

NUS-SHELL SHORT PLAYS SERIES

# PRIZE WINNING PLAYS

VOLUME 2 1987

*Edited by*  
Arthur D Lindley



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VOLUME II 1987



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Permission for production of any of the plays, published in this volume must be obtained from the playwright, whose address can be found in the biodata.

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## NUS-Shell Short Plays Series

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## 1987 Short-Play Competition – Winners

First Prize	– ‘Pistachios and Whipped Cream’ Theresa Tan Lee San
Second Prize	– ‘Dead on Cue’ Ovidia Yu
Third Prize	– ‘Idle Talk’ Sim Teow Li
Merit Prizes	– ‘I Do’ Liew Kim Siong
	– ‘Flat Lives’ Ovidia Yu
	– ‘The Last Will and Testament’ Ngin Chiang Meng
	– ‘Two Men, Three Struggles’ Tan Tarn How
	– ‘A Passing Phase’ Ophelia Ooi
	– ‘A Groom for Letchumi’ Cpt. Rajamanikam s/o K
Special Prizes	– ‘The Fall’ Boey Kim Cheng
	– ‘Speeding Ticket’ Wong Wie Sarn, Wilson

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## Credits

The Shell Short-Play Competition, 1987, was jointly organized by the Shell Companies in Singapore and the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore. It was administered by Mr Lam Pin Foo of Shell and Assoc. Professor John Kwan-Terry, Acting Head, Department of English Language and Literature, NUS. Mrs Christine Chen of the Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS, handled much of the paper work.

Judges of the Competition were Drs Arthur Lindley and Lee Tzu Pheng, Department of English Language and Literature, NUS.

The manuscript for this volume was typed by Mrs Fatimah Ahmad, Ms. Lee Yoke Leng, Tan Lay Khim and Junie Yeo.

The Editor

## Introduction

This volume is the product of the second year of the Shell Short-Play Competition, jointly organized by the National University of Singapore and the Shell Companies in Singapore to encourage the writing and the production of local drama in English. The six plays included here have been selected from a total of forty-six entries submitted by forty-one competitors. The entrants (twenty men, twenty-one women) range in age from fifteen to sixty-two, and include students, education officers, retirees, managers, businessmen, military personnel, and even a few professional writers. The size and diversity of this field is an encouragement to anyone interested in the development of a Singaporean literature. It is also a sign that the Competition is achieving its purpose.

It is one of the aims of this Competition to draw new writers into the complex, exciting work of writing for the stage. In this regard, the judges and sponsors have been pleased by the number of entrants both in 1986 and 1987 who have told us that they were prompted to try playwriting or to finish work in progress by the existence of this contest. Significantly, the top three prizes in this year's Competition all went to relatively young writers.

The winning plays represent in varying degrees the usual virtues of good dramatic writing: the ability to use the resources of the stage imaginatively and thoughtfully, as in Ovidia Yu's *Dead On Cue* and Liew Kim Siong's *I Do*, and to write dialogue which sounds natural and spontaneous, as in Sim Teow Li's *Idle Talk*. Theresa Tan's First Prize-winning play, *Pistachios and Whipped Cream*, manages the difficult technical feat of sustaining fifty minutes of interest using basically only two characters, one set, and the minimum of physical action. It succeeds because Miss Tan writes dialogue that is pungent, funny and vividly in character. Her play is a strikingly professional performance.

It is also a serious comedy whose subjects include loneliness, alienation, and even death. In this regard it is a fitting representative of the Competition, the plays of which generally reflect a high degree of healthy, if non-ideological, social concern. A remarkable number of them deal with a subject we might call 'the uncaring society'. In *Two Men, Three Struggles*, a father and son destroy one another in a fight brought on by economic setbacks and family dislocations. *Idle Talk* deals, as do a significant number of the entries, with strained rela-

tions between parents and children. *I Do* examines, not only the problems of a Singaporean woman trying to balance career and family, but also the problems of a liberated woman trying to relate to her traditional, subordinated mother. Other plays in the Competition deal with the strains of high-rise living and relocation, with the three-tier family, with impersonal bureaucracy, and with the emotional costs of careerism and economic individualism. Through these plays there is a deep and constructive concern with the quality of emotional life, a quality threatened less by 'Western influences' than by material success.

These plays also reflect a wide variety of influences. Theresa Tan adopts the style of Neil Simon and American 'buddy' comedy. Ovidia Yu blends elements from Tom Stoppard, Pirandello, and Michael Frayn. Sim Teow Li uses the mode of fourth-wall realism. One suspects, having been through the whole body of plays, that local writers are still looking for a Singaporean form into which to put our local and topical concerns. The model plays, it seems, are still to be written. But that will come with the writing of Singapore plays.

And with their production, I hope that the natural outgrowth of this publication will be the performance of all the prize-winning plays. A year's time has already seen the production of most of last year's winners. A good script is, after all, only the starting point. We should again thank the Shell Group for helping to provide that starting point. The rest is up to us, including those who will enter the next Short-Play Competition.

*Arthur D Lindley*

## PISTACHIOS AND WHIPPED CREAM

THERESA TAN LEE SAN



CHARACTERS: THEO

SANDRA

EDWARD

STUART

PEDRO

## THE SCENE

The entire action takes place in hostel room number 39-C, of Block G, in Lilywhite Hall of a local university.

## ACT ONE

Two weeks into a new term

## ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: Two months later, Friday evening just before a month long vacation.

SCENE TWO: Later that same evening.

## ACT THREE

After the month-long vacation.

## ACT ONE

*The scene is a cramped hostel unit, #39-C, on the third floor of Lilywhite Hall's Block G. The room is a dull grey, — used to be white — has two single beds, a wardrobe, and two desks which face windows. In between the two beds stands a small chest of grey drawers — previously white. A door situated on the the left leads to both the toilet and the bathroom. A door situated on the right leads to the common corridor.*

*The room is dusty and not very well-lit. The desks are cluttered with stacks and stacks of notes and thick texts. So are the spaces beneath the beds.*

*A girl is lying, stomach down, on one of the beds. She is reading; she wears a thick pair of glasses but is still squinting at her book. She has straight, limp, greasy hair that hangs about her face in a forlorn way. She wears a worn grey sweater — previously white — which reads 'I was tall', and a pair of pyjama pants and a pair of worn-out sneakers, all in bed.*

*It is two weeks into the new term. The occupant of the room is THEODORA (better known as THEO), a second year Language major, who has been staying at the same unit for the past two terms. She has never has to share her room, and has really been quite comfortable living with her untidy self. Until today.*

*It is late evening. Someone knocks on the door. It is a timid sort of knocking. THEO snorts and shifts her position a little, all the while still reading. From behind the door comes a...*

VOICE: Hello, is anyone in there?

THEO: No.

*(Silence ensues for the next few seconds.)*

VOICE: In that case...

*(The door opens. A girl steps in. She looks meticulously tidy in her spaghetti strapped yellow sundress, a matching yellow hat and yellow-framed sunglasses. She is carrying a yellow vanity case and a yellow handbag. She looks around her slowly, and catches sight of THEO.)*



Oh, hello.

*(THEO ignores her totally, seemingly absorbed in her novel.)*

Hi?

*(THEO ignores her totally, seemingly absorbed in her novel.)*

*Er...is this Room 39-C? (No answer. The girl walks back to the door and opens it. She looks at the door for a second, then closes it again.) I guess this IS 39-C. (She walks around nervously, vanity case still in hand.)*

*(Suddenly she notices the other bed, walks over to it, and sits down thankfully. She takes off her hat and her sunglasses and is about to lean back when...)*

THEO: That's my bed.

GIRL: *(Getting up immediately)* Oh, I'm sorry. Where do I sleep then?

THEO: In some other room.

GIRL: But I AM supposed to share this room with you, am I not?

THEO: *(Finally looking up from her book)* Share? My room?

GIRL: *(Nervously)* But...but I was told I'd be staying in 39-C?

THEO: Share? My room?

GIRL: *(Getting a little impatient)* I guess it's OUR room now.

THEO: Share? My room?

GIRL: I'm sorry if it's upset you...

THEO: UPSET? Who's UPSET? Incredulous, maybe. Annoyed, irritated, cross, insulted, mad, furious, OUTRAGED, maybe. But NOT upset. NEVER upset. Upset's for mothers and nerds. I'm not upset.

GIRL: Yes, you are.

THEO: No, I'm not.

GIRL: Yes, you are upset.

THEO: No, I am not.

GIRL: It's not healthy to deny your pent-up feelings.

THEO: What are you? A shrink?

GIRL: See, you are upset.

THEO: I called you a shrink. That makes me upset?

GIRL: No, that makes ME upset.

THEO: THAT makes you a nerd.

GIRL: I am not a nerd.

THEO: Okay, you're a geek.

GIRL: What's a geek?

THEO: A nerd.

GIRL: Oh.

THEO: Listen, I'm not sharing my room with you. You've made a mistake. I've had this room for the past year. ALL ALONE. BY MYSELF. IN MY VERY OWN COMPANY. Get the idea?

GIRL: Yes, but I was told to come to 39-C, Block G.

THEO: Maybe you heard wrong. Maybe it's 39-G, Block C.

GIRL: There isn't a 39-G in any of the blocks.

THEO: Who's been here longer, you or I?

GIRL: You, of course.

THEO: So I'm telling you there's a 39-G in Block C. Now, GO!

GIRL: But there are only three storeys in each block.

THEO: It doesn't matter. You see, Block A has levels A, B and C. Block B gets levels D, E and F, and Block C gets G, H and I.

GIRL: So how is it that Block G has got levels A, B and C?

THEO: I didn't build these things. I just live here.

GIRL: You're just trying to get rid of me, aren't you?

THEO: Right! Now please pack up your magic wand and leave.

GIRL: What did I do? Why don't you like me? *(Her voice rises to a whine. It is obvious that she is upset.)*

THEO: You were born, that's what.

*(Theo sees the girl's face.)*

Oh, alright alright alright alright alright alright alright!  
STAY!

GIRL: *(Brightening)* So where do I sleep?

THEO: In the corner with the spiders. *(She sees the girl's face again.)* Okay, okay, take the bed, take the bed.

GIRL: Which one?

THEO: The one with the four legs and the mattress.

GIRL: Oh. *(Then she looks at THEO)* Are you trying to be sarcastic?

THEO: Trying? Heck, no. I AM being sarcastic. Listen, just take the bed you've put your canaries on.

GIRL: What canaries?

THEO: There. *(She points to the vanity case.)* That thing there.

GIRL: *(Laughs)* Oh, that's just my vanity box.

THEO: Right!

*(The girl looks at THEO again. THEO smirks and sits up.)*

Okay, that's your bed, and try and find some space in the wardrobe, and take one of the desks — put whatever you find on it under my bed — and the bottom drawer of that table between the beds is empty. I think. I hope. Then there's the door to the bathroom and toilet.

*(All this while she is pointing to the respective areas while the girl glances at each one and nods, obviously getting more and more confused.)*

Okay?

GIRL: *(Slowly)* Yes, I do suppose so. I think I'll go to the bathroom. *(She walks over to the main door and goes out. THEO stares after her. A few seconds pass. The door opens and the girl re-enters the room, looking sheepish.)*

THEO: *(Patronisingly)* It's over there.



Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

