"WE IS ALL PEOPLE": THE MARGINALIZED EAST-INDIAN AND THE ECONOMY OF DIFFERENCE IN LOVELACE'S *THE DRAGON CAN'T DANCE*

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ABSTRACT

This study applies Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and symbolic capital, in order to present the difficulties and the possibilities for inter-ethnical communication in Earl Lovelace's novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance*. The author suggests that the lack of communication between the East Indian, Pariag, and the Afro-Trinidadian population of Calvary Hill is the result not only of racial differences, but also of competing economies, particularly the opposition of symbolic vs. material capital. If we consider this novel as a reflection of Trinidadian reality, we can conclude that to improve the inter-communal communication, both parties will have to overcome their respective "native field" mentalities, in order to find a common ground in their past mythologies, and eventually some hope for the future. As the attempt to establish the dialog between Pariag and Aldrick fails, through these two characters the novel explores nonetheless the possibilities of attaining the intercultural communication through a very much needed translation of a shared culture.

Keywords: Lovelace, Caribbean novel, Dragon, symbolic capital, East-Indian, postcolonial

RESUMEN

Utilizando los conceptos de Pierre Bourdieu de *habitus* y capital simbólico, este artículo discute los problemas y las posibilidades de la comunicación inter-étnica en la novela *The Dragon Can't Dance* escrita por Earl Lovelace. En esta discusión el autor sugiere que la falta de comunicación entre el Indio del Este (*East Indian*) Pariag y los habitantes africanos-trinidenses de Calvary Hill no solamente se debe a las diferencias raciales pero

también es causada por las economías competentes de diferencia: la simbólica y la material. Al leer la novela como narración de la nación trinidense, el autor concluye que para mejorar la comunicación inter-comunal, ambas partes tendrán que superar las lógicas de sus campos nativos para encontrar un territorio común en sus mitologías del pasado y esperanza mutua para el futuro. Por lo tanto, mientras en la narrativa de la novela, el intento de crear ese tipo de diálogo entre Pariag y Aldrick falla, la novela también, a través de estos dos personajes, explora las posibilidades de una traducción cultural común necesaria para lograr tal conversación intercultural.

Palabras clave: Lovelace, novela caribeña, Dragon, capital simbólico, Indio del Este (*East Indian*), postcolonial

RÉSUMÉ

En reprenant les concepts de *habitus* et de «capital symbolique» de Pierre Bourdieu, dans cet article nous discutons les problèmes et les possibilités de communication inter-ethnique dans le roman d'Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Nous avançons que le manque de communication entre Pariag, l'Indien, et les habitants Afro-trinidadiens de Calvary Hill, est dû non seulement aux différences raciales entre les personnages, mais également à des économies concurrentes, en l'occurrence le capital symbolique et le matériel. En lisant ce roman comme un récit représentatif de Trinidad, nous concluons que, pour améliorer la communication inter-communautaire, les deux parties devront surmonter la logique de leurs respectifs champs «natifs», afin de trouver un terrain d'entente—peut-être dans leurs propres mythologies—et enfin un espoir poir l'avenir. Alors que dans le récit la tentative d'établir le dialogue entre Pariag et Aldrick échoue, à travers ces deux personnages le roman explore les possibilités de traduire la culture commune, étape indispensable à la réussite de la communication interculturelle.

Mots-clés: Lovelace, roman antillais, dragon, capital symbolique, Indien (*East Indian*), postcolonial

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It is in the pages of a novel, suggests Benedict Anderson (1993), that "we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (p. 30). This method of representing a national reality along with the newspapers forms the basis of Anderson's theorization of the nation as an "imagined community" (1993:7).

This neat definition of the nation as imagined community fails to explain the inherent complexities of most of the Caribbean nation-states. Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*, I suggest, is a good example of an attempt at representing the particularities of Trinidadian national culture. In his fictional community of Calvary Hill, through the interaction between Pariag the East-Indian and the African-Creole community of the Hill/Yard, Earl Lovelace stages the class-specific dilemmas of a typical Caribbean urban landscape in which the neat assumption of nation as imagined is complicated by unresolved colonial legacies of class, race, gender, and ethnicity. This paper aims to focus specifically on Pariag's negotiation of the Calvary Hill culture in order to locate the causes of failure and possibilities of success of the urban lateral alliances in the postcolonial Trinidadian national landscape.

In most metropolitan works about the cultural production of the Caribbean, the Carnival Studies is the privileged mode of engaging with the Caribbean texts. By Carnival Studies I mean the general critical emphasis on carnival as an anti-establishment strategy of popular resistance. In such an approach, the acts of native agency are retrieved through the mass enactment of public rituals against the established order of the colonial and postcolonial state. Such an approach, suggests Shalini Puri (2003),

> does not engage the *structuring tension* between reputation and respectability, between mass performance of transgression and mass desires of acceptance and assimilation, between popular desires for work and popular celebration of respite from its exploitative conditions. (p. 23)

Shalini Puri is suggesting here that in reading carnival as mass resistance the local differences and the possibilities of political resistance are effaced and replaced by an aestheticized politics of transgression. She also suggests: "It is further possible that carnival trains the public in politics of irony in which radical knowledge may be yoked to conservative action" (2003:27). Certainly, here Puri is complicating the idea of carnival as a transgressive political strategy by pointing out its gendered, religious, and racial nature and that a mass performance of transgression does not by itself create lateral class solidarities needed to challenge the exploitative drive of global capital. In fact, such a depoliticization of native resistance increases the chances of their exploitation at the hands of their national-elite and the forces of neoliberal globalization.

With such an emphasis on mass transgression—of which carnival is a prime example—*The Dragon Can't Dance* becomes an ideal text for the so-called Carnival Studies: its main character—Aldrick—is the prime attraction of the carnival and the novel climaxes at the public performance of annual carnival. Because of this emphasis on the Carnival, the other important aspects of the novel are either elided or dealt within the limited domain of identity politics. It is also a known fact that in theorizing about the marginalized communities, the chances of romanticizing the marginal in opposition to its dominant other are quite high. In such an approach to the works of the Caribbean, the inner divisions of the marginal communities are silenced in order to build solidarity in the mere performance of mass transgression of carnival. But the lived experiences of these marginalized subjects involve a struggle of assimilation, of throwing "the bridge across" (Bakhtin 1994:58) to the others, in some cases hoping to assimilate not just to the dominant order but to seek the gift of self within the marginalized community itself. It is this tension between the East-Indian and Creole inhabitants of an urban slum that forms an important aspect of Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*. In his novel, Lovelace, instead of giving us the neat fixity of the imagined nation, foregrounds an important yet neglected problem of the postcolonial Caribbean nation-state: the presence of multiple marginalized others within the Caribbean national landscape. It is this important aspect of the novel and the Caribbean postcolonial nation-state that forms the main focus of this brief essay.

The novel is set in Calvary Hill, a Trinidadian Urban ghetto with a predominantly African-Creole population. On the whole the novel captures the life of its protagonist, Aldrick, who is famous for his performance as the dragon during the annual carnival. The other major African-Creole characters include Miss Cleothilda, the richest woman in the Yard, Guy, the rent-collector, and Fisheye, the neighborhood tough-guy. The only two Indo-Trinidadian inhabitants of the yard are Pariag and his wife Dolly. While Pariag's negotiation of this particular urban space happens to be the main focus of my inquiry, I will, of course, also incorporate Aldrick and other characters from the novel in my discussion.

In a way *The Dragon Can't Dance* enacts, through its juxtaposition of Pariag and the novel's African-Creole characters, the specific politics of two major competing identities: the Afro-Trinidadians and the "Indo-Trinidadians" (Birbalsingh 1997:xii). The novel, however, because of its specific urban setting does not portray the real ethnic divide in Trinidad, where the East-Indians almost form a majority (Birbalsing 1997:x). One must keep in mind this important aspect of the Trinidadian communal divide: it is the urban ghetto setting of the novel that represents the Indo-Trinidadian as a minority, and it should not be read as an emblem of actual ethnic make-up of the Trinidadian nation-state. Also important to note is the historical claims of the two major groups in retrieving their particular myths of authenticity: In the case of African-Creoles the common heritage of slavery serves as the main signifier of authenticity. For the Indo-Trinidadians, despite their late entry into the Caribbean colonial system, patient labor and industry constitute the main legitimating myth. According to I. M. Cumpston (1956) "The Indians were introduced into British

colonies after 1834 in order to meet the shortage of agricultural labour resulting from the abolition of slavery" (p. 158). Hence, the entry of the Indo-Caribbean into the Caribbean colonized space is inextricably linked with the slaves whose labor they replaced as indentured laborers.

Pariag's encounter with the African-Creole inhabitants of Calvary Hill is certainly a staged encounter between the representatives of two rival groups of the Trinidadian national divide. One can certainly read in this multi-ethnic encounter the postcolonial tensions between the "Afro-centric" (Birbalsingh 1997:x) view of the nation and the Indo-Trinidadian's place in it. Pariag's entry into the heart of the African-Creole culture—the Urban ghetto that spawns the major Trinidadian cultural markers of carnival and calypso—can be clearly read as a staged encounter aimed to enact the possibilities and dilemmas of such inter-group communication.

Lovelace's treatment of this ethnic divide of the Trinidadian nation-state has received quite a lot of critical attention, and it will be apt to touch upon some of these important readings of *The Dragon Can't Dance*. In Kenneth Ramchand's (1988) views "*The Dragon Can't Dance* erodes the contrast between the practitioners of the philosophy of non-possession and those who quietly engage in the accumulation of economic strength" (p. 9). In such an explanation Pariag represents the philosophy of capital accumulation and Aldrick a believer of non-possession. Hence, according to Kenneth Ramchand, in the end "if Lovelace's resolution of the relationship between Aldrick and Pariag seems insufficient, the reason might well be in the author's sense that there is more of the self to be found, before the Indian and African dare to expose themselves to each other" (p. 14). This is quite an apt conclusion, but it places too much emphasis on the question of self in order to build a relationship with others. One must keep in mind that self is, as Bakhtin suggests, also dialogic and if one were to wait to understand one's self fully before attempting to reach across to the other, almost all inter-self communication will have to be

put on hold.

Dina Brydon's (1989) critique of the novel also focuses on the competing ideologies of Calvary Hill. Commenting on the novel's contradictory ideology of "All o' we is one," Brydon suggests the following as explanation of the Yard's response to Pariag's overt materialism:

> The opinion-makers of the Yard, those who already possess a higher economic status, see Pariag as a suitable scapegoat for deflecting resentment away from themselves. As an Indian from the country in an Urban Creole Yard, Pariag is doubly an outsider. His bicycle further alienates him from the poorer folk in the Yard, while it challenges the authority of those richer than himself. (p. 325)

This is a brilliant exposition of Pariag's outsider status within the Yard: it captures the conflicts initiated by his rural background, his ethnicity, and his class specificity that threatens those "richer" than him. This analysis, however, still does not answer one main question: Why is Pariag so absolutely clueless in his negotiation of the Yard subculture? Can his failure to succeed in the Yard subculture simply be explained away under the general registers of ethnic difference, urban-rural divide, and a question of competing class interests? I think all of these factors impact Pariag's negotiation of the Yard, but his problems are compounded by his sense of individualism and his lack of understanding of the cultural economy of the yard. It is these aspects of Pariag's experience that I will now discuss in detail.

I suggest that Pariag's negotiation of the Yard plays itself out within two competing structures of social capital: The symbolic and material. In this exchange, some characters do reach a certain understanding of each other, but only within the symbolic economy of a material tragedy: loss of material and symbolic capital or human suffering. The novel read with such an emphasis can become a much powerful pedagogical tool as compared to a reading refracted through ethnicity or carnival studies alone.

I am drawing here on Pierre Bourdieu's work on the specific-

ity of a certain native field of existence and the functioning of symbolic capital within such a field. Bourdieu (1990) explains the possibility of entering such a field as follows:

> The countless acts of recognition which are the small change of compliance inseparable from belonging to the field, and in which collective misrecognition is ceaselessly generated, are both the precondition and the product of the functioning of the field. They thus constitute investment in the collective enterprise of creating symbolic capital, which can only be performed on the condition that the logic of the functioning of the field remains misrecognised. That is why one cannot enter this magic circle by an instantaneous decision of will, but only by birth or by a slow process of co-optation and initiation which is an equivalent to a second birth. (p. 68)

The two important concepts to understand the functioning of a specific field are the symbolic capital and the idea of misrecognition. According to Bourdieu, it is not the absence of material capital that defines a native field but rather the misreading of such capital. Hence, in Bourdieu's (1990) words: "In an economy, which is defined by the refusal to recognize the 'objective' truth of 'economic' practices...even 'economic' capital cannot act unless it succeeds in being recognized through a conversion that can render unrecognizable the true principle of its efficacy" (p. 118). Hence, for Bourdieu, while the symbolic capital does involve economic exchange, it must misread the economic exchange involved to function as symbolic capital (p. 118). With such an emphasis at hiding the functioning of economic/material capital within a native field, an outright display of material capital, as it challenges the very logic of the field's symbolic economy, can be construed as the greatest outrage. Bourdieu (1990) highlights this taboo aspect of the symbolic capital in the anecdote of the "Kabyle mason . . . who caused a scandal. . . by going home when the work was finished without eating the meal traditionally given in the mason's honour when a house is built and then demanding . . . a bonus of 200 francs in lieu of the meal" (p. 114).

The field of symbolic capital, then, involves material capital

but must constantly misread this material function. Any attempt at forcing the field by a material display of economism will bring the field to crisis and eliminate the misreading required for it to function. Hence, the biggest threat to the logic of a native field is not material capital itself, for it forms part of the logic of the field, but any attempt at inserting the naked truth of capital in the functioning of the field. Terry Eagleton (1991) explains this aspect of the field quite brilliantly:

> A field . . . is a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own internal logic, composed of institutions or individuals who are competing for the same stake. What is generally at stake in such fields is attainment of maximum dominance within them—a dominance which allows those who achieve it to confer legitimacy on other participants or withdraw it from them. To achieve such dominance involves amassing the maximum amount of the particular kind of 'symbolic capital' appropriate to the field; and for such power to become legitimate it must cease to be recognized for what it is. A power that is tacitly rather explicitly endorsed is one which has succeeded in legitimating itself. (p.157)

As Terry Eagleton's explanation of the field suggests, a native field also has its own dominant class, and the dominance of this class depends on the misreading of the functioning of the symbolic capital. It is also this dominant group that controls entry into a native field of existence. Certainly, the biggest threat to their interest also is an open reading of the economism of the field, which will force the field into a crisis forcing the elite to renegotiate their privilege.

With a few exceptions, Calvary Hill Yard can be treated as such a native field. Also obvious from Bourdieu's account above is the near impossibility of a forced immediate entry by an outsider into a field of beliefs governed by the logic of its own symbolic economy, especially if the outsider is unaware of the logic of the field in the first place. It is this aspect of the Calvary Hill culture that Pariag fails to comprehend. He moves into this urban ghetto expecting to be accepted, to be given the gift of self simply by

entering it without realizing the implications of the very structure, the very rituals of the field itself. Hence, on the surface what seems simply a case of ethnic difference is problematized by the interplay (or lack thereof) of two competing economies of recognition with no possible "bridge" between those standing at the opposing poles of this cultural transaction.

It is Pariag's lived experience that accentuates his difference from the inhabitants of the Yard. In chapter five, "The Spectator" Lovelace gives us Pariag's back-story. The chapter title itself hints at Pariag's outsider status within the Yard. Being a spectator, Pariag is within the Yard but still outside of its cultural logic. What we learn in chapter five is that Pariag had left his own integral rural community to be a part of something bigger. His move to the city, therefore, is clearly premised on a universalist idea of identity as opposed to its particularist drive. Lovelace captures Pariag's thoughts about his move to the city in the following moving passage:

> The main reason he had come to the city to live was so that he could join up with the people, be part of something bigger than just New Lands sugar estate, be more than just a little country Indian, cutting sugarcane in the day, cutting grass for the cattle in the evening, and, on Sundays playing all fours in front of the playground with Seenath, Bali and Ramjohn. (p. 91)

In Linden Lewis's (1998) words: "Pariag is on a mission to prove his manhood in terms that are perhaps more ambitious than all the other male characters: a manhood that could be recognized and accepted outside of its Indian context" (p. 177). As is obvious from the passage cited above, Pariag's aim is not only to seek a new form of masculinity, but also to be a part of the larger Trinidadian urban landscape. His drive can also be read as an attempt at defying the rural East-Indian stereotype. Pariag's move into the urban landscape is certainly a fictionalized version of the larger Trinidadian national divide: the place of the Indo-Trinidadian within the urban Trinidadian culture. Besides his fierce individualism, his move is also prompted by his changed views of the symbolic

field of his own native community. Lovelace informs us that he had "always wanted to break out of the little village world" (p. 91) but other than his personal dreams and desires, this feeling can also be attributed to his capacity to see the logic of his own native field transparently. Lovelace's suggests: "It seemed to Pariag that he had been too long in all this: too long in the village, too long in the sugarcane, too long meek and silent before his uncle" (p. 92). The uncle, Ramlochan, is the dominant figure in his native field for "he had become the fastest growing businessman in New lands" (p. 92) which gave him the power to interfere in the lives of all his relatives. It is Pariag's revolt against this particular servitude to his uncle and his own desire to be part of something bigger that causes him to move to the city. Hence, by the time he enters the Calvary Hill Field, he is no longer a typical East-Indian farmer, but someone who has already put his trust in the possibilities of self definition through the gaze of the other.

The main problem, of course, is that the urban landscape that he has entered does not have the capacity to meet his universalist self-view: it is a native field with its own inherent logic. Pariag is not privy to the logic of this field. Pariag's failure, as I stated earlier, is caused by his excessive individualism and his lack of understanding of the Calvary Hill field. Pariag's eventual failure becomes explicitly clear from his early attempts at negotiating the culture of Calvary Hill. He enters the field with his own idea of selfhood and uses the markers of the general material economy into the specific field of Calvary hill. It is his conflicting idea of self—a universal self—and his reliance on a different economy of exchange—material economy—that complicate his negotiation of the Calvary Hill, which becomes quite evident in his first attempt at opening a conversation with Aldrick. His first attempt at striking a conversation with Aldrick is couched within the logic of material exchange, which perplexes Aldrick, for he lacks the vocabulary to respond to Pariag's economism. Here is how the conversation goes:

> [Aldrick] it was the fellar, Parry or Singh or something—he

never could remember his name. . . . 'yea, how it going with you?' Aldrick said without vigour.

'I just cooling out. You want a cigarette? . . . .

Aldrick was thinking to refuse.

'I have a whole pack,' the fellar said. (88)

The first verbal exchange between Pariag and Aldrick (Pariag's first attempt at "giving himself verbal shape") even though he had been living in the Yard for two years is a good example of the complexity of this situation. It is an act of hailing coupled with a material offering—cigarettes—but since Pariag does not form an integral part of the field of symbolic capital of the hill, his attempt is only tentative, for he is attempting to force his way in through a sharing of material goods of which he has a "whole pack". Aldrick, on he other hand, is only an enforcer and does not have enough accumulated symbolic capital to grant Pariag access to the field of Calvary Hill. Only Miss Cleothilda and Guy, having the requisite symbolic capital within the community, can grant that access to Pariag. Hence, Aldrick's confusion at the tentative act of hailing by Pariag is more complex than mere negotiation of ethnicity and race: it is made complex by the two disparate economies of exchange that separate them.

Pariag's second attempt at forcing his way into communal recognition is also through material acquisition and brings the community to a level of crisis. When Pariag buys his green bike, he thinks that it would be noticed by the community and would become a vehicle of lateral movement within the community. Linden Lewis (1998) reads it as an act of claiming masculinity. In his words Pariag "suggests that his impaired masculinity could be overcome by the acquisition of some object which has the capacity to confer male status" (p. 179). Pariag's act, I suggest, is more than just a desire to reclaim his masculinity. It is, rather, an act aimed at obtaining recognition of his very humanity, his existence, from the Calvary Hill Yard. But within the symbolic economy of the Yard, this act is synonymous to that of Bourdieu's mason. The mere presence of the bike, that an East-Indian had bought it becomes

a symbolic threat to the main power-wielders of the field: Miss Cleothilda and Guy. A field that relies heavily on encoding and disguising the capitalistic nature of its functioning cannot bear the challenge of such an overt display of economism. It is the threat to the very logic of the Yard's symbolic economy, the presence of naked truth of capital, which prompts Miss Cleothilda and Guy to look for options to eradicate this threat. The purchase of the bike, according to Bourdieu's insights, threatens the very misreading required to keep the symbolic privilege of the elite, and hence forces the Hill elite to renegotiate their privilege.

The Hill's response can be read under two separate registers: the ideals of the symbolic capital of a hospitality culture and the threat of upward mobility posed by Pariag to Miss Cleothilda and Guy. Miss Cleothilda uses both these strategies to contain the damaging evidence of upward mobility posed by Pariag's purchase. She expresses her own class anxiety in the name of the Yard community:

> If you had more money, you buy more food; and if is a holiday you buy drinks for your friends, and everybody sit down and drink it out, and if tomorrow you ain't have none, you know everybody done had a good time (p. 117)

Miss Cleothilda is emphasizing the "equalness of everybody" (117) that to her is the main attribute of the Yard community. Many critics read this as a life of non-possession opposed to a drive to possess. But certainly, the Yard community is not really equal: it only has the appearance of being equal. Thus, even though Miss Cleothilda lives in the nicest house in the Yard and does not appear to want any material things, she must posit a sense of communal "equalness" to keep the economic hierarchy of the Yard hidden in order for the Yard's symbolic economy to function. Pariag's purchase of the bike, therefore, is not just an expression of accumulative economy but also a signifier of upward mobility that, if emulated by others, could bring the hidden working of the field to crisis. Miss Cleothilda cannot object to Pariag's purchase only from her personal point of view: she must posit it as an affront

to the collective culture of the Yard.

Of course there is a flaw in this indictment of Pariag, for he must be judged according to the logic of Calvary Hill community. The Yard has not accepted him, but must judge him as an insider, for if he is outside the logic of the field then he cannot be held accountable. Miss Cleothilda does have the symbolic capital to grant or deny access to Pariag, and she also sees him as a threat so she must couch her opinions in the best interest of the community itself. Hence, it becomes Aldrick's responsibility to take care of the problem:

> The Yard had already chosen him to as the one to defend it against the Indian; for it was he, more than Guy or Philo, who most faithfully upheld that living, that code; who, indeed, lived the reality of non-possession as a way of life that Pariag in acquiring the bicycle was now violating. (p. 119)

But this also starts Aldrick's own dilemma, for being the enforcer he must do something, but it is at this moment of crisis when he looks at the legitimacy of the dominant power itself through class consciousness, hence putting the very logic of the field under threat. Here is how he talks about the whole incident to Philo:

> Guy and Cleothilda trying to protect what they own.... I not an arse, you know. I know they don't own Trinidad and Tobago, but the little they have they frighten the Indian come and give them competition. The rest of us ain't threatening them at all. (125)

This is the beginning of Aldrick's own awakening and this awakening also threatens the very logic of the Calvary Hill field, for as Bourdieu suggests, the power that accumulates the symbolic capital only becomes legitimate when it is un-noticed and follows its own logic; hence, when the functioning of symbolic power is revealed, it must either relegitimate itself or give way to another emergent order. Thus, Aldrick refuses to do anything about the bike. The bike is ultimately destroyed at night, and seeing his destroyed bike Pariag addresses the Yard: "You mash it up, eh! Ain't it mash up! What you looking at now? What you looking at the mash-up bike that you mash up for? Ain't you satisfied?"

(p. 153). Pariag's loss has a two-pronged affect: it tampers his desire to be recognized by the Yard and it also makes the inhabitants of the Yard aware that they had deeply transgressed the boundaries of their own field's level of decency. Pariag and his destroyed bike become the symbols of the community's recognition of Pariag's humanity:

> Everybody grew silent. They watched Pariag carry-push the bicycle, and in that moment they felt themselves closer to him than they ever had. It was suddenly as if he had become alive, a person to them; and that moment, which was sacred, for it joined people together to a sense of their humanness and beauty, they would remember and recall long after. (p. 155)

In the end some understanding—the least amount possible—occurs though an act of loss and an act of painful birth. In the case of Pariag, he receives the gift of recognition from the community when he walks along the busy street with his destroyed bike. Something changes with the cultural economy of the Hill: he becomes a partial part of it through material loss. Even Fisheye tells his lieutenant not to bother him. Bourdieu (1990) suggests that one can enter a native field "only by birth or by a slow process of co-optation and initiation which is an equivalent to a second birth" (p. 68). The destruction of the bike, then, becomes a first step toward Pariag's new birth as an accepted member of the Yard community, for it takes away the very material signifier that was seen as an affront to the logic of the Calvary Hill field. But this recognition comes a bit too late, for the people of the Yard had "recognized him just at that moment when he was drawing away" (Lovelace:155). One could construe from this that a mutually recognizable loss and pain can function as a stepping-stone for someone to enter the invisible boundaries of a native field. Sympathy during the times of loss and pain also smoothens the interclass and interethnic exchanges. Hence, when Dolly gets pregnant Miss Cleothilda "led the line of women to the room in which the young couple lived, and made the greatest fuss over the girl" (p. 163). It is after one of these visits that Miss Cleothilda makes the most

inclusive pronouncements: "All o' we is one. We have the same pains—Indian, Chinese, black, rich, poor. All o' we is one. All of us have to live here on this island" (p. 163).

This pronouncement can also be read as the novel's attempt to posit a specific view of the Trinidadian nation-state. The island nation's two leading ethnic communities cannot just pretend to exist in their own insular fields, relying on their own particular legitimating historical mythologies to exclude the other. The nation is articulated thus through what Ernest Renan (1990) calls a precedence of "having suffered together" (p. 19). In fact, according to Renan (1990): "Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (p. 19). A common accounting of mutual sufferings of various Trinidadian communities should therefore function as a strategy for mobilizing a more inclusive nation, something that Renan calls a "large-scale solidarity" (p. 19). Read with these insights, *The Dragon Can't Dance* becomes an ideal pedagogical tool for teaching and discussing the past, the present, and the future possibilities of the Trinidadian nation.

Lovelace stages this possibility through the final encounter of Aldrick and Pariag. We know that Pariag had moved into the Yard with a universalist view of identity. When his wife Dolly points out the obvious difference, "you don't see that you is Indian and they is Creole," (p. 13) he replies; "They don't know me. They don't know the kind of man I is" (103), which he later reinforces by saying "they is people, girl, and we is people to them, even though they is Creole and we is Indian" (p. 103). This entire exchange rests on the assumption that if the inhabitants of Calvary Hill could know the real him, they would treat him differently. This recognition occurs after his bike is destroyed, but by then it is already too late. The most important aspect of Pariag's negotiation of the Yard is that he had come to the Yard after having abandoned the exclusive views of his own native field. A communication can occur with the inhabitants of the Yard only if they too can reach this liminal space beyond the logic of their own field of existence. Thus, within the

parameters of the narrative progress of the novel this attempt at an interethnic negotiation fails, but is it a total failure? I think that Pariag's interaction with the Yard, though a strategic failure, also signifies certain possibilities of future mutual recognition. This recognition is primarily based on the capacity for both sides to render the logic of their own field transparent in order to create a larger and broader lateral alliance. The final encounter between Pariag and Aldrick can, therefore, be read as a new possibility.

Toward the end of the novel, Lovelace stages this failed encounter for us. Aldrick, while walking by Pariag's shop, hesitates for a moment, as if thinking of coming in. It is in this hesitant gesture that one must place a hope for a future. For Pariag: "What worried him was not that Aldrick had moved on, but that Aldrick had paused... This meant that for a moment at least Aldrick had considered entering it." (p. 220). In this encounter, they both feel a certain hesitance, a certain desire to reach across and relate at a certain level beyond the economy of Calvary Hill. It is probably because the power of the field on both of them has weakened and they have moved away from the very logic of the Calvary Hill. Even though this again is a failed conversation, it does promise some possible change in the future, for the field has altered, for better and for worse, and so must the ones who live in it. For Pariag this change occurred during his last days in the Yard and by recognizing the possibilities of self-actualization present within his very home, from Dolly. Dolly had always been there to give him this gift of self, which he eventually recognizes. So, in a certain way Pariag's path to selfhood finds the very logical path to self-hood, through family and kinship as he looks at Dolly and says "We have to start to live, Dolly, you and me" (p. 226). Aldrick, on the other hand, has just returned home form a stint in jail consequent to a botched attempt at a popular revolution with Fisheye and others. Aldrick, who had already become self-reflexive while living in the Yard by observing how power functioned in the Yard, how Guy got the girls and Miss Cleothilda used her power of exclusion, comes to see his own way of life differently. In one conversation

with Fisheye in the prison library he declares:

> Even with guns in we hand, even with power, we was looking to somebody else to make a decision. . . . Even when we have power, when we have guns. Is like we ain't have no self. I mean, we have a self but the self we have is for somebody else. Is like when we acting we ain't the actor. (p. 202)

So Aldrick has learned that life is more complicated than playing the dragon and that even an individualistic reliance on self alone is caught up in the larger power structures. It is this knowledge of the self, I suggest, that grants him the vision to see beyond the immediate dictates of the Calvary Hill field, and it is in this awareness that one could place the hope for a future communication between him and Pariag. Within the larger context of Trinidadian nation, then, Pariag and Aldrick can only "speak" to each other if they know themselves and have the capacity to see beyond the larger power structures of their own particular fields of existence.

One important aspects of Benedict Anderson's (1993) theorization of the nation as imagined community involves the reading of the nation within a novelistic rendition of reality. What kind of a nation do we encounter in the pages of *The Dragon Can't Dance*? Using the novel as a pedagogical tool, we can go beyond the simple politics of representation and read the novel as an articulation of the major ethnic divide of the Trinidadian nation-state. We must not make the mistake of generalizing Pariag's plight: he is not an emblem of the Indo-Trinidadian minority group, for we know that the Indo-Trinidadians are not really a minority in Trinidad. Pariag stages for us the possibilities of a common future for the two major political communities of Trinidad: the African and the Indo-Trinidadian. What we learn in the process of reading the novel is that any such possibility will depend upon the mutual capacity of both these communities to see beyond the logic of their own particularities by mobilizing more inclusive past mythologies and by imagining a common future.

On the whole it may be quite useful to study the novel within its own context of Carnival Studies, but by studying Pariag's character through class and through his negotiation of the symbolic field of Calvary Hill, the novel becomes a better pedagogical tool to teach cultural difference in a context beyond race and ethnicity. Just as the lack of knowledge of the field of Calvary Hill makes Pariag's negotiation of it a painful experience, so can it happen in the lived experiences of the people in the real world, a world in which tragedies are real, losses just as painful as the ones in the novel, but where we do not have the luxury of resolving human problems through the flourish of a writer's pen.

Hence, read differently Lovelace's novel can take us beyond the politics of representation, and within the context of American studies it can be a great tool in teaching what Robert Young calls the act of looking at the "picture from the other side" (9). Such a reading does not only open new pathways toward teaching cultural and class differences, but it also transforms the text from a site of arrival to a point of departure.

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