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PROVERBS AND PROVERBIAL THINKING WITHIN LOUISE BENNETT'S POETRY

Abstract: This article examines the poetry of Louise Bennett (1919 – 2006) using the concept of proverbial thinking to explore the impact of the proverbs in her poems. Proverbial thinking is used as a broad term referring to diverse methods of using, collecting, and preserving proverbs, which in turn activates a sense of urgency surrounding the need to preserve and protect a body of knowledge. Looking at proverbial thinking is also about pointing out elements of proverbial use and knowledge that are not always obvious and that become even more interesting when analysed. Bennett's own collection of proverbs, here entitled the Proverb Manuscript, serves as a means of expanding the interpretations of the proverbs. The moral and thematic headings under which Bennett places each proverb in the Proverb Manuscript are considered integral to understanding the malleability of the proverb form. The openness of the concept of proverbial thinking also allows for discussion of many of the central topics which surround Bennett, whose career crucially straddles the shifting cultural moment when Jamaica gained independence in 1962. Overall, the article illustrates the multiplicity of proverbial thinking that reflects the layers of complexity within Bennett's poems, which are written exclusively in Creole.

Keywords: Louise Bennett, Jamaican proverbs, poetry, Creole, proverb manuscript.

1. Introduction

Scholars have long recognised the importance of proverbs for Louise Bennett's poetry, but none has yet offered an in-depth study of her use of this form. This article demonstrates how proverbs are key to understanding Bennett's poetry, arguing that she creates a multi-layered poetic art form and illustrating how proverbs expand our readings of the poetic text through the multiple meanings they offer. Bennett was aware of the importance of folklore material as a means of capturing the concerns and interests of a community, including the importance of proverbs. As a result, she presents poetry and proverbs as intimately connected art forms within a communally shared linguistic and cultural heritage.

The following article leans on an analysis of Bennett's Proverb Manuscript to provide a wider understanding of her literary use of proverbs (Appendix 1). This collection of Louise Bennett's personal collection of proverbs, lost since 1976 and recently rediscovered by the author of this article, offers a unique and nuanced source text to contextualise and advance readings of her poetry (this collection will be referred to as the Proverb Manuscript hereafter and the story of the discovery of the Proverb Manuscript can be read in Appendix 2 along with a detailed description of the manuscript itself). The Proverb Manuscript reveals the inter-relational quality of proverbial thinking identifiable in Bennett's work. In the Proverb Manuscript, Bennett organises proverbs under moral and thematic headings, such as Greed, Ambition, Caution and offers 'translated' meanings of the proverbs in Standard English. Examination of this taxonomy and interpretation of proverbs offers a suggestively open reading of their impact on Bennett's poetry.

2. Reframing Bennett's Poetry Through Proverbial Thinking

An analysis that is attentive to proverbial thinking allows an analytical review of Bennett's poems through proverbs which are explicitly written into her poetic texts. This approach demonstrates how proverbs provide a broader and more significant

reading of the poems. Each approach will be considered in detail throughout the article.

The first approach illustrates how proverbs can form a structural framework as, for example, in the poem 'Proverbs' where multiple proverbs are explicitly placed within the verse lines (Bennett 1942:35; Bennett 1966:217; Bennett 1983:58). This leads to a unique layering effect within the poetic narrative wherein the structuring power of proverbs dominates the poem. A second approach examines how Bennett employs a proverb as a core element to a poem where the poem circles around the proverb, that is to say where the poetry relies upon the inherent qualities of the proverb to enhance the poetic narrative. An example of this technique, analysed in detail later, is the poem 'Wartime Grocery'(Bennett 1966:83). Bennett borrows from the imagery inherent in the central proverb, 'Jackass say de worl' noh level', and harnesses it to flesh out the poetic narrative.

In the two areas of proverbial use referred to above, that is, proverbs as structuring devices and as integral cores of a poem, the presence of an explicit proverb within the poems is central. In reframing her poetry for a new critique, a third approach is proposed which considers the absence of proverbs in Bennett's corpus of poetry. This will be briefly addressed in this article.

The everyday integration of proverbial wisdom has been passed down through communities over generations. To borrow Carolyn Cooper's phrase here, 'the essence of a proverb is its immediacy of access to members of the community'(Cooper 1993:38). Sharing a communal folklore heritage can be integral to the identity of a society and the presence of proverbs assists in representing the realities of a society that shares an understanding of them. Commonality is integral to the relationship of Bennett's poetry and proverbs, where the proverbial element embodies the commonality of the folk, that is 'the people' that Mieder refers to in the quote: 'After all, proverbs are the poetry of the people!'(Sobieski and Mieder 2005: xiv). By integrating proverbs into her creative art, Bennett is promoting not just a sense of cultural identity through the language she uses, but she is championing the traditions of Jamaican heritage as part of a living literary and communal conversation. Not only does Bennett use Creole to undermine the position of colonial Standard English,

but she fully values the wealth of oral folklore of her heritage, highlighted specifically by her use of proverbs. Her poetry presents a communal, cultural "writing". In essence, she engages a community of readers/audiences in a Creole conversation.

To elaborate on this notion of a literary conversation framed in traditional expressions, it is helpful to reflect on Neal Norrick's definition of proverbs: proverbs are consistently described as self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and a fixed poetic form (Norrick1985:32). To interrogate this further, Norrick considers how the traditional nature of proverbs correlates closely with their status as items of folklore. He writes that:

> […] the correlation between traditionality and folklore status comes out clearly in Abrahams 1969 definition of folklore as 'traditional items of knowledge which arise in recurring performance'… since folklore is traditional and recurring it is viewed as authorless, sourceless and also as non- literary, non-learned. Further in as much as proverbs are linguistic items, the recurring performances in question must be verbal (even if they are later recorded in writing) (Norrick, 1985:39).

Norrick observes the traditional aspect of proverbs in the framework of their repetition through recurring performance, their authorless nature and the oral nature of the performances. The traditional wisdoms from older generations were initially passed down orally, and the emphasis Norrick gives to transmission of a non-literary proverbial form through oral channels accords with the debates surrounding the move from oral to text that scholars have continually debated within the field of Caribbean studies and across the body of Bennett's work. Norrick's parenthetical comment on 'writing' also raises questions as to the collectability of proverbs in written form; proverbs remain essentially speech elements within the field of folklore, and Bennett embraces oral forms in performance and in the written textual form in her poetry. Her live performances emphasise how proverbs come alive in spoken form as part of the living culture where Bennett manages the perceived schism between oral and written, and in utilising proverbs she creates a space for this 'traditional item of knowl-

edge' in preserving, validating, and shaping the cultural identities and poetics of Jamaican people. Lisa Tomlinson elaborates on Bennett's skilful balance between oral and written form:

> In reintroducing and legitimizing oral folk knowledge during a time when such a literary approach was often seen as inferior, Bennett's use of this approach, across the span of the written form, allowed her to speak directly to Jamaicans, thus promoting self-pride and a holistic sense of cultural identity (Tomlinson 2017:17-18).

The description of a 'holistic sense of cultural identity' is particularly significant. In this respect, Bennett was a visionary; she accepted the challenge at the time to champion the Jamaican 'dialect' (as she named it in her earliest publications), which was itself seen as inferior, utilising it in both performance and in the crafting of written representation. Carolyn Cooper also perceives that Bennett was ahead of her time in the Caribbean;

> She (Bennett) has long recognised the evocative power of Jamaican proverbs as the locus of folk philosophy. She weaves this wealth of cultural inheritance and knowledge into her artistry and the application of proverbs demonstrates a cross fertilisation of that inheritance within the construct of her poems (Cooper 1993:45).

The cross-fertilisation of inheritance that Cooper refers to allows Bennett to bring the wealth of generational wisdom provided by the proverbs into her poems and Cooper hints here that 'folk philosophy'—or we might say proverbial thinking—is a dynamic transformative part of Bennett's poetics. Bennett's use of the proverbs reinforces the idea that multiplicity is central to reading her poems. In the quotation above Cooper calls this 'the evocative power of Jamaican proverbs'(Cooper 1993:45). The presence of the proverbs creates a synergistic relationship between her poetry and proverbs which leads to the re-valuing of proverbs as spoken art forms and seeing poetry as an important site of proverbial expression. This encourages the reader to reimagine the complementary relationship created between the poetry and proverbial thought. Bennett's use of proverbs is integral to her poetic approach to the 'everyday'. Proverbial poetry is informed

by social experience and practice, and for Bennett it enables a non-partisan critique of those experiences and practices. In Bennett's poetry, the commonality of the proverbial heritage creates a means to reclaim truths passed on through ancestral voices where proverbs open out layers of historicity and interpretation from within a poetic construct.

The phrase 'layers of historicity' is used here to emphasise the idea that the proverbs are calling back to the past, with each proverb layering echoes of the voices of those who have lived and communed before. Being authorless, the proverbs retain a sense of being related to the wisdoms of older generations even as they remain relevant in contemporary contexts. The voices coming through are reflected in the multiplicity of the voices within Bennett's poetic narratives and this is also something to consider when looking at Bennett's characters and personae. Essentially, the notion of historicity prompts consideration of what qualities of the past remain relevant and how the past may be framed in particular ways. Prahlad's holistic understanding is of the proverb as 'a lived part of the culture'(Keulker 2009:657). Bennett incorporates into her own poetic and cultural commentaries this aspect of a traditional "living culture" which is embodied in the proverbs and thus she creates multiple layers to her commentary: the layer of the present, and the inherited layers of the past. Bennett stabilises the shared needs and the identity of her own community through the relationship she creates between proverbs and her poetry.

3. 'On a Tramcar': Listening to 'Dialect'

Scholars of Louise Bennett will be familiar with the poem 'On a Tramcar' and its status as the origin of her decision to write in Creole, a fact highlighted by Morris (Bennett 1983:xi). Bennett was greatly influenced by Claude McKay who first wrote in Creole in 1909 and Bennett follows him from the 1930s onwards. Like him, Bennett was educated under the colonial educational system which did not provide her with the freedom of language to represent communal everyday interests of Jamaicans in her poetry; instead, she chose to show this through writing in what

she initially calls 'dialect'. Bennett explains this decision in her 1968 interview with Dennis Scott:

> From the time I was quite young, I wanted to write. At first I started to write things about birds, and bees and trees. But then I realized that I was not doing what I really wanted to do. There was life going on around me and people living their lives, and what I was writing had nothing to do with what was really happening around me. So then I started to take a greater interest in people—to listen to what they were saying and how they were saying it, and the first dialect verse I wrote was about a tramcar (Scott 1968: 97-101).

What is important to note is that when Bennett wrote her first dialect poem as a teenager of nineteen, it was a direct consequence of wanting to write about people, through listening to their voices, through listening to what they were saying and doing. 'On a Tramcar' was her first poem written in Jamaican 'dialect' and is included in her inaugural book of poetry, (Jamaica) Dialect Verses, published in 1942 (Appendix 3). For Bennett, however, this step she took was not solely about writing in Creole — it was about viewing poetry as fundamentally 'human-centred'. This was the moment she began to listen to the people around her, the content of their everyday chatter, and to the way they were using the vernacular to communicate. This is the origin of not only Bennett's use of Creole, but of her lifelong position as observer and commentator on the everyday. In using Creole from this point forward, Bennett engendered new forms of critique and discourse.

However, it is notable that in 'On the Tramcar' Bennett did not initially turn to proverbs. Bennett's framing of this early vernacular poem, published in its entirety in the 1942 edition, would have afforded the perfect occasion to claim space for a targeted proverb to be used in an educational manner or as part of new poetic idiom. The poem starts with the description of the actions taken by the market women when the poetic speaker gets on board. The first lines are as follows:

> Preadout yuhself deh Liza, wan
> Dress 'oman dah look like sey

She se' de li space side a we
An want foace harself een deh (Bennett 1966:30-31).

On a socio-political level, this could be read literally as the market women making no room for a middle-class woman such as Bennett's 'wan / Dress –oman dah look like sey'. However, the condensed expression of this phrase feels reflective of proverbial speech where a multiplicity of meaning always underpins what is said. Even though there is no proverb in this first poem in the dialect, the sense hovers that there is more than one interpretation of the language — the connotation of the poshness and the schism in class between them and this 'dress-up' woman would not be lost on the market women, in their chatter, and the tension of the moment. This creates a poetic space for a social commentary that is essentially unsaid but understood in the context of the situation and environment of the tram. The commonality that enables the understanding of proverbs links to the commonality of the language that Bennett uses to explore the world of the market women.

Furthermore, the framing of this poem in Creole can be viewed metaphorically as making no room for the Anglophone language associated with those not from the working class. In Bennett's first steps to reclaim the language of the Jamaican people as a cultural marker, the absence of a proverb could be seen as a marker of the dominance of the coloniser's language over the language of the colonised; this is not to say that proverbs are seen as essential components of authentic Creole. However, the absence of proverb in this first dialectal poem perhaps evidences the instability of the moment and illustrates that Bennett's initial focus is to explore writing creatively in Creole. The notion of instability applies to the juxtaposition of the Standard English of Bennett's education and her desire that is now present to write in the Creole—in other words, the redefining of colonial dominance in vernacular terms. In response, Bennett's later use of proverbs in her poetry can be seen as reclaiming even more space for the colonised by remapping the relationship between proverbs and poetry. Proverbs impose a greater influence on Bennett's thinking as her use of the vernacular is solidified. In this early '(Ja-

maican) dialect verse' Bennett claims a national voice in the public sphere, one of empowerment and social redress.

For Janet Neigh, the mobility of the tram allegorically represents the cultural progression of the dialect spoken inside the vehicle and the heralding of independence (Neigh 2009:5-16). Consequently, in Bennett's poem, the 'li'(little) space of the tramcar becomes a microcosm for the state of Jamaica, through a Kingston-centred lens. While Neigh concentrates on the space inside the tram and the clash of class and social issues within the 'theatre space' of the tramcar, there is another space that is equally important. That is the liminal space between the street and the tramcar itself. This represents not only the divisions between class and gender but also creates the threshold between divisions of coloniser and colonised, where the physical crossing over from the status quo of colonial dominance captures the social instability of everyday life at this national moment of tension in approaching the end of colonial rule. It also represents the division between the Anglophone and the Creole and captures the decisive movement taken by Bennett to take subversive control through language. Therefore, by examining the issues of representation in the poem 'On a Tramcar', Bennett's work shows she is choosing Brathwaite's 'nation language' at a crucial time. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness are part of the process of identity construction: it is through the knowledge of the self and the discovery of others that an individual develops a feeling of belonging and security. The exclusion of the 'wan dress 'oman' from the community of the market women in the tram car gave rise to Bennett scrutinising her own position and may point to her decision to create her own identity as a writer in the language of the people. The decision to write in Creole embodies the politics of representation that Bennett makes when she chooses to claim the language of the people in her poetry. Bennett listened to the proverbs being spoken around her and it is in the framework of transformational listening and multi-layered performance that proverbs take their place as a form of creative practice. The following sections discuss the influence of the proverbs and the different approaches proposed above to examine the centrality of proverbial thinking in Bennett's poetry.

4. A Skeleton of Proverbs: Poetic Structure and Framing Techniques in 'Proverbs'

In the poem 'Proverbs', Bennett showcases the proverbs in line with the first approach outlined at the beginning of this article. In this poem the proverbs form a structural framework to the poem (Appendix 4). In stark contrast with the absence of proverbs noted in her first dialect poem 'On A Tramcar', this is a poem that is uniquely constructed around proverbs as an explicit part of the content. Notably the poem 'Proverbs' was first published in the 1942 edition of (Jamaica) Dialect Verses in the same volume as 'On A Tramcar', where the juxtaposition of these two poems in the same collection shows Bennett now claiming the folk element of proverbs as a fundamental part of her poetic voice. The (re)claiming of the proverbs in this poem strongly underscores Bennett's progressive desire to write with a greater focus on the people in her community, in a language and poetic style that embodies their heritage. The title of the poem itself proclaims the attention she is drawing to this complex and layered relationship between proverb and poetry.

A fundamental reading of the poem 'Proverbs' is that it deals with the memory of a dead parent. In terms of the authorial 'I', Bennett's poetry is generally dramatised in different kinds of voices. In 'Proverbs', Bennett uses the first-person voice of the orphan, who uses traditional Jamaican proverbs that carry with them the weight of collective memory. This automatically draws the orphan (and the reader's perspective of the orphan) into the collective identity of her people. The young lady turns for guidance to the proverbs as she enters a hostile world where catastrophe has befallen her. Her reliance on proverbs mirrors an interest in proverbs that the Jamaicans have turned to through generations. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Bennett presents this particular proverbially-led poem in the voice of the young girl, where historically the proverbs have been the province of elders. Yet, the poetic voice in 'Proverbs' is even more complex than this. At the start of a stanza, it is the disembodied voice of the mother that the reader hears, teaching the child lessons from the proverbs. Is the mother omnipresent? Or is it a more autonomous role? A voice is present, sometimes explicitly framed with quotation marks, but the voice is also indeterminable, which

adds to the question of who the author/ speaker of the proverbs might be, reflecting the authorless nature of proverbs.

In placing the proverbs in different positions in each stanza, Bennett uses different visual and aural effects of proverbial thinking within the narrative. Following Bennett's sequencing of her proverbial framework reveals how the poetic text in each stanza is built around the proverb producing a "skeleton effect" throughout the poem. Furthermore, the categories under which Bennett places the proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript offer a broader reading of the orphan's story and character. The categorisations of the proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript adds complexity to a reading of this poem, where proverbs are often placed by Bennett under two or more headings. In the first verse, Bennett establishes that the orphan's situation has changed:

> 'When ashes cowl dawg sleep in deh';[1]
> For sence Ma dead, yuh see,
> All kine o' ole black nayga start
> Teck liberty wid me.

The focus of this proverb is the presence of the fire which keeps people/animals away when it is burning; however, when it cools there are no barriers. In this case, the orphan now feels exposed to particular dangers, dangers that she imagines in relation to racialised and social hierarchies. The reading of the poem is strengthened by the proverb where the element of the changing nature of the fire draws attention to the 'temporary nature of power/life' (Morris 1966:158). Throughout the Proverb Manuscript, a layered reading of this proverb can be constructed, taking into account the meanings and associations that Bennett explicitly recorded. In the Proverb Manuscript, Bennett places this proverb under two category headings of Change and Class. Bennett's first categorisation of the proverb fits with the translated meaning of the proverb given above—that a change in circumstances has occurred. In the following line it is evident that the orphan's mother has died. Importantly, the second categorisation of the proverb in

[1] 'Wen ashes cowl dawg sleep in deh'; circumstances alter cases/ when one has lost his high position any one can take liberties (*Change 1 and Class 28*).

Bennett's Proverb Manuscript (Class) allows for an expanded interpretation of this proverb within the context of the poem itself. By placing the proverb under the category of Class (which may not be an obvious interpretation here), Bennett now interrelates the categories and allows the reader to realise, from the outset, that the change in circumstances in which the orphan finds herself now also relates to a change in status/class. The translation given by Bennett for this proverb 'when ashes cole dog sleep in deh' under the heading of Class in the Proverb Manuscript is 'when one has lost his high position any one can take liberties'. In noting that the mother afforded the child a higher position in society and with that a form of protection from anyone taking liberties, the change of situation that occurs when the mother dies can be better understood. This allows a fuller reading of the orphan's predicament which can then influence an interpretation of the rest of the stanza and the poem itself. As Cooper observed earlier, Bennett is interested in the imagery within the proverb. In the second stanza she uses an animal image to conjure up a picture of a dog with fleas.

> Me no wrap up wid dem, for me
> Pick an choose me company:
> Ma always tell me seh: 'Yuh sleep
> Wid dawg yuh ketch him flea'.[2]

The proverb, 'yuh sleep wid dawg yuh ketch him flea', expresses how the orphan tries to disassociate herself from an imagined 'common' people. A tension is created here around status and division where the perception of common people is pejorative and does not easily embrace community spirit. This also refers to the upturning of social order in which the orphan finds herself as a result of her change of status. Bennett categorises this proverb under the linked headings of 'Consequence and Results' and 'Weakness'. Here, Bennett draws an interesting relationship between victim or perpetrator. In effect, the placement of the proverb under these two headings asks the question as to whether

[2] 'Yuh sleep wid dawg yuh ketch him flea'; one who keeps bad company then evil will befall you (*Consequence 7 – see Results and Weakness).*

the ensuing situation is the result of the circumstances that the orphan finds herself in, or whether it is her own attitude of weak self-righteous snobbery that exacerbates the situation. Therefore, where the verse gives a poetic interpretation of the proverb—that it is important to pick and choose company—Bennett's categorisation of this proverb provokes questions of interpretation when considered alongside the poetic narrative, leading into so many dispersed directions. Bennett herself recognised the multiplicity of proverbial interpretation and used her knowledge of this to expand the poetic interpretation.

As the poem progresses Bennett exposes the hypocritical nature of the speaker in that she continues to be polite to her neighbours yet she sees herself above them:

> Ah teck time gwan me ways an doan
> Fas eena dem affair,
> Me tell den mawnin, for 'Howdy
> An tenky bruck no square'.[3]

The proverb emphasises that saying 'howdy' (hello, how do you do) and 'tenky' (thank you) 'bruck'(breaks, harms) no one. However, this focus on everyday politeness is in tension with the criticisms of the new neighbours that the poetic speaker voices throughout the poem. In requesting politeness or kindness from others, it could also be noted that from the opening of the poem, the speaker fails to offer it herself, revealing herself to be someone who does 'fass eena dem affair'.

Interestingly this proverb is not in her collection and this is a notable omission as she uses it in this poem, and in the monologues. Perhaps it has become so ingrained in everyday speech that it was an oversight. This could warrant further examination. Bennett uses proverbs within the rhyme scheme and, since she is free about the placement of proverbs and lineation, where her poems might be strict in some respects (rhyme scheme, stanza length), she is relatively flexible about using a proverb over two lines. As observed in this poem, proverbs are not discrete and do not always require a single line.

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[3] 'Howdy an tenky bruck noh square'; Saying please and thank you won't harm anyone (not included in the manuscript).

The dual categorisation of the proverb in the following stanza allows the reader to further pick up the disingenuous nature of the orphan's visits to the parson:

> Sometime me go a parson yard
> Sidung lickle an chat –
> 'Ef yuh no go a man fire-side, yuh no know
> Ow much fire-stick a bwile him pot'.[4]

The juxtaposition between the headings in the Proverb Manuscript of Association and Knowledge is an interesting one. The orphan has gone to glean knowledge, but also to acquire vicariously the associated and reflected status of the parson by gaining knowledge of the inner sanctum of his home. In context, it is the elders who hold respect in Jamaican society in Bennett's time and here, because of the interplay afforded by the two categorisations, the orphan is seen as either disrespecting or manipulating that relationship.

As demonstrated in the stanza above, the dual interpretation informed a more complex reading of the orphan's motivation. In this final illustration of the proverbial skeleton, reference to the Proverb Manuscript shows that by using one single proverb, Bennett not only invokes a traditionally recognised interpretation, but also expands it into a fivefold lesson of moral behaviour:

> But when me go look fi parson
> Me ongle talk bout me soul,
> For Ma use fi tel me; 'Sweet mout fly
> Follow coffin go a hole'.[5]

The proverb in the Proverb Manuscript is classified under Ambition (see Caution, Class, Character and Greed). By recognising this proverb's placement under the heading of Ambition, the reader is prompted to consider how this category might inform a

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[4] 'Ef yuh no go a man fire-side, yuh no know ow much fire-stick a bwile him pot'**;** If you don't associate with others, you can't learn anything about them (*Association 1/ Knowledge 7*).

[5] Sweet mout fly follow coffin go a hole; pursuit of luxury may lead to ruin (*Ambition 7 (see Caution, Class, Character and Greed* 47*)*.

reading of the orphan's actions. The translation Bennett gives under Ambition (pursuit of luxury may lead to ruin) illustrates the consequences of pursuing luxury to the furthest degree; but the Creole words of 'sweet mout fly' are most descriptive of greed, where notably the translation Bennett gives under this category is that the proverb 'refers to those who will stop at nothing to get what they want'. This gives a more pointed insight into the motivation of the orphan. Bennett also places this proverb under the category of Caution which contains a moral lesson for the orphan, that is to say these two 'sins' of ambition and greed are to be handled cautiously. Furthermore, the proverb, being also placed under Character, now questions the character of the orphan which we have seen is dubious. Cooper's comment on this stanza is that the speaker is using this proverb to absolve herself of all culpability (Cooper 1993:44). The use of the proverb for personal absolution questions the orphan's principal motive in speaking to the parson and adds a qualifying tone to the poem. Bennett also applies the category of Class to this proverb. This reflects the theme of social standing and the issues of class integration that underlie the poem in its entirety, reflecting the relevance of the deeper interpretation of category of Class embedded in stanza 1. Thus, these different categories add to the dispersal of meaning embodied by the proverbs across the poem.

In review, the categorisation of the proverbs in Bennett's Proverb Manuscript attracts a multiplicity of proverbial interpretation and adds to a reading of the three tiers of structure, story and interpretation. The framing of the poem between the skeleton of proverbs allows the reader/listener to connect the proverbs to the poetic narrative. But the proverbs also operate independently from the story being told. Visually and audibly, the presence of proverbs highlights the commonality of the oral nature of both the proverbs and Bennett's poetic voice. This advances the idea of the meta questioning of the poetic form where the proverbs question the poetry from within the poetic narrative. Furthermore, as this study illustrates, Bennett's poetry demands of its audience to be more than a reader and speaker; they must also be a listener and a viewer.

5. The Proverb as a Core Element to a Poem: The Reciprocal Relationship of Proverb and Poetry.

It is clear that the proverbs in the poem 'Proverbs' discussed above dominate the entire poetic structure. In the following examples, the poems circle around the proverb using it to generate the poetry; however, in this case, the proverb does not dominate the entire poetic structure. Sometimes, the balance between proverbs and poetry vacillates, for example, in 'Wartime Grocery'. In this particular case the proverb does not dominate the poem visually as such but dominates the particular stanza it is presented in (Bennett 1966:83). The proverb comes in the third stanza of nine; the first two stanzas set the scene where Miss Vie is seen to be frustrated at not being able to buy milk and yet Miss Pam's servant could buy four big tins of milk for her mistress. In placing the proverb in the stanza immediately following these two scene-setting stanzas, Bennett evaluates the injustice of this and uses the proverb to highlight the generality of the predicament of inequality.

> Jackass say de worl' noh level [6]
> Koo how Miss Pam she fat!
> She noh need milk, wen me side o' her
> Me fava mawga rat! (Bennett 1966:83).

The poem addresses the wartime hardships faced by the Jamaican people, and the fact that the shopkeepers exploited the food shortage by 'marrying' commodities together to sell a commodity that was harder to sell with one that was in demand. For instance, flour was 'married' to cornmeal, salt-pork to mackerel. One commodity which was especially scarce was milk and this is the immediate context to which Bennett applies the proverb—it is unfair that the rich, who are well fed and thriving do not need milk but can obtain it, whilst the poorer people cannot obtain it, but need it.

The layout of the stanza itself mirrors the stratification of the Jamaican class system from rich down to poor, overarched

[6] 'Jackass say de worl' noh level'; things are not evenly distributed (*Justice* 3; *Character* 109). For visual listings of the proverb under both headings see ***Appendix 5.***

by the general comment provided by the weight of the proverb in the first line. It is here that the proverb sits in a dominant position and verbalises the main message around which the poem is generated. Notably, the fact that the proverb is placed at the beginning of the stanza brings into focus the generalised theme of inequality and juxtaposes the specific conflict between Miss Pam and the 'I' of the poem: it brings the proverb into a personal relation with the voice of the speaker. The proverbial statement contextualises the stanza by making a generalisation of inequality pertaining to a wider group. It relies upon the present moment being part of the flow of communal experience, as Morris observed (Morris 1982:xvi). The proverb creates a broad base for the stanza which then narrows down into a specific group.

As the stanza continues, Bennett names a single person who is identified with the richer class of people—in this case, it is somebody who is fat in times of food scarcity: 'Koo how Miss Pam she fat!' Here, Bennett uses a singled out and named persona, Miss Pam, to embody a group identity and represent the privileges of the rich. In the following line, Bennett continues to comment on the irony that although Miss Pam does not need milk she is still able to purchase it: 'She noh need milk, wen me side o' her'. The balance of this line, created by the comma, highlights the comparison to follow in the last line of the stanza: 'Me fava (resemble) mawga rat!' The term 'mawga' is found in several proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript under headings of Character, Class and Conceit, Need and Necessity; for instance, in the Proverb Manuscript, Bennett records proverbs such as: ' mawga cow a bull mama'; a poor person can have high connections (Class, 15) and 'mawga dog nebber pass ole bone'; those in need are not choosy (Need and Necessity, 24). In these proverbs Bennett applies many meanings to the word 'mawga', such as ' poor', ' needy', 'lowly', 'hungry' and 'humble'. Each of these descriptions can be applied to the line in this stanza, 'me fava mawga rat', where the speaker declares she resembles a rat. Notably, in these particular proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript , the word 'mawga' is used to describe an animal. The placement of the word 'rat' at the end of the last line is not a triumphant final word but rather emphasises the status of the speaker within the stratification of the stanza. Here, pre-empting Cooper's ar-

gument concerning the metaphorical status of proverbs (Cooper 1984) the use of animals starkly interrogates human social relations, as the speaker compares themselves to an implied poor, needy, lowly, hungry, humble animal.

The fact that the speaker is unnamed could imply that the poorer classes are unimportant, but this is countered in the poem by giving the role of authoritative speaker to someone not from an elite class. The speaker belongs to this poorer class who are struggling with the exploitation of the retailers who, in turn, are manipulating the situation for their own gain by selling two commodities at once; the poor are unable to buy the minimum that is required, in this case milk. Miss Pam's servant has already bought four tins of milk. It is this injustice that the stanza replies to, with the proverb at the start announcing one response to the issue. This exemplifies how a proverb can not only generate the theme of the poem around which the poetic text circles but can also dominate one stanza within the poem. In sum, Bennett's particular placement of the proverb directs the reader's attention to the weight it carries within that one stanza.

As observed throughout this chapter, proverbs need to be interpreted in terms of the 'humanness' that is at the centre of Bennett's poems. Cooper identifies the relationship between the themes that the proverbs embody from Jamaican life and the structure created in imagery which draws from that Jamaican environment and heritage. She writes that 'in both subject and structure the metaphorical proverb affirms Bennett's umbilical connection to [the] matrix of oral Jamaican folklore'(Cooper 1993:37). Here the notion of the proverb being born into the Jamaican folklore genealogy solidifies the relationship between tradition and folklore that was noted by Norrick.

The use of a proverb allows the poet to reimagine the representation of the community. In the poem 'Wartime Grocery' discussed above, Bennett deals with the issues that concern her community and uses her poetic narrative skills to represent them both realistically and hopefully. In approaching her poetry through proverbial thinking, Bennett encompasses the issues at the heart of her community where, as seen, the proverbs add another layer to her poetic constructs. Bennett listens to the multiplicity of the voices and issues and creatively blends this within

the relationship of proverb and poetic construct. She brings the weight of validation of the proverbs into her poetic narrative and directs this at current themes of the everyday. In other words, it is not the poem or the proverb alone that acts as a vehicle for Bennett to provide a social commentary but the complementary relationship both genres have with each other.

An example of a poem which circles around two proverbs is the poem 'Sweetie Pie' (Bennett 1983:52). In this poem there is an element of proverbial misdirection where a picture of Sweetie Pie has been built up so that the expectation is that the subject is a young child. However, he turns out to be 'one big strong – muscle man/dah run fi fifty bole!' (around 50 years old). Two proverbs, 'Donkey tink him cub a race horse'[7] and 'John crow tink him pickney white',[8] comment on the misguided perception of Sweetie Pie created by the poetic text itself, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between poetry and proverb. The proverbs are not only placed in the first and last stanza to reinforce the poem's interests in perception, but both also highlight the double meaning that can lie behind a proverb — 'the illusion' as Morris describes it in the following quotation: "The startlingly different reality prompts the reflection that people hang on to the illusions they need: the point is made in the proverbs that open and close the poem" (Bennett 1983:157).

The poem illustrates how parents can often have an inflated and boastful view of their children and their capabilities, for example where the donkey unrealistically thinks his progeny is a racehorse. Furthermore, there is a deeper illusion in the proverb, 'John crow tink him pickney white.' This refers to a bird whose chicks are born white, but which turn black as they grow up. In reality, they present first as one thing but soon change to their natural form, thus breaking the initial illusion. This proverb is also placed in the Proverb Manuscript (in addition to Boastfulness as noted above) under Selfishness, with the additional translation of 'John crow tink him pickney white' which refers to

[7] 'Donkey tink him cub a race horse'; refers to those who overrate what belongs to them (*Boastfulness,*10).

[8] 'John crow tink him pickney white'; refers to those who overrate their relations (*Boastfulness,*13)

overrating one's relations (Selfishness,4). A racialised reading of this proverb can be applied, but the poem also invites a reading focused on the notion of a selfish parent who wishes others to be impressed by their child. Bennett frames the poem 'Sweetie Pie' with the two proverbs which imbue the poem with an illusory undertone, illustrating once again the skill with which she uses the proverbs to inform the poetry. In this case, the illusion inherent in the second proverb creates a symbiotic relationship with the poem in terms of the revelation at the end about Sweetie Pie.

A final exemplary poem where Bennett places the proverbs at the start and at the end of a certain poem is 'Dutty Tough':

> Sun a shine but tings not bright;
> Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;
> River flood but water scarce, yaw;
> Rain a fall but dutty tough.

The last stanza turns this around:

> Sun a shine an pot a bwile, but
> Tings no bright, bickle no nuff.
> Rain a fall, river dah flood, but
> Water scarce and dutty tough (Bennett 1983:27-28).

The stanzas at the start and the end of the poem are reversed and the effect of this, as Morris writes, is to turn the poetic narrative 'away from the individual into the communal expression of proverbs'(Bennett 1983:144). It puts that particular moment in a wider perspective in time but notably the use of the Creole words, 'bickle' (food) and 'dutty' (ground) challenges the reader to understand the meaning of the words—this highlights the tension between speakers of Standard English and those who speak the Jamaican dialect. The use of such localised dialectal vocabulary personalises the crisis to the Jamaican people whom it is affecting and references the historical divide between the coloniser and the colonised. For Bennett, not only the use of Creole but the use of proverbs reinforces the existence of group identities within societies.

In June 1981 Morris gave a talk in Beacon Bookstore in London (Morris 1981:audio cassette). In this, he gives an astute

gloss on the placement of the proverbs where he notes that they are more available to the reader rather than the listener. Morris's observation is that the proverbs in this poem are fundamentally sad, and in performance Bennett communicates this. However, the nuanced placement of proverbs may not be fully appreciated in performance. For instance, it is worth noting that in the last stanza the wording of 'rain a fall/ but dutty tough' is broken. Bennett does not do this in any other poem, and the effect here might be to make the reader pause to consider the jolt of discomfort this creates. To expand on this, Morris further notes that the proverbs are arranged so that in line 1 the proverb is positive, and in line 2 it is negative, positive in line 3 and negative in line 4.The tone of the poem is changed because of the rhyme schema and ballad form where lines 2 and 4 rest naturally, with a break after 2 and then 4 so that when you put a negative in lines 2 and 4 this comes across with more pathos (Morris 1981;audio cassette). The technique that Bennett employs here, placing the proverbs in opposition, encourages the reader to re-engage in the proverbs and to observe the different emphases created. The stress is in the last stanza, on the words 'Dutty tough' meaning that no matter what, the ground remains too hard—in other words, the harshness of life for a labouring class Jamaican will not ease. By framing a poem about hard times within the generational tradition of proverbs, this poem becomes transferable and applicable to other times and spaces. It is a deliberate technique used by Bennett to harness the timelessness and timeliness of proverbs. In this poem the individual and the communal come together to face a shared experience.

Overall, Bennett's continued use of proverbs presents an opportunity for scholars of today to better understand the relationship between this form and her poetry in an exciting and innovative way. This relationship emerges as fluid and relational, perhaps not always explored in earlier proverbial understandings. Indeed, in attending more closely to Bennett's proverbial thinking, and thereby moving the critical gaze away from a fixed understanding of proverbs as a self-contained form, one could suggest that Bennett may have been testing out the movability of the proverb genre through her different creative usages of it, that is to say by encouraging a more mutable, fluid approach to pro-

verbial meaning in her poetic art. This attention to proverbs and proverbial thinking in Bennett's poetry is ultimately transformational in that it allows for a use of proverbs that has not been seen in previous proverb collections, which necessarily adhere to a narrowness of form and perspective.

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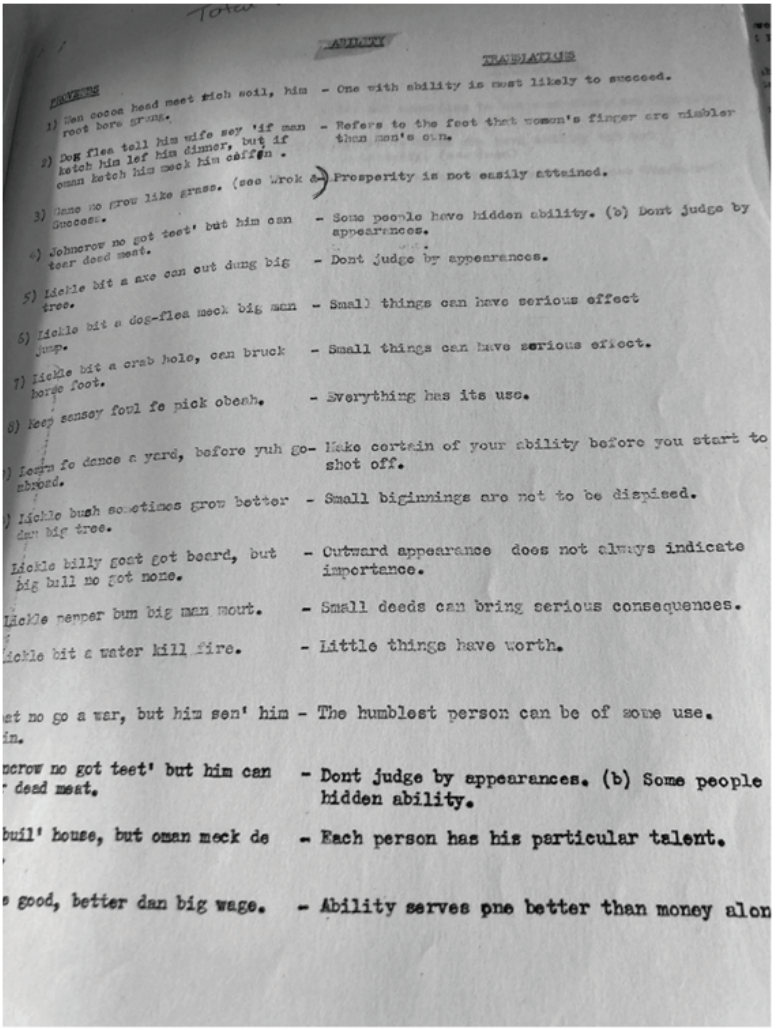
Appendix 1
Illustration of a page from Louise Bennett's collection of proverbs (entitled the Proverb Manuscript)



PROVERBS	TRANSLATION
1) Ben cocoa head meet rich soil, him root bore grung.	- One with ability is most likely to succeed.
2) Dog flea tell him wife sey 'if man ketch him lef him dinner, but if oman ketch him meck him coffin .	- Refers to the feet that women's finger are nimbler than man's own.
3) Cane no grow like grass. (see Wrok & Success.	- Prosperity is not easily attained.
4) Johnerow no got teet' but him can teer dead meat.	- Some people have hidden ability. (b) Dont judge by appearances.
5) Lickle bit a axe can cut dung big tree.	- Dont judge by appearances.
6) Lickle bit a dog-flea meck big man jump.	- Small things can have serious effect
7) Lickle bit a crab hole, can bruck horse foot.	- Small things can have serious effect.
8) Keep sensey fowl fe pick obeah.	- Everything has its use.
) Learn fe dance a yard, before yuh go- abroad.	- Make certain of your ability before you start to shot off.
) Lickle bush sometimes grow better dan big tree.	- Small biginnings are not to be dispised.
Lickle billy goat got beard, but big bull no got none.	- Outward appearance does not always indicate importance.
Lickle nepper bun big man mout.	- Small deeds can bring serious consequences.
ickle bit a water kill fire.	- Little things have worth.
at no go a war, but him sen' him in.	- The humblest person can be of some use.
ncrow no got teet' but him can dead meat.	- Dont judge by appearances. (b) Some people hidden ability.
buil' house, but oman meck de	- Each person has his particular talent.
good, better dan big wage.	- Ability serves one better than money alon

Appendix 2
The story of the discovery of Louise Bennett's Proverb Manuscript

From the start of my research it was the observations from various scholars, which appeared to be based on hearsay, that first started me on my own explorations to find Louise Bennett's personal collection of proverbs; this was to become a two-and-a-half-year process.

Professor Mervyn Morris, for example, writes in his article 'Louise Bennett in Print' that 'she (Bennett) has a personal collection of more than 700 Jamaican proverbs and is adept at citing the one appropriate to the particular moment'(Morris, 1982). On meeting Morris in 2014 (at the start of my PhD) I asked him but he told me that he did not know where this collection was.

During my initial research into Bennett for my PhD I searched in the notebooks in the McMaster Digital Archives. In these notebooks, catalogued under 'other contents', I found pages on Louise Bennett by Mary Jane Hewitt, divided into separate sections.[9] Mary Jane Hewitt was researching for her PhD in 1976, with the view to collating information for a book on Louise Bennett. She took this no further. In the section entitled 'Louise Bennett Anthology', under the title 'Proverbs' was a note stating that Bennett 'has a book in manuscript form waiting for Rex Nettleford's introduction'. This led me to the connection with Rex Nettleford and crucially also gives us the date that the manuscript was deemed to be completed by Bennett. This is the start of the trail to the manuscript, which led me to Nettleford's archive and the next stage of my inquiry.[10]

After initial unsuccessful approaches to various departments of the Mona library enquiring if Bennett's manuscript could be traced in the Nettleford archives, I asked Morris to enquire for me as he was on site. He did, and he received an acknowledgment

[9] McMaster Bennett fonds ['Miss Lou Fonds'] Aunty Roachy Seh, 'Other Contents' in notebooks. https://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A33188, retrieved on 1 May 2025

[10] McMaster Bennett fonds / Aunty Roachy Seh, 'Other Contents' in notebooks, p.15. https://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A33188, retrieved on 1 May 2025

from the curator of the Nettleford archives, Cezley Sampson, that there was a manuscript by Louise Bennett in those archives. Samson called Morris and explained that, on his death, some of Rex Nettleford's papers had been given to the National Library of Jamaica and some to the University of West Indies (UWI) Mona library. On 4 September 2015, Morris sent me an email confirming that there did appear to be a collection of proverbs belonging to Miss Bennett in the Nettleford archives in the UWI Mona library. Following this, a few weeks later, Morris emailed again, this time telling me that the papers given by the Rex Nettleford trustees to the UWI Mona Library included a folder of proverbs. He stated that, having viewed them for himself, he was confident that this was Louise Bennett's collection. Rex Nettleford had apparently confirmed to Morris in January 2008, that he (Nettleford) had a manuscript but had not intimated which manuscript. This was the confirmation that I needed to continue onto the next stage.

In a well-timed conversation with Professor Alison Donnell, she said that she could connect me with Frances Salmon, who was the Head Librarian of Special Collections at the Mona library. Being located in Scotland and unable to travel to the Mona campus, I contacted Frances Salmon to ask if she would be willing to photocopy the proverb manuscript for me. Subsequently, a chain of emails was established between Frances and myself, where she explained that we would need permission to photocopy the collection from the trustees of the Bennett Coverley Trust in Canada. This was done via a series of emails over several weeks between myself and the trustees, Fabien Coverley and Judge Pamela Appelt (copying in Morris and Salmon). Permission was granted in November 2016 on the condition that the Trust be given due recognition in my PhD for allowing the collection to be photocopied. These terms were all agreed and met, and on 21 March 2017 I received a confirmatory email from Frances informing me that the collection had been photocopied and three sets of copies had been mailed during the first week of March, one to my address in the UK and two to Mr Coverley's address in Canada as requested.

As this account of events shows, this was indeed an inspirational transatlantic collaboration between researcher, archivists,

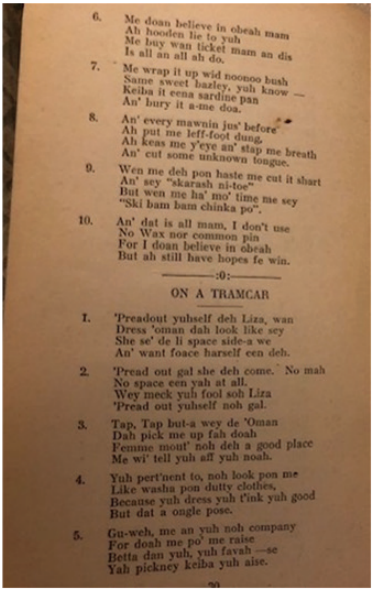
scholars, librarian and trustees which culminated in the rediscovery of Louise Bennett's valuable and exciting personal collection of proverbs. The process that began with my first question to Mervyn Morris in September 2014, followed by his email confirming that a collection of Bennett's proverbs had been traced to the Nettleford archives in the Mona Library, and culminating in the package containing the photocopied collection arriving at my door in March 2017, is testament to the value of transnational research cooperation and a collective willingness to track down and make available key resources. Each person in the chain contributed to this exciting rediscovery of an important collection and one that, as I found, is truly worthy of scholarly attention.

When I received my copy of the photocopied manuscript, I counted the proverbs listed and discovered that there were more than twice the number suggested by Morris – there are 1881 proverbs listed, including the repetition of certain proverbs under different headings and those written twice on the same page. Despite these repeats, I calculate that there are circa 1800 proverbs in the Proverb Manuscript, which constitutes a much more substantial collection than first believed.

In all, the Proverb Manuscript contains 196 pages of lists of proverbs, in A4 size, with no cover page, no introduction, no binding. Notably Bennett categorises the pages following an alphabetical ordering of 148 moral and thematic headings beginning with Ability, Abuse, Affluence, Age and ending with Work, Worth & Worthless, and Worry. The proverbs under those headings are apparently listed randomly, albeit with an occasional semblance of alphabetic ordering. These are numbered sequentially under each heading, with the section on Caution and Precaution being the longest with 167 proverbs included within it. Although it exists without any introduction or framing work, within its pages are clues as to how Bennett approached the Proverb Manuscript, giving an insight into her editorial choices and processes. If we look at the individual pages of the Proverb Manuscript, we note they are divided into two equal columns, with the proverbs listed in Creole on the left-hand side, and 'translations' in the right-hand column in Standard English. The heading 'Translations' immediately raises the question of this particular linguistic practice and its significance to Bennett's work, suggesting, at

the very least, that Bennett was acting as an interpreter, a bridge between Creole and non-Creole English speakers. On one level, the decision to translate shows that she may have felt a practical need to explain the meanings of the proverb, possibly for didactic purposes. The presence of translations could also simply reflect a desire to preserve the knowledge contained in proverbs for future generations, for non-Creole speaking Jamaicans or suggest a desire to make the proverbs more widely accessible when published. Indeed, it is to be surmised from the entry in Mary Jane Hewitt's note that Bennett did intend this collection to be published and to be accessible to a wider audience, hence the need for a translation. Bennett's intralingual translation practice in the *Proverb Manuscript*, such as her refusal to see Creole as a 'copy' in any way inferior to the language of colonial power and her refusal to erase Creole even as she translates it into Standard English, clearly echo some of the complexities within postcolonial understandings of translation.

Appendix 3
Illustrations from Louise Bennett, Jamaica Dialect Verses (1942), pp. 30 - 31



6. Me doan believe in obeah mam
Ah hooden lie to yuh
Me buy wan ticket mam an dis
Is all an all ah do.

7. Me wrap it up wid noonoo bush
Same sweet hazley, yuh know —
Keiba it eena sardine pan
An' bury it a-me doa.

8. An' every mawnin jus' before
Ah put me leff-foot dung,
Ah keas me y'eye an' slap me breath
An' cut some unknown tongue.

9. Wen me deh pon haste me cut it shart
An' sey "skarash ni-toe"
But wen me ha' mo' time me sey
"Ski bam bam chinka po".

10. An' dat is all mam, I don't use
No Wax nor common pin
For I doan believe in obeah
But ah still have hopes fe win.

———:0:———

ON A TRAMCAR

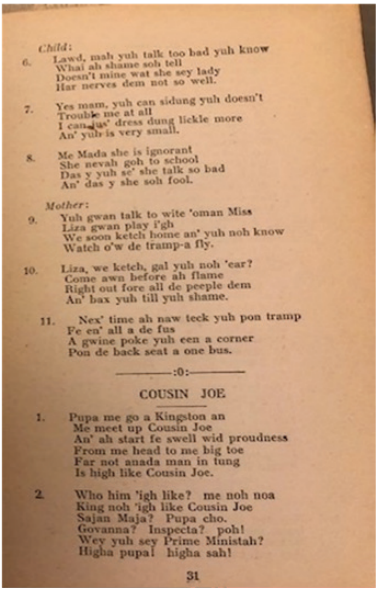
1. 'Preadout yuhself deh Liza, wan
Dress 'oman dah look like sey
She se' de li space side-a we
An' want foace harself een deh.

2. 'Pread out gal she deh come. No mah
No space een yah at all.
Wey meck yuh fool soh Liza
'Pread out yuhself noh gal.

3. Tap, Tap but-a wey de 'Oman
Dah pick me up fah doah
Femme mout' noh deh a good place
Me wi' tell yuh aff yuh noah.

4. Yuh pert'nent to, noh look pon me
Like washa pon dutty clothes,
Because yuh dress yuh t'ink yuh good
But dat a ongle pose.

5. Gu-weh, me an yuh noh company
For doah me po' me raise
Betta dan yuh, yuh favah —se
Yah pickney keiba yuh aise.



Child:

6. Lawd, mah yuh talk too bad yuh know
Whai ah shame soh tell
Doesn't mine wat she sey lady
Har nerves dem not so well.

7. Yes mam, yuh can sidung yuh doesn't
Trouble me at all
I can-jus' dress dung lickle more
An' yuh is very small.

8. Me Mada she is ignorant
She nevah goh to school
Das y yuh se' she talk so bad
An' das y she soh fool.

Mother:

9. Yuh gwan talk to wite 'oman Miss
Liza gwan play t'igh
We soon ketch home an' yuh noh know
Watch o'w de tramp-a fly.

10. Liza, we ketch, gal yuh noh 'ear?
Come awn before ah flame
Right out fore all de people dem
An' bax yuh till yuh shame.

11. Nex' time ah naw teck yuh pon tramp
Fe en' all a de fus
A gwine poke yuh een a corner
Pon de back seat a one bus.

———:0:———

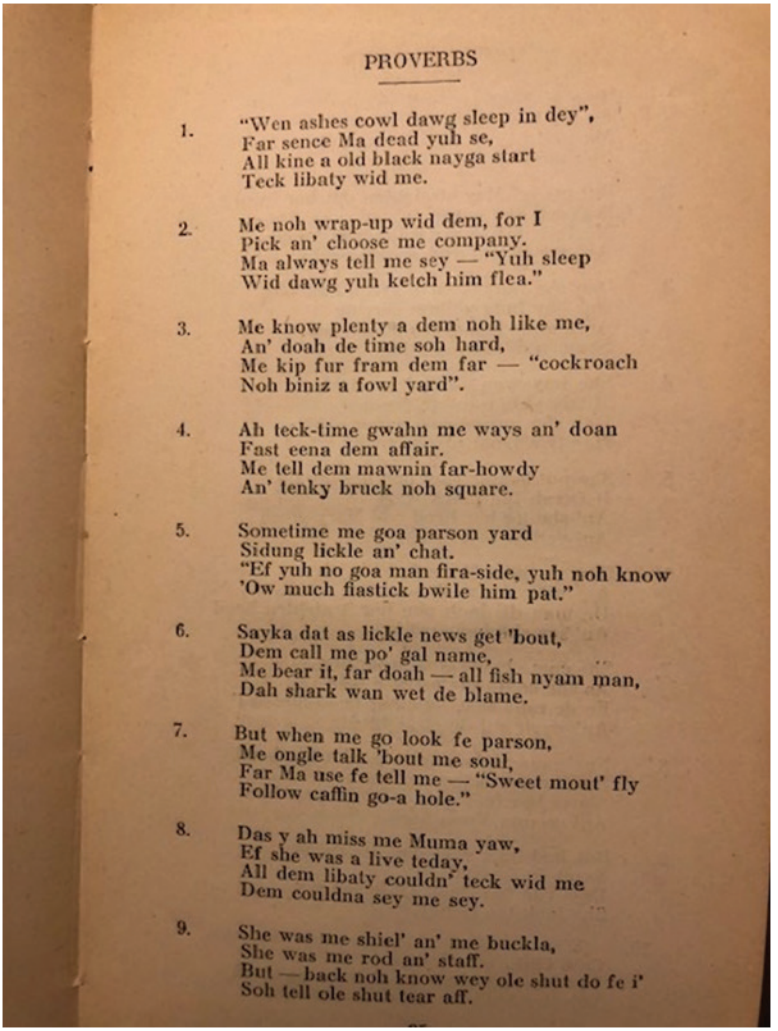
COUSIN JOE

1. Pupa me go a Kingston an
Me meet up Cousin Joe
An' ah start fe swell wid proudness
From me head to me big toe
Far not anada man in tung
Is high like Cousin Joe.

2. Who him 'igh like? me noh noa
King noh 'igh like Cousin Joe
Sajan Maja? Pupa cho.
Govanna? Inspecta? poh!
Wey yuh sey Prime Ministah?
Higha pupa! higha sah!

31

Appendix 4
Illustration from Louise Bennett, Jamaica Dialect Verses (1942), p. 35



PROVERBS

1. "Wen ashes cowl dawg sleep in dey",
Far sence Ma dead yuh se,
All kine a old black nayga start
Teck libaty wid me.

2. Me noh wrap-up wid dem, for I
Pick an' choose me company.
Ma always tell me sey — "Yuh sleep
Wid dawg yuh ketch him flea."

3. Me know plenty a dem noh like me,
An' doah de time soh hard,
Me kip fur fram dem far — "cockroach
Noh biniz a fowl yard".

4. Ah teck-time gwahn me ways an' doan
Fast eena dem affair.
Me tell dem mawnin far-howdy
An' tenky bruck noh square.

5. Sometime me goa parson yard
Sidung lickle an' chat.
"Ef yuh no goa man fira-side, yuh noh know
'Ow much fiastick bwile him pat."

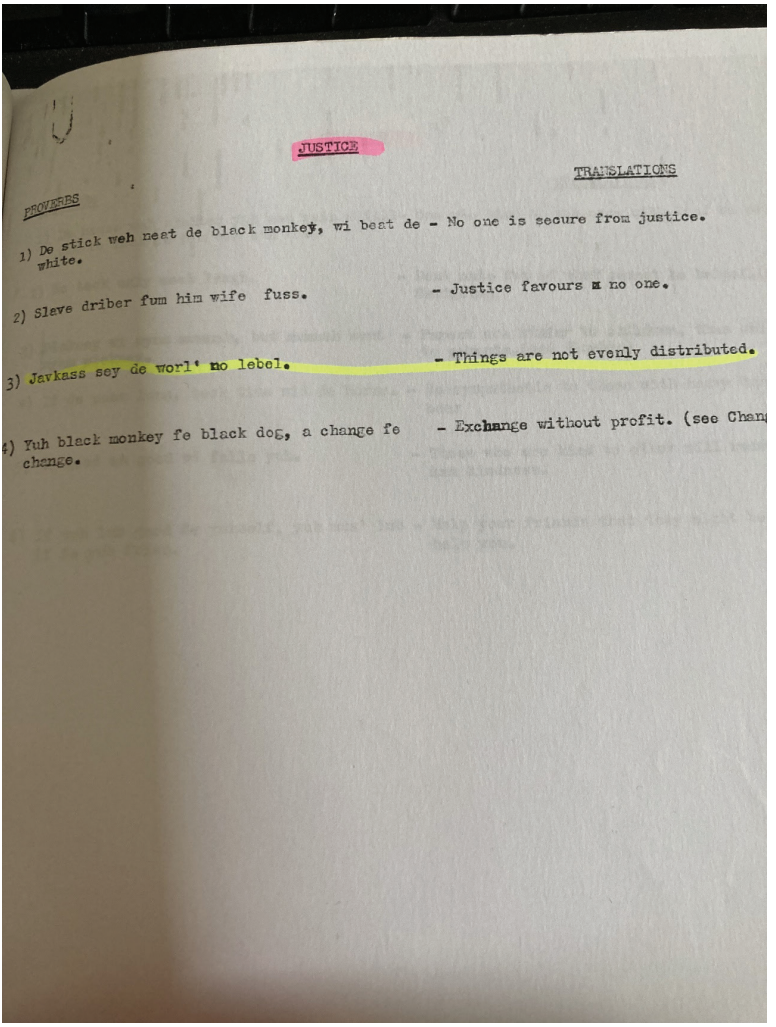
6. Sayka dat as lickle news get 'bout,
Dem call me po' gal name,
Me bear it, far doah — all fish nyam man,
Dah shark wan wet de blame.

7. But when me go look fe parson,
Me ongle talk 'bout me soul,
Far Ma use fe tell me — "Sweet mout' fly
Follow caffin go-a hole."

8. Das y ah miss me Muma yaw,
Ef she was a live teday,
All dem libaty couldn' teck wid me
Dem couldna sey me sey.

9. She was me shiel' an' me buckla,
She was me rod an' staff.
But — back noh know wey ole shut do fe i'
Soh tell ole shut tear aff.

Appendix 5
Justice, 3



JUSTICE

PROVERBS | TRANSLATIONS

1) De stick weh neat de black monkey, wi beat de white. - No one is secure from justice.

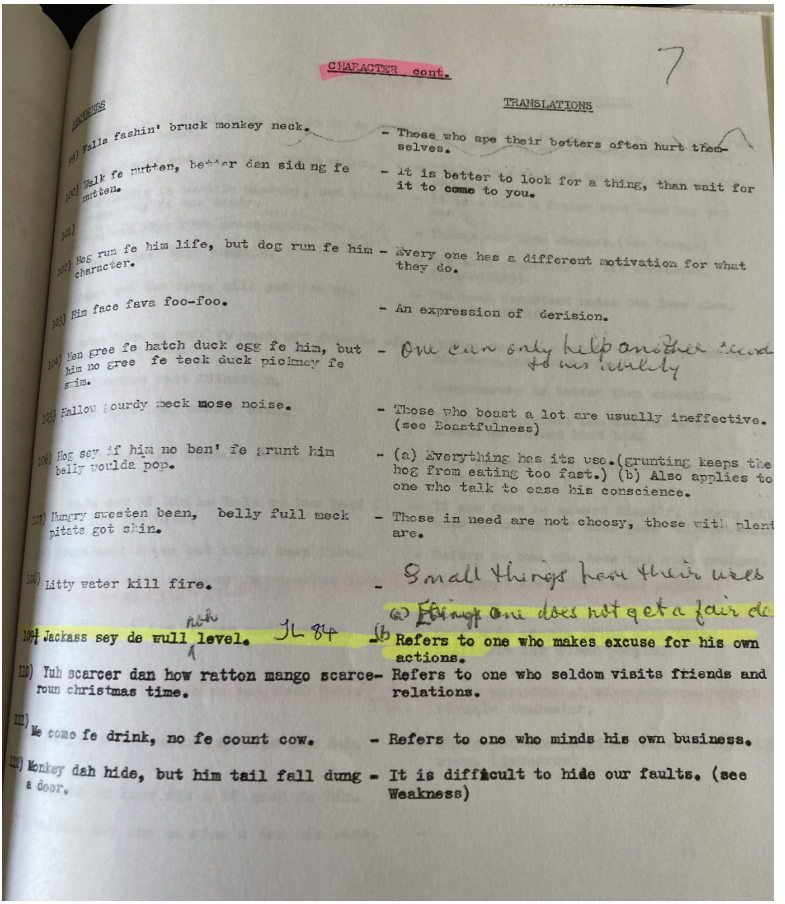
2) Slave driber fum him wife fuss. - Justice favours no one.

3) Javkass sey de worl' no lebel. - Things are not evenly distributed.

4) Yuh black monkey fe black dog, a change fe change. - Exchange without profit. (see Chan

‘Jackass say de worl noh level’; things are not evenly distributed

Appendix 6
Character, 109



CHARACTER cont. 7

PROVERBS — TRANSLATIONS

99) Fulla fashin' bruck monkey neck. – Those who ape their betters often hurt themselves.

100) Walk fe mutton, better dan sidung fe mutton. – It is better to look for a thing, than wait for it to come to you.

101)

102) Hog run fe him life, but dog run fe him character. – Every one has a different motivation for what they do.

103) Him face fava foo-foo. – An expression of derision.

104) Nuh gree fe hatch duck egg fe him, but him no gree fe teck duck pickney fe swim. – One can only help another to his ability

105) Hallow gourdy neck mose noise. – Those who boast a lot are usually ineffective. (see Boastfulness)

106) Hog sey if him no ben' fe grunt him belly woulda pop. – (a) Everything has its use.(grunting keeps the hog from eating too fast.) (b) Also applies to one who talk to ease his conscience.

107) Hungry sweeten bean, belly full neck pitate got skin. – Those in need are not choosy, those with plenty are.

108) Litty water kill fire. – Small things have their uses

109) Jackass sey de wull noh level. JL 84 – (a) Things one does not get a fair deal (b) Refers to one who makes excuse for his own actions.

110) Tuh scarcer dan how ratton mango scarce roun christmas time. – Refers to one who seldom visits friends and relations.

111) Me come fe drink, no fe count cow. – Refers to one who minds his own business.

112) Monkey dah hide, but him tail fall dung a door. – It is difficult to hide our faults. (see Weakness)

'Jackass say de worl noh level' (a) one does not get a fair deal (b) refers to one who makes excuse for his own actions

It is interesting to see in the listing of this proverb under the heading of Character that Louise Bennett adds a second interpretation in her own handwriting. This shows that the manuscript was a work in progress to which she was always adding new meanings.