

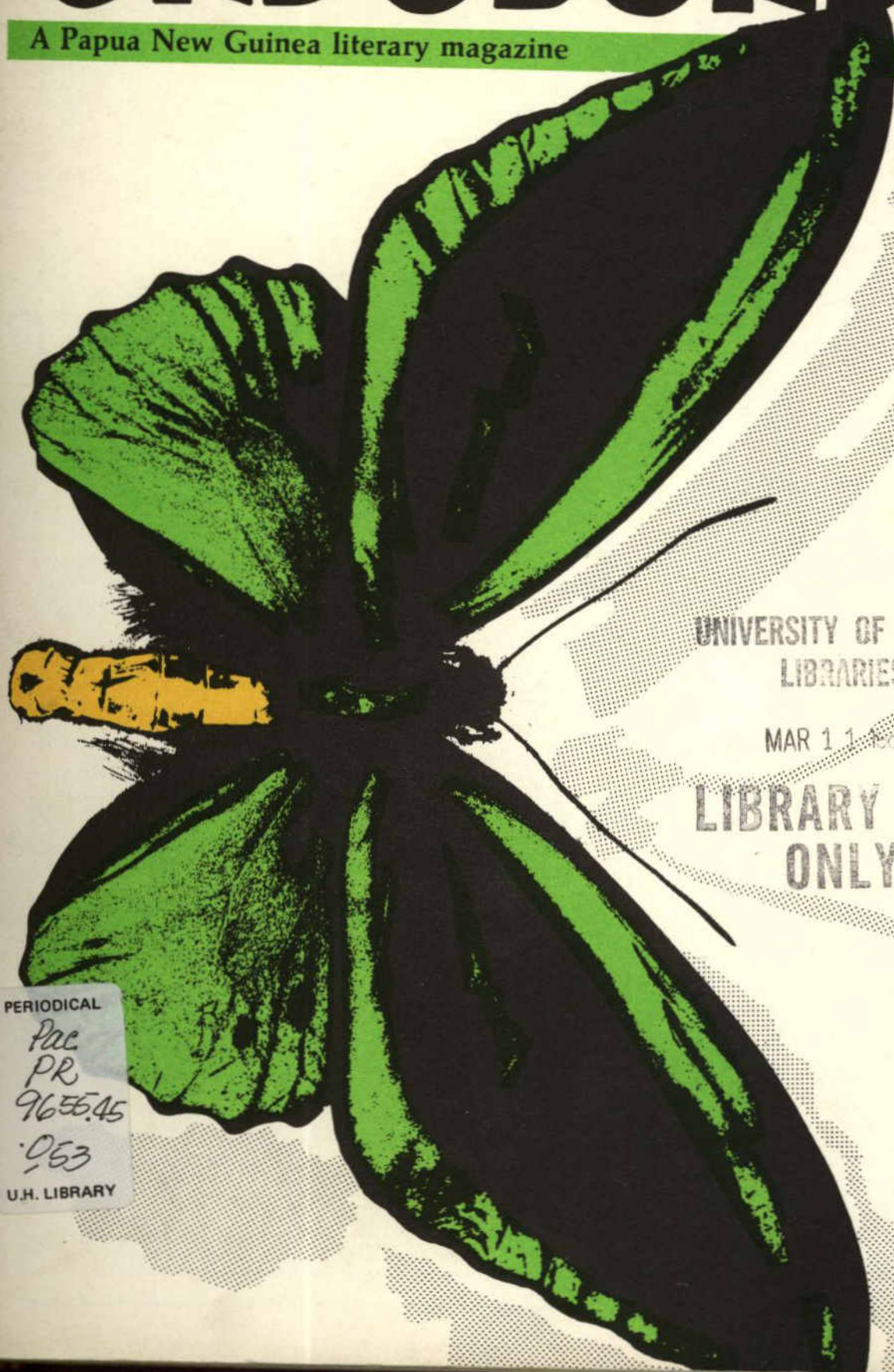
No. 2

Mid-1983

ONDORONDO

A Papua New Guinea literary magazine

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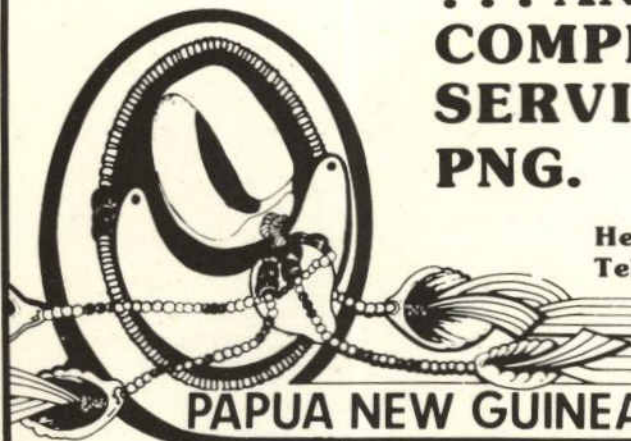
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PAPUA NEW GUINEA BANKING CORPORATION

Ondobondo

A magazine of new writing from Papua New Guinea

Editorial

This second edition of *Ondobondo* continues to be a periodical, where new and established artists from Papua New Guinea can show their talents as poets, playwrights, prose fiction writers, critics and visual artists.

The contents in this issue come from a number of sources. Especially represented are works shared with the public on recital nights of the Ondobondo Club, an association for PNG writers. This magazine offers those

writers a broader reading public, and seeks to give writers from all over the country a chance to share their creative talents.

Ondobondo is a Binandere word for festival or singing. The name was first used for the series of poster poems published by the Literature Department during the third South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1980.

Contributions of every form of creative writing and literary discussion are most welcome.

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Illustrations by graphic design students, National Arts School, Port Moresby.

Cover motif by courtesy of Lance Hill, Biology Department, U.P.N.G.

Cover design by Simon Welby, Graphic Design Department, National Arts School, Port Moresby.

DEAD BUT ALIVE

Benjamin Umba

Apa's legs ached terribly. They had been on the road since the first cock-crow. That was about seven or eight hours ago. Now, he could hardly see his own shadow. The sun was most unmerciful. He brought his left hand to his tiny forehead, wiped away the perspiration, then let it fall to his side again. It was too painful to swing to and fro. Kuno, his maternal uncle, held his right hand to steady him as they kept on walking.

The young lad was only seven years old, stood three and a half feet high, and was all bones. The laplap he wore looked very old. Its original colour was almost impossible to identify. It was held in place around his waist by a bush vine which served as a belt. His singlet which reached down to his crooked knees had a lot of ugly wounds which had been inflicted on it by the burning charcoal from the fire in the men's house back at Niglguma village. A well weathered TAA travelling bag with another bush vine strung right around it to keep it closed and intact because its zipper had been missing, hung from his left shoulder with its handle adjusted so it could only reach his waist to enable him to walk faster and with greater comfort. His hair was short, curly, and uncombed.

"Are you hungry?" Kuno asked Apa as they stopped near a bridge. The boy heard him and tried to look up at his uncle but the sun was so hot and bright it only made his eyes squint. He looked down at his toes and opened his mouth to speak but found it

troublesome. His mouth and neck were dry as a bone. He nodded his positive response instead. Kuno immediately understood and reached into his bag, brought out one roasted sweet potato and offered it to Apa. Apa shook his head in protest.

"That's yours! You will go hungry if I take that. Reach into my bag and give me one of my own..."

Kuno would not take his refusal as an answer. "Take one of mine anyway, Apa. Go on! Take it! I won't go hungry," he tried to sound very convincing. "Take it and go drink some water with it. Don't drink from the river though. That's filthy. Follow this path! It will take you to a small water-hole not too far from here. And take your time. We are not in any great rush. I'll wait for you right here on the road." Apa accepted what his uncle had offered him and took to the path indicated to him till he came upon a small water-hole.

The hole contained still water which at the time of his arrival was very muddy. Someone had visited it shortly before he did. He looked around and examined the footprints. Some people had been there but pigs had been there also and maybe had had a bath in it. He scooped some of it in his cupped hands, closed his eyes, and drank it. It hardly satisfied his thirst but he refused to drink a second time. The water was so thick with mud that most of it remained in his mouth. He ate the sweet potato as he started

back to the main road.

Kundo was sound asleep when he returned. As he did not intend to interrupt his uncle, he sat down on a nearby stone. The sun was still very high in the sky but thick black rain clouds had already started to gather over the virgin mountain ranges. He looked back along the road they had covered. It was narrow, dusty, and looked more like a green python turning brown during the dry season with its tail disappearing behind one hill. In the misty blue horizon he could clearly see the tops of Mt Wilhelm shooting very high into the heavens. Niglguma, his home-village, was somewhere before that. And only a short distance away from Niglguma was Imbuna where his grandfather Gior was having his final rest.

Suddenly the sweet potato dropped from his hand. He was not hungry anymore. A lot of things were going on in his mind. Gior had died only two days ago and had been buried at Imbuna. Memories of the good old days swept into Apa's mind in avalanches. He recalled the weekends or other days when there was no school. Gior would then take him to the gardens at Gambagl and Mangamle and teach him how to plant taros and yams, wrap the banana fruits so the 'wela' and other birds would not get at them when they were ripe. His grandfather had taught him how to plant and take care of sugarcane and how to make new fences or mend the broken ones especially where



Illustration by Gima Segore

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the pigs had broken in to get to the gardens.

Gior had always insisted that they keep out of the gardens if they had taken salted or cold foods, as that would kill all the food crops. If they didn't go to the gardens, they'd be going into the bush where his grandfather would show him their land with all the pandanus trees that would eventually be his responsibility to protect and then pass onto future generations. "Never chop the pandanus trees. Always climb them to get the nuts. And wherever possible, always plant new ones. At the start of each pandanus season, remember to thank the spirits who provide you with this special food," Gior had instructed, and had showed him the different ways of preparing those nuts. But above all, he remembered the evenings when he'd accompany Gior to the men's house. "These young boys and men you see here tonight are your brothers and fathers. Always be good to them," he had warned. "When they were young and your age..." and Gior began to tell Apa an old time story or legend.

Most of the stories were about the different ways Gior knew to court the women or how he had fought during the tribal fights. Gior wasn't very handsome and he wasn't the bravest warrior either but he did have a lot of girlfriends and he had managed to survive.

Apa recalled all the legends, though not because they were always interesting and exciting. Some were sad like the legend about the boy who betrayed his sister. Others were funny. The reason he remembered them so vividly was because they told him he was more than Apa. They told

him who he was, who the others were, where his clan originated, who were the neighbouring clans, who were his clan's enemies and who were friends, how they came to be where they were, where they would be going, what to do to get to their correct destination, and lots of other things. Each night, Apa had learned a new chapter of the life of a man who knew what real living was all about since he had lived it for more than fifty years. Apa had known his grandfather since he had reached the age of recognition and all through those years he had never known hunger, thirst, and loneliness. But all these things had come to a dead end two days ago.

Apa had been present at the burial at Imbuna. He could almost see himself standing near the grave to witness all that was to eventuate. As the old man was slowly lowered into the six-foot grave, he had felt his own world buried with him. He had felt so empty and so light he would have collapsed near his grandfather had it not been for some people who had held him so tightly. And here he was, a hungry, thirsty, and lonely skeleton, ready to shatter to dust in the next cold noon-day breeze even now had not Kuno woken up.

"Have you finished eating," his uncle asked?

"Yes," Apa replied with a slight nod of his head.

"And did you drink some water too?"

Apa nodded again as he bowed his troubled and weary head. He didn't want his uncle to see what was happening to him. But Kuno had suspected it and walked over to him. Apa was weeping. Cold tears had wetted his face and knees, and were flowing down to his big feet. Kuno took the bag from the boy's shoulder,

swung it over his left shoulder and held his hand. For a brief moment there was no sound or movement, only a silent sharing of sympathy, love, and the unforgettable loss that had descended upon their household through Gior's untimely death.

"Let's get out of this valley before the rains come. Once we get to the other side of that mountain," and he pointed to the mountain that was still another three hours' walk away, "we'll be on the big Highlands Highway. We can catch a bus there." Apa was too exhausted to look up but he trusted his uncle. And once again, the two lonely figures were on the road again, walking hand in hand. A suffocating silence was interrupted now and again by the sound of fast flowing rivers or the singing of the birds to mark the day's progress.

"How far have we got to go yet before we get to that big highway?" Apa asked Kuno in an effort to break the silence.

"Not very far! We'll be over there soon," Kuno replied while desperately trying to sound consoling. They had two more hours to go before they could hope to reach the mountain Kuno had referred to earlier, though it could take a longer time if they continued at their present rate. The Highlands Highway was still another hour from that mountain.

"I can't walk any further, uncle. My feet are already aching," Apa complained bitterly. Then suddenly, they heard the roaring engine of a vehicle just behind them.

"There's a vehicle behind us..." Kuno announced.

"Please, uncle, can you try and stop it! We may be lucky," Apa begged his uncle in an unconvincing voice. "I

can try," Kuno replied. "Depends on how full it is. But if they ask for money, we will be very unlucky. We have just enough for a lift on the main highway...It's a Government truck, a yellow Toyota Landcruiser and it's coming very fast. There is nobody on it...I believe...except the driver...and he's a European. No, Apa, I don't think he'll stop just for us." Kuno had already given up.

The truck was only a few yards away and before Kuno had time to wave his hand, it pulled up alongside them and stopped, its engine slowed down to an idle. "Where are you going?" the European asked them without even looking at them.

"We're going to Goroka," Kuno told him.

"Oh that's great! I'm going to Goroka too... Come on, jump onto the back, and be quick!" The driver seemed very impatient. Kuno shouted their gratitude to him. The driver nodded his acceptance, knowing that Kuno was speaking for both of them and waited till they had jumped on. When they seemed comfortable at the back, the driver passed them a brown cardboard box. "There's some food and cold drinks in there if you two are hungry," and without waiting for any words of appreciation, he started the truck forward. Kuno fell asleep after they had eaten. They had been on the road for nearly ten hours. Apa, however, was very wide awake. He seemed a little disturbed and uncomfortable at the European driver's attitude.

It wasn't very long before they reached the main Highlands Highway. Kuno started snoring loudly but Apa kept himself awake. It had been a smooth ride — too

smooth as a matter of fact, and very unusual for that Kundiawa-Keglsugl road, especially when one begins to take into consideration the sharp bends, the wooden bridges which are almost always built at right angles to the road, the big logs and boulders that are deposited all along that road by the rain, high waters, floods, and avalanches. Yet the truck had been so fast and so smooth, Apa kept thinking he was riding on a bird's wings. The wheels hardly seemed to touch the ground.

They drove right through Kundiawa, the administrative headquarters of the Chimbu Province and were now on the Kundiawa-Goroka section of the Highlands Highway. This part of the country was strange to Apa. He had thought about waking Kuno so he'd be able to tell him where they were and where the truck ought to stop. Somehow though, he didn't feel the urgency to wake his uncle as other thoughts penetrated into his mind. All the time, the thought of his grandfather Gior was first and foremost on his mind. He thought he was seeing an invisible artist co-ordinating all his thoughts, until slowly, very slowly, an image emerged, and one which he almost too suddenly found unbelievable, nerve-choking, and blood-freezing.

Only when he had said he couldn't go any further this truck arrived and stopped for them. It was before his uncle had had time to wave the stop-signal to the driver. The driver said he was going to Goroka which was also their destination. He even fed their hungry stomachs. So strange though, that the driver had never looked at any of them. The truck they were on was

so new there was hardly a speck of dust on it. All the time he thought he was seeing his grandfather, or maybe it was his imagination. Apa didn't know what to believe when suddenly a thought struck him.

He turned around and sat down again, this time facing the driver and the road ahead. Then, for the first time in his life Apa felt his heart stop beating. He could almost hear his blood flowing back along his veins and into his heart. He shuddered and then his whole body froze. The driver's skin was so pale it didn't look natural. As they were driving around the bends in the road, and there were thousands of them along that road, Apa could see neither the movement of the driver's hands on the steering wheel nor the steering wheel itself. He slowly shifted closer to the driver's cabin and saw the European holding his right hand against his left chest. "Grandfather!" was all that Apa could exclaim as he closed his eyes. He remembered his grandfather complaining of a heart disease that he had been suffering from during the last several days before his death. Vivid was the memory of a scar on his grandfather's right thigh which he said he had received during a tribal fight years ago. "Your mother was only a tiny girl when I got this," his grandfather had told him. Apa opened his eyes to steal a quick glance at the driver's right thigh and ... Goodness! A very similar scar was clearly exposed on his right thigh where his brown pair of shorts couldn't reach any further.

Apa's long train of thoughts were quickly interrupted by the sound of a siren wailing only a short distance ahead of them. It originated from a police vehicle parked just near

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the road, waiting to pull onto the road.

"It's the highway police," Kuno observed. He had woken up at the sound of the siren and was looking around nervously. "We've been travelling above the speed limit. We'll all get killed if he doesn't slow down and hand himself over to the police without any resistance..." Their truck whistled past the police who immediately swung onto the road. Apa glanced behind him but all he could see was the thick cloud of dust. The siren did not grow any louder. The police had slowed down to wait until the dust dispersed and eventually they called off the chase. Any and all attempts to stop that truck were plainly suicidal. Instead the police radioed Police Headquarters at Goroka to be on the road. (The Officer-in-Charge at Goroka Police Headquarters stationed three of his vehicles along the road leading into Goroka town, instructing each driver to keep an eye out for a yellow Toyota Landcruiser with the Registration Number AAA 803. All three drivers waited for the rest of that day for the truck but it never arrived. AAA 803 was the Registration Number of the truck that was never manufactured.)

Kuno returned to his sleep after it became obvious that the police had given up their chase. Apa however, turned to the driver again. There was something about him that made Apa still feel very uncomfortable and a little suspicious. He didn't know what it was and told himself that everything had been just one big long nightmare and tried to suppress the uneasiness that was welling deep inside him. It seemed impossible. Apa kept his eyes glued onto the European driver as they

slipped unnoticed into Goroka town.

"Where are we going?" Apa asked as he turned to Kuno who had already been awake. But before his uncle could reply, the truck turned off the main street and pulled to a gradual stop near a fuel station.

"We get off the truck right here," Kuno told him and stood up. Apa looked at the driver who still sat motionless. His instincts warned him to be more cautious. He had seen something just as he was about to stand up on the truck. He was completely paralyzed when his eyes fell on the rear vision mirror inside the driver's cabin. Again his blood froze. He couldn't think straight anymore. They were familiar eyes. He had recognized them the moment he set his eyes on them because they belonged to Gior, his grandfather.

He pricked his ears to listen to what he seemed convinced was Gior's voice when his uncle held his arms and brought him down from the truck. "Let's go and say 'Thank you!' to him first," Kuno reminded Apa. But before they could say anything, the truck started forward and drove onto the main street where it quickly disappeared into the heavy traffic.

"Tomorrow is the day for enrolment at the primary school just close by. We don't have any money for your school fees now," Kuno tried to explain late that night after they had eaten the rest of the sweet potatoes in their bags and were ready to retire for the night in Kuno's house. "I won't be paid for another two weeks so we'll have to be very careful with the little money we still have left..."

"But why school, uncle? It's not the most important thing.

A lot of children don't go to school anyway ... I can return to Nigluma some time in the future and build our home, make our gardens, and look after our pandanus trees just as grandfather taught me..." Apa tried to protest against going to school.

"No, Apa!" Kuno spoke bluntly. "You must go to school." He tried to sound very serious. "It was your grandfather's last wish and request..."

"But he didn't say anything about going to school to me ..."

"He told me, Apa! Shortly before he left us, he made me promise that I'd get you to school ... Tomorrow we go and see the Headmistress of the school. She is a religious nun. And believe me, those nuns are usually very sympathetic and understanding human beings. If we explain our situation very clearly to her, she'll understand our unfortunate situation and allow you to enroll. I can pay the school fees in two weeks time, when I get my salary..." Apa wasn't listening anymore. Neither did Kuno intend to continue talking as their weary eyes closed for the rest of that night.

Both were up early the next morning. Kuno bathed the little boy with warm water and dried him with his own towel. Then Apa opened his TAA Travelling Bag, took out his bamboo comb which had already lost several teeth, combed his hair, and handed it to Kuno when he finished combing. He then took out one of his two pairs of over-sized shorts and his only shirt. He put on the pair of shorts, then the shirt, but allowed his uncle to do the buttons for him. Unfortunately, three of the original four buttons it had were missing and the final one

went that morning. He had out-grown that shirt. He wanted to do away with the shirt and the singlet he had worn the day before. His uncle however lent him one of his. It almost reached his ankle but the extra length was tucked away in his shorts. When his uncle was satisfied that Apa looked reasonably presentable, they then walked to the school.

There was a long queue consisting of parents and their children. The Headmistress was dressed in blue with a white veil covering hair and ears. She sat before a large table outside one of the classrooms and was recording the names of the new students, their parents' names, and the names of their clans or tribes. Another nun, maybe her second-in-command, was sitting nearby collecting fees and putting them away in a black safe, Kuno and Apa joined the queue.

"Where is your four dollars and fifty-cents?" the Headmistress asked as she held out her hand.

"Sister, we have no money right now but..." Kuno was cut short.

"No money? May God help us today..." She looked down again and at Kuno. "You were supposed to bring the money with you now, not next year. What do you expect? Free education? Free... What do we do with our

telephone? Our water? How else can we pay for the electricity? How can we make new school uniforms? It costs the Church the thousand dollars to build this school and none of that came from your people... What's the boy's name?" She suddenly became very friendly and sweet.

"Apa," Kuno mumbled in embarrassment. There was a long silence. The Headmistress and Apa looked at each other. Then she smiled openly and sincerely.

"Come here, darling...!" She motioned Apa over to her. As Apa approached her, she immediately grabbed him, embraced him, and kissed him on his dimpled cheeks. "I'm very sorry about your grandfather's sudden death. I've heard all about him. He was indeed a very wonderful person... I'm sorry it came so soon... But you need not worry now. You have already found a good benefactor. That handsome European man says he knows you very well and will look after you from now on and pay everything for you. He came in this morning in that yellow Toyota Land-cruiser of his and gave me some money... I won't tell you how much. There's enough to take care of you for the next two hundred years. You are welcomed to our school here. I hope you will like it and enjoy it. Until you finish your school here, you'll stay in the

Convent. I have a room prepared for you already. Your food and accommodation, school fees, transport, clothing, and all the rest have all been paid for in advance. But we can talk about that later. There's the Convent over there..." she spoke as she pointed to a big permanent building. "Go and rest while I fix up the rest of the children... I'll be with you as soon as I'm finished. Next!" she asked.

A father ushered two children up to the table before the Headmistress, gently pushing Kuno off the queue in the process.

"That's right, Kuno! Walk him over to our house," the Headmistress shouted after them, as the two walked towards the Convent. Kuno waved back with a broad smile and then looked at Apa. The boy looked up at him with an open smile.

"You know, Uncle, Grandfather may have died but I believe he is still with us, alive!"

"They all are! And your grandfather really loved and treasured you very much. I'm not the least shocked or surprised. However, you did not have to remind me... Come on, let's keep going," his uncle suggested and reached for one of Apa's hands to lead him along.

THE TRAFFIC JAM *Russell Soaba*

His fingers moved. Along an open desert of clean emptiness.

The fingers froze.

A fall point pen came to life, laughed, rolled, rose to its one foot, and danced. His fingers met it. The pen panicked. It shrieked, shivered, panted blood. And died in his grip.

He was the Administrative Officer.

The clean emptiness that surrounded him was his home, his district, his country, his kingdom. And that kingdom was a sheet of paper. Clean. Empty. The emptiness was what he saw, before it was inhabited by alphabets, printed letters in fact, that formed words which scattered all over the sheet, sometimes at random places. Slowly the scattered letters moved, altered themselves, formed tribal groups, colonies, and drew dividing lines. The lines of the division were bold. Each colony of words was kind enough to leave a space. For him?

The pen fell from his grip. Landed. Became lifeless.

His fingers moved again.

But the fingers he saw before him were suddenly not his. They were claws, whose sharp nails were clean, purple and polished. They shone. They were healthy, fleshy, a little too fat, and brownish, feminine.

"Husband?"

Slowly his senses returned.

"Thought I'd find you here."

He could hear the words distinctly.

"It's five. Late. Went home and came back."

Silence. The moment for convalescence.

"The boy's okay with his

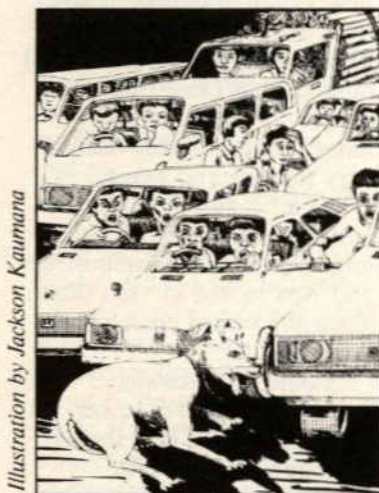


Illustration by Jackson Kaumana

aunt. He's beginning to speak, by the way. His first word I heard this afternoon was da. He was probably trying to say Dadi. So I came looking for his Dadi..."

Life flooded him. It wasn't life. It was the voice of those feminine fingers. The voice carried another life. His. His wife's. Their son.

"...and found his Dadi here."

He heard the words clearly.

"You listening, husband?"

He rose from his desk.

"Brought the car?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "But I'm driving please, Mac. From now on."

"Alright, Felicity," he returned and they left his place of work.

The traffic was jammed on their side of the road.

On the other side cars whizzed past, zzzt, one at a time.

"Exodus!" Mac thought of the speed at which the cars were moving past them. Felicity at the wheel swore in her language at the drivers in front of her. Then she pressed the horn knob. In response to

her beep, a car from the other side of the road pulled up beside the couple.

"G'dai!" said the driver.

"Did ya call me?"

"Dick!" screamed Felicity in excitement. "You nut! Orokaiva — kanabesi!"

"Im'averi! Danabeteta gio — na gae!" Dick screamed back and smiled. Then he shook his head gently. After which he laughed. It was the best he could perform of himself for the couple. "Fancy seeing you two here," he then said. "It's a dead world."

"Small dead world," the couple echoed.

"Well, I'll be going soon," said Dick, biting a lit and suddenly looking sour, desolate. "In a coupla days and" — he pointed to the road before him — "thataway!"

A car came up behind Dick, swerved to the left of his car and overtaking him, a woman's head popped out of the window and called, "We'll see you there, Dick!"

"Righto!" answered Dick and waved a hand. The woman drove on. Turning to the couple, Dick shrugged, "So I'm going."

"I'm sorry, Dick," said Mac. "I told you young fellows to slow down, take it easy, but you said No no no no, we have to see the professor, we have to see the professor!" Mac looked away.

"Everybody is a professor here."

"God, na ge i tae," said Dick, sighed, and drove off.

A little way down the road, Dick employed the four-letter word loudly, though the word itself was preceded by three or four Melanesian adjectives. Dick's road too was jammed.

A full minute passed and no

cars moved, on either side of the road. The drivers were bored. Bored with not being informed of what was going on. An Australian driver on the other side of Felicity and Mac remarked that the traffic officer was on leave, probably up on a flag pole. The children in the driver's car held a silent conference among themselves, after which and with well planned timing, they all grinned at Felicity and Mac. The couple grinned back.

"Hey, they like us!" a little boy exclaimed, after winding the car window down.

The children were now waving at the couple. The couple waved back. Then they were all bored with waving.

A car in front of Felicity and Mac, which looked like a turtle, reversed, turned, heaved and lifted its tail and moved itself backwards into the bush. From there the driver studied the nature of the traffic jam, its climate of confusion, and with a determined look drove out onto the road again. He squeezed the car between two others until he was facing the opposite direction. He was right behind the Australian driver with the children.

No more cars moved. The drivers were bored with waiting. Bored with boredom itself. Horns blared. The same story told all over, thought Mac. Boredom. No fresh thoughts. No fresh philosophies. Any driver on this road has no time for these. The people in all the cars were stuck, stranded. They just sat. Sat. It was then, then, that they thought, they dreamed, for the first time in their lives, Mac was amused to realise. They weighed the nature and assessed the content of each thought that came into their heads. They

were suddenly teachers, students, Waigani tribesmen, philosophers, poets, novelists, villagers or academics, all in that single moment of boredom.

"Aeee!" someone howled excitedly.

Mac was startled. He turned towards the direction of the voice. It came from a car just behind them. A gentleman of about fifty was pressing his red face against the wheel of his car, shivering and sobbing vigorously.

In the other cars drivers and their passengers were doing the same. Felicity too was startled, but noticing that her husband and the man in the car which looked like a turtle looked calm she decided against knowing what was going on. Mac pulled out a newspaper from the glove box of the car. He opened it to a random page. The air from the newspaper rose, danced, surrounded him and Felicity, filled the interior of the car and finally blanketed it and the rest of the cars, the road and the air above the traffic jam. From the paper he read nothing in the form of reassurance or, generally, fruitful information. Each printed letter, each word, each sentence and column, each paragraph and page, told the story of MacDonald Tawawaya's physical downfall. The editorial column accused him directly of some wrong he could not define.

"Aeee!!" the scream, which sounded like a dog in pain, came again from the car behind Mac and Felicity.

In the stilled moment that followed, so many thoughts leapt into and danced in Mac's head. The usual thoughts: he was white, European, human, virtuous, proud of his race, culturally and academically minded, intelligent, im-

aginatively creative, conscientious, Anglican, a whole being with a destiny ultimately resolved, married to a Melanesian, objectively appreciative of his country's values, son of the soil, human, self-conscious, proud of his race, Papua New Guinean, black.

The man in the turtle car laughed.

Mac returned to his newspaper. He flipped through the sheets, learnt or felt nothing, until a headline caught his attention. Under the headline the newspaper announced its own death. Everyone's dying these days, Mac thought sadly and buried the newspaper in the glove box. Felicity was desperately trying to tune in to her favourite station in the car's radio. The moment Mac buried the newspaper a voice from the radio advised Felicity to tune in to a certain frequency with the assurance: "For better reception". She did. At that frequency the same voice told her to tune in to yet another frequency. She did so. There again the same voice told her to return to the original frequency where the shifting had first begun. Back again to that frequency she was. The music reached her ears at last. From a car radio on the other side of the road. The music came from the turtle car. But Felicity knew that the turtle the man was sitting in had no radio. The man was just tapping his fingers against the window screen.

"Whaaah!" came the cry from the car behind Felicity and Mac.

Only the man with the turtle car remained calm, speculatively tapping his fingers and looking at the road ahead of him. Dick, ahead of the man, let out a wild yelp of excitement. When Mac and Felicity turned they saw

Stories

Dick's car speeding down the highway. The other cars followed. Then the man's turn came. He pulled up his turtle beside the couple in the middle of the road. The preceding cars easily drove past him, using the dirt track on his left. One of the cars had a huge crocodile painted on its side. The man studied Felicity closely then smiled. To Mac, the man said:

"Are you okay?"

"What do you want me to say to that?" Mac returned.

"I'm just asking, for curiosity sakes," said the man.

Mac shrugged and looked away.

The man turned to drive off but, remembering, turned to the couple again. "You two might be interested to know that I always have a spare hut for anyone interested in visiting me." The compelling necessity for motion came to his mind instantly. The man turned the gear lever of his turtle. There was a look of sadness in his eyes.

"Mac will write you for us anyway," prompted Felicity.

The man drove off.

That side of the road was now emptied of traffic. Only the couple's side remained jammed.

"Husband, you take over, ah?" said Felicity.

It was boredom that spoke for her. Mac got out of the car for her to move over. He walked round the back of the car and came to the door of the driver. Before getting in he studied the climate of the traffic jam ahead of them. He counted all the cars. After the twentieth car there was a space. A driver before the space was afraid of a dog, Mac's vision told him, a doberman chained to a light post and barking furiously. The couple could now hear the barking of the dog. But apart

from the dog's barking the air was silent. He turned to the other direction in pursuit of the cause of Dick's hold-up. It was the Mosbi Cowboy who had decided to entertain the travellers with his guitar, and right in the middle of the road.

Mac took his seat in the car, lit a cigarette and turned the car radio on. There was music. Felicity was surprised. Her husband was the master of everything, she thought. Mac was now wearing black gloves.

"The gear lever's too naked for me," he joked and winked at his wife.

Felicity laughed pleasantly and took out a betel nut to chew. When she offered Mac one he refused. He then took out his dark sun glasses and wore them at six o'clock in the evening. He paused. Recollected. All his senses returned. With the music. He felt and tested his whole body. Every part of his flesh and bones was in order. He turned the ignition key. The engine vibrated to life. His black gloves squeaked against the black ball of the gear knob. He looked back. The old man had stopped sobbing and was now writing vigorously on a pad. Probably an ode to dusk. I've grown out of that period, thought Mac, gently pressed the accelerator pedal and eased out the clutch. No jerks. The couple moved. Forward.

"Mac?"

"It's okay."

Third gear.

"Darling, we are on the wrong side of the road!"

"It's the opera, dear."

Horns blared.

"Husband, please!"

They stopped at the space where the dog was barking furiously. The frightened driver warned Mac to be careful. Mac got out of the

car, waved a hand of assurance at the driver, and walked over to the dog. It was still barking dangerously. When Mac stood over it, the doberman humbled itself, and was now wagging his tail. Its neck was bruised by a hot metallic chain that kept it a prisoner. Mac undid the chain, tended the dog's wounds with his saliva and palms, then tore his white shirt and bandaged the red mark of suffering on its neck.

"On your way, Papa," he told the dog.

The doberman tottered, walked a little further across the road, stopped at the dividing lines of the lanes to regain its strength, then scurried over the bitumen road and entered the low, brownish shrubbery. When Mac returned to the driver's seat Felicity saw on her husband's face a fresh cloud of desolate happiness.

Mac, now calmly listening to the music from the car radio, turned the gears again and drove on. The other cars followed, some drivers letting out wails of victory.

no mo poromani

no mo meri

bilongo mi

The old man's turn came. He stopped howling and writing and followed the others.

Sixty metres later Mac pulled up at the side. The bitumen road before the couple was clear. He motioned the other drivers to overtake him. Over sixty cars did, shouting "Cheers!" as they drove past. Some fingered victory signs at Felicity and Mac. The speed of each car leapt from seventy to eighty kilometres per hour. No one waved at the couple any longer. The people who were now passing were those who were not told of the cause of the traffic jam.

MOTHER'S CHOICE

by S. May Amo

CHARACTERS:

Lala
Chapa. Her mother
Chim, chosen as husband for her
Kane, Chim's cousin.

SCENE ONE:

In Chapa's hut. Late evening.

Chapa sits chewing betelnut over the fire. She looks up, then looks out the door. She crosses and lights the kerosene lamp hanging on the wall. Then sits again.

Chapa:
It's getting dark. He must come back soon.
What is she doing out there?

(She continues to meditate over the fire.)

(Chim enters suddenly. Chapa is taken by surprise.)

Chapa:
Oh! You have come, ah?
She. She is not home yet.

(Chim sits down by the fire.)

Chapa:
She doesn't normally do that, doesn't stay out late. You don't have to worry.

(Chapa hands Chim betelnuts from her bag.)

When the moment comes
Only you will chew
My only ripe betelnut.

Chim:
(after biting open the nut, and chewing a moment in silence)

Maybe she knew about
Me coming here tonight
Maybe she doesn't want to see me.

Chapa:
Ah! Don't trouble yourself to think
About too many things at once.
She is only pretending.

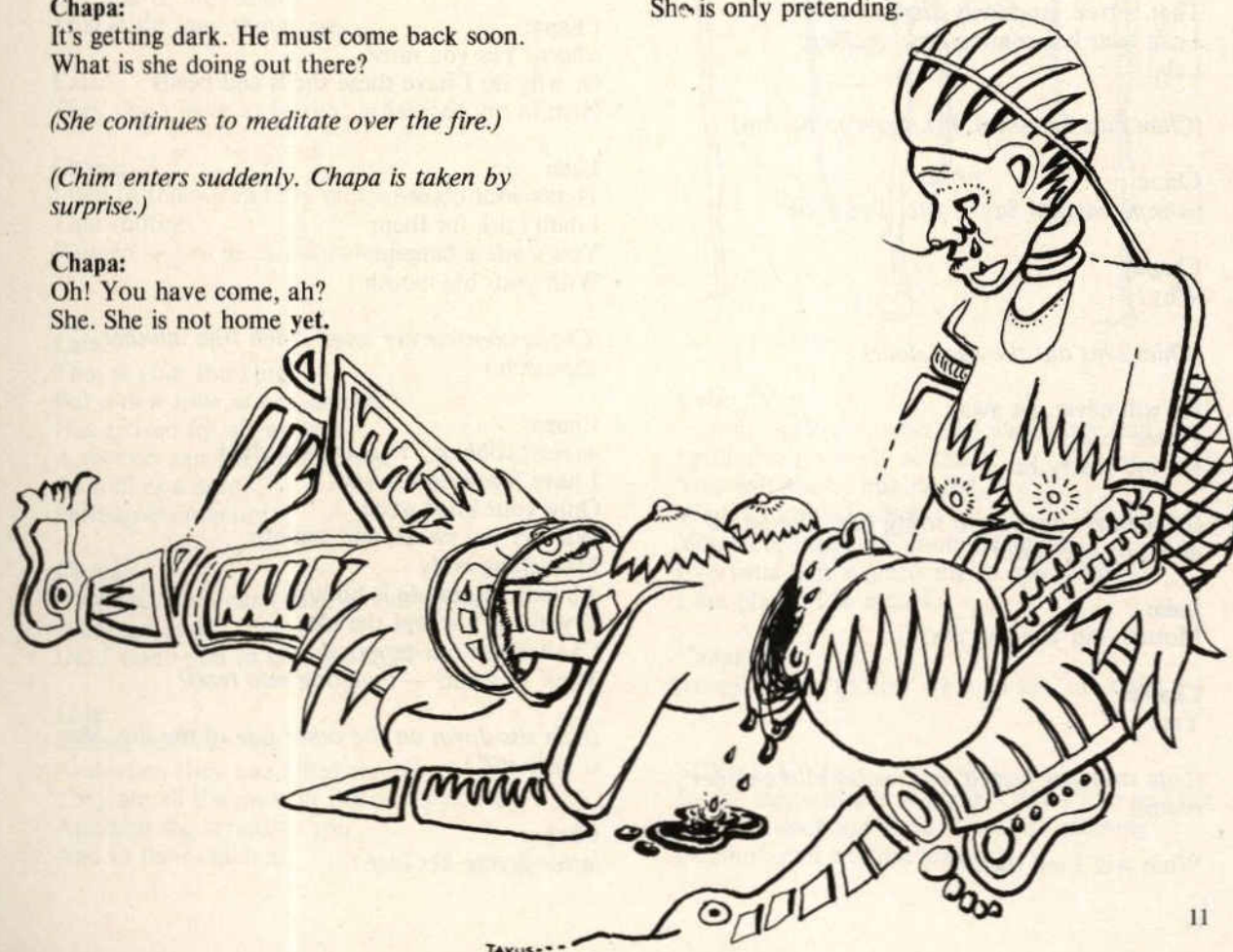


Illustration by Takus David

Play

(Chapa reaches into her bag, and produces strings of shell money and beads and displays them to Chim.)

Look at what I have from your parents.
Lala's hands have been fastened
For only you.
Her hands cannot be tied twice.
Make her yours. Keep her,
But her price is mine.

Chim:
Truly, I am proud and happy
And so will you be
And your daughter will come to be.

Chim:
Look at me. *(striding around the room)*
I am not like those other young men.
I can spear a pig.
I can make a garden.
I can build a house.
And all the rings and beads and money will
flow my way.

Chapa:
I can see that
That is true. *(suddenly alert)*
I can hear her coming now. *(calling)*
Lala!

(Chim cuts her short, his finger to his lips)

Chim:
(whispered) No! Say it after I've gone.

Chapa:
Why?

(Chim slips out the back door)

He will never get away
I'll see to it.
He will marry her.

(Lala enters carrying a string bag. She sets it down by the wall.)

Lala:
Mother, did you call me?

Chapa:
Yes.

(Lala stretches herself, and walks into another room.)

What will I tell them?

I can't put up with gossiping.
The wrong sort of stories.
They won't find out —
But words run down into hollows
And their son will know.

(Lala re-enters and stands listening to her mother's mutterings.)

Lala:
What are you talking about?
I was only chewing betelnut
At Uncle Tomu's house —
What is in your mind, mother?

Chapa:
(angry) You know surely enough.
You are not a single girl any more.

Lala:
(flashing back in anger at her mother)
Did I go off with a man tonight?
If that is the way you think
Then I will not marry Chim.

Chapa:
(sharp) Yes you must
Or why do I have these shells and beads
Here in my basket?

Lala:
That's your choice.
I didn't ask for them.
You made a bargain
With your big mouth.

(Chapa controls her anger, then tries another approach.)

Chapa:
(almost sobbing) You are my child.
I have laboured for you.
Only your bride-price
Will dry my sweat, and smooth
My aching body.
Already my inside is hollow
If you can't accept the idea,
Can't digest our proposal,
Then — when — *(bursting into tears)*

(Lala sits down on the other side of the fire. She is very still.)

Chapa:
(after drying her tears)

I don't know now, don't know
(fingering the shells and beads)
Where I stand.

Lala:
(calm) Mother,
All these young men —
They don't love us.
They don't care for us.
They have no wish to care.

Chapa:
Oh, yes they do.
(gently) Once a man has seen your body
He will always care for you.

Lala:
That man, that Chim, is only interested
In my body. That's not love.
He will expect me to look after
The garden,
The house,
A family and
The bulging stomach he already has.

Chapa:
But that is our custom.
That is the way things are.

Lala:
They don't have to be that way.

Chapa:
I had to follow, and my mother had to follow
That routine.
Women — are to care for the men.

Lala:
That is your thinking.
But a new time, a new season
Has arrived for all women.
A woman can kill with a spear
As well as a man,
Perhaps even better.

Chapa:
(outraged) You can't take a man's place!
What are you?
Did I teach you to talk like that?

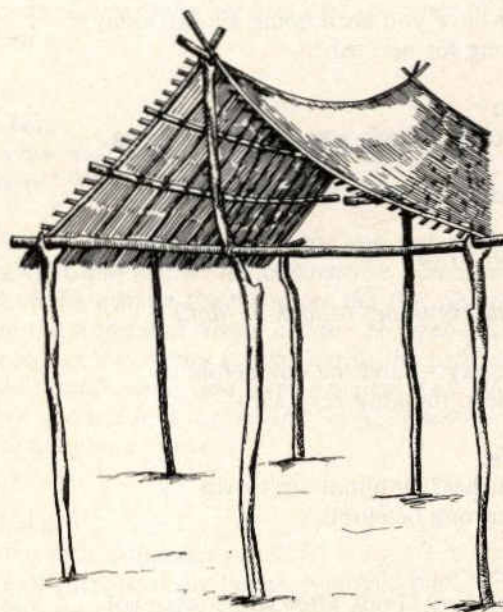
Lala:
(talking into the fire)
And when they had killed the pig
They ate all the meat in the men's house
And sent the scraps to you
And to their children,

Their growing children —
(strongly) Mother, I cannot marry a man
Who does not possess a true
Love for me.
I can't live a dog's life.

Chapa:
Close your mouth! Don't think such things!
You will ruin
Your only life.

(They both stare into the fire)

Chapa:
(gently) Chim — is different, he —



Lala:
(cutting in) For your sake I will marry him.
I will give my body so that
You will not be humiliated,
Were I to refuse Chim.
You have made the announcement.
Everyone here expects me to marry him.
I am played like a card.

Chapa:
(cowed) I don't know what to say, my child.

SCENE TWO:
In the men's house at night. Only Chim and his
cousin Kande are there. They are chewing
betelnut, and making jokes.

Play

Chim:

Ei — Kande!

I can't sit here and watch you
Chewing one betelnut after another
Like that. One after another.
Inside you
There is no feeling of mercy
For the nuts you crack.

Kande:

What's biting you? Why suffer?
You have your own two betelnuts
To go to work with. Get going!

(Kande snorts with laughter. Chim half-joins him.)

Kande:

What have you been doing all day today?
Looking for her? Ah?

Chim:

Yes, cousin that's what I've been doing.

(Kande looks sharply at him.)

I'm not lying.

(Kande continues to look at him.)

Yesterday — and the day before,
I've been thinking very hard.

Kande:

About her? Or about your own
Two strong betelnuts?

Chim:

(joking back) Look after your own two!
(more seriously) Look — are you not my cousin?
Aren't you going to share my problems?

Kande:

Yes, of course but, you see,
You are the son of a man,
Remember that. Don't force yourself
To marry someone who is not willing
To come obediently into your house.
My cousin, there are many
Many birds of Paradise along this coast.
They're easy to catch!

Chim:

But — but don't you know?
The breeze is changing its direction!
Only today. Only today I learned
It's blowing in my direction.

Kande:

Ah! You mean —?

Chim:

Yes! She has come out of her hiding corner.
She has swallowed down
Her mother's words, her instructions.
Her mother — I owe everything to her.

Kande:

(concerned) Ei! I hope her Uncle Tomu
Knows about it.
And all her other uncles, too.
They are the difficult ones.
They are afraid of Lala.

Chim:

(striding about) That's their problem.
I've had enough difficulties myself already
Turning her nose in the right direction.
Anyhow, she is expecting me.
(going towards the door)
So — malam goodnight, my cousin!

Kande:

Not tonight? She is waiting for you tonight?

Chim:

(turning) Yes, tonight.
(Chim goes out.)

Kande:

(softly to himself)
It is not that easy, man,
You're only her mother's choice.

SCENE THREE:

Inside a sleeping room of another house.
Morning.

Chim is sprawled in deep sleep, and grunts and snorts when he rolls to a new position. Lala is awake and sitting up out on the floor. She eats her food slowly, and sips from a cup of tea. A breakfast for Chim is prepared and covered with an upturned plate.

Lala:

(after turning to watch him in his sleep)
Look at him! Satisfied, sleeping like a pig
After knowing me all through.
And today he will be boasting
Of what he has done to me.
They will know all along the coast.

Play

(A bell is rung outside. Lala rises at once, tidies up the house, straightens her hair and clothes, and goes out.)

(A while later Chim wakes up. He looks about for Lala. He rolls out of bed rolling himself in the bedcover. He staggers into the next room. In a moment he returns wearing trousers. He finds the food, and throws the plate to one side. He eats some of it. Then starts to look for something to drink. He finds Lala's empty cup. He tips up the teapot, but there is only a dribble left. He kicks it aside. He kicks his food across the floor, and throws the empty plate out the window with a crash.)

Chim:
Bloody good-for-nothing woman!
Doesn't know how to take care of a man.
Where did she go to, ah?
Did her mother teach her that way, ah?

(Suddenly, Lala is standing in the doorway. Chim takes a moment to realize that she is there.)

Chim:
(without turning) Where is my food?
Where is my food, ah?

Lala:
I left you a plate of food.
What did you do with it?
Why make all this mess?

Chim:
Shut-up, woman!
Where is my tea?
You drank it all yourself!
You left me in the house without tea, ah?
Where have you been, ah?

Lala:
We were having our Women's Club Meeting.
We want to raise funds, make the Club strong.
We will organize a dance.

Chim:
Dance! Dance! Dance!
Let those old hens go dancing
And cackle as much as they want!
You didn't ask me
If you could go to that meeting!

Chim:
You can't prevent me from going.
I am a member of that Club.

(Chim walks to her. Lala stands her ground. He grips her wrists. She tries to twist free, but his grip is too strong.)

Chim:
(menacingly) I can't stop you, ah?
(throwing her down to the floor)
You bloody rubbish member!

(Lala is hurt. But she gets up slowly, and walks straight towards him.)

Lala:
And you — are good for nothing!

(Lala spits straight in his face. Then she walks away. Chim grabs her arm and spins her to face him.)

Chim:
(white-hot) Why did you spit at me?
Why? Why did you do that?

(Lala looks him steadily in the eye, but does not reply. Chim throws her against the wall, and she stumbles against the wood for the fire. She takes up the wood and rushes at him. He grabs the wood as she swings it, jabs her in the belly so that she doubles over, and slaps her face. Lala drops to her knees. Chim throws the wood at some things standing in a corner.)

Lala:
(trying to catch her breath)
You get out of my house, you wild pig!
You don't deserve a wife!
A stinking flying fox for you!

(Chim jumps onto her, beating at her head.)

Chim:
You will never go to those meetings again.
They're not married to you.
I am married to you!

Lala:
(pulling away as she gasps for breath)
I am not your wife.
I cannot be.
Get out of here!
Get out! Get out!

(Lala pushes against his chest, and he allows her to push him as far as the door.)

Play

Chim:

Your mother made you my wife.
She has my shells and beads.

Lala:

(pushing) Get out of here!
Marry her! Marry the shells and beads!
I don't want you!
Get out!

(Chim takes her shoulder. He swings back his fist.)

Lala:

(unable to move away) Mother!
(screams) Mother!!!

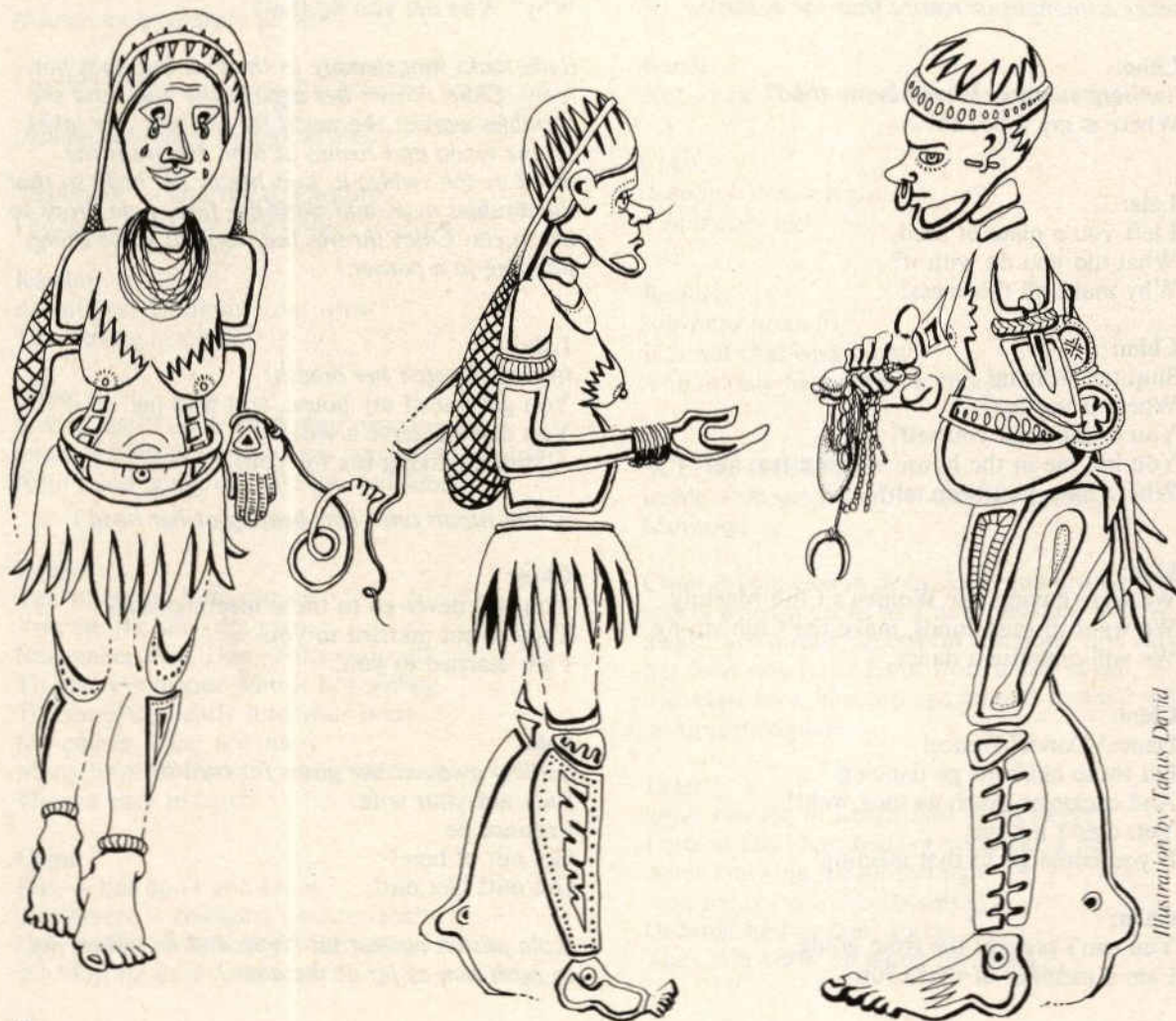
Chim's fist sends her sprawling across the room onto the bed. Her body is inert, hanging over the edge of the bed. Chim is suddenly terrified. The very young man again, he seems unable to act, staring at the body. He turns and runs out.

A little later Chapa runs in. She gasps, and runs to catch up the body of Lala and hold it in her arms, rocking it to and fro, trying to grasp what has happened.

The recorded voice of Lala is heard

Recording:

For your sake, I will marry him.
I will give my body so that
You will not be humiliated.
You have made the announcement
With your big mouth.
Everyone here expects me to marry him.
I am played like a card.



BIKHET TAMBARAN

by Robin Apa

Based on an old custom of the Jimi Valley, Western Highlands.

Characters:

Kunakini, a young man newly married,
Wena, a young woman, Kunakini's wife,
Narrator,
Bikhet Tambaran,
Bikhet Tambaran's wife,
Bikhet Tambaran's son.

Scene:

A clearing in the jungle. There is a small pool of clear water. Above it, a huge overhanging rock. Nearer the centre, three smaller rocks stand, looking like three stone seats in a row, raised,

almost like a meeting house. The three rock seats are graduated in size, from a larger imposing one, down to a much smaller seat. On the other side is the edge of the bush, the bush running back as far as one can see.

Narrator:

(coming forward to speak to the audience) Long ago, there was a custom held, and obeyed, by the people of the Jimi Valley in the Western Highlands province. To make sure that a newly married couple was brave, and could look after themselves, they were required to leave their village after the ceremony, and go off deep into the jungle. They had to live there for at least three or four days, feeding themselves by hunting, and eating the wild fruits, leaves, and roots that they found there. The village elders looked upon

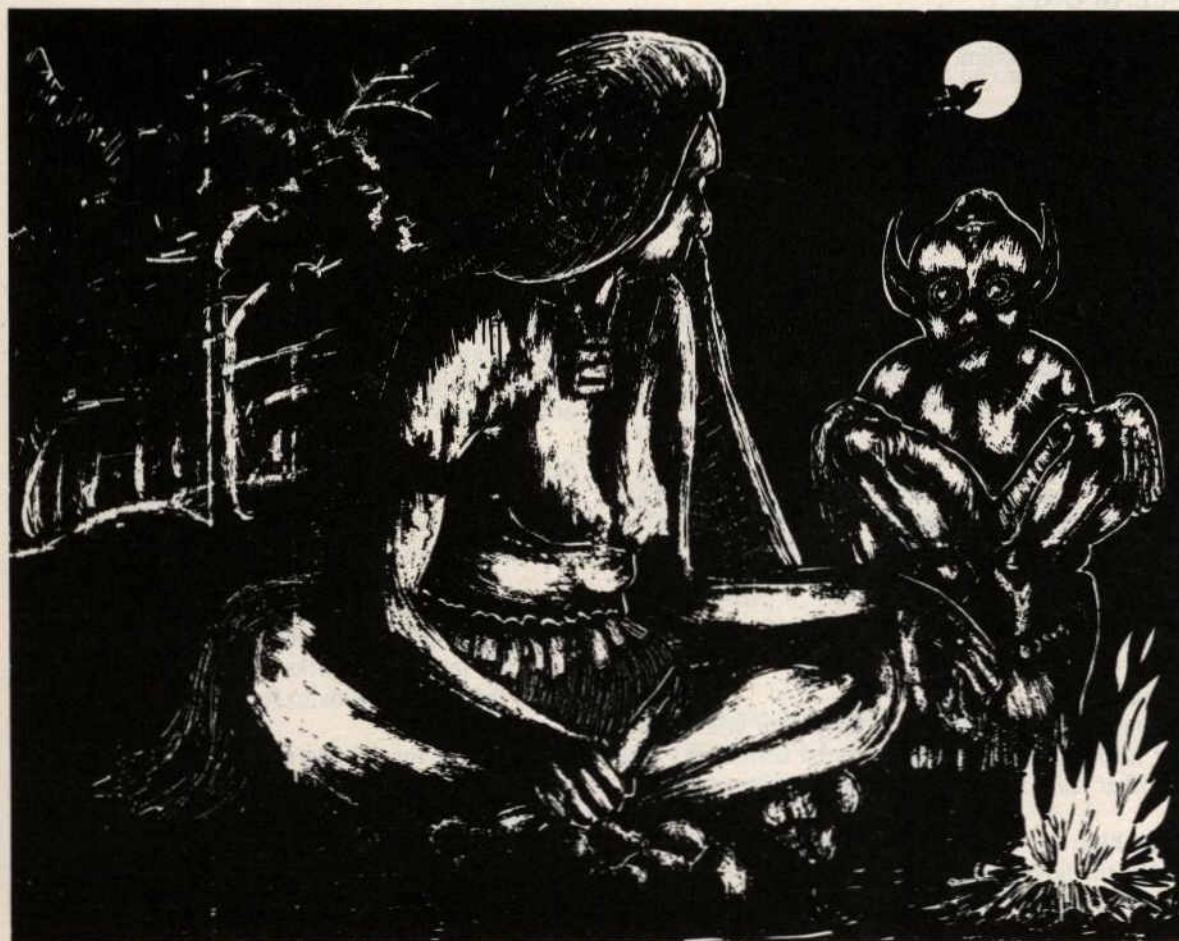


Illustration by Dekos Obu

Play

this time of being separated from the village as a test of whether the couple was truly suited. I think that the custom has now mostly died out.

But, tonight we will see the story of one young couple, Kunakini and his new wife, Wena; and you will know that it is a story of long ago. And there is something I must tell you about Kunakini: when his father and mother went into the same part of the jungle, years before, when they, too, were newly married, Kunakini's father killed a son of the Tambaran who lived in that area. Ever since, the Tambaran sought a way to have his revenge on Kunakini's father, or on a relative of Kunakini's father. But he never succeeded in finding a good opportunity.

Now Kunakini and Wena set off into the jungle knowing nothing of the Tambaran, or of the killing of his son all those years ago. Let's see what is going to happen to them.

(The Narrator leaves)

SCENE ONE:

The clearing by the pool. Sunset. A bird calls. Kunakini and Wena approach, tired from a long journey.

Kunakini:

It will soon be dark. We must find a place to shelter for the night ... come on ... keep going ... we must.

Wena:

(bent almost double with the heavy bilum on her back) Oh, I cannot go any further ... after walking for all that time ... and such a distance.
(They pause in the centre of the clearing)

Wena:

Kuna ... I said this earlier ... we must have walked past the place where we were told to spend our time before we return ... I'm sure of it ...

Kunakini:

I don't think so.

Wena:

I don't think human beings have ever come this far into the jungle! I say we must turn back! And another thing: remember your father's warning!

Kunakini:

I don't believe that. He was just trying to scare us, I know. *(growing excited)* I believe it! And I'm afraid. Let's turn back!!

Kunakini:

What are you talking about? Watch your tongue! You're talking like a man. And you'll disgrace me. Luckily nobody's around to witness what kind of lady I've chosen to marry! What would my family say if they heard you arguing with me. This is to test us! This is where we prove ourselves. Are you listening to me?

Wena:

(who has found the pool) No, I'm not listening to you. Come here! There is a little pool ... where we can drink ... and there is something like a cave ... it could shelter us!

Kunakini:

Yes. Yes, this is just what we need! Maybe you're a better wife than I thought! Bring your bilum here. And find some wood for a fire.

(Kunakini and Wena place things in the shelter of the rock. They drink at the pool. Then Kunakini goes to sit on the biggest stone seat, and looks about him. Wena is bathing sticks, and soon has a fire going. The sun is down, and twilight deepens.)

Kunakini:

(getting up and taking up his bow and arrows) Wife, you stay here and prepare some food while I go off and see if I can kill a cuscus, or a flying fox. The sky is clear, and tonight is going to be a full moon.

Wena:

(suddenly alarmed, she looks about her nervously) Please Kuna ... I don't feel like staying back! Can't I go with you? I feel there is something strange about this place! I have a feeling something is watching us!

Kunakini:

Stay here, I tell you. And no more of those silly fears, those warnings. It's all rubbish.
(Kunakini goes off into the bush.)

Wena stands a moment looking about her. Then she goes to the shelter and starts peeling kaukau for their meal. She works by the fire in the glow of its light, and begins to feel more at ease.

Then out of the shadows of the bush comes a monster, a tambaran of very strange appearance and with a long tail. He is able to approach and take his place on the big rock seat without Wena knowing he is there. He sits watching her.

Wena becomes slowly uneasy, slowly aware that

she is not alone. She looks about, and it is a moment before she sees Bikheth Tambaran sitting there. She freezes, afraid to move, or cry out. After a short time Bikheth rises and goes away again. There is no indication as to what the tambaran feels about the visit of strangers into his territory. Wena is in a state of panic. She starts to run away, and is then afraid of the dark, and returns to the fire, and blows it up. She huddles close to it, as if it would protect her.

The light dips down and up to suggest the passing of some time. Wena is still sitting by the fire, but it has died down somewhat. Then there comes a call from Kunakini as he approaches. Wena gets up quickly, and is about to run to him, when she stops, and decides it is better for her to build up the fire, and have food ready for her husband when he returns. Kunakini enters with his catch in the bilum. He proudly shows what he has brought.

Kunakini:

See what a good hunter I am? And, now, wife, I am hungry. Please give me some food. *(passing the hunting bilum)* Hang this up.

(Wena tries to act normally. She is eager to tell about the Tambaran, but wants to choose the right moment, and not be laughed at. She watches Kunakini carefully as he eats the food she brings him.)

Wena:

Kuna ... I want to leave this place. Leave it straight away. Please!

Kunakini:

Leave it? We've only just got here! And there is shelter and good water. And very good hunting!

Wena:

I — I saw something...! While you were away hunting. Something came here...

Kunakini:

What? What did you see? What are you talking about? Stop this nonsense and bring me more food!

Wena:

I saw...I saw...I saw...

Kunakini:

'I saw I saw I saw'! Saw what?

Wena:

I saw a big tambaran! He was sitting right there!

On that stone! And then he went away!

(Kunakini splutters with laughter, his mouth full of food. He rolls around. Then he starts to pelt Wena with small pieces of his food, circling around the fire after her. It is now quite dark out beyond the light of the fire.)

Wena:

Please, Kuna...I just couldn't start cooking I was so frightened! Believe me!

Kunakini:

Do you think I'm a fool? There are no such things as tambarans! There are just women's and children's silly stories. I'm a man. And a man cannot be scared by this sort of nonsense.

Wena:

(Starting to cry) If you think it is nonsense, or a silly story, then you can go on thinking like that. But I know what I know. And I know that I'm frightened. And I know that I saw a tambaran. And I'm going to hide so he can't find me. *(Wena brings branches and builds a cover under which she can hide behind the middle chair. Meanwhile Kunakini gets himself some more food, and sits eating it. He pretends to ignore her, but is actually watching out of the corner of his eye.)*

Kunakini:

(after Wena has disappeared from view, looking out into the night) I wonder what she saw?

SCENE TWO:

An open space — perhaps close to the audience. Morning. Bikheth Tambaran has his Bikheth wife and his Bikheth son with him.

Bikheth:

Wife and son, while visiting our resting place I saw that it was occupied!

Bikheth wife:

Occupied? Our own resting place?

Bikheth:

Two people were sheltering under the overhanging rock. They made a fire there.

Bikheth son:

Did they drink from our pool?

Bikheth:

They drank from our pool!

Play

Bikhet wife:

(Very angry and excited) When shall we go there and deal with them?

Bikhet:

Immediately after I've given you your orders. Your orders are: One, As we approach, don't talk once I've signed you to silence. Two, Make sure you don't step on a dry leaf, or a twig, or make a sound. Three, Follow whatever I do, every action. Copy me exactly, say exactly what I say. Is that understood?

Bikhet son:

Yes, we understand.

Bikhet:

If either of you disobeys me, in any way at all, I'll chase you away, and I'll have them all to myself. You won't have a chance to get any.

Bikhet wife:

We'll follow you exactly.

SCENE THREE:

The clearing by the pool. Sunny morning. Kunakini is sitting in the sun eating his breakfast. Wena is out of sight in the shelter she built behind Bikhet's chair.

Kunakini:

You are a silly woman who gets frightened at nothing! Spending the whole night in there. I'll just stretch out in the sun here, and have a little rest. There's nothing going to frighten me!

Kunakini stretches out on the rock ledge. After a moment the bushes on the shelter open, and Wena puts her head out. She is about to say something, and come out when she sees something coming on the other side. Quickly and silently she disappears again, and settles the branches over her head. The three tambarans enter. Bikhet signs them to halt, and each repeats the gesture. Then he points to the sleeping Kunakini. The wife and son exactly copy the gesture. Then silently they make their way up to sit on the seats, Bikhet in the centre seat, his wife and son on each side. Bikhet lays his tail out behind his chair, and in this case it lies across the bush shelter where Wena is hiding. The other two lay out their tails at the back with the same care. They sit solemnly staring at Kunakini. But suddenly Wena's hand is up through the bushes and she grips the tail of Bikhet. When the tambarans speak, Kunakini opens his eyes, but is too afraid to move.



Illustration by Dekos Obu

Bikhet:

Oh! Oh! What's going on? Who's holding my tail? Let me go! Let me go!

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

Oh! Oh! What's going on? Who's holding my tail? Let me go! Let me go!
(Bikhet tries turning this way and that, but Wena has his tail held too tightly.)

Bikhet:

Let my tail go! It's paining! It's paining!

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

Let my tail go! It's painting! It's paining!

Bikhet:

No, No! Don't copy me! Nobody has hold of your tail!

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

No, no! Don't copy me! Nobody has hold of your tail!

Bikhet:

Do something! If a tambaran loses his tail he dies, he dies!

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

Do something! If a tambaran loses his tail he dies, he dies!

Bikhet:

No, no'

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

No, no!

With a swing of her bushknife Wena cuts off the tail of Bikhet. He lets out a terrible cry of pain. Immediately the tambaran wife and son let out an exact echo of the cry, and stagger about just as Bikhet is doing.

Bikhet:

I'm dying...I'm dying...a tambaran dies if he loses his tail...

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

I'm dying...I'm dying...a tambaran dies if he loses his tail...

(Bikhet collapses and dies. His wife and son repeat his words and movements exactly, except that they still have their tails, and only pretend to die. Quickly Wena is out of her shelter, and quickly her bushknife cuts off the tail of the tambaran wife and son. They rise up a moment, and then, truly groaning, die too.)

Bikhet wife/Bikhet son:

I'm dying...I'm dying...a tambaran dies if he loses

his tail.

(Kunakini is still lying on his ledge. He has been too frightened to move. Wena goes over to him, and drops the three tails one by one on top of his chest as he lies there.)

Wena:

What have you done, brave man? Last night you stated that a man was something special, not to be frightened by silly nonsense, you said. And today you did nothing, just lay there with your mouth open. *(Smiling)* It was lucky for you you brought a woman along for protection!

Kunakini:

Wena, I'm proud of you. When we return to the village I'll tell them how brave you were! *(thoughtful for a moment)* But what will you tell them about me?

Wena:

(Picking up the tails and helping him to his feet) I won't say anything. I'll put down these three tails and let them guess for themselves.

Kunakini:

But they will guess that I killed the tambarans!

Wena:

(smiling) Yes, they probably will! *(They collect their bilums, bow and arrows, knife and the three tails and set off for home, their test successfully concluded.)*

POETRY

Alan Natachee, a noted Papua New Guinea poet, introduced new poets and their works during an evening of public recital sponsored by the Ondobondo Club. He said, "If we consider the nature of some of the things in life that move us, — such as love, human beauty or the beauty of nature, courage and disaster, — we will realize that they have one thing in common — they all pass away! In themselves they do not last. But, because they move or excite us, we wish to make them last.

A poet or a writer is someone unusually aware of his emotions — to feeling of all kinds. He feels most strongly the desire to communicate his feelings to others. He is especially conscious of the impermanence of feelings and so, is anxious to make something memorable out of them in order for them not to be lost to the world.

Of course, words are the only way we have to think about everything in life and about life itself. Therefore it is true to say that poetry is made of life.

When we speak of poetry, most of us Papua New Guineans think that the white men brought poetry to us. This way of thinking is not true because our gods were poets, and our ancestors were poets. Poetry existed in our land of Papua New Guinea long before the white men came, and it is still existing even to this day."

Later, in a more personal note, Alan Natachee said of the poet, Joyce Kumbeli: "Often it is the quite ones who have the most to say and who are less quick to speak because they choose their words with care and shun small talk in favour of ideas more deeply felt and more sharply seen.

These quiet ones have an inner quality which may find its fullest expression in the world of writing. Indeed, some of the finest novelists and poets, some of the most successful journalists and playwrights, are people of an essentially quiet nature."

THE SEA

Sardi

The green, green cascades
Roll slowly and gently
Against the dirty brown, wooden posts.
They reach up the white walls of the boats,
Inch by inch,
And then slowly creep away.

In youth and vigour she is green,
Greener yet she becomes as she grows older.
Blue and beautiful in her prime,
She turns to dark blue as the ages roll by.
In her finality she is a torrent of darkness.

Calm and peaceful at times,
Her manner changes as the breeze grows stronger.
Boats float like toys upon her;
Angry, she shows her white teeth
And hits them,
Tossing them from side to side.

Mile upon mile she stretches
To an unimaginable distance,
A grave for the Sailor,
She is home to the creatures living in her depths.

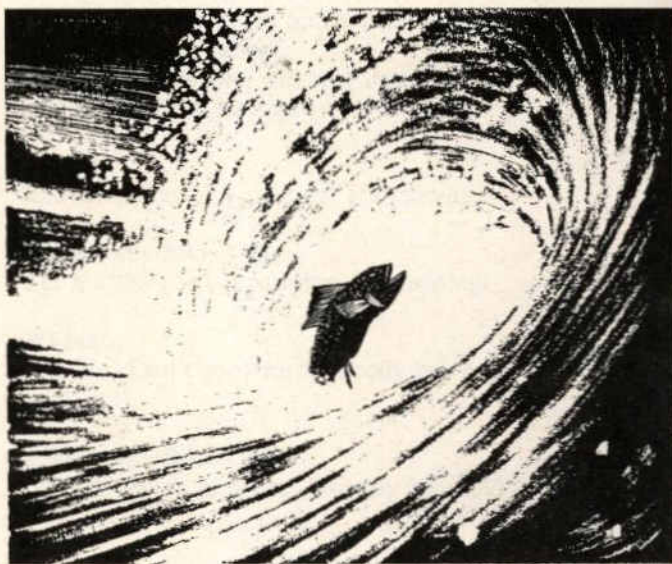


Illustration by Jackson Kaumana

THE BUS

Sardi

Gently he rolls, then into a canter he goes.
He runs swiftly and hurriedly,
Leaving dirty brown soil lapping at his feet.
When he meets the Lady in black,
She greets him, spreading wide her cloak,
Promising to smooth his way.

Eyes open, they sit inside,
Watching his speed, his elegance.
Soon eyes close to an unknown lullaby,
Heads droop, arms fall, bodies sag,
Black beards stand like trees on a savanna.
No longer do they hear his chimes.
He runs alone, no thoughts, no ideals.



He climbs the hill on legs
That have worked so hard
That they no longer know or care how long.
Up, up, up he goes, spluttering and coughing,
Breathing heavily, he uses every ounce of strength
To reach the top.

Mile upon mile he runs,
Now the Lady in brown greets him,
Spreading her dusty garment,
Spoiled with many a hole.
Jumping and swerving he tries to elude the holes.
Inside, they too, sway and jump, but do not
awake,
For the lullaby engulfs them as the curse of a
width.

Mile upon mile he runs.
Seeing the reflecting shining sea, he canters,
Then rolls slowly to a stop.
Hurray! Hurray! Here we are, they say.
Pats he does not receive,
Thanks he does not get.
Leaving him broken hearted, they part.

FORBIDDEN LOVE

Sardi

The god of love has pierced my heart
with his fiery, quivering arrow.
But my Beloved and I have to part
For our road of love is too narrow.

Tho' our Love is so great,
Broke barriers of race and religion,
For us it came too late.
Our Love is like a beautiful pigeon,
Wanting to be free and soaring high.
Thus, I want to shout that I love you,
That you are the sun in my sky,
My wonderful dream come true.

Alas...such joy is not ours,
Not for us a life we can share.
We must make do with stolen hours,
Snatched moments here and there.

This Love has been forbidden...
Our eyes may meet and kiss
But to others it must stay hidden.
Yet, how can I ever give up this?
The precious moments of happiness
That I find in your embrace,
Even though my heart fills with sadness
When my lips must leave your face.

The world commands — Forsake each other —
But then I will drown in a sea of tears
For this heart will never love another.
Hold me Love, and chase away my fears...

DEMOCRACY

Elsie Mataio

They call it democracy
they call it the rule of the people,
the rule of the grassroots people,
they talk freely
they decide freely
But the roots extend to the villages and islands
buried under beautiful soil
the grass spreads sharp blades to the sky
no body will fly in the special baluses
the Dash 7
the Kumul 1
the Kumul 2

Only the bigmen have wings
the small men have dead roots.

Poems

DOK

Elsie Mataio

Thin, crippled, without food for many days
Dok walked lazily down
sniffing at anything found in his way,
he knocked down bins large and small
Bins by the tall apartment building
Bins in a new suburbia
he soon felt tired.

But, alas
a bottle from an apartment above
landed in no time
crushing his back

In great agony
he staggered away
head bent
ears dropped
back flattened like an over ripe orange kunai leaf.



Illustration by Goliath Yason

MY AMERICAN FANTASY

Jack Lahui

I look to a possible day
When all commerce
takes a new form
Management aims toward
Machinery efficiency
Coded in punched tape dialect.

Planes arrive from Mars with prawns
Families are finally one family
Angels and mortals are brothers and sisters
and — God?
He is the Vice-President of
a giant corporation
who can be called
Toll Free
Via Laser Beam

FED UP WITH CONSUMERISM

Jack Lahui

Roaring lions and mimicing explosion
Kina drops to ninety nine toea
Mad closing down sales
Unremoved, tomorrow's sale

Free lollies
Lucky dips and Win Moni
and oops
20% discounts

My foot!
Close the blarry radio
Take the paper to the toilet
We're going fishing.

CAUGHT UP (for those who try their luck)

Joyce Kumbeli

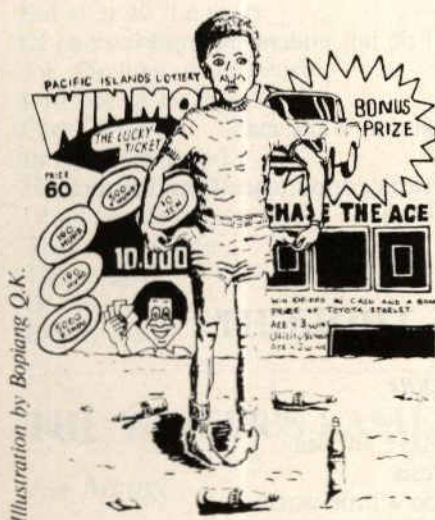
I dream of a mercedes
so I buy a raffle ticket
I dream of going places
so I buy another raffle ticket

I dream of money
so I buy a coke
I dream of more money
so I buy a win moni ticket

But Alas!
when the top falls
I find gazing up at me
'sorry try again'

And when I scratch
the last square
I find that there is
one ten thousand less

I curse myself
for having spent
the last toea I had
and shout "FINISH
THIS IS THE LAST"



But then I dream again

So I buy one more raffle ticket
then I buy one more coke
and yet one more win moni ticket

Is there an end to all this!

WILL I EVER BE

Joyce Kumbeli

coming home
i find my own home
uninviting

unswept
laundry basket full to the brim
dirty dishes all over the kitchen table
beds unmade
dinner waiting to be cooked
and endless chores staring at me

where do i begin?

with pikinini clinging to my hem
can i do much?
she doesn't want papa
because she's thirsty
for susu

as i sit down to fulfill her needs
'what time is dinner coming?'
he asks
'why don't you give a hand?'
then that almost everyday-quarrel begins
while i put a pot of rice on the stove

pushing that empty plate aside
he smiles as he picks her up
and tickles her
looking relaxed as ever
while i go from one chore
to another.

TIED UP

Joyce Kumbeli

when i bore you a child
you were excited
i was overjoyed
we welcomed him
we loved him
he was part of us

what now
with no roof over his head
not a toea to educate him
or to buy him a shirt
to cover his bare chest

we were young then but
did we look to this day
when we slept the night out
in each others arms
with all the best dreams

DID WE?

Poems

CAUGHT

Sampson D. Ngwele

I wonder where the birds fly to
Under the starry sky
Flying so freely
Flying to freedom trees, perhaps



Illustration by Bexy Beatus Moti

I wonder where the horses run to
On the silver screen
Running so freely
Running to the setting sun, perhaps

I wonder where my people go to
In my vivid dreams
Walking and talking so freely
Going homeward bound, perhaps

But what am I doing here?
In this snare, stranded, caught,
Caught in a spider's web?

POEMS

Sampson D. Ngwele

Poems
are but torches
to shine the way
or perhaps songs
to cheer the way

Poems
are cool waters
to find in deserts
or perhaps a friend
in the city's loneliness

Poems
are but today's dreams
of tomorrow's realities

TUTURANI*

Sampson D. Ngwele

Tuturani, I do not understand you!

You tell me my customs are evil
Yet your scholars obtain PhDs
Upon researching it!

You tell me my Kava** is evil
Yet your whiskey can make
A man stupid!

You tell me killing is wrong
Yet you wage wars upon
Your soil!

Tuturani, I do not understand you!

You tell me to love my neighbour
Yet you do not even know who
Your next-door neighbour is!

You tell me to pray on Sundays
Yet you go out on a picnic
Every Sunday!

You tell me to be kind
Yet you pretend to be blind
When you drive by me!

Tuturani, I do not understand you!

* translates as white man

** intoxicating drink made from the roots
of a shrub

JUST A THOUGHT

A.B. Kaspou

When you have an idea
It is hypothesis.
When you do a little work
on the idea,
It is a sub thesis.
When you do more ground work,
It is a thesis.
When you have people
Attacking your idea,
It is anti-thesis.
And when your idea is accepted,
It becomes a synthesis.

PARENTHOOD

A.B. Kaspou

It takes two citizens
It takes two providers
And it takes two individuals
To make what we call
Shared parenthood.

FOR ALL THE KINDNESS

A.B. Kaspou

Jok grew up an orphan.
Without the medical care
Of the missionaries.
He could have died ages ago.
But Jok grew up and
Got the best education
There was.
Married a fine cultured woman
And got the best job
The country offered.
Jok was a man of the people.
His house knew no social boundaries.
He had the understanding to
Care to give and to shelter
Those that were jobless,
Beer addicted, and sick.
But after all the years
Of painstaking life,
Jok, the man of the people,
Lost one of his legs.
Guess what?
In his hospital bed
He was the loneliest
Of all people
That ever walked
The surface
Of this
Bloody planet.

THE WRITER'S LAMENT

Joe Mangi

Thinking, Questioning.
Probing the depths of the vaults
Only dimly lit by the luminous glow
of consciousness.
Pour out words.

They are rare. They are few.
They are mine. They are unique.

Mine original.
Though multiplied a hundredfold,
They are still the original.

Buyers list them in their budget
They then can fill their pockets.
Critics use them as a source.
They then can gain fame and recognition.
Lovers use them as a catalyst
before the rolling mattress game.
Civillians use them as a drug
before falling into their own dream worlds.
Words still remain the original.

Tattered and worn out through the ages
are these endless black shapes —
all joined into a complex network.
A product of humanity
Words lie on the bookshelves
Only to rot away.

WET NATING

Joe Mangi

O Bikpela, giv me kaikai bilong tude:
i no planti.
Wanpela hap sikon na liklik kap wara tasol.

O Bikpela, giv me strong bilong tude:
i no planti.
Wanpela hap bun na liklik mit tasol.

O Bikpela, giv me lait bilong tude:
i no planti.
Wanpela hap bombom na liklik bokis masis tasol.

Boi i wet: em i save.
Bikpela bai i giv
olsem Em i bin tok.
"Askim na bai mi givim".

Sun i go daun pinis
kol win na angere i kisim Boi.
Tasol:

Boi i wet: em i save.
Bikpela bai i kam giv
olsem Em i bin tok.
"Askim na bai me givim".

BOI I WET NATING.



Illustration by Simon Arick

Poems

PORT MORESBY

Abba B. Bina

MORESBY

What have you given birth to:
Konedobu, Badili, Koki, Taikone.
I thought they sucked you dry.
No, there you go again:
Boroko, Hohola, Gordons, Tokarara, Waigani,
and
Now, Gerehu your latest.

Moresby the gateway to PNG —
You panic at the slightest dry.
Your hills and valleys show the scars of the anger
of the Koiari forefathers.
Your Koki is stunted and throws out fermented
perfumes.
Hohola, famous for her wolf and snakes —
Boroko you'd think was another Bomana.

Moresby, poor Port Moresby,
What have your children been doing, screwing
Fornicating, two Kinaing.
Kone shanty, Badili shanty, Kaugere settlement,
Six Mile haven.
Have you taught family planning?
Discipline you say,
But have you disciplined your burning dog,
desire?

Moresby, the Singapore of PNG.
Your children rejoice under the greenery of the
Morning urine of the Koiari grandmothers.

But have you observed the ques along their
intestines?
Boroko and her sister, 4 Mile, stomachs about to
explode.
Have you considered remedial actions, to relieve
all of their constipation?

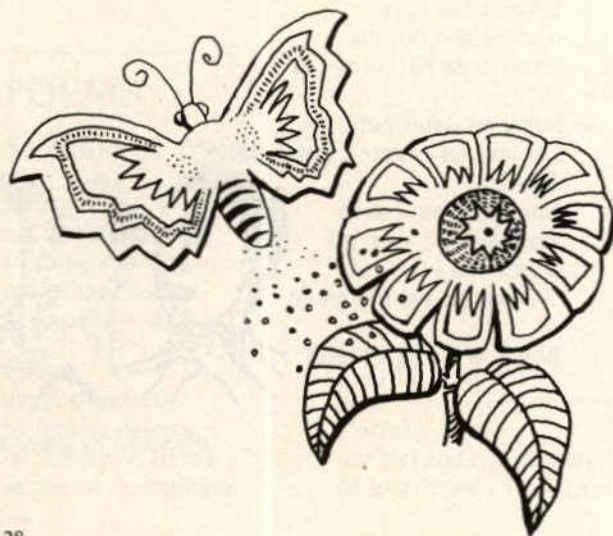


Illustration by Boney Dumison

Moresby, oh Moresby.
You have moved your brain to your
Favoured child, Waigani.
But are you co-ordinating efficiently as you
should?
Are you deliberately, neglecting your elder ones?
Have you considered the Motu Koitas?
I weep for you Moresby.
Counsel yourself and your mongrel sons.

TABUAGELE (BUTTERFLY)

Zak Tiamon



Tabuagele,
colourful and proud,
Lelegurua flower fawns at you
like a parted wet oyster
yawning to display
its jewel.

Tabuagele
You float over valleys and flower beds
to nibble and kiss maiden heads.
How your wings flutter
as you make love under the sun
spilling your seeds
and flying away.

Tabuagele
You're so careless
so carefree.

Russell Soaba's *Wanpis*

Reviewed by Zak Tiamon

"WANPIS" is a novel written by a Papua New Guinean, Russell Soaba.

The book examines the "modernity" of the PNG society, the struggle of the Melanesian towards the attainment of self-hood, self-respect, and self-determination. Melanesians have been caught in the whirlwind of a more powerful and dominant culture. Since PNG's independence, the country has been loving its enemies more than it has been loving itself. PNG society is not critical enough in examining the path it is treading. It has neglected its human condition, values, Melanesian identity, its world view, and has become a stranger within itself. This is the paradox of colonialism.

Russell Soaba's *Wanpis* is based on situations, characters and thoughts which come from the philosophy of existentialism. There are two underlying existentialist concepts that are prevalent in the book.

Firstly there is the LUSMAN who believes that he is born free and that he alone is responsible for his own life. His sense of freedom allows him to do whatever he wishes. He is happy as he is, and could even become a saint without God (according to Camus), and has little or no sense of responsibility. He does not wish to be tied down by any set rules, moral or religious values, dogmas etc. Lusman is the narrator.

Secondly, there is the WANPIS. He is not a happy one. He is worried that he is free as Jean Paul Satre puts it,

'condemned to be free'. He must remain responsible for his actions all the time. He questions his sense of freedom, his sense of existence. Whatever he does as a free man must be peppered or seasoned with a certain amount of rationalization which will enable him to prove his worth as a responsible human being. According to Soaba, he is a committed existentialist.

"...He is no longer free of the society, nor society free of him. He no longer rejects the society, nor allows society to reject him. The society is part of him, society constitutes him."

Soaba is a very existential writer. Much of the literature that he produces is fully committed to the society, the individual's functional interaction with the society. It is what Satre means by the "literature of commitment".

The story begins here in Port Moresby at the University campus and concentrates on a group of young people, young drifters living through the hysteria of this world. It also ends here in Port Moresby on PNG's political independence day when James St Nativeson is killed. He dies a poet, an artist with all the 'shanty dung' on his shoulders, but he dies a martyr.

James St Nativeson is the central character around whom the others revolve. He is a visionary prophet who is sought out by others for courage and reassurance. Ironically, however, he is neglected (much to Just Call Me Joe's advantage perhaps)

and rightly predicts (quite accurately) that "...people like us die like frogs on the road". (p.22) Even though he is not being talked about much in the book, his presence signifies the position of a real poet, an artist in contemporary PNG society. We hear nothing much of him throughout the book, but there is a great sense of his presence looming and haunting in the background.

Just Call Me Joe is full of noise. He has an out-going personality, is an opportunist and a public servant and enjoys life as a Departmental Head. This character reminds us of those well-known PNG personalities who like to keep on walking whether it's night or day. From being a student leader propounding black consciousness, he later becomes, "...a corrupt mini-manipulator who abandons the cause once he has attained the creature comforts...". Just Call Me Joe is in many ways a victim of the modern social development of the PNG society, a person with superficial values and stereotyped attitudes, with little concern for his Melanesian roots. We find people like JCM Joe very detestable but there is no denying that this character invites pity or understanding from a modern PNG society rather than moral indignity.

The narrator is the prominent figure in the novel, a representative of a contemporary PNG intellectual. He is quiet, isolated and certainly not a sociable type of person. His role in the novel is merely to observe, "...I lay on my

¹ See paper delivered by Russell Soaba, *Albert Wendt: Pacific's Existential Writer*, delivered on 25th February, 1982 at the Main Lecture Theatre, University of Papua New Guinea, p. 2.

² Quote from Soaba's interview with Chris Triffin in the SPAN magazine, p. 27.

Book Review

back, legs spread, silently observing...". This is the very first sentence of the book. This statement opens the door to the content and understanding of the book. Again the first sentence of the last section, "He lay flat on his stomach, legs spread, arms outstretched..." (p.104). Why is the narrator (Abel) so reticent, diffident? Well, according to Soaba, "The door is open, is it not?" The narrator's role in the novel is merely to observe. In the first sections of the book, his sense of isolation is tormenting him, life is becoming absurd and society is joining to kill him, because of being just an observer.

Mr Archiebal Goldsworth is PNG's perception of a Father of All Things, great or small. He is a monumental creation, a protector, a benefactor, an agent of a great colonizing power from a dominant culture, the founder of All Saints School, and certainly, a great powerful remnant of the colonial era. The extent of his influence (eg. political) is frightening.

It is very evident that the female characters play the role of a stabilising force in their relationships with the male characters.

Enita, from the beginning of the novel, has a powerful and silent influence on her son even though she never sees him for seven years before she dies. Enita is dead. Her presence haunts the narrator throughout the novel and we are conscious of this mystical spiritualism in their relationship throughout the plot. This mysticism of love fills the air to the extent of an Oedipus

complex and is haunting.

Sheila is a main force behind the narrator's life after his awakening of self-consciousness. His transitional phase of boy to man is also seen as an initiation period and when society is going to kill the narrator, it is Sheila's stabilizing force and understanding which saves the narrator from going over the abyss.

Vera is the indiscreet and understanding female figure behind James St Nativeson. She has a very powerful influence on most of the male characters.

Sophie, the white female Australian student involved with JCM Joe, is interesting. Sophie is trying to actually live her so-called liberated principles and values, and inter-racial relationships is one of these principles. JCM Joe, a revolutionary student at the time, is trying to show the world that however anti-white he is, he doesn't mind sleeping with white women.

"Soaba writes consciously in the world-wide tradition of black consciousness...the situation owes a little to Ngugi and the style in parts recalls Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, and the struggle for a PNG identity is explicitly compared to that taking place in Africa and Black America... Self consciousness is both the generative force at the core of the book and an obtrusive element in its style..."³

Wanpis can easily be identified with situations in any Third World nation. The Black American situation has to be looked at from a different perspective, but Third

World nations experience conditions similar to one another.

James St Nativeson's death is very symbolic. If it wasn't for the sufferings and psychological torments of external forces that contribute to events, such as St Nativeson's death, I don't think Soaba would have attempted to create *Wanpis*. That is why art exists. It exists for soul expression, to serve as a means of survival for humanity at large. Because of saints like St Nativeson, we at least can hope for a better tomorrow. The author is asking us, or rather warning us, to have hope in ourselves. We are our own means of salvation. St Nativeson has to die to justify the author's cause of questioning society, colonization and civilization.

The only poet PNG ever produced was St Nativeson, and he doesn't exist. He dies on PNG independence day at Racecourse Road, killed by drunkards on the street.

Many years from now, PNG society will begin to appreciate and understand the novel *Wanpis*.

Foreigners will find the novel difficult but challenging. Foreign readers have treated the novel with indifference and contempt because of the style of its presentation. This can only be considered a presumptive attitude on the part of the reader.

Since the printing of *Wanpis* in 1977, there have been numerous volumes, published in quick succession by John Kolia. When closely analysed, these are nothing but mere footnotes of *Wanpis*.

³ Chris Triffin (ed.) SPAN Vol. 7, University of Queensland, October 1978, p. 67.

Contributors

S. May Amo

studied at Goroka Teachers' College in 1975 and again in 1977, when the College was taken over by the University of Papua New Guinea. He was once Vice-President of the S.R.C. He comes from the Vanimo area of the West Sepik.

Robin Apa

comes from the Jimi Valley, Western Highlands. A former student of Goroka Teachers' College.

Abba B. Bina

is with the Defence Force of Papua New Guinea.

A.B. Kaspou

is one of the active organisers of the *Ondobondo* poetry recital. He comes from Manus and writes poetry and short fiction. Currently with the Foreign Affairs Department.

Joyce Kumbeli's

poems were read in *Ondobondo* recitals this year. She has just completed a play. Comes from Milne Bay.

Jack Lahui

comes from the Motu area of the Central Province. Was the last editor of *Papua New Guinea Writing*. His *Gamblers Niugini Style*, a collection of poems, appeared in *Papua Pocket Poets* in 1975. Attended the International Writers' Programme in Iowa in 1977.

Joe Mangi's

poems appeared in the first issue of *Ondobondo*. He is currently studying at the Australian National University, Canberra, towards a Master's Degree in Archaeology.

Elsie Mataio

comes from New Ireland. A former student of the Literature Department. Her poem, "Mopalau", appeared in the *Ondobondo Poster Poem Series* in March 1980. Was working with *Wantok* newspaper until recently.

Allan Natachee,

whose comments appear at the beginning of the Poetry Section of this issue, is presently a writer-in-residence with the Department of Literature, U.P.N.G. Comes from the Mekeo country of the Central Province. Author of *Aia, a Papua Pocket Poets* volume (1968) and *Mekeo Oral History* — an Institute of PNG Studies publication (1977).

Sampson D. Ngwele

comes from Vanuatu. He will complete his Law Degree at U.P.N.G. at the end of 1983. An active organiser of *Ondobondo* recital, he has started a similar movement in his home island.

Sardi

is the pen name of a budding poet.

Russell Soaba's

poems appeared in the first issue of *Ondobondo*. He is currently studying at Brown University, Providence, R.I., for his Masters in Creative Writing.

Zak Tiamon's

poems appeared in the first issue of *Ondobondo*.

Benjamin Umba's

short fiction has appeared before in *Papua New Guinea Writing* and *Three Short Novels from Papua New Guinea*. He comes from Simbu and is currently working in the Central Government Offices, Waigani.

NEW PUBLICATION FROM THE ERU

ERU REPORT No. 41 by Richard Cummings

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON SSCEP: 1978-1981 (59pp)

The Educational Research Unit is presently conducting an evaluation study of the Secondary Schools Community Extension Project (SSCEP). The Project is a major curriculum innovation with relevance to education currently being piloted in five provincial high schools throughout Papua New Guinea. Richard Cummings is the Co-ordinator of the SSCEP Evaluation Study.

This report presents a review of the past research on the SSCEP pilot programme. It examines the implementation strategy, staffing in SSCEP schools, the teacher in-service programme, assessment, student and teacher attitudes to SSCEP, career patterns of SSCEP graduates and concludes with five options for the future of SSCEP for consideration and discussion.

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