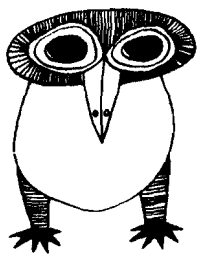


# T A A R O A

POEMS FROM THE PACIFIC

COLLECTED BY ECHEHART VON SYDOW



PAPUA POCKET POETS

PORT MORESBY 1967

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English Version by Ulli Beier

He was there – Taaroa was his name .  
Around him void:  
no earth no sky  
no sea no people .  
Taaroa calls – there is no echo .  
In his loneliness he changes himself into the world .  
These entangled roots are Taaroa .  
These rocks are Taaroa .  
Taaroa : sand of the sea .  
Taaroa : clarity .  
Taaroa : seed .  
Taaroa : ground .  
Taaroa the eternal  
the powerful  
creator of the world  
the large sacred world  
the world  
which is only the shell .  
Taaroa is the life inside it .

Tahiti

## SONG OF THE DEAD BEFORE THE GODS

You Gods!

We were buried terribly

our faces staring at the sky -

they trample us into the ground with feet.

Our ribs torn apart the pillars of our house

the eyes are rotten with which we looked at each other

the noses are crushed with which we kissed each other

shattered the breasts which we embraced

withered the mouth with which we laughed

lost the teeth with which we were biting

gone is the hand that threw the spear

rolled away the stones of the falcon

vanished the hair of pubis and beard.

Listen to the lament of the mosquito:

"Let them die let them go

but alas, my ear they have torn it away!"

Listen to the lament of the fly:

"Let them die let them go

but alas the eye is gone from which I drank."

Listen to the lament of the black ant:

"Let them die let them go

but alas they carried my penis away."

Fiji

## SONG OF A SUICIDE

My sister Audu Vavarusu lies asleep.

Is this the sleep of health or of death?

Her head drops feebly on the pillow.

Sleep woman, you leave no room for me

in the heart of our husband.

Sleep woman you forgot our childhood together.

Our marriage to the same man

is painful like thorns in the flesh.

Our marriage to the same man

is sharp like shells cutting our feet.

I carry my paints and my festival dress,

I cross the plain,

I pass the rock

I wade through the river.

Under the tall tree I open my paint basket:

I paint my eyes black,

I daub my cheek.

I tie my coloured garment

I sneeze.

What is the meaning of that ?

Is this the day of my death?

I turn to the coconut tree.

I wet my hands, I climb up.

Halfway between branches and roots I stop  
I look across the land:  
I see Setura, charming in the distance  
its rooftops dark against the sky.  
I see the beach where I walked idly  
the white shell decorations on the canoes  
are vanishing in the haze.  
I let go my hands -  
Ja nam bosulu.

Fiji

## FUNERAL SONG FOR A CHIEF

Behold the lightening .

As if he wanted to split the mountain ridges  
of Tuwhara .

The weapon fell from your hand  
and your shining spirit  
disappeared

beyond the heights of Rautawa .

The sun is pale and flees  
like a woman from the battlefield .

The tide is wailing  
the mountains of the south are melting away:  
for the spirit of the great chief  
is flying to Rona .

Open the gates of Heaven!

Enter the first heaven  
step into the second heaven .

And when you wander through the world of the spirits  
and they say to you : "What does this mean?"

Answer them thus:

"The winds of this world have been torn away from it  
by the death of this brave man ."

Atutahi and the morning stars  
look down from the sky

the earth is reeling  
for the powerful one  
the support of the nation lies prostrate.

O my friend!

The dew of Hokianga will soak your body  
the waters of the streams will dry up  
the land will waste.

Maori



LAMENT FOR CHIEF TE HEU HEU (died 1846)

The young morning walks across the dark Tauhara  
mountain.

Is that you my friend returning to me  
clad in luminous clouds?

Alas, I struggle alone in this world.

Go then

you were a tree

you overshadowed us all

in times of disaster.

What evil god prepared this sinister death?

Sleep in that dark damp place

and keep within close reach the precious weapon  
bequeathed to you

by Ngahue your glorious ancestor.

Let me see your face once more  
that is tattooed in blue lines.

Let me see your skin once more  
that is tattooed in intricate patterns.

The stars gleam feebly in the sky.  
Atutahi and Rehua-kai-tangato have gone  
the proud star beyond the milky way is extinct:  
your emblem quenched.

The Tongariro mountain rises lonely in the South  
the rich feathers that adorned your war canoe,  
are drifting on the waves.

The women in the West are weeping.

Maori

## SONG TO GREET THE KING

O the rain, the rain!

The rain is coming

the dance hall is dark

the large hall of Lono.

Listen : its mountain walls are stunned

by the noise of the crowd

as if thunder crashes down from the sky

in October.

And then Wellehu :

month of the Seven Stars.

No one is working now

unless they are forced.

But the sun shall rise

when the day has come.

And the heavenly son appears

and the land trembles

like an earthquake.

Sleep avoids my bed:

how shall this stomach be satisfied

this huge stomach of the crowd?

Hungry like the shark

whose eyes are glowing

in the darkness of the limitless sea.

The king rarely visits me. ---  
Everything is free, free.

Hawaii

### WAR CHANT

Early at dawn  
we raise our spears against the foe.  
Like the Tongans  
we let our flags fly in the wind.  
We struck them in their sleep.  
Who are the dead they carry from the battlefield?  
They heard the clanging of arms and fled.  
They hoped for safety beyond the river.  
Our women carry the muddy limbs of the dead.  
The sun rises and it gets hot  
the sea breeze blows and it gets cool.  
We cross the river to intercept their flight  
they dive into the lake - for they are like fish.  
Keep the big ones - throw aside the small!  
They are like poisoned fish  
drifting in the sea.

Fiji

## SONG FOR THE SECRET TUMBUAN SOCIETY

A woman sees the cock's feather of the Tumbuan.

She vomits,

she cries : "noy, ya, ya!"

The Tumbuan looks down,

moves like a snake in the water

and sings.

Someone beats the slit gong.

They all paint their foreheads.

They go to the bush.

They all see Leleo the dead spirit:

he descends from the tree

his body marked like a snake.

They beat their gongs,

they all put on feathers.

The noise carries across the sea.

Bismarck Archipelago

## TATTOO SONG

Our song rises to the gods  
and fervour descends to the artist.

Beat the drums  
praise the tattooist.

The black gannet  
its wings spread out  
flies towards us.

Its blackness flows  
into the artist's lines.

Draw good lines  
tattooist!

Marshall Islands

## TWO LOVE SONGS

We of your age group  
want to kiss you girl  
touch your tongue  
bite your mouth  
which is neatly carved.  
Beautifully formed your eyelids  
lovely your brows  
arching high in your face.  
You roll your eyes  
raise your brows  
arching high in your face  
like a string of beads or fireflies.  
Pretty your zigzag gums  
all red like a fruit.

You create brightness  
with your top knot  
its smooth  
like something polished with a plane.  
You curl it now  
bend back the tips into the mass of hair.  
You are leaving us  
a miracle that was ours.  
You are stubborn  
you exhaust our lungs  
you break our mouth.

Yap Islands



## LAMENT

Sweet woman

leaf from the tree of love

you are the one

who disturbs my soul.

My eye trembles when I think

she might still come.

But who would greet her with song?

Your day is gone

her image lost

the heart eaten and torn.

I descend into deep water

quarrel in my soul.

Nobody escapes love unscathed.

You - an estranged woman.

I - an estranged man.

Empty husks, food for pigs.

Look at the fish swarming in the water

the feeding places at the reef

are rich in moss.

You are the woman

and is that really your man?

When you return who will greet you with song?

When you come home who will be comforted?

Hawaii

## WOMAN'S SONG AT BOYS INITIATION CEREMONY

Descend from the tree house

my hornbill

let me admire you .

Your father painted the gate

and covered it with strings of beads .

My child, parrot, my hornbill

descend let me admire you .

Come down from the tree house

which your brother that giant fig tree

has fenced in .

Tell me whose coconuts are these?

We'll drink their milk later

and sing .

I am too tired

go climb the tree for me

then you may watch us

when we stamp out our dance .

Pluck me some betel nuts

I know they're green

but I am tired .

My child my parrot

pluck me some pepper leaves to chew!

Solomon Islands

## DIALOGUE OF LOVERS

### The man

Upstream in the wild forest  
near the Molokama falls  
in the hissing rains

I visited the flowering woods of Koili  
I fondled the blooming meadow of Manua  
and the hillock of Mahamoku.

I see the waters gleaming  
and my hand shall calm her excitement  
when I caress her in Lanihuli.

### The woman

Grant me but this wish:  
let us meet under these auspicious signs.

### The man

There are two flowers  
they bloom in the garden of your being.  
Bind them into a garland and add  
sign and crown of your love.

### The woman

And at what hour will you come?

The man

When the sun disappears behind the mountain  
when the evening wind changes course  
in order to breathe the scent of the Pandanus tree  
when the currents are whirling in Waipa.

Hawaii

## LOVE SONG

You're mad!

You followed me flirtatious woman  
to the other village.

My visit had excited you.

You told the messenger:

"Tell him the splendid tree  
that he may follow me along this path  
to come and rest with leaves of love.

Confused I followed him  
alone I wait for him here in this hut.

Oh the red parrot, bright hornbill, young bird -  
I weep for his love  
like milk of coconut.

I put my loincloth on only  
to be untied by him.

And I say this:

If the red parrot will pitch his camp up there  
I'll come.

I will prepare his food  
even in battle  
as if he were my husband."

## DISAPPOINTMENT

You are trembling with desire .  
I covered myself in silence  
like a tree of longing .  
But you said to me :  
"Tear many beads from the string  
and give them to me .  
Rest under the sun leaves until you are tired  
don't look for other mistresses .  
If you want me then as I hope  
follow the path  
that leads behind the battle ground .  
And if you turn your head  
and see the spotted feather  
you'll know my hiding place ."  
Your husband though the lazy fellow  
he scolded you and said :  
"You hawk around your body  
like someone does a spear  
you want to trade with it  
and call the customers yourself ."  
I wept  
when I heard that .

Hawaii

## THE FLOOD

The backbone of the wind is broken .

The wind slackens .

We make the wind magic -

it becomes quiet quiet quiet

dead quiet .

A lull a lull

the windmagic

creates a lull a lull a lull .

The breakers

the breakers the breakers

crash scream crash scream crash scream

the sea rises

it floods the beach with foam

it is full of the finest sand

it stirs up the ground

stirs up the ground

it slaps the beach and screams!

Marshall Islands

## CLOUDBURST

In Koolau  
the rain broke loose:  
it comes with whirling dust  
piled into pillars  
it rustles down.  
The rain sighs in the forest.  
It beats and swallows like breakers  
it whips whips now the land.  
The earth is pounded to mud  
rainwater jumps from the mauntain side.  
See the water jumping  
like a dog  
a mad dog biting itself free.

Hawaii