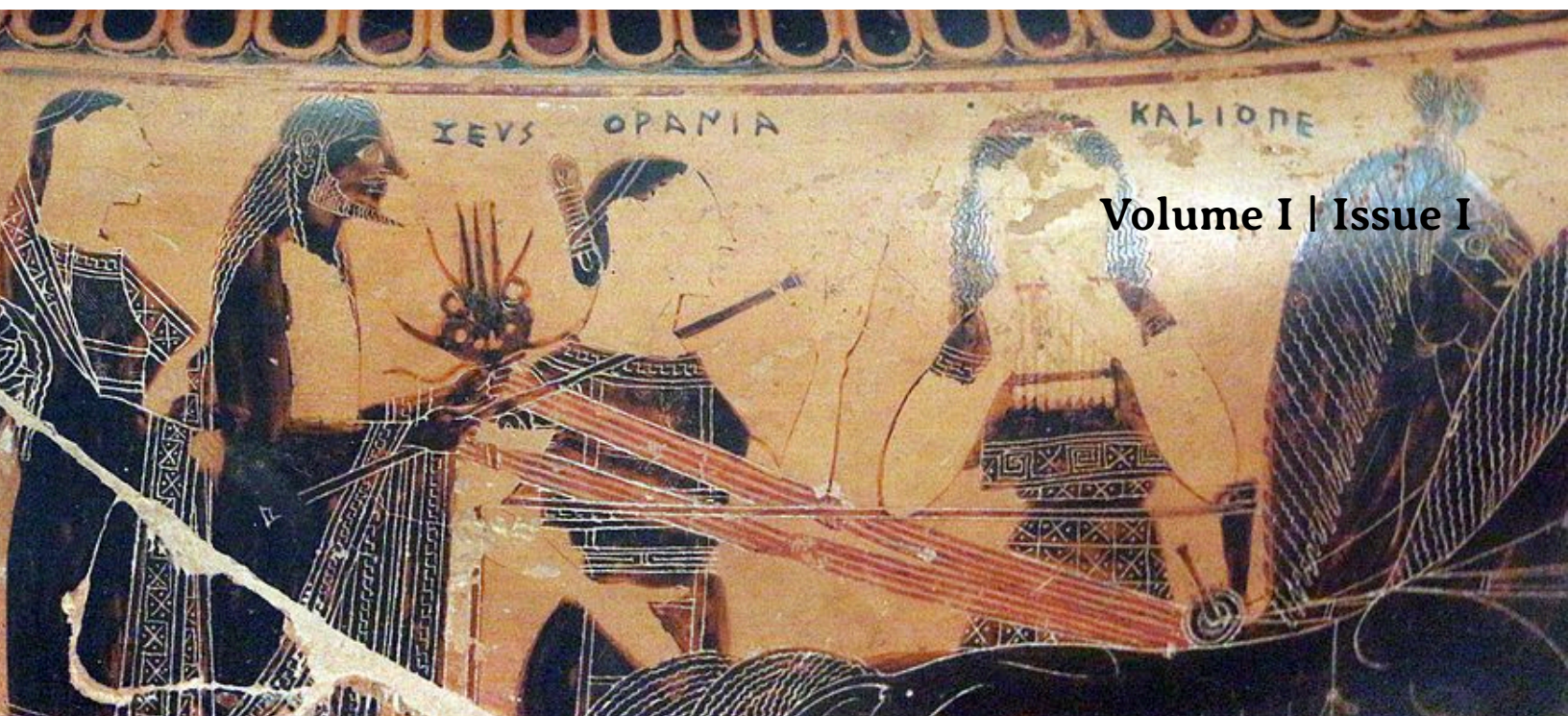




DOBL BENK

A Belizean Journal of Creative Non-Fiction & Poetry



Volume I | Issue I

About *Dobl Benk*

Dobl Benk is a literary journal that publishes creative non-fiction and poetry. Submissions are drawn primarily from University of Belize student work. Guest contributions are welcome.

The journal's aim is to provide an outlet and forum to display student work. Other objectives include fostering literary and artistic production, constructive critical dialogue, and the dissemination of the arts.

Editors: Christopher De Shield
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Design: Christopher De Shield

Dobl Benk publishes pure grade Belizean Literature in electronic format. If printed, it ought at least cost its weight in gold. The publication is supported by the Department of Languages and Literature of the Faculty of Education and Arts of the University of Belize.



Fig.1: Epi-Olmec Howler Monkey Maskette with incised text, possibly representing Hun Chuen, 'patron of the arts'. Protoclassic period, 300 BCE - 250 CE MESO IZAPA | Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, IN, USA | Photo by Christopher De Shield, 2005

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Thanks to Ann Knoll of the Snite Museum of Art who managed to track down records on the howler monkey maskette (Fig. 1) featured as frontispiece to this issue despite the nearly twelve intervening years since I took that blurry photo of the artwork at the University of Notre Dame's Snite Museum of Art in South Bend, Indiana, USA, where it was on loan from a private collector.

Copyright for the image of the Late Classic 'Chama style' polychrome vase (Kerr number 3413) used in the cover design is held by photographer Justin Kerr, inventor of the 'rollout' photography technique for capturing images of antique vases; see mayavase.com. The detail depicts the monkey scribes Hun Batz and Hun Chuen 'patrons of the arts' taking notes at a ceremony of tribute.

The photograph of the Ancient Greek Attic vase in the 'Black-Figure' style is reproduced courtesy Wikimedia Commons (User:Sailko). The detail depicts the muse of epic poetry, Calliope, as part of a wedding procession in one of the friezes of the François Vase by the ancient Athenian vase painter, Kleitias.

The photograph of Hugh Broaster's 'Abstract Woman' (upon which the ekphrastic series is based) is taken by Miriam Loh. The sculpture appears courtesy the owner, a private collector of Belizean art.

All other photographs and images of artwork are included by permission of their creators, as captioned.

Finally, big thanks to the students and contributors whose work graces the leaves of this little magazine, making it possible in the first place. May your efforts to nurse that divine creative impulse be blessed: all the best on your respective academic- and creative-writing journeys.

Introduction

Dobl Benk is a Belizean literary journal of creative non-fiction and poetry and a pilot project of the Department of Languages and Literature at the University of Belize.

The limitations of genre—non-fiction, poetry—serve to foreground the main criteria for inclusion: creativity, quality, truth. Pieces included in *Dobl Benk* are creative: they present real-world phenomena in literary and poetic form. They are quality: selections are made from among the best student-produced work and guest submissions. They are truthful: the poetry and prose selections all concern or seek to convey real Belizean social and personal phenomena.

There are several pieces of note in this inaugural issue. Guest contributor **Courtney Gillett** opens this issue with a piece that alludes to a much earlier composition of belles lettres offering its own rendering of Belize. In 1962, V.S. Naipaul, eventual Nobel Laureate, visited Belize. He wrote about the experience. As with much of his writing, however, Naipaul's 1962 essay, 'The Ultimate Colony', presents a rather unflattering national portrait. Some would declare that Naipaul unfairly presents pessimistic literary fare whatever the literary merit of the portrayal. Whatever opinion we may have of the tone of this writing, though, it presents a valuable literary snapshot of colonial Belize. In 'Ultimate Colony: A Poem for the Interior', Courtney Gillett presents a well-wrought poem that also represents the first significant Belizean literary response to Naipaul's essay. Gillett's poem, whose title alludes to Naipaul's essay, challenges Naipaul's famous postcolonial pessimism with a poetic evocation of nostalgia and cultural recognition. Gillett pens a poem for the interior whose every stanza captures a scene of common Belizean splendour. What Naipaul denigrates or fails to appreciate, Gillett celebrates in a gracious lyrical list.

In a powerful lyric essay, 'How to Flip the Script', **Sheryl Leslie** presents a brutally honest critique of Caribbean discourses that normalise masculine oppression as 'natural'. She argues in lyrical form, revealing how unacknowledged oppression flows even from ideologies whose intent is to uplift and raise consciousness. The language of empowerment can be manipulated and perverted into abuse. Central to this piece is a mode of stream-of-consciousness of palpable power. The argument and form reveal an artistic message well worth the effort required to fully appreciate it.

My own contribution takes the form of journal notes (though these notes were captured via a writing app on a mobile phone). It is always a

good idea to take a notebook around and record snippets of the remarkable everyday. The short account I provide here records my ordinary misadventure attempting to catch the bus from Belmopan to Belize City on a late Friday afternoon.

In a poem in the shape of a mock-epic, **Shane Williams** takes into focus a recurring socio-political event: the political campaigning leading up to election when reports of 'blue notes' exchanging hands to secure votes seems—from street-level discourse—to be accepted practice. Williams's persona receives separate visits from canvassing candidates for political office. The similarity of their discursive tactics to secure votes belies their rivalry. His story, based on the stated experience of those who reside in various constituencies in Belize City, offers a literary take on this phenomenon. I locate the veracity of the piece in its literary treatment of a cultural phenomenon rather than as pseudo-libellous statement of fact. Further, an important ethical conundrum is highlighted at the resolution of the poem. Williams's persona is unable to distinguish between the candidates and ends up rejecting high-minded virtue in favour of self-serving short-termism. The poem challenges our own ethical pretensions.

In 'How to Live with Anxiety', **Sheenah Habet** is able to employ humour in a creative essay for a new perspective on chronic anxiety. Rather than make light of a potentially serious condition, the humour here serves to facilitate a sympathetic understanding.

Sheryl Leslie returns in a poetic meditation that presents a slightly irreverent but nonetheless historically faithful take on a commemorated act in the decisions leading up to the Battle of St. George's Caye. Her poem treats the ceremony, held to this day in Flowers Bank, commemorating the decision to stay—and, if so called, to fight—of the 'Flower's Bank 14'.

Rudolph Rodriguez takes a philosophical look at a lowly and under-appreciated life-form, the cockroach. He attempts to employ the meandering conversational style championed by personal essayists after Michel Eyquem de Montaigne.

Courtney Menzies presents a creative poetic answer to the challenge of listing 'ways of making love'. Beyond the literal, Courtney offers a recipe for long-lasting relationships and implicitly argues that making love is a continuous and multifarious practice.

In addition to the creative material mentioned above are included two other sections: ekphrastic poetry and Belizean Kriol translation. Ekphrastic poetry is a species of transmuted art; it refers to works that are inspired by, or which interpret, other art forms. In this offering, the poems interpret sculpture; specifically, they use Hugh Broaster's wooden

carving entitled 'Abstract Woman' as inspiration. Take a look at these poetic interpretations of a plastic art.

Lastly, in what I hope to be a recurring series, students take famous works from other language traditions and translate them into Belizean Kriol. While Kriol is employed in other pieces in this journal this is not always in the phonetically standardised form championed by the Belize Kriol Projek. The pieces in this section however, adopt the Projek's dikshineri spelling. In this issue, we have a work translated, by **Shamah Smith**, from 16th Century Early Modern English into 21st Century Belizean Kriol.

Enjoy!

*Christopher De Shield
Belize City
July 2017*

The Ultimate Colony: A Poem for the Interior

In this
Naipaul's "Ultimate Colony",
Nostalgia,
marked by our bare-footed traipses through rainy season pools,
pit-pan races at Easter regattas,
hiccate meat and plaintain sides,
youths, bare chested and bold,
mining the emerald tides of the Olde River,
is its saving grace.

There are no Victoria Crosses or
marble elegies
immortalizing valour
save for our own jade
and the folk tales
and the bush songs of the interior,
and the memories from the lagoons in moonlight
quilted into bush leaf canvases with jungle vine and chicle sap.

There are no heroes,
but for the men who braved the currents on the logwood rides
and those who battled the drunken frights of the piccado road,
vainly ignoring the advances of beautied spirits
and claw-footed sirens
sheltering in Xieba shades or
resting near the muddy, weap-y
edges of some bushman's pool.

"This is our story, this is our song"
Heroes and heroines
knighted by the Cross at Passiontide,
and at Christmas
and at New Year's time,
their deeds recorded on the backs of the
cabbage tree pews and on the cement plastered walls of the
church in the wildwood
with their chanting,

“Oh, come, come, come...”

What industry,
but for the corned palms
that willingly gathered the sheaves from the ‘plantache’,
or for the women who patched cashew seeds
over cast iron coals in the dry,
or for the leathered brows that sweated ignorance under diesel engines
and birthed progress,

or for the
man-woman stresses that were tempered
by evening brams
and bedroom brawls,
their twilight catharses?

The Ultimate Colony?
Indeed.

Courtney Gillett

How to Flip the Script

Blessed love, Empress Menen I, hail di I. I am woman. I nuh wash plate. I nuh sweep house. House da what Kingman give woman fi turn into home. Home gat different meaning when you grow up and mek your own

SPACE

Space fi woman joy limited caz what sweet you soon sour you. You done know how costly sad is but what fi do? 'Do what come natural, wear tall skirt, queenly crown pretty'. Pretty lasts as long as Kingman care fi watch. Watch his googly gaze go when prettier win his

ATTENTION

Attention da the most precious gift fi give a person. Person da who me fa since I buss, fa I da lee gyal, before 'I am woman'. 'Woman come fa MY ribs, pikni come fa MY balls.' Balls mean entitlement but it used to mean

COURAGE

Courage push woman fi stay alive. 'Stay alive, stand strong ina Babylon, di struggle bigga dan we.' We forget 'strength to strength', kudos fi de ya, for staying here. Here, this place, is the crucible ah domestic discontent, condemned confidence and stifled

SELF-WORTH

'Self-worth', 'knowledge of self' da clever abstractions, man fishin' lines. Lines ah sacramental ash quarantine bleeding woman during sacred cycle. Cycle time fi sistren mean break. Break da nuh reprieve fa the heat, neither fa

SERVICE

Service da what Kingman demand fa ih dawta. Dawta, as in daughter of the faith, is brought to her knees. Knees once bent fi Jah now calloused in oral service to man. 'Man wa get fa out de what you nuh di give ah home'. Home, weh woman fashion her own fleshly trinity from her orifices fi seal Kingman

LOYALTY

Loyalty force woman fi maintain composure in spite ah what overwhelm her. Her life tough enough without di constantly justify her existence. Existence bland when ih nuh bitter so Kingman ital season with tears. Tears preferable to drifting thoughts, reminiscences, noise not-so-

White Thor, Captain America under my beans, under my chips. Muscles. Height. Rank white. Short men nice. Stand-up sex, comedic. Had a favourite short boy once. Sent him erotic notes two classes down. He avoided me every break. Ha! 12 years later, still short. Middle finger Kirk. Kurt the skirt.

Black. Tall. Bald. White beard. Incient sexy. If he didn't smell so old though. The short, fat, big belly, old man tell ah, 'Mek sure you tip generously.' Me, shotgun. Whore? Me, backseat. Kool-Aid? He, 'Checkout Redda new flava, Bredda'. How about the flavour of shit? No bly, straight fingatip to clut.

Good fuckin morning to Eneman who says 'Gmrnin' with tulips. Hate his lee-bit-ah-vowels-talking ass, enema-gifting-to-save-my-ass ass. No name man. Eneman. Another forever. Like I care. 3 months later, lick ass application stands. Hate me back. Cuss me back so I could justify rejecting you. Eneman hamster on my wheel. You ... you kind-hearted, ugly man cooing, 'How was your day? You hungry?' Everything fit good. I hate you for it. Climb the mountain with me. I still hate you. You're short. Middle finga Eneman. Shorty. Shorty. Shorty.

She read my letters. They always do. Must have copped some skills ... boring gyal. Fascinated by my antics. This is hard. I could have chosen a short cut; them instead of their boyfriends. Save myself some pregnancies. Straight shock therapy. Me, black Barbie: natural nude to imperial purple. Labias. Chiney mind- perm too. Instead I husband this licey, lousy lout who lacks

COMMON-SENSE

Common sense da what I use fi anchor myself to home Kingman gave as house. 'House and lot da the security I provide, what man due fi give'. Give your life and invariably they leave you with nothing. Nothing and everything between us, things, children, things, pillows, more things, people never hear Kingman 'no'. No degrees between us, 'Zero fucks given', thirty-two flavours of entanglement called marital

BLISS

Bliss nuh live inside these walls. Walls bare; no mouth, just ears, dark draped windows keep lion cave private. Private parts shared outside home, once house, once trees is not why woman leaves. Leaves of fonto in every nook betray man battle between heart and head. Headstrong woman raise grown boy, teach nouns from above list. 'Listen, not-yet-King man! You wa souls with broom and caress plate, til you own 6 words outta deh 8!' Eight years' tutelage under second ma sent courtesy that tall, black, fine fella Jah; thank Zion fi feminine

GUIDANCE

GUIDANCE, RESPECT, ONE LOVE!

Sheryl Leslie

Notes: the Belmopan Bus Terminal

Friday, about 4pm

I had been standing for at least three minutes up near the front of a queue of nine or ten at the bus stand for Belize City in the Belmopan Bus Terminal before I noticed a former high school classmate whom I hadn't seen for maybe eleven or twelve years. I greeted him.

'Eh, bwai, ah no see you from time! Weh di gwan mein? You di work out yah now?'

Like me, he was in Belmopan for work and trying to get back to Belize City.

'I hate ketch bus dehn time yah,' he said.

I nodded, as if in sympathy, but I didn't know what he was talking about. I had taken the bus from Belmopan to Belize City from the terminal several times since I started working here—whenever I was unable to catch the University of Belize charter. The experience wasn't so horrible as he was making it out to be. True, I didn't normally catch the bus at the terminal on a *Friday*, but could anything really be all that different? I looked around; there were perhaps slightly more people here than at the same time any other weekday.

We chatted a bit. Before long, I reached that point in the conversation at which I felt I had nothing more meaningful or entertaining to say. We stood and silently gazed off into the distance toward the road where, any minute now, a bus should appear.

Any minute now.

Two minutes passed, maybe three.

My friend broke the lull, 'you would think that, afta thirty years, they muss could come up wid a way fi do this properly, man.'

I paused and took this in. The peculiar thing about his speech was that it seemed to be addressed to everybody, not just me. An extemporary speech act, it was a strangely unsolicited peroration.

He shook his head.

I attempted a knowing smile, then quickly turned to look about—a bit awkwardly—trying to hide the fact that I did not really know what he was talking about. In truth, I was confused. What did he *think* was happening? Here we were lined up, waiting for the bus—as usual. Slightly more people on a Friday afternoon, but I'd never had problems riding the bus in the past. I shrugged it off.

I resumed my bus-stand vigil.

Another two minutes passed.

Then, rounding the corner of the ring road, the James bus appeared. It would proceed down the road toward the terminal, turn right, pass the bus terminal, and make the square, before turning into the terminal parking lot.

The moment the bus materialised on the road in the distance, a ripple coursed through the throng that was now gathered in semi-orderly fashion in front of the gate. It was palpable, the ripple; as the conductor's raised baton instantly readies an orchestra, so too the bus's sudden appearance commanded our collective attention. A few backs straightened. One woman began twisting a bit from left to right. Was she stretching? No... could it be that she was actually *limbering* up? I noticed another person's grip on their bag tighten. I felt pressure mounting, physical and emotional. Someone was pressing slightly from behind. The little gaps between people in the throng—little pockets of personal space one affords to others for comfort and respect—these suddenly shrunk and were swallowed entire. Potential avenues, mini-routes that I had noticed—where my right foot could step forward, the space where my bag would trail along—these were suddenly closed off. No through way.

Turning to my right, I noticed some children making their way to the front. Had they been sitting on the sidelines while their mother held the line? Or, no, was not that their mother behind and they were now being ordered to squeeze in on up ahead?

I arched my back a little and stood up straight. I was definitely feeling a slight push, a pressure, from behind. In response, I tried to more fully occupy my space, now standing up straight and inflating my chest slightly.

Wait. But wasn't that woman *behind* me not two minutes ago? Suddenly, the bus rounded the corner and entered the terminal parking lot. The bus lurched into its berth, jerking back on its wheels to the apparent dismay of the squeaking rear suspension. The hydraulic brakes belched in contented release of pressure. Out popped the conductor and the passengers dazedly disembarked to loud engine rattle, some pausing briefly to peer through the iron grille and discern the nature of the begrudging horde encased therein.

There were two men in orangeish terminal uniforms outside the bus stand gate. They took one glance at each other, nodded, and, to my surprise, actually *braced* themselves against the gate.

On cue, the throng surged forward.

'Mi baby! Mi baby!' One woman shrieked, hands shielding her belly. A few of us glance back, and ignore her. She catches my glance and smiles. Indeed, it is a tactical ploy; as I look back, she claws her way forward, batting my bags aside. Some people smirk. She is obviously a veteran here. A sense of defeat pervades me; I had lost the battle of

initiative, having failed to correctly interpret the signs, and here I was about to lose this war.

I saw that the two men at the gate were stationed there for the sole purpose of bottle-necking the mass, but we quickly swarm and overwhelm them. They hold back nothing. The dam breaks. It is chaos. I don't know whether I am walking or being carried by the tide. The terminal gates are a sluice. We squeeze through like toothpaste smashed out the tube.

Once through the stand gate, men race past in a blinkered frenzy to get around back of the bus; they raise the lever and leap in to board from the rear hatch. People are scrambling into the bus from both ends. It is a wonder no one is climbing through the windows. A mass of people quickly forms around the door. Everyone wants in, and everyone wants in now. Mothers use their children; kids crawl beneath and around the pushing passengers. They navigate between the sea of legs, trying to get in and claim territory. Seizing estates with the irrevocable title of a small butt planted on vinyl cushion, children gaze up at the incoming adults with false innocence. You can't tear a child from a seat. Besides, their wide eyes softly reveal that you'd still have to deal with their mother angrily thrusting her frame into the carriage.

* * *

Finally, after losing myself in the growing accretion of bodies before the entrance, I shove myself into alignment with the portal. The pressure behind surges and I ram through the breach. I think: *'I'm in!'* But, crammed inside and craning my neck above the congestion I can immediately see that there are at least ten people in front of me. The centre aisle is crammed with helpless standers. The bus had long been full. Those standing survey, with baleful gaze, the crowded seats.

I catch the eyes of my friend, mid-way through the bus, comfortably wedged between the window and a large woman. He calls out to me, 'Well, fuck, how yuh jus di get een?'

I shake my head in frustrated disbelief. 'Mada fella! Bwai! Pikni midi crawl chroo my leg an all!'

* * *

Back in the terminal, rebutted. I was now at the back of the queue, having failed my boarding attempt. I turned in to myself and cradled the phone, my only means of recording information. I typed in on the thing, 'Bus on Friday... to avoid. The system has reduced us to animals'. This was a learning experience. I made a mental note to avoid repeating this at all costs.

I thought for sure I would get on the next bus.

I didn't.

* * *

At the bus stand, again, I notice for the first time two flimsy laminated sheets serving as notices: 'Please form a single line. Boarding will be done in groups of eight'. Some women inside the terminal remonstrate the attendants. 'Unnu no di do unnu job! Unnu no di do unnu job! Dehn di cut di line and di enta di bus fram di back! Unnu no di do unnu job!'

'Whe me fi do miss? Dah no me fi di hol no bady back! Dat dah no my job!'

After over an hour and a half waiting, the third available bus that evening entered the lot. I had been standing at the front of the queue. At the opening of the gates, I bolted to the bus, leapt onto the threshold, and pranced up the steps. Inside, I noticed with a glance a seat over the tyre with a large young woman sitting in it. I did not waste time. I pointed to it, 'nobody nuh di siddown yah?' I moved to occupy it before waiting for the answer.

After several moments in which I collected my wits, I turned to her, 'Fiyah, this terminal yah crazy'.

She observed me impassively for a second before responding, 'when ih kohn time fi bus, me no business. Jus grab ah seat'.

I just nodded my head. I knew full well what she was talking about.

Christopher De Shield

Torn Between Two Devils

On this day, we mortals of this part of Earth pledge loyalty:
Whom among our ranks shall be dubbed royalty?
Once it was only after five years full we were asked,
but now this is becoming a more regular task.
Which devil shall reign over me, over you—
the viper in red, or the python, in blue?
For months I've suffered their temptations:
My leisure-time pleasure assaulted by pitches;
and my peace laid siege by their ambitions.
Both promise to deliver veritable Wonderlands,
but on details, quite short, are all their great plans.

The red fiend is neatly trimmed, elegantly attired.
With a smile from the heavens and Pharaoh-like posture,
his presence demands attention and words command belief.
He tells tales of how the other is selfish, corrupt and 'teef'.
Here, in our very land, he traces direct lineage,
excusing his leaving for new careers and marriages.
His tongue is made of the finest Elizabethan silver.
He can take beast droppings and convince you they're ginger.
The compassion he expresses for the poor leads one to conclude
that thinking this crimson saint had ill-will was quite rude.
Before leaving, the selfless visionary delivers a token of good will:
for at least one day, my desolate pocket was glad for friendly fill.

It was not two days after sealing our fate in blood,
that the indigo trickster suddenly became loud.
All day in our hood this opportunist stayed around,
with locks looking like they ought be stamped to the ground.
He did all the things that would make a wretch look cool:
played cards, smoked herb, shot hoops—believing us fools.
He too, on a constituency map, chose to show
where, in our neck of the woods, he did grow.
No fancy words or 'first-world thoughts' came from this youth.
He wore neither designer brands nor high-class suits—
he was grassroots! He described the other one as elite and aloof:
'Engaged now, yes, but after victory...? Just poof!'
Before leaving, the blue-coloured champ left a little treat;
It was enough for rice and beans *and* meat!

These two Caesars make my choice extremely tough.
Who shall I crown and who should I huff?
Great God please bless me with Solomon's wisdom
that I may see who's fit for this earthly kingdom.
Should I take a sword and cut the baby in half
so that neither one gets the last laugh?
Should I wait till that morning comes,
and choose the one who best meets ransom?
And does it even matter who wins,
if both are prisoners of their sins?
Why should *my* act alone be the one of virtuous nature?
I too should 'get mines' in this rare time of nurture!

So today, when I walk into the poll,
I choose the one willing to pay the toll.
And don't dare give me lecture, shade, or grief.
How would *you* choose wisely between two teef?

Shane Williams



Fig.2: Belize City Council Portal with Sleeping Dogs | Photo by Christopher De Shield, 2017.

The Thing about Having Anxiety

To feel nervous about everything is the worst.

It's like I have a super ability to detect all bad things that probably won't even happen – dumbest super power ever! I'll hear a small noise or notice someone's facial expression change momentarily, and subsequently internalize that detail and all of its imaginary, awful implications for hours. I have the innate gift of over-thinking and overanalysing a single word or sentence, which is why I proofread my emails like ten times before sending them – and if you think it stops there – it doesn't – it's incredibly painful to catch typos hours later as I go through my inbox. I overanalyse every situation, because I'm terrified if I'm not prepared for it.

Essentially, to have a nervous condition is to always gravitate toward the worst-case scenario – it's just how nervous people are born to roll. When my body is being slightly weird – a weird rash, a toothache that isn't going away, or spotting in between periods – I think that obviously it's a clear sign of cancer – and instead of calming down, I consult Google, which always ends up being the worst mistake of my life.

Going to the doctor is always fun for me, because even if there's nothing wrong, I'll be sure to find something. Getting a haircut is nerve-racking too, things can go so absolutely wrong – this is my hair we're talking about, my livelihood, my everything.

Not being sure if I locked the door at night when I'm pretty sure I did is the worst – unless I didn't – and if I didn't – a psychopath could totally shimmy into my house, stab me five times, and then steal my identity, and my dog too. Even if I check roughly five times, I'm never really sure of it. If there is any sort of noise in my house, I become easily convinced that I'm about to be murdered. Unknown callers are probably stalkers who want to kill me. It's got so bad that when my parents are calling me at 11pm, I automatically think, 'oh god, oh god, someone must be dead!'

The made-up scenarios in my head can be so time-consuming; I stress about things for absolutely no logical reason. Do you know what it's like to be afraid of your own mind? For me, it's like a silent battle. Every little fear of worry becomes ten thousand times worse. Did I leave the stove on? What if my house burns down? I won't possibly be able to make tea without a house. What if I'm late? Or get lost on the way? What if there's an accident? I've got ninety-nine problems, and I am all of them.

When people ask me why I'm worrying, I want to say, 'Because, Alvin, why shouldn't I worry when a million things can go wrong?' But I don't – because non-nervous, chill people don't get me. I hate it, too, when people ask if I'm okay right in the middle of an anxiety attack – like sure, I'm fine – don't mind me – I'm just here trying to catch my breath – of, course I'm not okay!

And oh my gosh – don't ever tell me to chill – I might just punch you in the face – but I'd honestly think ten times about doing it since violence gives me anxiety. People always try to make me feel better – but their concern only makes it much worse – and then sometimes when I tell people about my anxiety, I feel as if I am not taken seriously. I am worried I'll be laughed at and be accused of making it up in my head. Living with such a disease, I often feel like I'm being followed by a voice; it knows everything about you, all your fears and insecurities, and it will be sure to use it against you.

However, on the flip side you'd be very thankful to have me in your tribe. Why? Because I'll always have your back, your front, and for the things you don't see coming. I'm so very sensitive to the world around me – it's a part of having a heightened threat sensor – and that sensitivity also extends to everyone who is near. My strength is probably overwhelming – since I've experienced more pain than most people will in their lifetime. You will never understand the amount of back-bone it takes to face the world living every day with anxiety.

Sheenah Habet

Di Hassle bout di Battle

Seventeen Ninety-six's 'Vetel' meet mixed British strategy
Fight/flight tiff fix democratically by Burnaby
Weh mek fifty-one losers ah voters one sixteen
When di Flowers Bank Fourteen seh, 'Sah, please put we een'.

Maybe da lee few mi really willing fi chruu
Glad, grateful fi di bush, wa fresh gimitankyou
'Oh tank yu Sa fi di vote weh mi bredda nuh gat
Tank yu fi mi freedom, Gaad wehn bless yu wa lat'.

Bout fifteen months wait wit shush di pour een
Baymasta, free slave, real slave - all fi di queen
Di sitting duck de get Jamaican arms as a hand
Di wait fi lattah Spanish fa Latinised Yucatan

St. George's Caye mi neva did safe baka di reef
Caz she mi well pen up between two facey thief
British seh dehn win, di Spanish dehn gone
'Tank yu Sah fi gimi dis Belize weh ah baahn'.

Sheryl Leslie

Disgusting

To smash a cockroach has become instinctual for humans. It's so funny how, in a split second, such a small creature can un-civilize a man.

On the ground, the cockroach's six mechanical legs are capable of immense microcosmic speeds. One scientist—in a National Geographic magazine I read—claimed that roaches can sprint up to eleven inches per second, fast enough to ensure a safe getaway from most humans. A creature this size sees a human as a giant threat. The swing of an incoming arm wafts a torrent of breeze that is picked up by the roach's sensitive 'cercus' or tail which triggers the cockroach's nervous system.

It may seem that it is their destiny to be despised but cockroaches are obviously well adapted to survive in our human world. While most of us consider them pests, cockroaches are an important member of the circle of life. They are our wakeup call for hygiene; they are the hygiene police. If they are present it is more than likely because we left something behind for them to eat or perhaps because another life form is decaying; they come to clean up. It is true that roaches are known to spread disease and bacteria but ironically they themselves practice good hygiene: they keep their antennae clean at all times, their most important tool for seeing the world.

When I was younger I was somehow instinctively afraid of touching them, so I chose to destroy them by any means possible, even awakening the evil inside me and torturing them after capture. There were various fun ways of going about this. My favorite way of disposing of a captured cockroach (I would hold them using a leaf, paper or tissue) was sacrificing it to ants. For this to be successful, the cockroach had to be crippled; I would remove at least three of its legs, preferably on the same side. I would then drop the roach on an ant trail. After discovering this nutritious snack, the ants would all crawl on top, each biting a leg or the abdomen. After a few minutes of this butchering of the slain beast they would carry it away to their queen. As a child, I was fond of the ant monarchy; I was their protector and their provider. I would bring any insect I could find to them so long as they didn't invade my home.

My sentiments were different for cockroaches. My second favorite method of dispatch required matches; I would light a match and burn them alive. Surely all the bacteria died along with it. I and my fellow humans were inherently evil.

Lowly status notwithstanding, cockroaches should not be pitied. Cockroaches have no emotions; they hardly have a brain, Cockroaches act purely on instinct. Their body's nervous system has adapted so well to its urban natural environment. No matter how many of them we

kill, they will never stop popping up. According to National Geographic, cockroaches can give birth to fifteen younglings in each egg sack they lay. Moreover, they do this seven times within two month intervals. They have been around since the age of dinosaurs; they are surely not going anywhere anytime soon.

The cockroach is undoubtedly a resilient life form and maybe human beings tend to hate things that excel. If there's one spark of brilliance that cockroaches have been able to accomplish, it is gliding. A gliding cockroach will startle anyone. We already know that cockroaches run away from you—this gives you a level of comfort and dominance over them—but their clumsy gliding makes them completely unpredictable. The flap of their brown wings induces a cringe at the thought of it landing on your face. This prospect itself is enough to topple a giant human.

There are other cockroach activities we might find disgusting. Their mating rights, for example, might seem revolting and even immoral to human eyes. Throughout my life I've seen many insects mating abdomen to abdomen and this even includes butterflies. While there is no love experienced in the action, in my childish anthropocentric mind I would believe there was. Human beings tend to think that insects are immoral, the most immoral of the life forms upon earth. The sad irony of this is that it's nothing juxtaposed to humans. Humans tend to use themselves as an example as to how all other life forms must live. This is known as anthropocentricity and perhaps it is a synonym for 'evil' if other species had language to express this. If you think about it abstractly, there might not be that much of a difference between the cockroach's love rituals and ours. I've witnessed the cockroach mating once in my life, as a child, when I would inspect things from ten inches away, or as close as my entertainers would possibly allow. The male would raise its brown outer case and expose its wings, as if showing off, and with its antennae caress the females near him. In the human world this would translate to either income stability or attractive physical attributes (two things to which adult females are predominantly attracted).

Through research I know now a bit more about what I witnessed as a child. According to Patricia J. Moore and Allen J. Moore, the ritual begins with the male cockroach raising his wings exposing his abdomen. Following this action he releases pheromones that the female cockroaches are attracted to. The female would then mount the male. As soon as the female's genital opening is within reach of the male's pygidium (an internal hook-like structure) the male then proceeds to hooking the female and rotating to a hundred and eighty degrees position. In humans, this might translate to the male's words attracting a woman, persuading her until she gives in to the act. The result is abdomen to abdomen sweet love. The female roach will only

do this once in her lifetime, and therefore with one male partner. As a child I wouldn't be aware of all of this subjective thought and would proceed to burn them or smash them just the same, perhaps believing that it was not even sex I was witnessing but instead a mutated roach, like the Siamese twins I saw on television once.

Human beings are perhaps even more disgusting than Cockroaches. We may dismiss the evil acts we commit against them convincing ourselves that we remain the dominant species. But humans fight amongst one another; we attempt to distort taxonomy and further divide our species artificially. Cockroaches will likely outlive us. They would survive any apocalypse to come, indeed, an apocalypse we likely will have brought upon ourselves.

The population of roaches is far greater than that of humans and they are a more ancient species. Maybe we can learn a lot more than we realise from them. The truth is, our morality is challenged and contradicted when tested by our relationship with insects. Morality only pertains to those with cognizance and intellect—humans and not insects. The cockroach is resilient because it does not think; its body is well adapted to survive purely on instincts. Perhaps our intellect is our own downfall. It is as if consciousness comes with a price, frailty of the biological make up. True, we find tools and other ways to protect ourselves. But medical and technological inventions do not guarantee our survival across the millennia. In fact, they potentially hasten or heighten the possibility of our demise. Cockroaches have none of our technological and moral superiority and they are still here, adapted to us; maybe they are a prototype that in some way outshines a later design.

Rudolph Rodriguez

Ways of Making Love

Sending yellow flowers on a grey day
and handwritten letters whose pages
are saturated with emotion.

Late night phone calls with
heavy eyes and husky voices.
Trying to bake together and
burning cookies in the process.
Candlelit dinners of mac & cheese.

Dancing, body against body,
hands on hips, moving in sync.
Late night drives, singing off tune.
Laying on blankets, stars shining down,
sweet nothings whispered through the air.

'Are you okay?'
'Do you need anything?'
'Stay safe.'
'I'm here for you.'

Breaking down walls, taking off armor.
Opening up like a dusty book
full of stories, secrets and dreams.
Listening to words said by quivering mouths.
Understanding. Accepting.

Knowing not to buy chocolates with nuts,
and that head rubs are important.
Chasing away nightmares with tight,
half-asleep hugs in the middle of the night.

Curling up between sheets,
skin on skin on skin,
drinking kisses like the sweetest wine.

Courtney Menzies

Four Ekphrastic Views of Hugh Broaster's 'Abstract Woman'



Fig: 3: 'Abstract Woman' by Hugh Broaster | Photo: Miriam Loh, 2017

I: The Struggle into Womanhood

They occupied my mind:
wars that eased the struggle.
It's normal to pretend it never happened
but traces remain.

So little is revealed of the struggle.
Others succumb or become weary.
Our struggles in this world
sometimes overcome our ability to stand.

A world where you try to live outside
a man's control, stress, and agony!
It takes a real woman to live in
this world under patriarchal control.

James Valerio

II: Abstract Woman

Cut into pieces

Broken

I am torn

I am woman

I am your abstract woman

Made by man

into subject

I am at your disposal

I am here for your satisfaction

I am your abstract woman

Made by society

Forced to cook and clean

I am the 'good girl' or the 'bad girl'

I am the slut

I am the whore

I am the angel

Whichever you decide

I am your abstract woman

You look at my body

You look at my curves

You tell me who to be

I am your abstract woman

I am your universe

I am your mother

I am your daughter

I am your wife

I am your muse

I am your abstract woman

Ashley McFadzean

III: Abstract Woman

Abstract? Abstract?!
How dare they call me
Abstract.

Abstract
is lines
is colours
strewn about the page
like bedsheets after a one night stand.

Abstract
is relative.
I am not
Abstract.

I am woman.
I am the sun and the moon.
I am hot coffee on a cold morning.
I am the winds blowing across mountains.
I am a hurricane.
I am strength and
I am life.

Out of me,
the world was born.

Abstract?

I am anything but.

Courtney Menzies

IV: Wise old Woman

What do you see?

Look at her.

She is a wise old woman with
weary eyes, uncertain of the end of life:
how time flies by so fast!

Once she was young
and beautiful.
Now she is creased, with nothing to fear.

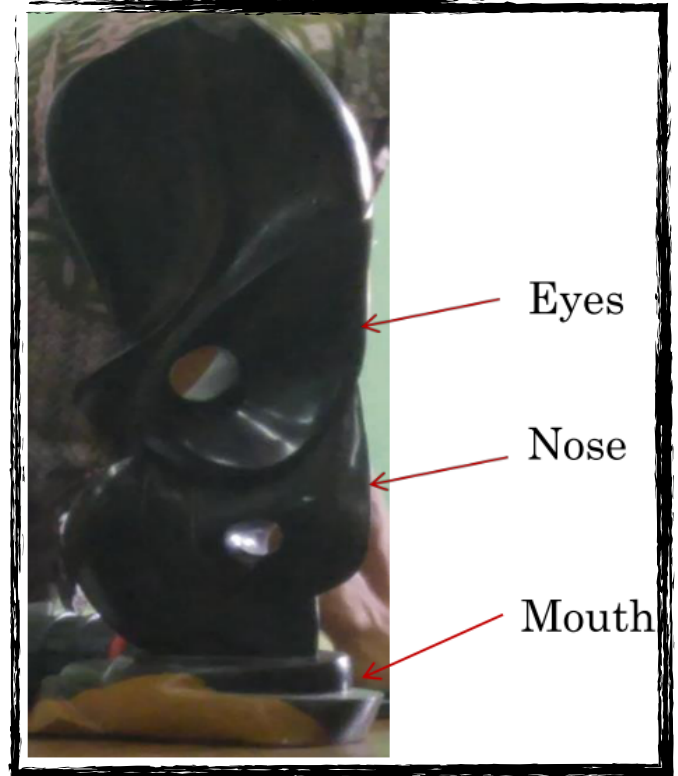
She waits for her soul to go to rest, a
place that she will never regret.
What do you see?

A tear-filled eye? A woman confused
about her past? A hard worker
who refuses to let go?

She is now toothless, like a child,
but holds to rouging skin and lips design.
She is the type that cares

and now she waits for favours in return.
But tomorrow's ground
is too uncertain for today's plans.

Her life's worries narrow.
She has contributed so much.
She suffers; she waits to go.



Karla Balam

Kriol Translation

Mi Haat Ah Gih Yuh Nuh fi Du it Pain¹

Mi haat ah gih tuh yuh, nuh fi gih mi haat payn,
Ah gih yuh fi cherish it.
Ah gih mi hole self op aan serv yuh nuh fi yuh tek mi fi granted,
Bot fi bee riwaaded agen.
Ah mi satisfai fi bee yuh slayv fi gud
Bot nuh fi mi geh riwaaded wit dis kinda koal chreetment.

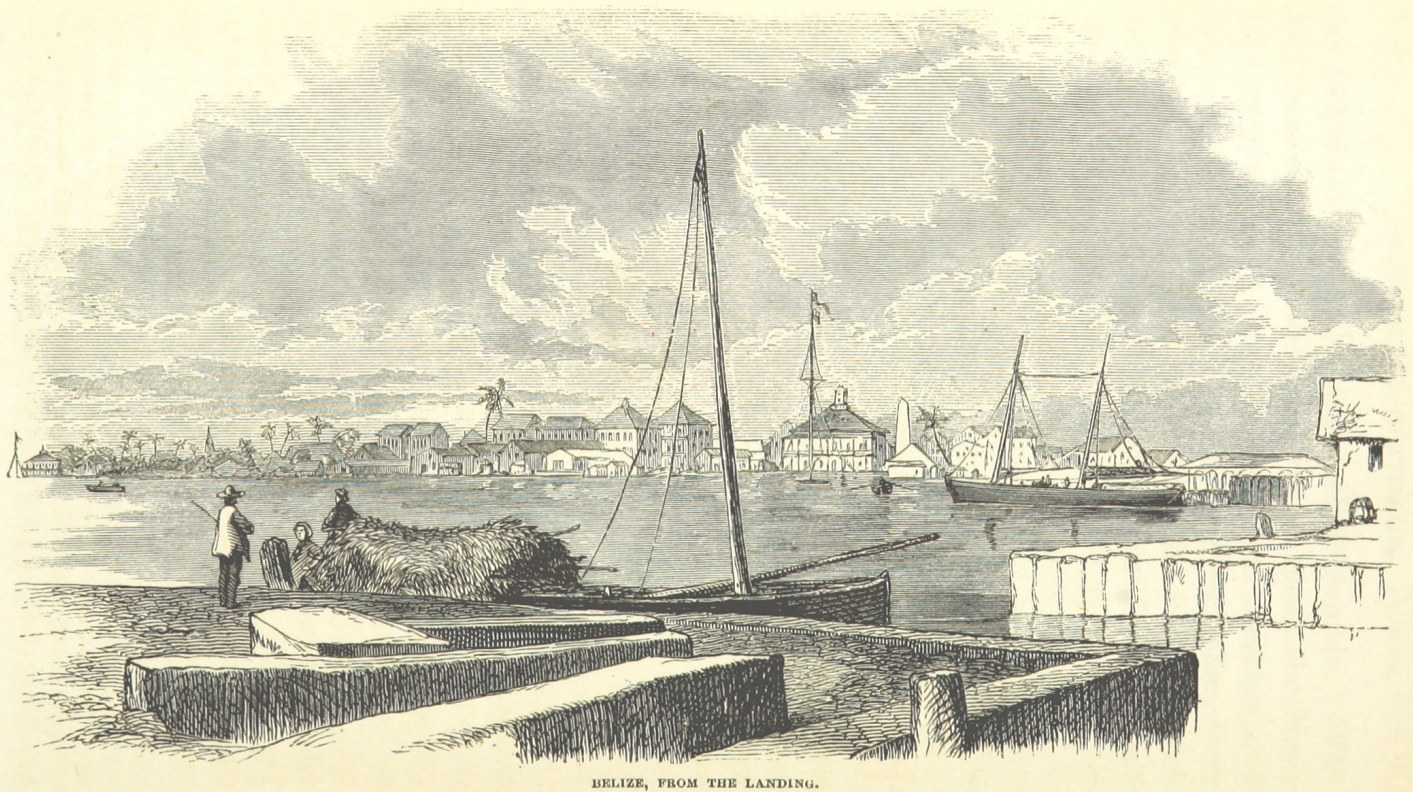
Sins deh nuh gah no ada reezn fi yu waah bee wit mi,
Ah wah hole bak aal mi feelins ah ha fi yuh.

Yuh wreck up mi, aan haad mi di trip,
Eef ah mi unlee noa yuh slick laik dat, ah neem mi ah baada!
Yuh nuh waahn lef deh ways an bicum wah bettah persn,
Mi haffi seh bai caz ah cah tek nuh moa.
Di langa ah kip rong, ih bon mi like fiyaah.
Weh yuh duh nuh gwain onpuneesh,

weh sweet yuh now wah bon yuh lataa.
Jus rimemba, erry dawg gah dem day!

Shamah Smith

¹ A Kriol translation after Sir Thomas Wyatt's 'My Heart I Gave Thee, Not to Do it Pain'.
See: Wyatt, Thomas. 'The Lover Forsaketh His Unkind Love'. Nicholas Harris, Ed. *The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. London, W. Pickering, 1831. 15. Internet Archive <<http://archive.org/details/poeticalworkssi03wyatgoog>>. Web. 25 Sept. 2017.



BELIZE, FROM THE LANDING.

Fig.4: 'Belize, From the Landing'. from Squier, Ephraim George. *The States of Central America: Their Geography, Topography, Climate, Population, Resources, ... Etc., Etc., Comprising Chapters on Honduras, San Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belize, the Bay Islands, the Mosquito Shore, and the Honduras Inter-Oceanic Railway*. New York: Harper & brothers, 1858. page 574.

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