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## The Nation/A World/A Place to be Human: Earl Lovelace and the Task of “Rescuing the Future”

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Earl Lovelace's fiction and public addresses<sup>1</sup> are preoccupied with two interdependent subjects. The first is Europe's colonization of the New World, which brought diverse peoples together under severe conditions of systematized inequality. The second is the unique cultural shape this ingathering generated in Caribbean societies and the invitation its continued evolution holds out to citizens to create a different future, not only for them, but also for the world. For Lovelace, therefore, the saving irony of the region's terrible history is precisely this meeting of so many peoples who, consciously or not, have been "all geared to the New World challenge" (*Growing in the Dark* 226). In addition to cultural expression and practice, this "New World challenge," as Lovelace envisions it, is nothing less than the creation of a new history for humanity, articulated as a radical reconstitution of the politics of recognition in relation to self and the other.

Lovelace's fiction is permeated by this urgent and necessary project of social transformation, which is perhaps best articulated in the botched campaign theme launched by the dissociated politician, Alford George, in the novel *Salt* (1996). Alford entitles his election campaign, "Seeing Ourselves Afresh" (Lovelace, *Salt* 122), which the novel's narrator explains is the politician's vision:

In this he argued that because enslavement and indenture had brought our peoples to these islands, we had continued to see ourselves from the perspectives of our loss, characterizing ourselves as ex-enslaved, ex-indentured. In reality we would better address our future if we saw ourselves as a new people brought together and created anew by our struggles against enslavement, indenture and colonialism. (Lovelace, *Salt* 122)

Like so many Caribbean writers and thinkers, Lovelace is convinced of the tremendous wealth inherent in the multiracial and multiethnic character of the region, the seeds of its ongoing creolization. He therefore invests in the Caribbean's unique potential to offer some manner of healing to colonialism's balkanization of humanity along lines of difference that were perversely deployed to measure human value discriminatively. Lovelace, however, is no wishful escapist. His faith in the region's potential is perhaps equally matched by his sober awareness of the debilitating pitfalls that mitigate against transformation such as the paralysis of nursing the losses of displacement, entrenchment in negative or pseudo-superior epistemologies of self, and nostalgic returns to ancestral identities and homelands. These sabotage what he calls the "struggle for human dignity, for a creative future" (*Growing in the Dark* 184). The past undoubtedly remains important for individual and collective understanding and, similarly, ancestral connections are necessary for cultural identification and belonging. However, what most concerns Lovelace is the project of making something of this unique gathering of peoples, that is, "the opportunity of coming together in new relationships, away from the often stifling traditions and narrowness of the old world" in this site of the "new" (*Growing in the Dark* 1).

The natural outcome of this belief in the opportunity history has provided the region is the emergence in his thinking of the nation as the primary context for refashioning the future. The nation is the place or ground of human endeavour, where people of various backgrounds, persuasions and gifts, by their investment in the landscape, make democratic claims on belonging and ownership. Beginning with *While Gods Are Falling* (1965), *The Schoolmaster* (1968), *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979), *The Wine of Astonishment* (1982), *A Brief Conversion and Other Stories* (1988), and the award-winning *Salt* (1996), Lovelace's fiction is marked by an on-going dialectic between nation and narration, nationhood and diversity, independence and freedom, the individual/community and social responsibility, power and leadership, faith and renewal. At the core of these concerns is the primacy of people as the shaping resource and force of history; the necessity of safeguarding the values of freedom, dignity and equality on the individual and collective levels; and the propagation of respect for the place where people make their home. There is much to celebrate in the history of rebellion against systems of "un-freedom," and the ingenuous tactics of cultural survival engineered by people whom Lovelace describes as "taller than cathedrals," "more beautiful than avenues with trees" (*The Dragon Can't Dance* 123). However, there is still much to be gained, given that what has been achieved so far in the quest for "National Independence" has been a litany of disappointments, "half-fulfilled promises, partial successes" (*Growing in the Dark* 191).

Lovelace arguably stands out as a member of that now uncertain group, for some an archaic category, called the national writer. In an age increasingly characterized by more porous state, cultural and economic borders due to unprecedented global "flows" of people, capital and information, the traditional categories that defined the nation, the nationalist writer and nationalism are undoubtedly in need of redefinition. Boundaries are no longer as easily definable. It is now in vogue, for instance, to speak of the "borderless" nation and even the postnation. Yet, to name Lovelace a national writer is not to imply that his investment in writing the nation does not simultaneously entail an embrace of the transnational and, for that matter, the universal. In short, his vision while concretized via an ongoing exploration of his native Trinidad and Tobago does not suffer from the malady of parochialism in the worst sense of the word. In fact, he continues a long tradition in Caribbean literary culture where the fictional constructions of his island-space, like George Lamming's "San Cristobal" and V.S. Naipaul's "Isabella," function as microcosms of the wider Caribbean. Therefore in "Welcoming Each Other," he categorically states that he uses "Trinidad and Tobago to represent the Caribbean. It is a truly West Indian community peopled by ... Africans from other parts of the Caribbean, as well, of course, and by Africans from the continent, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans" (*Growing in the Dark* 166).

So that to classify him a nationalist writer is simply to say in the terms of Stefano Harney that Lovelace's fictional worlds are not "strictly about a nation-state in the old sense of the term, but about a national diaspora" (*Nationalism and Identity* 24). This deployment of the nation, as well as the concept of national writer, to encompass a diasporic application is well suited to the

character of Lovelace's pan-Caribbean and New World vision. He claims that not only is the Caribbean "the nucleus of the New World civilisation," but that "Trinidad is one of the centres of this New World" by virtue of it being a meeting ground of so many peoples (*Growing in the Dark* 226). Yet, what remains consistent with his regionalist sensibility and, by extension, his transnational Caribbean self-understanding, is his work's faithful preoccupation with the particularity and integrity of place, a concentration that reinforces the relevance of the category "national" and cements the island as a "real" place, a landscape of belonging where all are called to build a world in which to live and be fully human.

The longstanding formulation of the nation in Caribbean discourse that embraces the transnation has been based primarily on a shared sense of historical and cultural continuity, as well as the mobile character of Caribbean peoples. However, its deconstruction of rigidly defined national identities intersects with contemporary debates, albeit open discontent in most cases, with the concept of the nation, its uses and meanings. In addition to the disillusionment wrought by the homogenizing, exclusory tendencies of Enlightenment nationalisms that formed the template of the modern nation, including postcolonial nations, several contemporary developments have served to undermine what may have appeared to be progressive or liberation nationalisms. On the one hand, even as metropolitan citizens have undergone radical demographic changes due to unprecedented migration flows, especially by ex-colonized peoples to the old centers of empire, the U.S.A. and Canada, experiences of inequality expose the dishonest brands of liberal multiculturalisms practiced by nations purporting to accept difference. On the other hand, authoritarian and violent nationalisms practiced by some developing countries in Africa, the Middle East, South America and the Caribbean have also undermined the concept.

Indeed, the huge question mark that now hangs over the very idea of nationhood is evident in current cultural discourses. Homi Bhabha, for instance, is highly sceptical of its productivity in today's world and feels that the migrant, hybrid character of the modern Western nation makes it necessary to think beyond the nation as a "sociological category or a holistic cultural entity" ("DissemiNation" 140), and to focus instead on the "cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation" ("DissemiNation" 140). The primacy given to the discursive life of the nation, that is, the signification practices of the social body by which ideas and performances of national belonging are circulated is undoubtedly very productive in demystifying the idea of the nation as some (pre)-fixed, consensual entity, and reveals its symbolic, temporal, and politically manipulated nature. Ironically, the very power inherent in national constructs to produce community is the basis of Edward Said's dissatisfaction with nationalism since the communal has been so often perversely dispensed for the production of inhumane exclusory practices. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), he includes it among the "negative models" of the modern experience, "whose wake is strewn with ruin, waste, and human suffering unlimited" (50). Closer to home, Gordon Rohlehr seems to echo the global skepticism surrounding the possibility, if not the value of nationhood, especially when its ideals are sullied and ethnic chasms are exacerbated by a political leadership more interested in holding

the reigns of power than in serving the people. He therefore writes in *A Scuffling of Islands: Essays on Calypso* (2004), that “[n]ational remains a highly questionable and politically manipulable concept in the multi-ethnic State and “unity” a laughable fiction, particularly in the mouths of politicians whose naked pragmatism has deepened popular skepticism ...” (14).

In the midst of all these questionings and dissatisfactions that perhaps fuel various postnationalist routes as correctives to the limits and errors of nationalisms, it is a useful provocation, in the midst of so much discontent, to evoke Frantz Fanon’s early counteractive position. During the post-World War II period, amidst growing agitation in the colonized world for independence, Fanon was disturbed enough to comment on what he perceived to be the premature dismissal of “national claims” as “a phase that humanity has left behind” (Fanon 198). He was adamant then that the abandonment of the national project or “wishing to skip the national period” was not a desirable response to feelings of discontent (Fanon 198). Even in today’s global environment where the need to redefine and review the concepts of the nation and nationalism are unavoidable, Fanon’s regard for the importance of forging a sense of national belonging and, more importantly a “national consciousness,” is not entirely outmoded. Of course, Fanon was careful to intimate the political, as opposed to the cultural, bases of the terms “nationalism” and “national consciousness” respectively (199). So that, where by its power agendas may paralyze the political, it is the cultural that he saw as the tool of mass empowerment. Of course, one cannot be naive about how one informs the other. Yet, his recognition that the role of the writer as unifier and social critic is invaluable in this regard.

Nations continue to be desirable though illusive ideals and spaces have enduring value for the human imagination and can productively serve the desire for community. For now, they are the constructs that the planet has to work with in order to meaningfully respond to the inevitable movements and gatherings of peoples who are constantly transforming the structure communities and, in so doing, challenge existing policies and practices of belonging. At the height of postmodern theoretical leanings towards postnationalism, Neil Larsen’s position is therefore a refreshing one. He is of the opinion:

[t]he significant turn over the last decade or so from tacitly nation-centred to “postnational” literary and cultural studies is a fact as pointless to ignore or dismiss as it is easy to convert into mythology. The upsurge of critical discourse on questions of hybridity, migrancy, diaspora, borders, etc. does not warrant, as is sometimes thoughtlessly claimed, the summary disposal of the national as a critical, or literary-historical category.” (48)

In spite of its problematic nature, the nation is an enduring axis for individual and group identification. That writers are still engaged with writing the nation evidences the power of its lure and value. Admittedly, the seminal paradox of any identitarian praxis is that it is as potentially dangerous, as it remains necessary for human beings wishing to locate themselves in the world out of a desire to belong to the world. However, the tendency to pervert that praxis,

particularly in relation of the nationalist cause, is apparently a pitfall that the world at large struggles to overcome. Said, for instance, is critical of destructive, hegemonic nationalisms like the kind the United States currently represents since, according to him, it breeds the “affirmative mischief of exceptionalism,” “natural superiority,” and “policies of arrogant interventionism” (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 50). Similarly, the misuse of nationalist claims turns him against the type of nationalism, albeit often indiscriminately associated with the Arab world, whose “patently anti-secular and antidemocratic” nature can produce an event like 9/11 (51). As a Palestinian immigrant to the United States, Said intimately knew both extremes.

Debates about national belonging, the future of the nation state, cultural location, and practice are certainly not outside the ambit of concern for Caribbean cultural and literary studies. As already noted, the region’s literary culture is diasporic in character and therefore ideological and thematic engagements with the nation and cultural identity have of necessity extended to the transnational. In fact, it is possible to identify a significant growth in the latter rubric since the emergence of a number of contemporary texts that represent, according to Sandra Pouchet Paquet, “the transnational literature of a new generation of hyphenated Caribbeans” (229). Multiple dwellings and borderless-ness are not new phenomena to the Caribbean. Lamming, for instance, has noted that people have always known what it is to belong to a “transnational family,” with a sense of “cultural contiguity” that is not incompatible with national loyalties (“Coming Home” 32). Yet, one wonders if in an academic climate preoccupied with theorizing life on the hyphen and the liminal identities forged by travel and migration, the importance of a type of Caribbean text interested in exploring the life of the nation within distinct geopolitical or physical boundaries is on the wane—the type written, incidentally, by the early emigrant West Indian writers to London who, according to Kenneth Ramchand, remained motivated by “national feeling,” and “seldom depart[ed] from a concern with the shape and possible directions of their society, its central issues and causes, its patterns of group life, and the quality of life possible for individuals in it” (13).

Certainly, it makes no sense entertaining the nostalgia for the nationalism, and even regionalism, which stimulated the writing of the first half of the twentieth century. However, that transnationalism may be rearing its head as the new fetish of postcolonial and Caribbean literary studies is a tenable line of questioning if one takes Pouchet Paquet’s formulation as an indicator of the current leanings of the discourse on Caribbean literature. She argues:

[A] Caribbean literary culture, broadly or narrowly defined, enjoins transnational affiliation rather than national solidarity. It shifts focus away from the ideal of a national literature as rooted and self-determining to focus instead on hybrid cosmopolitan experiences that tend to blur, if not erase, the physical boundaries of the nation state. (229)

There is no doubt that such a reading of Caribbean thematic and aesthetic practices rests solidly on the fact that Caribbeanness embraces both the nation within and beyond borders. Bearing in

mind Larsen's caution about the unstudied "summary disposal of the national as a critical or literary-historical category," one worries a little at the development of any trend in Caribbean theoretical discourse and critical practice that suggests the sidelining or undervaluing of the literature of "national solidarity," especially when the politics of representation, literary canonization practices, and institutionalization agendas within and beyond the walls of academia are still troubling issues for the Caribbean. Those viewing the Caribbean largely from its extended Diaspora may be anxious to disseminate constructs of Caribbeanness that are supportive of their own theoretical and social agendas, which may be differently invested in notions of nomadic and global identities. In short, certain anxieties of influence are well worth courting, especially in a world where the globalization of certain nationalisms, of the U.S.A. variety, is a serious matter.

It may be the case that when the proverbial dust settles on current ideological romances with travel, translocations, identities in-between spaces of dwelling, displacement and so on, the literature of the nation will prove itself to be alive and well. Far from promoting parochialism on a globe marked by increasingly unstable borders, a national literature of the best sort has, as Fanon so perceptibly saw, the ability to contextualize belonging without becoming entrapped in a static or closed self-understanding. Such a literature he argues assumes the responsibility for "mould[ing] national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons" (Fanon 193). Caribbean writers have certainly not stopped attempting to write "habitable texts of identity" (Harney 3), interested in exploring the quality of life and future possibilities for the people of multiple origins committed to living within its borders, even when this is done by exploring what threatens those possibilities. Apart from Lovelace's seminal novel *Salt*, Lawrence Scott's *Witchbroom* (1992), Merle Hodge's *For the Life of Laetitia* (1993), Barbara Lalla's *Arch of Fire* (1998), Robert Antoni's *Divina Trace* (1992), Oonya Kempadoo's *Tide Running* (2001), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms At Night* (1996), Lakshmi Persaud's *For the Love of My Name* (2000), and so on, offer the opportunity for a fresh look at the Caribbean literature of the nation, in order to examine how it has been imagined by contemporary writers, many of whom, incidentally, can be identified as members of Pouchet Paquet's current generation of "hyphenated Caribbeans."

In Caribbean literary discourse, the national writer and the novel of the nation remain highly relevant categories for those whose primary living space is the island, and this does not detract from the importance of a regional or trans-regional sensibility, nor does it underestimate the place of travel in the experience or construction of the national. While the nation state is a political entity with circumscribed geographical borders, culture cannot be contained within fixed boundaries, nor is home necessarily a physical or permanent place. James Clifford, for instance, has convincingly argued that "travelling cultures," like the Caribbean for instance, demonstrate that the life of culture or "cultural experience" is best revealed by the "concrete mediations" between "native" and "traveller," that is, the simultaneous cultural (or "dwelling") and intercultural (or "travelling") matrix of relations ("Travelling Cultures" 24). Perhaps the time

is ripe, in the light of widespread disillusionment with the nation, to revisit Fanon's warning of the "serious consequences" of prematurely "wishing to skip the national period" (Fanon 198). It may be helpful, in this regard, to remember that apart from Haiti (1804), the Dominican Republic (1844), and Cuba (1898), the nations of the Caribbean have a long way to go before attaining a century of Independence, not to mention the Anglo-Caribbean's brief romance with idea of a West Indian Federation. One cannot forget, even in the height of postmodern esoteric excursions into the notions of the citizen as an unanchored, globe-hopper, that this archipelago of islands is a place where many people freely choose to live and die to make a world.

Where is Lovelace positioned in relation to this chimera called the trans/nation? It is certainly worth repeating that the unquestionable nationalist character of his fiction by no means suggests that the generic transnational structure of Caribbean civilization and sensibility is not an informing factor in his politics and poetics. In this regard, it has already been established that he echoes Lamming's formulation of the Caribbean Nation as belonging to a "transnational family," wherein the individual nation remains a legitimate space and context for identification without severing its connection to a wider concept of home. Similarly, Pouchet Paquet recognizes the integral place of the nation in Caribbean formulations of home and belonging, since she too insists that "[t]here is no question that the ideal of a national literature has a role to play in the development of a national culture" (229). To not acknowledge this point would be to unfairly truncate, and so misrepresent her conceptual frame. However, it does not make irrelevant the need for serious questions to be directed at unearthing the politics of perspective and experience informing the particular articulations of transnationalism by which the Caribbean Diaspora is framed. For instance, from what vantage point is the Caribbean transnational being viewed, articulated, and imagined? Is it the Caribbean that is now located in North America, or commutes from North to South and is therefore always looking back at the region in an effort to re-chart, and legitimately so, maps of belonging that situate and validate the life on the hyphen? Or is it the Caribbean that looks out to the world from islands that never understood themselves to be isolated or closed, their inhabitants also being travellers with myriad connections of all kinds, familial, economic, intellectual, cultural, but choosing to relate to the world from their own ground, working against all sorts of odds to negotiate relationships that will preserve the integrity of their individual nation states and extended Caribbean family? The latter question, of course, implies that the Caribbean has approached the point where it can speak for itself from its own geography, and that the era when it was necessary for the voices in "exile" to articulate its meanings is past.

It is in the highly political choice of making the island the material and imaginative center from which he views and speaks to the world that makes Lovelace's work such an important intervention in Caribbean literary culture and discourse. Notwithstanding the fact that the imagination is an unfenced entity with the power to conjure home independent of literal returns, the primary difference with Lovelace's relationship to home is his fidelity to the importance of being rooted, for the traveller anchors somewhere, is shaped by some place and

most assume the “responsibility” of belonging to *a* place. The nation is the literal context where people make life and is therefore not to be lost or abandoned to the constantly shifting sands of travel that dominate readings of the transnational, even as the flexibility of the travelling subject is acknowledged and culture’s heterogeneity and openness are celebrated. The world, from Lovelace’s perspective, is never an elsewhere, or nowhere, but always here, a “real” location with “real” people. The nation, then, is the legitimate space from which its inhabitants learn about themselves, and so speak about themselves to themselves, and to the world. It is the location from which one begins to “see,” to “create,” even as the regional and the universal remain simultaneous engagements. The idea is succinctly expressed in his statement: “Nobody is born into the world. Every one of us is born into a place in the world, in a culture, and it is from that standpoint of the culture that we contribute to the world” (Lovelace, *Growing in the Dark* 152).

Indeed, Lovelace is no different from the host of Caribbean writers who, at some point of the other, would have faced, and in many instances, succumbed to the temptation to emigrate in light of continued absence of any infrastructure to support his writing career. In fact, a small but significant strain in Lovelace’s fiction is oriented around this temptation to emigrate and addresses the debilitating illusion that the island can never be a world. The short stories “Joebell and America” and “Victory and the Blight,” from the collection *A Brief Conversion*, as well as the novel *Salt*, explore immigration and its ambivalent play between the leave-taking spurred by the quest for self-improvement or “betterment,” and the leave-taking that is an escape from the responsibility of meaningfully contributing towards the building of community and country. Both short stories, set in Cunaripo, seem to prepare the way for Alford George, the teacher turned politician from that same village. Central to Alford’s growth is his rejection of the “shipwreck” script, that is, the condition of displacement that has so preoccupied Caribbean writers, perhaps the most memorable being the character of Ralph Singh from V.S. Naipaul’s novel, *The Mimic Men* (1967).

*Salt*, indeed, all Lovelace’s work, offer an alternative perspective to the historical construction of the island-nation as a non-place, reinforced by the Naipaulian vision of the apparent incurable psychic and spiritual paralysis of diasporic peoples. Alford’s hard-won development comes as a result of his decision to bring closure to his early seduction by the notion that his island was merely a “temporary” waiting-room or “state” of existence from which he would eventually launch out into the real world (Lovelace, *Salt* 34-36). His decision to stay marks the beginning of his refusal of the exilic condition, that is, from being a stranger to his world. The radical option to make the New World a home brings him full circle to the meaning of Guinea John’s mythic flight back to Africa, which is the symbolic closing of the door of literal and nostalgic return to the Old World. At the same time, it opens a way for Guinea John’s descendents, no longer Africans, but New World Africans, to take up, with confidence, the “heavy load” of shaping “their future ... in the islands” (Lovelace, *Salt* 3).

Interestingly, in Lovelace, one sees an almost existential struggle to put to rest both a personal and collective experience of displacement, a condition he cures by choosing to work out his belonging. In “From De I-Lands,” for instance, he integrates, as the play in the word “I-Lands” suggests, the dispossession Caribbean peoples suffered under colonialism with his particular experiences as an “outsider,” being first born in Trinidad, moving at an early age to Tobago, and then back again, only to be mistaken for a “Baje” because of his Tobagonian accent (*Growing in the Dark* 2). The curative to the various manifestations of what he calls in *Salt*, the non-status of “secondclassness” (76) is nothing but an intense commitment to “looking very closely at [his] environment,” particularly the “ordinary people” and the culture undervalued by the status quo (Lovelace, *Growing in the Dark* 1-2). Rootedness is therefore mandatory if one is to come to terms with the histories, epistemologies and attitudes engineered to make one feel a stranger in one’s own home.

The only creative response one can make to finding oneself an “outsider” is to lay claim to a world, to enter fully into its reality, which, for Lovelace, is synonymous to entering the “darkness into which we had our light” (*Growing in the Dark* 223), given the bastardization of non-European persons and their cultural practices under colonialism. Fiction, he understands, is a way of seeing into the life of a world and rendering its diverse realities for the collective imagination, with the fundamental purpose of forging unity based on the ideology of a common humanity, beginning with the nation, the region and beyond. In “Artists as Agents of Unity,” he writes that the “artist must help find that way. . . . to transcend the limits of race, class and gender to become all people. To become everyone and to seek nothing less than the dignity that everyone of us has in the Caribbean” (*Growing in the Dark* 100). As one who belongs to the generation of Caribbean persons educated on the books of elsewhere places, Lovelace is aware of the power of literature to make other worlds more alive than one’s immediate surroundings. In “Working Obeah,” he describes this trickery in relation to his actual encounter with Buckingham Palace as follows:

At school I learnt more about London than about Tobago or Trinidad. Now I am a little amused: the magnificence my imagination has produced dwarfs the reality: for all its grandeur, Buckingham Palace is smaller than I imagined it. But I do not want to scrutinise the reality too closely. I want the magnificence to remain. I like London as a dream. (*Growing in the Dark* 227)

The imagination is therefore the power that can mythologize landscapes. Lovelace, in a remarkable display of fidelity to its law, yields to its law by his choice to remain faithful to his childhood “dream” of Buckingham’s grandeur. He does so, fully aware that his task as a citizen of the world once ruled by the institution the palace represents must involve a conscious “disenchantment”<sup>2</sup> from the images of greatness on which he was fed. One can therefore read his initial refusal “scrutinise the reality too closely,” and so possibly dismantle the “trick” of perception the literature of his colonial education played on him, as a manifestation of his supreme respect for imagination’s power to enchant and transform, on the one hand, and his

conscious levelling of cultures, races, and geographies, on the other, by his acceptance of England's "magnificence," as he later does its imperfections, when the "dream begins to fade" (Lovelace, *Growing in the Dark* 227). His is truly a democratic and universal imagination that is unfettered by the past, although fully conscious of it. He is therefore unafraid to transcend the ills of history towards the equal inclusion and appreciation of all peoples and places, evidenced in his admission that his commitment as an artist is to "human hearts, the human spirits" that are perennially "fragile and foolish and moral and immoral, mortal and immortal" (Lovelace, *Growing in the Dark* 100-101).

The deliberate focus on the integrity of the landscape and people who are called to humanize their spaces of dwelling is centric to Lovelace's discourses on the nation. In his address "In the Dance," for instance, he writes that "National Independence was to be *the place* [italics mine] in which we would seek to repair relationships destroyed in colonialism and link us to one another so that we could begin creating for our welfare and delight" (*Growing in the Dark* 185). A meaningful civic nationalism is conceptualized not as an abstract goal, or the product of some packaged idea of nationhood. It is presented as a meeting "place" of peoples, a "space" from which to begin the radical process of re-forming consciousness and educating sensibilities to respect the differences of the "Other," given the distortions instituted under colonialism and their unfortunate mutations in the era of Independence.

From this perspective, that is, parity based on mutual recognition, the project of "National Independence," beyond its mere political application, is universal in its scope, and should, according to Lovelace, inspire people to be "attracted to larger ideas of what it is to be human" (*Growing in the Dark* 186). It should not perpetuate a myopic tribalism or individualism that stifles the very soul of the nation. This humanist-nationalist/regionalist orientation intersects perfectly with Fanon's brilliant articulation of the symbiotic bond between a civic nationalism and a humane world when he writes:

the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play a part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture". ("On National Culture" 199)

To speak of the nation and to believe in its possibility is to engage a fundamental question: what are the requirements of building a humane world? The flip side of that question, of course, is what does the human being want? Engaging the basic demands the person makes on the world is of utmost importance to a region that has its origins in the jaws of the racist and capitalist terms of relations under European colonialism, which engineered a controlling no/not/nothing trinity of negatives that was institutionalized as the referential "word" for the peoples met in and brought to the New World. Lovelace's primary choice of narrative subjects is

“ordinary people,” that is, History’s Others whom he considers “the principals in the creation of the New World” (103), and for whom he seeks “legitimacy and power” (*Growing in the Dark* 102). This choice seems to dovetail with Lamming’s observation in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) that the birth of the West Indian novel revealed writers that took the opportunity to look “in and down at what had been what had been traditionally ignored” (39). This “occasion for speaking” (23), as he names that outpouring, was nothing less than a disjunctive “moment” in time and space that performed a necessary interruption of the speech of the historically privileged. Lovelace’s choice of subject is therefore synonymous with the source of radical cultural regeneration.

In his speech “In the Voice of the People,” Lovelace extensively discusses the importance of narrative voice to his creative process, describing it as the simultaneous representation of people and self, thereby revealing his solidarity with the subjects of his fiction, the Others, who are also himself, and by extension the collective “we” of the national and human body. He therefore writes:

my struggle to find a narrative voice is a struggle, not only to talk about people, but also to say who I am.

It is the voice in which I find myself challenging rather than consolidating the established order of language and, therefore, of meaning. (*Growing in the Dark* 102)

In view of the damage wreaked by the negating “categories” and “representative modes of speech” under colonialism, the exercise of the imagination in relation to the life of the nation is tantamount to a poetics of force, directed at giving presence to a historically denied consciousness (Lovelace, *Growing in the Dark* 223). Lovelace’s approach to narrative voice is thus a search to discover how such people “enter the world. How do [they] speak to the world? Speak for the world?” (226).

The necessity of dismantling the infected codes and hierarchies that facilitate practices of denial and misrecognition is a persistent point of contention in Lovelace’s thinking. Starting from the obvious problems with national unity in his native Trinidad and Tobago, he writes in “Requiring of the World” that:

It seems to me that we need to update the vision of who we really are. We need to recognise that wherever we have come from and whatever we have brought from different regions, even in awkward circumstances—all of it—is really our heritage. And if we realise that we are preparing for our future, and not for our past ... we might just discover that the tribes said to be in contention are seeking what we have been always seeking—the same things: a sense of belonging, psychic ease, the valuing of our contributions, a space in which to grow and the

natural acknowledgement of our worth and dignity as human beings. (*Growing in the Dark* 230)

Against the discourse of opposites, tribalisms and “sides,” against the illusion of homogeneity, the “all o’ we is one” myth of inclusion (Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance* 19), Lovelace sees the challenge of cultural diversity as an opportunity to discover what truly makes for a shared humanity and to marvel at the new cultural beings that are evolving in this place, for the world. The nation is important because what is at stake is humanity itself, which is the same as saying that the “future is still to be won” (Lovelace, *Growing in the Dark* 184). The “future” of Lovelace’s imagination is one that is constructed on the innate “dignity” of human beings; especially those most denied dignity, and the creation of the conditions for all to experience “psychic ease,” “a sense of belonging” to a “space” called home. Indeed, there is something precious at stake—something to be fought for—the urgency of which is best captured in the tempered circularity of Lovelace’s public speeches and the studied re-visitation of his novelistic themes. Pointing to the past as the site of blame for contemporary failures is not an option for Lovelace, although colonialism and its aftermath are always implicated in the erection of a host of de-humanizing divisions among people, with injustices arising from race, ethnic and class divisions being the most fruitfully treated in his work.

Lovelace’s general position seems to be that political nationalism has failed miserably in the work of inspiring a concept of peoplehood. And it is to the people at the base of society that he consistently turns, investing in the power of cultural expression, as he does in the closing of *Salt*, as an abiding resource for social change and renewal. However, his is not an uncritical glorification of cultural praxis, as his scrutiny of the Carnival culture in *The Dragon Can’t Dance* demonstrates. Further, Lovelace’s cultural nationalism must not be mistaken for an abandonment of the essential relationship between the state and the people. In “Welcoming Each Other,” for instance, one of his suggestions for national reform is that, “the power of the state be responsible for setting the highest standards for humanity” (*Growing in the Dark* 173). The highly politicised agenda of his literary nationalism is therefore aimed at stirring people towards a mature democratic practice that can demand from governance and each other the type of civic society they want.

Any attempt to give recognition to diversity is simultaneously an acceptance that the nation is a site of conflict. Therefore conflict, or more preferably crisis, used here to echo its Greek root *krisis* meaning decision, is the first requirement for achieving parity. The nation, then, is a site where citizens must decide the shape of its future and the terms of its relations with the diverse groups and individuals who live within its borders, and the world at large. For Lovelace, diversity provides the creative chaos that extends an invitation to all, and particularly the “artist and the intellectual to go beyond speaking only for their sides,” because “[t]hey will have to take up the challenge to shorten the distance between the sides, between self and what is perceived as “Other.” Indeed, to help remove the category of the other and to help see ourselves and each other as human” (*Growing in the Dark* 231). The concern for closing the gap generated by the

“perceived” difference of the “Other” is a crucial dimension of Lovelace’s philosophical and creative praxis, which is certainly in need of close analysis, as it impacts on a range of elements, such as, his themes, narrative style, the quest for “voice” and characterization. While the self/Other dialectic navigates a complex matrix of applications, all cohere at the basic paradox of the doubleness, resulting from the relational dynamics with supposed opposites by which sameness and difference are known. In short, the Other is always constituted in any understanding of the self.<sup>3</sup>

Only a consciousness open to the innate dignity of the Other, one that intimately knows the pain of disrespect based on difference could produce Benn’s anguished, philosophical questioning in *The Schoolmaster*, “Ain’t a man a man” (60), which he directs to the Irish priest, the representative of the system that facilitated the guide’s abuse at the hands of Captain Grant. The Captain’s refusal to accept Benn’s offer of his prized horse as a gift, rather than an object of sale, is an attempt on Grant’s behalf to maintain the unequal capitalist terms of relations between Benn and himself. To pay Benn fifteen pounds more than the five Grant initially sold him the horse for would be to recognize the peasant as an equal. Lovelace seeks to challenge the colossal evil of that system’s reification of the human person as an object of exchange in order to maintain, at all cost, the illogical class/race hierarchy of its capitalist ethos. The Captain’s decision to shoot the horse when Benn refuses to comply with his terms of exchange is a tragic enactment of the system’s effort to foreclose any challenge to its unequal law of relations. However, the inherent violence against human dignity that sustains its prejudicial matrix of operations is nowhere as powerfully displayed as the crass immorality of the schoolmaster’s attempt to monetarily compensate the village for his role in the sexual violation and subsequent death of Christina. The female body, like the estate lands that comprise the Kumuca, is a commodity to be bartered and exploited in the avaricious marketplace of modernization.

Lovelace’s preoccupation with the historical poisoning of human relations that undermines the basic principle of parity among differences drives his vision of national unity in his novel, *Salt*. Bango therefore formulates his “reparation” claim on the basis of his shared humanity with his white victimizer, which he posits as the moral responsibility for each to act respectfully towards the Other, even if that first act must be a request for forgiveness. So Bango begins in his frequently quoted speech:

‘Understand from the start,’ he said. ‘I ain’t come here to make the Whiteman the devil. I not here to make him into another creature inhabiting another world outside the human order. I grant him no licence to pursue wickedness and brutality. I come to call him to account, as a brother, to ask him to take responsibility for his humanness, just as I have to take responsibility for mine ...’.  
(Lovelace, *Salt* 167)

Lovelace is one of those remarkable thinkers who accepts Kamau Brathwaite’s notion of “the many-ancestried conclusions” (“Contradictory Omens” 55) sought by Caribbean peoples.

However, he is open to diversity without being narrowed by ethnocentric fixations or nostalgic preservations of Old World identities. While his artistic perspective is understandably more intimately engaged with the experience of New World Africans, the healing of relations within the major groups that make up his native Trinidad and Tobago is what most preoccupies him. Even as he accepts that cultures change and that the onus is on the various groups to recognize that they are a “new” people, having left ancestral homes behind, he recognizes that race and ethnicity remain legitimate sources of social identification.

On the subject of cultural diversity, Lovelace provides a much-needed intervention in debates on Caribbean cultural identity. If the principal goal of his nationalist/regionalist project is to save the future from the epistemologies and structures of inequality that continue to short circuit a re-humanizing agenda, the crucial question, for Lovelace, is how does one construct national unity, or even regional unity, not in spite of, but because of diversity? There are many dimensions to this struggle, as there are many features that make up a people; but Lovelace is clear that while the prejudices against race or creed, or whatever that makes for inequality are to be addressed, difference provides both richness and challenge. He writes in “We the People Facing Each Other Again”:

People are not now and have not been one homogenous mass but are differently related to each other, and, in broad terms, people are also races and classes and religions and creeds, people are those who have been abused and those who have abused, those who are landed and those who are landless, those who are privileged and those who are exploited; people have had problems with each other that derive from power relations and it is to the degree that we address these problems, deal with these problems that we might begin to talk about emancipation and empowerment, it is when we can face each other that we can talk about commitment to a common responsibility and a shared future. (*Growing in the Dark* 198-99)

Finding the path to the reformation of human relations in order that people may transcend the distortions perpetuated by a host of hurts, fears, and prejudices is critical to this healing process. The primary requirement of what Lovelace calls “National Independence” is the confrontation of the troubled issue of “race”—it cannot be avoided nor should transcendence be the aim. In a cultural field where it is considered progressive to talk about the liberating potential of hybridity to circumvent the problem of difference, whether biological or cultural, Lovelace sounds a different chord when he insists that, “Race is *the* important business of the nation,” and giving it attention is not tantamount to “retarding” the “growth” of the nation (*Growing in the Dark* 230). Of course, there is complex network of variables implicated in the construction and deployment of the term, “race,” that will render simplistic any attempt to theorize their particular relevance to this society or the region at large. Further, by placing “race” on the table for national discussion, Lovelace asks that consideration be given to the new socio-political requirements necessary for ensuring equitable belonging in the era of Independence.

The focus here is Lovelace's approach to the matter, which he largely does from the Caribbean people's ethnocentric efforts to distinguish and defend their "race" differences in two respects: the historical distortions and abuses under colonialism and their persistence in the politics of Independence. Further, he insists that the Caribbean nation state must accommodate the reality of the multiple ancestral origins and affiliations of its population, even as its diverse members inhabit a shared creolised, psycho-cultural space, where the indigenizing reformulation of various ethnic and other cultural elements is an ongoing process. The fact is that the social environment of the Caribbean has made it possible for a creolized cultural sensibility to co-exist with specific race and ethnic identifications.

Lovelace's fiction has often engaged the difficulties and tensions of negotiating such a sensibility given the various histories of prejudices and misunderstandings, exclusions and losses that divide the major groups, all of which have legitimate claims to national belonging. For instance, the desire of Adolphe Carabon, a descendant of the white planter class, for full acceptance and a sense of national belonging is made analogous to his participation in his college football team: "when it didn't matter what his colour was or who the fuck was his father, was just that the team wanted a goal or to prevent one from scoring and he was there, the man on the spot. Just that. The man on the spot" (Lovelace, *Salt* 198). Nevertheless, Adolphe is pre-scripted by a history of plantation slavery and privilege that complicates his desire for inclusion and paralyzes him when faced with rejecting the very status quo that keeps him estranged and soulless. In similar terms, Sonan Lochan's longing to represent more than his race, not to escape it, but to transcend it in a commitment to something larger, is circumscribed and censored by his group's critical stance on his efforts as a politician to "bat for something bigger no matter who he was batting for .... They mustn't expect him to bat for some little idea, some Indian people alone" (Lovelace, *Salt* 234).

The challenge of Independence, it seems, is not to obliterate race as a social category, or to reconstitute hierarchies of difference, as much as to change the lens with which it has been approached because, as Lovelace argues, it has been viewed "with the eyes of the old colonials, with the eyes of those who employed race to serve as a vehicle for privilege and status and to determine who was master and who was servant" (*Growing in the Dark* 231). The process is by no means a simple one. Stuart Hall, for instance, notes the struggle to welcome the "Presence Européenne" as a constitutive member of the Caribbean identity-matrix, a point that is only partially useful for contemplating Adolphe's difficulties with seeking inclusion, torn as he is between the history he shares as a member of a race of oppressors and a population that holds him in suspicion because of that affiliation. Hall argues that because the presence of Europe has been "about exclusion, imposition and expropriation, we are often tempted to locate that power as wholly external to us—an extrinsic force, whose influence is thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin" (400).

For a country like Trinidad and Tobago, the fact that the majority of the population comprises two major groups, whose histories in the New World evolved from first African

plantation slavery and then Indian indentured labor, complicates the project of “National Independence.” Lovelace has been in the forefront of opening an important dialogue with this conflict particularly in the novels *Salt* and *The Dragon Can’t Dance*. For instance, the tense encounter between Jo-Jo and Feroze unearths the injustice of a one-sided colonial politics in relation to land ownership that historically favored Indians in the post-Emancipation period, while leaving Africans uncompensated (Lovelace, *Salt* 185-187), and thereby materially unprepared for freedom. On the other hand, the contentious issue of a traditionally Afro-centric governance and dominant Afro-Creole culture by which nationalism had been articulated and inclusion granted would later result in feelings of estrangement by the Indian community during the period of Independence. In *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, the need for the national community to address the issue of exclusory practices based on race difference is covertly broached when Pariag, the recent Trinidad Indian resident in the predominantly Afro-Creole yard at Calvary Hill, makes this crucial observation to his wife Dolly:

‘You see, Dolly. You see. They is people,’ Pariag told her, when she showed him the cake that Miss Cleothilda had sent, for it really looked to him that at last the Yard was ready to admit them as friends.

‘They is people, girl. And we is people to them, even though they is Creole and we is Indian.’ It warmed him so much, the gift of cake, that he took his money and brought two bottles of rum to have in the house in case the neighbours dropped in.’ (Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance* 89)

Interestingly, Pariag’s reception of the cake is based on the premise that the Yard had finally recognized them as “people,” and therefore as equals. As a result, he felt that a world from which he had been excluded because of his Indianness was about to open. Of course, this would be an expectation that the members of the Yard would blatantly deny him. It is this refusal of welcome, rooted in a culture of suspicion and a false hierarchy of Afro-Creole privilege that Lovelace wishes to critique from a position that the nation, in all its diversity, belongs to every one. He writes in “Requiring of the World:”

Allow me to repeat what I believe: that the only way we will see this diversity of race as our real heritage, as our great New World legacy is if we see ourselves afresh; if we see that all of us here are heir to everything brought here by everyone European and African, Indian, Chinese, Syrian, Portuguese, toute monde, languages and food, festivals and song, everything, our own.... (*Growing in the Dark* 231)

The contentious issue of the marginalization of Indians in national, and by extension Creole space, the problems with the one-way Afro-centric accommodation of the term Creole, and its association with Indian Africanization have been appropriately raised by several scholars including Shalini Puri, Rhoda Reddock, Patricia Mohammed, Asha Khan, and so on. The word is indeed problematic, but apparently inescapable. While the power dynamics of its applications

need to be constantly interrogated, the fact remains that the originating multicultural formation of the Caribbean nation means that Indian, African, European—*toute monde*—have embarked on a Creole journey that knows no limit. The concept of a Creole space, therefore, should not be approached as a pre-fixed space to which anyone group should feel compelled to conform or privileged to dominate. The requirement is to move the discourse beyond making claims to Creole space based on the length of presence, type or even the economic value of that contribution. While Lovelace is correct in arguing for the primacy of the African contribution to the foundation of creolization process in the Caribbean, he is open to criticism for seeming to privilege this group as the major catalysts in the healing process he envisions (*Growing in the Dark* 167), when the reality is that the project seems to require a collective effort.

Nevertheless, the orientation of Lovelace's thinking on the matter of race and ethnic diversity has happily avoided the pitfall of projecting cultural hybridities of various sorts as the route away from the divisions and squabbles that affiliations to ancestral and ethnic identities can produce. Derek Walcott, for instance, defiantly announces his rejection of "ethnic ancestry for faith in elemental man" ("The Muse of History" 40), in order to escape the trap of purist, stagnant identity claims, and to focus on the possibilities of a new "mixed" cultural space. It certainly makes no sense denying the richness inherent in cultural cross-confluences, the legitimacy of mixed identities, and the symbolic value of the hybrid to educate sensibilities out of narrow tribal ghettos. Yet, Caribbean discourses need to come home to the politics of its poetics, especially the celebration of hybrid poetics in both creative and intellectual discourses as the answer to race, ethnic, and even gender wars that divide the national community.<sup>4</sup>

In "Merle Hodge's Revolutionary Dougla Poetics," Sheila Rampersad, for instance, expresses a preference for a dougla-feminist reconciliation to what she sees as the racist and masculinist hegemonies that plague the Caribbean nation (149). Rampersad elucidates an important reformulation of the concept of the "folk" as employed by Hodge to include the Indian presence, thereby expanding its traditional African perimeters to suggest a broader reading of Creole culture. In so doing, she contributes to contemporising the African/European creolization norm institutionalized by Edward Kamau Brathwaite's early model, which gave secondary place to Indian contributions to the process.<sup>5</sup> However, at the same time that she appeals to the liberating potential of a hybrid, dougla poetics, she destabilizes its frame, in a helpful manner, by returning to a paradigm of difference in the privilege she affords an undefined brand of "feminism as a primary analytical tool," and in locating "the promise of the political configuration of douglarisation" in an equally generalized group called "Caribbean women" (149). There is a window of opportunity in this apparent aporia. The theoretical continuum that Rampersad navigates along dougla/hybridity and difference, in the observed style of Caribbean women, seems to intimate a gateway for dealing with the hybridized/creolized character of Caribbean cultural identity, on the one hand, and its apparently persistent race/ethnic/gender identification politics, on the other.

Lovelace has consistently positioned himself precisely on the continuum of hybridity and difference that Rampersad inadvertently signals, in his insistence that “race” matters in the ongoing becoming of the Creole nation-space. Diversity is not necessarily to be homogenized, nor is miscegenation a remedy for race-based prejudices. In fact, Lovelace seems to insist that difference is to be saved, even though the peoples gathered here cannot escape their inevitable indigenization, which is to say their creolization. Further, he is very much aware of the power of the symbolic and the imaginative currency of cultural nationalism, which accounts for the turn to cultural performance in view of the race-oriented political deadlock in a novel like *Salt*. The unifying trick that culture plays on the estranged Indian and African parties, for instance, is symbolized in Bango’s choice of Chance’s “half-Indian” son to play the part of the Indian in the Independence Day march-pass, thereby producing a public witness of an association that bridges the gap between the groups. Further, the somewhat ad hoc costuming of the children to perform the nation’s races in their ethnic wear—the albino playing the European, the African narrator playing the Chinese and so on—parodies the artificiality and senselessness of the divisions that plague the society, thereby reinforcing the notion of a common humanity not in spite of, but because of difference. The paradigm of culture as hybrid “differance” serves, in this sense, to validate the integrity of each group, as well as the inherent cross-cultural interdependence and exchange that informs the whole. In so doing, he suggests that this basic right of identification does not legitimize the maintenance of tribal prejudices or hierarchies of belonging.

Labels are always uncomfortable, even tricky, protean creatures, especially when they more than likely come with a heavy baggage, mostly because human beings invent them and then proceed to use, misuse and abuse them to their political advantage. However, they remain unavoidable tools for giving shape to worlds. The need to name things may mean resorting to the old, not as a return to its outdated, prejudicial inscriptions, or vainglorious histories, but to refresh or redefine those meanings. Two labels have been tagged to Lovelace. He has been called a humanist and national writer on the following grounds: his persistent investment in human possibility; his concern for the repair of dignity denied; his understanding that the basis of equality is not sameness but diversity; his fundamental belief that history is made by the actions of people; and the nation is the principal space where sensibilities are humanized and universal values honed. Admittedly, these terms, humanism and nationalism are two of the main casualties of postmodernism and postcolonial discourses. This is understandably so. They are intimately connected to discourses of an Enlightenment modernity in which the globalizing aspirations of European imperialism left in its wake a long trail of abuses in the name of a civilizing agenda, bent on homogenizing the human race in accordance with its ethnocentric and nationalist terms. Perhaps there is a real case for abandoning them.

Said, however, offers an alternative perspective on the matter. With particular reference to the crisis of humanism, he writes:

Attacking the abuses of something is not the same thing as dismissing or entirely destroying that thing. ... [I]t has been the abuse of humanism that discredits some

of humanism's practitioners without discrediting humanism itself. (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 13)

Said, of course, is very aware of the long history of exclusory intellectual practices that favored an Arnoldian or Levisian white, middle-class, Western, male hegemony, which passed as humanism to the detriment of all other realities. He therefore insists that any humanist practice worth its salt must see the humanities as an “unsettling adventure in difference” (55), rather than “a form of smugness,” and enquires after the possibility of a “*modernist* theory and practice of reading” and interpreting the part to the whole in such a way as neither to deny the specificity of the individual experience in and of an aesthetic work nor to rule out the validity of a projected, putative, or implied sense of the whole” (55-56). The call is for a cultural and literary practice that is grounded in the particular, but alert to the interdependencies and common values that link all humanity. “Peace cannot exist without equality,” he argues (142). It is a commitment to this elusive human value that drives his convincing argument for the revision and revitalization of humanism and the humanities. In a world that hovers precariously on the brink of violence and war the challenges of difference must be faced, head on.

Essentialist and parochial cultural models that cultivate insularity have no place in a world marked by the complex exchanges and confluences. Indeed, sophisticated modes of travel and communication, accelerated migration and growing multiculturalism, greater awareness of human rights and their violations have made escaping difference virtually impossible, though it is still possible to homogenize and disrespect it. The urgency to learn how to live creatively with diversity is great, for it is indelibly what makes us human—the unavoidable need for the Other on whom knowing and consciousness inexorably depend. For ex-colonial nations, the mistakes of the colonial past, as well as the unique cultural conditions that define the New World, require that a new history of humankind be launched. Lovelace's fiction, to date, is clearly national and place-oriented, yet his vision embraces a regional and international self-understanding. It is a range that characterizes what he understands Caribbeanness to be and so forms the bedrock of his humanism. In fact, he argues that for Caribbean people there is no real conflict between the “parochial and the international” since “this duality is rooted in our psyche, and might owe much to our need, in the circumstances of our history, to cultivate a sense of joy even as we hit out at injustices” (*Growing in the Dark* 169). To call him a humanist, therefore, is also to say that he is of the stuff that makes what is truly great of good literature, that is, its simultaneous national and international appeal. For as C.L.R. James observes, “the great artist is the product of long and deeply rooted national tradition.... He appears at the moment of transition in national life ... but the universal artist is universal because he is above all national”<sup>6</sup> (qtd. in Harney 34).

Today's global environment has reconstituted the racial face and cultural texture of nations. It has refigured the notion of a national identity in ways that provide opportunities of greater collaboration and exchange. It clear that the nation does not simply define a physical space or presume consensual, homogeneous belonging. How ever the nation may evolve, how ever it may be defined, the stabilizing factor in all these conceptual manoeuvres that seek to

engage the reality of travel and transnational affiliations is that it remains a timeless context for being and belonging. The nation is therefore of immense political, cultural and spiritual value. People must gather somewhere and begin the process of humanizing that locality by deciding how to live in relation to each other at home and abroad. The real issue is not the relevance of the nation in today's world, but the form its nationalism adopts that either makes it a destructive or creative space for those within, in-between and beyond. It is but a microcosm of the world where humankind gathers, a place where, according to Lovelace, "human[s] search for boundaries that enable us to impose limits on behaviour and to give shape to our civilisation" (*Growing in the Dark* 232). The world requires this labor of all its citizens in whatever space they call home.

### **Conclusion: a personal anecdote**

I want to end with a personal anecdote about Earl. That is another thing about good literature, we tend to bring it into our homes as a real presence, and when we are blessed to live in the same space as its creators, we want to claim them as friends. I feel the occasion of this conference permits such an indulgence. Carnival Tuesday, 2002—if memory serves me right. It is about three p.m. or so. The place is Ariapita Avenue, Woodbrook, precisely at the point where the road borders the northern length of Adam Smith Square. The setting and the occasion, it seems, consolidate everything about the marriage of paradoxes that makes a place like Trinidad and Tobago, which assembles so much of the world and brings so much difference into contact and dialogue. It is a street in a district whose names echo a history of conquest and domination, of race, color and class divisions. Now, it is a portion of the stage for a people's festival, which originated as organized rebellion against the injustices of Empires such as the one inscribed in the name of the square I stand facing.

On this street, on that Carnival Tuesday, I see Earl dressed in a white sailor costume. He is not playing king sailor, just an ordinary swab-squad kind of sailor. Incidentally, it is the type that echoes the "clean-up gang" metaphor he employs in "In the Dance" to represent the post-Independence generation, whose responsibility it is to not merely "take over the fete," but to "address the completion" of "four hundred years of struggle" in the "pursuit of liberty, justice, space in order to create" (*Growing in the Dark* 188). I think he is leading the way across this threshold.

That Carnival, I see Earl. He is wearing a pair of white and blue track shoes. I am too far away to make out the brand, maybe Nike or Adidas. In his right hand he carries, warrior-like, the typical cane associated with the sailor mas'. He images the cultural translation that consolidates what being New World and modern means. Earl is not really jumping or chipping. Like an athlete whose aim is to participate and finish the race rather than to win, he is jogging ahead of the small band of sailors. All kinds of people, Trinidadians, other Caribbeans, foreigners—maybe the world is jumping up behind him. A group assembles before the judges and begins

what is obviously a rehearsed choreography of traditional sailor dances. There is a group of white women dancing in the self-conscious way of the newly initiated. The smiles on their faces say that they feel proud that they can do the moves. The locals dance from a deeper knowing, comfortable in their space.

I am on the sidewalk, more or less a spectator, watching all this—Earl is jogging by and the band is behind. Somewhere in that moment, I try to wave. He does not see me. I feel he does not really see anyone at that moment, for his eyes are fixed on some place ahead of him, the rest of the band behind him, the nations of the world all around him—masqueraders, band-crashers, spectators—all there with him. And he with them, sharing their space, looking forward. On that day Carnival Tuesday, I encounter greatness. It is the stubborn surrender to the gift, and question of a place echoed in Eva's potent existential question: "What to do?" in *The Wine of Astonishment*. A nation, a world, torn by the fear of chaos and violence of every sort is in dire need of the truly contemplative stasis that is an agreement to stay in dialogue with the Other. Derek Walcott, possibly from an attempt to reconcile in him a sense of betrayal, names this posture "love" ("The Antilles" 77). This, for me, is what Earl Lovelace means: a strong love that makes "room to pass"<sup>7</sup> (Gibbons 149) in our personal and collective histories, cluttered with the pain of loss, rejection and disillusionment, burdened with all manner of stupidity in need of forgiveness, but gifted with the supreme potential to "create" a world in which to "grow" into being fully human. For this, Earl: deep respect, deep gratitude.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>All references to public addresses made by Earl Lovelace are taken from *Growing in the Dark*, ed. Funso Aiyejina (San Juan, Trinidad: Lexicon Trinidad Ltd., 2003).

<sup>2</sup>A variation of the term “disenchanted of all belief” used by Sylvia Wynter to refer to the need for a new epistemology of “Man” in “The Pope Must Have Been Drunk and the King of Castille a Madman,” *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada in the Hood*, eds. Alvina Ruprecht and Cecilia Taiana (Ontario, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>3</sup>Interestingly, Lovelace navigates between the use of “other” to imply the difference that recognizes social diversity, and the philosophical “Other” to imply alterity as well as the intersubjective dependency of identity formation.

<sup>4</sup>See Shalini Puri’s discussion of various Caribbean deployments of hybridity in chapter 2 of *The Caribbean Postcolonial* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 43-79. Also useful is Gordon Rohlehr’s “Drum and Minuet: Music, Masquerade and the Mulatto of Style,” in *Caribbean Literature in a Global Context*, eds. Funso Aiyejina and Paula Morgan (San Juan, Trinidad: Lexicon Trinidad Ltd., 2006), 255-303.

<sup>5</sup>Edward Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974). Brathwaite contends that Indians practiced a “selective creolisation” that resulted in the “Caribbean black” being the “most innovative and ‘radical’” in the intercultural process (54).

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Stefano Harney’s *Nationalism and Identity* (London: Zed Books, 1996), p.34. See C. L. R. James, *The Artist in the Caribbean* (U.W.I. Mona, Jamaica, 1965), 8.

<sup>7</sup>Taken from Rawle Gibbon’s, “Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics” in *Enterprise of the Indies*, ed. George Lamming (POS, Trinidad: Trinidad and Tobago Institute of the West Indies, 1999): 149-153.

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