

SHIVA'S DANCE: PLAYWRITING AS PROCESS

**AN ATTEMPT TO BRIDGE THE CHASM
BETWEEN LINEAR THINKING AND
MYTHOPOEIC CONSCIOUSNESS**

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ABSTRACT:

This document consists of two parts: one is a creative work (a full-length play) and the other is an introduction to and a commentary upon my experience of the creative process.

The play, **Shiva's Dance**, is an attempt to understand--from within, as it were--various individuals' encounters with the miraculous. I understand the miraculous to mean that which is inexplicable in any rational or past-experiential sense.

My play is set in Sri Lanka, near the village of Kataragama where the annual firewalking ceremonies take place even today. Firewalking is the central "miracle" of the play, but it symbolically represents much more: It is an initiation of consciousness and only those who are ready for the sacred experience of silent awareness can succeed at it.

There are various representatives of Western Culture present in Sri Lanka for various reasons in my play. There is a Protestant Christian missionary and his frustrated wife. There is an agricultural technologist who is the voice of reason and science. And there is a CUSO teacher: she grows into the focal point of the play and she discovers her own resources in the face of terror.

Yes, terror: The play is set in Sri Lanka, so other difficulties arise from these circumstances. The Sri Lankan civil war comes to the corner where these individuals are working out their destinies and terrorists play a role in the events' unfolding. Furthermore, there is the "old" versus the "new" conflict between two other characters--a father and a son--who are Sri Lankan. And, lastly, at the most obvious level, the play involves us in questions of cross-cultural education and/or indoctrination. It forces each of us (I hope) to question the cultural imperatives which we take for granted and to realize that these imperatives must be deconstructed to awaken to new self-created potentials.

Because **Shiva's Dance** was written in isolation, I naturally had to deal with the impact of its unveiling to other minds. I write about this in my Introduction in a general way, and in a longer Appendix in a more personal manner. In these parts, I attempt to study the process of creating characters who sometimes act against the writer's intentions and with the writer's assumed need to prevent this. I also deal openly with the process of continual rewrites and dealings with friendly critics and my review committee.

INTRODUCTION:

Following is a play on which I have worked intermittently for two years. During that time, I have discovered much about creative writing, much about the needs of the theatre, and much about myself. This last is especially true with regard to the operations of my own thought, and the inherent contradiction between revelation and determination.

I began with concrete musings of a philosophical/educational nature and attempted to create (perhaps "construct" is a better word) characters who would, each in his or her own way, express those thoughts, or opposition to those thoughts, which had been vexing me. My play was, at that point, really little more than a Platonic dialogue, but with none of the logical dexterity of Plato's keen mind. I had written a play of ideas, a play wherein cross-cultural viewpoints clash and opposing notions intermingle. I like to think a great many of those ideas are worth considering, but the naked reality of an audience watching characters doing little more than sitting around talking had not yet hit home.

I had thought that I knew precisely how the characters would interact and, therefore, how the play would end. In other words, the "I" that is I, imagined it was in control. The danger of creating characters who are essentially different from one's self-perception is that they tend to come to life. Sublimated or repressed or ignored potentialities that had previously lay hidden in the depths of soul suddenly found they had licence to *become*. Somewhat to my dismay, I found my characters behaving in ways I had not foreseen and moving toward a climax I had not ordained.

This is the essence of what I have called mythopoeic thinking in my title. It means a submission to creative intuition, and a willingness to blindly follow wherever the muses may lead. It is an adventure of discovery and, like

every true adventure, it is not without its moments of anxiety and terror .

Unfortunately, it is probably these moments of insecurity that led me, as they have led many others, to seek security by clinging to control. Though I initiated the process, I have not fully relinquished central command, as yet. Of course, every creative endeavour requires an ability to apply an acutely heightened consciousness to the unfolding situation, like kayaking through foaming rapids. But controlled awareness is not the same as determined conclusions. Because I felt I knew what the revelation of my play was to be, I kept my vigilant overseers cracking the whip over any spontaneous actions of my characters. In other words, I veered from the insecurity of pure creative discovery to the security of a mechanistic mock-up. The characters were wound-up to act only in accord with their schematized structures.

I neither submitted my ego to spontaneous creation, nor considered the vagaries of human personality . Though very different, each character attempted to "explain" himself or herself, trusting in the efficacy of reasoned argument. I had never considered that real persons often speak in fragments, lose the trend of conversation, or even stutter or burp. My characters were, at first, misshapen reproductions of my ego.

Through the constructive criticism of others and through the smattering of courage I have shown by being willing to enter the hermetically-sealed crucible of creation again and again, my play has come alive on me. Like trying to grasp old Proteus, its shape has refused to remain steadfast or predictable, but has always been the process of becoming something entirely other. This has revealed to me the limits of controlled rational thinking. To really understand what I am about, to embody the hidden faces within me, to comprehend that meaning must be discovered and not stated, I have had to

struggle to take my shadow from this drama, and allow it to emerge on its own.

Be it noted, however, that this process has not ended. I agree with the review committee of my Creative Project that , as a script ready for actual theatrical production, my play has a great deal of evolving to do. The process I have outlined has begun (and may be, ultimately, interminable). My play has not yet abandoned full control of process, adapted to the needs of an actual stage, nor allowed the finished evolution of each of the characters. In fact, there is some uncertainty as to whether or not my work at this stage can even bear the title of a "play". At present, it is certainly an expression of deeply-felt ideas in what may be called the "dramatic dialogue" format . It is relevant to pedagogy at all levels, and is, and will continue to be, symbolic of my own journey through "the dark night of the soul" to continued revelation of process.

Following the play, I have added an appendix to deal in an honest and personal manner with this process of discovery and what I, as writer, went through while planning, researching, and writing; while going to advisors and committee, and rewriting; and which I anticipate going through as the play continues to emerge and edit itself.

SHIVA'S DANCE

a play in two acts



Greg Nixon

...Shiva is a destroyer and loves the burning ground.
But what does He destroy?

Not merely the heavens and earth
at the close of a world-cycle,
but the fetters that bind each separate soul.

What menaced, now is excitement,
What terrified, is now delight...
And the universe resounds with the joyful cry
I am.

--Sudalaiyadi
(Dancer of the burning ground)

CHARACTERS:

(and suggested characterizations)

Pastor Armaund Nullos, a Protestant missionary, 40ish. He's blustery and bullish to hide his nihilism.

Sara Nullos, his wife, early 30s. Her boredom and dissatisfaction make her sarcastic and coquettish.

Trevor Yeats, a CUSO instructor (Ag. Tech.), late 20s or early 30s. He sees himself as a hard-nosed scientist, but he's always willing to lie for his lust.

Cindi Plunger, a CUSO schoolteacher, early 20s. Behind her outdated hippy banter and surface idealism lie a relentless perception.

Mr. Kosambi, a Sinhalese merchant, 40s/50s, a materialist, willing to barter belief for gain. His saving grace is his self-deprecating humour.

Mahinda, his son, a teenager, fervent and somewhat wild-eyed.

Mohotty, the firewalking **devalo** (sorcerer), a mystic presence.

Badawel, S.L.F. terrorist 1. He's youthful and fanatic in his drive for Sinhalese purity in Sri Lanka, full of indoctrinated dogma against religion and imperialism. His naivety is balanced by his very real danger.

Suriya, terrorist 2, fanatic and youthful. He's also memorized his slogans, like Badawel, but he's a bit more bloodthirsty and a bit more empty-headed.

(Each character talks beyond his/her own understanding. An ironic edge to many speeches is encouraged.)

SETTING is in the SE corner of modern Sri Lanka, in the village of Tissamaharama, near the temple of Kataragama. Time is the very recent past.

ACT I: Scene 1: A room in the house of Armaund Nullos, where he fervently prays in a spotlight. He wears grey and is somewhat disheveled. In the adjoining room, his wife, Sara, straightens up and arranges, seeming to impatiently feel that nothing is quite the way it ought to be. As the prayer nears climax, she sits down and becomes still.

Nullos

Almighty Ruler! He who knows all; He who sees from the depths of men's hearts to the farthest star without; Creator and Preserver of the universe; Compassionate Father! Clear Light of truth! Destroyer--merciless, harsh Destroyer!--of all false gods and...and false science, too.
Hear the meek voice of your most humble, most obedient of servants. O hear the distant squeak of this, the most miniscule and worthless of all your creatures. I who speak am as dust.
I...I crawl to thy potent throne and cling to thy heavenly feet.

[He flings himself forward on his face whimpering, then returns to his knees paging frantically through the Bible. Reads from Psalm 28:]

Unto Thee will I cry O Lord, my Rock.
Be not silent to me,
Lest, if Thou be silent to me,
I will become like them
That go down ... into the pit!

O Watchful Eye, leave me not lost in this pit into which Thou, in thy infinite wisdom, hath dropped me. O God, God, I am but as slime to Thee! I am less than the most repellent amoeba alone in this strange land. There are snakes everywhere. O harsh Father, you know how I suffer, er... Thou knowest howest I sufferest. Forgive, forgive, O Master! Let not these strange sights I have seen weaken my faith. You know it is the work of the great serpent. I must remain true, pure, to you, my Father.

Know, O King, that sometimes...
temptations...attack me...in my sleep, in my bodily weariness, in my lonely isolation. Could it be, Father, that sometimes even my wife seeks to lead me from the ways of godliness? She... O one, true God, punish me in my shame!

[As he grovels, distant drums are heard.]

O God, you know everything. All true miracles can only be wrought through Thee. Yes, yes, the blind to see, the lame to walk. But...I must know, my...my great and relentless Ruler, how is it these heathens perform their stunts! Are satanic forces behind their trickery? They call upon false gods, great

God; they call upon false gods with false names and perform...impossible...stunts to confuse my senses. Is this the devil's work or do you...dost Thou, perhaps, seek to test me?

O it is hard, Cruel Father. I seek to maintain my purity, my faith, but sometimes I doubt. I who am sheltered beneath the legs of thy throne deserve only the explosion of your holy refuse on my body, Lord, on my face!

...I deserve only the cruellest treatment for the wonder I have felt for the knife tricks, the fire tricks, of these godforsaken Hindus.

[drums surge]

What causes the hands of my wife to act as they have done? O Father, they crawl like serpents in the night, seeking to awaken the power of the goatfooted one within me. Oh, I do repent! I repent, Great King. Punish me! Yes, punish me, hurt me! I am an abomination upon the face of your creation! Reach for me! Touch me! Abuse me! I...I die for thee, Cruel Master. I die! Oh no, oh no...I...ooh...

[drums climax and end]

God, I'm taken...

[He collapses in repulsive ecstasy. Darkness, of course. After breaking from her hypnotized pause in the next room, Mrs. Sara Nullos rises and speaks with some irritation.]

Sara

Armaund? Are you still in there? You've been at prayer a long while. The teachers will soon be arriving. Do you need more time, Armaund?

[to herself, cynically] And beg a few favours for your wifey, too.

Armaund!

[Nullos enters]

Nullos

Sara, I have been with the Lord.

Sara

Yes, I'm sure you have, dear, but we did invite those CUSO people and--

Nullos

[pacing, gesturing, staring skyward] Sara, you didn't listen: I said I have been **with** the Lord. [turns to her]

Sara

You have...[she looks] Oh! He has spoken to you, then? Your eyes are so glassy--uh--so shining.

Nullos

He came. Sara, He came to me. He was in me. My prayers were truly answered this evening. I am renewed; I am possessed again. Oh, but it was glorious. Never will I doubt my mission again.

Sara

How lucky for you. It's been some time, hasn't it? Well, you must sit and tell me of your experience.

Nullos

But what can I tell you? God's power cannot be put into words for **anyone** to understand. My God understands the needs of my soul.

Sara

Yes, the needs of your soul. Of course. You have been suffering terrible tension of late. [innocently] How did it...how did it **feel**, Armaund?

Nullos

Feel? Is sensation the only experience you understand, Sara? It was joy, my dear, the joy of a hard God's possession. It certainly was not a mere feeling.

Sara

[with irony] I see.

Nullos

[lecturing] The repression of earthly vanities, that's the key, Sara. Repression, repression, repression. And then a final twist: submission of the ego to that Great Power. [eyes aloft, fluttery] Oh, I am His, oh yes, I am His.

Sara

[eyes mockingly aloft] You're so deep, Armaund.

Nullos

It is not I, but God, who has immeasurable depth and width and--

Sara

[interrupting] But, listen: sometimes, Armaund, when you find identity in your God, don't you feel...?

Nullos

Feel? Feelings, again, Sara? Feel what?

Sara

Oh, I don't know: Separate from yourself? Alienated from your natural centre? Like you're on the outside looking in?

Nullos

[unctuous deprecation] Sara, Sara, poor little Sara. Your mind is so rooted in the mundane. How could you possibly hope to comprehend the vastness of my transformation? Yes, my self, my mundane daily self with all its muddled desires and habits, has

been left untended to wither on the vine and, hopefully, to disappear entirely. I have abandoned it for the Great Circle--

Sara

Great Circle?

Nullos

[declaiming] --whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. [declining] I don't expect **you** to understand.

Sara

No, I don't understand. Not a bit. You describe an outer circle without an inner core, without a centre, like most of us have. Is it really so terrible to just be a man sometimes?

Nullos

Yes, when God can make me so much more than a man! [He leaves.]

Sara

[to herself, reaching into a drawer for a pack of smokes] Hm. Or so much less. Abnegation: Left to wither on the vine...

[There's a knock on the door. She quickly hides cigarettes and goes and opens it.]

Mr. Yeats, Miss -uh- Splasher, won't you come in?

Cindi

You bet, Mrs. Nullos. And it's Plunger, Cindi Plunger. Hope you'll call me "Cindi". [She shakes hands forcefully.]

Sara

Cindi, yes, of course. You'll have some tea, the two of you? And it's not that awful Ceylon-type. It's Canadian orange pekoe, Red Rose in fact. I have it sent from home. Mr. Yeats?

Yeats

Tea, yes, but do you keep any of the black Sri Lankan variety?

Sara

The local tea? If you wish, I do, yes. You've adapted, Mr. Yeats.

Yeats

Yes, I guess I have. There are so many facets to this mysterious land; there's always new excitements to discover. [They smile lingeringly at each other.]

Cindi

Jeez, I haven't. Adapted I mean. To the heat at least. I mean that bit of a hike from our hut really **slayed** me. I think it's even too hot for tea.

Sara

[coming round slowly] Hm? Oh, I have some fruit cordial in the fridge. I'll get some. [Nullos enters] Armaund, come join our guests. Cindi -uh- Miss Plunger, Mr. Yeats, my husband, the Reverend Armaund Nullos. We were just discussing adaptation here in Sri Lanka.

[exits]

Nullos

[assuming the podium] Adaptation? The little adaptation that's necessary is not too difficult. We just have to deal with the infernal heat or the monsoons. I do not think it wise to be too adaptable. After all, we are here to save, to teach these natives. We should cling to our natural habits. The example of our western lifestyles is just one more beacon to hold before them.

Cindi

You kidding me? The godforsaken little hut CUSO's given me and my crumbly little salary can't be a beacon for anybody. I just haven't got anything western to show.

Nullos

You have yourself to show, Miss Plunger. And I'm sure you're a fine example both as a person and a teacher.

Cindi

I can't be much of a teacher when my students won't show up for class, and as for the person part, I don't know.

Nullos

Your students won't show up?

Yeats

[moving in, putting his arm around Cindi, who moves away] They do, usually. I'm doing agricultural fieldwork so I often pick them up in my truck on the way out. And they're hard workers, too. But there's the war, and the Tamils and Sinhalese won't work together.

Cindi

And the Festival of Kataragama is upcoming right quick, so some tend to slip away.

Nullos

Slip away...?

Cindi

Yes, to go to retreat--3 months of it, to fast and pray so Kataragama will enter them.

[Sara returns.]

Nullos

Enter them? You're not telling me you permit such heathen superstition?

Yeats

[looking levelly at Nullos] As I see it, superstition is superstition. Anyway, we have little choice, Reverend Nullos. CUSO has its Prime Directive.

Sara

[stepping between the two men and gazing up at Yeats] Here's your black tea, Mr. Yeats. What is this "Prime Directive"?

Yeats

It's like the one from **Star Trek**, remember? "Don't interfere in the natural evolution of an alien culture." Teach them agriculture, or, in Cindi's case, English grammar and stuff, but leave their beliefs and rituals alone.

[Sara laughs appreciatively.]

Nullos

[pronunciamento] I don't know anything about **Star Trek**, Mr. Yeats, but it should be obvious that your Prime Directive is nothing less than preposterous. By teaching agricultural techniques or standard English, you are interfering directly in their culture. And well you should, too. They're a backward people whose culture needs a little interfering with. Not only are they engaged in total civil war, but they continue to believe in their endless train of bush gods, like this Kataragama, for whom they likely disembowel swine.

Cindi

[with some heat] They do not disembowel swine, Reverend, and I don't think they're so backward. A lot of the stuff they do is pretty far out. I mean real **wizard**: Like at this festival of Kataragama: Trance dances and the firewalk!

Sara

[Her attention taken from Yeats] Yes, we've seen the firewalk. One of the most horrible and frightening things I've ever witnessed. About two years ago--two years ago, wasn't it, dear?--we were invited by a group of the local Hindu sect to come to their little celebration. There was just drumming and chanting for hours and then about midnight about thirty people came trooping out of the temple, all glassy-eyed and possessed-looking.

[distant drumming resumes]

They walked, or danced--some played tambours--right into the firepit where the coals and rocks were so hot I couldn't bear to get in close. Some threw burning coals over their heads. Heatwaves rose malignantly, [entranced] yet... yet... there was a sort of power emanating from those wild beings, a... a dark glee.

And most strangely, amidst that unapproachable blast furnace, even their garments--in most cases--failed to ignite.

Cindi

Wow. But it's just some trick, right? They say anyone in the right frame of mind can do it, or [giggling] anyone with wet sweaty feet. Some guy leading business seminars in the States has his positive-thinking salesman hop over embers. [laughs]

Sara

We are not speaking of embers here, Miss Plasher. The pit is about a foot deep and twenty feet long; it's filled with great hardwood logs set afire, or stones that glow with fire. I tell you I could feel the heat from 40 feet away! [pausing] Well, one man died--burnt to death before our eyes--and another two people were severely maimed.

Nullos

[angry arms] Heathen devilry! The sadistic audience loved the cruelty. We had no thought of going back last year, let me tell you!

Yeats

[to Sara] You mean to tell me the coals were hot enough to burn a man to death? How long did it take?

Nullos

[assuming he was addressed] You'll have to ask Sara. I refused to watch, but **she** wouldn't leave.

Sara

[still entranced to rising drums and tambours]
Seconds. It took seconds. He glanced toward us. His toga ignited. He screamed, jumped, fell, and burst into flames. They raked him out too late. The maimed two, who also lost the trance but survived, were nearer the edge and managed to scamper to safety with burning limbs.

Yeats

Great God! But you're telling us some twenty-odd souls completed this firewalk unscathed?

Nullos

So it would seem.

[drums subside. Pause]

Cindi

[looking around] What's with the neat drums?

Nullos

It's the locals. Heating up their blood for that infernal ceremony. Their trickery is appalling.

Yeats

You don't believe in the miraculous then, Reverend Nullos?

Nullos

Of course I do. You must know, Mr. Yeats, that the Bible describes miracles that far outstrip the charlatantry of these local fakirs and mystics. They may appear to make a rope rise but I have yet to see them bring a man back from the dead, as Christ did for Lazarus.

Yeats

[somewhat snidely] Oh, you saw that one then?

Nullos

No, I did not, Mr. Yeats. But God's word as found in the New Testament is beyond question, beyond even the power of the senses.

Yeats

[laughing, with Sara, at his successful riposte] I meant the rope trick. You saw the rope trick?

Nullos

Hrumph. That, and many more besides. I have seen men, and women too, pierce their flesh with skewers and when the tool was withdrawn there was no blood nor even a wound. I do not know if these are but illusions or if some sort of satanism is behind them. There is so much to do with snakes and flames. I avoid these things now. There is no place there for men of God.

Cindi

"Satanism"? I mean come on, Rev. [giggles]

Yeats

[diving in] But that's fascinating! Surely there's a reasonable, scientific explanation for it all.

Cindi

Oh, Trevor, it's only that these Sinhalese have learned to focus the power of mind. Y'know: mind over matter. We come from halfway around the world and attempt to refocus mindvibes that have taken centuries to develop. I mean they'll learn English, but only as a thing, like a tidbit to eat. They learn your western growing techniques--

Yeats

--and I find them resowing the fields at night, in accordance with custom: more you sow, more you reap.

Cindi

[onto something] Yeah, they save their real mind resources for transcendence.

Sara

Transcendence? [Yeats rises]

Cindi

[fascinated by her own revelation, lots of hand talk] Yeah. Most of these people aren't sure whether they're Hindus, Hinayana Buddhists, or what, but, anyway, the purpose, the meaning of their lives is that some of them ...transcend their karma, man, and unite with some divinity or cosmic power!

Nullos

Miss Plunger, your words are not just hasty but near to sacrilege. Transcendence, awareness beyond our daily selves, is possible only for those chosen by God to serve Him. To attempt it otherwise is...is a betrayal.

Sara

[looking at her husband with withering disgust]
A betrayal of what, dear? Of our servitude, or of God's **special** relationship with certain people?
[eyes now on Yeats] Transcending my daily self sounds fascinating, in an awful way.

Nullos

Sara--

Yeats

[getting between them] You believe in miracles then, Mrs. Nullos?

Sara

No, I have no experience with such things, Mr. Yeats. But I think it's fair to say I depend on them to exist. What else is it keeps one going? The dream come true... the magical cure...
[meaningfully to Yeats' eyes] the lure of adventure... I suppose it's all in the hands of God.

Cindi

[picking up a statuette (many-armed Shiva, aflame, dancing on corpses) talking to Nullos, but trying to distract Trevor, who flirts on]
Speaking of gods, just look at this cat: Kataragama, himself, I think. The natives seem to think this is the little demon who confers such powers. The Laughing One. He wakens them and they're able to perform miracles, like walking on fire.

Nullos

That statuette is the Kataragama? The god of the firewalk? Mr. Kosambi only told me it was a good luck charm.

Cindi

Hey, man, maybe it is, in **this** "satanic" place. Lookit, the little bugger's smiling from ear to ear.

Nullos

--as he dances amidst flames. Hmph. Unnatural idolatry.

Cindi

[pointedly to Sara] I don't understand, Sara. You say you hated the firewalk, but that you depend on miracles...

Yeats

[stuck with Nullos] Flames, eh? I dunno, Reverend, maybe it's not so unnatural, but more...well...supernatural.

Sara

[to Cindi] Well, uh, Cindi, the firewalk turned out to be murderous, but I guess I say I depend on miracles to just maybe permit a few of my dreams to come true, as they say.

Nullos

[taking Yeats aside] You certainly have an unhealthy interest in the supernatural, especially for a man who has come to the other side of the Earth to awaken these people to the advances of western agricultural science. Surely you don't believe in these so-called miracles, Mr. Yeats?

Cindi

[to Sara] Your "dreams come true"? You mean I guess that you're not really happy in here in Sri Lanka.

[Sara stares at Nullos and shakes her head.]

Yeats

[to Nullos] Reverend Nullos, I **cannot** believe in the miraculous or even in the irrational. I am an agricultural technologist and, perhaps more important, a teacher. The locals take care of all the praying for good weather, good crops, and what have you. I am from the old and trusted church of Aristotle, the school of cause and effect. You experiment with methods, and, over the years you discover what works. Given similar conditions, the same methods will produce the same results. Environmental control. You stick with what works, y'see.

Cindi

[Taking Yeats by the arm] Trevor, you windbag, don't you think the Sinhalese pray and sacrifice because they believe that it works?

Yeats

Yes, but if their success-rate were to be calculated it would be found to be sadly lacking, no matter how many firstborn sons were sacrificed, so to speak. What **works** can be observed and measured, so, according to scientific principles, it can be applied again and again, and success can be expected again and again. Like you run your classes.

Sara

[after a pause, approaching Yeats around Cindi] But what does it mean to "work"? If you apply the same methods again and again, you know in advance exactly what you expect to achieve. You are,

in essence, controlling the future. There's less chance for failure, but no chance at all for...well...the miraculous.

Yeats

[peevd] Who started all this miraculous stuff? I suppose it would be a miracle to sprout beautiful rose bushes instead of grain, but that's not the reason I was brought here. I'm here to achieve definite, predictable ends.

Cindi

And to turn your students into budding agronomists, whose success can be observed and measured?

Yeats

Hmmm. I suppose so. What else can I do? I know the results I expect.

Sara

[running over, intense] But that's just it, don't you see? There are parts of people, probably the largest parts, which we cannot observe, cannot measure. It is there, in that secret self, where miraculous breakthroughs occur, and it is also there where inexplicable despair can break through and destroy its container.

Nullos

[paternally] Now, Sara, contain yourself. You're going on. [to the others, stepping directly in front of his wife] You'll have to forgive my wife; sometimes her fancies bedevil her. All this talk of "secret selves"! I have noticed no "secret self" in me, I can assure you. My "self" is outside, subsumed in God.

Cindi

Then you could never walk on fire, Rev, or give yourself wounds that don't bleed. Doncha see? We, western teachers or preachers, can only teach them things, man, **things**, from the outside in. We can't dig their minds--or selves or souls or whatever--because they're on their own thing, their own secret journeys. In their retreats and weird tricks they learn to wipe-out that outside identity and to engage the secret self. Man, that's real learning, and they could teach me there!

Yeats

While I teach them agriculture, I can watch their rituals like I would watch a play. I may jeer or applaud but I cannot participate.

[Mr. Kosambi, a Sinhalese merchant, comes to the door and stands listening.]

Cindi

But the **devalo**, the boss magician, **can** and that's cool. I mean you're one of the outsiders. Man, we're all outsiders, even to ourselves. That's our culture, eh? Our job is to teach others to become outsiders, too, see? Sure they're willing to learn farming

techniques. They'll learn anything that makes daily profane life more tolerable. But that's all on the outside, eh? It's okay as long as it doesn't interfere with their inside need to prove their faith and transcend their karma. Sacred **experience** is all that matters; man, the rest is just physical husk, and it has nothing to do with us.

Nullos

[the righteous prophet] If I responded to those outrageous statements as they warrent, Miss Plasher, Sara and I would soon be having our tea alone! But I am the host, a representative of Canadian custom, and I encourage you to continue to enjoy your tea, as well. But if you're implying that it is their faith which allows them to pull such dramatic stunts, then I say it's time you considered the state of your own soul. It's just sleight of hand, I tell you, and I'm sure Mr. Yeats agrees.

Yeats

I...

Sara

[seeing Kosambi] Ah, Mr. Kosambi, you sneaked up on us. Do come in and join us. Another point of view is always refreshing.

Kosambi

[bowing] Ah. Much thank you.

Yeats

Well. Kosambi. Have a chair, Old Sport.

Sara

Oh, you know Mr. Yeats?

Kosambi

Oh yes. Very good friend. Much good trading.

Yeats

Yes, there's always the need for machines and the machines always need something. So I have need of a **mudalali**.

Kosambi

A **mudalali**! You are kind, Mr. Yeats.

Yeats

You are a merchant on the way up, and a valued resource to me. You know, **Appuhamy**, we were just discussing the firewalk. Perhaps you can be a resource here, as well.

Kosambi

[humbly] Ah, the firewalk.

Yeats

What do you know of this thing? What trick is behind it?

Kosambi

Trick? The fire is walked, Mr. Yeats. This is all that I know.

Cindi

Oh Wow. You've seen it then. I knew it! What is it, mind over matter, right?

Nullos

What's the trick? And no nonsense of "transcending karma".

Yeats

How's it done? It's simply physically impossible to actually walk upon red-hot coals! Would you do it?

Kosambi

Would I do it? No, I would not do it, Mr. Yeats, but perhaps that is not to my credit. I am a **mundalali**, as you say, a merchant. I make business. To walk the flames would not influence my balance sheet. [wide grin]

Cindi

So much for American business seminars.

Kosambi

But "impossible"? No, I think not. These eyes have seen it many times.

Yeats

Then I ask you again: How is it done?

Kosambi

[shrugs] They say Kataragama gives them the power to do this ...thing.

Cindi

They do it with their minds, right?

Nullos

[snidely] "They do it with their minds." Minds indeed! Who or what is this Kataragama? And why, Mr. Kosambi, did you give me a statue of him as a so-called good luck charm?

Kosambi

Oh. Oh, yes. But this is the father of Kataragama: Shiva, the Destroyer. Of course, I did not think you mind which local deity was represented. Idols all. [chuckles ingratiatingly] Idols all. Of course! But many strange forces are around us, Pastor Nullos. I think I only hoped to protect you.

Nullos

Protect **me**? From what?

Kosambi

Oh, I do not know. Maybe from the strange things.

Nullos

Now look here, Mr. Kosambi: Many phenomena are no more than false trails conjured by the Serpent to mislead us. We do better to look away.

Yeats

But, Reverend, if we look away we may never understand the hidden cause. That's the essence of a mystery: Something strange and unique occurs. There seems to be no explanation; curiosity is aroused. We investigate, explain, and new knowledge is gained.

Sara

Oh, how western! New knowledge is gained, Mr. Yeats? But to what end? I am so weary of this need to explain! You may be able to explain the...the...

Cindi

Transcendence.

Sara

Or the trick, or whatever, by some scientific jibberish but can you do it? Can you **do** it? To know it is not to **be** it.

Nullos

[moving in on his wife] A-hem!

Kosambi

Oh, you are so very correct, Mistress Nullos. I do not know how they do it but I am afraid I can never experience it either. If I did **know** how, I do not think I could do it even then.

Yeats

I don't want to walk the damned flames, but if fire can be walked on and flesh pierced without harm I would very much like to see it.

Cindi

Yeah, me too!

Kosambi

The opportunity is here, if the Tamil rebels don't get here first. In two weeks' time the initiates of Kataragama will undergo the firewalk. Many will succeed, but, as always, there will be some who lack faith or favour to Kataragama...and they will burn, hee-hee.

Nullos

[the judge] Do you find that amusing, Kosambi? Has your new Christianity done nothing for you but triple your foreign business?

Kosambi

Oh no, Pastor Nullos. I laugh at the fools who try to walk with the -uh- devil. [ingratiating chuckle] I think maybe the devil laughs, too--at the ones who burn, I mean.

I maybe not laugh. My son, Mahinda, has been prepared for two months now. Then he will walk the fire.

Sara

Your son!

Nullos

My God, Kosambi, why didn't you tell me? I could have saved him. This must be stopped.

Yeats

But--

Nullos

That boy is in grave danger--both his body and his soul. Where is he being kept?

Kosambi

[shrugging] He is at the main temple. There they practise **vrit**: they fast and pray. But he will listen to no one but Mohotty, the **devalo**, the chief priest. I can no longer reach him.

Sara

[taking Trevor's arm and appealing to his eyes]
Mr. Yeats, what can we do for this boy?

Cindi

[enough is too much] Shit, leave'em be. He's there by his own choice. Remember the Prime Directive.

Nullos

[jumping up] Don't be blind! I'll not let him be destroyed this way. Kosambi, you must show me to this temple. The true path must not be lost to him!

[dark]

Scene 2: In dim light, Cindi and Yeats walk through the village to their dwelling and pause when she explodes.

Cindi

[fuming, politeness annihilated] Man what an asshole! He thinks he can just step into an alien world and turn it upside down to suit himself. I mean, shit, whutthefuk does he know about Mahinda or what the kid wants? Or needs? [pauses, tromping] Mahinda

took some classes, y'know, and he was hardworking and sincere...maybe a bit intense. What gives that Nullos creep the...the **idea** that he's the only one with Truth! It's the goddamned Canadian version of the Inquisition missionaries: Somebody told me what was right; **ergo**, it's right; **ergo**, anyone who thinks different is wrong--

Yeats

--and should be reprogrammed or killed.

Cindi

You got it, Yeats. I mean whutthefuk does he know about the kind of experience those firewalkers have? What do any of us know? North American transcendence went out with acid. At all costs, at all fucking costs, man, we want to bring people up and teach'em to avoid personal experience.

Yeats

Now, Cin, we're from a different world. Our society has different needs. We're a technological--

Cindi

Wasteland. What a steaming pile of shit you're talking, Trevor. You really believe individuals are brought into this world and made to conform to what your frigging society needs, as though this "society" were some sort of allfather machine in which we all become a part.

Yeats

[painful patience] Gett'n a bit clichéd there, Cin.

Cindi

Yeah? Well maybe there's some lessons we forgot too soon. What social purpose is served by people like Kosambi's son, Mahinda, learning to concentrate enough to transcend his physical limitations? It sure the hell isn't gonna make his daddy's trade increase. I mean that's all we ever teach: mentalize and understand--synonyms for control. Like that cracked void, Nullos. He's terrified to hell Mahinda'll experience something he can't find explained in his bloody Bible. And you're just as terrified that it can be done at all without some "perfectly reasonable explanation"!

Yeats

[stopping] Cindi, Sara said a man died before and others were maimed. Maybe that sicko Nullos can prevent that. Now, why not just forget about it. Come to my hut and let things, y'know, happen? Like last weekend?

Cindi

[considering] Just like that, eh?

Yeats

Sure. I mean even old Kosambi seems worried.

Cindi

[Yeats' mistake: she's off again with a vengeance] And that's another thing: Kosambi the **mudalali**. Ooo, la dee dah. Do you think you laid it on thick enough? That cheap imitation capitalist is the worst example of what western influence has done, and you're sucking up to him for bargains on your goddamn farm toys.

Yeats

Ciiindi, you're getting a little wild.

Cindi

Well, I can get wilder. Why the hell doncha just go back to your Sinhalese teenyboppers? You're sure the hell not gonna get into Sara Nullos's starched little drawers!

Yeats

Aha, so that's what this bitchy tirade is **really** about!

Cindi

Man, I'm not blind. It'd be tough to miss you two brushing against each other and making googly eyes! But I already know what a slut **you** are, like every little brown chick in Tissa!

Yeats

It's not like that with us, Cin.

Cindi

Yeats, I don't give a flying fuck! I really am sincerely bloody worried about the magic we're messing up here.

Yeats

Magic?

Cindi

Yes, magic! And I'll tell you this, you yahoo scientist, I'm not going to your greasy hut and you're not coming to mine unless you get that wacko evangelist away from Mahinda and all the rest of the firewalkers. You're the one that brought it on! [storms off]

Yeats

Look, I just teach agriculture, d'ya hear: agriculture! All this is nothing to do with me. [makes sure she's gone] If you think I'm interfering in any of this for a little nooky, you can go to hell! [strides off, pride intact, while stage darkens]

Scene 3: There are shots, shouts, and screaming for several long minutes. Village attack. Lights come up on the upper stage on a village hut. Two Sri Lankan terrorists burst on the scene in front of the hut, one

with a rifle and the other with a machete. The one with the rifle signals the other to enter with a jerk of his head. The other smiles and rushes in. In moments the air is rendered by the shrill cries of a family being murdered. Amidst the pandemonium, the machete bearing terrorist emerges with a bloody (and obviously broken) blade and the two run off into the night.
[darkness. silence.]

Scene 4: At the Nullos house, Sara is singing and humming while she cleans. She finds the Shiva statuette on the tea table and stares at it a long while. Then she begins to hum "The Blue Danube Waltz" as she moves to restore the statuette to the mantle. She smiles at Shiva and begins to waltz with the icon about the floor. At that point, Yeats comes in, sweaty in work clothes.

Sara
Mr. Yeats! [freezes] I was just...just--oh! [stumblingly replaces Shiva]

Yeats
It was lovely, Sara. I hope you don't mind me cutting in but I was packing up some supplies in the village and I found myself thinking of that fruit cordial Cindi had yesterday...

Sara
[spellbound] Oh...

Yeats
It's very hot.

Sara
Oh yes, of course. [smiling] Do come in, Mr. Yeats. I have some in the cooler. [exits]

Yeats
[sitting] Hot and wet!

Sara
[returning with tumbler and glasses] This should refresh you, Mr. Yeats.

Yeats
Trevor. I'm used to being called by my first name, Sara.
[As he takes the glass, their fingers touch, and hold.]

Sara

Yes. [releases her hand] My husband isn't home, as you're probably aware. He's gone to the temple of that fire-god to try to save Kosambi's son. It's a bit of a journey, I'm afraid. [smiles]

Yeats

I hope he knows what he's doing.

Sara

[her smile fails, replaced by confused anger] Mr. Yeats, Reverend Nullos is a man of God! Without his guidance these natives have no hope whatsoever.

Yeats

Mrs. Nullos, you Christians represent something less than 4% of all the population of Sri Lanka. You're probably the only two in all Uva province. These natives, as you call them, have been practising Buddhism since 500 years before your Saviour was even conceived, and a form of Hinduism long before that. Somehow they've found enough hope to sustain them these thousands of years.

Sara

[turning away] You accept the reality of these heathen ideologies?

Yeats

Your husband believes in his miracles; they experience theirs. What's important is that the initiates believe. I only hope your all-knowing Saint Nullos does not disrupt their faith enough to put them in actual danger.

Sara

Danger?

Yeats

You heard Kosambi: The firewalk and other miracles were possible only through faith, total faith in their god, Kataragama. In their months of ascetic retreat, they prepare themselves to be subsumed into the being of this god of theirs...

Sara

But you know that's utter rubbish!

Yeats

What I **know** has nothing to do with what they live. Don't you see? That's why our teaching is only really ever to do with methods of acting, not Being in itself. Those who walk the fire believe totally in their god's protection. Those who experience a lapse of faith...Well, you saw that.

Sara

You mean Armaund could succeed only in disturbing Mahinda's devotion, or concentration, or whatever, causing him to... Lord, I think I understand. If I for one second doubted my own faith, I fear I would ignite, as well. I would go sailing free from my moorings to... God knows where.
[puts down her glass and faces him, as if waiting...]

Yeats

[finishing his drink and rising] Perhaps off to a land where such music as you were dancing to is heard?

Sara

[giggling] Oh, Trevor, that was just a fancy.

Yeats

You danced in time, and very smoothly, too. Perhaps the imagination is the truest realm of all, as someone said.

Sara

[approaching, touching, seeing him toward the door]
If that's so, what a dangerous place it must be: a place without boundaries or moorings. I visit it far too often.

Yeats

But it's a realm of limitless possibility, where all things are permitted. [the eyes have it]

Sara

That's what's scary.

Yeats

Don't you think we in the West face something far scarier, a greater danger--that of believing we can create a rational universe, that we can control nature outside and obliterate our own nature inside?

Sara

Obliterate our nature? You mean our feelings? Can they do it, Trevor?

Yeats

[Flynn's grin] Not as long as we can dance to music only we can hear. What was that waltz you were humming?

Sara

This is embarrassing, but it was nothing less than "The Blue Danube", itself.

Yeats

Strauss? Of course. [mimics tune] Da-da-da-de-la, dum-dum, dum-dum.

Sara (with Yeats)

[joining in a hum duet] Da-da-da-dee-dee, da-doo, da-doo...

[In a moment he has taken her on a spontaneous ballroom waltz about the room, both singing. Actual background "Blue Danube" would be swell.]

Sara

[breaking, laughing]

Oh, Trevor Yeats, I fear my moorings are strained!

Yeats

Are you about to ignite?

Sara

It's possible, you rogue. I'm dreadfully out of practice, but-- oh, how delightful! [She laughs against him; it becomes a hot embrace.]

[Nullos and Kosambi burst in, forcefully guiding Mahinda, Kosambi's son, between them.]

Nullos

We've saved the boy! [looks up, they separate] Yeats, you here?

Yeats

Obviously. [turning to the boy] Do you feel saved, Mahinda? [Mahinda looks down.] Do you consider him saved, Kosambi?

Kosambi

He is here, yes? Maybe someday he will understand.

Nullos

[embracing, trying to arouse the boy]

Mahinda, poor lad. Come round, boy. Is he hypnotized?

Mahinda, try, try to come back! It's not too late. Kneel with us here, with your father and me, and Jesus will save you!

Sara

He's crying. [to Yeats] Why is he crying?

Yeats

Mahinda, is it over? Can you go back to the **devale**?

Mahinda

[looking up angrily] Never! The **kapurales** would not permit the disturbance on the sacred ground. And Mohotty, the **devalo**, could not be sure of my faith.

Kosambi

My son...

Mahinda

And I could never be sure when my father, my father the Hindu-Buddhist-Christian **mudalali**, trader, he who trades my **mukti** for his **rupees**, would put his thoughts around me--to give me the prison of things and words.

[Mahinda and Kosambi argue **sotto voce**.]

Nullos

What is this "mukti"?

Yeats

Mukti, moksha, transcendence. You should know, Reverend: union with God.

Nullos

I know a lot more than you think, Yeats. Something you so-called teachers and scientists will never know. But **union** with the one true God is not possible. The only joy is service and submission to His will.

Yeats

And the enforced submission of others.

Mahinda

[bursting out] He laid hands on me--shook me! The laughing god released me from his embrace.

Nullos

We came to save your eternal soul, Mahinda--and not only your soul for the flames would have--

Mahinda

[struggling] --kissed me like a loving mother. Already I was accomplished. Mohotty had pierced my face through, but Kataragama laughed away all pain and wounds. I must go back! [breaks away]

Nullos

[restraining him] Sit down!

Kosambi

It is too late, my son.

Yeats

[approaches Mahinda, studying his features]
Your face has no marks whatsoever, Mahinda. You say this sorceror, this **devalo**, Mohotty, cut your face and left no marks?

Mahinda

I was accepted!

Yeats

Now that's a mystery! Could you do it again?

Nullos

[pronunciamento] Mr. Yeats, you are interfering. Your presence is no longer required here.

Mahinda

[only to Yeats] I could, with time and prayer, or with Mohotty.

Yeats

[turning] Kosambi, you're destroying your son. Let me take him back to the temple.

Nullos

[huffing, puffing, jumping up and down]
You...you thrillseeking pagan! Leave my house immediately!

Sara

Armaund!

[Yeats takes Mahinda by the arm and shoves Nullos aside.]

There's no need--

Nullos

[taking Mahinda's other arm, pleading] No, don't go, my child. It's the wrong faith, don't you see? My God has gifts far greater than those of your local idol.

Mahinda

[turns back] I know your gifts: walkmans, TV, CD players-- foreign contracts for my father.

Nullos

More than those: salvation after death!

Mahinda

I want life now! **Mukti**, bliss, now! You preachers, you teachers, always planning, but you walk in death.

Yeats

[taken aback, loosening his arm] We all have to plan, Mahinda.

Kosambi

The old ways have no purpose, my son.

Mahinda

[to Kosambi] The old ways are eternal now! [to Nullos] Now! I spit on your later life! Kataragama will give me life beyond life now!

Nullos

No.

Mahinda

Life without fear of life, awakened fire in the rivers of my veins--

Nullos

Damn you, boy! [jerking him from Yeats]

Mahinda

[still transported] So bright with life I walk though flames!

Nullos

It can't be done! No idol can do this.

Yeats

[laughing maliciously] And no God either!

Nullos

[rushes to counter and grabs Kataragama figurine]
This toy, this idol of yours, will let you go beyond created nature. It cannot! It has not the strength of God Almighty!
[He smashes it. Silence.]

Yeats

[insidiously] Can your God Almighty protect you from the flames, Reverend Pastor?

Kosambi

[looking up from Shiva's shards] Can Jesus stop the fire, Pastor?

Nullos

My God has no need of--

Yeats

Faith? Faith alone stops the fires.

Sara

Trevor, don't do this. You don't know--

Mahinda

The Laughing One will take me across the coals.

Kosambi

[also egging on] Jesus walked on water.

Yeats

Jesus is a bit out of his territory here, Kosambi.

Nullos

What? You're all such disgusting fools! Only a day ago I was vouchsafed a special revelation, and you dare compare God the Father to some heathen clown-spirit! You want miracles, Yeats? I

can show you them. Mohotty! Kataragama! My faith is infinitely more pure and I can walk the firepit with infinite ease.

Sara

Armaund! This is not a miracle-competition between Jesus and Shiva. This is real life and...and real death. Get control of yourself!

Nullos

You, woman, get control of **yourself**. You've always been jealous of my faith. Now you can watch it in action. Mr. doubting Yeats will have his wonders. Take your son, Kosambi. Take him and burn. Come to the firewalk. I shall be there and I shall walk the coals without any of your **fakir** tricks, but with the power of Christ to guide me!

[Darkness. END, Act I]

ACT II: Scene 1: Split stage. In the right scene, Mr. Kosambi and Mahinda load and sort supplies for Mr. Kosambi's store. They do not talk and even seem to avoid each other. In the entirely different scene left, Cindi Plunger is at the door of her classroom. It is a simple affair with benches and tables and a standup chalkboard. When Cindi and Yeats talk, the others work, and when Mahinda or Kosambi talk, Cindi putters about planning and ordering.

Cindi

Yes, have a good-day. See you, Basil. What's that, Lavina? No, I won't forget. And don't forget your sentence review. Bye, now.

[She returns in and sits, leans back with her feet up and stares thoughtfully at the ceiling.]

Kosambi

Mahinda, go outside for the big sacks. You know your father cannot carry such things.

[Mahinda goes silently while Kosambi begins counting stock.]

Yeats

[entering brushing off his hands] Ah, Miss Plunger. Another successful day of spreading wisdom to the masses?

Cindi

[ironically] It's been a wonderful day. Everything perfect! Well, there was the damned snake that was discovered in the corner. Minor distraction while they killed it. And, hmmmmmm, the slight problem that no one had their homework done. And I suppose I should recall that, aside from the usual respect shown to the whitey teacher, no one had the least interest whatsoever in anything I had to say.

Yeats

But what can you expect with the firewalk tonight! [attempting a hug] Oh, you're frustrated, poor child. Come to my arms and forget the day!

Cindi

[pushing him off] Piss off, Yeats. Why add the grim to the bad?

Yeats

[temporarily rigid] Right. Is it like this when there's no fire-festival?

Cindi

Yes, and no. Yeah, there's always a shitpile of distractions. Yeah, homework is difficult to get done what with all their family obligations and such. And, yes, what I teach is alien to their way of thinking so it often seems dull or merely curious.

Yeats

Well, me too. They often think me right crackers but they try what I ask, though it goes directly against the walls of tradition which have produced them.

Cindi

"...which have produced them." I think you're onto something there, Farmer Yeats. That tradition isn't just their background, eh?, it's what they **are**. When you grow up in a traditional society, every thought and every movement is conditioned by that tradition. The idea that there might be another culture just as valid--

Yeats

--or a new method which may be more productive--

Cindi

--just ain't possible. Sure, **we** accept the idea of the "new" and the "different". It's a part of our mass cultural network, but to even think of such things is a sort of heresy to them, a denial of the law of tradition: look backwards to your ancestors; look forward only with the ancestors on your back. [rising]

Put the chairs in order, willya, Yeats? I'll do boards.

[On stage right, Suriya, the terrorist who broke his machete in Act I, enters Mr. Kosambi's shop. When Kosambi keeps working, he bangs loudly on the counter.]

Suriya

Merchant! Merchant! [Kosambi looks up then keeps counting stock] Hey, you, capitalist pig!

[Kosambi turns and looks at him over his spectacles but does not move. Panting with anger, Suriya leaps atop the counter, but, before he can do any damage, Kosambi has turned and with gentle and deft gestures has brushed him back to the customer side.]

Kosambi

Yes, yes, of course you want a closer look. I have very many fine goods in here, yes? Handmade crafts to support our local farmers, and machine-made goods from America. What is it you would like?

Suriya
[confused] 'hair you get these goods?

Kosambi
I bought them. Now do you want to buy something or not?

Suriya
I say 'hair you buy them, merchant? From the Imperialists?

Kosambi
Do you want--?

Suriya
'Heverything belong to the People in common!

Kosambi
Yes, if the people in common have money. Do you?

Suriya
I have much money. [pulls out **rupees**] I am a servant of the People. I will liberate your goods for the People!

Kosambi
Little fellow, you will pay or my son and I shall throw you out the door.

Suriya
[quoting] Revolution 'hof the People is... is... [forgets jargon] Did you hear 'hot the revolutionaries do in Hambantota?

Kosambi
Hambantota? Which revolutionaries?

Suriya
You see, you know nozzing! One month ago, the S.L.--uh-- the freedom fighters execute 200 informers. [mimicks the slash of a machete] Swizzz! Swizzz!

Kosambi
You want to buy...?

Suriya
That machete! [pointing to one behind the storekeeper. Kosambi stares long at him then, grunting, hands it to him] Will you take these **rupees**? Some are...stained.

Kosambi
[taking the entire stack of bills and coins before him] Every blessed one.

[Suriya leaves laughing, swizzing his new machete. Kosambi, watches him go, then picks up his clipboard and continues counting stock.]

[On stage left, Yeats comes up behind Cindi and tries to put his arms around her from behind. She allows it for a second until he gets too forward. She shakes him off and strides outside. Yeats looks after her, scheming, scheming.]

Mahinda

[returning, carrying supplies, he drops them loudly and roughly in the middle of the floor and speaks with heavy sarcasm] Respected **appuhamy**, I am sorry to interrupt the counting of your **rupees** but I do not know where to put your illusions of worth.

Kosambi

My illusions? Ah, Mahinda, spoken like a true vedantist. Yes, yes, but if we must live in the illusory wheel of **maya**, might we not make the illusion a comfortable one, yes? Hee-hee.

Mahinda

It's just words to you, isn't it, father. You think these ...materials are real. Is this what the Christian God tells you?

Kosambi

Mahinda, my son, everyone has gods to tell me of. Pastor Nullos tells me of Jehovah and Jesus. I grew from a boy listening to the ways of Brahma and Shiva, and well I know the story of Gautama Buddha who once walked on these stones. I do not know what is right; maybe all is one. But maybe one is many. I only know I can feel this paper and these sacks. I can see the goods I accumulate. I can taste the splendid dinner awaiting us and I know that we prosper, my son. We prosper, you see? We do well. I would be happy were it not that I have a disapproving son.

Mahinda

You do not have to have a disapproving son, old man! Yes, I disapprove of being a prisoner! I disapprove of my father who turns his back on the gods of awakening! You can change all that!

Kosambi

If I change, I may lose what little I have. If I let you go to the temple, I will lose a son and you may lose your life.

Mahinda

But can you not see? When you lose your gods, you forget your way to the cave of birth!

Kosambi

Enough! Maybe I have wanted to forget! In your cave or in your firepit, all is lost: your possessions and your identity. Now I have an identity, repulsive as it may be, and I am slowly and surely gaining much wealth. I grow larger!

Mahinda

You are like a beast that must carry the accumulating burden of its own wastes about with it. Do you not fear what will happen to your soul when you die?

Kosambi

[shrugging] Maybe I will be reborn as a dung beetle, I do not know. I only know all this work is for you, Mahinda. When I die it will all be yours.

Mahinda

[angrily] I could have all you own and still be worthless! I do not want to be locked into this one life, crushed forever in **samsara**. All these **things** you love are dead!
[stepping forward, quoting, ritually dancing] Mohotty says: "In the night of Brahma, Nature is inert, and cannot dance till Shiva wills it: He rises from His rapture, and dancing sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sounds, and lo! matter also dances appearing as a glory round about Him. He **destroys** all forms and names by fire, and new being is manifest."

Kosambi

Shiva is the destroyer, my son. I want my security.

Mahinda

But I want to stop being this **me** wanting this, wanting that! I wish to awaken as one with the sparks of matter. I need only to walk through the flames of **maya**: But you stopped me!
[storms out]

Kosambi

My son...

[watches after him, then, shrugging, goes out after him]

Yeats

[Cindi returns, picks up a book, and sits thoughtfully; Yeats moves behind her to rub her shoulders.]

Maybe there's something in what you say, Cindi, but you don't really think a traditional society has a place in today's world, do you? If they don't die off from overpopulation or malnutrition, their intolerance will so isolate them from the ways of others that they'll suffocate in their backwardness. I mean I know we may produce some turmoil in the elders, but there's no doubt in my mind that in the long run we're doing good here.

Cindi

[Standing] Trevor, Trevor, now you're sounding like that blowhard ass, Nullos: [mimicking] "We're here for **their** sake; we're here to save them from the error of their ways cause we know so much better." And now he's gonna try to beat'em at their own game to prove it. You gonna walk the fire, too, Farmer Yeats?

Yeats

Damned rights: either on some insulated aluminum stilts or wrapped in some good Ontario asbestos. Nothing like a little technology to get things safely done!

Cindi

You would, you bastard, just to promote your program.

Yeats

My program needs no promotion. [arm around Cindi]

Cindi

Sure, they realize, some of'm, that your methods will produce more food. They can dig that. It's basic. It's their bellies. But my math sounds like I'm trying to brainwash them with some sort of evil western magic, and my English lessons--

Yeats

English is practical.

Cindi

Yeah, but the thing is: you cannot learn another language without confronting another reality. And it ain't just the subject matter. I mean I try to make up sentences about their lives. Y'know: their work, their religion, the jungle, the sea, or even the war. But, shit, man, the sound, the syntax, the methods of address--it all changes the way they think, the way they **are**, and, well, they resist it fiercely.

Yeats

[paternal understanding] Yeah, they accept our language as they would a new mechanism: It works, yes, but only in the realm of daily necessity--what you call the profane. It has no connection to anything that matters--their **real** lives.
[he attempts an embrace]

Cindi

[she slides away; he follows] Sometimes I think we're just jokes to them, or worse, phantoms--at least as far anything that's **real** to them. Oh well. Stop closing in on me, Trevor, and grab a broom.

[Mahinda enters the shop alone. He walks about in a dreamy frustration. He picks up a long sharp skewer from a bin and studies it carefully. Suddenly he stretches his arms and intones-- in Sinhalese, if possible:]

Mahinda

Kataragama, son of Shiva! I know your power. I feel your presence. O Laughing One, run your fire through my veins. Mocker of Illusion, free my eyes from **maya**, from the falsehood of

material things. Divine Fire, burn from me these human limitations.

[Mahinda stands, arms up and outstretched, humming as a taut wire in extreme concentration. Eerie music is heard distantly.]

I am not I!

[He has the skewer in one hand and his head bent, deep in concentration for many long moments. Slowly, he looks up, eyes distant and entranced, an uncanny high-pitched wail reverberates from his throat; and slowly, but with some obvious force, he impales the centre of his empty hand with the skewer. At this moment, Kosambi enters and stops in shock.]

Kosambi

What...What is happening?

[Mahinda slides the skewer from his hand, drops his arms, and blankly stares.]

Mahinda, my son, what have you done? Oh, my child, the old ways have no longer the power to... But what is this? There is no blood!

Mahinda

[blinking, coming round and holding up his unmarked hand in glee] Hahahahaha, yes, my father, there is much blood. But, you see, it is all in my veins where it belongs. Look, look, esteemed father, where is the wound?

Kosambi

No, no, this cannot be.

Mahinda

You saw. Now I ask: Where is the wound?

Kosambi

Give me your hand. [he does. Kosambi muses:] Can Shiva return?

Mahinda

Feel, O dung beetle, the wound closes even now.

Kosambi

[feeling his son's hand in disbelief] Mahinda, you have done it! Aiee! My world crumbles! But you! You are chosen: Kataragama has embraced you!

Mahinda

He has opened my heart, yes. But the great test is ahead. I must give my heart back to him. I must dissolve the image of Mahinda. Now you see: I must go to the firepit to become one with the power of the Laughing One. It must be so.

Kosambi

[embracing his son] Clearly you have the gift of the **fakir**, of the **devalo**. Clearly you have power to walk in the realm that nature's flames cannot reach. [looks at Mahinda from arm's length] But, Mahinda, my son, there is more to fear in these times than entranced steel or burning hardwood.

Mahinda

What more to fear? You cannot fear the disapproval of the Nullos missionary, my father. He, too, will attempt the firewalk. Your western contracts are safe.

Kosambi

It is not that, Mahinda. It is this endless war. Did you know that the year you were born the village of Kataragama was captured by rebels? Yes, it is so. It could have been any one of the groups but in this case it was not Tamils; it was the **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna**, the JVP. Buddhist killers, they think our dances are alien. They occupied Kataragama village for 3 weeks. No help came before then because the government did not want to alarm other Hindus or Sinhalese Buddhists. Many good people were killed, even those in **vrit**, in retreat, and the firewalk did not take place.

Mahinda

But surely the JVP were fools! Did the people not turn against them?

Kosambi

No, our people are not killers with weapons. My son, the danger now is here again. Come take tea with me and I will tell of the dangers of human foolishness in this world of illusion.
[They go about preparing tea.]

Cindi

[stopping: sudden thought] You think we should be changing that?

Yeats

Changing what?

Cindi

What matters to'em: their **real** lives. Instead just their skills. Is that what we're really supposed to be doing here, Trevor?

Yeats

Nope. We're multiculturalists, remember? The Prime Directive and all?

Cindi

Shit, man, don't you listen? That's all bullshit! Anything we teach has the weight of a thousand years of assumptions behind it.

We're not machines here. We're minds. And no mind is separate from other minds. And I'm beginning to jive onto something bigger: Minds are not separate from matter either.

Yeats

Cindi, how can you prove that? What about experimentation and observation?

Cindi

What about it? Man, you just said it: That's what we teach.

Yeats

What?

Cindi

Experimentation and observation: The Berlin Wall around our whole upbringing. Measure, measure, measure! The bloodyfucking prison around our whole comprehension of potential!

Yeats

Oh, c'mon. All knowledge is a doorway to more knowledge. We've learned to be objective and rational because it works! Sure there's a lot of things still unexplained, but, given time, they will be. Their **real** life, as we've been calling it, is just a primitive...a traditional society's dream of understanding of cause and effect. They imagine it as **karma**. We're doing them a favour if we change it.

Cindi

Change it? You mean make their **real** lives objective and rational? Like the dead-souled calculators we try to make of our students in the West? Hell no! We'd have to destroy their spirit, the soul of their culture, like we did to our own indigenous people in Canada. Western civili-bloody-zation hasn't had a spiritual language since the death of Latin!

Yeats

This spiritual stuff sounds weird coming from you, Cin. [He sidles over to her.] I mean we both know how physical you really are. Why don't we--

Cindi

[pushing away] Dammit! You don't get it, do you? Spiritual, mental, physical--it's a continuum!

Yeats

[rethinking] I could grant that minds may be in touch with minds but... What was that you said about minds and matter?

Cindi

Oh, shit, Yeats, you wouldn't get it if some **fakir** divided himself in halves and sat on either side of you.

Yeats

Eh?

Cindi

Our mind, our a-ware-ness is not walled-up inside of our heads, like the voice of ego insists it is. Ego is learnt. Awareness is outside, mingling with awareness. If our mutual awareness is mutually directed, we can even mingle with the awareness of matter.

Yeats

[staring] ...the awareness of matter. You did a lot of drugs in university, right?

Cindi

Fuck you, Yeats. Just listen and I'll describe your goddamned scientific proof: Our objective rationalist viewpoint works because there's plenty of directed awarenesses that expect it to work; they've learned their walls; they've been taught in schools. But in their **vrit**, these firewalking initiates combine the power of mind--the way they've been taught--and they overcome the "natural" effect of matter. And that's your proof, man: There's miracles all around this globe. All you need is the heart to look past your frigging measuring and explaining, and, man, you'll see fire's power beaten.

Yeats

Beaten? I thought you said they **combined** with matter?

Cindi

They say they unite with Kataragama, can you dig it? Kataragama is the fire-god; he **is** fire. They protect their bodies and even their clothes by **becoming** the fire!

Yeats

...Hmmm. Something our scientific wisdom has decided is beyond possibility. [suddenly blustery] Well, I, for one, don't believe that! I believe in the power of flame, so let's go see if we can find something burning hot to eat, or go somewhere and make a little fire of our own.

Cindi

Oh, Trevor, you really piss me off. [she falls against him, tapping her fists on his chest] Man, I can't get so revved up. I'm really exhausted. [Yeats smiles. A little, mush]

Kosambi

And so, my son, our whole island is falling apart. The more people there are and the bigger the world seems to get, then the more groups we have fighting each other. Each group seems to

fragment into other groups, and each wants to kill until it is the only group left. And you know what it would do then?

Mahinda

Live in peace, at last?

Kosambi

Oh no, my son, oh no. The people would be so used to killing to settle the disagreement and just for the pleasure that they would fragment into warring factions again and again until but one man, or maybe one woman, was left. And that person would soon go mad from the warring voices in his head. Hee-hee

Yeats

Relax, my sweet, you made your point. It's always exhausting because we and the students are from two different planets, and, worse, you've lost faith in ours.

Cindi

For true, man. Nothing is real any more. But I did say, yes, it's always tough for us emissaries of world Americanization to destroy these remaining pockets of mysticism...

Yeats

But--way back there--you also said "no, it's not always this tough."

Cindi

Straight, Yeatsie. It's tougher now than ever, what with the **Esala perahera**, Festival of the Buddha's Tooth, just past in Kandi. And the fire-worship of Kataragama warming up right now: The people's **real** life, as we were saying. And the goddamned war seems to be closing in.

Yeats

Yes. The war. We may never have a chance to corrupt this traditional culture or any other on this island. They seem to be doing a very determined job of destroying each other all on their own. [They hug and whisper]

Mahinda

But, Father, who would dare bring weapons to the holy ground at the time of the fire-worship? It would be sacrilege.

Kosambi

To you it would be sacrilege, but what would that mean to a Tamil Tiger, a Moor, or even an orthodox Buddhist? The Marxist P.L.F. do not care for miracles, and the J.V.P. were here before. I do not think the national army of India or even that of Sri Lanka

would hesitate to destroy our outdated cult to preserve the government. And there's the S.M.S., the S.L.F. and the L.P.P.--

Mahinda

Enough. Do they not know what happens here?

Kosambi

To them, my son, our miracles are just a threat. All they see here is a little more madness to oppose the greater madness, the war madness.

Cindi

Madness, isn't it. What do they hope to gain? Does each group really imagine it could ever really take control, that the rest would ever peacefully merge in its traditions?

Yeats

I don't know, Old Sport, maybe each group is fighting for its identity, or what it imagines itself to be. It's fighting for what it sees as a defensive measure.

Cindi

Yeah, that's it. Each area of awareness was born in splendid isolation, and now that isolation has become dangerously fragile. It can't bear contact with another such area whose very existence is a threat. Each group thinks, "We are the chosen. We are right. We are the people," and it will kill to retain its insular sense of being.

Yeats

God, it's worse than Lebanon. All they're doing is fanaticizing each other and, in the process, destroying any hope there might have been for material prosperity. No one of them can ever win. We should take them to Canada and show them multiculturalism. At some point they're going to have to accept it anyway.

Cindi

Yeah, at this point I even miss the boredom of the tranquil so-called Canadian mosaic. The subcultures are all different but, man, when they become Canadian--

Yeats

--they become polite.

Cindi

Right on. Did you know we're the only people in the world who thank their banking machines? Har-har!

Yeats

But, y'know, Cin, there's **real** differences in Canada: Spiritually. Politically. Linguistically. But we manage.

Cindi

And we're even a crazy quilt of different colours!

Yeats

I see what you mean. I wonder if any of these murderous groups knows how similar they all seem to us.

Cindi

Well, we're from Canada, suburban Forest Lawn of the world.

Yeats

And thank God for it. And thank God for Kataragama for keeping these madmen away from here. [they embrace]

Mahinda

Why do you tell me these things, my father? You now know I am chosen. Do you fear my firewalk?

Kosambi

No, my son.

Mahinda

You are keeping something from me, **Appuhamy**.

Kosambi

The very day I was foolish enough to pull you from your **vrit**, Mahinda, that very day... in Hambantota...

Mahinda

Hambantota? The big town near the sea, yes?

Kosambi

Over 200 villagers were slaughtered. They were said to be informers. Men, women, and children, Mahinda, all hacked to death or shot.

Mahinda

The old madness... Who was it? Will they come here?

Kosambi

I have heard it said it was the S.L.F., the Sinhalese Liberation Front. They say they want only to rid the island of Moors, Tamils, and burghers, but now they are killing even their own Sinhalese, as Tamils kill Tamils in the north.

Mahinda

Will they come here, Father?

Kosambi

No, my son, I do not think they will make the same mistake the J.V.P. made many years ago. They do not want to anger our gods

and lose our sympathy. The pilgrims who come to Kataragama to take part in the dance of the **kavadi**, or to walk the sacred fire are not always Sinhalese Hindus.

[As Mahinda and Kosambi talk, two rebel soldiers enter, Suriya and his partner from Act I, Badawel, and roughly separate the two lovers. Yeats protests and is brutally knocked down with a rifle butt. The Candadians are roughly forced out of the room. After Yeats and Plunger have been hauled off stage left, Mohotty enters near Mr. Kosambi's shop, stage right, and stands unseen by the doorway. Indian sitar music plays distantly. He is an ascetic: thin, with a matted beard and hair. There is the **tikka**, the "divine eye", on his forehead. His eyes are intense but humourous.]

Kosambi

No, my son, the terrorists will not come here, I do not think. Too many others come: Tamils come. Buddhists make the pilgrimage. Even Christians come to watch. Such sacred festivals honour the gods and draw all us foolish humans with time-honoured hatreds together in the act of homage. It is by the humbling of our haughty pride that we see ourselves in each other, each struggling lifelong on our own pilgrimage, hoping for power or wealth.

Mahinda

--or cleansing and salvation.

[Mohotty comes forward]

Mahinda

Mohotty, **kapurala!** [He takes Mohotty's hand to his forehead, and goes to one knee. Kosambi bows.]

Kosambi

Yes, yes, perhaps we need cleansing from such worldly desires as wealth and power. Maybe it is such desires that make the young men join groups and fondle their rifles, I do not know. I only know that terrorism and killing continually smashes and breaks what was once a great rock into ever smaller and smaller fragments. Each group breaks into new groups to kill each other. What madness! Each fragment, however new, imagines it is the whole rock. Is it any wonder Kataragama laughs and Shiva dances in joy?

[Mohotty laughs a full yet strangely silent laugh. He whirls like a dervish. Mahinda and Kosambi pick up the spirit and laugh, as well.]

Mahinda

Yes, my father, is it any wonder Shiva dances and Kataragama laughs.

Kosambi

It is no wonder, my son. Shiva dances for destruction and his son, Kataragama, rules the hunger of war. So many meanings! Is nothing clear?

[Mohotty again laughs, and, taking a long match from Kosambi's counter, strikes a bright flame.]

Kosambi

Ah. This is clear. I know what you say is the truth, respected **kapurala**, but I fear the firewalk is in some small danger of attack by Sinhalese purists who fear the power of the old gods. The J.V.P. and the S.L.F. are both in the vicinity and either one would like the "prize" of cult destruction.

[Mohotty smiles and holds the flame.]

Mahinda

Do you know, Mohotty, that the Christian minister, Reverend Nullos, intends to walk with Kataragama, as well?

[Mohotty, still holding the long bright match, turns to Mahinda who understands and takes his sleeve. Kosambi rubs his chin, then understands, as well. He takes the other tattered sleeve and they exit. Mohotty laughs again, leading them out to matchlight.]

Scene 2: As in Scene 1, Act I, the main room of the Nullos house. Sara sits alone, puffing inefficiently on a cigarette and finishing a glass of wine. The voice of the good Reverend Nullos can be heard praying, though he is unseen.

Nullos

All my life, O Lord, has been given to you. I've deserted every natural emotion I've ever had. For you, my Ruler. All for you, my King. I no longer exist without you. I no longer **feel** anything without the stress of your regard. I... am nothing without you. Is it too much to ask, O God, now that I have grovelled mightily at your hobnailed feet, is it too much to plead but for one little **miracle**? I mean it's not as though it's beyond your power, right? You did create this world, right? Surely your most obedient servant can be given just one little bit of unearthly ...magic, just one small miracle so I may continue spreading your holy gospel about these parts. [building some steam] I've given my life to you, Lord, damnme. I've let you enter me again and again, and, yes, I admit I've been grateful for it, too, but, Jesus, you gotta keep those hot coals from actually burning my soles! [breaking down] I hardly ever ask anything, dear Lord, but please, please, get me through that unholy firewalk alive! If I succeed, then we can convert this whole heretic island into an Eden of Christianity. Doncha see, God? You've gotta protect me!

[Nullos enters the main room, while Sara defiantly blows smoke into the air.]

What? Smoking? What's gotten into you, woman?

Sara

Maybe I'm just preparing for your ...your barbeque.

Nullos

What? Whatinhell are you talking about? You're always trying to destroy me, aren't you? Just when I need total faith, and total confidence in my faith, you stick in your stupid womanly doubts. And you [he grabs her cigarette and mulches it out on the table] **taunt** me!

Sara

[nervously grabbing another smoke] I'm only trying to bring you to your senses. You're completely out of your mind, don't you know?

Nullos

I've never been more sane, you satanic witch. This thing, this firewalk, is the crowning apex of my life. Can't you see? No one

can pray like I do. No one. Now this will be God's reward to me:
Proof that the fires of life will leave me untouched.

Sara

[lighting up] Now you're onto something. There hasn't been a
fire in you for years.

Nullos

[swatting the smoke from her hand] Ouch!

Sara

[standing] You're some firewalker, you are. You can't even touch
a cigarette without making an ash of yourself. [giggles tipsily at
her own humour]

Nullos

[attacking and throttling her] You goddamned witch! What have
you turned into? You're damned in hell! Damned in hell! You're
so jealous, jealous of Godalmighty! You hate my holiness! You're
nothing! You deserve to die! To die!

[He stops in shock and looks at his hands, then bolts from the
room in horror. Sara rubs her throat then shakes her head and
rearranges herself. She rises and paces, then pours herself
another glass of wine, has a swig, and goes back to the table.
She steps on the slapped cigarette and picks up a piece of the
shattered Shiva statuette she finds there. She puts it on the
table to look at and shakily lights herself another cigarette. At
this moment, Yeats barges in, disheveled and distraught.]

Sara

Good Lord, what now?

Yeats

Sara! [he embraces her] It's terrorists. They've got Cindi.

Sara

Cindi? But how? How do you know this?

Yeats

[he grabs her glass and socks back a goodly amount]
I was with her when she...when we got taken. They knocked me
about pretty damned good.

Sara

Trevor, stop and slow down. Tell me what happened.

Yeats

No time! [grabs her cigarette and drags on it] Have you got any
guns around here?

Sara

No, we certainly do not. How'd you get away?

Yeats

I... I... just ran. They thought I was out of it and were... preoccupying themselves with Cindi. I just bolted for the door. They're all over town, though. I think they--

Sara

Just what do you mean by "preoccupying"?

Yeats

Uh, they were... roughing her up. Feeling her pretty good, but I don't think they'll rape her: Mao's revolutionary ethics and all that.

Sara

You "don't think..." Let me get this straight. [rises and pours fresh wine for each of them] They were attacking poor Cindi, and you took the opportunity to escape. My, my. How many of them were there?

Yeats

There were -uh- two.

Sara

Big men?

Yeats

No, goddamit, little scruffy Sinhalese. But they were heavily armed!

Sara

And you left Cindi to their pleasure?

Yeats

It was the only bloody way to help her! Now that I'm free-- for a time anyway-- I can get some weapons and go the hell back there and save her!

Sara

Men are such amazing creatures. You actually imagine you're **rational**. [she sighs and sits back, rubbing her neck]

Yeats

Sara, your neck's all bruised. The bastards have been here, too! That's why you're drinking wine.

Sara

No, no, Trevor. It was ...my husband.

Yeats

What?

Sara

I tried to shock him out of this insane firepit suicide he intends. Instead, I believe I drove him into it. Oh dear God, dear Shiva, I fear he detests me to the core of his being. [she takes her cigarette back]

Yeats

[not missing his chance, embraces her fondly] He detests himself, dear lady. That creature you call a husband has no "core"; I even wonder if he has any real "being". The only god he worships is extinction.

[rather than listen, she butts the smoke, then kneads his shoulder muscles lasciviously]

Sara

[looks up and they smooch, her voice is distant and insincere] Trevor, darling, you must be here in some sort preordination. You can help me stop Armaund from destroying himself. We must stop him.

Yeats

Sara, Sara, there's no need. Doncha see? That's why those terrorists are here: They intend to overrun the firepit and stop the ceremonies. Maybe kill a couple dozen heirophants just for attention. They don't want the "old black magic" to continue.

Sara

How do you know this, Trevor? Did they tell you? No? I didn't think so. What if, for reasons of their own, they decide to let the firewalk go on? Then Armaund will burn, won't he? We must stop him, and then save Cindi!

Yeats

Sara, Sara. Don't be so blind. Even if the firewalk were permitted, you have no reason to stop ol' Nullos from his attempt at immortality.

Sara

What are you saying?

Yeats

Look, I say "look": Break from your eggshell, little chicken. What if Nullos succeeds in his "miracle"?

Sara

Why then I should guess he would be a saint.

Yeats

Yeah, a saint. Is the concept too horrible to contemplate?

Sara

No, of course not.

Yeats

And what would he **do** then?

Sara

[sits forward and drinks] Do? Why I imagine he would be in demand everywhere. He'd have followers. I... I'd be proud to be one of them.

Yeats

Follow him or...? Would such a man **need** you, Sara?

Sara

A saint? I don't suppose so. I should be free to leave him, if that's what you're hinting at. But if he really turned out to be a saint, I'd be [giggles] obliged to follow in his elevated footsteps. [sits back] Trevor, he can't succeed, can he?

Yeats

Probably not. [drinks, puts glass down] And if he fails?

Sara

Well, he'll be maimed or...

Yeats

Dead?

Sara

Trevor, what are you hinting at?

Yeats

You'd be free, my lovely. Unmoored. Ignited. The world your oyster waiting to be taken.

Sara

Why you filthy pig! I'd be free, yeah, like you're free? To have fun? He's likely going to his death, Cindi's in mortal peril, and you're hinting at...

Yeats

Do you love him so, Sara?

Sara

I? Love him? [drinks] Life is more than emotion, Trevor! I married and my duty...

Yeats

Your "duty" is your prison, my beauty. What do you really **want**? [fumbles at her]

Sara

What do I...? God, you're a pig. [she finishes her wine, crudely puts the glass down, and forcefully embraces him and smooches him half over backwards]

My duty is my prison, eh? So let me smoke cigarettes; let me get a little drunk; let me dally with the devil while my husband meets his maker... And your lover gets raped.

Yeats

What?

Sara

Shut-up, Yeats. Close your eyes, open your mouth, and take it like a man. [she kisses and crawls on top of him lewdly. Lights dim.]

Scene 3: The two terrorists, Badawel and Suriya, stare at Cindi, who is bound wrists behind her back, ankles to each other. The terrorists stare and fondle their weapons with some repressed fervour: Badawel, his Kalishnikov, Suriya, his new machete. They are arrogant and stupid bullies. R's and W's are hard for them to say. Director's choice on character or caricature.

Badawel

'Hy you boyfriend run haway?
[Cindi does not respond. He pushes her with the rifle.]
I say 'hy you boyfriend run haway?

Cindi

Maybe he didn't like the company.

Suriya

'Hy not? We freedom fighters. He has nuzzing to fear from us...
'Hunless maybe he spy!

Cindi

O good Lord.

Badawel

[angrily] 'Hy you call on "Lord"? You think Gott help you? You belief in Gott?

Cindi

What the fuck's that got to do with anything?

Suriya

[reciting] There 'hiss no Gott. Revolutionaries belief 'honly in the will of the people. There 'hiss only **bodhisattvas** who bring

realization to the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka. Today, **bodhisattvas** must arm. We are liberation. We are the chosen people.

Cindi

Jeez, if there's no fucking God, then who did the fucking choosing?

Badawel

'Hot? Are you laughing hat us? Suriya, 'his she laughing at us?

Suriya

She laughs. You filty 'Henglish peeg! We kill you now!
[he raises his machete]

Badawel

No, you fool! We are not finished the interrogation. We must know for what she spies. Hey, you 'Henglish peeg, for what you spy?

Cindi

I'm Canadian, not English. And I'm a goddamned schoolteacher, not a spy. And if I had a fucking serial number, you'd be the first to know.

Badawel

[slapping her] You lie! We know.

Suriya

We know!

Badawel

You speak bad words. You slut, yes?

Cindi

No, I'm a good Catholic virgin.

Suriya

[pushing her] You lie. All 'Henglish women want to do is go to disco all night, and make sex with anyone who ask. We know. Badawel has seen.

Badawel

I know. I haf been to 'Henqland. Women there all sluts. Admit you a slut!

Cindi

I...have...never...been...to...England...in...my...life. And if you wanna think I'm a slut, think it. You've probably never seen a woman who makes her own decisions in your whole little lives.

Suriya

No more lies. Who you work for? 'Hot you doing in Sri Lanka? Tell us now or we keel you.

Cindi

[deflating] Jesus. You're only one little island. Why can't you get along with each other?

Badawel

'Hy? Because the government is owned by 'Hengland and wants only to give power to the peeg Tamils. We would be destroyed!

Suriya

They want to destroy pure Sinhalese culture!

Cindi

So, you're gonna kill them all?

Badawel

Yes, we kill them all then the Lions will rule!

Cindi

God, what a pair of assholes. Look, d'you know what "multiculturalism" is? Like in Canada? We have all kinds of races and religions in one big, huge country. Even more than one language. Why can't this one goddamned island--

Suriya

You lie! How many languages you speak?

Cindi

Well I speak only one but--

Badawel

'Hot your religion?

Cindi

I dunno. Survival, right now.

Suriya

What 'hiss you manyculture? Who buys you schools?

Cindi

The federal government takes care--

Badawel

You lie! [he strikes her] This not manyculture. This many foods, many spices: one stew. Government the cook. You lie!

Suriya

You lie, 'Henglish slut! We know. We kill her, yes, Badawel?
[raises machete]

Badawel

Who you work for? No more lies or you bleed good.

Cindi

I...work...for...CUSO: Canadian University Services Overseas.
You don't have to question me. You can check on it for yourselves.

Badawel

You lie! 'Hif you teacher, 'hy you boyfriend run away?

Suriya

Yes, 'hit proof you spy! You work for government, yes?

Cindi

He ran because he's a fuck'n coward, afraid of little boys like you who need to bully people with guns to feel like men!

Suriya

[pulling her head back by her hair]
You scum! You slut! We know.
[still gazing at her, he runs his hand over her breasts]

Badawel

Suriya! 'Hit is against Mao's code.

Suriya

She does not even fight, the slut. You 'hant it, don't you, slut?

Cindi

Want? You want me to fight? Then loosen these bonds, give me a weapon, and you bozos will have a fight like you've never had in your worst nightmares!

Badawel

[trying to be cunning] Ha-ha. She is fighter. Like a tiger.
Are you a tiger, whitewoman?

Cindi

Ooo, are you cunning! "Are **you** a Tiger?" Is that what you represent--the Tamil Tigers of Eelam?

Suriya

[jumping up and raising his machete]
I kill her! 'Henglish peeg!

Badawel

[pointing his weapon at Suriya]
You keel her later, Suriya. She think she fool us. But we know.
We are not Tamils, like you. You see? We know.

Suriya

We are not Tigers! We Lions! **Sinhala** is lion. We eat Tigers.

Badawel

Yes, we keel them all! And Moors, too!

Suriya
And burghers! And the government!

Badawel
And 'hall Europeans, like you!

[They do a sort of impromptu war dance. Cindi suddenly bursts out in laughter. Terrorists freeze.]

Suriya
'Hy you laugh?

Cindi
It's just that you're so incredibly fucking stoo-pid, the two of you!

Badawel
[grabbing her and pulling open her khaki shirt]
Now you die. Keel her, Suriya!
[Suriya, near slavering, teases her with the machete point across her breasts and on her throat. Then he pulls back the machete for a piercing motion directly at her chest.]

Cindi
Do it! You'll never see -uh- Christ walk the fire!

Badawel
'Hot? [to Suriya] Wait!
[Suriya thrusts, but Badawel knocks the blade aside with his rifle barrel just in time.]
'Hot you say? Christ is here?

Cindi
Yeah, at the firewalk, right now. My... My leader, the Reverend Pastor Nullos of the holy universal Anglican church, is going to walk the flames in Christ's name and put Kataragama to shame.

Badawel
'Hot?

Cindi
Yes, he plans the victory of Christianity for all Sri Lanka. But he will not walk unless all of us from his church are there to see him. Me especially.

Suriya
You lie!

Badawel
Maybe she no lie. She crazy slut.

Cindi
Look, you guys, get straight. You wanna destroy Islam and Hinduism, right?

Suriya/Badawel

Right!

Cindi

You only want pure Sri Lankan Buddhism?

Badawel

Only for the weak ones! **Sinhala**, the Lions, we need no gods. Right, Suriya?

Suriya

[still staring at her breasts and fondling his machete] Right, maybe.

Cindi

Well, wake-up, you Lions. Christianity's taking over tonight. I tell you a great Christian leader will walk the fire for the first time since Jesus was descended to hell. Tonight-- maybe right now!-- all the converts you wanted are about to see a miracle and are gonna convert to Christianity instead.

Badawel

Oh.

Cindi

And... And y'know what that means?

Badawel

No.

Cindi

It means those capitalist Americans and those immoral English are soon going to be all over this island! All because of what's happening right now at the firepit!

Suriya

[waking up] Oh-hoh. Big trouble. What we do, Badawel?

Badawel

Suriya, we see. We take her to the firepit. We see this Pastor Christian fight the flames. We see the gods fight.

Suriya

'Hokay. Hee-hee. [looks back at her chest] We keel you later. Slow. And then we keel your leader. [both laugh, her ankles are unbound]

Cindi

Oh, you'll see. The Reverend Pastor is a great fakir.

[They haul her off]

Scene 4: Now staging must be the focus beyond words: an extended choreograph suggestive of hypnotic transport. In the background, wild sitar, flute, and what-have-you music warps and Indian drums beat a steady, rising rhythm. In the following scene the music should crescendo, loudly, madly, twice upon deaths. Furthermore, there should be all the chanting, screaming and general excited babble an aroused crowd can produce. The centrepiece is the firepit, or a suggestion thereof. It must be bright and flickering, varying in colour from whites to reds. All other lights should be subdued. The director rules, of course, but the general effect should be one of disorientation, horror, and miracles.

Amidst sudden silence, Mohotty enters the pit from stage right and hauls a sledge, attached to his back by hooks, across the pit to stage left--to rising pandemonium. He is met there by Mahinda and Nullos and Mr. Kosambi. Mahinda and Kosambi wrench out the hooks. Mohotty turns, and, extending his hands, offers to share **vidya**, sacred knowledge, and assist the two, Nullos and Mahinda, to walk with him. Mahinda refuses the hand and with one high-pitched wail begins the walk, seemingly successfully. Nullos moves to begin, but, again, Mohotty, walking out a few paces on the flames (while Mr. Kosambi goes around behind the pit to the far side and Mahinda continues), insists Nullos take his arm or hold his garment.

Nullos

No! You mean to destroy all I have built! [reaching and looking up] I am yours, my God! [silence falls as he begins his walk]

Mahinda completes his walk, transported but dancing in joy, and is greeted by Mr. Kosambi, his beloved father. They embrace and turn to watch just as Nullos seems to be making good progress, though some smoke rises from the area of his feet. Suriya and Badawel (forcing Cindi Plunger with her hands still behind her back) appear behind Mohotty and watch the good Reverend's seeming success.

Suriya

Yes, look! [pointing with his machete] He is doing it! [murmurs from the crowd and low drums begin]

Badawel

Truly, the Jesus-god has much power. The English are coming! The island is lost!

Cindi

My mind is lost. [cheers, increased general noise]

Nullos looks transported with ecstasy until-- somehow in sudden silence-- he sees and hears (as does the audience) his wife and Yeats making love in his house. He hesitates, then screams and covers his face with his hands. He goes down and, as flames consume him, he falls silent and looks with horrified realization about him. The noise returns. Drums crescendo.

The terrorists laugh and turn to drag Cindi off for their murderous delectations, but Mohotty, laughing too, gently touches the arm of Suriya and, to the astonishment of captive and captors, leads them all onto the firepit. The terrorists try to resist but are unable to do so or detach themselves.

Badawel

Let go. Let go!

Suriya

'Hot 'har you doing? 'Hot is he doing, Badawel?

Badawel

[to Mohotty] Wait! Wait! We free her. The woman is free!

Suriya

[twisting] No more, you **devalo**, you evil **devalo**! [He raises his machete at Mohotty who looks at him and laughs then looks down at the coals. Suriya looks down, too, as does Badawel.]
Badawel, 'hot is this? We walk the fire! [lowers machete]

Badawel

Can this be? Yes, we walk the flames! [He throws his rifle away in glee]

Suriya

I am a firewalker, the greatest firewalker! [he looks at Mohotty in disgust] So, you must die, **fakir**! [raises machete again]

Mohotty laughs and gently loosens his touch from Suriya. All watch as a silence descends. Suriya is frozen in mid-strike pose; then as thick smoke begins to rise from his feet he first starts to whimper, then wail, then he drops his weapon and his sounds turn to screams. He falls and his screams become gurgles as he burns. The crowd cheers in ecstasy, and the musical instruments renew their hypnotic frenzy.

Mohotty looks at Badawel who realizes in terror what is about to happen. He releases the hand he has on Cindi and uses both his hand to fearfully grip Mohotty's garment and wrist. Mohotty laughs and a crazy laugh seems to fill the air.

Mohotty reaches behind Cindi and her bonds fall onto the glowing hardwood. Forming a wedge with himself at the apex, he leads both a terrified Badawel and a confused Cindi through to the other side of the firepit. There, they join Mr. Kosambi and Mahinda.

The music, especially flutes, becomes a wild, joyful dance. Mohotty first, then Mahinda, do a Shivan dance back across the firepit from stage right to stage left. They are ecstatic, but under a strange control. As they reach the other side, Mr. Kosambi ventures gingerly out and hops across, as does a transported Badawel. The Sri Lankans continue their dance right into the darkness at the back of the stage.

Cindi stands alone, staring at the firepit as the music and crowd noise becomes muffled.

Cindi

Oh, whatthefuk!

She steps out, the music surges, drums crescendo, the crowd squeals, and the lights darken to black before she completes her transformation.

END

APPENDIX:**A Comment on Process**

My decision to write a play was based on my feeling that it would be difficult to prove transformations of *psyche* through research or to explain in an essay. Such a hidden metamorphosis can only happen "At the still point of the turning world" (T.S.Eliot) beyond the place "where words leave off" (Joseph Campbell, from the Sanskrit). The soul's initiation involves the release of its narcissistic attachment to ego and its centring in what may be called the Self (Jung). This centring of awareness results in the apperception of the world and participation with it, as opposed to the previous state of perceiving the world always in terms of ego and always seeing ego from the world's terms. A kind of death is involved here, as in all initiations, and my intention was to use the Sri Lankan firewalk as the image and the gateway of transformation.

Associated with this psychic *rite du passage* is the dance of Shiva. Though Christianity has often viewed this god as demonic because his dance is destruction and death, the Hindu sacred texts stress that He is the necessary principle of rebirth: as life must give way to death, so death is necessary for new life. He is the Destroyer, yet essential to creation, and his images often represent him as dancing unscathed within the fiery wheel of death/rebirth.

This is mythic thinking, and the mythopoeic consciousness tends to be untidy in its classifications. Forms tend to merge into one another, and it sometimes seems, as in *Macbeth*, that "nothing is, but what is not". So, though Shiva is the Destroyer, he is also the guide through the fires of awakening to the "transcendence of *karma*" (Western psychology has reduced the whole mystique of *karma* to the general term "ego"). So, too, the presiding deity of the firewalk in the Sri Lankan village of Kataragama is the village's namesake, Kataragama-- otherwise known

as Skanda, the Hindu war-god and son (thus representative) of Shiva.

I had a vision of a group of people from our cultural framework who are used to clinging to ego and calling it "reality". I saw them confronted with an inexplicable mystery which filled them with dread and yearning (like two of Shiva's hands in some of His iconography, one beckoning the neophyte to approach and other forbidding entrance to the uninitiated) and which compelled them to respond. Their initial response-- similar to that of the confused swarming of ants when the top is torn from their nest-- is an effusion of speech. This verbal "swarming" is an expression of their need to explain, to encompass the inexplicable within the framework of the habituated and the known.

Of course, the enculturated conceptualizations of the habituated and the known can never express the mystery of supra-natural, or, even, supra-cultural awareness, as the so-called heretic, Marcion, knew:

O it is a marvel beyond marvels, enravishment,
power, and wonder, that one can say nought about
the Gospel, and think nought about it and compare
it to nothing.

Each person, of course, responds in a unique manner to this confrontation with the uncanny. Their only common response to the contradictory impulses of dread and yearning is their need to *talk*.

I imagined characters each of whom is "ripe" and ready for a particular sort of metamorphosis. Each character does change in some manner, but only a few can deal with the unsayable mystery of ego-death and psychic rebirth, represented by the power to walk unscathed through fire. What happens, then, is that all their talk comes to nothing.

This proved to be the most frustrating experience when anyone read my play. It did not matter whether they were "forced" into reading it or did so cheerfully-- perhaps buoyed by a glass of wine or two-- they become bogged down in the conversations of

my victims of the *mysterium tremendum* (Otto, **The Idea of the Holy**): "Why don't they do something?" "You need more action." "In a play, you shouldn't tell us; you should show us!"

Now it seems to me true enough that my characters do go on occasionally: Nullos pontificates, Yeats prevaricates, Cindi rages, and Sara procrastinates. And I understand that, no matter how intellectually stimulating some of their ideas *may* be, a non-participating audience is unlikely to maintain an interest. But it still saddens me that these verbalizations, or some of them, are taken by readers to *mean* something final and permanent, such as "The Truth". In fact, my purpose was just the opposite: not to *tell* a truth, but to reveal one. I was attempting to demonstrate the linear, verbal, defensive response of Western Culture to that which is "Wholly Other" (Otto). I was hoping to *show* that our use of reason is neurotic, and little more than ego gratification and a denial of awareness:

But this crisis in which reason is madder than madness-- for reason is non-meaning and oblivion-- and in which madness is more rational than reason, for it is closer to the wellspring of sense, however silent or murmuring-- this crisis has always begun and is interminable.

[Derrida, **Writing and Difference**]

Despite their veil of verbiage-- confused, curious, or protective-- the characters change in a manner appropriate to the state of soul of each. It is the hidden yearning of the heart which emerges to guide the transformations, perhaps into new being (or lack of being) that was precisely the heart's wish:

Nullos, like Narcissus, is being subsumed by his own image, by his own idea of himself. He wishes to dissolve the Self in ego, and so is a nihilist. He wants to become nothing (Latin: nihil) and his name indicates it: Nullos, from the Latin "nullus", meaning "none" or "nothingness". He's a sort of spiritual masochist who, in the end, finds exactly what he was seeking. The fire consumes him. Despite his bombast, he knows nothing about living Christianity.

Sara was once impressed with Nullos' self-assurance and what seemed his powerful faith. They had been active lovers before his inversion made the ways of nature seem disgusting to him. She's a vital woman in the prime of life who is torn between her indoctrinated loyalty to her husband, and her need to break away, to "ignite". Eventually, her repulsion from Nullos and the opportunity to use Yeats as her metamorphic catalyst liberate her from her role and she becomes "unmoored". Fire (as in passion) has freed her.

Yeats, himself, is much like Hermes, the god of transformations. Hermes is also the god of thieves, adulterers, and liars. Yeats is Western Man; he lives by the tenets of science without really believing anything will come of it. Science is useful to him, but it can never become a faith. He uses its theories merely to exploit others and to support his shallow lusts. His only change is that he ends up being used and cast aside, rather than using. He does not go through fire but, perhaps, this humiliation will be the beginning of new being for him.

Cindi has the perception which allows her to "cut through the bullshit". She sees nothing solid around her, beliefs all seem relative, and she is ready for the breakthrough and emergence.

Mahinda needs only the renewal of his ancient faith, which is based not on obedience but transcendence, to walk the Shivan coals. But ancient wisdom must be alive here and now.

Mr. Kosambi has come from a family of merchants, but he has grown downright venal in his pursuit of material gain. He has become a Christian solely for profit. His change is that he comes to reconnect with his ancient roots, though he, himself, never attempts the firewalk. [see Final Note]

Mohotty is forever in the state of becoming. He is forever "dying into life". The terrorists are simply brainwashed boys, blindly attached to their revolutionary jargon, and thus never becoming (anything more than tools).

Not that any of these characterizations were pre-planned. It is the nature of a metamorphosis that the "other side" cannot be foreseen; it is no accident that the centre of initiation in the mystery cults is always a place of darkness and foreboding where previous identities are to be left behind. In creating my characters, I, too, went through similar metamorphoses, as did my conception of the characters. I found it impossible to get a grasp on their basic natures because they had no basic natures. It is like trying to get a grasp on shape-shifting Proteus. The characters evolved and are still doing so.

In the beginning, I had a Yeats-like character and an idea from an earlier effort, **Firewalker**. That didactic piece in which the central "character" was the idea of the miraculous, itself, was broken-down like the body of a caterpillar in the chrysalis (an appropriate analogy). It was then combined with a more recent fascination with metamorphosis, both physical and psychic, in myth and literature, and with the Derridean (and, earlier, Norman O. Brown) project of showing that language, in repressing the silence of being, conceals more than it reveals.

In my first draft of the preceding play, my conceptions were more ego-centred. Yeats was meant to be my central character, a man with a yearning for new understanding and a sort of Mephistophelean potency. Cindi Plunger was a brat, doomed to be killed as a result of her yappiness. Sara was unformed, changing radically from the devoted admirer of her husband to a murdering adultress. Nullos was not yet such a private groveler and public moralistic boor. The relationship between Mahinda and his father, Kosambi, was not clear, and is not fully developed yet.

In the Jungian symbology of individuation, a Self-seeker must first encounter and absorb his/her opposite gendered *anima* (for males) or *animus* (for females) figure before any depth can be obtained. So in the process of my writing, pondering, and rewriting, the female figures began to act as though they had a will of their own. I encountered them and had either to repress them (and determine an even worse play) or allow their nascent beings into me to speak from the writer. They grew, each

differently, in power and presence and personality until Yeats was eclipsed and reduced to his present slimeball shallowness. Presumably, for me, the writer, some egoism was eclipsed, *anima* was encouraged to express herself, and I emerged more of a stenographer and less of a puppeteer. Much to my surprise, the process of development of Cindi's personality demanded not only that she be taken seriously, but that she reveal the in-sight which takes her through the initiatory flames.

At this time, I began to be reminded by a close friend that this play was in fulfillment of Master of Education requirements, and that it had better make some clear statements on pedagogy. I took her at her word and added "some clear statements on pedagogy" to lines which were already overcrowded with pedantic conversation.

I then put it all together and took it to the member of my reviewing committee from the Drama department for advice. Not surprisingly, since there is no indication of direction otherwise, he found it talkative and at times unclear. I took it back, rewrote large sections, including making Cindi's personality more consistently foul-mouthed, dated hippy, and disruptive. I was starting to like her. I added stage directions for more under-the-surface interplay.

My adviser told me to seek what each character *wants* at a particular time and place. I had previously thought that I had shown that what each one declared he or she wanted was only a self-delusion, but that what each really (unconsciously) sought had been revealed. It was made clear to me that I was not communicating. I was depressed and was beginning to fear my project was a boring dud.

Back to the drawing board.

I thought I had a "final" version at last which made obvious what I imagined as going on behind the verbal interplay, and which gave the audience plenty to be amused by. I gave it to the head of my review committee to pass to the members. Then we had a combination oral examination, critical review, and speculative discussion at the committee head's house.

Through discussion, it became clear that, as a play (in present unworkshopped form), some conversations in Act I went on too long, though not quite to the point of entitling the entire drama "a boring dud". It was made clear to me that an audience finds conversations which lack dramatic conflict less than compelling. No matter how speculative or philosophical the ideas may be (how often is one of Plato's dialogues on stage?), the committee felt that some basic dramatic impetus was lacking. I understand and I concur, yet I had to get my creations to air their philosophical views so they could reveal their inner workings to me, so, that is to say, I could get to know them. Now editing at some point, into a more taut drama becomes possible.

Psychic metamorphosis requires a loss of arrogance or pride before the initiate is able to enter the *sancto sanctorum*. If my enthusiasm for my project had led me into exaggerations of instant artistry or an artificial sense that I had already arrived, then I definitely needed outside input. The committee provided this, and I left our meeting with more humility and less arrogance realizing that-- like my thematic intention-- my characters needed to just be characters more, and not spend so much time in displays of verbal virtuosity. This was and is a lesson for my private quest, as well.

Scattered among the suggested changes, there were some gems of encouragement. One committee member said that he felt the play was complete-- as a solo-writing project. He thought no more could be done with it until it was workshopped. Another very much liked the title and most of the points he perceived as being made, but he wondered: if the characters were created merely to make points, then why put them in play form at all. A third thought there might be a fine play within my garrulity, about a third as long. I did perceive some curiosity amidst the perplexity.

I like to think that most objections were impatient misunderstandings, but, in retrospect, I guess I am simply failing to communicate, as yet. The committee was perfectly correct in noting how my early scenes dragged on to unresolved conclusions, and how, conversely, my later scenes rushed like a young lover to

early conclusion. Aside from these structural anomalies, the intent which I am here outlining did not communicate either: I was repeatedly asked what my theme was, or which character was me, or why I didn't like my characters, or who was the central actor. Two reviewers even found an explicit statement of theme by a character, albeit in two different places in the play. I was unaware that anything *said* by a character was my theme.

Some of my intentions, thematic or stated, were certainly understood. My pedagogical philosophy was of some satisfaction to the committee members, for they agreed to accept it as a Creative Project in fulfillment of my degree requirements as it stands, with the addition of the preface declaring it to be a play-in-progress. However, I still left in a fit of artistic dissatisfaction knowing that my drama is still very much in need of confirming to the realities of the stage.

I think I was in some shock at discovering the further realities of playwrighting. To me, as a would-be playwright, the theme is centred on transformation and that's that. The extended conversations are important to reveal the participants' characters and why they can or cannot endure initiation through fire. Yes, I can see the conversations are over-rational and over-long. But my point was not rational: I guess I was attempting to show that all our talk-- in schools or in general-- is nothing more than *rationalization*, in both senses of the word. We attempt to rationalize our repression, and thus continue to create a culture of neurosis (Derrida). "Unspeakable" initiatory awareness is beyond us as long as we continue to do so.

Let me say that I would leap at the chance to someday engage in workshopping this play, to discover devices to bring my words, worlds, and characters to life. Some of the conversations, especially in Act I, clearly become tedious without an audience which has been brain-injected with Benzedrine. I also think, however, that, given a chance to stage my vision, the play would become far more lively and "real" than it appears on paper.

It appears now that **Shiva's Dance** is a play undergoing continued creation. Given the protean nature of my intent, it

must always be "in process". Perhaps I was mistaken in my choice of milieu, but that was how I envisioned it. I "saw" it as pictures, and never meant it to be mere statements of truth.

Even now, as I write this "appendix", the muses demand changes. Suriya has been inserted to interact with Mr. Kosambi in his store to illustrate the extent of his (Mr. Kosambi's) venality. I see that Mr. Kosambi must be more aggressively defensive toward his son. More important for my purpose, I have conceived the idea of allowing Mohotty, the mystic, to symbolize the point toward which I was aiming. If the metamorphosis of psyche is possible only beyond words, then the words shall be taken from his mouth. He will be only presence, itself, to indicate that the Way for seekers must lie "where words leave off". The play which precedes this after-word, will have incorporated this change.

So, this is where I stand now: somewhere near the edge of the firepit, thinking myself either a Cassandra or simply a fool. Yet, I have no choice but to step into the pit and be either destroyed or transformed. No choice: I must pursue the unspeakable vision to whatever metamorphoses it leads me.

-- Greg Nixon
Spring/1990

Final Note: The process is truly neverending, and always revelatory. Much of the advice I received in committee must have been distilling in my brain and working some transformations of its own. Now, on final printing (for now!), I find Mr. Kosambi and even Badawel, one of the terrorists, have found their way into the fiery chrysalis after all. Could it be that my drama continues to become more hopeful of metamorphosis in others as it creates itself?