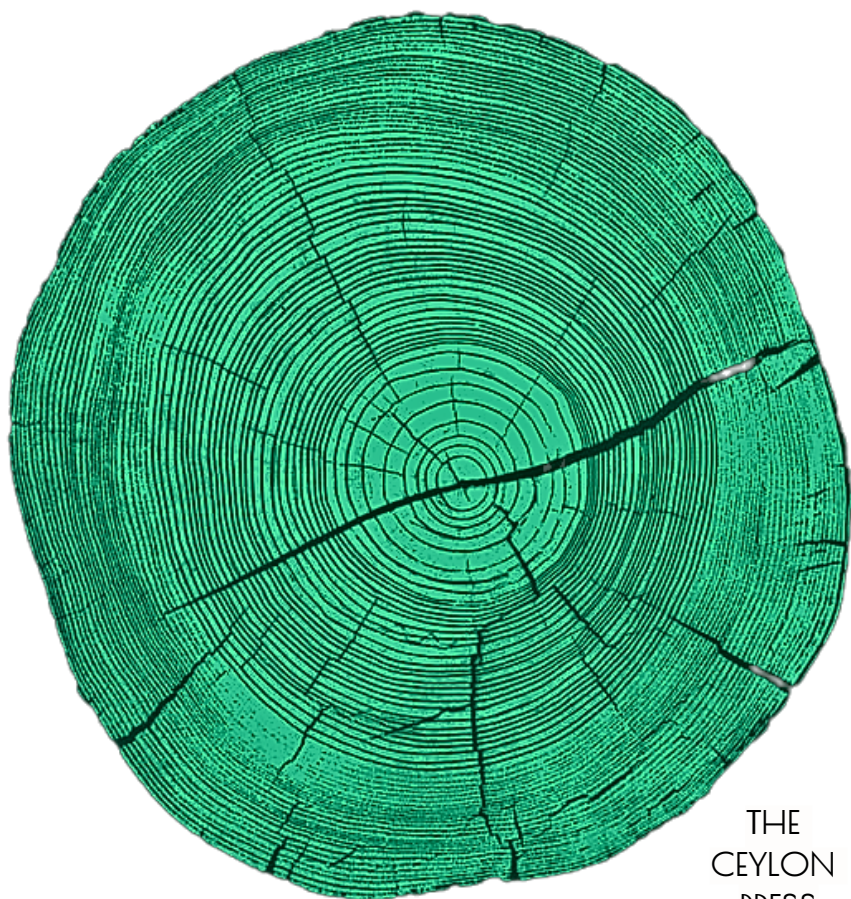


THE JUNGLE

Edited by
DAVID SWARBRICK



THE
CEYLON
PRESS

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Published By The Ceylon Press
2024

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**THIS BOOK IS
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The Ceylon Press
The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel
Mudunhena Walawwa,
Galagedera 20100,
Kandy,
Sri Lanka.

www.ceylonpress.com

A Preface

To The Work
& Its Discovery

INTRODUCTION

The Jungle is a curious work, and its provenance is something of a mystery that I hope this edition will go some way towards illuminating.

I have pieced it together using as much of the original research conducted many years ago by my old friend and tutor, Max de Silva, as possible. Max died long before he was able to reach any conclusions about the work or complete his ground-breaking research. But his labours were instrumental in rescuing a series of otherwise obscure and curious scraps of manuscript that might otherwise have passed into oblivion.

Many scholars, not least some of Max de Silva's older colleagues at the Department of English Literature at Marischal College, have commented that it is not a poem at all. Or even a reliable history.

Max, as an academic specialising in old English dialects and English colonial lexicons, and not poetry (or even Literature or Colonial Studies), wisely decided that it was not his place to enter such debates. And nor shall I.

But what, you might most reasonably ask, is this work?

The Jungle (and that is not its real title, as you will learn) is not a complete piece of writing. It is missing parts – how many exactly we cannot really know.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

I will begin at the beginning, relatively speaking.

THE
BUCHANAN-
SMITH ARCHIVE
& MOCKETT
CATALOGUE

The manuscript was discovered amongst the papers of Lady Margie Buchanan-Smith, a Scottish landowner from Balerno, south of Edinburgh, who died in 1901.

Buchanan-Smith was well known in her time for her crossbreed shorthorn cattle, which later went on to produce the beef for which Scotland is now so famous. But she was also a collector of antiquarian papers, and left her considerable, albeit largely uncatalogued, library to the Montrose Library.

There it sat, still in its original boxes until 1932 when T. Jerome Mockett (later Professor Mockett) discovered the trove of documents and set about cataloguing them for the library.

Many interesting first-hand accounts were revealed by Mockett's careful cataloguing, the Diaries of Captain Graham Laurie, being probably the most famous, written as there were over the period of the later Napoleonic wars.

The Diaries capture in vivid detail what life was like for a merchant ship ferrying trade from the East and West Indies through seas swarming with French frigates. As we know, Laurie's Diaries later went on to inspire the Hornblower novels written by C. S. Forester. Laurie would later go on to create a not inconsiderable scandal by his marriage to Coco zur Wag, the natural daughter of the French pretender, Archibald, Duc de Orleans-Bourbon who had married the redoubtable Spanish Infanta, Bianca, a lady known for knowing which way up was grand. Scandal, it seems ran in that family for Laurie's son, Dominic became

a notable London buck and partner-in-arms of George Bryan "Beau" Brummell, whilst his brother, Cuthbert, or Bertie as he was more commonly known, was, of course, to go down in history as the famous great fixer for James Stuart, the Military Governor who captured Colombo and Galle in 1796-7, aided by the Burger secret agent, Nestor.

The Jungle (and I will call it that for the sake of convenience) was one of the many manuscripts for which Professor Mockett could find few details.

A Bill of Sale, still attached to the manuscript, showed that it had been bought by Buchanan-Smith from Desmond Truscott, an antiquarian bookseller then based in Edinburgh's Lawnmarket in 1884.

THE RUTLAND
FAMILY &
LANGOLD-
GILLOW LIBRARY

From that small ticket, it is possible to trace a likely provenance to the Rutland family, who had for several generations been tenants of the Langold-Gillows, the eminent eighteenth-century furniture makers who later built Leyton Park near Slackhead in the Lake District .

The Rutlands were tenant farmers of the Leyton Park Estate.

The last of the line, Katarina Kennedy Rutland, married Rupert, the swashbuckling younger son of the watercolourist and poet Sir Simon Langold-Gillow, who famously meet his end aged 98 when out sketching Scafell Pike in a snowstorm. Katarina Kennedy Langold-Gillow (nee Rutland) was widowed early after Rupert Langold-Gillow came off the worse in a local duel. She spent the years of her widowhood living at Leyton Park, taking a particular interest in rescuing the famous Herdwick sheep breed, introduced into the area by Vikings and later immortalised by Beatrix Potter; but in her time, almost extinct. She left her own papers, which included the complete papers of the Rutland family, to the Library at Leyton Park.

When eventually, in 1854, Sir Stefan Langold-Gillow came into the baronetage, the Leyton Park Library was sold off. The new baronet, a member of Cardinal Newman's Oxford Movement, was interested in theology and kept behind only those books and papers that related to his particular interest.

The rest – including a complete set of Audubon's famous "The Birds of America", with its now priceless illustrations,

a 1297 copy of the Magna Carta, a hand-written copy of The Furstenberg Sonnets, the original handwritten manuscript of Ich Träume by the German romanticist, Beata von Heyl zu Herrnsheim, an unpublished section of Milton's Samson Agonistes, and, most interestingly of all, an original - if damaged - printing of one of the three Contested Quarto Editions, containing the comic play Fair Em. This play has, of course, long been attributed to Shakespeare due to a book found in the library of Charles I, in which this play was bound with two others under the title of "Shakespeare, Vol. 1." Its actual authorship is unclear - and remains much debated by scholars.

EDINBURGH &
THE ROBERT
KNOX
CONNECTION

Truscott's purchase of the Library was a sensational commercial coup, on the proceeds of which he was able to build himself a large, elegant house in Edinburgh's New Town designed by Ralph Holden, then a young architect much taken with the neo-classical styles of his day. The mansion is still standing to this day in Moray Place.

Holden would go on to create many more famous structures in his career, the most famous of which are of course the multiple follies he built for Cosima, Duchess of Doneraile at Coningsby Park and Gabriella, Countess of Kennedy at Wycombe Cross.

Buchanan-Smith was a regular customer of Truscott's – a buyer of his more obscure and no doubt much cheaper documents, amongst them several items from the Leyton Park Library.

But if all this traces the provenance of the manuscript back, with reasonable certainty, to the Leyton Park Library, it does not explain how it first came to be gathered amongst the Rutland papers.

For the connection of Rutland to Knox, we have to go back to December 1680 when a scion of the family, Archibald Rutland, returned to his family's farm in Slackhead after an exile of almost 22 years.

Archibald Rutland had been the companion of the more famous Robert Knox, a soldier imprisoned by the King of Kandy in 1659 after their ship ran aground in Ceylon.

Sixteen surviving crew members, including Knox and

Rutland, were captured, and transported to Kandy, capital of the last independent king on the island, and kept in captivity until two of them, Knox, and Rutland, escaped to Dutch held territory near Jaffa somewhere between 1679-80. From there they were able to make their way back to London.

Knox later wrote his famous account of the captivity he and his shipmates endured, *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon*, which was published in 1681, originally by Nathaniel Harrison, a London printer.

The book would go on to become part of the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Rutland however remained silent, leaving behind no later papers of his own and dying soon after returning home to Lancashire in May 1681. But although he seems to have written nothing about his tropical adventures, he most probably left behind many documents relating to it.

It cannot be known for certain that this is how the manuscript of *The Jungle* ended up in the papers of the Rutland family, but it seems safe to surmise that this must be the only logical explanation for how the manuscript of *The Jungle* was recovered: it had been brought to England by Rutland – from Ceylon.

Several other papers dating to the same time and place were also discovered amongst the Buchanan-Smith archive. These include the partial diaries of Roger Gold, and Ralph Knight who had also endured captivity in Kandy; letters written in Dutch appearing to come from the office of the then Dutch Governor, Ryklof van Goens de

Jonge; a memorandum from Samuel Perera, the Dutch Military Governor of Arippe Fort in Jaffna; a tally of slaves signed "Max u Viveka Engeström;" notes written in Dutch, English and Portuguese, many in poor or partial condition from European settlers, soldiers and administrators who lived in Ceylon between at least 1659 to 1679; the Journals of Susan and George Middleton-Frith, early planters from Ottogedera whose others writings helped scholars validate the complicated royal politics of the last descendants of the Kotte kings.

Work undertaken by several undergraduates, most notably Dom Frith (later a Colonel of The Blues and Royals), the philologist John Lyne-Perkis and Karen (later Dr) Hilliard, all then working for Professor Mockett, translated most of these documents, finding them to be letters, bills, memoirs, guides, and observations about the island of Ceylon.

THE LANKY DIALECT

Where *The Jungle* differs from these other manuscripts is that it was written in a form of Lanky, a spoken dialect widespread in Lancashire until roughly the start of the nineteenth century.

Lanky was one of the most distinctive of the northern English dialects, and intermingled with that of the Old Scots, then widely spoken across the border region of England and Scotland, with many words and expressions common in both vernaculars.

Few people then could read or write, and the Lanky dialect, as it is studied at the English Language and Linguistics faculty at Marischal College, is mostly of the spoken variety, using a corpora of texts that have been gathered by academics and transcribed over 120 years, and in particular the corpora assembled by Dr Ameena Hussein and Lady Olivia Reynolds during their ground-breaking audio recording tour of north-western Lancashire in 1984. As such, it is extremely unusual to find any documents originally written in Lanky; to do so which have required the writer to transcribe phonetically his or her own unique understanding of the spelling of spoken words.

But this, it appears, is exactly what the author of *The Jungle* did.

The written text of any such document would necessarily contain many easily identifiable words in standard English – but to anyone, even an Englishman reading it, it would, as a whole, be largely incomprehensible.

In choosing to write the document in Lanky, the author was effectively encoding it, making it almost impossible for anyone but himself to actually make sense of the text.

Quite why this degree of secrecy was necessary can only be a matter of fruitless speculation.

Was the text banned, illegal, stolen, confidential?

Or was it something Rutland needed to hide from his captors or even his colleagues? In a fascinating, albeit largely speculative, article publishing in *The Hebridean*, in 1967, the criminologist Dame Belinda Hacking thought that this was possibly the case. Referencing several scraps of paper that even the redoubtable F.A.F. Hogan was unable to place with any certainty into the final poem, she surmised that the work was in fact, ultimately, a description of the location of a lost treasure. Some of the largely unintelligible scripts F.A.F. Hogan excluded from her final version of the work include parts of words that could be associated with gold and relics – and possible place names. Dame Belinda's conjecture is that the work is actually in part a description for the recovery of lost treasure, hidden during a medieval invasion and never recovered. And indeed unless and until the lost final critical parts of the work are found, it is likely to remain hidden.

If this is true, she states, it is hardly surprising that Rutland wished to keep the whole thing secret. We do not know. Indeed, from this far end of history, we cannot know. All that is really relevant is that the text was almost unreadable. Only Rutland could make sense of it.

We know that Rutland could both read and write in English from annotations clearly made by him on some of the other documents that ended up in the Buchanan-Smith archive. A graphological study conducted in Winchester in 1934 by Dr. James Kennedy and Dr Corin Draw on all the archive's documentation conclusively demonstrated that the text of *The Jungle* was written by Rutland.

REASSEMBLING A PUZZLE

Establishing the order and meaning of the manuscript proved to be a lengthy task.

Mockett had the document translated into standard English by mid-1934, since when of course there have been several other literal translations, the most famous of which is that of Dr F. A. F. Hogan's, published in 1962 by revivalist Latimer Press in St Martin.

This publication however, while of use to scholars, does not capture in modern English the rhyme or metre used in the original manuscript. But it does provide an exact translation copy of the 137 pieces of often damaged (and in some places indecipherable) parchment that make up the work.

That the manuscript was fragmented into quite so many pieces, with no readily available Contents Guide to help establish the order of the papers, presented a great challenge. It is undoubtedly F.A.F. Hogan's greatest contribution that she was ultimately able to make a continuous sense of it all. Her work, of the arrangement of pieces, most of which were written, with, it first appears, random design across the pages, and almost entirely without punctuation, has only slightly since been amended by other scholars.

The most relevant of these is the work done by Dr Rockingham-Gill at Lampeter University. Where there are contradictions, I have selected to use those set out by Dr Rockingham-Gill who, working with the benefit of infrared technology many years later, was able to discern discrepancies and connections invisible to the naked eye.

The actual arrangement of text on parchment was itself unconventional, as if swimming in a large sea; or perhaps as if they had been jotted down by a writer not looking too closely at how he wrote what he did.

My own surmise is that this is more than possible.

When someone is writing something they do not, in all instances, pay too much attention to how they write what they do – when copying, for example. I will come back to this possibility later.

F.A.F. Hogan's painstaking study effectively put back together a large and complicated linguistic jigsaw, and almost all of the layout of the words in this edition follows Hogan's published summary – the lines, spaces, gaps, and paragraphs.

To make better sense of narrative, I have added in the most obviously missing parts of punctuation, without which it would be hard to make sense of many of the lines. For this I make no apology, but I have been greatly helped in this task by the grammarians Dr Persephone Kenton and Professor Timothy Ward at Bristol and Dr Loten Wennerholm.

In preparing this work for publication it has been my sole objective to make the text as easy to read and relevant for the current age as possible.

Certainly, there will be some who dissent from the wisdom of doing this – but my mission is not a scholarly one.

To achieve maximum readability, I have revised a substantial number of words, using wherever possible 21st century alternatives in order to provide a smooth reading experience, unencumbered by footnotes and linguistic explanations. For help in this task I am indebted to Dr Penny McCoy Silva and her team at the Oxford English Dictionary.

At every point, my objective has been to provide the manuscript with all the necessary apparatus as to permit it the most widespread readership possible amongst typical booklovers, a task not of simplification but of clarification.

THE TITLE & MISSING SECTIONS

The work itself came without any title, but it has over time been given the sobriquet of *The Jungle*, as much because of its opening and ending lines, as for the greater themes it appears to cover. It is for that reason that I have selected to retain this title in presenting the work.

The titles of the 16 different sections are of course, the ones given by F.A.F. Hogan to make stronger sense of the content of each part, though for Section XII ("Loose Ends") I have selected the alternative title later proposed by Lady Beckett who conducted her own compelling appraisal of the text in 1984-5 at The Ryde Department of Continuing Education on the Isle of Wight.

But we know that there are missing sections too – in fact, it would seem eight in total are completely missing, that is if the current Section XVI is the last section.

Of course, there may well have been more sections – but we are unlikely to ever know this. It is therefore impossible to state with any certainty that Section XVI was the final section of the work. Perhaps others still await discovery?

The original manuscripts included numbers, from which it is possible to discern some of the missing sections.

Number Allocated in this Edition -
Original Number
Hogan's Given Section Titles

Number Allocated in this Edition - I
Original Number - I
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Secrets

Number Allocated in this Edition - II
Original Number - II
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Island

Number Allocated in this Edition - III
Original Number - V
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Bounty (coming after 2
missing sections)

Number Allocated in this Edition - VI
Original Number - VII
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Underfoot (coming after 1
missing section)

Number Allocated in this Edition - V
Original Number - VIII
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Gods

Number Allocated in this Edition - VI
Original Number - X
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Pilgrims (coming after 1
missing section)

Number Allocated in this Edition - VII
Original Number - XI
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Famine

Number Allocated in this Edition - VIII
Original Number - XII
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Regicide

Number Allocated in this Edition - IX
Original Number - XIV
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Exodus (coming after 1
missing section)

Number Allocated in this Edition - X
Original Number - XV
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Memory

Number Allocated in this Edition - XI
Original Number - XVII
Hogan's Given Section Titles- River (coming after 1 missing
section)

Number Allocated in this Edition - XII
Original Number - XVIII
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Loose Ends

Number Allocated in this Edition - XIII
Original Number - XIX
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Footprints

Number Allocated in this Edition - XIV
Original Number - XX
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Beat

Number Allocated in this Edition - XV
Original Number - XXII
Hogan's Given Section Titles- Travellers (coming after 1
missing section)

Number Allocated in this Edition - XVI

Original Number - XXIV

Hogan's Given Section Titles- Certainties (coming after 1
missing section)

AUTHORSHIP

But was Rutland the original author? From the start, Mockett did not think so; though certainly it seems clear that Rutland was the written author. But if Rutland compiled or transcribed the document, what made Professor Mockett and others so certain that he was not its original author?

Thankfully, there are clues.

Several parts of the manuscript (13 in all) include the phrase "Given As," a phrase common at the time to denote a statement that had been provided to a writer. Twenty-seven other fragments have part of a place name beneath, below or alongside the text, written in Dutch and with one or two exceptions, all untraceable on known maps of the time, indicating most probably a source.

This of course begs the questions whether the work is that of a single author. Textural analysis of the vocabulary indicates that this is indeed so – or likely to be so. It is unlikely that it can ever now be proved one way or the other. But it appears that the tone, vocabulary, and grammatical structures used in the manuscripts represent the work of a single person. For corroboration of this there are several people I must thank, most notably Professor Mark de la Torre and his team at the University of Gloucestershire, Dr George Miller at UCL and the Oxford lexicographer, Mrs Susie Dent.

That this person was probably not Rutland is supported by the annotations Rutland himself made from time to time, as if he were copying out sections of a larger document. Certainly, with his long incarceration in Kandy, he would

have had more than enough time to do this. And it is therefore for this reason that I have taken the decision to issue to work without a given author, to let it stand alone, simply as a written document. We do not know who wrote. We only know it was not most probably not Rutland.

GENRE & PERIOD

Whether this document constitutes poetry, historical observation, religious or philosophical prophecy seems to be beside the point.

It is what it is. I do not believe that it requires a literary label to make it more or less readable. More relevant perhaps is to weigh up the likely period and place it describes. This is a much simpler task.

It is clear from Section II that what is being described is an island:

“what survives
is that perfect island,
presented in the way
a child might dream of an island”

That the island is most likely to be Ceylon, now present-day Sri Lanka, is evident not simply evident in the provenance of the manuscript – but in the text itself.

In one section Adam’s Bridge, the chain of islands that links India to Sri Lanka, is clearly defined:

“A single shattered path remains
holding the island
to the outside world
on sunken limestone banks
racked by cyclones,
reduced, year on year
till it is cast adrift.”

More specifically, only Sri Lanka, has such an exact set of natural gemstones as described in Section II:

“pink sapphires and rubies,
garnets, topaz, aquamarines;
rose quartz fine enough
to see through.”

The customs the same section describes, the respect paid to older people by touching their feet, the puberty rites of girls, and the birthing ritual:

“new babies
are fed on milk
dipped in gold”

were - and in some places still are - common in South East Asia, Sri Lanka included.

The singing fish (“Fish sang off long sandy beaches”) is a well-known Sri Lankan phenomenon – from Batticaloa one that, extraordinarily, may actually be true, according to the work done there by American missionaries and their recording equipment in the 1950s.

The reference to lagoons links up with Sri Lanka’s many famous lagoons, the most significant of which is the Puttalam Lagoon on the west coast.

The reference in Section III to southern ports, is most likely thought to refer to the ancient port of Godapavata in present day Hambatota:

“of shipping lanes that converged
on southern ports”.

A reference to irrigation tanks - and specifically “island seas” - is most probably a reference to The Sea of King Parakrama, is a vast reservoir in Polonnaruwa constructed by the king in 386 AD and still in use today:

“Waters rippled in great tanks
built by kings like inland seas
to flow to fields and homes.”

The references to three coup leaders (“coup” being an example of one of many words I have myself introduced or altered from the original to make the narrative less obviously ancient) could refer to a number of different periods in Sri Lanka’s history.

One strong possibility is the Dravidian period of 101 BC which saw successive kings kill one another.

Another is the later reigns of Vijaya dynasty from 31 AD when King Amandagamani Abhaya was murdered by his brother, Kanirajanu Tissa, who was in turn most likely killed by King Amandagamani Abhaya’s son, Chulabhaya, after whose death, three years later, a state of extreme lawlessness took over.

An almost exact set of circumstances occurred later in 246 AD triggered by the death of King Siri Naga II.

The links are manifold; to “northern temples”; to gods who

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cure “maladies and fevers”, to stupas and pilgrims travelling up a hill or mountains (Adam’s Peak?); the king’s “lofty citadel” (Sigiriya?).

Indeed, the text is so littered with references of this kind as to make it almost impossible for it to describe anything other than Sri Lanka.

Even so, I am indebted to Dr. Ranjani Goonetilleke at the Society of Surveying & Mapping; Mr Perera and Mr Molligoda at the Surveyor General's Office and Mr I.V.A. Ivo at the Land Registry for their invaluable help in helping determine many questions relating to place names in Sri Lanka. For readers interested in following more closely a greater number of associations, I have attached some Notes to the back of this book to give a greater level of detail for some of the events, people, places, fauna, and flora covered in the original text.

HISTORY
OR FABLE

Rutland's given work most likely describes a series of historical events, over a possibly very wide period of time (most likely ancient or early medieval), that occurred in what is today the island of Sri Lanka.

But the work is quite evidently more than just a historical recollection. It is filled at every turn with the author's own peculiar and inescapable perspective.

The anonymous author outlines a fearful jungle wilderness tamed by kings, and then destroyed, an earthly paradise that imploded through civil unrest and invasion, leading to the complete breakdown of an ancient civilization, that was subsumed again by the jungle – to a point where its present inhabitants had only the sketchiest of recollections of its past.

Amidst the ruins of a greater past, the current inhabitants live out plain lives, with little hope of redemption.

This story-structure is readily recognisable as an archetypal fable or parable of the kind that underwrites countless narratives, poems, or fictions. Indeed, it permeates into official histories, and certainly mythologies, old and new.

It is a typical story of the rise and fall of civilization – and man himself, in part a sort of Sri Lankan Lords of the Rings, albeit without, scholars think, the ring. This must necessarily count as one of the most popular subject matters ever selected by authors. "The search for an earthly paradise," wrote Dr Hilary Mitchell in *The Highgate Journal of Thematic Philology*, "is a classic literary *modus operandi*, an essential plot mechanism that

underwrites much of the written word from 'The Epic of Gilgamesh' to 'Five on a Treasure Island'."

Parables like this are to be found in a myriad of other much more famous and better written texts from the Holy Land to the Ancient World, from the civilizations of South and Central America to China, from Middle Earth to the Fables of the Bo – or any number of book categories on Amazon.com.

Its value today lies simply in its reading, purporting to be none of these things, but merely a modest tale from the hand of a single anonymous man who believed in exactly this kind of parable. Indeed, were it not for the work of earlier scholars, it would have amounted to nothing at all.

I shall not attempt to provide a commentary on or judgment over the actual work: that is a task that each and every reader will come to themselves.

The Title of the work (The Jungle) and of the sub sections are of course entirely missing from the original manuscript, being useful shorthand introduced along the way by scholars trying to get to grips with the puzzle. I have retained them all for they offer a simple and direct point of access to comprehend the work that I have found impossible to better.

And finally, a word of thanks to the staff at The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, whose kind and indulgent hospitality I enjoyed whilst on location to research aspects of the work.

David Swarbrick

The Jungle

I. SECRETS

Nothing yet
 does the jungle give,
 however long you wait
 or watch;

 it is eternal,
 it does not age.

Its appearance
is scarcely a hint
of all that is hidden -

 tight-lipped,
 dark green;

 ceaselessly undisturbed,
 untouched,
 unconcerned even;

indifferent
to what begins where,
or how, or why -

as if it could know
that it will all
simply return.

 Actually,
it is a great wall,

limitless,

its ends unreported,
holding close
the smuggled secrets
of this day
and tomorrow,

of one millennia
to the next,

filtering the sun like a censor,

carrying forward its confidential cargos
in low capacious vaults.

Listen now;
stop, and listen.

It speaks in ciphers
that have no key,
yet picks out imperfections
betraying them
like a spy to an enemy,

dipping, dipping
into nameless valleys

and up the steep sides
of unforgetting hills.

II ISLAND

The songs that have endured
are merely words,
the tunes themselves long lost;

the texts are somewhat incomplete,

but what survives
is that perfect island,
presented in the way
a child might dream of an island
set in a great sea,

rising up from forested beaches
to a centre of mighty mountains
that disappear into clouds.

Immense rivers
tumble back down.

In the villages
the old dances are still young;

new babies
are fed on milk
dipped in gold
before their horoscopes are taken.

Numbers rule the universe.

Boys touch the feet of elders;

households
prepare their daughters
to come of age
washed in water with herbs,
the girl concealed
until she is presented
with her own reflection
swimming in a silver bowl
beneath her face.

The gems later looted from their antique tombs
were not even from the island -

diamonds, emeralds,
even amber, to mix
with their own stones,

pink sapphires and rubies,
garnets, topaz, aquamarines;
rose quartz
fine enough to see through.

Carpenters inlaid furniture
with ivory and rare woods;
crafted secret chambers,
hidden drawers.

Fish sang off long sandy beaches.

And along the rivers
stretched parks,
warehouses, jetties, mansions.

III BOUNTY

Later,
they measured that happiness,
when happiness was a choice,
recalling a time of bounty,

an embarrassment of great cities,
of shipping lanes that converged
on southern ports.

The safe shallow waters of the Lagoon
welcomed visitors.

Kings ruled,
father to son,
brother to brother,
daring to do all they thought,

There were brindleberries and fenugreek;
lemongrass, mangos;
the coconuts fruited;

frangipani bloomed, ylang ylang, ,
even kadupul flowers,
queens of the night.

High wooden watchtowers rose protectively
over wide courtyards,
and gardens grew cardamom,
cinnamon, cloves, vanilla.

Waters rippled in great tanks
built by kings like inland seas
to flow to fields and homes.

Kitchens prepared milk rice
and new dishes
with ginger and kitel,
turmeric, tamarind.

In the shade of palace buildings
frescos were painted, statues carved,

the talk was of new trade routes,
marriages, miracles.

Tomorrow is tomorrow -
Here I picked a flower, and this is for you.

Mangosteen ripened in orchards
their seeds, fragrant, fluid-white,
strips of edible flesh.

It was like eating sex.

Within the stupas
were thrones and begging bowls,
and relics won in foreign wars.

From northern temples
great chariots were hand pulled
through the crowded streets
by thousands of worshippers.

Fortifications, moats, ramparts
guarded the borders;

the realm was not made for defeat;

and the fishermen flung their nets with ease.

IV UNDERFOOT

Somewhere,
rotting in its red earth
is the custom of half-remembered kings,
and the begging bowl of antique gods;

of adventurers
who thought to make their mark
with gold;

of lawmakers, doctors, artists
soldiers, saints -
even governors, wise administrators,
men and women with titles,
once known;

of the nameless poor
who left no trace,

of hermits courting
a legitimate oblivion;

and the guard ordered
to slay the king;

of thieves and outlaws,
whose character was their destiny;

and refugees, sent south,
pushed
onto small carts,

stripped
of their valuables, jewellery, money;

of freed slaves walking towards the hills
in search of jobs.

of last year's leaves lost underfoot,
disturbed by the flickering passage
of unseen snakes.

V GODS

Old texts have given gods
to many vantage points;

to the meeting point of streams
and small rivers;

and the little demons
of maladies and fevers;

and the ones used
for exorcisms.

Everywhere, everything
was full of gods.

They have given gods
to triangulation points
laid out later by surveyors
of the old school
using theodolites;

to the dance of flower dancers;

to the point of it,

and the zero point,

measured from the oldest stupa
fifty times the height of men;

to stories
that were once true
in some small part,

and now persist magnified, distorted,

a map of ghosts, and hard redemption
that is chanted through dense trees,
ceaselessly murmured,
like love -

even now,
across the laid-out bodies
of the recent dead,
lying in white satin;

the incantation
is fixed and precise,

deaf

to the mourners
and the myths;

to the modest wakes
on small verandas
where people have collected
to give alms

(for the gods cannot do shameful things;
they are not fools).

VI PILGRIMS

Prayers are passed on
like a baton
that has worn thin
since the time
they were first ever
written down.

Night falls abruptly,
brilliantly,

an elegy
of shy beasts and fear,

a long hypnotic lament
of disregarded lives,

burning on a brief horizon
where the sun has collected
into a million tiny pieces.

Pilgrims halt,

the path to the top
dissolves with dusk;

an out of season wind
drives heavy rain and mist.

They were unprepared for rescue;

this, after all,
was not this kind of rescue
that brought them here.

They were hoping
to be remembered
for their good deeds,
not their sins –

but they were not sure.

Coming here,
they had something quite different
in their minds,

salvation of another kind,

a liberation.

Worry
has led their minds to waiver.

Oh, they know sorrow,
they know it only too well.

VII FAMINE

Then, suddenly
came the time of famine,

an inadequate, insufficient, deficient, barren,
niggardly age.

The old queen was burnt in her palace.

There were massacres at the cemetery;
mobsters were released from jail;

tax collection fell;
nothing was working.

There was no money
to pay the mercenaries;

administrators multiplied
a hundred fold
but had no stipend
and came to work marginalized, ignored.

Wild elephants trampled
the roads,

people were hungry, insolent,
and the warehouses lay empty.

Faraway,
the new king built a lofty citadel,

a capital just for him,

a safe estate
where he could live secure,
tending his fears,
trusting no-one –

its stone cemented by frightened masons,
its rooms places where he would watch
his allies.

From its walls
he could see far across the plains.

His enemies would not surprise him;

and occasionally he appeared
in specially managed ceremonies.

VIII REGICIDE

Later, came the days of terror,
a time to burn the forts.

Unlike the last,
this regicide will not fail.

The king's death was confirmed
when his ring was found.

Rumours of spies
flooded the markets,

a murderous intent seeped from town to town
shops were looted;
buildings burnt;
the criminals escaped.

A curfew was declared;
societies formed
to protect language, culture,
even the gods.

The dead had living enemies;

impaled heads stood in shocking circles
at the entrance of certain villages.

Assassinations were listed
like a muster roll –

councillors,
generals,
diplomats,
scholars;

even the friends around the throne.

Suicide-assassins raised their knives,
their mouths laced with small sachets of poison
should the attack goes wrong.

One by one, three coup leaders
took their turn,

each
loving his power:
a rotten dedication;

and though the new judges
were busy
with proscriptions and judicial slaughter,

the hangmen resigned
or simply fled.

IX EXODUS

Old actors put on plays
That should be banned.

They, at least, are unafraid.

“I am the end. I exist no more.”

Charges of sedition
imprisonments, floggings,
advertise up-country courts;

even ex advisors are not safe.

Especially, ex-advisors are not safe.

The cunning plans have come to nothing.
The debt is grown.

New laws prohibit
counterfeit coins,
the possession of weapons,
unlawful assembly.

The anthem is changed,
its composer dead,
by suicide.

An unremarkable exodus
drains each little village,

the money lender gone,
the girl selling fruit
the spice wholesaler,
the shops selling sailfish, mangos, rope –
all closed.

The little cafes are empty.

And though the wise men know
of other wise men,
they cannot act.

Uprisings
break off corners of the state,
and the men who go to there to fight
do not return.

The lies have grown old;
no-one believes the little victories anymore;
or that the monarch's forces have overrun
a rebel island,
a final, murderous innings
led, it is said,
by a golden elephant, ridden by a golden king,
last of the coup leaders
whose name, even now,
the scholars cannot agree upon.

It is a time of chaos,
the ancient kingdom's long farewell,
remembered in frail scraps of bloody parchment
that contradict.

And in faded reds and ochres,
in lapis lazuli, cerulean blues
the lost landscapes flake away
a fragmenting world.

X MEMORY

There are no names;

from end to end,

from this year to the next,

from the first year to the last

the annihilating heartbeats strike too softly
ever to be heard,

cancelled

by all that seems

to happen in the day,

their memory

rubbed out like people talking over each other,

their conversation grown a little louder

with each comment -

a rising tide of expectations

that is, now, merely academic.

The prophets are blind.

Even the notable families are evicted,

strangers in their own cities;

their oblivion a blessing – eventually.

And somewhere else,

and somewhere else,

and somewhere, everywhere, far away
the centuries fall
upon centuries,

and fall upon centuries,

brighter, bigger, richer;

for it is not safe to stop.

Wealth; war -
evade what waits to come -

though they cannot outrun it
or outspend it;

they cannot, finally, out fight it,
or even out love it;

but they can
drown it out
till it is too late,

minimising the time it takes
to know all this.

(Though of course, they know all this

- or some do).

XI RIVER

Even in the drought
the big rivers flow,
the muddy waters unstoppable
as falling stones.

In the evenings
people gather
in modest villages
that have no roads going to them,
merely paths
through scraps of paddy;

and they talk,
sitting in small circles,
and compare their days,

seeing how splendid they are.

To speak dishonourably is pardonable.

XII LOOSE ENDS

The inscriptions tell of taxes,
of rules for monks,
of Roman gold,

and the conquest of lands
whose place names
live on in the way homeless lepers did,

shifting
from site to site,

learning things
that they did not want to know.

They have learnt many things
from their enemies,

and have become
the loose ends
of an older story with too many sub plots
from when the world seemed kind.

Sometimes, the savage killing
in this village

or that,
lets slip the longest rivalries;
the ones that still survive,

descending into hell
from a single place,

issuing currencies
whose pledges
are never broken
or betrayed.

XIII FOOTPRINTS

Here and there,
sentinel guard stones stand over steps
that led from the everyday,
and are now worn down;

the moonstones are rubbed smooth,

the buildings above
an outline of thin dissolving bricks,

the mountain lookouts forgotten,

the training grounds for soldiers
I lost in marsh or forest
where the lions are extinct.

The monuments are unprotected;
invaders have come and gone;

the sluice gates lie open,
the live fences overgrown.

Land grabs are commonplace.

Burnt-out temples have lent
their scattered stones
to little houses, huts even,
a mute pedestrian eternity,
a witness full of heartbreak
certifying each short domestic dynasty

written in sand.

Doorposts lean open and still;

the smooth contours of an antique pool
(lovely for its lotus shape)
are granite-hard and dry.

The old springs have dried up,
have moved elsewhere
leaving sharp ravines and sandy basins,

footprints on footprints,

charting an unrecordable maze
of lost routes
and rumoured destinations.

Tales abound
of troves of ancient gold
in this hill or valley;
whole villages
empty for days on end.

The old kings have gone,
the last deported
to feed off dreams

(we know not where);

long ago the booty was carried off,

the linen, fine furniture, and curiosities,
the silver, statues, cannon, the howdahs
the jewellery made of sapphires and gold.

Invaders rule
from time to time,
fleeting overlords,
curing evil with evil,
adding pain:

"Side?" they asked;
"I am on nobody's side,
because nobody is on my side."

A single shattered path remains
holding the island
to the outside world
on sunken limestone banks

racked by cyclones,

reduced, year on year

till all it holds
is cast adrift.

XIV BEAT

The greatest griefs
are wielded like a knife
held in the same hand.

A catfish wriggles across dry land;

vipers eat their young;
geckos bolt,
their soft stickly toes
sucking them briefly up and out of danger.

Tarantulas wander
through temple groves
found out by time;

birds fly overhead,
invisible and shrill;

dragonflies and damselflies
hover – and are gone;

a family of monkeys
glides
from branch to branch;

in this place
snakes and squirrels
sail
suddenly through the air,

and the jungle
pauses and parts,

and closes in, its dark green waves
holding fast the drama;

enfolding, tight,

wrapping tighter and tighter,
like a pair of arms
around a thrashing child,
that is hysterical and small.

And as suddenly as it started;

it stops.

It is quiet.

For a moment, even the insects
are still;

the humid air
holds its breath,

until its silent, speechless
beat
begins again,

this time
in a register
too high
to even hear.

And those you love
you will love still,
no matter how foolish
or how deadly.

XV TRAVELLERS

Travellers

that still come this way,
have come from far away,

treading out one wilderness
for another,

leaving just before
they see that this is not
what they think it is,

or they,
what they think they are.

The air they breathe
smells wet, brown, organic,
blocking their noses
like soil;

Like snipe, flamingo, herons -
they pass through quickly,

deliberately so,
before they have to buy back
what they most love;

for they have read
(before they came)
the words of the last minister,

the one who said -

"Peace is a battle. Peace is never given freely,
never acquired."

Although they have come here
to be here,

coming to get away,

they cannot arrive
until they stop.

And no-one stops in the jungle.

The dark evening
leaves them pitifully wrecked, sweaty.

Everything rustles.

They turn their face.

The old demons never left -
and though they are invisible,
they have black faces
and long white teeth.

XVI CERTAINTIES

Season
after season,

the dark glades
are tinder dry

and soaking wet;

from one moment

to the next

flames explode across the mountains
like the sails of a stricken ship;

water drips from
a million billion
fronds;

creepers
flood over ancient trees,

concealing

the oldest certainties
of that time before
this time,
before time was old,

before, eventually, it was to come
only once more,
deciding everything;

assuring,
with stones and broken shadows
the road,

running out
to a point
that disappears
into nameless valleys

and up the sheer sides
of unforgetting hills.

The time for words has gone.
This is a time for sleep.

Notes on The Text

Section I

JUNGLE

There is nothing in Section I that makes it possible to place the jungle it describes in any particular region or country. The Section contains one of only three references to such an environment in the entire Work, but coming as it does so high up in the poem, is the reason why the work attracted the title *The Jungle* in the first place. The others are to be found in Section XIV:

*"and the jungle
pauses and parts"*

and Section XV:

"And no-one stops in the jungle."

CIPHERS

The reference to ciphers does little to date the work for ciphers were commonplace across most early recorded civilizations to the present day.

Section II

ISLAND

Section II offers a very clear possible description of an island that most closely resembles Sri Lanka, with its massive mountain range in the south central part of the island rising to a peak of 8,281 ft. The topography descends in hills and valleys to narrow coastal plains on

on the east, south, and west, and more extensive coastal plains in the north:

*"but what survives
is that perfect island,
presented in the way
a child might dream of an island
set in a great sea,*

*rising up from forested beaches
to a centre of mighty mountains
that disappear into clouds."*

RIVERS

Sri Lanka is renowned for large rivers that flow seaward in all directions from its central mountains, the longest being the Mahaweli at 206 miles:

*"Immense rivers
tumble back down."*

WETTING

A reference to a traditional Sinhala childbirth practice, "Rankiri katagama" or wetting the mouth when a clean piece of gold is dipped into the first milk a child consumes – so making gold milk. A detailed horoscope from an astrologer later ensures the child's name is appropriate:

*"new babies
are fed on milk
dipped in gold
before their horoscopes are taken."*

FEET

The reference to touching feet is common in many parts of Asia, Sri Lanka included – especially touching the feet of an elder, a gesture of respect that in turn elicits a blessing:

"Boys touch the feet of elders;"

PUBERTY

The presentation of young girls officially into the public community is associated with very specific rituals in traditional Singhala Buddhist households. Girls, on reaching puberty, are briefly confined to a room from which all males are excluded. To guard against solitude and evil spirits she is given a price of iron. An astrologer advises on the best time for the subsequent ceremonial bathing. And helped by female relatives she is then washed in water with medicinal herbs. Once dressed and jewelled – though with her face covered – she is presented with the reflection of her own face in the water:

*"the households
prepare their daughters
to come of age
washed in water with herbs,*

*the girl concealed
until she is presented
with her own reflection*

*swimming in a silver bowl
beneath her face."*

FOREIGN GEMS

Tombs of wealthy people were typically endowed with jewels. That these stones did not come from Sri Lanka, famous for its own gemstones, is by no means strange. Indeed, the most recent find was a set of gems discovered amongst the burial artifacts of the Ibbankatuwa Megalithic Tombs near Dambulla which did not originate from the island though the tombs themselves date back to 700 BC:

"The gems later looted from their antique tombs were not even from the island -"

LOCAL GEMS

Thanks to the extreme old age of its rocks (90% are between 560-2,400 million years old), Sri Lanka's gems are so numerous as to sometimes just wash out onto flood plains, and into rivers and streams. Rubies and sapphires are its primary jewels, but many others are also found: cat's eyes, quartz, amethysts, garnets, topaz, moonstones, aquamarine and rose quartz:

*"pink sapphires and rubies,
garnets, topaz, aquamarines;
rose quartz fine enough
to see through."*

SINGING FISH

The story of singing fish in Batticaloa on Sri Lanka's eastern seaboard is famous on the island. Locally it is called the oorie coolooroo cradoo – or crying shell. It is thought that the sound is made by singing fish and amplified by the skilled use of the fishermen's oars as they

seek where to cast their nets. In 1953, two American Jesuit priests recorded the singing fish for the first time:

"Fish sang off long sandy beaches."

Section III

PORTS

Medieval Sri Lanka had a number of important ports: Mahātittha, situated at the Northwest tip which played a significant role in the Silk Route; Ūruvelapaṭṭana on the West Coast; Gōkaṇṇa and Lankapaṭṭana near present day Trincomalee flowing out into one of the largest natural harbours in Asia and in use since at least 4th century; Dondora and Nilvalatittha at the Nilwala River; Mahavalukagama on the Polwatta River, Bhīmatittha at Bentota, Gimhatittha at the Gin River, Kālatittha at the Kalu River, and Wattala at the Kālaṇi River. The reference here is thought most likely to be to Godapwata, in the south near Hambatota which had been yielding custom duties to the kings of Anuradhapura since the second century:

*"of shipping lanes that converged
on southern ports."*

LAGOONS

Sri Lanka is famous for its many lagoons, the most important of which is at Puttalam, though others exist, most notably at Jaffna.

"The safe shallow waters of the Lagoon welcomed visitors."

KINGSHIP

Medieval kingship in Sri Lanka was not an exclusively father to son inheritance. The crown often passed to a brother instead of a son:

*"Kings ruled,
father to son,
brother to brother,"*

FRUITS

The references to certain fruits and spices in interesting. Brindleberry, sometimes called Malabar Tamarind, is widespread in Asia and is used extensively in Sri Lankan cuisine, where it is known as Goraka. Fenugreek has also been grown on the island since ancient times, its leaves a key ingredient in curries and salads. Coconut palms grow in most parts of Sri Lanka; indeed a local legend has it that Prince Vijaya, the founding father of the island was offered coconut water when he landed in Tambapaṇṇī in 543 BC.:

*"There were brindleberries and fenugreek;
the coconuts fruited;"*

FLOWERS

It is not known when frangipani (plumeria) first came to Asia, but it was certainly well before the 9th century. The cananga tree (ylang ylang) is endemic through the region. The Kadupul flower is one of Sri Lanka's most legendary

flowers, said to be descended from heaven. At its' blossoming the Nagas – the original indigenous island inhabitants - pay homage to Lord Buddha. It flowers for barely 12 hours, its intoxicating scent making it one of the most expensive flowers in the world:

*"frangipani bloomed, ylang ylang, ,
even kadupul flowers,
queens of the night."*

SPICES

Cardamom is one of the classic Sri Lanka spices, native to the island especially in the central hills - Ratnathura, Kegalle, Matale, Kandy, and Nuwara Eliya. Cinnamon too is a native species. In fact, *Cinnamomum verum* (true cinnamon) is also called Ceylon Cinnamon. Although the inner bark of several other *Cinnamomum* species is also used to make cinnamon, cinnamon from Ceylon Cinnamon is considered to be of superior quality. Cloves, one of the rarest and most expensive of spices, was not indigenous to Sri Lanka, being brought to the island by traders, along with vanilla, but can reliably be dated back to 2,000 years ago from findings at Mantai:

*"and gardens grew cardamom,
cinnamon, cloves, vanilla."*

GREAT TANKS

The reference to this reservoir is thought to come from King Parakramabahu (1164-1196 AD) who constructed the famous rainwater "Sea of Parakrama" stating: "Not one drop of water must flow into the ocean without serving the purposes of man:"

"Waters rippled in great tanks
built by kings like inland seas
to flow to fields and homes."

MILK RICE & KITTUL

Milk Rice or Kiribath is a classic Sri Lankan dish made by cooking rice with coconut milk to create a rice cake that is commonly served for breakfast and at important events. Ginger can be dated back to at least 150 AD from a reference Ptolemy made, stating that it was produced in Ceylon. Turmeric and tamarind have been indigenous to the island for 2-3 thousand years at least. Kittul, from the fishtail palm, is also indigenous and widely used as a sweetener in traditional desserts, like kiri peni, a buffalo milk yogurt. It is collected as sap by tappers and boiled down over a wood fire, to a sticky sweet syrup like honey:

*"Kitchens prepared milk rice
and new dishes
with ginger and kitel,
turmeric, tamarind."*

PAINTINGS

Frescoes were routinely painted in the palaces and temples of medieval Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, the surface of bricks prepared with a dry plaster like tempura to take the paint:

*"In the shade of palace buildings
frescos were painted, statues carved,"*

FLOWER PICKING

The reference to flower picking is an ancient tradition in

Sri Lanka, denoting leisure, love, and plenty. It is used as a symbolic act in several ancient songs - even to the present day when Marcelline Jayakody included it in one of the songs for the film Rekawa:

"Here I picked a flower, and this is for you."

MANGOSTEEN

Mangosteen is native plant to Asia and is thought to have been brought to the island by early traders. It is greatly valued for its juicy, delicate texture and sweet and sour flavour:

*"Mangosteen ripened in orchards
their seeds, fragrant, fluid-white,
strips of edible flesh.*

It was like eating sex."

STUPAS

There are hundreds of stupas in Sri Lanka – important Buddhist hemispherical monuments that house sacred relics, the most famous of which is the Jetavanarama Stupa in Anuradhapura:

*"Within the stupas
were thrones and begging bowls,
and relics won in foreign wars."*

TEMPLE FESTIVALS

The reference to temple processions is thought to indicate the still very much alive festivities at the Nainativu

Nagapooshani Amman Temple near Jaffna, which is referred to by Ptolemy. The temple is a major pilgrim site, especially during the Ratholsavam festival when three great chariots of over 30 feet long are hand pulled by thousands of worshippers:

*"From northern temples
great chariots were hand pulled
through the crowded streets
by thousands of worshippers."*

DEFENCES

The medieval kings of the Anuradhapura Kingdom were assiduous in building significant fortifications across their kingdom to repel invaders and control the population:

*"Fortifications, moats, ramparts
guarded the borders;
the realm was not made for defeat;"*

Section IV

HERMITS

Buddhist, or bhikku, hermit monks are a key part of the Buddhist tradition since at least the 6th century BC. Some lived as a group in forest retreats; others wholly alone:

*"of hermits courting
a legitimate oblivion;"*

PALACE GUARD

It is possible that this is a reference to the notorious Vijayan king Subharaja, a palace guard who looked like the real king, Yasalalaka, whom he killed in 60 AD to briefly take the throne - till he himself was murdered:

“and the guard ordered
to slay the king;”

REFUGEES

Following the various Tamil invasions of the Anuradhapura Kingdom, refugees would most typically go south to the protective enclave of Ruhuna, a small principality that was left largely untouched by the invaders:

“and refugees, sent south,
pushed
onto small carts,
stripped
of their valuables, jewellery, money;”

Section V

PLACE NAMES

Many of the place names and maps in Sri Lanka take their names from The Mahavamsa, or Great Chronicle, which covers Sri Lanka's tangled tales of monarchs, wars, and daily life from the 4th century BC to the end of the 4th C AD.:

*"Old texts have given gods
to many vantage points;"*

AMBALAMAS

The meeting points of streams or rivers were commonly places for Ambalamas to be built, resting sites for pilgrims constructed as a meretricious act. Many remain, such as the Kadugannawa Ambalama on the Colombo–Kandy road; the Panavitiya Ambalama in Panavitiya; the Mangalagama Ambalama between Kegalle and Mawanella; the Giruwa and Jubilee Ambalamas in Kegalle:

*"to the meeting point of streams
and small rivers; "*

ILLNESS

Ancient village tradition in Sri Lanka has it that most illness can be categorised as one of 18 problems, caused by a demon, maladies and fevers included. Each demon is associated with a specific mask for a ceremony to cure the sufferer: Colds (Jala Sanniya, a flamed faced mask); Spots (Gedi Sanniya, a mask with carbuncles); Blindness (Kana Sanniya, an eyes closed mask); Paralasis (Kora Sanniya, a lob sided mask); Poison (Naga Sanniya, a green faced eye-popping mask); Dumbness (Golu Sanniya, a mask with an arrested mouth; Vomiting (Ammuka Sanniya, a green faced mask with a protruding tongue); Fever (Jala Sanniya, a yellow faced mask); Confusion (Beeta Sanniya); Madness (Pissu Sanniya, unmistakably mad face with hair; Delirium (Maru Sanniya, a red-faced mask with pointed teeth); Trembling (Vatta Sanniya, a mustard faced

mask); Erratic behaviour (Butha Sanniya, a green mask with moustache); Epidemic diseases (Deva Sanniya, a yellow faced mask with protruding tongue); Deafness (Bihri Sanniya, a mask enveloped by a cobra: Plague (Kola Sanniya, a terrifying eye bulging mask with trailing hair) Bubonic plague (Veddi Sanniya, a black faced mask); Nightmares (Demala Sanniya, a long two toothed mask):

*"and the little demons
of maladies and fevers;*

*and the ones used
for exorcisms."*

THEODOLITES

It is thought that the ancient engineers of the Anuradhapura Kingdom had their own version of theodolites, the (modern) versions of which were introduced later by the Portuguese after 1505:

*"They have given gods
to triangulation points
laid out later by surveyors
of the old school
using theodolites;"*

FLOWER DANCE

There are several kinds of flower dance in traditional Sri Lankan culture, the oldest probably deriving from the Kohomba Kankariya ritual of the early Vijayan king, Panduvasdeva, who was cured of an illness known to a fellow king, born not of a woman but of a flower:

"to the dance of flower dancers;"

TALLEST STUPA

This could refer to the Jetavanaramaya Stupa which at 400 ft was the third tallest structure of the ancient world. It was built by King Mahasena of Anuradhapura (273–301 AD):

*"measured from the oldest stupa
fifty times the height of men;"*

FUNERALS

It is a traditional part of the ancient Buddhist funeral ceremony that the dead are laid out in their homes wrapped in white cloth for surviving friends and family to honour during a long ceremony at which the monks chat prayers over several days:

*"even now,
across the laid-out bodies
of the recent dead,
lying in white satin;*

*the incantation
is fixed and precise,"*

ALMS

Alms giving is a traditional part of every funereal, and also occurs on several occasions after the main funeral:

*"to the modest wakes
on small verandas*

*where people have collected
to give alms"*

Section VI

PILGRIMS

There are many important pilgrim sites in Sri Lanka, the most notable being Adams Peak, a 7,359-foot high mountain that carries a depression on its top that is claimed by Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, as – respectively - the footprint of the Buddha, Adam, and Śiva. December to May is the traditional pilgrim month but some pilgrims visit it out of season, battling heavy rain, extreme wind, and thick mist:

"Pilgrims halt,

*the path to the top
dissolves with dusk;*

*an out of season wind
drives heavy rain and mist."*

Section VII

FAMINE & LAWLESSNESS

There are various notable periods of acute famine and

in ancient Sir Lanka, one of the most significant being from 991 AD in the reign of Mahinda V. The king was weak and the country poor. Tax collection had fallen to an all-time low. Mercenaries outnumbered regular soldiers in the army and when the Chola invasion of Rajaraja I captured Anuradhapura around 993 AD, the king was forced into exile:

*"Then, suddenly
came the time of famine...*

*tax collection fell;
nothing was working...*

*There was no money
to pay the mercenaries;"*

SIGIRIYA

The "lofty citadel" would appear to be an unmistakable reference to the great, almost-unimpregnable rock fortress of Sigiriya. It was constructed by King Kasyapa I who, in a widely reviled act of patricide, had his father walled up to die. The fortress gave an unhindered 360-degree view across the countryside, the perfect eyrie to spot an attack; and was enhanced by gardens, fountains, pools, palaces, an extraordinary underground irrigation system that is still working, and frescos. The king himself was dethroned by his brother, Moggallana.

*"Faraway,
the new king built a lofty citadel..."*

*a safe estate
where he could live secure,
nursing his fears,
trusting no-one...*

*From its walls
he could see far across the plains."*

Section VIII

PERIODS OF UNREST

Periods of extreme lawlessness most typically followed disputed regnal successions, and were sometimes accompanied by outside invasions. There are, therefore, several contenders to such a period as described in Section VIII:

- Around 103 BC King Valagamba was defeated by the armies of seven Dravidian Tamil invaders at the battle of Kolambalaka. Five of these invaders would go on to rule for short bursts: Pulahatta (104-101 BC) who was killed by Bahiya, who was murdered in 99 BC by Panayamara, who in turn was assassinated in 92 BC by Pilayamara, whose rule extended for just 7 months before dying at the hands of the last Dravidian, Dathika who ruled until 89 BC.
- In 50 BC King Choura Naga was poisoned by his wife Anula, who also killed his successor, Kuda Thissa.

- The Queen then installed her lover, a palace guard, as Siva I, before also killing him and installing her new lover Vatuka to the throne in 46 BC. He too was later murdered and replaced by Darubhatika Tissa, and then Niliya, a palace priest in 44 BC. After this the Queen took the throne for herself before being murdered in 42 BC.
- in 31 AD King Amandagamani Abhaya was murdered by his brother, Kanirajanu Tissa who was himself killed in 33 AD, after which Chulabhaya, son of the assassinated Amandagamani Abhaya became king. Chulabhaya was killed within three years and replaced by his sister Sivali in 35 AD for 4 months before she was slain by Ilanaga, nephew of the King Amandagamani Abhaya - who was himself dethroned by the powerful Lambakanna Clan.
- In 432 King Soththisena's one-day rule ended when he was poisoned by his queen, Sanga and replaced by his stepsister, Chattagahaka Jantu, who was herself replaced after four months by King, Mittasena, whose reign ended after a year when Tamil invaders captured his kingdom
- A final alternative is that of the reign of Mahinda V (see notes on Section VI):

*"Later, came the days of terror,
a time to burn the forts.*

*Unlike the last,
this regicide will not fail."*

SUICIDE

The practice of assassins pre-arming themselves with poison for instant suicide should they be captured has been long practiced throughout world history, right up to the present day – for example the killing of Lalith Athulathmudali, a possible Presidential candidate whose LTTE killer was himself found dead by cyanide poisoning:

*"Suicide-assassins raised their knives,
mouths laced with small sachets of poison
should the attack goes wrong."*

COUP LEADERS

This reference could be related to the events of 247 AD when King Vijaya Kumara was murdered by three Lambakanna relatives who each took their turn to rule; firstly Samghatissa, killed after 5 years; Siri Sangha Bodhi I, dead after 3 years and then Gathabhaya:

*"One by one, three coup leaders
took their turn,"*

Section IX

ELECTRA

The self-evident reference to Sophocles' great play Electra, is a curious interpolation in the work. Was it placed there by Rutland, the original writer, or someone else? The play was well known throughout the Western world since its

first performance, but did it travel to Sri Lanka from a Western source? Or was it perhaps known on the island through traders, or monks; or from after the Portuguese occupation in 1505? We cannot know:

"I am the end. I exist no more."

REBELS

The rebel island could easily refer to one of the many islands in the north of Sri Lanka.

*"or that the monarch's forces have overrun
a rebel island,"*

GOLDEN ELEPHANT

The reference to a golden elephant could well refer to the strange reign of King Ellalan who waged war on his elephant and captured the Anuradhapuran kingdom in 205 BC:

*"led, it is said,
by a golden elephant, ridden by a golden king,"*

Section XII

ROMAN GOLD

Sri Lanka's ancient trade with the Roman Empire dates back at least to the time of Claudius (A. D 41-54), which we know about thanks to a reference to such trade via South India from Pliny the Elder. As a consequence Roman

gold in the form of coins has been unearthed across the island, most especially in and around old ports:

*"The inscriptions tell of taxes,
of rules for monks,
of Roman gold,"*

Section XIII

GUARD STONES

Mura gals, or guard stones, stand as guardians to the flights of steps into a temple:

*"Here and there,
sentinel guard stones stand over steps"*

MOONSTONES

The Moonstone is a unique feature of the ancient Sinhalese architecture – an ornate carved semi-circular stone slab, placed at the bottom of staircases and entrances that symbolises the cycle of rebirth in Buddhism:

"the moonstones are rubbed smooth,"

LIONS

Lions have been extinct in Sri Lanka for thousands of years but the myth of their living persists. They are thought to have arrived as important symbols in the flags borne by Prince Vijaya in 543 BC:

"where the lions are extinct."

LIVE FENCES

The practice of sticking *Glericidia*, a nitrogen fixing plant, into the earth to take root at close intervals, is a long established way of demarking land boundaries in Sri Lanka, though one that is subject to abuse – should the plants be dug up and moved:

"the live fences overgrown,"

LOTUS BATH

This reference to a bath is very likely to be that of *Nelum pokuna* or Lotus bath in King Parakramabahu's palace in at Polonnaruwa, built in descending tiers of eight petalled lotuses from fine cut granite:

*"the smooth contours of an antique pool
(lovely for its lotus shape)
are granite-hard and dry."*

TREASURE

Treasure hunting remains a popular obsession in modern day Sri Lanka though there are references to it going back over 2,000 years. As an activity it is inextricably linked with the belief that great royal treasure was buried all around the island at times of invasion; and was never recovered:

*"Tales abound
of troves of ancient gold
in this hill or valley;*

*whole villages
empty for days on end."*

INVADERS

Many invaders came to Sri Lanka, including several Tamil dynasties, the Portuguese, Dutch and British. The most notorious are probably two Tamil horse traders, Sena and Guttik who, capitalising on the weak rule of King Surathissa, conquered Anuradhapura and ruled it for 22 years from 237 BC:

*"Invaders rule
from time to time,
fleeting overlords,
curing evil with evil,
adding pain:"*

ADAM'S BRIDGE

Until about 1480 AD people could sometimes walk from India to Sri Lanka along a narrow path of limestone cliffs that stretched some 48 kilometres. A cyclone in 1480 destroyed the bridge but the limestone banks remains under very shallow water:

*"A single shattered path remains
holding the island
to the outside world
on sunken limestone banks*

racked by cyclones,

reduced, year on year

*till all it holds
is cast adrift."*

Section XIV

CATFISH

The Sir Lankan Walking Catfish is a well-known part of the island's fish world. It wriggles across dry land in a hunt for better water:

"A catfish wriggles across dry land;"

VIPER

The native Russell's Viper of Sri Lanka is not simply highly venomous; it is also renowned for cannibalism – especially eating its own young:

"vipers eat their young;"

TANTULA

There are 15 species of tarantula native to the island, the largest, the Fringed Ornamental Tarantula, routinely grows to around 10 inches:

*"Tarantulas wander
through temple groves "*

FLYING CREATURES

Flying snakes and squirrels are common throughout the island – though they glide rather than fly, moving from tree

branch to tree branch:

*"in this place
snakes and squirrels
sail
suddenly through the air"*

Section XV

BIRDS

Sri Lanka is of course home to many migratory bird species, herons, snipe, and flamingo being just three of dozens:

*"Like snipe, flamingo, herons -
they pass through quickly,"*

DEMONS

Demons are considered widespread in Sri Lanka since ancient times. The ones most feared are said to be invisible and live close to the earth's surface. They are dedicated to making life miserable for people. In masks they are depicted as having black faces and long white teeth:

*"The old demons never left -
and though they are invisible,
they have black faces
and long white teeth."*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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