

# MIRRORS

JUSTIN SPRING





A SOULSPEAK EBOOK

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Justin Spring's poems have been published in American Poetry Review as well as in anthologies such as Florida in Poetry. He is a prizewinning poet, novelist, and video artist who works in many mediums: print, audio (CD), video (DVD/internet).

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He is the author of two novels, one short story and one non-fiction book, as well as oral poetry. He has also created over 100 DREAMSTORY poetry videos, performance-poetry videos, art videos and video documentaries about poetry. Finally, He was educated at Columbia College and is the founder of SOULSPEAK.

Mr. Spring's oral poetry can be found on the following MANY VOICES/SOULSPEAK STUDIO CDs: Gathering, Smoke, Nursery Raps, Speakings, In Your Mind, Witnesses Log,

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Mr. Spring is the founder of SOULSPEAK, an organization dedicated to bringing poetry back into the everyday lives of everyday people. He is the originator, along with Scylla Liscombe, of SOULSPEAK, a simplified version of ancient oral antiphonal poetry that allows anyone to express his or her emotions in a beautiful, healing and human way.

Mr. Spring is also the author of SOULSPEAK: The Outward Journey of the Soul. This ground breaking CD/book combination is intended for anyone interested in attaining the deep spiritual expression possible through SOULSPEAK. It gives a series of techniques for re-awakening our inborn ability to speak that poetry. The author also examines contemporary poetry through the lens of this ancient poetry. A considerable section is devoted to understanding the art of preliterate poetry and Homer in particular.

**FOR**

**KELBY**





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## FOREWORD

These translations from Melanesian pidgin (Tok Pisin) are selections from twelve poems written by the Australian aborigine Eldred Van-Ooy. The poems were published by Van-Ooy as a multi-page advertisement in a socialist Brisbane paper "The Worker" on January 27, 1960, although the poems themselves are all dated as being written in January 1939. Of the twelve poems, I have translated only four: Dreamtime, Naming Things, Homecoming and I'm Tired. Although the others are often quite cleverly constructed, given the incredible limitations of Tok Pisin, they border dangerously on doggerel. I cannot explain this apparent discrepancy in quality. For the curious, I have translated one of them, "Nambartu Meri", at the end of this foreword.

Much of Van-Ooy's history is unknown, though several biographical facts have been gleaned from a short Worker editorial that accompanied the poems. A pure-blood aborigine, Van-Ooy was taken from the outback at birth in 1891 and subsequently raised by a white, middle-class couple, Cinque and Mildred Van-Ooy, on the outskirts of Brisbane. In his early twenties, as an instructor in Hydraulic Engineering at the Queensland Institute of Technology in Brisbane, he achieved a modicum of local scientific fame by designing an ingenious waste-pumping system of vacuum and ball valves that continues to function in the Southern Queensland Water and Sewage Management District despite

the fact that it makes minimal use of the force of gravity, the mainstay of all such systems past and present.

I do not know if these poems have ever been formally translated elsewhere. The only knowledge I have of Van-Ooy and his poems comes from the editorial and several inquiries I made on my own. That I was able to piece together any information some forty-odd years after the fact still amazes me. After all, if Van-Ooy wasn't obscure, he was close to it.

The poems themselves, despite their simplicity, present the translator with a number of problems. One is the absence of any other pidgin poems against which to gage Van-Ooy's efforts. (There is no Tok Pisin literature outside of the oral myths and ramblings that have been phonetically transcribed by scholars). Another is determining whether Van-Ooy wished the poems to be read as curiosities, protests, jokes, or as "serious" poetry. All that I had to go on were some microfiche of the pages containing the various poems and editorial, all of which had been forwarded to me in 1985 by an old Australian computer acquaintance, Boyd Munro, who had come across them during the conversion of some old microfiche files belonging to The Worker.

In addition to these difficulties, there were many others. First of all I had to find some formal way of truly understanding the pidgin. Its vocabulary and syntax for

starters. Many words and phrases can be intuitively grasped, but some can't. For a while, I had no choice but to guess at meanings and then I somehow managed to locate several dictionaries, one in particular being a dictionary on a Melanesian pidgin called Tok Pisin. It was a bit of luck finding it, because the poems (as I subsequently discovered) were written in the same pidgin. Without that dictionary, I doubt if I would have ever been able to accurately translate the poems.

But there were often problems that couldn't be solved by any dictionary. As I mentioned earlier, I had been unable to locate samples of pidgin poetry in any linguistic or anthropological journals. There was no history, no tradition of pidgin poetry to give me some feel for what Van-Ooy was trying to do. Many times I had to make instinctual decisions as to the essential emotional tone of a poem. This is always potentially dangerous business for a translator, i.e., bleeding into the original, but pidgin is so elemental I had no other choice. I bled all over it.

Related to this is the fact that the language is so lacking in vocabulary, flexibility, nuance and tense that many times there is simply no way to accurately sense the underlying emotional tenor of a poem. Sometimes a poem would strike me as funny, and then a little later, pensive, almost poignant. I found that when you really "entered" the pidgin, by being open emotionally, the language was so fundamental there were many ways for the imagination to

go. It was as if the words were reflective crystals. You could never predict the results. This is partly due to the fact that pidgin, to Westerners, often seems funny at first hearing. To get past that perception, and sense the underlying emotional texture of the poem, you have to go beneath the surface. You have to take your chances. You have to open up and enter the pidgin and let it take you on an essentially unpredictable journey. The poem might turn out to be outrageously funny. Or it might turn out to be incredibly poignant. There's no way to tell.

Pidgin, to put it bluntly, is a very strange language with which to create a written poetry, a poetry in which the words on the page have to do everything. If Van-Ooy had created these poems orally and spoken them to us, or even read them off the page to us, we would have no doubts as to their intended tone, as the poems would fill out emotionally. But just reading them silently on the page can often give you the impression Van-Ooy thought everything around him was a joke.

Despite these inherent problems, I am sure that Van-Ooy's decision to write the poems in pidgin was very deliberate. Surely it was a signal of some kind. One has only to put oneself in his place to begin to guess the nature of that signal, and hence begin to sense the true tone of the poems. For one thing, the use of pidgin, which is a "half-way" language, surely indicates a desire to at least go "half way" and offer the European (white) reader a more direct

way of understanding the aboriginal sensibility. Thus, one sense I had almost immediately (with regard to tone) is that of an "offering", although some might call it a bargaining chip. Connected to that is a sense of alienation and yet a very erect pride of heritage: the insistence that his white readers leave their world and learn a new, but not especially difficult language, if they wished to partake of his.

That sense of alienation becomes even more complicated once you realize pidgin is a "borrowed" language. The aborigines no more speak pidgin among themselves than do the white men who trade with them. The language is really so elemental it can only properly be used for its original purpose of establishing commerce and avoiding conflict between native and white. In short, pidgin is a "No-man's " language, brought out solely for the occasion.

Yet it is the language Van-Ooy chose to communicate in even though he had other choices. As the facts of his upbringing indicate, English was his language from birth. As to whether he knew an aborigine tongue is unknown, yet there is no reason to believe he grew up being completely ignorant of tribal languages. In other words, he had other, more flexible choices (English for sure, and perhaps an aborigine tongue) but he didn't take them. My sense is he wanted a language that truly fit who he was: a man with no language of his own. "No man", "Half man", take your pick

This becomes even more ironic after you discover, as I

eventually did, that the pidgin used by Van-Ooy was not an Australian pidgin but a New Guinea pidgin, which is what Tok Pisin really is. This choice may have been dictated by the fact that the Australian government had all but extinguished pidgin by 1950. Yet there is every reason to believe that there were still places in Queensland where an Australian pidgin could have been easily picked up. Indeed, Van-Ooy could have possibly known both pidgins. After all, the pidgins wouldn't have been that far apart except for specialized terms. As to how he was able to pick up the Melanesian pidgin is anybody's guess. My own is that Brisbane's close proximity to New Guinea would have given Van-Ooy plenty of opportunity to bump into Tok Pisin speakers.

The choice of a New Guinea pidgin therefore seems to have been deliberate. It is my own guess that the choice was made simply because unlike the Australian pidgin, Tok Pisin had not been eliminated. Nor has it to this day. In many ways, it must have stood as a symbol to Van-Ooy of the stubborn will of the New Guinea aborigines to survive on their own terms. And again it was a secret language, known only to "border" people. And although pidgin is an oral language, as are the various aborigine languages (the aborigines have no written language), and thus might seem an appropriate choice to use in place of an aborigine language, Van-Ooy's decision to publish the poems in a newspaper resulted in his having to adopt the written pidgin script utilized by colonial governments in their

uncontrollable desire to communicate through the normal channels of newspapers, directives, road signs, et al.

Van-Ooy must have known how rough (and comic) they'd appear on the page without his voice to fill them out. But the only real option open to him in those days was print. He may have published in small magazines and quarterlies and things like that, but it's clear he wanted to be published in newspapers. This tells us, I think, that Van-Ooy didn't create them as an academic exercise. He wanted people to read his poems. Lots of people. All kinds of people. And he was willing to suffer the consequences, including being laughed at it seems.

What he was actually willing to go through becomes even clearer when one realizes that despite Van-Ooy's position at the Institute, he had to pay to have his poems published (as advertisements). Or he may have deliberately chosen to print them as advertisements as a way of mocking, or commenting on, the Western emphasis on profit. There is no way to tell, but either scenario seems equally likely. It is equally unclear whether he chose *The Worker* or that *The Worker*, being a socialist paper, was the only paper that would accept the poems. It is always possible of course that he could have been in collusion with the editors of the paper, who may have agreed to print them for free (as advertisements) as a joint protest against the exploitation of aborigines, but then again the editors may have been as unenlightened as everyone else and actually made him pay.



The accompanying editorial, which is mostly factual, doesn't give any hints. It's presence, however, does suggest the editors were at least aware of the upcoming ad and thought it best to give some sort of explanation for the decidedly strange advertisements. My guess is that Van-Ooy had decided from the start that they would be only printed as advertisements. If someone chose to help, fine; if not, that was fine too

One other consideration with regard to tone has to be mentioned, and that is the inherent tension of trying to express feelings in a very limited language of approximately 400 words. (There are about 40,000 words in the head of an educated English-speaking Westerner.) This tension may not be especially evident in my finished translations, (although I hope I have captured some of it) but it will be immediately evident to anyone who takes the time to read the pidgin originals and their literal renderings. For although pidgin has an inherently comic nature (and Van-Ooy was not above taking advantage of that fact in his comic poems), the poems I have translated are serious personal and philosophical poems which stretch pidgin to the breaking point.

I think it's important to remember that Van-Ooy was as well educated as the average Australian college graduate of his time, and it is obvious from at least one of his poems, Nambartu Meri, that he was acquainted with 17th century English verse. His frame of reference was not that of a

bushman, but an educated Westerner. I think this is important to understand and is the reason my finished translations have that type of surface. Some have found my translations of the intensely literal pidgin a bit too polished, but, alas, that is how they came to me, that is to say, my inherent sense of the "English version" of Eldred was of a man who read newspapers and drank tea on his patio in Brisbane, rather than someone who lived in a hut and speared pigs, while at the same time, my inherent sense of the "pidgin" Eldred was of someone much more primal and mysterious. But to give you some idea of what a very direct, literal translation might look like (for those who prefer a more "primitive" translation, and who's to say that they're wrong) I have supplied a literal translation of each poem in a separate section. Who knows? Perhaps there are as many Eldreds as there are readers.

I should say something about the positive side of pidgin as a language for poetry. As I mentioned earlier, expressing sophisticated emotions and ideas in a language like pidgin can create an incredible tension, a tension that, at times, is quite tangible, because it stretches the language to a point where you think it will break, or fail, and then somehow, and this is the miracle of all languages, something in the language finds a way to say what has to be said. Van-Ooy's use of pidgin lets us really feel that tension, that same dangerous yet beautiful tension that is at the heart of every act of true artistic creation. Because such acts, when all is said and done, are always attempts to portray the

unknowable world in terms of the knowable, an act, that on the face of it, would seem impossible. That perceived impossibility, of course, is what gives rise to the tension (and eventual release) that every artist feels during the act of creation.

I have come to the conclusion that Van-Ooy felt, and wanted his readers to feel the beauty of this "birthing" process. What he wanted others to feel is the beautiful danger of trying to say something very deep and very complex in a very simple language. That's one of things I think he was up to with these poems. The average Brisbane reader attempting a translation would feel that tension. You might say he wanted to remind us of the essential creative fire within us and was willing to offer us a piece of himself to do so. I remember watching an Australian documentary some time ago in which the narrator was complimenting an aborigine woman on the beauty of the sand painting she had just finished, to which she replied, "You could do this too, but your people have forgotten how." Van-Ooy, I think, was of the same opinion.

I should say something about another problem presented the translator by the structure and nature of pidgin: determining the meaning of words. To stick to the literal dictionary translation in many cases is foolish, because in pidgin, there is only one way to say many things, and the native speaker depends on gesture, intonation, setting, and context to convey his true meaning. This must be allowed

for in the translation. It seems to me that Van-Ooy expected his reader to bring his own "world" to the pidgin he was reading, and translate the pidgin "outwards" into that world, as the users of pidgin, both white man and native, constantly do in practice.

Although there's no way of knowing, I suspect that a good many of Brisbane's older citizens in 1960 had a working knowledge of pidgin, and that it was therefore somewhat easy for them to translate the pidgin "outwards" into their own world of reference. I'd like the reader to have somewhat the same experience, but since few readers will have any knowledge of pidgin, I have included line-by-line, literal translations of each poem that should give you a good sense of the pidgin. You're then free, if you wish, to "enter" the pidgin and experience that process by creating your own translation. As an aid, I suggest that the reader speak the literal translation out loud while scanning the original pidgin simultaneously, as pidgin is much like Chaucer's English in the sense that despite the odd spelling and usage it is often recognizable. An attentive reader should feel comfortable with the pidgin after a few tries and be able to enjoy them as such. Both the tension and the need to invent "outwards" should then become evident.

One thing that was particularly difficult to come to terms with was Van-Ooy's sense of humor. Whether that sense has been exaggerated by the inherently comic nature of pidgin is hard to say, but it presents a problem to the translator, as

his work at first glance seems an odd, almost hip-hop rap, much like black rap music of today. For in his less serious poems, and I must say they make up the bulk of the twelve poems, he seems to use pidgin in much the same way as American blacks sometimes use "ghetto English," and it explains why these poems seem to be playing with language and mocking the reader. My guess is that those poems are meant to. In his serious poems, however, that initial comic sense seems to disappear as the poem progresses and it becomes apparent that the spirit of the poem is much deeper.

There is one other matter that I have not been able to resolve and that is whether the poems "came" to him in "English" or "Tok Pisin". It stretches my imagination to believe that he felt more at home in the latter, especially since the first thing the poet reaches for in a poem's formation is the language of his childhood, which in Van-Ooy's case was English. Yet it is obvious from the comments of linguists who have examined the pidgin texts that he was very fluent in pidgin, and that he undoubtedly learned it by listening and speaking to natives. My suspicion is that they were composed in a mixture of both languages, as a truly bi-lingual person might do, and that he later back-translated them entirely to Tok Pisin. But there is no way to know. They may have come in an absolute torrent of pidgin.

There are several other curiosities about Van-Ooy's work that have nothing to do with translation but are worth

mentioning because they are strong indications of something secret being woven into the fabric of the poems. The first is that all of the poems, if the published dates of composition are to be believed, were all written in January 1939; the second being that two or three versions of basically the same poem were sometimes published by Van-Ooy. This is true in the case of Drimtain, where I have translated the version that struck me as most "true." As to whether they were actually written in January 1939 is anybody's guess.

But then the question remains as to why the dates exist in the first place. Quite frankly, I have no idea, unless they represent a code of some sort, which is not out of the realm of possibility. After all, the pidgin itself is a sort of code, so why not up the ante a bit with some date codes? But if the gap of time they represent is the actual time it took to create the poems, he must have worked at an extremely rapid pace, as the 12 poems (and their sometimes multiple versions) would have been finished in 27 days. But where he acquired the skill to do so, why he waited twenty one years to publish them, why he sometimes published several versions, and why he placed such an importance on their date of composition remains a mystery.

One thing, however, that becomes immediately evident to someone versed in mathematics such as myself (and Van-Ooy) and that is the dates of composition are either prime numbers themselves or divisible only by the prime number

3 or powers of 3 such as 9 and 27. When I realized this and then remembered that the poems were written in 27 days, I became quite excited, and was sure that everything was a code, even the number of poems, until I remembered there were 12 poems, and 12 was divisible by 4 and 6, but then I remembered there were multiple versions, and when I counted them up that total was 19, another prime. What the meaning of all this is I have no idea.

I can give you a guess, however, on one thing, and that is on the reason for multiple versions. It is based solely on intuition. It seems to me that some part of Van-Ooy wasn't really interested in literature per se, i.e., he really didn't care about poetry as a written, permanent expression, i.e., as something that was to be captured in writing and then catalogued and studied. Rather he saw it as an expression of spirit. In an oral culture, a poem might be spoken out any number of times until the speaker feels he is finished. There is no official version. Each has its own value. It is all process. That, I believe, is what the multiple versions are all about.

At any rate, for those readers curious about the "comic" poems I didn't include in this book, I include the following comic poem with an inter-linear, literal translation). The reader is free to project the literally translated pidgin "outwards" into his own world, but the astute reader will soon realize that Van-Ooy has already done most of this for him, as the poem is a very funny pidgin paraphrase of

Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." I should add that for those unfamiliar with Tok Pisin, the accent is always on the first syllable, which when read aloud, results in a chant not altogether displeasing.



**Nambartu Meri Bilong Mi**  
**MY SECOND WOMAN**

Mi Tokim yu oltaim olkain tings.

I TALK TO YOU ALL THE TIME ALL KIND OF THINGS

Yu tokim mi oltaim olkain tings.

YOU TALK TO ME ALL THE TIME ALL KIND OF THINGS.

Orait, naw, mi laikim mekim puspus long yu.

VERY WELL, NOW, I WANT TO HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH  
YOU.

Na yu tokim mi oltaim yes na no na maibi.

BUT YOU SAY TO ME ALL THE TIME YES THEN NO THEN  
MAYBE.

Maski.

OK BY ME.

Naw aitink bainbai mifela no gat taim mifela stapim manki.

BUT I THINK SOON WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR US TO BE  
MONKEYS.

Oltaim mi hirim hors bilong taim klostu.

ALL THE TIME I HEAR THE HORSE OF TIME NEARBY.

Olsem mifela hariap na mifela mekim bol

THUS WE HURRY AND WE MAKE A BALL

naw mifela troim bol long ayandor bilong laif.

AND WE THROW THE BALL AT IRONDOOR OF LIFE.

Inaf. Olsem mifela no mekim dai san

THAT'S ALL. THUS WE CAN'T STOP THE SUN

yet bainbai

YET SOON

mifela mekim em i-ran.

WE MAKE HIM RUN.

January 17, 1939

This poem, besides being outrageously “over the top” in almost every sense of the word, is also a very good example of how difficult it is to gage the emotional tone of Van-Ooy’s poems. I finally took this one as comic, but it could have also been taken as a serious paraphrase, an exercise. Try paraphrasing Marvell in pidgin yourself and you’ll see how difficult it is to control the emotional tone of *Tok Pisin*. Take the word *end*, as in the end of the line, his life ended, etc. The pidgin for end is *ars* (ass). It’s also the word for bottom. I think you get the idea.

For those not familiar with aborigine symbols and myths, which are constantly worked back and forth in these poems, Dreamtime is the aborigine term for the mythological time of creation when the gods or "ancestors" gave form to the world. For the aborigine, Dreamtime is ever-present in the form of rocks, water holes, trees, animals and other physical phenomena that surround them and that it can be accessed through dreaming. The aborigine, however, is aware of the special nature of that dreaming, and distinguishes it from normal dreaming in much the same way as we sometimes distinguish "lucid" dreams from those we call "normal". The aborigine, however, has no doubts as to their reality: to him Dreamtime is as real, if not more so, than his waking hours.

As a final note, let me say that looking back on these translations, I am a bit awed. However you choose to classify them, these poems deserve a hearing. They have a peculiar magic all their own. You may have discovered that magic already, but if you haven't and would like one last directive, let me say you will be missing something if both the pidgin and English aren't given equal consideration, for the true poems lie somewhere between the two. And that in the end is what these poems are all about. You can *fee*/both of them becoming something else if you read the pidgin silently with one eye and the English out loud with the other. Pretend you're wearing 3-D glasses and that I've brought you into a particularly enticing garden and left you there for a few moments, alone, wondering, looking up at the leaves.

**Drimtain**  
**DREAMTIME**

Baimbai ol waitman i-singawt long mi: "Eldred."  
ELDRED THEN BECAME MY NAME.  
long skul, em i-singawt: "Van-Ooy."  
VAN-OOY AT SCHOOL.  
Behain mi go long haus, em i-singawt: "Abo."  
"ABO" WHEN THE DAY LET OUT.  
Yar kam na go. Olsem san. Olsem mun  
THE YEARS PASSED BY. LIKE SUNS. LIKE MOONS.  
Drimtain i-kam. Drimtain i-go.  
DREAMTIME CAME. DREAMTIME WENT.  
Na ol waitman i-no tokim mi em i-saevi Drimtain.  
BUT NO ONE SPOKE OF DREAMS TO ME.  
Em i-tokim nem bilong olkain samting.  
THEY ONLY SPOKE OF NAMING THINGS,  
Em i-tokim: wan, tu, tri, wan, tu, tri, tasol.  
AND NUMBERING.  
Wantaim long skul mi tokim drim bilong mi.  
ONE DAY AT SCHOOL I SPOKE OF DREAMS.  
Tisa i-tokim mi olsem: Mi nogat saevi.  
THE TEACHER ASKED  
Yu tok Drimtain long mi, orait, Drimtain i-stap olsem ,  
IF DREAMTIME ALWAYS STAYED THE SAME,  
Drimtain i-no stap, olsem de?  
OR CHANGED, LIKE DAY?

Mi tok: Drimtain i–stap olsem de:  
DREAMTIME IS THE SAME AS DAY I SAID:  
olsem yu, dispela tebal, dispela buk, dispela skul  
LIKE YOU, THIS DESK, THIS BOOK, THIS SCHOOL,  
olsem olgeta samting i–stap hir  
LIKE EVERYTHING THAT WAITS ME HERE  
olgeta taim mi wek long dispela rum.  
EACH TIME I WAKE INSIDE THIS ROOM.

**Toktok Nem Bilong Samting**  
**NAMING THINGS**

Na Drimtaim i-tokim mi mas ran.  
THEN DREAMTIME SPOKE THAT I MUST HUNT,  
Na mi mas ranim nu samting.  
BUT HUNT THINGS IN A DIFFERENT WAY.  
Mun go kol.  
THE MOON GREW COLD.  
Ai bilong wara i-tudark, i-faitim kundu.  
THE DARK POOL SWAYED.  
Lip bilong mi i-tokim nem bilong plenti samting.  
MY LIPS BEGAN BY NAMING THINGS.  
Na toktok gowe long nattaime ples, olsem balus.  
LIKE BIRDS WORDS GATHERED THEN FLEW OFF  
em i-stap wantaim long samting i-nogat nem.  
TO ROOST WITH UNNAMED DARKER THINGS.  
Mun go kol.  
THE MOON GREW COLD.  
Ai bilong wara i-tudark, i-faitim kundu.  
THE DARK POOL SWAYED.  
Blut bilong mi go olsem starstar.  
MY BLOOD PULSED STARS.  
Mi foldawn olsem dog.  
I CRAWLED ON FOURS.  
Naw samting mi ran, em i-ranim mi.  
THE HUNTED THING NOW HUNTING ME:

Naw toktok i-maw, olsem ran, olsem smel bilong grawn.  
THE UNBORN POEM, THE RESTLESS SPOOR.

**Mi Tair**  
**I'M TIRED**

Mi tair.  
I'M TIRED.  
Mi no laikim buk.  
I'M TIRED OF BOOKS.  
Mi no laikim waitman i-tokim mi olkain samting.  
I 'M TIRED OF TALK.  
Mi no laikim yu.  
I'M TIRED OF YOU.  
Mi laik go ples bilong haid, ples bilong mi.  
I WANT TO CRAWL INSIDE MYSELF.  
Mi laik go slip.  
I WANT TO SLEEP  
Mi laik go drim.  
I WANT TO DREAM.  
Mi laikim ren bilong drim em i-kam.  
I WANT THE DREAMING RAINS TO FALL.  
Mi laikim lukim ala dor dai.  
I WANT TO WATCH THE DOORS DISSOLVE.  
Mi laikim lukim ala wol  
I WANT TO WATCH THE WALLS BECOME  
i-swelap kwik, olsem sid bilong flower i-kamap, i-brok  
nabaut .  
A SUDDEN, RESTLESS BLOSSOMING.



**Mi Go Ples Bilong Mi**  
**MEETINGS**

Mi saevi bainbai yu wetim long mi  
I KNOW YOU WILL BE WAITING FOR ME  
long wanples,  
IN THE SAME PLACE,  
hed bilong yu em i-stapim haf long haus bilong rod ayan,  
YOUR HEAD HALF IN THE STATION HOUSE,  
hors i-stap baek long yu, em i-saekim yu long dor.  
THE HORSES BEHIND YOU, NUDGING YOU FORWARD,.  
Na olsem oltaim,  
AND THAT AS ALWAYS  
taim mi helo long yu, mi singawtim yu "Uncle",  
DESPITE MY GREETING YOU, MY CALLING YOU UNCLE,  
yu tokim mi yu no gat samting.  
YOU WILL SAY NOTHING TO ME.  
Na taim mi sidawn long haefsaed long yu,  
AND AS ALWAYS, MY BODY BESIDE YOURS,  
go haws bilong yu,  
JOURNEYING HOMEWARD,  
laen go awtsaed long mifela olsem tudark rivar,  
THE OUTBACK STREAMING PAST US LIKE A DARK RIVER,  
na hors lait long munmun long baeksaed,  
THE HORSES' BACKSIDES SHINING, DRIPPING MOONS,

mi no hirim singawt  
THERE WILL BE NO SOUND  
tasol singawt long mifela i-stap.  
EXCEPT THE SOUND OF OUR OWN BREATHING.  
Na bainbai taim fair bilong haus kamap  
AND WHEN AT LAST THE FIRES RISE UP  
olsem longwe starstar  
LIKE DISTANT STARS  
mi hirim tasol singawt bilong yu  
THERE WILL BE ONLY THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE  
em i-kamap na fal.  
RISING AND FALLING IN SONG,  
em i-no gat frant, i-no gat ars.  
A SONG THAT HAS NO BEGINNING, NO END,  
Yet mi kichim tok long singawt yu sing.  
A SONG I SOMEHOW UNDERSTAND,  
Long wonam mi sing?. Mi no saevi Na mi sing tu.  
A SONG NOT KNOWING WHY, I JOIN YOU IN.

## **Drimtaim: LITERAL TRANSLATION**

Baimbai ol waitman i-singawt long mi: "Eldred."  
SOON THE MASTERS CALLED TO ME : "ELDRED"  
Long skul, em i-singawt: "Van-Ooy."  
IN SCHOOL THEY CALLED "VAN-OOY"  
Behain mi go long haus, em i-singawt: "Abo."  
AFTERWARDS I GO HOME, THEY CALLED "ABO."  
Yar kam na go. Olsem san. Olsem mun.  
YEARS COME AND GO. LIKE SUN. LIKE MOON.  
Drimtaim i-kam. Drimtaim i-go.  
DREAMTIME COME. DREAMTIME GO.  
Na ol waitman i-no tokim mi em i-saevi Drimtaim.  
BUT THE MASTERS DON'T SAY TO ME THEY UNDERSTAND  
DREAMTIME.  
Em i-tokim nem bilong olkain samting.  
THEY SPEAK TO ME NAMES OF ALL KIND OF THINGS.  
Em i-tokim: wan, tu, tri, wan, tu, tri, tasol.  
THEY SPEAK TO ME: 1, 2 3, 1, 2, 3 ONLY.  
Wantaim long skul mi tokim drim bilong mi.  
ONCE IN SCHOOL I SPEAK OF MY DREAM.  
Tisa i-tokim mi olsem Mi nogat saevi.  
THE TEACHER SPOKE TO ME THUSLY: I DON'T UNDERSTAND.  
Yu tok Drimtaim long mi, orait,  
YOU SPEAK OF DREAMTIME TO ME, VERY WELL,  
Drimtaim i-stap olsem ,  
DOES DREAMTIME STAY THE SAME  
Drimtaim i-no stap, olsem de?  
DOES DREAMTIME NOT STAY THE SAME, LIKE DAY?

Mi tok: Drimtain i–stap olsem,  
I SAY: DREAMTIME STAYS THE SAME:  
olsem yu, dispela tebal, dispela buk, dispela skul  
LIKE YOU, THIS TABLE, THIS BOOK, THIS SCHOOL,  
olsem olgeta samting i–stap hir  
LIKE EVERYTHING THAT IS HERE  
olgeta taim mi wek long dispela room.  
EVERYTIME I WAKE IN THIS ROOM.

JAN 1 1939

## **Toktok Nem Bilong Samting: LITERAL TRANSLATION**

Na Drimtaim i-tokim mi mas ran.  
THEN DREAMTIME SAID THAT I MUST HUNT.  
Na mi mas ranim nu samting.  
BUT I MUST HUNT NEW THING.  
Mun go kol.  
MOON GOES COLD.  
Ai bilong wara i-tudark, i-faitim kundu.  
EYE OF WATER GETS DARK, IT DRUMS.  
Lip bilong mi i-tokim nem bilong plenti samting.  
MY LIPS SAY NAME OF MANY THINGS.  
Na toktok gowe long nattaim ples,  
NOW TALKING GOES AWAY TO NIGHT-TIME PLACE,  
olsem balus.  
LIKE BIRD.  
Em i-stap wantaim long samting i-nogat nem.  
IT STAYS WITH THING THAT HAS NO NAME.  
Mun go kol.  
MOON GOES COLD.  
Ai bilong wara i-tudark, i-faitim kundu.  
EYE OF WATER GETS DARK, IT DRUMS.  
Blut bilong mi go olsem starstar.  
MY BLOOD GOES LIKE MANY STARS.  
Mi foldawn olsem dog.  
I FALL DOWN LIKE DOG.  
Naw samting mi ran, em i-ranim mi.  
NOW THING I HUNT, IT HUNTS ME.  
Naw toktok i-maw,

NOW TALKING IS RIPE,  
olsem ran, olsem smel bilong grawn.  
LIKE HUNT, LIKE SMELL OF GROUND.

JAN 3, 1939

**Mi Tair: LITERAL TRANSLATION:**

Mi tair:

I'M TIRED:

Mi no laikim buk.

I DON'T LIKE BOOKS.

Mi no laikim waitman i-tokim mi olkain samting.

I DONT LIKE MASTER SPEAKING TO ME ALL KIND OF THINGS.

Mi no laikim yu.

I DON'T LIKE YOU.

Mi laik go ples bilong haid,

I WANT TO GO TO PLACE OF HIDING,

ples bilong mi.

MY PLACE.

Mi laik go slip.

I WANT TO GO SLEEP

Mi laik go drim.

I WANT TO GO DREAM.

Mi laikim ren bilong drim em i-kam.

I LIKE DREAM RAIN TO COME.

Mi laikim lukim ala dor dai.

I LIKE TO WATCH ALL THE DOORS DIE.

Mi laikim lukim ala wol i-swelap kwik

I LIKE TO WATCH ALL THE WALLS SWELL UP QUICK

olsem sid bilong flauer i-kamap, i-brok nabaut .

LIKE SEED OF FLOWER COMING UP, BURSTING.

JAN 9, 1939





## **Mi Go Ples Bilong Mi: LITERAL TRANSLATION**

Mi saevi bainbai yu wetim long mi  
I KNOW SOON YOU WAIT FOR ME  
long wanples,  
IN THE SAME PLACE,  
hed bilong yu em i-stapim haf long haus bilong rod ayan,  
YOUR HEAD WILL BE HALF IN THE HOUSE OF THE RAILROAD,  
hors i-stap baek long yu, em i-saekim yu long dor.  
THE HORSES WILL BE IN BACK OF YOU, PUSHING YOU IN THE  
DOOR.  
Na olsem oltaim,  
AND IN THE SAME WAY AS ALWAYS  
taim mi helo long yu, mi singawtim yu "Uncle",  
WHEN I GREET YOU, I CALL YOU "UNCLE",  
yu tokim mi yu no gat samting.  
YOU WILL SAY TO ME NOTHING.  
Na taim mi sidawn long haefsaed long yu,  
AND WHEN I SITDOWN BESIDE YOU,  
go haws bilong yu,  
TO GO TO YOUR HOME,  
laen go awtsaied long mifela olsem tudark rivar,  
THE LAND GOES OUTSIDE OF US LIKE A DARK RIVER,  
na hors lait long munmun long baeksaied,  
THE HORSES SHINING WITH MOONS ON THEIR BACKS,  
mi no hirim singawt, tasol  
BUT I DON'T HEAR A SOUND, ONLY  
singawt long mifela i-stap.  
THE SOUND OF OUR BEING.

Na bainbai taim fair bilong haus kamap  
AND SOON WHEN THE HOUSE-FIRES RISE UP  
olsem longwe starstar  
LIKE DISTANT STARS  
mi hirim tasol singawt bilong yu  
I WILL HEAR ONLY YOUR VOICE  
em i-kamap na fal.  
RISING AND FALLING.  
Yu singim singawt bilong yu, em i-no gat frant, i-no gat  
ars.  
YOU SING YOUR SOUND, IT HAS NO FRONT, HAS NO END.  
Yet mi kichim tok long singawt yu sing.  
YET I UNDERSTAND SOUND YOU SING.  
Na mi sing wantaim lon yu.  
NOW I SING WITH YOU.  
Long wonam mi sing?. Mi no saevi.  
WHY DO I SING? I DON'T KNOW.  
Na mi sing tu.  
NOW I SING ALSO.

JAN 27, 1939



## AFTERWORD

Deep within us, we all carry truths so strong and so real they literally shape our lives. Truths such as a belief in a caring (or an uncaring) God), or an absolute conviction that someone truly and deeply loves us.

When truths such as these suddenly collapse within us, when they no longer seem real, the very ground beneath us becomes horribly fluid. We can suddenly become lost (as in the case where we realize someone *never did* love us) or we can suddenly find ourselves (as in St Paul's thunderbolt acceptance of Christianity), but we can never predict which.

These moments represent pivotal points in our lives, points at which an entirely new understanding of what is true takes possession of us. That possession may take a very long time to complete itself (as in the case of a mistaken love) or it may take place in an instant (as in the case of St. Paul), but in either case, it eventually replaces the previous truth that ruled our lives.

We are never really sure how this happens. All that we can really say for sure about it is that something outside of our normal way of knowing entered us and cast an entirely new light on our world. In a way, illusion is yesterday's truth. We can still look back and feel how real that truth was, but there is always something unreal about it, ghost-like. And it becomes more ghostly with time.

In its place, a whole new way of looking at things takes possession of us and looms solidly before us, and within us, like a newly discovered land. Luckily, over time, like all immigrants to a new land, we forget about the ghostly place we left. It is empty for us. A place only of memories. We can only think about the new land we have come to inhabit. How real it feels. And how true.

It is a very frightening and humbling experience to realize our deepest truths can be suddenly snatched away from us by God knows what. Those moments are the reason being human is not a game for the faint of heart. But those moments are also the beginning of wisdom. What we ultimately come to realize is that when it comes to knowing what is true, we are standing on a pile of shifting mirrors. We are standing on quicksand.

Of course it doesn't feel like that; it feels rock-solid. Or more precisely, like the solid edge of a precipice we are but inches from stepping over (but don't know it) because we are blind to it. But to see just how precarious our position really is, all we have to do is take off our blindfolds. Or have someone else take them off for us, which is usually what takes place.

I am going to give you a little taste of that vertigo right now by telling you that almost everything I've told you about these poems is a fabrication. What I mean by that is

although I have assured you (and linguists have assured me) that the pidgin texts are real, I am compelled to tell you that Eldred's history and a good portion of the original pidgin texts are a fabrication. I made them up. Just as I made up the translations and the commentary. And this confession.

Let me clarify that. I didn't really make them up. They sort of made themselves up. And with some substantial help from others, I might add. For example, my statement in the foreword that I had received microfiche of *The Worker* containing the twelve pidgin poems along with an editorial isn't quite true. I did receive something in the mail in 1985, but very little. What I received was a floppy disk containing two pidgin poems, titled *Drimtain* and *Mi Tair*, but no other poems and no information at all about the author, whom I assumed to be Eldred Van-Ooy, the first-person narrator of *Drimtain*. But nothing else except for a handwritten note from a long-time, Australian computer associate, Boyd Munro, hoping the poems might be of interest.

And indeed they were. Because no sooner had I looked at them than I sensed something utterly mysterious and wonderful had fallen into my possession. My sense of wonderment only increased after I had displayed the two pidgin poems on my PC. In fact, I was stunned. Even with my then very limited sense of pidgin. I decided I simply had to find out more about them. First, I acquired some pidgin dictionaries. After translating the two poems in their entirety, I realized they were indeed extraordinary poems,

the real thing as they say.

But were they the real thing? Munro was a notorious practical joker. Could they be frauds? After a good bit of searching, I located a linguist at a large university who specialized in pidgin languages. I sent the texts to her with a query as to their possible authenticity, i.e., were they frauds, something written by someone with a scholarly knowledge of pidgin or were they authentic, did they have the stamp of someone who was orally fluent in pidgin? The message I got back was quick and to the point: they were indeed authentic and did I have any more? *No*, I answered, much to the disappointment of the linguist I'm sure. Looking back on it, I should have answered, *Not right now*, but I have never been that prescient.

Having been assured they were authentic pidgin, I bore down on trying to locate Munro to find out what he knew about the author. I finally located him. In those pre-web days, it was a bit of luck to be sure. He seldom answered phones and tended to make himself scarce, so it was only by coincidence that someone I was talking to on the phone at Boyd's subsidiary in Burlingame California offhandedly told me Boyd was in the next room picking up some mail. I asked him to put me through and when he did I asked him about the two pidgin poems.

Munro, by the way, could never decide if he was Australian or British, so there was much huffing followed by something

I can only describe as a Foster's guffaw before he told me what had happened, namely that he had come upon the pidgin poem *Drimtain* in a small restaurant in Brisbane, where he had found it scribbled on the back of a menu. When I asked him about the second poem, *Mi Tair*, there was a long silence on the other end after which he said something like, *What second poem, mate?* I was totally confused and recited *Mi Tair* to him in English (after all I *had done* the English translation) and it suddenly came back to him. *Oh*, he said, *I wrote that one. As a sort of joke. Couldn't you tell?*

I was waiting for the Foster's guffaw but it didn't come. Could he have written it? I doubted it. I could maybe, *maybe* conceive of him writing *Drimtain*, which for all its beauty is a bit "thinky", but the lush emotional falling of *Mi Tair* seemed far beyond his sensibility. I told him, as politely as I could (because you can never be sure about these things) that I couldn't really believe he'd written it. He said he didn't really believe it either, but he *had* written it, really, *that it sort of came to him.*

He went on to tell me, and he seemed very exact in his reconstruction, that he was especially tired that day but the pidgin poem (*Drimtain*) he had seen at lunch kept coming back to him, so he went back to the restaurant and located the menu, which he bought as a souvenir. He said he didn't know why, but my *interest in poetry* came to mind, so he decided to key up a floppy and send it to me as a curiosity.



And here's the part that got my attention. He said that as he was sitting at his desk staring at the restaurant menu, he started keying in some nonsense about how tired he was and then, suddenly, *Mi Tair* started to come to him in pidgin. Very quickly he added. He said he had acquired some pidgin in his travels through New Guinea in his school days, but when this pidgin came to him it he said it felt like it was coming from somewhere else in his head. When I said nothing (what *could* I say?), I could feel a little nervous shuffling on the other end of the line before he went on to say that for some reason he liked what he'd done and decided to throw it on the floppy without saying anything to me about its origin. So there you are, that was it, he said.

Well, maybe he was telling the truth and maybe he wasn't, but there was no way to tell. Knowing his penchant for practical jokes, it was also possible that he had written *both poems* and there *was no menu*, or (and this is really devilish) maybe *he had actually found two poems* on the menu (not just one) and had made up the confession about writing *Mi Tair* just to thicken the porridge. If this was the case, the Munro I spoke to that day must have been a very fast thinker, but then again no one had ever faulted him in that department.

All this went through my head in matter of seconds, but before I could say anything he went on to tell me he was pleased I had thought his pidgin poem (*Mi Tair*) as good as

*Drimtain*, a poem he considered a small masterpiece. This was followed by a long silence on his part, which was his usual signal he wanted to hang up. It was all I could do to keep my composure and thank him for the poems. After I hung up, I looked at myself in the hallway mirror for a very long time.

My own best guess is that I was the victim of one of his more elaborate practical jokes. Munro always admired what he termed “the delayed effect” of some practical jokes, a topic he never stopped talking about, and he may have seen in me the perfect potential dupe. After all, poets always believe they lead secret, mysterious lives, but I think Munro, when he came across the poems, being a bit of a little greedy piggy himself, must have sensed my own little greedy piggy need for poetry. When he found the two poems on the back of the menu, I think his head went into overdrive. He knew if he sent them to me I wouldn’t be able to put them down, and that when our paths would eventually cross (as they did) I’d have to bring up the poems. Like a trout to bait. And then he’d have some fun with me in his own odd way. Which I can assure you he did.

Then again, if you think about it, and I can also assure you that I have, and on many occasions, there’s nothing more confusing than being told something you thought true is only half true. Before my conversation with Munro, I had always assumed that the two poems had been written by a poet, and in this case, by an aborigine poet by the name of

Eldred Van-Ooy. The poems seemed, beyond a doubt, to be the real thing. But when Munro “confessed” to having written *Mi Tair*, it really set me spinning. No matter how much I tried to dismiss his confession as a clever ploy, I was never really able to look at the two poems in quite the same way again.

All this, of course, was a lot of work to go through for a practical joke, but there were a few reasons why Munro may have done so, one of them being his nature and the other being mine. Unfortunately for me, beneath my genial surface I do have an assumed air of superiority that some men instantly dislike and will go to no end to put down. Munro may have been one of them, if for no other reason than he’s a bit like that himself. Of course another reason for his wanting to have a go at me may have been that I had bolted from his company some years earlier to start up a competing firm that was successful enough to put a small dent in his pocketbook. A dent I’m sure he remembered beneath all the chatty geniality of his phone conversations.

So he had a lot of motivation, if you know what I mean. But I must say he was very discreet and persevering about it. He never let on. In the end, though, your call is as good as mine as to where the two original pidgin poems really came from. I have no way of really knowing. All I have is the word of Munro, which is a hall of mirrors all by itself. But as for the poems themselves, all I can say is they have an undeniable authority.

Despite that felt authority, his confession still left me in somewhat of a quandary vis a vis their publication. How could I publish them knowing what I did: that (at best) they were two pidgin poems of questionable authorship found (reportedly) on the back of a restaurant menu in Brisbane? Of course, they could very well have been the poems of an aborigine by the name of Eldred Van-Ooy, but just as equally they could have been written by some day-tripping hippy returned from a sojourn in the outback, or by some spinster inspired by the latest library slide-show travelogue on Ayres Rock. After all, when it comes to poetry, there's no telling.

At any rate, it was precisely at this point of confusion that I decided it was best to let the poems go. There was simply no way to publish them without knowing if they were real. Yet I adored these poems: sometimes they seemed so real I wanted to cry. *My Beautiful little monsters*, was what I kept thinking as they began to recede into the backrooms of my memory, where they lay like dusty, misarranged treasures.

For the most part they stayed there, undisturbed, except when some real or imagined personal slight would trigger the memory of Munro playing with me and cause me to endlessly skate and re-skate over the oily, slick surface of my conversation with him, looking for some kind of indication as to what the real truth was. But I never found one.

Once I became so crazy to know I left a message on his answering machine demanding to know the whereabouts of the menu and then a few months later I simply lost it and left another one to the effect that I knew enough about poetry to know he had written both poems, hoping to flush him out, and although I had to wait several weeks for an answer to the former and over six months for an answer to the latter, his replies were always affable. I'll have to quote them from memory, but they went something like this: *(Listen mate, that was years ago, who knows where the menu is now? and Justin, I have no idea how you deduced I was some kind of Earl of Southampton, but it happened like I said it did, really. By the way have you been drinking or something?)*

A little too affable, and a little too smooth is what I'd thought at the time, especially considering the frenzied nature of my inquiries, but he liked exercising that British upper class part of his personality, and what better person to use it on than that oddball, snobby little poet who had cost him several hundred thousand dollars in revenue when he bolted the mother ship. Then again, he may have been telling the truth. There was simply no way to tell. Like I say, he never let on. At any rate it was after that last frenzied (and somewhat embarrassing) inquiry that I simply let the whole thing go and said goodbye to the poems. It had gone far enough.

But not far enough it seems, because some 15 years later, as I was wandering through a didgeridoo shop in Los Angeles (where else?), the haunting, pulsating music playing in the background brought up my little monsters once again. That remembrance was so beautifully bittersweet it made me finally realize the poems would never really go away. Like the memories of a love affair that had never quite worked out, they would be with me until the day I died.

A few weeks later, before returning to Florida, I drove down to Sonora Mexico, to visit a friend in a little town called Alamos. Frozen in time is hardly an apt enough description. There was nothing to do except read and sleep, and the bright, hot days and cold, star-filled nights invited both. It also invited the most vivid dreams I have ever had, but one in particular refused to let go of me.

In the dream, two small children suddenly appeared in front to me in the desert. For some reason, they seemed to be full of mischief. I don't know why I thought this, perhaps it was because of their large, dark bright eyes, which were so large as to almost mesmerize me, so much so that it took me some time to realize the two children were not only naked, but were glowing with a white, almost numinous light.

I was trying to decide what they really were: children, or aliens, or angels, when the one to my right spoke to me. He was very matter of fact, and said they wanted me to build a

house for them, that they were tired of wandering the desert like a traveling sideshow. "What kind of house?" I asked, and no sooner had I said that than the other one started to slowly lift off the ground and with no apparent effort turn completely upside down, so that his feet were sticking up in the air and his arms hanging down, at which time his fingers started to grow downwards like long, thin shiny roots that burrowed into the earth until the roots were so many and so glittery and widespread it seemed as if they were branches and he were a tree growing downwards into the earth.

I remember thinking it was one of the most beautiful sights I had ever seen, but I also remember feeling very uneasy, because his eyes hadn't turned upside down with the rest of his body, but had remained right side up, and they were burning right through me like an insistent, unspoken command. When I woke up, I realized the two children were my beautiful little monsters. Right then, I knew something was going to happen, I could feel it in my bones. I just didn't know what would happen, or where or when.

And then, a few months after my return to Florida, it happened. Although it smacks of a Frank Capra movie (and me a bewildered Gary Cooper), two new poems (*Naming Things* and *Homecoming*), and all of Eldred's history came to me in a rush one day while I was driving to pick up some potting soil at the Green Fountain Garden shop in Sarasota. Although the poems came to me mainly in English, pieces of

pidgin also came to me at the same time. It was a mess, but a gorgeous one.

But it wasn't really that much of a mess. I have a bit of psychic ability that comes and goes, but I wasn't quite prepared for the little nuggets of biographical "facts" that I found in my little pudding. (Those "facts", by the way, were roughly as follows: Eldred Van-Ooy, the author of the poems, was an aborigine born in 1891 in the outback near Brisbane and then raised from birth by white, middle-class parents, Mildred and Cinque Van-Ooy, who educated him to the point where he went on to become an instructor in hydraulic engineering at a technical college as well as the inventor of a unique waste pumping system. In January 1960, at the age of 69, he published twelve pidgin poems he had written in January 1939. They were published as advertisements in a local radical paper, *The Worker*. He died in 1984, at age 93, of natural causes.)

I can only say that when I checked all this out later with the Chamber of Commerce in Brisbane, many of the "facts" turned out to be correct. I wasn't able to find out a great deal of detail, especially when it came to Van-Ooy himself, but I did manage to ascertain that there are people with the name of Van-Ooy in Brisbane, and there is a technical college (Queensland Institute of Technology) and they do teach hydraulic engineering. These last two correspondences can perhaps be explained as coincidences, but not the name Van-Ooy. I can't think of a more peculiar



name. Take a look in your local phone book if you don't believe me.

But that was just the beginning. No sooner had all this come to me, than other "facts" began to make themselves up. Suffice it to say that the initial rush of words and images and facts eventually turned into a torrent. The result was an extraordinary house of mirrors that constructed itself with very little help from me. And I must say that its glittery architecture continues to impress me. Not only did I get a chance to write some poems in both pidgin and English, but I was also awarded the job of translator (both ways) and commentator. And critic. And trickster: for along with the raisins of prime numbers and numerology that began to dot this loaf, a whole host of other goodies began adding themselves as well.

For one thing, that old chestnut about what constitutes a good translation was given a nice nose twist. Not only does pidgin absolutely require that the translator add his two cents, but in this case the oft-heard complaint that the "English translations don't live up to the originals" goes to pieces as soon as the reader realizes that English translations are often the originals and the pidgin originals are often the translations. All I can say is, the way they came is the way I caught them.

Of course, the whole "arts fraud" issue is also given a good going over. The legendary art critic Bernard Berenson, who

never seemed to hesitate in grabbing a magnifying glass to examine a suspicious canvas, probably had an answer for all this, but like the Borges character that accidentally rewrote *Don Quixote* word for word, I don't care to hear it. Who cares whether Van Gogh painted the "The Flowering Orchard" or some clever Armenian forger. If you get the same rush when you look at either version, who's to say one is art and the other not?

To my mind the only issue worth talking about with regard to so called art "frauds" is whether the thing made up moves you. Besides, this whole thing about authorship is a herring. No poet worth his salt would ever claim he was responsible for his best poems. He just brought them into the world, was merely midwife to the Muse. Let me put it to you this way: someone else is making these things up for us. We just don't know how or why or who. Or when they're coming.

Finally, let me say that sections of both the pidgin "originals" and their English translations continue to move me. They *are* urgent, simple, mysterious utterances. And funny. And sad. The reader who is willing to take the time to read the "original pidgin" will be well rewarded. What could be funnier or more eloquent than young Eldred's impatient lament in *DRIMTAIM* about the white man's world, the world we call *real*:

YAR KAM NA GO  
OLSEM SAN. OLSEM MUN.

DRIMTAIM I-KAM. DRIMTAIM I-GO.  
NA OL WAITMAN I-NO TOKIM MI  
EM I-SAEVI DRIMTAIM.  
EM I-TOKIM NEM BILONG OLKAIN SAMTING.  
EM I-TOKIM: WAN, TU, TRI,  
WAN, TU, TRI, TASOL.

Or this tired, expectant letting go into sleep, into dreaming  
in *MI TAIR*:

MI LAIK GO PLES BILONG HAID,  
PLES BILONG MI.  
MI LAIK GO SLIP.  
MI LAIK GO DRIM.  
MI LAIKIM REN BILONG DRIM EM I-KAM.  
MI LAIKIM LUKIM ALA DOR DAI.  
MI LAIKIM LUKIM ALA WOL I-SWELAP KWIK  
OLSEM SID BILONG FLAWER  
I-KAMAP, I-BROK NABAUT.

Finally let me say there was never any desire to trick the reader. If anyone was tricked, it was me. I have no idea what it was that caused *Mi Tair* and *Drimtaim* to appear on my doorstep some twenty six years ago, but I can tell you this: whatever spirit it was, it refused to let go of me until I had built my beautiful little monsters the house they so ardently desired. A house in which they could be safe, have guests, receive mail, where they could put down their roots,

become a part of the world. Some may argue with its shape, but all I can say is, it is the house I was instructed to build.

Who can say what it is that brings these messengers from the other world into our lives? Spirit wants a body, it wants roots in this world, it wants to walk the walk and talk the talk. It's as simple as that. Every soul, every spirit, that arrives in this world ripples the very real water and disturbs the very real earth in a way we can only bend to. They create a truth that will not be denied. Next to that truth, most of our speculations about what is true and what is real and what is illusory seem somewhat beside the point. Truth is what spirit wants it to be. And it can change in a moment. Just like that. Get used to it.

Justin Spring  
2011  
Merida Yucatan Mexico

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justin Spring is a prize-winning poet, video artist, and writer of fiction and non-fiction. He is one of the few poets who works not only in the written mode of composition but also in a contemporary version of preliterate oral poetry called SOULSPEAK—of which he and fellow poet Scylla Liscombe are the originators.

He is also the sole originator of an allied video form called SOULSPEAK DREAMSTORIES. He considers his work in the oral and audio/visual area to be pioneering.

Mr. Spring is the founder of *SOULSPEAK*, an organization dedicated to bringing poetry back into the everyday lives of everyday people. He was educated at Columbia College, has three children, and lives in Mexico and the United States.

Mr. Spring's written poems have been published in *American Poetry Review*, as well as numerous anthologies such as *Florida in Poetry*. He is the recipient of many prizes and honors and is the author of seven collections of poems, *Polaroid Poems*, *Other Dancers*, *Nursery Raps*, *Talkies*, *Poems for Family and*

*Friends, Poems of Sarasota and Florida, Collected Poems 1985-2014*

Mr. Spring is one of a handful of poets in the country who compose in the ancient oral mode. His seven SOULSPEAK oral poetry CDs are: *Gathering, Smoke, Nursery Raps, Speakings, In Your Mind, Witnesses Log, I'm Talking to You Oprah.*

Mr. Spring is also the author of four prose works:

**SOULSPEAK: *The Outward Journey of the Soul:*** a ground breaking CD/book combination intended for anyone interested in attaining the deep spiritual expression possible through SOULSPEAK. It also contains a unique look at poetry going back to the earliest preliterate cultures.

**Alice Hickey: *Between Worlds:*** is a fast-paced, lightly fictionalized, sometimes troubling memoir of a seven year period in which the author and psychic Alice Hickey try to unwind a skein of bewildering psychic events that threaten to unseat the author. That effort sends them ricocheting back and forth between Sarasota, Tavernier Key, Panama, Santa Monica, Sedona, and the San Blas Islands and then,

finally, back in time to the dawn of the human race. This is a totally new look at the roots of human consciousness, the psychic roots of poetry, the early Mother Goddess period, and our constantly evolving consciousness, but even more, it is a moving story about a deep friendship that blossomed unexpectedly on the unruly border between the two worlds.

**Mirrors:** a short memoir of Mr. Spring's mysterious encounter with the *pidgin* poems of Eldred Van-Ooy, an Australian aborigine, an encounter he describes as having left him in a shadowy garden, wondering, looking up at the leaves

**River Mother: *The Face of the Sphinx*:** is a novel set in the Mother Goddess period of Neolithic, preliterate Nubia. In it, *River Mother* tells of her life—from her birth to her early training as a Nubian shaman to the prophetic vision that drove her to travel to the Nile delta—where her spiritual leadership and prophecies not only established the unique male/female balance central to all Egyptian spirituality but also helped save the Nile delta tribes from the great tsunami caused by the eruption of Mt Aetna in 6000 B.C.. Her powerful leadership eventually led the people of the delta to honor her as a living Goddess by carving *her face* onto a rocky outcropping that was

gradually transformed over the next 3500 years into what we now know as the Great Sphinx of Giza.

Mr. Spring's aim in creating this story was to give readers a better knowledge of the *artistic, spiritual, and highly psychic nature* of the much neglected, preliterate Proto-Egyptian culture that he contends had a cohesive spiritual and intellectual center whose interests were totally different from ours, and yet powerful enough to give birth to the complex spiritual/psychic concepts and practices that eventually came to maturity thousands of years later in Dynastic Egypt.

[Click here](#) too visit is a companion web site to the book, *When Was the Sphinx Really Built and Why*



Among the recent poetry prizes and honors Mr. Spring has received are:

**For his written poetry:**

The 1997 State of Florida Individual Artist Fellowship

Finalist 1994 Academy of American Poets

*Walt Whitman National Prize Contest.*

Finalist 1997 Academy of American Poets

*Walt Whitman National Prize Contest.*

**For his SOULSPEAK oral poetry:**

The 1993 Homer Award for Spoken

Poetry/Tampa Bay Poetry Council 1995

POETICA Hall of Fame Award

**For his DREAMSTORY poetry videos:**

The 2005 John Ringling Individual Artist Fellowship

The 2006 State of Florida Individual Artist Fellowship

The 2006 State of Florida Individual Artist Enhancement award

**For his SOULSPEAK HEALING PROGRAMS:**

The 2003 Images and Voices of Hope Award

The 2003 Point of Life Award for Excellence

**For his prose:**

The 2009–10 Ringling Towers Literary Award for ALICE HICKEY.

**Other:**

The Ringling 2009 “*Ageless Creativity*” award for his lifelong contributions to poetry.

**WEB LINKS**

Free downloadable selections from most of Mr. Spring’s poetry and prose are available at:

<http://justin-soulspeak.blogspot.com/>

<http://sptpress.blogspot.com/>

Free downloadable selections from most of Mr. Spring’s SOULSPEAK Oral Poetry CDs are available at:

<http://justin-soulspeak.blogspot.com/>

<http://soulspeakstudio.blogspot.com/>

You can hear the latest SOULSPEAK poetry and music on Mr. Spring’s eclectic, free, web radio station, Radio SOULSPEAK:

<http://www.live365.com/stations/soulspeakspring>

Free downloadable selections from most of Mr. Spring's DREAMSTORY videos are available on VIDEO SOULSPEAK:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/soulspeakspring>

Free downloadable DVDs of Mr. Spring's SOULSPEAK HEALING PROGRAMS are available at:

<http://therapeuticsoulspeak.blogspot.com/>

For Mr. Spring's latest artistic efforts:

<http://justin-soulspeak.blogspot.com/>

For a Directory to SOULSPEAK Programs and Videos:

<http://justininmexico.blogspot.com/>

[Click here](#) for Mr. Spring's insightful and original site, *Investigation of Alternative World Views*.

