

Earl Lovelace. *A Brief Conversion and Other Stories.* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988) 141 pp., \$7.00 paper.

A gentle beauty pervades these stories. It softens the ironies, dignifies the poverty, and serves as a subtle reminder of the indomitability of the human spirit.

Travey, the narrator of the title story, is a young boy whose mother forces him to attend school with his hair shaved and his shirt buttoned to the top. Travey is mocked by his classmates, but in a moment of profound identification with his father, he realizes that his calling to the intellectual life will require certain sacrifices; not being accepted by his peers is one of them. He stops resisting his mother and seems almost to revel in his unattractive appearance. This worries his mother, who is accustomed to Travey's resistance. When Travey loses sight of his "calling" and fights the school bully, his mother surprises the boy by deciding to let one of Travey's friends cut his hair. In this story, the smallest gestures are filled with emotional significance. Travey wants to tell his mother that he loves her, but he can't: "With us love had always been expressed in language more tender and tough than words."

In the next three stories, the narrator is Santo, an educated Trinidadian who writes for a newspaper in Port of Spain. These three vignettes trace the relationship of Santo and a boyhood friend from Cunaripo, a man named Blues. Blues has not had the benefit of an education, but he is ambitious and has plans to see the world as part of a circus act. He makes it to Port of Spain, but Santo worries that his friend will not survive in the city. The third story, "The Fire Eater's Return," set twenty years after the first in the series, proves Santo's fears have been well founded.

Lovelace's characters are ordinary people in everyday situations, but the way that they deal with life's challenges sets them apart, if only for a moment. In "Call Me 'Miss Ross' For Now," a middle-aged woman acknowledges that fear, not superiority, has kept her from marrying. The main character in "George and the Bicycle Pump" decides that it is better to be robbed than live in a state of paranoia. In these stories, men fight in order to maintain their position in the community; they go to jail rather than make alimony payments; they drink rum and dream about young women who smell like "aloes and leaves and moss"; they learn that omens can be misleading. When Joebell is caught trying to enter the United States with an illegal passport, in "Joebell and America," he debates how he should carry himself as the authorities lead him away in handcuffs:

I think about getting on like an American, but I never see an American lose. I think about making a performance like the British, steady, stiff upper lip like Alec Guinness in *The Bridge over the River Kwai*, but with my hat and my boots and my piece of cigar, that didn't match, so I say I might as well take my losses like a West Indian, like a Trinidadian. I decide to sing.

Like Olive Senior, whose stories capture the rhythm of Jamaican life and speech, Earl Lovelace makes the West Indies the measuring stick for human behavior throughout the world.

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Peter Manuel. *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) x, 287 pp., \$29.95.

This is a wide-ranging, insightful and often fascinating survey of popular ethnic musics of the world. The title is perhaps a bit misleading. By “western” Manuel clearly means modern Northern European and those parts of the Americas most directly influenced by the Anglo-Germanic traditions of Northern Europe. This is certainly a current and popular connotation for the word, and most readers should have no trouble with Manuel’s use of the term in this way. Readers who are used to thinking of “western” as comprising Europe, Africa and the Americas, however, will have to make adjustments. Manuel excludes consideration of “westernized” popular music forms as Greek *rebetika* and Jamaican *reggae* and *ska*.

Manuel begins with a fine introduction in which he discusses popular music as a vehicle for the expression and consolidation of ethnic (and frequently lower-class) groups undergoing rapid urbanization. Depending on particular social-historical-political circumstances, specific pop music styles can become symbolic of emerging ethnic, national or (especially in Africa) pan-ethnic identities.

The dynamics of these styles—their development and patterns of acceptance—make an interesting study of great relevance to students of ethnicity in the modern world. Although popular music styles tend to come from lower classes still in touch with their ethnic roots, they are often rejected at first by the upwardly-mobile members of those same groups in an effort to assimilate and gain acceptance by the dominant society. Only after the styles are “discovered” by an international audience (typically made up of middle-and/or upper-class youth), and thus “legitimized,” do they finally gain the acceptance of the local middle and upper classes. Jamaican reggae and Argentine tango are two good examples of this process. Manuel discusses these and many other examples of the process. It seems a shame that he had to omit “western” styles such as the blues from his analysis as it provides a perfect example of his thesis of development, avoidance, international acceptance and finally, national acceptance. It would have been interesting to compare