

The
books
of

SUMMER

- 1999 -

A h-h-hh. Summer's here. Time to dive into a good book. This year we offer our annual reading guide (page 131) plus our own picks for 1999's Red Hot Writers. Whether you love men or women, fiction or nonfiction, these talents will fire you up.

RED HOT WRITERS!

SHYAM SELVADURAI

C i n n a m o n G a r d e n s

The acclaimed author of *Funny Boy* goes back to the tropics for a tale of dangerous love

You'll have to wait until July to sink your teeth into *Cinnamon Gardens* (Hyperion, \$23.95), but you'll be richly rewarded. The second novel by Shyam Selvadurai is an old-fashioned page-turner with a literary heart—the perfect book for beachgoers who want melodrama that doesn't ignore the mind.

For all its Dickensian plot twists, *Cinnamon Gardens*

is less gripping than the tale of the risks Selvadurai took to research the book in his childhood home. In his acclaimed first novel, *Funny Boy*, the author had written about growing up gay in Sri Lanka and being forced to flee the country's racial unrest. Returning in 1997 he found a land still torn apart by civil war—and where people could still be jailed for being queer.

"They would cordon off ▶



BOOKS: ILLUSTRATION BY WAYNE DESELLE; SELVADURAI: JERRY BAKER

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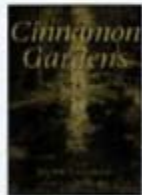


a street
and search
for rebels,”
he says. “It’s 2
in the morning.

You are asleep. There’s a big knock on your door. You go downstairs, and a bunch of army guys are standing there with machine guns. While you’re trying to deflect them, trying to stall, your partner is upstairs defagging”—Selvadurai’s word for rearranging things to make it seem that a gay couple sleep in separate rooms. “If they see, the most

likely thing that happens is, they start to blackmail you. But the pressure of that was just terrible.”

Nevertheless, he says, the experience was crucial to his writing: “I needed to be



back in Sri Lanka to understand emotionally how difficult it is to do even a small action like riding a bicycle or writing a letter. How much courage it takes to do that—

and the consequences of it.”

In Selvadurai’s sharp portrait of upper-class 1920s Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the smallest impropriety seems reckless and mad. The burdens lie heavy on Selvadurai’s heroine, who burns to do more than just marry the man her father has in mind. Her uncle Balendran is one of the few people she admires. She doesn’t know that beneath the surface of his own marriage, Balendran is gay and bursting under the strain of his lies.

Their fates interweave in

this ambitiously plotted novel, which Selvadurai, 34, describes as his most personal effort yet. “People think I’m Arjie [*Funny Boy*’s hero],” he says, “but they’re wrong. With *Funny Boy* I knew the autobiographical question would come up, so I was actually careful to keep myself out of it. I’m much more like Balendran. Because this was a period piece, because it was distant, I was free to pour much more of myself into the characters.”

—Michael J. Giltz