

All Politics Is Local: Heterosexual Masculinities in the Anglophone Caribbean Novel

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Abstract

In the age of feminism, intersectionality, and LGBTQIA studies, it would seem that scholarly inquiries into masculinity are niched squarely within one of two categories: those that examine non-normative sexual identities and preferences and those that seek to explore the influence and effects of hegemonic masculinity on women and the political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces that govern gender and gender role socialization. Insofar as this pigeonholing has given voice to the concerns of previously unheard and historically marginalized groups, it has contributed valuably to our understanding of the dynamics that help to establish, regulate, and maintain social hierarchies. However, the uncompromising insistence of relevant scholarship on examining solely the macrosocial detriments of a normative masculinity—that is, one that venerates heteropatriarchy and sharply bifurcates gender roles in order that heterosexual men remain in power—detracts from even the most insightful contributions to the field. Specifically, such analyses tend to neglect—or at least severely overlook—the nuances of masculinity and male-female relations. To this end, this essay seeks to explore the nascent criticism of masculinities in Anglophone Caribbean literature by (1) providing an overview of extant critical analyses; (2) discussing what I view as the continuum of (Caribbean) masculinity; (3) briefly considering the breadth and depth of novels that engage ideas of manhood in its varied forms; and (4) beginning to conceptualize a theoretical approach that I contend best illuminates’ notions of Caribbean masculinity.

KEY WORDS: *gender, heterosexual, hegemonic, masculinity, normative*

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Introduction and Review of Scholarship

In the age of feminism, intersectionality, and LGBTQ(IA) studies, it appears that scholarly inquiries into masculinity are reductively niched within one of two categories: those that examine non-normative sexual identities and preferences and those that seek to explore the influence and effects of hegemonic masculinity on women as well as the political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces that govern gender and gender role socialization.¹ Insofar as this pigeonholing has given voice to the concerns of previously unheard and historically marginalized groups, it has contributed to our understanding of the dynamics that help to establish, regulate, and maintain social hierarchies. However, the uncompromising insistence of relevant scholarship on examining solely the macrosocial detriment of a normative masculinity—that is, one that venerates heterosexuality and sharply bifurcates gender roles in order that heterosexual (white) men remain in power—detracts from even the most insightful contributions to the field. Specifically, such analyses tend to neglect—or at least severely overlook—the nuances of masculinity and male-female relations, often positioning women (and their advancement) and men (and their advancement) comfortably and unquestioningly within a gendered, winner-take-all dialectic. Moreover, these studies make sweeping claims about male-female relationships without discussing, even tangentially, the alternative interpretations of the microsocial interactions that lend credence to the broad ideas being advanced. The result has been the widespread use of a critical approach based on the inference that, by understanding the ultimate desire of man—to remain in control, at least relative to woman—one can understand man’s actions within a microsocial context.

The line of reasoning delineated above forms the foundation that undergirds much of the contemporary social science research on gender. Although the argument’s conclusion—that men act to stay in power—may be accurate inasmuch as men generally comport themselves in ways that lead to their maintaining control, the argument itself pays neither homage nor lip service to the psychological and psychosocial determinants of such a decision. It is not enough and far too base to assert that the need for power in-and-of-itself negates or supersedes these important factors. And, more importantly, from a class perspective, it seems

¹ In some cases, the categories are not mutually exclusive. A transgender woman, for example, would fit squarely within both.

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that socioeconomic status has little place, if any, in the conversation. Stated simply—and reductively—men rich or poor are interested in having and holding onto power. But as we can see in multiple novels—Earl Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance* and *The Wine of Astonishment*, Michael Anthony’s *King of the Masquerade*, and Edgar Mittelholzer’s *The Life and Death of Sylvia*, for example—socioeconomic status is central to understanding masculinities, particularly as young men of disparate classes seek to perform and validate their conceptions of manhood. Despite these limitations and simplifications, social science research about gender has, on the whole, contributed to our understanding of the ways that men and women operate. If only in a most global sense, it has opened the door to studying gendered interactions and their implications.

Of all the gender and sexuality quagmires, perhaps the Caribbean slough remains the most tenebrous. Although the past three decades have seen a rise in the amount of research on gender in the region, the inquiries themselves have been decidedly pitched toward exploring the historic and contemporary subjugation of women. Notably, V. Eudine Barriteau, Patricia Mohammed, Rhoda Reddock, and M. Jacqui Alexander have sought to detail the influence(s) of male privilege on women in the public and private spheres, and scholars of performance, literature, and art history, including Belinda Edmondson, Faith Smith, Samantha Noel, and Jennifer Thorington Springer, have expanded our understanding of women’s contributions to Caribbean society, particularly with regard to Carnival and the carnivalesque. Given the intensely patriarchal history of the Caribbean, this corpus of research has foregrounded women’s issues and allowed women’s voices to be heard more clearly. Similarly, it has served to counterbalance certain sociological studies of the mid-twentieth century whose findings heavily downplayed and, in some cases, attempted to delegitimize the importance of women to Caribbean societies. But however insightful contemporary studies have been, each to some degree or another flows from the abductively reasoned conclusion detailed above, thus falling victim to the homogenizing premises of the overarching claim.

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To a significantly lesser degree, scholars have interrogated masculinity in Caribbean societies.² Linden Lewis, a Guyanese sociologist resident in the United States, has been most active in this arena, having authored numerous articles and book chapters on the topic. He is, perhaps, singularly responsible for the growth of the study of Caribbean manhood. In addition to Lewis, the late Barry Chevannes made valuable contributions throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, with research focusing on male socialization and the role that women play therein. Michael Bucknor, Michael Kimmel, and Errol Miller³ have also endeavored to broaden our understanding of masculinity in the Caribbean, sporadically publishing essays and delivering conference papers. Even scholars of Caribbean women's writing have entered the fray, with Belinda Edmondson and her 1999 monograph *Making Men* leading the charge.⁴ Despite the sum total of contributions to the field, many of which have been enlightening, much research remains to be done, especially in the humanities: to date, the social sciences have held a monopoly.

It is with the aforementioned considerations in mind that I have set out to scrutinize Caribbean manhood more intentionally and more incisively. My study is in large part a response to three of the concerns which I have already outlined: the dearth of scholarship on masculinity in the Caribbean (and specifically in Caribbean literature), the tendency of extant (feminist) scholarship to homogenize men and their issues, and the perils of the hasty inferential conclusion drawn by many scholars of gender and sexuality. To this end, my main objectives are to begin to decipher Caribbean masculinity—especially its construction and the ways that it is affirmed and challenged—through an interdisciplinary lens; to analyze dynamics of power in heterosexual relationships in a way that recognizes the nuances of male-female interaction; to expose the residual influence of Victorian ideas (about sexuality and

² I am not suggesting that masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive and that they must be studied in isolation. Rather, I am noting that scholarship on Caribbean manhood pales in breadth and scope when compared with scholarship on Caribbean womanhood.

³ The page limits of this essay do not permit me to examine Errol Miller's controversial marginalization thesis. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Miller is quite possibly the most provocative Caribbean scholar of gender and sexuality.

⁴ Somewhat confusingly, Edmondson's monograph concerns itself more with women and the issues that women writers face. To justify this decision, Edmondson argues that "the founding moment for the anxieties of Caribbean migrant women authors over literary authority can be traced back to [] Victorian speculations on whether men could be 'made' out of black West Indian men" (*Making Men* 6).

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the family) on the Anglophone Caribbean; and to enlarge the scope of research on Caribbean literature. My ultimate focus is starting a candid conversation about issues of gender and sexuality. Such a discussion should provide stakeholders with the opportunity to constructively air their grievances and work toward bridging the gender(ed) gap.

Before proceeding, I must emphasize that my research is, at its core, a literary undertaking. Although I draw upon a number of theories—performance theory and cultural studies, for example—and even though sociological, historical, and ethnological studies provide sociocultural context, close reading is my primary analytical scalpel and novels are my primary patient. I use theory judiciously when a theoretical interpretation helps either to demystify a problem or to explain a phenomenon. Apart from these specific instances, any engagement remains exclusive to discussions of scholarship about the particular topic under consideration. I believe that an analysis that privileges a contextualized close reading over a strictly theoretical approach excavates textual meaning more completely. Likewise, I view the singular or unqualified use of theory as a garden pathway of sorts, one along which a scholar walks in order to impose onto a text a meaning that fits a certain narrative.

For the purposes of this essay, I have deliberately confined the scope of my inquiry to the Anglophone Caribbean. This choice flies in the face of contemporary approaches to studying the literatures and cultures of the region, most especially Rosamond King's concept of the "Caribglobal," which "takes the spirit of the foreign-local⁵ and shifts it into a broader and more unified concept" (3). Equally, it steers away from Kamala Kempadoo's assertion in *Sexing the Caribbean* that studies can address, simultaneously, "local particularities and regional generalities, as well [as] relationships between the local, regional, and global" (5). I have opted for this seemingly narrow focus in part to avoid a significant problem that David Murray finds with King's *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*:

Once again, the intention to highlight pan-regional and diasporic

⁵ "Foreign-local" is a colloquial Trinbagonian phrase that describes an individual who has enough knowledge of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago to pass as a fulltime resident even though he is not. It is commonly used to describe members of the diaspora.

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cultural similarities in transgressive sexual and gendered practices is admirable, although my anthropological training caused a few warning bells to go off in relation to the potential pitfalls of regional/diasporic sociocultural generalizations that risk oversimplification and/or glossing over complex local historical, political, economic, and sociocultural contexts. (1)

Certainly, the idea that one can examine gender—or any topic in the Caribbean—without accounting for varied histories is tenuous for the mere fact that patterns of migration and colonization are not the same throughout the region. For example, Barbados does not exhibit the ethnic diversity of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana: in 2010, 92.4 percent of Barbadians identified as black. By contrast, in 2002 in Guyana, just 30.2 percent identified as black African, and, in Trinidad and Tobago, a 2011 estimate found that 34.2 percent identified as black African. Moreover, Barbados is referred to as “Little England,” a tongue-in-cheek label that testifies to the decidedly British influence on the former colony. (Barbados is the only island in the Caribbean to have been colonized by just one European power.) In any case, the larger point being made here illustrates the fact that, *within* the Anglophone Caribbean, a diversity of cultures and cultural influences exists. As this reality applies to gender and sexuality, it is reasonable to conclude that Victorian ideas about womanhood and the family are more intact in Barbados than in Trinidad and Tobago, where Spain and Great Britain once ruled and where a plurality of citizens identify as Indo-Caribbean and are for that reason more likely bound by East Indian sexual and familial mores (even if heteropatriarchy is indeed normative in Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean communities).⁶ Ultimately, one must recognize that ethnic differences within the Anglophone Caribbean complicate—or should complicate—the study of gender and sexuality. Such is the case most especially in Guyana

⁶ I am not arguing that Victorian thought does not influence Trinidad and Tobago. To the contrary, it does. Rather, I am noting that although Victorian ideas may hold sway over certain sociocultural understandings held by white and Afro-Trinidadians, they do not supersede sexual and familial East Indian dictates to which many Indo-Trinidadians ascribe.

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and Trinidad and Tobago, which have high populations of Indo-Caribbean and mixed peoples.⁷

For this reason, given different—if nonetheless similar—expectations of men regardless of familial heritage, I have limited the scope of my research to Afro-Caribbean masculinities. This topic is broad and complex in-and-of-itself, for there exists a diversity of *heterosexual* masculinities that are made manifest as a result of different combinations of socioeconomic, historic, and psychological factors. To assert otherwise is to homogenize men and their experiences. Although the general feminist claim that men seek to perpetuate patriarchy rings true throughout the Caribbean, the analysis cannot stop there: class and cultural dynamics influence men of different social statuses in different ways, and to gloss over the process through which a man arrives at his beliefs about gender roles is to assume that such a process is either effectively the same regardless of background or functionally unimportant given the perpetual subjugation of women. But as Barry Chevannes notes:

Among the Caribbean peoples [,] masculinity is both the product and the determinant of the complex interaction of people, each with his or her own attributes or motives, framed in culturally significant ways. The more we understand masculinity, the more we understand masculinity does not everywhere mean the same thing, that in multicultural societies ‘there are likely to be multiple definitions of masculinity.’ (206)

Recognizing the existence of a panoply of masculinities is crucial because, as I will discuss, any critical approach to interrogating gender in the Caribbean must account for the concomitant influences that help to shape an individual. It must also take into consideration an individual’s psyche as well as his awareness of the environment in which he lives. Stated succinctly, people operationalize ideas, and people make decisions to support or renounce beliefs or positions advanced by nonprofit organizations, governments, and corporations.

⁷ I am referring here to *douglas*, not to people who have mixed white or indigenous heritage.

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Ideas must be assigned meaning, and only when something has been imbued with meaning can that something hold sway. Any critical approach must also be flexible enough to explain the presence of (seeming) anomalies and contradictions while not being so malleable as to veer from the fundamental tenets upon which it stands. Put another way, it must nimble yet sturdy, firm yet tractable.

A Fresh Theoretical Lens: Sexology and the Psychosocial

With these conditions in mind, I propose in this essay a new critical approach for scholars of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean. This interdisciplinary lens is grounded firmly in the idea that rigorous analysis of microsocial interaction is preferable when examining the ways in which Caribbean men display their manhood. Likewise, it finds footing in the belief that an broad examinations of gender and sexuality—such as those discussed at the beginning of this essay—lead to broad conclusions that do not accurately account for the nuances of intimate relationships, particularly the variety of factors—psychocultural, psychosocial, and sociohistorical—that help to shape an individual. In this sense, then, the traditional scholarly approach, feminism, is double blind:⁸ on one level, it ignores the intricacies of the socialization process that Caribbean men undergo, opting rather to advance the claim that women have been and still are consistently oppressed by heteropatriarchal power structures; on the second, it eliminates any conversation about the individual—man or woman—and the ways in which people must actively participate in order to perpetuate ideologies and, in this case, male control.

⁸ It bears emphasizing that my work is neither antifeminist nor antiwoman. Although I do indict (what I perceive as) the shaky premises upon which many feminist assertions about Caribbean manhood stand, and despite the problems that I will raise with claims of feminist research, I ultimately do not take issue with the central argument advanced by many scholars: that, historically, women in the Caribbean have been marginalized. Rather, I seek to interpret male-female interactions with a far more penetrating gaze, one that facilitates the identification and analysis of the subtleties of each character's personhood and his opposite-sex relations. In this regard, then, context is vital to my research, and I am far more concerned with understanding the particularities of the relationships under the microscope than I am with contradicting or attempting to disprove feminist ideas.

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With this in mind, my central problem with the extant body of research is simply homogenization. It arises in opposition to the spirit of the argument advanced by Jacqui Alexander that “the archetypal source of state legitimation is anchored in the heterosexual family” (20). Although Alexander’s claim has merit—and even though she ably anatomizes the ways in which the governments of The Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago have regulated sexual expression and sexual practices—she assumes that, by highlighting this troubled phenomenon, change will come. To the contrary, only when the street/yard socialization process is dissected can meaningful advancements take place.⁹ As Chevannes observes in “The Role of the Street in the Socialization of Caribbean Males,” a chapter in Linden Lewis’s *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*:

In Jamaica over the past several years, females have been outnumbering males by as much as two to one at the Universities of the West Indies and among Caribbean Examination Council high school graduates. On the other hand, an extraordinary rise in crime over the past twenty-five years, ranging from robbery to drug trafficking to murder, is largely the handiwork of young males Issues such as these are generating many questions. Has our value system changed? Are we reaping the result of a different pattern of socialization from that of earlier generations? Specifically, how are our males being socialized? [This chapter] focuses on an important agent of socialization often overlooked, namely the wider community—or, as the informants put it, the *street*. (215-216; emphasis mine)

My approach in this essay is informed by sexology—the study of human sexuality and the dynamics of intimate relationships—as well as by psychocultural and sociohistorical

⁹ The street, yard, and government are indeed interconnected. I do not, however, believe that an approach that seeks government “deregulation” of sexuality change will prove fruitful—at least in the short term or as an isolated strategy. Attitudes about gender and intimacy in the Caribbean are deeply ingrained in familial consciousness and discourse, and even though these attitudes have led to discriminatory policies it is vital to employ a reversal strategy that starts at the bottom and progresses toward policy changes at the national government level.

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factors. Specifically, I work from a tempered sex-positive perspective¹⁰ that embraces sexual expression as normal and as an important function of intimate relationships. I favor the biopsychosocial approach to interrogating sexuality that scholars such as Justin Lehmillier use,¹¹ and my textual analyses bear in mind (1) that all relationships are influenced by unique concatenations of external factors and (2) that men and women alike must navigate a labyrinth of sui generis psychological, interpersonal, and macrosocial forces. To this end, I am indebted to the likes of Virginia Masters, William Johnson, William Gagnon, John Simon, Alfred Kinsey, Wilhelm Reich, Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault, and Helen Singer Kaplan, each of whom has contributed greatly to the study of human sexuality.

In the pages that follow, I will analyze two novels of the Anglophone Caribbean: Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) and Michael Anthony's *King of the Masquerade* (1974). In examining *The Dragon Can't Dance*, I will focus on the relationship between Aldrick, the novel's protagonist, and Sylvia, his love interest. The goal of this section is to show the potential of my lens for the study of masculinities in the Caribbean. It is also to correct several shoddy appraisals of the work. In the next section, I will explore *King of the Masquerade* and discuss Bakhtin's conceptualization of the carnivalesque. The aim here is to demonstrate that masculinities are shaped extensively by institutions such as the family, and that an inextricable link exists between a man's (non)participation in certain activities and his social standing. Specifically, I will use the portraiture of Dr. Broomley and Alan to support these claims.

Taken as a whole, this essay seeks to provide a rigorous interrogation of heterosexual masculinities. Themes of class standing and social affirmation will persist throughout, and in the case of *The Dragon Can't Dance* and *King of the Masquerade* will be crucial to understanding the ways in which men are expected to comport themselves (based upon their knowledge of self and grasp of society's expectations of/for them). Likewise, in two of the three novels—*Waiting in Vain* and *The Dragon Can't Dance*—the notion of an ideal(ized)

¹⁰ A sex-positive perspective generally endorses all sexual activity that is both consensual and healthy. I hesitate to agree fully with this definition, for "healthy" is very relative.

¹¹ See Lehmillier's *The Psychology of Human Sexuality* for an expansive commentary on the biopsychosocial approach and its core tenets.

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masculinity will take shape. Although in the conclusion I address such an overlapping, the page limits of this essay do not permit me to go into significant detail about the problematics of a singular archetypal heterosexual maleness. Furthermore, my commentaries on femaleness and the female socialization process are necessarily limited to discussions about gendered interactions during which men seek to validate their manhood.¹²

As I noted in the first pages of this essay, much research remains to be done on Caribbean masculinities. Linden Lewis arrives at this conclusion as early as 1998, writing that one of his essays “opens up for further consideration the place of [] texts as a site for exploring a popular and academic understanding of the role of gender in Caribbean society” (“Masculinity and the Dance of the Dragon: Reading Lovelace Discursively” 165). Moreover, it is my hope that my ongoing scholarly efforts—borne out in this essay and in the papers that I have presented at the Thirteenth and Fifteenth International Conferences on Caribbean Literature—will contribute valuably to this crucial area of inquiry.

Savior on the Hill? Aldrick, Maleness, and *The Dragon Can't Dance*

Arguably no text in the Anglophone Caribbean literary canon provides a more compelling commentary on or portraiture of masculinities than does *The Dragon Can't Dance*. This does not mean that many Caribbean novelists do not pose the question of what it means to be a man, but alternatively that Lovelace's dichotomization of masculinity is especially poignant, with two polemically opposite constructions of manhood at the forefront of the novel. On one end rests the hegemonic man, who is aggressive, stagnant, emotionally restrained, and subordinates' women; on the other is the idealized man, who is sensitive, dynamic, compassionate, and affirms women. Studying the novel's two most prominent male characters, Aldrick Prospect, the doting protagonist, and Mr. Guy, his foil and the hyper-masculine slumlord, demonstrates these two extremes. To best understand this dichotomy, one must reference Sylvia, the men's love-interest and a crucial character in the text. For that reason, upon a thorough examination of Mr. Guy, Sylvia, and Aldrick, one concludes that,

¹² In opting for this approach, the goal is not to define women based on their interaction(s) with men. Rather, it is to recognize that the female socialization process is itself intricate, and that to fully analyze such a process requires a (more) theoretical essay, one in which social science literature plays an integral role.

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following his epiphany, Aldrick embodies the idealized masculine; that Mr. Guy represents hegemonic masculinity; that Sylvia ultimately recognizes Aldrick as idealized and abandons Mr. Guy for him; and, that Sylvia's choosing Aldrick does not succumb to the trite "happily ever after" narrative which current scholarship asserts.

A rigorous interrogation of Aldrick's characterization at the novel's outset shows that Aldrick is not a hegemonic male. He "get[s] up at midday from sleep, yawn[s], stretch[es], [and] then start[s] thinking of where he might get something to eat" (Lovelace 25). He appears largely disinterested in providing for himself monetarily, let alone for a wife and children, and he spends much of his day sleeping and relaxing. In fact, he only exerts himself when the time comes to make a new dragon costume for Carnival. In this way, Aldrick clearly eschews his "manly" duties and society's expectations of him. His deliberate avoidance of Sylvia exemplifies this behavior:

To him [Sylvia] 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 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 the dragon costume that he prepared for masquerade on Carnival day. (23)

Notwithstanding, the symbolism of his dragon costume is crucial to our understanding of Aldrick's masculinity. As Linden Lewis notes in "Masculinity and *The Dragon Can't Dance*: Reading Lovelace Discursively," Aldrick's creation, destruction, and recreation of the dragon costume "is a construction and extension of his identity as a man" (169). In essence, over time, the dragon costume has instilled a "dragon" mentality in him. This way of thinking entails pure symbolic ferocity but little actual terror. It is a shallow, self-centered, and noncommittal perspective, one that allows him to tergiversate and wallow in his shack. Its warnings are all smoke and no fire.

Indeed, and incontrovertibly, Aldrick possesses this mentality at the novel's beginning; it defines his very thoughts and behavior. It makes him stagnant, "a hustler, working nowhere"

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(Lovelace 36), only responsible “to his dragon, that presentation on Carnival day of the self that he had lived the whole year” (36). But as the book progresses, if one considers Aldrick’s development, one sees that he outgrows this mindset and develops a more sophisticated understanding of his role in society.

Certainly, by the end of the novel, Aldrick has fundamentally transformed himself. His epiphany while in prison—that his “dragon” mentality must no longer define him—changes his life. When released, he seeks out Sylvia to proclaim his love and share his newfound understanding: “*Now I ain’t no dragon . . . Funny, eh? Years. And now I is more than just to play a masquerade once a year for two days*” (197). By this time, however, Sylvia has seemingly accepted his former self and has said yes to Mr. Guy’s marriage proposal, telling Aldrick that she “*ha[s] everything that [she] want[s]*” (198). However, the reader knows of Sylvia’s discontentment: while she may possess the material pleasures in life given to her by Mr. Guy, she lacks emotional fulfillment. In this vein, it could be argued that Aldrick is the only man who could fill this role. Beyond a doubt, Mr. Guy’s intense focus on materialism and womanizing over emotion and passion precludes him from fulfilling Sylvia. It is his detachment, one could assert, that compels Sylvia to seek emotional shelter with other men, most notably the man enthralled by Africa and the one by Cuba. In any case, it is Aldrick’s maturation (facilitated by his epiphany) that allows him to enter Sylvia’s life again. As much is clear when Sylvia challenges him during a lull in one of their conversations following his release from jail: “*What could you give me?*” (201) “*Yourself,*” he responds (201). Stunned, she retorts, “*You know, you change,*” (201). In this conversation, it is clear that, on hearing Aldrick’s words, Sylvia begins to think that his maturation now justifies her jilting Mr. Guy. After all, she may not want to lose Aldrick a second time, especially after he now feels able to affirm openly his love for her.

Undoubtedly, when Sylvia, eyes “*eager, burning, and shielding invitation and promise . . .*” (44), dressed in a virginal white knee-length dress and high heels slightly too big for her, first offers herself to Aldrick, he is unable to reconcile his desire for her with his dragon mentality. He cannot find the words to express his internal conflict, and when he finally can, the conversation ends abruptly as Philo arrives and tries to grope Sylvia. In this scene, Aldrick displays his impotence; he embodies the dragon. Subsequently, he tries to

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justify refusing Sylvia: he tells himself that he is poor, has no prospects, and cannot provide for her: “She’s a woman with all those woman wantings . . . I mean, she not asking for anything, but if you’s her man, the world is what you will want to give her” (93). However, Aldrick can give her what she desires, and he recognizes that his love for her supersedes all else. This recognition further entrenches the dichotomy of masculinity in the novel, and examining Mr. Guy adds to this clear polarization.

Indisputable is the fact that Mr. Guy, the novel’s hegemonic male, serves as Aldrick’s foil. The two could not be more polemically opposite. For one, Mr. Guy takes advantage of Sylvia’s family’s poverty. In exchange for leniency when Sylvia’s mother defaults on rent payments, he fondles Sylvia. Moreover, he is morally bankrupt. He attempts to purchase Sylvia by telling her that he will buy her whatever costume she wants for Carnival: “‘What costume you want?’ he asked her . . . ‘Any costume you want, just tell me’” (19). For these reasons, Aldrick characterizes him as “a son-fa-bitch[] who step[s] around like a proper gentleman [but who] screws all the little girls on the Hill” (31). And, for a long while, Sylvia manages to steer clear of him. She reaches a turning point, however, when Aldrick refuses her advances. Having grown frustrated with Aldrick’s hesitancy, she turns to the arms of Mr. Guy, who can provide her with the material goods that she desires. (In turn, one can assume that she provides him with sexual pleasure.) In this way, Mr. Guy shows his hegemonic masculine characterization. He is devoid of emotion and passion and is interested solely in perpetuating his dominance and increasing his social and socioeconomic standing in Calvary Hill. He epitomizes the conflation of manhood and materialism, in so doing unearthing a chief problem with hegemonic masculinity: stagnancy. (Throughout the text, Mr. Guy remains morally and ethically static. From the beginning to the end, he swindles, gropes, and buys off women, and he, unlike Aldrick, has no epiphany. He arrives at no life-altering realization, and he relies on the belief that hegemonic masculinity is preferable.)

Nevertheless, perhaps the most interesting elements of characterization in *The Dragon Can’t Dance* are Mr. Guy’s and Aldrick Prospect’s last names. Indeed, Lovelace likely chooses to give Mr. Guy an ironic name to show that he validates his masculinity through his actions and not through his very being. He seduces the girls of the Hill, gropes them at-will, buys their affection, and tosses them to the side. His level of unscrupulousness goes

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unparalleled in the text. What is more, his intimate relationships are fleeting and transactional. They are a means to an end and are detached from emotion. Contrarily, Aldrick's last name, "Prospect," is not ironic but premonitory. In the beginning, Aldrick shows little promise. As the novel unravels, however, his "prospects" change: he becomes sensitive, intuitive, and introspective. He marries the need to provide for himself and for his family with the idealized masculine, and he feels empowered. Armed with this newfound *esprit de corps*, he concludes that Sylvia is the woman for him. But by the time that he realizes this, Mr. Guy has already proposed and Sylvia has accepted. This capitulation demonstrates a significant defeat for Aldrick, even if it is short-lived, for Sylvia escapes to Aldrick at the novel's end.

Accordingly, determining the text's comment on masculinity necessitates an understanding of the ending. In an unchallenged analysis of the novel's final two chapters, Linden Lewis concludes that:

Though Lovelace attempts to fashion a male character [Aldrick] who is sensitive at some levels, and with whom readers can empathize, he ends up retelling a time-honored patriarchal tale. This is a tale in which the woman capitulates in the end, and the 'star boy' wins the girl, even though as a sort of consolation, she has 'tamed' the Dragon, somewhat. (173)

This analysis, uncontested in current and past scholarship, represents a trite, sarcastic, and "happily ever after" reading that lacks substantive critical insight. First, Sylvia does not "tame" Aldrick, as Lewis would have the reader believe. Saying as much writes away his epiphany. To support Lewis's conclusion, the reader must see Sylvia as the catalyst which propels Aldrick's transformation. The text does not substantiate this interpretation. Rather, the attack against the police, which lands Aldrick in prison, spurs his epiphany. While jailed, Aldrick recognizes that engaging in such a hastily planned, spiteful display of machismo is the action of a dragon-minded person. He then links this action to his worldview, and he links subsequently the impact of his "dragonness" to Sylvia. Therefore, the stunt with the police is the catalyst, not Sylvia, as Lewis suggests. (This alternative interpretation does not mean that Sylvia is not impacted. Quite to the contrary, she benefits the most from Aldrick's epiphany as she sees that he understands the extent of his full potential.)

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Second, Lewis's assertion that Sylvia capitulates in the end, wooed by Aldrick, the "star boy," is dubiously uncritical. This interpretation undermines the novel's larger comment on masculinity. It simply does not tell the complete tale, one in which Sylvia, *herself* ignited by Aldrick's declaration that he can give her "[her]self" (Lovelace 201), realizes at last that she need not choose Mr. Guy for the material goods that he can provide. From the moment that she has this realization, Sylvia understands that she does not have to justify choosing Aldrick. And, at the point when she becomes cognizant that justification is unnecessary and would serve only to placate the residents of the Hill and Miss Cleothilda, her domineering influencer, the pressure to conform to social convention—choosing Mr. Guy—releases from within her. In a way, a weight is lifted off Sylvia's shoulders. She feels the freedom to choose Aldrick.

Third, Lewis's characterization of Aldrick as a "star boy" presents problems. Using this term undermines his growth. For that matter, one should find it difficult to reconcile this characterization with Aldrick's initial lethargy, which Lovelace goes to great extents to demonstrate. Nonetheless, Aldrick does mature, and the text substantiates Lewis's argument if and insofar as he refers to Aldrick's transformational change. Stated differently, if Lewis calls him a "star boy" because his epiphany results in a fundamental transformation of being, then Lewis's conclusion is permissible. However, Lewis goes further. Implied in his argument is the idea, again, that Sylvia is the reason for Aldrick's change. As I have shown in the last paragraph, the catalysis is actually reversed. Furthermore, Aldrick's rumination on the botched police kidnapping induces his epiphany, not hers. Finally, Sylvia has her own realization that ultimately leads to her overcoming her apprehension about choosing Aldrick.

Fourth, Lewis poses a rhetorical question: "Could not Sylvia have pursued another option which involved neither dragons nor sponsors?" (173) Here, Lewis attempts to indict what he perceives as a false dichotomy. This attack misses one of the novel's most powerful comments: that Sylvia has no other choice between the hegemonic and the idealized. Ultimately, she chooses the idealized. She rejects convention. (Notwithstanding, Lewis is correct insofar as other men in the text rest somewhere spectrally in between Mr. Guy and Aldrick—Philo and Fisheye, for example. However, none piques Sylvia's interest or excites her sexually, emotionally, and intellectually quite like the Mr. Guy and Aldrick. Thus,

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speculation as to Sylvia choosing a man who falls spectrally between these two men is irrelevant.)

Masculinity, Carnival, and Social Hierarchy in *King of the Masquerade*

However short it may be, *King of the Masquerade* by Michael Anthony is a cultural tour de force in which the social implications of Carnival are brought to center stage. At the most basic level, the novel details the struggle of Alan Broomley, a young Afro-Trinidadian man from a respectable family, to gain his father's approbation to participate in the traditional Carnival festivities. But as one digs deeper, one sees a more profound and subtle portrayal of masculinities and the ways in which institutions shape men's identities and understanding of themselves and their position(s) in society. *King of the Masquerade*, then, is much more than a novel that plainly expresses the hesitations of the Afro-Trinidadian middle class (vis-à-vis the Broomley family) about participating in Carnival. Rather, it is a work in which the reader is made privy (1) to the decision-making process of this socioeconomic group and (2) to the results of transgressing well established norms.

To understand the extent to which Alan's desire to fête Carnival is incongruous with his socioeconomic status, it is important to understand that class and race have played a central role in the development of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. From the late eighteenth century when French plantation owners inaugurated their Mas tradition in Trinidad (scheduling the festival for the days immediately preceding Lent), slaves were prohibited from taking part in the revelry. As Creque notes in a protracted discussion about race, class, and ethnicity in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Trinidad Carnival and Jamaican Jonkonnu¹³:

Role reversal of whites playing slaves and slaves playing kings and queens in the selection of costumes was a custom in Jamaican Jonkonnu festivals as well as in the Trinidad Carnival. In Trinidad[,] the festivals were primarily restricted to the upper class[,] with limited participation of free coloreds. Slaves were

¹³ An alternative spelling is *Junkanoo*. The festival is thought to have started in Jamaica or The Bahamas and is similar to Carnival. It takes place on Boxing Day (December 26) or New Year's Day (January 1) each year.

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onlookers and were only allowed ‘contained’ celebrations in the slave quarters of the plantation. (9)

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that white participation in Carnival decreased and was replaced by that of free coloreds and (former) slaves. In the 1860s and 70s, Trinidad Carnival goers continued to embrace their African roots and incorporated more and more African-derived dances and music. But the celebration would meet fierce opposition in February 1881, when the Canboulay riots¹⁴ broke out. The resultant clashes between British police and revelers would result in the temporary suspension of Carnival and its associated activities. Not until the 1980s would things return to normal.

Given the racialized and classist history of canboulay and Carnival, it is no wonder that Dr. Broomley harbors open disdain for anything remotely related to the festivities:

‘This thing is a cancer. There is nothing you or me could do. There is nothing God or man could do, much less you or me. No, I mean sometimes I think about it but I don’t know. Alan’s always saying “All the world’s a stage.” Shakespeare. All the world’s a stage and everyone’s playing a part Well, I could see with that, but there’s no reason why we should act the fool All I could say is that I won’t ever be a part of this thing called Carnival and I know that none of my family will ever be in it. That’s all I know.’ (12)

Moreover, in Dr. Broomley’s diatribe, it becomes apparent that Broomley sees himself as the protector of the family’s social status. Because he perceives that Carnival is a celebration for the lower class, he must ensure that his children do not take part. To do so would be to shame the Broomley name and the reputation that he has worked hard to cultivate.

¹⁴ The Canboulay riots play an important role in the social history of Trinidad and Tobago. They resulted from attempts by the colonial government to end canboulay, the precursor to Trinidad Carnival. Canboulay is a creolized iteration of *cannes brûlées*, which means “burnt cane” in French.

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Notwithstanding Dr. Broomley's outright hatred of Carnival, Alan proceeds with his preparations for J'ouvert¹⁵ and the Parade of the Masquerade. He does so with the furtive assistance of Letitia, the family's maid, and eventually performs on the Savannah. Dr. Broomley, who had been coaxed into attending the event, enjoys the fêting until he realizes at the end of the show that the King of the Masquerade, his favorite perform, is actually his son:

Unable to contain himself [Alan] ran and threw his arms around his mother's neck. Then there was pandemonium Dr. Broomley, in a fit of jealousy, flew on the masker and floored him And as the mask was taken off Dr. Broomley fainted when he saw Alan's face. (81-82)

In sum, *King of the Masquerade* is a novel in which the social implications of Carnival participation are foregrounded. Likewise, it is a text in which readers are given insight into the ways in that masculinity plays a role in both the decision-making process and the celebration itself. To this end, Dr. Broomley represents one end of the spectrum. His son, Alan, rests at the other.

Conclusion

The question of what it means to be a man in the Caribbean remains unanswered. Although many novelists and poets have addressed the issues that men face as well as the ways that they respond, more research needs to be conducted. This is especially true in the realm of heterosexuality, given that most scholarship on Caribbean manhood focuses on the subjugation of queer and trans-men by governments and political organizations. With those considerations in mind, I am hopeful that, in the long run, a panoply of incisive interdisciplinary studies will come to fruition. Interrogating Caribbean masculinities requires an understanding of the diverse histories and cultures of the region, and one cannot meaningfully contribute to the field without recognizing the uniqueness of the islands that millions of people call home.

¹⁵ J'ouvert is a Creole word. From the French *jour ouvert* (roughly translated as "daybreak"), it is the celebration that takes place the Monday morning of Trinidad Carnival.

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