

The Complexities of Carnival Identities in Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*

Earl Lovelace'in *The Dragon Can't Dance* Adlı Eserinde Karnaval Kimlik Sorunsalları

Ann Marie Simmonds
American University in Dubai, UAE

Abstract

If one were to identify three elements of Caribbean society that are integral to the region's identity, they would be creole, calypso, and carnival. All three are interrelated but it is the latter, Carnival, that has shone a spotlight on the Caribbean and its people, through its adoption and reimagination in wider international spaces. In this paper, I look at Earl Lovelace's landmark novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, and discuss the way in which the three principal Afro-Trinidadian male characters construct their identity through the medium of Carnival. With changes to Carnival, these characters struggle to define themselves in relationship to a society and festival that is in flux. The novel is a detailed look at the way in which disenfranchised men seek to gain power through performance. It is also a reminder that today, as in 1979 when the novel was first published, the issue of identity and what it means to be Trinidadian, Caribbean and male is something the region continues to grapple with.

Keywords: Carnival, identity, masculinity, Trinidad, performance.

Öz

Karayıplerin bölgesel kimliğine esas olan üç özelliğini belirleyecek olsak, bunlar kreole, kalipso ve karnaval olacaktır. Her üç kavram da birbirleriyle bağlantılıdır fakat özellikle Karnaval, daha geniş mekânlarda uyarlanabilmesi ve yeniden tasarlanabilmesiyle Karayıplara ve halkına ışık tutan kavramdır. Bu metinde, Earl Lovelace'in önemli romanlarından *The Dragon Can't Dance* incelenerek üç ana Afro-Trinidadlı erkek karakterin nasıl Karnaval aracılığıyla kendi kimliklerini yeniden inşa ettikleri ele alınmıştır. Karnavalda değişiklikler yaparak, bu karakterler, değişken olan festival ve toplumla ilişki içerisinde olan kendi kimliklerini belirleme mücadelesi içerisindeyler. Roman hakları gasp edilmiş erkeklerin nasıl performans aracılığıyla güç kazanmaya çalıştıklarını detaylı bir şekilde anlatır. Aynı zamanda, kimlik edinim probleminin ve Trinidadlı veya Karayıplı bir erkek olmanın ne anlama geldiğinin, romanın ilk yayınlandığı 1979 yılında olduğu gibi bugün de bölgenin boğuşmakta olduğu problemlerden olduğunu hatırlatır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kimlik, karnaval, maskülenlik, Trinidad, performans.

Introduction

Etymologically, the word "Carnival" derives from Italian *carnavale* and Latin *canelevare*, meaning the removal of meat. With its origins in medieval Europe, Carnival was a festival of abandonment that included unlimited eating and

drinking as well as a rejection of societal codes of conduct. Marked by excessiveness, Carnival allowed diverse peoples to interact and to create an alternative way of life. The mood was one of celebration and laughter; social hierarchies were overturned as voices and bodies usually rendered silent and invisible took center stage. Dabydeen describes the carnival in 18th century England as constituting “an atmosphere of drunken merriment, vulgarity and violence” (40). He also notes that it was mostly the laboring classes who participated in Carnival, which they viewed as a release from toil and a way to subvert societal structures that had placed them at the bottom of the societal ladder. Therefore, if only symbolically and temporarily, Carnival, from its inception, was a site of resistance for the dispossessed and disenfranchised.

The arrival of European, specifically French, colonists in the 16th century marked the beginning of a Caribbean Carnival. In the New World as in Europe, Carnival festivities were an important part of the social fabric. However, within the context of a plantocracy, Carnival’s symbolism differed greatly depending on one’s status. “Carnival for whites was fun and frolic; for Africans, it was religion and the celebration of freedom” (Liverpool 36). Unlike the Medieval Carnival with its attempt at a temporary egalitarianism, the Caribbean Carnival starkly reinforced social and racial stratification and highlighted key differences between groups. European settlers used Carnival to satirize the Africans’ dress and mannerisms. In turn, the Africans ridiculed the elites’ dress, actions and dance. Caribbean Carnival therefore has always existed against a backdrop of societal, specifically socioeconomic and racial, tensions. This paper examines the relationship between Carnival and Caribbean masculine identity in Earl Lovelace’s novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, a seminal work described by some as the quintessential Carnival novel.

Historicizing and Theorizing Carnival

The Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, saw the carnivals of Medieval Europe as a mechanism for inverting and subverting the political, legal and ideological authority of both church and state. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin theorized that Carnival was a sort of revival/renewal in which everyone could participate as they “built a second world and a second life outside officialdom ... in which they lived during a given time of the year” (7). There was a suspension of hierarchal rank, privileges and norms, with everyone seen as equal which meant that during carnival, the laws of carnival’s own freedom became applicable instead of the restraints or conformities of everyday life (10). Carnival created an alternative social space that was characterized by freedom and equality. In the Bakhtinian understanding of Carnival, an upside-down world was created, in which those at the bottom were liberated from the fear of imposed rules.

If one looks at contemporary Caribbean Carnival celebrations, the principal tenets of Bakhtin’s Carnival remain applicable. Class distinctions are suspended as people celebrate and dance together at the myriad events held throughout the Carnival season. Through costuming and masking, Carnival participants can gender bend and assume roles that are antithetical to a pervasive binary performance of sexuality. In this way, participants create the “second world”

Bakhtin refers to. And since Carnival behavior is primarily unpoliced, there is a freedom in dress and expression absent from everyday life. Carnival was and is a response to challenge power. Danow provides an apt description of Carnival as “an established period in time when certain cultures engage in a spirited celebration of a world in travesty” (3). Modern day reiterations of Bakhtin’s Carnival can also be seen in the Gay Pride Parade or the 2008 Pute Pride Parade in Paris, where prostitutes demanded that their profession and human rights be recognized. Such collective and visible responses support Hall’s claim that in Carnival, not only does “the low invade the high” but that there is a revelation of “the interdependency of the low on the high and vice versa, the inextricably mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life” (8).

However, Richard Schechner’s reminder that “Bakhtin’s model of Carnival was developed in terms of the medieval European practices as Bakhtin reconfigured them while living in the dangerous totalitarian world of Stalinism” highlights the need to go beyond Bakhtin’s theory (3). Caribbean, and specifically, Trinidad Carnival, developed under very different historical circumstances:

All the evidence supports the view that Trinidad Carnival originated with the Africans who were enslaved on the sugar plantations of the island; that the majority of customs associated with the festival are African in form and function . . . and that the Carnival festival, as developed and practiced in Trinidad over the years, is to a large extent – to use the words of Father Cothonay – ‘remembrances of African life’ (Liverpool 36-37).

The Carnival that would subsequently spread throughout much of the Anglophone Caribbean – was essentially African, a marked distinction from the European Carnival. Another distinction that must be made between Bakhtin’s Carnival and the Caribbean Carnival relates to the issue of control. From its inception, Trinidad Carnival was never truly free. Before Emancipation, Blacks were not allowed to join in the Carnivals with Whites but given their separate celebratory space. Ironically, from time to time, the white slave owners would join them in dancing, but this could not be initiated by Blacks. Post Emancipation, a law was passed that restricted the Carnival celebrations to two days instead of the three days previously allotted. Black female bodies were “under surveillance” by the authorities since it was thought they violated the rules of etiquette governing how women behaved in public spaces. Even Carnival music did not escape censorship. Hebdige speaks about a proposal that song lyrics be submitted to the police for prior approval (40). Caribbean Carnival therefore remained highly monitored and controlled well into the late twentieth century.

Bakhtin’s theory also ignored the temporality of Carnival. Although to some extent liberating and countercultural, Carnival is ultimately a system that sustains the dominant ideology. Its liminality or transitional nature means that although it inverts the preexisting social order, its end signals a return to that order. Carnival is therefore a sort of release valve, existing in a weird middle ground between licentiousness and holiness, excess and abstinence. On the other hand, scholars such as Schechner and Rohlehr argue that Carnival’s marginalization has now morphed into broader mainstream acceptance. Writing in the late 1970s when many Caribbean islands had either achieved or were on the road to independence, Manning noted that Carnival was advertised in the travel literature as “a baroque,

garish extravaganza" (198). Decades later, Carnival is even more commercialized, providing a major source of income for Trinidad and much of the Caribbean. Thus, while the festivities themselves are limited to a set period, Carnival itself is a pervasive part of Caribbean culture. With its "authorized transgression of norms," Hutcheon notes that Carnival, in order to invert norms must also recognize them (99). It is this recognition that has led to an uneasy but necessary truce between Caribbean Carnival and its naysayers.

A crucial component of Carnival for Bakhtin is "grotesque realism". The body is presented "not in a private, egoistic form...but as something universal, representing all the people" (10). He goes on to state that within the context of Carnival, "all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" (10). Physicality is central to Carnival as bodies are in constant motion and in touch with each other, regardless of social standing. This grotesque physicality has the potential to incite societal and political change. But here too another question is raised regarding Bakhtin's Carnival, that is, its revolutionary nature. As noted by scholars such as Umberto Eco, much of Carnival is based on the parody of rules and rituals. However, since these rules are already recognized and accepted as part of the social fabric in the first place, they lend themselves to parody. One of the prerequisites of a good Carnival therefore is "that the law must be so pervasively and profoundly interjected as to be overwhelmingly present at the moment of its violation (Eco 6). Thus, while Carnival is representative of unruliness, it is a state sanctioned and authorized unruliness, out of which the possibility of permanent social transformation seems unlikely.

Evidently, a wholesale application of Bakhtin's theory of Carnival to contemporary Carnival, and specifically Caribbean Carnival, is not only impossible but highly problematic. The dynamics that are at play within the ritual of the Caribbean Carnival have very distinct subtexts from those theorized by Bakhtin. But his theory cannot be wholly dismissed since, as previously noted, both European and Caribbean Carnival challenged hegemonic dynamics of power. In the same way that the lower classes were full participants in the medieval Carnival, transplanted Africans were pivotal in the evolution of Trinidad and Caribbean Carnival. Thus, while scholars such as Puri view Carnival as a culture of resistance and others such as Burton argue for a culture of opposition rather than resistance, a general consensus exists that both Bakhtinian and contemporary Carnival have not only been subversive, but also transformative.

Today, Carnival is celebrated across the Anglophone Caribbean as well as in cities such as Notting Hill, Toronto, Brooklyn, Miami, and Leeds where populations of Caribbean immigrants reside. Though each is distinctive in ways that reflect the local culture, they are fashioned in some way after the Trinidad Carnival. The scholarly work and documentation concerning early Carnival celebrations in the Caribbean point to Trinidad as the origin of both the festival and the musical genres of calypso and soca, i.e. Carnival music. It is therefore impossible to discuss Carnival without Trinidad, and no Caribbean author has focused more on the social function of Trinidad Carnival than Earl Lovelace.

Carnival and Masculine Identities in the Dragon Can't Dance

Born in 1935 in Toco, Trinidad, Earl Lovelace's first novel *While Gods are Falling*, was hailed by C.L.R James as a new type of writer with a new type of prose. His fiction has always been deeply embedded in Trinidadian society, and having lived all his life on the island, minus time spent studying in the United States, his perspective is that of one who has seen the island's and the region's transformation from within. He therefore offers a literary insight different from Caribbean writers such as Derek Walcott, who penned their works about the Caribbean while living outside the region. Another hallmark of Lovelace's work is its positioning among the lives of ordinary people in Trinidad. Whether he is focusing on the influence of the Baptist Church in a rural village as in his novel *The Wine of Astonishment*, or the effects of Carnival on the residents of an urban slum as in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Lovelace's themes and language (he often uses Trinidadian English Creole) depict a society in flux, a society born out of slavery grappling with a search for its identity or as Fanon puts it, "a national consciousness". Pivotal to all of Lovelace's novels are two overriding themes: "the liberation of the individual from imposed rules and attitudes" through a "salvaging of the real self" and "the discovery of meaning and value through an imaginative rendering and fulfilment of cultural forms that have evolved out of the lives of the peoples who have met in these islands" (Ramchand 5). It is this search for the self, a masculine self closely aligned to the cultural form of Carnival that permeates his 1979 novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance*.

The Dragon Can't Dance is a nuanced literary representation of the construction and negotiation of masculinity in the Caribbean, specifically in Trinidad (Lewis 165). Set in the urban impoverished community of Calvary Hill, the novel takes place in the 1960s, the decade when Trinidad gained independence, when steelband music became cemented in the social fabric, and when the commercialization of Carnival threatened to undermine the festival's original meaning as a symbol of protest. Lovelace dedicates each chapter to an individual character, using their role in Carnival and the wider community as chapter headings. Therefore, instead of naming a chapter Aldrick after the protagonist, Lovelace uses the title "The Dragon". The character of Sylvia is discussed in "The Princess" while the aging Carnival queen Miss Cleothilda is the focus of "Queen of the Band". Characters' identities are bound up in Carnival and Lovelace shows how Carnival has forged these individual identities while also challenging them to reexamine their relationship to Carnival. This is indeed the case for the three principal male characters: Aldrick, Fisheye, and Philo.

The central character, Aldrick Prospect, can at times be placed firmly into a hegemonic type of masculinity (Lewis 166). This, according to Connell, is an ideal or dominant form of masculinity, based on strength and aggression and a degree of social status (78). As the dragon master, Aldrick holds a position of respect in the Calvary Hill community. Every year, in preparation for Carnival, he sews a new dragon costume that he wears on Carnival day to present his "self that he lived the whole year" (Lovelace 44). He believes the costume provides him with a link to his ancestors:

The making of his dragon costume was to him always a new miracle, a new test not only of his skill but of his faith... it was only by faith that he

could bring alive from these scraps of cloth and tin that dragon, its mouth breathing fire ... It was in this message that he asserted before the world his self. It was through it that he demanded that others see him, recognize his personhood, be warned of his dangerousness. (35-36)

By bringing the costume to life, Aldrick's sense of self is connected to the dragon, the dragon dance, and on a broader scale, to Carnival. Preparing for and celebrating Carnival is instrumental to Aldrick's existence. It is his opportunity to be visible and to be heard. According to Martin, the Dragon role originated in 1908 as a hellish illustration that was inspired by Dante's *The Inferno* (225). The mask corresponds albeit metaphorically to the suffering endured by African slaves under the yoke of slavery. As he dances through the streets, the costumed Aldrick frightens onlookers and delights in their fear. His performance is a reclamation of the power lost by his ancestors but regained by him via the fearsome mask he wears.

Aldrick also retains a sense of power through his rejection of the money offered by the Carnival spectators. Traditionally, the offering of money was seen as a way to appease the Dragon's wrath and would occur "after the traditional climax of the Dragon dance...known as the crossing of the water... when its passage was blocked by water in drains or gutters" (Harris 117). But by refusing to accept money for his performance, Aldrick assumes a position of moral superiority. Although Carnival is controlled and commercialized, he will not be; instead he dances the Dragon dance for the sheer pleasure of the act itself and what it symbolizes.

This philosophy of non-possession, to not succumb to a capitalist notion of payment for services or ownership and the responsibility this entails, is another component of Aldrick's identity as a resident of Calvary Hill. Though a dragon, he is also "a hustler, working nowhere; and the only responsibility he was prepared to bear now was to his dragon" (Lovelace 44). In conversation with his friend, the calypsonian Philo, he says "You see me here. I is thirty-one years old. Never had a regular job in my life or a wife or nutten. I ain't own house or car or radio or race horse or store. I don't own one thing in this place, except that dragon there, and the dragon ain't even mine. I just make it" (110).

At the end of each Carnival season, Aldrick discards the dragon costume. By his very lifestyle, he rejects those hegemonic notions of masculinity that call for a goal-oriented ideology (Lewis 168). Yet, this is in line with the dominant thinking on the Hill which on its surface, despises all attempts at material possession. There is almost an unspoken adage that to possess is to be possessed. For this reason, Aldrick refuses not only material trappings, but also the prospect of a relationship with Sylvia, the carnival princess.

Throughout the novel, Aldrick harbors feelings for Sylvia, a seventeen-year-old tenant of Calvary Hill. However, these feelings prove problematic as they require him to consider the possibility of disruption to his autonomy:

To him she was the most dangerous female person on the Hill, for she possessed, he suspected, the ability not only to capture him in passion but to enslave him in caring, to bring into his world those ideas of love and home and children that he had spent his whole life avoiding. So he had

watched her swing back and forth in the yard, not even wanting to meet her eyes, keeping his distance, not even trying to get her into his bed, for he knew that she could make him face questions that he had inoculated himself against by not working nowhere, by not being too deeply concerned about anything except his dragon costume that he prepared for his masquerade on Carnival day. (31)

But the more he distances himself from Sylvia, the more anguished he becomes. Sylvia harbors romantic feelings for Aldrick, all but offering herself to him. Aldrick however feels that his economic circumstances prohibit him from entering into a relationship. He is unable to reconcile his desire for her with his dragon role. As he sees the face of Carnival changing all around him, Aldrick struggles with his identity. He is afraid he has nothing to offer Sylvia, he is afraid she will possess him, and he is equally afraid that his romanticized view of Carnival has left him unable to see the annual festival the way he used to.

It is against this background of struggle with the self that leads Aldrick to ultimately find himself in prison, serving a five-year sentence. Disappointed with the transformation of Carnival, he joins a rebellion patrol, the Calvary Nine. In a reimagining of the 1970 Black Power uprisings in Trinidad, Aldrick and some other men organize a short lived and poorly executed rebellion against the authorities. Upon his release from prison, Aldrick makes up his mind to never again participate in the Carnival with his dragon mask which he now sees as “a mere masquerade with no political, cultural, or social significance” (195). Instead he gets a job as a sign painter and for the first time, approaches Sylvia. His admonition to her that she “wants to be a self that is free” can also be viewed as self-admonition. He asks her to reject the safety net of material security with Mr. Guy just as he has rejected the security of his dragon costume. The novel concludes with the status of their relationship somewhat unsure. However, the same cannot be said for Aldrick, who, now unmasked, is able to rethink and renegotiate his identity outside of Carnival, but more importantly, outside his Carnival costume:

Lovelace recognizes the necessity of veils but points to the saving virtue of being conscious of one's veils as veils, as well as to the dangers of allowing the veil to become a permanent mask. For if the latter occurs, the self is denied; or else it becomes impossible either to begin to know one's self or to be known by other selves. (Ramchand 8)

Aldrick's disillusionment with Carnival is shared by another character, the bad john, Fisheye. “Notions of masculinity in the island of Trinidad are historically linked with the figure of the bad-john” a term that is strongly associated with the yard or ghetto, an environment inhabited primarily by lower class Afro-Trinidadians (Ramchand 313). The bad-john is a warrior who rebels against any system that seeks to regulate his behavior or control him. In the context of Carnival, both Dragons and Bad Johns are characters local men play. While Aldrick performs an exaggerated manliness via his dragon costume, Fisheye does so through physical violence. He finds himself through a “hyperactive virility displaying itself in all its pathology” (Badinter 20). At nights when Fisheye lies restless, he has to “get up and go and burst a man head” in order to make sure he

is still himself" (Lovelace 50). His – like Aldrick's – is a kind of hegemonic masculinity defined by aggression but for him, every day is Carnival.

In the same way that Aldrick finds his identity through his participation in Carnival and his wearing of the dragon costume, Fisheye's identity has been shaped through his participation in the steelband. This according to Lewis, is "yet another metaphor for the construction of masculinity" (175). His assertion is that "the fashioning of melody in the crucible of steel drums, wooden sticks, rubber tips and fire, constituted the alchemy through which young boys became men, and where they experienced their 'manness' and enacted their warriorhood" (175). Fisheye is therefore able to use the rivalry between competing steelbands as a way to do battle:

In this war, in this army, Fisheye at last found the place where he could be a man, where his strength and quickness had meaning and he could feel pride in belonging and purpose to his living, and where he had all the battles he had dreamed of, and more, to fight. While he was with them, Calvary Hill became a name to be respected. (Lovelace 54)

Fisheye and his band continually clash with other rival steelbands, the Bad John leading the way and "entering bodily into the violence boiling in the guts of the city" (54). He is therefore disillusioned when the warring steelbands make peace, as he finds himself a warrior without a war. Eventually the band suspends him for his continuous fighting despite the truce that has been brokered. Without his membership in the steelband, Fisheye's life loses its sense of purpose. This is the catalyst for his formation of the rebellion patrol which Aldrick joins.

In many ways, Fisheye seems destined to become the man he is. He comes from a family of men described as being good with their fists. His father, a stickfighter turned preacher, taught Fisheye and his brothers to fight from an early age. This leads to a conflation of intimidation and violence with masculinity. Through the stickfight or kalenda which could be traced back to Guinea, there was a "psychological release of tensions; frustration engendered by domination, and violent expressions of anger" (Liverpool 31-32). By the time Fisheye arrived in the capital city of Port of Spain from Moruga in southern Trinidad, he was "at eighteen, already too young, too strong, too eager to prove himself a man to have escaped the violence in which men were tried and tested in that town" (Lovelace 62). Unlike Aldrick who donned his dragon costume only during Carnival to discard it soon afterwards, Fisheye is never able to rid himself of his violent tendencies. The violence and aggression of the steelband clashes permeate his personal life; he is physically abusive to his girlfriends, son, and stepson. But Carnival is temporary and Fisheye's hypermasculinity needs a constant outlet. Like Aldrick, his disillusionment with the 'new' Carnival propels him to rebel. But unlike the dragon, there is no reformation for the Bad John at the novel's conclusion. While he brings himself to admit that being a bad John is a joke, "this business of being bad," that it is an "old long time thing" and that a man must "learn how to live," he represents the least progressive aspect of masculine identity (Lovelace 190). Having seen every day as Carnival, he remains a warrior in need of something against which to fight. He struggles to come to terms with the commodification and commercialization of steelbands and Carnival in general, a transformation that leaves old warriors like himself, ostracized.

Carnival's metamorphosis is fully embodied in the character of Philo in *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Like the dragon and Bad John, Philo's identity is bound up in Carnival; he is a calypsonian. Calypso is a musical genre that developed from African musical sources such as song commentary and ritual music (Winer 116). According to Rohlehr, "the roots of the political calypso in Trinidad probably lie in the African custom of permitting criticism of one's leaders at specific times, in particular contexts, and through the media of song and story" (2). Liverpool believes that the genre "was not the descendant of any one particular form of song, but owed its origin to the numerous songs, rhythms and dance traditions present in Trinidad during the time of African enslavement" (204). Like Carnival, calypso emerged as a cultural art form that spoke to the plight of African descendants in Trinidad, and the calypsonian's role became even more important post Emancipation. Calypso was therefore seen as a marker of identity, specifically an Afro-Caribbean identity as the lyrics addressed issues relevant to each island, the Caribbean, and the larger Black diaspora. As the self-proclaimed voice of the people, the calypsonian gave voice to the plight of the underprivileged masses, enjoying a position of respect in the community.

This however is not the case with the character, Philo. He never receives the respect Aldrick does, despite his full participation in Carnival. This is due in part to his physical appearance; he is "skinny, ordinary and unmuscular" (229). In addition, he continues to pursue Miss Cleothilda, the former Carnival queen, even after seventeen years of rejection. Labeled "a jackass in a jackass skin," Philo, unlike Aldrick and Fisheye, embodies a type of subordinated masculinity that according to Connell is characterized by physical, and to an extent emotional weakness. At the age of forty-two, he remains a struggling calypsonian who sings about social change but finds little to no commercial success. This changes with his release of a sexually suggestive calypso titled "the Axe Man".

Over the decades, a pattern has emerged wherein calypsonians release two types of calypsos during Carnival: the social commentary that is mostly local (read national, regional or Black) in its focus, and its more upbeat, less seriously themed counterpart. The bottom line is that the social commentary calypso does not attract the kind of broad based and commercial popularity of the party calypso (Best 31). Philo is tired of following calypso tradition since in his view, his songs about social change and local politics have yielded neither success nor recognition. He pens "the Axe Man," a song about sexual bravado and prowess in which the Axe Man cuts down any tree in his way. The tree is a metaphor for female sexuality, the Axe the man's penis but more so, his ability to conquer any woman. The song becomes hugely popular and Philo finds himself catapulted into a level of fame and success that had previously eluded him.

He also finds himself alienated from his community who now view him as a traitor to the music and to Carnival. By selling his song to foreign sponsors, he has also sold himself, another victim of the continued commercialization and foreign influence on the local art form. And although he makes genuine efforts to retain his position among the residents of Calvary Hill, he is shunned and alienated leading him to ponder:

What did they want him to do? Continue to stand on the Corner watching people? What did they want him to do? End up like his father singing and

playing the Arse on Local Talent on Parade? The show didn't exist anymore...He had to move on, and they couldn't, wouldn't leave the Corner... he had to get away, to move in larger area of space, to move, to move. (Lovelace 232)

This movement is not only symbolic but literal. Philo relocates to the bourgeois neighborhood of Diego Martin, further alienating himself by violating the norm of non-possession to which Aldrick and other Calvary Hill residents subscribed. For a while, he plays the role of the dandy, and here Lovelace presents readers "with a concept of masculinity filled with fantasy, sexual conquests and material gain" (Lewis 181). But at the end of the novel, Philo returns to the Hill, welcomed not only by his mates but even more symbolically, Miss Cleothilda. He releases another song, this one more in line with his former social commentary, an act that can be seen as a kind of compromise. As a calypsonian, he realizes that his music can work outside prescribed social boundaries of ethnicity, race or nation, as does Carnival. He is therefore able to come to terms with his class background and reconnect with his community, without fully abandoning or disparaging his newly gained affluence. This navigation of a middle ground is not the all or nothing game that Aldrick and Fisheye play, which is why Philo seems more at peace than the other principal male characters when the novel concludes.

Conclusion

With its roots in African cultures and expressions, Carnival remains an integral part of Caribbean society. Emerging as it did in a society that had enslaved African peoples, Carnival was a symbol of resistance, a means of giving voice to societal dissatisfaction, a way of masking/hiding and being invisible, yet completely visible. It was therefore not surprising that it would be so instrumental in shaping the identity of the Caribbean and its people. As seen in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Carnival not only constructed the society but it also to some extent, constructed varying versions of masculinity. The novel shows characters struggling to redefine themselves in an ever changing milieu where outside forces threaten to undermine and devalue what for them has become a marker of identity: the Carnival. Written in 1979, the novel was ahead of its time, its themes of identity formation, negotiation and reevaluation still evident today in a region where men and women continue to grapple with entrenched masculine heteronormative ideals. And even today, there are dragons, Bad Johns, and calypsonians – each trying to find themselves as they are forced to negotiate and compromise, all while seeking to remain true to the spirit of Lovelace's novel, which is ultimately, the spirit of Carnival.

Works Cited

- Badinter, Elizabeth. *XY On masculine identity*. Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Best, Curwen. *Culture @ the cutting edge: Tracking Caribbean popular music*. University of the West Indies Press, 2004.

- Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. University of California Press, 2005.
- Dabydeen, David. "Man to pan." *New Statesman & Society*, vol. 26, 1988, pp. 40-41.
- Danow, David. *The spirit of carnival: Magical realism and the grotesque*. The University Press of Kentucky, 2004.
- Eco, Umberto. "The frames of comic freedom." *Carnival!* Edited by Thomas A Sebeok, Mouton Publishers, 1984, pp. 1-11.
- Hall, Stuart. "Introduction." *Carnival: hysteria, and writing: Collected essays and autobiography*, edited by Allon White, Oxford University Press. 1993.
- Harris, Max. "The impotence of dragons: Playing devil in the Trinidad Carnival." *The Drama Review*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1998, pp. 108-123.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Cut n' mix: Culture, identity and Caribbean music*. Methuen, 1987.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A theory of parody: The teachings of twentieth-century art forms*. University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Lewis, Linden. "Masculinity and the dance of the dragon: Reading Lovelace discursively." *Feminist Review*, vol. 59, 1998, pp. 164-185.
- Liverpool, Hollis. "Origins of rituals and customs in the Trinidad carnival: African or European?" *The Drama Review*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1998, pp. 24-37.
- Lovelace, Earl. *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Persea, 1979.
- Manning, Frank. "Carnival in Antigua (Caribbean Sea): An indigenous festival in a tourist economy." *Anthropos*, vol. 73, 1978, pp. 191-204.
- Martin, Randy. "Dance and its others: Theory, state, nation, and socialism." *Of the presence of the body: Essays on dance and performance theory*, edited by Andre Lepecki, Wesleyan University Press, 2004, pp. 47-63.
- Ramchand, Kenneth. "Calling all dragons: The crumbling of Caribbean masculinity." *Interrogating Masculinity: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, edited by Rhoda Reddock, University of West Indies Press, 2004, pp. 309-325.
- Ramchand, Kenneth. "Why the dragon can't dance" An examination of Indian-African Relations in Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1988, pp. 1-14.
- Rohlehr, Gordon. *Calypso and society in pre-independence Trinidad*. Rohlehr, 1990.
- Schecnher, Richard. "Carnival (theory) after Bakhtin." *Carnival: culture in action – the Trinidad experience*, edited by Milla Cozart Riggio, Routledge, 2004, pp. 3-12.
- Winer, Lise. "Socio-cultural change and the language of calypso." *New West Indian Guide*, vol. 60, no. 3/4, 1986, pp. 113-148.