

(written under the pen name M Lovori).

As a second-generation PNG literary artist, I could ask for nothing better than to read a book that celebrates the artistic, literary, and performative arts of Papua New Guinea. Even more, this book is from the person who has had everything to do with the emergence and recognition of these art forms outside the country. The memoir, at least for me, serves as the link between the pre-independence era of literary and artistic culture and the present. I find the memoir written with passion and honesty; and, as expected, it is a book rich with vivid recollection and dedication to the arts, artists, writers, and people of Papua New Guinea. It gives these pioneer artists the place they deserve in PNG history. Most important of all is the generosity and good will of Ulli and Georgina Beier in promoting PNG arts and culture. We couldn't ask for more, could we, than such a splendid book, which is also clearly written and contains memorable photographs and other images—other signatures of the Beiers' influence.

Thank you, Ulli and Georgina Beier, for leaving us a legacy that has transformed us and continues to be the yardstick that we measure against and build on in our continued attempts to develop our own artistic and literary arts, from that time till now.

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*Savannah Flames: Papua New Guinean Journal of Literature, Language and Culture*, Volume 5, edited by Steven Edmund Winduo. National Capital District, PNG: Melanesian and Pacific Studies (MAPS), University of Papua New Guinea, 2004. ISSN 1561-7807; ii + 137 pages. Annual subscription K25.00 (individual), K30.00 (institutional).

The beautiful cover of *Savannah Flames* anticipates the variety of offerings inside. The journal includes a range of prose and poetry, interviews and reviews, creative and critical work. For me, however, the distinctions between the genres blur; I see poetry in the prose and stories in the poetry. Regis Stella admits in the interview with Aundo Aitau that the major influence on his writing was “listening to myths, legends, stories, songs, and other traditional aspects of culture” (7). This ancient method of enculturation continues to inspire storytellers from our region, and much of the creative writing in this collection retains that oral flow and flavor.

Vincent Warakai's critical essay on Sia Figiel's work is a provocative foray into the deliberately outrageous sexual politics of the Samoan author, and refers to the Margaret Mead–Derek Freeman controversy, adding to a “story” started over a hundred years ago.

The short prose pieces in the collection reveal very different worlds for readers who reside outside of Papua New Guinea, reminding us that the home of *Savannah Flames* is a place of myriad communities: linguistic, social, cultural, geographical, artistic,

and political. Especially different is the acceptance of the unknowable, the spiritual, the mystical, and the unexplained; the world is not divided into the living and the dead, the present and the past, the real and the imagined or dreamed. In many of the stories it is accepted that there are different planes, different realities, and there can be movement between them.

In "The Child" by Sandon P Kikala, we meet Nepara, a spirit child who is discovered by the wayside. At first, the villagers want the finder "to throw the child away" (100), but they later accept him, until a woman goes missing. Nepara is blamed for her disappearance and the men of the village decide to kill him. Before this can happen, though, the child is spirited away by forces unseen; he departs just as mysteriously as he arrives. This story is told as matter-of-fact, as if suddenly finding a child and just as suddenly having it disappear, although not an everyday occurrence, is part of life. The mysterious and unusual are accepted, though not always to be trusted.

"Lost at Sea" by Yana Elius tells the story of survival at sea, reminding us of the many remarkable stories from a people who know the sea intimately and travel over it as most of us travel across the land. We are given precise dates and times, exact distances, weights, horsepower, and ages of the children on the boat. There is a sense of verisimilitude, heightening the reality, but tight control is maintained on the emotions of the characters and the readers. The story reads like a report, a journalistic piece. Again, as in the previous story, occurrences similar to this happen on a

regular basis; they are noteworthy but not exceptional.

"Talangat" by Denise Lokinap is about a university graduate, Tallie, who is shocked and deeply hurt by her lover's rejection when he is informed of her pregnancy. Although forced to give up the life she had worked so hard to attain, like many women before her, Tallie learns that becoming a mother does not mean the end of the world. Estalla Cheung's "Freedom before Dawn," on the other hand, shows that some men are turning their backs on the traditional custom of arranged marriage. The husband chosen for Tingsoi gives her the gift of freedom, enabling her to pursue studies at university.

Some of the poetry in the anthology is interesting and evocative, but some poems are difficult to connect with. The effect, at times, is of writers trying too hard to produce "poetry," rather than truthfully expressing an emotion or describing a scene. Many of the poems, although personal, lack intimacy. There is a sense, too, that the poets are trying to disconnect from their roots and base their poems in cultures only read or heard about but not experienced. In Reinee Sobajana's poem, for example, we are asked to accept a totally Western idea of a dream girl: "I see an angel appear / In the whitest of white / And brightest of bright. / Hair of perfect gold / . . . Eyes in the shade of blue sky / . . . A nose so cute" (104).

I enjoyed Leah Moide's "Our Past" and Paschal Waisi's "A Politician's Necktie." These poems ring true, to me at least, as political voices that understand and appreciate the value of what has been lost.

As with any writing, it is difficult to convey through words on a page the sound of language, the rhythms and cadence, the tone and inflections, the way words take on deeper, more profound meaning through body language and facial expressions, and in some cases, the mispronunciation of English words. What is obvious in some of the poems is the struggle the poets have with the English language, clearly not their first: "Lest a despise in the eyes of men" (90) or "There's a piece of cue to wisdom" (90) and "On walls and dust engaged shop windows" (54). I am puzzled by Aigilo's poem "Memorial Park" in which a graveyard, complete with an archangel, moss-covered wrought iron, and perhaps, strangest of all, "griffins" (56) appear. This is a cemetery located in northern climes, cold, damp, and grey, not in a lush, tropical landscape.

There are no poems in Tok Pisin, which, in my opinion, is a shame and a serious omission. Tok Pisin is such a rich and expressive language, which has grown out of Papua New Guinea. It is the lingua franca of a people who have not only created a way of communicating with each other for practical reasons but have also invented a completely new and unique way of expression.

Most of the writers convey what it is to be New Guinean, to be part of a community that includes those who remain in the village and those who have moved into the towns and entered Western institutions of learning, politics, and business. Life is varied and complex, as the cover suggests. *Savannah Flames* is a celebration of this community as much as

it is an offering of critical and creative writing. Perhaps even more importantly, as Regis Stella states, there is a desperate need "for indigenous people in the Pacific to study and read works by Papua New Guinean writers, by Pacific writers, instead of reading works by expatriate writers" (15). Perhaps the most important function of the journal is that it provides the opportunity and the space for Papua New Guinean writers and academics to publish their work.

Steven Winduo is widely acknowledged as an important and influential poet and scholar in the region and in the ten years of editing *Savannah Flames* he has encouraged and promoted writing from one of the world's most richly diverse countries. The journal also introduces the next generation of writers, allowing them to share their talents, ideas, and dreams, all of which are unique in the world.

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*Expressive Genres and Historical Change: Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Taiwan*, edited by Pamela J Stewart and Andrew Strathern. Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific Series. Aldershot, Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2005. ISBN 0-7546-4418-9; xvi + 268 pages, tables, photographs, appendixes, notes, bibliographies, index. £50.00; US\$89.95.

This volume started out under the title "Worlds of Song." Though this was subsequently widened to embrace additional aesthetic genres and