

## Johnson's Artistic Resistance to British Brutality: "Inglan Is a Bitch" and "Sonny's Lettah"

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### ABSTRACT

As a Jamaican poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson is the forerunner of dub poetry that combines words with the reggae rhythm. Johnson establishes a postcolonial discourse of his own and uses his dub poetry to fight against the dominant Western discourse. His poetry tells real stories from a black immigrant's life by using Creole English and the rhythmic music of Jamaican culture. Thus, his poetry voices the real immigrant experience in Britain in a highly dramatic way. This article focuses on two important poems by Johnson; "Inglan Is a Bitch" and "Sonnah's Lettah". In both poems, Johnson subverts English language, and thus shows his resistance to the colonial power in the level of language. Besides, both of his poems have the same political concern of revealing the British discrimination against black people. In this respect, Johnson's poetry is surely his artistic tool against racism and serves to his political activism.

**Keywords:** Linton Kwesi Johnson, racism, dub poetry, post-colonialism.

## Johnson'ın İngiliz Zalimliğine Sanatsal Direnişi: "Kahpe İngiltere" ve "Oğlundan Mektup" Şiirleri

### ÖZ

Jamaikalı şair Linton Kwesi Johnson sözcüklerle reggae ritimlerini birleştiren dub şiirinin öncüsüdür. Johnson, şiiriyle kendine ait bir sömürge sonrası söylem yaratır ve dub şiirini egemen Batı söylemine karşı yürüttüğü savaşında kullanır. Kreole İngilizcesi ve Jamaika kültürünün ritmik müziğini kullanan şiirleri siyahi göçmenlerin gerçek hayat hikâyelerini anlatır. Bu nedenle, Johnson'ın şiirleri İngiltere'deki gerçek göçmen deneyimlerini oldukça canlı ve yaratıcı bir biçimde gözler önüne serer. Bu makale Johnson'ın "Inglan Is a Bitch" (Kahpe İngiltere) ve "Sonnah's Lettah" (Oğlundan Mektup) başlıklı iki şiiri üzerine odaklanır. Johnson, her iki şiirde de bilinçli olarak dil kurallarına uymaz. Onun bu tutumu, sömürgeci güçlere karşı dil düzeyinde bir meydan okuyuş olarak yorumlanabilir. Ayrıca her iki şiir, siyahilere karşı yapılan İngiliz ayrımcılığını ve zulmünü ortaya koyarken, İngilizlerin siyahları tanımlamak için yarattığı vahşi "siyahi hayvan" stereotipinin ardındaki insanı gösterir. Johnson'ın şiirleri bu yönüyle şairin ırkçılığa karşı kullandığı sanatsal bir silahtır ve aynı zamanda onun siyasi aktivizmine de hizmet eder.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Linton Kwesi Johnson, ırkçılık, dub şiiri, sömürge sonrası çalışmaları.

### Introduction

Born in Jamaica, Linton Kwesi Johnson came to England in 1962, shortly before the independence of Jamaica in 1962. When he was 17, he joined the Black Panthers, a militant Black Power group. It was an African-American revolutionary socialist organization started in the United States and became very active between the years 1966 and 1982. After reading *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by W. E. B. Du Bois, he decided "to express and say something about what was going on in England with young people and how black people were being treated" (qtd. in Hoyles, 2002, p. 64). During his involvement in the Black Panther group, Johnson organized poetry training courses together with the Rasta Love, a group of black poets and drummers. His poetry first appeared in the magazine *Race Today* which was a platform for giving voice to the radical black politics in Britain. His first poetry collection was *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (1974) while another well-known poem collection entitled *Inglan is a Bitch* was released in 1980. He is the first black poet whose works

were published by Penguin Modern Classics. Indeed, this detail shows that black literature still confronts the problem of recognition by the white majority ("Linton"). Johnson's major concern in his poetry is African Caribbean experience in Britain. In a 2008 interview, he claims that "[w]riting was a political act and poetry was a cultural weapon" (Wroe, 2008, p.1). As a tool of resistance to the British governmental policies, his most powerful poems were penned during the Thatcher era when racism and racist police brutality were at their peak. This paper will focus on Johnson's two important poems "Inglan Is a Bitch" and "Sonny's Lettah" that subvert the English language in order to analyze the poet's use of poetry to reveal injustices against the black immigrants in Britain and to criticize the racist policies of his day.

### **Main Body**

With the coming of the Conservative Party into power in 1979, racism and nationalism started to rise in England. The government legally restricted immigration to Britain especially from the Commonwealth countries and paved the way for some racist practices in the country (Arnold, 1989, p. 54). For instance, the police, encouraged by the Vagrancy Act of 1824 that had granted them a right to stop and search suspicious people, exploited the law to harass black immigrants (Whitfield, 2009, p. 1). At that period, the Sus Law, the informal name for a stop and search law, caused great controversy, becoming one of the triggering reasons for the 1981 Race Riots across many major cities of England. The main motives for the riots can be listed as increasing racial tension and inner-city deprivation. The Brixton riot in London, the Handsworth riots in Birmingham, the Chapeltown riot in Leeds and the Toxteth riots in Liverpool were recorded as the major ones as these areas had large ethnic minority population suffering from poor life conditions (Cloake and Tudor, 2001, pp. 60-4). Particularly through his use of aggressive language, Johnson's activist poetry reflects the rebellious spirit of these riots.

His poetry is mainly classified as dub poetry which is a form of performance poetry of the West Indian origin. It evolved out of dub music consisting of spoken word over reggae rhythms in Jamaica in the 1970s. "The early reggae DJs, who improvised lyrics against a popular tune, were also an influence, encouraging Johnson to try to spread his poems' influence by declaiming the verse against music and drum beats" (Dawson, 2006, p. 53). It is evident that Johnson's use of dub poetry is not a coincidence but a deliberate choice to express his West Indian roots. Dawson also claims that "LKJ sought to craft his own poetic language in order to overcome the traditions of linguistic and mental colonization imposed by the educational apparatus in the British colonies of the Caribbean" (2006, 54). In parallel to Dawson's argument, Johnson points out the rich oral literature in West India and claims that he is "adapting this West Indian tradition to circumstances confronted by black communities in Britain" (qtd. in Dawson, 2006, p. 55). In other words, instead of adopting British values to be accepted by the English, he insists on his indigenous identity to resist the British oppression. So, his dub poetry turns into a postcolonial weapon against cultural imperialism. Over the issue, Johnson also says:

"[...] I could relate it [his poetry], in a sense, to my idea of what the real African tradition was, in terms of telling the story of the tribe. I wanted to draw upon my Jamaican heritage, use the everyday language of Jamaican speech. I was also heavily influenced by dub. I wanted my verse, the actual words, to sound like music, to sound like a bass line. So when I was talking, I wanted to use my voice like a talking bass and that's how I developed my style as well as my poetics" (Wheatle, 2010, p. 38).

As can be inferred from the quotation, Johnson creates his own discourse and fulfills the goal of postcolonial literature that seeks to "formulate non-Western modes of discourse as a viable means of challenging the West" (Quayson, 2000, p. 2). He uses the rich oral tradition and rhythmic music of Jamaican culture to utter the problems of his immigrant fellows in a very Jamaican way. Thus, he frees himself from the imposed Western values over his identity.

Johnson's best-known albums dealing with the problem of racism include his debut *Dread Beat an' Blood* (1978), *Forces of Victory* (1979), *Bass Culture* (1980) and *Making History* (1983) while "Dread Beat An' Blood", "Sonny's Lettah", "Inglan Is A Bitch", "Independent Intavenshan" and "All Wi Doin Is Defendin" are well known examples of his dub poetry. "Inglan Is a Bitch" focuses on the hard life conditions of black community in England. It gives voice to the angry black man who works under harsh conditions and is exposed to discrimination. At first, the language of the poem attracts attention. Johnson does not use standard English but uses Creole English, which can be regarded as his resistance to the colonial power in the level of language. Thus, the form – namely, dub poetry of performance – and the language stand as the main elements of his anti-colonial stance reflected in his art. In relation to dub poetry, França states: "By making an effort to give a voice to a community forged on the borders of privation and marginalization, dub poetry is composed of a deeply antagonistic and conflictive nature (as most of the legitimate claims made from the minorities perspective)" (2011, 5). As appropriate to the nature of dub poetry, "Inglan Is a Bitch" reflects this antagonism through its aggressive language including filthy words and this aggressive tone mirrors the fury of black immigrants in England. Moreover, there are different kinds of English that create tension in Johnson's poetry (Hoyles, 2002, 64). Johnson says:

"The kind of thing that I write and the way I say it is as a result of the tension between Jamaican Creole and Jamaican English and between those and English English. And all that, really, is the consequence of having been brought up in a colonial society and then coming over here to live and go to school in England, soon afterwards. The tension builds up. You can see it in the writing. You can hear it. And something else: my poems may look sort of flat on the page. Well, that is because they're actually oral poems, as such. They were definitely written to be read aloud, in the community." (qtd. in Hoyles, 2002, p. 64).

Coming from a postcolonial country and being raised within the British education system, Johnson surely knows English. Yet, he subverts the English language and makes it new by consciously using Creole language and adapting it to his own background. Besides, Johnson emphasizes the importance of poetry reading in relation to his oeuvre as performing poetry in Jamaican rhythms is another way of asserting his Jamaican identity. Subversive in nature, the hybrid Creole language of his poetry is a direct challenge against Standard English while Jamaican rhythms constantly remind the audience of his Jamaican roots.

Apart from the form, the content of Johnson's poem is also revolutionary for his time, since it gives political and social messages by projecting the grim reality of racist England in the 1980s. As Yuval-Davis argues in *Gender and Nation* (1997), woman is the symbol of national collectivity and the one who transfers traditions from generation to generation. Johnson, coming from a former colony, can not satisfy his expectations in his "mother land," and thus calls her a "bitch" that disappointed her black children. England was the colonial master of Jamaica and when the country achieved its independence from the UK in 1962, it has become a part of the Commonwealth realm. Having arrived in England just before the independence, Johnson hoped to set up a better life in his mother country. Yet, his mother country turned her back on her children, leaving them in misery. Therefore, Johnson defines her as a "bitch" and voices his hatred.

In the first stanza of the poem, he mentions his first arrival to England. As the poem proceeds, we see the life story of a black person, starting with his young years and ending with his old ones. Johnson's story exemplifies the discrimination against a black immigrant. From the lines "y'u don't get fi know your way aroun' " ("you don't get to know your way around") in the first stanza, Johnson's confusion and desperation in a foreign country can be sensed. His desperation does not subside at the end of the poem and he adopts a more rebellious tone.

After the first stanza, Johnson starts to list some typical works like cleaning associated with the Black community in England. Coming from the colonial lands, black people generally worked as blue-collar workers in England. This shows that the master-servant relation did not change for the blacks, although they arrived in their mother country. So, black people suffered from both belonging to the

working class and belonging to a racial minority group. It can be considered another version of "double burden" since they are exploited more than the white working class. Johnson also draws attention to the lesser wages for black community, saying "w'en dem gi' you di lickle wage packit" ("they give you your little wage packet"). Although they did the same jobs with the whites, the blacks would mean the cheapest labor force for white employers. So, their slavery did not come to end in their mother country.

In the seventh stanza, hard work undertaken by the blacks is emphasized. Here, Johnson makes a reference to the "black beast" image saying "mi did strang like a mule, but, bwoy, mi did fool" ("Me was strong as a mule, but boy, me was a fool"). Black people are always regarded physically stronger than the whites. Thus, in the colonial plantations, they were always charged with hard field works. Yet, their physical strength was not only exploited, but also considered a threat against the white rule. The black beast stereotype, promoted by Thomas Dixon's racist work *The Clansman* (1905), sketches a lazy and rapist portrayal for the black man who craves for a white woman's virgin body. In this respect, a black man's physical strength has a paradoxical role in the white man's discourse and his "bestial" power must be used for the common good. This prejudice against the black man provided a justification for the white man's discourse as the blacks were given the tasks that no white man wanted to do.

In the ninth stanza, Johnson makes references to some other stereotypical images imposed on the black man. When the colonial powers were invading the territories of black people, their aim was to develop the living conditions of these so-called lazy and backward men. So, as Rudyard Kipling offered in his 1899 poem entitled "The White Man's Burden," these "lazy" black people were a burden on white men's shoulders. Indeed, Johnson's reference to this stereotype shows his self-awareness about his public image in British society and challenges the prejudice. Over the stereotypes ironically mentioned in the poem, Johnson criticizes the attitude of white people against the blacks. Also, he projects them the other side of the coin by depicting the harsh living conditions faced by the black immigrants.

The repetitive lines of the poem "Inglan is a bitch /dere's no escapin it" ("England is a bitch / There's no escaping it") show Johnson's both hatred against and despair about England. In the last stanza, Johnson raises an important question "Inglan is a bitch fi true / is whey wi a goh dhu 'bout it?" ("England is a bitch, for true / Is what we going to do about it?"). It can be argued that the last lines reflect Johnson's activism since he believes in the importance of taking action to improve poor living conditions and change England's attitude towards black immigrants. Even this poem with its subverted language and social realism is his weapon against the white dominance.

Johnson's another well-known poem "Sonny's Lettah" is known as an anti-Sus poem and depicts police brutality towards the blacks during the Thatcherian era as mentioned earlier. The poem is written in an epistolary form as the speaker addresses his mother from Brixton prison. Johnson wrote this poem in order to draw attention to the unfair practice of the Sus law by which many black people in South London were criminalized at a young age (DiNovella, 2007, p. 33).

Similar to his poem "Inglan Is a Bitch", Johnson uses a subverted form of official English in addition to his rhythmic lines reflecting the rebellious spirit of his dub poetry. As marked by Dawson, the rhythms "emphasize the surge of violence precipitated by the police attack," because the music stops "during Sonny's comments to his mother" (1991, p. 64). One of the stanzas where Johnson depicts the police violence goes as follows: "Dem thump him in his belly and it turn to jelly / Dem lick 'im pon 'im back and 'im rib get pop / Dem thump him pon his head but it tough like lead / Dem kick 'im in 'im seat and it started to bleed" ("They thumped him in his belly and it turned to jelly / They beat him on his back and his rib broke / They thumped him on his head but it is tough like lead / They kicked him in his seat and it started to bleed") ("Sonny's"). As it is seen, the repetition of sounds sets a fast-paced poem while projecting the increasing tension as a result of high levels of violence. At this juncture, the content and the form of the poem go hand-in-hand, which justifies Johnson's choice of dub poetry to utter social reality.

As the poem proceeds, Sonny fights back the police at the sight of violence against his brother. As a result, he kills a policeman and is sent to a jail. Here, Johnson undermines the stereotypical views of black criminality and violence by humanizing the persona Sonny through the poem (Dawson, 2006, p. 63). Sonny does not commit a murder arbitrarily but tries to protect his brother who has been entrusted to him by his mother as underlined with these lines: “For I did mek a solemn promise / To tek care a lickle Jim / And try mi bes fi look out fi him” (for I did make a solemn promise / To take care of little Jim / And try my best for looking out for him). However, he cannot protect his little brother from the police force. Giving this background information, Johnson highlights the other side of the coin once again and reveals the reasons behind the crimes committed by the blacks. As it is seen, violence is paid back with more violence by the oppressed blacks. Sonny’s counterattack by using brute force overlaps with Frantz Fanon’s argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) where he points out the necessity of revolution based on “absolute violence” to overthrow European colonialism (1967, 37). Besides, from a Marxist point of view, the act of the policemen reflects the state agenda since police force is regarded as one of the Repressive State Apparatuses by Marxist critic Althusser. Considering that the time period covered in the poem is Margaret Thatcher’s time when the conservative and nationalist values were on rise, it can be argued that the police is encouraged by Thatcher’s racist statements that define immigrants as a threat against British culture. In the midst of such racism, Johnson’s poem stands as a tool of resistance by drawing attention to the ill-treatment experienced by the blacks.

Johnson’s “Sonny’s Lettah” ends with another direct address to the mother: “Mama, doan fret / Doan get depress an downhearted / Be of good courage / Till I hear from you / I remain / Your son, /Sonny” (Mama, don’t fret / Don’t get depressed and down hearted / Be of good courage / Until I hear from you). Here, the mother figure is very important because Johnson humanizes Sonny by marking his family relations and emotional bonds with his mother. In this way, the audience gets deep into Sonny’s mind and the stereotypical “black beast” image – the inhuman trouble maker image – is destroyed. Instead, the audience establishes empathy with a young black man.

### Conclusion

To sum up, Johnson’s poetry is highly political as seen in the examples of “Inglan Is a Bitch” and “Sonny’s Lettah.” He not only uses aggressive words to voice grim social reality but also subverts the English language in an attempt to stand against cultural colonialism. His disillusionment with his life in mother country fosters his hatred against England. While his rhythms reminding of drum beats are functional in terms of reflecting rebellious emotions, they also draw attention to Johnson’s African roots. Mixing artistic genres with politics, Johnson manages to reach more people and raise public awareness about racist practices. In this respect, he sees his art as an extension of his activism and says: “Through our rebellion, we helped change Britain” (DiNovella, 2007, p. 33).

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## Extended Abstract

Jamaikalı şair Linton Kwesi Johnson, 1962 yılında İngiltere'ye göç etmiş ve henüz 17 yaşındayken Kara Panterler grubuna dahil olmuştur. 1966'da Amerika'da kurulan ve yıllar boyu aktif olan Afrikan-Amerikan kökenli bu örgütün amacı siyahilerin gücünü ortaya koymaktır. Kwesi Johnson, şiir kariyerine örgütte düzenlediği ve bir grup siyahi şair ve davulcunun katılımıyla gerçekleşen şiir eğitimleriyle başlamıştır. Johnson, şiirleri Penguin Modern Klasikler tarafından basılan ilk siyahi şair olması açısından edebiyatta çok önemli bir yere sahiptir. Yazmanın siyasi bir eylem olduğuna inanan Johnson, İngiltere'de yaşayan Afro-Karibik göçmenlerin gerçek hayat hikâyelerini şiirine aktarır. İngiltere'de ırkçılığın yükseldiği Thatcher döneminde kaleme aldığı şiirleri ırkçılığı ve ırkçı polis şiddetini anlatırken, dönemin ırkçı uygulamalarına şiir yoluyla bir eleştiri getirir. Bu makale Johnson'un "İnglan Is a Bitch" (Kahpe İngitere) ve "Sonny's Lettah" (Oğlundan Mektup) başlıklı şiirlerine yoğunlaşır ve bu şiirlerdeki siyasi mesajları ortaya koyar.

1979 yılında Muhafazakâr Parti'nin iktidara gelmesiyle İngiliz hükümeti, özellikle de İngiliz Milletler Topluluğu'ndan (Commonwealth ülkeleri) gelen göçmenlere kısıtlamalar getirmiş ve ülkede bazı ırkçı kanunların temelini atmıştır. Buna göre, İngiliz polisi sebep göstermeden insanları durdurup üstlerini arayabilecektir. Bu kanunun siyahi göçmenler aleyhine kullanılması, 1981 yılında, ülkede isyanların çıkmasına sebep olur. Johnson'un şiirleri de agresif dil kullanımıyla bu isyankâr ruhları ve gerekçelerini yansıtır. "Dub şiiri" olarak sınıflandırılan Johnson'un performans şiirleri, reggae müziğiyle Kreole İngilizcesini kullanarak, gerçek hayat hikâyelerini söze döker. Dub şiiri, İngiliz değerleri karşısında Johnson'un Jamaikalı kimliğini yansıtır ve egemen İngiliz kültürüne karşı çıkar. Bu, aynı zamanda Batı'nın kültürel emperyalizmine de bir karşı çıkıştır. Bu nedenle, Johnson'un şiirleri adeta sömürge sonrası edebiyatın silahları hâline gelir.

"İnglan Is a Bitch" İngiltere'de yaşayan siyahilerin zorlu yaşam şartlarını gözler önüne sererken, öfkeli siyah adamın duygularına da tercüman olur. Şiirde standart bir İngilizce kullanılmaz, bunun yerine Johnson karma Kreole İngilizcesini tercih eder ve bunu dil düzeyinde bir karşı koyuş olarak adlandırır. Kreole İngilizcesinde şair sözcük yapılarıyla ve İngilizce'nin dilbilgisi ile oynayarak, standart İngilizce'nin dışına çıkar. Şiirde kullanılan saldırgan dil ve kötü kelimeler siyahilerin öfkesini gerçekçi bir tonda ortaya koyar. Kadın figürünün bir ulusun alegorisi olarak kullanıldığını varsayarsak, "İnglan Is a Bitch" şiirinde siyahilerin İngiltere'de yaşadıkları hayal kırıklıkları anlatılır. İngiliz Milletler Topluluğu'na empoze edilen söylemde İngiltere diğer sömürge ülkelerinin anası rolündedir. Yani onun, diğer ülkeleri kollayıcı ve koruyucu bir görevi vardır. Ancak, Johnson'un şiirinden anlaşılacağı gibi İngiltere ülkesine gelen göçmenlere karşı bu koruyucu görevini yerine getiremez ve onlara sırt çevirir. Bu bağlamda, İngiltere'deki siyahi göçmenler kötü koşullarda yaşar, kötü işlerde çalışır ve ayrımcılığa uğrarlar. Johnson da şiirinde İngiltere'yi bir kadın figürü olarak hayal eder ama onunki kollayıcı bir anne değil, sömürgeci bir fahişe rolündedir. Johnson, ayrıca siyahilerin beyazlarla eşit ücret almadığını vurgular. Bu eşitsizlik, sömürgeci zihniyetin temelindeki sahip-köle karşıtlığıyla açıklanabilir. Ayrıca, Johnson beyaz insanlar tarafından siyahilere atfedilen "tembel" ve "aptal" gibi sıfatların farkında olduğunu da ima eder. Rudyard Kipling'in "Beyaz Adamın Yükü" şiirinde bahsedildiği gibi beyaz insanlar, siyahilerin eğitimsiz, cahil ve ilkel olduklarına inanırlar ve onları kendi sırtlarında birer yük olarak görürler ama gerçekte, beyaz insanların yapmadığı tüm pis işleri siyahiler yapar. Şiirde Johnson "siyah adamın çok tembel olduğunu söylerler / ama benim çalışmamı görseydin, benim deli olduğumu düşünürdün" diyerek, "tembel siyah adam" tiplemesine karşı çıkar. Şiire genel olarak isyankâr ve alaycı bir dil hâkimdir.

"Sonny's Lettah" şiiri ise kardeşi polis tarafından vurulduğu için polisi öldüren ve hapse düşen siyahi bir çocuğun annesine yazdığı mektup formatındadır. Şiir, Thatcher döneminde yükselen ırkçılığın gölgesinde İngiliz polisine istediğini durdurup arama yetkisi veren Sus kanunlarının siyahilere karşı nasıl kullanıldığını gösterir. "İnglan Is a Bitch" şiirinde olduğu gibi burada da Kreole İngilizcesi kullanılmıştır. Dawson'un ifade ettiği gibi, polisin çocuğa şiddet uyguladığı sahneler, şiirdeki ritmik dizelerle paralel gider ve kendini hissettirir. Çocuğun annesiyle konuştuğu bölümlerde ise ritim kesilir (2006, s. 63). Bu şiir, devlet tarafından potansiyel suçlu olarak görülen siyahilere uygulanan keyfi şiddeti gösterir. Bu açıdan siyahilerle özdeşleştirilen şiddetin gerekçelerini de vermiş

olur. Johnson'ın amacı, bir polisi öldüren siyahinin bu şiddet sarmalına nasıl bulaştığını göstermektir. Şiir, aynı zamanda katil olan çocuğun annesine yazdığı mektup üstünden kendini haklı çıkarma çabasıdır. Çocuk, annesine "Sana bir tek söz verdim / Küçük Jim'e göz kulak olacaktım / Ve bunu başarmak için elimden gelenin en iyisini yaptım" der. Ancak, şiire göre çocuğun gücü polisin, kardeşini öldürmesini engellemeye yetmemiştir. Bu şiir, beyazların yarattığı ve yine siyahi erkeklere atfedilen vahşi "siyah hayvan" benzetmesinin ardındaki insanı ve onu şiddete sürükleyen nedenleri anlatır.

Sonuç olarak, her iki şiir de Johnson'ın yaşadığı toplumda siyahilerin uğradığı haksızlıkları dile getirmeye çalışır ve Johnson, bu siyasi kaygısını şiir yoluyla topluma iletir. Şair, şiirlerinde sadece toplumun can sıkıcı gerçeklerini göstermez. Ayrıca İngiliz dilinin standart yapısıyla oynayarak, Kreole İngilizcesini oluşturur ve onu kültürel sömürgeciliğe karşı silah olarak kullanır. Şiirlerindeki ritimler, davul ritimlerine benzer ve Johnson'ın Afrikalı kökleriyle içinde yaşadığı Batı toplumunu birleştirir. Johnson, şiiri adeta bir performans sanatına dönüştürmek suretiyle daha çok kişiye ulaşmayı ve bu yolla İngiliz toplumundaki ırkçı uygulamaların yok olmasını hedefler.