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CONTENTS

PNG WRITING IN ENGLISH: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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PNG WRITING IN ENGLISH: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

by **Kirpal Singh**

Among the more volatile and dangerous subjects for discussion — especially among intellectuals — is the sensitive and thorny issue of language. Any discussion of language can easily lend itself to provocation and offence so that it becomes incumbent on us to set out as objectively as possible those aspects of the subject that need consideration. It is extremely difficult to rule emotionality out of any such consideration because of the inherent nature of language itself. Language is one of man's greatest possessions and it is to be expected that it should be zealously and jealously guarded. We have, therefore, to proceed with caution.

The need for caution is even greater when we have in mind a language that has made itself part of a people's life without its natural evolution. It is one thing for the Englishman to discuss English but quite another for us, in a different world altogether. For the majority of us English imposed itself as a second, in some cases a third, language. It is, as is often recognised, perhaps the greatest legacy of British colonialism. The interesting thing about it, however, is that it threatens to become our first language with the passing of years.

The pressures to adopt English as the main language of administration, justice, education, and the like cannot be ignored without regard to the expense involved. Even countries outside of the Commonwealth of Nations are increasingly forced to recognise the international status of English. One thinks of the emphasis placed upon it in such countries as China and Middle East. The proud Frenchman may seldom say anything in English but he does, I think, make it a point to learn it. In a world of growing technological complexity where communication must of needs be immediate and precise, the significance of English as a world language cannot be over-stressed.

And for a country such as Papua New Guinea I honestly see little alternative to choosing English as the national language. I know that persons like Bernard Narokobi are strong advocates of Pidgin (and they do find sympathetic voices in some expatriates) but I cannot in all honesty see how Pidgin can achieve the ends served by a major world language. Apart from the obvious reason that Pidgin is not an international language, there are serious local doubts associated with its adoption. It does not, for example, have a ready vocabulary and it will take an inordinate amount of time and energy to provide it with one. As a spoken language Pidgin can be a fascinating mixture of sound-patterns and tonal variations, but as a written language it perplexes more than it expresses.

There is another quite good reason to adopt English. The foundations for its use are already laid — as they were in all Commonwealth countries — and we cannot underestimate its role as a buffer language. Because of its apparent neutrality English can best help to bring the various linguistic groups of this country together. I cannot state authoritatively but I am given to understand that certain groups in PNG are unhappy with Pidgin because it has tended to borrow more from one indigenous language-group than another. Such borrow-

ing can create anxiety and resentment — emotional states which this country can certainly do without. Pidgin has a definite role and a certain relevance but I do not think it can challenge English as the dominant language. As of now it may be true to say that more people speak Pidgin than they do English, but it is only a matter of time before the situation is drastically altered. I do not for one moment say that Pidgin ought to be forgotten or side-stepped. But I do believe that English must, and will, to all intents and purposes, continue to play a primary role.

Let me then, come to the question of PNG writing in English. As we know writing may be broadly classified into two categories: the fictive and the factual, or the imaginative and non-imaginative. This latter description does not really do justice to factual writing (because some factual writing is highly imaginative) but it does, I hope, indicate the two divisions I have in mind. While my main preoccupation in this lecture is to discuss the problems and prospects of PNG writing in English insofar as it pertains to creative expression I must, briefly, pause to consider related aspects of non-imaginative writing.

I do not at all wish to give offence but I shall be blunt and state quite flatly that in my opinion the level of English usage in PNG leaves a lot to be desired. As evidence allow me to cite the examples of such usage as it occurs in student assignments in this University, news and other broadcasts of the NBC and general newspaper reporting. There is a conspicuous lack of sensitivity to the language, its nuances, its vocabulary, its structures, its idiom, its grammer and its function. Most people do not really know what words to use and how to use them, so they fumble their way through expression with the distressing result that frequently they fail to communicate properly or even adequately. One has only to read carefully the two daily newspapers to see how lacking the general standard of English is. Verbosity and inane phraseology is often the rule and little, if any, attention is paid to such things as correctness of idiom, precision of detail, suitability of tone and sensibility of meaning. Frequently there are errors in basic grammer and one is left wondering as to the importance attached to the use of English as a vehicle for communication. Perhaps a key index to the low level of English expression is the sheer poverty of vocabulary. I was most disturbed to discover that my first year students knew the meaning of prose but not prosaic, enormous but not enormity, climax but not climatic. And words like exquisite, crescendo, exasperation left them completely baffled. These are students who have come from either the National High Schools or Preliminary Year; students, in other words, from whom one expects a fair degree of competency after all their years of studying the language. I am, therefore, convinced that somewhere along the line there has been a dire failing, a falling off of standards, a non-desire to achieve efficiency. Though it is becoming more evident that this is a universal problem we cannot afford to discount it or to remain complacent in the face of it.

Without wanting to sound arrogant I think it is fair to say that insufficient attention has been given to the question of standards. Slackness is almost everywhere apparent, from the incorrectly worded sentence in a student essay to the awkward (and often confusing) statements in a government advertisement. The people at NBC have already been taken to task for their peculiar problems. If the elite of the country — and I include as elite government officials, newspaper reporters and editors, university students — do not see fit to express themselves with any degree of precision and correctness, what are we to expect of the general public?

There is, undoubtedly, ground for special pleading but, ultimately, special pleading is but an insidious form of insult and patronisation. It posits the myth that Papua New Guineans are unique (which they are) and therefore cannot be expected to master the language in the way others do (which is rubbish). The belief that only so-called native speakers of English are (or can be) good at it has exploded ever

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since the Indians, the Africans and others learnt the language. It might give plenty more people employment to overlook the real causes for badness and come up with so-called remedial teaching services. One way to maintain usefulness is to neglect the root cause in exchange for superficial cures. Finally the question is really one of effort, committment and dedication. Unless and until a serious move in the direction of upgrading standards of English is made, there appears to be little hope for improvement. I have it on good authority that those who went to school in the late 60s and early 70s have a far superior command of English than their subsequent counterparts. Perhaps, therefore, the teaching is at fault. Or is it a fault of educational policy on the whole? Whatever the chief fault, the sooner the realisation is made the better. For you cannot expect people to use a language confidently if the groundwork is haphazard. Many Papua New Guineans are quite ready to admit that their lack of confidence with English inhibits their full and active participation in meetings with the result that their contribution to decision-making is frequently weakened. This, I am told, applies at all levels; here in the university, in schools, in various government departments and statutory bodies.

Naturally enough not everyone is as handicapped as I have made them out to be. But so far I have been speaking only of basics. Competency in a language does not stop short at basics however; there are other, more stylistic and aesthetic considerations as well. Except for a very small minority (and these are the writers whose problems and prospects I shall shortly discuss) English users in this country have little or no familiarity with matters of style and aesthetics. Those who have some facility with the language write a grammatical but dull prose. The inability to express incisively and put across ideas in a succinct manner is another marked weakness. There is hardly an instance in everyday life where we can point to a fairly sophisticated use of the language. Since linguistic ability is invariably linked to such things as comprehension, communication and conceptualisation, this state of affairs should worry those who have the long-term interests of the country at heart.

At this point a few words about the teaching of English in the schools are, perhaps, in order. For some years now PNG schools have taken the so-called functional aproach to the teaching of language. I am not a language specialist but as the tree is always judged by its fruits so I feel confident to say that to date the end-products of this approach have not lived up to expectations. This is not to state that the functional approach is wrong; but it certainly does not seem to be right. As I understand it, the gist of this approach is that the student is taught the strategies before he is taught the basic rules, the tricks before the rudiments. Furthermore because "function" is stressed above everything else, the student learns (or is supposed to anyway) to handle and cope with specific situations without really knowing how to handle and cope with general situations. Thus if he has been taught how he should conduct himself during an interview with a prospective employer, using all the right jargon for such a purpose, he would, probably, be able to do just that. But would he, then, be able to conduct a good interview with a news reporter, or an overseas visitor, or a politician? When we use specific situations as teaching examples we risk creating specialists. All over the world it is being increasingly recognised that specialisation in itself may not be a boon to human civilisation; it reduces the human animal to a function, a digit, and there are large areas of life into which such a digit cannot fit without embarrassment or without serious disadvantages. I am truly amazed at the kind of jargon that the functional approach introduces the student of English to, but, sad to say, I am most unhappy with the substance. If I am right in my supposition, I believe the functional approach was experimented with in many other parts of the world without much success and was therefore either heavily modified or entirely dismissed. In any case,

as has been said before, the functional approach in itself does not promise to elevate the standard of spoken or written English in this country.

Closely connected to the study and teaching of English in schools is the question of literature teaching. I have repeatedly pointed out that Papua New Guinea might well be the only country in the world in which literature does not occupy a formal status in the entire school curricula. As a token it finds a meek place in so-called extension periods, and individual teachers use (or more frequently don't use) their initiative to utilise whatever little time they may have to introduce some literature to their students. I think it is generally accepted that good written expression is greatly influenced by the reading of literature, since the best use of any language is to be found in its poems, plays, novels and stories. Inspite of the widely accepted fact that most students in schools love and enjoy reading literature the Education Department and its various Committees do not seem to endorse that literature should be studied and taught as a subject in its own right. There are other, perhaps even more pertinent reasons as to why it ought to be taught (what, for example, in the present school syllabi stimulates the student's imagination?) but no language teacher can afford to dismiss the value of literature as an essential tool in the acquisition of a sound language base. A sensitive study and appreciation of one good novel will do more good than ten specific lessons in functionalism. The reading of good literary works has, to my knowledge, never been seriously questioned, and it is a terrible shame that in this country this aspect of education seems to be so grossly neglected. Indeed, the first moves to eliminate literature from the Preliminary Year course at this university have already been set in motion!

This brings me to the question of creative writing in English in Papua New Guinea. Let me say right away that this country bubbles with creative energy. Seldom does one come across a group of people who are so earnest in wanting to express themselves in a creative form. There is a natural dynamism, spontaneity and urge that it is a wonder that more literary works have not seen the light of day. The enormous freedom which the PNG writer enjoys is an added godsend. All told the writer here seems to have everything going for him. Why then, is there an apparent dearth of good literary works in English?

The problems are manifold. To begin with the physical shape of the country may have something to do with it. There is precious little communication between writers. As a result most operate on their own and therefore do not get the necessary feedback or stimulation which a writer must have if he is to produce a continuous stream of works. It also means that genuine development is hampered because growth can only take place when there is a healthy exchange of views and ideas. Otherwise creative expression can so easily stagnate. Writers build upon each other's work, each influencing the next. But if channels of communication become clogged for whatever reason then the writer, working in isolation, develops an insular mentality with the result that his writing becomes staid and, eventually, boring. Absence of cross-fertilisation leads to in-breeding with chaotic results. There must, therefore, be a freer flow of ideas among writers, more meetings to discuss mutual problems and a good, well organised communication network that ensures a ready exchange of new works. At a recent poetry reading at this university I made the call for a National Writers' Organisation to be set up to facilitate such a network. Whether or not the call is heeded will depend on the writers themselves.

A related problem is the lack of readership. Papua New Guineans are notoriously poor readers; they will avoid reading a book if they can do anything else. There may well be good historical and cultural reasons for this, but if PNG wants to produce a substantial and viable body of literary works, it is crucial that the public be educated to read more. Naturally, the

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schools have a vital role to play in this respect. Again I make the point that unless and until you encourage people to read literature from a young age, you are not going to succeed in creating a literate society. In other cultures reading is taken to be an important part of every person's life and it will be rare to come across an American, an Englishman or an Australian who did not find some free time to read a novel, for example. But here the situation is remarkably different. I find it extremely diffficult, for instance to make my own students read anything beyond their immediate texts. A few do, (and with excellent results for as the good book says to those that have shall it be given) but most simply ignore the challenge. I am convinced that the problem has to be tackled at its roots; that is, the reading of literary works should be made a compulsory part of the general school curriculum.

It is not only the general public that seems averse to reading. Among the writers themselves there does not appear to be any great desire to want to read each other's works, or the works of writers from elsewhere. I believe there was, some years ago, a generation of writers who did actually make it a point to read each others works and to assimilate as much as they could from their reading of international writers, but this generation seems to have dispersed, if not disappeared. While it is true that many writers are aware that Vincent Eri has produced *The Crocodile*, that Russell Soaba has written *Wanpis*, that Nora Brash has created *Which Way Big Man*, not many, I feel inclined to say, have actually tried to come to grips with these works in any real sense. A cursory reading of a literary work is not very helpful beyond superficial acquaintance: the genuine writer makes it his sacred duty to study the styles and techniques of his fellow writers so as to better his own. In this way he learns and develops his own writing. I might also add that it will do the PNG writer immense good to spend some time reading and appreciating the works of the great masters of English language. If nothing else they will at least discover the heights reached by such men as Shakespeare, Keats, Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Hemingway, Orwell, Achebe, Ngungi, Narayan, Raja Rao, Nick Jocquin, Lee Kok Liang, Walcott, Patrick White, Albert Wendt, Janet Frame and the umpteen others whose names I leave out. Such reading should also encourage by way of setting an example of what the dedicated writer can do with the language. Reading the Harold Robbins', the Wilbur Smiths' and the Georgeyette Heyers' of the world is all well and good but these writers seldom have much to teach other writers beyond sensationalism and novelty. If I were a PNG writer I'd make it my business particularly to study the poets, because it is in poetry that the utmost resources of the language are exploited and it is in poetry and poetic drama that the human experience is most fully explored.

Most Papua New Guinean writers seem to me to be in a terrible hurry to want to get their works published. I know that it is natural to want to be recognised and accepted as a writer but the way to go about this is not to rush. Some budding writers I know give up simply because they cannot find an outlet for their works. It is very true that there are pathetically few publishing outlets for creative materials but impatience is not going to get us anywhere. Publishing should be seen as the end in a process involving writing, revising, rewriting, mulling: it should not be the first thing that a writer should think about. You only worry about publishing once you feel that you have something worthwhile to publish. Again, the danger with quick and easy publishing is that writers feel they have made it, that they have done their bit for the literature of this nation, that they have gone as far as they can. Early publication can also breed arrogance; writers can become unduly proud and unmanageable. Indeed a quick success-story is besotted with dangers and one thing the PNG writer should be wary of is being told he is good (or even very good) on the basis of a preliminary draft. I know it is not easy to discourage without destroying the creative urge but people in positions

of authority (such as university teachers) should, in all fairness, be judicious about their assessments. As anywhere else in the world, a lot that is written here is mediocre, if not plain trash. And it is essential to realise that not everyone can be a writer and not everyone can be a good writer. There are differences both of degree and kind. It is very easy for a young writer to get it in his head that he has made it just because some expatriate says what he has written is good. Judgement in literary matters is already a complicated business without having to contend with paternalism.

This leads me to say a few things about criticism. I firmly believe that any literature can flourish only when a healthy stream of critical feedback is forthcoming. Writers need to know if what they have written and published is up to scratch, if it means anything to the larger audience, if it can be improved upon, and if it merits wider circulation and acceptance. A robust tradition of creative expression cannot exist without an equally rigorous tradition of critical scrutiny. In this country there is an appalling lack of critical feedback. There is, really, no tradition of book-reviewing, writing of critical essays or notices, and provision for scholarly study of local works by Papua New Guineans for Papua New Guineans. I suppose this last is, to some extent, served by the Literature Department of this University, but it in no way suffices. Writers cannot succeed when working in a vacuum: we cannot imagine what paths the great literary traditions of England and America would have taken without the accompanying paths taken by their critical traditions. The important role of suitable critics in this respect cannot be over-emphasised. I think it is time some of the more experienced writers of PNG took it upon themselves to study the work of their fellow writers and make suitable commentaries on them. Criticism and creativity should go hand in hand; with one hand missing only a modicum of success can be achieved.

In both the areas of publishing and criticism PNG writers have, to a very large extent, relied upon expatriate expertise and initiative. And, I am told this state of affairs continues today as well. We must remember that expatriates will come and go, and, depending on who is available, such expertise and initiative will either expand or contract. Ulli Bier, for example, seems to have fostered many literary publications, but upon his leaving their fell a certain emptiness, a certain quiet. And this will undoubtedly continue because in the very nature of things expatriates ultimately leave, when their time is up, they pack and go. Also, expatriates will normally tend to judge local literary works from the stand-points of their own back-ground and training. It is a rare creature who is able to shed off his prejudices and see merit where it truly is. On the other hand, there can arise a situation, and I believe there has, in which anything what-ever is published. This could be a dis-service, for, in the final count, the writers are not going to be judged by the pro-moters but by the much more severe community of readers and scholars. It should also be borne in mind that the PNG writer in English has the added onus of being judged internationally. Nowadays almost everywhere in the world people write poems, plays, stories in English and they are judged by standards set by those who have made it on the international scene. From this part of the world it would be fair to say that only Albert Wendt of Western Samoa seems to have achieved a standard of literary expression acceptable far and wide. Vincent Eri's novel was a welcome start but he has not given us anything after it so that the promise is yet to be fulfilled. Perhaps the writings of John Kasaipwalova, Russell Soaba and Nora Brash contain a vitality which can be more fully exploited so as to warrant international recognition. But is is hard work and utmost dedication is required. One does not become an established writer on the basis of just one novel, or one play or a few good poems; a literary reputation is indeed hard to earn and takes a lot of effort and energy and time and devotion. Too many people in developing countries see creative expression as an easy way to

, I am told this state of oday as well. We must patriates will come and g on who is available, d initiative will either . Ulli Bier, for example, fostered many literary upon his leaving their tiness, a certain quiet. ubtedly continue because e of things expatriates when their time is up, . Also, expatriates will udge local literary works ints of their own back- g. It is a rare creature d off his prejudices and truly is. On the other rise a situation, and I in which anything what- This could be a dis- final count, the writers be judged by the pro- he much more severe aders and scholars. It orne in mind that the glish has the added onus ternationally. Nowadays e in the world people , stories in English and standards set by those it on the international art of the world it would only Albert Wendt of ems to have achieved a y expression acceptable cent Eri's novel was a he has not given us that the promise is yet erhaps the writings of a, Russell Soaba and a vitality which can be ted so as to warrant gnition. But is is hard dedication is required. me an established writer t one novel, or one play ms; a literary reputation earn and takes a lot of and time and devotion. in developing countries ssion as an easy way to

gain recognition and popularity; alas time catches up with them and they are forgotten as quickly as they are recognised. The true writer remains committed to his task, he does not abandon his writing just because his first poem or story or play is rejected by publishers, he remains undaunted in the face of failure or defeat. Sooner or later success is bound to come to the writer who takes his writing seriously. A writer needs to have the courage of his convictions, he needs to be honest with himself and say what he really feels. He also needs to be strong enough to realise that perhaps, after all, he is not as good as he thinks he is. Different writers have different strengths and these strengths should be recognised for what they are and the creative energy should be accordingly channelled. Very few people can be novelists, playwrights and poets all at once; indeed to be even one of these is an achievement in itself. What I am suggesting is that Papua New Guinea writers have not, generally, been able to organise their talents properly — they have let current moods decide and determine what they write or what they do. Thus, for instance, John Waiko, who, I think has done some excellent work, told me the other day that his creative energies were now directed into other channels. I imagine the same may be said of Vincent Eri, Leo Hannett, Ignatius Kilage and others who showed promise of becoming good writers but who have since given up writing for other, more pressing preoccupations. I am not recommending that writers in PNG should all turn full-time but I am saying that you cannot expect to achieve very much if your energies are dissipated in various directions. Writing, like so much else in life, requires discipline and this I find to be sometimes lacking among many local writers. This is probably one reason why they have not produced as much as they should have. The genuine writer will always find time to write, no matter how urgent his other tasks.

In the early seventies writers in PNG found an immediate spur in the fight for Independence. This resulted in the production of several very good poems, plays and stories. Most of these writings are only important today for their historical significance, though some have been able to withstand the test of time. In discussion with some local writers I discovered that there was a general feeling of apathy. Current events did not seem to matter much and the writers therefore complained of the lack of things to write about. Some of them fall easy prey to the idea of writing things "exotic". One suspects a foreign hand in these matters, for the outsider will always be impressed by new things. But pandering to the exotic is not, in itself, going to produce good writing: once the novelty wears off the interest is going to wane too. For the true writer life is the large subject, he does not wait for "big" events to take place in order to express himself. The history of literature shows that more often than not it is the lesser writers who seize upon opportunities afforded by big events and happenings. These are writers of inferior imagination whose needs must be given external motivation and inspiration to get them writing. The real writer's urge to express comes from within, not from without. Externalities may prompt the urge but they never dictate it.

Much PNG writing in English tends to be unduly romantic. Most of the creative writing I am acquainted with is written by young people. That may be one reason why it does not reveal sufficient maturity of thought or expression. The generation-gap, boy-girl relationships, potted politics, are among the more common themes explored by PNG writers. I must say that the writing is on occasions strikingly original and invites the reader's total engagement. But more often than not, there is little attempt at expression in a language other than the ordinary; usually a colloquial tone is employed (which, of course, is apt for certain kinds of writing) with the sad result that the writing does not ask for a second or a third reading. Simplicity is the norm and the reader has to make his own provisions for any complexities which the subject matter may

suggest. In the poems of Loujaya Kouza, for example, there is positive utilisation of imagery and myth and the poems do carry their effects over quite forcefully. Unfortunately such instances are few and far between and the vast majority of works written in English suffers from any realisation of the full potential of the language. There certainly needs to be more attention paid to craftsmanship before the art can truly flower. Also, effort has to be made to veer away from topical themes to other, more universal issues. Good writing in any language should transcend time and place; at the moment few PNG works in English have arrived at this distinction. But the few that have (Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile*, John Kasaipwalova's *Reluctant Flame*, Karma Kerpi's *Voices From The Ridge*, among others) ably and amply demonstrate the potential that is there. And it should, in fact, be only a matter of time before the Papua New Guinea writer in English arrives on his own.

So far I have been lamenting and, perhaps even more accurately, lambasting. Allow me, in conclusion, to say a few words which may help to suggest that the situation is not all that bleak. Considering the fact that it is only fairly recent that English has been taught and studied, it might be remarked that Papua New Guinea writers have come a long way. The relative isolation in which these writers have worked illustrates the lengths to which they can go if they were put in general touch with the rest of the international community of writers. Perhaps the National Cultural Council ought to accelerate the establishment of a Literature Board which could facilitate fellowships and publication of the many writers we find in the country. Such a board could also help organise regular workshops and encourage writers to visit schools and colleges throughout the country so as to make people aware that there is a rich body of literature in English locally available. The press, too, can play an important part in the fostering and promotion of creative writing, as can the NBC. Talks by writers as well as discussions of their works could be actively broadcast and made available to teachers and students in schools. I am myself now working on three anthologies with a view to assemble the best that has been produced in poetry, fiction and drama. I intend to follow this up with a short critical study of the more important works. There is much that has to be done and a lot will depend on the attitudes people adopt towards writers and writing. Ultimately the society in which a writer lives and writes must nourish his imagination if it wants to be rewarded with good works. There is a definite pride which Papua New Guineans ought to take in their writers; in this part of the world PNG seems to have the greatest potential to produce a very substantial and rich body of writing in English.

I began by saying that any discussion of language is bound to be touchy. I am aware that I have made some rather harsh remarks in the process but I want to re-affirm that I have said what I've said not with the intent of belittling or ridiculing but with the honest view of trying to put things in perspective. There has, I believe, been too much pussy-footing around the place with regard to the level of English expression and it is about time we faced up to this. English is a living and vibrant language and ought to be received as such. High falutin terminology and endless experimentation with teaching methods is not going to get us to the heart of the matter which is simply that people seem to have adopted an allow-it-to-happen-it doesn't-matter attitude to the issue. It is my fervent belief and hope that in the next few years Papua New Guineans will wake up to the problems involved and see for themselves the enormous prospects that await a concerted exploitation of the English language. When Caliban was taught a language he replied that his profit was that he learnt how to curse his master: we have come a long way from that mentality and our profit in learning and mastering English should lead us to become more articulated and more confident of ourselves and less dependent upon others to do our bidding.

PNG: THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN A NEWLY-INDEPENDENT COUNTRY

by **William McGaw**

The place of literature in developed countries is almost never discussed. This is no doubt because it is almost never questioned and is certainly never threatened. Good literature is broadly published and widely read, it is taught in the schools, the colleges and universities as a vital part of their curriculum. In developed countries literature frequently enjoys a favoured position with generous subsidies to theatre companies and generous grants to individual writers. A poet, a novelist or a playwright may well find himself encouraged to devote his working hours to the perfection of his craft. Direct funding of writers is, of course, generally beyond the means of developing countries. It is to be assumed that writers must fend for themselves. But what of the literature which they write? By what means should it be published and by whom? And, if published, what role should it play in the educational institutions and what audience should it reach?

I have read of "the death of Papua New Guinean Writing". Bernard Minol lamented its demise in the Reviews Section of *The Times* on 26th September, 1980. Presumably, he is still awaiting its resurrection. In his reluctant funeral oration, Minol describes how PNG writing flourished in the womb of pre-independence only to be still-born when Independence finally came. Minol notes that the two most important factors in producing so much literary activity in the years 1969-74 were the entrepreneurial presence of Ulli Beier and an understandable desire "to hit back at the dying colonial master". He also notes that the two major factors which have inhibited the growth and development of PNG literature since Independence have been "the scarcity of publishing outlets" and "the lack of an interested reading public in Papua New Guinea".

The question of a writer's audience I shall deal with later. It is scarcely something which can be remedied in the short term. The former constraint on literary activity, that of a lack of opportunity to publish, would seem to be more easily cured. In the heady days of the late sixties and early seventies it was the University which encouraged and published much of the country's literary output. The country (then on the brink of independece) and its literature were mutually, supportive and mutually dependent. If much of that literature — e.g. Vincent Eri's novel, *The Crocodile*, and many of the plays written for and produced by the Drama and Arts Society at UPNG — was directed against colonial practices it was because it was entirely appropriate that the nation should seek to understand and assess the past before confronting the present and charting the future. If the kind of literary activity which existed then and which does not appear to exist now is to be enjoyed again then it would seem to me that the best opportunity for resurgence in the short term lies with the University. It would seem to have the best resources for both promoting and publishing work which it considers of literary merit.

The place where the literature of Papua New Guinea ought first to be promoted is in Papua New Guinean schools. I was surprised to learn on my arrival here that literature is not taught as a subject in its

own right from Grade 1 to 12. I do not wish to add to the controversy which has been generated over the past two weeks by seeking to comment on the school curriculum as it is currently structured. However, I do wish to emphasise the constructive role that literature can play in the education of a people. Essentially we read and study literature for human reasons. Together with the other great art forms, music and painting, literature moves the heart, broadens the mind and ennobles the soul. The medium of literature is language: not the functional, denotative, jargon-filled language that dominates almost every other intellectual pursuit, but the richly connotative language of metaphor and symbol, allegory and myth. Among all the subjects which are taught in schools, literature is the only one that calls for the active participation of the imagination. When we read literature the images we form in our mind are suggested but not determined by the words on the page. The words feed the imagination. To deprive a child of literature is to starve his imagination. To deprive him of his own nation's literature is to deny him his cultural heritage.

Taking a place in the education of the young is a direct role that an indigenous literature can play in the growth and development of an emerging society. There are other roles, indirect roles, which are equally important. They revolve around a new nation's search for a national identity. In a nation like Papua New Guinea, whose history has been one of dislocation and disruption, of invasion and war, of lengthy colonial administration followed by sudden independence, the first task of national writers is, inevitably, to explore that history, to find in it meanings for future imaginative and spiritual growth.

With Independence imminent, Papua New Guineans could not begin with a "clean slate", too much had passed between the colonisers and the colonised for that. But what their writers could do was to begin with "a foolscap pad and a biro" as does Anonymous, the half-caste narrator of Russell Soaba's *Wanpis*. But where to being?

Stories of missionaries, pilots, patrol officers, fishermen and also soldiers had appeared fairly regularly through the middle of the 20th century. But these were stories seen through Western eyes and written for a Western audience. They portrayed Papua New Guineans in a patronising and trivialising way. The white colonisers were not shown as interacting with indigenous population. They were shown as either controlling or confronting them. The moral interest of these stories lay in the ways in which Western men and women responded to the disruptions and dislocations in their lives caused by their transference to a foreign land. Little attention was paid to the disruption and dislocation their presence and authority brought to Papua New Guineans. An obvious first task would be to reverse this perspective and to concentrate moral interest on the plight of the Papua New Guinean. Papua New Guinean stories seen through Papua New Guinean eyes would then be available to a Papua New Guinean audience. Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile* and the various plays which were generated by the Drama and Arts Society performed this role.

The plays are extremely direct in their portrayal of white racism. Indifference, intolerance, condescension, injustice — these are the colonial vices which the plays expose and condemn. Leo Hannet's *The Ungrateful Daughter*, to take an example, begins with the Carneys, an Australian couple resident in PNG, discussing a newspaper item on the jailing of the Black Power leader, Stokeley Carmichael after delivering a memorial lecture on the anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X. "Serves him right," says Mrs. Carney.

Mr. Carney: Well I'm damned! The man's just inciting people to violence! He's just asking people to kill all white men.

Mrs. Carney: Well, American Negroes are like that. They always make trouble. They burn, shoot and loot.

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Mr. Carney: Nowadays they have guns even on University campuses!

Mrs. Carney: Thank God New Guinea is different. This can never happen here. I know they have a few bigheads on the coast now, but the majority of the natives are hard-working and peace loving.

Mr. Carney: Well, they do appreciate what we do for them.

Mrs. Carney: Poor things, what would happen to them if we left them on their own?

Mr. Carney: They'd start going bush again. That's one thing I am certain of. And it would only be a matter of time, before they'd start killing each other off, fighting over their pigs and their meris.

Johnnie Tom Tom (trying to attract their attention): Missis, Kaikai i ...

Mrs. Carney: (ignoring him) Well I am sure the Australian Government will never be irresponsible enough to abandon them. And they are grateful to us too: it was nice to hear that Highland member of the House of Assembly moving a motion, thanking Australia for being a good mother to them.

Mr. Carney: Yes, except I didn't like the way he compared Australia to a cow that gives a lot of milk, that eats the good grass of this country, but also puts something good back into the soil to make it fertile.

Though the Carneys have raised an adopted PNG daughter, Ebonita, they despise Papua New Guineans and are seeking to marry her off to a Mr. Sidney Smith who is equally racist. Ebonita, proud of her race and repulsed by the prejudice and hypocricy of her parents and fiance seeks moral and spiritual support among her own people. Ultimately she does yield to the coercion of her parents and the two arm-twisters they have enlisted in their aid, an uncle from Canberra called Patron and a missionary priest called Spellman. The play concludes with a wedding ceremony which ends abruptly at the words, "for better, for worse" —

Ebonita: For better, for worse, FOR WORSE, FOR WORSE, FOR WORSE!!!! (She tears off her veil and throws it down. She swings round to the audience and shouts) NO! NO! NO! I want to be FREEEEE! (Sudden drum beats off stage and Ebonita breaks into a wild dance, tearing off her wedding dress. Suddenly the crowd is filled with New Guinean dancers all dressed up in traditional costume. They rush threateningly at the whites on stage who scatter in all directions. There is a triumphant victory dance for about a minute. Then:

BLACK OUT
THE END

As you can see, the moral appeals the play makes are crude and unabashed, its biases are blatant. The role of such literature, with its raw clashes of the oppressors and the oppressed, is to exorcise the sense of injury and shame that colonization has ingrained in the country's original inhabitants. Its purpose is to rediscover pride.

The anti-colonial plays are too short and succinct and too narrow in their vision to explore the national identity. The need to subject the colonial period of PNG history to prolonged fictional treatment was fulfilled by Eri's much praised novel *The Crocodile*. *The Crocodile* is a simple tale of innocence and exploitation set some sixty miles to the west of Port Moresby in the 1930s and 40s. It records village life

and village ways, interpolates Papuan myths and superstition and reveals the disruption of village life as the over-bearing demands of colonial and war administrations are met. Hoiri, the hero of the novel, is dragooned into service, first as a porter for a churlish and insensitive patrol officer and then, during the war, both as a canoe paddler on the Taure River and as a cargo-bearer on the Bulldog trail to Wau and Lae. The novel is descriptive rather than analytical and interpretive, it reveals events rather than explores their implications, so that when at the end, Hoiri is handcuffed after seeking to reclaim his spirit-possessed wife it is not clear which he is more a victim of, the magic of the crocodile from which the novel gains its title or the intervention of the white man. What is clear is that Hoiri is lost. From the time of his being selected from a line of his tribesman by the patrol officer his life has been beyond his control. He is a spoke snatched from the wheel of his family and village and in his absence the wheel collapses. His wife disappears while he is with the patrol officer, his father dies while he is in Lae and he does not learn of his death till the end of the war, and he is separated from his son for over three years. His final state of alienation and frustration represents in microcosm the shattering impact of the imported white culture on the traditional native culture.

The Crocodile, though it has little literary merit, is nevertheless important historically. Its value is psychological. It tells the Papua New Guineans how, if not why, he no longer lives in the intergrated world of his forefathers. To say this is to note the functional role of literature in a new country. The Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, whose first book *Things Fall Apart* is the archetypal African colonial novel, argued the importance of this functional role in an article in *The New Statesman* called "The Novelist as Teacher":

> The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and re-generation that must be done. In fact he should march right in front ... Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive.

The inclination of literature in newly independent countries has always been towards the didactic. Change is inevitable and one of the vital roles of new literature is to reflect that change and to explore ways of adjusting to it. T.S. Eliot said that the writer should be "at the tip of the senses of his age" seeing the fragmentation of modern life and forever seeking to form new wholes. That more than anything else perhaps is the task of the writer in Papua New Guinea. But what is the effect of this responsibility upon the artist himself?

For the little band of writer-friends in *Wanpis*, the act of writing is too traumatic. The Papua New Guinean writer, according to this novel, is destined to be a "lusman", to remain fragmented and, as the poet among them, Jimi Damebo puts it, "to die like frogs on the road". Damebo himself dies at the age of 23 after being battered unconscious and being left for dead during a labourers' uprising. He dies having abandoned poetry, his sole legacy to his girlfriend Vera being some "Random Notes" for a novel he has never written. In his notes he defines his literary inertia in the following way:

> Even now, while planning this novel, while treating it as a spare-time hobby, I am afraid. Afraid because I am too young to attempt an effort as ambitious as this; and since I am too young and too underdeveloped I feel I am fooling over two and a half million people. (p. 118)

He elaborates further:

> there are no definitive enough forces to help create that self-determination in me; every book I read is simply a dream which automatically gets crushed by the next book I pick up. I am all confusion. Why should I be frightened of saying this? And my condition is as poor as the society which constitutes me; one moment I adore loneliness; the next, this loneliness is tormenting ... My senses are dormant, dead. My eyes are

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blurred not of ageing but self-neglect and pride within these dead dreams of becoming a famed idealist. (p. 118)

For this writer, living at "the tip of the senses of his people" produces a psychological state which is destructive and debilitating, the fractured condition of the writer reflecting the fractured condition of the society. Fearing failure, fearing his lack of intellectual sophistication, confused by the myriad pressures and external stimuli, and doubting that he is really anything more than a glib confidence-trickster, the writer is robbed of the power to write. Creation has been a lonely and ardous task since Genesis I!

Soaba's portrayal of the PNG author as "lusman", as fragmented and tormented is both valid and harrowing. The writer in a newly independent country faces dilemmas which his counterparts in developed societies do not face. One of the great dilemmas is choosing the proper language of communication. Should such writers speak to their fellow countrymen in their own language or should they speak to the wider world in English, which is really their second language? In Africa, where Swahili may be a viable alternative to English, this dilemma produces considerable anguish. I attended a Commonwealth Language and Literature Association Conference some years ago in which several African writers were vehemently of the opinion that they should not write again in English.

This particular dilemma would not seem to be as great for writers in Papua New Guinea. As there are so many dialects in a nation of only 3,000,000 people and as no one single dialect is common, the choice for the writer is almost certainly between English and Pidgin. Yet of the dialects, Pidgin and English, Pidgin would seem the least satisfactory medium. The dialects, if not particularly wide in vocabulary, are nevertheless rich in symbol and metaphor, the product of a long tradition of myth-making. Pidgin is a kind of half-way hot-house lacking the sympathetic diction and expressiveness of the dialects on the one hand and the syntactic subtlety and wide vocabulary of Engish on the other.

The question I am dealing with is, of course, the question of audience. For whom should the artist write — for his people in the village or for the educated elite of his country and the wider audience of English speakers throughout the world. Soaba deals with this dilemma very early in *Wanpis*:

> That's how Just Call Me Joe and I were. Our conversations began with lust and ended up meaningless with the dying dusk of each day. Often we talked a lot, using a lot of words, sometimes big English words too, about nothing. We were students.
>
> Yet however meaningless our words sounded they had always contained in them, we felt, little bits of truth which we could only wonder if they had found their marks in the people we used to direct them to. Even now, while lazily peeping through the louvres of a Government-rented house at the northern end of Port Moresby city where I am writing this, pretending I am doing it to please myself or to let the thought of a dying friend out of my mind, I can only wonder if those words we used to say at Uni meant anything to anybody at all. I wonder if the children playing *kung fu* just outside the house know anything. I even wonder if the people of this country know what I am all about. (p. 6)

What Soaba is expressing here is modern theory of literature. It is a theory he holds in common with such writers as Henrik Ibsen and James Joyce, but which, as I have just been discussing, he develops as essentially Papua New Guinean. Ibsen believed that in order to write an artist must detach himself from society, that he must hold himself aloof and, from an alienated and superior position, describe and evaluate his society. Such a theory lies at the heart of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in which Stephen Dedalus, the writer in embryo, comes, by a process of ever-accelerating alienation from his fellow-students and the Catholic Church, to discover his literary vocation. The things which most characterise Stephen are his

intensity, his introspectivity and his fascination with words : "Through words you can understand things," Stephen says.

Soaba's narrator in *Wanpis* shares these characteristics with Stephen but what alienates him is not merely the artistic temperament and intense interest in language he shares with Stephen but the language itself. Where the writer whom Joyce is portraying might be said to have two audiences, a contemporary audience and posterity, the writer Soaba is portraying may be seen to have three: a contemporary PNG audience, a contemporary world audience and posterity. When Soaba's narrator says:

> I can only wonder if those (English) words we used to say at Uni meant anything to anybody at all. I wonder if the children playing *kung fu* just outside the house know anything. I even wonder if the people of this country know what I am all about,

— when he says that — he is acknowledging that he cannot speak to his three audiences simultaneously.

An Ibsen or a Joyce may divorce himself from his society in order to speak as prophet or seer to his contemporaries. A Soaba, however, when he divorces himself, knows that he can no longer communicate with most members of his society. He must speak as prophet or seer chiefly to an audience which has not yet been born.

It is therefore his third audience, the contemporary audience outside Papua New Guinea to which, for the present at least, a writer such as Soaba chiefly directs his creative talents. It is an important audience. The cultural value and literary merit of Third World literature is being recognised more and more in the West. Increasingly, it is being read in Western schools, studied in Western Universities and written about by Western critics. The tragedy for PNG writers is that their work is not seen to be relevant to the education of their people. Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, two years before Nigerian independence. By 1964 the novel was compulsory reading for African secondary school students throughout the English speaking countries of Africa. In that year 20,000 copies of it were sold in Nigeria alone. By contrast, *Wanpis* published in 1977 is out of print and no reprinting is envisaged.

A further dilemma for the writer in Papua New Guinea is the competing demands of literary vocation and career. In a country whose whole outlook and philosophy of education is dominated by the "functional approach" it is only to be expected that those who command the subtleties of the English language will be drawn into the higher levels of the Public Service. In these circumstances the writer's aspirations, to use John Kasaipwalova's words in his remarkable poem *Reluctant Flame*, will forever be lost in the mess of paper status.

PNG writing, though not dead, would nevertheless seem to have been temporarily stifled as Soaba's novel prophesied. Has the same fate befallen writers of pre-independence days as befalls Soaba's characters — have they (like the narrator) become more and more alienated as their literary skills developed, have they (like Nathaniel) joined the Civil Service, or have they (like Jimi Damebo) "died like frogs on the road"? It is to be remembered that in Soaba's novel one character, the narrator, does finally take up his pen and does complete his task. It is to be noted also that Soaba himself has completed a second novel, though it has still to be published.

If PNG literature is not noticeably progressing, where then might it be said currently to stand? Because of our experience of new literatures in English in Africa and other de-colonised parts of the world it is possible to have some expectations about the phases through which a New Literature will emerge. The first phase, usually in the time immediately before independence, has as its impetus a desire to "set the record straight". In this phase the conflicts between traditional village life and Western religion and colonisation are reexamined and reassessed. On the one hand the rich oral traditions

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of myth and folklore are reestablished, on the other hand bitter memories of racial injustice are purged. The centre of focus is the erosion of the indigenous culture. *The Crocodile* and *The Ungrateful Daughter* are part of this phase.

In the years immediatedy following Independence, there usually ensues a second and broader phase in which themes are deepened and clarified. It is a period of consolidation. The centre of focus may transfer from cultural erosion to cultural adaptation as the new nation moulds traditions and adjusts to the new and modernised world in which it finds itself. From my reading of PNG literature, which I stress is incomplete, this second phase would not seem to have been realised. Perhaps the lack of a genuine period of consolidation may in part account for the current faltering and tentativeness of PNG writing.

In the third phase which may be anticipated in new literatures the centre of focus becomes urban rather than regional and social rather than cultural. The confrontation with Western education and Western life-style becomes increasingly manifested in the national population itself. The plays of Nora Vagi Brash, in particular *Which Way, Big Man* and *The High Cost of Living Differently* may be seen as part of this phase. It is interesting to compare *Which Way, Big Man* with *The Ungrateful Daughter*. In the earlier play, the white Mrs. Carney treated her servant with extreme condescension and impatience and found the social habits of his people offensive. In *Which Way, Big Man*, this role is assumed by Mrs. Sinob Haia, the social climbing wife of the newly appointed Director of National Identity, Mr. Gou Haia. Mrs. Haia can't stomach her own people's food (she eats T-bone steak), forbids betel nut chewing in her house (she serves alcohol and cigars) and condemns "this 'wantok' business". She treats her servant badly and is mortified by the sudden arrival of her father-in-law just as she is about to give a party:

Sinob: (*OFF*) Where is your father? Did you tell him?

Gou: He's gone with Peta to clean up, and change clothes. Then come to the party.

Sinob: To the party? The last thing I wanted was for your father to stay for the party? What will the people think? You better introduce him — and say he doesn't speak English. Tell him not to smile either. His teeth are as black as the bottom of a village cooking pot!

Gou: That's enough, Sinob! Tonight is supposed to be happy. And besides, I didn't ask the old man to come. Besides you had better make believe that we still have a bond between us and the village people. Despite the fact we rarely visit them. It's only proper thing to do.

Sinob: All right. But I'll hold you responsible for any disasters that might happen to-night. Don't forget that.

White colonial behaviour, offensive in its own right, is grotesque and ridiculous when manifested in Sinob Haia. It is also insidious. When Mata, a character in *The High Cost of Living Differently*, says of village people:

> They must realize that towns are for people like us, who can cope with the Western style of living and stay out of trouble ...

We see how much the subject matter and political perspective has changed since the literature of pre-independence. The moral interest now revolves around the problems of social evolution. The tone of Mrs. Brash's plays is strongly didactic. *Which Way, Big Man* ends with Mrs. Haia as a drunken caricature, publicly disgracing herself and destroying her own party. National Identity must not be determined by the likes of the Gou Haias!

The plots of work in the Third Phase are still situational but the perspective from which a story is told is usually more complex and often ironic. John Kasaipwalova's short

story, *Betel Nut is Bad Magic for Airplanes* is an excellent example. The story is set at Jackson's airport:

> One Saturday afternoon in May 22 this year some of we university students went to meet our people at Jackson Airport in Seven Mile. They arrived and we happy very much. Then we all comes to that backyard corner. That one place where Ansett and TAA capsize boxes for native people who go by plane.
>
> We was standing about thirty of we, waiting to catch our things. We was chewing plenty buwa like civilized people. We was not spitting or making rubbish. Only feeling very good from the betel nuts our people had bringed to Moresby.
>
> Then for nothing somebody in brown uniform with cap like pilot, and wearing boots like dimdim and black belt, he comes up to one our people and he gives some Motu and English. That one our people didn't understood. So soon that uniform man was redding his eyes and rubbing his teeths just like white man's puppy dog. Maybe something like five minutes died but still he talk. Bloody bastard! He wanted our people to stop chewing buwa because TAA and Ansett jets had come and plenty plenty white people inside the terminal. They must not be offended to see us chew betel nut. Anyways, this brown puppy dog of white man angried himself for nothing. His anger now made big big pumpkin inside his throat for because he was 'educated native' and he didn't wanted kanaka native doing like that in front of Europeans.

The students refuse to move and so finally the airport official is forced to call in his white boss:

> Anyway, the security guards came to us. But now we three university students, we was standing together and looking them very proudly. Too late now. We was not going to run any more. We decided to defend our rights. At first they didn't know what to say and only they talked quietly inside their throats. Then their boss, the Australian papa with big stomach, he started showing we his teeths. Oi, we was frighten by his hard voice. He says to me, 'Listen boy, who gave you permission to chew betel nut here? You are breaking the law, the legal laws of this land. And when they (pointing to his puppies) told you to stop, you said you didn't believe in the law and will continue to break the law!'
>
> Straightaway my face blooded because many black, white and yellow people, they was watching us too and this white papa dog, he was talking bad like that way to me. Plenty times I hear white people calling black men 'bois' so this time I hear it and my mind was already fire. I wanted to give him some. Maybe good English or maybe little bit Strine. So I says loudly to him, 'All right white man, on what moral grounds is it unlawful for me to chew betel nut here? This is a free country of which we black people are citizens and unless you can show me the moral basis for your "so called laws" I cannot recognize and therefore comply to that law!'
>
> Well, he was very angry now because one black man answering him in very good English. Maybe he didn't understand what I say.
>
> 'Listen boy, don't be smart. You are breaking the law and the law is laid down by the lawful government in the book.'
>
> I knows straightaway that he is another one of the those ignorant, uneducated white man. I getting very angry to.
>
> 'O.K. then, show me that ordinance which specifically lays down that we natives are not allowed to chew betel nut within the precincts of an air terminal, in our country. As a citizen I have at least the right to be shown that law before you crassly accuse me of breaking the law. Until such times as you do so we shall consider you a liar and one using his delegated authority to intimidate the black people of Niugini.'
>
> 'Shut up! You are nothing more than a cheeky brat!'
>
> 'Your resorting to insults is unwarranted here. All I'm demanding from you is the proof for the existence of such a law. Come on show me the exact ordinance.'
>
> 'I don't have to show you the written

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ordinance. The lawful authority is vested in me as an officer to arrest you if I want to. It's written in Commonwealth Safety Regulations Act, section 32.'

'Bull shit. I want to see it with my own eyes! Listen mate. Why aren't you arresting those white kids inside the terminal for chewing P.K.? What's the difference between their P.K. inside the terminal and our betel nut outside the road pavement?'

In this racial clash, the Papua New Guinean is victorious because his control of English is superior. The great irony of the story is that the language which has so long been the scourge of the people is the very vehicle through which simple human dignity is returned to them. Three of the students are arrested and taken to Port Moresby but there is indecision over what if any charges should be laid and the story ends with the CIB officer, at the narrator's request, ordering the same sergeant who arrested them to see to their being driven home to Waigani. And the final sentence?

We was chewing our betel nut on the way.

Wanpis, the other work I have discussed here, belongs to a fourth phase in the emergence of a new literature. In this phase, the centre of focus is transferred from the social to the individual and personal. This accounts for *Wanpis*'s not being particularly nationalistic. It is a contemplative novel, preoccupied with philosophical issues. Where other works explore the Nation's consciousness and conscience, *Wanpis* explores the consciousness and conscience of individuals.

In one of his *Naked Thoughts*, Russell Soaba says of Port Moresby:

in the ice of this city
rainbows
are never complete.

The ice, as in John Kasaipwalova's *Reluctant Flame* would seem to represent the chilling effect of colonisation and urbanisation on the vibrant spirit of Papua New Guniean life. In the myth and folklore of the villages before colonisation the rainbows of illusion were complete. But superstition, once undermined by education and religion, can never regain its integrity and pioneer, though it may, in a lingering way, bewitch and confuse. Old systems cannot be regained, old harmonies cannot be restored. What are needed are new myths, new symbols that are relevant to an emergent Papua New Guinea. A way forward is suggested, perhaps, in *Wanpis* when the captain of the boat, which is returning the narrator to his village at the end of his schooling, draws a comparision between the sun and the sea:

"Which do you think is safer?" he then asked.

"The sun or the ocean?"

"Why, the ocean, of course," I returned.

"The sun burns. I'd much rather spend the rest of my life in this Pacific Ocean because it somehow makes you feel something."

"It does. It does."

The Captain fished out a packet of cigarettes from his hip pocket, took out a box of matches from his breast pocket, then played with the two little things with his fingers, deep in thought. Then, taking a cigarette from the packet, he said, "You see, this spread of the wide Pacific is only a replacement of a place where you would want to be. There is no blood, no flesh, in it; it just lies there, motionless, immortal — in face of a kind of immortality that has no sentiment of the everlasting mortality of man." He stopped to place the cigarette between his lips. "It is merely a thought, a dream, but at least you would kind of feel free," he continued, "with nothing before you for miles and miles around. Know what I mean?"

The writers of Papua New Guinea may in time find in the Pacific, the peaceful ocean into which Drake sailed after the storms around Cape Horn, a permanent symbol for the Papua New Guinean identity. The rainbow to be complete must have elsewhere its setting.

ALLAN NATACHEE: POET FROM PNG

by **Kirpal Singh**

The names of writers like Albert Wendt, Patricia Grace, Russell Soaba, Subramani are well know in the Pacific region. These writers have, over the years, come to prominence with their rich creative output. Their educational and cultural backgrounds helped in many ways to establish themselves.

But there are other writers who have not always had the advantages which the better known writers from the region have enjoyed. One such writer is Allan Natachee, now — after many years of hard and lonely struggle — Poet in Residence at the University of Papua New Guinea. His name will be known to some, those who have research in the area of creative writing in Papua New Guinea and those who, by accident or quirk or circumstance, came either to know him personally (as the case with the present writer) or came to know him through reputation.

For within Papua New Guinea — certainly in the Capital — Allan Natachee *has* a reputation, and one which is growing steadily as his maturity gives rise to greater creative expression. Perhaps his singular most contribution to the rich and diverse heritage of PNG is to have written the history of his people — the MEKEO. He has also translated hundred of chants, incantations, legends and poems of his people into English — thus performing a function crucial in these times when old ways are slowly (but surely) giving in to pressures of modern living.

Natachee was born in July 1924, and is, therefore, to be regarded as an elder through sheer qualification of age. "I come from a family of Peace Lords and War Lords and Sorcery Lords of Amo Amo Village," he tells me. Like most Papua New Guineans Natachee was early subjected to missionary zeal but his parents resisted this for awhile. But in 1930 he was given to the Catholic Nuns to be educated in English.

It was then that he discovered, as he gleefully says, the "joys and music of English poetry". The great poets like Keats, Tennyson, Shakespeare showed him how words, when creatively organised, could yield such delightful music as to make the soul sing out in happiness. And sing he did, he has produced and written so much that the archivist at the UPNG Library may well consider setting up THE ALLAN NATACHEE COLLECTION.

Even though Natachee's main fascination is with the English Language and even if he chooses to pen his verses in English, the early, formative influence of the poetry of his own MEKEO people is not to be overlooked. "Everyday my grandfather used to sing to me a war song which is called AIA WAR SONG or AIA PARAETA and which I loved very much to sing every day when the noon breezes swayed and rustled the leaves of the nearby coconut palms and the betelnut palms." Here is that War Song which shaped, once and for all, Natachee's devotion to the music of poetry:

Language:—	*Translation:—*
Aia kearai e vea	= Aia walks on the road
Aia iviruvua	= Aia all naked,
Kearai e vea!	= He walks on the road
Aia imau sanea	= Aia my hand is faultless,
Aia iviruvua	= Aia all naked
Imau sanea	= My hand is faultless!
Aia tivania rereva-rereva	= Aia in war decoration
Aia iviruvua	= Aia all naked
Tivania rerera-rereva!	= In war decoration.

These spiritual and traditional chants and incantations, as well as the music of Keats and Tennyson, help to explain

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Natachee's poetry. When he writes in English he is meticulous in his choice of words. With a dictionary by his side Natachee chooses each word he wants to use very carefully, so that even if he does not have the benefits of a full education he has the great advantage of discipline and dedication. Then there is the metre. Unlike many contemporary poets, Natachee is adamant that metre is essential to music in poetry. Reading many of his poems, we may well be transported into a different age — the Victorian — but this is not to suggest that Natachee's verse is archaic the manner is, not the value.

Let is take a brief look at one of his better known pieces:
"Contentment":

Why weep for the years that are dead —
Those years of delight or of grief?
Why weep and sigh with drooping head —
For days and years be long or brief?

Weep not my dear lady nor sigh —
For the years that never can return!
But you my dear — must one day die —
And back to dust for aye return.

Let us not weep nor sigh for things —
Impossible for us to gain!
But let us be happy beings
With things attained through work and pain.

Fear not a man with earthly power
For we all shall come to one end!
By that mighty eternal mover
Which mows us all to equal end!

Of course this rings true, because the values enshrined in it have been sung through all the ages known to men. And yet, if one looks at it closely, one notices both tradition and ingenuity — two qualities essential to any poet. There is a formality in the verse which is forbidding and which makes for the lilt and the strength. Even if we do not wish to regard "Contentment" as a great work, we must, nevertheless, concede that the voice which comes through is the true voice of poetry.

Natachee has the loftiest claims to make for his chosen vocation — poetry. "Poetry is thought-provoking, soul-searching, soul-lifting. Poetry is truth dwelling in beauty. Poetry touches the feelings even of the hardened leader of any kingdom, any democracy, or communistic society, and even the feelings of a hardened criminal. There is no corruption in poetry, there is no money in poetry." For Natachee poetry is the means to a full life and in his own living he tries to exemplify the virtues attendant upon him who takes poetry as his guide through this turbulent world.

"I confess I am a poet in my own right because those who know me intimately will tell you that I am a lover of music: there is always music in my heart, music in my political and public life, and music-is-poetry".

Such outspoken frankness so simply and directly put across, is rare. Rare indeed, too, the devotion and attachment to words which Natachee manifests. While the young are trying to fashion new ways of expressing themselves Natachee doggedly continues with the blessings of age-old practise. He is not one to give in to experiment for its own sake. For him poetry is sacred and has to approached with reverence and care. But poetry is also eternal and provides for him the basis of his life — ever moving forward:

According to my simplicity,
And my generosity,
I shall always be taken for a fool!
But being aroused;
And being filled with realisation,
Of some marvellous future event,
And with a smile of no sweet content,
I go moving forward,
Moving forward forever!

THREE SHORT STORIES: 1982 LITERATURE COMPETITION

THE UNKNOWN GIFT

by **Barbara Todidayu**

Entering the village we crossed the street between the two rows of houses. It was a fine evening and I could see a family slowly eating their last meal of the day. The village was almost deserted as most of the families had set off to their work during the cooler hours of the late afternoon.

As we moved on, I saw a family in front of a hut, the mother was preparing the food, the children were playing and the father was amusing the youngest baby. It was here that we stopped and asked for directions.

Later, as the descending sun cast its rays over the calm sea, my guide led me to a small hut near the beach where an old woman was lying on a *pandanus* mat facing the doorway. I could not recognise her and thought that my guide might have made a mistake in bringing me to her. I did not have time to protest as he unrolled the other mat beside him and motioned me to sit.

"He told you my name eh?" she asked, extending her hand in greeting. Even though it was still warm I felt my body shiver as I held out my arm. The grip of her wrinkled hand was surprisingly strong.

"No, I don't know your name, do you know mine?"

She laughed mockingly and said: "Perhaps I do, you know it has been a long time since I have seen you."

I wondered if she really did know me; I certainly did not remember seeing her before. Surely this was our first encounter. At first I did not know what to say, I could only hear the sound of the waves crashing onto the sand. Then she spoke again: "I have a question Tuda." So she did know my name! "I'm listening ..." I stammered. She waited for a few moments as if to make sure that I was really listening.

"If the Chief of this island asked you to marry him, would you agree?"

"No!" I shouted, feeling my heart thumping, "even if it meant my life!"

"Never mind Tuda, I have another reason for your visit. I know that you do not have many brothers and uncles to fill up the Chief's yam house. I am only teasing you."

She laid her hand lightly on my arm and reached behind her *pandanus* mat and felt for her basket.

"Do you chew betelnut, Tuda?"

"No, my teacher doesn't like red teeth. He tells us that it is a bad habit for children."

"Ah,I see, a wise man. I can't stop the habit, but even though I can't break the hard nuts with my teeth, I still chew the soft ones."

She raised herself with her elbows and dipped the lime spatula into her lime pot.

"So you do not know me Tuda ... but we can still talk, true?"

"Yes," I said, nodding my head, "I like talking."

"Good, now if you are a patient girl I am going to ask you to do something for me and whether you carry out my wishes will be up to you." She looked at me carefully for a few moments, as if to study my face. I tried not to show any emotion.

"How old are you?" she said, shifting her position slightly on the mat.

"Ten," I replied proudly.

"Ah, I see, your are a big girl now. I heard from the other children that you will be leaving the island for more schooling, is this right?"

"Yes, that is true ... I am one of the lucky ones. Twelve of us will travel on a mission boat back to the Secondary school."

"Listen my daughter, in your school there is a sister. I want to talk to her. I would have

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liked her to come and visit me but she is very busy and I don't think she would have time to come. You see Tuda, I have visited the giant's cave ... I used to visit once or twice every month, but now I cannot do it. It's about six kilometres from here. So I want you to ask my friend the Sister to bring the Landrover here and the three of us visit the cave once more."

The old woman raised herself to her elbows. I looked straight into her eyes for the first time. The old woman was blind!

I was so surprised and sorry for her. I looked at the guide, he had obviously known, why hadn't he told me? Then I saw an old man by the doorway. He must have been the old woman's husband.

"Of course I will see the Sister and tell her of your request," I said finally.

The old woman nodded, as if satisfied and patted me on the arm:

"I will be waiting for you both," she said.

On my return to the school I told the Sister of the old woman's request. Surprisingly, she agreed to bring the Landrover and in two days we were driving back.

Not far from the village we stopped to pick a bunch of lavender for the old woman. The track passed through fresh green vegetables and coconut palms. I felt sad knowing the old woman couldn't see such beauty. But at least she would be able to smell the lavender. We didn't talk during the remainder of the ride to the village. We were both engrossed in our own thoughts.

The old woman was lying outside the hut on a banana leaf in the shade of the hut's overhanging roof. There was a group of men sitting under a nearby mango tree chewing betelnut. The old woman's husband smiled as we got out of the Landrover. He had been sharpening his axe. He walked over to the sitting men as the Sister took the old woman's outstretched hand and placed the lavender between her gnarled fingers.

After telling us how wonderful they smelled she gestured for us to sit beside her.

"Can you speak Kiriwina, Sister?" the old woman asked in the Kiriwina language.

"Only a little," she replied in English.

"So you will translate for us Tuda," she said, turning her head in the direction she thought I was sitting.

I told the Sister, whom I had come to know as Sister Mary, then the old woman interrupted us.

"When you are ready, we will go. I think you know where the cave is, Tuda?"

"Yes of course," I replied, and helped the old woman to the seat in the Landrover.

We had almost driven the entire six kilometres to the hidden cave before the track became so rough we had to walk for the remainder of the way. But it was easy to find and after several minutes we came to the cave's dark opening. Sister Mary gasped in surprise at the sight of the huge old log which crossed what seemed to be an endlessly deep chasm, guarding the cave's entrance. I had heard stories about the cave, but I hadn't really believed them. The villagers said the cave was the home of the man-eating giant. The only way to reach the cave was to cross a long old log, which didn't look very safe to me. But to my surprise the old woman walked right across without stopping or faltering. When she was safe on the other side, she beckoned us to follow.

Sister Mary kicked off her sandals and crawled inch by inch across the abyss. I was so stunned at first, I could not bring myself to follow them ... but somehow, without looking downwards I half crawled and walked unsteadily, until I reached the others.

The old woman now led us through many tunnels until at last we came to a very low one which made us bend over as we walked through.

"I have walked into this cave since I was six years old," said the old woman, whose cackle was suddenly interrupted by the noise of bats squeaking and flying from a nearby roof. Now it was getting damp and eerie. I began to think of the stories, and the old woman had actually shown us some bones and skulls in one of the other tunnels ....

"This may be my last visit," said the old woman who had stopped in the section of the tunnel which was more like a cave, "Up there is a little box and I have been thinking for many nights for the most trustworthy person to keep it for me. I could only think of you, Sister."

As she talked, she felt carefully up at a ledge, moving her fingers until they touched her prize. Then she slowly brought the small box down, which we could hardly see. But later, in the sunlight, outside the cave with it's many tunnels the old woman instructed Sister Mary to keep the box safely hidden until she received instructions from her to bring it back to the village.

I was tempted to ask her what was inside, but decided not to. I was not even upset that she had chosen Sister Mary to look after the box for her instead of me, because the Sisters and Priests were well known for their honesty and loyalty and of course their devotion to their church.

Many things have happened to me since I left my island. I was away for almost fours years. I spent three of my Christmas holidays back at the Secondary school working for the Mission while the other Kiriwina children went home. I thought about Sister Mary quite a lot of times and wondered what had happened to the old blind woman, whose name I came to know as Iseda.

Then to my surprise, I received a letter from Sister Mary, as the end of my last term at the Secondary school drew close. She asked me if I would like to go home with the other Kiriwina students and spend my holidays in the Mission school. I was so delighted that I rushed off a reply to her and from that day until the end of my term my excitement seemed to grow and grow.

What was my school like ... was the old woman still alive ... did Sister Mary still have her secret box ... would we go for another visit? These and other thoughts flashed through my head time and time again, but at last, after three days on the Mission boat, the beautiful swaying trees and the golden sands of our Island became a reality. We jumped ashore squeaking with pleasure and there to meet us was Sister Mary. What kind of a Sister is she, I wondered, she doesn't look a day older.

The night at dinner, we talked and talked. She asked me questions about myself and my school work, but in spite of a growing feeling of excitement within me, I didn't say anything about Iseda and the box.

"Let's go into the library and talk, it's more comfortable than these hard old seats," she said, smiling at me.

She pointed to an armchair near a table piled with dusty manuscripts and she sat close to me in another chair. She sighed.

"You know I'm getting old and my bones ache too much," she said, but in a tone that didn't seem like she was really complaining. "Do you remember the cave we visited, Tuda?" she said so suddenly that I felt blood rise into my face.

"Of course, I don't think I'll ever forget that day!"

"Ah, so you have wondered about old Iseda too then?"

"Yes ... she was such an incredible old woman." My voice dropped lower and I thought about Iseda's hut and the man whom I guessed was her husband.

"Well Tuda, Iseda has gone; she died last month ... she didn't suffer any pain."

As Sister Mary spoke she raised her wrinkled hand and crossed herself. I just sat staring at her waiting for what was to come next.

"You know part of the reason that I invited you was because of Iseda. Before she died she sent me to discuss the little box that we had brought out of the tunnel. She instructed me to pass the box to you."

"To me!" I gasped, following her with my eyes as she got up and went over to the side of the library and reached to the top of a shelf and brought down the little box.

Then Sister Mary slowly walked towards me with her hand outstretched. Automatically, I opened mine and found the precious box nestling in my palm. I looked down at it trying to think what to say, but before I could open my mouth Sister Mary smiled and turned away and left through the library, closing the door behind her.

For a few moments all I could do was to stare at the door, then slowly I allowed myself to open it. What was inside ... a secret charm that would give me everlasting life? The little lid came up easily and there, right in the centre of a small cushion lay a beautiful red shell necklace and under that was a piece of folded paper. I took the necklace out and held it up to the light. It was the most delicately made and beautiful necklace that

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I had ever seen. I wanted to put it on and see what I looked like. There was a small mirror on the back wall. But as I laid the box on the table, the folded piece of paper seemed to beckon me to open it. Trembling with excitement at the wonderful necklace I unfolded the paper and read the simple message it contained out aloud:

"FOR YOU WITH LOVE FROM MUM." My stomach turned over and over. I sat down heavily in the chair with my hand and the lovely necklace clasped to my lips.

A thousand thoughts raced through my head. Before I realised, tears streamed down my cheeks and I started to sob.

After what seemed to be ages I looked up and saw Sister Mary sitting in the chair again. I hadn't heard her come in. She just sat until the last of my sobs died away.

"You've had quite a shock ... perhaps it was unfair of me to let you find out the truth that way," she looked to me for approval. I just shook my head and said it didn't matter.

"Well my dear, your mother was eight months pregnant when your father left on a Kula expedition. It was wealth and pride that took him away from your mother. He thought that he would be able to return with long strings of shell money and make a big name for himself."

"What happened?" I asked when Sister Mary hesitated.

"Well, it seems that they encountered bad weather after about four days at sea. They were never heard from again!"

I just shook my head with amazement at what was being revealed by the dear Sister and begged her to continue.

"Until the end of your mother's pregnancy she was very sick. I suppose that she missed her husband too and that didn't help. On the day she gave birth to you, which just happened to be in the garden," ... she raised her right arm and pointed outside, "your mother was only semi-conscious, when Iseda, who died last month, came to her aid. There was not much to be done, except to clean you and help your mother and comfort her."

"Then what happened?" it was all that I could seem to say, I was so enthralled by the story.

"Well, before Iseda died last month she told me of the conversation that took place between her and your mother, Boli."

I listened carefully as Sister Mary recited what had been said:

"Iseda, what is it, a girl?"

"Yes Boli, a little girl, and healthy too."

"Good, I have always wanted a girl, but I am so weak now ... please promise that if I should die you will find a good home for her ... someone that will look after her well?"

"Of course, of course ..."

Suddenly Sister Mary assumed her normal talking voice and brought me back to reality. She told me that it had not been long before my real mother had died. And it wasn't long after that, the old woman Iseda had a domestic argument which led to her going blind.

"Did she get hit?" I asked.

"Well, the story goes, and I don't believe it, that her older brother made sorcery on her eyes which caused her to go completely blind. Anyway, Iseda told me that she did not have any children of her own and she regarded you as her daughter!"

I had listened to the story from the beginning to the end and sorrow had filled my heart. I could not think of a better thing to do, to express my appreciation and love for this woman, than to return the most precious and valuable gift to where I thought it rightfully belonged.

It looked as if I had chosen the wrong day to visit Iseda's village. Every Friday morning the villagers were required to stay at home and clean the grounds of the village.

I arrived about nine, and asked to see the widower. He was putting charcoal on his body as is the customary practice for the Trobriand Islanders during this mourning period. When he saw me approaching him, he hurriedly finished putting the last of the charcoal onto his legs and went inside his hut. All of a sudden there were men and women coming to me from different directions, wailing. I bent my head, entered the small hut and joined the widower who was carrying his wife's decorated grass-skirt. Because of the custom the widower had to stop wailing before everybody else. The mourning period continues until the clan members make a big feast as a traditional

payment to other people who have been at the mourning period.

When it was quiet again I apologised to the widower for not being present when Iseda died. I told him my reason for coming and he led me to where his wife was buried. Her grave was behind their hut. It was enclosed by four layers of stones, and bottles of fresh lavender were neatly placed around it.

I took the little box out from my *pandanus* woven basket and walked closer to the grave. Taking the necklace out I placed it on a white flat stone in the middle of the grave.

I looked at it for the last time and at the widower who was with the other villagers.

In a clear voice I said to all the people around me:

"This is to show my love and appreciation for the care which this woman gave me from child-birth until she died. It is difficult to know what she would have preferred now that she is dead.

I will always remember her and one day I will come back to seal her grave with cement and make a marker."

Then I knelt down, picked up one of the border stones, hesitated, feeling my eyes burning with tears and dropping the stone onto the precious red shell necklace I smashed it into very small pieces. Somehow, I rose and walked to the Mission school without looking back at the people still around the grave continuing their sorrowful mourning.

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MACHINE TRAGEDY

by **Adam Delaney**

The empty tin can rolled along and into the drain after the kick I gave it. The streets of Boroko were so filthy at this time of the night, when all the shops had closed — with the exception of Pinochio's coffee bar. It was a long way from home, I felt darkness in my body as the loneliness of my heart grew larger and engulfed me.

The mess scattered on the ground was part of the everyday life of the people, betel nut skins and the reddish blots spat upon the concrete. The walls of the shops were covered with graffiti written by the rascals who often hung around the amusement centres and pubs. "Mafia DAREA 480" and "KIPSCO one-o-koboni" and many more related to the different gangs.

I entered the coffee shop; it had a miserable atmosphere, with smoke floating in the cool air fanned out by air conditioner. This was one of those nights, hardly any teenagers, they only come on Saturdays to enjoy a glass of iced coffee and read the "Niugini Nius". There was not a single toea in my pocket, so I sat down on a chair in the far corner looking outside the window towards the construction of the new Brian Bell Plaza. Getting rid of the dirt on his legs to look respectable, a young boy aged about seven came inside, attracting my attention.

The stroll inside was a normal sloppy walk; you could say this boy was a loser, with hands tucked inside his ragged pockets and a cigarette dripping loosely from his lips. He had an unclean haircut and buai had stained his lips red. He stood and glanced around cautiously, making sure that there was no-one he knew around the shop. He drew a coin from inside his pocket and with his fingers rubbing it, slipped it into the pinball machine with gleaming lights and design spread across the glass case. The boy stood there as if something was on his mind, he wasn't going to start playing, he finished smoking his cigarette and crushed it under his heel. I couldn't stop watching him from the time he walked in.

There were more people coming in to enjoy the cool hours and assorted dishes written on the menu in front of me, Chicken and Salad, Roast Beef, Fried Rice and Chicken Sandwich and many more that caused a big problem tonight. I was hungry. From the moment a person enters here he orders his food and whilst he waits he buys a drink to pass the time or for the better purpose of showing that he is there for a reason and not just hanging about. Luckily I had not been served, for in refusing to buy anything I would be asked to leave. From my own experience over the past years that I have come to this shop, I often finished two glasses of iced coffee before I even tasted my food. After walking out I'd complain that it wasn't worth the cost.

I looked back again to the boy at the machine; he pressed the "Player-one-button" starting a fresh game. The motion of the boy pressing the button with his fore finger brought back the reasons I was here at this time of night without a single toea; at eight tonight when Dad was slipping his key into the lock of the house, Mum and I were at the dinner table, having finished eating, waiting for Dad's arrival. The ball was fired and swiftly it made its way up and into the main arena of the pinball machine. Then I remembered, Dad came charging into the house singing out "meri istap o nogat!"

Mum sat quietly not wanting to make a big fuss. I was completely stiff and you should have seen Mum's eyes; they were shining like the ball gleaming through the glass on the machine. Dad's face left the innermost feeling of terror and evil.

The ball was shot around, like an aeroplane on fire with no controls, from the hole points and back to the target areas as it zoomed for the exit between the flippers, the boy was like an ace pilot with the speed of his fingers on the flippers he would save it and hit it at a corresponding angle so that it returned perfectly upwards to the targets.

The ball was really running amok amongst the electronic devices inside the machine, but in total control when the boy pushed the flippers, winning another minute of play. As the ball rolled from one side to the other, I

noticed that its motion was similar to Dad's behaviour tonight.

As Dad was completely drunk, his mind was shuttered with alcohol and he found it difficult for his senses to come back. His head leaned forward and down onto the carpet he fell, smashing the half empty bottle of beer that remained in his hand. His hand was bleeding. He picked himself up, staggered and looked around. What a fool I thought he was, never shall I behave in this manner, it is ridiculous. Dad was acting like those Bainings fire dancers; with a mighty blow he punched the house walls and from his mouth f's and b's gushed one after the other. I felt I was in asylum with just a single man causing the wreckage. Crash came the curtains, the tables and chairs, the sound of material ripping and furniture bunting against the floor. There was not only the feeling of fear in my nerves but deep inside I felt sorry that Dad was being tormented by his sins, something kept holding me back to stop my father from being a savage. I could be running now, maybe towards the police station but I was still frozen in my seat and Dad ripped my paintings off the wall and threw them into the fire and I stared as they burned.

The paintings were my finest craftwork ever since I had dropped out of primary school and they were what I treasured most; there was a Mekeo dancer standing beside an old village hut, her breasts uncovered. She wore the prettiest feathers in her hair and a garamut rested comfortably under her arm. There was also the painting of the Asaro mud man, his face greyish with a green and red background of wild forests with the beauty of the cocoa trees and the birds of paradise singing high up in the top branches. The mudman was playing a bamboo flute. I will never see my painting again, I thought sadly, sensing a great loss.

The young boy was concentrating on the game, his first ball was still in play, his excitement was rising to a climax and the ball made revolutions after another miserable hit on the target spots. This was typical of Dad's behaviour, lurching through the house with drooped eyes. I was damn frightened and sneaked behind the kitchen door where it opened into the living room. The table was small but it fitted neatly in the corner while a few bamboo chairs circled a wooden table where visitors could relax, and chew betel nut for hours as they told stories. I sometimes wondered if their mouths ever tired from chewing the lime, the betel nut and mustard.

Dad threw the radio on the floor, smashing the speaker and messing up wires inside it. Mum screamed, "Get out you bastard," then Dad got angrier; he pulled her by her dress and belted her across the face, bruising her beautiful features. This was not the only problem that our family faced but Dad's aggression built up as he knew the nearest police station was Boroko and that was three miles away.

The ball bounced off targets, onto the sidewalls and flew into the trick or unlucky hole where the ball sank for another game. The points kept rolling, rolling and then seconds later stopped. It was marvellous watching the computer digits move like lightning. The screen read "Second ball in". Still in panic and terror, Mum was now half naked but for the lap-lap wrapped around her waist. She was bloodied, and Dad was swaying drunkenly saying to Mum, "You filim now ah! nogat bik head tumas". I felt as if I were one of those dead bodies they kept at the General Hospital a couple of streets from where we lived. I was feeling this way because of the shiver in my body, my legs were shaking and Dad's appearance made me so scared. I knew he meant shut up or you will get the same. My parents were standing in the moonlight like werewolves, they were becoming vicious and I was there watching all of it.

Dad reached for the knife, grabbing it with ease. Muscles tensed as he advanced on Mum, with his hands clasped around the steel handle. There was no stopping him now. "mi kilim yu, Mi one mind, yu save o nogat, me tumas me sorry for my loved one is no more". Dad was enjoying the drama he was directing, producing and acting out using his power of being a father. I trembled more and more; tears falling on my cheeks, I was trying to hide my face from Dad as he would start raging madly at me for crying at the wrong moment. I hid beside the cupboard where Mum kept her favourite hymns and records from the Pacific.

The boy's first chance of playing was gone and with much more excitement he fired the next ball into the machine. Around and around the ball swirled like a spinning top. With his left thumb he pressed the flipper hurling the ball into the corner pocket scoring a thousand points. The people inside the shop were finishing their food and drinks as it was nearly closing time.

Dad swung his hand and the front end of the knife slit Mum's throat; she ran towards the door, but it was locked and there was no means of escape. The blood was gushing out from the wound. It dripped from Mum's neck and socked into the lap-lap she had wrapped around herself to cover her nakedness.

Dad was getting angrier. With the shiver down in my spine, my body was sweating from the horror which was beyond my imagination. In the movies I loved blood but not now. It was causing my head to spin and I really wanted to throw up but kept holding back in case I would get much too sick to run. The second ball fell through, between the gap in the flipper and this gave the boy's last chance of playing before his game was up.

Mum saw me, she was very badly wounded and her eyes were now half shut. "Run son," she cried, "Run!" I never wanted to leave Mum, wherever she went I would follow her. I had always followed her — to the river for water, out on the canoe fishing, but tonight everything completely changed. I jumped out the window and when only a few metres away I heard her death throes. Longer and longer the sound of the scream pile-dried onwards into the night. Looking around from where I was, I saw Mum fall on the floor. The knife had been driven into her stomach.

The place was as black as I had seen it. The beast had committed murder; "Dad kills Mum", or should it have been "Dad kills Mum and son?" There was stillness and no-one else was around now. I ran and ran, my mind still seeing the image of murder and here I was tonight watching this young boy playing pinball.

The score increased as the last ball ricocheted off the targets. With excitement the boy danced from side to side and his eyes closely watching the ball, so that he could accurately make contact with the flippers. The last minute was very unlucky, he swerved and hit the machine with his knee.

The power automatically shut off and the ball rolled into its starting place. The machine read 'TILT! Game over'.

The boy was quite disappointed that such a thing should end in such a way and without too much worry he walked towards the door, gave me a wink and then disappeared onto the ragged street.

It must have been about one in the morning. I really wasn't taking much notice of the time as I didn't have to go back for breakfast at home.

Everybody was leaving the coffee shop. I sauntered through Tabari Place looking inside the shops' windows, admiring the displays of the clothing and toys.

The wind had died and the moon was looking upon Earth like a huge glittering balloon. About the time I was walking along past Haus Bilas I heard sirens coming closer and closer, and I could see the blue lights pulsing. They came by, there must have been three or four cars, I couldn't really tell by the lights as they were close together in a bunch. But the sirens faded into the trees and the police cars disappeared in the darkness and headed in the direction of my house. I could tell that they were going to investigate the murder and tomorrow I should be in a court as the one and only witness. I had never been in a court case and I never wanted to, but this case would obviously rely entirely on my story.

I would feel badly about having to start from the beginning with "Dad came charging into the house, drunk!" and then end with "looking back I saw Mum with the knife stabbed into her stomach". I can't help it, this world is reckless and there's too much evil going on. But from my experience tonight I know that wickedness, hatred, blood and murder start in the house of every man.

There was a cement wall along the road and I decided to have a rest and to try and clear my mind. One last thing I thought about the murder of Mum and that cooly on the pinball machine; "Are there three chances in a lifetime?"

LEO KOLMA WALKS THE DARK JUNGLE

by **Erancis Senge**

For the first time Leo Kolma decided to take the short cut through the Dark Jungle alone. He had good enough reason for this. The scene of a couple of hours back was vivid in his mind. At recess the head master had called him to his office. There Mr. Sula had told him that he had been awarded a scholarship to go to Fiji for a year. Kolma had been taken aback greatly by the head master's words and had sunk to the floor, his knees being weak.

Now that the shock was over he bounded happily through the low brush, feeling suddenly at the top of the world. 'Thank God it is me this year,' he sang repeatedly to himself. 'Wait till I tell dad and mum! I hope Mr. Sula didn't break the news to them first. I hope not!' Absorbed in these and similar thoughts he scarcely noticed his surroundings until the sudden screech of an owl stopped him dead in his tracks, stopping not only his movement but nearly his heart as well. He stood stock still for the better part of a minute, before his eyes, always the first to recover awareness, began to function. He looked at the narrow, dead-leaves path he was trudging, the huge tree trunks towering into the air, and the semi-darkness all around him, and failed to comprehend where he was. He shifted his gaze from the ground to the shadowy canopy of branches overhead, and saw the eerie light of dusk breaking through here and there in the thick foliage of leaves.

Suddenly, from the corner of his eye he saw something moving. He darted a quick glance and what he saw cleared his crazed mind as to where he was. What had caught his attention was a snow-white owl. The owl of the Dark Jungle. The cold hand of fear gripped him then. All over his body he felt goose pimples forming and the hairs at the back of his head standing on end. A chill of frightful thoughts crossed his mind. The awful tales of what happened to those who crossed the Dark Jungle loomed before him.

Just a month back, Mark Bapin, the son of his father's closest friend, had been found dead in these woods. Because of their father's friendship and their being in the same age group, they had been good friends.

Leo had not been told what had happened to Bapin, only that his body was found in such a place as this. One evening while passing the parent's house he'd heard Mark's father say to his wife, "Juliana, we've heard about the Dark Jungle and what happens there, but our son had no signs of violence on his body. He only had that serene look on his face which I did not like. It was as if he died unsuspectingly." Not wanting to hear more, Leo had walked away. He had not understood it then, but now as he stood in the gathering darkness, the significance of what he had heard struck him. He thought he saw malicious creatures behind every shadow in the gloomy aisles of trees and draping vines, and told himself that at least he wouldn't be caught unawares.

The gloom and the eerie images haunting his mind, and the flapping of the white owl's wings loud in his ears filled him with panic. His legs trembled and gave way. Weakness enfolded him, a faintness that made him sink to the ground. He wanted to scream but his voice failed him. The only thing that seemed to function was his urinary tract — the warm wetness between his legs was increasing every minute. Huddling close to the path he drew his legs up against him and decided to wait it out.

Somewhere in the course of his flight, his hand had got hold of a sweet tasting leaf and had pushed it into his mouth. Involuntarily his chattering teeth moved unceasingly on the leaf. He tried to swallow but could not seem to take in much. Gradually he swallowed everything but could not get up to look for more. The numbness held him huddled there.

He was contemplating trying to shout for help when an owl screeched and his mind exploded. He felt himself falling into a bottomless pit, turning over and over in the abyss. Many times he thought he was going to land and braced himself for the thud, but it never came. Then he felt the need to see where he was falling. Using all his energy, he

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forced his eyes open to find that he had only imagined the falling sensation, that he was frightened no longer. He was thinking of getting up and walking home when he sensed rather than saw something drop lightly in front of him. The air seemed to vibrate and blur and he saw something taking shape, a human shape. Impelled by horror, he recognized the shape of Bapin, his dead friend.

Intense fear lent him extra legs and courage and jumping up he set off through the woods as fast as he could. He had been running for a long time when he found out that he was not out of breath and that he had actually passed straight through several trees without blundering into them. But there was no time for thought because Bapin was right behind him. In fact, the moment of indecision had been enough for Bapin to catch up. Leo was about to set off again when he saw that Bapin was blocking his path. Leo turned around in a flash and was about to run back the way he had come when he saw a look of fear come over Bapin's eyes. He was staring at a point above Leo's head. Leo quickly turned around and came face to face with his deceased uncle, Bare.

Bapin suddenly blurted out. "Please, Leo, don't go near. He is going to ..."

He did not finish because he was doubled up in pain. Leo glanced up to see his uncle pointing steadfastly at Bapin. For the space of a minute all were held by that pointing hand, then his uncle gestured to Bapin to get out of his sight on the instant. Leo had only time to notice the sudden glance of pure hatred which Bapin cast in their direction.

Bare watched the boy disappear through the trees, then he turned and clapped Leo on the back. "Welcome Nephew. How very good to have you here." He hugged Leo so tightly that Leo thought the life was being squeezed out of him. Then Bare dropped him and looked down at him with a serious expression. "When you are with me, you are never to go near that boy. He is an enemy of our family and will do anything to harm you." He grabbed Leo again and whispered, "Leo, I have always been lonely in this here god-damned place. That spoilt brat out there does not improve life either." After a brief pause in which he seemed to be thinking deeply, he said, "When you have rested, we will attend the council of the dead."

"The council of what?" Leo asked, perplexed. Then his eyes widened and he whispered, "You mean, you mean that I am dead, uncle Bare?"

"Yes, you are. My brother will be grieving over your body, but that can not be helped. When you were ..."

"No, it can't be! No, that can't be true," Leo cut in. But he knew it was true because the strange happenings of his chase unfolded before his mind; why he had not been out of breath, why he had passed through trees and why he had met dead persons. After a moment of silence he said, "But I don't want to die. I want to go back to my parents. They must be terribly worried. You see, I have won a scholarship to Fiji and I must tell them."

"I know that, Leo. However, as I said it can't be helped. You would have been living now if that boy had not chased you. I am afraid he has chased you beyond the realm of the living. I'm sorry but that's all there is to it."

"Isn't it possible to go back?" queried Leo tearfully.

"No, it is not possible. The dead do not return to life," came the reply, almost too bluntly. That silenced him but a hatred deeper than any other feelings surged up to the surface. The next time he saw Bapin, he wouldn't run.

Bare took Leo's hand and together they passed deeper and deeper into the forest. Whenever he looked back, he saw the light receding and the darkness closing in. He also noticed, or thought he noticed someone following them. When he told his uncle that, Bare held his hand even more tightly and increased their pace. Then Leo became afraid of the dark and heard himself ask, "Do we have to go any further, uncle? It is so very dark and I am afraid."

His uncle drew him closer and said, "Yes, we have to get away from here. The dead are not immortal. This is only a secondary sort of life. In time you will find out that this life is very much like the one you left. There are more phases of life yet to be enjoyed.

However you can also be made to cease altogether. The one and only thing that will cause that is light, hence the need to hurry. I tell you this now. Whenever you see light, always turn your back on it. After a little more time you will be able to stand it but now is the crucial time. You must not see light, least of all think of it."

And so they went forward. Now Leo found that they were in complete darkness, but he was able to see in the darkness. Suddenly his uncle let go his hand and lengthened his stride to cross a deep chasm that seemed to divide the entire forest at that place. Leo was about to follow when a shrill voice stopped him in his tracks.

"For the love of Peter and Ann, don't cross over that chasm!" The voice rang clearly in command.

Bare stiffened abruptly and beckoned to Leo to hurry up. But the urgency in the other voice, the use of his parent's first names, and his wanting to have it out with Bapin for causing his death made him pause.

His uncle shouted something obscene, and tried to leap back across the crevasse, but to Leo's surprise an unseen hand threw Bare back in his stride. In a blur of speed Bapin was beside Leo and before he could act, had twisted Leo's arm behind his body and held it in an iron grip.

Leo turned and saw something break into a million showers in the darkest recess of his mind. He watched in fascination as the object grew bigger and bigger in size and continued to burst into brilliant displays, very much like a fourth of July celebration, only slightly better. It seemed to be approaching him at a terrifying velocity. Realization dawned on him then. What was approaching him was light itself. Light, the one thing that kills the dead, his uncle had said. He tried desperately to twist around and out of Bapin's grip but it was useless. It was like the feeble efforts of a rat inside a python's coils. He looked up at Bapin's face and saw a look of triumph rise in his eyes.

"Uncle," he shouted. "Help! Someone, please!"

Quietly Bapin said, "I am afraid your uncle won't come to your aid. That chasm he crossed is the border between the dead and the living. It can be easily crossed from this side because one is moving with time, but to come back again against time, and so soon, takes immense efforts, even for one so powerful as Bare. And now let's get you back to Ann and Peter."

Leo was fighting mad at Bapin, and so frightened in his frantic efforts to slacken Bapin's hold, that he failed to register fully what the other had said. He struggled harder but in vain. The hold on him was that of iron. He whipped his head around and saw that the light was frighteningly close. He tried to close his eyes but it was useless. The light kept on coming.

Then, he felt intense heat touch him and simultaneously the light dashed into a multitude of brilliant colours. He screamed then, over and over again, until his voice caught and he choked into silence. When he found after sometime, that he could still think, he tried to force his eyes open, but dazzling white light flowed in and he screamed again. Then something like sleep descended on him and he lost consciousness.

He awoke with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. He opened his eyes slowly and from mere slits took in his surroundings. A bed, a room and finally some people swam into his focus. When his dazed mind cleared and his eyes focused properly, he saw the anxious faces of his parents and an Aid Post Orderly looking down at him.

He saw his father's lips moving and, as if from a distance he heard him say, "Leo, are you all right? Why did you scream? Your mum and I have been worried stiff all night. I am so glad you are awake." They had stayed awake all night long, watching their son's feeble struggle to live. They had found him after hours of searching, lying unconscious and cold where he had fallen. They had brought him to the hospital right away. The medical officer had said that Leo had chewed on one of the most dangerous of the native drugs, that if he had taken one more leaf he could not have survived. Now that their son was awake a great burden had been lifted off their shoulders. Leo watched as both shed tears of gratitude. Only a mere fifteen minutes ago their son had nearly died.

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An hour later, Leo was sitting up and had eaten a full plate of rice. Then he was able to tell his parents the strange experience he had had in the jungle. They listened quietly, but now and again glanced at each other. When it was done his father spoke eagerly, confirming his belief in what had happened.

"When you were about to follow Bare across that gulf, that was the moment the nurse said that you were about to go. It must have been when Bapin held you, that she looked at us in surprise and said the pulse was stronger again. That boy, Bapin, tried to help you all along, but you didn't let him. Thanks to him, were returned to us."

He let that sink in, then he continued, "Your uncle was always an evil man. When he was young, he wished to have your mother. Throughout his life he was lazy and always jealous of the little that we own. He died threatening to harm me, from the spirit world. He nearly succeeded." Ann's voice came in gently, "Yes, those yarns your uncle Bare spun, about your being already dead and that light kills the dead, were all lies to get you across that chasm. The dead never die again, and light is the essence of life. Always remember it Leo."

Leo's father spoke again, "Thanks to that boy, Bapin. He was always a remarkable boy, and we were glad when he lived that he was your friend. A boy just like his father who helped us search for you yesterday."

"But I don't understand, dad. All the time Bapin seemed to be chasing me."

"Sure he was chasing you, — to get you back to us."

"Then I've got apologies to make. I hated him non-stop until now."

After some more happy chattering, Peter said, "But there is something you must explain Leo. You would never cross the Dark Jungle alone before. Why were you there at all? Why did you do it this time?"

"Oh dad, I took a short cut to tell you I have won the scholarship to Fiji!" So he had finally broken the news to them and their reaction was all he had hoped for.

"You've what!" they exclaimed together, failing to comprehend from the rush of his words. Then understanding dawned and they both reached for him. Ann's arms went around him first, gathering him into her arms, she hugged him. "My Leo, I always knew you were a man and a half. I'm so proud of you." His father's arms were there too, his face looking down at him with sheer incredulity and pride. His look said everything. Ten scholarships would not make Leo as happy as he was then.

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