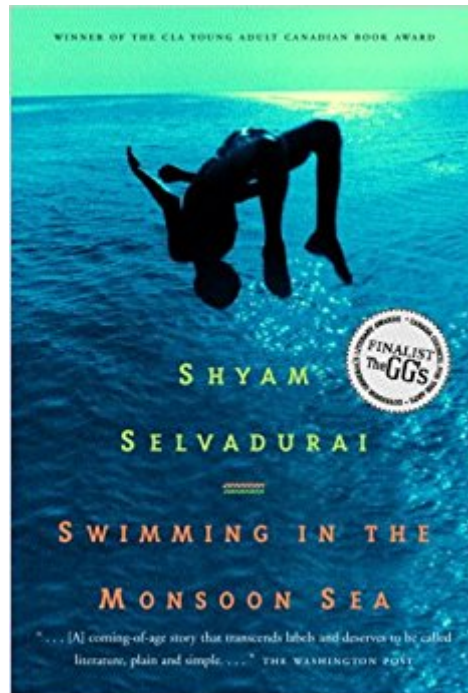




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# Swimming In The Monsoon Sea



## Synopsis

Nominated for the Governor General's Literary Awards 2005, (Children's Literature, Text) The setting is Sri Lanka, 1980, and it is the season of monsoons. Fourteen-year-old Amrith is caught up in the life of the cheerful, well-to-do household in which he is being raised by his vibrant Auntie Bundle and kindly Uncle Lucky. He tries not to think of his life "before" when his doting mother was still alive. Amrith's holiday plans seem unpromising: he wants to appear in his school's production of Othello and he is learning to type at Uncle Lucky's tropical fish business. Then, like an unexpected monsoon, his cousin arrives from Canada and Amrith's ordered life is storm-tossed. He finds himself falling in love with the Canadian boy. Othello, with its powerful theme of disastrous jealousy, is the backdrop to the drama in which Amrith finds himself immersed. Shyam Selvadurai's brilliant novels, *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, have garnered him international acclaim. In this, his first young adult novel, he explores first love with clarity, humor, and compassion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up  
In Sri Lanka in 1980, 14-year-old Amrith is forced to confront his feelings about his birth family when Nireesh, a cousin from Canada, visits. He falls in love with the boy, jealously refusing to share him with his adoptive sisters, in spite of their obvious interest. Amrith is a gentle, innocent boy from an anglicized and privileged world of private school, country club, and numerous servants, so readers will be surprised at the intensity evoked by his first sexual feelings. Mirroring the rage of Othello, the play his school is producing, he almost causes a tragedy before

coming to terms with his anger at his family and his own sense of difference. The arc of this sensitive coming-of-age story moves slowly but inexorably to its breaking point, lingering over details of Sri Lankan life. Thunderous monsoon storms set the mood and detailed descriptions of the landscape, architecture, and food provide the backdrop. The author's affection for the country of his childhood is evident in this sympathetic and insightful look at first love. --Kathleen Isaacs, Towson University, MD Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** Gr. 8-11. As lush and languid as its Sri Lanka setting, this novel tells the story of 13-year-old Amrith, whose complicated life becomes even more so with the appearance of his Canadian cousin, Niresh. Amrith lives with his adoring godmother and her supportive family in 1980 Colombo. But although he lives in luxury, he is poverty-stricken when it comes to knowing his own family. There is mystery surrounding the death of his beloved mother and alcoholic father, and because of the circumstances of his parents' marriage, his extended family shuns him. So when Niresh turns up with his father, who has come to sell off family property, Amrith is anxious to make a connection. Eventually, he realizes his feelings for Niresh go beyond friendship, which finally makes him aware of his sexual identity. This is much closer stylistically to European novels such as Per Nilsson's *You & You & You* and Andreas Steinhofel's *Center of the Universe* (both 2005) than to our own plot-driven YA novels, with situations arising organically from the characters. What captures readers is the way the story rolls in waves, mimicking how Amrith looks at himself, then looks away. The luxuriant language, with details of architecture and verdant gardens, doesn't call attention to itself, but refreshes like a breeze. Selvadurai, who wrote so gracefully for adults in *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998), now does the same for teens. Ilene Cooper Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Absolutely wonderful writing--descriptions that are so vivid that you can taste the foods and smell the spices of the tropics. Set in Sri Lanka in 1980, it is the story of 14 year old Amrith, an orphan being raised by his Aunt Bundle and Uncle Lucky. (Yep, those are really their names) His life is forever changed when his cousin, Niresh, arrives from Canada. The story is intertwined with Shakespeare's play *Othello*, as Amrith copes with his jealousy as he falls in love with his cousin. Although Amrith's sexuality is part of the story, there is nothing inappropriate as a Young Adult novel. Highly recommended

Stories of redemption are my favourite. This may be described as a young teen story. But it is much more than that. Read it.

Great read! A good novel for the gay and lesbian reader. I will recommend it to all my friends now.

I'll admit, I found the first 90 or so pages slightly slow, but once Niresh shows up things got a lot more interesting. I loved Amrith's affection and feeling of possessiveness toward his cousin, emotions Amrith justifies with the fact that his parents were taken from him when he was young and his extended family turned their backs on him because of scandal surrounding his parents' marriage. Niresh's fierce, bold, wild-child attitude is the perfect contrast to Amrith's quiet, reserved one. All characters are likable and three-dimensional, but Amrith was especially empathetic. When he began to feel as though he were losing his cousin to the attention of his sisters, I felt his pain. When he was struggling to balance his increasing inner turmoil (regarding his feelings for Niresh and discovering his sexuality) with competing for an important part in the school play, I felt his anguish. His is a character easy to root for. I enjoyed learning about Sri Lankan culture, the ways its traditional roots compared and contrasted with its westernization. The author's voice was just mesmerizing, putting me into an almost sedative state as I read this charming novel.

The dust jacket makes it seem like this novel is just about a boy falling in love with another boy, but really, Amrith's love for Niresh is only peripheral to the plot. More important is Amrith's reconciling his feelings about his dead parents and the trouble in their families, and his adoptive parents and sisters, whom he both loves and hates. All the main characters in the story are fully real, and Amrith's growing maturity is well portrayed. However, this book did have some flaws. It was overly didactic -- obviously written for a Western audience that had no notion of Sri Lankan life, there was a little too much explaining about customs and architecture and the weather. The other, bigger problem (in my mind) is that way too much was told rather than shown, particularly about Amrith's feelings. It was as if the author didn't trust the reader to draw the correct conclusions and had to spoon-feed them everything. I would give this book a B, and might be tempted to pick up more of this author's work in the future. I hope he works out his showing-telling problem.

This is one of the easiest books I have read in a really long time. I literally breezed through it, and found it charming. But what is truly surprising is not that the book is so easy, but the fact that it manages to be so even while painting pictures of lands which draw you into them, while detailing

characters to an extent that you can really empathize with them, and while conveying a variety and depth of emotions that is highly commendable. That's a formidable task for any writer, but Shyam Selvadurai continues to impress with his literary capabilities even today just the way he had done with his excellent first novel "Funny Boy". The book is set in Colombo, during a hot and humid lazy summer vacation in the life of 14-year old Amrith. The vacation begins uneventfully and promises to have no bigger highlight than practicing for a school drama till Amrith is suddenly confronted by his past, and much to his complete surprise, is very soon overjoyed and completely absorbed by it. As the days go by, however, Amrith's emotions go through a roller-coaster ride as he learns more about his family and friends, but above all, about himself. The vacation period turns out to be the coming-of-age one for Amrith, and he finally comes to terms with his new discoveries and learning. There is no dearth of coming-of-age books, and many might be better, or at the very least, more poignant, but that should not deter you from reading another book on this widely dealt with subject, for the combination of the locale, the protagonist's situation, and Mr. Selvadurai's writing make this a book worthy of its own place on the bookshelves of bibliophiles. Finally, I'd like to make a particular point about this book: I really don't think of it as a "young adults" book at all - it is a book for everybody. It is a lovely piece of writing, and will surely leave a positive mark on your literary journey, irrespective of who you are.

The story, set against the backdrop of Colombo during the monsoon season, is about Amrith, a fourteen year old orphan who lives with his mother's best friend, her husband and two daughters. Amrith is very much a part of their lives, as he is more of a son and a brother to them than a stranger. However, Amrith still feels alienated and different. He explores these feelings against a rising darkness within him and memories of his mother and his past. He attempts to forget and focus on his acting skills at drama society in school, and typing at his adopted father, Uncle Lucky's office, but as fate would have it, his past lands on his doorstep in the guise of a cousin from Canada. Amrith finds a new found happiness in Niresh, his maternal cousin, and intrigue in a life so different from his. Somehow along the way, his relationship with Niresh is threatened, and Amrith begins to blame his adopted family. In the midst of the rising past, he deals with his own turmoils of sexual awakening and identity. The story is intended for young adults, but like Harry Potter, even adults will find pleasure reading it.

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