

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!

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Belize City
July 2017*