On the whole the voice of the contemporary West Indian woman is yet to be established in the literature of the region. Very few women indeed write for a living in the West Indies, and the paucity of writers is perhaps a good explanation for the absence of a tradition of women's writing in the sense in which it exists for instance in Black American literature. This statement concludes a brief overview of the treatment of women in A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature, where the authors however acknowledge the recent attempts by women to project themselves in the written literature of the region.

Although there is no well established tradition of West Indian women writers, there have been a few significant and inspiring examples such as Louise Bennett and the less known Una Marson who was active in the Thirties. Both of them are Jamaican poets in whose work the preoccupation with the woman's situation is pervasive and well integrated with racial and cultural themes in general.

Nowadays there is perhaps no major woman writer dominating the scene, but the increasing variety and relevance of women's voices is nevertheless apparent. Jamaica Woman, an anthology of poems first edited by Pamela Mordecai and Mervyn Morris in 1980, is a case in point, showing the presence in the Jamaican poetical arena. In the preface the editors disclaim chauvinist intentions and simply justify the collection by declaring that many of the new Jamaican poems they had seen and liked were by women. The statement is important, since it comes also from someone like Morris who is considered a pivotal figure in the assessment of the present directions of contemporary West Indian poetry, while the disclaiming of any feminist or otherwise ideological intentions fits in with Morris's position as a "private" poet who refuses any binding political commitment.

On the other hand the possible intersections between feminist and postcolonial writing and criticism have found their supporters and theorists. A recent
fundamental study of theory and practice in post-colonial literatures, *The Empire Writes Back*, gives special attention to the relationship between feminism, post-structuralism and the discourse of post-coloniality, with reference to the major works that have addressed the issue. Beyond theoretical disputes, at a very basic level, it seems possible to draw parallels between the situation of women and that of the colonized, both in terms of their experience of the politics of oppression and repression and in terms of their need to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors.

Indeed, the multiple concerns of gender, race, class, language and colonialism are not absent from the poems included in *Jamaica Woman*, although it is true, as stated in the preface, that the poets cannot be said to share a programme or a limited/limiting set of attitudes. In some poems the issues are treated one at a time, but more often they seem to overlap out of necessity, and even the more private poems end up by suggesting universal and social meanings. This process is well exemplified in "Crow Poem" by Christine Craig. Here the poet identifies with the crow, which is one of the most striking and pervasive images of the Caribbean landscape and poetry. She would like to put her arms around her lover, but they have become "feathered/ vanes, snapped, tatty things/ no longer curving...". The transformation into bird is complete and it affects the poet's song:

    My voice wants to say things
    about blue skies, blond sand,
    yet a rasping, carrion croak
    less from my beak
    sharp edged.

The poet can no longer enjoy her private life, nor can she celebrate the beauty of her natural surroundings, but she has to face the grim realities, the contradictions the crow figure epitomizes. The metamorphosis is painful for the poet, who is "Condemned to live a life for which / (she is) ill suited", but it ironically involves the crow. "Perhaps there is out there / one crow, wheeling over the city dump/ convinced she is a woman."

In another poem, "For the Artists and Writers", Craig portrays the complexity of the artist's role in a post-colonial and multi-cultural society:

    We, writing black, the African experience,
    flinging accusations at our colonial past,
    vying with each other to vault most quickly
    the sharp european fence, flushing to see,
    separately, whatever speaks of our warm,
    black roots. Still the cold creeps up
    through our careful behaviour.

While acknowledging the significance of all the major themes that have emerged in West Indian literature in its search for indigenous cultural forms, the poet declares her dissatisfaction with cold cerebral attitudes. She feels a deeper urge to scream, to bring out emotions, the love and pain of living represented by "A young mother howling in childhood."

A similar fusion of private and political underlies "In Memoriam" by Jean D'Costa: "Someone must carry on political dispute / For black and white. / My labour lies with the dappled land." With a few beautiful images the poetic vision retrieves places and people, establishing an idea of community that goes beyond political commitment.

In "Ancestral Poem", Olive Senior evokes her rural background and celebrates its rituals. The picture of life dominated by natural cycles, where "The ritual was ingrained / in the blood" is opposed to life in the city. Out of this double experience emerges the poet's capacity for endurance ("if I could balance / water on my head I can / juggle worlds / on my shoulders"), but also her ear for rhythm and her conflicting interior voices:

    Now against the rhythm
    of subway trains my
    heartbeats still drum
    wordsong. Some wheels
    sing freedom, the others:
    home.

The last poem in the book, "Protest Poem" for all the brothers" by Pamela Mordecil, appropriately summarizes the complexity of interrelated issues emerging throughout the collection. It starts with a sympathetic description of life in the ghettos which concentrates on harsh realities and personal suffering without becoming sentimental. Marxism as a solution to the problems of post-colonial societies is rejected both as a dehumanizing form of religion and as an alien white ideology. The search for social equality has to be based on the acknowledgment of the person and the dignity of the human being. In a brief section the poet of the poor and of the colonized is expressed in the local dialect, accepting the richness of the Jamaican linguistic dual experience: "we propose to speak / your language / but not abandon our...". On the whole the poems in *Jamaica Woman* explore the themes that dominate contemporary West Indian literature from a distinctive women's perspective that asks to be recognized, as in the last two sections of this poem:

    On the corner again and again see
    me stand with my pride and my children, my
    quiverful, lot, my portion of life; see
    me labour and wait; see me plan and scratch
    dust for a yam root, a corn, bellyful.

    See MB / Look!
    I am
    here
    I am
    here
    I am
    here.

Since 1980, some of the authors included in *Jamaica Woman* have had their separate volumes of poetry published. Foremost among them are Velma Pollard and Lorna Goodison, both of whose work combine a great versatility of themes and moods and a distinctive use of imagery and rhythm. In Pollard's poetry female oppression and racial oppression are expressed respectively in the simple and moving lines of "Martia" and "Yaller/Yellow". In fact a deep sense of dispossession in general pervades the lyrics, but it is counterbalanced by a strong search for cultural identity and hope for the future. In a way common to much West Indian literature, the search for identity is carried out both at the personal and at the political level. Bringing out memories of the individual
past, of parents and grandparents and childhood, some poems emphasize folk traditions and the indigenous sense of community that constitute a shared historical experience. This is the case for instance of the title poem «Crown Point» and of pieces like «For Time Oct. 18, 1976» and «Our Mother», where the elegiac tone is supported by sweet memories of father and mother and by pride in their music and wisdom. Moreover the Caribbean landscape, with its insular contours and endlessly humming sea, becomes a sort of uniting symbol of geographical identity that goes beyond strictly national delimitations. In fact throughout the collection precise geographical signals locate specific places — from Crown Point in Tobago to Belize, from Roseau, Dominica to Kingston, Jamaica — establishing a peculiarly West Indian dimension.

Space seems to be especially important in Pollard, who confronts herself with foreign places as well, from metropolitan England to the United States. This confrontation assumes obvious cultural and political implications, best exemplified in poems such as «British Museum and After» and «BM Revisited».

The British Museum is seen as «Guardian of the Great Tradition», intimidating in its purported sacrality. There, books are holy and cannot be touched, there great works of art have been ripped away from their original environment. The Egyptian statues, lonely and nostalgic of the golden desert, are taken as specimens of the displacement and rape of culture. In a sort of imaginary and mystic voyage, the poet is then instructed to go beyond the past and western culture, in order to discover an indigenous beauty and culture. The task of the poet in a post-colonial society is to look at the present with new eyes and to create a liberating art that will help build the future:

And these books of endless unbinding will fatten with the leaves of their reaping and the seamless wide open wall sides will green with the pages of their toil... tomorrow belongs to the children.

As opposed to the old striving of the colonized to emulate the culture of the colonizer, the post-colonial artist not only underlines the contribution of different cultures (in this case the Egyptian), but looks for a new synthesis of culture and nature stressed by the imagery used («leaves of their reaping», «green with the pages of their toil»). As in much West Indian literature, the child becomes a symbol of hope and the future.

In «BM Revisited» images of fragmentation dominate and establish the striking connection around which the whole poem turns: «empire fragments / in marble as in men». These lines, present also in another poem («Anansi»), are exploited here to their full meaning. The great art works of Greek civilization have been dispersed and broken into pieces, parts of the same statue are kept in different museums and a Greek must travel from Athens to the Louvre and to the British Museum to see them. The same fragmentation exists within the poetic persona, with her African, Chinese, Irish/English ancestors. This mixture of races and cultures represents the typical West Indian heritage and its hybrid nature, brought about by colonialism.

But out of this fragmentation, an integrated consciousness can be perceived and developed. Like «a patchwork quilt / or a vase from shards or ornate china», there are possibilities for a unified culture where folk dances and Afro rhythms coexist with European ones, where different influences can form a whole. If «the imperial / master mind insist on London as the centre», there is «a finer axis now on which to turn / a place where to begin / a better centre». In this poem the compact and consistent use of imagery handles a central West Indian theme in an innovative way. In a sort of circular pattern, the poem starts with the idea of fragmentation in art, establishes an analogy with the personal compounded heritage of the poet and by implication with the West Indian experience, and then reverts to the problem of art. In the process fragmentation acquires a more positive value for the creative act, while the poem itself becomes instrumental to finding a new centre.

Again and again the poet goes out in the world and confronts herself with other realities. In texts like «Remembering Washington DC» or «Foreign», poverty, separation. Using a biblical image made popular by Rastafarians, Washington is the new Babylon. God comes to beat it down, assuming a «black hamitic face», becoming himself poor:

In Washington / Black DC not to be confused with Washington White DC one Sunday
I saw God

The United States is a bitterland for the island girl, whose rather conventional story of deprivation is redeemed by beautiful images:

the scars like kelpjocks mark the back of your remembering like pictures shot too sharp grow large in retrospect

A thousand spades —
a thousand journeys
each generation's new roots
grown in air or barely touching ground twisted and gnarled...

The tragic destiny of emigration that marks the history of the West Indian produces rootless and sickly people. In «Foreign», the poet experiences a sense of alienation, a loss of identity:

In America when people stop me (people meaning white)
its not me its just the last black model dancer addict they've not known In America I am faceless other people's versions of myself not me.
The presence of the United States is felt also in the Caribbean islands, especially in the American Virgin Islands, where the invasion of tourism has changed the landscape and the hillsides are scarred now with condominiums white like race for sea front restless like the boats that jostle huge ships white again like race (from Mandahal Peak).

The rejection of this kind of development takes the form of bitter irony: • bettersit naked / silent in your peace / than clothed in stars (and stripes)... From the very beginning of this poem, the description of the lush tropical beauty of the archipelago is contrasted with the lack of freedom of some of the islands and prepares for its political implications:

One brown free islet humped like a turtle looks out upon one flawless blue-grey line touching the sky looks sadly out considering islands far less free that gaze on that same flawless line.

As in most recent poetry, the Caribbean landscape has lost its traditional pastoral and escapist dimension to inspire an urgent awareness of the old exploitation and the new dangers to which it is exposed. Beautiful descriptions of this seductive landscape are not absent and they include the luxuriant vegetation of the tropical forests (Rain Forests), the little vignette of village barefoot children playing in the rain (Rain thoughts), the peaceful sea scene of 'Fisherman'. But in most of these poems the beauty and the apparent tranquility are marred by ominous signs of contrasted with human problems. The apparent calm and peacefulness of the sea is in fact precarious: nature itself can become violent and devastating. In the first part of Belize Suite -the ocean's gentle murmur- contains memories of its angry wail, when death rode loud and furious- and it causes a sort of prayer:

From storm and earthquake Lord deliver us and us, and us.

In 'Sunday Thoughts (Frenchman's Cove) instead, the poet wishes for an earthquake storm to purify a 'poisoned land'. Destruction and rebirth seem a solution to the troubles and muck which are sharply opposed to the pure and rich beauty of nature:

that smooth sea hides the litter of a thousand earths.

washed in by earthquake storm or tidal wave perhaps the sea will wash our land perhaps destruction with its blessed cleansing will call our country to a baptism.

But in another poem, -Roseau August '79-, the hurricane that hit the capital of Dominica makes that desire look absurd, stressing the difference between metaphors and reality. Actual destruction brings sufferings and tears.

But today I watch your city clean and fresh baptised with water and with wind like the beginning after chaos fled and I confess that like you I walk in agony longing for dirt and sin for pre-baptismal stench for something/anything.

If dirt and stench are better than the 'pure clean nothing', Pollard as we have seen is deeply aware of the problems facing her country and in fact her voice is most intense when looking at the living conditions of her own people and at the situation of the West Indies in general. Kingston constitutes perhaps the best example of this kind of poem, where anger and compassion blend to present an uncompromisingly bleak picture of life in the slums.

This tractless city withering the young old people festering in the slums hope felt now hopeless darkness depressing till the mind forgets its country moonshines with their dreams of city streets alive... stark now and stinking with the stench of dead hopes rotting.

The general sense of decay is conveyed through harsh visual and olfactory images. The influence of modern English poetry can be detected in the background, but its echoes are played against the initial folk song (-moonshine baby / ring time / rain showers / play time-) to create an imaginative text with a special West Indian flavour, where the different sources form an original compound. With its contrast-
ing and mingling of past and present, the country and the city, dreams and reality, folk songs and modern poetic diction, this poem is significant not only for its meaning but for its aesthetic achievement.

The juxtaposition of traditions is exploited in a variety of ways. In «National Heroes 1980», the turmoil and violence in Jamaica are depicted on the inspiring tune of Dylan's Blowing in the Wind. The poem moves from biblical images («How many Baptist heads must young Salome seek»), through the evocation of historical slaughters (the guillotine and the holocaust), to slavery and present-day massacres:

how many Blakes must dot the middle stream?
how many corpses dangling in the wind
must feed their stench
must poison all this land
before you retributive givers
canceling plagues
call off your hounds of hell?

In other poems it's the traditional folk music which establishes the rhythm to the potent beat of the family drums to the rattle of gourd to the whistle of life-(After Adowa). Music and dance are part of a cultural heritage that doesn't get lost. Women take part in the harvest dance and in the funeral dance; they don't even need instruments; they move their feet to an inner rhythm that expresses feelings, the soul's moan and grief. The use of dialect becomes in this case an integral element of the total mood and texture of the poem. The same is true in a poem like «Anansi», which uses the spider-god from West African folklore that has become part of the West Indian cultural heritage. Anancy is at the same time spider and god, man and woman, West African and West Indian, providing a complex and apt symbol. As a spider it weaves its web around the house and moves it to a cold and foreign environment, thus possibly representing the uprooting and transplanting of enslavement. But the urge to weave («she weaves because she must» the urge to weave comes in) could also be related to writing and the «magic web» could be seen as art. In any case this mythical protean figure becomes here a woman («The King is forever a woman»), bringing together ethnic and cultural themes. In this poem the lines «Empire fragments / in marble as in men» are employed in a somewhat different way from «BM Revisited», being followed by «The marble reconnects / but humpy dumpty's / fragments cannot hold». The fragmented colonial experience is seen as having created divided human beings whose damage can never be repaired. However the mention of the familiar nursery-rhyme character who fell from a wall and broke into bits introduces an identifiable English element; the verse «fragments cannot hold» echoes and mingles two of the most famous English modern verses, Eliot's «These fragments I have shored against my

poem like «Ocho Rios» where the protest tradition seems renovated by the specific Caribbean consciousness and enlivened by the local dialect conversation in the market place. The historical past of multiple colonization is traceable in the language itself, in the names of places and people: «A conquistador hit by the muse who gives names / tongue-tied eight rivers together», demoting a spot in the northern part of Jamaica; the British let Ocho Rios stay, while doing some naming of their own, so that black people have names like Goodison and Montgomery. The past is further evoked with the mention of the genocide of the Arawak, one of the original Amerindian people inhabiting the islands, while a bag from Florida and the sign in the square supporting «Tourism, not socialism» bring in the present and prepare for the final question. «Which Colonizer is winning in Ocho Rios?»

«For My Mother (May I Inherit Half Her Strength)» presents a beautiful portrait of a strong woman who worked hard, raised nine children, sacrificed and loved. The long verse, almost prosaic in its simplicity and lack of rhetorical devices, manages to avoid sentimentality while disclosing deep feelings. This poem is taken from Jamaican Woman and included in Goodison's second collection, I Am Becoming My Mother, where it is in good company with the title poem and others focusing on the life of women. «Guinea Woman», in particular stands out for its multiple concerns with gender, race and history. It traces the family tree of the speaker from the African great grandmother with the antelope walk, to the blue-eyed grandmother, the first Mulatta, taken into back's household and covered with his name. But with each new generation the black traits appear stronger, bringing back the proud African inheritance. The complex racial mixture that constitutes the Caribbean human situation turns private history into public history and gives deeper resonance to the poem.

The mulatta condition of the poem is in fact at the heart of the collection and receives treatment not only in «Mulatta Song», «Mulatta Song II», «The Mulatta as Penelope», «The Mulatta and the Minotaur», but in a number of scattered images of hybridism, involving the vegetable, the animal and the mythological world. If the mulatta is the poetic persona, she can take the shape of a mermaid, a green tinged fish/fleshed woman/thing, in a beautiful poem of underwater life and metamorphosis ( «On Becoming a Mermaid»). She can be like a plant: «In my morning / I imitated the bougainvillea / (in appearances / I'm hybrid) » in a poem completely constructed on nature metaphors ( «Mine, O Thou Lord of Life, Send My Roots Rain»). She can meet with the minotaur, a composite monster, half man and half bull, but «wearing God's head» in a poem where time is nullified in the mythical dimension: «there will be a next time / Centuries ago» ( «The Mulatta and the Minotaur»). The mulatta condition then becomes part of a larger heterogeneous context, of an intermingled and crossed world that exists both in reality and in the haunted human imagination.

Goodison's «essential engagement with the authentic, boundary life of woman» (as reads the book-cover), emerges in a number of other poems, both in the personal lyrical strain and in the collective political vein. The experience of motherhood pervasive book and establishes the continuity of past, present and future, reuniting the relationship with the women in the family: mother, grandmother, great grandmother, «My Last Poem», «Songs For My Son», «My Will», all relate the experience of being «mother to a man», of childbirth and a strong love that gives new meaning to life. The poems turn at times into sweet mellow songs like lullabies for the baby, but they also stress the connection with African traditions:

The midwife
tie-head African woman
fingers like healing-roots
feeds me thyme-tea
to hurry on your coming
summons the appropriate spirits
to witness your crowning.

Natural childbirth becomes one area of expression for the folk wisdom of women and their healing skills. Reference to the different forms of magic that are part of the black woman's culture is frequent in the poems, emphasizing their ethnosexual concerns. "We are the Women" is one example of the political implications of the woman experience. The plural "we" substitutes the singular "I" as the speaker, stressing the shared social values and consciousness. Out of their struggle for survival, out of misery and oppression, come their wisdom and their powers of endurance, and finally their hope:

We've buried our hope
too long
as the anchor to our
naked strings
we are rooting at
the burying spot.
we are uncovering
our hope.

In this poem as elsewhere in Goodison, the idea of hope is connected with the body and the earth in a sort of vegetation rite of death and re-birth. A similar kind of hope concludes the beautiful and sad "Nanny", which relates the emblematic Winnie Mandela, whose house is raided by the police who, ironically, arrest the women and their healing skills. Reference to the different forms of magic that are part of the black woman's culture is frequent in the poems, emphasizing their ethnosexual concerns. "We are the Women" is one example of the political implications of the woman experience. The plural "we" substitutes the singular "I" as the speaker, stressing the shared social values and consciousness. Out of their struggle for survival, out of misery and oppression, come their wisdom and their powers of endurance, and finally their hope:

And the woman who never raised her voice
never lowered her eyes
just kept walking
leading us towards sunrise.

Notes of hope and cries for freedom are knotted in the bedspread woven in the colors of the ANC by women in South Africa. The speaker in "Bedspread" is Winnie Mandela, whose house is raided by the police who, ironically, arrest the bedspread. The poem is addressed to the imprisoned Nelson, who is the husband and hero, but the role of women in the fight for freedom is emphasized:

It was woven by women with slender
capable hands
accustomed to binding wounds
hands that closed the eyes of
dead children,

that fought for the right to
speak in their own land
in their own schools.

As can be inferred from the texts mentioned so far, Goodison's concern with political issues ranges from local to international scenarios, covering the past history of slavery and the present history of apartheid and oppression from a woman's point of view. In "Jamaica 1980" she focuses on her own country and its dramatic situation of violence and bloodshed. The poet is haunted by its natural lush beauty, but perceives its reality behind the edenic surface and is constrained to write what she sees:

But this time my Jamaica
my green-clad muse
time your callings are of no use
I am spied on by your mountains
wire-tapped by your secret streams
your trees dripping blood-leaves
and jasmine selling tourist-dreams.

Already in these lines the landscape is tainted by "dripping blood-leaves", by "tourist dreams", and by the distorted persecuting function of mountains and streams. But this is nothing compared to the imagery that follows with the strength of a revenge tragedy: "and each man eats his brother's flesh / Lord, so much of the carnal left / in the jungle of my people's tongues". The poet represents the voice of consciousness and her task is to express in writing her outrage and participation:

And mine the task of writing it down
and I ride in shame round this blood-stained town.
And when the poem refuses to believe
and alms to aloes in my hands
mine is the task of burying the dead
I the late madonna of barren lands.

In the last line the poet becomes a merciful Madonna, but from the beginning her role had a religious connotation: she had taken "the order of poetry" and the sacred vow couldn't be broken. If this is the highest point of Goodison's pledge to the holiness of poetry in this book, other compositions are concerned with the poet's vocation and craft. The whole collection opens on these lines:

I once wrote poems
that emerged so fine
with a rough edge for honing
a soft cloth for polishing
and a houseproud eye
I'd pride myself in making them shine.

Here poetry is presented as a much humbler craft, somewhat akin to housework, but requiring much polishing. In another case it is associated with tightrope walking and a dangerous way of living. But apart from the explicit thematic reference to the art of writing, Goodison's preoccupation with the actual task and craft of the poet is central in her production and is at the basis of her most successful pieces. Her poetry seems to flow without effort, in a wide range of tunes and modulations that draw on different sources, from jazz to reggae to folk music.
and speech. Thematic references to the power of music are frequent (Keith Jarrett - Rainmaker, and Jah Music, are cases in point), but above all music informs the rhythm of her poetry, while her language moves from Standard Jamaican English to Creole, with the inclusion of Rastafarian words. Another significant feature of her poetry is the striking visual imagery, at times rich in shapes, textures, colors and obviously related to her parallel painting activity. The covers of her books, incorporating her watercolors, give an idea of this side of her creativity.

Goodison's third book of poems, Heartease, seems to mark a change in the direction of her quest, towards reconciliation and a mystical celebration of spiritual light. This pervasive mysticism has been noticed by Velma Pollard in a review of this volume. We still find her sympathies for the plight of the destitute and the oppressed of the world, but the tone is prophetic and the ultimate purpose is the restoration of peace. The engagement with social and political issues is especially present in poems like "This Is A Hymn", "Dream", and "Some Nights I Don't Sleep," Here "bag-women", the homeless, the dispossessed, the children of Soweto, the people assassinated in South America are brought in the foreground by a compassionate consciousness.

This hymn
is for the must-be-blessed
the victims of the world
who know salt best
the world tribe
of the dispossessed
outside the halls of plenty
looking in
this is a benediction
this is a hymn

In a sort of messianic speech the ethnic issue is overcome by the universal human misery that joins together the victims in the “world tribe.” These sufferings prevent the sleep of the poet, but allow for meditation and the search for light:

So to awake now don't really matter
for some night is not for sleep
is to use collective light
as laser beams
to clear the home stretch
to Heartease.

And the journey to Heartease, a place of peace and illumination, away from the Anxiety Valley, constitutes the central theme of this collection, whereas light provides the main recurring image, from the first poem, "I Shall Light a Candle," to the last one, "Always Homing Now Soul Towards Light."

Above the face of yet another city
bright points of seduction
I hover; and know from having been there
that the lights of cities go under,
their brilliance is not what
this soul is after.

The light the soul is after is not found on earth, it is spiritual illumination. The quest has clear religious contours: it is a search for God who is light and culminates in the celebration of "A Rosary of Your Names." Inevitably this kind of mystical vision takes the place of political struggle:

And release, release now
an end to pain
within the stillness of surrender
all striving cease
in the telling of your names rosary
peace be, Heartease.

Within this perspective the role of the poet continues to be central and is charged, if possible, with stronger responsibility, becoming a real "mission." Writing poetry remains a painful urge, something connected to the body and flesh of the poet: poems are seen as "blood leeches", clots of poems are found in her insides, proving that poets are made of poems. ("My Last Poem, Again."). The times still require the voice of the poet: I come only to apply words, to a sore and confused tone. ("Heartease III"). Telling her stories is a sort of compulsion, but it is above all, as we have pointed out, a mission, as is further clarified in "Heartease New England 1987."

I have stories too, until I tell them
I will not find release, that is my mission.

For my mission this last life is certainly this
to be the sojourner poet caroling for peace
calling lost souls to the way of Heartease.

Subject to the pressures and demands of a post-colonial world, struggling for historical identity at a crossroads of cultures, the artist directs her passionate attention to the actual conditions of the West Indian, but also demands the freedom to go beyond this necessary pattern, establishing her personal vision, refusing to be fitted into convenient labels and literary categories.

So this one here has decided you see
that her place, is going to be
within the light of truth and love first
and then round the circumference of the universe.
And I’ll be wife to the wind
or mistress to the sea
or humble where I’m standing
for my place is to be
To bloom to heal to sing to be.
So please, give to another
the space you were saving for me
for when this poem is done
I’m going by cosmic to Zanzibar
to chant a next one.

Gianfranca Balestra

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NOTES


