

ABSTRACT

Earl Lovelace and the Evolution of Voice in the History of the Novel in
Trinidad and Tobago

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This study assesses the contribution of Earl Lovelace to the evolution of the literary voice in Trinidadian prose fiction. It examines language use, and the worldview it reflects, in the novels of Lovelace's antecedents from 1838 to the early 1960s. His novels are then analyzed against this background. An over-arching issue is the response of writers to the Trinidadian language situation.

The literary voice has traditionally been shaped by the positioning of writers in the colonial hierarchy of race-*cum*-class. In the earliest fiction, the dominant voice is that of the privileged classes. The narrative voice is exclusively Standard English, and the language of the lower classes, though represented in fiction, is largely marginalized and devalued, as are those who speak it. The dominant literary voice is elitist and racist.

By the early 1960s the profile of the Trinidadian writer had changed. Writers originating in the lower classes now made lower-class life the main focus of fiction, and the Creole voice gained enhanced status as an element of the literary voice. Lovelace is of this generation.

More fully than his antecedents or his contemporaries, Lovelace embraces the possibilities of the language situation, and experimentation with voice has been a constant feature of his work. Earl Lovelace has considerably expanded the Trinidadian literary voice. He has advanced the democratization of that voice, and also increased the range of language strategies available to writers of prose fiction in the West Indian language context.

Keywords: Merle Hodge; Earl Lovelace; Trinidadian language, literary history, and voice.