LOCATING THE EUROPEAN CARNIVAL IN THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF BRITAIN*

Britanya'nın Kültürel Tarihinde Avrupa Karnavalının Yerinin Saptanması

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ABSTRACT

This essay aims initially to trace back the European carnival celebrations which emerged out only after the mid-twentieth century within the British culture. A cultural phenomenon that has its roots in the festivals of the pre-Christian times, carnival was a series of rituals associated with the arrival of spring at the time. In time it was adopted and appropriated by Christianity in the western world and it thus spread all around Europe as a religious rite. Carnivals opened up a space for unruliness and excess before the period of fasting and abstinence started for Lent. As opposed to the rest of Europe, in Britain carnival could not be established as a tradition, the reason of which remains ambiguous to this day. In this essay, the potential reasons behind this cultural exclusion are laid out and examined with reference to the views and discussions of other scholars. The particular focus of this essay is the possible relations between carnival and the act of masking as masking constitutes one of the most defining aspects of the carnival. As stripping off one's identity by means of performance is essential to both masks and the carnival, it could be argued that these two omissions in the British culture are somehow related. Besides, it is a fact that there has never been an authentic mask tradition in the history of British theatre. This essay tackles the question: can the lack of carnivals in the cultural history of Britain be connected with the lack of an authentic mask tradition there? In answering this question, examples of masking traditions in theatre from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are discussed particularly with regard to the reception of the audiences and authorities. As masking practices were banned in the social arenas by authorities, they seem to have disappeared in the culture. The final part of the essay provides information about the state of carnivals in contemporary Britain. The curious incident of carnivals eventually finding a place in the British culture of the twentieth century is explained through developments regarding immigration, racism and multiculturalism.

Key Words

Carnival, mask, British culture, performance, theatre.

ÖZ

Bu makale öncelikle Britanya kültüründe ancak yirminci yüzyılın ortalarından sonra ortaya çıkan Avrupa karnaval kutlamalarının izini sürmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kökenleri Hristiyanlık öncesi çağdaki festivallere dayanan kültürel bir olgu olan karnaval o zamanlarda baharın gelişiyle ilişkilendirilen bir dizi ritüelden ibaretti. Zamanla Batı dünyasında Hristiyanlık, karnavalı benimseyip kendine mal etmiş, böylece karnaval tüm Avrupa'ya dini bir tören olarak yayılmıştır. Karnavallar, Büyük Perhiz için oruç ve perhiz dönemi başlamadan önce bir kontrolsüzlük ve aşırılık alanı yaratma görevi görmüşlerdir. Ancak diğer Avrupa ülkelerinin tersine, Britanya'da karnaval bir gelenek olarak tesis edilememiştir ve bunun sebebi günümüze değin belirsiz kalmıştır. Bu makalede, karnavalın kültürün dışarısında bırakılmış olmasının ardındaki potansiyel sebepler ortaya koyulup diğer araştırmacıların görüş ve tartışmaları ışığında incelenmektedir. Makalenin özel olarak odaklandığı nokta karnaval ile maskeleme edimi arasındaki olası ilişkilerdir çünkü maske takma karnavalın en tanımlayıcı özelliklerinden biridir. Bir kimsenin kimliğinden performans yoluyla sıyrılması hem maskelerin hem de karnavalın temelinde yer aldığından Britanya kültüründeki bu iki eksikliğin bir şekilde bağlantılı olduğu tartışılabilir. Bunun yanı sıra, Britanya tiyatro tarihinde hiçbir zaman otantik bir maske geleneği olmadığı bir gerçektir. Bu makale, Britanya'nın kültürel tarihinde karnavalların olmayışı otantik bir maske geleneğinin eksikliği ile bağlantılı olabilir mi sorusunu ele almaktadır. Bu soruyu cevaplarken Orta Çağ ve Rönesans'ta tiyatroda maske geleneklerinin örnekleri, özellikle seyirci ve otoritelerin tutumu üzerinden tartışılmaktadır. Zaman içerisinde maske pratikleri toplumsal arenada otoritelerce yasaklandığından kültür içerisinde de kaybolmuş gibi gözükmektedir. Bu makalenin son bölümü günümüz Britanya'sında karnavalların durumu hakkında bilgi vermektedir. Karnavalın sonunda yirminci yüzyıl Britanya kültüründe kendisine yer bulması zamanın göçmenlik, ırkçılık ve çokkültürlülük ile ilgili gelişmeleri çerçevesinde açıklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Karnaval, maske, Britanya kültürü, performans, tiyatro.

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Introduction

One remarkable cultural contribution of the upsurge of West Indians' immigration to Britain[1] from the late 1940s onwards can be observed today in the streets of Britain in the form of carnival celebrations. All around the island, in cities and districts ranging from Notting Hill and Hackney to Birmingham, Leeds, and Cardiff, carnivals are organised as a product of collective effort following a long period of preparation. In today's Britain, carnivals are annually enjoyed by huge crowds, sometimes drawing in as many as two million visitors. It is a well-known fact, however, that the phenomenon of carnival failed to integrate into the British customs back in the Middle Ages when it was widespread all around Europe. Taking as its point of departure this lack of carnivals in Medieval Britain, this essay concerns itself with inquiring the possible reasons behind this fact while also problematising and elaborating on the perspectives offered by other scholars on the issue. In doing so, this study aims not only to present a portrayal of the carnival within the historical context of Britain but also to speculate on the conspicuous absence of carnivals from the cultural history of Britain. This essay also lays especial importance on the possible relations between masks and carnivals, suggesting that the lack of an authentic mask tradition in the history of British theatre could, at least, partly account for the lack of carnivals from medieval times onwards in Britain.

Carnival: Definition and Implications

The word, carnival, derives from the Latin *carnelevare*: *carne* meaning flesh and *levare* meaning to lift or to lighten, thus roughly translating into English as putting away meat (Hunter 1882: 72). This original Latin meaning has come to be interpreted in two different ways: either giving up meat for the Lenten[2] fast, or abstinence from pleasurable flesh-related acts (i.e. eating and sexual intercourse). The origins of carnival date back to pre-Christian times, more specifically to ancient Roman festivals of Saturnalia, Lupercalia and Bacchanalia (Shafto 2009: 3-5) which were dedicated to the Roman gods Saturn, Lupercus and Bacchae respectively.[3] However, carnival is acknowledged today generally through its Christian significance because "[t]he Christian Church, aware of how incorporating elements of the old pagan religions into its own ritual would consolidate its position, adopted some of the celebratory spirit of these feasts into its own liturgical festivals" (Williams 2000: 5). Over time, the original purpose of the carnival, which was welcoming the arrival of spring, was appropriated by Christianity to consumption of food for the last time before fasting for Lent starts.

As the final turn before a time of restrictions and worship, it is not surprising that carnivals comprise activities that move beyond the boundaries of 'normal' whereby those involved experiment within a space and time of excesses. Encouraging intemperance, the 'one last time' mentality behind the carnival disregards any system of rules. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), Mikhail Bakhtin points towards this defining transgressive nature of carnivals by underlining the suspension of the 'noncarnival':

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it–that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people (Bakhtin 1984: 122-123).

Perhaps the most notable element defining the carnival is that it facilitates an atypical and truly refreshing level of contact among participants, surpassing any form of restriction or obligation. By opening up a temporary free zone devoid of all parameters of social codes and manners, the carnival invites freshness and originality in communicating with the world around us. Subversion is a key strategy in unearthing this (lack of) ethics found in carnival:

Carnival is not contemplated and, strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a carnivalistic life. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent "life turned inside out," "the reverse side of the world" ("monde à l'envers") (Bakhtin 1984: 122).

Bakhtin here observes that carnival is not an exercise that allows space for careful consideration or planning; nor can it be considered as a type of performance insofar as it duplicates as life. Such reasoning brings to mind issues regarding the real and the copy because even if carnival may be accepted as life on another level, the parameters leading to this definition are still determined by what life is or is not. It is possible to suggest that the carnival is a copy of life in which the focus shifts towards the 'other' side, challenging the constructs of reality. As it calls for a different set of relations among the people involved, it violates – though temporarily – the existing (real) identities in exchange for new ones (copies). As the copy surpasses the real by replacing it, the carnival turns into a profoundly disruptive process that has the fearsome capacity to uncover the latent individual potentials. That is the main reason why authorities have usually discerned a danger lurking behind the unruly structure of carnivals and ended up imposing bans on them.

Carnivals, Masks and the British Society

In the medieval period, as a result of the exchange of ideas and practices among European countries mainly through trade but also through wars, conquests, colonisation, and learning, England shared a 'continental connection', in its dramatic activities among others, with the rest of Europe, which demonstrated itself in similar staging conventions and customs in the preparation of the plays (Johnston 1997: 7-24). However, the country also kept itself relatively insulated from the frenzy of European carnivals in which masks – particularly those with long noses suggestive of the phallus and thus the sexual significance of the occasion – are known to have been worn in order to obscure the facial features of the performers.[4] The scarcity of data from medieval England makes it impossible to discuss the reason behind this rather curious exclusion with any confidence while speculations have proliferated.

The lack of carnivals in the distant cultural history of Britain may, perhaps, be connected with another significant omission in this country: there has never been an authentic mask tradition in the history of British theatre. Considering the fact that stripping off one's identity through performativity lies at the very heart of both masks and the carnivals, it could be argued that these two omissions are somehow related. "The lack of a masked theatre tradition in England," write John Rudlin and Olly Crick, "means that most audiences do not have any inherent cultural information as to how to watch masks" (2001: 77). On the one hand, this observation about a lack of cultural legacy regarding masks may seem slightly problematic since the cultural history of England is otherwise replete with mask activities mainly in the form of festivities, tournaments, disguisings and mummings – all performative in essence. On the other hand, it stands out as a rather curious exclusion that a culture with such a strong theatrical background as England should not

have an authentic mask tradition used in performance; even during the Elizabethan Period, which is known as the golden age of drama in England, masks were only scarcely used in performance.

In England, the earliest use of masks in service of theatre dates back to the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages, a practice followed later in a completely different fashion in the court masques of the Tudor and Stuart periods. Our knowledge on the use of masks in English mystery plays is limited as the only source of information is the Guild records. The common belief, however, is that masks were used in representing the other-worldly beings such as God, Satan, and the angels as well as to allow men to impersonate women (Beadle and King 1999: xxiv-xxv). In these plays, spectacle was the most important element in attracting the attention of the public; therefore, masks had to be fairly sophisticated and intricate. Very different from these masks used in the medieval plays, the masks of the court masques were merely ornamental and were mainly used to endow a quality of mystery as well as elegance to these hybrid shows which brought together music, dance and performance.

The purpose of donning masks in these two types of performance must be contemplated in order to develop a better understanding of the general cultural response to the use of masks at the time. In mystery and morality plays, masks largely served a religious function as they enabled the impersonation of the other-worldly beings, thus reaffirming their existence and by extension the Christian doctrine through performance. It is not surprising then that no loud opinions were voiced by authorities against the use of masks in these popular plays. The case of the masques was different from that of the medieval plays in that these shows were designed to appeal to the courtiers' taste in entertainment. It can be concluded then that since masques were not shows presented to the public, they did not pose a risk against the maintenance of public morals.

The case with the carnivals would certainly be different from the two types of mask-based performance examined above. Most of the time, the participants of the carnivals were comprised of the common public who eagerly aimed to disrupt the existing hierarchies and order, albeit temporarily. That the carnivals, and along with them the practice of masking to uphold the subversive carnival spirit, failed to fully integrate into the cultural scene of England as opposed to the rest of the continent is clearly expressed in the words of the Renaissance scholar Polydore Vergil:

Among all the parts of the world, only England has not seen such masked beasts, nor does it want to, because among the English (who more than others are truly wise in this matter) there is capital punishment, that is the death penalty, for anyone who wears these masks (cited in Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 78).

While the reasons behind England's isolation from the European carnival tradition remain ambivalent to this day, Vergil's words alert us to the threat masking practice posed at the end of the fifteenth century. Writing in the eighteenth century, George Blewitt refuted Vergil on account of mistaking "the Puniſhment, which was not Capital by that Act (nor indeed by any Law whatever) but only three Months Impriſonment, and a Fine at the Diſcretion of the Juſtices." (1725: 151). Emphasising that Vergil's claim was ungrounded, Blewitt's words give a truthful account of the extent to which mask-wearers in England were held accountable for putting on a mask at the time; nevertheless, Vergil's misinformation is still not completely without value in that it gives us an idea about how the other European nations might have seen England in its disregard for carnivals.

In fact, Vergil seems to be misguided on more than one aspect: first, and foremost, masks had actually been worn in England, not during the carnival season which typically

starts before Lent (Shrovedite) but on occasions ranging from mystery plays to mummers' plays during which masked performers danced or visited houses in their neighbourhood challenging the occupants to a game of dice. Therefore, it is more reasonable to infer that, instead of all types of masking activities, Vergil was referring particularly to the carnival masks when he made the above note about masquerading in England. However, even within the confines of this conclusion, he seems to be incorrect in that England was surely not the only country in Europe, let alone the world as he offhandedly puts it, where the Carnival was virtually absent at the time. It is known that the carnival was

at its weakest in the north, in Britain and Scandinavia, probably because the weather discouraged an elaborate street festival at this time of year. Where Carnival was weak, and even in some places where it was lively, other festivals performed its functions and shared its characteristics. (Burke 1978: 191-192).

The adverse weather conditions in the north of the continent may at least partly account for the unsuitability of a street procession which has been a landmark of carnivals. Considering carnivals are documented from the medieval Germany and The Netherlands, two countries from around the same parallel zone as Britain, it should be clear that weather conditions cannot wholly explain the lack of carnivals in medieval England. Perhaps added to the adversity of weather conditions in Britain was the relative isolated status of the island from the continental Europe.

Another possible reason, which should be considered with regard to masquerading and its potential to defy and disrupt, is that the "[c]arnival… offers an environment of general public licence which seems more abandoned and anarchic in expression than anything recorded in Britain" (Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 84). So, the level of unruliness in the carnival was perhaps deemed far too unmanageable by the authorities in England, and since masks were a defining feature of the carnivals, they came to be regarded in the same way too. Nevertheless, it is not entirely reasonable to explain the sense of distrust caused by masks at the time solely on the basis of the carnival and its divergent customs. Besides, there is solid data in the form of the records of masking for mummings in a few chronicles from the medieval London which also testify to the way masks were conceived as falsifying and disruptive to the natural order of things such as when a group of the supporters of Richard II allegedly defied kingship in attempting to assassinate Henry IV in 1400 during a Christmas mummer (Nicolas and Tyrell 1827: 86; Capgrave 1858: 275). To be able to understand the sense of alarm caused by masquerading one needs only to consider the numerous civic proclamations against the use of masks in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England (Lancashire 1984: 174-177) and the 1511 Act of Parliament which dictated that persons who "have disgysed and appareld theym, and covert theyr fayces with Vysours and other thynge in such manner that they sholde nott be knowen" would be seen as "Suspectes or Vacabundes'" (Footnote 1 in Chambers 1996: 396). The official response to masks indicates that once people masked themselves and went out in the streets, a threatening sense of malice was conceived at least by the authorities, but the playful mystery brought on by masked persons performing dances or playing games with their friends or acquaintances during a mummers' play in the confines of their hosts' houses was a welcome thrill in medieval England.

In England, the European carnival may have never been an established performative tradition but, as Burke observes above, there were other festivals that compensated for this absence. The carnival spirit assumed, for example, the form of groups of local villagers visiting one house after another in masks and festive costumes performing mummers' plays as a part of the Twelve Days of Christmas celebrations. Another such festivity

wherein masquerading was an essential element was the Feast of Fools, celebrated originally in France on the day of the Circumcision (1 January) beginning from the twelfth century. It was later adopted in the Low Countries and England. On this feast day, subdeacons (and other low-ranking clergymen as well as choirboys) put on masks, and engaging in a dramatic reversal of their actual roles within the Church, assumed powerful clerical positions. Based on these masking practices in the Church, which was the single most domineering power in the medieval period, we could accept that the Carnival spirit was more or less alive in England although it is hard to suggest that the European carnivals along with their defining mask practice took real hold there. In fact, even the Feast of Fools remained a somewhat perfunctory enterprise insofar as it could never fully take on the secular quality it assumed elsewhere:

There is little evidence that in England the riotous masquerading in church overspilled into the town and became a secular event, as it seems to have done in France and the Low Countries; but one or two wisps of information suggest that it was not solely clerical (Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 43).

In any case, by the mid-seventeenth century a series of Parliamentary ordinances put an end to all traditional festivals in England. Puritans had long complained about the unruly behaviours encouraged during the religious festivals such as the Twelve Days of Christmas. The English Puritan pamphleteer John Stubbes, for example, wrote the following lines about this festival as early as 1583: "more mischief is that time committed than in all the year besides; what masking and mumming, whereby robbery, whoredom, murder and what not is committed?" (cited in Thomas 2019: 66). When Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan followers established the Commonwealth, they were finally in a position to ban the festivals. In 1647, the British Parliament ruled that "the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and all other festival days commonly called Holy-days, be no longer observed within this kingdom of England" (Bowler 2017: 32). This, however, "does not mean that the old customs vanished altogether. They simply went underground." (Marcus 1989: 21). As these customs turned into a clandestine enterprise, there is not much information about them that suggests any development about masquerading in England.

Historical evidence suggests that masks had a highly alarming effect on the local authorities in England who considered them to be false and fraudulent. These authorities usually ended up imposing a ban on public masking by publishing proclamations. However, there is also clear evidence of other festivals and masking customs despite the official censure. England's rather uneasy status with regard to the carnival (and masks) could be explicated with the disorderly nature of the event, the prevailing sense of folly, and the reversal of order having been deemed too threatening or superfluous by the authorities.

As opposed to the sense of threat felt by the authorities against carnivals, they actually provided an outlet for the tensions among common people and their potentially aggressive feelings, allowing local authorities "to control and monitor emotions and disruptive forces among the town population throughout the rest of the year" (Nijsten 1997: 129). In that respect, the carnivalesque release of tension by the participants' testing of their limits operating out of accepted norms must have been a welcome custom for the other European countries as it probably averted a much bigger risk in the long run. However, that surely was not the only function of the carnival. While officials may have viewed it as a means of warding off bigger evils, it may be put into good use by the participants. Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that

[R]ather than being a mere 'safety valve,' deflecting attention from social reality, festive life can on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community (even guarantee its survival), and on the other hand, criticize political order (1975: 97).

It would be understandable if this potential for targeting, if not dissolving, the governmental rule was noted by the authorities and thus brought about the self-imposed exclusion of England from the continental Europe's scene of carnival. After all, public masking was prohibited a number of times in England which testifies to the authorities' fear of public shows and gatherings. With that aside, what is actually remarkable in Davis's observations above is that the carnival also serves the function of strengthening communal bonds. She suggests that the carnival has an extremely constructive role in terms of bringing together different social groups, and when the contemporary carnival scene in Britain is taken into account, this function of the carnival seems to surface over the others.

Emergence of Carnivals in Britain

Unlike their medieval prototypes in Europe, the modern-day carnivals in Britain are devoid of a religious agenda. However, as John A. Walker observes, "[r]esidues from several past epochs co-exist in the carnival" (1984: 32); that is why they are hinged upon the same performative principles such as long processions, music, ecstatic dancing, and exaggerated or grotesque figures accompanied with consumption of food and drinks. The flamboyant masks and costumes used for the parade are diligently designed by experts, months before the carnival as the parade remains to be the chief attraction of these festive events. Carnivals are rather boisterous and jubilant occasions during which people from various cultural backgrounds could intermingle and enjoy the feeling of being surrounded by numerous spectacles.

In a little more than fifty years' time, carnivals have already become landmarks in today's Britain with the buoyant atmosphere they offer and the sense of loosening of social norms and structures they immediately impose. But how did the carnival become a part of the British culture today? It actually took a long and arduous route for the carnival to find itself a place in the British culture: it had to travel as far as the Caribbean Islands first. It is known that the European slave traders – mainly the French and Spanish – took the European carnival tradition to the Caribbean Islands (Tompsett 2005: 43). After slavery was abolished in 1834 in the islands which were colonies of the British Empire at the time (hence the name, British West Indies), all the inhabitants of the islands, who were free slaves as well as the Spanish and British settlers, began to participate in the carnival celebrations, thereby granting them a somewhat multicultural hue (Tompsett 2005: 43). Years later, when Britain invited immigrants due to a severe shortage of labour after World War II, the West Indians, quite expectedly, took with them a baggage full of their cultural practices and traditions, one of which was what has come to be known as the Caribbean carnival. The long journey of the carnival from Europe to the Caribbean Islands through slave trade and then to Britain has erased off the religious origins of these festivals, marking them as secular merry-making events.

Contrary to the joyful mood of these carnivals though, the origins of the Notting Hill Carnival—the earliest carnival in Britain—are immersed in a story of racism. During World War II, thousands of black soldiers from the British colonies were recruited to assist the country in war and thousands more were brought in to work mainly in the munitions industry. After the war, most of these black soldiers and workers went back to their countries but "on discovering the depressed state of the economies there, a significant number decided to go back to Britain where post-war reconstruction enhanced the

prospect of finding employment" (James 2004: 368-369). Arriving at the island in ships from 1947 onwards, the black migrants did not find a hearty welcome in Britain. Both the Labour (1945-1951) and Conservative (1951-1963) governments of those times were far from eager in receiving large numbers of these British subjects – a result of an attitude of "racial supremacy fostered by centuries of imperial power" (Dawson 2007: 9) as well as eugenics and the claims of such theorists as Robert Knox who proposed the idea that different human races belonged to distinct species.

Due to cultural differences combined with the Britons' belief in their racial supremacy and the racist ideologies at the time, social intermingling of black people and the white people of Britain presented certain problems. In his article "Notting Hill Carnival-The Untold Story", Ishmahil Blagrove Jr. informs his readers about the post-war social and historical background to the West Indians' living conditions:

The desperate labour shortage at the end of the Second World War invited mass immigration to the UK. West Indians arrived in droves, joining the ranks of working-class Britons, Jews, Irish, Greeks and Spaniards in the cramped tenements of Notting Hill. By the late 1950s, Notting Hill and Brixton had the most concentrated population of West Indians in the country (2014: 40).

The number of West Indian immigrants in those neighbourhoods as well as their life styles, which differed wildly from those of the white working-class citizens living in the same area, produced sour feelings in the community, eventually stirring racist attacks against them. Perhaps the anti-immigration sentiment and the hateful attitude against the black community were most openly disclosed through the scandalously racist slogan of the era, "Keep Britain White", which was fervently supported by far-right organisations like the White Defence League.

Against that wave of racism, "Claudia Jones, a Brixton-based Trinidadian political activist and editor of the first black weekly newspaper in Britain, the West Indian Gazette, presented the idea of holding a Caribbean carnival to build unity among people by showcasing Caribbean arts and culture" (Blagrove Jr. 2014: 40). Although this carnival that has come to be known as the Notting Hill Carnival was officially organised for the first time in 1966, its roots are placed in the Caribbean carnival organised by Jones in 1959 as a response to the Notting Hill Race Riots the year before.[5] What started as an attempt to build a bridge between the Caribbean community and the British has, thus, singlehandedly paved the way for the carnivals celebrated by diverse cultures that live in Britain today. Moreover, "[e]ver since the 1980s," writes Winston James, "far more white than black people revel in the Notting Hill Carnival" (2004: 384). The carnival was clearly instrumental in bringing together these two communities by opening up a space of interaction for both.

Conclusion

During the carnival celebrations in Britain today, a variety of masks are widely used as a part of the glamorous costumes worn by the participators. It is indeed not possible to imagine a carnival without the use of masks, which may, as proposed by this essay, be one of the reasons behind the cultural insulation of England from Continental Europe during the carnival season. The sense of alarm caused by masks was surely an outcome of fear because authorities were concerned about citizens attempting to conceal their real identities with the help of masks. It is known that masks were prohibited in the public domain and so were the carnivals. The lack of carnival in the cultural history of Britain before the mid-twentieth century could then be associated with the fact that a country

with such a strong theatrical background as Britain has never had an authentic mask practice on its stage. The strength of British theatre, especially during its golden age, was partly due to the diversity of influences which seem to have integrated into its culture.[6] In fact, it was precisely this kind of diversity that managed to insert the carnival back into the British culture, albeit as late as the 1950s.

The development of carnivals in the cultural history of Britain has taken a relatively curious course, which is imbued with such contradictory attitudes as fear of social disorder, censorship, racism and embracing multiculturalism. While the carnival is suitably rooted in Europe, it seems Britain was hesitant along the way in adopting that tradition; it took a long time for it to become a part of cultural life. When West Indians migrated to Britain in the post-war years challenging the nation's dominant white supremacist ideology, they encountered racial assaults there. However, if anything as horrible as racism has ever had a positive outcome, it must be the flourishing of the carnival in the British cultural sphere after centuries of struggles.

NOTES
1. It will be noted that while referring to the geographical area known as Britain or even more correctly as the United Kingdom today, this essay sometimes uses the name, England because the country has come to include the other constituent countries within a historical process and only after that it became Britain.
2. A time of sacrifice, Lent is the period in the Christian calendar that covers the forty days preceding Easter. During Lent, Christians either fast or stop consuming particular products they are especially fond of. For further information, see Blackwell, 2009: 4-23.
3. It is possible to trace further back the roots of the carnival into pagan rituals and then to the ancient Greek festival of Great Dionysia during which a series of festive activities such as drinking, singing and theatrical performances took place in order to honour Dionysus. This tradition was then adopted by the Romans in the form of Bacchanalia which started as a three-day festival in early spring celebrated by women and involved drinking wine, singing, dancing, masks and a procession. Bacchanalia gradually turned into a more frequent gathering in which men also participated. In 186 BCE the Roman Senate prohibited these festivals altogether as they had then become a threat for the social order. Saturnalia was also an event marked by eating, drinking and game-playing as well as inversion rituals such as slaves enjoying their freedom for a day. Likewise, Lupercalia was an occasion of merry-making and loosening of control. These festivals were adapted by the Roman Catholic Church in its early days. As the festivals had already been enjoyed by the crowds, the Church utilised them to convert the locals into Christian belief. Twelve Days of Christmas, for instance, involved excessive eating and drinking as well as games and inversion rituals. For further information, see Shafto, 2009: 3-7; Grafton, Most and Settis, 2010: 116.
4. Despite popular belief, it is suggested in contemporary records that there may have been at least two attempts at street festivities in the manner of carnivals in England, one in the fifteenth and the other in the sixteenth century. For a discussion of these performances, see Twycross and Carpenter, 2002: 78-81.
5. For further information on this carnival, see James, 2004: 381.
6. The influence of both Ancient Roman and Italian literatures, for example, was crucial in shaping the literature of the Elizabethan Period.

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