



The Dragon Can't Dance

By *Earl Lovelace*

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A story of shanty-town life in Trinidad. Calvary Hill is the home of Aldrick Prospect, who lives for the carnival and his once-a-year chance to play dragon. Here too live Miss Cleothilda, the ageing carnival queen, Philo the Calypsonian, and Fisheye, who flaunts his strength in the steel bands.

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The Dragon Can't Dance By Earl Lovelace Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The lilting, metallic harmonies of steel drums and the musical rhythm of Trinidadian Creole patois are elegantly rendered by consummate Caribbean man-of-letters Lovelace (*Salt*) in this novel, published in England in 1979. As always, Lovelace is concerned with how West Indian men and women struggle to find their individual identities in the face of dehumanizing living conditions, and how they resist cultural assimilation. For two days a year, the festival-parade of Carnival allows struggling Trinidadians to forget their poverty and embrace the frenzy and glory that masquerade provides. For the hilltop shack communities that dot the outskirts of Port-of-Spain, Carnival takes on mythic proportions. The respect that hustler Aldrick gains for his portrayal of an intricately scaled dragon carries him through the year. But the old order is fading: aging Carnival queen Cleothilde is forced to give way to beautiful, free-spirited Sylvia; drummer Fisheye fights to preserve his pride; and corporate sponsors rush to profit from Carnival and do away with its old customs of warriorhood between rival bands in favor of a more tourist-friendly version of the festivities. Conflicts arise when those who resist control by the corporations alienate neighbors by challenging the inevitable commercialization of Carnival. Kaleidoscopically colorful characters and a faithful ear help make this quest for personhood one of Lovelace's best works.

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From [Booklist](#)

Distinguished Trinidadian novelist Lovelace writes fiction as syncopated, sinuous, and irresistible as the calypso music that punctuates the lives of his poor but proud characters. Here, as he did in the award-winning *Salt*, Lovelace peers beneath the rigid structure of island society into the desiring hearts of men and women struggling for recognition, respect, and love. Carnival season has just begun in Calvary Hill, a Port of Spain shantytown, and Miss Cleothilda, the carnival queen, and Aldrick, the dragon king, try to concentrate on creating their elaborate costumes, but both are distracted by a young beauty named Sylvia. The queen senses a rival, and Aldrick, famous for his avoidance of work and marriage, feels love coming on. Conflict also drives Fisheye, a warrior without a cause whose restlessness infects his fellow drummers to the point that their steel bands become veritable street gangs, and Pariag, the only Indian on the Hill and the most ambitious and innocent of the lot. As Lovelace masterfully choreographs the dance of each of his finely drawn characters, he reveals the conundrums not only of Caribbean life but of the human condition itself.

Donna Seaman

From Kirkus Reviews

Caribbean writer Lovelace, whose *Salt* won the 1997 Commonwealth Writer's Prize, returns with a story (first published in England in 1979) that offers a defining and luminously sensitive portrait of postcolonial island life. The island in question is recently independent Trinidad, but it could be any Caribbean island settled by European planters, African slaves, and indentured East Indians. Carnival time is at hand, and the inhabitants of the Hill, former slaves, who "survive here, holding their poverty as a possession," are getting ready for this Mardi Graslike celebration: Steel bands are practicing, calypso singers and writers--like the diffident Philo--are creating new songs, and Aldrick Prospect, as usual, is working on his dragon costume. Aldrick, who, like most of the men, is unemployed, comes alive at Carnival, where it's his mission to do the Dragon dance, a dance that expresses all the people's frustrations and memories of their warrior past, and affirms their power--power that, if provoked, could burn down the city. But this year Aldrick, who's spurned the advances of young Sylvia, finds himself brooding. Change is in the air--those steel bands are acquiring commercial sponsors, the old fighting spirit of the people is changing to passive acceptance, and Aldrick's friends are drifting away and making new lives. After Carnival, Aldrick, feeling like "the last symbol of

rebellion," continues to brood, especially when he sees Sylvia take up with Guy, a notorious womanizer. He befriends Fisheye, an angry radical, and joins a futile rebellion against the government. Aldrick is jailed but, unlike the others, doesn't accept defeat, and once released--still depressed--he returns to the Hill. Finally, a quiet epiphany and a promise of Sylvia's affection present him with hope and reason enough to give up the impotent protest of the Dragon's dance. A poignant, beautifully crafted tale about a man and his country on the cusp of change. -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Murray:

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Ronald Adams:

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