

ULLA SCHILD: *Literaturen in Papua-Neuguinea*. (Mainzer Ethnologische Arbeiten, Bd.3). Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1981. 236 pages, DM 38.-

In this informative study the author fulfils a twofold task. Besides the main topic, an outline of the development and contents of written literature from its beginning in the 1930s up to 1975, when Papua New Guinea became independent, she is concerned with its roots - the traditional oral literature.

After a short but adequate introduction dealing with the areas relevant to cultural change in Papua New Guinea - geography and economy, history, history of the education system and adult education - U.Schild then analyses the traditional literary forms. She manages to show that oral literature not only served educational purposes and helped transmit traditions, but often provided entertainment, thus being a fertile ground on which the newly created challenge could flourish. Section 2 contains a knowledgeable and sensitive stocktaking of the indigenous literary genres, including epical forms, lyrics, and dramas. It ends with a discussion about the survival chances of oral literature in the situation of rapid social change.

The next section (3) deals with the origins of written literature in Papua New Guinea, a process with many initial set-backs, which nevertheless could not prevent the emergence of famous indigenous writers. Beginning with the early attempts by F.E.Williams, a colonial anthropologist, whose discriminatory treatment of the Papuans could not produce an atmosphere of creativity among the writers, the author examines the respective success of subsequent endeavours. U.Schild dwells at great length on Ulli Beier's merits - who, by the way, inspired her to embark on this remarkable study. Perhaps this personal relationship may have led to some overestimation of his leading rôle in the genesis of Papuan written literature although there can be no doubt about his engagement for autonomous literary manifestations. Thanks to his pertinent experiences in West Africa he became the first 'lecturer in literature of developing countries' at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1967 (until 1971) and later on director of the newly established Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (from 1974-1978). He not only succeeded in adapting literary studies to indigenous needs, for instance by initiating 'creative writing courses', but also by promoting such in schools. In addition to his efforts other attempts were made on stage, by magazines, by competitions, and by publishers to promote the developing literature.

The next, and principal section includes the analysis of written literature from the beginnings up to 1975, in the course of which U.Schild confines herself to prose and drama, in view of the extensive size of lyrical works which demand particular attention. Highly ranked are the autobiographies, such as the accounts of the Papuan statesmen Albert Maori Kiki and Michael Somare; yet the author also deals extensively with those of persons of different 'calibre'; these too are of equal interest, for example the well known Ongka Kaepa (at least in anthropological circles), an outstanding Highlands 'big man' - a special type of political leader in traditional Melanesian society.

In the following passages she discusses the importance of the numerous narrations, which unanimously focus on three subjects: village, culture conflict, and town. To interpret these works appropriately, you have to bear in mind the aboriginal cultural values. First of all, these narrations wanted to express a 'view from below', as an indigenous counterpart or even rejection of the usual ethnographic and ethnocentric procedure, which often treated the Papuans only as research objects and thus falsified the cultures observed. Related to this problem is that of the culture clash, which finds its pictorial expression in the contrast of village and town: in the towns there are no neighbours, no friends, and no help when required.

After analyzing the only novel written in this period, U. Schild continues with the plays, emphasising the fact that the dramatic genre is able to achieve the greatest success in Papua New Guinea. She mentions two reasons for this phenomenon: 1. the ideas of the authors can be conveyed to people who cannot read, 2. the drama already has an important place in traditional life. According to her the plays of the early phase of Papuan literature can be divided into 1. folkloristic 2. those dealing with the culture conflict and 3. anticolonial pieces. Their leading idea is the search for a new cultural identity, derived from the fusion of traditional and modern values.

This conciliatory attitude which predominates in the last pages, provokes some comment. Throughout the study she rather critically observes the development of written literature, but towards the end she seems to become somewhat blue-eyed when denying the militant political character of Papuan literature before 1975. However that may be, in the following years, when some authors realized the menace of neo-colonialization, literature shows a growing tendency towards a different cultural identity, marked by the non-acceptance of Western ideas and ways of life.

But this argument against some of her conclusions can not diminish the value of this dissertation, which has indeed become an elaborate work, thanks to Schild's profound general knowledge of oral and written literature and her intensive and sensitive research of the Papuans' efforts to develop a literature of their own.

Peter Hanser