

BIRDSONG
AND OTHER TALES

CARL MULLER

This book is a work of fiction and all names and characters are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is wholly coincidental.

First published by the author in 2000

E-book publication by The Z-World 2008
www.the-zworld.com

Copyright © Carl Muller 2008

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior written consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser and without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner of this book

OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

FICTION

The Jam Fruit Tree [*Winner of the Gratiaen Award and also rendered in Sinhala*] – Yakada Yaka – Once Upon A Tender Time – Spit and Polish – Grandmama’s Kitchen

HISTORICAL FICTION

Colombo - A Novel – Children of the Lion [*Winner of the State Literary Award*] – City of the Lion

SCIENCE FICTION

Exodus 2300

CHILDREN’S FICTION

The Python of Pura Malai and Other Stories – Ranjit Discovers Where Kandy Began [*Also rendered in Sinhala*]

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cemetery – Birdsong and Other Tales [*available online at www.the-zworld.com*] – All God’s Children [*Shortlisted for the Gratiaen Award*] – Wedding Night: Stories – Read Me in Silence – The Thin Red Line

POETRY

Father Samaan and the Devil [*available online at www.the-zworld.com*] – Sri Lanka: A Lyric – Propitiations – A Bedlam of Persuasions – Clouds Over My Senses – A Return to Rhyme and Other Lines

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Many Bulls in My China Shop – More Bulls in My China Shop – More and More Bulls in My China Shop – The Bulls are Back in My China Shop

ACADEMIC WORKS

The Elizabethans: The Origin of, and the Great Flowering of Modern English Literature [*Volume I and Volume II*]

MONOGRAPHS

Glorying in that Great Divide – Conflict in Cinderella’s Kitchen – The Service Economy: Is there a Dangerous Dichotomisation of Wealth? – Productivity: The Key to Economic Domination – Tourism: Aiming for that Magic Million – God Men Rising: Challenging the Berock of Hindu Beliefs and Values – Conflict Within: Challenging Sovereignty and Human Solidarity

APHORISMS

Carl Muller’s Mental Mayhems

HOBBIES

Stamp Stories of the USA

TRAVELOGUES

Indian Journeys

WORKS EDITED

Mews and Purrs [*Lancashire, England*] – The Tide Press of a Dedicated Life: A Tribute to Christine Spiytel-Wilson – Rendering Unto Caesar – The Poems of Destry Muller [*Winner of the State Literary Award*] – A Rainbow Sash Adorns my Dreaming Sky

THE RUMPUS LINE-UP

This is from the writer: It is not an apology, not even a shoulder shrug. In presenting this collection of short stories and pithy pieces masquerading as poems, the writer is aware that some of the stories have already caused quite a rumpus. *The Empty Throne*, presented at a cross-cultural workshop conducted by the British Council in Colombo became the cause of both outrage and umbrage. *The Seizure* was considered blasphemous and tossed out by the Editor of an English literary publication. *Jee and Ju* was treated with scant regard by the BBC. So what? That's exactly the writer's point. So what? In these pages there is enough to raise sundry eyebrows. Who knows, Sri Lanka may yet become a land of raised eyebrows. The prospect vastly pleases...

Check it out. The writer will remain unavailable for comment.

CONTENTS

A Square and an Opposition	1
A Very Moral Man	9
Baby Talk – 1	15
Baby Talk – 2	16
Before the Conference	17
Birdsong	23
Black and White and Red All Over	28
Chootie	33
Disco Dancing	40
Froth and Bubble	45
Holidays	51
I Will Go to the Waters	58
Jee and Ju	62
Karen	67
Lovelines – 1	72
Lovelines – 2	73
Me	74
Moods – 1	76
Moods – 2	77
Peelings	78
Realisation	81
So I Kissed Her Little Sister	86
The Centipede	92

The Empty Throne	101
The Flute	108
The Girl With the Satisfied Air	113
The Seizure	118
Wysiwyg	127
Genesis – 1	135
Genesis – 2	136
Still Waters	137
To Live and Live and Live...	138
Nose Job	147
Fox-Cheese	148
Wedding Night	149
Ground Rules	158
Under Wraps	159
Suspension	167
Endings – 1	176
Endings – 2	177

A SQUARE AND AN OPPOSITION

“YOU CHOOSE UNWISELY,” SAID THE OLD WOMAN WITH THE BEAKED nose, the thick eyebrows and the smudged lips. “You need to deliver yourself.”

Susan rocked on her hips. Her eyes were large, quite dead and lustreless, but inside her head the fire turned white, white like the fire that rose in her vitals. She did not like Madame Inana. She did not like this room with its dark curtains and that harsh proclamation in letters of shifting gold. “Why is that there?” she had asked, “it looks so – so cheap. Tricks of your trade, I suppose.”

The old woman had sighed. “Those are not my words, dearie. Your poet Bly... have you not read him?” She had gone to a baize table. “Here, this is his hook. ‘Sleepers Joining Hands.’ And those words are his.”

“Too obvious, I should think,” Susan had almost snapped. ‘I came out of a mother naked...’ Haven’t we all?”

The old eyes had glittered. “Everything is so obvious, is it not? Tell me, then, why have you come? Surely the obvious is not for the seeker.”

Susan had swallowed her aggression. “Well – well, you see, people tell me you are – you are...”

“I am what I am, dearie. People... these people you tell of... what do they say? That I am a healer, or a witch, or a fraud. Of course, that