

professors. The role Kailasapathy played as an innovative journalist as the editor of *Thinakaran* in setting new directions and guidelines and the innovations he made in the form, style and content of Tamil prose was a truly path-breaking one.

However, I have a quarrel with the Progressives on one count; their stand on Arumuga Navalar. While they were aware of Navalar's limitations and how he functioned within a feudalistic cultural and ideological framework, they still consider him a great figure. They have failed to focus attention on the fact that Navalar has not challenged the social system in Jaffna which has layers of hierarchy on caste, class and gender. They have also projected him as a nationalist, an innovator in Tamil prose and a man with social consciousness. While conceding the first two, the position that he was a man of social consciousness needs to be challenged. My own reasoning is this: Arumuga Navalar's indifference to, if not total disregard of, the caste system in his behaviour, his implicit advocacy of caste codes and his projection of the *saiivar vellala* as the hegemonic group, have to be viewed as reactionary. Any social reformer in Jaffna who does not take an ideological stand on the caste system would not deserve to be called a reformer. Moreover, his aversion to the low caste marginalised groups was indeed an expression of high caste behavioural norms. Folk dance, the worship of the mother goddess and dances of women at the temple were treated by him as

unacceptable, and he was responsible in banishing much of the folk culture from Jaffna. His introduction of the *agam* tradition into the temple was socially and religiously a rejection of the native culture. This is perhaps why Jaffna lacks an artistic tradition in dance and drama (unlike the other Tamil areas in Sri Lanka) and even the art of cinema. Indeed, the cleansing reformatory role played by Navalar has detrimental to the innovative capacity of the culture of Jaffna. His *vellala* and *saiiva* identity had a lot to do with this. The *saiiva-vellala* hegemonic construction of Navalar was to remain in Jaffna for some time. One wonders whether, apart from his caste views, he was also influenced by Victorian standards of morality which viewed dances and folk tradition as morally corrupt and inferior, and women as subordinate.

My contention is that the Progressives should have gone beyond Navalar the Tamil prose innovator, and Navalar the nationalist. In fact, the attempt to place Navalar within the nationalist framework has led to the making of a hero of Navalar. This is clearly an ideological contradiction within the progressive movement of the Tamil writers. Has the sin of nationalism misled them? My final contention concerning Navalar is that his place in the history of Jaffna needs a serious critique, especially on issues of caste and gender.

However, I congratulate the Progressives for the many tasks they have undertaken against many obstacles. Theirs, I think, should be a continuing task.

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## MILLER AND THE CRAZY DIAMOND

Dylan Perera

A review of Colombo University's production of *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller.

To preface with, a word for the Director; Jerome De Silva is an interesting phenomenon. Whilst his peers and contemporaries drifted towards, flirted with and eventually embraced, that dubious 'other woman' of the performing art - viz. television -, Jerome has stuck to theater for his art. His 25 years in active theater is indeed just cause for celebration quite apart from the wild well of creative energy that sees him produce, act and direct in everything around. His drift towards 'serious theater' in English is good.

His workshop gives young people the exposure and opportunities to perform and learn about good performing and theater without the elocution indoctrination bally hoo. This singular contribution of his will bear fruit in the years to come and its worth cannot be quantified. Shine on you, crazy diamond.

It must have been a long time indeed since those old boards at the Wendt witnessed the magic of theater in the English Language. There have been good, even excellent, productions

in the past few years, but magic is rare. The Colombo University production of *All My Sons* discovered it again for its audience.

Predictably pace flagged, few of the actors used their lines to extract more than an immediate meaning, the actors walked too much or walked in the wrong places and had unnaturally long and protruding hands - leave aside all the contextual incongruities. The costumes were doggedly uninspired. The set was adequate and ordinary. But none of that takes away from the real achievement of the production of providing the audience with a clear glimpse of Miller's idea of tragedy - tough as that is to create on stage.

There is a root, an essence of tragedy; the cumulative impact of which is delivered in a single line or a few words. It is the concentrated effort of the actor to build an illusion so complete that it impinges totally on the observer excluding all else - only the illusion exists. It may not last long, but its moment is one of truth and achieving it is not easy. Superlatives spring to describe it.



Miller gave himself a tough act to follow in modern tragedy of the mediocrity; the pathetically petty, pathetically precious tragedy of modern existence; the innumerable compromises of what we believe to be just and right and good; so that we may cling to the fragile order of our lives, survive, make things a little better for our children.

The Kellers make airplane parts. Just once in a while they ship faulty cylinder heads to be fitted on warplanes. Keller and his partner get caught when 24 pilots crash to their deaths. Keller sells his partner up the river. Everyone either suspects, knows or ignores his guilt. Chris, Keller's young idealist son, plunges into the past to salvage the present; to bury his missing brother and marry his fiance, Ann Keller partner's daughter. Making a tragedy of that in the classic mould with that cheap paperback plot following the Aristotelian unities of time and place is Miller's achievement.

Curiously, though the play is modern - its heroes are ordinary folk - the thematic motif Miller uses is mythic. The hidden guilt, ironic retribution through the curse on the house and the passage of guilt from father to son; the very stuff of Greek tragedy. The central theme of the conflict between father and son echos the ancient Greek mythic battle between Zeus and Cronus as well as being an Oedipus-like pursuit of the truth. The power of the play to transcend the mundane is in the mythic quality, and of course Miller's craftsmanship.

The Campus production was ambitious in attempting *All My Sons*. It is in the heartland of the maudlin emotional confessional drama of the average white American family in the midst of all its material comfort that bombards us everyday through the television. The gush was an ever present danger even in this vigorously controlled production.

An actor faced with the task of doing little but talk on stage for the better part of two hours can be forgiven for "sawing the air too much". Nothing happens in this play, no convenient duel, no cloak and dagger stuff, no comic relief apart, from a badly faked kiss- just one whopping big skeleton in the cupboard with its flesh barely dried.

Shenuka Peris' performance as the mother was full of depth, quite the pivotal performance of the evening. She captures all the collective nervous tension of Kate Keller's neurosis. Kate Keller for all her whining irritation faces squares off with reality. Her pilot son is coming back from the war, he is not dead; because if he is dead then the guilt would be on the father who made faulty cylinder heads for warplanes. Warped logic is the essence of the compromise.

A noncommittal 5 for Brian Jeganathan in his role as Father Keller. He carried the burden of his umpteen lines well. But then he is a clever actor, with many of an actor's tools and tricks of the trade at his disposal. Ever so often one felt he relied a tad too much on his tools and not enough on his character for the root of his performance.

Mario Gomez's tight character piece as the anti-establishmentarian lawyer brother of Ann and general party pooper in the happy reconciliation of the two families was excellent. Dayan Candappa sustained himself rather creditably if slightly over the top in his intense portrayal of Chris Keller, the young idealist.

If much of the acting was ordinary, then that was the paradox of the production. It was greater than the sum of its parts. *All My Sons* didn't offer flamboyant, larger than life character roles. It was not a play for prima donna's. It was non-glam nitty gritty run of the mill acting that is so much more harder to give magic to.

## The Hundred-Heads

The Hundred-Heads is a fish created by a Hundred ill-tempered words uttered in the course of an otherwise blameless life. A Chinese biography of the Buddha tells that he once met some fishermen who were dragging in a net. After much toil they hauled up on to the shore to huge fish with one head of an ape, another of a dog, another of a horse, another of a fox, another of a hog, another of a tiger, and so on, up to one hundred.

The Buddha asked the fish:

"Are you Kapila?"

"Yes, I am," the Hundred-heads answered before dying.

The Buddha explained to his disciples that in a previous incarnation Kapila was a Brahman who had become a monk and whose knowledge of the holy texts was unrivalled. Upon occasion, when his fellow students misread a word, Kapila would call them ape-head, dog-head, horse-head, and so forth. After his death, the karma of those many insults caused him to be reborn as sea monster, weighed down by all the heads he had bestowed upon his companions.

**Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*.**