

9-2-94 PS 23C B/N Bennett Coverley Louise
'Miss Lou' at her best

- **Aunty Roachy Seh**
- **By Louise Bennett**
- **Edited by Mervyn Morris**
- **Published by Sangster's Book Stores Ltd. - 111 pages**
- **Production and design by Prodesign Ltd. - Price \$250**
- **Review by JEANNE WILSON**

WE ARE told on the back cover of this delightful book that **Aunty Roachy Seh** is the first published collection that has been culled from **Miss Lou's Views** of Louise Bennett's monologues in prose, the popular radio programmes aired in Jamaica between 1965 and 1982. Reading these pieces is like hearing Miss Lou say them, one hears her rich chuckle, the unmistakable lilt to her voice and remembers hearing her two or three times a week giving her views on the issues of the day.

Her range was wide and she had no hesitation in making caustic comments on race, class and gender, on wife beating and woman equality, on a wide ranging variety of subjects, but always her comments were given with such depth and insight, couched in her inimitable style, that lessons were learned without knowing that a lesson had been read.

She gives us new words for the language, 'unfairity' 'mannersable' 'ignorancy' 'jump alleuluia', to name a few, she also gave us the 'nylon road' for the black smooth barber green road surface that came into use during those years.

'Tek Bad Sinting Mek Laugh...'

What a wonderful expression that is! She has added wealth to the language and in doing so has added a new dimension to Jamaica culture. We are told on the back cover - all Jamaicans must know, but visitors will want to know more about this remarkable woman - that she is a writer, actress, authority on Jamaican folklore that she is the Hon Louise Bennett-Coverley, O.J (and we know that she is an ambassador at large, although that is not given on the cover).

She has written a number of books, **Jamaica Labrish** (1966),

Anancy and Miss Lou (1979) and **Selected Poems**. (1982) all published by Sangster's. She was awarded the Order of Jamaica in 1974, the Norman Washington Manley Award for Excellence 1972, the Musgrave Gold Medal of the Institute of Jamaica in 1979 and an Honorary D. Litt. from the University of the West Indies in 1983.

Pantomime

Readers will remember her marvellous performances in the yearly pantomime, many in which she starred with the late Ranny Williams - "Mas Ran" - they made a wonderful team, the humour unforced and bubbling out of them.

Introduction

There is an introduction to the collection by Mervyn Morris, who is a Reader in West Indian Literature at the University of the West Indies. He has long recognised the worth of Louise Bennett's writings and has written at length about them in the **Jamaica Journal**. He writes:

"...Miss Lou has chosen to work not in our official language (English), the norm for commentators in Jamaica, but in the language that most Jamaicans speak. She has often, as in the piece placed first in this book, explicitly defended the dignity and autonomy of that

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LOUISE BENNETT

her perform. This book is a marvellous vehicle for them to get to know this one aspect of this very talented Jamaican artiste, to appreciate her unique sense of humour and her way of projecting the social life of the island in these radio talks over a period of 17 years.

She mirrored the times, the good and the bad, and always with wisdom, compassion and a deep understanding of people and events. All this, and to make one laugh while she accomplished these feats! This is not a book to be read at a sitting, but to delve into, to have by one's bedside--as an antidote to early morning blues!

All Jamaican

The book is an entirely Jamaican publication, printed and bound in the island. It is clearly printed and free from printing errors, the cover is very attractive, a portrait of Miss Lou against a yellow, green and orange background. All in all, a most satisfying read.

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language, Jamaican Creole; and she notes the connections with English and the African languages..

He goes on: "...Our main concern has been to present the pieces in a form which makes them easy to sight-read..."

This object has been attained, for even if the reader is not familiar with Jamaican speech, he will soon get into the rhythm of it and recognise the familiar in the unfamiliar. To help, there is an excellent glossary at the end of the book.

Proverbs

The pieces are liberally sprinkled with Jamaican proverbs, which, pithy and to the point, amuse and inform. We are told in the Notes that Louise Bennett has an unpublished collection of more than 700 proverbs! She uses some of them to excellent effect in this publication. She has lived in Toronto for the past few years, so sadly, the young people have not benefited from seeing