Ralph Bulmer will long be remembered for posing one of the most fruitful questions in cognitive – or symbolic – anthropology. At once modest and outrageous, it was a question that flew in the face of (Western) common sense. I refer, of course, to the celebrated article published prominently in *Man* over twenty years ago: “Why Is the Cassowary Not a Bird?” This remarkable essay established Bulmer’s reputation as a keen student of natural history as well as a foremost scholar of ethnozoological classification, a reputation which he later consolidated by a uniquely collaborative work with Saem Majnep (1977). The Cassowary article directly inspired the thinking of many anthropologists (e.g. Tambiah 1969, Maddock 1975, Gardner 1984); the “dialogical” ethnography of *Birds of My Kalam Country* provided a model which, despite much lip-service, has been emulated by all too few.

In this brief contribution I take as my theme the place of certain birds in Goodenough Island (Nidula) folklore and mythology, focussing particularly on the status of the most majestic of its birds, the sea eagle – *Manubutu* – sometimes referred to as the chief (*kaiwabu*) of birds. Although not as “anomalous” as the cassowary, the sea eagle plays an imposing figurative role in Nidula thought, as conspicuous as its natural, hierarchical position in the skies. First, however, the cultural and ethno-ornithological context of Manubutu’s habitat must be sketched.

Goodenough is one of the three main continental islands of the D’Entrecasteaux group in Milne Bay Province (the Massim) of eastern Papua New Guinea. Although marginally the smallest of the three in area, Goodenough is by far the highest and thrusts awesomely to over 8,500 feet. Its ecological diversity permits an avifauna correspondingly rich and diverse, with a number of endemic species in addition to a large proportion of the mainland genera. The cassowary is absent, however, and so too are all but one (*Manucodia*) of the birds of paradise.

The human population of Goodenough numbers about 15,000. Villages are found mainly on the coast and in the lower foothills, though traditionally people also dwelt further inland on defensible spurs and ridges. Birds were – and on occasion still are – hunted for their meat and their feathers, but fortunately for them the traditional sling-shot marksmanship of the islanders has long since atrophied and shotguns have always been few in number. In contrast to the extravagantly decorated headdresses of mainland Papua there was in Nidula only a modest use of plumes for self-decoration. Oddly enough, one of the most important items of dance apparel was a switch of cassowary feathers which were traded from the mainland. A common decoration still to be found is a single hornbill feather, trimmed and bent so that it bobs over the wearer’s ear. This is an explicit threat display, and the man with a hornbill feather in his hair means trouble: it is the aggressive signal of the food-fighting man intent on an *abutu* contest (cf. Young 1971 and 1983b:408). Neither as decoration nor as meat, however, are birds on Goodenough as important as for their cognitive “uses” in magic, folklore and mythology. More so than any other class of creature, birds are – in Lévi-Strauss’s well-worn dictum – “good to think”.

Most of the information I recorded about birds was contingent, haphazard and incomplete. My research interests did not extend to exhaustive indigenous taxonomies, and I investigated local knowledge of natural species only as it intruded upon my attention. The material I possess on birds, therefore, is unsystematic as well as incomplete, though I believe it represents a broad sample of what Nidula people know and believe about the various birds of their island. What follows would be better characterised as “the language and lore of certain birds” than as ethno-ornithology (as Ralph Bulmer’s infinitely more systematic information can claim to be). Unless indicated otherwise, the vernacular terms are those of Kalauna, the hill village of 550 people situated in eastern Goodenough where I have spent my longest terms of fieldwork.

All flying creatures (i.e. birds, bats and flying foxes) are classed as *manuya*. Of the 60-odd birds (or “terminal taxa”) I recorded, only a couple of dozen appear to have any particular salience in Nidula thought and ideology (“cosmology” seems too pretentious a word in this context). That is to say, about two dozen species are important as “totemic” emblems, or as possessing magical, mythological or other folkloristic significance.

In talking about *manuya*, Kalauna people appeared to assess them in terms of a tacit, informal classification based on their social or cultural uses. This was not an ethnozoological ordering, but rather an ordering of discourse about birds, one indicative of culturally constructed perceptions concerning their social value or cultural status. Thus, most birds can be said to belong to one or more of the following “discourse” classes: (1)
tabu or *talahaïyi* birds that cannot be eaten by those who have inherited them as “totems”; (2) heroic or “important” birds who feature in special myths called *neineya* which provide validating charters for systems of magic; (3) less important birds which feature in less important myths or folktales (*ifiifu*); (4) sorcerers’ birds (and bats) which have nefarious functions, and other “spirit” birds; (5) game birds that are good to eat or whose plumes are good to wear. There was also — for me at least — a residual category (6) of birds of which there was either little to say (other than mention of their habits and habitat), or to which folkloristic “sayings” adhered. I shall give some illustrations from each category (with the exception of game birds, which I referred to briefly above).

**TOTEMIC BIRDS**

The principal totemic birds are the same as those found throughout the Massim: *Manubutu* (white-bellied sea eagle), *Bunebune* (Torres Strait or nutmeg pigeon), *Binama* (hornbill), *Kaneala* (green parrot), *Kewala* (red lory), and *Kakawe* (sulphur-crested cockatoop). In Kalauna and other parts of Goodenough, some of these birds are linked with the two ceremonial moieties of *Modawa* (Drum) and *Fakili-Giyo* (Comb and Spear), and there is a weak oral tradition of war-making clans (*Fakili-Giyo* moiety) whose emblem was *Manubutu* (and sometimes *Bwaiobwaiio*, crow), and peace-making clans (*Modawa moiety*) whose emblem was *Binama* and *Bunebune*. Along with other such *dewa* (customary practices and properties) these totems are inherited patrilineally through clan membership. Together with any other birds that might be inherited through one’s sub-clan, they are referred to as one’s *tabu* or *talahaïyi*, and a child is enjoined to show “respect” by refraining from killing or eating them. The punishment for eating one’s *tabu* birds is believed to be blindness, lameness or haemorrhages. A person should also respect his or her mother’s totem birds, though the sanctions are less drastic. Taboos are also extended to those birds which give their name to, or feature in, magical formulae owned by one’s clan or sub-clan; likewise, a magician or sorcerer would not eat any creature associated with his particular spells.

Associated with many but not all totem birds are interdictions like curses, verbal formulae which are uttered to break a close relationship (Young 1971:46). If, having quarrelled, one brother deliberately speaks his *talahaïyi* formula to another, they may no longer enter another one’s house, nor share food, nor otherwise communicate until the interdiction is ritually countermanded. Besides bird names, however, there are other imprecatory bases for *talahaïyi*. To name but two: a common millipede (*molikeke*) which curls up resentfully on being prodded, and the suicidal mythical hero Honoyeta (see Young 1983a:74).

**HEROIC BIRDS**

One of the first questions Kalauna people ask of any bird is, “How does it eat?”. This does not mean, as one might expect, what does it eat (though this is a major consideration, for people do not themselves eat *Bwaiobwaiio* [crow] and *Manusiyo* [kite] because they are known to feed on carrion or snakes), but rather how much does it eat. In accordance with their cultural preoccupation with food, its dearth or abundance (Young 1971 and 1986), they are asking whether the bird is worthy of admiration for its restrained appetite or to be despised for its gluttony.

Two little birds in particular have significant roles to play in *neineya* myths belonging to the “food-controlling” clan of Lulauvile precisely because their observed eating habits are restrained. Thus, *Kiwiwiole* — a sandpiper than frequents the seashore and mangrove swamps – is said to “feed on spindrift and mud”. As the hero of a major charter myth of *Manumanua*, the ceremony designed to banish famine (Young 1983a:Ch.7), *Kiwiwiole’s* role is to activate his petrified grandmother and release the abundance locked up in her immobile body. It is his name that Lulauvile magicians invoke in new taro gardens, standing on a tree stump and shouting at the sky: “Ki-wi-wi-o-leiiii!” At once a bird, a culture hero and a human ancestor, his spirit is summoned to infuse the taro with a desire to grow fat and sumptuous.

The other small bird with hemic credentials is *Kikifolu* (unidentified), who won a competition to see which bird could fly highest and furthest. It was Kawafolafola, an ancestor and culture hero remarkable for the hole in his throat (indicative of his inability to eat effectively), who then sent *Kikifolu* to Muyuwa to fetch the soil which had disappeared along with the food. The little bird brought back a speck of earth in his beak and deposited it on Yauyaba, the sacred mountain of mankind’s origin. Kawafolafola made rain, and the soil magically replenished the island’s fertility. Kalauna’s garden magicians invoke his name too at an early stage of the gardening cycle, calling the spirit of the ancestor to descend and enrich the soil (see Young 1983a:228-33).

The mythical roles of these two little birds are complementary: one brings back the soil, the other an abundance of food. They are “important” despite their puny, insignificant size — something which is repeatedly stressed by the owners of the myths. But if *Kiwiwiole* is thought to feed on sea-foam, *Kikifolu* goes one better and simply “licks stones”.

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At the other end of the avian spectrum is Manubutu (sea eagle), whose very name (manu - bird; butu - noise/fame) announces its portentous significance. In this respect one might suppose the sea eagle to be anomalous; after all, big birds have big appetites, and Manubutu's mythical role as a wanton and voracious man-eater implies an awesome gastronomic capacity. But a crucial distinction is made by Kalauna people between eating meat and eating cultivated produce. It is an unrestrained appetite for the latter than carries the stigma, and there is no magic of hunger suppression for kevakeva (meat of any kind, fish, fowl or animal, including human flesh). Manubutu escapes censure, therefore, for its manifestly healthy appetite for meat, and the eagle's powers of predation are clearly among the reasons for its heroic status. Other reasons - its nurturing capacities and its perceived suicidal tendencies - will be dealt with below, when I turn to a more extended treatment of this heroic bird.

FOLKTALE BIRDS

Under this rubric I place all those birds which appear as characters in the secular stories called ifufu. There is some overlap with the previous category, and both Kiwiwiole and Manubutu appear as different persona in folktales too (see below for Manubutu's role in The Orphan). Numerous birds feature in Ifufu, including parrots, lories, cockatoo, kingfisher, hornbill, crow, metallic starling, owl, reef heron, nutmeg pigeon, butcher bird, and manucodia.

Some tales are "just-so stories", for example the tale of Bwaiobwaio (crow) and Ulo (channel-bill cuckoo?): the two birds agreed to paint one another, but whereas Crow gave Cuckoo attractive coloured stripes on its tail (which men like to use for decoration), the Cuckoo painted Crow a dull and uniform black; since then Crow has been angrily chasing Cuckoo. (Ulo may also have given its name to the act of suicide, for this bird is observed to plummet dangerously in flight.)

Other ifufu amount to complex and substantial myths, though they evade the label neineya by having no magic to impart. Unlike neineya myths they are not owned by particular descent groups. The frequency with which birds feature in Nidula folktales is readily indicated by a perusal of Jenness and Ballantyne's (1928) collection of 30 stories, most of them from Bwaidoka in the southeast of Goodenough: 15 different birds appear in nine of the tales; all other animals (wallaby, caterpillar, dog, turtle, frog, lizard, shark, prawn and snake) occur in about eleven of the stories. A far larger collection of myths and folktales made by Maribelle de Vera Young and myself feature birds and animals in similar proportions (see M. Young 1979, for a Bwaidoka sample).

SORCERERS' BIRDS

All bats, flying foxes and several birds are associated with sorcerers, some as their "familiars" and agents. Thus, Manukiki (cave bats) are said to be their "messengers", while another such "messeger", Manuboyi ("night bird", fruit bat or flying fox), lends its name to a sorcery technique which blocks the victim's anus (based on the widespread belief that the bat has no anus and must excrete through its mouth [see Majnep and Bulmer 1977:125]). More sinister yet is a small black bird called Bulibuli which is said to live in the stones of certain sorcerers; it emerges at night and changes into a kwahala (a witch-like agent of mystical attack), increasing in size and growing fangs and talons (see Young 1971:137). Another bird of the night that people fear is Ululu, the (boobook?) owl, though there is some dispute as to whether it can be controlled by sorcerors. It is said to be a balauma (ghost or spirit) bird which can eat the bari or spirit of food (more accurately the chyme) in a person's stomach; it is therefore associated negatively with the threat of famine (see Young 1986). Yet another balauma bird of which Kalauna people are wary is Bwaiobwaio, the Papuan crow (though in some parts of Nidula it is a totem bird). The observation that it will eat anything, including human corpses, inclines people to shun it. There is at least one avian phantom: Owa, which is said to be "like a bird", though it more properly belongs in the class of balauma or spirit beings. The Owa's lower half resembles that of an owl, its top half that of a man. It lives in the bush and has a baby's pitiful cry. It is said that if a hunter sleeps alone in the bush after cooking and eating his game, the Owa will be attracted by the aroma and will try to eat him.

THE LORE OF BIRDS

All the birds for which adages and sayings have been coined are too numerous to mention here. They include Kaneala (green parrot), Kwaite (red parrot), Kwaiwoyala and other lories, noisy birds which "steal" bananas and other tree crops; they include Kabwakulo and Maibwana (swallows), whose call is a signal to prepare the yams for planting; they include birds like the jaunty and "stylish" Seseko (wagtail) which gives its name to a traditional dance form; and they include Dakedake (metallic starling), whose shrill clamour men liken to the excited gossip of women at a food exchange: "vavine wowone dakedake" (see Young 1971:211). I give one more example. Maiyela (tern) is seen as a landless wanderer, and its name can be used to insult those with dubious land rights. A wife who wishes to divorce an uxorilocal husband might provoke him by saying.
"Kulua maiyela buyatahotahona", which can be glossed "Your hair is shitty like the tern". This rather surprising association is based on the observation that terns are often to be seen sitting on flotsam.

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This brief survey of a range of Goodenough birds concluded, I return to the biggest and most important bird of all: the sea eagle. The following description of Manubutu was published in a Summer Institute of Linguistics collection of texts in the Iduna language of northern Goodenough – to which Kalauna’s dialect belongs (Huckett and Lucht 1976:86-7). The editors identify Manubutu as the wedge-tailed eagle, but according to most ornithological authorities (Mayr, Rand and Gilliard) this bird is not found in the D’Entrecasteaux, and almost certainly Manubutu is in fact the white-bellied sea eagle. (Jenness and Ballantyne had also incorrectly identified Manubutu as the white-headed osprey [1920:159 and 1928:248].) The English translation of the text follows closely that of the editors, but I have substituted "Manubutu" for "wedge-tailed eagle" and inserted a few of the vernacular terms to recapture the more homely style and anthropocentric imagery of the original. I should add that Lawrence Yaubihi, the author of this text, was for many years a government interpreter and subsequently an elected Member of the Milne Bay Provincial Government for which he served as Speaker during the early eighties.

**MANUBUTU**

"The behaviour [dewa = custom, habit] of Manubutu is like that of people, but as for its appearance it is white flecked with brown. It has big legs, very long claws and a pointed beak. Its wings are long with huge feathers. If we see one in the distance it looks dark brown.

"Now concerning its mating habits [dewa nagi = marriage custom], the male Manubutu does not go around with the female [vavinena = his wife] but goes off on his own. After he has mated with the female [vavinena = his wife] and she is ready to lay an egg, he will begin to work for her and to look for somewhere for her to lay an egg. He always makes a nest like a large platform in one of the big trees, placing the sticks criss-cross one on top of the other. He builds nests in big trees like yabalava, ilimo, tawana, or kikiyawa.

“When he has finished his work, the female [ama] lays her egg. Then the male [halo] begins to sit on the egg. As for the female she is the one who fetches food. Manubutu does not want to spoil its young [natuna = child], because its offspring is its heir/replacement and acts just like a man in continually thinking about food for his child.

“As for its food, it always eats the best, young pigs, possums, bats, eels and large fish. It swoops down on these animals and eats them or the female [vavinena = his wife] catches them and feeds the male. When the egg hatches, then the male [kaliva = man] also begins to look for food for the young bird.

“But the male is badly behaved because if he loses his prey, a fish or a possum or whatever, then he sulks [gina’ulo] and does not go on flying around. He just stays sitting and you can go and kill him."

Two principal qualities are stressed in this account: nurturing and predation. In the exaggerated discourse of myth Manubutu thus becomes a super-nurturer and a super-killer, somewhat contradictory attributes. Manubutu is also observed to be monogamous (and is the only bird in the Nidula bestiary which is described as having a "wife"). Concerning its "bad habit" of taking umbrage when it loses its prey, "sulks" is too weak a translation for gina’ulo, which means "suicidal". In Kalauna dialect one would say unawe’ewe: the self-destructive resentment which motivates so many mythical heroes and their human emulators (see Young 1983a: Ch.3 for the paradigmatic case of Honoyeta).

The following Kalauna folktale (recorded from Daudia of Kalauna) illustrates both the nurturant and the suicidal Manubutu.

**NATUA’EDANA (The Orphan)**

A young orphan is being looked after by his dead father’s kinsmen, but they do not feed him well and he searches the seashore for shellfish. One day he finds a large fish with the eyes pecked out; he hurriedly cooks and eats it. Next day he finds another in the same spot, then another and another, always with the eyes missing. The fish had been caught by Manubutu, who discards the fish after eating only the eyes. Manubutu sees the boy picking up his rubbish, and asks him why. Then he picks up the boy in his claws and carries him to his nest high in a tree. "O, perhaps you are going to eat me, Grandfather?" says the boy. "No, I am a good man," replies Manubutu. He fetches him fresh fish to eat and shelters him with his outspread wings. The boy requests more and more things for his human comfort: firestones, cooking pot, firewood, sleeping mat .. Manubutu obligingly steals them from a nearby village. When the boy declares he is tired of eating fish Manubutu brings him yam, taro, bananas, coconuts and sugarcane, and later pork, cuscus and other game. The boy grows up, unsatiety fed by the eagle who indulges the boy’s every whim. But finally the boy wants to play with the children of the village, and asks for a rope so that he can descend from the nest. Then he sends his “grandfather” further and further
afield to fetch bigger and better fish, and with each longer absence the boy prepares for his final departure. At length the boy sends Manubutu to Muyuwa (northern Massim) and when he returns it is to an empty nest. Disconsolate, Manubutu searches for the boy. After many days he spies him and lands on the path in front of him. "O my grandfather!" says the boy. "No, if I'm your grandfather you wouldn't have run away." And Manubutu tells him to gather firewood for a large fire so that he may warm himself. When the huge fire is blazing the bird flies above it then plunges into the flames. "O my grandfather!" cries the boy. "Oh my grandson!" cries the bird. "I fed you. I was good to you. You deceived me and ran away from me. I am resentful (unuwewe). I will burn." The fire kills him and the boy weeps bitterly.

This rather stark family drama of selfless fostering, perceived ingratitude and suicidal resentment shows Manubutu in the same light as Lawrence Yaubihi's natural history notes: as a bird of strong nurturing instincts but with a strong susceptibility to slight and umbrage.

The most important myth of Manubutu greatly overshadows this one, though as we shall see a neat thematic inversion is involved: the "sons" vengefully slay the "bad father-figure", while in the previous one the "good father-figure" resentfully kills himself to punish the "son" with guilty remorse (see Young 1983a:90). The Manubutu myth provides several Kalauna sub-clans with important secret charters for war magic or storm magic (sections which are omitted in any public narration of the myth), but it is also the most popular and best known story in the local folklore. It has a simple, straightforward plot - the slaying of a man-eating monster by two brave young heroes - as warming as any romance in which good conquers evil.

A measure of any story's popularity is the extent to which it is known by children. In 1973, with the cooperation of the European headmaster (who knew nothing of such myths), I set a coloured-drawing competition for the three grades of a local primary "T" school. I asked the children, whose ages ranged from 9 to 14, to draw anything they liked from any of the "old stories" they had heard from their elders, and I offered a dozen cash prizes as incentive to do their best. The results were surprising for a number of reasons, though here I mention only two. Of the 64 entries, only nine were from girls, though the sex ratio of the school only slightly favoured boys. I could only infer that girls were reluctant to compete, either with one another or with boys. Of the subject matter of the 64 entries, the Manubutu story accounted for no fewer than 35 - well over half. This was so many that I had to suspect teacher-influence (denied, however) or mass mutual copying by the children (quite a few drawings were imitative of one another); but the point remains valid that Manubutu was more accessible and more appealing than any other story. Of the remaining 29 entries, ten other myths or folktales were depicted, seven of them depicting bird heroes.

The number of Manubutu entries in this competition was testimony not just to the "popularity" of the tale but also its imaginative appeal to young minds. This may well be due to its powerful Oedipal theme (viz. an absent father, sons reared by their mother, a family under massive external threat by a cannibal giant, whom the boys - as their first, constitutive task of maturity - go forth and kill, thereby reuniting their people). I might note that relatively fewer girls (3 out of 9) chose to deal with this subject compared to boys (33 out of 55).

Many versions have been recorded on Goodenough Island, two by Jenness and Ballantyne (1920:158-9; 1928:51-83), and about ten by Maribelle de Vera and myself. The one I give here is a composite and abbreviated version (though a few discrepant versions resist inclusion).

**MANUBUTU, THE MYTH**

From his tree-house on the hill behind Bolobolu [on the east coast of Goodenough] Manubutu has been catching and eating all the people. So the survivors decide to load their canoes and flee to Fergusson Island. One pregnant woman and one old woman [in some versions an old man] are left behind, there being no more room aboard the canoes. They take refuge in a cave where the younger woman gives birth to twin boys [variously called *Kewala* and *Wiwia* (two kinds of paroquet), *Babisinata* and *Babisinanageya* ("Below Ground" and "Above Ground"), *Tomoweinagona* and *Kwamanena* ("First Born" and "Second Born").

While the mother makes gardens the old woman looks after the children and makes them grow up magically fast. When they are fullgrown they ask why they need to whisper all the time, and where all the other people have gone. Their mother explains that they have fled from Manubutu [often euphemistically referred to as *Itaita*, "The Seeing One"]. She warns them not to venture far from the cave. Their grandmother [as the old woman is now called] secretly teaches them spear-fighting magic, and provides them with an armory of different kinds of spears magically shaken from a black palm tree. One day the boys venture out in search of Manubutu, taking their dog Kafuyoi and their bundles of spears. They paddle along the coast to Bolobolu and, depositing spears at intervals along the way, climb the hill to where the giant bird is sleeping in his tree-house. They throw stones to waken him. A branch breaks. "It must be the wind," says Manubutu, and goes back to sleep. When the boys have all but stripped his tree of branches, he finally awakens and sees them. "Who are you? I thought I had eaten everyone!" And he swoops down to kill them. The boys flee for the beach, throwing spears at him as
they run. They jump into their canoe, paddle out and overturn it. They hide under the canoe while Manubutu digs his claws into the bottom, trying to get at them. The boys jab their spears through a hole and finally kill the monster. He lies inert on the beach but the boys are afraid to approach. They send their dog to fetch Manubutu's heart, telling him to enter the mouth, go down through the body and out of the rectum, then back again to the mouth, and on his return to pick up the heart. Back at the cave the two women are overjoyed to see the dancing of the cordylines on their stone sitting circle — a sign that the children are safe and that their mission has been accomplished. The boys take the heart, place it on a small raft with a miniature sail, and push it out to sea. [In some versions the women and boys eat Manubutu's body at this point.] On Ferguson Island, their father dreams of something drifting on the waves: he goes down to the beach at dawn and finds the raft. "This must be Manubutu's heart," he tells the people. "Our enemy is dead." They propose to return home, but prudently decide to wait a little longer.

Meanwhile the old woman tells her grandsons that there is another, greater threat: Manubutu's wife Vinetauna ["Woman Herself"], who is even bigger and stronger than her husband. Armed with more spears the boys set off again, and as before they place their spears in caches along the route. This time they climb a tree and watch Vinetauna sweeping her hamlet. They throw nuts to catch her attention, but she thinks it is the wind. Finally, she looks up and sees them. "So it was you two who killed my husband!" She declares that she will avenge him. She dons a named "fighting skirt", dances, removes the skirt, tries another, then another. The ground trembles as her rage increases with each new skirt, each new dance. At length the boys flee down the hill with Vinetauna in pursuit. They hurl spears at her as they go, but she shakes them off unharmed. On the beach they are left with a single spear, a double-pronged spear of special virtue. Vinetauna is about to pounce. The boys bicker over who should throw the last spear. The "elder" twin claims precedence and hurls it at point-blank range into Vinetauna's eyes. She falls dead.

Again the boys warily send their dog to enter, emerge, and re-enter Vinetauna's body for the heart. Again they place it on a raft and cast it adrift for their father to find next morning. This time all the people return, wondering who has delivered them from their enemies. The father is astonished to see his sons for the first time, already full-grown heroes. The people make them their chiefs.

A variety of elaborations and embroidered details as well as some additions to the basic plot complicate the myth. For example, in Kalauna (where the myth gives charter to a clan's spear-fighting magic) the story continues with the people feasting upon Manubutu's heart, an act which causes groups to speak different dialects, so that they disperse to different parts of the island or elsewhere in the D'Entrecasteaux. The story can then be joined to another one concerning Kafuyoi the dog. The dispersal of the people leads to the loss of fire, and Kafuyoi is sent to find an old woman on Fergusson who is the only source. She relinquishes it only after a long appeal. Kafuyoi finally succeeds by tying it to his tail which he holds above water as he swims. In another variant, Kafuyoi becomes a rogue killer dog, made vicious by having tasted the blood of Manubutu and his wife. He is still associated with the powers of the storm. Yet in the following version these powers are the prerogative of the heroes.

Again, a more esoteric version of Manubutu has Vinetauna toppling over to form part of the symbolic geography of the island, her bent legs (more human than birdlike!) forming the shoreline of Mud Bay in the southeast, and her massive body forming the 5,000 feet mountain of Yobia. Yet again, in the Bwaidoka area (which makes special and circumstantially detailed claims to be the home of the mother and her sons) there are huge boulders in the hamlet of Yeyaina which are said to be the petrified twins and their canoe (Jenness and Ballantyne allude to these stones [1920:158-9]).

Yet another version purports to be a naineya myth which encodes the magical incantations for wind, thunder, lightning and torrential rain. The Kalauna sub-clan which claims this magic refers to the wind it can summon by the "secret" name of Manubutu. In many cultures, including those of Europe, the eagle is associated with the powers of the storm. Yet in the following version these powers are the prerogative of the heroes.

Manubutu was eating the people but instead of fleeing to a neighbouring island, Nibita folk (the ancestors of Kalauna and Wailolo) literally went underground (hence their name, for nibita is a crab which buries itself in the sand to escape predators). According to this version, Manubutu's slayers are the two boys from the north of the island who are remarkable for their powers over the skies, thunder and lightning. They have only to raise their left arms and lightning strikes. So disconcerting is this faculty that their mother binds their left arms to their bodies while they sleep. Thus disarmed, so to speak, they paddle their canoe to Bolubolu, where they hide beneath it while Manubutu tries to kill them. Suddenly, they cut their left arms free and smite the monster with thunder and lightning. They use the right wing of Manubutu as a sail for their canoe. The origin of pottery making in the northern villages is also explained by this version.

* * *
As we have just seen, the “core” version of Manubutu is readily swamped by bewildering variations and complicated by a medley of themes. This does not bode well for the success of interpretative efforts. Lawrence Yaubihi’s father told him that the myth of Manubutu commemorated an actual event near Bolubolu, a fight to the death between two warring sides. Manubutu people (who really did decimate local populations, causing them to seek refuge on other islands) were attacked by two related groups (with parrot totems) who came to Nidula from “Baniara” (i.e. the mainland). The invaders vanquished the Manubutu people and recalled the refugees. This prehistorical interpretation of the myth, turning it thereby into a legend, might be plausible but for the stubborn fact that just about every village in the Massim and beyond has a similar story. Although it is not impossible that the basic plot mistily commemorates the defeat and extermination of one group of people by another, there are many difficulties - logical, methodological and evidential - in testing the theory.

Indeed, this genre of myth is so geographically widespread, that it is something of an embarrassment to anthropologists who cannot hope to place upon it too many interpretations of a culturally specific nature. The rule-of-thumb must apply that the more ubiquitous the myth the less particular the interpretations it will bear. This must apply to parochial “social structural” readings as well as to local quasi-historical readings.

A search through the folklore archives of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies by Chakravarti (1974) yielded 73 versions of the “ogre-killing child” story (as he called it). A large majority of them (47) were from eastern Papua, though the Massim is served by a greater variety of monsters than Chakravarti’s distribution map indicates. In fact all the ones he lists are represented: pig, eagle, sea monster, snake, and giant (i.e. human ogre); all, that is, except cassowary, which occurs only in ogre-killing myths from the Highlands (the bird itself is not found in the islands of the Massim). Venturing beyond Papua New Guinea, the picture becomes even more complicated, for the basic myth plot (of cannibal-ogre(s) killed by young boy(s) whose mother was deserted by her fleeing people) is found throughout Oceania and Indonesia (Lessa 1961) and as far afield as South America, where among the Apinaye the man-eaters who persecute the Indians are also eagles (Lévi-Strauss 1973:119ff).

In a couple of recent articles I analysed the Nidula myth of Matabawe, a giant serpent who, in exchange for pots of food, provided his human mother with valuable tusks (the circular boar’s tusks – doga – which used to circulate in Kula). This serpent was arguably a symbolic “pig” too, and I explored the spiralling transformations (snake-man-pig-man-snake) by which his Snark-like name (mwata = snake, bawe = pig) might make the identification of python with pig plausible in Nidula thought (Young 1984; also 1987). The sea eagle (Manubutu, Magisubu, Manubada, etc.) has been subjected to similar Lewis Carroll-esque manipulations in the deft hands of Massim mythologers, and his association with the snake is as irresistible as Matabawe’s was with the pig.

For the remainder of this paper I shall indicate briefly how Manubutu becomes transformed once we look beyond Nidula. An adequate structural analysis would be far beyond the scope of this essay, since it would require the comparison of hundreds of other Massim myths. I restrict myself to a couple of observations, for each island area, on the variable character of the monster and of the heroes who kill it (see Appendix for a tabular summary).

A MEDLEY OF MONSTERS: FROM MANUBUTU TO MATABAWE

In the Trobriands, the ogre is Dokonikan ("Man-eater") and the human hero Tudava (Malinowski 1927:111-14). In the Dobu area of Fergusson Island the man-eater is Tokedokeket and the hero a large dog, Weniogwegwe, whose fate is that of Nidula's Kafuyoi (Fortune 1963:270-1). On Duau (Normanby Island) there are monsters in triplicate: Tokedokeketai (a cannibal ogre), Bawegaragara ("Grunting Pig"), and a giant octopus. A four-eyed hero Matakapotaitai, a boy, kills each in turn, helped by a dog – and in some versions Magisubu, the sea eagle. At the story’s end this hero joins his mother on the seabed (Rôheim 1950:225-6). In a lengthy version from northeast Normanby the abandoned woman also gives birth to eagle and dog, thereby quite explicitly making them younger brothers of the four-eyed hero (Thune 1980:400-11). As in some Goodenough versions, this hero commands the magic of thunder and lightning.

The fate of the sea eagle in this Duau version deserves mention. When the son retreats to the seabed with his mother he commands his brother Magisubu to go to Sanaroa Point, and to sink any canoes that try to round it. But one day a man hides beneath his outrigger and when Magisubu sweeps down the man stabs him in the belly (as in so many Goodenough versions of Manubutu). The wounded bird flies south, causing thorny sago to grow wherever his blood falls to earth. At Bwasilaki (an island near the mouth of Milne Bay) he folded his wings, and thorn-less sago grows there. Then he flew on to the Louisiades, to Rossel Island and Sabarl, where he died. Thus, the giant sea-eagle of Nidula switches role from man-eating monster to hero’s younger brother in the Duau versions. In myth as in life, it seems, one group’s hero is another group’s monster.

In the Bwanabwana area of the southwest Massim the hero is Manukapwataita (the manu- prefix means “bird”, whereas the mata- prefix of the Duau name means “eye”). He kills two monsters: Grunting Pig and
Magisubu, the latter by the upturned-canoe trick. His mother bids him make a boat using the pig’s back for a hull, a rib for a mast and the eagle’s wing for a sail. The people return from Duau whence they had fled, and give the hero wives from each canoe (Macintyre 1983). From Bartle Bay on the northeast coast of the mainland two versions have been published (Seligman 1910:414-15; Ker 1910:121-7), both of which feature a human hero pitted against a giant pig. In Sabarl Island in the Louisiades (southeast Massim) the ogre is Katutubwai, who is partial to eating children, though in another version he is none other than the Grunting Pig of Duau and Bwanabwana (Battaglia 1990:205-9). Unique in the genre is the hero – or rather heroine – for the abandoned woman in Sabarl gives birth to a daughter: she despatches the monster with her axe after he has swallowed her and passed her through his anus unscathed.

In the Grunting Pig version from Sabarl there are two other monsters: a mangrove crab, and a sea eagle. The abandoned woman is protected by a reef heron who hides her under his wing before finding a home for her in a hollow tree. Her son kills the three monsters, drowning the sea eagle by the usual hole-in-an-overtumed-canoe trick.

On nearby Sudest (Tagula) the characters are scrambled yet again. The terrorising monster is a gigantic snake, and the hero a sea eagle. He flies around with the snake in his claws until it dies and rots. Parts of the flesh fall and become the islands of the northern Massim; the bones fall and become Sabarl. The bird then goes to Rossel Island to fight a giant octopus, but the sea-creature wins by drowning the eagle. Its feathers float ashore and become small birds who return to the human mother; she looks at them and says, “You are not my son”. She pours cooking water on them which gives them different colours, then she dies of sorrow (Battaglia 1990:202).

A myth from Misima Island combines themes familiar to Goodenough mythology. A pregnant woman is washed out to sea in a flash flood (the fate of Kiwiwiwole’s mother). She gives birth to an eagle on a deserted island. The bird flies to Misima and fetches his mother a house, complete with fire, pot and water (reminiscent of the Orphan tale from Kalauna). Then he kills the giant snake on Misima, and all the other birds help to scatter the pieces of its body, which form the islands of the Calvados Chain. The eagle then goes back to Rossel and tackles the giant octopus, but it drags the hero into the deep and drowns him. His feathers float back to the mother, who places them in a wooden dish with fresh water and “hey grow into small birds (Battaglia 1990:202-3).

These two stories from the Louisiades feature a benign hero (a bird), who defeats a condign monster (a snake), but is himself defeated by a third monster (an octopus). The dead snake’s body makes islands, and the dead bird’s feathers generate small birds. The mother’s role seems to be crucial in both myths, but fatherhood is ambiguous or unimportant.

These stories depart from the strict canon of the ogre-killing genre as defined by Chakravarti (1974:13), so it is now time to close the Louisiades-Goodenough connection. The commonest myth on Sudest is about a giant snake who came from Goodenough Island and gives shell money to his human “mother” in exchange for food; but the ungrateful people of Sudest chased it away to Rossel Island (Lepowsky 1983:490-1). The same myth is indeed found in Nidula (analysed in detail in Young 1984), and it is usually to Sudest or Rossel that Matabawe resentfully retires (taking all the shell-wealth with him) after being insulted by his younger (human) brother. Nowadays there is no direct trading or communication link between Goodenough and Sudest, and almost the full length of the Massim lies between them; these islands share only the common substratum of Austronesian “Massim” culture, and possibly the only thing they have in common is this complementary snake-myth.

Another variant of this myth from Sudest has mwa (“Fat”), the serpent, resentfully seeking refuge on Rossel after the quarrel with his young brother, only to meet greater persecution. “There goes our meat!” say the Rossel men. They did not understand his speech as he stood there shaking his head, the great head decorated with shell valuables. They attacked him and cut him into many pieces. That night the pieces of Mwa joined together again and he killed the people who had tried to eat him.

Let us now return to our beginning in Goodenough, tumbling as in the game of Snakes and Ladders along the sinuous body of the last and longest serpent. Mwa’s trail leads back to Mwatakeiwa in Duau (see Thune 1980:411-13; Young 1987:236), To’une une in Molima (Chowning 1983; Young 1987:245), and finally to Matabawe in Bwaidoka, where Jenness and Ballantyne (1928:47-9) recorded the following myth.

MOTA KAKAWE (The Snake and the Cockatoo)
A serpent was eating all the people. They fled, leaving a woman behind. She hid in a hollow tree and gave birth to Cockatoo. He grew up and his mother told him about the snake. Cockatoo flew to a tree and shrieked loudly, attracting the snake. The snake asked where he came from. Cockatoo lied, but flew in that direction. That night the snake searched for him in vain. Next day Cockatoo told the snake he came from a different place, but though he flew in that direction the snake could not find him. Each day, a different place and a different direction. Finally, Cockatoo told the snake his home was in the sky. “Fly up then, and let me see you,” said the snake. The bird climbed. That night the snake reared up to
look for him and Cockatoo swooped and cut the snake in two. He took the snake’s genital covering [sic], its heart and its hair [sic], and placed the snake’s body in a canoe and set it adrift. One of the men who had left the island had a dream; he went to the beach and found the canoe. He told the people and they cooked and ate the snake’s body. Then they all returned to their homes and praised the Cockatoo highly for ridding them of the man-eating snake.

Another version, recorded in Kalauna in 1973, conflates the motifs of several other Nidula myths while remaining faithful to the Chakravarti canon.

MATABAWE
Matabawe the giant serpent lived on the mainland in a longhouse formed by 10 houses laid end to end. He was eating all the people so they fled, leaving behind the pregnant widow of one of his victims. The woman lived in a cave with an old woman, and she soon gave birth to Cockatoo. When he grew up his mother warned him of “Itaita”, but the bird disobeyed her and flew to the point to look for Matabawe’s house. He landed nearby in a laiwai tree and dropped fruit to awaken the snake. “Who are you?” “I am Cockatoo and I come from heaven.” He flew high into the air as the snake reared up to catch him. Then the hero dived and pierced the snake’s belly, cutting him open from navel to neck. As he died, Matabawe told Cockatoo to bring all the people back, and to bury him so that different kinds of sugarcane might grow from his body. Cockatoo cut off the monster’s head and took it to his mother. She sent him to her brother to tell him that Matabawe is now dead and that everyone can return.

The ubiquity of the ogre-killing myth means it is effectively homeless, beset by contradictions as each and every community tries to domesticate it and claim it as its own. If we cannot yet specify the transformation rule according to which eagle, human ogre, pig, snake, and octopus may be substituted in the role of man-eating monster, we can at least note that they form a vertical series, from Above to Below. They correspond respectively to sky, land, subterranean and submarine domains. The Duau versions are remarkable for their spread over three domains, the Goodenough versions for their concern only with the domain of the skies (for even the serpent Matabawe simulates Manubutu’s avian role by rearing into the air). What this might mean will have to await an exhaustive structural analysis of the whole corpus of Massim mythology. At this juncture the truly protean character of the monster (who changes form between and not within stories) resists effective analysis.

* * *

BULUWOI: AN EPITAPH
As I was completing this paper I received news of Ralph Bulmer’s untimely death. An hour earlier I had watched a large magpie standing sentinel on the branch of a tree outside my study window, and — my head still full of New Guinea birds — I was reminded of the black butcherbird, Buluwoi. For Nidula people it is a bird of ill-omen, one that heralds a death with its charcoal garb and melodious lament. I realised that I had avoided mention of Buluwoi in this essay, perhaps from some preconscious superstition attending the sad circumstances of my writing. Now, with heavy heart, I can invoke it. The Buluwoi birds of New Guinea are surely crying now, calling their doleful message from valley to valley: the great bird-man of Kalam country is dead.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

TABULAR SUMMARY OF MASSIM MONSTER-KILLING MYTHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISLAND</th>
<th>CANNIBAL MONSTER</th>
<th>MOTHER</th>
<th>HERO(ES)</th>
<th>HERO’S OUTCOME</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Ogre</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>marries MBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobu</td>
<td>Ogre</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>marries woman, - goes wild</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(&amp; wife)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nidula</td>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>with GM</td>
<td>2 Boys (parrots)</td>
<td>made chiefs, - goes wild</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duau</td>
<td>Ogre</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>kills MBs &amp; joins M</td>
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<td>Pig</td>
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<td>Pig</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>marries 2 wives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wamira</td>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabarl</td>
<td>Ogre</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td>Nidula</td>
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<td>with GM</td>
<td>Cockatoo</td>
<td>grows sugarcane</td>
</tr>
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