

ALL
OF
MIDNIGHT
BIRD

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CALL OF MIDNIGHT BIRD

Poems by

KAMA KERPI



Papua Pocket Poets

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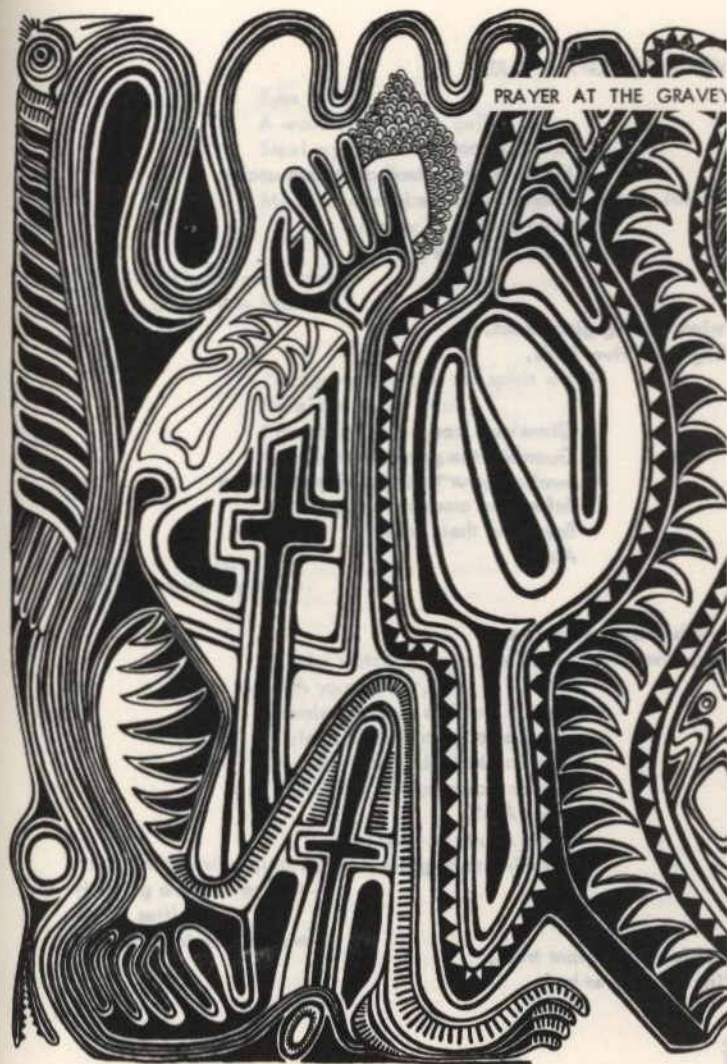
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TO LIAO
MIDNIGHT BIRD

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PRAYER AT THE GRAVEYARD

Late afternoon.
Moments when dead aunts and uncles
Chant and crack jokes.
Only murmur of voices,
Steam from the graves.

And winds kissing giant trees,
Howling down river beds.

Giant gum trees,
Guarding the graves.
Swallow your thoughts of being alone
Before the assembly of dead kins,
Breathing their breath.
Aia!

And winds kissing giant trees,
Howling down river beds.

Legs apart,
Arms folded,
Eyelids slamming the gates,
I am, Aia!
In the courts of dead kins,
Listening to gurgling murmurs.

And winds kissing giant trees,
Howling down river beds.

Eyes pin me stiff,
A wave of welcome smiles,
Steel my nerves.
In the midst of terror,
My boldness sprouts like a seed of corn in the f

And winds kissing giant trees,
Howling down river beds.

"Noble members of the spirit world,
Defender of our clans,
I greet in the name of my family,
Who depend on your hands,
I greet you again."

And sun is setting,
Swallows returning home.

"Under watchful eyes we battle,
With your power,
Enemies tremble and fall in numbers,
A cloud of defeat far away at dawn,
Our warriors masked with pride."

And winds kissing giant trees
Howling down river beds.
Sun is setting
Swallows returning home.

"Before the season of Planting
Your shadows falling on the cultivated hills
Make the seeds excited
Like mushrooms they grow,
When pigs smell your piss
Like a young girl's milk breast they grow,
A murmur sweeps the village
Of pigs crossing the paths,
Of your fountain.

I greet you
For prosperity dwells in my compound.
But yesterday,
Only yesterday
Aia!
My meals bitter
My sleep unwanted,
Kunani has gone
To the village of her secret lover.

O Kin!
I beg her seed that makes child,
Her strong hands that feed my family.
O kins!
Harken to me."

And winds kissing giant trees
Howling down river beds
Have stopped.
And sun has gone down,
Swallows have retired home,
Darkness setting in.

MOMENTS OF INITIATION

Vital moments come,
We, like Adam,
Adams banished
From paradise of childhood.

The solemn march,
To register for service.
Childhood life glows dimmer behind.
Before awaits,
I march to wear the heavy shell.

No longer
Will I hunt gamebirds,
But human heads,
No longer
Will I walk in the shade,
But bask and bathe in the open.

The farewell march,
Mother's midnight stories
A defeated bush fire.
I vomit formative years,
I walk for my share of the ginger.

The solemn march.
Only the winds
Whistling through giant trees
Accompany murmurs of encouragement
From dead fathers.

DRUM BEATS

Yonder the echo of drum beats
vibrating amidst the tropical heat steaming
from the rain soaked laterite
calling warriors to assemble.

Down the valleys
and beyond the ridges
with upraised spears
and clubs they gather.
The able reply the call of duty.

Whispers of farewell
and fight well
blow in the breeze.
The aged and infants
watch them go.

HUT ON A RIDGE

So majestic
silhouetted against the grey unripe dawn.
Resting place of a weary soul
father and protector of the hillmen.

Raw winds
streaming softly and cautiously
through heavy clothed hills
collecting on the ridge
only to move on to another.
A hut stands solid
rooted on the laterite hill.

Down the valley
where a new day is beginning
a black child asks:
"Black mother who lives up there?"
"Black son your protector dwells up there."
Don't point or death will eat your hand!"

CHANTS FROM MENDI

The rolling hills
and the valleys echo
a hundred times over.

The gentle breeze
carries the chants
of the hillmen.

Listen to their proud songs
of wars won and lost
of parents lost and gone.

Every stanza brings
the old into tears
of those youthful days.

But listen to them
retell their sorrows of brothers
who abandon simplicity to live and fish on the seashores.
Alas! many shed tears,
mothers and fathers drink the cup of bitterness.
Lovers look far into formative years,
those youth days lost and forgotten
come back into the horizon.

The rolling hills
and the valleys
will echo of sorrows and joy.
For ever it shall echo
the History of the hillmen.

BRING THEM HOME

In pursue.
They are scattered in disarray.
Each going his own way.
Into the wildness of hope,
Of new desires.

Road of new struggles,
Of new seasons.

Strange shadows,
Of strange trees.
With charming melodies,
Of unknown promises.

Initiated warriors
Have thrown their weapons
On the wayside.
All victims of charming melodies.

Who will lead the next initiation ceremony,
Who will discuss the next Feast?
Who will wrestle for our village?
Who will bring them home
To pray at the graves,
Lovers of unknown desires?

Awaits in the mountain,
Diamond
Of my treasure hunt.
Under the shadows of Kubour range,
Awaits the subject of my dream.

Rolling to the subject of my dream,
Picture of her dancing before me,
Reminds me of
The long distance.

OCCASIONAL HOME VISITS

Passing seasons.
Forgotten tales.
Will you leave me in dying age
When silence cloud my home,
Death eating into my soul?

I suffer the burning desire
To educate you,
Cast you into wildness,
Unknown road,
Where I nor your Grandfather trodded.

Flash of lightning.
Passes.
Memories my sad world of thoughts.

Happy years come and go,
Like the sweetness of food.
Retiring moments have arrived.

Son;
Before I depart.
During your occasional visits,
To recall your good old days,
Trim the grass
Around my grave.

CALL OF MIDNIGHT BIRD

We all sit around him,
Eyes cast
On the victim of their magic.

Our minds running wild,
Mine crawling into formative years,
Moments I learned to follow his footsteps.

I race here and there,
Hunting the cream of childhood,
Yet he haunts me,
Because he is part of my history,
All around me,
I hear them helpless in the pool
Of bitterness and sorrow.

On approaching
the hour of the spirits
I feel very strange.

Far in the night
Over the hills or beyond
The call of the midnight bird,
Harbinger of Father's departure,
Welcome signal of the dead.

I grab his hand
To hear the last pulse.
Fraction late.

It is not the hand that showed me how to shoot.
It is not the face that blinded married women.
Yet this object was my father.

Father said only women cried.
Yet the moment my little brother lifts
The lifeless hand in tears,
Father forgive me,
I have to rain a few drops,
For I can hardly hold the outburst.

HAMLET ON A RIDGE

Pig shit ridden path
On a ridge where the path ends
Its a hamlet low shrunken wedged huts
Chocking an open area
Where children practise their steps
Grandmamas and Grandpapas
Plow into the chamber of memories
Daydream in the fumes of dead romance
and nostalgia, nostalgia ...

O yes stranger
At the end of this pig shit ridden path
Afternoons await darkness
Mothers leave the gardens for the hamlet
Infant voices receive them with greetings:
"Ambi pie lili, ambi pie lili."

O yes stranger
My blood leaps, throws me into ecstasy
My veins pulse singing dancing
Singing: Ambi pie lili, ambi pie lili, lili ...

At the end of this path
Stranger I mean
This pig shit ridden path
When darkness kisses and makes love
To my ridge
Cries of hunger from infant voices
Overriding the grunts of pigs
Keep Mamas sweating and Papas swearing.

At this pig shit ridden path's end
Darkness hovers ... settles on my ridge
Stranger you ought to see
Sky heavy with its lamps
Around the flickering firelight
Flutes are blown; legends amplified
Stranger in the silence of the night
You can hear the ridge talking to you
breathing into you:
Life. Strength. Sorrow. Joy -
But stranger its life, strength,
and JOY ... JOY ... AND
JOY ... JOY.

Dew-gemmed Dawn
On the horizon its rusty glow
Its the same Great grandfather knew
My sisters hiding in tapa cloth
Giggle on their way to the watershed
The roosters crow in their hunt
Kok kok kaaaaai!
Mamas preparing to go gardening.

At this path's end
Stranger I mean
This pig shit ridden one
A hut standing distant from others
Needing urgent repair during wet seasons' arrival
There awaits a woman watching the path
To greet her prodigal son's homecoming.

SONG OF LAMENT

Uchimakona.

My backbone,

My beloved.

Uchimakona.

Cream of love dream,

Descendent of Ochimakona.

You dwelled in the mouth of elders,
The insects whisper your name in terror.

Uchimakona.

My digging stick,

My beloved,

The cream of love dream,

Blood of Ochimakona.

You who uprooted homes and gardens.
Terror descends like a heavy downpour
On nearby neighbours.

Uchimakona.

My digging stick,

My red shell.

Cream of love dream,

Pride of Ochimakona.

Uchimakona.

My sun,

My childhood days.

Uchimakona.

The roar of distant waterfall.

Shield of Ochimakona.

You, the legend,

At feast, at dance, at war,

Your name the roar of thunder.

Uchimakona.

My tattoos that capture the eyes,

My childhood days left behind.

Uchimakona.

Roar of distant waterfall,

Stone axe of Ochimakona.

You the 'big man',

You whose face blinded the eyes of married war

Uchimakona.

My tattoos that capture the eyes.

My joy to hear mother's familiar stories.

Uchimakona.

Roar of distant waterfall,

Defender of Ochimakona.

Uchimakona.

Bitter taro soup,

Grieving moments of mother's death.

Uchimakona.

White bear whispers the song of departure,

Bending post of Ochimakona.

You the memories of happy years,
 You midnight stories of all mothers,
 Uchimakona,
 Bitter spear wound,
 Grieving moments of mother's death.

Uchimakona.
 White bear whispers song of departure,
 Decaying tree trunk of Ochimakona.
 Memories of our days lie
 Rusting in the most forgotten corner of my house.

Aia! Uchimakona.
 Aia! Bitter spear wound.

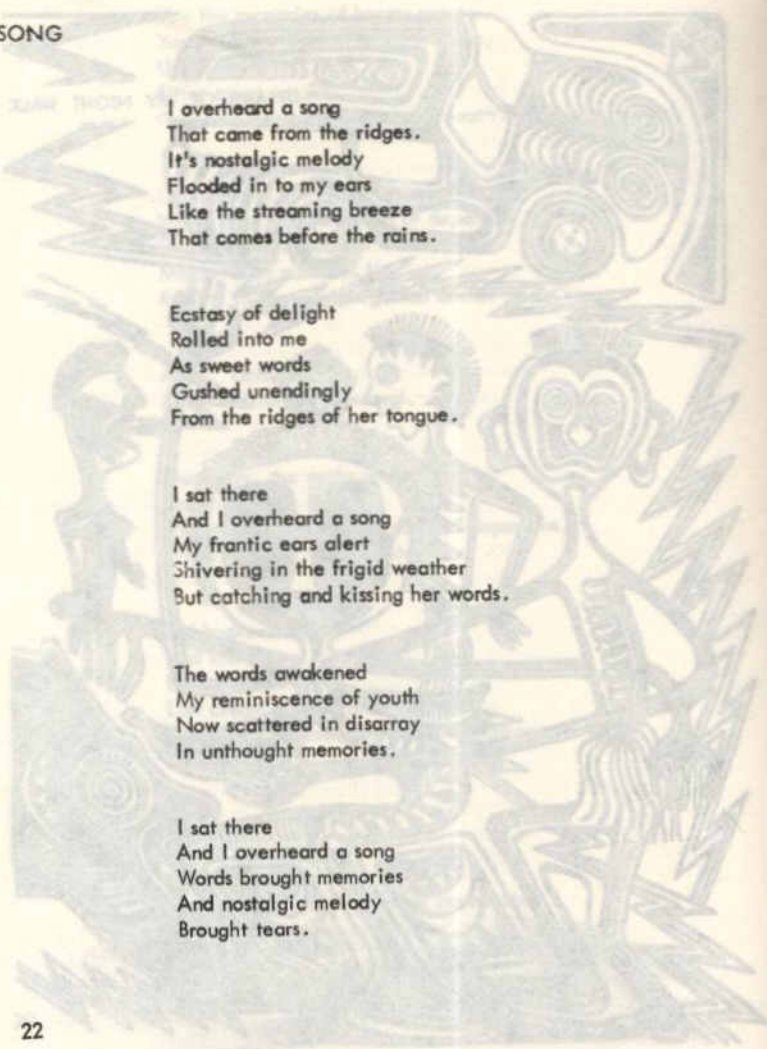
Our ways, our paths are retiring,
 Uchimakona.
 The white bear whispers song of departure,
 Dried blood of Ochimakona.

Uchimakona.
 Last warrior.
 Uchimakona.
 Last dream of love dream,
 The last true descendent of Ochimakona.

Aia! Aia!
 I have dreamed,
 A terrible dream.
 Two horrible white termites have eaten
 Your shield.



A SONG



I overheard a song
That came from the ridges.
It's nostalgic melody
Flooded in to my ears
Like the streaming breeze
That comes before the rains.

Ecstasy of delight
Rolled into me
As sweet words
Gushed unendingly
From the ridges of her tongue.

I sat there
And I overheard a song
My frantic ears alert
Shivering in the frigid weather
But catching and kissing her words.

The words awakened
My reminiscence of youth
Now scattered in disarray
In unthought memories.

I sat there
And I overheard a song
Words brought memories
And nostalgic melody
Brought tears.

I sat there
And I overheard a song
My eyes wore tears
My head failed to stay upright.

The song rolled on
Pains of memory shot through me
Yester-year haunted me
Bitterness gnawing my inside.

I sat there
And I overheard a song
At intervals a flute accompanied the song
My eyes wore many tears
My head dropped abashed.

THE SIMPLE JOYS OF LIFE

We sat around the fire.
Doors barred to shield off
the cold mountain winds.
The flicker of firelight
leaping before our eyes.

And there under the cover of darkness
the old woman began
stories of long ago,
of her formative simple joys.
And there we followed her on an unused trek
passing through an old ruined kingdom.

Filling over the horizon were the days
of wars and hill-farming,
where feasting and hunting
became the simple joys of life,
a life that remains a scar in her.

Sorrow masked her wrinkled face.
It was a nightmare,
and only sleep awoke us from a
strange journey.

FAREWELL KISS

I realize,
Oho!
Strange Farewell Kiss,
Memories flower,
Of childhood days.

I rowed the gulf
Look! There! In the west,
Across the gulf.
Row! Row! Row back with your memory,
Kins.

Where the flowers grow
Along the creeks,
Where Grandfathers fought,
And feasted.

Oho! I have never realized,
School was moment,
Of strange Farewell Kisses.

BLOODLESS WAR

Crossing of swords,
At the floor,
Clash of metal shields,
Reminds us of greedy fights.

Cave man shut up!

Greedy man shut up!
Harken to the wishes
of late starters.

Cave man!
Maws wara! Ape man.

Verbal insults,
The promises,
And drum beats,
of an inevitable bloody feud,
of a bloody war.

PUBLIC CONFESSION

Tossed spear
white-washed to glitter
conspicuously strange to startled eyes.
I a 'golden calf' at the village square,
am I the painted sign post
to look majestic?
And I knock at your door steps a stranger

Pardon me my lost village ways.
So distant

yet only yester-year
I was praised in the village,
by the creeks,
in the gardens,
by the river beds,
in the market.
Now?

I a victim,
whimpering in a wrestle of waves,
a flotsam and jetsam
of a private bloodless struggle.
Assimilated to love strange ways.

I have fallen in the milky pit head-on
and blindfolded,
forgetting to make love with simplicity
Alas! What is this hovering
at the edge of my memory,
this almost lost memory,
of something I possessed?
Surely a lost Treasure!

THIS-MY VILLAGE?

Come my conscience:
my right hand man come.
Hover and float
over this-my village.

Come my eye's eye:
my staff and rod come.
Tell my conscience
what you knew-what you saw before.

Come my conscience.
Tell your discovery
to my soul, and the souls of exiled.
About this-my village
torn and tattered
criss-crossed by dull monstrous flame
setting fire on simplicity.

Come my conscience.
Tell, my soul brother, come
and tell about this-my village;
whose foot paths are
swallowed by wide roads,
where stone and metal statues
demand a place in the club house.

Therefore come my conscience
Let's explore
the landscape of memories
about this-my village.

FATHER YOUR FACE

Father!
Why do you wear
This long haggard face,
The type mother wears
On melancholy occasions,
Like funerals beyond the ridges?

Why Father?
Why these silent looks?

During the dead years
Were you known as Boma
Ruler of many wives?
Are you not the son of Umar?
A warlord who summoned warriors
To assemble for battles.
Did you not run ahead of them to battles?

Call me the ungrateful son
Who ran away from the front lines
In mother's mid-night stories.
Do you not call me
"The stormy flashes"?
Have you not labeled me
"The seasonal homecomings
Of the Kingfishers"?

Father!
Your black blood runs fresh
In my white veins,
So let me hear the voice
I once heard long ago
Unwrap this secret you keep.
For your face speaks many hateful words.

LET HER BLOOD ENTER THE TRIBE

Forgive me elders
for I have sinned
against this sacred law,
"Thou shall hear the words of elders."

I bring the tears of a sinner
and the clasped hand of a beggar.
What punishment have you kept for
an ungrateful son?

My closed ears
have rejected the echo
of distant drum beats.
It was this sacred law,
"Thou shall hear the words of elders."

Yester-year
under the village shade tree,
when dry season left and
the skies tore open,
rivers took new courses,
the crying earth drank it's fill
and healed its wounds.
Life returned.
From ridge to ridge
my black kinsmen chanted
until words left them.

Yester-year
under the village shade tree
did you not hold a council
and chose Koima's daughter
to bear my child?
Forgive me elders
for I have sinned
against this sacred law,
"Thou shall hear the words of elders."

My liberty has become my enemy.
That afternoon a storm roofed the valley.
When thunders danced overhead
and rains pounded the village
people said fate lurked my way.

Accept this trophy from the towns.
She will not dance like Koima's daughter
nor sing the songs of the valley youths.
She will not lament
in the stagnant water
where the pigs left their waste
like the village girls
nor besmear her body with clay
when death visits you in your old age.

I pray fathers of wisdom
and understanding
let her strange blood enter the tribe.

HOHOLA IN THE NIGHT

Bright western skies die.
You have waited the anxious hours
of a woman in her first pregnancy.
The hour like a wounded soldier,
struggling to your dismay.
Now; moments to display your beauty arrive.

You smile like a titled warrior,
Pride your mask.
You transfigure into Hellen,
to capture my admiration.
You have cast a spell over me.

I admire you.
Man created heaven,
symbolic of progress.

Yet;
you;
a camouflage:
a deceiver:
a pregnant woman with a deformed child.
You whisper the devilish whisper of a harlot,
of her virginity to an innocent teenage
male virgin in bed.

Oho! Hypocrite
I admire you.

Hohola infested with hook worms,
Sick and diseased.
I smell the dead corpse
in the still air.
You breathe out unbearable smell.

Though splendid your beauty
I hear a siren of a police van far to my left
Scream of a raped female to my right
Before me in under dim lights
A woman selling her body to a queue
And five juvenile delinquents
Follow me.

Hohola you send a wave of fear
Like the fear of death descending on my aged father
Or the fear to get V. D. from my high school girl
While making love.

Hohola I wish you were a second
Gomorrah.

THE NIGHT WALK

Carolyn and me,
The two of us,
On the road to nowhere.
Only our whispers and chants
Will echo with the gurgling brook.

Where and which direction
Its flowing the night hates to tell.
Even the path we walk
Will end nowhere.
Lonely encircles us,
Its powerful grip choking us.

Under the unseen shades
There is a flicker of joy.
For we shall walk till dawn,
Where our hearts embrace with joy.

And its at dawn,
We the two of us,
Carolyn and me,
Shall know in which direction
The creek flows,
And where the path will end.

In the night walk we have become
A living part of the night.
And we shall walk till dawn,
To reveal our mysteries.

I was born on a ridge (Kaling) during the dry season of 1952. A good part of my youth was spent there. The ridge people have always been different - so they say. Others say its because we have an extraordinary sense of humour. I would say its because we are the first to see down and equally the first to bathe in the first drops of rain from a raging storm. Yet I lived in constant fear of magic and my Grandfather's spirit haunting my ridge. By the flickering firelight of camouflaged huts one can see magic men and their witch wives rave around the limestone caves. The joy and fear living on the ridge has ever since cast a spell on me.

In 1961 I was forced to school at the Catholic Mission Kup. It was my father's ambition to see me be a Kiap. I attended high school at Kondiun run by the De La Salle Brothers, previously by the S.V.D. Fathers. In 1971 I was offered an Administration scholarship to study at the University of Papua New Guinea. I am currently doing second year Arts, with literature and creative writing as my majors.

Jack Lahui of the Literature Bureau in his poetry section of Papua New Guinea Writing says that a poet can help shape our society. Apisai Enos, one of our leading poets, says a poet can be a silent politician. I agree. A poet in a developing Papua New Guinea can be a voice of vision playing a redemptive role. All societies need poets.

KAMA KERPI

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