The Koshering Process: Images of Redemption and Reconciliation in Lorna Goodison’s *Turn Thanks*

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In her latest book, *Turn Thanks*, Goodison takes common objects and processes, simple experiences, and transforms them into a series of metaphysical exaltations and rituals. Things are cleansed and purified in a manner which resembles very much the Semitic koshering of food, that process by which food is prepared by "washed" hands and set aside for secular or religious use. This "koshering" process forms part of a wider circle of ritualized behavior which permeates *Turn Thanks* and gives the text a quality and texture, a poetic vision, an exaltation of the quotidian and commonplace. Simple and everyday experiences such as washing clothes, preparing dinner, opening up a coconut, a conversation, etc., take on new meaning and significance. It is as if the microcosmos of the common things were opened to us and we now behold them in a newer light and perspective. We are reminded of W.C. Williams with his “red wheel-barrow” and “white chickens,” but translated, perhaps, transmuted, into the Caribbean context.

Goodison deals with and explores the common things, but in an unusual and creative manner. Throughout her poetry there is a solemn and painful undertaking to state the truth, the poet’s “Truth.”¹ This is understood in the “absolute” sense; truth is truth regardless of time and space, and the poet is here to capture it in images and elucidate its meaning and significance. It sometimes takes on a sentimental and sad tone, but rigorous, reposed and Wordsworthian: “And I say that this too would be/powerful and overflowing/and a fitting definition/of what is poetry.”² In many

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passages it is wrought out in a most tender way, lively, with optimistic imagery: “A bed of mint/will render the morning air/sharp and sweet.”

In many parts of her poetry Goodison uses modern day “conceits,” making unusual comparisons, even whole chunks of ideas are compared in a most exquisite and lively manner. And so the poet offers us very liquid imagery of rivers, oceans, stars, and the “final and fiery sunset.” There are memorable and tender passages filled with silk images in the poem, “Winter Dreams”: “I dream I am apprenticed to the master potter/the one who captured exactly the shade/of the eye shadow of Queen Nefertiti,/and spread it as Egyptian blue glaze/across the terra cotta surface.” There is a desire in the poet for exactitude, wanting to capture precisely the image and replicating it with an artistry that can stand the tests of time.

But there are two aspects of Goodison’s *Turn Thanks* that are most exceptional: (1) the use of common, quotidian images, sharply focused that are transformed into religious and mystical objects and processes, and (2) the redemptive purification and cleansing of persons and things. Both these components seem to overlap; thus, the “cleansing” is a religious, sacred procedure, something not to be ignored, a kind of “koshering” of the soul and memory. Simple objects and processes are “koshered” and transformed into “the sacred.” This is not done as satire; it is a solemn and serious enterprise for the poet.3 Most importantly, and which I will explore later, is this cleansing and “koshering” as it relates to redemption and reconciliation, a new perspective for writers in the Caribbean who are sometimes engulfed by political fusses and squabbles over post-colonialism, racism, gender issues and the fight for “politically correct” labels and terms. One critic has described her poetry as “less interesting for me,” and “retreats too far into absolutes for me.”4 Of course, this critic is more interested in the polemics of gender, politics and racial issues. Goodison in her early years was abundantly political in her poetry; but times have changed. Yet, this does not mean that she totally leaves out her political thoughts and ideas, but they are articulated creatively to reflect the complexities of human reality.

In her poetry, Goodison explores reconciliation, *redemption*, and the healing of “wounds” that have ensnared not only the Caribbean writer, but also, Caribbean peoples: the wounds of slavery, sugar
plantations, poverty and illiteracy. This is not to say that her poetry is void of a critical voice, a cry against injustice. But her later poetry is a deep pondering of the soul; an exploration into a brighter day after the historical storm, a soothing balm of Gilead, not something that can be dismissed as trivial or indifferent, or put to one side and ignored. Mordecai states that Goodison, like Louise Bennett, “is comfortable with the native voice and happy to record the local experience even in its most anguished aspects …” She is not interested in *Turn Thanks* in the frustrating work of political criticism, but in the problems of everyday existence. It is crucial and important to explore the common things around us, the everyday experiences which many times go unnoticed, and may be the essence of life itself and human existence.

In order to explore and study these “koshering” images it is important to identify the common images that Goodison develops. We must remember that the poet is also a painter, and as a painter she is in a constant search, in quest of the “image.” Mordecai says:

… she is an artist as well as a poet. The keenness of her observation, her certain demarcation of shapes, her canny sense of physical and sociological textures are undoubtedly related to that other cousin sensibility.

We see this clearly in *Turn Thanks*. And we see how the artist has fused with the poet. Goodison uses different forms of imagery: religious, everyday, painting and landscape. In “Winter Dreams” the poet writes:

I dream I am *handmaid to the ancient of days,*  
That I’m drawing water from the Blue Nile river,  
And when its waters rise and flood the banks  
The potter who is now my father  
Regains youth and vigor  
And rows me in a reed skiff past danger.  

The term “ancient of days” has echoes from the book of Daniel and Apocalypse. The imagery is that of a royal, wise and godly old man dressed in white with hairs white like wool: “I beheld
till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.”

This “Ancient of days” is of course Deity, that is, the Old Testament Jehova. And he is depicted here with white hairs and a white robe, a type of purity and cleansing, of wisdom and deity. The speaker of “Winter” says that she is a “handmaid” of this ancient of days. She is a kind of disciple, servant or priestess of this “Ancient of days.” The image here is one of “mission” and duty. It is a sacrosanct image, serious, indicating that there is a mission in this “handmaid”, a mission of handling “things belonging to the Temple.” It is interesting to note that, perhaps, Goodison is suggesting that the mission of the poet is, also, a sacrosanct affair, a serious sacred undertaking, not to be underestimated.

It is the mission of the unveiling of God in the common and quotidian. The image is invoked again in the last section of “Winter” when the speaker says: “Wild heart/The potter’s apprentice/The singer of praise/Handmaid of the ancient/of days.” It is strange that all first letters in this section are capitalized, including “handmaid.” In the next line the poet declares that: “Look no more outside yourself.” This is indicative of the mystical and reverential quality of invoking this biblical allusion of “Ancient of days.” This “Jewish” imagery of Daniel is used alongside the allusions to classical Egypt. Notice that Greece and Rome are not mentioned. It is only the ancient kingdoms of Egypt and Nubia which are used with the biblical allusion. There are other lines that use biblical allusions which we will not mention here.

Another type of image common in Turn Thanks is the one associated with painters, such as Van Gogh, Max Ernst, John Dunkley. Meditating upon Van Gogh, the speaker says how the artist has the keen ability to transform common things and objects into glorious subjects: “but see instead the glory of his gift/for transforming elementary things/through patience and careful seeing/past all obvious appearances.” Here we can appreciate that Goodison is also interested in presenting the “common” objects in a newer perspective. Here is an interesting passage that comments poetically about Van Gogh’s “The Starry Night”:

For then you could have shown them your sunflowers
and your night skies.
Your gold sun spinning in the holy blue skies over
Your canvases at Arles. (55)

It is peculiar how Goodison writes poetic “art criticism.” A few of the imagists also wrote these “art-critical-poems,” such as Williams in a “Portrait of a Lady” in which there is reference to Watteau and Fragonard. Goodison writes about Max Ernst like an art critic, but poetically:

Someone just threw a stone at her
See it drop to the base of the picture.
Maybe it was the stone that decapitated her.
There is a conical red stroke falling
From an indigo mass below
Where the rags and feathers blow. (57)

Images of landscapes are also explored by Goodison. In Turn Thanks there is a shifting of the landscape from Jamaica to Ann Arbor. It seems that the poet is swaying from one to the other, nostalgic, unfamiliar, suspicious of the winter days: “This year is my third spring, the third time/that I have been witness to the cycle of the season.” She is suspicious at the supposed “beauty” of the four seasons. Then, she adds, “Where I am born, there is no such thing, seasons just shift over a bit to accommodate/the one following …” She is slightly homesick for her Jamaica. It is as if she is trying to rationalize her condition at Ann Arbor, like a child in a new environment who is uncertain but tries to be at ease. Am I better off here in this cold land, or is it better back in Jamaica? There is nostalgia for the Jamaican landscape of home. In the first pages of her book there are many passages with sea imagery and landscape. In a later section Goodison is not happy at all because she is in Ann Arbor and it’s an awful winter.

On these snowbound days all outside is an ice vista,
A frozen foreign landscape, a large acreage of white
so that it is icicling slowly in me. Now an ice shard
seems to have formed, it sharpens, it severs my heart. (79)
Notice the “frozen foreign landscape”; there is ice, snow and, most of all, a continuing imagery of “coldness” which may be said to be the poet’s loneliness or alienation in this strange winter world of Ann Arbor. Her blood is turning into icicles, and she says: “it severs my heart.” Yes, Goodison is worried and “gone in search of [her] identity” in these “snowbound days.” The poet seems to be slightly alienated. But it is the spring in Ann Arbor or the eternal summer of Jamaica that she really enjoys: “A bed of mint/beneath the window.” The sweet and refreshing smell of mint is a welcomed sensual pleasure. The speaker finishes with:

Then we will roll over
Like the waves and wake
To draw tea from the source
Springing beneath the window
Living sweet and sharp to each other. (72)

In the poem, “God a Me,” Goodison is pleased as she sees God in her and in everything around her. Of course, this is back home in Jamaica:

Tide wash me out of the river
Sweep me up onto the bank
I was swimming in sync
So with the live currents
Of the big rivers, one hundred
Rivers of this green island.
Now here I am beached
But still breathing. (65)

Let us compare this poem with one that she wrote some twenty-five years ago in 1973 probably after a trip to Europe. The lasting nostalgic sense of the poet has been with her all these years.

I lost my friend somewhere between
Strange continents
My love for the sun
And the eternal peace
I can find only on
I have examined only a few passages in which images dealing with biblical allusions, local and foreign landscape, and painting have been used by the poet. But the bulk of the imagery is directed and focused on common objects and processes, and is, in my opinion, what makes *Turn Thanks* an exceptional work of poetry.

Common objects and processes abound in *Turn Thanks*. These are images of cooking, sewing, conversations, praying, washing of hands, and they take on new meanings, full of suggestive connotations. In many passages there are clear, photographic images, standing still in time but full of dynamic energy and pathos, perhaps echoing of W. C. Williams. In the following lines the image is clear enough and very suggestive:

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Return her ripe body clean
to fallow the earth.
Her eyes to become brown agate stones. (4)
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It is a focused image, concentrated with no superficial or ornamental words added, but rich with connotation. The speaker remembers her dead mother as “scampering barefoot among/the lush fruit groves.” Such simplicity and concrete detail could only gain poetic significance in the hands of a master poet. The common images of soaking peas in water before cooking them are taken to new heights; also, the preparing of the meat with garlic and pepper. Cooking and the pouring of just plain water have heightened significance. These are not just simple rice and beans cooking; it is the essence of personal experience, of life itself.

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You pour that then like a libation
Upon the seasoned red bubbling water
Which is now ready to receive the rice, (9)
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Sewing, that little chore that most contemporary girls hate, is also developed in poetic language. It is not that simple of a process; it takes patience and perseverance, but providing a means for young ladies to “earn a bread.” And you can always tell a good seamstress “by the shoulder’s fit” (the emphasis here is on “exactitude”). The
poet’s mother taught many young women how to sew in order to “live independent.” The following passage is an excellent image of her mother as seamstress:

… She sewed so
at her Singer, my mother sewed
her long shanks tilting at
the broad wrought iron pedal
turning the hands like a spindle.
No camel goes through the eye of a needle. (18-19)

A nice bowl of pottage for a hungry man or woman is described as follows:

Using all golden foods. Bellywoman
Pumpkin, yellow yams, sweet potato,
Carrots and deep ivory bones of beef.

I would bear it to you in an enamel bowl,
The smell of fragrant thyme and pimento
Would waft, domestic incense, as I go.\textsuperscript{18}

And the simple process of eating a mango is told in this manner:

But now I think of a ripe mango
Yellow ochre niceness
Sweet flesh of St. Julian,
And all I want to do
Is to eat one from the tree
Planted by my father
Three years before the sickness.\textsuperscript{19}

In the above passages, clear examples of the use of imagery were shown; the common images of people, places and things are the prime materials that Goodison uses in her poetry. Baugh has even called her: “the voice of a people.”\textsuperscript{20} It is a voice that is connecting the community, the folk with her personal world.
An increasing number of Goodison’s recent poems, ones which are likely to rank as major pieces, speak with this voice, in which the poet’s personal experience and emotion are assimilated and *transfigured* by the *communal condition* while, at the same time, that communal condition is made all the more immediate by the charge of personal experience with which it is *infused*.  

Utilizing these common images, the poet goes on to higher heights by articulating these with the more solemn, sacred message of cleansing and redemption for the community, the individual, and the self. I have hinted above of this religious and mystical aura which permeates some of the passages. There are a group of images that deal with physical “cleansing,” and, of course, can carry over to spiritual, inner cleansing. These images are present mostly in the first part of *Turn Thanks* and are highly personal and charged with emotions and a sense of stoicism. Of course, many of these images deal with the departure of loved ones, of suffering and melancholy.

The mystical sense which permeates *Turn Thanks* was hinted at in some of Goodison’s middle poetry in the 1980s. For example, the poet wrote in “My Will” published in 1985 the following lines:

> But, for a start,  
> The gift of a song,  
> This *sweet immediate source*  
> Of release was not given me  
> So I leave it for you in the hope  
> That God takes hints  
> ....

> *Eat each day’s salt and bread*  
> *With praise,*  
> And may you never know hungry.  
> And books  
> I mean the love of them.*22* [my emphasis]
One can see the development of the mystical sense in Goodison. This is also true in the poem, “Bedspread” (“for Winnie Mandela”) in which the poetry has a tone of high exaltation, the beginnings, perhaps, of a redemption discourse which was to take hold of her later in *Turn Thanks*.

They wore the bedspread  
And knotted notes of hope  
In each strand  
And selvedged the edges with  
*Ancient blessings*  
*Older than any white man’s coming*.

This poem published in 1985 was a sign of what would await her. The diction and solemnity associated with the religious-mystical sense that was reflected here would find its way more prominently in her later poems. Edwards makes an observation on her poetry before *Turn Thanks*: “Goodison blends prayer, musing, meditation, narrative, chant, and prophetic questioning in order to evoke the various spiritual odysseys undertaken ...” More than meditative and prophetic, I would say “revelatory,” that is, personal revelation of the mystery and divine unity of common life and common things. This is accomplished more fully in *Turn Thanks*.

The second and third sections of *Turn Thanks* are mostly focused on aspects of literature and art, with instances of historical discussions, such as, the middle passage, local Caribbean folklore and popular music. She goes to Ann Arbor and she thinks about other poets and artists. And she ponders about history and Africa; the slavery and the sufferings. But it is interesting to note that, like the first part, the fourth is also very personal; it is a kind of returning back home. The poet returns to very personal matters. She returns home again, but with more knowledge and experience, with a broader and wiser perspective. It has also been a redemptive experience for the poet. She has undergone a trip and has returned with keener knowledge and wisdom. But the cleansing purifying process of redemption and reconciliation is poeticized mostly in the first part, a good portion dealing with the departed loved ones.

It is in Grandmother Hannah that the biblical words, “the low shall be exalted” is fulfilled. Hannah in the words of the speaker
“aspired to sanctity” by being just a plain washer woman, a simple
domestic who washes people’s clothes for a fee. The “Kings and
Priests” of the Bible do not come from the modern professional
world of doctors, lawyers, politicos, university professors, but from
the common people, the simple domestic, the seamstress, the barber,
the tailor, the carpenter. The prize of the Kingdom is not given to
these professionals, but to the humble and weak. The Biblical echo
of the Sermon on the Mount can be clearly heard. In the words of the
poet, Granny Hannah is immortalized:

To my grandmother with the cleansing power
In her hands, my intention here is to give thanks
On behalf of any who experienced within
Something like the redemption in her washing.25

The imagery of water is everywhere; it is part of the cleansing
and redemptive process. It is the essence of reconciliation and the
Balm of Gilead. It is a basic element of nature that is used for
cleansing and redemption, the water and the blood.

Would there was a body of water
Deep and wide enough
For the errors of some of us.
Artic, Antarctic, Atlantic, Indian, Pacific
Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean
Where our ancestors drowned.26

In 1986 Edward Baugh mentioned Goodison’s incessant use of
water imagery in Tamarind Season. He mentions that “a few key
images are likely to emerge” in Goodison’s future poetry, and which
will serve as “distinguishing marks” or “signatures of a sensibility.”
This is, no doubt, the case in Turn Thanks where many references to
water and wetness can be found. In fact, it is a world of water and
rain, of purification and cleansing. Water imagery is everywhere; its
source is probably the Old Testament.

A fascination with imagery of water and wetness –

rain, river, sea. This water imagery signifies

variously fertility, creativity, the erotic, succor,
freedom, blessing, redemption, divine grace, cleansing, purification and metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{27}

In the poem, “My Mother’s Sea Chanty” the poet writes:

I dream that I am washing
my mother’s body in the night sea
… and I wash her white hair
with ambergris and foaming seaweed.\textsuperscript{28}

Throughout \textit{Turn Thanks} there is a deep reverence for her mother and father, even for some of her relatives. This reverence takes on a solemn religious tone and meaning. Even at the end of the book when the speaker is cooking she remembers her mother and her presence is felt in the room:

I know now that I never lose you.
Look how you came calling today
As thoughtful Sunday afternoon rain.
...
You in all things, O everything,
All atoms saturated then
With your unction grace and presence. \textsuperscript{29}

It is not a mere presence because it has a holy anointing, an “unction grace.” The dearly departed are not totally gone, and they are not just remembered; they continue living and are present in our everyday lives. It is the poet’s original version of ancestral practice, not idolatry but poetry. Her father is also brought back: “One Christmas I spent in New York alone/my father appeared to me on Dry Harbor Road./He smiles so and the room is filled/with stillness, high transcendent peace.”\textsuperscript{30} The dead ancestors are revered and given due respect; they are with us metaphorically in our lives to give us hope and strength.

In another poem, “The Domestic Science of Sunday Dinner,” perhaps, the best example of cleansing and religious ritual, Goodison takes us into a different world of perception. Here we have the simple process of cooking rice with peas. They are soaked in water in order “to be revived.” The word “revived” does not merely mean a
physical process; it is a resurrection of some kind, a redemption. And this must be done with clean hands. The pimento, the salt and pepper, the condiments must be “rub[bed] … in with clean bare hands.” The seal of the koshering process is required, a process which takes on more noble aims because it is elemental to human life and existence. This dinner is a Sunday dinner and not just any kind of luncheon. A strict ritual process is adhered to, much in the same way that a poet composes his lines with insight and revelation, with the eye of an eagle that can see its prey below from miles above. Each member of the family has his/her function; there is no anarchy here. Everyone knows his/her duties. The classic sense and repose is well taken. It is thus reminiscent of the modern classical perspectives of the imagists with its non-baroque emphasis on detail and rendering. The opening of the coconut is a function of the head of the household, her father. He would be summoned to the kitchen and given the appropriate “instruments.” Once it has been opened by the father-priest, the coconut water is poured into, not just any simple glass, but a specific wine glass. A communion then ensues.

My father pauses to pour the water
Into a long-stemmed wine glass
And lifts it like a chalice to my mother’s lips.31

This ritual is suggestive of the Christian communion service. It has allusions to Old Testament sacrifice, violent death, and redemption. The slaughtering of the lamb and the pouring of the sacrificial blood is implied. The redemptive act is necessary; it is painful most of the times, but it is vital for the ongoing process of life. To live means that something must have died; to die means that something will go on living. The mother (the church) drinks the coconut water, and the father (the priest) eats the coconut flesh. This is an interesting reversal of the Catholic ritual. After this has been accomplished the speaker says: “This signals/the ending of this high domestic ceremony.” There are many Christian symbolic implications in these passages, such as, the linkage of death/life, suffering/joy, sickness/health.

The poem that deals with Miss Mirry also includes cleansing and healing imagery. Miss Mirry uses herbs and plants. She is the African “bush healing woman.” For every disease “there exists a
cure growing in the bush.” Miss Mirry is also a temple worker using her knowledge, which has been laughed at and ridiculed by high society and called “superstition,” to cure her people from the scourges of diseases and sickness. Her herbal soothing baths are well remembered by the poet. Water here takes on, not only a cleansing function but also one of healing. Water is elemental, vital and necessary for life. It is also a transporter from this life to the next: the river, the ocean that one must cross over at death.32

I thank her for giving me a bath in her washtub
Which she had filled with water heated
In a kerosene tin and in it she had strewed
The fringed leaves of the emancipation tamarind.

I turn thanks for the calming bath
That she gave to me which quelled effectively
The red itching measles prickling my skin.
Ss she sluiced the astringent waters over me

She was speak-singing in a language
Familiar to her tongue which rose unfettered. 33

There is cleansing imagery when Grandmother Hannah is portrayed. She is just a simple and common washerwoman. But there was “power” in the hands of Hannah for “every clergyman in St. Elizabeth’s parish/would seek out her cleansing service.” It was not just “washing” that Hannah did; she was actually “praying.” The washing is transformed into “praying”: “My father’s mother prayed through/laundering the garments used in temple service.” The speaker is almost saying that Hannah’s hands were not just common hands, but “holy hands.”

The use of incense in the Bible has been sometimes interpreted as an element of prayer, and Goodison’s association with cleansing and water has been connected with praying. In “Domestic Incense,” the poet uses various images together: praying, washing, and cooking smells. The smells of a Saturday lunch consisting of various vegetables and spices are brought out in a deliciously smelling soup. The smell is compared to “incense,” but interestingly the speaker is taking this soup to someone who she cares for.
I would bear it to you in an enamel bowl,
The smell of fragrant thyme and pimento
Would waft, domestic incense, as I go.  

The poet-speaker here is going through a temple service; It is ritualistic and solemn, something profound, not a joke or some political discourse. Every step is carefully weighed out, precise and exact, overflowing yes, but not chaotic and baroque. In “Signals from the Simple Life” the poet is writing about her deceased mother. She has been “cleansed”: “A red cloth/tight around/her brow/and he knows/she is being/cleansed now/by the tides/of the moon.” She has been cleansed by living her life fully, a life not dedicated to herself, but to her family and friends.

When writing about her father in the poem, “This is My Father’s Country,” the poet after careful pondering all of a sudden goes into a kind of ecstasy, a religious exaltation. There is an abundance of rain, “torrential, overflowing blessing.” All droughts are driven away by this overflowing: images of water and cleansing, of healing are wrought out. The poet finally declares in the vision:

The sight of your clean hands
Breaking the bread
Is turning my heart inside out.

It is not just a mere “father” who is portrayed here, but the “priestly” clean hands that must break the bread of life. The image of religious “communion” is repeated again in this passage. It is the connotation, the association, the symbolic implications of the “breaking of bread” which is important, and which takes on higher levels of meaning. The poet’s heart is turned inside out, as if she desires to offer it in sacrifice. Here we have the “clean hands” which connotes spiritual and physical cleansing, the “breaking the bread” which is the ritual commemoration of the Christian communion, and, finally, the heart that is home of the Soul in Christian theology. And yet, the image has proceeded from a common man washing his hands, probably before sitting down for dinner. But the poet has transmuted her experience and memory and has given it a more elevated significance.
In the poem, “My Uncle,” the speaker’s uncle, a simple man, who had carpenters and stone masons for sons, and seamstresses for daughters was laid to rest in one of his son’s wooden caskets, lined with purple fashioned by his daughters. This was a family affair not to be delegated to funeral personnel: “His daughters, fine seamstresses,/lined his coffin with purple./They washed and dressed him/in a serge suit of dark blue.”

Notice the cleansing and redemption that is invoked for the poet’s family and relatives. Her uncle is seen in a dream.

I dreamt I saw my uncle
Entering the Jubilee pavilion of Kings.
Osiris weighed his heart against a feather
And his heart was not found wanting.

Lorna Goodison’s poetry has changed since her early verse in the seventies. It has undergone a transformation from an early jocose playful verse, dealing with the humorous and light-hearted to a more serious pondering of life and the human condition. The early verse, I find, was more political and rebellious, critical about injustices in society, striving to change the world. The vision has changed slightly; the images have taken on more subtle meanings; priorities have been set. Her poetry is more philosophical. Of course, there is still persistence, as an artist, in protesting and criticizing the wrong things in our society, but it goes beyond this into more complex spheres. Human existence is explored fully. It is poked at, analyzed, and commented from various perspectives. The poet is trying painfully to understand the essence of human existence, the semantics of life. There are symbols everywhere, especially in the common things, and the poet wants to decipher these. It is important to seize the day in a carpe diem because life is brief.

The use of the photographic image in poetry captures that fleeting moment before it passes quickly and is lost in time. Goodison accomplishes this very well. The poet captures the fleeting image, the common occurrence, the simple act. Then, it is transformed, transmuted into a higher form of reality, a reality that is translated into “sacred” terms. The hands that wash are not the simple hands of a “washer woman.” They are the hands that have broken the bread, and wiped the tears from our eyes. They have
washed us and prepared us. Perspiration has been turned from water into blood.\textsuperscript{40}

*Turn Thanks* represents a turning point in contemporary Caribbean poetry because it is dedicated to reconciling and healing the wounds left by centuries of abandonment, cruelty, prejudice and indifference. For the poet it is time, not to just look back at the past: the middle passage, slavery, racism, and alienation, but to look optimistically towards a better future. The text deals with redemption and reconciliation, and the capacity of Caribbean people to do just that. It is to be done with pride, with head high, knowing that layers of historical suffering have been laid so that the present generation may be able to lift its head up high. In *Turn Thanks* common objects and subjects have been transmuted into the fundamental essences of life itself; thus, they have taken on deeper mystical meanings. The main function, thus, of Goodison’s poetry is that of bridging and reconciling, not one of destroying; it is a kind of sacred endeavor because it is intimately connected with creation. The “koshering” process is one of the body and the soul, the spirit and the mind. The cleansing redemptive process is crucial and vital for reconciliation and healing of the individual and collective soul in the Caribbean.

To my grandmother with the cleansing power
In her hands, my intention here is to give thanks\textsuperscript{41}

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\textit{Works Cited}


1See Birbalsingh’s interview with Goodison in which “truth” and its importance to the poet is discussed.

2See such poems as, “To Mr. William Wordsworth,” “Song of the Burnt Gypsy…,” “The Gypsy in the Russian Tea Room,” “The Mango of Poetry,” “When I Know You as Mountain,” “A Quartet of Daffodils”; these poems include allusions and references to Wordsworth’s poetry, perhaps, twisting the meaning and context creatively to fit the Caribbean milieu and perspective.

3It is interesting to note that there is a hinting by Goodison that poetry and the poet is a solemn affair, sometimes taking on a religious and sacred function. The poet is a kind of creator and intermediary between reality and the reader; she interprets to the reader the fine aspects of existence.

4Fido, p. 18-19; the critic seems to be saying: [let’s confront and face the issues].

5Edwards, 1997, p. 167; Edwards uses the word “redemption” when he discusses Goodison’s To Us All Flowers are Roses: “Her stylistic originality and her incisive thematic preoccupation with the redemptive power of poetic craft and vision have resulted in the inimitable textures and tones of her oeuvre.” It is important to note this carry over in Turn Thanks.

6Mordecai, p. 35.

7Newson, p. 750; Goodison’s use of sharp images and the method of the artist was discussed in an early review of To Us All Flowers are Roses, 1995, in which Newson says: “To this volume Goodison brings the eye of the visual artist, the discriminating taste of a chief, the memory of a griot, the precision of a diamond cutter…” [my emphasis].

8Mordecai, p. 39.

9Turn Thanks, p. 80; thereafter page numbers cited in the text.

10Daniel, Old Testament, Ch. 7; Apocalypse, New Testament, Ch. 20; for the Jamaican Rastafarians the image of “Ancient of Days” has a particular sense of highest reverence and authority; a wise elder.

11Daniel, Old Testament, KJV, 7:9; see also Daniel, 7:13, 22.

12See also Edwards; the critic discusses these aspects.

13See the book of Genesis, e.g. Hagar, Abraham, full of days; there are allusions to these in Turn Thanks.

14Williams’ poem deals with Fragonard’s “The Swing,” a lively piece.

15P. 84.


17Turn Thanks, p. 7.

18P. 22; notice also the “pregnancy” of the “Bellywoman pumpkin.”
19 Turn Thanks, p. 43; there is also a double resonance here: St. Julian is a type of Jamaican mango, so it can represent a kind of “holy communion,” an eating of the flesh of a Saint.

20 Baugh, 1986, p. 21, He says: “…her voice, personal and unmistakable as it is, is increasingly, and whether she knows it or not, the voice of a people.”

21 Baugh, 1986, p. 15; also the use of the “broom weed” is mentioned, p. 18.

22 Goodison, “Poems,” p. 60.


24 Edwards, p. 169.


26 p. 61.


28 Turn Thanks, p. 6.

29 p. 74.

30 p. 31.

31 Turn Thanks, p. 9

32 See Homer, Dante’s Divine Comedy, Vergil’s Aeneid, Milton’s Paradise Lost, The Bible.

33 Turn Thanks, p. 13.

34 p. 22.

35 p. 23; also, allusion to woman’s monthly cleansing with menstrual blood.

36 p. 30.

37 See Baugh’s discussion of feminism in Goodison’s work, 1990.

38 p. 33.

39 P. 34.

40 Notice Birbalsingh, p. 152: “Goodison’s works combine a strong sense of patriotism and deep compassion for the underprivileged with distinctly mystical overtones.” [my emphasis]

41 Turn Thanks, p. 14; in an interview with Birbalsingh some years before publishing Turn Thanks, she confessed that her later poetry has been undergoing a spiritual and mystical transformation, reminiscent of a mystical “mission” or “journey”; see Birbalsingh’s article, pp. 152-156.