

Sonnets from After Middle Age  
and Other Verse

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## Waaséena

Ngaang waaséena.  
Wúwa pasato ngaang  
mé wóóni fénúwey,  
soonóóni inen,  
soonóóni Kachaw.<sup>1</sup>  
Núkúni ppeyinen  
iyaani fénúwey.  
Enúúmwaríinen  
esee mwo wúriyey,  
ngé ese turufiyey  
Nisowukepiinen.  
Rongen akkamanaw  
aa túmwúnúúwey.  
Waaséena ngaang.

Ngaang waaséena.  
Inisiy epwee nómw  
pwúppwúnú me pwpwún,  
ngé ngúniy epwe niwin  
feyiniiti imwan—  
changanó neefúú,  
aséé Fewúkasé;  
áassinó Fachchamw,  
túútú neenómwun;  
changatá wungowungan,  
toneyi amanaman;  
soonó soonóón  
neewoon wunusan.  
Waaséena ngaang

## Drift Voyager

I am a drift voyager.  
hither I've strayed  
from on my land,  
the far side of heaven,  
far side of Space Worlds.<sup>1</sup>  
Outside of heaven's edge  
is the place of my land.  
The heaven-garland god<sup>2</sup>  
has not yet assailed me,  
nor has laid hold of me  
Mistress of the Lower sky.<sup>3</sup>  
Life-giving spells  
have watched over me.  
A drift voyager I.

I am a drift voyager.  
My body will remain  
in wedlock with the earth,  
but my soul will return  
going back to its home—  
soar off among the stars,  
rest at Repose Rock;<sup>4</sup>  
fly away to Under Brow,  
bathing in its lagoon;<sup>5</sup>  
zoom to its zenith point,  
peak of empowering;<sup>6</sup>  
alight on its far side  
at the source of all.  
A drift voyager I.

I composed this poem in the language of Chuuk (Truk), Micronesia. In it I tried to express what I had come to feel represents the Chuuk people's traditional sense of their place in a world of little land in the middle of a vast expanse of sky and sea. In the Chuuk language there are nine vowels: three front unrounded vowels (i, e, á), three central unrounded vowels (ú, é, a), and three back rounded vowels (u, o, ó). Some consonants are represented by digraphs (pw, mw, ng). Instead of stressed and unstressed syllables, as in English, there are units of duration or morae, each mora consisting of a vowel or a consonant plus vowel. Double vowels are held for two morae, and double consonants are held for one mora. In the traditional poetic form used here, each line of verse consists of seven morae, an eighth mora being a slight rest at the end of the line.

### Notes

1. Kachaw or Achaw is the name of a distant land beyond the eastern juncture of sky and sea and hence in the spirit world.
2. Reference here is to the rainbow god (énúún mwárisi), dangerous to infants, who must be protected by amulets at sea.
3. A creature, half woman and half eel, who inhabits a lagoon or sea in the spirit world in the sky and seizes spirits or souls who stray across it.
4. A way station of souls of the dead on their journey back to the sky world, perhaps to be equated with the evening star.
5. 'Under Brow' (Fachchamw) is the abode of the heavenly gods, ruled over by 'Great Spirit' (Énúúnap). Souls of the dead, on bathing in the waters there, were said to forget their former mortal existence and to acquire new identities as spirits.
6. At the zenith of heaven, above Under Brow, resided Great Spirit's mother's mother's brother 'First Wise Knowing' (Mwmwesinnare).

## Ikenen Wúkúnné

Ngaanga átiniré.  
Wúwaa wara ngaang  
me wóóni fénúwey,  
sópwiyi-we Neesót.  
Siya chuutoo mwo  
pwe sipwee rééfew  
fááyi féwiitip,  
wutun nuukanap.  
Site rééréépwuch,  
sipwe rééréépwúng,  
sipwe rééyaawu  
ikenen wúkúnné,  
wochááyi Nééyé,  
wochááyi Naangas.  
Epwe wocháán átiisómw,  
epwe wocháán átinimwár,  
pwe áteyé,  
átaangas.

## The Fish of Sufficiency

I am groping man.  
I have come, I,  
from off my land,  
my town there Search Place.  
We meet hither now  
in order to stone-grope  
under feeling stone,  
core of the middle.  
Grope we not crazily,  
let us grope truly,  
groping grasp out  
the fish of sufficiency,  
food of Lady Learned,  
food of Lady Skilled.  
It shall be food of chiefs,  
it shall be food of commoners,  
to be learned  
and skilled.