

NUS-SHELL SHORT PLAYS SERIES

***PRIZE
WINNING
PLAYS***

VOLUME V 1991

Edited by
Thiru Kandiah



PRIZE WINNING PLAYS

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*With a critical Introduction by the Editor and
an interpretative Commentary on Singaporean Theatre
by Ong Keng Sen, Artistic Director, TheatreWorks*

Edited by
Thiru Kandiah



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c/o Department of English Language and Literature
National University of Singapore

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NUS-SHELL SHORT PLAYS SERIES

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CREDITS

The Short Play Competition, 1991, was jointly organised by the Shell Companies in Singapore and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. Representing the University on the Organising Committee were Professor Edwin Thumboo, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Chairman) and Mrs. Annette Chia, Administrative Assistant, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Mr John Lim, Public Relations Officer, Ms Angie Gan, Community Relations Executive and Ms Winnifred Chen-Ooi, Public Affairs Manager represented the Shell Companies in Singapore.

The Organisers are grateful to Professor Tommy Koh, Director of the Institute of Policy Studies, for consenting to be the Guest-of-Honour at the prize giving ceremony and for giving away the prizes.

The judges at the Competition were Ms Sng Poh Yoke, Corporate Relations Manager, Singapore Press Holdings Limited, Mr Ong Keng Sen, Artistic Director, Theatreworks (Singapore) Ltd. and Dr Thiru Kandiah, Department of English Language and Literature.

The manuscript of this volume was typed by Mrs Siti Rukisah Bte Ahmad.

PREFACE (1)

The Shell Companies in Singapore are most pleased to be associated with this Short Play Competition. From its inception in 1986, this competition has served as a channel to encourage new, budding writers to contribute to the local drama scene. I am pleased to note that several of the participants in previous years have turned full-time writers and continue to add to the critical pool of locally-written plays. Many of the prize-winning plays have also been successfully staged by professional and semi-professional drama groups.

The scheme owes its success, in large part, to the tireless efforts of the staff of the English Language and Literature Department, National University of Singapore. It is always a rewarding experience working together with this dedicated team as well as the judges of the competition, who have toiled many hours to read through countless scripts, to always ensure the highest standards in our prize winning plays.

The support of our local writers is vital for the continued existence of the performing arts, especially in drama. It is our hope that this volume of short plays will give some permanence to the efforts of the latest group of Short Play Winners.

Winnifred Chen-Ooi
Public Affairs Manager
Shell Companies in Singapore

PREFACE (2)

Theatre is not only about spectacle or performance. Nowadays it is fashionable to emphasize the performance side of theatre. I happen to agree, fashionable though it may be that a play is above all about performance. However, theatre is also about plays (in the main, about plays, I might add) and plays rarely can exist without a playscript. Even if the play starts from a moment of pure inspiration and improvisation it needs to come together as an aesthetic form through an ever increasingly structured and complex series of workshops. So, in a world where performance appears to be the rule, the role of the playwright remains a crucial part of the theatrical experience. Take away the playwright and you might have improvisation and inspiration but something of the more formal, more complex levels of experience would be missing.

The NUS-Shell Short Plays Series addresses this problem in a sustained and directed manner. Every year for the last five years, Shell has been committed to the nurturing and the discovery of new playwriting talents through its Short Play Competition. And looking back over the last four volumes, we can sense how important it was for the competition to have been held: to have provided the initial push to new writers, the mechanism to attract them to put pen to paper and the joy of seeing themselves in print. It was not just the competition itself or the prize money that Shell so generously gave; the idea of a playwriting series took root and became part of the mental landscape of potential writers. Writers knew they could get printed, have their plays performed and be critiqued. To a serious author all these are important considerations. The Department is honoured to be partners with Shell in this project. We feel that it has been worthwhile and important.

This year, "Prize Winning Plays" takes on a more structured and thought-out format. In addition to the seven plays which Thiru Kandiah has discussed in his introductory article, Ong Keng Sen has a concluding essay on "The Practice of English Language Theatre in Singapore". These two essays are, to my mind, important milestones in the criticism of theatre and plays. Together with the seven playscripts the volume points to the new direction that the series hopes to take with this present volume.

Ban Kah Choon
Acting Head
Department of English Language & Literature
National University of Singapore

1990 SHORT PLAY COMPETITION PRIZE WINNERS

First Prize	<i>Red Man, Green Man</i> Sim Kim Jin, Desmond
Second Prize	<i>Storyteller</i> Sim Kim Jin, Desmond
Third Prize (Tie)	<i>The Year of the Dragon</i> Chu Lik Ren
	<i>Raw Material</i> Tham Li Mei, Claire
Merit Prizes (in alphabetical order)	<i>The Father's Visit</i> Lim Eng Koon / Chua Hak Lien
	<i>Remembering Joanne</i> Lim Wee Teck
	<i>Flying High</i> Ovidia Yu

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INTRODUCTION

Seven authors in search of the Singaporean play

Thiru Kandiah
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In his Introduction to the second volume in this series of prize winning plays (1987), Arthur Lindley suggested that our national writers (in English) "are still looking for a Singaporean form into which to put our concerns" (p. vii). A great deal of lively activity has gone on since then on the Singaporean stage and much pleasing progress has undeniably been made. Yet, in much of the considerable discussion that takes place of this activity, whether at a popular level or in academic circles, the most pronounced note of agreement appears to be that the Singaporean theatre in English has not yet quite arrived.

The search, it appears, is for a contemporary Singaporean theatre idiom which would allow a meaningful exploration and expression of the contemporary Singaporean sensibility and the distinctive life of the experience that this sensibility defines. Far from hampering an encounter with larger human concerns that preoccupy people elsewhere and everywhere, such an idiom would help bring these concerns immediately alive, by rooting them in a distinct place and time. This, as Synge led us to see, would enable them not to remain mere disembodied abstractions but to be concretely realized in the felt terms of a particular contextualized experience.

Of course, as Max Le Blond warned us in his Introduction to the first volume of plays in this series (1986), the search is not to be pursued through "learned...scholarly disquisition(s)". The theatre idiom sought after needs to use the unique resources of the stage in creative resonance with the life of the reality it is applied to in pursuit of its goals, and this will make central to the quest the actual production of plays on the live stage (pp. vii-viii). At the same time, we must not do these writers the disservice of not recognising that their creative endeavours are informed by a critical awareness of what they are about. The task of trying to make explicit the kind of issue that they find themselves needing to grapple with cannot, therefore, be neglected. Among other things, this will contribute to the emergence of the kind of

Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

THE FATHER'S VISIT

Lim Eng Koon and Chua Hak Lien

CHARACTERS: LEE KIONG
DAVE
LEE KIONG'S FATHER

ACT ONE

(Hostel room, one bed and a chair and table. Lee Kiong lies stretched out on the bed with his guitar, strumming the riff of 'Smoke On The Water'. His bed is a mess, with one or two heavy metal magazines lying on it. A leather jacket lies on the floor. Dave's table, on the other hand, is neat and tidy, with a photo frame conspicuously displayed. Dave walks in, carrying a book)

LEE KIONG: So how was she? Was she full of adulation for you?
(Twisting out of bed, still strumming) Did she get down to the floor and lick you all over and say *(In a high pitched voice)* 'Oh, David, David, please, please take me now.'

DAVE : Stop it, Lee. She's a sweet girl.

LEE KIONG: Oh yes. *(Fluttering his eyelids. Puts down guitar)* So sweet, and what did she give you? *(Reaches out and grabs book)* **Great American Poems** *(Eyes suddenly open wide)* Can it be a miracle? She is trying to convert you into a sensitive, well-rounded individual.

DAVE : Lee, stop it. I happen to like poetry.

LEE KIONG: Oh? O.K. Name a poet you know, dear learned one.

DAVE : Uh... *(Pauses)* Shakespeare?

LEE KIONG: Name two.

DAVE : Uh... *(Stuck)*

LEE KIONG: 10... 9 ... 8 ... 7...

DAVE : Uh ... Leonardo?

LEE KIONG: *(Shakes his head. Sighs)* 6 ... 5 ... 4 ...

DAVE : Wait. Wait.

LEE KIONG: *(Climbs onto bed)* 3 ... 2 ... 1 ...

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