt more and more of the real content of MacIntyre's play will filter through in time.

'Message' apart, it is plainly obvious that Miss Asia marks Ernest MacIntyre's coming of age in the theatre. After his early experiments with a variety of one-acters, it was his production of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman that first gave a hint of what he could do. Not only did he prove himself able to direct veterans like Winston Serasinghe and younger actors of formidable talent such as Karan Breckenridge, but his choice of play demonstrated his awareness of the emotional needs of his audience. For the first time since the work of Ludowyk and Cuthbert Amerasinghe in the forties, we had a play on the boards that was a unified whole: excellent as was the acting of Serasinghe and of Shelagh Anghie in the main roles, it was no longer a case of an actor of presence holding the centre of the stage while a cast of ill-trained and unrehearsed 'bit' players shuffled their feet uneasily and the late Arthur van Langenberg or some other unobtrusive genius with lights and make-up did his best in the wings for a disintegrating play.

The Crucible and Chalk Circle were important stages in the years that followed, landmarks in the development of MacIntyre's theatrecraft and in the history of the modern Ceylonese stage. The first play, it will be remembered, brought Henry Jayasena into an English-language play with a performance that showed, more than any number of good intentions, the rewards that lie in store for directors and actors ready to create by co-operation. The Chalk Circle, apart from its confirmation of the qualities MacIntyre had already shown himself to possess as a director, added a few more - I am thinking particularly of the way he made the fullest use of the skills of a musician like Haig Karunaratne in devising the musical



ERNEST MACINTYRE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE

settings for that play. It also scored another bull's eye in a row of personal successes for Iranganie and Winston Serasinghe, and by serving to inspire Henry Jayasena's Hunuvataye Kathava in Sinhalese made the development of theatre in Ceylon an attainable vision that each good original play in Sinhalese since has helped to furnish with flesh and blood.

Thus far MacIntyre as a director, whose professionalism made possible his recent achievement of the near-impossible, the production of Shakespeare's Othello in an atmosphere that is, to say the least, unsympathetic to English and impatient of Shakespeare (who, alas, represents for most of us the epitome of Eng.Lit.). His influence in the development of the theatre as we know it has been, though decisive, largely unconscious, the result of his pursuit of personal and individual interests. As a writer? Still in his thirties, MacIntyre cannot but be conscious of the existence of a theatre tradition which has formed him, and within which he has, by and large, found himself. I did not see The President of the O.B.A., his last play, which had a very successful run last year, and was described to me as having been 'an uproarious comedy'. The title makes a satiric intention clear, and of course status-snobbery and what we have been pleased to term our 'public school' education system are subjects that offer tempting targets to the satirist. The Education of Miss Asia, in spite of surface similarities, I suspect to be a much more serious and significant piece of work. Among the many possibilities MacIntyre opens up for local playwrights through his own practice, loom importantly those latent in spoken English - by which again I mean English as it is spoken in Ceylon. The comic value of our linguistic and racial differences having been played for all it was worth by de Lanerolle, does anything remain that can provide fit language for art? By assigning his comic, 'accented' speeches to a distinguished foreigner, Professor Raasagoola Chaudribhoy, MacIntyre hints that it is surely time we took a new look, from a serious and artistic point of view, at the language we ourselves speak. So rapidly does one witty shaft succeed the other that it is easy to miss the way in which a number of significant points are made. The phrase 'Daddy is going to London', for instance, synonymous still in our society with the idea of a pilgrimage to the Mecca of the arts and of the good life in general, becomes in Miss Asia a convenient euphemism for the serving of a jail sentence. A familiar nursery rhyme acquires ironic overtones; we hear an expert explaining the essential difference between 'forging' and 'fudging' a cheque, and being rewarded by his wife's admiring comment that he should have had a chance to contribute his talents to public life. All this is very different from the great Mudaliyar's famous phrase, 'Well, well ... how?', less kindly, more searching in its satire. We learn, as Miss Asia educates herself, not only how we speak but something at least of what we are: and we learn this through an idiom as familiar as the air we breathe.

A play comes to real life only when it is acted, and the reality it communicates is experienced first by the actors working in harmony with the director and with one another, and then by the observing and participating audience. In the context of the theatre in Ceylon, where actors and directors however dedicated, can necessarily give only a part of their time to the theatre, the moments when real theatre magic creates itself between actor, director and audience are rare, and for that reason the more memorable. MacIntyre has indeed touched our lives, the common existence of the 'Pararas and Fer-r-nandos' with a little of the theatre's authentic magic.

ERNEST MACINTYRE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE

To say that MacIntyre is a product of the University Dram Soc at Peradeniya is, alas, no compliment to him today when the light kindled there by E.F.C.Ludowyk and Cuthbert Amerasinghe in the fifties has long been dying before the uncreating word of worthy but less talented men. Perhaps, indeed, we have already seen the final demise of that light, and MacIntyre must himself wonder whether his former University is not now quite beyond the reach of any education, including such as the theatre has to offer. Before the edifice of the arts and their enjoyment, so lovingly built in Colombo and later on at Peradeniya, and decorated by the creative work of Sarachchandra and others finally collapses, however, I have an idea that Ernest MacIntyre has saved something from the wreckage. Only time will show whether that something was a developing, original and lively theatre tradition and whether we have the talent and the wit to respond to its challenge.

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- (2) Y. Gooneratne, 'A Note on Drama in Ceylon', Journal of Commonwealth Literature 7 (July 1969), pp. 104 - 106.
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NEW ANURADHAPURA

C.V.Velupillai

Here is completeness  
In the endless monotone  
Of the jungle tide;  
It swells and spreads  
Where a hundred kings  
Crowned you  
With a single name.

The dust growing  
On your ruins  
Makes now our history.  
Your buried temples -  
Their pillared echoes  
In perfect ruin  
Remind us  
Of our achievement.

In the sacred niches  
The prayer unfinished  
Calls forth  
Unborn men.



NEW ANURADHAPURA: poemGRASS FIELDS IN SUNLIGHT: poem

The WORD,  
 In a thousand voices  
 Speaks forth  
 In the silence,  
 In the strivings  
 Of man and nature;  
 Of a life lost and won  
 In the womb  
 Behind the stone.

GRASS FIELDS IN SUNLIGHT

Alfreda de Silva

Now, at one end of them, the squatters' shacks  
 Hurt the eyes with their tin roofs,  
 And the stench of rotting dirt  
 Piled on the tree-roots  
 Disturb the old images.

Then, there were fields,  
 Turned into seas or mountains  
 By childhood. And the wind's cries  
 Were horses' hooves, and the whining grass  
 A tale one listened to in the moth-brushed night.

In hurt adolescence I remember the sun  
 Over these fields, like a fisherman  
 Netting in green water, shocking everything in  
 its glory;  
 Making the radiance so scathing  
 That hot tears rolled on the grass  
 On that day that was irretrievable.

AFTERNOON PICTURES

Jean Arasanayagam

Leaf mobiles  
 Stir in the air  
 Moving with silver birds in sunlight,  
 Tinkling fruit, orbed pendant crystals  
 tremble in an occasional river breeze,  
 Slender  
 Stamened flowers  
 flutter transparent glass petals.

AFTERNOON PICTURES: poemFUTILITY: poem

Circlets of light  
 Stirred by windfingers,  
 Dancing webs of filigree patterns  
 Flicker in a leaf-  
 breeze.

Honeysuckers puncture green-bronze berries,  
 Parakeets red beaks split globules  
 of golden juice clustering on branches,  
 Butterflies pollened wings  
 Shafting in flight among crimson  
 Canna lilies, green chameleons.

Afternoon glimpsed through tissue  
 Of light - transparent leaf,  
 Time crawls like a green caterpillar.

Playing among pebbles faceted  
 Sparks of light,  
 Childrens sharp sleepless bird-  
 cries, spurt like rainfountained  
 Water  
 Sprinkling sunflecked pointillist air

In a hot shaft of wind  
 leaf mobiles crazily shake  
 and clash like clinking glass.

FUTILITY

Rosanne Gomez

Waiting, waiting, waiting,  
 Queues and committees,  
 The creaking wheels of endless words  
 Go turning round and round -  
 Avalanche of noises smother  
 The million microscopic things to remember:-  
 And tangled webs of dusty thoughts  
 Break, tail and trail  
 Away to nothingness.

Futility has no opposite but  
 Utility: the dog-chased circles of  
 One's own not-there tail:  
 No strong brown root that silently penetrates,  
 Striking down, deep down, into  
 The still, warmwomandark of womb:  
 No long brown sunburnt morning,  
 Nor lightning flash of kingfisher.



CENSORSHIP AND THE SINHALA FILM

Gamini Haththotuwegama

'Mr. Speaker,

We are indeed honoured, sir, that you are able to participate, in the midst of all the heavy duties relating to high office, in such a function as the Film Critics Awards Presentation.

Two years ago the Minister in charge of the destinies of the cinema was kind enough to grace nearly all the ceremonies in connection with the Awards Presentation with his presence, and to explain his government's plans for the cinema. As Minister in charge of cinema we welcomed him, and at our Critics' Dinner that year we made our needs known: 'Now go back to your office, sir,' we said, 'and do something for the Sinhala cinema.' That was the first and last time we held a Critics' Dinner, and those words were not repeated last year.

Of course, sir, this government (unlike the previous one) has done something for the Sinhala cinema. We appreciate that. While announcing legislation on the cinema, it has acknowledged its debt to the Film Critics' and Journalists' Association of Ceylon in a glowing tribute. You, sir, are so used to the vagaries of parliamentary verbiage. Nor are we to be seduced by a show of words. At last the Film Corporation is to be set up. That is important. It is important to set up corporations, and more corporations. But how can we be satisfied with the mere setting up of corporations, and by constitution-framing alone?

The question is, precisely: How far is the Government prepared to go? Is the Government really prepared to smash monopolies? Is the Government ready to put a stop to exploitation? Here, in this field, as elsewhere, we cannot separate 'policy' on films from the general socio-economic policy of the Government. Nor can we separate the one step taken hesitantly forward from the three steps taken firmly backwards.

Censorship, for instance, sir, is a form of barbed wire. Take present day Greece, the birth country of Costa-Gravas, the maker of 'Z', the Academy Award winning film of 1970, and of Mikis Theodorakis, the brilliant music director of 'Z' and of 'Zorba the Greek', as you will remember. And Theodorakis composed the music for 'Z' behind bars, and had it smuggled out of his beloved country of shame. He is a real man, a real artist. I do not claim any privileged status for our artists. Nor are they to be absolved from criticism, for they have failed to test and challenge Censorship sufficiently early through their work for the film. And how far, how freely, have they tried to explore human experience? How strongly and honestly have they challenged the fundamental established values?

It is true that many serious artists have survived the many difficulties that have plagued them in their work for the cinema. Lester James Peries, our first serious film artist, took guard and stood firm nearly 25 years ago against the might of one of the biggest establishments of capital in Ceylon: the commercial cinema, financed by the cinema moghuls. Romantic and picturesque as it might seem to be for the most part, even rather stilted, Lester James Peries' Rekava offered some of the most daring and searching moments registered in the Sinhala cinema. It required uncompromising honesty to take such a risk in his first film - the risk of offending national susceptibilities - and expose the brutality of

CENSORSHIP AND THE SINHALA FILM

superstitious villagers who, influenced by a group of greedy exploiters, could make a scapegoat out of an innocent child. And the film was made at a time when pastoralism was staging a revival in our land, and was being used for the benefit of cineastes all over the world. Lester offered us Sandesaya after that. But the rare daring he had shown became lost to him, and generally to the other serious cinema artists who followed in his wake. Twentyfive years of Sinhala cinema, and why is it that we feel that the occasional masculinity achieved, the rare freeing of impulses, is rare, and even quaint?

I cannot help but recall to your memory, sir, and to yours, Ladies, Gentlemen, and Friends, our friend Jayavilal Willegoda, late Vice-President of our Association; the honour is ours in paying this small tribute to his memory. There are Sinhala and English critics in Ceylon, and there is no doubt that it is the Sinhala critic who makes his impact felt. I sometimes feel that in the whole range of our writing, we can boast of but one film critic, and that one is Jayavilal Willegoda. It was he who, singlehanded, created and nurtured for so long a serious film generation - the first in this country. If not for him, the film of art might not have found a place in the affections and interests of the cinema-going public of Ceylon. There is a whole generation of young men and women who have gathered, grabbed and treasured his film reviews; these writings have indeed helped to form the critical standards of such people. Jayavilal was in some ways a lonely man; he was lonely to the degree that it is necessary to be in order to preserve his integrity as a critic. No one who talks of, or cares for, the Sinhala cinema can forget his name.

All over the world there is talk of a generation called the 'film generation' - "The first generation that has matured in a culture in which film has been accepted as serious and relevant," says one writer; "The film is also the most seriously admired art form among young people in the world. No other medium responds more vividly and immediately than cinema to contemporary moods and hopes and anxieties," says another. And so it goes. All over the world the very young have taken to film-making. In the United States where big business holds sway, the young amateur film-maker has shaken up the strongholds of big business with their small-budget films, and some of them have seriously challenged the social order of the day. We too have artists with natural talent, as our short film festival showed last year. These creative spirits are no doubt intelligent people, but they seem reluctant to confront the harsh facts of normal living; their very harshness avoids normality. It's unjust to blame them entirely for this: there are peculiar difficulties which the local amateur film-maker encounters, and which the public can know little of. But they cannot totally escape criticism for being insensitive to the larger demands of a social conscience.

Nor can we spare the critics, and more important, our so-called educated film public, from their responsibilities. In what is called the discriminating areas of taste, we are nearly threatened to be over-run by the growth of a seductive aestheticism, a worshipping of technique. In this regard I can only recall to your memory, friends, George Orwell's novel, 1984, which in many unforgettable passages shows how twisted and pernicious this can be. The aesthete, the technique-worshipper, is as close to the tyrant as the insensitive escapist living in his dream factory.' From the Address given at the Awards Night of the Film Critics' & Journalists' Association of Ceylon, 19.11.1971.



RADIO THEATRE

Claudette Taylor

Listening to the radio appears to be unfashionable today - at least among the 'intellectuals' - in Ceylon. In those circles where people gather to talk of art and music, dissect a poem, view a bronze head or listen to a learned discourse on 'theatre', the cognoscenti make a point of telling you that they 'never listen in to the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation'. Never? Well, hardly ever, in the best tradition of the Captain of the 'Pinafore'. Some people go so far as to declare that they don't even possess a radio set! Listening to the radio, it appears, is distinctly declassé!

Some years ago I spent, perforce, a good deal of time listening in to the C.B.C. And while I cannot pretend that I enjoyed everything I heard, I must admit I was pleasantly surprised on occasion by programmes that were not only interesting, but revealed a high degree of technical skill and, which is even more important, much dedication and hard work. Significantly perhaps, most of these were 'features', stimulating pieces whose originality of approach and imaginative technique set them well apart from the ordinary run of programmes.

I often wondered at the dearth of good radio drama in English. And by this I don't mean that the C.B.C. made no attempt to remedy the situation. It did. Efforts were made, by the organising of competitions and by inaugurating a 'Radio Workshop' for potential writers and actors, to stimulate would-be artistes. But these well-intentioned projects merely underlined and emphasized the paucity of the talent available. Lacking better scripts, producers and directors began to churn out mediocre and often positively bad 'plays' (if one might call them that) to meet their regular deadlines. Imitative, pretentious, platitudinous and with hardly a trace in them of literary sense or skill, most of the 'original' drama of that era fell far short of even the lowest standards of B.B.C. Transcription drama. Pitiful attempts by producers to bolster up a weak script with 'strong' acting and a plethora of technical devices and effects resulted in (totally unintended) comic entertainment of a high order. At the same time writers over-sensitive to criticism, began to justify their mistakes instead of attempting to rectify them. Worse still, protective 'gurus' saw fit to insulate their proteges against critical assessment, and nurture them like tender hot house plants. Radio drama gradually became a 'closet' art.

None of this kind of thing has ever done an art form any good, and radio drama seems today to be stuck in the doldrums and facing extinction. Despite the best efforts of a few people, there is hardly any English drama heard on the C.B.C. today that is worth listening to - unless it is a B.B.C. transcription or a good local production of a foreign play. Original drama specially written for local audiences, using local settings, characters and themes, is virtually non-existent - except for an occasional 'who-dunnit' or, even worse, an 'historical' play. And this goes on while many persons qualified to write by virtue of their education, their reading and the breadth of their experience, remain aloof. Through their studied dissociation from the medium of radio, the narrowing circle of English-speaking and English-writing artists in Ceylon are not only helping to kill English medium broadcasting in this country, but are also isolating themselves. The radio, being a popular and increasingly commercial medium, commands an audience comparable with that of the cinema. It seems

RADIO THEATRE

fashionable today to take occasional swipes at the radio audience - it is referred to as a 'mass-mind' or 'mass-mentality' group which is beyond the pale, needing only to be fed on pop songs and penny serenades. But those who sneer seem to have abdicated totally from the responsibility of involving themselves in the stimulation of minds outside their own enclosed circle. Ultimately this ingrowing preciousness will isolate them so completely that one can foresee a time, not so very far away, either, when there will be no one left for them to communicate with.

It would seem that to bring freshness and zest into English broadcasting in general and drama in particular, a change of attitude is very necessary. It is not enough for those who have benefited by a vision of wide horizons to bend their efforts only to discriminate, dissect and dogmatize. It is also their duty to participate. They would then have a better right to criticism.

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DANCE, THE RESCUED ART

The great changes and development of the Dance as Theatre and as a form of entertainment have been brought about by men like Chitrasena, Prema Kumar and Vasantha Kumar, Sessa Pallihakkara, Ganganath and Basil Mihiripenna. Some through their own schools, and others in collaboration and sometimes with the help of pupils from the Dance School and past pupils who are invariably dance instructors in schools, have kept up a tradition of Dance sufficiently inspired by the ancient Art as well as the contemporary. But above all they have been dour enough to bring to the Dance an attitude of contemporary theatrical professionalism, in spite of severe odds, which could be their greatest contribution towards saving the Dance in Ceylon from an ever-present danger of becoming once again something you saw on a picture postcard, the delight of a tourist paradise.

Sinhala dance forms in contemporary society can and will survive mainly, if not only, in the Theatre. The social environment that gave the dance relevance before is fast changing. The enormous wealth of our dance forms and rhythms, the rich potential and vitality of our drums, our ear for delicate melody, the inexhaustible fund of tales and legends, and the rapidly changing society that confronts the artist, can and are being made to add an extra dimension to our Theatre and satisfy a demand for varied theatrical experiences. To Chitrasena, the Ballet Maestro, the world of Ceylon Theatre owes almost everything, not merely for his pioneering work in bringing the Dance to the stage, but for his contributions, both as dancer and choreographer of Sinhala Ballet, in which field he remains more than just "Primus Inter pares".

As a boy pupil, encouraged by his illustrious father, Seebert Dias, the young Maurice Dias set out to learn the great art of Dance. The Natya Sastra and the science embodied in the Nataraja was his world in his travels through Travancore, Lucknow, Almora, Lahore. He spent many days with the masters of the Kandy Dance - Kiriganitha Gurunanse, Muthanawe Appua and, later, Lapaya Gurunanse - before he came to the Indian forms, to Sri Gopinath and the glades of Shantiniketan. The consolidation of this gathered learning took place with the commencement of the Chitrasena Dance School.



DANCE, THE RESCUED ART

It may be held that Chitrasena's greatest contribution to the Sinhala Dance is his wife, Vajira. She began her dancing life as his pupil and has matured into Ceylon's outstanding danseuse and prima Ballerina under his tutelage. The matter would be, however, controversial: we have to consider Vajira the artist independently. Vajira, the present exponent of the Lasya (feminine) of the Kandyan dance is the creative dancer of ballet roles, is the indefatigable teacher herself, the subtle choreographer of children's ballets.

However, two contributions of Chitrasena there are, which go undisputed. First, the infusion of the idea of Theatre, the Stage, the world of audience confrontation and entertainment to the Sinhala Dance; and second the actual work proceeding from this conception, transforming our folk dances into gems for modern theatre and from this transformation creating a vehicle of artistic expression for the Sinhala Dance - the Ballet.

The Chitrasena presentation of the programme "Nirthanjali" (dance offering) consists of a wide repertoire of folk dances of all types. But each of these dances has, by theatrical design, combinations, lighting, decor, and a system of choreography been transformed from festive and ritual phenomenon into modern theatrical entity. Besides this, these items settle one basic problem relevant to the ballet of Chitrasena - the dance form and its development in line and content. This development, which is really a linear extension of restricted movement in the Kandyan Dance, has been condemned for its similarity with, and therefore possible derivation from, the Western ballet. The point made by Chitrasena is that the Kandyan dance movements lend themselves quite logically to this extension, if the purpose is to do something more than their original purity demanded. The vibrance, brevity and firm-footedness of the Kandyan Dance remain in the ballets of Chitrasena.

Equally relevant and sometimes controversial is the use of natural and realistic gesture in the ballet in the absence of elaborate mudhras or "limb-speech". This bears a close similarity to Western ballet. The question of new demands made by fresh fields has helped to clear the road of stultifying controversy. A break from tradition need not mean a negation of it.

From the earlier experiments in a ballet like "Vidura", Chitrasena moved to the capture of the sensuous world of ballet in "Nala Damayanthi", the love story of Nala and Damayanthi and the swans. Then came "Karadiya", the artistic and poetic recreation of the lives of those who go down to the sea. Here the various techniques experimented with in "Nala Damayanthi" received an economic vetting, were geared to the central purposes of a tale told in dance, and gave the ballet an equilibrium and steadiness that had been missing in "Nala Damayanthi". Somewhere between these two ballets, and in some ways at a tangent to the completeness of their cycle, come the creations of Vasantha Kumar - "Kumburu Panatha" and "Hiroshima" - together with Prema Kumar's "Thiththa Batha". They are socio-political essays given a ballet form, by men to whom the dance is a natural means of expression. Their creation added a vital dimension to the Dance as modern theatre. Assisted by the creative work of talented musicians such as Amara-deva, Lionel Algama, Shelton Premaratne and Khemadasa, the Dance of Ceylon has grown in stature. It has travelled abroad, and been acclaimed from Australia to America, through India, Pakistan, the Soviet Union, China, Britain, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

It has come a long way from the time when only Peraheras indicated that it was alive.

Reprinted from 'The Dances of Ceylon' by Karan Breckenridge, in the Times of Ceylon Annual (1967)

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PABLO NERUDA AND CEYLON: A BRIEF NOTE

H.A.I. Goonetilleke

Pablo Neruda, regarded as Latin America's finest and most prolific living poet, if not its greatest ever, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in late October 1971. The Swedish Academy said he was chosen for 'a poetry that, with the action of an elementary force, brings alive a continent's destiny and dreams'. His is the authentic voice of the unfree world's identity, and his poetry has always reflected the turbulence and romance of the stormy political fortunes of his country.

Neruda, a leading member of the Chilean Communist Party for many years, was the party's front-runner before the last elections in 1970, conceding the presidential stakes to his close friend Dr. Salvador Allende when the left-wing parties agreed on a coalition candidate. He is now his country's Ambassador in Paris, thus climaxing a series of diplomatic appointments which began in his early twenties. He came to Ceylon as Chilean Consul in 1928 at the age of 24, four years after he first achieved fame as a poet with the remarkable Twenty Love Poems, And A Song of Despair. This short lyrical cycle of personal verse celebrated the fierce earthiness and brilliant experience of his raw and nervous young love, and has never ceased to be popular.

As Chilean Consul in Colombo, he lived in a 'seaside chalet' at Wellawatte and quickly became involved in the avant garde literary and artistic circle pioneered, sponsored and presided over by the late Lionel Wendt. The idyllic beauty of the remote island and the gentle character of its people were to leave an indelible mark on the lover and poet in Neruda, as he confessed with affection and nostalgia many years later. Many of the poems in Residence on Earth, Series 1 (1925 - 1931) were written in Ceylon:

"I lived in a cluster of houses, among people and trees and a noble perspective: pavilions of passional leafage, roots breaking the subsoil, plants bladed like oars, immediate coconut palms; and there in the midst of a spindrift of verdure, I moved with my sharp-pointed hat, my heart a pure fiction, my stride heavy with splendours ..."

(From 'Falsified Documents', a poem in this collection, translated by Ben Belitt)

'Monsoon Rain' is perhaps the best known of them, and deservedly popular.



PABLO NERUDA AND CEYLON

The bohemian fantasies and ironic wit of Wendt, the critic, allied to the dramatic verve and unconventional fire of Neruda, the poet, precipitated the entry of George Keyt into the local artistic scene. Neruda's percipient review of Keyt's first controversial exhibition in January 1930 in Colombo was translated by Wendt for the Times of Ceylon:

"Keyt, I think, is the living nucleus of a great painter. In all his work there is the moderation of maturity, the beautiful stability of achievement - qualities most precious in so young an artist. Magically though he places his colours, and carefully though he distributes his plastic volumes, Keyt's pictures nevertheless produce a dramatic effect, particularly in his paintings of Sinhalese people. These figures take on a strange expressive grandeur, and radiate an aura of intensely profound feeling."

Neruda's decisive praise was important and gratifying to the 29 year old painter on the fringe of success. When later in the same year Keyt exhibited the celebrated nude painting of 'Govindamma', the lovely Tamil dancer, Neruda stood up in its defence at a time when a self-satisfied Mrs. Grundy stalked the buttoned-up groves of metropolitan taste. During this period the artist painted many nudes, and the poet bought one of them, 'Apres l'Orage'.

His friendship with Keyt grew firm, and when he returned to Ceylon briefly in 1957, he made a special pilgrimage to Sirimalwatte near Kandy to meet his old friend. Keyt brought him to the University, and he was entranced by the Peradeniya campus and its lushly verdant setting that he remarked he wished he was a student again. On that visit he was a delegate to the World Peace Council sessions in Colombo, and the opening words of his speech at the public meeting held in this connection are worth quoting:

"Hail Ceylon, pearl of greenness, flower of the islands, tower of beauty! Thirty years ago, life brought me to your shores. I wrote some of my books at Wellawatte. My ideas and my poetry owe much to this island. I have known and loved its generous people."

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NEW CEYLON WRITING is sponsored by no University, literary group or other institution, and is maintained by the interest of those who read it and contribute to it. The first issue (1970) was produced and distributed free of charge to many hundreds of persons through the generosity of people interested in the arts in this country. A second printing soon became necessary, and its success suggests that the role NEW CEYLON WRITING now plays in the field of the arts has become very much more than the informal literary sheet originally planned. Although no payment is made for contributions, it was a source of great satisfaction to us that we were able to pass on to many writers sums earned through the translation and reprinting of their work in other journals. The next issue of NEW CEYLON WRITING takes as its theme: 'New Writing in Sinhala'. Contributions are invited from writers of fiction, poetry, drama and criticism (translated into English before submission); AND a prize is offered for the best short story submitted to NEW CEYLON WRITING in 1972.

THE KALAKENDRA RANGA SHILPA SHALIKA: ART CENTRE THEATRE STUDIO

Shiranthi Jayamanne

The small, and yet vital theatre world of Ceylon was very enthusiastic about the opening of the Art Centre Theatre Studio in December 1970 (see New Ceylon Writing 1970, p. 52). Up to that time there had been sporadic attempts at organising theatre workshops on a short-term basis, none of which, however, had been successful. This one was to be different. Some of the most significant directors, playwrights and actors were involved in the venture. Patron: Dr. E.R. Sarachchandra. The inspiring force behind the venture was Dhamma Jagoda. Others included Gunasena Galappathy, Iranganie Serasinghe, Vajira, Chandrasena Dassanayake, Henry Jayasena and many more names extremely well known to playgoers. The plan was a long-term one, the Studio possessing a permanent home in the Kala Kendra, with its own studio, rehearsal rooms and library. The opening was impressive and the hopes and enthusiasms of students ran very high.

There were about 150 applicants, and three sets of classes had to be arranged, one being bilingual and the other two conducted in Sinhala. Classes were held three times a week. The first term ended with two student productions, Synges Riders To the Sea and Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, both of them established plays, which had been performed before, outside the Workshop. The fact that the plays were English-language plays (albeit the work of Irish and American dramatists respectively!) created an unexpected problem, which soon became a major one, involving a rift between the so-called 'English' group and the 'Sinhala' group. It was considered by some that the very first productions of the Workshop being in the English language was not a healthy sign. There had been provision to present a Sinhala play, but no one had come forward to do one, the excuse being 'the lack of Sinhala one-act plays'. In this way the sense that the 'English' group was 'getting ahead' created a great deal of unpleasantness. This unhealthy situation automatically disappeared when classes reopened following the insurrection of April/May. The numbers were in any case reduced (from 150 to about 50), and the bilingual class was scrapped. This reduction in numbers was a good thing from the point of view of real work being done, because one felt that only the really enthusiastic students stayed on: with the unwieldy numbers, the earlier tension disappeared too.

The programme itself was altered. There were fewer teachers now, and more emphasis was laid on mime and production exercises than on theory. But since the reopening, the somewhat amorphous character of a workshop devoted to the training of directors and actors itself seems unreal, and unrelated to our present sociopolitical context. Since we do not have a professional theatre we cannot produce actors and directors in the manner of the R.A.D.A. or other drama schools in the west, to feed the various professional groups. The aim of the K.K.R.S.S. is to produce an Art Centre group of actors and directors; but such a group cannot involve itself only in the techniques of acting or directing, surely the content of the thing acted and directed must be a vital consideration.

So far we have been working on excerpts from 'accepted' pieces such as Ves Muhunu, Hunuvataye Kathava, Muhudu Puttu, and Rattaran. That's fine, and a 2-hour class under the dynamic direction of Dhamma Jagoda can be exciting, the Stanislavsky approach of Gunasena Galappathy can be absorbing - while they last. But at the end of it all there is a sense of futility and of emptiness, which is all the greater after the insurrection.



THE ART CENTRE THEATRE STUDIO

Where are we going? What is the meaning of all that we are doing? These are vital questions, and unless we in the Workshop are aware of these questions the whole venture, as I see it, is bound to fail. Of course we can say that we are dealing with plays that have a 'universal significance', plays that probe 'the human condition', etc. etc. We can hide behind these impressive, yet oddly ruthless words, and seek refuge from our lack of a social awareness, a social commitment, a social anguish (I do not for a moment deny metaphysical anguish, but the latter has to be informed and penetrated by the social, by the Here and the Now).

For this kind of awareness we must have 'playwrights' (rather unfashionable in avant garde western theatre), and directors and actors with vision, with a sense of purpose other than the egotistic satisfaction of producing an established play well acted. It seems to me that the Workshop is at present futilely turning and turning in one spot, not aware in the least that it should ask the vital questions of 'Whither?' and 'Why?'. Most of us in the Workshop are in our twenties, some of us are University students, and close enough to the recent disturbances in the country; to us it seems that we are engaged in an obsolete and inauthentic exercise. A quotation from Lorca indicates the utter inadequacy of our theatre in the present context:

'If there is a nation that does not help and encourage its dramatic art, it is a dead nation, or a nation that is dying. Likewise, a dramatic art that is not aware of the pulse beat of the nation, the life struggle of the people, and does not depict the real colour of the land and does not depict its soul in tears and laughter is not an authentic art, but mere entertainment. The place that depicts such art is not a theatre, but a shameless place where 'time is killed'.'

We, the young, should create a new kind of theatre in Ceylon, a socially alive theatre (as distinct from propaganda), a radical theatre that is socially alive and artistically experimental. This is the only kind of theatre that is valid for the Third World. We must seek the 'Paradise Now', not the 'Universally Valid for All Time'.

Here I would like to describe the only instance of an authentic act, both socially and artistically, in the Workshop after its recent reopening. A fiery young undergraduate from Vidyalkankara enacted an experience of death.

Situation: A Police Station during the recent upheaval, where he is falsely accused of being an insurgent. We saw a young man being reduced to a writhing worm. The Police Inspector plays with the suspect as a cat does with a mouse, a pistol is held right up to his mouth while he is being questioned. Suddenly a gun shot (from a policeman cleaning his gun in the same room that hits another policeman) puts an end to the episode. Melodramatic? Not to us, who saw it acted with such conviction and authentic terror. The terror was in the reduction of a human being to such a level of degradation. Here the social and the 'universally significant' merged imperceptibly, so that there was no need to label the result. It was an authentic act, a meaningful theatrical experience, however brief.

We must, I think, begin expressing our experience, not necessarily in the form of 'well-made plays', but using exciting new improvised means (for this we must be aware and exposed to the happenings in the world theatre scene, where theatre is moving away from the primacy of the word

THE ART CENTRE THEATRE STUDIO

to a more total conception of an encounter with touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing). Then we can take this non-verbal or minimally verbal (in the sense of being non-intellectual) theatrical experience into the villages, into every part of the country. Professor Sarachandra's words have great insight - 'Theatre is the least intellectual of the arts'. It is only in this way that the theatre of the younger generation could become a committed, socially relevant theatre, possessing a vision beyond that, merely, of Art and Aesthetics.

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FOR VAJIRA, DANCING

Yasmine Gooneratne

Moving in a lit circle of your own pleasure  
quivering precision of hand and arched foot  
melting into surprised, unexpected delight  
as the arrow, finding it, delights the target,

unconscious of our gaze, arrogant in your careless  
spurning of our applause  
streaming to you out of the darkness,  
conscious if at all only of the drums

sounding beside you, building the stair  
up which you sweep, the pedestal  
on which you momentarily pause,  
the arena in which you aim your javelin glances,

you are for us the essence of poetry  
weaving a seamless garment with a housewife's skill  
in which the patient stitches disappear  
and reappear as one, bright, single

sheet of light to clothe a goddess  
or a child: here power and innocence  
float into one, as lifted on the beat  
of drums, poetry dances on bare feet.

Reprinted from HEMISPHERE

(Australia, 1971)



## CEYLON THEATRE

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## OBSEQUIES OF THE LATE ANTONIO POMPIRELLI, BISHOP

Patrick Fernando

Impressive though dead -  
A Siamese fighter richly red,  
Profusely finned and spread  
Completely still in crystal  
Bowl among ornamental  
Weeds and filigreed coral -  
In his cold cathedral.

On the right, with strict propriety  
Monsignori et reverendissimi domini  
Gravely glide; on the left, the laity  
Pass sadly, but betray a worldly  
Interest in ruby, silk and golden mitre  
Of their late right-reverend Siamese fighter.

Quiet eyes of the crucified rest on  
Patterns of geometric perfection:  
Squares of confraternities, children,  
Nuns, the Press, politicians, public men.  
No man ambiguous, unclassified,  
Unlike crowds the day He died.

This simplification makes for clarity.  
In peaceful unicellularity, we  
Know who we are.  
Self-possessed and firm of purpose,  
Varied thousands, simplified, emerge  
A composite undertaker, reliable,  
Touched, yet beautifully practical.  
Whose love of proper conduct supplies  
Discipline love's proud spontaneities  
Never can reach.

From forty pews containing each  
A dozen, susurrous penguin nuns beseech  
Our Saviour from half-past-three to five  
That He, so sinned against, forgive  
Sins, surely not many, of this red  
Resplendent servant He hath willed dead.

At five the Cantor. Great jaw bones  
Champ engine-like as he intones  
The De Profundis. A true artist, he  
Cares only for the chant's integrity.  
Then the great bell rung so rarely  
(Function changed for idle majesty)  
Booms. As the huge concentric hum  
Thins, rise. The end is come.



OBSEQUIES OF THE LATE ANTONIO  
POMPIRELLI, BISHOP: poem

In life, in death consenting prey  
Of ceremonial, you turn our gaze  
Inwards, where whole-hearted formality  
Coolly triumphs over sin and grace.

In our limbs it stirs, purrs  
In our speech, breeds conformity.  
Hands and eyes of even lovers  
Reach for each other as in a play.

Detesting wildness, you confused  
Wildness with spontaneity.  
Warred against nature; the crusade produced  
Bloodless savagery.

Soul sprang at flesh, thought exiled  
Feeling, joy fell to merit.  
Warm, supple finger to give a child  
Dried to benedictory digit.

Dead though you lie, the war goes on.  
Nature flees like a hunted fawn;  
And I, wavering mercenary,  
Unconvinced of your policy,  
Yet moved, for you meant well,  
Can wish for you only a quiet hill,  
Mist for incense, green dove for bell,  
And lush attendance of the elements,  
Lonely, lordly, Siamese fighter,  
Wrathful at reflections in your glazed  
World of springless, waveless water.

Robed at the windows in red and gold,  
The sun enters like a king.  
The best photographers twisting  
As their art demands, for the right  
Angles, with small lightning  
Augment the ebbing candlelight.  
Cantor hurls his thunder:  
Decisive 'Into Paradise'.  
Stone slab in the nave stirs,  
And into the chambered floor  
Of his own house he is lowered, shut and sealed.  
The lid, reversed, resettles to display  
Epitaph of hexametric praise.  
Here shall our sons some day,  
Teased by the Latin, pause.

The obsequies terminate ex-  
actly, as the programme said, at six.  
We correct our watches as we leave.

OBSEQUIES OF THE LATE ANTONIO  
POMPIRELLI, BISHOP: poem

This mathematical, sure-stepped evening,  
Attired neat in plan and purpose,  
Arch simplifier whose touch reduces  
Even silence to ceremonial, stalks us  
Far into the night.  
I dream thickly in baroque -  
Green wold fades to gold, flesh dries  
To veined heraldic stone, quick eyes  
Now firm set as emeralds, cannot move  
Away from a huge prognathous creature,  
Centaur, death's cantor, curvetting nearer,  
Still nearer, and voice just a bell,  
Proves to terror's need most unequal.

I break awake and slowly regather  
Round myself the room's reality;  
Then through greying windows discover  
Familiar roofs, trees, patch of sky,  
And something of my own identity.

The task takes long. I've still not done  
Looking among my neat-laid speech,  
Pruned attitudes and silences  
The rows of potted questions  
Ranged against rows of potted answers,  
To make the garden safe and habitable.

Meanwhile, though fowlers laugh their unbelief,  
This simple faith I've got to keep  
The green dove's lost in the cage  
And cage-trained bird can never make  
His own authentic music, never take  
One note of earnestness.

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A NOTE ON MODERN SINHALA POETRY

Wimal Dissanayake

The modern period in Sinhala poetry dawns with the works of the Colombo poets, like Meemana Prematilaka, P.B. Alwis Perera, Sagarapalan-suriya, Wimalaratna Kumaragama and H.M. Kudaligama (they are so named because Colombo was their centre of operation). Clearly, they made a positive attempt to introduce certain new features into Sinhala poetry, although in the main they did adhere fairly closely to the injunctions of classical poets and literary theorists.

The Colombo poets chiefly interested themselves in Nature, social iniquities and romantic love. They also produced a number of verse-tales. In writing about these subjects they were greatly influenced by such English Romantic poets as Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron and Coleridge; and by some poets of an earlier time such as Goldsmith, and



of a later, such as Tennyson. Although they took a rather lively interest in the society around them, and although they tried to modernise the Sinhala poetic tradition, they fell far short of their objective. Primarily, this is due to two closely related reasons. Firstly their experiences lacked concreteness or even, indeed, human interest, with the honourable exception of Wimalaratna Kumarakama, who tried to recapture the relationship between Man and Nature in the remote villages of the Wannu and succeeded in doing so with the authority and intimacy of lived experience. Very often their writings were vague, undefined and ill-digested. Secondly the language medium selected by the Colombo poets lacked force and precision, and could not express a truly modern sensibility. They discarded the creatively outworn vocabulary sanctioned by time and tradition, but failed to fashion a vigorous idiom to take its place. Indeed, quite unwittingly, they fell victim themselves to a superficially glittering language medium replete with trite poeticalities.

As a reaction to the feeble rhyme and metre poetry of the Colombo poets, the Sinhala Free Verse movement was launched. G.B. Senanayake introduced Free Verse to the Sinhala reader in the forties. He was, however, rather reluctant to call his writings poetry, and described them instead as a form of literature between verse and prose. But it was Siri Gunasinghe and Gunadasa Amarasekara who won critical recognition and a certain measure of popularity for this new art form. Their works, Ma Le Nathi Ata, Bhava Gita, Abinikmana, Uyanaka Hinda Liyu Kavi, aroused much curiosity and a great deal of comment. It was felt in certain quarters that Free Verse was an importation from the west, and that it went fundamentally against the grain of Sinhala poetry.

The Sinhala Free Verse writers made no attempt to conceal the fact that they were largely influenced by such modern European and American poets as Eliot, Pound, Lawrence and Whitman. But they stressed the fact - and with justification - that Sinhala Free Verse emerged not as a deliberate attempt to foist an alien form on the reading public and on practitioners of poetry, but rather in response to a genuine and deeply felt need: the need to revitalise the Sinhala poetic tradition, and make Sinhala poetry an instrument capable of imaginatively exploring contemporary problems and tensions.

The Sinhala Free Verse writers abandoned the set metres which had, up to that time, been deemed indispensable to poetic statement. Much of their writing takes the form of an exploration of a mood, of an atmosphere, of a mode of feeling. At times they have attempted to investigate the plight of man enmeshed in an industrial environment. Generally speaking, Sinhala Free Verse contains only a little of the rhetorical anguish that characterised the compositions of Colombo poets. In their best pieces one observes a mature interest in human experience, a freshness of language and an interplay of striking imagery. Unfortunately, such instances are not as common as could have been wished.

With the mid-sixties the interest in Free Verse began to diminish. The average reader who was used to literary spoon-feeding felt that the writers of Sinhala Free Verse were burdening them too much with poetry that was too baffling, too cerebral. In addition, of course, there was the question of language. Siri Gunasinghe was one of the poets who rejected the current poetic idiom, on the grounds that it was intimately and irretrievably linked with certain stock and shallow experiences. He and others of the same way of thinking sought to effect a drastic change,

which did not quite come off. There are, to be sure, forceful turns of phrase and strikingly original imagery in their writings. But many discerning readers felt that there was an artificiality, an alienness about the language, and also that it was not sufficiently rooted in tradition and cultural memory to strike a spontaneous chord of response in the reader. Further, not everyone who practised the form had a clear conception of it. In the hands of many writers, Free Verse became little more than chopped up prose. Looking back on those years, perhaps we should have adopted Eliot's statement, "No verse is libre for the man who wants to do a good job".

It was with the desire to remedy this situation that Gunadasa Amarasekara, whose name had been once closely linked with the Free Verse movement, began to urge a re-thinking on modern Sinhala poetry. (Strictly speaking, though, Amarasekara cannot be titled a Free Verse writer, for his poetry is not entirely free of metre.) He pointed out that Free Verse lacked the blessing of tradition, in terms of language as well as of form, and attributed to this fact the bewilderment of the average reader. To counteract this situation, he sought to draw on a rich poetic tradition, that of Sinhala folk poetry. He has, to some extent, succeeded in giving his poetry a traditional colouring, and by this means winning back the sympathy of many readers who had been discouraged by Free Verse. But I think that in the process of doing so, he has raised two important problems to which he has not as yet provided adequate answers. Firstly, is the folk idiom expressive enough to communicate the complexities of modern life? Secondly, if the modern poet is to lean so heavily on the form and language of folk-poetry, where does his linguistic creativity lie?

Commenting on the English poetic scene, Dr. F.R. Leavis once said that "without a public, poetry can hardly survive, and the ordinary cultivated reader is ceasing to read poetry at all". This, I am afraid, is equally true of the contemporary situation in Ceylon. We seem to have lost our interest in poetry, and today it is all but a forgotten art.

Various reasons suggest themselves as having brought about this state of affairs: a lack of original talent is one, too sharp a break with the past is another, an undue reverence for modern European and American poetry is a third, an inability to forge a language medium that is flexible enough to express a modern sensibility is a fourth. All, I daresay, have had something to do with it. But there is another factor, not mentioned so far, which we cannot afford to overlook: the failure of Sinhala critics to educate the reading public, and guide its taste towards greater discrimination. If one of the functions of literary critics is to explain and comment upon the poetry of their times, then the modern Sinhala critics have most certainly failed in their duty.

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## THREE POEMS

Lakdhas Wikkramasinha

## FROM THE LIFE OF THE FOLK-POET YSINNO

Ysinno cut the bamboo near Hanikette,  
And from those wattles made his hut  
And had nothing to cover it with, nothing  
Like a hundred and sixty  
Bales of straw.

So he made his way to the Walauwa at Iddamalgoda  
And to the Menike said how poor he was,  
And how from his twenties he had made those lines of song  
Swearing before her all his fealties.  
So she said, Wait for the yala  
Harvest and take the straw.

Ysinno said, O the rains are coming near,  
My woman fretting, her kid will get all wet

Then the kind Menike said, O then  
You take what straw you need from the behind shed.  
And Ysinno being a folk-poet, and his lines being not all dead,  
The benison of the Menike of Iddamalgoda  
Lives even today.

## IF THE MONSOON IS A TIGER

If the monsoon is a tiger,  
Its stripes fall tonight;

The lightning flashes like the eyes  
Of the red-ant clouds, and

In the hut, we lie awake  
By fire. Kali never comes.

On a plantain leaf our passion lies,  
And all the trees are gnashed,

Burnt, surrounding us.  
But Kali never comes.

## THE POET

He is the one that, tossing a bomb into  
The crowd, takes notes;  
The one who, from an unseen distance  
Levels on the tripod that black rifle  
With sights that see as far as his soul

Trains and levels, manoeuvres for a clear sight  
Of the speaker on the platform;  
Waits, watching the clock, for the onset of a car  
In the left corner of its back seat  
Carrying the enemy.

The poet is the one who is always preparing  
The ambush, the one who  
Covers with layers of  
Earth and grass and worn weed,  
The spiked pit,  
And watches from the level of weeds ahead;

The poet is the bomb in the city,  
Unable to bear the circle of the  
Seconds in his heart,  
Waiting to burst.

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THE BIRD WITH THE CLIPPED WINGS

A short story by Indranee de Silva

Business was slack during the siesta hours. Nobody stepped out, except on the most urgent of errands, at the heat of the day when even a wary foot might come close to stepping on a pyramid of venom coiled in the shade or slithering soundlessly in search of water. Hemapala meticulously set in order the disarray of the morning's brisk business. Glancing around the large single-roomed, brick-walled structure, he recalled the start of the kadē at Kalladi several years earlier. A mere sixteen year old, out of a village school in the densely populated Southern coastal belt, he had been over-awed by the arid desolation of the Western seaboard, bordered dramatically by scarcely cleared, teeming jungle. The six-by-six thatched mud shelter had just been completed and stocked with scanty provisions purchased by his father en route. Conspicuous was the shining new aluminium kerosene boiler, bubbling with tea on tap.

It was the lure of prosperity that had drawn his father to invest



meagre savings in opening a shop here, after his mother's death. The jungle was being humbled and in its stead would rise even more over-aweing concrete giants - tall barrel silos to hold streams of fine, powdery cement, heat exchanger towers, packing plants, clinker stores, and the magnificent fire-breathing shell of the kiln itself.

Six years! The promise of prosperity had, in a measure, been fulfilled. Strings of shining kitchen utensils, a variety of exotic tinned foods, and a medley of rainbow-hued toilet paper rolls, jostling with the more mundane chillies, coriander and other household requirements, testified to this. It was also reflected in the knot of children playing under the giant arms of the Mara tree, whose antics now caught Hemapala's eye. His step-brothers and sisters were among them, one for every year of his father's five year old second marriage. Very endearing they were, and he, an only child, doted on them.

Surely the group was more animated and vociferous than was usual for this time of day? For even the children's play dwindled to idle backchat under the sun's sapping rays. He stepped out into the yard, and was almost upon the huddle before he saw that the centre of interest was a parrot. The bird was encircled completely, and though precariously poised on one leg, the backward flung head and curved snapping beak held more than a hint of hauteur. But beneath the bright, leaf-green plumage, its breast heaved and trembled in panic as the children stood ready with more stones.

"What are you doing?" Hemapala's sharp query broke the concentration of eye and arm alert to aim.

"Aiya, see what we have found in the jungle!"

"We are not hurting him."

"We are just trying to make him move."

"He can't fly, Aiya, his wings have been clipped."

It did not need the babble of voices to tell him what the game had been. Well directed stones had left the bird unhurt, but on the edge of exhaustion with the effort and tension of avoiding them. His wings had indeed been clipped! With one sure motion, Hemapala leant forward and gathered it up, to be rewarded by a glimpse of a small, pink tongue, and blood spurting out of his finger. The babble of voices grew louder, but he just shook his head, transferred the bird gently to his other hand and sucked his finger.

"Why can't we play with him?"

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Are you going to set him free?"

"He is full-grown, wild and very frightened because his wings have only just been clipped. I will look after him and feed him till he becomes accustomed to human beings. Then you can play with him - but not as you did today." Crooning "Peththo, peththo," in a soft undertone, he carried the bird away.

His step-mother's bright, comely face was drawn with crying. His own heart was sore. What had started out as a typical attack of malaria had developed, last night, into spasms of vomiting blood. His naturally

sturdy father lay on the mat with skin as blanched and brittle as its own texture, and withdrawn, uncomprehending eyes. At last driven to seek medical help, he found his father hospitalised and the doctors serious and uncommunicative.

What to do? What would he have to do? Uncertainty, sorrow and restlessness drew him out into the luminous night. A multitude of deep-voiced frogs sang in unmelodious baritone, and myriads of midges brushed his eyelashes, before he stepped away from the lamplight.

The way had seemed so clear at last. At forty-five his father was young, the kade thriving and his own blood astir. He did not want to help in a boutique all his life - however lucrative it turned out to be. He had, in the last years, seen too many men, boys of his own age, turning from cultivators, wanderers, to skilled operators of intricate machinery. The metamorphosis had taken place before his own eyes, and he yearned to enter their world of gleaming tools and precise movement, to feel the power of being able to control monsters, to share the comradeship of sweat and time clocks and pay-day. At last an opportunity had come his way! A regular tea-drinking customer of his was a driver of one of the hundreds of lorries that queued up through the long, hot afternoon and short, cool nights to purchase cement in the early morning. He had graduated to his position after starting off as a house-boy in the home of the owner. Hemapala had confided in him, and had his assurance that he would be alert for a similar opportunity. That had been six months before and last week the driver had said that the current house-boy had been made a watcher in the firm. He had promised to speak to his employer about Hemapala.

So much, so close - but now, what? Would his father be ill long? He knew his stepmother could not manage the boutique and the children. There was nobody else to be trusted. Would the opportunity come again? Two roads, but one desire.

The roar of the lorry along the jungle road fragmented the fragile silence. His friend swung out.

"No time for tea now. I have to take my place in the queue. I came to tell you to be ready to leave with me tomorrow morning. The master says he will speak with you, and if he is satisfied, you will get the job." Swinging back, he flung gears into position and the humming engine, responding to the pressure of his urgent foot, bore him away.

But the night did not return to silence. That was no mechanical roar rising piercing and desolate, but the single call of human anguish. He rushed through the boutique into the small mud and thatch family room behind. His stepmother's hair flowed, her hands and mouth worked in soundless bereavement. Two neighbours, just returned from the hospital, stood by. The elder children watched, big-eyed and docile. More neighbours slowly walked in, and the women set in motion the machinery of mourning.

Hemapala was still passive with shock, when someone, in a clumsy effort at consolation, said "So, you are a mudalali now!"

The tears could no more be withheld: the thoughts of freedom vanished, irrecoverable. Eight pairs of eyes looked solemnly at the unaccustomed sight of an elder brother weeping. Then the middle-child crept slowly forward, and pushed a small fist into his hand.



THE BIRD WITH THE CLIPPED  
WINGS: short story

A FABLE

"Aiya, don't cry. We will find you another."

Bewildered, Hemapala checked his tears and asked, "Another what, Chuti Nangi?"

"Another peththa."

Mistaking perplexity for doubt, she repeated reassuringly, "We will get you another peththa, aiya. Your peththa's wings grew and he flew away today, but we will get you another."

\*\*\*\*\*

A FABLE

Basil Mendis

There once lived a noble child, noble not only by birth but also in spirit. This child was playing one day in his father's ample garden when he noticed some poor children standing at the gate. As he went nearer he saw that the poor children were crying. He asked them why they were crying, and they replied that they wanted the roses which grew in the garden. The child promised them each a rose, and began to weep bitterly when his father's gardener prevented him from giving the roses away.

Presently his father came by and asked him why he was crying. On hearing the cause the father said to his son, "Give away as many roses as you wish, my son. Call all the children in the village, and give them each a rose." This made the child very happy, and he joyfully began to pluck the roses.

The number of children at the gate began to grow, for the news had spread that every child would get a rose. Soon all the children of the village gathered at the gate. Our noble child with joy in his heart gave each one a rose. The children were so many that when he had finished, there was not a single rose left in his father's garden. But this made him all the more happy. He was now about to turn away to his home when he noticed that one more child had come to the gate. He went back to the gate, and saw that the last child was lame. That was why it had come so late, after all the others. It now waited with hand outstretched, pleading for a rose.

There were no more roses to give, so the child sat down and wept bitterly. His father came by again, and once more asked him the reason for his weeping. The child replied, "There is no rose to give the lame boy." "Do not weep, my son," said his father. "You have given away many roses, and have made many children happy, so do not cry." But the child did not understand. "This one is not happy," he said, pointing to the lame child at the gate, and he wept as bitterly as before.

The next day the child gave away the apples in the garden, and again the lame boy was late, and again the noble child wept. And though the child knew that every day the lame boy would be late, he continued to give away the pears, melons and all the flowers and fruit that his father's garden abounded in, and every day he would weep for the lame boy who was late.

\*\*\*\*\*

FATHERS

Peter Scharen

I

I am one who soaked the soil of no country  
with his blood:  
Rib that's marked with the fallacy of emigration;  
Rib that bears the shining emptiness of exile.  
Anchorage, harbours, the plot familiar unto invisibility,  
I have nothing to say to you.

Caged in ribs of paper  
Caged in ribs of paper.  
Long generations ago, among untongued dialects,  
In the year locked in four untasted seasons,  
The birth of my blood  
Poured down such crying-out recesses.

I stand before those broad salt-packed boundaries  
That lifted swelling sail, the coral-dark lanes  
At the foot of that imperial quest, swaddling seas,  
(Green sea, whose light is stuck under my veins -  
In the consuming vision, the stern shaping of verse,  
This empty sea  
Grates upon the naked act,  
I let the silence scallop  
The running of the lines, the heedless children:  
Follow where the lines end,  
It is where they cut beneath the flesh.)

Bringing bread and canon, chain, pike and halberd,  
Came my stately fathers, gowned and booted,  
Zealous but unfanatical, with book and fortress  
Of squared stone, coat of arms on the great door,  
Warm as home, sweating greed, my fathers,  
Whom I do not know

whom I do not wish to know but that they  
Are dust, their meaty voices carrying back



FATHERS: poem

Along the coral circuit,  
 Slow in the after-head of a culture's height  
 That brought its weighty  
 Diligence to wald another people's narrow backs  
 To the trade: cinnamon, elephants ...

The trade of settling burgher and protestant  
 In a barbarous heat,  
 From a barbed cold.  
 Dust of my fathers  
 Back in the sharded cold.

The blood of this people  
 Does not beat  
 Where meaning is a hair tight-drawn,  
 Binding the sleep of a name:  
 Here is dark-gold blood that remembers  
 No muddied snow or narrow sea,  
 That beats against the imported name  
 As against a stone.

So I am  
 Riven, split asunder as the narrow backs  
 Under the hulking rock of regulation.  
 No soil has drunk the blood of my love:  
 I that have no soil,  
 I have dust,  
 I make my beginnings with fingers that clench  
 The dust, forcing it out of  
 The traction of the wind, the blind suck of a hollow  
 Edged with blood ....

\*\*\*\*\*  
 \* OUT IN 1972: \*  
 \* The Lizard's Cry and Other Poems \*  
 \* by Yasmine Gooneratne \*  
 \* The Sithumina Press, Kandy: In the bookshops in July \*  
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THE CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE  
 AND LANGUAGE STUDIES, JAMAICA 1971

James Goonewardene

The literature of the Commonwealth, that is the literature written in English in those countries that were once colonies of Britain, now sovereign and independent members of what is commonly known as the Commonwealth of Nations, has excited the interest of scholars in Universities scattered over a wide area of the globe for over a decade now. The first Conference to discuss the phenomenon was held in Leeds, around 1961 or 1963. Since then interest in the subject has spread to countries as distant from and as unconnected with the Commonwealth proper as America and Denmark and Belgium. The most recent gathering of writers, scholars and students to discuss Commonwealth Literature was held at the University of the West Indies, in Kingston, Jamaica.

It seemed appropriate that such a Conference should be held there, in the West Indies, from where a considerable body of distinguished writing in English has come. The wide, sprawling grounds of the University was the backdrop to perhaps one of the most exciting Conferences ever held in Kingston. The campus was once part of one of the largest sugar plantations in Jamaica that, during the period of Spanish and British rule, was built by the labour and sweat of the wretched slaves still being herded across in tramp ships along the dreaded 'Middle Passage'. The campus and the land adjoining it made up the vast sugar plantations then known as Mona. The delegates - a hundred odd in number - met each day at the Creative Arts Centre, an attractive building dominated by a solitary sculpture of a Negro slave, situated in a corner of the extensive campus. They slept at night in the residential halls, and dined in the University dining hall along with the University students, who were drawn from all parts of the scattered islands. The theme of the Conference - "The Literature and Society of the West Indies" - could not help but be appropriate, in such an environment. This theme however, as soon became clear, held hidden and obscure tensions and exploded in the most unexpected fashion. I do not know whether the Creative Arts Centre was ordinarily accustomed to the sort of cross-fire and verbal pyrotechnics we witnessed but I got the feeling that what took place then was an entirely new experience, even for the West Indies. There was an extraordinary depth of experience from which the protagonists ranged in the different wings of the hall, and especially the West Indians coming as they did from the different islands of the Caribbean, spoke of their search for a meaningful literature and life. There was present in their hunger for the creative thing a sincerity that I had not heard before, certainly not in Ceylon where interest in the arts is as lukewarm as an interest in the other world.

Perhaps part of the explanation of the high feeling that was generated at the Conference was the diversity of literary talent, temperament and character gathered in Mona. Another reason for the exciting display of fluent argument and counter argument was, perhaps, the presence of so many more practising writers than were present at the Brisbane Conference in Australia in 1968. Having been at the Brisbane Conference, I was unwittingly led to make comparisons between the two gatherings. Writers generally being a more committed breed, more committed to their particular visions of life than scholars and academics generally are, we were treated to a greater vehemence and passion in the expression of points of view than we had been at Brisbane.



THE ACLALS CONFERENCE, JAMAICA 1971

A writer upon whose work much of the attention of the Conference was focused was V.S. Naipaul, whose books - especially A House for Mr. Biswas, The Middle Passage, and Area of Darkness - had aroused a great deal of controversy in recent years; George Lamming, the Negro expatriate novelist (author of The Castle of My Skin) from Barbados, was another. The absence of Wilson Harris from this Conference was, I thought, a pity; his work was much discussed at the Brisbane Conference, and he is considered one of the most original, though difficult, writers to emerge from the West Indies. It is not possible to mention by name the others attending the Conference, but I would consider it a serious omission were I to forget to mention the poet, Edward Brathwaite, whose personality dominated the Conference; a historical and critical discussion by him began the proceedings of the Conference, and a reading from his long poem, Rights of Passage, by University students, was one of the sensitively chosen evening programmes by which the organisers of the Conference at once relieved the tightly packed morning sessions of seminars and discussions and gave literary and academic theory a chance to compare itself with actual creative work. And I cannot forget the quiet mannered Raja Rao, the Indian novelist, who might easily have been mistaken for a rather good-looking holy man who had come to salvage a lost tribe.

Set against the Jamaican hills - these incidentally begin almost on the fringe of the sea shore, sometimes - the Conference seemed to register and echo another kind of tension, a political tension that, looking at the sleepy islands, one would hardly have suspected as being present. But if one knows the history of the Caribbean, and the suffering with which it was created, this should not after all have been a matter for surprise.

The opening session of the Conference brought about a great burst of excitement and interest. Edward Brathwaite, introducing the morning's main theme, 'The Function of the Writer', touched on what appeared to be the most sensitive area in the West Indian psyche - the search for a national identity, especially in its literature. If I may quote from a private communication from Brathwaite to me, to illustrate one of the more important issues in the West Indian literary conflict that seemed to rise from this search: "The plea therefore, is not to write exclusively in dialect", says Brathwaite, "that would be a falsification of life as we live it - but for a recognition of the dialect. That battle, as a matter of fact, has already been won in our literature. Our novelists went straight to it, so did our playwrights though less successfully. Poetry resisted until Rights of Passage. But the critics are still, by and large, against dialect."

The presence of Naipaul, whom Dr. Kenneth Ramchand described as "one of the most technically assured and disturbing observers of West Indian social realities" seemed to be another source of irritation to a few of the more militant of the back-to-Africa protagonists. The main cause of the irritation was, it appeared, Naipaul's refusal to identify himself with the Neo African movement in literature, or, as Dr. Ramchand puts it, "the attempt to see West Indian literature and West Indian culture as part of African literature and culture".

This became more or less a recurring theme at the Conference - this attempt to discover some 'mode of New World Negro cultural expression based on an African inheritance'. Towards the end, however, the thinking

THE ACLALS CONFERENCE, JAMAICA 1971

of the Conference steadied about the point of view summed up in a comment Dr. Ramchand made when referring to the situation of the protagonist in Edward Brathwaite's poem Masks. "Masks," says Dr. Ramchand, "stands as the most impressive and complete work yet produced in this literature of the black revenant who finds in Africa something less than a real homecoming, but something from which both his life and his art can feed and grow. But ultimately he must abandon it and return to the islands which are his own real, and now sufficient world."

The preoccupation with the West Indian problem at the Conference to the exclusion of the wider spectrum of Commonwealth literature was, I thought, its chief short-coming. Delegates who came from other parts of the Commonwealth thought that their problems deserved even a passing reference. In this respect the Brisbane Conference was more successful, having covered a much wider area of Commonwealth Literature than the West Indies Conference did. And yet, if one put oneself in the skin of a West Indian who had been despoiled of his heritage felt himself denied a history, one would not be so quick to condemn.

Before concluding I must mention Professor Joseph Jones of Texas University, who, in his self-effacing way, was on a private but important mission. His mission was that of a crusader, if I might quote his own words. He spoke of his conviction "that the world's people are not totally different from one another, but on the contrary, quite similar underneath. The external differentiae sustain me in my efforts to promote a wider acceptance of writers in English, as well as an approach to English as the most eligible candidate for a functional world language."

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TWELVE POEMS TO JUSTIN DARANIYAGALA, 1903 - 1967

Edited by Lakdasa Wikkramasinha

One hundred copies printed, November 1971.

All inquiries should be made to the Editor,  
28 Mulgampola Road  
Kandy



## PEOPLE, PLACES

poems by Rienzi Crusz, D.M. de  
Silva, Khalida Lebbe, Kris Rezel,  
Anne Ranasinghe, Basil Fernando  
Yasmine Gooneratne

## REMAINS OF AN ORIENTAL POET WRITING IN CANADA

Rienzi Crusz

about the butterfly  
that flapped  
amber  
in the cerebral land:

how winter  
was made equal  
to summer,  
and the skin glowed  
like an oiled Brahmin  
and bangles grew  
on naked trees.

And summer  
blew orioles,  
salad of mango,  
and the bird of Paradise  
draped its wings  
on the concrete land.

They found  
saffron wings  
raw  
on a smooth stone,

the skull,  
separate, still green  
in the dark wound of a tree,

a thigh,  
bronze, warm  
with the maul  
of thorns,

and they found  
the sun dead  
under the snow.

Reprinted from Quarry (Queen's  
University, Canada, 1971)

ON THE BEACH: poem

## ON THE BEACH

Anne Ranasinghe

Neither the crash  
Of the morning waves  
Nor the sunlit singing of wind  
Can drown  
His yelps  
Three boys, one puppy  
A rope -  
Torture on the beach.

His agony rips  
Dark holes in your eyes,  
And helpless anger  
Twists in your hand  
As the rope nooses tighter  
The thin stick beats harder -  
Then they throw sand.

The sand fills his eyes  
The sand fills his nose  
The sand fills his ears

And though your tears  
Taste salt in my mouth  
The alien years  
Have rotted my tongue  
Into immobility

And people swim  
In the sunlit sea  
It's an ordinary day

They cry: let's play  
At burying him

And then  
They bury him.



PRETTY PEOPLE: poemOUR KIND: poem

## PRETTY PEOPLE

Kris Rezel

Metals - Brass, Copper, Gold  
 They make people with these,  
 Pretty people  
 And they dress them in dead ideas.

Pretty people got a reason for everything  
 They must have  
 The world stretches  
 Out from a point  
 Themselves.

They were eating one day,  
 Food - dainty plastic peaches  
 With glittering silver hands  
 And a lady went into the toilet  
 To powder her nose.

## OUR KIND

Khalida Lebbe

A knock on the door  
 Inside  
 Confusion  
 Soft patter of feminine feet  
 Veiled heads whisper together  
 Gently  
 A curtain moves  
 Imperceptibly  
 Then  
 Jubilation  
 Why it's our cousin  
 Ahamed  
 Girls, come here  
 Open the door  
 It's one of our kind.

MORNING AT THE OFFICE: poem

## MORNING AT THE OFFICE

Yasmine Gooneratne

Somewhere along a corridor of files  
 six floors up above a seething city  
 a bell rings  
 a voice replies

What is this I say can't get a call  
 you fellows talking talking all  
 the time on this phone you're telling me all  
 this is Government business Ha ha ha  
 Look here Head Office rang up complaints being made  
 about those missing items Then some foreigners it seems  
 paid  
 a visit here (our chaps also) and they have said  
 we should do something about the lava-  
 tory too Trouble is I say that Silva is  
 a soft chap never moves from his chair His  
 people can't be controlled naturally This  
 is your problem Melvin not ours  
 I think you better advise the chap Just tell  
 Head Office rang up Tell they'll give us hell  
 if things don't improve Bad for us no Mel-  
 vin all this talk What? Can you hear  
 me I say Another thing just  
 now I heard them say your section must  
 shift into Grandpass I can fix it yes  
 but you must also ha ha ha remember  
 us Good good good Glad to help a friend  
 Goodlooker your Boss has got himself Congratulations  
 boy I'd like to give her some dictation myself Send  
 her along some time So how's the  
 wife and kids Regarding  
 the other matter No need to tell I told I say King  
 Kong on line son I'll be hanging  
 up now Cheer-o cheer-o Yes sir Morning sir  
 All the mail in order sir Unlock  
 the files Watch the clock  
 Grease a palm Pass the buck  
 Our responsibility stops here

(From 'The Petition', part four of  
The Lizard's Cry, to be published  
 in 1972)



LATE CALLER

D.M. de Silva

Stranger to me  
Than any stranger, you  
Darkening my doors in the twilight.  
How do you think I should come with you?

It is so long ago.  
Along the avenue of lonely evenings  
The wind was desolate, sobbing in the ancient  
fan-palms.  
The feet shuffled dead leaves. In the dusk  
Alleys the urchins pelted stones  
The starving mongrels yelped. But still  
In the pleasant morning in the country  
There were children playing in the sunshine,  
The young girls going down the hill for water.  
How fragrant the little flowers were, white in the  
light green shadow!

What is it that you want?  
My feet are sore, I cannot come with you.  
My hands are empty as yours are, I cannot give you  
Anything back you have lost. Forever  
In the circling of bewildered spirits  
Wailing at the junction where three roads meet  
It is lost also to me.

And look, it darkens to rain.  
Come in.  
It is late now to break bread, and late  
For absolution. Only, in this house  
There is no memory, there is no despair;  
There is sleep sometimes and quiet.  
Bone-wearied beggar, brother if you will,  
Come into my house and sleep.  
I would give my loved one sleep. Lie down and sleep  
Till a black wind wake you.

AN ENCOUNTER

Basil Fernando

I shook hands with myself  
was received in sheer delight.

We viewed the world together  
agreed I was right.

I looked in and me looked out,  
the world was full of light.

DAY

A short story by Kris Rezel

Head still groggy - booze. Must stop it. If I drink I die; if I don't drink I die; so why not drink and die. Gent who kept telling me that became worm food a long time ago. Destructive fellow. The coroner said he did not see any liver, the heart was twice the size of an enlarged heart - diabetes, high blood pressure, the whole works. Fool: didn't he know he must return them in perfect working order to the dust? One good thing about a hangover it helps you to concentrate. It doesn't matter if you're staring at a pin and a million mosquitoes are stinging you, you're still staring at a pin. Fire: cigarette crackles into life. Another thing I must stop if I don't want my lungs in a mess. They should have made our livers and lungs and kidneys outside instead of inside. If we saw our lungs or livers disintegrating probably we will give up anything to protect them. If smoking wasted your fingers away nobody would smoke. That's because we can see them - cigarette over, ends up on the floor as ash. Logic - everything that has a beginning must have an end. The day will end the year will end the world will end. But what happens to the ash? Why don't we count our age in days instead of years.  $365 \times 24$  equals 8760 plus another 150 days and today will make 8911 multiply that by 3. No that will be too much. By  $2\frac{1}{2}$ .  $891 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  equals 22277. Twenty two thousand two hundred and seventy seven days from the date of my birth and I'll be pushing up daisies. ✓

7.30. That ..... clock rules us. Work begins at 8 ends at 4. A small thing worn on the wrist dictates our life and everyone big or small obeys. People big and small running round the face of the dial chased around by the second hand. Cowards - but I must wash, shave, dress neatly and run. Smile - morning Mr. Perera, How are you Mr. Perera. Nice day Mr. Perera. Glad to have met you Mr. Perera and all the time I want to kick a trash can and have a good fight. People are so civilised they don't fight anymore. A man will knife you because he's so inhibited he doesn't understand one must have a good fight once in a way. Smile - Morning Miss Perera. Nice day Miss Perera. How are you Miss Perera. Glad to have met you Miss Perera and all the time I want to make love to her. They'd put me behind bars if I did.

"Morning, late again." - my boss.

"Yes" I throw back at him. That's going to spoil my day and the first mistake my peon makes I'll rub the poor fellow's face in the dust and he'll go home and probably hit his wife and his wife will give her children hell. And the children? Their day will come.

Poor kid - my girl friend. She's so cosmeticised she doesn't know who she really is. Yesterday she told me she loved me. I thought that was silly and I wanted to laugh or I wanted to get angry. A secondrate actress like Brigitte Bardot says it more convincingly. She says she loves me and I've heard her say she loves cars, dresses, lipstick, dances, ice cream, poor little plastic thing she'll have to find someone with values as similar as hers. (Little tin box with one button rattling in it. Very original saying, courtesy Mrs. Gomez.) By the way who am I to pass judgment on other peoples' values. Kick her out if you don't like her, no, but I must conform. Poor kid maybe she'll kick me out one of these days. Pretty smart of me banging out my brains early in the morning. I've got the Author kink. Kris Rezel - Author. Sounds good maybe it'll last just as long as the rugger kink and the hunting kink and the painting kink and sculpture kink and all the other kinks. A marble slab will last just as long as a well written book.

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## A TROUBLED SUMMER

poems by Suvimalee Gunaratna, Anne  
Ranasinghe, Lakshmie de Silva, Maureen  
Seneviratne and Gamini Seneviratne

VESAK 1971

Suvimalee Gunaratna

There were  
no paper lanterns in the streets  
or huge pandals with painted scenes  
from Buddha's life;  
No sense-seekers in seething strife  
illusion bound  
whirling round  
electric jets.

Instead  
in each homestead  
oil lamps were lit  
and flags unfurled  
this time with mindfulness.

Did it take  
spouting blood  
and tongues in guns  
to strafe our minds awake?

SINHALA NEW YEAR 1971

Anne Ranasinghe

Our servant leaving here  
For his ancestral village  
There to celebrate  
The Sinhala New Year

Knelt down before my seat  
And offered me betel  
Touching with his forehead  
The ground at my feet.

How is it that he could not hear  
The echo of the rifle  
The voice of the soldier cry:  
Halt, who goes there

As he knelt on the mat of bast  
Worshipping with betel -  
Holding in his joined hands  
An age that has passed.

Reprinted from Poems (1971)

TANGALLA, 9TH APRIL 1971

Lakshmie de Silva

That too was real; the evening suns  
Dripped like slow honey through the filtering leaves  
Gilding the dried grass cropped by the pied goats  
Foam lit blue sea, cloud lit blue sky; and peace  
Dawned with clear morning, loitered by our eaves.  
Flocks of shrill parrots dangled upside down  
Nibbling the fat thorn-pods; the Kohas lay  
Fanned on the sunwarmed hill with songless throats.  
Mongooses slid low shadows as they passed  
Stars lit the sky, as fireflies lit the grass  
That too was real as this night we lie  
Silently, listening to the crash of guns.

BLOOD GUILT

Maureen Seneviratne

There is blood on my hands,  
The indelible stain  
On my heart.  
But I did not slaughter innocents;  
My finger did not pull the trigger of the gun.  
I have only waited idly  
Watching the sun.

The blood streams from my hands,  
The loathsome, sticky flow  
Hot in my heart.  
But I have not spewed out horror  
From the muzzle of a gun.  
I have merely waited  
Watching the sun.



## SONG FOR THE NEW ERA (1963)

Gamini Seneviratne

Laboured into a vacuum  
 you are my brothers,  
 because you have no hope  
 have only dignity and a struggle  
 and self-respect seems a vanity.

Boys without words, no words to say, no ears,  
 when your bafflement needs  
 a listen,  
 tell your anger on the fingers of these days -  
 Hour by hour, day by day  
 with noting of slim gestures the times slip by  
 with never a challenge, neither friend nor foe  
 in the no-man's land of the nothing done;  
 and we're weighed into acceptance.

Time for loving comes,  
 time for the making of families -  
 How could we draw a long-term loan  
 on the distress of these days? - youth passes,  
 we settle into folly with a bed-side book,  
 epistles of the forgetful.

Let the guards awaken  
 let us make the music of alarms -  
 Though each man must for himself spit  
 and clean his slate.

## REQUIEM

Maureen Seneviratne

They were in the midst of life:  
 It was not in the night the thief came,  
 Not stealthily either; creeping slowly, silently  
 Through the dim, dark, dreadful small hours -  
 But, bold in the sunshine, the thief came -  
 In their high, brilliant noon-time -  
 Swift and sudden the thief came -  
 And they loved life well, those two.  
 In their full, rich ripeness he took them;  
 Put out the dancing, brown-gold lights,  
 And stopped the bubble and the tinkle of their laughter  
 In one swift, single shuddering breath.

In the red-dark we remember them.  
 We did not have enough of them -  
 To forget.

## A WELCOME SIGN

New Ceylon Writing 1970. Ed. by Y. Gooneratne and M. Pieris. Kandy.

It is a welcome sign that university dons of the present generation should not only engage in creative writing in English but also provide encouragement, under difficult conditions, for promising writers in Ceylon to see their work published. Dons of an earlier generation did not, as far as I know, directly engage in editing the creative efforts of young hopefuls.

Another change for the better is a sense of realism on the part of the editors, who have kept costs low by producing a neat cyclostyled magazine. Rather than print a plush magazine which will die for want of money after a few issues, it is better to operate like this on a tight budget.

There is ample variety in New Ceylon Writing 1970, short stories, poetry (including translations from Sinhalese), essays, book reviews and even a short play. Most of the contributions are intelligent and serious minded, even if some of the writers included have still to win and keep their audience. In bringing together a variety of writers and in directing a critical eye at the past record, the editors have begun to provide an invaluable service in keeping the lines clear and the heart hopeful for the time when these writers of the present generation can publish their own work and win themselves an audience here and abroad.

D.F., in the Ceylon Daily News

## QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE

Poems. By Anne Ranasinghe. Lake House Investments Ltd., Colombo. Rs. 4.75.

'We are

What our heritage has made us

Our unextinguished past

Burns in blood and flesh and bones' (Arrival and Departure)

Her own words best express the quality of vividly felt, frequently searing experience which fills Anne Ranasinghe's work. An 'unextinguished past' burns in many of these poems, and the reader is not surprised to discover that it influences her reactions and responses to almost every new experience. Anne Ranasinghe was born in Germany, and at thirteen she fled to England, escaping Hitler's Jewish pogrom; the rest of her family, her mother included, died in the Nazi extermination camps. When one has read Holocaust 1944 (dedicated to her mother), Auschwitz from Colombo (in which the old wound is reopened by a jab 'Half a world away and twentyfive years later') and Images of Germany 1933 - 1939 one can see why this burning 'in blood and flesh and bones' of an 'unextinguished past' is inevitable.

The forty one poems in the book record a variety of experiences that extend from childhood to the present day. Moments of life are caught and held or analysed - moments of happiness, sorrow, realization (bitter, sweet, or both as in I Had Expected Tears), moments also of calm, sardonic comment or of sentimental indulgence, moments of fear, uncertainty and even of terror.

For me, it is this quality of dread, a tension created by an inability to enjoy complacently the joys of the present, that is the dominant theme of Anne Ranasinghe's work. It is present in many poems, in Judgment,



in Dry Season, in Last Night I Dreamt, and in Fear Grows Like a Cactus; but most of all it pervades At What Dark Point, a chilling poem (stimulated by a past horror and by present dread, one precise and the other terribly vague) that makes a positively hair-raising experience out of a seemingly innocuous incident. The silent figure of a man sitting under a blossoming frangipani twisting jute fibre into a rope becomes a symbol of evil past and evil that is to be -

And seeing him sit day after day  
I sense the charred-wood smell again.

It is this 'cold-winter-taste of charred-wood-midnight-fear' that forces itself into the poet's consciousness, each time some new experience rouses old associations. The persistent uncertainty is always there, and so is terror, but no hysteria. The resilience of her spirit, of a basically healthy and mature mind, of a disciplined adult sensibility, is expressed through many poems that make more of what life has to offer. Contentment, wonder, compassion (In Our Lane), indulgence, love, a sardonic but sad comment (Secretariat) and simple joy are all part of the rich textured fabric of her experience.

I cannot pretend I like all the poems in the book. Some - like Colombo, with its 'opalescence' of sky and sea - seem to me unworthy of the writer, while one or two like Renuka, are undistinguished by anything more than a sincerity of emotion. The total impression, however, is of a strong, adult mind with a finely developed sensibility playing upon experience; and a mature writer's ability to use language that is at once richly suggestive and disciplined in use. I would say that her best work passes my test for good poetry - to read it is to enrich one's own experience.

Claudette Taylor, in the Ceylon Observer

#### A RARE DISTINCTION

Word Bird Motif. 51 Poems. By Yasmine Gooneratne. Printed at the Sithumina Press, Kandy. Rs. 12.00.

Writing verse being an uncommon pursuit, the rarity itself lends the writer some distinction. In the case of a Ceylonese writing English verse this may not be so. The knowledge that his readership is dwindling may undermine his zest; he may even fear being taken for a social freak, incurably alien, and even unauthentic, and feel a peculiar illegitimacy threatening his work. On the other hand, he runs the worse risk of being regarded among loyalists as a hero fighting the losing battle for 'the good and the beautiful'. In either event his writing itself takes only a poor second place. But before they feel martyred, those who write in English might first examine the quality of their own work to make sure that most of the trouble does not lie right there.

This observation is made to indicate the first benefit of Word Bird Motif. Better than any argument or discourse, these poems will assist those who write in English to re-examine any socio-cultural dilemmas of theirs in relation to their literary work, to get a clearer understanding of the relationship of poetry to society in our context, and to improve their craft. After reading these poems those who still write in English and the many who have stopped doing so can no longer cry 'Our days are

gone' - a poor excuse, in any case. Enjoying this poetry, and noticing its virtues and weaknesses, they will realise that a poet's relationship to his society is a personal thing, subtle and always growing and never a literary pose; also that there are no fixed formulas to which it must conform. Word Bird Motif will have a corrective and liberating influence on creative writing in Ceylon.

I had almost said that this poetry reconciles the alleged incompatibles: Ceylonese experience and English Verse, but stop short lest this remark rouse up that weary and profitless war over cultural integrity, language and experience, form and content and similar issues, thereby shifting attention from the poetry itself. Word Bird Motif is, on the whole, too good to be liked merely because it contains many Ceylonese themes, eastern allusions and some translations from Sinhala originals. The poetry pitches its claim higher. Neither self-consciously nor dutifully local (to have been either would have been merely a literary pose), it makes no concessions to stock prejudices and oversimplified social values. In Lake City, for instance, the lines

And though the frangipani swings its censers in the tropic  
night  
The sores of children drown the sense in stronger odours,  
blind the sight

are more than a simple, realistic contrast: the first line directs overtones of irony against a certain local romanticism, and against the literary tastes associated with it.

In an effortless manner, achieved mostly through a smooth and swift diction, the verse sets about its own poetic task. In the lines

Not that I ever saw a prairie fire  
lick up the grass, nor lit a funeral pyre  
but once I had to watch a woman burning,  
her beauty shrivel, kindness slowly turning  
to ashes with the years, all joy consumed  
till cold at last and like her marriage, doomed

(from The Fire)

we recognise a humanity and a craftsmanship which need no justification other than their own combined worth. The poetry talks rather than meditates, and the general impression is of a person keen on living without illusions, on finding meaning in the actual situation, personal and social, in which she is placed, and on conveying this experience with striking earnestness. It is appropriate, therefore, that the style is light, its pace quick and easy, and that - being bent on conversation - it relies more on tone and movement than on richness of metaphor and image. In these poems, most of them short, the poet has achieved a personal diction, still narrow perhaps, but well suited to her purpose. It is enjoyable, it does not bristle with 'influences'. This is all the more significant in the case of a Ceylonese poet writing in English, whose work lies in the English Department of a University. In this personal diction there is present, I think, an indigenous quality. In its lightness and movement the verse bears the character, refined no doubt, of our common speech and echoes its rhythms. It reminds us that poetry is the constant refinement and recasting of language as a means of communication. One recalls, in this connection, Eliot's observation that, 'while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another, and this is just as true if



you sing it, for singing is another way of talking'. Our local poetic traditions are inseparable from song and chant, our common speech is unadorned and brisk. These qualities may be recognised in verse such as the following, from the poem Three For a Wedding (based on the popular children's rhyme about magpies, 'One for Sorrow, Two for Joy'):

But now the moon may wax and wane  
and glow through every window pane,  
magpies sport their black and white  
on every bush and shrub in sight,  
causing no special agitation,  
requiring no propitiation,

except, that by the grace of Heaven,  
I trust each nestful numbers seven  
to keep them snug against the cold  
to keep our story's joys untold.

As may be clear from the verse quoted, the unit of this poetry is the stanza rather than the single line or couplet, and a few excerpts from here and there cannot adequately illustrate the quality of the verse. Its impact is slow; one needs to read it over and over again, or better still, to hear it read, to enjoy its quiet persuasion. Often a past generation and its way of life, affluent and humane in its limited way, come up vividly before us as the poet recalls her own childhood, not with nostalgia but with a critical understanding. The change to the present environment is accepted with calm and cheerful good sense, sometimes with a kind amusement. A mind that is Ceylonese in a positive and contemporary way.

I have said already that the language of this poetry is not rich in metaphor, epithet or image. This comment is, of course, a broad generalisation. The lines quoted from Fire show careful attention paid to each line, variety of construction and the effective use of pauses. Again, in Our Children, Swinging (which in some ways brings to mind Cumming's Chanson Innocente), nobody who has enjoyed a swing will miss the long upward movement, the instant's pause and the swift descent in

Up and away the children fly sky-  
wards and return  
Exulting.

Not all the poems in this collection are equally enjoyable. In my view the unsuccessful ones are those done in free verse, where the absence of formal discipline seems to have had a weakening effect. We miss here that tautness and energy on which free verse must depend for its success. But rhyme and formal stanza have their own dangers: commitment to formal pattern may reduce conciseness and affect the language itself. Occasionally, the verse in this collection proves that such dangers are real.

The book includes two translations from French and three from Sinhala originals, and also a narrative poem based on a traditional Sinhala tale. They cover a wide range of topics and themes, though style and feeling are less varied. Particularly enjoyable are the tenderly lyrical Our Children, Swinging, the more complex but equally well executed Three For a Wedding, the vivid humanity and poignant final stanza of Review, the very personal Past, Present, Future and A Problem of Storage, and also the two poems titled The Anniversary and Horoscope. These are among the best, but the delicately satirical The Peace-Game and Lexicon, as well as A Marriage, 1938 and Tides of The Middle Passage, are impressive.

Word Bird Motif is an important event in literary publishing in Ceylon. Apart from the enjoyment it is sure to give its readers, it should renew interest in the whole business of creative writing. Those who enjoy poetry, and recognise the importance of language in life will like it. Those who think of poetry, especially English poetry by a Ceylonese, as something esoteric, definitely need it.

The book is well brought out, with a beautiful cover design by Stanley Kirinde.

Patrick Fernando, in the Ceylon Daily News

Giraya. A Novel by Punyakante Wijenaiké. Lake House Investments Ltd., Colombo. Rs. 7.50.

"Exciting ... thrilling ... but - do such people really exist?" The reader who doubts whether quite so many abnormal and malevolent personalities could gather beneath a single roof must remember that there are certain aspects of familiar Ceylonese life that anyone unused to our ways and our social history might well declare to be beyond belief. The everyday life of Ceylon's crumbling Sinhalese 'plantocracy' is surely one of these aspects. Taking it as the setting of her new novel, Punyakante Wijenaiké secures for herself a magnificent subject but one that, translated into fictional terms, inevitably invites charges of sensationalism. Fortunately, this author's now characteristic method of quiet, thoughtful narration, supported by a great deal of carefully observed and selected detail, helps to draw this, her second novel, back from the brink of unreality.

Punyakante Wijenaiké's picture of an old Walauwa, hostile to the changes brought by modern times, and finally coming to distorted and unsatisfactory terms with them, provides the background for a tale that begins with deceptive calm and then moves with increasing speed and sureness to its exciting, gory finish. The stifling atmosphere of decay that clings to the house and to its inhabitants is well captured, and the author's meticulous care for detail helps the reader to credit the twisted life that drags on within the stately but crumbling walls of a feudal house. In the method of its narration, and in the way a society in decay is presented through the consciousness of a sensitive young woman trapped in and by it, Giraya provokes comparison with Pearl Buck's novel of China in transition, East Wind, West Wind.

In reviews of Mrs Wijenaiké's fiction some years ago (The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 2 (1966) and No. 4 (1967), issues containing bibliographies of the current year's work in creative and critical literature) I described her short story writing as being notable for the deliberate simplicity of its style, and the pleasantly natural manner in which the rhythm and idiom of local speech are caught; and found in her first novel, The Waiting Earth, a quiet ironic humour so satisfying as to make one regret that social comedy was not her chosen sphere. Commenting on the fact that she, like many other writers of the present day, chooses the village and its environs deliberately as a setting for her fiction, I reflected that it was 'pleasant to think Mrs. Wijenaiké might widen her field in her future work'. This, with Giraya, she has done, retaining at the same time her distinctive and individual qualities of style and method. In a society such as ours, often insensitively and gossippingly inclined to 'trace' fictional writing to real or



imagined 'sources' in real life, and bristling with sensibilities only too ready to be - or imagine themselves to be - 'offended', it is not difficult to understand the reluctance Mrs. Wijenaike has hitherto shown to step out of the safe middle distance of the village setting and into the social world that she knows at first hand. If she were to do so, and to throw caution and kindness to the winds in a pursuit of the actual and the true, one suspects that her humour will deepen to something more disturbing than 'quietness' and 'irony'. Perhaps the deliberate descent in Giraya, from the exploration of character in a faithfully captured social milieu to a headlong pursuit of the melodramatic and the unreal, is the novelist's new method of distancing reality. If so, whatever this might prove of the kindness of a writer's character and outlook, it does little for her art. Giraya could, and seemed at the beginning to be about to do so, have become a real work of art, exploratory of the social realities of our time and our society, disciplined by the experience and stylistic virtues that Mrs. Wijenaike has developed over a number of years of writing fiction.

No one who has read her work can doubt the sincerity and discipline that she habitually brings to it. No one who has watched her journey from the conventional village setting, through a number of short stories impressive in their depth and skill (see Retreat, for instance, published in New Ceylon Writing 1970), to this latest attempt to deal at last with the way of life of a known and familiar social class, can fail to admire the honesty with which she has gradually stripped herself of cliché and sentimental romanticism. The artistic failure of Giraya is due quite as much to the expectations of the local reading public that exists for fiction, as to the novelist's last-minute revulsion from the logical and legitimate end of the beginning made in the novel's opening pages. 'Exciting...thrilling', the novel cannot fail to be a popular success. But if, as seems clear, its author has not exhausted her reserves of skill and energy, nor bade farewell to the honesty that has marked her earlier work, its successor will be worth looking forward to.

#### NEW CEYLON ENGLISH

The Call of the Kirala. A Novel by James Goonawardene. Hansa Publishers Ltd., Colombo.

This novel should, to do it justice, be viewed against the background of what constitutes the language of creative writing in Ceylon today, which was conveniently exemplified in New Ceylon Writing 1970 last year. Containing much writing of distinction, the anthology appeared to lend conviction to the view that there is no distinctively Ceylonese style for creative writing in English. The success of some of the poetry might help to conceal this, but the fact is that the better poems, even where they treated of or referred to 'local' subjects, were all tours de force of writing in an English, as distinct from a Ceylonese, style. Their concern was not with a distinctively Ceylonese experience but with a distinctively personal experience, and if they did not become mere private exercises, it was because their writers had been able while (in a sense) detaching themselves from the Ceylonese community within which they immediately live, to move easily into the larger English community and successfully apply and sustain norms acquired from their reading of English-language poetry, and native English poetry.

The translations were a special case. Where their Sinhala originals were more traditional, the language of the translations reflected an idiom that could only have been derived from Sinhala. None of the writers of the original poems in New Ceylon Writing 1970 used an idiom anything like it - which seems to indicate that they do not regard it as an authentic Ceylonese English idiom at all. Where, however, the Sinhala originals were less traditional, and more likely to have been influenced by western modes of writing, the translations used a language closer to that of the original English poems, and which derived its strengths and weaknesses from the same non-Ceylonese sources as the latter.

The prose writing presented a different aspect: generally, the 'creative' writing was indifferent while the critical and academic writing was good. (Since all good writing is creative, the dichotomy must, perforce, be dictated by analytical convenience.) This can, I think, be accounted for. The wider canvas on which the creative prose writer must (unlike the poet) work, makes it impossible for him to detach himself from the larger Ceylonese community in which he immediately lives. Unfortunately he does not yet possess a flexible instrument with which he can handle life in this community. His predecessors, who wrote in English during the heyday of that language in Ceylon, had failed to fashion a truly Ceylonese style that could give sincere and living expression to distinctively Ceylonese experience. The question remains, of course, whether for them there had ever been a distinctively Ceylonese experience. Their lives had been shaped largely by things British, and cut off (partly by these) from the rest of their countrymen, they had assiduously sought in most aspects of life, to cultivate within their little circles the only norms that were felt at that time to be worth upholding, the British.

The effect on language has been disastrous. A living speech, a medium for a living art, can thrive only in a living culture. Despite all the locals' efforts, British culture - the genuine product - failed to take root and flower in native soil. The rhythms of the Ceylonese version of British that the locals lived could not possibly bear any relation to the rhythms of native English speech or sustain them. What happened, therefore, was that a distinctively Ceylonese style of speech began to develop out of their particular kind of culture. Unfortunately no writer of English in Ceylon has, up to 1970, deigned to take hold of this speech, and refine it and creatively refashion it into a viable instrument for the living expression of the rhythms of Ceylonese life. No doubt the comparative impoverishment of the imitative culture he lived in prevented him from being impelled to do so, but what most obviously inhibited him were the British English norms that he took as absolute. These norms were derived partly from the English literature he read (which gave him access to the rhythms of living English speech), but mainly from the academic style of English writing that had begun to develop in modern times. This style of writing was removed some distance from the rhythms of actual English speech, it was in a sense supra-cultural and international. A control of the basic grammatical rules gave fairly easy access to it, and no special feel for English culture was necessary for its mastery. While the norms extracted primarily from this academic style were set up as a barrier against the forms used in actual Ceylon English speech, some of the latter did occasionally smuggle themselves into the written language (as they still do, in the writing of most of us). As a result of this diglossia, there has developed for posterity a highly academic written English, whose preoccupation with the formal scholarly norms of grammar and correctness obliterate the actual rhythms or flavour of English, or even of Ceylonese, speech. If a



distinctively Ceylonese style of writing had ever had a moment when it could have come into being, the creative writers had missed it.

The formal style of writing is excellently suited to the expression of academic and critical thought. Such thought is neither specifically English nor specifically local, and a formal non-culture-bound style, stamped only with the individual writer's personality, enhances its expression. In creative prose fiction, however, it has proved to be a stultifying heritage, intrinsically incapable of rising above the formal and the expository, and insistently drawing attention to its self-conscious preoccupation with academic grammatical norms. The social sanction attached to these norms is so powerful that no writer can but be committed to them. Attempts to turn away from them to the actual forms of Ceylon English speech generally embarrass both reader and writer. The challenge that confronts the contemporary writer of fiction is, thus, to fashion a new and significant style which, while using the academic standard as its base, is still able to reflect in an ideal form the actual rhythms and idiom of living Ceylon English speech.

It is in terms of this challenge that I would like to view James Goonawardene's Call of the Kirala. The novel is certainly serious in intention, and the author has elsewhere (New Ceylon Writing 1970, pp. 80-81) shown his explicit concern with some aspects of the problem raised above. It is also representative, I believe, of its kind, and most of the points I make could probably be made without significant change of a great deal of contemporary English fiction in Ceylon.

Goonawardene's commitment to the academic norms is so great that he rejects not only 'broken English' (which is the idiom assigned to Premadasa, a person who would be quite out of character if he spoke in any other way), but also many of the more normal features of Ceylon English. Thus Premadasa's reunion with the novel's hero, Vijaya, takes place near a 'tea kiosk' (not a 'tea boutique') and he is greeted by Vijaya with the extremely formal and unCeylonese 'Premadasa, aren't you?'. The style is not consistent, however, and a few non-English features somehow slip in. Some of these are Ceylonese ('They took a different route to the one they had come along'), while others are plain bad English ('She probably had a husband working in some nearby chena and would be back soon'). Note that one of the effects of such departures from the norm assumed is to draw attention to the involved formal structures aimed at. These are by no means trivialities, for they demonstrate that the style is not a natural one for what the writer has to say, that it is not so appropriate to the experience communicated that it can compel the reader to forget his prejudices derived from the academic standard and concentrate upon the novel itself.

The development of such an authentic style in the novel has been partly inhibited by Goonawardene's inability to find an appropriate subject matter for his language. Like so many contemporary writers of English fiction in Ceylon, he locates his positive in the village, on the other side of the very high wall erected between himself and the rest of the nation by a knowledge of English. So Vijaya, the city man, wants to liberate himself from the tensions, the superficiality, and the lack of humanity of the city, and escape to a 'quiet little niche' in the village, where he could be a 'man of the earth', having 'the smell of the sun in his nostrils and the feel of the grass on his body, and the noise of the winds and the trees in his ears'. The false note has already been struck; the attributes of this animal figure (note the deliberate crudity of the

'nostrils') are derived from commonplace notions of the 'natural man'. Moreover, they are not concretely apprehended: what exactly is the 'smell of the sun'? The falseness is inevitable; the theme is just not a genuine, significant one for writers and readers of English fiction in Ceylon. It might be argued that the sense of rootlessness which many urban writers apparently feel, and which makes them see nothing of value in the city and turn to the village in a desperate effort to develop a sense of identity with the people is, in fact, a genuine urban experience. Even if this were so, its acceptance would condemn the writer to negative writing, a writing of rejection and failure.

The reason is that Ceylon English speech, out of whose rhythms the writer has to develop his contemporary Ceylonese style of writing, is just incapable of handling village positives effectively. This speech was born and nurtured in an urbanised, westernised, partly sophisticated middle class society, and it still serves the purposes of such a society. Life in the village never came within its ambit in any real way, and that experience is now quite alien to it, quite beyond its range. If it is to handle the village experience with any degree of sincerity and truth, if it is to achieve within itself the identification with the village that the writers seek, it will have to be transformed into a new language. Language being a social phenomenon, individual writers are most unlikely to achieve the miracle today, for the social conditions under which the change can take place have passed. In the circumstances, writers can at best hope to write negatively.

Negative writing can be powerful, if sincere. But the writers of fiction do not aim at such writing, they try to write positively. When one sees the positive force of some of the poetry in New Ceylon Writing 1970 one can see why they are impelled to do so: the writing of negation, or of rejection, is just not a valid style for writers of English in Ceylon, it is not true to their experience, which has a positive aspect (one that is quite unrelated to the village). But it is from precisely the only kind of positive experience that the language can appropriately and sincerely handle, the experience of urban people in an urban setting, that the writers turn away.

The result is writing like this: 'A lonely bat was winging its way slowly, moving northwards, and a kirala called from somewhere nearby. Listening to the cry of the kirala he felt contented and happy, and there was suddenly no hate, no rancour in him. As he stood at the window, he became conscious of the almost mystic sensation one feels watching a tropical evening change into night. There was nothing here to disturb its beauty and strangeness.' The vague lyricism which infuses the sterile academic style draws its effects from the debased romantic journalism in vogue among the Victorians. There is no first hand experience of the 'mystic sensation', and Goonawardene slips unthinkingly into the catchphrase, 'a tropical evening' which, in its distance from what he is trying to describe (is there such a thing as 'a tropical evening' for those of us who live in this country?) might well have been extracted from a tourist brochure. The 'mystic sensation' thus remains unrealised in concrete terms, merely stated. He goes on, 'There was only the sky, the fields, the trees and the hut and these changed slowly into softer tones and tints and finally into the universal grey of dark, and then came night with the softness and gentleness of an infant going to sleep.' Any concrete apprehension of the experience would have made him ask at least how a hut could change into 'softer tones and tints'. His vagueness here afflicts even the normal collocational rules of English grammar. The infant, like many



of the writer's innumerable similes, is not organically integrated with the experience, but imported from outside for its vague 'romantic' qualities. And all this runs finally into the clichetic statement: 'In the city one killed the natural things such as these with the garish street lamp, the neon sign, the electric bulb ... An oil lamp was all he needed here.' Although Goonawardene rejects the Ceylonese 'kerosene lamp' for the more exotic 'oil lamp', the last sentence has a slight effect of incongruity that is obviously not intended.

As a result the reader experiences neither the positive force represented by the village nor the negative force represented by the city. If at least the language had reflected something of a struggle as the writer tried to make it serve the needs of an alien subject matter, one would have felt that something of importance was taking place. But all there is is an attempt to inject 'local' flavour into the academic style by dealing with a subject on the other side of the wall and wrapping it up in a kind of nostalgia, or rather, a mushy kind of sentimentalism (one cannot be nostalgic about something one has had no experience of, except in a Rotarian kind of way) that might have an exotic appeal for the indiscriminating non-native ear on account of its association with a 'local' subject, but which can hardly provide a medium for the significant expression of the Ceylonese sensibility.

The whole exercise tempts one to ask of these writers, and of James Goonawardene as representative of them, the question one asked of their predecessors: 'Do you have a distinctively Ceylonese experience to communicate at all?' For in the last analysis, their failure is not merely a failure with language, it is the larger failure of taste and sensibility. Their retreat to the 'quiet little niche' is basically escapist and irresponsible, a refusal to make the effort of mature positive living in the city, which is the only kind of positive living most of them as well as of their readership can aspire to.

T. Kandiah

\*Note: This review has benefited greatly from discussions I have had with Derek de Silva. The point of view expressed and the unsatisfactory features that remain are, of course, entirely my responsibility. T.K.

Of Love and Squalor & Other Stories. By Mark Bartholomeusz. Hansa Publishers Ltd., Colombo. Rs.6.50.

A collection of short stories gives a writer a fair chance to show what he is capable of doing, and places less strain upon his imaginative and creative powers than the full-length novel. Mark Bartholomeusz has been wise to begin as he has done, and his publishers can be commended for the production of the book, which is attractive to look at, comparatively free of the printing errors that seem almost inevitable in these days of piece-meal printing by inexperienced and often unskilled compositors, and reasonably priced. But the short story is more than a showcase of talent, for its very brevity compels the writer to place the severest discipline on his art and on himself, to keep his eye steadily on his object and make every word earn its right to appear on the page. And as readers, of course, we would like to have our attention engaged and our interest held by what we read, believing that at least one of the motives of any writer is to delight and move an audience.

Of this motive Mark Bartholomeusz falls short indeed. And this is a pity, for his writing has many things to its credit which are regrettably

lacking in the work of many Ceylonese writers of fiction today: he does not romanticise the landscape or sentimentalise the people he describes, he is rarely pretty and never pretentious, and though he is as fond as most of his fellows appear to be of the inevitable man-meets-village-beauty-at-the-well situation ('The cloth she wore up to her armpits was wet and revealed the brown soft beauty of her body' - Of Love and Squalor, the title story) he is by no means ready to join the flight to the village and the idealisation of village values that have engaged the attention of so many of them. But - and this is important in the genre he has chosen - he is dull. Very dull indeed. It is possible that the lifelessness of the tales springs from a wholly creditable desire to avoid sensationalism; it is even possible that the writer is striving after the (sometimes very powerful) device of understatement. And there is no doubt that his inability to reflect in any way the tones of real conversation and the rhythms of real thought does little to help. But whatever the reason, Bartholomeusz must be among the few authors ever to have handled a description of an interview with a sorcerer and a devil-dancing ceremony (Wages of Envy) and induced no reaction in the reader except the fervent wish that he would hurry up and get it over with. In an extensive blurb that precedes the stories, Professor Ashley Halpe of the Department of English, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, credits his author with a 'patient, tactful art and generous humanity'. The tact, however, is entirely Professor Halpe's, and patience very necessary in the reader. The art, such as it is, belongs to the genre of the documentary, and useful as documentaries frequently are, they are not and cannot be, imaginative fiction.

#### CHILDREN'S CHOICE

Little Granny by Sybil Wettasinghe (Rs.2.00); The Elephants From Heaven by Reggie Siriwardena (Rs. 2.25); The Cat That Walked By Itself by H.D. Sugathapala; Sunil's Diary by H.D. Sugathapala; The Giant by Sunil Jayawera (all Rs. 2.00). Hansa Publishers Ltd., Colombo.

Published in Sinhalese as well, each of these books represents an imaginative departure in the field of children's fiction, and has proved a success with children of the age-group for which it is intended. Some of the titles are retellings of familiar tales - Elephants From Heaven, for instance, is based on a well-loved Jataka story, with interesting and amusing characterisations of the principal village characters, and an unexpected and new twist at the end. The Cat That Walked By Itself is, of course, a retelling of Kipling's famous tale. Little Granny and The Giant are intended for younger children, and Sunil's Diary, with its delightful illustrations by children, for the same group. In a field as starved of nourishment as Ceylonese imaginative writing for children, parents have become accustomed to putting up with very inferior material in the hope that somehow something of value would get through. If these titles from Hansa are anything to go by, however, better days are with us, and we can be certain when buying books for our children that we shall delight as well as do them good. Harried by educationists and ambitious parents, children in our land are not among the luckiest in the world. It seems only fair that they should learn to read for pleasure and real instruction, before they have to read for examinations and the status-race.



A Return To Kandy. By Vesak Nanayakkara. With line drawings by Stanley Kirinde. Arasan Printers, Colombo. Rs.40.00.

'In a work originally undertaken for my own personal pleasure and not intended for publication, I have had occasion to use quotations which unfortunately I have not documented or accredited and the sources of which now elude me ... These fragmented essays are not meant for the historian or the scholar but for people like us, sweating it out in endless drudgery at office tables, who would occasionally go up to Kandy to watch the Esala Perahera, worship at the Dalada Maligawa, and perhaps stroll in the Gardens at Peradeniya ...' (Author's Prologue). Thus flattered and disarmed, 'the historian and the scholar' will condescend to give Mr. Nanayakkara his blessing despite the absence of footnotes and even (God save the mark!) of a bibliography. The author has indeed trod with delicacy and cunning the thorny way of book-publishing (privately) in Ceylon, for his modesty robs the professional historian who might have been his worst and most effective critic, of his familiar weapons; it might even blind him to the fact that the book accumulates a wealth of information rarely found in the 'scholarly' thesis, and will probably attract many more readers than the latter. Pleasing his readers, Mr. Nanayakkara has also pleased himself: free to choose his own paper, he has chosen the best available. The book and its cover have been designed by Neville Weereratne, and the illustrations are the work of a painter whose work is rapidly gaining wide recognition for its skill and sincerity. It is true to say, therefore, that A Return To Kandy is a delight to possess, its beauty almost a wicked luxury in these days of austerity printing.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the contemplation of the historic city appears to rob Mr. Nanayakkara not only of his references, but also of his native good sense. Perhaps sentimentality is a lover's privilege, and there is no doubt that this author is devoted to his subject; but 'people like us' - like me, anyway - tend to feel slightly uncomfortable when we are represented by a contemporary as 'musing on the Dalada Maluwa, dreaming at Balana Pass or imbibing the beauty of the Kandyan scene', and invited to 'let this book abide by thee and caress thee gently with the knowledge and the feel of the past'. Luckily this kind of writing is limited to the Author's Prologue, on the whole, and once Mr. Nanayakkara begins his journey over Balana and beyond he proves to be a trustworthy and pleasant companion, with a quick eye for the amusing or significant in the past and sincere feeling for the vanishing beauty of the present.

#### COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

Commonwealth Short Stories. Edited by Anna Rutherford and Donald Hannah, Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd. £1.20 (paperback); Caribbean Voices, An Anthology of West Indian Poetry. Edited and selected by John Figueroa: Vol. I - Dreams and Visions. Vol. II - The Blue Horizons. Evans Brothers, Ltd. U.S.\$ 1.02, £ 2.38 (paperbacks); New Ships. An Anthology of West Indian Poems. Edited by D.G. Wilson. Savacou Publications Ltd., Jamaica; Thirty Poems. By Balamani Amma. Orient Longmans Ltd. New Delhi. Rs. 17.50.

One of the best collections of short stories to appear in recent years, Commonwealth Short Stories presents the cream of Commonwealth writing in fiction. No mere string of well-known names (though Patrick White, V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, R.K. Narayan, George Lamming, Amos Tutuola and Mordecai Richler are among those present) the book contains work chosen

for the intrinsic value of each story as well as for its ability to represent an area and a writer's most characteristic style and themes. Each story is prefaced by a brief but intelligently written commentary that relates the item to the main body of its author's work, and 'places' it accurately against the background of Commonwealth writing as a whole. A reading list at the end of the collection provides biographical details of each author, with a list of titles of his or her published work. There could not be a better starting point than this for students of Commonwealth literature, and for writers interested in the way English has been developed to suit the needs of non-English landscapes, interests and themes.

The first volume of Caribbean Voices, which appeared in 1968, presented a collection of poems - many of them short and relatively simple in theme and technique - that could have figured valuably and interestingly in the poetry syllabus of secondary schools, in addition to its appeal for the general reader. Volume Two, Dreams and Visions, takes us further and deeper into Caribbean verse writing. Derek Walcott, Mervyn Morris and Claude McKay are particularly well represented; and although one might have wished that the editor had been slightly less generous in his selections, and given us more of the very best rather than much of the merely indifferent, the Anthology as a whole gives an invaluable picture of an area much like ours, where recent history has followed similar paths and patterns:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?

(Derek Walcott, A Far Cry From Africa)

There is much here to reward the interest of any reader conscious of the burden as well as of the riches he has been bequeathed as part of a colonial inheritance.

New Ships follows the course charted by Figueroa's collection, and is an anthology intended for use in Junior Secondary Schools. The poems in it have been compiled by a team of teachers and educationists, and offer rich possibilities to the interested and imaginative teacher possessed of initiative - and there are many - in our own schools. By way of comparison and contrast, their relationship to other areas of study such as History and Geography, and their usefulness in illustrating some of the distinctive features of a language situation, they illuminate many areas still unlit in our own educational scheme. An Anthology such as this in a child's hands must help to build a sensitivity to the importance of poetry in human life, an importance that transcends their stuffy and cramped world in which literature in all its varied and exciting forms is merely an examination subject.

'At a time when a new generation of poets, cut off from their traditional moorings, are groping in the dark, its bold inspired assertion of the purity of the classical tradition comes as a breath of fresh air,' runs the blurb on the jacket of Thirty Poems. Orient Longmans have demonstrated their confidence in this assertion by presenting the book most attractively. It is a pity, therefore, that the poetry itself does so little to reward such faith. Ranging from 1934 to 1966, Balamani Amma's poetry reveals no development into greater technical strength or inner awareness. There is little real difference between



Alas! this striving is futile.  
 The foot of the miraculous throne is still distant.  
 Countless are the steps yet to be climbed.  
 How could this mould of clay,  
 With life ebbing away as its earthiness is subdued,  
 Prompt this machine on?  
 Undirected it might fall  
 And shatter to bits.

(From In the Plane, 1937)

and its updated version -

O Lord of consciousness, why do you spread wings  
 Through these wilful men, who lost paradise,  
 If not to enjoy life of varied tastes  
 From the starry flowers in bloom?  
 Though thirsty for the sweet waters at home  
 Where dear ones wait,  
 Though the body grown weightless  
 Feels tired on the least effort,  
 Thoughts do not falter; Brain is kept clear.  
 And imagination, with its telescope,  
 Watches a future mankind that feels the solar system  
 As one state;  
 A mankind that forgot murderous weapons!

(Through Space, 1966)

and although no doubt the poems have suffered in translation from Malayalam into English, one cannot help but feel that, however dark the path of literary expression might be, Thirty Poems sheds at best a feeble light upon it. 'Ripples of beauty streamed into my mind,' declares the poet in a foreword, 'my life that slowly unfolds its petals amidst the dazzling light is honeyed with poetry.' What can a reader say to a statement such as that? Nothing, probably, as, leaving the lotus to its serene self-worship he goes elsewhere in search of poetry.

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#### OUR CONTRIBUTORS

SHELAGH ANGHIE, well remembered by Ceylon audiences for her playing in E.F.C. Ludowyk's production of Androcles And The Lion, in MacIntyre's productions of Death of a Salesman, The Crucible and Othello and (by Peradeniya's theatre-goers especially) in University Dram Soc productions of The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife and other short plays, is a Trustee of the Lionel Wendt Memorial Theatre, has been closely connected with the activities of Stage and Set, Colombo's well-known amateur theatre group, since its beginnings, and lives at 86A Rosmead Place, Colombo 7 .... KARAN BRECKENRIDGE, who comes of a family well known for its interest in the theatre, still remembered for his powerful playing in Peradeniya's student theatre world as 'The Man Who Wouldn't Go To Heaven', and as the flamboyant narrator in MacIntyre's production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle later on, recently made a success as a director with his production of Collision Course, a series of short plays. Address: Ministry of Defence & External Affairs, Fort, Colombo 1 ... GEORGE CLAESSEN, painter and poet, has lived in Britain since 1949. His published work in poetry includes Poems Of A Painter (1967), verse contributed to Poetry Today. Also:

Drawings (1946), and contributions to Leonardo (1969). Address: 5, Spencer Rise, Kentish Town, London, N.W.5.... JEAN ARASANAYAGAM writes poetry, teaches at a Kandy school, and is well known for her work as a painter and textile designer in batik. Her verse has been published in Hemisphere, New Ceylon Writing 1970, Sankha, Indian & Foreign News, the Young Artists' Group Magazine, and in various newspapers in Ceylon. She is considering the publication of a first collection of her poetry. Address: 2, Watapuluwa Housing Scheme, Kandy .... PHILIP COOREY, Editor of the Ceylon Observer, writes occasionally under the pseudonym 'Ranil' and has a special interest in theatre and the performing arts. He has described himself as a film-crazy journalist, and is the author of a recent study of the work of Lester James Peries, the Ceylonese film-director. Address: C/o The Ceylon Observer, Lake House, Fort, Colombo 1 .... RIENZI CRUSZ immigrated to Canada in 1965, and works at present as Reference and Book Selection Librarian, University of Waterloo. His poetry has appeared in a number of journals in Canada and America, and his first book of verse is to appear in mid-1972. Address: Apartment 13, No. 407, Hazel Street, Waterloo, Ontario .... ALFREDA DE SILVA is Alumni Officer at the United States Educational Foundation in Colombo. She has broadcast regularly for the CBC, and worked for a short period at the Yale Experimental Theatre and Drama School. Her verse has appeared in the Times and Observer Annuals, in Hemisphere, and in various Ceylon newspapers; Hansa Publishers recently brought out her English translation of Sunil Jayaweera's story for children, The Giant. Address: 36/20 Rosmead Place, Colombo 7.... D.M. DE SILVA is an Assistant Lecturer in English at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, and has had verse published in New Ceylon Writing 1970. Interested in German literature and in amateur University theatre, he is a Roman Catholic by religion and describes his mind as being 'furnished in the best Christian taste'. Address: The Dept. of English, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya ..... INDRANEE DE SILVA, whose short story Jinadasa appeared in New Ceylon Writing 1970, has another story in this issue (see page 67). Address: 102 Allan Avenue, Dehiwela .... LAKSHMIE DE SILVA is well known as a translator from Sinhalese into English, and writes poetry in both languages. Her published work includes verse in Poetry Peradeniya, New Ceylon Writing 1970, and in various Ceylon newspapers; and a translation of Martin Wickramasinghe's Ape Gama under the title Lay Bare The Roots (1968). Address: District Judge's Bungalow, Tangalla .... WIMAL DISSANAYAKE lectures in Sinhalese at the Vidyalkara University of Ceylon, and writes poetry in Sinhalese and in English. He frequently broadcasts for the CBC. His published work includes five volumes of verse in Sinhalese (1961, 1964, 1965, 1969, 1971), and verse published in New Ceylon Writing 1970, besides two books in Sinhalese on drama and literary criticism. Address: 3 Jayatilake Gardens, Wanagoda, Kelaniya .... BASIL FERNANDO's poem, An Encounter (see page 80) appeared on the editorial desk with no further information about the author than it conveys itself. It would be good to know more of him .... PATRICK FERNANDO combines the occupation of Assistant Commissioner of Inland Revenue with a meticulous and mannered practice of poetry. Published work includes The Return of Ulysses (1955), verse published in Community, New Ceylon Writing 1970, Sankha and Peradeniya Poetry, and in various anthologies. Address: 347/2 Nawala Road, Rajagiriya .... ROSANNE GOMEZ has had verse published in Ceylon Housewife, and in various newspapers in Ceylon. Address: 27, St. Mary's Road, Colombo 4 .... YASMINE GOONERATNE lectures in English Literature at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. With special interests in Commonwealth Literature and the fiction and poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries, she returned to writing poetry in 1970. Published work



includes a book of poems, Word Bird Motif (1971), verse published in English, Outposts, Savacou, Hemisphere and other journals and read at the third Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature & Language Studies in Jamaica in 1971; two books of literary criticism, Jane Austen (Cambridge University Press 1970) and English Literature in Ceylon 1815 - 1878 (Colombo 1968); annual bibliographies of Ceylonese literature in the Journal of Commonwealth Literature (1966 -); contributions to books and literary journals published in Britain, the United States and Ceylon. A second book of poems, The Lizard's Cry and Other Poems, is due to be published in July 1972. Address: 6 Augusta Hill, University Park, Peradeniya ...

SUVIMALEE GUNARATNA counts creative writing as a major interest, has worked as a journalist in Ceylon, broadcast on the CBC's overseas programmes, and is interested in painting and the local theatre. Her published work includes verse, published in Solidarity, New Ceylon Writing 1970, and in various Ceylon newspapers; short stories; and a translation into English of a children's book in Sinhalese. Address: 9 Greenlands Avenue, Colombo 5 ...

H.A.I. GOONE-TILLEKE, Librarian of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, is the author of a recent bibliography on Ceylon (see Theatre Bibliography in this issue) and among the contributors of reminiscences to Neville Weeraratne's beautiful book published recently in memory of the late Arthur Van Langenberg. Like Rienzi Cruz (see above) another librarian, he includes poetry among many and varied interests. Address: Upper Hantane, University Park, Peradeniya ...

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GAMINI HATHHOTUWEGAMA lectures in English at the Vidyalkara University of Ceylon, and has published poetry in the now unhappily defunct Poetry Peradeniya, which there are some hopes his enthusiasm might revive ...

SHIRANTHI JAYAMANNE (Laleen) recently delighted audiences with her playing in Lorca's House of Bernarda Alba, is at present in the United States ...

THIRU KANDIAH lectures in English at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, his special interests being in the field of language and linguistics, and the theatre. Publications include contributions to specialist journals, Community, and various newspapers in Ceylon. Address: Sub-Dept. of English, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya ...

E.F.C. LUDOWYK, Emeritus Professor of English Literature of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, gives an account of the beginnings of the University Dram Soc in his letter from London (see page 1): he has lived in Britain since 1955. A specialist in Shakespeare studies, his editions of the plays have introduced them to a new generation of students and scholars. His imagination and interest provided the basis on which the English-language theatre in Ceylon developed, his skill and experience as a director assisted the work of E.R. Sarachchandra and of Jubal in the presentation of translated dialogue drama in Sinhalese, and through the many students who passed through his hands his influence on Ceylonese theatre in general has been profound. Besides publications listed in the Theatre Bibliography in this issue, he is the author of The Footprint of the Buddha (1958), The Story of Ceylon (1962), Robert Knox in the Kandyan Kingdom (ed., 1948) The Modern History of Ceylon (1966), and of numerous essays on educational and literary subjects. Address: 11, Kidderpore Gardens, London, N.W.3 ...

ERNEST MACINTYRE is a graduate of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, where he took part in Dram Soc productions, and began an individual contribution to theatre in Ceylon with his productions, sponsored by Stage & Set, of Death of A Salesman, The Crucible and Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle, and his own plays (see Theatre Bibliography in this issue). Address: C/o the Lionel Wendt Theatre, Guildford Crescent, Colombo 7 ...

BASIL MENDIS taught for a time at the University in Perade-

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ANNE RANASINGHE published a first volume of poems in 1971 (reviewed in this issue) and has had her verse appear in Jerusalem Post, The Jewish Quarterly, Hemisphere, Radio Times, and New Ceylon Writing 1970, besides various magazines and newspapers in Ceylon. She holds a Diploma in Journalism, and in addition to poetry writes short stories, articles and radio scripts. Address: 82, Rosmead Place, Colombo 7 ...

KRIS REZEL, aged 24, writes short stories and poetry, and describes himself as 'comfortably clerking - desk, chair, fan, telephone, neat clothes' - at Hayleys Ltd., Colombo, and wondering 'what civilization is all about'. Address: 400, Deans Road, Colombo 10 ...

PETER SCHAREN (formerly SCHARENGUIVEL) worked for some years with the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Ltd., now lives in Australia. Apart from poetry, his interests lie in Russian, Spanish-American and African literature; in music; and in active participation in the Moratorium Movement, protesting against aggression in Vietnam. He has published verse in New Ceylon Writing 1970, and in various newspapers in Ceylon. Address: 61/100 High Street, North Sydney 2060 ...

GAMINI SENEVI-RATNE, now Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Plantation Industries, writes poetry in Sinhalese and in English. His published work includes verse in Poetry Peradeniya, United Asia, Vimansa, Samasamajaya, and New Ceylon Writing 1970, and in a number of anthologies. Address: 37E Podris Road, Colombo 3 ...

MAUREEN SENEVIRATNE is a free-lance journalist and short story writer, edits Ceylon Housewife, and contributes scripts to the CBC's radio theatre programmes. A collection of her short stories is scheduled for publication in 1972. Publications include Some Women of the Mahavamsa (1969). Address: O.M.Q.Q. 30, Royal Ceylon Air Force, Katunayake ...

K.S. SIVAKUMARAN has contributed a great deal to general knowledge in Ceylon of contemporary literary activity in the Tamil language. His translations of prose and poetry published in New Ceylon Writing 1970 appeared this year in Thinakaran and in the magazine, Mallikai. Address: 21, Murugan Place, Colombo 6 ...

CLAUDETTE TAYLOR, a graduate of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, teaches English at Musaeus College, Colombo, and broadcasts regularly for the C.B.C., besides working as a free-lance journalist specialising in articles on radio and theatre. Address: 61, Horton Place, Colombo 7 ...

C.V. VELUPILLAI, Secretary of the National Union of Workers, was recently awarded the honour of the Golden Mantle, in recognition of his efforts to make the Tamil estate worker the centre of his literary endeavour. Published work includes In Ceylon's Tea Garden, Poems (1954) and Born To Labour (1970), a volume of literary sketches reviewed in New Ceylon Writing 1970. Address: Fancyfield Estate, Talangama ...

LAKDASA WIKKRAMASINHA studied law for three years before deciding to enter the teaching profession. A writer of verse in Sinhalese and in English, he writes mainly in Sinhalese now. Published work includes Lustre, Poems (1965), Fifteen Poems (1970), Janakiharane and Other Poems (1967), and verse published in Quest, Outposts, New Ceylon Writing 1970, Madrona, and Indian PEN. He has recently succeeded in bringing ten Ceylonese poets of divergent interests together in a single tribute to the memory of the Ceylonese painter, Justin Daraniyagala (see page 75). Address: 28, Mulgampola Road, Kandy.

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