

ABSTRACT

The Rich Man in His Castle, The Poor Ones Take the Street: Integrating The 'Canonical' Text and Popular Culture

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It is established that West Indian literature has played a role in the nationalist aim to validate Afro-Creole contributions to the creation of a Caribbean civilization. This study examines how a literary text draws on popular culture to do this.

I explore the similarities in strategies, devices and themes used by George Lamming in the much respected landmark Caribbean text, In the Castle of My Skin and several popular forms of the carnivalesque. The study draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's model of the carnivalesque, supplementing it with borrowings from Kamau Brathwaite's model of creolisation, and from analyses made by others, including Richard Burton and Curwen Best. Throughout, the study pays significant attention to questions of how the social construction of women is effected, and leans on the history of feminist thought to which I have been exposed as a feminist activist and scholar across several disciplines. The study also includes an interview with Dr. Lamming¹, who responds to the hypotheses I advance.

I argue that Lamming was influenced by existing narrative structures and concerns of West Indian carnival forms to create this text. The study concludes that an understanding of these forms is important for critiquing West Indian literature, and consequently, for better understanding of social relations in the countries of the region.

Keywords: Carnavalesque; grotesque body; festive speech/creole narrative; gender; woman; carnival; knowledge system.

¹ I refer to the author as Lamming but wish to refer to the person as Dr. Lamming. This introduces a discrepancy in my presentation. I find it necessary to do it in order to accord a certain ceremony.