

A great deal of recent criticism has concentrated on narrative fiction, yet very little attention has been paid to its position in the history and world of empire. . . . narrative is crucial to my argument here, my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonised people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future- these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. . . . nations themselves are narrations. (Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, 1993)

*When we know **where** we are, we are in a far better position to understand what other cultural groups are experiencing within a time and place we all share. The locale itself may change so often as to defy. . . a “thick description”. Between restlessness and continuity lie a lot of contradictions. (Lucy Lippard, The Lure of the Local, 1997)*

Here's Luck is one of the tattoos uncovered by Jim Hawkins (in the children's classic *Treasure Island* of 1883) on the body of seaman Billy Bones. Jim embarks on his adventure in search of buried gold on a Caribbean island, marked by a cross on Bones' treasure map. The single inhabitant of the island turns out to be the blue-eyed pirate Benn Gunn, gone native but delirious for a 'Christian diet' (specifically of cheese), having been marooned on the desert island for three years.

It is still impossible to ignore this pervasive colonial narrative and Western representation when coming to the Bahamas from England, as I did on an artist residency exchange in 2011. The Bahamas is where Columbus made first landfall and within 25 years the entire indigenous Lucayan population was exterminated after being enslaved to work on gold mines in Hispaniola; now the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It was colonised by the British 150 years later and became independent in 1973.

As a white European woman, I was raised in Holland and have subsequently made England my second home. This means that I can relate to some extent to the sense of displacement that migrants from the Caribbean diaspora experience here. Although migration has allowed me to reinvent myself, a schism continues to exist in my daily life: for instance my children do not speak my mother tongue. I had been to Curacao before, so my expectations of the Bahamas, based on tropical paradise imagery of sun, sea and fruit trees, were checked by the experience I had elsewhere in the Caribbean. The Bahamas is one of the most prosperous countries in the Caribbean region, with tourism and banking providing most of its income and employment, though its representation as a home for the ultra-rich masks the social realities of poverty and limited public services.

As I didn't know how Bahamians would react to me, I was pleased to find that the people I approached to write and read aloud the narratives presented in this book were happy to participate in a hands-on way. As writers, they were invited to respond to a short time-lapse film, titled *Here's Luck*, which I

had made on Adelaide beach, New Providence, during my residency. The film shows the silver foil emergency shelter I brought from the UK being taken by the incoming tide at a spot marked by the words Here's Luck written in the sand. The shelter eventually takes a left turn and disappears out of the frame. The film repeats.

The drift and fluidity of the tides, the image of paradise (a golden sandy beach fringed by imported palm trees) together with the shininess or bling and agency of the shelter provided the visual points of reference for the Bahamian responses. Krista A Thompson in *Youth Culture, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Art of Being Seen in the Bahamas (African Arts, Spring 2011)*, describes how African American hip-hop culture has influenced the visual displays of materialism and conspicuous consumption, coded as 'bling' by young Bahamians, at their school proms. For many working class young Bahamian people, the aesthetics of bling is a visual effect that questions and shows their status in postcolonial Bahamian society. Governmental censure of black American music videos on local television was initiated by the Bahamian Christian Council, because they were "not in keeping with the mores of the Bahamas", which one could argue were the mores of middle class 'respectability' that have their roots in colonialism and the British-instilled ethics of work, thrift, discipline and education. What these criticisms ignore is the fact that the Rolls Royces and Lexuses at the proms were sometimes borrowed or rented from wealthy Bahamians whose prestige many working class public students want to imitate.

I think that my attitude towards the people I met was that I wanted to hear their stories and meet their perspective, which was underlined by my position as a stranger and outsider. As with some other parts of the Caribbean, whites are seen as a elite minority and I had been warned that as a stranger, a white woman, I would be seen as an easy target and be 'pulled off my bike', 'eaten by dogs', 'harassed by local men', 'run over' or 'ripped off' if I went out on my own. In fact, some local people seemed even more scared than me and did not go out without their cars, phones or others. Coming out of a history of colonial brutality, the Bahamas like many countries in the Caribbean experiences violence on many levels: domestic, public, political, while a

conservative Christian orientated ethos suppresses open public discussion of gay rights, patriarchy, feminism or domestic violence for instance.

At school in Holland I had learnt a passive form of English through reading literature, which was a struggle to make more active when I came to the UK. I came to the Bahamas with a Queen's English, which I only realised how passive it was when I encountered the dynamic English Bahamian turn of phrase. Many Bahamians speak a creole language, which shares similar features with other English-based creoles in Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and the Virgin Islands, in that it uses an English lexicon with an African grammar. Yet speaking creole has been stigmatised as a 'bad English' dialect that has little value as a language in itself. Therefore, apart from taking sometime to begin understanding what people meant in my conversation with them, I am also conscious that some may have tried to adjust their speech, according to the way they perceived me. I have tried to honour the voice of each participant by making transcriptions of the recorded readings after my return to the UK, which form the basis of the printed texts presented in this book. As I am not attuned to the sound of the Bahamian tongue some forms of expression have inevitably been lost in translation.

I am proud that as a result of my residency these diverse narratives of eleven Bahamian participants, whose own ancestral roots lie in the far-flung continents of Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, have been created and published to counter the Western outlook of my film *Here's Luck*. Finally, I would like to thank Margot Bethel, who runs The Hub project space in Nassau, for her support, as well as Michael McMillan, London based writer/artist of Caribbean descent, for his correspondence, line of questioning and insights that are central to this introduction and for editing all texts.

Bettina Furnée 2012

Here's Luck 3 minute time-lapse film (Bettina Furnée 2011) http://youtu.be/bBMa3rQ_a5I

Sonia Farmer: Did it just start? I-I'm just gonna do it okay (SIGH)

Bettina Furnée: Everybody ready?

Voice from audience: Yes!

SF: *Does thinking the worst make it happen?*

For a long time I watched us drift away from each other

Our conversations coming through in fragments like shells you come upon walking along a beach

So picked over you think you won't get lucky but you do

You find a whole butterfly shell intact

You find it because it cuts your foot

Talking with you was like that

Then one day you asked me that question

Does thinking the worst make it happen?

Does it ?

Do we invite our tragedies into our lives?

Do we see them far off there like rain in the distance?

[some grey curtain drawn along the horizon from sea to sky] (RUSTLING OF PAPERS)

The two-dimensionality of it breath-taking...

I feel a longing then

A longing that extends forever outward [I think thunder is that longing realised]

I didn't mean to make it rain

I don't mean to do a lot of things

I see us from far away [the sorry flatness of us] and our curtains of longing and regret extending forever outward and upward forming for us the tent (COUGH FROM AUDIENCE) of our impending disaster

I know what it means to live here
I remember the tsunami
It was fast I held my breath...
I remember rain so hard it's as if the earth turned upside down
The earth when it was flat
Back before desire for knowing
Before longing gave way to wanderlust
To violence

Is it better to drop off the earth or return from whence you came (TURNING PAGE) eventually?

I asked you that once
I asked you that because I returned
My desire gave way to violence and then I had a language to use against you
That language was familiarity (SOUND OF MOBILE PHONE RINGTUNE STARTS)
That language built us a tiny silver tent of resentment
We made our home and we made our home on the shoreline and we both knew what this meant
No-one thought the best...

But what you asked me then that is the wrong question Instead you must ask yourself

*Will the house be flooded or
Will the house be drowned and
Which one of us will do the deed?*

Bettina Furnée: Just forget

Royann Dean: Yeah great, not making anything official... ish!

BF: So maybe if you say your name I know...

RD: Oh okay

BF: ...which recording it is - No just to me now

RD: Um yeah, my name is Royann

(RAP SOUND, GENERAL LAUGHTER)

BF: Haha yeah we need those drums yeah... yeah

(MURMUR, COUGH, PEAL OF LAUGHTER, RAP OF DRUMS, SOUND OF TSSHK) (.)

BF: Okay Royann

RD: Okay um I'm Royann (RATTLE OF COW BELL) and I know most people okay um... the name of my story is um... it's called pass- I'm Only Passing By

First I showed up marking my territory clenched my fist and held my ground and waited the importance of it all!

The grandeur the significance I waited thinking pondering making lists checking thrice and waiting coming and going

all around me ebb and flow in and out and there I was slowly unclenching I looked up and around

I am still here good! That's good

Somehow I am smaller lighter than before and now I am moving not fast not slow but almost imperceptibly moving definitely not

still ebb and flow in and out and there I was I looked up again blue beyond and *WHAT?*

who knows? who cares? Just move! Go Be

And wonder if it ever really mattered

Jeffrey Meris: My piece... I guess you can say was inspired by... The Bahamas and like all political affiliations, so the way like we kinda juxtapose things. Like I think the image is kinda juxtaposed on the beach like everything around it is so natural in colour and hue and all that kind of stuff and this silver material just comes out of nowhere.

(SELECTING AMBIENT SOUNDTRACK FROM A MAC AND ADJUSTING VOLUME)

My piece is called: *Masks of the Caribbean*:

Clustering then against warm cheek sands
 waves rolling
 sun glistening.

Black people testifying a degradation to an Afro-Caribbean nation
People talking about illegal Haitians [Haitians of many sensations]
 Bahamians - What does it mean to be of Bahamas, but not made in the Bahamas?
 A juxtaposed people with no sight?
 Foolish politicians that shed false light?
 Money
 Jobs
 Corruptions
 Citizenships?
 Citizens that are not of the ship?

The ship!
 The ship of slavery
 Over the hill
 Pumping water
 Shotgun weddings
 That same ship that traded switching for tea and (INAUDIBLE) rice for harmony.
 Bahamians - What does it mean to be of The Bahamas?
 A bowl of conch salad and a cool Kalik?

Little bit of Junkanoo?
One sweet girl from down the road?
The one that got the peas 'n rice
[You know the peas 'n rice]

We horse-ride down town
A fake Gucci bag
A little bit of weed
Devali
The Saxons
Don't forget Baptists, the Baptist!

Well, doesn't that make *me* Bahamian?
Man *I* is Bahamian just like *you*
Born foreign
Immigrated
Repatriated
Hated
Under-appreciated
Bahamian

Voice from audience: WHOOHEE!!

(APPLAUSE)

(SOMEONE TALKING)

Rudi Levarity: Good evening, my name is Rudi Levarity and this is what... this is my interpretation of what I saw here. I have um termed it or gave it a title called *Sobering Thoughts*:

It's a windy day out at the beach. There are two friends who like to go swimming and they're ready to take a swim and this is their dialogue:

It's a windy day out at the beach.

Do you think we should still go out to swim today?

Ah, the other said, ah it will calm down, that's just a pass over...

Say, but the wind's not letting up. Oh my god, it's blowing the tent into the water...

Well let's see what happens.

Now the tent's beginning to go into the water as the tide comes closer to the shore ...and now the wind is taking hold of the tent... and now it's beginning to go into the water...and now it's going around and around and around...

Man this is amazing - I wonder what's in it to cause it to go around and around and around...

I've never seen anything like it before... and it's still going around and around and around and around and around and around and around and around and around... it's amazing...and it's still going around... and around... and around!

And now it's gone, up to Andrews I suppose

Yeah, well I think we should go home now...

Shall we tell anyone about this?

Nah, they wouldn't believe us anyway, they already think we are crazy.

Well I think that's a good reason why we should stop drinking!

Audience: Ha! Ha! Ha!

(SOUND OF DRUMMING)

(COUGHING)

RL: [The end]

Bettina Furnée: You're ready?

Jace McKinney: Okay, this one is untitled.

The man in the can is only one man
with one hand on his (INAUDIBLE) Stitchie
and a Rum 'n Coke in the other
(LOUD) *DIS MY GOD!* he professes
as he tongue-kisses
that translucent vessel
that contains
that liquid holy spirit.
The hard times
can't cause him to lose that religion.
In the ballroom gutter
to him is like the womb of his mother.
Warm... comforting... slick with the entrails
of regurgitated memories.
Somewhere a family waits
staring out from the shores for that father
who has set sail on da wine-dark ocean.

(TURNING PAPERS) JM: This one is called *My will*.

It's dark
I'm all alone and there's zombies outside.
No that can't work.

It's daytime
and I can still see the sun
when I close my eyes.
I'm all alone
but it's on a beach
or rather I'm on a cliff that's on a beach.
The water is so distant and deep.
I can't believe that I've walked all these miles of sand three days
without food only water
just to climb and perch on a cliff next to a bush.
But this is the best place to die.
I wonder if there is really any pirate treasure in these little caves.
Let me look.
To think that eight hours ago I was warm and snuggled up in my bed
This place is too placid.
You can't have a placid death and a placid place!
I've got to juxtapose.
Jumping off this cliff to the rocks below and screaming
would be the opposite of placid.
That'll do!
(LOUD) AAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHH
Not enough strength to jump
just enough to scream.

Voice from audience: (INAUDIBLE)
(HANDS CLAPPING ON THIGHS)

Margot Bethel: Haha

Bettina Furnée: Ready haha?

(GENERAL LAUGHTER)

MB: I don't have my glasses. I actually can't see this very well, but I'm gonna try...um (CLEAR THROAT) Okay

All I can think about is how *long* the wait

How long will it take for the tide to change

for the winds to break

for my ship to come in?

How long will I wait to be free

to be carried somewhere

anywhere but here

this place

where I face

where I face my worst fears

Now I am buoyant

now I am on my way.

I have cast my lines and the moon draws me from the land into her... *mercuriality*

This feeling

this desire to escape the land

the soil

the sand

shifts.

I feel adrift unsure alone

I want to return

retrace

jump ship.

Too late!

How quickly the seasons change!
How suddenly my fears break the shore
break my heart
my mind.

I am divided
Undecided
Return!

I can come back
nearer to the familiar
I can come back I will come back!

But now it's too late
and home is a distant fading shoreline

Already I am sick
homesick
seasick
I see your shadows however in fading light and my desire is returning

But there is no returning
Home is a new horizon

Agnieszka Christie: Ummm

Pashinky(?)

my orthodox village

green pastures.

I was a shepherd.

Me alone in a little straw pyramid

awaiting patiently and impatiently

it's brain to pass.

Watching drops of liquid water pass through

that could not miss me.

My pyramid was small

why did I feel like a giant?

Sheep in the distance.

White little balls of mischief

appeared hiding in a distant forest

(LONG SIGH)

... waiting for the growing mushroom surprise
Are they not wise?

Shantinique Rolle: My name is Shantinique. The story is called *Silver's Stay on the Beach*

Today is a beautiful... day
calm crystal waters
fresh air
cool breeze
the birds singing
that sweet early morning sound.

No one will guess this is coming from a... talking foil tent.
My name is Silver
and I live on this peaceful beach named sunny island
which is chosen first for individuals
who like a quiet time
or romantic vacation.
I do get bored
because I don't have any friends
but I don't let it get to me.
I'll just sit back
and watch the humans play.
Sometimes getting wet is pretty fun

(TURNING PAPERS)

because there's nothing else to do
but just sit around
and watch other people play.

The sun is about to set
and the tide got a little rough.
Next thing I know
I was pulled in the water slowly
then drift off into the deep blue sea
[That's it... that's it]

Brandon Bethel: Right um my name is Brandon Bethel and this is *Just a Foreign Entity*

I am that silver tent over there cruelly left on the shores of nature's isle.
To be subjected to an inevitable fate.
To be carried away by the currents.
For the invisible hurricane comes for me.
See as the tide creeps and lurks in the light of the sun in amber clad
coming to cleanse thy wish does not belong.
It knows I am a foreign entity and I seek to restore balance.
In its horror I am swept away on tides of Bahamian waters.
To be swept away to my destiny.
To a place that I'll never leave it were-if it were up to me and I know why I am the one to be taken away.
I am the blemish.
Just like those human words as it may be.
Just foreign entities on nature's face to be washed away. (PAPER RUSTLING) (SIGH)
Watch me drift aimlessly and then off into the horizon
with a sun and sea kiss
where I am to freeze and burn
where fire and ice collide.

(INAUDIBLE) it is a term to display suffering torment and anguish
and it is this I have felt for the first moments of my life.
But on this island as the waves can attest
the misery is made easy because the winds allied with the waves
push my sails deep into deep water
deeper into my shallow dreams.
But wait (INAUDIBLE) can also mean rebirth (TURNING PAGES)
and this is why the hurricane came for me.

It is the balance seeking to restore balance
You see me the foreign entity disappear
long before the sand is swallowed by the sea. (RUSTLING OF PAPERS)

You see me once more
the foreign entity disappearing while the sea swallows the sand.
Ex nihilo appears two lads.
They belong here and I do not
and my tears of leaving is rewarded a million times over
because I saw them arrive.
But as another consolation prize
though I was swept away by the sea I saw the city below the surface
a place with wondrous things.
Do you see how I disappeared without a trace?
Because I am a foreign entity.
(APPLAUSE)

Tina Johnson: Margot! You put you me!
Margot Bethel: (INAUDIBLE) Please!
(GIGGLES FROM THE AUDIENCE)
TJ: Okay (DEEP BREATH)

I lie here,
my consciousness
barely registering my placement.
Do I have form this time?
Is this shape?
Is this consciousness?
Is this light?
Is it water?
What is it that I feel?
Am I here? (SIGH)
I feel something.
Is it in my head?
Should I-should I move?
Can I move?
Do I have shape?
Do I have form?
Something's moving me greater than me,
yet I'm connected to it and I feel it,
but where do I feel it?
Is it tactile?
Is it wet?
Is it me?

Am I cold?
Am I warm?
Where is this place that I cannot see?
The light reflects and refracts
Do I have eyes?
Is this real?
Is this inner space or outer space?
I don't know
I can't see.
I can't see, but I can't *not* see
it's all around me
the light
the water
the air.
There's something around me
holding me
cradling me
shipping me out to sea
and bringing me back into myself.
I feel signs of life
there's somebody here
there's something here
somebody
something else.

(APPLAUSE)

Maria Govan: (SOFT) I'm nervous (WHISPER) I feel nervous!
Bettina Furnée: (SOFT) Okay
MG: Okay um...

I am still now
can feel the earth below me
surrendered
whole body planted
unencumbered
and source I feel you as light at dances
skin eyes world brightened
reflected backward
upward inward
and in the dancing I am steady
resting knowing that she holds me
this land
this eternal moment now.
But now soon dies
and births anew
expands collapses into time
and in the dying all shape-shifts
as water rises like the tide. (SIGH)
Yes water rises
as if from all around
without within
between my skin and that of hers
this earth.
I am weightless
as water lifts me [hmm missed a beat oops]
and roots cannot cling to that which was

the death has happened
and without surrender I am drowning. (MOTORBIKE PASSES IN THE DISTANCE) (SWALLOWING)
She takes me stormy water with no apology
and distance grows between us as you watch.
Same place still standing
I am gone now.
Your eyes beg to see things different.
Death comes like weather
a storm passing and for those remaining there's no doing
The dance but only to witness and surrender [Oh my god! I'm sorry hmm] (LONG PAUSE)
[I have to make up my last line I guess I don't know what it is]
The dance only to witness and surrender [question mark]
The dance only to witness and surrender?
The dance only to witness and surrender
The dance... the dance (MOTORBIKE PASSES BY THE WINDOW NOISILY)

This project has been made possible through the contributions and help of many Bahamian people, and my thanks go first to all who took part in the Instant Writing Event on 21 July 2011: Brandon Bethel, Margot Bethel, Agnieszka Christie, Royann Dean, Sonia Farmer, Maria Govan, Tina Johnson, who ad-libbed her story on the night, Rudi Levarity, Jace McKinney, Jeffrey Meris and Shantinique Rolle. My heartfelt thanks also go to John Cox, director of Popopstudios for the use of the work/live studio and the house in Adelaide as a base for filming, Margot Bethel, director of the Hub, Nassau, for hosting the Instant Writing Event and recruiting writers, Holly Parotti for taking me round and Kachelle Knowles and students of the College of the Bahamas for assistance with building the shelter and filming. Thank you also Crispin Dillet, Dede Brown, Dylan, Phoebe, Katrina, Alistair, Duke and Lisa at Popopstudios for a great time.

The project was initiated and managed in England by Jeremy Theophilus, director of A FINE LINE, who organised the Material Response exchange residency programme between Colchester & Ipswich Museums and the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas and Popopstudios International Centre of the Visual Arts. He was supported by David A. Bailey in facilitating the partnership with the Bahamas. Thank you to the staff at Ipswich Museum for help in researching and disseminating this project, especially to Emma Roodhouse and Julia Devonshire, art curators, and Darren Stevens and Graham Webber, exhibition organisers at Colchester & Ipswich Museum, and Lynn Harris of AND Publishing for inspired advice. I am extremely grateful for the support of Michael McMillan with writing the introduction following our email correspondence and phone calls, as well as his expert handling of the final editing and layout of the texts, which would have looked far less consistent otherwise. Finally thank you to Ian, Katherine, Jo, Beverley, Miranda and all at BAT, for their ideas and feedback.

The film *Here's Luck* and all eleven sound recordings, accompanied by this book, are exhibited at Ipswich Museum from 25 July 2012 as part of the second of two exhibitions for Material Response by Bettina Furnée.

Material Response is part of Eastern Exchanges, the official East of England part of Stories of the World, a programme of the London 2012 Olympiad, presenting museum exhibitions across the UK. The project is led by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, in partnership with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

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