

A TINY GUIDE TO SRI LANKA'S
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
NOVELISTS



THE
CEYLON PRESS

In a
Word
or Two

The new-Jersey born CEO of a top global publishing company once famously enjoined her party guests in Delhi to delight in the “exotic” literature of South Asia. The executive, riding high on the wholly unexpected international success of possibly the only “exotic” novel she had (inadvertently) published, was eager to commend this niche of the literary cannon to her tolerant if wearied editors. Exotic after all is says more about the speaker than the owner. A vegetarian is, amongst other things, exotic to a meat eater, just as Bolivian opium farmer is something of a catch to market gardeners in Oxfordshire or Nuwara Eliya.

Fiction from South Asia has burst like a much-needed firecracker over the somewhat sagging silos of commoditized fiction chased by editors and literary agents in the west. And none more so than that from Sri Lanka or by Sri Lankan writers, where ever they now live. So what are best contemporary Sri Lankan novels written in English to read today?

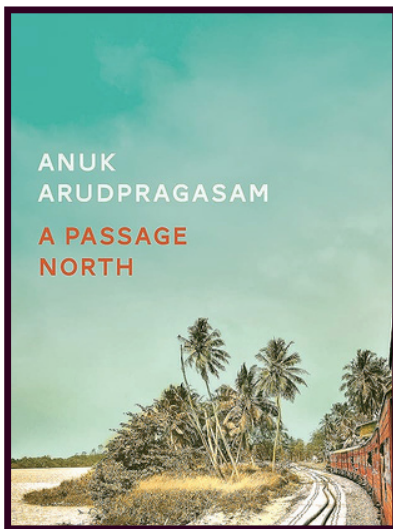
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A PASSAGE NORTH

ANUK ARUDPRAGASAM

It begins with a message: a telephone call informing Krishan that his grandmother's former care-giver, Rani, has died in unexpected circumstances, at the bottom of a well in her village in the north, her neck broken by the fall. The news arrives on the heels of an email from Anjum, an activist he fell in love with four years earlier while living in Delhi, bringing with it the stirring of distant memories and desires.

LONDON REVIEW BOOKSHOP



“A Passage North is written with scrupulous attention to nuance and detail...At its centre is an exquisite form of noticing, a way of rendering consciousness and handling time that connects Arudpragasam to the great novelists of the past”
Colm Toibin

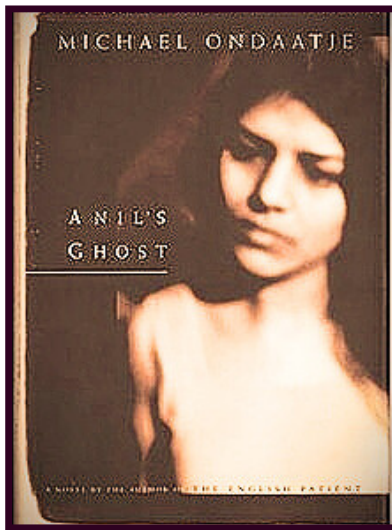
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ANIL'S GHOST

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

When Anil discovers that the bones found in an ancient burial site are in fact those of a much more recent victim, her search for the terrible truth hidden in her homeland begins. What follows is a story about love, about family, about identity - a story driven by a riveting mystery.

LONDON REVIEW BOOKSHOP



“More effective than a documentary, Ondaatje's novel satisfies one of the most exalted purposes of fiction: to illuminate the human condition through pity and terror. It may well be the capstone of his career.”
Publisher's Weekly

3

BLUE SKINNED
GODS

S.J. SINDU

In Tamil Nadu, India, a boy is born with blue skin. His father sets up an ashram, and the family makes a living off of the pilgrims who seek the child's blessings and miracles, believing young Kalki to be the tenth human incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. In Kalki's tenth year, he is confronted with three trials that will test his power and prove his divine status and, his father tells him, spread his fame worldwide.

PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE



"This marvellous novel offers up the most extraordinary circumstance in which to live a life. What am I and what am I capable of? These pages left me with the best case of culture shock, and in awe over Sindu's storytelling talent."

Devin Murphy

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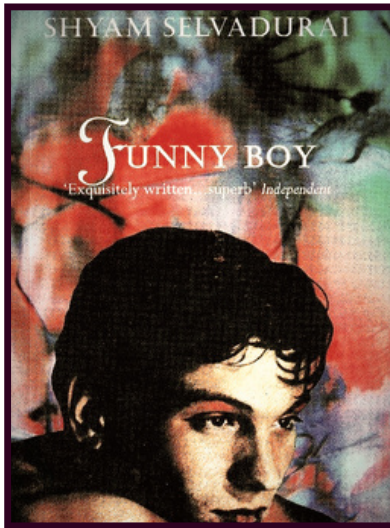
FUNNY BOY

SHYAM SELVADURAI

In the world of his large family - affluent Tamils living in Colombo - Arjie is an oddity, a 'funny boy' who prefers dressing as a girl to playing cricket with his brother. But as

Arjie comes to terms with his own homosexuality and with the racism of the society in which he lives, Sri Lanka is plunged into civil war as fighting between the army and the Tamil Tigers gradually begins to encroach on the family's comfortable life.

BAREFOOT



"This marvellous novel offers up the most extraordinary circumstance in which to live a life. What am I and what am I capable of? In the asking comes revelations on the nature of love, power in friendship, weight of dogma, and the visceral seeping together of diverse cultures. These pages left me with the best case of culture shock, and in awe over Sindu's storytelling talent."

Devin Murphy

5

MOSQUITO

ROMA TEARNE

When author Theo Samarajeeva returns to his native Sri Lanka after his wife's death, he hopes to escape his gnawing loss amid the lush landscape of his increasingly war-torn country. But as he sinks into life in this beautiful, tortured land, he also finds himself slipping into friendship with an artistic young girl, Nulani, whose family is caught up in the growing turmoil. Under the threat of civil war, their affair offers a glimmer of hope to a country on the brink of destruction...

GOOGLE BOOKS



“Thought-provoking and beautifully written, Mosquito is a stunning and bittersweet portrait of a shipwrecked land, torn by the dualistic ideologies of a post-colonial people.”
Europa Editions

6

ON SAL MAL
LANE

RU FREEMAN

Sri Lanka, 1979. The Herath family has just moved to Sal Mal Lane, a quiet street disturbed only by the cries of the children whose families that live there. As the neighbours adapt to the newcomers in different ways, the children fill their days with cricket matches, romantic crushes, and small rivalries. But the tremors of civil war are mounting, and it is only a matter of time before the conflict engulfs them all and the sleepy neighbourhood erupts in violence.

BAREFOOT



“Ru Freeman’s new novel moves like a stage play in a dream. Dread hovers over the richness, childhood’s abandon faces the crushing power of adulthood, and we live for a time in a world many of us did not imagine. And we fear what might be coming.”

Luis Alberto Urrea

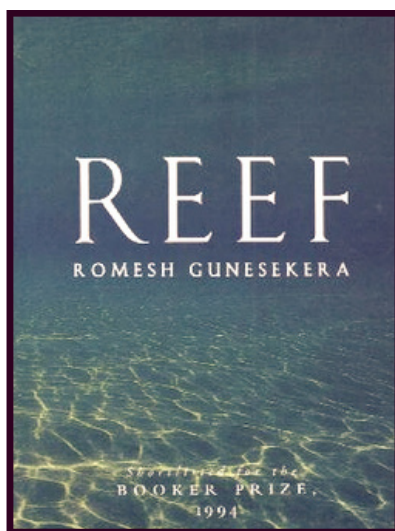
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REEF

ROMESH GUNESEKERA

Reef is the moving, multi award-winning story of young Triton, a talented young chef who goes to work for Mister Salgado, a marine biologist obsessed by swamps, sea movements and the island's disappearing reef. So committed is Triton to pleasing his master's palate that he is oblivious to the political unrest threatening his Sri Lankan paradise, and yet subtle undercurrents of impending doom do ripple through Triton's haunting story of memory and friendship.

WORLD BOOK CLUB



“Dark as one of Graham Greene's tropical undergrowths, funny in the way that Naipaul can be, multi-layered in the manner of Joyce, evocative as Narayan, Reef is a thing of Beauty.”

Alan Taylor, Scotland on Sunday

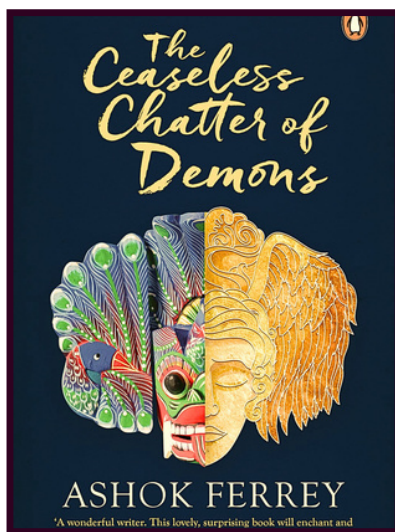
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THE CEASELESS
CHATTER OF
DEMONS

ASHOK FERREY

The story of young Sonny Mahadewala who leads a dual life: between his adoptive England where he cohabits with a privileged American; and the big house on the mountain belonging to his father's people in Kandy, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka—where a troubled existence has earned him both honour and shame. For Sonny's mother is convinced that demons possess this ugly son of hers. Demons and the devil himself circumscribe the playing field of this book, and through their clever interplay they speak of larger horrors with able grace.

PENGUIN



“This loving surprising book will enchant and amuse. It is quite simply a triumph.”
Alexander McCall Smith

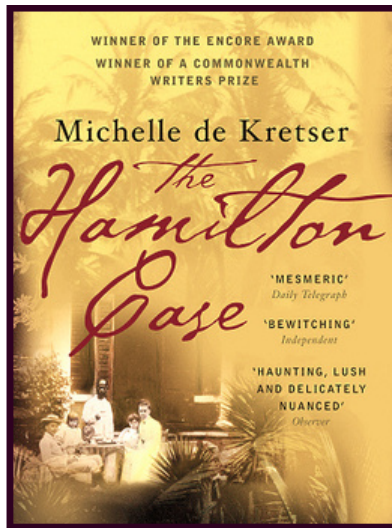
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THE HAMILTON
CASE

MICHELLE DE KRETZER

A flamboyant beauty who once partied with the Prince of Wales and who now, in her seventh decade, has “gone native” in a Ceylonese jungle. A proud, Oxford-educated lawyer who unwittingly seals his own professional fate when he dares to solve the sensational Hamilton murder case that has rocked the upper echelons of local society. A young woman who retreats from her family and the world after her infant brother is found suffocated in his crib.

HACHETTE



“A haunting and acclaimed novel of thwarted ambition, corruption, murder and family secrets.”
Google books

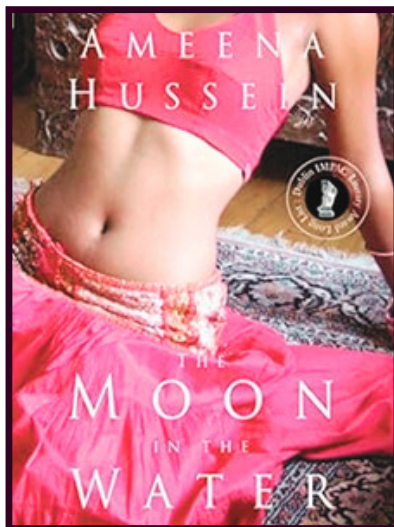
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THE MOON IN
THE WATER

AMEENA HUSSEIN

Khadeeja Rasheed has the perfect life in faraway Geneva. A loving family, a fulfilling career, and an adoring boyfriend. When her father is killed in a bomb blast she returns home to Sri Lanka. There she discovers a secret that threatens to destroy family bonds and reveal complicated threads of love, loyalty, and betrayal.

GOOGLE BOOKS



“She is a great story teller, drawing in believable portrayals, personality analyses and reflections of how people think and feel in modern Sri Lanka. Like many Sri Lankan novels the focus is on families, their beliefs and opinions, prejudices, and cultural traditions.”

Good Reads

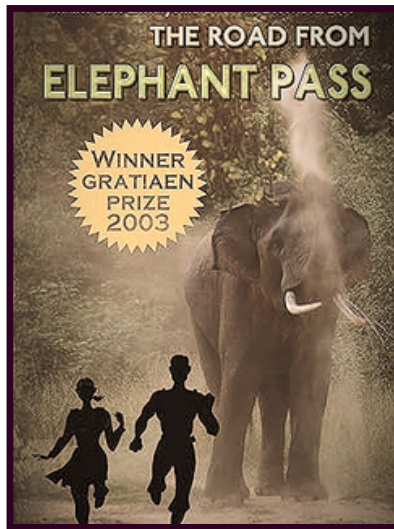
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THE ROAD
FROM
ELEPHANT PASS

NIHAL DE SILVA

An army officer's routine assignment to pick up a woman informant near Jaffna turns into a nightmare when the Tigers launch a massive attack on the peninsula and the camp at Elephant Pass. The two adversaries are forced to escape together through the rebel held Wanni and later, cross the abandoned Wilpattu National Park on foot.

AMAZON



"...its moving story...its constant feel of real life... its consistency of narrative momentum ... its descriptive power ... its dramatic use of dialogue to define social context, capture character psychology, and trace the development of a relationship ... its convincing demonstration that resolution of conflict and reconciliation of differences are feasible through mutual experience and regard, and last though not least, for its eminently civilized handling of the last degree of intimacy between a man and a woman."

Gratian Prize

12

THE SEVEN
MOONS OF
MAALI ALMEIDA

SHEHAN
KARUNATILAKA

Maali Almeida, war photographer, gambler, and closet gay, has woken up dead in what seems to be a celestial visa office. His dismembered body is sinking in the Beira Lake, and he has no idea who killed him. At a time when scores are settled by death squads, suicide bombers and hired goons, the list of suspects is depressingly long. But even in the afterlife, time is running out for Maali. He has 'seven moons' to try and contact the man and woman he loves most and lead them to a hidden cache of photos that will rock Sri Lanka.

THE BOOKER PRIZE



“a rollicking magic-realist take on a recent bloody period in Sri Lankan history, set in an unpeaceful afterlife. It is messy and chaotic in all the best ways...a pleasure to read: Karunatilaka writes with tinder-dry wit and an unfaltering ear for prose cadences.”

TLS

13

THE SWEET AND
SIMPLE KIND

YASMINE
GOONERATNE

The Gooneratnes' mountain bungalow, overlooking rippling tea plantations, is called Pemberley, after Mr Darcy's mansion. A wall plaque commemorates Elizabeth Bennet's description of it. In the style of a modern Jane Austen, Yasmine Gooneratne takes up the enduring and universal question of who will marry whom.

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW



“Resonant in its social insights and beautifully written, The Sweet and Simple Kind offers a richly imagined world of love, political chicanery and family turmoil in the newly independent Sri Lanka of the 1950s and 60s.”
Amazon

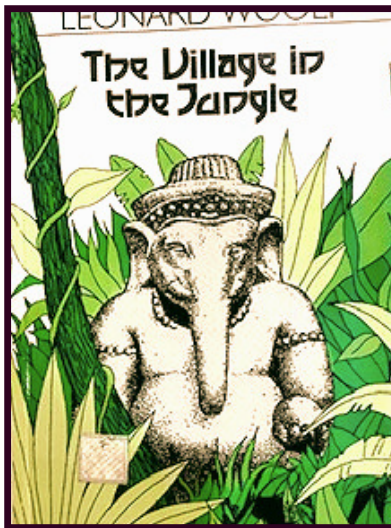
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THE VILLAGE IN
THE JUNGLE

LEONARD WOOLF

This novel follows the lives of a handful of villagers hacking out a fragile existence in a jungle where indiscriminate growth, indifferent fate and malevolent neighbours constantly threaten to overwhelm them. It is as if Thomas Hardy were immersed in the heat, scent, sensuality, and pungent mystery of the tropics. Woolf ... skilfully incorporates local storytelling traditions and beliefs into his chilling narrative, to create a book which remains one of the best-loved in Sri Lanka to this day.

PAPER PLUS



“...it is a miracle in writing. At no time has the author’s more celebrated wife, Virginia Woolf, approached this height in workmanship.”
Chicago Tribune

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YOU'RE INVITED

AMANDA JAYATISSA

When a Sri Lankan woman now living in LA learns that her former best friend is marrying her ex-boyfriend, she will do anything to stop the wedding.

KIRKUS REVIEWS



“Absolutely addictive...it’s like Agatha Christie meets Crazy Rich Asians.”
Brad Thore



DISCOVER MORE

A small island surrounded by large oceans, Sri Lanka is a mystery to many: remote, hard to place; a well-kept secret. The Ceylon Press aims to make its complicated story more accessible.

Read its story in *A History of Sri Lanka*, or hear it as a podcast. The *Companion to Sri Lanka* makes visible more of the whole. The digital Museum of Sri Lanka unites the island's artefacts – scattered around the world – into a single exhibition. Its downloadable eBooks cover all Sri Lankan subjects. Its podcast, *Poetry from the Jungle*, presents the work of 80 poets to reset the literary canon. And in case it all gets too serious, enjoy the off-grid *Jungle Diaries* blog and Podcast. All these works are added to weekly and available free at theceylonpress.com.



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flametreestate.com

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