

## **The Spirituality of Carnival: Using Yoruba Cosmology to Read the Dragon Can't Dance**

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For anyone who has experienced Trinidad and Tobago carnival, whether festooned in beads and feathers, baptized in mud, oil, or paint; or simply feting on the sidelines, the claim that this festival is more than a spectacle, display, or escape is easily understandable. There is indeed power in this mass congregation of revelry—both political and spiritual. In literary criticism, in academia at large, the focus is usually on the political power of carnival, its effect on class struggles and racist hegemonic paradigms. However, while the political power of carnival is important to note, equally important (but not as frequently explored) is the spiritual power of carnival. Even when attention is focused on the spiritual nature of carnival it is usually skewed through a Judeo-Christian binary of pious versus profane, Christian behavior versus devilry. This is partly due to the reigning epistemology of many tertiary institutions, an occidental proclivity for creating categories with rigid boundaries. Yet it is possible to investigate carnival spirituality from a different perspective, especially when one considers the presence and participation of Africans in the evolution of carnival and carnival arts.

Hollis “Chalkdust” Liverpool discusses the African ancestry of Trinidad carnival, stating that:

*Mas* making and masquerading are traditions found all over Africa as interlocking aspects of most celebrations. Masking suggests spirit-associated transformations whereby the wearers cancel or obliterate their personalities by changing into other human characters and supernatural spirits so they are no longer themselves. (33)

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Liverpool's interpretation of mas' making and masquerade as "spirit-associated transformations" certainly suggests a spiritual basis for carnival and roots it in African traditions. Liverpool expands on the spiritual influence on mas', masquerade, and masking, explaining that by embodying spirits, African maskers bring the mysterious world of nature and the supernatural into the known and more predictable community of humans, so that the spirits may commune with the people and cause them to respond in various ways: dancing, drumming, praying, hand-clapping, offering, and singing. (33)

Here Liverpool implicitly links carnival, mas', masking, and masquerade with African and African infused religions. The reactions listed here can be seen in Shouter or Spiritual Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic Catholic, Pocomania, Santaria, Candomble, Voudoun and all Folk religious ceremonies in the Caribbean. I am using Lovelace's definition of "folk." Lovelace makes the claim that "the only group that was forced to address the Caribbean landscape with radically new eyes has been the African" (35). This group is what Lovelace terms the folk—the enslaved Africans and their descendants who have "had another preoccupation" besides the land or the factory when constructing a culture (26). These folk and their culture are "concerned with the struggle by the people for liberation from the oppressive system of enslavement" (26). This folk culture is responsible for what we know as Trinidad carnival, what Lovelace calls Jouvay Carnival, where celebrants are unwittingly "commemorating the celebration of Emancipation" (38) with presentations characterized by a "sense of threat and violence, ritualized in masquerades: Devil, Jabmolassie, Midnight Robber, Dragon" (39).

These Jouvay carnival characters evolve from Cannes Brûlée (burning of the canes) or Canboulay. This Cannes Brûlée or Canboulay is evidence that, as Liverpool states, "Africans in Trinidad remembered the harvest in Africa, which was usually accompanied by masking and masquerades" (34). According to J.D. Elder, Canboulay is a "Black Artistic institution in Trinidad and Tobago" that is "anchored in the matrix of the African cultural traditions brought into the Caribbean by migrants from West Africa [...] where cultural traces are still evident in contemporary Black Caribbean society, as zoomorphic masks like the cow/bull dancers, dragons, serpents, butterflies, giant spiders, *Burrokeet*" (38). Elder explains that Canboulay is "a ceremony symbolizing cane burning that Africans of Trinidad devised to celebrate their 'freedom from slavery' in 1838" (38).

Elder's account of Canboulay also resonates with Lovelace's assessment of the folk's preoccupation with the struggle for liberation. Elder asserts that the "elemental features of cannesbrûlées are highly expressive of the symbolical functions of this ceremonial protest and resistance of European domination" (39). He also describes Canboulay as "a duel between European moral codes and the African canons of freedom" (39).

These "African canons of freedom" are what Elder posits as the Africans' projection of "their aspiration for true liberty, freedom to pursue their own goals as human beings and not to be hampered in this effort by the White planter class or the Colonial rulership" (38). This analysis suggests spiritual as well as political freedom, indicating the multipurpose aspect of the carnival rite. Liverpool's assessment explicitly emphasizes this spiritual element claiming that for the enslaved Africans "harvest was a time to praise their god and their ancestors" and that the "sight of the whites dancing in their ballrooms also gave the Africans an *additional* reason to fete, to masquerade, and to ritualize the Cannes Brûlée" (34, emphasis added). After all, if the message of Canboulay is presented through the African "*world view, belief system, philosophy of life*" and all three are based on an understanding of community encompassing various states of being (that the human world is influenced directly by the spirit world), it becomes a vital project to recapture and reexamine the spirituality of carnival.

Although these analyses are based on Trinidad carnival, there is a shared ancestry of the carnivals throughout the Caribbean—the majority of which celebrate emancipation or harvest or both. Liverpool, Lovelace, and Elder base their discussions on this common ancestry—the African presence in the Caribbean and the evolution of African cultural practices in a new landscape. The similarities between the Christmastide celebrations of Junkanoo (Bahamas), Jonkanoo/ John Canoe (Jamaica and North Carolina), and Wanagrúa (Belize) and the Lenten carnivals in Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, St. Lucia, and other islands with a large catholic population and influence also suggests the African cultural roots of such festivals in the Caribbean.

E. Clement Bethel in tracing the etymology of Junkanoo cites Robert Dirks and Virginia Kerns's speculation that the "'Bambara's *Kano* [dance] may have served as the model for Jamaica's *Canoe*" (14). Bethel also considers Orlando Patterson's assessment that Junkanoo is an amalgamation of Igbo, Yoruba, and Ga harvest festival traditions, each combining ancestral appeals or appeasement with agricultural concerns through the use of masks and processions honoring ancestral spirits and the bounties of the earth (14). While Bethel insists that Junkanoo is not religious or magical because all such knowledges would have been secreted away from the Masters' gaze, if Junkanoo is derived from these harvest festivals and/or the Kano dance (also religious) then there is probably an element of spirituality coursing through the festival. As such, analyzing (Trinidadian) Carnival as spiritual also elucidates the unseen or supernatural functions of all Caribbean carnivals, Junkanoos, Crop Over, and other such festivals. The manifestations within these carnival rites may differ from island to island, but the underlying ritual process remains. It is with this understanding that Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* will be addressed.

Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) makes overt claims of African Ancestry and spirituality in the creation of the people and carnival—music, costumes, and dance/masquerade. Liverpool asserts that this African ancestry is "mainly of Mandinka, Fulke, Kwakwa, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and kango peoples" (34) and that in Trinidad the majority of enslaved Africans were Igbo who have very specific uses for masks and masquerades. Elements of the *egwugwu* and *mmuo* can be seen in such characters as Devil and Wild Indians in Trinidad, and similar characters in other islands (Grenada, for example, has a *jab jab* (devil) mas' as well). However, while the Igbo may have been in the majority, the Yoruba exerted powerful cultural influence, so much so that many of the syncretic religions in the Caribbean display remembrances of Yoruba cosmology. It is possible, therefore, to examine the text primarily through a Yoruba philosophical lens, particularly Yoruban cosmology, and Wole Soyinka's theory of the "fourth stage"—the "natural home of the unseen deities, a resting-place for the departed, and a staging-house for the unborn" (2) and the "storehouse for the creative and destructive essences" (3). As it manifests in both texts, however, the "fourth stage" takes on a particularly Caribbean African memory—the Middle Passage. It is also possible, therefore, to apply Wilson Harris's theory of limbo which deals with the artistic revelations to be gained from revisiting the Middle Passage.

Through such an investigation it would be possible to expand the discussion of the significance of carnival beyond political terms to incorporate the spiritual and creative (re)awakening of self and society, what Gerard Aching terms “lower-frequency politics” (21). At this point it would be prudent, for the sake of clarity, to state that I do not posit carnival in the text or elsewhere as a *religious* ceremony or festival. I prefer the term *spiritual* because, as I will discuss further, the Orishas evoked by carnival do not function strictly as deities but as synecdoches of the creativity represented by these Orishas.

### **Dragon Dance and Revolution**

In Lovelace’s third novel, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, the link between carnival and African culture is overtly made. Both Aldrick and Fish Eye embody these linkages as much as carnival manifests them. Aldrick, like the head of a secret society, constructs the dragon costume in the presence of the young boy acolyte. With only his hands, his tools, and his instincts he works “in a flood of memories, not trying to assemble them, to link them to get a linear meaning, but letting them soak him through and through” (Lovelace 50), constructing this costume every year, the progress of which marks the stages of the rise of energies unleashed during carnival. Fish Eye, through his warrior-hood, evokes the mighty warrior king image of Africa. The bad John is, at the very least, the chief of his village; the protector of his clan. Even as he torments passersby from his post at the bottom of the hill, he protects his domain. For many scholars, such as Linden Lewis, Aldrick and Fish Eye invite one to examine Lovelace’s treatment of masculinity in the text. For others, like Max Harris and Gerard Aching, the centrality of carnival invites one to interrogate the festival as a site of political struggle. Such analyses *are* vital. However, even as Aching alludes to the “unnamed” African influence on Caribbean culture including carnival, such analyses do not engage the linkages Lovelace takes care to elucidate. Not engaging such linkages may well lead to a skewed reading of the text. Lewis’s reading of carnival and gender in the text, for example, does not consider African spirituality at all. Lewis claims that “the Dragon is a construction and extension of [Aldrick’s] identity as a man. Indeed, the making of the Dragon is a metaphor for the construction and reconstruction of masculine identity” (169). While this is a valid claim to make, the Dragon and Aldrick are not only concerned with the masculine identity but with self—bearing in mind Lovelace’s assertion that carnival is a self-affirming rite.

I separate self and gender because the affirmation goes beyond social performance or position. Also when one considers Aldrick after the revolution and the message he has for anyone who will listen, his transformation goes beyond gender, race, or class. Lewis also makes the claim that the text

Explores the unmasking of human pretensions in the aftermath of carnival, which would have served to obscure and defer the pain and suffering in the slums of Trinidad. At all times Lovelace is mindful of class origins, status aspirations, and contradictions in this very gripping tale of being and nothingness. The people whose lives are revealed in this novel fight to rescue their humanity from the abyss of poverty. (165)

Such a statement suggests that the residents of Calvary Hill consider their humanity tenuous, jeopardized, retractable because of their poverty. Yet Ms. Olive, Sylvia, Aldrick, Philo, Fish Eye, Cleothilda, Guy, and all the residents of the hill do not question their right to be called or treated as human. These characters question the right of anyone to define humanity in one way. Miss Olive's attitude towards Cleothilda, the mix of anger and pity, illustrates the Hill's inhabitants' understanding that humanity is not dependent on class or possessions. Often Miss Olive would question Miss Cleothilda's intentions and sincerity but would always feel "a sense of Miss Cleothilda's fragility" her "lack of human toughness to face real life as a real person" (Lovelace 34). The women's relationship contradicts an overarching claim of "status aspirations" of *all* the Hill dwellers, especially if status relates to social class and material wealth. This is also suggested by the Hill's elevation of Aldrick and Fish Eye to heroic status. Neither men desire to be heroic figures—they do not actively seek to be such but act out aspects of their personalities, their *àshe, chi, vital force, soul, spirit, inner self*, and so forth.

The African cultural linkages in the novel invite the reader to analyze the text from an African philosophical perspective or understanding. For me, the most readily applicable African philosophy would be Yoruban, particularly because of how visible Yoruba cultural practices remain in Trinidad and Tobago culture—Orisha worship being the most obvious. For my purposes, I would like to focus on at least three Orishas that I argue are present in carnival in the text and who influence Aldrick and Fish Eye—Shango, Ogun, and Orunmila.

## Shango's Fire

Shango is usually thought of as the Orisha of Lightning and it may seem like an awkward stretch to associate Shango with Aldrick as the dragon—lightning and fire. However, as Baba IfaKarade (a Yoruba Chief, Ifa Priest, and Priest of Obatala) states, lightning is one of several attributes that Shango possesses. These include Kingliness, "Dance," "Fire," and "Protector/Warrior" (29). Aldrick embodies these attributes as the dragon, fully manifesting them during carnival, but also expressing them throughout the year, after all the dragon is "a presentation on Carnival day of [his] self that he [has] lived the whole year" (Lovelace 58). In a sense, when Aldrick painstakingly constructs his dragon mask and parades for the two days of Carnival as the fire breathing king of intricate footwork, he is reinscribing himself with himself—renewing his selfhood, reigniting his *àshé*, what Robert Farris Thompson terms "the-power-to-make-things-happen" (xv) and Karade defines as "the presence of primal power and creative potential" (113). That this renewal evokes Shango presents three interesting analyses of the dragon and Aldrick.

The first considers Aldrick's position as the dragon/warrior of Calvary Hill. As the dragon of Calvary Hill, Aldrick is expected to maintain the philosophy of non-possession. Thus, when a coalition led by Guy and Cleothilda demand that Aldrick punish Pariag for the audacity of owning a bicycle; they are astounded that he should refuse. His refusal, however, reveals his link to Shango who is not only the Protector/Warrior but the righteous judge. Karade states that Shango's devotees "approach him for legal problems, protection from enemies, and to make bad situations better" (27). Judging Guy and Cleothilda, who both *own* property, as hypocrites because they are as guilty as Pariag of transgressing the sacred "all o we is one" in poverty mantra, Aldrick chooses to do nothing to Pariag. Guy's hypocrisy becomes most apparent when he demands rent in response to Aldrick's non-action reminding the reader that Guy, at the very least, has influence over the financial struggles of the residents of Calvary Hill. Pariag's bicycle is no longer a transgression against the non-possessors and therefore just cause for Pariag's punishment. Instead, it is a threat to those who already exploit the non-possessors. In fact, in righteous judgment, Aldrick threatens Guy, stating that he (Aldrick) "could turn beast in a minute" (123).

The second and third analyses incorporate Shango's history. Shango, the deified Alafin of Oye, according to Karade, "hung himself because of his over-indulgence" (27). Wole Soyinka elaborates on this history stating that Shango's "self-destruction [is] the violent, central explosion from ego inflation" (151). This suggests that the Alafin's demise is directly related to his pride. For the Alafin, this pride is based upon his political power and wealth—his kingly status. Aldrick has the same kingly pride. For all his years on the Hill, Aldrick has been "the king, setting the pace, living the style" (Lovelace 151) of non-possession. His pride, which may be as great as the Alafin's, is grounded in this non-possession, Aldrick's version of kingly status. Yet, like Shango the Alafin, Aldrick over indulges in this pride which allows him to live, "avoiding and denying the full touch of the Hill," "cheating himself of the pain, of the love, of his living," "untouched by things that should have touched him" (145). Like the Alafin who, according to Soyinka, was forcibly isolated or separated from the rest of humanity because of his abuse of his kingly status, his pride, Aldrick because of his proud adherence to non-possession is isolated from his humanity, his feelings:

He [feels] a great distance from himself, as if he [has] been living elsewhere from himself, and he [thinks] that he would like to try to come home to himself; and even though it [sounds] like some kind of treason, he [feels] that at least it [is] the only way he could begin to be true to even the promise of the dragon which he [feels] bound in some way beyond reason, beyond explanation, and which he [feels] [has] its own truth. (146).

This is Aldrick's realization that he has overindulged in one aspect of the dragon, that he has not accessed the true strength of his *àshe*.

This realization, however, brings us to the third phase of analyzing Aldrick through Shango. As stated before, Shango is a deified Alafin. As Karade explains, Shango's followers "merged him with the deity of lightning and fierce retribution known as Jakuta" (27). This merging of human and divine—*ori* "the reflective spark of human consciousness embedded in human essence" and *sha* "the ultimate potentiality of that consciousness to enter into or assimilate itself into the divine consciousness" (23)—represents the possibility of redemption, the "promise of the dragon" to which Aldrick is still bound. This promise is Aldrick's potential to transcend earthly concerns, not through an adherence to non-possession to the point of stagnation, but through the achievement of the full potential of his *àshe*.



Aldrick finds himself in crisis due to this distance between himself and his humanity. This crisis is brought to his attention by Sylvia who may well function as two Orishas—Eshu-Elegba and Oshun. As Eshu, Sylvia “tempts, thwarts, and disrupts” (Karade 25) Aldrick’s apathy, forcing him to seek a new understanding of self. Embodying Eshu-Elegba, Sylvia is the “powerful holder of the *àshe* or creative potency of other orisha” (25). Through her mere presence Aldrick becomes aware of his unfulfilled potential. As Oshun, “orisha of unconditional love, receptivity, and diplomacy” (26), Sylvia embodies the “feminine essence” (26) which challenge Aldrick’s one-sided existence. One notes that she offers neither “accusation [nor] invitation” in her eyes “rising boldly to meet [Aldrick’s]” whenever she walks through the yard (Lovelace 114). Sylvia’s natural sensuality also links her to Oshun who is “known for her sensuality” (Karade26). That Sylvia challenges Aldrick to eventually seek enlightenment is also expressive of Oshun’s attributes as a “river divinity symbolizing clarity and flowing motion” (26). She makes Aldrick “feel the need to understand himself, to find out what things [mean] and why he [is] doing the things he [is] doing” (Lovelace 114). Figuring Sylvia as Oshun is especially interesting as the Dragon dance includes an elaborate crossing of rivers. This crisis can only be resolved by Aldrick breaching the distance between himself and his humanity. To an extent, this bridge is constructed during Carnival. The dragon mas’—the revelation of Aldrick’s self—is his instinctive breaching of this gap. However, as previously stated, Aldrick has never used the mas’ to its fullest potential—the promise that he understands the mas’ to hold. Neither has Aldrick accessed the true potential of Carnival and the palpable presence of Ogun during the two days of masquerade.

### **Ogun, Path Clearer**

Karade describes Ogun as “the divinity of iron and all that iron becomes” and the “patron of [...] warriors” (26). As such, the claim that Ogun is the patron Orisha of pan and pan men is not far-fetched. Steelband, the “rallying point for especially the dispossessed Jouvay youth” does not only represent the “spirit of resistance and rebellion” but also a spirit of another sense because it has “grown out of bamboo bamboo and skin drums, [is] inspired by Orisha chants and Shouter [Baptist] hymns” (*GITD*39). When one considers the material used to make steelbands—iron and steel—there is another connection between pan and Orisha besides the chants that influence the rhythm of the steeldrum/band. The material suggests there is a spirit or deity housed in the steelpan.

The material and rhythm of the steeldrum allows one to see the correlation between Ogun and pan, iron and iron (and at the heart of every good steelband is the iron section or engine room as David Rudder so aptly describes it).

One may even venture so far as to say that Ogun is the patron Orisha of the steeldrum/band/pan/man. Further, as Karade states, Ogun is the "divinity of clearing paths" (26), the function of the pan side during Carnival, leading the revelers through the streets, clashing with other pan sides as warriors and path clearers. The pan side, like Ogun, also clears a path through the spiritual void, what Soyinka terms "the fourth stage." This fourth stage, the chthonic realm, is "the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming" (Soyinka 142). According to Soyinka, Ogun's attribute as the clearer of paths arises from his actions as the first deity to breach the chthonic realm to reestablish a connection with humanity. As Soyinka outlines the myth the gods, led by Ogun, "the first actor, disintegrating within the abyss" (142), seek to re-unite "with human essence, to reassume that portion of re-creative transient awareness" (144). This journey across the transitional gulf through the fourth stage, this trespass of the chthonic realm, results in cosmic creativity. Soyinka also argues that Shango's deification can only occur because Ogun has already transgressed this gulf facing both destructive and creative forces in the fourth stage. It is Ogun's example that Aldrick must follow. The dragon must follow the pan and by extension the pan man to breach the chthonic realm. Aldrick follows Terry, the band leader, who "[rings] a piece of iron, calling the band to attention" (137). Then as the "music burst forth from the steelband; shouts [go] up and the steelband and masqueraders," including Aldrick, begin "moving down upon Port of Spain" (137).

This initial breach is opened with Carnival, the chaos in which Aldrick displays himself for the two days. This is his initial descent into the chthonic realm. Here Aldrick communes with the various stages of existence, the living, the ancestors, and the Orishas. Here, he is "Manzanilla, Calvary Hill, Congo, Dahomey, Ghana. He [is] the ancestral Masker, affirming the power of the warrior" (Lovelace 137). Here he shows the city that he has Shango's fire in his belly. The language here also evokes the Middle Passage by linking places in Trinidad (Manzanilla, Calvary Hill) with places in Africa (Congo, Dahomey, Ghana). The latter place names were important suppliers of enslaved African to the new world. Ghana in particular the port of Elmin was the "opening" stage of the middle passage. Yet it is not the slave trade or the horrors of the Middle Passage being recalled here.

Instead carnival evokes the Middle Passage as the crucible of creativity. As Wilson Harris explains, the Middle Passage is the “limbo gateway between Africa and the Caribbean” (157) that cannot be equated with the length or duration of a single trip across the Atlantic. Harris argues that this limbo, for him represented by the limbo dance, is the “renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures” (158). Aldrick’s linkage with his African ancestry, already conjured earlier while building the costume, crosses and re-crosses the Middle Passage for creative inspiration. This invocation of Africa also suggests the cultural syncretism and evolution occurring in the Caribbean.

While one can claim the presence of Orishas in the text, it is also possible to recognize Bantu (Congo) cosmic beliefs influencing the text, particularly, the concept of vital force and the relationship between and position of the world of the living and the dead (Mpemba). Building the Dragon mas’ requires the compilation of objects instinctively. As each piece is added, the costume grows in potency until Aldrick senses its completeness. The Bantu concept of vital force asserts that all inanimate and animate things and beings exert a force. This force can be enhanced or diminished by another object or being. One can construct a collection of objects—specific stones, woods, animal parts, cloths, metals, and so forth—to create “medicines” which would increase one’s vital force. Aldrick’s construction of the costume and his assertion of self can also be explained through the application of this philosophy. The costume enhances his self, his vital force. His descent down the Hill and the evocation of the Middle Passage are also analogous with the Bantu description of the world of the living (on a mountain) and the land of the dead (underwater). According to Farris Thompson’s sources, Bantu cosmology figures the “earth as a mountain over a body of water which is the land of the dead” and this “water is both a passage and a great barrier” (106).

His masquerade brings him just beyond the threshold of the fourth stage which is “natural home of the unseen deities, a resting-place for the departed, and a staging-house for the unborn” (2), as Soyinka describes it, and “a storehouse for creative and destructive essences” (3). Through his mas’, Aldrick has entered the chaotic void, and is besieged by forces that threaten to destroy him and recreate him or release his *àshe*. This destruction is manifested by his beheading—taking off the dragon head as he sits on the pavement.

It is further revealed by the “masqueraders, so splendidly dressed earlier in the day, moving across the streets leaving a trail of bits and pieces of their costumes” (139) a visible trail of destruction. Here too one can see an overlapping of a Yoruba and Bantu explanation. The destruction of the physical costume means a diminishing of Aldrick’s vital force. Vital force and *àshe* correlate especially regarding Aldrick’s ability to enter and exit the fourth stage. One can also see a correlation to *chi* as discussed in the previous chapter. The constructive or creative forces, on the other hand, include his creative dancing and sustained energy during his masquerade as well as his recognition of the dragon’s truth on Ash Wednesday. However, this is just the beginning of his journey through the fourth stage. Carnival opens the gates as it were, but the revolution constitutes Aldrick’s traverse through the chthonic realm.

Just as the pan music clears the way for Aldrick to descend into Port of Spain and the chthonic realm, Fish Eye, the Bad John pan man, clears the way to and through the chthonic realm—to and through the revolution. This revolution is linguistically linked to carnival and is a more politicized expression of the ritualized violence of Jouway. Fisheye’s warrior-hood, his instinctive rebellion, under the patronage of Ogun, foreshadows Aldrick’s act of rebellion. It is important to note that Ogun’s patronage of Fisheye begins before he becomes the Bad John pan man of Calvary Hill. There are allusions in the text, if one is applying a Yoruba lens, which indicate Ogun’s presence and influence over young Belasco John even if Fisheye does not know and cannot name the Orisha. At the very least, these allusions remind the reader of the cultural unities buried deep within Trinidadians of African descent.

As a youth of eighteen, new to Port-of-Spain, working loading trucks, Fisheye would “look at the muscles on his arm and feel the strength in him” (63). Muscles are associated with sinews and tendons; these words conjure images of strength. Sinews and tendons, according to Karade, are the parts of the body that corresponds to Ogun. This may seem trivial to note, but one should consider too that Fisheye, while fantasizing that he is a gun man “would feel for a few moments his strength, his youth, his *promise* fill him” and “his secret power and invisible guns” (64; italics added). Fisheye’s promise, his *àshe*, is linked to steel—the product of iron, Ogun’s symbol, thus the presence of Ogun in contact with the budding bad John becomes more apparent. Indeed his very name, Fisheye, and the fact that he has “bulging eyes” (65) informs the reader that he is full of divine *àshe*. As Robert Farris-Thompson explains, devotees’ eyes, when possessed, contain the Orisha’s *sàshe* causing the eyes to bulge.

This possession is also alluded to when Lonie claims that it is the “devil” in Fisheye’s *head* (64)<sup>2</sup> and all things carnival are, according to the colonized mentality, “activities of the Devil” (*GITD* 2).

Perhaps the most important association of Fisheye with Ogun is that Fisheye breeches the chthonic realm first—he is the first to rebel, to challenge, to face the destructive forces personified by the policemen and present in the jail cell. Even as he enters the fourth stage he is associated with Ogun when bystanders assume he has a knife (steel/iron). As he fights the policemen, Fisheye finds himself “floating down very slow, like he [has] all the time in the world to fall, and it would be the last thing he would do, forever and forever fall” (66). This “forever and forever fall” conjures the image of sinking in the sea—the slow descent into the abyss. This sinking slowly underwater signifies on the middle passage. Also this fall is both his entrance into the chthonic realm and his nearly impossible struggle with the destructive forces he encounters there—destructive forces that make him want to “burst out of himself, to fly out and become himself” (67). The words burst and fly out suggest cramping and expansion and are reminiscent of Harris’s theorizing of the limbo dance and mokojobies or stilt walkers. The imagery of the cramped limbs in limbo or the hyper-extended limbs of stilt-walkers suggest to Harris a people/culture compensating for a legacy *amputated* by (forced) migration and the subsequent metamorphoses of elements of the Old World cultures in a new environment. Harris states that the limbo dance “implies [...] a profound art of compensation which seeks to *re-play dismemberment* of tribes [...] and to invoke at the same time a curious *psychic re-assembly* of the parts of the dead god or gods” (159, emphasis added).

Fisheye instinctively reaches the same state of mind that Aldrick reaches when he realizes his betrayal of his dragon-hood. Both men are struggling to be their true selves, to fulfill the promise of their *àshe*. Both men need to face the challenge of the chthonic realm, to be “human representative[s] to breach [the underworld]” not just for themselves but “on behalf of the well-being of the community” (Soyinka 3). It is no surprise, then, that Fisheye, already bulging with Ogun’s *àshe*, initiates the rebellion. It is also no surprise that Fisheye’s gun seems simply to materialize. The gun appears as the men fully engage the chthonic realm and begin their almost-revolution.

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<sup>2</sup> I emphasize the word *head* because it is the basic translation of the word *ori*. According to Karade, *ori* means both the physical and the spiritual head. There are two aspects of the spiritual *ori*—*Ori Apari* (the internal spirit) and *Ori Apere* “the sign of an individual’s personal god (Orisha)” (24).

This revolt begins as haphazardly as Fisheye's battle in the parlor or shop. However, where Ogun's presence is an allusion, an assumption of the presence of iron in the form of a knife in the shop, with this act of rebellion Ogun's presence is all but tangible. Not only is iron present in the form of the gun, but iron is used to describe Fisheye, making the link between the Orisha and the bad John more overt. He has the "potent silence of a blue cannon" drawn by "two black horses whose only sound is the clopping on the roadway of their iron-shod hooves" (183). Here we have iron, roadway, and war, all symbols associated with Ogun. Fisheye is also clad all in black, one of Ogun's representative colors, signaling that Fisheye is functioning as Ogun's *babalorisha* (priest). Therefore, when Fisheye tosses the gun to Aldrick and tells him to pass it from man to man in the gang standing at the corner, it is not the "Holy Communion" (184) in the Christian or Catholic sense, but the initiation of the gang into the cult of Ogun.

This initiation not only brings Aldrick under the patronage of Ogun (in addition to his link to Shango) but also signals that both Fisheye and Aldrick, already prone to the destructive forces in the fourth stage, are actively resisting disintegration. Both men are actively fighting, though without a clear understanding of what they are fighting for, to release their potential creativity, their *àshe*. Both men engage in a spiritual ritual designed to facilitate such a release. Under Fisheye's guidance, assuring Aldrick that "[s]omething will happen" (185) and picking the site of their rebellion, Woodford Square<sup>3</sup>, "as if it had been there just to be plucked out of the air" (187), Aldrick is again possessed—filled with divine *àshe*, the sudden "feeling of excitement, of power" (188), Shango's "roasting heat" causing "his whole body to glow" (189). He is so filled with *àshe* that he cries out. These cries represent the constructive and creative forces in the fourth stage as well as an aural sign of his possession by Ogun. Aldrick is prophesying, telling all that it is time "for our people to rise, to rise up and take the self over [...] take Pow-er, Pow-er! Pow-er!" (189), trying to clear a path for the creation of a new society.

In fact, of all the men in the jeep, Aldrick seems to be the only one capable of responding to these creative and constructive forces surging into him, the only one receiving the "[i]ntuitions, sudden psychic emanations" (Soyinka 3) that these forces impart. Aldrick alone, upon receiving divine *àshe*, is able to question, to seek. Of all the men, only Aldrick asks: "What we going to do now?" (Lovelace 190).

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<sup>3</sup> It is very interesting to note the location of the revolution as though Aldrick is meant to be the "ordinary man" Eric Williams, having his own lecture in the "University of Woodford Square."

Fisheye, Liberty Varlance, and Pistache are still too focused on resisting destruction, on the adventure of it all, to respond to or receive the intuitions, to feel the psychic emanations that prompt Aldrick's questions. Fisheye's answer indicates how entrenched he and the rest of the gang are in the battle: "Ain't we get past the police?" (190). Aldrick's question separates him from the rest of the men. Unlike the pan men in the van, Aldrick is a masquerader. It is his ritualistic masquerade that fully opens the possibilities of the chthonic realm to him.

While Fisheye has entered the fourth stage before, assuming that he ever emerged from it, he embraces the struggle, the fight, the aspect of the dragon that Aldrick has renewed every year to the neglect of the dragon's true promise. Further Fisheye is under the patronage of Ogun but does not himself embody Ogun's *traits*. Aldrick, on the other hand, embodies several of Shango's traits, a link rejuvenated every time he puts on the dragon mas'. He is accustomed to encountering the "the unseen deities." Therefore, Aldrick is able to experience the fourth stage, the "storehouse for creative and destructive essences" (Soyinka 2), more fully because through his dragon mas' he comes into contact with the various aspects or states of being—past, present, future, and divine. This is highlighted by the very title of the chapter, "The Dragon Dance;" the days of the revolt, Monday and Tuesday; and the fact that these two days are likened to Carnival with Aldrick "feeling [...] imprisoned in a dragon costume on Carnival Tuesday" (Lovelace 191), "holding himself in that important calm of the masquerader who parades before the judges, filled with the sense of the character he portrays" (192). There is no indication that Fish Eye or any of the other panmen in the revolution gain the level of understanding that Aldrick does. After their release from jail, Fish Eye all but disappears from the narration. After clearing the pathway for Aldrick, Fish Eye has fulfilled his role.

If all this is true, if Aldrick seems to be making a successful journey through the chthonic realm—resisting disintegration and experiencing intuitions and receiving psychic emanations, why does he and the others get caught? Why does the revolution fail? Where is Ogun? Where is Shango? There are several possible and plausible answers to the first two questions. For example, Umberto Eco's argument that Carnival cannot achieve a sustained upheaval of society and, therefore, the revolution could only be temporary. Conversely, Gerard Aching's analysis of Carnival and the revolution applies the theories of "lower-frequency politics" (21), and demasking.

Based in part on Marxist and psychoanalytic theories, Aching argues that “lower-frequency politics [...] do not always aim to achieve social upheaval but seek to gain and maintain visible representation within the region’s democracies” (21). Thus Carnival is not “*merely* a symbolic [site] of subversive activit[y], and, by implication, [a] failed [attempt] at transforming the social order” (21).

According to Aching, “the rhetoric about independence implies that countercultural masks and their traditionally subliminal preservation of historical complaint are no longer required;” therefore, Aldrick’s frustration can only be vented no other way than “through the undisguised, spontaneous uprising” (70). Aching argues further that though Aldrick realizes that the uprising is “an unfamiliar mimicry” (70) divorced from his Carnival countercultural mas’, the revolution does not fail because “frightening the population into seeing and acknowledging social injustices [...] demasking the public, is the mark of a successful dragon mask and dance” (71). From a Marxist psychoanalytical theoretical base, Aldrick’s revolution is successful because it creates visibility and exposes the superstructure. Aldrick’s speech that both demand that the public “make no peace with slavery” and asks “[h]ow can [one] not make peace?” (Lovelace 193) highlights these social injustices.

At the same time, however, Aldrick questions this need for visibility thereby questioning lower-frequency politics even as they ride around in the jeep calling attention to themselves. Later, in prison, Aldrick asserts that “so many things [they] coulda do, and all [they] wanted [is] to attract attention! How come everything [they] do [they] have to be appealing to somebody else? Always somebody to tell [them] if this right or wrong, if it good or bad” (Lovelace 202). Aldrick questions the need to respond to the authorities with their language or through actions that acknowledge and engage the paradigms established by these authorities. In other words, the uprising, what Aching describes as unfamiliar mimicry, is defined by the same oppressive systems Aldrick and Fisheye are trying to eliminate or escape—calling attention to the construction of an ideology does not negate that ideology, it does not allow the people to “rise up.” All that is gained by calling attention to themselves is a ‘feeling of impotence’ because their speeches “stirred feelings but did little else” as they rode around in the jeep.

Lower-frequency politics, as Aching describes it, traps them in a cycle, challenging authority in such a way that the superstructure retains all the power. Therefore, there is no need for the police to intervene.



As Aldrick explains, the authorities “knew [they] couldn’t win” (199) and allows the uprising to run its course because the ruling class wants “to tell [the Calvary Hill nine] that [they] can’t be free unless [Aldrick et al.] beat [authority], that [they] can’t be men unless [they] win, that [they] don’t have no claim to anything because [they] lose to [authority]” (199). Such a message insists that, despite how unnatural the superstructure might be, to function in society, to win, to be free to be “people,” one must engage the superstructure in an all or nothing struggle. In such a context, maintaining visible representation, based on the intuitions Aldrick receives traversing the chthonic realm, is no longer enough. Instead Aldrick proposes that the true revolution is to act for oneself within parameters one defines for oneself, rather than fight the battle the authorities or the superstructure has defined, because “as long as [one] appeal[s] to others, to the authorities, they will do what they want” (203).

However, this is not to say that the revolution completely unsuccessful. I agree with Aching that, despite the failure of the uprising to overthrow the power structure, the revolution achieves a positive outcome, the fact that Aldrick *can* come to such a conclusion. This assertion that: “We have to act for we” (203) is equivalent to Aldrick’s dragon dance during Carnival when he refuses to participate in the typical exchange between threatening dragon and wealthy spectator, refuses to play the “game” which maintains the power structure and sends them scurrying away perplexed. This hard won conclusion is the articulation of the dragon’s true promise—the ability to create one’s own definitions and retain one’s personhood, and the reason Aldrick instinctively enters the fourth stage. At the same time, however, the revolution fails because, as the human representative breaching the chthonic realm “on behalf of the well-being of the community” (Soyinka 2), Aldrick must find a way to relay his intuitions and conclusions to his community and does not know how.

While Aldrick is able to traverse the fourth stage and emerge with this new knowledge, it is possible that the nature of his breach of the chthonic realm limits what he learns there. As he puts it, he “couldn’ta enter where [he] had no vision to go” (201). Even though he enters the fourth stage through his masquerade, even though he is impelled to venture further than he has gone before by the presence of Ogun, he does not know where he is or what he is looking for. He senses it, is more attuned to the possibilities because of he has been here before, but is still not fully aware of the true promise of his traverse there.

He is able to gain some insight, but had he made such a breach with a better understanding, he may have realized the message and how to relay it. *He* changes, but cannot change others. As for Shango and Ogun's whereabouts, there is no indication that they leave. Indeed, after the revolution, Aldrick has ascended in a sense. He has elevated himself above the superstructure, above the struggle, and above his excesses in the name of non-possession. He is closer to uniting his *ori* with the *sha*; he is closer to OrishaShango.

### **Aldrick and Orunmila**

The assertions that Aldrick makes in jail and his ascendancy also suggest the presence of another Orisha—Orunmila. Not only is it possible for Aldrick to encounter Orunmila's divine *àshe* in the fourth stage, the relationship between Orunmila and Aldrick/Shango can also be explained in the similarity of their deification. Karade notes that "Orunmila, as with all prophets, is a deified personage who has been elevated to a central point in the creative origin of life itself" (7). Like Shango, Orunmila was once human, he "did actually exist" (7) in history. However where Shango is the Orisha of fiery judgment, Orunmila "knows the truth of all beings, and too, the destiny of all beings" (7). Orunmila, then, exerts a different kind of judgment. It is also important to note that this divine judgment was a trait of the human (*ori*) Orunmila. As Karade states, to "the people of the land he was clearly recognized as a divine child" and that he "expressed from the onset divine wisdom and attributes" (9). Orunmila comes to "Ile-Ife in order to teach a system of ethics, religious belief and mystic vision" (9). Aldrick's words, his message, express a system of ethics—insisting that the folk live for the folk and judge themselves according to their own ontology—and a mystic vision in the sense that such ethics are not based on material or even socio-political criteria.

Aligning Aldrick and Orunmila<sup>4</sup> is also plausible when one considers how cryptic Aldrick's message proves to be to Fish Eye and the other men as they talk in jail. Orunmila "is the most esoteric" Orisha and all "references of him are expressed through divinatory implements" of the *babalawos* (7). This offers another explanation for Fish Eye and the others' inability to grasp Aldrick's message. As Orunmila (or mounted by Orunmila's *sàshe*) Aldrick's message is esoteric—beyond Fish Eye's earthly understanding or consciousness (*ori*).

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<sup>4</sup> It is also interesting to note that Eshu "maintains close relationship with Orunmila (Karade 25). This renders another dimension to Aldrick's and Sylvia's relationship, heightening her influence on him.

Further, Fish eye and the others who “couldn’ta enter where [they] had no vision to go” (Lovelace 201) are unable to achieve the “state of divine oneness” to unite their ori with their ipanori, their “earthly consciousness” with their “heavenly consciousness” (Karade 10) because “those who embark on the journey (irinajo) need do so with a pure heart, and with sincerity” (10). Not knowing where they are going (chthonic realm) or why they are revolting (traversing the fourth stage)—only Aldrick has a message for the people, again esoteric, cryptic—Fish eye and the other pan men cannot prepare their hearts, or focus their will enough to be sincere in such a quest<sup>5</sup>.

As more Trinidadians fear for the future of carnival, it becomes increasingly important for us to remember not just the political but also the spiritual role of this festival. Shango, Ogun, Eshu-Elegba, and the pantheon of Orishas are still present in Carnival. The ability for a masquerader to enter the fourth stage, therefore, is still present. Ever so often our calypsonians either mention these Orishas by name or celebrate the spiritual power inherent in Carnival. Two representatives that readily come to mind are Super Blue with such songs as Soca Baptist, and Jab Jab where he calls Shango; and David Rudder with his Bahia Girl, Hammer, High Mas’, or calling Papa Legba to open the gates in Oil and Music. By acknowledging the spiritual potency of carnival, both as literary trope and as cultural production, allows the stakeholders both to preserve the traditions and underlying meaning of the festival and to promote the evolution of the festival to address present-day needs

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<sup>5</sup> From a Shouter Baptist (as well as other Christian sects heavily influenced by African religious practices) Aldrick is a “prophesier” without an interpreter. During church, a celebrant could be mounted by a spirit/angel/deity and prophesy in tongues while another celebrant will be mounted by a spirit and able to translate the prophecy.

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