

26

sonnets

CONTEMPORARY PAPUA NEW GUINEAN POETRY



MICHAEL DOM

26 Sonnets: Contemporary Papua New Guinean Poetry

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*To Ileana and Oliver
For making my world brighter
And hopefully understanding me morer.*

Excerpts of reviewer's comments on Michael's previous collections include:

“One of the more delightful aspects of running a national literary competition is coming across new and talented writers. In our estimation, Papua New Guinea can rightfully claim that it has produced a world-class poet.”

— Phil Fitzpatrick and Keith Jackson AM, *Co-founders of the Crocodile Prize, on 'The Musing of an Assistant Pig Keeper'*

“Michael Dom has poetry all over him and is surely the most talented of Papua New Guinean poets. Though his array of poetry is diverse, his work on PNG politics is filled with the best piercing and most blistering political poetry ever.”

— Kelakapkora Sil Bolkin, *Author of The Flight of the Galkope, on 'O Arise!'*

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SHARPER WORDS
A FORWARD BY STEVEN WINDUO



I have great respect and admiration for the bold and measured language in Dom's poetry. Reading this collection assured me that Dom is willing to take up forms of poetry that are structured and articulated through very specific rules of construction. He is willing to explore through such forms very complex social and cultural world. I recognize that the forms used are the sonnet and sijo, two different cultural platforms for poetry. Though I am curious how Tok Pisin poems can fit into these forms, I think we can learn that the frames of expression are there; all we have to do is give it flesh and life through poetry in our own language.

Poetry is a special language that engages with the deep unconscious of a human being. Expressing the deep unconscious takes a special kind of person whose poetic sensibilities are expressed in sharp words. A poet with the sixth sense can see, articulate, and string together words that tell a thousand stories. A poet recreates the world to make sense of it.

Michael Theophilus Dom has that special gift of poetry. He has sharpened his words every time he writes a new piece. Dom is a young poet who has come of age. He has the ability to pick up the ordinary and mundane, and project it on to a page and make us see what we are unable see on our own. He shows us a different

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worldview to the one we have been living and breathing our whole life. He is a great poet in the making. In a line of poetic tradition since Alan Natachee, Kumalau Tawali, John Kasaipwalova, Apisa Enos, Russell Soaba and this writer, Michael Theophilus Dom is quickly securing his place among the great poets of this nation.

Finally, just as much as I valued reading Michael Theophilus Dom's wonderful and powerful poems, I invite all readers to follow this young poet on his journey to greatness.

Steven Winduo

Port Moresby, 28 January 2019

PREFACE

This book is a small collection of poems written in or approximating the sonnet and sijo forms. These poems were written over fifteen years, the earliest in August 2003, 'So near, so far – a sonnet to transience', was my first attempt at using the sonnet form.

Until then, and even for some years afterwards, I had disregarded the sonnet form as an archaic and irrelevant means of poetic expression for my modern age thinking. I now recognize how very ignorant and inexperienced I was at the time – the form is easy to describe but difficult to master.

There are three major sections in this collection of poems. Firstly, the sonnets number only 26, but are not numerically ordered since a number of works were either discarded or were started but never completed to satisfaction.

The sonnets are arranged into four periods. I had written these sonnets whenever the need arose in my creative pursuit so there was no effort to write a series of poems in the form. The four periods were noted in hindsight.

Period 1 – Learning curve: Russel Soaba threw down the glove and I decided to revisit my study of the sonnet form, soon finding out that my first thoughts were poorly founded.

In this revisionary period, I tried the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnet forms and developed a liking for the closing heroic couplet. After this I tried using tetra-meter rather than pentameter lines, and then used triplet stanzas for a translation into Tok Pisin.

I believe Sonnet 6 may be the first of the form to be translated into Tok Pisin. It seems fitting then that the poem also expresses thoughts about the dawning of Papua New Guinean Independence.

Period 2 – Playtime: In this section I took a more playful approach and experimented with an acrostic sonnet, using sextets and triplets while translating into Tok Pisin or into English. Sonnet 10 may also be the first of the form originally written in Tok Pisin.

Period 3 – School's out: At this stage I was starting to use the sonnet form at will, experimenting with unusual meter, unrhymed verse and couplets.

Period 4 – Mastery: This period is a zenith for me, where I can visualize the sonnet as it forms and work more confidently at the content while utilizing the learned details of sonnet construction to allow the poem to reveal itself fully.

Poems have a life of their own: This second section contains poems which were initially envisaged in sonnet form or at least I had tried to write them as sonnets but they somehow mutated. Some of my personal favorites are in this section.

Sijo are like sonnets: The last section is my entire collection of sijo to date. While studying the Korean poem form, I learned that they perform a similar function to sonnets. This emboldened me to experiment more with not only writing in the classical form, but using the triplet-like structure to form individual verses in a poem.

The triplet sijo lines in this format are broken up as indented lines to allow them to fit on the pages.

LEARNING CURVE



Parallel lines run through the Markham Valley, Morobe.

SONNET 1: PARALLEL LINES TO NOWHERE

Travelling roads that wind over mountains
Where trees and high *Imperata* are blinds
Traffic passing by on parallel lanes
Converse directions down dividing lines.

On prehistoric treks of time and chance
Each step chosen for a safe arrival
Hand-made stories, legends in chants and dance
Ancestral maps were means of survival.

But now we drive along broad thoroughfares
Disregarding those places where we step
Doing whatever we want, unawares
Destinations aren't just names on a map.

Nomads and seafarers found their somewhere
Their kin cruise parallel lanes to nowhere.

**SONNET 2: BANISHMENT IS A WRITER'S
OBJECTIVE**

O writer! Your quill quivers in its mark!
As a light shine in the gathering dark
While people struggle towards some vision
To attest them truths is your sole mission.

In prose and in poem may you reveal
Festering lies and felonious deals
Despite those who censure please persevere
Your ink is the ichor your foes fear!

Banishment is a writer's objective
By this we know our foes were attentive
By their displeasure our work is measured
And one day our toil is truly treasured.

Take up your quills and prepare to question
The quest for truth is a path to heaven.

**SONNET 3: I MET A PIG FARMER THE OTHER
DAY¹**

At the foot of Mount Giluwe we met
A place where they say ice falls from the sky
We spoke of pork and the lack of good vets
As we toiled in his village piggery
Each planning how his stock would reach market
Did we both share a wish that pigs could fly?

Agriculture is our backbone we say
(Rhetorical ruse on farmers always)
Yet in our grand plans for development
We have forgotten what that really meant
From the highlands to the coastal islands
The struggle to feed ourselves never ends.

If you met those who's unheard voices cry
You too would join me in questioning, why?

¹ Awarded the PNG Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers Poetry Award of The Crocodile Prize in 2012.

**SONNET 4: BEFORE WET ADJECTIVES THE
MIGHTY VERB**

It seems some poet's pleasure to conjure
Words of shimmering beauty, rich and rare
Verbose prose, wrought in great style and glamour
Express and expose; whose cupboards are bare.

It's all about me and things as I see
My feelings, my thinking's, my fantasies
It's all about them, what they did to me
Their foibles, their turmoil's, their angst at me.

Let a word put in edgewise be sharper
To cut to the chase, to seek and to sow
To draw a map to a hidden treasure
To plant a seed so a mustard tree grows.

Why write of your sorrow and misery?
Why not instead rewrite our history?

**SONNET 5: THE OLD MAN IN THE CRIPPLE
CHAIR**

That old man in the cripple chair
Has been hawking that street corner
Longer than I can remember
And I have never seen his cheer.

A cardboard box plays on his lap
The jingles of our currency
The music of our sympathy
But I have never heard him laugh.

That old man in the cripple chair
Has no time to spare for smiling
Selling wares to buyers willing
To part with just a little change.

Won't someone share with him a while
The priceless music in a smile?

**SONNET 6: AT DAWN WE LEAP FREE OF THESE
PRISON WALLS**

Kumul; do you recall how daylight broke?
Over Waigani Hill, spilling red-gold
From those black, black skies – cascading starlight –

Do you recall those dreams of which we spoke?
As we kept company that morning – cold –
Kept faith in friendships strength, born of dark
nights;

When we wandered, helpless, each on our own,
Without promise, till our shared certainty,
Sparked by each other's trust; our word, our bond.

So, when Sana made that fire light – full grown –
Those flames raged within our sanctuary.
We knew then that we must now go beyond;

Beyond the measure of these shackled halls
Our hearts and minds must leap from prison walls.

**SONET 6: LONG TULAIT BAI YUMI KALAPIM
DISPELA BANIS KALABUS**

Kumul; yu tingim tu taim tulait i buruk?
Antap long Waigani maunten, kapsait olsem ret na gol
Ikam long bilak na bilak skai – stalait i pundaun –

Yu tingim tu ol driman stori mipela ibin toktok?
Taim mipela stap wantaim long bik moning – kol –
Mipela poroman strong tru taim tutak i holim graun;

Dispela taim mipela raunraun nating long laik
Nogat promis, tasol mipela bilip strong tru
Stil paia i stap long pasin; yumi tok aut na tok stret.

Na taim Sana i kirapim dispela paia – traipela lait –
Dispela paia i kamap strong insait long bel trutru
Na mipela save olsem i gat longpela rot i stap iet;

Bai yumi abrusim mak bilong dispela haus kalabus
Taim bel na tingting bilong yumi i kalapim banis.

PLAYTIME



The Perfect Woman at Jais Aben Resort, Madang.

SONNET 7: GARBAGE BIN POEM

Good people will place me where I serve best
And charge me with a most noble duty
Regardless of the weather I won't rest
Bearing the task of preserving beauty
And though some may sneer and say I'm smelly
Greater peace of mind breathes where I am seen
Everyone needs me to keep their home clean.

But if I should not be found standing there
In the place I was left, alone and bare
Not many would notice or even care.

Public places are cleaner when I'm there
Offices, beaches, streets, shops and kitchens
Everywhere people live I should be found
My hope is that people want me around.

SONNET 8: THE PERFECT WOMAN

How many gentlemen have chased your myth?
How many captains and how many kings?
How many have heard of your legend fell?
How many poets and how many priests?
How could they resist your tender mercy?
They'll never deny the world at your feet.

How many gentle ladies dread your myth?
How many mistresses, how many maids?
How many have known your calamity?
How many nurses and how many nuns?
How could they ever dare compete with thee?
They'll never deny the world your beauty.

How many people, both women and men,
Meet the measure of the Perfect Woman?

SONET 8: DISPELA NAMBAWAN MERI TRU

Hamaspela gutpela man isave bihainim tok win bilong yu?

Hamaspela lidaman na hamaspela bikman tu?

Hamaspela man isave harim poret stori bilong yu?

Hamaspela man bilong tok singsing na hamaspela man bilong Anutu?

Long wanem kain strong bai ol lusim naispela pasin bilong yu?

Ol ino inap abrusim graun taim ol istap long lek bilong yu.

Hamaspela gutpela meri isave poretim tok win bilong yu?

Hamaspela bosmeri na hamaspela yangpela meri tu?

Hamaspela isave gut tru long bikpela bagarap bilong yu?

Hamaspela matron long haus sik na hamaspela meri bilong Anutu?

Long wanem kain strong bai ol traim resis wantaim yu?

Ol ino inap abrusim dispela kalakala bilong yu.

Hamaspela meri na hamaspela man tru

Bai inapim mak bilong dispela Nambawan Meri tru?

SONET 10: 'LELE INO MO LAIKIM PINGA BLONG MI

Long taim mi paitim 'lele bilong mi
fopla string stap long pinga bilong mi
mekim swit mo iet singsing bilong mi.

Bihain mi raun long paitim trabel man
long narapela hap, Buka ailan.
Mi stap, long oda bilong ol kaptan,

pinga bilong mi pulim masin gun.
Mi kamap olsem wanpela 'lele string,
open faia long oda blong gavman.

Mi no save long— ol—no save long mi.
I tru mipela wanpela kantri?
Ol tu paitim 'lele olsem blong mi...

Bihain mi kam bek long ples bilong mi
'lele ino mo laikim pinga blong mi.

SONNET 10: MY UKULELE LOVES ME NO LONGER

Once I played my trusty ukulele
Four strings obeyed the touch of my fingers
How so sweetly we would sing together.

But I was sent to fight against rebels
At a faraway place, Buka Island
There I lived under my captains' orders.

My fingers now caressed a machine gun
I had become a ukulele string
To open fire on government command

I did not know them – they did not know me.
Is it true, we are from the same country?
They play the ukulele just like me...

When I returned to my home lands at last
My ukulele loved me no longer.

**SONNET 11: WHAT WE SAY AND/OR DO WE ARE
AND/OR BE**

We say what we like, what we like we say.
Whatever that's said; what's staying unsaid
Is that we may live a lie if we lay
And dream of better days we wish we had.

We write what we know, what we write we know.
Whatever happens; what's told or foretold
Opportunities come, lies and dreams grow
And here we are much like in days of old.

Then we stood, as now we stand and still do
What we'd done; we do, and don't know better
Not to do; but what we should instead do
To say and write –right– is to know better.

What we say and/or do we are and/or be
Being our own creation(s), we are not free.

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SCHOOL'S OUT



There is a high place in the Tambul Valley, Western Highlands.

SONNET 12: A PRAYER FOR OUR TIMES

Above these trees towering
Above these deep blue seas
Above these clouds soaring
Above these mortal fears.

Beyond these steep mountains
Beyond these battered slopes
Beyond these wasted plains
Beyond these shattered hopes.

Through these shifting shadows
Through these darkening days
Through these shuttered windows
Through these dim lit doorways.

Triune God, hear me pray
Let my people find their way.

SONNET 13: POETRY'S INTERSTICES

These are the spaces I confide
These are the narrow crevices
These are the places I reside
These are the secure refuges.

Upstairs attics with small windows
The quiet corners where I go
The hidden chambers no one knows
Downstairs cellars through secret doors.

There I have my room for dreaming
Room to create and postulate
Pose questions and probe for meaning
Riddles and rhymes to contemplate.

In there the world does not dictate
And there I have less room for hate.

SONNET 14: GETTING BRUISED

In this ring you should get hit often,
Early on, as much as possible: want it.
In fact, walk right into it and always
Make sure you're hit hard and that it hurts much,
Especially when you fall on your face
Don't try to save face let that get bruised too.
Believe me you don't want to forget this
No matter what advice that well meaning
Friends offer, they're wrong. Do it again.
Get off the canvass and go back swinging.
Jump in the ring and walk into that punch.
Friends, no one can tell you what love feels like

Keep your punches true; get hit where you must
Don't back down from a good toe-to-toe match.

**SONNET 15: THERE IS A HIGH PLACE WHERE
WRITER'S FEAST²**

I'll meet you up in those mountains Keith,
Where the Crocodile will sink its teeth
In all those con men and master thief's;
They'll see us standing, they'll crawl beneath
The podium of the Croc Prize feast
And then they'll know that a writer's wreath
Is a crown for those who seek the truth;
Of who we are and of our beliefs.

We shall not falter or fail, lose faith,
We shall raise our flag and rule our fates,
We shall keep the honour of our race,
Proud Melanesians born and raised.

I'll meet you up in those mountains Keith
Where the Crocodile will sink its teeth.

² Written for the 2015 Crocodile Prize Awards held in Kundiawa, organized by the Simbu Writer's Association.

SONNET 16: 1975 TO 2025³

September 16, Independence Day
Fifty years it will have been in between
Far down this road, how much closer today
Are we to that Melanesian dream?
What may we toast this Independence Day?
Which-where have we been, what - when have we
seen?
Why may we boast of 'much better' today?
How much bolder and brighter do children dream?
Have we won the war, so that they may play;
Safe from those whose hearts and minds are obscene?
Then maybe one day our children will say
What wonderful people we must have been?
God save us all this Independence Day
Keep us just as or better than the Queen.

³ Originally titled '...1975 to 2015' for Papua New Guinea's 40th anniversary.

SONNET 17: THEY STRAYED, THEY STAYED

I have seen them in the Port Moresby dust
I have seen them thru the Port Moresby haze
And I wonder why, how did they lose trust
In home and hearth, in a better place
Where their worth was known, no wallet to bust
Fat around a fire place, proud voices praised.

Now amongst street garbage bins they rummage
Once their gardens gave *kaukau* and cabbage
Sold at town markets, to go home with cash
They did not know of food stuff called trash
All things had their place, all things had their worth
They placed their rough hands into good clean earth.

But Port Moresby's lights revealed only lies
They strayed, they stayed, they did not see the flies.

MASTERY



Polis divai (eucalyptus) along the roadside, Bena Eastern Highlands

**SONNET 18: SHY SMILES BY THE ROAD – SWEET
MISDIRECTION**

I saw her that morning, across the road,
Watched her supple form, her feet firm in grace
I witnessed sweet beauty smashed like a toad!
Smacked that booty into death's cold embrace.

Some Member made the road – re-election –
We kids' played there, till hair and breasts begun...
Shy smiles by the road – sweet misdirection –
Now blood-stained glass glitters in the mad sun.

I watched in horror the cruel crowds surround,
Felt their shock, pain and tears – grief turned to rage!
For her fate was sealed when none were around
And her tale is not on today's front page.

No one heard the resign of her mother
“At least my girl is free of her father”.

SONNET 19: #PUTTHEMBACK!⁴

Theo Zurenuoc, whose name means ‘god’,
Hated carved figures, so he gave the nod,
To LBC workers, armed with chain-saws,
To harvest like timber our totem poles,
And fell carved heads at *Haus Tambaran*’s doors.

Claiming the rights of an introduced god
His followers cried, “He did the good job!”
They spit and curse our *tumbuna pasin*
And keep themselves righteous and free from sin!

But hear what the court says, news just in,
Theo’s acts “were unlawful and infringed”
PNG’s mama law and culture act.

You can’t seem to stop MP’s corrupt acts
So, now, Theo, just put our carvings back.

⁴ The Speaker of Parliament illegally ordered the destruction of property of the National Parliament and the people of Papua New Guinea in 2016.

**SONNET 21: PETTY O'NEILL, SCARY BUT STILL
PETTY⁵**

Despot toddler with a pot of honey
Using *Haus Tambaran* like a dunny
So smart and cunning to take our money
Lawyer's gowns are the skirts of your mummy

Poor academics wave you blow-kisses
From underfunded ivory towers
Trammeled airmen joined unemployed masses
But now you know that some will not cover

'How does anyone dare question me?
I am the PM: "It's all about me"
Poster boy of the MDR-TB!
Fawned over by Eggins on Em-TV!
If Pete's not a wannabe Mugabe
He's being scary, but still very petty.

⁵ Air Niugini pilots were sacked after going on sit-in strike over unanswered court charges against the Prime Minister in 2016.

SONNET 22: OF DOG, FRIEND AND GOD⁶

Some wise folk may like to imagine god
By deep or towering philosophy
Whose good faith remits, though fear has begot
Prophets who promote inhumanity.

This earth was subdued by science, our rod.
Old gods we beat and by reason defeat,
Mystic with logic, grand knowledge replete.
Yet our vacuums beg for meaning, poor sods!

But it was my fate to befriend a dog,
A dumb beast taught me faith and loyalty.
So, at the end, when I buried that cog,
I thought about my own mortality.
I learned then the truth of dog, friend and god:
A dog's death was his god's epiphany.

⁶ Dedicated to my beamish boys, Neo Korima 'White-bullet' and Oi emu Turana Korikori – And have you slain the Jabberwocky! You were not born for death, my immortal friends!

**SONNET 24: YOU SAY WHAT YOU SAY, I SEE
WHAT I SEE⁷**

You say the law of the jungle is wrong
I see a girl whose vagina was torn
You say it's inhuman taking their balls
I see five men fucked a girl like a doll
You say vigilantism is not right
I see how, at first, she had tried to fight
You say this is evil and terrible
I see her legs, semen and blood dribble
You say taking balls will not stop the rape
I see that two of the five have escaped
You say that good does not come from bad
I see that those men may one day be dads
You say we must be civil and Christian
I see: men will not stop raping children.

⁷ Five men were caught raping a ten-year-old girl at Sabama in 2017. They were beaten and castrated by members of the public.

SONNET 25: EJACULATION IS AS SURE AS SPIT

There is less lyric in pyric passions
Explosive, explicit, exotic dance
Some syllabic maze to navel-gaze on
Swallowing a shallow, callow cadence.

When the deeper you feel, the more you drool
And as high as some bird flies in the sky
Somewhere, somehow there's some similar fool
Achieving states of ecstasy as high.

Instead, use emotional propulsion,
Let this be surrendered to the rudder,
Thence to the tiller of our tongue, your pen,
Confer your soul: seek emancipation.

Ejaculation is as sure as spit
Show me your poetry, don't just write it.

**SONNET 26: BAPTIZING OURSELVES IN TEARS
AND MUD**

Oh, Papua New Guinea are we cursed?
Land of the unexpected; where hope rests
In cruel hands so quickly balled into fists
Lo paitim meri but palms to please guests
Or tongues as forked as some demonic beast
That robs your *wantoks* to roll with the best
Whose hearts so filthy with rape and incest
Will fuck *fikinini* then fake their faith.

What is it on this island paradise?
That turns us into new-age cannibals
Feasting upon each other's flesh and blood
While claiming welcome into heavens halls
By baptizing ourselves in tears and mud;
For those sins, our future will pay a price.

POEMS HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR
OWN



At dawn on a beach somewhere in Madang

SO NEAR, SO FAR – A SONNET TO TRANSIENCE⁸

Why do you have to be a shooting star?
To come so near, yet fall so far.
For all to see but none to feel
Your blazing flame that was so surreal
The Silent Sky with cold black glare
Did see, did feel your hasty flare
He does not speak and ne'er will tell
Your tale he keeps with those who fell
The fiery path that was your light
Is as silent and black as the Old Night
No tracing scar to show your burning
No memory of your bright journeying
Why do you have to be a shooting star?
To come so near, yet fall so far.

⁸ Penned on a fateful day, 18 August 2003

LOST AND FOUND⁹

In a corner of my bedroom,
Wedge between walls and a bed post
I found an earring you had lost.
Twelve months and forty-seven days
Of living had somehow missed it;
Some things are too easy to lose.
I took it to the kitchen bin,
Then made a cup of strong, sweet tea.

Yesterday I found another,
But this piece on a window sill,
Where I gazed on a vacant lawn.
That earring too went in the bin;
Some things we can just throw away.
Many precious things come in pairs.
But matching pairs are sometimes lost
And found, piecewise; or thrown away.

⁹ Started off with the idea of using the sonnet form but very quickly morphed into this prosaic verse.

STATE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE¹⁰

The public service we do - is not known.
The public we do service, - once a month.
The service we do public, - for the boss.
We do the public service. - They pay us.
We service. The public do. - No one cares.
We, the public, do service. - It's all good.
We service. Do the public? - Does anyone?
Do we service the public? - Yes, we do!
Do we, the public, service? - Yes, sometimes.
Service the public, do we? - Not today.
Service we do the public - is secret.

Welcome to bureaucracy. Out for lunch,
(back at four).
If you have good ideas, like I did, (long ago),
When you enter, please leave them at the door.

¹⁰ Jokingly referred to as a “dommet” by Phil Fitzpatrick, posted on Keith Jackson and Co: PNG Attitude.

AT DAWN ON A BEACH SOMEWHERE¹¹

I see them now, in the light that glitters in foam,
as waves break on a beach in the grey of morn;
Between two worlds, in that moment,
I taste their salty tang, in my mouth;
When the first gasp of dawn shudders through me
and sunlight shears the horizon in a brilliant streak;
Then a grain of sand clinging between my lips,
is a coarse bread on which to break my fasting;
When youth is no more than a memory,
where twilight borders our mortal reality;
And we each, blindly seeking our destiny,
send our prayers to a place beyond the sea;
There, at dawn on a beach somewhere,
all our secret dreams are washed ashore.

¹¹ Started off as a sonnet but the lines became too long so I let them go.

THE IMPROBABLE GEOMETRY OF YOU & ME¹²

Darling, you are my missing ampersand.
Our togetherness is hand-in-hand
& when we travel places far & wide
Those long distances too are side-by-side.

Even on some remote, outstretched beach,
There in your heart keep me just within reach.

You & me, we, are always parallel
We are: near & far, at infinity...
There is no geometry to dispel
This improbability – you & me.

¹² This almost became a sonnet but the poem closed by itself in this short ode like form, whereas, The Crocodile (next page) was planned as a sonnet but finally emerged as a quatrain.

THE CROCODILE

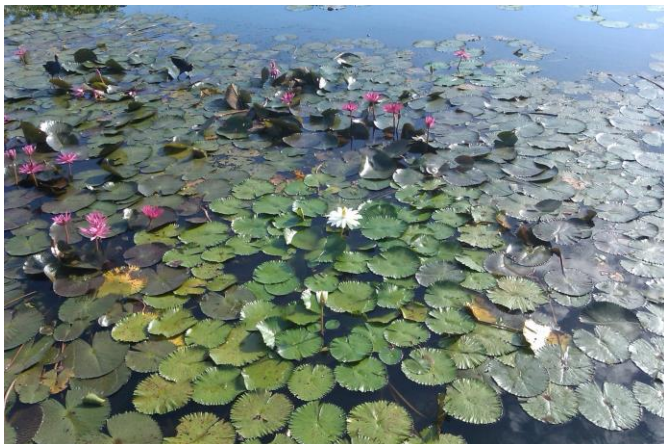
In the wild you own the muddy water,
On the other side of swimming children,
Gorging on fish, pigs, dogs and friends alike;
An implacable grin of certain death.

Hoiri was wrong to fear, hate and hunt you.
In my mind you are the old way we were.
To you Mitoro was simply a meal,
Silent and deadly, you stole to the deeps.

In the city you're a belt or hand-bag,
On the waist or arm of some socialite,
Greedy fat wallet spewing Somare's;
An innocuous sin of certain wealth.

Hoiri was right, the sorcerers used you.
In my mind they are the new way we are.
Taking "possession of his wife Mitoro",
Spreading their sanguma to steal our dreams.

SIJO ARE LIKE SONNETS



Water lilies on the ponds at Pacific Adventist University outside National Capital District.

SIJO FOR TAWA¹³

My Tawa, remember me
and recall that first sweet bloom
Of flowers in a garden,
where my strong arms, once carried you.
T'was your smile, lifting my weak heart,
taught me to love another.

SIJO FOR THE FLAME OF THE FOREST

A red Flame hangs from the heights
in your proud green forest home.
Pride, you don't feel nor care to know,
you love the glow of city lights;
Fell your trees and kill the Flame,
sell your green pride and buy shame.

SIJO FOR THE SEPIK

Your forests will be felled, your bush burned
and your swampland drained out,
To plant oil palm by the hectare,
to get your share of foreign wealth.
Foreigners will make films,
to show your grand-kids what you sold off.

¹³ Sijo is a Korean form which performs a similar functional role as the sonnet.

MINING

We have moved mountains
and dug deep into this earth to find gold
To exchange for paper notes,
while burying our brothers in filth.
We call development
the trenches dug between us for wealth.

QUEEN PACIFICA

Melanesian, Micronesian, Polynesian,
She resides with the sea
and her tide draws all men,
young and old alike.
Where the continents of man fail,
this vast Pacific, she reigns.

Oh Queen Pacifica,
whose crucifix graces your night sky?
Whose jealous eyes caress you
amidst those rain-fed peaks and salted depths?
You are His servant
and the mistress of all my earthly desires.

You are my obsidian dream
and I will quarry your love
In the Temples of Oblivion,
reveal your secrets to me!
Let us strike a mortal bargain
to smite the dull frame of night!

THE WRITERS ABC

To be one, to be together,
 we each must think together
Beyond Africa, beyond Babel;
 people speak a thousand tongues
This is our trust as Writers:
 Communication – to commune.

ACHIEVEMENT

To reach the height of achievement,
 ascend with humility
To know what you understand,
 know what you do not understand
Casting your ignorance aside
 to leap into the unknown.

SIJO ON A BROTHER-LEADER

In those war games we played brother,
 I was always first your friend.
When we stormed Fort Banner, smote our foes,
 and when we leaped from its walls;
It was not so much my leading,
 as you being one step behind.

SIJO ON TRIBALISM TO NATIONALISM

Until this day we are tribes;
 each one desiring nationhood,
Eyes closed to the past, blind to the present,
 yet we seek a future?
Was what we called our Melanesian Way
 a transient dream?

SIJO FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEANS

Coastlander,
You say I am of the highlands;
 stone headed and hard hearted.
But my children dance
 amidst heavens fresh tears, shed on mighty
 peaks;
Whose sweet strength you cannot taste,
 in salty seas where you fish.

Highlander,
You say I am of the coastlands;
 sleek skin salted and sun-lazed.
But my children dance
 beside the pregnant swell of the deep blue sea;
Whose warm love you cannot touch,
 on lonely peaks where you hunt.

A POEM OF A POEM

A poem may be
wonderfully challenging to write
Why should it be too easy,
if it is to be a delight?
Nothing that has value comes
without some struggle or a fight.

A poem may flow with grace,
flawlessly for our delight.
Why should it stutter, stumble,
deny, defy the skill to write?
Anything of beauty and truth
should not spite one to fight.

A poem may sit on a page,
no need to pick a fight,
Rather, it could care less
if it causes one grief or delight.
Something of moment passes
and becomes the cause to write.

A poem fights, it writes
of one grief or delight, moving,
But sitting still as a rock,
unchanged, its role is changing
Everything and always,
without rest, its war is raging.

A REVIEW BY KONAI HELU THAMAN

It was indeed a pleasure to read this collection of poetry by Michael Dom of Papua New Guinea. I had not read any poems by him before so it was quite an adventure to come across him. I belong to the so called First Wave of Pacific writers (in English) and am more familiar with the works of PNG writers such as Soaba and Kasaipwalova, so this collection made me a little afraid as the poet utilizes a form of writing that I had not appreciated nor tried before. I remember reading Shakespeare's Sonnets and trying to understand what he was on about but thank goodness for the last two lines, of each sonnet, I would have some appreciation of what he was trying to say to me. Then I would return and re-read the whole sonnet and it made a bit more sense. I utilized this approach in this collection, which showed the depth and breadth of the poems. I really got to like many of the sonnets after doing this and being able to go a little deeper into the poet's imagination. Thank you Michael for triggering my interest in the Sonnet, something that I thought I'd left behind in high school English classes!

The poems is a thoughtful collection of experiences, of about fifteen years, of a writer with an acute sensitivity and an eye for detail, about what is going on (or not going on) locally, nationally and globally, thus confirming to me, the role of the writer in bringing many of life's issues to the attention of the readers, be they students, ordinary people or other writers. In his poetry Michael shares his experiences and feelings about many of the issues of our time and of our region, such as relational disconnection, neglect of those most vulnerable, prejudice and corruptions of all types as well

as unreasonable expectations. Michael provides a rich and bold commentary on other issues facing many island nations in general and PNG in particular, thus reminding us that we need to re-thing and re-claim our own approaches to appreciating if not attempting to find solutions to issues such as community conflicts and contradictions, education, environmental degradation, politics, social and interpersonal relationships, many of which are directly linked to existing inequities and injustices in our various island nations and are linked directly or indirectly to the current, fashionable ideology of globalization.

As someone who love free forms, as well as utilizing some elements of Tongan poetics, I marvel at Michael's choice of adopting the sonnet genre and perfect it through a conscious effort to succeed. I personally did not like English literature at school - in fact I hated English classes mainly because I did not understand most of my teachers who were foreigners, and did not adequately explain the different types of approaches that writers (also foreign) whose works we had to study. As for poetry, I was completely lost and thought that apart from making things rhyme (which I thought was cool because Tongan poetry almost always rhyme), I did not understand much of the content of the poems we had to study nor the nuances of the metaphors used. And despite the fact that I had successfully memorized many poems, including my favourite, Daffodils, I did not really understand what they were actually saying to me as well as many of my friends. I realized years later that what was missing in many of my English literature classes was the proper contextualization of what we had to read and study, as well as an explanation of the actual process of writing utilized by the writers themselves. But then I realized that many of the poets that we had

to study were already dead and they did not tell us what they were up to - at least told our teachers.

So it's refreshing nowadays to be able to read poems by people who are still alive, especially those by young people such as Michael Dom. For me, this collection is a unique addition to what we already have in Pacific literature in English, and especially from PNG, a place that most Pacific Island people need to better understand and appreciate. Because of its relative size and cultural diversity, it is not often easy for those of us who come from tiny island nations, with their cultural and linguistic homogeneity to fully understand the realities of bigger places such as PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Many Pacific school students study the history and geography of other PICs, in books often authored by non-Pacific people, and at best they know a little bit about what we as Pacific people share in terms of our colonial histories and an ocean-based geography, but very few learn about what Pacific people actually feel about these things, and about one another. For me, this collection tells me more about PNG than most of the reference books I've used and/or recommended to my students. The passion, humility, honesty, as well as the determination of the poet to share important human issues facing his community and the concomitant link between those and what is going on globally, make this collection unique. This is of course not to underestimate the collection as a treasure chest of a special type of poetry – the Sonnet, and although this form originate from elsewhere, Michael has used it successfully, contextualized and made it his own, including the Tok Pisin poems, for our education and enjoyment.

I leave you with a few lines from Sonnet 3, a favourite, and for me, sums up what I sometimes feel about the

Michael Dom

never ending ‘expert’ discussions and advice, from our region as well as globally, on the sexy topics of our time, such as climate change and sustainable development:

“Agriculture is our backbone we say
(Rhetorical ruse on farmers)
Yet in our grand plan for development
We have forgotten what that really meant
From the highlands to the coastal islands
The struggle to feed ourselves never ends

If you met those whose unheard voices cry
You too would join me in questioning why”

Thank you Michael for the effort and creativity – and we look forward to your next collection.

Konai Helu Thaman
Fiji, 10 June 2019



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Theophilus Dom was born in Port Moresby Papua New Guinea to Simbu parents, Ruth and late Kuri Dom, in November 1977. He has an older sister Sola Gratia and a younger brother Stanley St. Paul. Michael lives in Lae Morobe Province and works as a scientist for the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI). His main research is in pig production.

He holds a BSc (Chemistry) degree from the University of Papua New Guinea and a PhD (Animal Science) degree from the University of Adelaide. He has been writing poetry since leaving high school in 1996. From 2006 to 2011 Michael had several poems published in *The National Newspaper* under the pseudonym Icarus, which he later dropped. He also uses the pseudonym *Kassandra Komplex*.

In 2012 Michael won the Poetry Award of *The Crocodile Prize** for his sonnet *I met a pig farmer the other day*. It was later posted in *The Weekend Australian Review* October 27-28 2012 p24-25, in an article by author Drusilla

* The Crocodile Prize is Papua New Guineas only national literary awards, established in 2011 by Australians Philip Fitzpatrick and Keith Jackson AM through the website Keith Jackson & Friends: PNG Attitude.

Michael Dom

Modjeska. Michael's poems have been published in the Crocodile Prize Anthologies of 2011 through to 2016. Many of his poems have also featured on PoetrySoup.com.

Michael's poem *Two reasons why we dig holes* was published in PNG Resources Magazine Issue 4 2012. His terza rima poem *The Political Economy of a Pig Farmers Life* was printed as a BBC Poetry Postcard during the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. A recording of Michael reading the poem can be found on the BBC website. In 2016 Michael's poem *Lucky Little Lizard* was published by the Commonwealth Education Trust in their children's book *A River of Stories*, a collection of stories and poems from 53 commonwealth nations. He considers the last his greatest recognition.

Michael's first collection of poetry, *At another Crossroads*, was published by the UPNG Press in 2013. His second collection, *The Musing of an Assistant Pig Keeper*, and two chapbooks, *O Arise!* and *Send words as gifts*, were published on the CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform in 2015 and 2016 respectively. He has reviewed four poetry collections from Crocodile Prize entries.

Apart from this proposed collection of modern sonnets and sijo Michael is currently working on two other poetry collections. One of these is in collaboration with de-facto partner, Samoan spoken-word poet and New Zealand resident, Faumuina Felolini Maria Tafuna'i. The third book is an anthology of selected poems from PNG poets writing for the Crocodile Prize from 2011 to 2018.



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* * * * *

"I have great respect and admiration for the bold and measured language in Dom's poetry. Michael Theophilus Dom has that special gift of poetry. He has sharpened his words every time he writes a new piece. He shows us a different worldview to the one we have been living and breathing our whole life."

— Professor Steven Winduo, University of Papua New Guinea

"For me, this collection tells me more about PNG than most of the reference books I've used and/or recommended to my students. The passion, humility, honesty, as well as the determination of the poet to share important human issues facing his community and the concomitant link between those and what is going on globally, make this collection unique."

— Professor Konai Helu Thaman, University of South Pacific

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