

deal—but he will marry her and take her away to America where she will be safe and secure. Wrong again! With the other women of her African community she was prepared to accept her fate at the hands of the excisor. Why? To achieve status the only way possible, and in their own turn to “circumcise” their daughters and perpetuate the myth. This is the role which they must play in a patriarchal society, internally conditioned to endure for the sake of belonging to their society.

Tashi, as a bride, travels to America where it seems she adopts all of the western cultural norms, as well as a new name, Evelyn. She suffers great pain trying to consummate her marriage, to no avail. She finally conceives by accident. She suffers again at the birth of her son, at the hands of a “doctor” in a hospital. The delivery is botched, causing her only child to be born retarded. One wonders if she would have been better off in her homeland. One last gift from western society is visited upon her—psychiatry. She spends years trying to get in touch with her psychological pain, and repressed memories of her childhood, her lost sister, who bled to death after her excision, and the strange haunting vision of the excisor. She learns to express her anger and in fact to act on it, by returning home to kill M’Lissa. She comes to possess the secret of joy. Resistance! But this cannot be condoned. The “leader” of the homeland takes on some characteristics of a former president of Kenya, who denounced the missionaries for trying to eradicate “circumcision,” which he explained as an attack on the culture of his people. The “leader” condemns Tashi to death, so that she is made an example for all the community to see—a clear warning that the integrity of the male-oriented society must not be challenged.

Alice Walker, to her credit, has designated part of the proceeds from her book “to educate women and girls, men and boys, about the hazardous effects of genital mutilation.” There is no question that her novel will have an impact on those who

read it. Many who come from some of the 29 or so countries where FGM is practised may take offence at *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, but FGM is no longer a local issue. War, famine, and complete social anarchy have brought the affected to our shores.

## SELECTED POEMS

Lorna Goodison. The University of Michigan Press, 1992.

### by Deborah Jurdjevic

Reviews are supposed to be well-tempered things, setting the poem, the canvas, the symphony within their own traditions, evaluating how successfully they compete for a contemporary ear and eye. Now and then, however, there comes along a work so fine that one’s hands smart from the applause; one’s throat is hoarse from the bravos, one’s delight in the perfect combinations of sound and sense outstrips by light years the careful pace of analysis.

Lorna Goodison’s *Selected Poems* is such a work. Many of the poems from *Tamarind Season*, her first volume (1980) are included here; all but four are included from *I Am Becoming My Mother* (1986) and all but four from *Heartease* (1988). New poems, a half dozen of them, from the forthcoming *Book of Amber* are, one by one, wonderful.

“To us, all flowers are roses” which opens *Selected Poems* gives Goodison, for those who don’t already know her work, a context at once Jamaican and universal. Like Frost’s poems, these simple, lucid, singing lines lend themselves to light reading; like Frost’s poems, they repay concentrated attention. A paean for Jamaica and rosary of significant names, “To us, all flowers...” turns on a double metaphor which sees the specific word as a natural bloom of language, and language as a life-giving stream. Its power

resides in the voice of the poet which is by turns pedantic, playful, authoritative, and confessional. We catch some of these turns in the first stanza:

Accompong is Ashanti, root,  
Nyamekopon  
appropriate name Accompong,  
meaning  
home to bushmasters, bushmas-  
ters being  
maroons, maroons dwell in dense  
places  
deep mountainous well sealed  
strangers unwelcome. Me No  
Send You No Come.

This is as synoptic a view of Caribbean slavery as one is likely to find, but the point it makes is a linguistic one. The Ashanti word survives; rebel warriors live on the Jamaican tongue. A lesser poet might have been content to point the history lesson. Goodison, who knows that poetry’s source is sound, speaks clearly to the most delicate ear of the mind. We hear in the alliteration and assonance of this stanza an older language, and in the last line we miss neither the threat nor the joke.

The sixth stanza, a mid-point in “To us, all flowers are roses,” begins by remembering what of Africa has been lost and develops the poem’s central metaphor of language as a nourishing stream.

Some of it is lost, though, swept  
away forever,  
maybe at Lethe in Hanover,  
Lethe springs  
from the Greek, a river which is  
the river  
of Oblivion. There is Mount  
Peace here  
and Tranquillity and Content.  
May Pen  
Dundee Pen, Bamboo Pen and  
for me,  
Faith’s Pen, therefore will I write.

The poet’s voice modulates in this stanza from that of teacher to that of acolyte, as African place-names give way to English and Greek ones, themselves of no certain permanence.

Lethe, the Greek river of forgetfulness, appears initially as a spring suggesting both healing and refreshment; it turns up again in the eighth stanza as the Hope River; names are redeemed, altered to fit the needs of people. The poet brings the past into context in the fourth line: "there is Mount Peace here" with a pair of opposing adverbs, and she puns on the place names which include "pen," to announce herself a writer. Goodison's poet picks up faith's pen and traces the journey of the soul knowing that in obedience to her craft and calling lies a necessary freedom.

These *Selected Poems* show a range, depth, and clarity that mark significant achievement. What is remarkable about Goodison's work as a whole, however, is her refusal to use language as a thing separate from experience. One thinks of Longinus's 'synthesis,' "a harmony of that language which is implanted by nature in man and which appeals not to the hearing but to the soul itself." Goodison's language is so close to Jamaica that we hear in clearly political poems, "The Woman Speaks to the Man Who Has Employed Her Son," in personal poems, triumphant and full of fun like "On Becoming a Tiger," in poems which mourn the loss of love, "She Walks into Rooms," or in those which recognize the dispossessed, "This Is a Hymn," a classical harmony. We recognize in Goodison's poetry that language is not a separate and symbolic dwelling place, but that it partakes, poem by poem, and word by word, of the world it speaks of and that it does so with a sense of what might be called 'grace.'

Helen Vendler remarked recently (*The New Yorker*, January 18, 1993) that "powerful poets are so thin on the ground in every country and in every generation that, eventually, they are eagerly sought out by readers worldwide." *Selected Poems* is an indication that such seeking has once again found its object.

## ON ENTEND TOUJOURS LA MER

Odette Parisien. Sudbury: Les éditions Prises de Parole, 1993.

par Lélia Young

Ce recueil de poèmes, écrit par une femme originaire de l'Outaouais ontarien, nous présente dix sections imprégnées des murmures de la mer. La plupart des sections sont de sept pages chacune à part la première et la sixième qui contiennent respectivement neuf et cinq pages. Cette structuration peut laisser supposer que cette œuvre, faite de courts textes poétiques, se scinde en deux parties de cinq sections chacune. La première partie commence par un ensemble de poèmes, intitulé *Dans les regards étonnés*, qui ouvre le livre sur les signes matriciels de l'eau et de l'amour. Nous sommes prises, tout de suite, par un jet d'images ou les liens hermétiques, par saccades, nous glacent et nous réchauffent. Par moment, les images sont créées par des associations de mots où se perd le sens; les vocables se présentent alors sans identité et l'aventure du silence commence à s'exprimer dans le verbe de l'écrivaine pour parcourir les recoins de son œuvre. Ce voyage à travers le non-dit est émouvant. Il est marqué de souvenirs faits de «gestes empaillés» alors que

à la cime des arbres  
chantonnent les nids d'autrefois

Ces souvenirs constitués de gestes inertes créent une structure féminine, ils tressent ces entités bipolaires que sont les signes. La parole en devenant poésie donne leur voie entière au signifiant et au signifié qu'elle associe aux sons musicaux des voyelles, ces sons dont la fluidité s'articule sans barrage du souffle.

La poésie d'Odette Parisien est alimentée d'images, mais ces mêmes images sont pour elle, par essence, des icônes brisées, elles apparaissent souvent juxtaposées et sans cohérence directe. Aussi, le thème du passé

semble lourdement noué dans les lacets de l'enfance.

La vie  
des mains de l'enfant  
s'échappe  
dans les miroirs piégés (15)

Dans la deuxième section du recueil, intitulée *Le sablier du désir*, la tristesse nous surprend presque sans espoir car le silence, la marée et l'océan sont sans issue, l'homme inmanquablement s'enlise dans la solitude. Le thème de la solitude reviendra constamment traverser le recueil se mêlant étroitement à celui du silence de la femme.

Cette écriture sans ponctuation cultive l'éventualité de liens syntagmatiques et la polysémie interprétative. On est mené à se demander parfois jusqu'à quel point les images qui se superposent sans transition s'associent à l'expérience, la femme n'est-elle pas pour l'auteure cette «goélande immobile» qui «tisse l'absence». (23)

Dans la section intitulée *En filigrane* l'auteure compare la femme aux galets; ici la mer dicte sa patience. La résignation de la femme est nourrie par la lente agonie de l'amertume. Façonnée de patience, elle tisse et brode le temps contenant sa soif et déversant son feu «dans la conscience des arbres». Ce rapport effectué entre la femme et l'arbre est intéressant, il ramènerait au thème de l'immobilité, mais aussi à une sorte de transcendance initiée par la nature. Cette «conscience» pourrait avoir un double sens, elle pourrait soit solliciter une attention dirigée vers la vie végétale, soit traduire une conception «animiste» du monde. L'arbre personnifié est lui aussi confronté au mal de la solitude.

Le thème de l'enfance revient ici se préciser. Il est bonheur acide, recrudescence d'angoisse et tremplin meurtri

à l'épaule de l'enfance  
la caresse des aubépines,

Aux côtés du thème de l'enfance se glisse celui de la vieillesse. Une toile