

PRESS RELEASE - Frotesteria at GLF

POETRY IS BACK and better than sex in the city according to publisher Juliet Coombe, who says this is the first Sri Lankan poetry collection to be launched at GLF in five years, and in fully colour illustrated in the country.

And yet again, Sri Serendipity has done it again, taking on the status quo of the establishment fearlessly with the same furor of a matador savoring those last pauses before the inevitable death thrust and the same gusto of a fleet of vultures nipping away at the thick hide of a slain animal, only Sri Serendipity's target is the derelict remnants of the moth eaten boa of democracy's carcass that we (the a-political generation) plan to offer as inheritance to the future young of this land, as a show of faith and pride and above all because ours will be a legacy of apathy, if this endures. They at Sri Serendipity says this book, a product of dark times, Marlon Ariyasinghe's Froteztology will be a testament to the eclipse of this apocalypse, because ours is not the spirit of subservience but a spirit that fights, and nothing will stand in the way of those who want to frotezt and let this be a torch that be lit in the hearts of the men and women of this country and be a constant reminder of our potential, our shame and also of our fundamental civil rights and responsibilities. So The Poet of this incendiary collection of torch (literally) songs or sometimes his Luciferian alter ego seems to tell us "speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". So help you o lecteur, these are damned pages, and you hold in your hands the blood of kings and lambs and men and women.

Upon lengthy pensive pontification the poet Marlon Ariyasinghe says

"To be honest I write when I'm angry. Especially when it comes to poetry and writing poems I can't write when I want to. It may sound like a cliché, but that's the sincere truth. That is why it has taken me over three long years to write 35 poems. It's very difficult for me to write "nice" "normal" poems of love or nature. I've realized after countless failed attempts that that's not me. Sometimes I wish I could write like Patrick Fernando; totally unconcerned about the socio-political scene but deeply intellectual and witty. I can't!" Marlon is passionate in so many different ways about his country "I write to make people aware of the injustices in this society. To make people see, so that they can act against them. Lakdasa in "The Poet" summed up the role of a poet. I follow that wholeheartedly. A poet must not be afraid to act; a poet must meet the "enemy" (of the people) head on. As a poet, I cannot, remain oblivious to what's happening in the country. I don't want to be the sort of writer who preaches from his room."

Marlon loves crass raunchy politically incorrect humour, which he uses as a vehicle for getting his very different messages across. Sometimes, when it's humorous, readers according to Marlon tend to miss out on the bigger picture, which is fine by him on some levels. He says, "The more they don't know who or what I'm talking about the better. Saves me a trip to the gallows. At the end of the day, what you write is indubitably fashioned by how it's received/read. Once it's published it's the property of the readers and they have the freedom to (mis) interpret it however they want and in many ways you can't even start to imagine."

Some say, and have said, that Marlon writes to shock or unsettle people. That he scandalises seemingly ordinary subject matter; sugarcoat sit to make it more marketable. Marlon at such a suggestion says this

is true; after all, a good scandal is definitely more marketable. I want to assure those who doubt me that I do not merely write to create a shockwave. I voice things that are unvoicable in a democratic country like ours. I speak aloud the thought of others; thoughts that they dare not articulate it.”

Marlon also writes to contribute to Sri Lankan literature in English. Every time he writes he feels as if he is writing on behalf of the community of amateur poets (which he is also a part of). It is no secret that Sri Lankan literature in English is/was monopolized by a few. Marlon grew up with names like Jean Arsanayagam, Anne Ranasinghe, Patrick Fernando etc. Frankly, as a reader of poetry, Marlon says “I don’t want to get old with them nor die with them. Sri Lankan literature in English is currently centered in Colombo, dominated by a few, mostly elite, voices. We need some alternative voices. Voices that smell of Sri Lankan Arrack and not of French Wine!” And those voices he believes like his publisher Sri Serendipity Publishing House are out there. Sri Lankan literature in English has huge potential. Marlon says I” believe that we can create the next Booker prize winner (or maybe we already have; Shehan?). This is the sole reason why Vihanga and me initiated SLAM, to give voice to the voiceless (not to sound too patronizing), and to SLAM those who had been hogging the stage for too long. That is why we have been wary and critical of the Galle Literary Festival and its consumerist agenda. Since, it does not contribute to the development of Sri Lankan literature in English.”

Vihanga his poetic says boycott I say sabotage. My sole reason for going to the GLF is to sabotage it; to make my voice heard, to make ripples in that pond like my surprise reading at Stories at Sunset, because I can’t make ripples from home. We must engage with the discourse, meet the enemy head on in order to have even a slight chance of defeating it.

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” Elie Wiesel.

Marlon says protest(ing) is at the heart of my poetry. I protest/frotezt against the wrongs I see. And as long as there is breath in my body that is what I aspire to do and with the Australian artist Nigel Sense incredibly powerful and provocative illustrations take the poetry collection Froteztology to a whole new level. Each painting was inspired from reading the poetry Nigel says “Marlon’s work has a universal voice that can apply as much in Australia as it does in Sri Lanka and highlights why we should stand up and protest when something is really important and not just take things lying down.”

So go on buy a copy from Barefoot, Odell or any major bookshop and join the growing numbers of people that recognize the importance of the poet in society.