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Book Reviews

Maryse Jayasuriya. *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature, 1983–2009*. Plymouth: Lexington, 2012. Pp. x, 183. $82.04 CDN.

Maryse Jayasuriya's *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature, 1983–2009*, published relatively soon after Sri Lanka's separatist war ended in 2009, presents a deeply engaging account of the twenty-seven-year conflict through the literature of local and diasporic Sri Lankan writers. Stating that her "study illustrates and examines the capacity of literature to respond to what might seem to be unimaginable circumstances, and to imagine alternatives to them and a future beyond them" (26), Jayasuriya synthesizes literary analysis, historical narrative, and political commentary with the intent of exploring possibilities for reconciliation.

In her introduction, Jayasuriya addresses the production, reception, and possible impact of English creative writing in Sri Lanka, expressing her desire to bring this literature "to the attention of the Western academy but also to the attention of a Sri Lankan audience" (17). For the implied international reader, she provides context, such as the country's ethnic mix—which comprises seventy-four percent Sinhalese, eighteen percent Tamil, and eight percent Muslim—and its 1972 name change from Ceylon to Sri Lanka, when Sinhalese was declared the official language and Buddhism the religion of the state, predicating ethnic unrest mainly due to the language barrier for Tamils.[1] Moreover, Jayasuriya contextualizes the literature through significant markers in the history of ethnic conflict, such as the riots of 1953, eruptions of violence in 1983 and 1988, the intervention of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) in 1987 and their subsequent departure, intensified attacks and suicide bombings by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Norway ceasefire (2002–08), and the final overthrow of the LTTE in 2009.

Jayasuriya states that the sufferings of Sri Lankans have gone unnoticed by the world due to Sri Lanka being a small country and the conflict not being on a major scale. Nevertheless, she mentions that "the LTTE was proscribed as a terrorist organization by the United States, the United Kingdom, India, Canada, and most recently, the European Union" (15).[2] Since her book's publication, however, several events have drawn widespread attention to Sri Lanka's politics. These include the arrival of 449 Tamil migrants to Canada in

August 2010; Canadian Liberal Minister of Parliament Bob Rae flying to Sri Lanka on a fact-finding mission in June 2009 and being turned back at the Katunayake airport by the Sri Lankan authorities; Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper boycotting the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, followed by deliberations by other leaders; and a United Nations resolution in 2013 calling for an investigation into human rights violations by the Sri Lankan government during the last stages of the conflict—conducted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay.

"For healing and reconciliation to be possible," Jayasuriya writes, "the wounds of all sides in the conflict must be acknowledged" (40). In the chapter "Mourning Terror: Memorials to the Conflict in Poetry and Film," she holds out hope that "[t]he capacity of Sri Lankan Anglophone writing to cut across ethnic lines has provided an important opportunity for Sri Lanka's ethnic communities to mourn together" (66). To that end, she reveals suffering and grief through the poetry of local writers Jean Arasanayagam, Kamala Wijeratne, Anne Ranasinghe, Sivamohan Sumathy, Vivimarie Vanderpoorten, and Richard de Zoysa as well as the short fiction of Neil Fernandopulle, Nihal de Silva, and Arasanayagam.

Jayasuriya asks, "Is there any healing possible for a people so inured—and perhaps so immune to violence?" (54). In her exploration of numerous works that communicate the effects of trauma, she calls attention to those that convey guilt, not only of perpetrators of violence, but also of silent and passive bystanders who look on, paralyzed by an internalized helplessness or fear of reprisal if they intervene. Such "double-victimization" is evident in Vanderpoorten's work, in Helene Klodawsky's "Problem in making the documentary film *No More Tears Sister: Anatomy of Hope and Betrayal*," in Ranasinghe's poems, and in the writings of murdered journalist and poet de Zoysa. However, Jayasuriya appears not to probe too closely into expressions of rage and anger—an inherent part of the grieving process. Selections such as "For Richard" by Arjuna Parakrama, "Garland for Ranjani" by Regi Siriwardena, "Madness" by Vanderpoorten, and poems by Sumathy, which Jayasuriya describes as "angrily denoun[cing] not only the state and the LTTE but also the general public" (49), are a few that could have been given more consideration in terms of the cathartic journey towards recognition of loss and, ultimately, reconciliation.

Jayasuriya suggests three ways to move forward: through dialogue in English as the common language; through recognition of commonality; and through empathy. In her view, English, as a "link language" (11), is an appropriate medium to understanding extreme suffering, "as the narratives of

such experiences have to be understood in the context of a language of incompleteness, suddenness, darkness and *endless unfulfilled continuity*" (31).

The extent to which the Sri Lankan general public would read Anglophone literature or academic work written in English is debatable. Financial hardships resulting from a long war, lack of leisure time, preference for news reports rather than imagined realities, and an antipathy to revisiting traumatic experiences (particularly through the language of the colonizer, referred to by the Sinhalese as "kaduwa" or "sword") may inhibit the possibility of a reconciliation through English. However, Jayasuriya proposes that a recent increase in interest in English proficiency and compulsory English learning in schools may hold promise. Regrettably, a comparison between English and vernacular narratives of the ethnic conflict is beyond the scope of her book.

An effort to dismantle categories of race introduced by the British in the nineteenth century is clear in Jayasuriya's writing. Stressing commonality, she refers to the similar physical appearance of the Sinhalese and Tamils and to Arjun Guneratne's assertion that they arrived "in successive migrations" (qtd. in Jayasuriya 19), knowledge of which has been passed on through oral histories, myths, and legends. Foregrounding the works of de Silva and Arasanayagam that see empathy and personal connections as a means to overcome difference and divisions, she refers to Gayatri Spivak and bell hooks who advocate love as a force for "mind-changing" and social justice (88, 94). Envisioning a futuristic, humane end to ethnic conflict, Jayasuriya discusses works that present the prospect of mixed marriages, adoption, and resultant "bastardization" (as in Salman Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, "the bastard child . . . of many parents and therefore heir to many legacies" [124]) as an answer to ethnic divisiveness and essentialist ideas of racial purity. She observes that characters in fiction who have intermarried with either Tamil or Sinhalese are "not infected by ethnic prejudice [and are] as close to being neutral as possible" (102).

Intent on accountability, Jayasuriya situates herself as a Sinhalese residing in the United States and identifies the ethnic identity of writers and characters in the works she discusses. Among such writers are Arasanayagam (a Dutch Burgher married to a Tamil); Shyam Selvadurai (whose father is Tamil and mother is Sinhalese); Rajan Rajasingham Thiranagama (a Tamil married to a Sinhalese Buddhist); de Zoysa (whose father is Sinhalese and mother is Tamil); Ranasinghe (a "German Jewish Holocaust survivor and naturalized SL citizen" [46] married to a Sinhalese surgeon), and Vanderpoorten (Belgian-Jewish and Sinhalese).[3] As a diasporic critic, Jayasuriya reveals an understanding of diasporic writers' deep emotional at-

tachment to Sri Lanka, which gives them authority "to speak about [their] homeland and its people" (102). In the section "Interpreting the Conflict: Historiography and SL Fiction," she observes that these writers present the civil strife back home by "[engaging] in an act of imagination and creation" (101), producing stories that at times may be seen as exaggerated, wishful, and, in certain instances, partial narratives, due to distance of location, time, and personal relations.

Missing from the book are a few minor details: not only did the Japanese bombing affect the Galle Face Esplanade, as she notes, but the Angoda mental hospital, too, was bombed, albeit unintentionally, by the Japanese on 5 April 1942.[4] As Jayasuriya carefully notes the ethnic background of most writers and actants, it is noticeable when the ethnicity of assassins of high-profile political figures, including that of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, is missed in her historical accounts. Nonetheless, such omissions do not detract from the meticulous research that contextualizes her comprehensive discussion of literature on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

Jayasuriya's analysis of selected works reveals an "abiding" commitment to her subject (8), one that demonstrates a personal investment in her land of birth. In this respect, her book is an offering to Sri Lanka by a diasporic critic who projects a hopeful vision for the future.

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Notes

1 Further details can be found in Anderson.

2 On 16 October 2014, the EU removed the Tamil Tigers from their list of terrorist organizations. See Macdonald and Aneez.

3 Michael Ondaatje, whom Jayasuriya mentions is "most easily identified as a Burgher" (138), writes in *Running in the Family* that his father "claimed to be a Ceylon Tamil," and that "[e]veryone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations" (Ondaatje 32).

4 See Jayamaha for details.

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