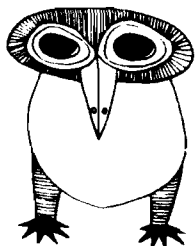


MODERN POETRY FROM PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Volume I



Edited by Nigel Krauth
and Elton Brash

PAPUA POCKET POETS
Port Moresby, 1972

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INTRODUCTION

The modern period of Papua New Guinean poetry began in 1968. Its initial four-year phase coincided with the presence of Ulli Beier at the newly formed University in Port Moresby. Beier provided encouragement and stimulation for young poets through his creative writing courses, and as a result of his efforts their work was published in the Papua Pocket Poets series and in the biannual literary magazine Kovave.

The oral literatures of Papua New Guinea reveal a high degree of creativity and poetic-mindedness in the lifestyles of the country's people, but without access to the printed word the people had not been able to present to the world a national poetic literature. The large number of differing languages and the unavailability of broadcasting media forced the poetic creations of the country to remain as esoteric exercises within small tribal groups.

The poets represented in this volume come from all over Papua New Guinea. Styles and concerns vary from individual to individual but, taken as a whole, the poetry speaks with a distinctively Papua New Guinean voice. These young poets are relatively free from external influences, and this accounts for the spontaneity and freshness of their verse. Many of

their rhythms derive from the songs and incantations of the oral literatures, and most of their images are naturally and logically chosen from aspects of the life they know best. Their techniques are never self-consciously literary: they speak with a passionate directness and a quick sensitivity to essentials.

Their poetic interests generally focus on the pressing concerns of the moment: the clashing of the modern and ancient cultures, and the love for the old way of life; the inherited feeling of closeness to nature, and the alienation of the modern man; the uncertain political future of Papua New Guinea, and the ineluctable stirrings of the individual's desires. The range of concerns is limited because the poets are all young, none beyond his early twenties, few with more than two years' writing background. Yet the range of mood and experience evoked in the poetry is not limited. There is searching, and discovery; there is despair, and celebration; there is wildness, and tenderness.

These poems are the first fruits of modern Papua New Guinean poetry. The future will bring forth more substantial products, but perhaps none quite so sweet.

Nigel Krauth
University of Papua New Guinea

If we had grown to face
The morning dews together,
We could show our fathers that after all
Their counsels were not wasted.
When our enemies came, with youthful bodies,
We would have borne the children to safety,
Then taken our arms to the front.

If it had been, we would have shared
The scolding, the praise, the worries together.
Together we would have faced the first arrows
To defend our Lukinya Rocks, our indestructible backers,
Whose changing colours we watched
With misty eyes, under the dawning sun,
When our legs were too thorny to carry us there,
And our hands too small to grasp the protective shields.

But tell me, what is in your mind
That causes me to scratch my head?
Yesterday you looked at me sideways,
And since my return you have denied my due.
Brother, the fault is not mine.
It is the path of the whiteman
That our fathers chose for me;
Yet this has deepened my love for you.

HOMECOMING

Pokwari Kale

There were greetings from the living
And handshakes from the dead.
Familiar faces all, but remote.
The sounds were strange
The scene not remembered.
Small hills had grown into mountains
And had moved closer together
With grey clouds hanging from their brows.
The devil had been around planting unusual trees
Leaving wide valleys, dark and green
Clear of all human trace.
A big place for himself to reign?
Was I cut off to put roots in the air
And expected to grow fruit thereon?
All was so quiet, so cold, so vast,
I felt lonely and small, like a wanderer
Walking through an ancient, ruined kingdom.

HIDDEN POWER

Herman Talingapua

Slowly the moon climbs
along its silvery path
over Kumbu mountain.
Palm trees cast the shadows
of their rough bodies
across my path,
their wombs
heavy with sago.
Avoiding the wind,
coconut trees bend low.
Leleki baskets
hang from the roof of the men's house
pregnant with secrets
and power.
But I,
the 'modern man',
complete with suit,
despatch case and transistor set,
shall never know
what hidden happiness or strength
is tied up in these baskets.
My age and 'learning' notwithstanding,
I am excluded.
Uninitiated,
condemned to sleep with women,
unfit to carry shield and spear.

AWAKEN BELL FOR THE GOLDMINE LABOURERS

Nganining Grinde

Oh my friends wake up!
Why don't you wake up?
Up, up and up,
The bell has awoken up.

We have no food, there is nothing for us.
We can't wash, there is no water for us.

Oh the disturber, the disturber,
The unmerciful disturber.

Who are we? The kanaes?
Who is a kanae, the bird of the seas?

Oh we shall see
The sea geese.

SONG OF AN OLD WOMAN ON BOUGAINVILLE

John Bitu

A different plane
a different plane
machine roars in the middle
machine roars in the middle
name is helicopter

Plane is going
plane is going
propeller revolves in a different place
propeller revolves in a different place
plane is gone

Weep weep let us weep
weep weep let us weep
we thought it was merely a stone
we thought it was merely a stone
but it carried away our wealth

THE FIVE SENSES

Philomena Isitoto

I like the smell of new-ripened oranges;
And newly picked yellow pumpkin;
The sweet smell of roasted pig;
The colourless smell of hot taro;
The passing salt breeze of the sea;
And the scent of flowering shrubs.

What sounds now come into my ears?
The stream, rushing down its rocky wall;
The bumping truck along the rough road;
The groaning of hungry pigs;
Drop, drop, of falling rain on a roof;
And tapping of a bird on a hollow trunk.

I love to see the beauty around me:
People in straight lines like marching ants;
The silver moon shining on green leaves,
Making them glassy and silvery;
The glorious sun rising in the early dawn;
And the calmness of the blue Pacific Ocean.

What's that I feel attacking me?
Only the blazing sun that strikes my body.
The bite of a black ant surprises me;
Sharpness of roughest rock hurts my feet;
The softness of bed sends me to sleep -
But the stinging mosquito wakes me.

It's my taste which I rely on:
The sweetness of taro satisfies me;
Starchy kaukau helps my growth and
The protein of fishes brings saliva to my mouth;
Greasy pig is horrible on my tongue;
But coconut liquid quenches my thirst.

BATS

Rei Mina

Who inhabits these dark and sinister walls,
Blacker than night itself?
The air is still,
Expectant of nocturnal disturbance.
Suddenly there is a flutter of wings.
Some thing brushes past my face.

Another follows.
In no time there are a swarm of creatures,
And a rising cadence of eerie music.
The pungent aroma of unwashed bodies
Flits through the air.
How do these creatures find their way
Between these walls,
Blacker than night itself?

SONG

Addie Odai

I'm going to Madang
I'm going to Madang
I'm going to Madang
I want to take an X-ray

I want to take an X-ray
I want to take an X-ray
I want to take an X-ray
I can't take off my blouse

I can't take off my blouse
I can't take off my blouse
I can't take off my blouse
For you will see my breast

You will see my breast
You will see my breast
You will see my breast
I can't take off my blouse

THE OLD MAN'S EXPLANATIONS

Kumalau Tawali

Thunder roars in the sky:
"God is angry!"
The sea is rough:
"God breathes hard."
The sky rains:
"The angels are pissing."

THE BUSH KANAKA SPEAKS

Kumalau Tawali

The kiap shouts at us
forcing the veins to stand out in his neck
nearly forcing the excreta out of his bottom
he says: you are ignorant.

He says: you are ignorant,
but can he shape a canoe,
tie a mast, fix an outrigger?
Can he steer a canoe through the night
without losing his way?
Does he know when a turtle comes ashore
to lay its eggs?

The kiap shouts at us
forcing the veins to stand out in his neck
nearly forcing the excreta out of his bottom
he says: you are dirty.

He says we live in dirty rubbish houses.
Has he ever lived in one?

Has he enjoyed the sea breeze
blowing through the windows?
and the cool shade under the pandanus thatch?
Let him keep his iron roof, shining in the sun,
cooking him inside, bleaching his skin white.

The kiap shouts at us
forcing the veins to stand out in his neck
nearly forcing the excreta out of his bottom
he says: you'll get sick.

He says: you'll get sick
eating that fly-ridden food.
Haven't I eaten such food all my life,
and I haven't died yet?
Maybe his stomach is tender like a child's
born yesterday. I'm sure he couldn't
eat our food without getting sick.

Every white man the gorment sends to us
forces his veins out shouting
nearly forces the excreta out of his bottom
shouting : you bush kanaka.

He says: you ol les man!
Yet he sits on a soft chair and does nothing
just shouts, eats, drinks, eats, drinks,
like a woman with a child in her belly.
These white men have no bones.
If they tried to fight us without their musiket
they'd surely cover their faces like women.

Their bodies painted in black and red stripes
tell the story of their purpose.
They wait, tensely
they listen to the power songs.

"Tomorrow will be the day
when obsidian shall break
when the inland men
shall lose many
and the beach shall chew betelnut. "

The garamut answers their voices
and a hundred agile warriors
display their strength.
They shake, jump, shout in procession
to the rhythm of the drums.

They work hard.
Their minds grow light
and sweat falls like rain
on their hands, legs and eyes.
The treacherous spears
tired of ceremony
look hungry for the real thing.

In my mother's womb
peace was mine
but I said "māping"
I greeted the light
and came into the world
saluting it with a cry.
I paddled downstream
drifting at ease
like Adam
before the fall.

But now
a storm rises before me
my canoe has swung round
I paddle against the stream.
The river my helper
has become my enemy
I fight the river
until my veins stand out
until the paddle blisters my palms.

Yet in this battle I gain glory
I win fame
I grow a name
the true essence of it.
One day I will reach the source again.
There at my beginnings
another peace
will welcome me.

TUNA

Kumalau Tawali

Tuna you are the mirror of the blue
Tuna you are the pain in my veins
Tuna you are lord.

When I set out to catch you
I am a prisoner of taboos.
"Don't dangle legs over the side of the canoe."
"Don't whistle for merriment."
"Is your thought straight?"
"Is your wife having her first pregnancy?"
"Are you newly married?"
All this awkwardness my duty.

But on the market you are the sun.
You darken the eye of the inland man
when he offers plenty in exchange
without bargain - just to get you.

You are worth the pain in my veins.

THE OLD WOMAN'S MESSAGE

Kumalau Tawali

Stick these words in your hair
and take them to Polin and Manuai
my sons:
the ripe fruit falls and returns
to the trunk - its mother.
But my sons, forgetful of me,
are like fruit borne by birds.
I see the sons of other women
returning. What is in their minds?
Let them keep the price of their labour
but their eyes are mine.
I have little breath left
to wait for them.
I am returning to childhood.
My stomach goes to my back,
my hands are like broom sticks,
my legs can fit in the sand crab's hole .
I am dry like a carved image
only my head is God's.
Already I sway like a dry falling leaf
I see with my hands -
Oh tell Polin and Manuai to hurry
and come to my death feast.

NIU

Kumalau Tawali

You are the baby that crawls
too long.

All the others are walking -
what has your mother been doing with you?
Have you been carried too long?
Have you been fed too much?

Niu
don't crawl too long
your legs will be weak
like a cripple's.
Oh Niu!
stand up
you must try to carry weight.

One day nobody will be around
and you will have to carry weight
if you can't -
you will fall.

Oh Niu!
Will you stand up?
Now?
Right now?

UNITY

Apisai Enos

Old wrinkled womb
mother of
Gamas
Markhams
Wabags
Arowes
Kaviengs
and Chimbus
you who brought forth
Manus
Sepiks and Tolais
Gogodalas
Kiwais Keremas Dobuans Huris and Motus
and all those others
who scattered and dispersed
who know not their father and mother

Your pregnant stomach burst
scattering your children like seeds from a pod
over your bleeding body they scrambled
and crawled like wriggling worms
each claiming his part

Though your blood is their blood
your flesh their flesh
your mind their mind
they will not acknowledge their kin
and like delta islands they drift
further apart in pools and streams of blood

Awake mother
from the coma of birth
and as your clouded eyes regain vision
and your trembling hands steady
pull them back by their navel cords
into the warmth of your bilum
keep them safe under your tapa cloth
let them recognise each other at last
on your breasts.

HIGH WATER

Apisai Enos

Listen to the rain drop
the underground water
mountain water
tickling
trickling
dripping deep
in the heartbeat
of the massive ranges
black razor edged mountains
with purple peaks
they clutch each other
in perpetual mockery
wild like a tightly packed
formation of warriors
ready to die...
high water
of the mountains
seeking the plains
there is no straight path for you

as the crow flies
those rocks defy you
yet you cling from outcrop to precipice
you grind them down
explode them like laughter
like spider's silk you fall
like a poem gliding across
black boulders
convoluting now through plunging ravines
where prawns and crabs gather
carelessly bouncing off the stones
you spray the beauty of creepers
and ferns that mimic cliff shapes
the mountain air is trapped
in the solitude of the whirlpool
and the water echoes
the rhythm of rushing feet
like a long column of highland men
seeking the life in the cities below
and as the sun faces the west
the high water
through dark caves
through witches tombs
over the foot prints of ghosts
and the splintered shapes of spirits
until at last you break out
to cast your hope
upon the glitter of the silver moon
and the tumbling stars scattered over your breast
and you awaken to the wagtail
proudly displaying himself
as if he were the only bird in creation

but you laugh, to see him upside down
reflected in your water
only the kingfisher understands the trick
and in the sudden warmth now
you mate with the dragon fly
and on you must flow
naked through the choking jungle
arrived you have
but at ease no more.

NEW GUINEA

Apisai Enos

New Guinea, beloved New Guinea
What do they say about you?

The rugged
the impossible
the broken bottle
the hostile
the Saturday made
the waste land
the hot island
the tomb of death
the forgotten isle

The land of thousand tribes and trials
primeval forests of termites, leeches and cicadas
hidden valleys and mountain crags of old
deep gorges and rugged ranges
fast rivers flowing to endless swamps
land of killers and cannibols and sacred corpses
of mountain raiders and mangrove snipers
land of fevers and dreaded diseases

molten lava and sulphureous ashes
of coral beaches with lashing fishes.

New Guinea!

Land of proud warriors of courage
land of ancestral spirits
entangled in myths and incarnations
land of haus tambaran, dukduk and eravo
land of kavave masks and gope boards
land of hiri, kula ring and fire dance
land of a thousand faces and facets
I hardly know you!
New Guinea, dazzling with diversity
wild, rugged, yet tender.

New Guinea, whispering with love
murmuring, dove-like and gentle.
Land of swaying palms
frangipani
orchids
hibiscus
rock mosses and water lilies
beautiful like a bride
with a veil of bird of paradise plumes.

New Guinea!

My fathers sang to the kundu drum
my fathers danced to the garamut
on the banks of your mighty rivers
the Fly
the Sepik
the Purari

then as now they watched the sun retreat
to the gentle sound of jews harps
and tilatilo flutes
mumbling magic formulas
as the last glitter faded on the hills.

Awake, awake, awake,
wake up New Guinea!
Destruction!
The sky is falling!
Flying creatures inhabit the earth
a mighty bush fire rages.
Hofoza, Jate, Iko, Gamu and Kaia!
God of thunder
god of lightning
spirits of the air
do not destroy me!
Let me not die in this whirlpool of blood
save me before dawn!

Be quiet New Guinea
ancient cocoon
be still!
Don't you know that I am your husband
betrothed to you in childhood
promised to you in the womb?
I have come to celebrate our wedding
I have come to elope with you
into better times.

INGAL

Apisai Enos

Ingal!

I cannot please you
but I can evoke your names
 you are the rainbow
 nature's finest work of art
 angel among angels
 none to equal you on earth
 not even the Philippino girls
your body all soft
 gentle
 slender
 slim

elusive spirit

 meek and mild
you dissolve between my hands
all to nothing like wind to nowhere
 Yet perfect like love
 your eyes sparkling like dew
 spectrum of all colours
in morning sun rise
 Crystal clear your body
 transparent like fountain
 your delicate hair soft like lba blossom
You drink the sweetest of honey
as you fly from tree to tree
flower to flower
and feed on delicate petals

When the world is asleep
you travel on like fragrant midnight breeze
If I could catch you
you could give me love

luck

fragrance

and magic

but you are sensitive to the lightest sound
you sniff the faintest whiff of air
like a frightened wallaby beside the lily pond,
you evade me

yet I feel the warmth and calmness of love
that shine from your eyes when you sit and rest

Oh Ingal,

no one could ever make you hate
for hatred has flown out of your heart
the source of love and peace.

THE DEATH CEREMONY

Jack Lahui

He has fallen out of the parade of life,
So we farewell him with pints of precious tears,
Embroid the log in his best attire,
Smear the motionless figure with odorous spice.

Into church and then out of church,
A stately procession in silence,
With all heads inclined forward,
A stately procession we march out of our village
And into his village.

A village for the aged in need of rest,
A village for the fallen new,
A village lined with cracked wooden crosses,
A village lined with sad brick crosses,
Where tears roll loose on the part obliterated letterings.

At last we come to a spot
Where mother lies waiting,
Dear old mother with gaping mouth -
And that's where we lay him down,
Right down near the lips of the mother,
A mother with a perfect appetite,
Who waits to munch him to soft powder.

There we lower him down,
Down into her bloodless system,
And when she binds her mouth of soil,
We remember our own fall too.

THE GAZELLE INCIDENT

Jack Lahui

Due north-east from here,
in the land of tremors and eruptions,
the police stood like the Spartans,
and the Mataungans stood firm too,
claiming power and land,
a venomous political obligation.
Right round the globe
there's no peace where
a house is divided in two
and no sense of compromise.

Out of the heat of peaceful violence,
the law with batons bold and banging
and shields ready to protect,
the two foes stood ready for battle.
Amidst the enemies came Whippy,
with his savorous and melodious icecream,
the celestial hammering crotchets of "Greensleeves" -
surely such charm of music
has power to soothe the savages . . .
so goes the saying.

MUD

Benjamin Evara

Dirty old mud!
But I love it from the bottom of my heart.
Mud, dirty mud, filthy mud
mud which is in our blood.

We are made of mud
as was said in the Holy Scriptures.
Where is that filthy mud
that moulded me into a human being?
O mud - I love you.

The blind man can see you with his hands
dirty, slimy mud.
The sky is painted with mud
with muddy ochre.

Milo water on muddy banks you drank
as a child at home.
Mud you've eaten
when walking on four legs.
Yes! Mud, your mud!

BORN A MAN

Meakoro Opa

born under the trees
 guarded by spirits
 was I

born a child with
 a head like stone
 they told me

born a stone age
 savage
 they tamed me

born a man
 with child's thinking
 I was fooled

born a real man
 before the age of profits
 I was discovered

born intelligent man
 into a dark corner
 was I
 not to be a slave of time

Deep in my core that small blood droplet pulses lonely and faint
Each day the weighty cover shrieks arrogantly
Vowing to crush and smother the tiny flame within that pulse
I know the threat, my fear piss is streaming down my legs
I will call my ancestors and all the spirits of my grounds
and waters
They will throw their magic over my body
I will stop pissing my leg and cup my palms around my precious
flame
My shoulders will stoop under the chilling weight
My back bone will groan and break its suppleness
But my ancestor companions will not loosen my sinews around
the flame

Green mountains will boast their size and their foreverness
A passing eye will sing their permanency and solidness
But inside each mountain lies a tiny flame cradled and
weighted by above
People will live, people will die
But the tiny flame will grow its arms and legs very slowly
Until one day its volcanic pulse will tear the green mountain
apart
To allow pentup blood flow and congested vomit spit freely
Tiny flame of my pulse, you are silent, you are patient
My hands and my aching body will nurse you against the
venomous enemy
You will grow, you and I will soon be free to grow our love

Stretch your ear to ground and listen to the distant stirrings
Napalm cannot burn out the flames and guerrillas now open
The green chilly mountain is staggering to burst apart
The tiny flame within its own fence is burning into the icy
centres

Look how the flame came from the ghettos
The flame kept down by chain and hunger
Once reluctant now creeps obviously into the pale coldness
Chubby Checker gave Elvis the twisting flame to throw
Ray Charles gave the Beatles the explosive pulse to shake the
total stiffness

That children tempered by this flame will scorch and burn
their elders

Listen carefully, this is but one arm of the reluctant flame
Burning and melting the icy bloodless body

My flame take your fuel from these brother flames
Let not the oceans drown your linking pipe
You will grow, you will grow, you will grow like a boil on
pale skins

Maybe your vibrant lava will flow to burn anew the world
When Johannesburg and New York is in flames
And the black vomit will fertilize this barren soil
But today your eyes are dimmed and in your enemy you see
your friend

My lover, my me, we will not follow the cold pale reach for
the moon

Our ancestors and our spirits sleep on this earth
Let the lunatics meet on the lunacy, we will use the soil to
grow our brotherly flame

Our reluctant dream flame is burning disconnected like a
bush fire

But one day, one day..... one day.....

Is this the dream of an unborn child - a madman imprisoned?

No! No! No!

The foetus is already a man; the madman is judgement for his
imprisoners

My body has no time for God and the miracles

My poison is your bitter booting and clapping shut my mouth

The voice that will shoot from my stomach

Will be the death axe to smash the ice of my imprisoners

It will not come from heaven nor from the green mountain

It is the unseen vibrant rhythm from my pulse deep down down
inside

Crying violently for me to open my eyes and the time.

For to wait a thousand years is to wait too long.

Reluctant flame you have lifted your skirt to my eyes

I come up truly for your wavy rhythms to burn

But how can you and I make live love

Your flesh and mine shivering to make one soul

To know the burning frenzy of our flesh tremble in unison

As we passionately dig into reality the living shape of
love-body-soul?

Yes how! How? How? How can we live the shaping of this love

When the cold seed creeps silently in the cover of the fog

To make our love limbs cold and our souls senseless?

How? How? How? How can a dying soul make love, yes how?

Where is that flame to thaw out my freezing deadness? Where?

I must open my mouth in search of air!

Cry my soul body, cry violently

For your unseen enemy has the poisoned knife to my throat!

Black faces staring mutely by the dusty bus stops
Our envy hateful hearts crying tears to see them speed past
in arrogance

Black shoulder bleeding from the copra bags
Our silent spear strikes inside to see the fortnight scraps
Black angelic voices singing the strange alleluia
Our soul damning itself to feel the memory of sensual
dance and song

Black bodies madly showing off white long stockings shirt
and trousers

Our laugh spirits cries to wear fully the colours we know
Black feet uniformed blue carry the terror of baton and tear gas
Our eyes hate one another, but somewhere we feel a strand
of wantok

Black ears glued to the cheap transistors
Our we yearns to make music instead of feeding senselessly
on noise

Black stooges yessarring whitishly to make paper our destiny
Our revolting will be turned against our selves traitors
Black muffled servants clamouring shamelessly for black cars
stigma

Our aspirations will forever lie lost in the mess of paper
status

FUCK OFF, WHITE BASTARDRY, FUCK OFF!
your weighty impotence has
its needle into
me

NOTES

- P. 6: 1.11: "Lukinya Rocks" - sacred objects.
- P.11; 11.16 & 17: "taro", "kaukau" - root vegetables.
- P.13; 1.1: "kiap" - patrol officer.
- P.14; 1.12: "gorment" - government; 1.16: "les" - lazy;
1.21: "musiket" - gun.
- P.15; 1.6: "obsidian" - used in arrowheads, axes, etc.;
1.10: "garamut" - large drum fashioned from a log slit
at the top and hollowed out.
- P.16; 1.3: "maping" - "good morning".
- P.19; 1.7: "Niu" - coconut -1.21; "Niu gini" - this spelling
of New Guinea translates into Motu as "coconut, stand up!"
- P.20; 11.3 -13: "Gamas, etc." - Papua New Guinean tribes.
- P.21; 1.6: "bilum" - string bag used to carry goods and infants;
1.7: "tapa" - beaten bark cloth.
- P.24; 1.7: "haus tambaran" - sacred meeting house for men;
"dukduk" - dancer with face and body totally masked;
"eravo" - men's house of spectacular architectural design;
1.8: "kovave" - initiation; "gope" - ceremonial shield;
1.9: "hiri" - trading voyage along Papuan coast;
"kula" - trading circuit, eastern Papuan islands;
1.24: "kundu" - hand held drum with snake- or lizard-skin
membrane.
- P.25; 1.12: "Hofoz, etc." - legendary ancestral spirits.
- P.35; 1.14: "wantok" - friend, usually from the same language
group.