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**Bodies of Words and Bodies in the Words:<sup>i</sup> Form and Content, in Literature about  
TABOOS**

Dark skin, curly hair, dancing, eating with our hands, certain religious rituals, same-sex love, interracial marriage, and many others are some examples of non-harmful, non-violent traits and acts, concerning the body, that can be found in the literature familiar to my part of the world—Guyana and the Caribbean. At some point in our history, the features and acts of the body in the [incomplete] list above were looked down upon by some sections of society and they have all been rendered TABOO.

There have been and continue to be attempts to shut down/eradicate/negate these TABOOS. But what is the true meaning of this word? Outlining the strange and unwanted—the unwelcome, misunderstood, and unknown—in scarlet for the world to see? Or, more insidiously, a tool used to *other*? For writers to successfully write about everything the word connotes, we must understand what the word represents, and, more deeply, society's true purpose in labelling/branding acts and peoples as TABOO.

Actions and characteristics identified as TABOO are highlighted to be repudiated and destroyed. TABOOS—regardless of religious, cultural and moral significance—assume a place in society that emphasizes these traits by labeling, marking, or striking them out while simultaneously demonizing and denigrating them, so that, eventually, they will be eliminated entirely.

For example, **homosexuals** in Guyana bravely exhibiting their sexuality (by dress, holding their partner's hand, and publicly displaying affection) face constant bullying, threats, and coercion. ~~As a gay man, myself, this attempted crossing out of the narratives of a unique/alternative minority is terrifying. I am TABOO. Despite the discrimination and negativities associated with being TABOO, we homosexuals continue to survive, live, and love between the lines drawn over us, around us, holding us bound.~~ Presenting this paper, I make my TABOO-self known to the world, and reach beyond the limits preventing me from **discussing my sexuality, from coming out to my parents, from buying my boyfriend flowers on anniversaries.**

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<sup>i</sup> This paper advocates for a form of experimental writing that uses the written text itself to imbue symbolic value to characters and themes. I first came across a version of this style while reading Mark Z. Danielewski's fantastic horror novel, *House of Leaves* (Pantheon Books, 2000), which, in a way, further underscores the applicability of using the style for addressing social TABOOS, as all TABOOS are regarded as horror by those who choose to brand them as such.

To ask “How does Literature contend with TABOOS?” is to ask how Literature contends with me, a TABOO. Do I think that my body, my feelings, the sum of my thoughts – subjected to scrutiny, ridicule and disdain – belong to the same category of writing as

normalness? How can I be Times New Roman, 12, double-spaced into neat lines and paragraphs, when in the real world I am scarlet, scratched out, with my “faults” magnified for everyone to see? If you write about me, should your words not contain the very essence of the strange, the unknown, the pervasive and the fear-inducing that makes my **TABOO** definitive of me? Should your words not seek to represent me, *exactly*? How can I be written alongside the norm?

If you write me in your stories,

I want you to mix my past with my present. The teenager watches. I want the adult-me to listen to the teenage-me tell stories while the other school boys in uniform go out to play cricket, and I go to the library, but that’s okay because the library got me here.

In your plays, show:

TEENAGE-ME: *(reading)* “...exactly how the **TABOO**’s relationships are shaped.”

DAD: What? Let us go for a swim.

TEENAGE-ME: No.

DAD: Let us go play some cricket.

TEENAGE-ME: No.

DAD: *(looks away disappointedly)*

In your poems,

Write  
me  
in  
words  
and symbols  
that show  
exactly  
what  
I  
am

If you ever write about **TABOOS**, embrace our weirdness and otherness. Make it a part of your text. Put our **TABOO** bodies in your bodies of words, and let them comment on each other. Force the **TABOO** on to your reader. Discomfort them until they see what really lies beneath, until they see that literature is literature, regardless of form, as people are people, regardless of **TABOOS**.

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