I AM BECOMING MY MOTHER

Lorna Goodison. London: New Beacon Books, 1986.

Deborah Jurdjevic

Lorna Goodison sowed the seeds for her second volume of verse in *Tamarind Season* (published by the Institute of Jamaica, 1980). The themes she established in that first volume -- a concern for continuities, for deeply integral harmonies between human kind and the natural world, for true identities -- these ripen and bear their fine fruit in *I Am Becoming My Mother.*

It is a mark of Goodison's stature as a poet that her preoccupation with the past draws on an enormous and very much in-the-present vitality: "To My Mother (May I inherit half her strength)" -- which finds its place in both volumes -- "Lepidopterist," "Farewell Our Trilogy," and "Guinea Woman" all reflect this blend, while the title poem, "I Am Becoming My Mother," "My Will," and "On Becoming a Mermaid" show an appreciation of the interrelatedness of death and life.

Goodison's concern with continuities begins most often with the immediate and the actual and finishes frequently at the point where myth and history acknowledge one another: "the jed-bead warts/ that itched when the rain set up," on the cheeks of an unseen great grandmother; or the bedspread of Winnie Mandela, confiscated by the South African police, but woven by makers who "knotted notes of hope/ in each strand/ and selvedged the edges with/ ancient blessings/older than any white man's coming."

As though to underline the significance of continuities in *I Am Becoming My Mother*, Goodison's first piece is titled "My Last Poem;" and although it summarizes the past and laments a cold and empty present, its ends look forward to new beginnings, to a poem where the poet, her voice gone sardonic, will use the word "love," because since love has used her, she would return the courtesy. "My Last Poem" introduces both poet and the individual poems which follow. The imagery is personal, often domestic. The poet sees herself as a craftswoman and a homemaker. Her poetry requires a "rough edge for honing/ a soft cloth for polishing/ and a houseproud eye."

Underneath the summary account of the poet's achievements runs a central religious metaphor which sees life itself as a journey. Goodison's poet wonders, in the cold season marked by her father's death, where the next year will find her, "in whose vineyard toiling." And since man does not live by bread alone, the poet gives, to her son, the poem, the chronicle of her many lives: "daughter, sister, mistress, friend, warrior/ wife/ and a high holy ending for the blessed/ one/ me as mother to a man." The primary emphasis is on family relationships. "Daughter" heads the list; "wife" gets a line to itself, "me as mother to a man," is a whole line.

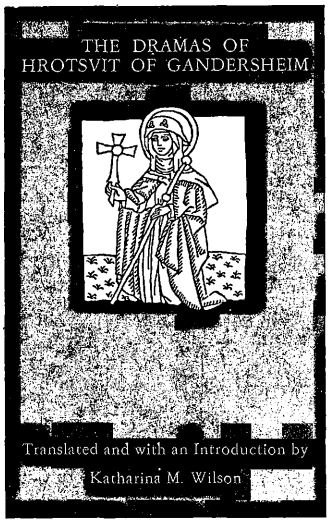
The poems which follow explore those relationships. In "Garden of the Women Once Fallen" the flowers are women to whom the poet offers redemption. "The Tightropewalker" is an extended metaphor for the mistress who must balance her life to make room for her love. "Nanny," surely one of the best in the volume, celebrates woman as hero and as warrior, a keeper of the consciousness of the race:

And when my training was over
they circled my waist with
pumpkin seeds
and dried okra, a traveller's
jigida
and sold me to the traders
all my weapons within me.
I was sent, tell that to history.

When your sorrow obscures the
skies
other women like me will rise.

That rough stone which the poet remembered polishing in "My Last Poem," is many faceted. Each of these poems shines with its own light, and each poem lights another, for her vision of the world we all inhabit is an harmonious one. The harmony carries over into cover design: Goodison's paintings are the basis for the woman who seems to be both full blown plant and the seed in *Tamarind Season*, and for blue/green woman who merges with a landscape of sea and sky on the cover of *I Am Becoming My Mother.*

In an interview with Anne Walmsley (in *Africa Events*, May 1985) Goodison defined a good poet as one who had learned to listen. Her "measure for a good poem is when it doesn't sound as if the person was talking, as opposed to listening." It may be this attitude which accounts for the naturalness of her poetry, the seeming ease with which important things are said. And this is, perhaps, the mark of all great art.



Matrologia Latina Peregrina Publishing

THE DRAMAS OF HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM

Katharina M. Wilson. Saskatoon: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1985.

Ann M. Hutchison

Once upon a time, in the northern land, a noble virgin, whose name was remembered from the distant past to be Hrotsvit, was born among the Saxon people. This learned lady sang divinely inspired love songs; in skillful verses, she recounted holy lives of martyrs and the deeds of priests. Phoebus, looking down on her labours, heaped well-deserved honours upon her and, with eternal praise, made her the tenth in the sacred number of sisters.

This Latin encomium, written by an admirer at the turn of the 15th century, tells of Hrotsvit, a 10th-century canoness of the Abbey of Gandersheim, who had for many centuries passed into oblivion. In 1493, she was virtually rediscovered when the German humanist Conrad Celtes found a manuscript of her works, written in Latin, among the books of the monks in the monastery of St. Emmeram in Regensburg. Celtes edited the legends, plays, and epics contained in the manuscript and circulated them among his friends and fellow scholars, who responded to this "second Sappho" with great enthusiasm.