CUSS-CUSS

Not to be confused with Kart-Kar, this poem re-stages a tracing match (i.e., a quarrel) between two Jamaican women. Common cuss-words like "boogooyagga" (low-grade) "heng-pun-nail" (bedraggled) are here liberally used. Opponents are sometimes subjected to the most unexpected similes as "Yuh lip dem heng dung lacka vorn Mule keen meck up him mina".

Gwan gal yuh fava teggereg,
Ah wey yuh gwine goh do?
Yuh an yuh boogooyagga fren
Dem tink me trait o' yuh?

Goh wey, yuh fava heng-pun-nail,
Is me yuh want fe trace?
Me is jus de one fi teck me han
An leggo pon yuh face.

Fe me han noh jine chu'ch an me naw
Pay licen fe me mout',
Me wi tell yuh bout yuh—se yah
Gal noh badda get me out.

Me noh know is wat kine o' chu'ch
Fe yuh mout' coulda jine,
Yuh lip dem heng dung lacka wen
Mule kean meck up him mine.

Gwan, me an yuh noh combolo,
Yuh foot shapeless an lang
Like smaddy stan far fling dem awn
An meck dem heng awn wrang.

Fe yuh foot fava capital K,
Koo pum yuh two nose-hole!
Dem dis big an open out like
Miss Jane oussize fish bowl.

Goh wey, yuh kean bwnle sof egg
But still yuh want get ring,
Noh man na gwine fe married yuh
Wen yuh kean do a ting.

Is grudge yuh grudgeful, me kean cook
But me ben goh dah good school,
Me got intelligenicy yuh
Illiterated fool!

Me sorry fe de man yuh get
De po' ting hooden nyam
When you acebub him salt-fish
An bwilivous him yam.
CENSUS

In preparation for elections under the New (Adult Suffrage) Constitution an island-wide census was taken in 1944. This exercise was not only new but irritating to many citizens who objected to the "familiar" questions put by enumerators. Ownership of property always connotes taxation, so one citizen here insists that her livestock belongs to a far-away relative and another citizen gets angry on being asked about her marital status. This poem is a comment on the difficulties encountered in getting accurate data. The census results were nevertheless published and a voters' list made up in time for the elections the following year.

But goyament fas' ee mah? Lawd:
Me laugh soh tell me cry,
Me dis dun tell de census man
A whole tun-load o' lie.

Him walks cen an sidung like is
Ecna my yard him grow,
An yuh want hear de femelia tings
De man did want fe know.

Him doon fine out one ting bout me,
For fe me y'eye soh dry,
Me stare right ecna census face
An tell him bans o' lie!

Me tell him sey dat all me parents
Dem is still alive,
But me mada she dead twelve 'ears
An me fada him dead five.

Me tell him sey de fowl an goat dem
Doan belongs to me,
Me dah-care dem fe me sista,
Daughta son wat gawn a sea.

Him ask me if me married, me
Get bex an tell him "gwan!"
For noh man nevah ax me dat
Deh question from me bawn.

One time him question me sob fas'
Me couldn' lie so quick,
Me hol' awn pon me heart an belch
An form like sey me sick.

Him ax me ef me feel bad, ah sey
"Jus like a gwine to dead!",
Me stumble, soh him hole me han
An lead me to me bed.

Him sey him gawn, hear me "goodbye",
Me meck me voice soon sof,
Him tip-toe go web and me jump up
An bus out in a laugh.
WHITE PICKNEY

By 1949, War babies—the coloured ones—had excited comment in the press everywhere. Advice is here given to a Jamaican mother of one such offspring—in the interest of the child’s future.

Miss Mary pack yuh baby tings!
Me come fe gi a han,
Noh fret noh more bout supportance,
Jus sen him a Englan!

Me mine did tell me so long time,
Me never sure me right,
But now newspapa tell me broad
Sey dat yuh baby wite.

Me noh lie mah! Se it big-big
Ena paper, se it yah!
Five-thousan black baby dah-lef,
Britain fe 'Merica.

Dem yah baby muma wite, dem
Pupa is black 'Merican,
So dem teck de pupa colour,
An gawn a de pupa lan.

Dem half o’ dis an half o’ dat
Dem neida dose nor dese—
So since dem half-an half, dem chice
Watever side dem please.

Ef dem deh baby muma call
Dem “Black”, den is awright—
Since him pupa is wite-man
Fe call fe yuh pickney “wite”.

An now yuh sure sey dat him wite,
Yuh keen raise de pickney,
For him naw go able fit eena
Yuh black society.
INDEPENDANCE

"Jamaica start smoke pipe, ah hope
We got nuff Jackass Rope" (tobacco)

In other words, Jamaica has taken on to herself new responsibility, let's hope we can manage! Independence came to Jamaica on August 6, 1962. The true meaning of the new status was not fully grasped by all, but political leaders emphasized hardships to come, the need for work, self-sacrifice, and plenty of training and education (second-to-last stanza).

Independance wid a vengeance!
Independance raisin' cain!
Jamaica start grow beard, ah hope
We chin can stan' de strain!

Wen dog mawga him head big an
Wen puss hungry him nose clean
But every puss an dog nohn know
Wat Independance mean.

Marty sey it mean we facetsy
Stan' up pon we dignity,
An we don't allow nobody
Fe teck libarty wid we.

Independance is we nature
Born an bred in all we do
An she glad fe se dat Govament
Tun independant to.

She hope dem caution wortl'-map
Fe stop draw Jamaica small
For de lickle speck can't show
We Independantiss at all

Morsomever we mus' tell map dat
We don't like we position
Please kindly tek we out o' sea
An draw we in de Ocean.

Wat a crosses! Independance
Woulda never have a chance
Wid so much boogooyagga
Dah-expose dem ignorance.

Dog wag him tail fe suit him size
An match him stamina,
Jamaica people need a
Independance formula!

No easy-come-by freckness tings,
Nuff labour, some privation,
Not much of dis an less of dat
An plenty studiration.

Independance wid a vengeance,
Wonder how we gwine to cope,
Jamaica start smoke pipe, ah hope
We got nuff Jackass Rope!
COLONISATION IN REVERSE

Jamaicans, who have been migrating since the late 19th century (to Panama, Central America or the U.S.A.), turned in the early 1950's to Britain, where some 200,000 first generation Jamaicans now reside. Truly a paradox of colonial history—this colonisation in reverse to the Mother Country which once settled her colonies with Britons who came as planters, traders, administrators, technicians, etc. . . .

Wat a joyful news, Miss Mattie,
I feel like me heart gwine burst
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in reverse.

By de hundred, by de t'ousan
From country and from town,
By de ship-load, by de plane-load
Jamaica is Englan boun.

Dem a-pour out o' Jamaica,
Everybody future plan
Is fe get a big-time job
An settle in de mother lan.

What a islan! What a people!
Man an woman, old an young
Jusa pack dem bag an baggage
An tun history upside down!

Some people don't like travel,
But fe show dem loyalty
Dem all a-open up cheap-fare-
To Englan agency.

An week by week dem shippin off
Dem countryman like fire,
Fe immigrate an populate
De seat o' de Empire.

Ooo oo see how life is funny,
Ooo oo see de tunabout,
Jamaica live fe box bread
Outa English people mout'.

For wen dem catch a Englan,
An start play dem different role,
Some will settle down to work
An some will settle fe de dole.

Jane say de dole is not too bad
Because dey payin' she
Two pounds a week fe seek a job
Dat suit her dignity.

Me say Jane will never find work
At the rate how she dah-look,
For all day she stay pon Aunt Fan couch
An read love-story book.

Wat a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse,
But I'm wonderin' how dem gwine stan'
Colonizin' in reverse.
BACK TO AFRICA

The Back-To-Africa movement has its advocates in Jamaica among the Ras Tafari, who believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, and in the pre-destined repatriation of the "black Israelites" (Jamaican blacks) to the Promised land (Africa and/or Ethiopia). In this poem the aspirations of the movement are seen as a defiance of common-sense and of the realities of the historical situation of the Jamaican people. What a confusion would indeed result, "Ef de whole worl' start fe go back, Weh dem great granpa come from". A final advice is given in the last verse which reflects a common attitude. In other words, there may be some point in migrating to seek one's fortunes, but migrating in search of roots is hardly sensible since Jamaica is home—"... a right deh so yuh deh!" This poem was written in 1947, but belongs in spirit to the Jamaica of the sixties.

Back to Africa Miss Matty?
Yuh noh know wha yuh dah-sey?
Yuh haffe come from some weh fus,
Before yuh go back deh?

Me know sey dat yuh great great great
Gramma was African,
But Matty, doan yuh great great great
Grampa was Englishman?

Den yuh great granmada fada
By yuh fada side was Jew?
An yuh grampa by yuh mada side
Was Frenchie parley-vous!

But de balance o' yuh family
Yuh whole generation
Oonoo all bawn dung a Bun grung
Oonoo all is Jamaican!

Den is weh yuh gwine Miss Matty?
Oh, you view de countenance,
An between yuh an de Africans
Is great resemblance!
DRY FOOT BWOY

Another migrant Jamaican, of humble stock, returns with an Oarbridge accent and is pulled down a peg or two by his former friends.

Wha wrong wid Mary dry-foot bwoy?
Dem gal got him fe mock,
An wen me meet him tarra night
De bwoy gi me a shock!

Me tell him sey him auntie an
Him cousin dem sen howdy,
An ask him how him gettin' awwn,
Him sey, "Oh, jolley, jolley!"

Me start fe feel so sorry fe
De po bad-lucky soul,
Me tink him come a foreign lan
Come ketch bad foreign cole!

Me tink him have a bad sore-throat,
But as him chat-chat gwan,
Me fine out sey is foreign twang
De bwoy was a-put aww!

For me notice dat him answer
To nearly all me sey
Was "Actually, what oh deah!
An all dem sit ting deh.

Me gi a joke, de gal dem laugh
But hear de bwoy, "Haw-haw!
I'm sure you got that ballydash
Out of the cinematic!"

Same time me las' me tempa, an
Me halla, "Bwoy kir out!
No chat to me wid no hot pittata
Een a yuh mouth!"

Him tan up like him stunted, den
Hear him noh, "How silly!
I don't think that I really
Understand you actually."

Me sey, "Yuh undastan me aw,
Noh yuh name Cudjoe Scoop?
Always visit NCAA kitchen an
Gi laugh fe guango soup!

"An now all yuh can sey is 'Actually'.
Bwoy, but tap!
Wha happen to dem sweet Jamaica
Joke yuh use fe pop?"

Him get bex an walk through de door,
Him head een a de air,
De gal dem bawl out alfa him,
"Not going? What! Oh deah!"

An from dat night till todays, mah
Dem all got him fe mock,
Miss Mary dry-foot bwoy!
Kean get over de shock!
Everybody dis a-talk bout
Finga-printin an passport,
Finance-board, 'Merican Council,
Airways ticket, winta-coat!

Ah wanda is wot fault dem fine
Wid po' li Jamaica.
Meck everybody dah lif-up
An go a 'Merica?

Bc dc time yuh sey "pus-pickney"
As yuh y'eye quint, as yuh yawn,
Yuh miss smaddy an baps yuh hear—
Is 'Merica dem gawn!

Some a-go weh fe vacation
Some a-go weh fe tun "high"
Som a-go fe edication,
But de whole a dem a-fly!

Me ask meself "warra Matta?"
Me ask meself "wha meck?"
Is tidal-wave or eart'quake, or
Is storm dem dah-expeeck?

Jane sey she meet so much ole frien
Wen she strole dung New York,
Dat she feel like is dung King Street
Or Luke Lane she dah-walk.

Dem might call me "falla fashin",
But wah fe do me chile?
Ef yuh no falla fashin, yuh
Wi never cena style.

So me dah-go falla fashin,
Me dah lif-up an go web,
Any time oonoo noh hear me mout
Is 'Merica me deh.

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AMERICA

Jamaicans migrated to America (U.S.A.) in the forties as they did to England in the fifties. What is an economic necessity sometimes appears to be a "fashion".

Every seckey got him jeggeh
Every puppy got him flea.
An yuh noh smaddy ef you noh
Got family ovah sea!

"Uncle Zacky sen' a parcel!
"Air mail cable come from Sue",
"Sammy boat pull out his mawnin",
"Yuh noh hear sey Sarah flew?"
PASS FE WHITE

Miss Jane's brown-skin daughter has one thing to her credit in the United States where she is studying—she "passes" there as white. This poem was written in 1949 and is an amusing comment on some Jamaicans' sensitivity to skin tones.

Miss Jane jus hear from 'Merica,
Her daugha proudly write
Fe sey she fail her exam, but
She passin' dere fe wite!

She say fe tell de truth she know
Her brain part not so bright,
She couldn' pass tru college
So she try fe pass fe wite.

She passin wid her work-mate dem,
She passin wid her boss,
An a nice wite bwoy she love, dah—
Gwan wid her like sey she pass.

But sometime she get fretful an
Her heart start gallop fas'
An she bruk out een cole-sweat
Jus a-wonder ef she pass!

Jane get bex, sey she sen de gal
Fc learn bout edication,
It look like sey de gal gawn weh
Gawn work pon her complexion.

She noh haffe tan a foreign
Under dat deh strain an fright
For plenty copper-colour gal
Deh home yah dah-play wite.

Her fambily is nayga, but
Dem pedigree is right,
She hope de gal noh gawn an tun
Noh boogooysgga wite.

De gal pupa dah-laugh an sey
It serve 'Merica right
Five year back dem Jim-Crow him now
Dem pass him pickney wite.

Him dah-boas' all bout de districk
How him daugha is fus-class
How she smarter dan American
An over deh dah-pass!

Some people tink she pass B.A.
Some tink she pass D.R.,
Wait till dem fine out sey she ongle
Pass de colour-bar.
NOH LICKLE TWANG!
(NOT EVEN A LITTLE ACCENT)

This poem bemoans the fact that a recent repatriate Jamaican has returned from the United States without a trace of having been—not even a little "twang"! This, to say the least, is a highly unusual occurrence and all the more unforgivable.

Me glad fe se's you come back bwoy,
But lawd yuh let me dung,
Me shame o' yuh soh till ali o'
Me proudness drop a grung.

Yuh mean yuh goh dah 'Merica
An spen six whole mont' deh,
An come back not a piece betta
Dan how yuh did goh wey?

Bwoy yuh noh shame? Is soh you come?
Afta yuh tan soh lang!
Not even lickle language bwoy?
Not even little twang?

An yuh sista wat work ongle
One week wid 'Merican
She talk so nice now dat we have
De jooce fe undastan?

Bwoy yuh couldn' improve yuhself!
An yuh get soh much pay?
Yuh spen six mont' a foreign, an
Come back ugly same way?

Not even a drapes trouziz? or
A pass de rydim coat?
Bwoy not even a gole teet or
A gole chain roun yuh t'roat.

Suppose me las' me pass go introjooce
Yuh to a stranga
As me lamented son wat lately
Come from 'Merica!

Dem hoo da laugh afta me, bwoy
Me could'n tell dem soh!
Dem hoo da sey me lie, yuh was
A-spun time back a Mocho.

Noh back-amsa me bwoy, yuh talk
Too bad; shet up yuh mount,
Ah doan know how yuh an yuh puppa
Gwine to meck it out.

Ef yuh want please him meck him tink
Yuh bring back someting new.
Yuh always call him "Pa" dis evenin'
Wen him come sey "Poo".
COLOUR-BAR

This is a comment on the sensitivity of Jamaicans to different shades of skin-colour and the stratification of society based partly on these differences—what the sociologists call the “white bias” mentality. Indeed, the colour-fight . . . “dung yah, Is not wid black an’ white, but said, Red nayga an’ black nayga”. This is rapidly decreasing in the society at large and what was once a strong determinant of social relationships is now becoming a mere “vestigial trace” of an earlier indulgence.

Sir Lyle eena House o’ Commons
Dah-talk bout “colour-bar”
But right eena Jamaica we
Dah–have big “colour-war”.

Po’ Sir Lyle hooxda shock fe know
Dat de colour fight dung yah
Is not wid black an white, but wid
Red nayga an black nayga.

Some o’ de red-kin nayga feel
Soh bux dat dem noh white
Dat dem start fe cuss black nayga,
An soh dem ketch a fight.

Wen red-kin hitch too much pon white
White people tun dem back,
An dem fraid fe talk to black people
Less people tink dem black.

Me sorry fe po’ red-kin, for
Dem don’ know wey dem stan’
One granpa white, an’ oda granpa
Big, black, African.

Wat a debil of a mix-up!
Wat a dickans of a plight!
Dem sey dat dem noh nayga,
Nayga sey dat dem noh white.

Yuh tink de Lawd noh good to me!
Me glad me bawn naygal
For yuh muss live in torment
Wen yuh is a malatta.

Me live eena one lickle Tung,
An me jus a-pray sey
Anancy hooxda teck fas’ an invite
Fire fe visit deh.

Since edication an religion
Kean stop de colour war,
We need a dose o’ fire fe
Bun dung de colour bar.
Glossary

No attempt is here made to produce an exhaustive dictionary of the Jamaican version of the English language which developed over a period of three centuries in the island and which has provided such rich raw material for Louise Bennett, who has preserved and even popularised many Jamaicanisms. For the purposes of this volume, the Cassidy study has in turn served as a useful cross-reference. Readers who are interested in details of etymology, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary of the Jamaican dialect will find Prof. Cassidy’s book a rewarding and readable reference. The following list of words is therefore limited strictly to use as an aid in comprehending some of the poems on the preceding pages.

a or ah. is as in “Ef a bomb, a weh it come from?” To as in “Wata come a mc yeve”
a-. auxiliary with the force of it is, there are, as in “Rain a-fall but dutty tough” (see Cassidy, p. 59)
ais. ear(s)
ai. at or after
as or aks. ask
backa. behind
backra. white man, person of privilege, person in authority
baffon(s). puny, backward, slow to walk
bapl. echoism for sudden noise of striking
bangarang. worthless, good-for-nothing
bans o’. a lot of
barrah. borrow
batteration. betterment
bez. you, irate
bickle. cooked food (lit. victuals)
big-gill. quarter of a pint
bit. four pence-half penny
bit-an-tup. six pence (4jd. and 1ld.)
boogy-yoga. good-for-nothing, socially awkward person
boomonoosom. term of endearment meaning pretty, beautiful; also pleasant, lovely, nice
boodle. bottle
bolo job. hard work
bongo. bongo. black-and-ugly
bra or brer. brother
bridda. brother
brucsh or brexy. broken down, dilapidated
buck-buck. butt-butt, e.g. forehead
bungarang. worthless, good-for-nothing
buff-blin. echoism for noise from hard thuds or knocks
bull. cake made from flour, wet sugar and drinking soda
burn-pan. saucepan or cooking pot (lit. burnt pan)

burr-burr. prickly grass
bus, bus fort', bus on. burst, burst forth, burst out
buie. boil
bwu. boy
capas. copper container for boiling sugar
cha:mba. disfigured
chenks. small quantity, also kelps, kench
chichi-bi: bi: public transport buses with doors opened by compressed air
chigga fly or jiga. insect which infests feet
chigarooko. person infested with chigoe
cho. interjection showing impatience, scepticism or mild scorn-almost like English, 'Tshai or Pahawd cirise or cerase. vine, bitter in taste, used for medicinal purposes
coskooma:chka stick. stick cut from tree with prickly (macka) branches
coco:bye. type of leprosy which the bullfrog can give by spitting cod. to walk as in "cod me back"
combol. friend, companion
constab-macka. large prickly cob or coob. fowl house
counta or 'count o'. on account of
cow. cold
croonoogin. sly, underhand, deceitful
da. same as a
dah. intensified form of a-
daradeh. (lit.) that there or that very
don the
deggeh or deggeh-deggeh. sole, only
deh. there
deh-deh or did-deh is there
dem. them
destant. decent
dis-a or dis yah this very, (lit. this here)
don. don't
dress-up. rolled up
drop-pan. Chinese gambling game named from method of play
duckoonoo. pudding made from green banana, sweet potato or coca boiled in plantain or banana leaves
dung. down
duppy. ghost
duppy-conquer. bully, (lit. conqueror of a ghost)
dutty-dutty. mud, muddy
dweet. do it
een. in
efe. if
efa. if I
efaa. either
ege. being advantage
enkle. ankle
faba, faava. resemble, favour
fancy. imperfect, rude
fah. for
famela. familiar
fe. for
fe-me. mine
fe me own. my own
fe we. ours
fenky-fenky. ordinary, puny
fig. three peace
fot. one shilling and six pence (or 9s. 8d.)
front. in front of
fuloon. go on (lit. go along)
gangasie. ruffian, belonging to
gang. give
gill. three farthings
gumnoo. Congo pea
goon. go on
gwine. going to, as in "a gwine talk" (I am going to talk)

halla. boller
han-miggle. palm of hand
heng. hang
Hermitage. a reservoir near Kingston
kimmattie. hypnotise
kigger. peddler
hooza really. would really, or would have really
hooze. wouldn't
hogameer. hogshish, rude, crude
i. oil
i', it
jammoo. work-song
jeru-park. seasoned pork cooked by steaming under earth
jesta-pot. saucepan (lit. digester)
jing-leang. good-for-nothing, ordinary
jokify. jocular, given to practical jokes
joece. deuce
kea. carry
kear. car
kemps. bit, also chenks
kibba. cover
kik or kin poppa-litch somer-sault or back-flip
kip. keep
koo. look
koo yah. look here
koono-koono. rough, crude
koot or catch. hold, fasten, or support something temporarily, as in "let me koot up de door", or to stay temporarily as in "let me koot with you to-night"
labirish. gossip, chatter, hence labrish
lacka. like
lah. lord
leg. let go, so "leggo bea" for person on the loose
lard. like, lying
lidung. lie down
light-finger. thieving, kleptomaniac
livalspsy. talkative
lot o' or lotta. a lot of, same as bami o'
macka. prickle
mack-an-tup. rs. and tld.
malatta. mulatto, half-caste
manusables. polite
marina or merino. vest
Mass. Mister as in "Mass Joe"
mashalaw or mashalah. trouble (lit. marital law)
mawga. maegr
meel. trouble
mo. more
mocho-furro. very stupid, very low in character
Mona. the Richards reservoir or the Camp
mout-a-mass. blabber, chatter-box (lit. mouth have mercy)
mouty-mouty. given to gossip (lit. mouthy)
musua. must be, or must (emph.)
nus-mus. mouse, mice
Mus-Mus. war-time name for Mussolini
naasy. Nazi (Bennett), nasty
naya. Negro, "nigger"
naw. not
nealy. nearly
ninyam. food
nize. noise
noon. noise
noffe. not to, as in "I tell her noffe go"
nok. no
nyan. eat
nyan-nyan. given to eating, glutinous, disfigured
oonoo. you (plural)
oor or odda. other
omuch. how much
onkel. only
outside daughter, son, child. illegitimate daughter, son, child of married person (usually husband)