13 July 2017

Dear Faye Halpern and and Michael Tavel Clarke,

It is now a year since I responded to your letter concerning my article, “Dots on the Literary Map? Literary Valorizations of Place, the Wealth of Earl Lovelace’s Trinidad, and Geometric Data Analysis.” I expected that I would send back a revised version in the late fall of 2016. However, circumstances made this impossible for me: added to the full teaching load I’ve had these two semesters came the acceleration and complication of our youngest son’s epilepsy. Fortunately, his health problems have abated in the past few months and I’ve put the spring term’s teaching chores behind me. Anyway, I hope you will accept a re-submission at this date.

In this letter, I will briefly point out what changes I have made in response to the recommendations and suggestions made by you and the external reviewers.

First, “the need for more clarity about the payoff of the GDA analysis.” As you noted in your original letter, the two readers were “sharply divided” in their response to the article, and I must confess I doubt that my changes will win over the less enthusiastic reviewer. However, I have taken to heart the suggestion that I compare my analysis to the work of other critics on Lovelace’s use of setting and the readings of this particular short story. This has meant adding a new section, starting with the rhetorical question “Has anything been gained by using this admittedly labor-intensive method for mapping out the structure of spatial relations in Lovelace’s short story?” It comprises four paragraphs in which I consider a number of readings of setting in Lovelace and readings of the story itself (I deal with seven pieces on Lovelace and the story, among them one published in ARIEL). This discussion could easily (and interestingly, I think) have been prolonged but I was worried about the length of the article as a whole. Nevertheless, I think this short section does point out how the GDA adds substantively to what has been said about the short story by other scholars and I expect it will also help the more generous reader of Report1 in her or his puzzling over the exact payoff of using the method. With respect to the larger body of scholarship on Lovelace’s novels, I do have material now that could be brought in which shows that the emphasis on the street in Lovelace scholarship (as a site for Carnival and protest) and the focus on the polarity of the rural and the urban tend to miss the importance of the domestic space in Lovelace’s fiction. But that would mean at least another full page of writing and ideally another graph, so I have not pursued this any further.

Second, “more clarity about the argument of the essay itself.” Going through the article, I’ve tried to find and alter passages that were obscure, but I have to say that this did not result in major changes but only in slight revisions of wording. The reader of Report1 says that the abstraction and the style makes for some difficulty, and I have made some changes of style that I hope will help, but without specific examples I was not sure where the difficulties lay. This reader also says that “Explanations of all key terms and theories are clearly provided” which I gratefully take as tribute to my aim to be clear about the argument. As you note, the difficulty may be quite simply the theoretical and methodological substance of the argument, and that is what I hope readers will find sufficiently interesting to justify their efforts. I have added some additional signposting in the revised article; for example, the first paragraph now ends with this: “In this essay I will argue for the fruitfulness of a structural and formalizing approach to the spatializing impulse that Quayson notes, offering as an example the way a short story by Earl Lovelace takes measure of a small but infinite world.” I have also included a brief discussion of an article from ARIEL that explicitly noted the problematic rendering of Lovelace’s landscapes according to literary conventions (Evelyn O’Callaghan), in the hope that it will help connect my discussion to qualitative literary studies in a helpful way.

Third, the rhetoric of dismissal of other approaches. I think you were quite right to point to this as a weakness. I have reworked the main engagement with close reading in the paragraph that starts “Our aim is to speak about literary place while …”. On the other hand, the self-reflexive critique of the way that literary criticism no differently than other discourses contributes to a constant valorization and re-valorization of particular parts of the social world is a key point I do wish to make. I have included an important footnote early (footnote 2) that will defuse, I hope, the kind of defensiveness that the term “euphemization” may trigger, and I have replaced that term with other terms when they serve the same purpose elsewhere in the text (“translation,” “refraction”). The argument concerning the merits of close reading and related methods could be developed by including a lengthier consideration and endorsement of the deliberate activist interventions against the status quo of place values (which a journal like ARIEL can be identified as making), but I decided that the critical point was the more important one for now. Furthermore, developing that affirmation of activist intervention would add considerably to the essay’s length. As it is, that point is present in the article among the general points made on page four about the struggle over space as a fundamental dimension of postcolonial studies.

Fourthly, the reader of Report2 correctly points out that my argument does not engage with the story by way of historical and political contextualization. That is correct, and could be remedied. But I would prefer not to add the kind of contextualization that I could at present put together, based on secondary sources, such as the work of Funso Aiyejina and the writers contributing to the Schwarz-edited volume. I do take questions of periodization and generational dynamics very seriously but at present I don’t have the means to make an independent contribution to those issues. The larger project I am working on will have the comparative data that will allow for such a contribution. It should be noted that the article as it stands does not make claims that directly call for more historical context than what a reader with general knowledge of Caribbean fiction will supply themselves.

Finally, let me say that whether ARIEL will publish this essay or not, I am very grateful for the comments by the reader in “Report1”: they were generous, insightful and clearly the fruit of careful reading; they must have taken a good deal of that time which is so scarce for all of us. If you would convey my gratitude to this reviewer, I would be much obliged. On the other hand, if this revised essay goes back to the reader responsible for Report2, I doubt I will be given the thumbs-up, and frankly, given the slender substance of his or her previous dismissal, a rejection from that reader will not hit me where I live. But I do hope that this article will find a place in ARIEL. I can see that the traditions I draw on might find more hospitality from journals devoted to narrative theory, for example, but it seems more important to me to reach your readership with this argument. This means, too, that I am quite open to further revision if there are specific flaws that need to be fixed (and I will actually have time for such fixing in the coming six months).