

Our Mothers' Kitchens and the Domestic Creative Continuum: A Reading of Lorna Goodison's *Turn Thanks* Hannah Chukwu and Susan Gingell

In “The Domestic Science of Sunday Dinner,” Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison depicts a young woman in her mother’s kitchen where she is learning to work culinary magic on the desiccated ingredients of a national dish, rice and peas, while confidently anticipating the reward:

There is the soaking of the peas; the red kidney beans
dried out from hard life, which need to be revived
through the water process, overnight osmosis. . .
Your efforts will return to you
As aromas of contentment, harbingers of feasting
And well being on Sunday afternoon. (1–3, 13–15)

Like any good cook, poet Lorna Goodison knows how to substitute one ingredient for another, and her use of metaphor—making the hard life of the legumes stand in for that of her people—sets up a formula of transformation and of transmission of heritage analogous to those recorded in a well-known passage in African-American writer Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*:

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.

Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect for the possibilities—and the will to grasp them.

Guided by my heritage of love of beauty and a respect for strength—in search of my mother’s garden, I find my own.
(241–43)

Whereas Walker uses the garden to represent a Black woman’s space of transfigurative creativity, Goodison, in both “The Domestic Science” and “Aunt Rose’s Honey Advice,” makes the kitchen that creative space. For both writers, their mothers’ activities supply a model for their daughters’ literary aesthetics, a “redeemed and rescued richness” (Goodison 8) from the stuff of an otherwise marginalized life, while Goodison’s Aunt Rose provides an aesthetics of loving that makes life itself into poetry.

In *Turn Thanks* domestic activities feature at the levels of subject matter, diction and imagery as Goodison represents domestic creativity in three related spheres: a mother’s creative activity of giving birth to the children and instilling in them a sense of their culture; a father’s nurturing and tutoring of his children; and the family activities involved in the running of a household. Cooking and eating, sewing, gardening, laundering and body care—all of these activities are shown to exist alongside language teaching, singing, dancing, and literary aesthetics, piecing together what Grace Nichols calls a domestic creative continuum. Goodison’s language imparts a sense of sacredness to such routine domestic activities as laundering and cooking, and even the dead are revealed to be involved in a spiritual form of creativity. In other words, both physical and spiritual creativities are conceived of as necessary for the balance and proper functioning of an individual in the Caribbean society about which Goodison writes.

By infusing into these domesticities a higher meaning than they have commonly been held to have, and modeling her poetic vision from them, Goodison transforms what has commonly been overlooked as the merely quotidian activities of home making. As woman, mother, artist, and painter, Goodison’s creativity informs all the dimensions of her life, but in *Turn Thanks* she is especially concerned with her experiences and ideas that arise from home-life activities and creative heritage. This article concentrates mainly on sections one and three of the collection and uses them as springboards for a discussion of domesticity based upon

matrilineal heritage, although this discussion will logically extend into the two other sections of the book, and will include an examination of the patrilineal heritage celebrated in section two. These extensions are necessary to present the full range of Goodison's conception of the domestic creative continuum.

Our focus on Goodison's foregrounding of positive connotations for domesticity takes place within the context of a feminist scholarly discourse that links domesticity with work and represents domestic labour as typically a kind of drudgery. Olive Senior's *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* presents a portrait of those mainly working and underclass lives as characteristically hedged round by acute economic stress and unrelenting labour both inside and outside the domestic space. In setting up her argument that a woman's domestic labour in her home should be publicly recognized as work, Senior quotes a woman who reports, "housework is very hard, because every day you got to do some. Some days the same thing what you do today you got to do tomorrow. You got to cook, wash, sweep, dust, cook, clean, scrub" (114). Such a report is a salutary indicator that the domesticity of Goodison's book is not a representation of an underclass phenomenon because a domestic servant significantly alleviated the drudgery in the household of her youth. Moreover, it is far easier to see such activities as cooking, sewing and gardening as creative activities than it is washing, sweeping, dusting, cleaning and scrubbing, and it is the former dimensions of domesticity rather than the latter that Goodison's poetry most, though not exclusively, celebrates.

Feminist scholarly discussions of domesticity also typically emphasize the subordination of women through their identification with the domestic sphere even though their creative negotiations of their subordinate status indicate that their agency is never completely effaced. Anne McClintock's exemplary analysis of domesticity in *Imperial Leather* begins with the history of the word "domesticate," a history that uncovers not only male, but also imperial, domination: "Etymologically, the verb to domesticate is akin to dominate, which derives from *dominus*, lord of the *domum*, the home. Until 1964, however, the verb to domesticate also carried as one of its meanings the action 'to civilize'"

(35). Moreover, McClintock goes on to indicate that the colonial mission station was an institution that initiated the transformation of a “domesticity rooted in European gender and class roles into domesticity as controlling a colonized people.” As Sharon Harrow bluntly puts the matter in *Adventures in Domesticity*, “Domestic discourse was deployed as a colonizing tactic; African and Caribbean cultures were called civilized or savage based in part on their domestic practices” (9). Goodison’s linking of domesticity and Black women’s spirituality and creativity, and our affirmation of it in this article could then, from a point of view informed by such scholarship, be suspect, at least initially.

We in no way wish to dismiss or subvert the accounts of domesticity offered in scholarship such as Senior’s, McClintock’s or Harrow’s, but our reading of Goodison’s *Turn Thanks* suggests that such works do not tell the whole story and do not exhaust an accounting of the ways in which women understand and negotiate domesticity, whether it be understood as an architectural space or a “social relation to power” (McClintock 34). Goodison’s poems, while not erasing harsher realities, represent domesticity as a space and a set of activities that provide an arena and paradigm for other creativities.

In the two poems “The Domestic Science of Sunday Dinner” and “Domestic Incense” Goodison uses an overtly domestic diction, which exudes an effervescence of pleasure and gratification. In both poems readers are transported into a world of contentment by cooking aromas, but it is an alluring Saturday soup in the second whose reference to incense suggests cooking as a form of spiritual practice:

I would bear it to you in an enamel bowl,
the smell of fragrant thyme and pimento
would waft, domestic incense, as I go. (7–9)

In both poems, the poet-persona also equates the fragility of cooked food and the softening process of cooking with other sorts of fragility and softness. In “Domestic Incense” the parallel is with the delicate and tender nature of love. With reference to the “Scotch Bonnet pepper” Goodison writes, “but because like our love its seeds / can scorch, I’d be careful to remove it / before it cooked itself into breaking” (13–15).

Similarly, in "The Domestic Science of Sunday Dinner," she uses the art of cooking as the springboard to comment on the tenuousness of life because sickness may result in the death of the physical body, as well as the death of pleasure. Here, the process used in cooking is similar to the weakening effect of illness upon the body. On the surface the poem is about the preparation of Sunday dinner, but contains references to the illness and impending death of both parents. Commenting on her care to remove "foreign bodies" and "impurities" from the rice (77), the persona foreshadows her father's death because the "small pebbles and chaff / . . . remind us that all this is the produce, / the bounty of the earth into which / my father is preparing to return" (78–81). She also observes the gradual deterioration of her mother's health:

Over and over I watch for signs
that hearts are softening
that hard things are broken open
that in the end it will all come together
like the Sunday dinner rice and peas.
as I pray for your soul's safety Mother,
as I pray for your blessed release. (102–08)

The process of cooking, which softens the ingredients of the food to make it more readily digestible, is can be read as a process parallel to sickness and death. The trope is extended through cyclical imagery: the earth that produces the food will also be enriched with the father's corpse, while the prayer for the "blessed release" of the mother refers to her soul, which will continue her creative activity unhindered. Cooking and eating become Goodison's metaphors for death and the consumption of the body through the natural process of ageing and ultimately decay. Even the length of the 108-line poem helps to communicate the long process of cooking, thereby reinforcing the parallel imagery of softening food with physical disintegration.

Goodison emphasizes her spiritual sensibility, evident in her penchant for religious language, by depicting the preparation of food as a sacred act, similar to a ritual such as Christian communion. Her language conveys a sense of sacredness as the dinner is prepared in the "Advent season"

(21): the nearly burnt roast is “redeemed and rescued” (33); dinner is a “ceremony” (46) in which the father “perform[s] this ritual” (49–50) lifting “a chalice” in a “tender holy” (57–58) gesture. Finally, the “high domestic ceremony” (69) ends with the pouring of a “libation” (73) of coconut milk.

Part one of *Turn Thanks*, from which the two poems discussed above come, can be located in the tradition of African praise poetry, and expresses appreciation of Goodison’s matriarchal heritage in poems that celebrate the female figures who have contributed to the poet-persona’s development and growth. The language of the poems, however, is inflected by the Jamaican context, the phrasing of the title “Turn Thanks,” for example, is a typical Creole formulation of what would be phrased in Standard English as “returning thanks.” The first poem, “After the Green Gown of My Mother Gone Down” (3–5), deals with themes of death and the spirit’s continued creativity after death. The dead are shown to be involved in forms of creativity that continue from their earthly domestic creative involvements which are expanded on in other parts of the collection. Goodison’s mother’s posthumous influence on her daughter’s creativity is elegized in the book’s celebration of the domestic creative continuum.

The title of the elegy, “After the Green Gown of My Mother Gone Down,” exemplifies Goodison’s attention to the phonological dimensions of language. The persistent alliterative “g” sounds and the assonantal “o” sounds in the title of the poem accord with the Afro-Jamaican perception of life’s continuity and renewal, because it is through these sounds that the idea of the dead assuming a new form of creative role is first articulated. The alliterative phrase “Green Gown” is her metaphor for the vivid life of an embodied individual while “Gone Down” is a metaphorical expression of death, which is further developed in the lines “Fall now, and trees flame, catch a fire and riot / last leaves” (2–3). Moreover, Goodison alludes to nature and Jamaican landscape in such words as *leaves*, *headwaters*, *agate*, *rivers*, *lagoons*, and *earth*, and the phrase “Blue Mountains of Jamaica.”

Goodison’s intertextual references to Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song” work in a way that invoke the healing effect of songs and the

prominence of music in a collective Caribbean consciousness. By incorporating the song into the poem, the poet alludes to her concern with liberation, the Caribbean destiny, and struggle, themes which are also expressed in her phrase “plead / for our recovery and redemption” in the poem “To Become Green Again and Young” (20–21). The poet-persona in “After the Green Gown of My Mother Gone Down” attributes to her mother a premonition about Marley—“you sensed him traveling”—a Caribbean phrase connoting a movement toward death. Metaphorically, she equates Marley’s death with her mother’s, first referring to Marley’s music, then to death in general, and finally to her mother:

In a studio with stray echo and wailing sound
Lost singing scattin’ through the door of no return.
When the green goes, beloved, the secret is opened.
The breath falls still, the life covenant is broken.
Dress my mother’s cold body in a deep green gown.
Catch a fire and let fall and flame time come. (9–14)

The phrase “the door of no return,” apart from referring to death, alludes to the door of African coastal slave castles through which the slaves passed out to the ships of the middle passage, never to return.¹ The poet thus connects to her ancestry in a phrase that foregrounds death and deracination, which was the lot of so many enslaved Africans. Through these references Goodison links the past, present and future of her family lineage in a circular continuum that both inspires and incites memory.

Ideas about the continuity of life and renewal that come with death are further emphasized in the line that reads “When the green goes, beloved, the secret is opened” which supports the notion that the dead are liberated into another realm of life and creativity—an idea that recurs in the later poem “My Mother’s Sea Chanty.” The theme of community renewal continues in stanza nine of the poem “After the Green Gown of My Mother Gone Down” where all of the deceased woman’s dead relatives are summoned. This functions as an evocation of the Africaribbean pantheon with its roots firmly grounded in an African conception of ancestors and communality.² In particular, the reference to a “chant griot” (17) underscores her consciousness of her African her-

itage: the word *griot* refers to a member of an African caste of poets and musicians, with origins in Senegal, who specialize in reciting genealogies (Finnegan 96). This same allusion to African heritage is repeated with reference to her great-grandmother “with her guinea griot style” whose “wild mystic chanting” is comparable, the poet claims, only to the song of Keats’s nightingale (46). Goodison’s African-influenced references to songs while addressing the issue of death can be explained by Dennis Osadebey’s assertions about the significance of song in an African context: “We sing when we fight, we sing when we work, we sing when we love, we sing when we hate, we sing when a child is born, we sing when death takes a toll” (qtd. in Miruka 87). Osadebey’s claim validates the idea that the slave work songs, and song and dance in general within the African diaspora, may be read as the slaves’ and their descendants’ attempts to stay connected to their ancestral traditions.

The final stanza of the poem explores the Caribbean belief that when a person dreams of keeping company with a dead friend or relation, he or she is bound to die soon. The stanza simultaneously reiterates the point that the dead are involved in another form of creativity. The poet-persona tells her dead mother of a dream narrated by “Aunt Ann” in which she is accompanied by “Aunt Rose,” a dead relation. The dream is used as a flashback to authenticate the natural sequence of her mother’s approach toward death at the ripe old age of eighty-five. Her mother, though dead, is transformed into an agent of creative order and beauty in the following lines:

Return her ripe body clean
To fallow the earth.
Her eyes to become brown agate stones.
From her forehead let there dawn
bright mornings.
May her white hair contribute
to the massing of clouds. (31–37)

The earth’s archetypal symbols of fertility and nourishment are attributed to the mother, as the poet addresses the ground, “Earth, she was a mother like you / who birthed and nursed her children” (40–41). With

these words, the poet-persona justifies her mother's qualifications for having her name "written down in the index of the faithful / in the mother-of-pearl book of saints" (43–44). Goodison figures her mother's continuous creativity after death as a contribution to the larger creative processes of nature while still being a product of the same body that in life engaged in the physical creativities of childbearing, cooking, and sewing. This theme is revisited in many of the other poems in the first section.

A continuation of this theme is exemplified in "My Mother's Sea Chanty," a poem that emphasizes how continuity, liberation, and creative beauty supersede death. With the alliterative *s* sound, first introduced in the title after the humming *m's*, the poet foregrounds music and, because of the sounds' contexts, the continued creativity associated with the dead:

And that she sings slow
And that she still breathes. . .
showing [pilot fish] how to direct barks
that bear away our grief and anguish. (2–3, 15–16)

Here her mother's chief creative activities are her song and guidance, the latter of which effects an emotional liberation from sorrow. The revelation "I pray my mother breaks free" (17), however, poses a problem in relation to the notion of her mother's own liberation. The line envisages another level of liberation that is different from a political liberation; it is the expressed desire for a kind of transformative spiritual freedom, a desire the persona expresses as the hope that her mother will ride "a wild white horse" (20).

The poem "Aunt Rose's Honey Advice" begins the series of poems that pay tribute to various women in Goodison's creative matrilineal heritage. Here, honey is a synecdoche for honeymoon or the sweetness in marriage, and "Aunt Rose's Honey Advice" anticipates the possibility of difficulties in a relationship between lovers and the effect of time upon love. Aunt Rose conveys the difficulty by contrasting the semantic import of honey (smoothness and sweetness) with that of salt (granulation and alkalinity) to show the possible contrast between the couple's

old sadness (saltiness) and their new joy (sweetness). The honey drawn from the moon will “lend a gold glow / to wan lustreless skin” (13–14). Because the lovers come from different racialized groups, their new love relationship is an “integrated honey” (35) and the honey kiss has salt in it, which “could be the sting from old tears” (38), hence “we need to make up / for our honeyless years” (39–40). The poet’s diction, laced with the imagery of salt and honey, is effective in conveying the potential conflict and difficulty that may be involved in an interracial marriage. The honey advice given by the aunt and accepted by the young girl identifies Goodison’s matrilineal heritage as indispensable to her development even as an adult woman.

“Turn Thanks to Miss Mirry” complicates Goodison’s picture of domesticity because of the alienated labour of the Africaribbean servant named in the title, “an ill-tempered domestic helper who hated me” (2). Nonetheless, the poem is a praise song for the African bush healer and domestic, who despite, being un-loveable in appearance and demeanor, acted as a surrogate mother. Goodison reveals how Miss Mirry came to be endeared to her because of how the poet understood in later life what the domestic servant had given her. Miss Mirry provided the poet with a creative model, in both her struggle with language and the living of a woman’s life, because the servant’s unfettered spirit, self-acceptance, and resistance to the drudgery of alienated domestic labour found form in her fully-embodied resistance to English and favouring of the Jamaican Creole:

In her anger she stabbed at English, walked it out,
abandoned it in favor of a long kiss teeth,
a furious fanning of her shift tail, a series of hawks
at the back of her throat, a long extended elastic sigh,
a severing cut eye, or a melancholy wordless moaning
as she squatted over her wooden washtub soaping
our dirty clothes with a brown wedge of hard key soap.
. . . Miss Mirry . . . subverted the English language
calling Barbara, Baba; my father, Tata; . . . desiled her mind
that I was boofuttoo, a baffan, and too rampify. (19–28)

In representing Miss Mirry's name according to the Creole formulation, her Africaribbean nation language, Goodison demonstrates a further sign of respect for her. She also appreciates the name Miss Mirry used for her, explaining that Miss Mirry "Called me 'Nana.' Nanny's name I have come to love" (6). That love springs from the name's connection between she and "Maroon Nanny" of Africaribbean oral traditions. By including Miss Mirry in her matrilineal line, Goodison expands her domestic sphere to include not only her nuclear family but also the Africaribbean matrilineal community as a whole.

Despite that fact that Miss Mirry harbors four centuries of resentment "for being uprooted and transplanted, condemned / to being a stranger on this side of a world / where most words would not obey her tongue" (10–12), she still serves as a model for the poet because she comes into "her true self" (45) as she "speak-sing[s] in a language / familiar to her tongue" (41–42) while medicinally, but also ritually, bathing her measles-afflicted charge in water strewn with "the fringed leaves of the emancipation tamarind" (36). Miss Mirry launders, bathes, and heals, simultaneously employing other forms of creativity, like language and songs, to form part of the domestic creative continuum.

In "Turn Thanks to Grandmother Hannah," Goodison reconstructs the cleaning which, in the British cult of domesticity, was part of a "middle-class fetish for boundary purity" (McClintock 171). Through diction the poet invests laundering with the sacredness of a "domestic vocation" (2) as she recounts that her grandmother "aspired to sanctity" (1) in offering "her cleansing service" (10) through the laundering of church linens, and modeled "redemption in her washing" (24). Whatever a socialist feminist analysis may want to argue about false consciousness and the appropriation of a woman's labour in the service of the church, Goodison clearly presents her grandmother as hallowed agent, and any hint of drudgery is expunged by the work being represented as a spiritual cleansing and revivifying:

Wine-stained altar cloths, once-chaste white albs
would rejoice, spotless, transfigured
to stand, redeemed under the resurrecting
power of grandmother Hannah's hands. (13–16)

The grandmother is imbued with spiritual strength and creativity as evidenced in both her “cleansing power” (21) and her prayer: “My father’s mother prayed through / laundering the garments used in temple service” (19–20). Here, we again see the domestic terrain configured into the ground for ritual restoration and as creative activity.

“Love Song for Great-Grandmother Leanna” and “Notes from My Mother’s Village before the Village Got Light” centre on the poet-persona’s heritage and the ways in which her different ancestries have come to blend or contrast in human figures. Her great-grandmother, “the Guinea woman” (20), gracefully blends her African dexterity with her new position as “Mrs. Buddle”:

You [Leanna] descended from the mule’s height
In one swift fluid movement.
And if someone too familiar should forget
themselves and call out, “Whoa Leanna”
you would turn and rebuke them,
“Say remember do, it is now Mrs. Buddle to you.” (17–22)

Her grandfather, in the poem “Notes from My Mother’s Village before the Village Got Light,” analogously, but less self-consciously, merges his European ancestry with his Africaribbean heritage:

My grandfather, she says, celebrated St. Patrick’s Day
By drinking a puncheon of rum and playing the violin.
Colonial combination, rum and violin. O to hear him sing,
The Lake Isle of Innisfree now became Harvey River. Lucea.
(17–20)

The poem draws attention to the oral traditional practices of Africaribbean and British heritages in easy co-existence, though the reference to Yeats’s poem, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” also evokes the textual tradition of her European ancestry. The use of the word *Notes* in the title evokes both the idea of writing and a sense of the oral because there is the double-entendre that notes are also musical; the repeated phrase “she says” (13, 17) also helps to locate the poem in the oral tradition. The contrast between the European and the Africaribbean heri-

tages is presented graphically in the figure of the poet's father, who is described as "a blue-eyed high yellow child / whose loyalties were torn and divided / between mother Africa and a son of the British Empire" (22–24). The image of the father resonates with Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa," in which the persona presents himself in the same dilemma: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" (26–27). This dilemma, however, is resolved in the daughter in whom the miscegenation has become the sacramental wine of a doubly rich life, as Edward Baugh suggests in arguing that she "wears her blackness easily" (qtd. in Gale 4). Further, her poems, with their blend of the guinea griot style, attest to an easy commerce with European canonical writers, like Yeats, Wordsworth, and Akhmatova.

"Hardanga the Lost Stitch" (18) celebrates the mother's creativity in sewing, and the empowerment and independence that she finds through hard work. Hardanga becomes a symbol for women's survival of the vicissitudes of life through their economic independence and a reconnection with gained ground in readiness for, and in recognition of, the challenges ahead for modern Black women. Domestic skill, then, is not confined to the private sphere because the poet-persona reports that her mother passed on her seamstress's skills to many young women as "a way / for them to earn a bread. Earn a bread / miss lady, and live independent" (17–19). The spiritually creative dimensions of what she passes on are, however, no less important than economic benefits that can flow from this skill, as Goodison suggests by announcing that "No camel goes through the eye of a needle" (27) and concluding her poem in a way that suggests that a poet needs to engage in the same careful crafting recommended to the seamstress:

In search of Hardanga the lost stitch
to sew up your garments of victory,
to seam up the robes of righteous lovers,
to hem up the mouths of the bad mind forever. (41–44)

Collectively, then, the poems of the first section of the text show how the poet, by tracing the various creatively performed domestic activities

of the female members of her family, locates herself within the matrilineal domestic creative continuum.

The seven poems that comprise the second section, "This Is My Father's Country," give a holistic picture of domesticity in which, this time, her father is part of her creative heritage. This section also investigates ironic aspects of her patrilineal heritage in the light of the Caribbean reality of dispossession. According to Edward Baugh, "Goodison's work is typical of the emergent mainstream of (Anglophone) Caribbean feminist discourse in that it does not exhibit any of the separatist / isolationist tendencies which some metropolitan feminist critics have found it necessary to regret in their sisters" (11). However, this section is the shortest part of the collection, which may suggest that the matrilineal influence upon her is stronger than the patrilineal one. The brevity of this section may also be read as an emphasis of the natural fact that although both parents are important in a child's life, a girl would likely grow up to be more like her mother than her father.

"This Is My Father's Country" explores her father's life, and depicts his homelessness as a result of the literal and symbolic loss of birthright, his life as an individual, and finally his death. The poem conveys the ironic sense of laying claim to something to which one has legally lost the rights. Through the use of specific Jamaican places names like "Half Way Tree," "Black River Courthouse," "Pedro Plains," and "Spur Tree Hill" Goodison illustrates her pre-occupation with her background, but even more, it shows her heritage is rooted in Jamaican places as well as people. The poet-persona presents her father as a creative, simple, and clean man, a singer, dancer, and instrumentalist, whose life is productive despite its instability. Again, she depicts an indubitable proof of her creative heritage, showing it to be domestic in nature because of its being part of the normal activities that go on in her home. Though the circumstances of her father's loss of birthright are painful, the poet-persona's paternal grandmother is not sentimental about the loss, and Goodison uses her sense of humour, Jamaican Creole, and metaphor to ameliorate the inherited hurt:

St. Elizabeth, make tiefing Russell unable
to take my children's birthright with him.

May they use it as a loose red blanket
to cover him in his suit of cedar board. (33–36)

The addressing of the prayer to such a female figure supports the idea of spiritual creativity, which Goodison has associated with her mother and her grandmother, Hannah. The voice of the grandmother calls down a curse upon Russell in the Caribbean oral tradition of invective and “cuss-cuss.” Furthermore, “Loose red blanket” and “cedar board” (35–36) are death images. Specifically, “loose red blanket” represents the red sand of Jamaica, which is used to fill up a grave as though wrapping the corpse inside the “suit of cedar board,” or coffin.³ Despite the possessive title “This is My Father’s Country” and the curse on Russell, the birthright is not legally regained; the poem, however, enacts a reclamation on a discursive, if not the material, level.

The third stanza of the same poem foreshadows the father’s death through reference to oral tradition: “They say that if you dream your father / and he does not speak that it is an ill omen” (107–08). At the same time, by presenting death as a release, and the dead person as an agent of enlightenment, Goodison undermines the ill omen. She writes that although the father does not speak to her in the dream, “there is no need” (113) because later he bursts through the funeral home’s doors, mounts the fire escape, and “hover[s] as a bright ball of light / illuminating my solitary actions at evening” (117–18). The theme of her father’s death is juxtaposed with music, for her father was “of the tribe who came singing” (58), so that this death is treated in a way similar to her earlier treatment of her mother’s death. The return to juxtaposition emphasizes the function of music in the Caribbean world-view when we consider the origin and purpose of the blues. According to Paula Burnett, “To the enslaved, exiled and abused blacks it [song] was an important tool for survival: to sing of suffering and sorrow was to commute their pain” (xxxiv). In another sense, the juxtaposition presents Goodison’s idea of death being a release into continued creativity. She and her father are portrayed in the context of a serenade sung by Harry Belafonte, a famous Jamaican-born performer, singer, and actor, who used his entertainer’s access to a wide cross-section of North American audiences to

hearten the oppressed and educate others as he showcased Black culture from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. The same notion of continuous creativity as a sacred domestic essence is thereby presented when, in the dream, her father teaches her a ribald Creole ditty (89–96), and, though dead, “He smiles so and the room is filled / with stillness, high transcendent peace” (114–15).

Other titles in section three pay tribute to important male figures like her great-grandfather, and uncle, and also to Nana Yah, her “Grandy Nanny.” In “My Uncle” the persona shows her uncle’s children as part of a large creative family of many talented craftsmen and seamstresses whose skills are called upon at the time of his death to provide material testament of their valuing him royally, although he was in his earthly life a tailor and farmer (26):

One was a carpenter.
He built a fine casket
One was a stone mason.
He constructed the vault.
His daughters, fine seamstresses,
Lined his coffin with purple. (5–6, 13–14, 21–22)

With this catalogue of the various creative pursuits in her uncle’s family and the opening of the possibility that he passed his tailor’s skills on to his seamstress daughters, the persona foregrounds creativity as domestically based, while also including her extended family as part of her patrilineal heritage. She suggests that being creative is the condition for the dead to be accepted and given certain privileges in the life beyond the physical. That idea is deduced from a dream in which she sees her uncle “entering the Jubilee pavilion of Kings. / Osiris weighed his heart against a feather / and his heart was not found wanting” (34–36). In “Nana Yah, Your Teacher,” her father’s mother, a root doctor learned in various magical arts, is honoured. Drawn from family and relations, the poet’s catalogue is an eloquent analogue to her own literary work in the domestic creative continuum in which the living and the dead are involved.

Goodison’s ability to bring creativity to the forefront of her domestic experience, which involves both her patrilineal, and her matrilineal lin-

eages, makes her vision unique. In particular, her vision of a male muse in her poetic self-fashioning is iconoclastic. As we have mentioned earlier, even in the poem "The Domestic Science of Sunday Dinner," her father is a part of the creative process of preparing a meal. Through a series of reflective questions Baugh points to this same gender-balanced vision: "Do we conclude, then, that Goodison's feminism, such as it is, is self-contradictory or flawed, since it still invests in patriarchal notions? Or do we say that the many sidedness of her imaging of gender relationships reflects the complex actuality of her world, rather than a doctrinaire or separatist feminism, and that this complexity may be fulfilling rather than limiting?" (9). Her vision *is* essentially liberating and fulfilling, illustrating the point that a truly liberated woman cannot be scripted by any tenets but her own.

The thirteen poems of section three, "The Mango of Poetry," continue to investigate the poet-persona's creative heritage, from ancestral roots to her perception of other world artists as belonging to a larger family, as well as showing literary aesthetics in particular to be the offshoot of domestic creative roles. Goodison's vision of domestic creativity that involves both men and women is extended to an acknowledgement of creative artists not only in the oral and written traditions, but also in the art of painting. In this way she enlarges the vision of her domestic creative heritage to embrace her own creativity in the two modes. Her attempt to transcend her own private world of creativity by including other artists resonates with Walker's assertion in her essay "Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in an Artist's Life," that:

What is always needed in the appreciation of art, or life, is the larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immense diversity, a fearlessness of growth, of search, of looking, that enlarges the private and the public world. (5)

Goodison, with a similarly broad attitude, begins this part of her collection with her personal definition of poetry as the domesticized act of

eating luscious mango fruit from a tree planted by her father. The poem opens with an observation about the creativity of her great-grandmother, and then enlarges its horizon through varied and wide references, to include the French Impressionist artist Vincent Van Gogh and multinational painter, collagist, and sculptor, Max Ernst. Goodison pays tribute to both acknowledged and unacknowledged artists, and even to her own vivid paintings in the poem “Hungry Belly Kill Daley.” She uses this poem to make comments on the disdain with which Black artists were regarded before the Harlem Renaissance (60). Her reference to the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova in the poem “Moon Cakes and Anna Akhmatova” uses Akhmatova’s lonely life, to connect with her own perception of the loneliness that goes with the condition of being a poet (48). Goodison then enlarges her domestic imagery to encompass the world of other creative artists while foregrounding the model of the creativity of the Black woman as a major part of her personal literary canon.

The poem “The Mango of Poetry” conveys the idea that the pleasure to be derived from excellent verse may be likened to the sensuous pleasure of eating a ripe mango from a tree planted by her father. The richness of the poetic canon is suggested by the tree “bear[ing] fruit all year round / in profusion and overabundance” (18–19). Her attaining intimate knowledge of this fruit is represented by her softening it by “rolling / it slowly between [her] palms” and unhurriedly savouring it:

Then I’d nibble a neat hole
at the top of the skin pouch
and then pull the pulp
up slowly into my mouth. (29–32)

She presents her mango poetics as a complement to the Wordsworthian definition of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings [that] takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (168):

And I say that this too would be
powerful and overflowing
and a fitting definition
of what is poetry. (37–40)

The familiar mango thus becomes part of the domestic terrain of her rich creativity. Cyril Dabydeen maintains that Goodison's training in art "also comes into play as we visualize her fingers forming or shaping fruits" (224) just as her mind forms works of verbal art. Her father plants the mango tree, but the poet, in preparation for eating from the tree, actually forms and shapes its fruit. Her early forebearers, she seems to claim, have planted the seed of her creativity, and she reaps from the family tree of oral tradition, and redefines it for her own literary aesthetics.

She extends this theme in "To Mr. William Wordsworth, Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland" by valorizing the oral creativity of her great-grandmother, Miss Leanna. Goodison does so not only by listing her in the canon of other artists but also by affirming the quality of her art. The older woman is so remarkable a singer that "Only Keats's nightingale / could compete with her guinea griot style" (28–29). The poet-persona demonstrates the oral quality of her great-grandmother's poetry with reference to its composition, performance, and transmission:

But great-grandmother was a poet
who wrote her lyrical ballads on air,
scripted them with her tongue
then summoned them to return to her book of memory.
(13–16)

The title address to William Wordsworth has a double significance. Goodison prepares to set her grandmother in the company of canonical poets by the titular reference to the great Romantic poet of the English tradition who, with his friend Coleridge, wrote the poems published as *Lyrical Ballads*. Further, she implicitly claims the status of Jamaican national poet for her foremother by identifying Wordsworth's 1813 appointment as Stamp Distributor for Westmoreland because his post was given to recognize his contribution to English letters. Goodison also alludes to her own creativity by calling attention to her rescue of her great-grandmother's poems, a rescue effected by her use of the new print technology which allows the older woman's spoken words to continue to perform and stand out in the dual contexts of the White culture in general and its page-bound production in particular:

And I've written them down for her,
summoned them to stand, black-face type
against a light background, Mr. Wordsworth.
Please tell Miss Leanna her poems are now written down.
(45–48)

The poet-persona thus locates herself at the intersection of oral creativity and the literary aesthetics of the Caribbean creative continuum, emphasizing once again her matrilineal heritage.

Many scholars of the African diaspora have offered evidence that the creativity of Black women has been transferred to them through their mothers, or at least that their mothers have a strong creative influence upon them. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues this point succinctly by claiming that African-American literature was preserved through the matrilineal line. It would follow, then, that Black Woman is responsible for the nurturing and growth of Black literature, just as Black women filled mothering roles in the domestic sphere. Gates submits:

That the progenitor of the black literary tradition [Phillis Wheatley] was a woman means, in the most strictly literal sense, that all subsequent black writers have evolved in a matrilineal line of descent, and that each, consciously or unconsciously, has extended and revised a canon whose foundation was the poetry of a black woman. (x)

In a move analogous to Virginia Woolf's search, in *A Room of One's Own*, for Shakespeare's sister as a foremother for female creativity, Walker in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" goes further than Gates to link Phillis Wheatley's creative achievement with the domestic creativity of other black women in Africa and in particular, with that of Phillis Wheatley's mother. She writes:

And perhaps in Africa over two hundred years ago, there was just such a mother; perhaps she painted vivid and daring decorations in oranges and yellows and greens on the walls of her hut; perhaps she sang—in a voice like Roberta Flack's—*sweetly* over the compounds of her village; perhaps she wove the most

stunning mats or told the most ingenious stories of all the village storytellers. Perhaps she was herself a poet—though only her daughter's name is signed to the poems that we know.

Perhaps Phillis Wheatley's mother was also an artist.

Perhaps in more than Phillis Wheatley's biological life is her mother's signature made clear. (243)

Goodison's claims to continue the tradition begun by her great-grandmother lends strong support to Walker's informed speculation about the creativity of Black women, speculation which includes all their domestic creative endeavors in Africa and the diaspora. Therefore, through an affirmation of her transcription of Miss Leanna's poems, Goodison situates her creativity in this venerable female line, and by subsequent homage to other creative artists and painters, brings together her personal, Caribbean, African, and world human resources as part of the family that informs her creative endeavour.

Section four, "God a Me," investigates in sixteen poems the spiritual and private issues and phases in the poet's life experiences, articulating those issues and phases as a basis for renewal and change. It is the longest part of the collection perhaps because it explores Goodison's involvement in creative and spiritual journeys and addresses religious themes. This part's title poem examines Caribbean culture against the background of Goodison's mixed heritage and Western culture. The metaphors of water, land, and amphibians refer to the various aspects of her heritage, such as Caribbean and Western backgrounds, and mixed-blood ancestry, respectively. Her claim "They say I'm the only one / who can live so" (9–10) illustrates the way in which she copes with her heritage without any torturous ambivalence.

A Caribbean sense of rootlessness, however, persists in the poem "On Houses." Houses are, of course, synonymous with domestic spaces, so the poem re-evokes her emphasis on home life. The poet-persona presents herself as being house-less in the lines "You ruined every house / that I ever built" (1–2), and to be 'unhoused' is to be without a domestic space. This assertion could be understood as indicating Goodison's absence, a result of her relocation to Ann Arbor, Michigan, away from

the Caribbean home and family life celebrated in the previous parts of the book. The feeling of homelessness and “dream[ing] of houses / built upon rocks” and her “yearn[ing] to live / inside them” (27–30) are in consonance with the common Caribbean feeling of rootlessness and need for a reconnection to origins, which would fuel her creativity.

“A Bed of Mint” temporarily resolves the feeling of homelessness by providing Goodison with a domestic sphere, probably as a married woman enjoying her new life. Love is described in the image of the bed of mint rendering the morning air “sharp and sweet” and the couple’s existence as “Living sweet and sharp to each other” (15). The lovers “wake / to draw tea from the source” (12–13), that source being both their new love and the bed of mint. The activity of brewing tea is here invested with particular meaning because the tea’s sweet sharpness functions as a metaphor for their integrated love in the same way as the honey and salt of “Aunt Rose’s Honey Advice.” The repetition of descriptive words evokes the sense of age-old advice, handed down through generations of women.

If domesticity has in many contemporary discourses, especially those informed by feminist politics, been seen to circumscribe imagination, it is because the domestic is so often experienced as mundane and associated with drudgery, Goodison’s *Turn Thanks* suggests that bringing imagination to bear on domesticity can sometimes make that space fertile and life-sustaining. Goodison presents a domestic creative continuum to suggest that her creative world is one of varied domestic activities, including both physical and spiritual creativities. Her feminist piecing together of the various domestic activities as parts of her creative heritage shows that, in recognizing them as creative activities, she has discovered her own creative voice. She transforms the pieces—domestic activities—into an equivalent of Walker’s mother’s beautiful garden. To make the symbol of Black creativity her own, Goodison refashions it as her mother’s kitchen, establishing this space as a synecdoche for other aspects of domestic space and a basis for a domestic creative continuum in which younger Caribbean artists can situate themselves.

Notes

- 1 See Brand, especially where she asserts that although the door is physical, it is “not mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is also perhaps a psychic destination” (1). Later, Brand offers a further gloss on Goodison’s comment by remarking that the door “does not claim the human being unremittingly. All that emanates from it is not dread but also creativity. This comes to me as I am standing listening to the music” (42).
- 2 The ideas about ancestors and the role they play are entrenched in the African pantheon. For example, Achebe observes of the Igbo people of West Africa: “The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died [of course an old woman too]. A man’s life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer to his ancestors” (107). The poet-persona, with reference to her mother’s death, shows the mother in the light of continued creativity, bringing about order and beauty.
- 3 Shacara Lightbourne, a Caribbean student at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, explained the particularities of the Jamaican context in this association between burial, the “loose red blanket,” and “suit of cedar board.”

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