

David K. Danow. **The Spirit of Carnival**. Lexington: University of Press of Kentucky, 1995. Pp. 183, notes, works cited, index. \$25.95 cloth.

Lynn Gelfand

Carnival, celebrated just before Lent, is a festival marking the transitional point in the calendrical year where the barriers separating winter from spring, dark from light, and death from life break down, and the stable, discrete categories by which we frame our lives melt into each other. Merry-making, feasts, and colorful costumes are a part of the festivities, as is excess, instability, and the reversal of commonly held values. It is a period of both lush freedom and lawless danger. David K. Danow's book, *The Spirit of Carnival*, is an examination of the connection between this chaotic festival and the literary genres of Latin American magical realism and Holocaust literature, which Danow characterizes as grotesque realism.

Latin American magical realism, Danow asserts, is carnival reflected and refracted through the multi-perspectival prism of verbal art (4). Fusing natural and supernatural dimensions in such a way that the reader cannot tell where one ends and the other begins, Latin American magical realism creates a universe where the mundane becomes extraordinary and the fabulous appears commonplace. In Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*, the voices of the dead, trapped in the hollows of the walls or under stones, still echo through the living village (27). In Isabel Allende's book *Eva Luna*, fish rain from the sky and books left open in a room at night produce spectral characters that walk the house (65). Yet, however bright and life-enhancing the principles of magical realism appear, Danow notes it does not deny the reality of pain or injustice. Rather, it acknowledges suffering as a facet of reality, alongside wonder, mystery, and hope.

The grotesque realism of Holocaust literature, by contrast, reflects the darker, life-negating aspects of carnival; it takes us directly into the realm of the Grim Reaper. Holocaust literature presents a world of demonic reversals and horrific inversions, where the unthinkable becomes commonplace. Chaos, lunacy, and nightmare, Danow notes, are the defining terms of the carnivalesque spirit subverted and contorted from its original playful aspect into its most deadly manifestation (63). Danow illustrates this principle by drawing upon such works as Elie Wiesel's *The Town Beyond the Wall*, where the main character sees saints turn into criminals for a crust of bread—a small, dry, filthy crust could change the natural order, could reverse the structure of creation (53). Survivors of the camps are haunted by the ghosts of those who did not survive. When a survivor returns to the town of his birth, he is confronted by emptiness and ghosts—thronging up from the depths of history, fearful, silent ghosts (169). To the question, what if God is mad? Wiesel answers: That would explain so much (158).

Despite the *The Spirit of Carnival's* genuinely intriguing thesis, there are some problems. The argument that Holocaust literature, with its grim and horrifying vision of existence, is the inverse of Latin American magical realism suggests a tidier binary relation between the two genres than exists in reality. Danow notes that Latin American magical realism does not deny suffering and injustice; however, he downplays significantly the darker side of the genre in favor of its life-enhancing features, even though oppression, torture, and death are often as much a presence within the genre as beauty, mystery, and warmth. Another problem with the book is its repetitious nature. It continues to provide literary examples for its arguments long after the reader has gotten the point. Shortened, this could have been a powerful and moving article for a literary journal; as a book it becomes tiring.

Nonetheless, Danow's book succeeds in demonstrating how Latin American magical realism and Holocaust literature reflect and refract in literary form the carnivalesque spirit of inversion, intensification of experience, and hallucinatory strangeness. Drawing on the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Carl Jung, James Frazer, and others, Danow is able to suggest a striking and subtle connection between two genres that on the surface would appear to have little in common.

John Cowley. **Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xv + 274, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth.

John Fenn

Using mainly newspaper reports, John Cowley traces the development of calypso music during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. His analysis focuses on the establishment of the calypso tradition within the context of the celebration of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, though he also examines parallel happenings on other Caribbean islands. Descriptions published by travelers of the day, local folklore, and interviews with some later calypsonians provide other sources that Cowley weaves into his year-by-year account. The combination of the everyday immediacy of newspaper reports with first person accounts of travelers and calypsonians provides differing levels of perspective on the unfolding calypso tradition within Carnival. The addition of folklore provides background for some of the characters and performances that occurred during Carnival, including both those that have disappeared and those that remain today.

Cowley locates the beginnings of Carnival celebrations in Trinidad in the 1780s, citing the arrival of French Creole planters and their slaves as a catalyst. He follows the development of Shrovetide festivities along social,