APPENDIX A: Transcription conventions

. A one-second pause.

[...] Part of a turn that has not been transcribed.

No gap at all between two turns, an interruption.

(()) Non-verbal and paralinguistic information of the utterance

preceding the parenthesis.

It would be- False start.

APPENDIX B: Examples of Student-Student Interaction

EXAMPLE OF DEFINITION

LEARNER: To greet is to say hello.

EXAMPLE OF USAGE: WORLD KNOWLEDGE

LEARNER 1: Ouè és advice? [What's advice?]

LEARNER 2: Advice is. . .

LEARNER 3: Help more or less?

LEARNER 2: Yes. I have a problem and I explain my problem to you and you say I

think you should.

EXAMPLE OF TRANSLATION INTO L1

LEARNER 4: Què vol dir pattern? [What does pattern mean?]

LEARNER 5: Los patrones.

EXAMPLE OF PROVISION OF L2

LEARNER 3: Sobre todo, com es diu? [how do you say that?]

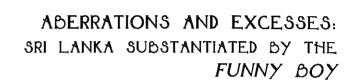
LEARNER 6; Moreover.

EXAMPLE OF UNKNOWN

LEARNER: Courtyard. No ho sé però com que no podia mirar al diccionari. [I don't

know but as I couldn't look it up in the dictionary.]





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Shyam Selvadurai's Funny Boy consists of six discrete episodes that deal with what could at first seem two very different issues. As the title suggests, Selvadurai's focus is a narrator growing up to an awareness of his own homosexuality in an unsympathetic and often hostile society. However, the novel also deals with the ethnic violence that has dominated Sri Lankan society and politics for the last fifteen years, and shows the manner in which the minority Tamils were increasingly treated as outsiders so that in the end they had no option except to consider themselves as such.

Put like that, of course, the thematic connections within the work can be seen quite readily. Unfortunately, however, the illumination the different sections of the book shed on each other has not generally been appreciated. This is in part perhaps because of the manner in which Selvadurai initially introduces the personal element. The first chapter of the book, "Pigs Can't Fly," deals with the narrator in an early childhood in which he enjoys dressing up in a saree and playing together with girls instead of other boys in a game called "Bride-bride" which he has invented himself. The extraordinary nature of this performance seems to the reader to emphasize that the book, in dealing with homosexuality, is concerned with something aberrant; and though such dressing up in childhood may not be unusual, and though Selvadurai manages to introduce real pathos into the awareness of the narrator at the end of the loneliness that awaited him—"I would be caught between the boys' and the girls' worlds, not belonging or wanted in either"2—the im-

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pression is created that the writer is dealing with strange exoticisms that are of no great concern to the average reader.

This cannot of course be said about the chapters that deal with the ethnic issue and the violence that has accompanied it. The second chapter deals with the love affair of the narrator's aunt, a Tamil, with a Sinhalese boy; though she withstands family pressures, indeed is to some extent spurred on to the affair by her determination to resist what she sees as unreasonable prejudice, she is overcome when she herself is hurt in one of the attacks that became

increasingly common in the early eighties.

The third chapter introduces yet another aspect of the violence in making clear the manner in which the government promoted it. The protagonist here is a Burgher, a Sri Lankan of mixed European descent. Like many other Burghers in the period immediately after independence, Daryl Brohier had emigrated to Australia, but now he comes back as a journalist, to investigate the rising racial tension. Earlier he had had an affair with the narrator's mother, but this had come to nothing because they were of different races. Now the affair is resumed, clandestinely.

The need for secrecy is one factor that prevents her pushing for an investigation when Daryl is murdered, obviously by government security forces when he had become too curious about the burning of the Jaffna Public Library, one of the measures instigated by government politicians to intimidate the Tamils. Another factor is fear, the awareness of what the police had done to the servant boy they decided to make a scapegoat at first, the anxiety

about what might be done to her and to her family.

The fourth chapter deals with Jegan, the son of a friend of the narrator's father who gives him a job in his hotel business for sentimental reasons. Jegan had however been involved with the terrorist Tiger movement earlier and, though he had left it, when the connection is found out and he is attacked on that account, he has to be got rid of. The novel brings out clearly the problems the hostility causes the business so that, even though it is suggested that the father might have been more heroic, we can also understand that he should have had to sacrifice Jegan. What is more critically presented is the vicious advantage taken of the situation by rival businessmen, and the attitude of the government which, in allowing the propagation of half-truths, encouraged such discrimination.

The fifth chapter reverts to homosexuality as its principal subject in recounting the narrator's first affair with his Sinhalese fellow schoolboy Soyza. I would suggest however that it needs to be read in the light of the three preceding chapters too if its impact is to be properly appreciated.³ The affair develops at a time when both boys are being tormented by the principal

of their school, and the climax of the story is when, to show his solidarity with Soyza, Arjie defies the principal, Black Tie, and thereby risks an excess of the physical punishments that were inflicted as a matter of routine in the school. The episode itself is trivial, but the language Selvadurai uses emphasizes its thematic importance—

"I did it for you," I said. "I couldn't bear to see you suffer any more."

There was a look of surprise on his face, then understanding. He moved to me and I put my arms around him. . . . My eyes came to rest on my parents. As I gazed at Amma I felt a sudden sadness. What had happened between Shehan and me over the last few days had changad my relationship with her forever. I was no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me. . . We stood for a moment, each lost in his own thoughts, then we began to walk together towards the stairs that led down to the auditorium. (FB 284-5)

At first sight it would seem that this episode does not really connect very closely with the political theme of the book. Of course Soyza and Arjie do belong to two different communities, and the fact that they are in the same class is unusual, due only to Arjie's father's desire to have his son educated in what he saw as the dominant language of the nation. Otherwise Arjie would have been in the Tamil medium class and therefore barely in communication with Sinhalese boys. Again, Black Tie's cruelty is presented in the context of his rivalry with his deputy, who wanted the school to be identified with Sinhalese and Buddhism. Yet this factor barely figures in the deliberations that lead Arjie to defy Black Tie; and though it is made clear that Soyza was not one of those who engaged in communal hostilities, such hostilities amongst the boys are also merely peripheral to the story.

Though ethnic tensions are not central to this episode, I would argue that there is an even more important thematic link in terms of the violence that is wielded so unreflectingly by authority. The placing of this chapter before the final one, which is a diary of Arjie's experiences during the riots of 1983, the government-sponsored attacks on Tamils that contributed more than anything else to increased support for Tamil terrorism, seems to me therefore particularly significant. The arguments put forward in that chapter about the involvement of the government in the riots, as well as the characterization of the President's speech, finally made the narrator's father accept what his wife had been trying to tell him for some time, that "It is very clear that we no longer belong in this country" (FB 304). There seems to me no doubt then

about the parallels Selvadurai draws between Black Tie and the President, both of whom rely on violence alone and have no scruples while in pursuit of their own ends about treating others as instruments without any rights or feelings of their own.

Throughout the work Selvadurai shows that such arbitrary excess on the part of authority generally goes unchallenged. So, in the earlier episodes, injustice had been accepted because to fight against it would have caused trouble. Arjie's mother gives in at the first hint of ridicule and tries to straitjacket Arjie within the world of the boys. Radha, his aunt, briefly resists family pressure about her Sinhalese boyfriend but feels in the end that the effort would be too much. His mother tries to find out what happened to Daryl but gives up almost at once, after she learns that the servant boy's arm had been paralyzed and realizes the hostility her initial involvement had roused. And Arjie's father, though he at first quelled his qualms because of sentimentality about his old friend, in the end sends Jegan away. It is only Arjie who in the end is willing to risk his own skin, literally, given Black Tie's prowess with the cane, to stand by his friend. Though the particular context of his defiance of authority might seem a trivial one, he decides in the full knowledge of the suffering he would have to undergo, suffering he has already experienced as intense. In this sense, Selvadurai suggests, Arjie has fulfilled his father's original purpose in sending him to "the best school of all", namely that "The Academy will force you to become a man." (FB 210) His act of commitment then shows up the inadequacies of all the others who had acquiesced in violence and authoritarianism and thereby perhaps allowed them to grow to the excesses of 1983.

My argument then is that both Selvadurai's major subjects are skilfully presented in terms of what is almost a didactic theme, the importance of asserting individual feelings and relationships in defiance of the dictates of authority. This presentation with regard to the homosexual element has been obscured as noted previously by the obviously peculiar nature of "Bridebride," and the apparently funny, i.e. ridiculous rather than simply exceptional, nature of the protagonist. In chapter five however the theme of defiance is much more forceful; at the same time the thematic connections have not received as much attention as either the account of the ethnic differences that form the background or the vivid description of adolescent sexuality. And it was predominantly this latter, the sexuality seen too in relation to the first chapter, that prompted the criticism of the book as filth by Sri Lankans, and most significantly by a writer who should have been more sensitive, and to whose viewpoint I shall return.

With regard to Selvadurai's other subject too there has been some confusion, caused I think by the intensity of the passions the ethnic conflict has roused on either side. The subject is seen as that of ethnic violence in itself. though as I hope I have made clear above his scope is in fact broader in that he is concerned with the wider issue of political violence, and the involvement therein of the government and government media. In the early eighties. the period with which the book deals, such violence was most obviously directed against Tamils, though the account of Daryl's death and of the suffering of his servant boy, and before that the boy's brother, makes clear its wider provenance. For some Tamils, however, the book is seen as simply a moving justification for the violence Tamil Tigers (amongst them the fictional Jegan) have unleashed in turn, while some Sinhalese respond by claiming that the book presents only one side of the story. Thus, Selvadurai suggests in the novel, in the obviously autobiographical-indeed almost documentary-last section, that his own family home was burnt by the mobs. Certainly the Selvadurai home was burnt, but it was confidently claimed in some quarters that the book gave a false picture in attributing this to mob violence, and that the "truth" was that Selvadurai's father had set fire to it himself to claim the insurance.

Such claims are typical of the manner in which Sri Lankans respond to criticism. The question of whether the book presented an accurate picture of what had in fact occurred was not even considered. To that question there could have only been an affirmative answer. Instead, rumour was given precedence over the realities of fiction, to provide an evasion of the moral issue raised. Such an approach was of a piece with the claim often heard in Sri Lanka at the time that, though of course not all Tamils were responsible for the terrorism of the Tigers, many were, and the rest were sympathetic, and therefore it did not really matter that they had been hurt in the violence.

Such attitudes are connected with the collectivizing streak that has characterized modern Sri Lankan society. It could of course be argued that this is nothing new, that it arises almost necessarily from some of the basic characteristics of that society. It is generally acknowledged for instance that shame is a far more prominent socializing factor than guilt in Sri Lanka, in common with most South Asian or indeed Asian societies. Selvadurai certainly pays due attention to this in his depictions of the way in which the adult world reacts to the idea of nonconformity—"... if he turns out to be the laughing-stock of Colombo, it'll be your fault', my father said in a tone of finality" (FB 14); "What's wrong?' Ammachchi said. 'I'll tell you what's wrong.' She paused for effect. 'People will talk'" (FB 58); "I recalled Mr. and Mrs. Siriwardena and his running away with the next-door servant woman;

how people on our road stared at Mrs. Siriwardena, when she passed them, and sometimes even laughed openly at her. Their son had been in my class and the boys had teased him until he cried" (FB 118); "Be careful, Nalini', she said, 'Society is not as forgiving as a sister is" (FB 125); "The trick is not to make yourself conspicuous. Go around quietly, make your money, and don't step on anyone's toes" (FB 173); "Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you" (FB 211). Yet in addition to this relentless depiction of the manner in which public perceptions are canonized, Selvadurai equally importantly also suggests the way in which the classifications that permit condign criticism are made so easily, without any attempt at discriminatory analysis.

This is perhaps obscured by the fact that the ready categorization of the first chapter, in which Arjie is identified as different, cannot be questioned, and is indeed the substance of the author's claim to attention. What is challenged in that chapter is not the categorization itself but the judgments that flow from it, the criticism of the difference, the social urge to belittle it. The categorizations that follow however are more complex. Radha's family's insistence that Anil be seen as simply a Sinhalese and not as a young man paying court to a young lady with whom he has much in common is of a piece with the school bully's declaration that Arjie is not wanted in their class because he is Tamil; Soyza's simple question— "'But Salgado, aren't you always saying that Tamils should learn Sinhalese?" (FB 216) pinpoints the state of mind that insists on punishing differences even while exacerbating them. It was this sort of attitude that separated Daryl and Arjie's mother long before distinctions between Sinhalese and Tamils became intense, and it is this sort of attitude that drives Jegan back to the Tigers by allowing him no refuge when he had come to Colombo to try to escape

And Selvadurai's characterization of such attitudes has indeed been amply borne out by reactions to his book. The dismissal of the book as filth by the distinguished writer and journalist Maureen Seneviratne is a phenomenon that I think deserves some closer attention, given that Mrs. Seneviratne's own writings had dealt with sensitivity previously on the torments of childhood. Her present approach however perhaps owes something to her very successful emergence in recent years as an activist with regard to the issue of child prostitution that has recently bedevilled several Asian countries. Having done some invaluable work to highlight the abuse of children, not only by tourists but also by locals, Mrs Seneviratne has however gone on a crusade even against what in an earlier incarnation she might have recognized as qualitatively different. Inveighing against a

proposed gay conference in Sri Lanka, she declared that it had to be prevented, since otherwise paedophiles masquerading as homosexuals might be able to slip into the country; and a recent letter of hers to a magazine called *Lanka Woman*, that despite scantily dressed young ladies on its cover purports to uphold traditional Sri Lankan values, needs to be quoted at some length:

Today I have . . . come to know not only about lesbianism but *also* of paedophilia and homosexuality, having been chosen to *work in* areas where those sexual expressions are only too common and in some cases are wreaking havoc on the lives of children everywhere . . . there ARE some all too many—GAYS and LESBIANS—as do [sic] some heterosexuals, not so many, who use children as sexual partners.⁵

Mrs Seneviratne's letter does indicate an awareness of a distinction with regard to paedophilia, though her argument ignores this; understandably so for her letter was in support of an editorial which was even more neanderthal in its approach:

Make no mistake-homosexuality is unnatural. It is immoral and goes against all religious teachings as well as civil law. . . . Just because homosexuality has been looked upon with a benovolent eye by law enforcement authorities in Scandinavian countries, it doss not mean that a country such as ours, the palladium of Buddhism with large segments of Christians, Hindus and Muslims with a centuries-old culture behind them are going to do likewise. The true and evil nature of homosexuality and lesbianism has been blurred by certain laws passed, in Britain, particularly, which allowed two consenting males to indulge in their immoral practices in private. . . . President Robert Mugabe . . . recently condemned homosexuals strongly, even calling them "pigs". . . At a time when rape and child abuse are rampant in Sri Lanka and law enforcement authorities are attempting to review the relevant laws which are totally inadequate, a new and festering sore erupts in our midst. . . The very heart of all our religious and moral teachings is at risk, and we will be wanting in our duty to future generations of unspoilt children if we were, not only to condone these practices, but also legalise them. It is up to thinking people to speak out and condemn these people unreservedly. A plethora of words can confuse and blur the issue as we are all too aware, and a strong stand must be taken against deviants who would worm themselves into and destroy the very fabric of society.6

Such hysteria accords with the characterization of Funny Boy as filth. Ironically, Mrs Seneviratne's outrage extended too to another writer gaining prominence around the same time whose subject matter was less alien. This was her cousin Carl Muller, whose trilogy of novels about the Burghers was undisguisedly based on his own family. In this case, Mrs. Seneviratne's indignation, in common with that of many other Burghers, was with regard to the very earthy manner, involving an excessive degree of sexual activity of all sorts, in which Muller had presented his community.

The indignation can to some extent be understood since Muller, or rather his publishers, had presented his account as a faithfully comprehensive account of the Burghers; and this was a tremendous shock to the community in a context in which previous literary presentations had depicted them as genteel and proper. The fact however was that, whereas Burghers had contributed distinctively to what was termed respectable society, there was also another side to the community, which was celebrated for its less restrained *joie de vivre* too. This was most marked with regard to sexuality, in the sense that, when I was at school for instance, it was generally assumed with more of envy than scorn perhaps that Burghers, boys as well as girls, were more readily available for the more advanced levels of experimentation. This was of course only an aspect of the truth, but it was an aspect that was suppressed in literary accounts of the community until the publication of Muller's work.

The criticism then by its leading lights that Muller had insulted and betrayed his community was typical of a society with a collectivizing outlook that could not discriminate about details. This is not the place to go into any greater detail about the absurdity of a debate that does the Burghers themselves no service, in detracting from Muller's actual literary/autobiographical achievement, as opposed to his building up of a sociological record that was never intended to be definitive. It is worth noting here however that, in the context of what has been characterized as filth, Muller's work presents a contrast to Selvadurai's that more discriminating criticism might have used to focus on their very different perspectives. Muller, for instance in his treatment of homosexuality, which figures at regular intervals if not very prominently in the trilogy, adopts what might be termed a ruthlessly practical approach wherein it provides a purely physical outlet, occasionally for predatory bachelors or men deprived of their wives (such as the narrator's father when his mother embarked upon a lenghty affair with another man), more often for preposterous perverts such as the squint-eyed schoolmaster who achieved orgasm by digging into the boys he was caning. Such

excesses, it might have been thought, would have highlighted by contrast the romantic nature of Selvadurai's presentation which is primarily concerned with human responses; but no such discrimination was to be found.

This however is not surprising, in a context in which, as elsewhere on the subcontinent, homosexuality continues to be an embarrassing issue. In literature in English it has barely figured, except with regard to two works, the reactions to which are indicative of the anomalous nature of the situation. In 1971, in her novel *Giraya*, which is widely considered one of the most important recent works of fiction, Punyakante Wijenaike made it clear at the end that the husband of her narrator, whose problems with her marriage and her inheritance form the substance of the novel, was homosexual; when the book was turned twenty years later into a very popular television serial, it was decided by the authorities (and the decision was agreed to by the director, Lester James Pieris, the best known Sri Lankan director and one widely regarded as liberal in his own outlook), that homosexuality was unacceptable? and the man had to be epileptic instead. This change completely subverted Wijenaike's very subtle account of the relations between the husband and his mother, but artistry had to be sacrificed to convention. 8

In the case of my own political novel Acts of Faith, which dealt as far back as 1985 with the 1983 riots, a lot of energy was expended in Colombo in trying to identify the originals of the characters portrayed, in particular the homosexual ones. I had tried, in dealing with both overt and clandestine sexuality, to tie the latter to the undercover terrorism in which the government was engaged. Unfortunately the political content of the book seemed of less concern in some quarters than what was thought sexual innuendo. In that respect, though for very different reasons, in Sri Lanka itself the book suffered in a similar way to Selvadurai's, though again, albeit to a much smaller readership, the message got through abroad.

It should be registered though that, in the other works mentioned above, homosexuality was peripheral to the main concerns of the novels; and though I have argued that Selvadurai's political concerns and his moral theme are at least as important as the topic his title emphasizes, it is clear that those are substantiated by his central homosexual subject. In that respect Funny Boy is as important for the debate about sexuality to which there are already signs that it has given rise as for its wider content. It is regrettable if that content gets belittled in the controversy; but it may be hoped that that controversy itself will lead to a more open outlook, in which the excesses that pass for normality will no longer be able so readily to divide people up for destruction.

NOTES

1. See for instance the review by Manique Gunesekere, of the University of Kelaniya (1996).

2. Shyam Selvadurai, Funny Boy, Penguin India 1994, p. 39. All page references to the book henceforth will be to this edition (abbreviated FB in parenthetical references).

- 3. I would in fact suggest an even closer connection in that the boy with whom the narrator has his affair is intended I think, in terms of physical description as well as his name, Soyza, to recall Richard de Zoysa, the journalist who was murdered by government forces in 1990. Though the earlier episode involving Daryl Brohier is dated to 1981, a period which did not in fact see murders of that nature, the discovery of Brohier's body, washed back to shore, is clearly reminiscent of what happened with de Zoysa.
- 4. See Obeyesekere, Gananath, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, for a vivid account of the phenomenon. Rushdie's *Shame* is of course the most engaging account of the possible consequences of an excessive delicacy confronted with increasing social dislocation.
 - 5. Maureen Seneviratne, in Lanka Woman, 10th January 1996: 7.
- 6. Clare Seneviratne, Editorial in Lanka Woman, 11th October 1995. The two Seneviratnes, both ladies, are not related, though the former does contribute regularly to the journal the latter edits.
- 7. See the account of what occurred during production in Lester James Pieris' article in *The Sunday Observer* (Colombo, 1996).
- 8. Ryhana Raheem and Siromi Fernando (1979) characteristically claim that Giraya is sensationalistic.

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RESEÑAS

LOVE AND LONGING IN BOMBAY: FOREVER LISTENING

Vikram Chandra, Love and Longing in Bombay.

London: Faber and Faber, 1997. 257 p.*

Those passionate poets and storytellers melt the chains of worry with the warmth of their song Ali Sardar l'afri, Urdu poet

Love and Longing in Bombay (1997) is the second book written by the young Indian author Vikram Chandra. His first work, the novel entitled Red Earth and Pouring Rain (1995), which has received great critical acclaim, has been awarded the David Higham Prize for Fiction and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Published Book. Now Chandra comes back with a work that corroborates his mastery as a modern storyteller.

Love and Longing in Bombay is a collection of five interrelated stories set in contemporary India, displaying a rich variety of plots, characters and dénouements that are, above all, essentially human. Dharma is the story which opens the collection, establishing the frame for the whole book, a frame that confirms the important presence of traditional Indian oral storytelling in Chandra's intertextual and highly polyphonic fiction.

We face the voice of a first-person narrator whose name, Ranjit Sharma, will remain unknown until the very end. He speaks in past tense and seems to be depicting events that happened some years ago, when he had just started

^{**} I can never thank Vikram Chandra enough for his kindness, his support, his stories, his voice. This review is also in debt to Dr. Mary B. Farrell, who gently read the final draft.