

**'ENGLISH LITERATURE' IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SRI LANKAN SCHOOLS:
A SURVEY OF COURSES OF STUDY, PRESCRIBED TEXTS,
AND METHODS OF TEACHING**

Sarathchandra Wickramasuriya

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in some detail some of the courses of study, prescribed texts, and methods of teaching English literature in the foremost English colleges in 19th century Sri Lanka (like the Colombo Academy, St. Thomas' College, Colombo, and Trinity College, Kandy). This study helps to clarify the 'place' of English literary studies in the 19th century school curriculum, and to evaluate the quality of these courses of study from a modern point of view; it also throws interesting light upon the strong influence exerted by British colonial administrative policy and Christian missionary activity upon the formulation of courses of study and syllabuses in English literature during the relevant period.

However, at the outset it should be emphasised that no complete and detailed "syllabuses" or "schemes of work" in the modern sense and actually used in 19th century colleges are extant at the present day. The terms 'course of study', 'scheme of work', and 'syllabus' as used in this paper refer not to official school or examination syllabuses (unless where so stated), but unofficial lists of writers or works mentioned in contemporary accounts of 19th century education or incidental references in autobiographies, biographies, etc. of pupils who attended English colleges during the period under study, and later used in compiling the 'histories' of colleges like Royal, St. Thomas' and Trinity on the occasion of their jubilee celebrations. Consequently, nearly every syllabus or course of study discussed below is defective in one respect or another. Most of them are extremely vague and general to be of much use, like: "English, with special attention to Shakespeare,"¹ or "History of literature;"² others mention anthologies of poetry which are not available now, like "English Literature (Chalmers);"³ or do not indicate which particular poems in an anthology were prescribed for detailed study. The most detailed and therefore the most useful "course of study" discussed below, that used at Trinity College, Kandy, in the 1860s, presents a different type of problem—its main defect being that it indicates not the work done during a whole year but only a single term's work done in the first class of the upper school".⁴ Yet other courses of study refer not to the routine work done in class, but only to the texts prescribed for a particular examination, like the syllabus prescribed for the "Turnour Prize" at the Colombo Academy in 1846.⁵

It should also be borne in mind that the syllabuses and prescribed texts (discussed below) give only a partial and inaccurate picture of the role of English literature in the lives of English-educated individuals in the 19th century, for most of the English-educated students, whatever their study of English literature had been in the schoolroom, often read extensively in English literature in their spare time outside the classroom. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that many of them read not only the prescribed authors and texts, but also writers and works completely outside the school syllabuses, and in some cases, as in that of Anagarika Dharmapala,⁶ even authors who had been ostracised by their teachers and other authorities. Thus a full discussion of the place of English literature in 19th century education would comprise at least two complementary parts: (1) English literature as taught in the upper forms of

“English colleges” as part of the regular curriculum; and (2) the “general” and “background” reading of college students outside the school syllabus and their reading of literature after leaving college, as recorded in their autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters and so on. The present paper, it should be stressed, is concerned only with (1) above, for reasons of clarity and space, and is meant to provide the necessary foundation for a study of the second type described under (2) above.

Part I

Compared with the two major native (i. e., Sinhala and Tamil) literatures, English literature appears to have enjoyed a monopolistic, highly privileged position in the 19th century Sri Lankan school education system, for Sinhala and Tamil literature were almost totally excluded in the early years from the curriculum of “English Colleges”. During the 19th century, and even well into the 20th, the medium of instruction in all English colleges was English, and although no records survive of specific texts used in the early years of the 19th century, it is almost certain that some English literature must have occupied an important part of the syllabuses of all educational institutes working through the medium of English. Wyndham declares that “the primary object of the government schools during the first half of the 19th century was the teaching of English and of a purely western curriculum,”⁷ a statement which can be safely applied to all the private colleges as well.

The pupils at the first English school in Sri Lanka, called “The Academy”, or “The Seminary” at Wolfendahl⁸ which commenced as early as 1800⁹ do not appear to have studied any English literature texts in class except the Bible, for only “The Parable of the Vineyard,” the Lord’s Prayer, and the Apostles’ Creed are mentioned as having been studied at that institution.¹⁰ Apart from these sacred religious “texts”, the main task of the pupils in the “first English school” appears to have been the learning of the English language as distinct from the study and enjoyment of its literary works.

At the “Christian Institution” at Cotta (Kotte), the Headquarters of the CMS missionaries established in 1828, no mention is made of English language or literature. The subjects taught were as follows: “Latin, Greek, Mathematics, Geography, History and the Bible, and for some boys, Hebrew.”¹¹ However, since it is known that the sole medium of instruction as well as the home-language of the pupils was English, it is likely that English language and literature, though omitted from the “syllabus,” was one of the main components of the curriculum and that the only “textbook” used was probably the Bible or selections from it, as during the period before 1828. The Bible, of course, was the most suitable literature text for an institution the pupils of which were all being trained to be clergymen later in life.

The half-decade between 1829 and 1835 was one of crucial significance for the future of English education not only in Sri Lanka but also in India. This period marks the turning point of language policy in India and Sri Lanka, for in both countries, the momentous and far-reaching decision was taken to make English the sole medium of education, a policy that was to remain unchanged till the mid-20th century. On 26th June, 1829, William Bentinck wrote to the Committee of Public Instruction, instructing them “to announce to all concerned

.....that it is the wish and admitted policy of the British government to render its own language (i. e., English) gradually and eventually the language of public business throughout the country and it will omit no opportunity of giving every reasonable and practical degree of encouragement to the execution of this project."¹² Colebrooke's recommendations regarding the administration of Sri Lanka in 1832 were in line with the changes that were being made in India —he "looked upon the employment of an increasing number of Ceylonese.....as a means of reducing the expenditure of government".¹³ To facilitate the process of employing the Ceylonese in such positions, Colebrooke said that "it was Government's duty to establish schools to provide the necessary education."¹⁴ He recommended that "a competent knowledge of the English language should be required in the principal native functionaries throughout the country,"¹⁵ and that "a college should be instituted at Colombo where general instruction may be afforded to pupils of all classes."¹⁶ Also, "A professor should be appointed from England,"¹⁷ and "An English professorship should be maintained by the government."¹⁸ In his proposal to set up English schools, Colebrooke was probably influenced by the view held by Englishmen at the time that Oriental learning was of little value and that "a knowledge of English would lead to the moral and intellectual improvement of the Eastern peoples."¹⁹ For example, Thomas Macaulay (in his *Minute on Education*, 1835) had asserted that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."²⁰ Thus it is not surprising that the beginnings of a systematic teaching of English literature in Sri Lanka can be traced to the establishment of "English Colleges" that were set up to implement the Colebrooke proposals, the pioneer such institution being the "Colombo Academy."

In 1835, a clergyman, Rev. Joseph Marsh, acting Colonial Chaplain of St Paul's Church, Colombo, opened a private "Academy" at Hill Street. In the following year this school was converted to a government school and called "The Colombo Academy."²¹ With regard to the schemes of work at this institution, the "Rules and Suggestions" said: "It is desirable that the system of classification and mutual instruction, on which the English national schools are conducted, should be introduced into the schools so far as circumstances allow."²² The Colombo Academy actually consisted of "two schools under one roof: a high or classical school, and a lower or preparatory school"²³; strangely enough, in the syllabus for the "high or classical school," English literature does not appear as one of the subjects to be taught: "Among the subjects studied in the upper school were Logic, the elements of English law as expounded in an abridgement of the commentaries of Blackstone, the Principles of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy, as also the Singhalese and Latin languages. To boys destined for the church instruction would be afforded in the Greek and Hebrew languages."²⁴ However, the opening phrase employed here, "Among the subjects" makes it probable that the syllabus as set out here is not exhaustive; English language and literature without doubt comprised an essential part of the syllabus of these students, and it is regrettable that details regarding the literature syllabus, especially the prescribed texts, if any, were not included therein.

When the Central School in Colombo was opened, it took over the normal students²⁵ who were studying at the Academy. According to Wyndham, "The training they received is indicated by the syllabus of their examination in 1844. It was divided into 4 parts: Scripture

(Theology), Mathematics, Latin and English. English included **Paradise Lost**, Book V, 11. 153 – 208, and a passage from Young's **Night Thoughts** on 'Procrastination.'²⁶ Thus at this time either only poetry appears to have been done under "English literature," or the other prescribed texts have been omitted from the syllabus.

Around 1845, under the principalship of Rev. Barcroft Boake, the subjects in the upper school of the Colombo Academy were of "a more advanced and philosophical kind,"²⁷ and included English literature, represented in the vague statement: "Shakespeare, and English literature were taught on the classical side."²⁸

The Colombo Academy awarded a Prize for English Literature from 1846. The examiners' account of this exam, as reported in a contemporary newspaper, said that it included 'written questions on English language and literature, and on Shakespeare and Bacon,'²⁹ which shows that Shakespeare and Bacon were, in mid-century, part of the syllabus of the Colombo Academy.

For the year 1848, the course of work prescribed for students who aspired to the "Turnour Classical Prize" at the Colombo Academy included a textbook, perhaps for the first time; this was "English Literature (Chalmers)."³⁰ This was an anthology of English poetry from Chaucer to Cowper. Thus, at this stage, probably only short poems and brief extracts from long poems comprised the literature syllabus; no mention is made of prose fiction, drama, and essays in prose.

In the meantime, St. Thomas' College, Colombo, had been in operation since March, 1851, founded by James Chapman, Bishop of Colombo, who had arrived in the Island on 1st November, 1845.³¹ Unfortunately, once again, the earliest available course of studies at St. Thomas' only states: "The subjects taught in the school (included) "English Reading and Composition",³² without more specific details. No other details of the literature syllabus at this early period are available except that the masters of St. Thomas', who were then "chosen almost entirely for their scholarship and missionary zeal," are described as maintaining "a dignified aloofness" and being "apt to look askance at such trifling occupations as novel-reading and games."³³ The last statement perhaps accounts for one of the reasons why prose fiction rarely or never finds a place on any early English literature syllabus. The titles of some of the college "term essays" have been recorded, however: they included: "On the Scriptures of the Old Testament," "The Miracles of Christ," "Fulfillment of Prophecy," "The Age and Literature of Queen Elizabeth," and "Advantages of the study of Geography."³⁴ W. T. Keble gives detailed syllabuses for first, second and third year students at St. Thomas': however, for each year the "English" syllabus specifies only "English Composition,"³⁵ from which it appears that no specific texts in literature were prescribed.

In 1859, the Colombo Academy was affiliated to the Calcutta University. This probably necessitated the adoption by the Academy of the syllabus then being used in similar high schools and English colleges in India, like the Presidency College at Calcutta. At Presidency College, it is reported, "The standard of exams was high. It required a critical acquaintance with the

works of Bacon, Johnson, Milton, and Shakespeare.”³⁷ However, the syllabus used at the Colombo Academy even after its affiliation with the Calcutta University in 1859 appears to have been much narrower than at the Indian colleges, for according to available records, under “the subjects which were studied at the Academy after the affiliation” the texts used were “English: Thomson’s **Winter**, **Rasselas**.”³⁸

In 1854, Andrew Kessen, then compiling the syllabuses for Sri Lanka’s first Normal School, requested Elijah Hoole to send him “a programme of the hours of study in the various classes of our Westminster Institution, and also a copy of the class-books in use.”³⁹ This suggests that both Joseph Marsh (who modelled his school, the Colombo Academy, on “the English national schools”) and Andrew Kessen (who modelled his Normal School on the Westminster Institution) derived their main inspiration in preparing the English literature syllabuses from British Public schools. St. Thomas’ and Trinity probably adopted the same procedure.

Perhaps the most detailed course of studies in English literature now available is the one used at Trinity College, Kandy in the 1860s. It refers not to a complete year’s work, but to a single “term’s work done in the First Class of the Upper School”: “**Poetry**: ‘Psalm of Life’, ‘Excelsior’, ‘To a Waterfowl’, ‘Procrastination’, ‘Paul Before Agrippa’, ‘Lays of Ancient Rome’, Extracts from the ‘Spanish Armada’.”⁴⁰ Ironically, this list of prescribed poetry texts, while being more interesting and helpful than the ones so far encountered, creates a different type of problem— that of the correct identification of the two poems ‘Paul Before Agrippa’ and ‘Extracts from ‘The Spanish Armada’, as discussed in detail below.

Part II

Purely for purposes of discussion, it is possible to conflate the separate syllabuses described above into a kind of composite list of authors (and where known, of individual literary works) in English literature which can be used to give an overall picture of the kind of work done in the English colleges in the 19th century in Sri Lanka. This composite list can also be used to determine (in the absence of more adequate information) the principles and criteria that apparently operated in the 19th century colonial Sri Lankan context in the selection of authors and literary works for use in the “English colleges”, the highest and most prestigious educational institutions at the time.

Such a list of authors and works, set out in chronological order of composition, would appear as follows :

(a) Poetry

- (1) John Milton (1608–1674) : **Paradise Lost**, Book V (1667), ll. 153–208.
- (2) Edward Young (1683–1765) : **Night Thoughts** (1742), lines on “Procrastination.”
- (3) James Thomson (1700–1748) : **Winter** (1730).
- (4) James Grahame (1765–1811) : “Paul Before Agrippa” (c. 1808).

- (5) William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) : 'To A Waterfowl' (1815).
- (6) Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) : 'Lays of Ancient Rome'; extracts from 'The Spanish Armada'.
- (7) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882): "A Psalm of Life" (1838); "Excelsior" (1842).

(b) **Prose (Essays and Fiction)**

- (1) Francis Bacon (1561–1626) : **Essays** (1597–1625).
- (2) Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) : **Rasselas** (1759).

(c) **Drama**

- (1) Shakespeare (1564–1616) : **Macbeth** (1607).

On first glance, several glaring features strike the eye, not the least of them being the non-representation of drama except Shakespeare. Although none of Shakespeare's plays (or excerpts from them) except **Macbeth** which was prescribed for a Prize Examination was included in the syllabuses discussed here, there is some evidence to indicate that Shakespeare was perhaps considered to be the single most important literary figure from the inception of English colleges in Sri Lanka. As already indicated, in the only syllabus available for a higher exam, the Turnour Classical Prize, the "prescribed course of study" included, for 'English', "Shakespeare's **Macbeth** and one of Bacon's Essays."⁴¹ In 1846 the examination for the English literature prize at the Colombo Academy included "written questions on English language and literature, and on Shakespeare and Bacon."⁴² Reimann reports that in 1872 at the prizegiving at Trinity College three scenes from Shakespeare's **Merchant of Venice** had been staged by the boys.⁴³ Moreover, "the general routine" in the lower school of the Colombo Academy after 1836 included "Shakespeare, and English literature,"⁴⁴ though the play or plays have not been specified. All this indicates without doubt that Shakespeare at least was considered throughout as a **sine qua non** on the English literature syllabuses.

The reason for the omission of all drama except Shakespeare and of prose fiction may be presumed to have been their excessive length in part. The other possible reason for the omission of fiction may have been the moralistic one of the aversion for fiction on the part of Puritan Christians (most of the Sri Lankan teachers would have fallen into this category at the time referred to). We are informed, for example, that at Trinity College in the 1860s, "works of fiction..... seem to have been carefully excluded from the school library, due perhaps to the rigid old-world ideas of the giants of those days."⁴⁵

The most important question raised by the above 'composite list' of prescribed authors and works is: Why were the authors or works included selected in preference to others? Why were certain important and 'standard' authors who undoubtedly deserve inclusion in any English literature syllabus excluded? In other words, what were the principles and

criteria employed by those responsible for drawing up the courses of study? The consideration of these questions below throws interesting light not only on the literary scholarship of the educational authorities of the time, but also on British educational policy in Sri Lanka in the colonial period. What follows is a discussion of the probable reasons for the inclusion of the writers and literary works that find a place on the composite syllabus.

(1) **John Milton** (1608–74) was perhaps the only poet of undisputed “classical” status on the syllabus. As the greatest religious poet in English, the poet whose works (especially his great religious epic poem, **Paradise Lost**) stood next to the Bible in every English household, Milton could not have been kept out of any English syllabus for Christian children—he would have been an automatic choice. However, even in the indisputable case of Milton’s **Paradise Lost**, the choice of the particular excerpt from Book V shows certain peculiar features: it indicates clearly the non-application of strictly **literary** criteria in the preparation of the English literature syllabuses. The 56 lines selected from Book V of **Paradise Lost** (V. 153–208) are not really representative of Milton at his best; they are illustrative neither of his rhetorical ‘Grand Style’ with its classical tropes and allusions, nor of his dramatic and imaginative powers. The greatest religious poet in English though Milton was, he appears to have posed a problem to the colonial religious and administrative authorities in Sri Lanka, for Milton, though a good Puritan Christian, had been a severe critic and opponent not only of the king but also of the priesthood, especially during the time of the Republican ‘Commonwealth’ under Oliver Cromwell (1649–1660). Milton’s prose pamphlets like **Of Reformation in English** (1641), **Prelatical Episcopacy** (1641), **The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelacy** (1642), **Of True Religion, Heresy, Toleration and the Growth of Popery** (1673) against the priesthood, and his attacks on the monarchy in pamphlets like **Kings and Magistrates** (1649), **Eikonoklastes** (the Image-Breakers) (1649), **The Defence of the English People** (1651) and **The Second Defence of the English People** (1654) had unequivocally shown his bitter opposition to the monarchy (whom he characterised as ‘tyrants’) as well as to the priesthood. Thus Milton was in no wise the automatic choice that he should have been, and had to be treated with circumspection. The dilemma of the authorities was resolved by sacrificing literary worth at the altar of religious and administrative conformity—by choosing a passage in which Milton expresses faith in God without attacking His priesthood or His representative on earth, the monarch. In lines 153–108, the passage selected, therefore, Adam and Eve are shown together singing their orisons to God the Almighty Creator. The lines are dull and undistinguished; but they express unqualified religious faith and a sense of wondrous humility at the “power and goodness” of God who is eulogised in exaggerated terms, as in the lines

These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
 Almighty, thine this universal Frame,
 Thus wondrous fair; thy self how wondrous then!
 Unspeakable, who sitst above these Heavens
 To us invisible or dimly seen
 In these thy lowest works, yet these declare
 Thy goodness beyond thought, and Power Divine: (ll. 153–59)

Adam and Eve are followed by the 'lower orders', in their hierarchical order, in paying their obeisance to God; they are exhorted thus:

On Earth joyn all yee Creatures to extoll
Him first, him last, him midst, and without end. (ll. 164,165)

After the sun, the moon, the planets, the air and the other elements, the plants and the animals down to the tiniest living creature have been in turn exhorted to "acknowledge God, their creator," His power and His wisdom and to "sound His praise" (ll. 172,173), the extract concludes with 4 lines expressive of obedience and supplication to God to continue to be good and bounteous to his creatures:

Hail universal Lord, be bounteous still,
To give us only good; and if the night
Have gathered aught of evil or conceald,
Disperse it, as now light dispels the dark. (ll. 205-208).

The lines quoted indicate that this particular passage was selected for its sermonlike qualities rather than for its aesthetic value. The passage would obviously have been a good tool in the hands of the missionary-teachers then in sole charge of Sri Lankan English education.

Had not the vested interests of the missionary been considered, the formulators of the literature syllabus could easily have found several other characteristically Miltonic passages in Book V of **Paradise Lost** itself (not to mention the famous description of the Garden of Eden and the first appearance of Adam and Eve in Book IV, the temptation of Eve by Satan in Book IX, and so on). Indeed, the lines immediately following upon the extract selected provide a fairly good sample of Milton's characteristic "Grand style"—the picture of Adam and Eve performing their daily labour for their Lord. However, these lines (ll. 209 ff.) may have seemed objectionable to the priggish, prudish Victorian morality of the teacher-clerics in charge of education at the time, because of the rather liberal use of sexual imagery in lines like the following by Milton:

.....where any row
Of Fruit-trees overwoodie reachd too farr
Thir pamperd boughes, and needed hands to check
Fruitless imbraces : or they led the Vine
To wed her Elm; she spoused about him twines
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings
Her dowr th' adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves. (ll. 212-219).

There follows in the same Book V of **Paradise Lost** an even more characteristically 'Miltonic' passage describing Eve gathering fruits and juices where Milton's poetic and linguistic powers are given full play—his sensuousness, his power of evoking deep musical cadences, his proclivity towards exotic proper names, his use of classical allusions and other tropes, and so on. This passage occurs only about 100 lines after the passage actually prescribed in the syllabus, but would have been unpalatable to the missionaries for the reasons already enumerated. Unfortunately, also, Book V is "vitiating" by the presence in it of an obnoxious passage in which royalty is shown in a highly unfavourable light:

Mean while our Primitive great Sire to meet
 His god-like Guest, walks forth, without more train
 Accompani'd then with his own compleat
 Perfections, in himself was all his state
 More solemn then the tedious pomp that waits
 On Princes, when thir Retinue long
 Of Horses led, and Grooms besmeard with Gold
 Dazles the croud, and sets them all agape. (ll. 350-357).

Much more dangerous than this, and even subversive from the colonialist point of view, was the account of Satan's rebellion against God, as narrated in this Book by the Angel Raphael to Adam. Satan's revolt against God could be interpreted or represented as a kind of double revolt, religious and political; the "conspiracy" between Satan and his chief associate, especially Satan's detailed reasons for the necessity for rebellion would have been considered near-seditious in the Sri Lankan colonial context where such lines as the following could have been applied as analogical to contemporary British administration of the Island, involving the introduction of new laws, (especially in view of the abortive rebellions of 1818 and 1848). One of Satan's indictments against God, significantly, is that He had imposed "new laws"; Satan explains to his chief lieutenant in conspiratorial tones how

.....new Laws thou seest impos'd;
 New Laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise
 In us who serve, new Counsels, to debate
 What doubtful may ensue, more in this place
 To utter is not safe. (ll. 676-680).

Later passages (e.g., ll. 764-68; 776-781) outline in detail the typical methods used by the mob-leader who misleads his followers by uttering falsehoods; passages which could have 'corrupted' the impressionable minds of adolescents. Satan's speech to his subordinates is highly 'seditious', as in the following lines where he comes into the open as a revolutionary leader:

But what if better counsels might erect
 Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?
 Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend
 The supple knee? Ye will not, if I trust
 To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
 Natives and Sons of Heav'n possest before
 By none, and if not equal all, yet free,
 Equally free.....(ll. 782-89).

Satan, in these lines and the lines that follow (ll. 789-99) brings out with passion, fervour and eloquence the revolutionary concepts of reason, right, freedom, liberty, and democracy, which the powers that reigned in 19th century Sri Lanka would have considered highly undesirable to be disseminated among the youth in a country where rebellion was constantly feared. Satan also utters sentiments which are profane and blasphemous, casting doubts on God's powers of creation, asking:

.....who saw
 When this (i.e., God's) creation was? Rememberst thou
 Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
 We know no time when we were not as now;
 Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai'd
 By our quick'ning power.....(ll. 853-858).

The above analysis indicates the probable reasons why only a dull uncharacteristic passage was selected from Milton's **Paradise Lost**, Book V.—the framers of the syllabuses were obviously motivated less by strictly literary criteria than by political and religious ones—in other words, the vested interests of the colonial administrators and the missionaries were allowed to override strictly aesthetic considerations.

(2) **Edward Young** (1683-1765) appears to have been a favourite poet in 19th century Sri Lanka, for he was perhaps the only author whose poetry was prescribed at both the Colombo Academy in 1844 and at Trinity College in 1860; he was probably represented in all the school literature syllabuses of the period. At both the Colombo Academy and Trinity, the same passage on 'Procrastination' from Young's long poem **Night Thoughts** (1742) was prescribed. This particular extract appears to have been a perennial anthology-piece in Britain as well as in Sri Lanka throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for it was included in many collections of short poems,⁴⁶ one of the latest being the **Oxford Book of 18th Century Verse** published in 1926.⁴⁷

Young's **Night Thoughts** is in the 18th century tradition of verse in which natural description is used as a stepping-board to moralisation and reflection on the human condition. The chief reason for the inclusion was probably its moralistic, didactic and aphoristic quality. The passage contains such aphoristic lines like "Be wise today, 'tis madness to defer", and

Procrastination is the thief of time,
 Year after year it steals, till all are fled
 And to the mercies of a moment leaves
 The vast concerns of an Eternal scene,

Which the authorities would have believed to be of help in sound character-building. In the following lines Young provides a salutary reminder to wayward youth to be circumspect about their immediate duties and not to blame others, especially their parents, and points out somewhat wittily that elders should be respected and listened to; the tragic consequences of delay are described as follows:

.....we sometimes.....only wish,
 As duteous sons, our Fathers were more wise:
 At **thirty** man **suspects** himself a Fool;
 Knows it at **forty**, and reforms his Plan;
 At **fifty** ends his infamous delay
 Pushes his prudent Purpose to Resolve;
 In all the magnanimity of thought
 Resolves; then dies the same.

Thus it is clear that Young's "Procrastination" was selected as a class text solely for its moral and didactic content.

(3) **James Thomson** (1700–1748) too was a pioneer in a strain of descriptive and meditative poetry in which the description of natural phenomena prompts moral reflections on the human situation: a vein of poetry which obviously appealed to those in power in the early and mid 19th century in Sri Lanka. In his long poem **The Seasons** (1726–28) from which 'Winter', the prescribed poem, was taken, Thomson employed a quasi-Miltonic blank verse to describe the countryside at different times of the year, interlarding the description with serious meditations on man and human life.

Apart from the didacticism, Thomson's poetry possessed many of the basic 'qualifications' or prerequisites for inclusion in an English literature syllabus in a colonial set-up: orthodox Christian faith and belief to appease the Christian missionary and eulogistic patriotism and nationalistic sentiment to win the heart of the British colonialist. Unlike the Romantic poets, most of whom tended to deify Nature and thus to preach a kind of 'pantheism,' Thomson expressed the idea that the Wonders of nature are evidence of the power of an almighty creator (nature being only an agent, a manifestation, or creation of a much greater all-powerful divine power who controls and directs it) as illustrated in the following lines of Thomson:

All Nature reels : till Nature's King, who oft
 Amid tempestuous darkness dwells alone,
 And on the wings of the careering wind
 Walks dreadfully serene, commends a calm;
 Then straight air, sea and earth are hushed at once (ll. 197–201).

The supremacy of God over inanimate Nature as well as over human beings is acknowledged when the poet addresses the Almighty Deity in the following words:

Father of light and life! Thou God supreme!
 O teach me what is good! Teach me thyself!
 Save me from folly, vanity, and vice.....(ll. 217-19)

This type of "nature poetry", (i.e., poetry in which nature is admired not for its own sake but as created and controlled by a supreme maker) was clearly preferable to the missionaries to the 'pantheistic' worship of Nature; this probably explains the inclusion of the "Pre-Romantics" Thomas Young and James Thomson who did not display a pantheistic attitude to nature in their poetry, and the total exclusion of the Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats.

Thomson's "Winter" possessed another element that made it especially appropriate for use in Sri Lankan schools from the point of view of the British imperialist administrators—viz., the highly eulogistic description of Peter the Great, the Czar of Russia who carried "the torch of civilisation and culture" to the 'savages' of Northern Russia, in a long passage, ll. 950-87. In studying this poem at school it was clearly expected that the analogy between Peter the Great and the benevolent British sovereign (and his local representative in Sri Lanka, the British Governor) on the one hand, and between the "Primitive" Northern Russians and the equally primitive 19th century Sri Lankans on the other would be made clear by the British teacher-missionary. This eulogistic passage outlining what a 'blessing' a 'benevolent monarch' could prove to be in a 'backward' country (like Sri Lanka) opens:

What cannot active government perform,
 New-moulding man? (ll. 950-51).

The subsequent description of the people of Russia as "a people savage from remotest time" (l.952) and of Russia as "a huge neglected empire immersed in Gothic darkness" was undoubtedly expected to remind the Sri Lankan schoolboy of the 'savagery' of his own little island. More important, the description of the czar Peter's great services to Russia was to conjure up a picture of the same benevolent "civilising" process operating successfully in contemporary Sri Lanka too, if the Sri Lankans would only bear the colonialist yoke willingly and patiently. Peter's rule over Russia is a "benevolent despotism"; he "tamed his stubborn country" (l. 956) including not only "her rocks, her fens, her floods, her seas" (ll. 956-57) but also the people, "her **ill-submitting** sons," (an awful warning to any budding Sri Lankan rebels in the schoolroom!); "the fierce barbarian he subdued" (l. 958), after which he improved the conditions of the natives immensely morally and spiritually: "To more exalted soul he raised (the fierce barbarian)" (l. 959). The services that this "matchless prince," (l. 963) rendered were, moreover, economically, socially and culturally invaluable, for the great monarch (Peter)

His sceptre laid aside, with glorious hand
 Unwearied plying the mechanic tool
 Gathered the seeds of trade, of useful arts,
 Of civil wisdom, and of martial skill (ll. 968-71).

Besides this, as a result of Peter's wise policies,

Cities rise amid the illumined waste;
O'er joyless deserts smiles the rural reign (ll. 973-75)

and

Sloth flies the land, and ignorance and vice (l. 982)

making of the entire country

One scene of arts, of arms, of rising trade (l. 985).

In these lines, it is a highly Utopian picture that is painted of Russia; it is clearly hinted that the rapid advancement of Russia should provide an example to Sri Lanka, provided that her sons take the proffered cue by not rebelling against the British crown.

Thus Thomson's **Winter** contained almost all that was desired not only by the pedagogue but also (more important) by the missionary (who was in full control of education) and by the colonial administrator (who was in full political and administrative control of the Island). It was an ideal text for classroom use in the colonial context with its serious moral attitude, and its demonstration of the Almighty's powers of creation and its emphatic assertion of the benefits of British rule. Around this time, as is well known, the British missionaries were engaged in a vigorous campaign of converting the Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity (carried out mainly through the "English colleges") on the one hand, while the British imperialist bureaucrats were attempting to make of Sri Lanka a model British "crown colony" absolutely loyal to the British crown.

In addition to all these qualifications, Thomson was probably looked upon with great favour by the authorities for his authorship of several other poems embodying patriotic sentiments and orthodox religious faith. In "A Hymn on the Seasons," a poem of 121 lines added to **The Seasons** after 1730, the author expresses his non-patheistic appreciation of the wonders of natural phenomena as the creations of God:

These (i. e., the seasonal natural phenomena), as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God. The rolling year
Is full of thee. Forth in the pleasing Spring
Thy beauty walks, thy tenderness and love.
Then comes thy glory in the Summer months
Thy beauty shines in Autumn unconfined
In Winter awful thou!.....(ll. 1-16).

Another poem by Thomson, "Liberty" (1735) eulogised Britain, "the best isle" (l. 362) as a country where liberty was more deeply entrenched than in any other nation past or present, including ancient Greece and Rome. This "land of light and rectitude of mind" (l. 523) is described by the Goddess of Liberty herself as

The land where, king and people equal bound
 By guardian laws, my (i. e., Liberty's) fullest blessings flow,
 And where my jealous unsubmitting soul,
 The dread of tyrants! burns in every breast (ll. 318–21).

Britain is described as a land of all the various freedoms:

There (i. e., in Britain) truth unlicensed walks; and dares accost
 Even kings themselves, the monarchs of the free! (ll. 364–65).

Even more full of patriotic sentiment and national pride was Thomson's famous ode, "Rule, Britannia!" This was a song which appeared in Act II scene v of *Alfred: A Masque*, a dramatic piece printed in 1740 in which a poet called Mallet collaborated with Thomson. The poem contained the refrain, "Rule Britannia! Rule the waves! Britons never will be slaves" at the end of each stanza. In this ode, Britain "the blest Isle with matchless beauty crowned" (l. 29) is depicted as the greatest nation on earth:

Thou (i.e., Britain) shalt flourish great and free
 The dread and envy of them all (i. e., all other nations) (ll. 9–10)

and

Thy cities shall with commerce shine;
 All thine shall be the subject main,
 And every shore it circles thine (ll. 22–25).

Among Thomson's "Miscellaneous Poems" was yet another poem of patriotic fervour entitled "Britannia";⁴⁹ also among his *Juvenilia* was included a poem called "The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power—A Fragment,"⁵⁰ an early example of Thomson's attribution of the wonders of nature to the wisdom and power of God. The purpose of the latter poem, according to the author, is to "declare, in lofty strains/ The power of Godhead to the sons of men" (ll. 7–8). Thomson in this early poem even attempts to challenge (and to answer) some of the contemporary atheists who disputed the existence of a creator and claimed that the universe is the product of pure chance:

How can I gaze upon yon sparkling vault,
 And view the planets rolling in their spheres,
 Yet be an atheist ?.....
 What but a Being of immense perfection
 Could, through unbended spaces, thus dispose
 Such numerous bodies all presumptive worlds?
 The undesigning hand of giddy chance
 Could never fill, with globes so fast, so bright,
 That lofty concave! (ll. 21–31).

Thomson's religious orthodoxy and conformism in an age of increasing pantheistic and deistic belief and of religious scepticism which probably made him a pet of the educational religious and administrative 'establishments' in Sri Lanka were further demonstrated in a number of religious poems like the hymn on "The Power of God",⁵¹ "A Paraphrase of the Latter Part of the Sixth Chapter of St. Matthew",⁵² "A Paraphrase of Psalm CIV"⁵³ and "A Pastoral Betwixt David, Thirsis, and the Angel Gabriel, Upon the Birth of Our Saviour."⁵⁴

(4) **William Cullen Bryant** (1794–1878) was the author of "To a Waterfowl",⁵⁵ another poem studied by the Trinitians in the 1860s. This was a very popular anthology piece that has survived in anthologies of English poetry till the present day.⁵⁶ "To A Waterfowl", too, contains many of the "essential" ingredients that were looked for in poems prescribed for study by teenage high school pupils in a colonial environment—viz., orthodox religious faith, the "poetic" description of some aspect of nature, aphoristic, memorable expression of moral sentiment, together with jingling rhymes and often a refrain. Bryant's poem is a dramatic description of the vision of the form of a waterfowl floating slowly against the distant horizon at sunset—a sight so wondrous that the poet in his ecstasy achieves the realisation that the waterfowl could only be the creation of an almighty creator, that

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast (ll. 13–14),

and the bird's path could not have been a haphazard one but one directed and guided carefully and deliberately by its creator, God, who "Guides through the boundless sky thy (the waterfowl's) certain flight" (l. 18). Thus, like Young and Thomson, Bryant had the correct religious orientation in relation to the description of nature and its wonders; in real life, too, Bryant was more than adequately qualified to be represented in an English literature syllabus, as a pious, practising clergyman who had told Godwin: "I knew the Greek **New-Testament** from end to end almost as if it had been English."⁵⁷ Bryant is also described as having showed "an early and ingrained familiarity with the Scriptures."⁵⁸ Indeed, "when he was 10 or 11 his grandfather Snell gave him the whole **Book of Job** to turn into verse."⁵⁹

Bryant was a very popular poet, though an American by nationality. By 1825, he had "clearly emerged as America's one great poet;"⁶⁰ his collection of poems (1832) was hailed by the **North American Review** as "the best volume of American verse that has ever appeared."⁶¹ Indeed, it has been asserted that (as a poet) Bryant "holds a position in American letters akin to that of Wordsworth in English, as America's great poet of nature with which more than one hundred of his total of about 160 poems deal..... (and that) he possessed a sensitively artistic perception of what was lovely in nature, and the capacity for its imaginative interpretation, which are not equalled by any other American writer."⁶²

It is not nature in general, but the "untouched nature of the New World and of New England in particular, which Bryant's verse pictures with definiteness and accuracy."⁶³ With this descriptive power were joined "an elemental piety a pervading sense of the transiency of all things, and a meditative philosophy."⁶⁴ All these features would have endeared

Bryant to the Victorians, British as well as American and Sri Lankan. According to recent critics, Bryant "believed poetry should provide "direct lessons in wisdom" through "truths which the mind instinctively acknowledges."⁶⁵

However, although Bryant was clearly and profoundly influenced by Wordsworth, he was not considered objectionable like the latter for a very important reason: Bryant's God remained ever a Divine Being distinct from His creation—i.e., Nature is simply the visible token of God's transcendent beauty and awful power, as in Young and Thomson; in other words, Nature was not, as with Wordsworth, Shelley and many other Romantic poets, a **substitute for God**. This short lyric "To A Waterfowl" was written in 1815 and published in 1818, and called by Matthew Arnold "the most perfect brief poem in the language."⁶⁶

(5) **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** (1807–1882) was the author of two poems prescribed for detailed study in the English literature syllabus of Trinity College, Kandy in the 1860s—"A Psalm of Life," (1838) and "Excelsior" (1842). Longfellow, like Bryant, was an American, not a British poet. Longfellow's popularity and reputation were great, both at home as well as abroad.⁶⁷ "No other poet has anything like your vogue," Nathaniel Hawthorne is reported to have written to his fellow poet Longfellow in 1855. In London, 10,000 copies of Longfellow's poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish" were sold on the first day.⁶⁸ W. C. Bryant, the author of "To A Waterfowl," praised Longfellow's "exquisite music and creative power."⁶⁹ Hawthorne on another occasion wrote to Longfellow: "I take vast satisfaction in your poetry, and take very little in most other men's."⁷⁰ European criticism of Longfellow's poetry was also very favourable, for Prof. Philarete Chasles, of the College of France wrote in 1851: "Longfellow seems to us to occupy the first place among the poets of his country."⁷¹ Longfellow's poetic reputation in the mid-19th century appears to have been so high that **Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine** declared in February 1852: "In respect of melody, feeling, pathos, and that exquisite simplicity of expression which is the criterion of a genuine poet, Mr. Longfellow need not shun comparison with any living writer"⁷² and the London **Spectator** spoke of "the sweet and limpid purity.....and the thoroughly original conception and treatment of his later poems, especially that which will doubtless live as long as the English language, "Hiawatha."⁷³ Even recent critics concede that Longfellow was indisputably one of the most popular poets who ever lived: "His popularity in his own lifetime was great, unbroken by the Civil War, honoured by Oxford and Queen Victoria, and finally by Westminster Abbey."⁷⁴

The art of Longfellow has been sometimes described as "an outstanding example of popular taste."⁷⁵ Perhaps the most popular and typical among Longfellow's short poems in Victorian times was "A Psalm of Life" (1838), dismissed by modern standards as "a work of melancholic cliché on mutability."⁷⁶ Next perhaps in popularity came "Excelsior", "The Wreck of the Hesperus", "The Village Blacksmith", "Evangeline", "The Rainy Day", "Hiawatha", and "Paul Revere's Ride", all well-known and exceedingly popular anthology-pieces in America, Britain and Sri Lanka throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, though now often referred to derogatorily as "sentimental classics of bathetic rhetoric and self-pity raised by their readers to levels of myth."⁷⁷ As James D. Hart has pointed out, however, "a later age, with different standards, has accused Longfellow of undue didacticism

and excessive symbolism as in "A Psalm of Life", "Excelsior", "The Village Blacksmith" and "My Lost Youth", and "The very simplicity that made him a children's poet has lessened his mature audience, since despite his great metrical skill, he is lacking in passion and high imagination, and is too decorous, benign and sweet."⁷⁸

"A Psalm of Life", on which the Trinitians in Kandy (and perhaps most other Sri Lankan schoolboys in English 'Colleges', including the present writer) were nurtured, "stresses the importance of a full and sincere activity in making the most of life's brief span, rather than succumbing to moods of vain regret or dejection."⁷⁹ "Excelsior," the companion-piece of "A Psalm of Life", "figuratively depicts the life of a man of genius, as he maintains his individualistic purpose, resisting temptations, and ignoring warnings. Climbing the mountain of his career, he passes beyond the village and the monastery, repeating his idealistic motto, until he is found dead on the highest glacier. Even then a voice is heard from the sky, proclaiming the motto as a promise of immortality."⁸⁰

Both poems are didactic, moralistic, solemnly serious and abound in clichetic but highly aphoristic, quotable and memorable, lines and phrases like "The soul is dead that slumbers" ("A Psalm of Life", l. 3), often antithetically balanced, as in the stanza from the same poem:

Life is real! Life is earnest !
 And the grave is not its goal!
 Dust thou art, to dust returneth,
 Was not spoken of a soul. (ll. 5-8).

and in lines like "Art is long, and Time is fleeting" (l. 13); "In the bivouac of life, / Be not like dumb, driven cattle ! Be a hero in the strife!" (ll. 18-20); "Let the dead Past bury its dead! / Act,—act in the living Present! / Heart within, and God o'erhead!" (ll. 22-24); "Learn to labour and to wait" (l. 36). The poem also contains that highly aphoristic quatrain which would have echoed in every 19th century and early 20th century schoolboy's memory:

Lives of great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime,
 And departing, leave behind us
 Footprints in the sands of time (ll. 25-28).

The poem is clichetic and conventional in its morality, but embodies in easily memorable words and phrases certain general moral virtues, i. e., a code of life and conduct built upon a foundation of courage, bravery, self-sacrifice, moral uprightness, endurance, Christian piety, and steadfast endeavour. The poem would have obviously endeared itself to the Victorian missionary educators for all these qualities.

"Excelsior", Longfellow's other poem, is a specific symbolisation of moral uprightness, unrelenting endurance and courageous endeavour: a poem particularly appropriate as an exemplary model to youthful readers, for its hero is a youth bearing a banner with the strange device "Excelsior!" considered a suitable motto for Sri Lankan schoolboys.

Thus in both Longfellow's poems "A Psalm of Life" and "Excelsior", the "approved" elements or ingredients considered desirable and even essential in the Sri Lankan context were plainly in evidence—i.e., character-building didacticism, pithy aphoristic expression, a deep underlying faith in God and religion, and the sentiments of idealistic patriotism and loyalty to the authorities in power. The presence of all or some of these elements in combination undoubtedly contributed much towards the inclusion of Longfellow's poems in the literature syllabus.

(6) **James Grahame** (1765–1811). Another poem listed in the Trinity College English literature syllabus (without mention of the author) was "Paul Before Agrippa." This poem has upto now remained unidentified by previous writers on English education in colonial Sri Lanka. In spite of extensive search by the present writer in 19th and 20th century anthologies of English poetry, no poem bearing the name "Paul Before Agrippa" has been discovered. However, a short poem bearing a title that differs only very slightly in the wording of the given title has been located in the collected works of a comparatively minor English poet of the early 19th century called James Grahame.⁸¹ The title of the poem reads "Paul Accused Before the Roman Governor of Judea,"⁸² which was probably the longer title originally given to the poem which was abridged to "Paul Before Agrippa" for convenience. The poem is a versification of the incident in the **New Testament**⁸³ in which Paul is brought before Herod Agrippa, the Roman Emperor of Judea who finds Paul guiltless of any offence.

From the point of view of the missionary educational authorities, James Grahame too clearly possessed the essential prerequisites for an "approved" author. He was a classical scholar who "used seldom to walk abroad without a volume of the classics in his pocket, and had a copy of the Greek Testament always by his bedside to employ his waking hours."⁸⁴ His more famous fellow-poet Thomas Campbell described him as having once spent "the night alone in pouring out extempore hymns to God, in a depth of musical intonation and with an enthusiasm of devotion"⁸⁵ which Campbell never heard equalled. Grahame achieved fame with his devotional poem "The Sabbath"; his editor-biographer described him as having been "Pious as a habit and as a necessity ; he swam in devotional feeling as in his native element."⁸⁶

At the end of Grahame's **Poetical Works** is to be found a series of short poems called "Biblical Pictures." These are versified narratives of incidents taken from the Bible⁸⁷ and bear titles like "The First Sabbath", "The Finding of Moses", "Japhtha's Vow", "Saul and David", "Elijah Fed by Ravens", "The Birth of Jesus Announced", "Jesus Walks on the Sea and Calms the Storm", "The Death of Jesus", "Jesus Appears to the Disciples" and "Paul Accused Before the Tribunal of the Areopagus", the themes and content of them being self evident.

"Paul Before Agrippa", probably the same poem as the one prescribed for study at Trinity College, is, like the other "Biblical Pictures," a straight-forward versification in blank verse of the well-known **New Testament** incident; the poem is not artistically distinguished, being more prosaic than poetic in the treatment of the theme. The style is pseudo-Miltonic, with its deliberate inversions of sentence, clause and phrase structure (for example: "Dauntless,

he forward came", l. 3; "A silence dead/Succeeds each pause", ll. 8, 9; "The peal/Tremendous louder rolls", ll. 7,8; "The listening band/of soldiers forward lean'd" ll. 10,11; "No more he feels", l. 13).

The inclusion of Grahame's piece, it is clear, was motivated mainly by pietistic, religious considerations rather than by strictly literary criteria, Grahame being another clergyman among the authors of the poems included in the syllabus. In his own time, Grahame appears to have been a great favourite with the early 19th century reading public. We learn, for example, that "Three new editions of Grahame's most famous poem "The Sabbath" were called for in a year, and as poet of "The Sabbath" Grahame was much respected by Scott, while he was the object of one of Byron's most gratuitous sneers in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers."⁸⁸

(7) **Thomas Babington Macaulay** (1800–1859). The Trinity College syllabus in poetry also included without any mention of the author, as in the case of "Paul Before Agrippa," "Lays of Ancient Rome" and "Extracts from the Spanish Armada." These two poems may be identified with the poems by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay. However, both present certain problems which call for some discussion since these problems have not been dealt with by any earlier writer on English education in 19th century Sri Lanka.

In *The Complete Works of Macaulay*, Vol. XII,⁸⁹ the poem "Lays of Ancient Rome," together with its prefaces introducing each separate 'lay' comprises 130 pages of printed text. Previous writers have overlooked the fact that the length of this poem makes it very unlikely, perhaps impossible, that all the "Lays" would have been prescribed to the young Trinitians. In the absence of definite information on this point, therefore, a decision has to be arrived at on the basis of relative probabilities.

Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" consists of 4 verse narratives ('Lays') viz., "Horatius", "The Battle of the Lake Regillus", "Virginia" and "The Prophecy of Capys". In his general preface to the lays, Macaulay, having described "the process by which the lost ballad-poetry of Rome was transformed into history" (i.e., into prose from the original verse), declared his intention to reverse this process, i. e., to re-transform some portions of early Roman history back into the poetry out of which they were made.⁹⁰ In doing so, Macaulay, influenced to some extent by "our own (i.e., traditional English) ballads, and more from Scott, the great restorer of our ballad-poetry"⁹¹ adopted the dramatic **persona** of the medieval **troubadour** or oral teller of tales as well as popular ballad metres, in order to render in verse form the Roman stories that were available to him.

Of the four "Lays of Rome" versified by Macaulay, the first and most important as well as the most popular was "Horatius." This is one of the poems (together with 'A Psalm of Life' and 'Procrastination') that has survived in the school English literature syllabuses in Britain and Sri Lanka upto the mid-20th century. Thus it is probable that it was "Horatius" (of the 4 'Lays of Ancient Rome') that was read by the young Trinitians in the 1860s. However, even then the problem appears to be only partially solved. Even "Horatius" could not possibly have been included in the Trinity College syllabus in its entirety, for in its

complete version the poem contains 70 stanzas, each stanza being (variously) 8,9, or 10 tetrametre lines in length. It is therefore quite likely that only the central dramatic episode of this 'Lay', the part of the poem describing the defence of the bridge by the brave Horatius, and not the entire poem, was prescribed for study by the schoolboys. This supposition is probably strengthened by the fact that it is this part of the poem that is normally included in popular anthologies of English poetry.

The "central" portion of the poem commences with Stanza XXVIII, beginning with the lines

Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the Gate.....

and continues up to the end of the poem. Since even this section of the poem is probably too long for schoolroom use, being much longer than the other short poems included in the syllabus, it is probable that only a few stanzas beginning with Stanza XXVIII were included.

"Extracts from 'The Spanish Armada'", the last item on the Trinity College syllabus, raises two problems: (a) the identification of the poem and (b) the identification of the lines included in the 'Extracts'. Neither problem can be solved definitely in the present state of our knowledge, unless and until an actual textbook used by an old Trinitian of the 1860s comes to light. Problem (a) arises because at least two fairly well-known poems exist on the subject of the Spanish Armada—again, a problem of which no previous writer on English education in colonial Sri Lanka appears to have been aware. Macaulay's poem on the Spanish Armada, an incomplete fragment, is entitled "The Armada—A Fragment" (1832) and consists of 74 lines. Robert Southey is reported to have written a poem entitled "The Spanish Armada", which was unfortunately excluded from his **Poetical Works** (and hence has not been available for consideration in the present study). The Trinity College syllabus refers to the poem as "The Spanish Armada". While the possibility exists that it may have been Southey's poem that was prescribed, it may be presumed that it was Macaulay's poem that was used at Trinity, especially because "Extracts from 'The Spanish Armada'" occurs immediately after Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome' on the syllabus. Macaulay's fame and eminence as the author of the famous **Minute on Education** of 2nd October 1835 and therefore as the chief architect of English education in India and Sri Lanka also make it likely that he was the author of the poem, rather than Robert Southey, one of the Lake Poets who were, individually as well as collectively, considered to be **personae non grata** in colonial Sri Lanka for reasons to be indicated below.

The main feature that probably commended Macaulay's incomplete fragment on the Spanish Armada to the educational and administrative authorities in Sri Lanka (presuming that the poem was prescribed in its entirety) was probably its expression of a strong vein of British patriotism. Macaulay at the outset indicates what he wanted to express: the bravery and valour of the British in the face of grave danger from Spain in the form of the Armada:

Attend, all ye who list to hear our noble England's praise;
I tell of the thrice famous deeds she wrought in ancient days,
When that great fleet invincible against her bore in vain
The richest spoils of Mexico, the stoutest hearts of Spain. (ll. 1-4).

However, Macaulay's greatest qualification for inclusion in the literature syllabus (a unique one that perhaps no other writer possessed at the time) was extra-literary: he was a member of the Board of Education for India at the time and was also the author of the famous **Minute on Indian Education** of 2 February 1835, the document that was instrumental in first formulating a policy of "English Education" in India—as such Lord Macaulay was really the father of English education, both of English language as well as English literature, in the East. In addition to his close connections (administratively) with India, Macaulay was also one of the most prominent English prose-writers and politicians during the Victorian period, and this, in combination with his connections with India, made him an eminently suitable, nay, an essential and indispensable, representative on an English literature syllabus in India or Sri Lanka. Macaulay, in short, was that rare phenomenon: the combination in the same man of a direct formulator of British colonial policy and an eminent man of letters, in addition to his other achievements: he was "a great debater, and enormously well-read, and had a prodigious memory, so that he knew **Paradise Lost** and many other literary classics literally by heart".⁹²

(8) **Dr. Samuel Johnson** (1709-84), the famous essayist, lexicographer, editor of Shakespeare, and literary critic, was the only prose writer to appear on a 19th century school English literature syllabus, apart from Lord Bacon, one of whose essays was prescribed for the examination for the Turnour Prize at the Colombo Academy. His oriental prose romance, **Rasselas or the Prince of Abyssinia** (1759) appears as a prescribed text in the course of studies for the Colombo Academy's "senior" students in the 1860s. Again, it cannot now be ascertained whether the entire novel was studied in class, or whether only extracts from it were prescribed, and, if the latter, which specific part or parts.

Rasselas is a highly didactic tale with an ostensibly Oriental (Middle Eastern) setting in which the principal characters search for happiness under the guidance of a sage, only to find in the end that "Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed"—a highly serious, sombre, pessimistic philosophy in keeping with the serious, reflective moral code of the Victorians, especially the Christian missionaries. Dr. Johnson's heavy morality, coupled with the pseudo-Oriental background of Abyssinia would have been sufficient to have recommended it for inclusion in a school English literature syllabus in Sri Lanka.

It is not difficult to see why the more popular and successful 18th and 19th century English novels (there was a great deal of fiction available at this time by Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott) were automatically precluded from selection—either they erred on the romantic, sentimental side, or contained accounts of "vulgar lower class life" or of roguery (as in Defoe, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne with touches of ribaldry and obscenity) or were too satirical of the governing and or clerical classes to be satisfactory for classroom use. Although, by the middle of the 19th century, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot had emerged as important novelists, their social criticism (especially Dickens' radical criticism of religious missionaries and of the Victorian upper and middle class) would have been unpalatable and dangerous from the point of view of the colonial missionary and administrator stationed in Sri Lanka.

The 19th century novelists' exposure of the evils of Victorian capitalist society was no fit fictional fare for the Sri Lankan schoolboy to feed upon—he had to be given a 'rosy' picture of the civilisation, culture, and living conditions in the mother country (Britain) in the mid-19th century.

Thus, in fiction (as in poetry) the formulators of the English literature syllabuses had perforce to fall back constantly upon the second-rate, mediocre and/or the little known author or to omit certain literary genres (fiction for instance) altogether, for non-literary reasons.

Part III

The English Literature Syllabuses: General Features

An overall survey of the English literature syllabuses used in the most prominent "English Colleges" of early and mid-19th century Sri Lanka brings out several striking features. The most conspicuous feature of the syllabuses is the lack of balance between the three basic genres of literature—Poetry, Fiction and Drama. Most modern school and university English literature syllabuses attempt a more or less equal division into these three categories; the 19th century literature syllabuses, on the other hand, display a striking lack of such balance, a lop-sidedness, with a heavy weightage and bias towards poetry at the expense of fiction and drama. The syllabuses examined above contain no prescribed plays at all, and only one work of fiction, *Rasselas* by Dr. Johnson, a work which is not a 'novel' in the strict sense, but rather a moral treatise masquerading as a novel. While it may be presumed that drama was excluded partly because most plays (especially the Elizabethan plays) are probably too long for classroom study and also cannot be usefully studied in parts (unlike verse), most novels too would have been precluded for the same reasons. In addition to the reasons already indicated, the non-inclusion of fiction in the syllabus may have been due to the antipathy that persisted throughout the early 18th century towards works of fiction.⁹³

Poetry appears to have monopolised the English literature syllabuses of 19th century Sri Lankan English Colleges, partly for reasons of convenience (shortness of length) and partly for non-literary reasons. In the selection of specific poems (and extracts from poems), non-literary considerations unfortunately appear to have superseded strictly literary-critical criteria. Looking at the detailed syllabus, one is struck by the fact that none of the poets represented was of recognised "classic" status except Milton; but, as pointed out above, the passage selected from Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one of the most dull, prosaic, unpoetic and "unmiltonic" passages in Book V and perhaps in the whole poem. In most cases, political and religious factors appear to have been considered to be of greater importance in the selection of poems than strictly literary criteria.

The syllabuses obviously raise a very significant question : Why are the major poets of the 18th and early 19th centuries conspicuous by their absence in these syllabuses? Their omission is so glaring and complete as to appear to be the result of deliberate exclusion. Even if Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare were excluded for being too remote in time and archaic in their language, the total omission of the great poets of the Restoration and Augustan

periods (John Dryden and Alexander Pope respectively) and after them of the first generation of Romantic poets, (William Blake, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley and John Keats) could not be so easily explained away.

Although at first sight it may seem that the major Romantic poets were too close in time to have established their poetic reputations, such a line of thought appears erroneous when the poets who **were** included are closely scrutinised. Whereas Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats all died between 1821 and 1827, Coleridge in 1834 and Wordsworth in 1850, Macaulay died even later (in 1859), W. C. Bryant (author of "To A Waterfowl") in 1878, and H. W. Longfellow (author of 'A Psalm of Life' and 'Excelsior') in 1882. The inclusion of the poems by Bryant and Longfellow suggests that contemporaneity could not have been the main reason for the exclusion of the first generation of Romantic poets and that the crucial operative factors have to be looked for elsewhere — probably in the religious and political beliefs and ideologies of the poets concerned. As already indicated, the American poet W. C. Bryant was widely known to have been influenced by Wordsworth. This poses the question why, if Bryant (and the so-called "pre-Romantics," Edward Young and James Thomson) qualified as "nature" poets, Wordsworth, the acknowledged Nature poet **par excellence** should have been deliberately excluded altogether.

Another strange phenomenon in the syllabus is the total **exclusion** of the Restoration and Augustan poets and the first generation of Romantic poets as against the **inclusion** of two pre-Romantic (i.e., post-Restoration and post-Augustan) poets who lived and wrote **after** the Augustans but **before** the Romantics—James Thomson and Edward Young, whose poems were written in 1730 and 1742 respectively. Again, no conceivable reason except the possibility that Thomson and Young were considered harmless and unobjectionable from the religious and political points of view compared to the Restoration, Augustan and Romantic poets could be adduced to explain the choice of the makers of the syllabuses.

Yet another amazing feature of the selection of poetry texts is the inclusion of two **American** Victorian writers W. C. Bryant (1794-1878) and H. W. Longfellow (1807-1882) in preference to British Victorian poets who were contemporaneous with them, especially Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) and Robert Browning (1812-1889). The real reason for the exclusion of Tennyson and Browning may have been their expression, through their poetry, of religious doubt, scepticism, and wavering faith in God and religion. Considering the fact that most of Tennyson's poems were published in collections as early as 1830, 1833 and 1842 and that he was appointed Poet Laureate in 1850 on the death of Wordsworth, no other cogent reasons could be offered for the exclusion of Tennyson, whatever reasons there may have been for the non-inclusion of Browning.

Thus the English literature syllabus used in Sri Lanka in the late 19th century appears to have been a lop-sided and idiosyncratic selection which deliberately brushed aside all the important Restoration, Augustan, Romantic and Victorian English poets, gave undeserved prominence to two minor English pre-Romantics, (Thomson and Young), to two undistinguished American poets (Bryant and Longfellow) and to the little-known poet Macaulay (Macaulay the prose-writer, of course, was admittedly more distinguished).

The most important Restoration poet, John Dryden (1631–1700) and the most important Augustan poet, Alexander Pope (1688–1744) do not appear to have been looked upon with much favour by the religious and administrative “establishment” in Victorian Sri Lanka. It is probable that in their view Dryden had committed an unpardonable sin in supporting Oliver Cromwell’s republicanism in writing the early poem entitled “Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell” (1659) just a few months before the restoration of Charles II in 1660 where he eulogised Cromwell, “Our Prince”, as a man who “derived his grandeur from Heav’n alone” (stanza 6) asserting also that “to our crown he did fresh jewels bring” (stanza 7). This poetic ‘miscalculation’ was a fatal indiscretion which remained a permanent blot upon the first page of Dryden’s collected poems. As if the panegyric on Cromwell was not enough to damn him, Dryden had into the bargain cast himself into the wilderness by engaging in sly satiric digs at the merry monarch Charles II (through the character of David in **Absalom and Achitophel** (1681) and in attacking priestcraft and monogamy in such lines as the following:

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
 Before polygamy was made a sin,
 When man on many multiplied his kind,
 Ere one to one was cursedly confined,.....
 When nature prompted and no law denied
 Promiscuous use of concubine and bride,
 Then Israel’s Monarch after heaven’s own heart
 His vigorous warmth did variously impart
 To wives and slaves, and, wide as his command,
 Scattered his maker’s image through the land.

(Absalom and Achitophel, ll. 1–10)

One could picture in one’s imagination the prim, modest, serious Christian missionaries and administrators including the Governor shaking their heads at the author of such obscenities, blasphemies and seditious sentiments! The fact that Dryden had become a Roman Catholic in 1686 and had then been obliged to relinquish his position as Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal with the accession of William of Orange and the restoration of the Protestant succession (after the Roman Catholic James II) in 1688, his religious scepticism, and anti-clericalism could hardly have helped to make Dryden a pet of the Sri Lankan establishment and to give him a place in the English literature syllabus. Nor did Dryden’s poem **The Hind and the Panther** (1687), a verse fable satirising both sides in the religious controversy between the Roman Catholic church and the Established Church improve his plight: he had in fact antagonised both the Catholics and the Established church by writing that poem.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744) was probably considered not better than Dryden as a candidate for representation on the literature syllabus by the missionaries and the bureaucrats in power during the 19th century in Sri Lanka. Pope, like Dryden, was a Roman Catholic at a time when Catholics in England still suffered civil disabilities. Though a dominant poetic figure among the Augustans, Pope’s optimistic deism (as expressed in **The Essay on Man**) and his almost Swiftian contempt for his fellows in his satirical poetry would have made him

a bad choice for inclusion in a colonial literature syllabus, the teaching of which would invariably have been in the hands of clergymen-teachers of the Established Church.

What were the principal charges against the first generation of English Romantic poets? Without doubt, they were all highly suspect, and considered 'undesirable' to say the least, on two counts, one religious and the other political. William Blake, the eldest of the first generation of Romantics, was a rebel and visionary who was "completely at odds with all the official doctrines of his time, theological, political and aesthetic."⁹⁴

William Wordsworth, the greatest of the Romantic poets, at least "for a brief but important period probably deemed himself a deist."⁹⁵ Coleridge had described Wordsworth in 1796 as "at least a semi-atheist."⁹⁶ According to Fairchild, "We may infer that Wordsworth was heterodox at this time."⁹⁷ In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth had declared himself "a worshipper of Nature" (l. 152). Nature in fact was "the only God Wordsworth knew at this time,"⁹⁸ and the words "pantheism," "panantheism," and "pansychism" have been used by critics to characterise the nature of Wordsworth's religious belief and to distinguish it from orthodox Christianity.

"The Sage of Highgate," S. T. Coleridge, Wordsworth's chief comrade-in-arms, too, was suspect with regard to his religious beliefs. He had sinned by "decrying an anthropomorphic conception of God wherever it may be found"⁹⁹; his concept of God as a "spirit" rather than a being with anthropomorphic features could not be accommodated within the ambit of accepted orthodox Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Coleridge had predicted that "The age of priesthood will soon be no more,"¹⁰¹ in one of his essays.

Shelley differs from Wordsworth and Coleridge in explicitly denying that he is a Christian.¹⁰² He had become notorious for his attacks on Christianity in his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* (co-authored by him with his friend Thomas Hogg, for which both friends were expelled from Oxford University in 1811). *The Necessity of Atheism* was "almost the first in England openly to champion atheism."¹⁰³ Moreover, Shelley had attacked the priesthood vehemently in one of his earliest poems, *Queen Mab* (1813),¹⁰⁴ thus enraging and antagonising the missionaries both in Britain and in Sri Lanka. In *Queen Mab*, the fairy queen declares unequivocally: "There is no God!" (Canto VII); in the same Canto, Ahasuerus the Wandering Jew attacks the Almighty. Clearly, lines like the following in *Queen Mab* could hardly have made Shelley a favourite of the Christian missionaries:

- (1) A cowed and hypocritical monk
Prays, curses, and deceives. (Canto II)
- (2) Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man
Inherits vice and misery (Canto IV).
- (3) But for thy aid,
Religion! But for thee, prolific fiend,
Who peopled earth with demons, hell with men,
And heaven with slaves (Canto VI).

Again, in the **Ode to Liberty** Shelley had made himself the sworn enemy of the missionaries by his fond wish expressed in the lines

O that the pale name of PRIEST might shrink and dwindle
Into the hell from which it first was hurled (stanza xvi).

In the same **Ode** he refers to "Anarchs and priests who feed on gold and blood" (stanza iii) who "drove the astonished herds of men from every side" and hankers after a time when "the free would stamp the impious name/Of "king" into the dust" (stanza xv). Thus, Shelley's exclusion from the college English literature syllabus was assured, in fact a foregone conclusion; his name probably led all the rest among the sceptics and atheists.

Byron, close friend of Shelley, also believed in a kind of pantheism or "nature worship."¹⁰⁵ In his letters he attacked "the scoundrels and priests, who do more harm to religion than all the infidels that ever forgot their catechisms!"¹⁰⁶ Unlike Shelley, however, Byron did not attack Christianity or God openly; nevertheless, he too was hardly a favourite of the establishment, for "he was a doubter who found no satisfaction in his doubts.....Sentimental deism was the only positive form of belief to which he could lay claim." On one occasion Byron had confessed: "The more I think the more I doubt; I am a perfect sceptic."¹⁰⁷

John Keats, like Shelley, "was an avowed non-Christian,"¹⁰⁸ though he, too, like Byron, never attacked Christianity or its priesthood directly in his poetry.

In their old age, however, all except Shelley and Keats became orthodox believers, but such late conversions would not have sufficed to compensate for their youthful 'indiscretions' in the eyes of the missionaries.

From the administrative aspect, too, almost every important Romantic poet was a **persona non grata** in colonial Sri Lanka, for they had either attacked the royalty and the nobility in their poetry, or were (politically) supporters of radicalism, revolution, and Jacobinism, and either supported or sympathised with the French Revolution. As Crane Brinton has shown, "Almost to a man, the English romanticists were actively interested in politics."¹⁰⁹ When the "first generation of revolt" comprising Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey first began to write, "they were all Jacobins of one shade or another," although, "by the time they had entered old age they had become unmistakable Tories."¹¹⁰

Details about Wordsworth's long residence in France, his connection with the patriot Beupuy, his undisguised sympathy for the French Revolution and his stay in London as a disciple of William Godwin, the celebrated author of **Political Justice** (1793), that Bible of Anarchism, are well known.¹¹¹ Wordsworth's comrade, Coleridge, held similar views and soon after leaving Jesus College, Cambridge, wrote for the **Morning Chronicle** "a series of sonnets which are filled with the idiom of sentimental radicalism." Next Coleridge was found in Bristol, editing **The Watchman**, "a journal that seemed to the sober citizens of Bristol dangerously revolutionary."¹¹² It was here that the great scheme of "Pantisocracy" was worked out by Coleridge and Southey—a project for forming a small communist society

in America on the banks of the Susquehanna.¹¹³ From all this, concludes Crane Brinton, "Coleridge has a definite revolutionary belief."¹¹⁴ All this, no doubt, did not escape the attention of the educational authorities in 19th century Sri Lanka.

To the second generation of Romantic revolt belonged Byron and Shelley. Though of aristocratic birth, "Byron from the first was the friend of the poor and downtrodden;"¹¹⁵ he was a humanitarian, if not a radical revolutionary. Byron believed that "Kings oppress; therefore republics do not."¹¹⁶ According to Brinton, he was "as bitter against kings as any Jacobin, (though) not equally bitter against the nobility."¹¹⁷ "The truth is, he was in all things a son of the Revolution,"¹¹⁸ concludes Crane Brinton.

As many critics including Brinton have pointed out, Shelley's political ideas were taken over almost intact from his would-be father-in-law, William Godwin, that high priest of anarchism and author of **An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice** published a few years after the French Revolution in 1793. Almost all the principal ideas of Godwin are expressed by Shelley in his early Utopian poem **Queen Mab** (1813). **Queen Mab** was a condemnation not only of Jehovah and Christianity, but also of the entire capitalistic economic and administrative system in its savage attacks on kings, nobles, administrators, priests and judges. Anticipating socialists of a later Marxist vintage, Shelley wrote: "There is no wealth but the labour of man."¹¹⁹ Shelley's ferocious attacks on the use and abuse of hereditary power, his contempt for the capitalist classes, his concern for the downtrodden, his conviction that labour alone constitutes wealth, all justify his later adoption by leaders of the socialist movement as one of their inspirers. Shelley was really a pre-Marxist radical humanitarian, although he did not advocate at any time violent revolution and insurrection to capture state power. Karl Marx himself recognised Shelley as one of his predecessors in socialist thought when he said that "he (Shelley) was a revolutionist and had he lived (he) would always have been one of the advance guard of socialism."¹²⁰ Bernard Shaw, likewise, paid a tribute to Shelley, declaring: "Had Shelley lived fifty years later, he would have been a Social-Democrat with strong leanings toward the most democratic communism attainable and practically workable."¹²¹

P. B. Shelley, the self-declared atheist and social revolutionary was therefore the last person to have been included in an anthology of poetry for impressionable young schoolboys in a loyal British colony like Sri Lanka in the 19th century. It is probable that Shelley was kept out not only from the English literature syllabus of English colleges but even from the school libraries.¹²²

Part IV

Methods of Teaching English Literature in 19th Century Schools in Sri Lanka

The chief method of teaching English literature in the English colleges of Sri Lanka in the 19th century appears to have been the memorisation of the prescribed texts especially in the case of poetry. Even in Indian colleges at this time, "all that was expected of students was an accurate memory."¹²³ The memorisation of the poems prescribed (or the more

important parts of them, if the poems happened to be too long for memorisation in full), was followed by the constant repetition of them, as was done almost till the middle of the 20th century. V. L. O. Reimann described the manner in which English language and literature were taught at Trinity College, Kandy in the second half of the 19th century as follows: "Much poetry had to be memorised and recited."¹²⁴ Even passages of prose appear to have been committed to memory: "Passages from Macaulay were read and had to be reproduced."¹²⁵ Memorisation was probably accompanied by paraphrase or explanation of the meanings of sentences and constructions, for (again at Trinity) "Lines from **Paradise Lost** (were) paraphrased."¹²⁶ It is probable that the method of memorisation was found to be the most practical in a colonial context where the pupils were taught through the medium of an alien tongue; as Ludowyk pointed out, "The curriculum was quite unsuited to Ceylon, and needless repetition was resorted to by the pupil in order to grasp the unfamiliar content of what was placed before him."¹²⁷

Much time appears to have been spent on teaching the pupils the correct use of the English language—i.e., on the teaching of grammar and composition. "English Composition," it would have been noted, appears as one of the components of the syllabus (in most of the lower classes, it was the **only** element). Thus at Trinity College, "A great deal of time was spent in the teaching of correct English.....Each week an essay was written and this was ruthlessly criticised on the following Monday morning. The students were even expected to attempt English verse, not to make them poets, but to teach them how to select words, the meaning and power of words, the dignity and style and the music of well-accented prose."¹²⁸ James de Alwis described the methods of teaching used by Mr. Dupy, whose private school he attended in 1830: "So very careful was (Mr. Dupy) to make me pronounce my words correctly, and with the proper emphasis, that he actually made me repeat after him each word some twenty times."¹²⁹

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussion has brought out some of the characteristic features of British colonialist policy as it was applied through education and educational institutions in 19th century Sri Lanka and probably in other British colonies like India, Malaya and Burma during the same period. It shows clearly how educational principles had to be sacrificed to political and administrative expediency and how, as a result, the missionary control of education in colonial societies led to the suppression of true literary merit. This in turn led inevitably to the unmerited elevation of mediocre poets to prominent places on the school curriculum, ultimately resulting in non-representative, lop-sided, badly selected, and unsatisfactory English literature syllabuses from a modern point of view.

From the evidence presented in the present paper, the conclusion that the 19th century English literature syllabuses used in the most prominent "English Colleges" in Sri Lanka were drawn up less in accordance with literary criteria than with non-literary ones is inescapable. To be included in the literature syllabus at this time a poem or other literary work and its author above everything else had to possess certain "negative" qualifications like religious orthodoxy, a tendency towards heavy and conventional moralisation, political conformism

and a strong sense of patriotism towards the mother-country (Britain); proven literary merit was only a secondary consideration. To be on the safe side, writers who were suspected of religious heterodoxy (like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron), belonged to sects other than the Established Church (Dryden, Pope), or guilty of atheism (Shelley, Keats) were automatically excluded despite their literary merit and reputation. Attacking the monarchy or the priesthood were, needless to mention, capital offences. Similarly, authors who criticised or attacked the prevailing capitalist economic and administrative system (like Shelley) were also carefully excluded.

On the positive side, in keeping with the Victorian doctrines of "self-help" and *laissez-faire*, and the idea of "character-building," a poem was considered suitable for school use if it had a clear didactic, moralistic content, a pointed lesson or moral. The particular circumstances of the crown colony status of Sri Lanka at the time also made it desirable that the items included in the literature syllabus be expressive of loyalty to the mother country, and if possible, contain some eulogisation of the "greatness" and "benevolence" of Britain towards her colonies.

From the modern point of view, therefore, the "English literature" syllabuses used in 19th century "English Colleges" were highly unsatisfactory and unsuitable for the purpose of inculcating a wide knowledge of English literature, its history, and landmarks, or imparting a rigorous training in the principles of literary criticism. It would have been surprising if such had not been the case, in view of the principles of selection (or lack of them) that operated in the compiling of the syllabuses. As has been shown already, the great landmarks of English literature as well as some of the greatest creative writers in English find no place on these syllabuses. These "English Literature" syllabuses appear to us today to have been only one of the many methods and devices used in Sri Lanka (and other former British crown colonies like India) by the imperialists to produce in their colonies "a class of persons (Sri Lankan) in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect,"¹³⁰ in the words of one of the authors represented in these syllabuses, Lord T. B. Macaulay.

To sum up: the precedence accorded to non-literary criteria over literary criteria in the preparation of the literature syllabuses resulted in the following glaring defects in the literature curricula: (1) the syllabus was ludicrously lop-sided, consisting almost exclusively of poetry, drama and fiction being meagrely represented, if at all; (2) the syllabus did not cover systematically the various periods of English literature, or include the reading of some at least of the main landmarks of English literature; (3) the "classic" writers of English literature were conspicuous by their absence, the most prominent places in the syllabus being given either to mediocre poets and poems, or to unimportant works by reputable writers (cf. the selections from Milton and Macaulay); (4) the preference of mediocre American poets over the great English Augustan, Romantic and Victorian poets added insult to injury and became tantamount to the abandonment of all critical standards; and (5) the relevance of the selections to a specifically Sri Lankan (or at least an Oriental) context was disregarded, except perhaps in the case of *Rasselas*.¹³¹

It is evident that such an unsatisfactory literature syllabus as the one described above could not have contributed in a significant way towards the production either of good scholars and critics of English literature, or of good creative writers in the English medium. The consequences of the use of such unimaginative syllabuses are reflected in the poverty and paucity of both English literary studies as well as good creative works in English during the 19th century in Sri Lanka.

Appendix

This appendix contains the texts of two poems prescribed in the English literature syllabus which are now relatively inaccessible to the ordinary reader.

(a) W. C. Bryant : "To a Waterfowl" (1818)

Whither, midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean-side?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air—
Lone wandering, but not lost

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

(b) James Grahame: "Paul Before Agrippa" (1808)

The judge ascended to the judgement-seat;
Amid a gleam of spears the apostle stood;
Dauntless, he forward came; and look'd around,
And raised his voice, at first, in accent low,
Yet clear; a whisper spread among the throng:
So when the thunder mutters, still the breeze
Is heard, at times, to sigh; but when the peal
Tremendous, louder rolls, a silence dead
Succeeds each pause, moveless the aspen leaf.
Thus fix'd, and motionless, the listening band
Of soldiers forward lean'd, as from the men,
Inspired of God, truth's awful thunders roll'd.
No more he feels, upon his high-raised arm,
The pondrous chain, than does the playful child
The bracelet, form'd of many a flowery link.
Heedless of self, forgetful that his life
Is now to be defended by his words;
He only thinks of doing good to them
Who seek his life; and, while he reasons high
Of justice, temperance, and the life to come,
The judge shrinks trembling at the prisoner's voice.



Notes and References

1. B. R. Blaze, **The Life of Lorenz**, The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Ltd., Colombo, 1948, p. 44.
2. **Ibid.**, p. 48.
3. **The History of Royal College Written by Boys in the School**, Cave & Co., Colombo, 1932, p. 63.
4. V. L. O. Reimann, **A History of Trinity College, Kandy**, Madras, 1922, p. 5.
5. Blaze, **op. cit.**, p. 48.
6. Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), the great Buddhist missionary and reformer, a pupil of St. Benedict's, Kotahena, and St. Thomas' College, for example, described how he had first come across an "old copy of Shelley's poems in his uncle's house", and having read it, adored Shelley's poems ever afterwards. cf. A. W. P. Guruge (Ed), **Return to Righteousness**, the Government Press, Colombo, 1965, p. 686.
7. H. A. Wyndham, **Native Education**, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, p. 38.
8. L. J. Gratiaen, "The First English School in Ceylon", **Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register**, Vol. VII, Part III, Jan. 1922, p. 141.
9. **Ibid.**, p. 142.
10. **Ibid.**, p. 143.
11. **The History of Royal College**, p. 44.
12. M. Edwardes, **British India 1772-1947: A Survey of the Nature and Effects of Alien Rule**, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1967, p. 114.
13. G. C. Mendis, **The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers**, Vol. I, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. lx.
14. **Ibid.**
15. **Ibid.**, p. 70.
16. **Ibid.**, p. 215.
17. **Ibid.**
18. **Ibid.**, p. 74.
19. **Ibid.**, p. lxiii.
20. T. B. Macaulay, **Minute on Education**, 2 Feb. 1835.
21. L. J. Gratiaen, **The Story of Our Schools: the First School Commission, 1832-1841**, Colombo, 1927, p. 8.
22. **Ibid.**
23. L. J. Gratiaen, **The Colombo Academy under Marsh and Boake**, n. d., p. 2.
24. **Ibid.**
25. i.e., "teacher-trainees," as in modern 'Training Colleges for Teachers'.
26. Wyndham, **op. cit.**, p. 42.
27. **The History of Royal College**, p. 58.
28. **Ibid.**

29. **The Examiner**, Jan. 28, 1846 quoted in Y. Goonaratne, **English Literature in Ceylon 1815-1878**, CHJ, Vol. 14, Dehiwala, Ceylon, 1968, p. 23.
30. **The History of Royal College**, p. 63.
31. **St. Thomas' College Centenary Number, 1851-1951**, Colombo, 1951, p. 9.
32. **Ibid.**
33. W. T. Keble, **A History of St. Thomas' College**, Colombo, 1937, p. 6.
34. **Ibid.**, p. 8.
35. **Ibid.**, p. 14/15.
36. **The History of Royal College**, p. 66.
37. M. Edwardes, **op. cit.**, p. 119.
38. **The History of Royal College**, p. 67.
39. Letter from A. Kessen to Elijah Hoole, Nov. 11, 1854, quoted in Goonaratne, **op. cit.**, p. 14.
40. Reimann, **op. cit.**, p. 5/6.
41. Blaze, **op. cit.**, p. 48.
42. See fn. 23 above.
43. Reimann, **op. cit.**, p. 14.
44. **The History of Royal College**, p. 58. cf. also, "With special attention to Shakespeare," Blaze, **op. cit.**, p. 44.
45. Reimann, **op. cit.**, p. 21.
46. The poem was included in T. H. Ward (Ed), **The English Poets**. Vol. III, London, 1919.
47. **The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse**, Ed. D. N. Smith, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1926.
48. i.e., Peter I ("the Great") 1672-1725, Czar of Russia, 1682-1725.
49. A poem of 299 lines, written in 1727, and printed in January 1729. See **The Poetical Works of Henry Kirke White and James Grahame**, ed. Rev. George Gilfillan, London, MDCCCLVI.
50. **Ibid.**, p. 483/84.
51. **Ibid.**, p. 489/90.
52. Contributed in 1729 to **Ralph's Miscellany**. See **Poetical Works of James Grahame**, p. 180/81.
53. **Ibid.**, pp. 484/89.
54. **Ibid.**, p. 490/91.
55. The title of this poem has been cited incorrectly as "To a Waterfall" in Gooneratne, **op. cit.**, p. 30. The correct title is given in Reimann, **op. cit.**, p. 5/6.
56. This poem was included, for instance, in W. Peacock (ed), **English Verse in Five Volumes**, Oxford University Press, London, 1920, Vol. 4, p. 306; **The Pageant of English Poetry**, Oxford University Press, London, 1922, p. 57; and **The New Oxford Book of American Verse**, Ed. R. Ellman, Oxford University Press, New York, 1976.

57. Godwin, **Bryant I**, p. 33, quoted in **Dictionary of American Biography**, Ed. D. Malone, Vol. iii, New York, 1933, p. 200.
58. **Ibid.**
59. **Ibid.**
60. **Ibid.**, p. 202.
61. **Ibid.**, p. 203.
62. **Ibid.**, p. 205.
63. **Ibid.**
64. **Ibid.**
65. **The Penguin Companion to Literature, Vol. III, USA and Latin America**, Ed. M. Bradbury et al., Penguin Books Ltd., England, 1971, p. 46.
66. James D. Hart, **The Oxford Companion to American Literature**, Oxford University Press, New York, 1956, p. 765.
67. **Dictionary of American Biography**, Vol. XI, p. 382.
68. **Ibid.**, p. 384.
69. **Ibid.**, p. 385.
70. **Ibid.**
71. **Ibid.**
72. **Ibid.**
73. **Ibid.**, **The London Spectator**, June 20, 1868.
74. **The Penguin Companion to Literature**, Vol. III, p. 159.
75. **Ibid.**
76. **Ibid.**
77. **Ibid.**
78. James D, Hart, **op. cit.**, p. 433.
79. **Ibid.**, p. 611.
80. **Ibid.**, p. 231.
81. 'The Poetical Works of James Grahame,' in G. Gilfillan (ed.), **op. cit.**
82. **Ibid.**, p. 305/6
83. **New Testament**, 'The Acts', chapters 25 and 26.
84. 'The Poetical Works of James Grahame', in Gilfillan (ed.), **op. cit.**, p. 203.
85. **Ibid.**, p. 204.
86. **Ibid.**, p. 208.
87. **Ibid.**, p. 295 ff.
88. **Dictionary of National Biography**, Vol. viii, Oxford University Press, London, 1921, p. 366.
89. **The Works of Lord Macaulay, Vol. xii: Speeches, Poems and Miscellaneous Writings**, Vol. II, London, MDCCCXCVIII.
90. **Ibid.**, p. 335.

91. **Ibid.**, p. 337.
92. D. Daiches, **A Critical History of English Literature**, Vol. II, Secker and Warburg, London, 1960, p. 946.
93. For example, at Trinity College, Kandy, in the 1860s, "Works of fiction—seem to have been carefully excluded (from the school library), due perhaps to the rigid old-world ideas of the giants of those days." Reimann, **op. cit.**, p. 21. Dandris de Silva Gunaratne wrote an article on Dickens in **Young Ceylon**, Vol. 1, No. 9, Oct. 1850 where he referred to the contemporary period as a time when "not a few condemn the practice of reading novels as pernicious and prejudicial to sound morals and a healthy intellect."
94. Daiches, **op. cit.**, Vol. II, p. 873.
95. H. N. Fairchild, **Religious Treads in English Poetry, Vol. III: 1780-1830**, New York, 1949, p. 10.
96. S. T. Coleridge, **Letters**, Ed. E. H. Coleridge, p. 146, quoted in Fairchild, **op. cit.** p. 155.
97. Fairchild, **op. cit.**, p. 155.
98. **Ibid.**, p. 171.
99. **Ibid.**, p. 310.
100. **Ibid.**
101. **Essays on His Own Times**, Vol. 1, p. 47n., quoted in C. Brinton, **The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists**, London, 1926, p. 69.
102. Fairchild, **op. cit.**, p. 328.
103. K. W. Cameron, **The Young Shelley—Genesis of a Radical**, London, 1951, p. 76.
104. For details, see the present writer's paper, 'An English Romantic Poet With a Sri Lankan Disciple: Shelley, "Queen Mab" and Anagarika Dharmapala,' **Navasilu**, Nos. 6, (1984) and 7 (1986).
105. Fairchild, **op. cit.**, p. 414.
106. **Letters**, V, p. 24, quoted in Fairchild, **op. cit.**, p. 435.
107. Richard Edgcumbe, **Byron: the Last Phase**, p. 207/8, quoted in Fairchild, **op. cit.** p. 452.
108. Fairchild, **op. cit.**, p. 452.
109. Crane Brinton, **The Ideas of the English Romanticists**, Oxford University Press, London, 1926, p. 4.
110. **Ibid.**, p. 48.
111. **Ibid.**, p. 49.
112. **Ibid.**, p. 68.
113. **Ibid.**, p. 48.
114. **Ibid.**, p. 70.
115. **Ibid.**, p. 152.
116. **Ibid.**, p. 153.
117. **Ibid.**, p. 154.
118. **Ibid.**, p. 164.

119. Notes to Shelley's **Queen Mab** (1813), in **The Poetical Works of P. B. Shelley**, Ed. H.B. Forman, Vol. IV, London, 1877.
120. Aveling, **Shelley and Socialism**, quoted in Brinton, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
121. Bernard Shaw, "Shaming the Devil About Shelley" in **Pen Portraits and Reviews**, quoted in R. A. Duerksen, **Shelleyan Ideas in Victorian Literature**, Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1966, p. 172.
122. Despite all this, however, Shelley's poetry was not totally inaccessible to Sri Lankan schoolboys in the colonial era. For example, Anagarika Dharmapala not only read Shelley but also became one of the latter's most fervent disciples after reading "an old copy of Shelley's poems" which he found accidentally in his uncle's house. For details, see the paper mentioned in fn. 104 above.
123. M. Edwardes, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
124. Reimann, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
125. **Ibid.**
126. **Ibid.**
127. E. F. C. Ludowyk, **The Story of Ceylon**, London, 1967, p. 219.
128. Reimann, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
129. James de Alwis, **Memoirs and Desultory Writings**, Ed. A. C. Seneviratne, Colombo, 1939, p. 3.
130. Thomas Macaulay, "Minute on Education," 2 Feb. 1835.
131. Dr. Samuel Johnson's **Rasselas**, though described as an 'Oriental Romance,' has nothing except a few proper names like 'Imlac,' to make it appear "Oriental"; it was probably selected over other prose works for its heavy moralistic tone and content rather than for its 'Oriental' features.