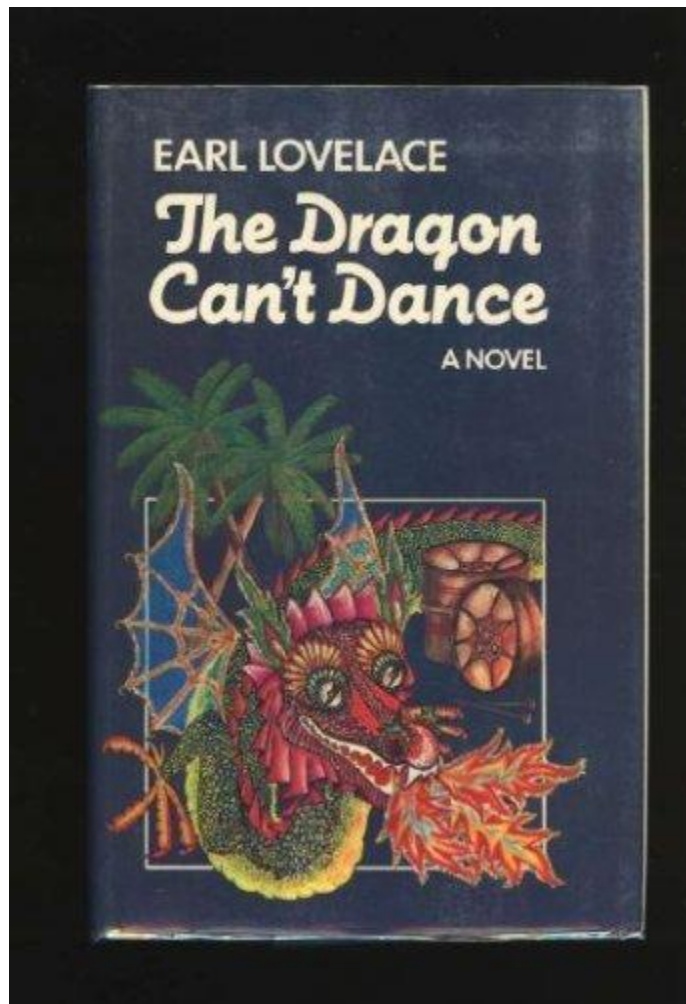


Search for Identity in Earl Lovelace's
The Dragon Can't Dance

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Abstract

The present study mainly concerns particularly about the search of identity and the struggles faced by the protagonist Aldrick Prospect in search of his self-identity by dressing

himself as a dragon. The story focuses on the struggles of a particular society on the basis of Carnival. The suppression of minorities in the Trinidadian society were shown clearly in the by the major communities. Also, it deals with the cultural identity among the Indian settlers in the Cavalry Hills and also the preponderance of the costume solemnity celebrated in the particular place.

Key Words: Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Cavalry Hill, Self- Identity, Dragon, Carnival.

Post-colonial Theory

Post-colonial theory is about the imbalance of power created by colonization. When we think of post-colonial theory, we must think about 20th century and colonization in the Indian subcontinent, northern and central Africa, and South Asia. Post-Colonial Theory focuses on literature developed by these new nations (e.g., *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Midnight Children* by Salman Rushdie.)

It also focuses on European responses to colonialism (e.g., *A Passage to India* by E.M. Foster and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad). Another type of writing using post-colonial theory is the creative works on immigrant groups that moved to or migrated to a new nation. Post-colonialism emphasizes the importance of the cultural, economic, political and military dominance of the past.

Earl Lovelace and *The Dragon Can't Dance*

Earl Lovelace, a West Indian novelist, usually analyzes the changes happening in the society. Also, he talks about the problems between the rural and urban society. *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1976) is a novel by Lovelace which deals with the clash between the higher and lower class people in the slum of Port of Spain. It is the novel that revolves around the major character Aldrick Prospect, a young man who struggled to create his dragon for the upcoming Carnival festival.



Earl Lovelace

Courtesy: <http://metro.co.uk/2011/01/12/earl-lovelace-uncertainty-has-made-religion-become-more-extreme-626080/>

Camera Press/Laif

Dance as a Dragon

The novel focuses on the struggles of an individual to dance himself as a dragon in the Carnival festival. Even the relation between the high-class people society with the people like Aldrick is directly based on the racial divisions and colonial legacies. The readers could understand the mental struggle of the main character Aldrick, who is longing for his personhood. The search is of a piece with two events, both of which are full of symbolic resonances: the abortive rebellion some of the residents stage, and the annual rite of Carnival.

The Dragon Can't Dance is considered to be the fundamental factors in the creative and historical worlds as a novel of Post Colonialism and racial divergence. The novel deals with the past events happened in the different regions in Trinidad society. The usage of irony in the novel adds strength to the novel. Lovelace used subjective form to describe the racially discriminated society. He recovers the importance for self-search in order to show the ugliness of the society, how the poor individuals are dumped under the name of culture.

In this novel, Lovelace analyzes a new intuition on Caribbean literature by relating the festival of carnival in radical, ethnic and political issues. Carnival plays an important role in Trinidadian culture. This novel employs the importance of this carnival and how it is affecting a self both physically and mentally. The struggle faced by the character Aldrick is shown directly without any deviation. There are many examples quoted by Lovelace to make the readers to understand the exact situation in the culture.

Cleothilda

It is through the character of Miss. Cleothilda, who considered herself as the ‘Queen of Band’, a proud mulatto widow owner of a parlor. She used to respect the people of Cavalry hills only when the festival comes. The opening chapter itself recounts the yearly Calvary Hill community preparations for the Carnival. The Afro-Trinidadian government of the fictional Cavalry Hill neighbourhood, colloquially called “The Yard”, negotiates, regulates, and publicizes social positions through costumes and clothing.

Celebrating Self-imprisonment

The Dragon Can't Dance too celebrates the self-imprisonment within the masks of suffering. What is remarkable about his novel is that Earl Lovelace is not writing about a particular group alone but is concerned with a very human problem such as the selfhood of an individual in society. He emphasizes the fact that a person living in a heterogeneous, multiracial society in the Caribbean cannot afford to be obsessed with Africanness or Indianness alone as it is only one aspect of his complete personality.

Vision of a Transformed Society

It is to Pariag that Lovelace imparts the vision of a transformed society in which the fusion of the music of steel band, sitar and flute is an epiphanic expression of cultural pluralism, the antithesis of cultural extinction. All the characters in the novel stand for some value in life. They are not there simply as deprived people, but they are striving to discover the self in them. Aldrick’s central question in the novel is “Is he going to continue to play the role of dragon?” and Pariag’s central question is that he should relate himself to the crowd.

What Is a Man?

In the novel almost all the characters are liberated towards the end. Aldrick's is liberated in the sense he realizes it is not enough playing the role of dragon; Sylvia is liberated in the sense she rejects Guy and returns to Aldrick; Pariag that he should relate to his country, to the largest society in which he lives even though his uncle offers him a lucrative job. Earl Lovelace in this novel is simultaneously engaged in examining the quality of heroes and our wisdom in choosing them.

The most important question in the novel is "what is a man?" (DCD102) assumes philosophical dimension in the novel. The search for the meaning of life has been a perennial one that has haunted philosophers, poets, novelists since innumerable centuries. Earl Lovelace peruses such a meaning in a very simple and lucid manner. The concern of selfhood plays a vital role in every writing of Lovelace. It is only through the protagonist Lovelace succeeds in portraying the struggle for selfhood in his words.

Aldrick's dragon role is given positive value for his usefulness. Furthermore, Aldrick playing the dragon becomes obsolete as he falls into a trance of Carnival, which mimics authority. His liberation is an act of defiance that shows the resistance against cultural effacement and obliteration. This is an attempt to restore a culture against the powerful influence of colonialism. Lovelace's description of the dragon inevitably carries centuries of complex historical proceedings of Carnival, which are rooted in stories of post war Caribbean. "Dance! If the words mourn the death of a neighbour, the music insists that your dance; if it tells the troubles of a brother, the music says dance" (DCD 5-6).

Significant of Dragon

The dragon symbolizes forgotten values for Carnival for instance the fight for emancipation and freedom from slavery. Aldrick constructs a powerful masculine identity in his dragon mask, which is an instance of 'overlapping territories'. Here histories form different nations intertwine and run over one another that resulted from the intrusion of empire. Aldrick's act of sewing together every thread and scales of his grandfather is an adventure of his journey of

his survival as his work in a flood of memories. Through the artifice of the mask of Lovelace overlaps and intertwines the culture of Africa to the Caribbean.

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