

Overall this is an impressive book. Neither easy to read, nor without shortcomings, the sheer cumulative impact of Douglas's struggles to achieve an intellectual perspective she respects and to wrest information from her nineteenth-century documents amounts to an epic battle in its own right. It is only regrettable that the reader is launched into the midst of these battles, to suffer their contusioning tangle of bodies and barbs, rather than being kept at a readerly perspective where bold outlines combine to narrate events. Finally, it remains unclear whether Douglas believes no such broad outlines are defensible (her antirealist position) or if she has simply not yet deigned to describe them.

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*Gutsini Posa* (Rough seas), by Regis Stella. Suva: Mana Publications, 1999. ISBN 982-02-0145-4; 153 pages. Paper, US\$15. Available from Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva.

I found myself thinking about Penagi, the protagonist of Regis Stella's *Gutsini Posa* (Rough seas), as a cross between a Joycean breed of Bloom and Camus's *Messault*, the two unlikely friends of western literature. Penagi reconciles the difference between idealism and practice when he takes to the street and participates in the demonstration like any good Sartrean individual who believes in a humane society. Penagi fulfills the function crafted by the author of having the idealists participate in a collec-

tive struggle, even if at a cost. In the process of achieving reconciliation of the conflicting self between idealism and practice, Penagi must pass through a series of denials, sacrifices, and transformations. In some sense Stella's extended metaphor is that literature too must be transformed from an idealist and trivial pursuit to one that is political in order to intervene in the national crisis and identity questions.

Far from its existentialist value, *Gutsini Posa* is a novel that has two achievements: First, it is an important literary representation of the struggle of the Bougainville people to come to terms with a crisis that has completely devastated their moral and physical strength. The crippling condition of the society is a sadness that cannot be washed away by tears or with organized guerrilla resistance, but with strategic negotiations. Rape, senseless killing, and torture are not confrontations but the wounds of conflict in the lives of those who have to live through crisis: "None of you know how I feel, the anguish in my soul! How can I ever tell you the agony of my mind? Torogegai has been devastated. Your mates have destroyed villages, raped our women and massacred people. People talk about human rights violations—they happen continuously. Where is justice for my people? Laws define rights but do they also define justice?" (42).

Hope comes only with the reminder that divine intervention comes only after a people have proven that collectively their spirit has not been broken but is consolidated. It is precisely this that Stella represents by the use of a volcano metaphor, a force mightier than and devastating to both

the oppressed and the oppressor. The relationship between humans' ability to destroy themselves and yet also be destroyed by a greater force, in the form of natural disasters, is an inevitable reality that Stella impresses on the reader of *Gutsini Posa*.

Second, despite the differences among the characters of the book, they all have ideological strengths that keep them from fragmenting. Captain Gawi, the colonel of the Southern Command on Torogegai, has plotted a coup against the government. In his support for the resistance he recruits Jamila, a native daughter of Torogegai, in her own right boldly radical and dissenting. As Captain Gawi reminds Jamila and her response indicates, there is a deep-rooted sense of belonging to place that is seen as an ideology: "We are very proud of your success," the colonel continued. "I always believe that anyone whose umbilical cord is buried in this land has a moral duty towards the land and the people when threatened by an enemy. Always remember that every part of this soil is sacred in the eyes of our people. Every hill, valley, plain and grove has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days gone by. The very dust upon which we now stand responded lovingly to the footsteps of our forefathers" (68).

Jamila replies, "Colonel, I am a daughter of this land. This is the major reason why I have come back, to wash this land with my blood. I've been moved by the courage and perseverance of my people, especially women and children. The war is slaughtering innocents. This is genocide!" She stopped to control her emotions. "I volunteered to undergo com-

bat training because I couldn't stand reading and hearing about army atrocities committed on Torogegai. I couldn't tell you which was greater: my anger or my pity. On paper, my mission is to purge the country of corrupt leadership and government. My mission is to arrest the root cause of this war" (68-69).

An important inference made by Stella in *Gutsini Posa* is to highlight novelistic discourse enabling him, as author, to address a number of things. First, the heterogeneity in which the lives of Papua New Guineans are constructed allows dialogics to feature as a prominent factor in recognizing a common destiny. The destiny is freedom from all kinds of oppressive reality, be it state sponsored or epistemologically instituted. Second, in the fight to liberate oneself from the onslaught of negative influences one must be willing to insert oneself in the mental construct and structures of the oppressor. In *Gutsini Posa* we see this clearly represented by Captain Gawi and Jamila, who are willing to fight for a cause that they believe in, no matter where and how it is staged. These two characters are willing to forgo even personal relationships for the sake of a collective struggle. Jamila becomes the heroine of the resistance and Captain Gawi becomes the sacrificial lamb—an interplay of the ontological conclusions, realized only in the climax of the crisis. Perhaps also in that expression, peace comes at a price, attained through both strategic negotiations and armed resistance. It is a novel of hope within a society bent on destabilizing itself.

Stella's exploration of the theme of journeys is consistent with other

Papua New Guinean writing—journeys out of and return to the village, old ways and customs in both spiritual and physical terms. The factors that drive such peregrinations have to do with cultures and roots—the birth-place always remains the point of return. In *Gutsini Posa* both Penagi and Jamila must return in order for them to find each other, a strategic ploy suggested by the author. Strategic it is, because the reclaiming of what is lost is only possible when individuals pursue such commitments. Stella is perhaps suggesting that the only way to secure lost identity is to retrace the journey to the beginning, where it all began. Through retracing Stella also suggests that somewhere along the line there are intersections of the various discourses that structured the Papua New Guinean identity—if there is one.

I read *Gutsini Posa* as a metaphor of a society fragmented by its own internal conflicts and torn by its own differences in the use of economic resources, democratic governance, and social equality. It is a society in need of ideological repair insofar as nationalism has deteriorated into exaggerated sentiments and political fleeing by its constitutionally elected representatives. The metaphor of rough seas is to me a representation of the times of turmoil, conflict, and contradictions in a Pacific nation's status, where full-blown conflicts are the result of lack of consultation, consensus, and negotiations: "Every day you wait at the bus-stops; you walk the streets; you turn on the radio and television. The day-to-day realities of social injustices and moral decay are revealed. The gap between rich and poor is widening daily. Greed, dishon-

esty and hypocrisy by leaders are suffocating the nation. The ordinary people are neglected, marginalized by selfish government policies in which only a handful of people benefit" (94–95).

If *Gutsini Posa* is meant to represent the Bougainville crisis, it is only a fraction of the many issues Stella is aware of as a Papua New Guinean writer, literary scholar, and academic. If this book has anything to offer, it is in the precise moment of its publication, which I read as an intervention in the quiet moments of Papua New Guinean literature. Observers of Papua New Guinean writing may note that *Gutsini Posa's* publication marks the direction the Papua New Guinean novel is taking—a movement toward social criticism and evaluation of contemporary society. Likely, perhaps, is a movement toward making sense of modernity and its dominant presence in the lives of many Pacific peoples.

Stella's voice is stunning, yet controlled by the demands of the book to be readable and provocative. Though it is Stella's first novel, he secures a place in the literary culture of Papua New Guinea. Unlike the Papua New Guinean novels that preceded *Gutsini Posa*, this one, in my opinion, is remarkable for its creative as well as its critical characteristics. *Gutsini Posa* is for readers who graze the surface, as well as for those who probe for answers to questions that cannot be answered elsewhere. *Gutsini Posa* stands on its own as a fresh flame in the collective struggle of writers in Papua New Guinea. Not surprisingly, this is a work informed by successes and failures of earlier Papua New Guinean writing, though in no way

compromising Stella's originality and impeccable style. Stella is astute in suggesting that literary culture defines an imagined community, builds a nation state, and assaults threats and any forms of oppression. Without seeing its uniqueness in Papua New Guinean literary history, we are likely to miss the deep concerns alluded to by Stella or any Papua New Guinean writer, for that matter, on keeping the literary flame in Papua New Guinea alive.

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*Baby No-Eyes*, by Patricia Grace.  
 Auckland: Penguin Books, ISBN  
 0-14-027993-8, and Honolulu:  
 University of Hawai'i Press, ISBN  
 0-8248-2161-0, 1998. 294 pages.  
 Paper, US\$19.95.

This novel may bewilder, confuse, and perhaps even irritate some readers. Those familiar with Patricia Grace's previous two novels *Potiki* and *Cousins* will find *Baby No-Eyes* a very different and challenging work. On a first reading it is difficult to follow the narrative shifts, although the chapter headings are reliable guides. But, as one narrator reminds us, there are different ways of telling stories: "There's a way the older people have of telling a story, a way where the beginning is not the beginning, the end is not the end. It starts from a centre and moves away from there in such widening circles that you don't know how you will finally arrive at the point of understanding, which becomes itself another core, a new centre" (28). On a second

reading however, the reader, at least this reader, becomes a member of the *whanau*, extended family; the characters are familiar, their relationships, problems, secrets, idiosyncrasies, part of everyday life. It is like being welcomed onto a marae; we arrive as *manuhiri*, visitors, but after the *powhiri*, official welcome, and *hongi*, the mingling of breath, strangers become *tangatawhenua*, people of the land.

The prologue introduces the major characters through Tawera, talking from inside the womb. We experience Te Paania his mother, described as "the frog"; we hear of Glen, Tawera's absent and inconsequential father; meet Dave and Mahaki, the gay couple who protect and nurture the family; and welcome Kura the *kuia*, woman elder, who arrives to assist an impatient Tawera into the world. There are also hints of a presence, unnamed and unknown, the one character not so easily pinned down. *Baby No-Eyes* is deceased but highly animated and, as her name suggests, she has no eyes. (How she comes to be eyeless is a chilling account of an actual event.) The relationship between Tawera and his sister *Baby No-Eyes*, known as *Baby*, is the core of the novel and the most perverse in a story brimming with seven generations of relationships.

Of the thirty-seven chapters, nine are given to Kura, the *kuia* who recounts the terrible and wondrous past. Eight chapters give voice to Tawera, *teina*, younger sibling of *Baby No-Eyes*, gifted artist and future historian. He has the last word, talking to us from the end of the story looking backward into the future. Thir-