

## Us and the modern monsters

Basil Fernando

Cry, my beloved country, cry.

Loudly ask why

Do not let the monsters

Smash out the light.

Look at those three hoodless vans

In the thick of darkness coming,

Keeping measured distances.

They move slowly.

One in front carries

Young prisoners from a camp

And a few soldiers.

They each take a prisoner

Throw them into the air,

As children throw balloons.

A marksman takes aim,

Moving his expert fingers.

A few soldiers rush out of the third van,

Pour petrol and set fire

To the wounded youths.

Three vans move again,

Keeping measured distances,

Till the next prisoner is thrown like a balloon.

When kerosene runs out,

The van begins its return, taking back

A single surviving prisoner.

In a mass grave at Matale

Remains of one-hundred

And fifty bodies are excavated.  
Some, among so many  
In the South, North and East.  
Such are the works of new monsters,  
Created by the marriage of  
Modern physics and ancient metaphysics.

Modern monsters more sinister  
Than a nine-headed poisonous dragon,  
Medusa or Minotaur.  
Thesius, Perseus and Hercules  
Too weak to tame  
The modern monsters,  
Created out of new concoctions.  
Perhaps, the depths of all oceans,  
And ocean-like human minds,  
Must be stirred, again and again...  
Till a new potent concoction,  
Emerges with powers  
To annihilate the modern monsters.

Cry, my beloved country, cry.  
Till out of the abyss of our desolation  
New giants may arise,  
Who, unlike Hellenistic heroes,  
Will possess the psychic power  
To melt away our collective burden.

Basil Fernando published his first volume of poems *A New Era to Emerge* in 1972. Since then, he has published several volumes of poems in English and two collections in Sinhala. His poems have appeared in several Sri Lankan and international anthologies. His poems have been translated into many Western and Asian languages. A translated anthology of his poems was published in Malayalam entitled *Sundaramaithry*. In 1983, he and Richard Zoysa shared the first prize for poetry in *New Ceylon Writings*, published by Professor Yasmin Gunaratne.