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*“Ah Never Get Weary Yet”:
Gordon Rohlehr’s Forty Years in Calypso*



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This paper, co-opting Gordon Rohlehr’s approach to Eric Williams (1998), sketches in the context of Rohlehr’s critical intervention in the business of calypso research, evaluates his performance and discusses his legacy.

Gordon Rohlehr remembers clearly how he became involved in the business of calypso research in 1967:

I had already been in England for two years when I went to the second meeting of CAM [Caribbean Artists Movement]...at Orlando Patterson’s place in London. They were talking about the Caribbean aesthetic, everybody was pronouncing what they thought this aesthetic was or wasn’t. I think George Lamming would have been there, Kamau would have been there, Orlando certainly—I can’t remember who else—Aubrey Williams maybe. I kept silent, listening to the talk. It might have been Kamau who said, “You’re not saying anything”. I didn’t know what I was supposed to be saying. These were big guns; when George starts talking you listen. You don’t put in your little mouth; you listen. I said, “Well, I think you are going about this thing the wrong way. My basic assumption is that

any people would have an aesthetic, a style, a way of doing things and the Caribbean people, like any other people, would have some way of doing things that is characteristically Caribbean. The way to determine what this aesthetic might be is to look at what Caribbean people have done and to create, through a close dialogue with the material, some way of talking about their achievement and of distinguishing what is peculiarly Caribbean about it, if you employ that method, beginning with the work—Walcott’s poetry, Sparrow’s calypsoes, Selvon’s novels—you might then be able to recognise recurring features. If for example, you read Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* and short stories alongside Sparrow’s calypsoes you might discover something that was peculiarly Trinidadian in both of these people.....those were not my exact words, of course; only a paraphrase of the sense of what I said. Then someone, one of the big voices, said, “If this is the way you feel, why don’t you do it?” (in Aiyejina 2003, 247).

The backstory to this is that the 25-year old Rohlehr had already secured a reputation as an undergraduate at Mona and was already known to Lamming and other men-of-words then based at or associated with the Mona campus of The UWI (Rohlehr 2007, 392-93). Rohlehr, then a doctoral candidate at Birmingham researching Joseph Conrad, accepted the CAM’s challenge and set about the task which would prove to be his life’s work.

Although he concedes that “[w]hatever I perceived during the one year of my attending CAM meetings was a matter of pure instinctual improvisation” (in Aiyejina 251), reading his account of the originary moment and of the steps he took to concretise his vision, I suspect the ideas may have already been there floating in his head and CAM’s challenge simply catalysed the career-long labour of love.

In a letter to Kamau he declared his proposed method of procedure for his inaugural address:

I will try to comment on the use of Creole in Sparrow’s calypsos and Louise Bennett’s dialect verse, and suggest that the medium of Creole is in fact amenable to some of the subtlest effects of mind and irony...Selvon’s achievement in *The Lonely Londoners* and some of his short stories will form the final part of my paper (Walmsley 68).

Having no critical precedent to rely upon, Rohlehr needed to be guided by his own instincts. Even at that preliminary stage when he confesses that “I was just floundering, really, and inventing the thing on the basis of what was in front of me” (in Aiyejina 251), his instincts led him to the theoretical approach which he would elaborate in future work:

I began to recognize the importance of using the music to understand the society. So two things were necessary. One needed to have some broad concept of the society and at the same time, one needed to bring a particular focus to bear on what the society produces artistically before one could begin the discourse: one had to adopt a two-way approach—the society through the creations, the creations through the society and to somehow try to keep the balance (in Aiyejina 251).

On Friday 7 April 1967 at CAM's second public meeting at the Students Centre in London, Rohlehr stood forth to deliver not the anticipated "Selvon, the Calypso and the Creolisation of Experience", a title suggested by Kamau, but "Sparrow and the Language of Calypso". His then-stated explanation for the change was simple and to my mind eminently understandable: "I found that when I got down to Sparrow's calypsoes, the range was so wide and the subject so vast that I had to limit it to Sparrow alone" (Walmsley 68). In his later recall of the incident, Rohlehr remembers the difficulties he had in accessing Selvon's work and Sparrow's records, a few of which he did get eventually. By a chance which he doesn't dwell upon, he happened to own a copy of Sparrow's *One Hundred and Twenty Calypsos to Remember* and reading the lyrics of the songs, it struck him right away that he "didn't need to do the Sparrow and the Selvon since there was so much taking place in the Sparrow calypsoes" (in Aiyejina 249).

"Sparrow and the Language of Calypso" is an awesome introduction to the study of the Calypso as poetic and dramatic artistry of calypso, as well as the use of calypso as literary artefact with tremendous potential for understanding Trinidad's complex and complicated sociology. Sparrow is the catalysing and unifying figure in all of this through his calypsoes, the natives of his personality.

Rohlehr begins by establishing the context for his examination of Sparrow's calypsoes. He cites VS Naipaul's celebrated affirmation of the calypso as a uniquely Trinidadian artefact and notes that Naipaul's use of the calypso in his novels indicates his awareness of the ironies of which calypsonians were unaware. He however faults Naipaul for treating the Calypso as "as a sign of the pathological insensitivity of the Trinidad people" (1). This is in dramatic contrast to Rohlehr's view that the spirit and gaiety of the calypso were a sign of "a new and strange positive which the masses of Trinidad have constructed out of the debris of their lives" (1). Against the background of this, he arrives at the conclusion: "Again and again the paradox appears in Sparrow of brilliant and sophisticated organisation of narrative, without any directing ethical sense; what emerges is an essential directionless irony, the gift of a normless world" (5).

Rohlehr introduces the psycho-sociological dimension when he identifies Sparrow's calypso as a reflection of the thinking and actions of members of Trinidadian society:

Sparrow's calypsos grow out of the uneasy competitive world of urban Trinidad, but in their gay machiavellianism reflect the mistrust and intimacy which permeate the society at all levels. They reflect both the mistrust of the small back-yard society where everyone tries to conceal his action from a gossiping neighbor who either knows about it already know will know about it next day, and the paranoiac mistrust of certain middle-class element who are prepared to exploit superiors, equals, friends and juniors in order to ascend one inch on the social greasy pole (3).

He then factors in Lloyd Brathwaite's observations about the exploitative self-centredness of members of Trinidadian society and then draws the startling conclusion, "If Brathwaite's assessment is true then he is their spokesman though he may not know this and they will not admit it" (3).

Middle class society may have welcomed Sparrow's naughty but sometimes bitter derogation of his working-class peers and especially prostitutes, spinster teachers, naïve teenagers, lecherous adulterous wives and the like. Middle-class endorsement of calypsonian derogation of lower class

morals dates to the founding of the calypso tent in the 1920s when Railway Douglas developed the ballad form and used lower class people as the subjects of his satire and censure. As Naipaul observed, the irony of reveling in calypso degradation was lost on the lower class. By the 1930s, however, members of both classes flocked to the calypso tents to relish the bacchanal or comesse emanating equally from the Country Club as from the barrack-yard/back-yard. In this way Sparrow can be seen as a spokesman for the society, but he, like other calypsonians, is a victim of society's ambivalence towards those bring Trinidadians and Tobagonians in touch with their private reality. When Rohlehr considers Sparrow's 'phallic' songs, the sometimes salacious songs for which he was equally beloved and chastised throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he makes a long statement about "Congo Man" (1964/65) which he describes as "[b]y far the most disturbing and complex example of the 'phallic' calypso" (7). Noting that in "Congo Man" "the Congo is apprehended as another exotic setting for yet another sexual calypso, with its lurid mixture of fantasy and tongue-in-cheek laughter" (7), he remarks that the lyrics are good and the imagination is admirable in its way but he deplores its insensitivity: "one has to be a pretty insensitive West Indian to hear it without misgivings of some sort". He believes that

of all calypsos, nothing is so characteristically West Indian, and nothing so mercilessly and unconsciously reveals the cultural limbo in which the West Indian moves, naked and defenceless save for a sensitive awareness of his own unbelonging which he cannot afford to relinquish (7).

This comment reflects the divide between the few thoughtful and the numerous thoughtless in Trinidadian society because "Congo Man" was tremendously popular in 1965 and has remained one of Sparrow's favourites. Many years after, soca star Machel Montano, born 1975, did something of a cover version to great acclaim. Where Rohlehr may have felt uncomfortable many others felt nothing.

Ruminating upon Sparrow's political calypsos, and in particular on "Get to Hell Outa Here" (1964/65), Rohlehr essays an explanation of what he calls "the peculiar nature of calypso irony", and with this mind he concludes that

[t]hese calypsoes which I have been considering are the record the slow birth and maturity of an ironist. The [political] calypsoes considered show the genesis of satire in abuse and in the demands which intelligent abuse makes for the right word and the right simile. When this capacity for abuse was blended with a taste for the fantastic, a strange irony emerged. And when politics and national pride created a world that dared to take itself seriously, then this irony grew to fruition (11).

This is an example of the critic collecting the separate bones of the skeleton and making sense of a phenomenon which requires sympathetic understanding.

By locating and anchoring the Calypso within its socio-historical contexts, the paper establishes a way of reading the Calypso but it insists upon hierarchising the reading tasks. Rohlehr discerns "the necessity not merely for an enumeration of the several sociological tendencies which the calypso either uncovers or betrays, but for a critical examination of the intelligence behind calypso – the worth of the mind, the nature of the insight and the quality of the awareness" (3). "Sparrow and the Language of Calypso" marries the artistic/technical concerns of literature to

social/anthropological interests but stresses the importance of irony, organisation of narrative and so on. Literature rather than anthropology was Rohlehr's early focus.

Anne Walmsley does us an invaluable service in evaluating the presentation:

Rohlehr's paper was a landmark in West Indian literary criticism. By applying the same criteria to the sung lyrics of a popular calypsonian as to the poems of literary writers, he attempted for the first time to break down the separation between the oral and written traditions. By looking at Sparrow's attitudes to society, he drew attention to expression of the experience of the 'masses' by their own spokesman (70).

Many years later with characteristic understatement dramatically opposed to the exuberant signifying practices of both Sparrow and the Calypso, Rohlehr described the audience as being "fairly appreciative" (in Aiyejina 250). Fortunately for those of us who were not there, Walmsley records the following response from Andrew Salkey:

That was sparkling, that was head-wrenching. We never heard that kind of conspectus on our culture. If the culture had been derided by alien commentators, been ignored by our teachers, had been vilified by officialdom, there was Gordon telling us, convincing us that we mattered. Our drawings at school mattered. The songs in the streets mattered. There was Gordon telling us that there was tremendous vitality in the festivals that we put on. In our ordinary everyday utterances, there was poetry (70).

The lively post presentation discussion which followed was a dramatic and welcome difference from the first public session whose urbanity was the source of a private Rohlehr complaint to Kamau (Walmsley 55).

Subsequent to this there was an exchange of letters between Kamau and Rohlehr when the former questioned Rohlehr's closing observation that "there is in the spoken language of Trinidad a potential of rhythmic organisation which our poets have not yet discovered—or if they have, have not yet exploited" (1968, 91). Rohlehr first apologised because his point was "so sloppily made and so hurriedly sketched in", then he went on to explain that

Calypso provides us with living examples of a very complex metric organisation of language. It is not simply a matter of using WI speech rhythms and idioms, but of being conscious of the syncopated drum-rhythms in the background of a 4/4 time signature broken down into semi-quavers so that one has a maximum of 16 syllables per bar...of the extreme freedom which this creates not only in the music, but in the bending of words to match the sinuosities of rhythm (1968, 92).

Engaging the niceties of stress and other technical qualities of poetry, Rohlehr felt that the traditional ways of scanning verse to establish metrical organisation and so on were inadequate to when applied to the Calypso. He also likened the counterpoints of various lines of Walcott's famous "Tales from the Islands Chapter 6" to the strumming patterns of the double-second and guitar pans respectively. Rohlehr also apologized to Kamau for giving the impression that he [Rohlehr] subscribed to the prevailing notion that Sparrow was different from other poets like Kamau since he thought that "by applying to Sparrow's work the strictest academic standards I was really placing him on par with any other artist" (1968, 95).

"Sparrow as Poet" (1970), the third in the trilogy of essays which discuss the language of [Sparrow's] Calypso, expands on Sparrow's masterful use of irony, of dramaturgy and so on. Before this, however, there appears "The Calypso" (1969), a little known essay, which represents the beginning of a major shift in focus away from Sparrow to the Calypso in general. By this time Rohlehr had accepted a teaching position at the St Augustine campus, and had embarked on the library research as well as the informal ethnographic research which gave him a new orientation. "The Calypso" is primarily important insofar as it affords us a preview of *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* which was completed some 21 years later.

"The Calypso" considers that the gap in recording of our social history might lend some truth to Froude's negative assessment of the Caribbean, which was echoed by VS Naipaul and against this offers the following:

We will soon have to write more carefully documented social history of the West Indies and when Trinidad's turn comes much more detailed attention will be paid to things like the history and development of the calypso (1).

Returning to the debate of the 1940s Rohlehr evaluated the several claims and agreed that **kaiso** was the most probable parent of the art form. In his opinion, the word 'Calypso' was "an attempt to provide a rendition of the earlier African term suitable to Anglo and Anglo-Saxon intelligentsia" (3). Although agreeing with the theory of Afro-genesis he credits the development of the Calypso to the processes of creolisation.

One intriguing statement is the elaboration of the Hispanic influence on the Calypso. Rohlehr, who lacks formal training in music but who functioned as a part time pan arranger in his student days in Birmingham, demonstrates an ear for music noting "[t]he creole Trinidadian form of the 'Castilian' where a quadruple time in the quatro strum is often superimposed on the triple time, was an important influence" on the Calypso (3). Looking at the ways in which parang bands of the late 1960s treated the Calypso and its putative parent the **kalinda**, he observes:

The kalinda is an interesting dance as you hear it played in parang bands because you can dance it in two ways. You can dance it almost as if you were dancing a calypso, but you can dance it almost as if you were dancing a Spanish waltz...you get an odd sense of two entirely different things happening if you listen to some of the parang bands they have around the place still (3).

This insightful observation was made some 10 years before Crazy recorded "Parang Soca" and 34 years before Crazy's "What is a Calypso" (2004), which records the Hispanic influence on the Calypso. Rohlehr's awareness of rhythm and other elements of music as well as the necessary connection between art-form and society leads to the conclusion: "Yet it is fascinating to note that Trinidad's most outstanding art form resembles in its vague cosmopolitanism an richly incongruous parentage, something of the manner in which the country was settled and became creolised into something quasi-English" (3). In other words, the Calypso is the product of the socio-historical processes which created modern Trinidad.

However, Sparrow still dominated his thoughts and the second part of the essay concerns itself with the Sparrow problematic of positioning himself comfortably in two antagonistic spheres of Trinidad social life. Examining some of the calypsoes which testify to this unbelonging, Rohlehr

notes, “[i]t has been fascinating and sometimes painful to watch his struggle as he becomes more and more successful, to preserve his identity within the group” (13). Rohlehr reads “The Governor’s Ball” as a metaphor for Sparrow’s ambivalent social positioning. As the essay has it,

Polite society bears the same relation to Sparrow as the Governor in calypso bears to the mad woman. Sparrow is the anarchic invader of their fete. It will be interesting to observe the twists of this struggle, the profit and the loss. It might tell us the truth about what social scientists term “social mobility” in a small world. It will tell us something about the tensions which beset the man who oscillates between two worlds, the lower one still basically intolerant of the man who ceases to belong, the upper one still basically reluctant and probably incapable of genuinely accepting the little man who has made it by talent alone. And of course the situation is further complicated by the official recognition of calypso as the culture in Trinidad (13).

The observation that Sparrow is the “anarchic invader” of the middle class space testifies to the ambivalence of the middle class towards the lower class entertainer whom they patronise in his familiar environment (the calypso tent) but reject in theirs (the Governor’s ballroom). It also validates Rohlehr’s earlier observation that Sparrow is their spokesman even though he may not know it and they do not admit it. This too is the critic’s offering a sophisticated reading which may not have been operative in the mind of the composer/performer.

In 1983 the government declassified official documents of the 1930s, among them the lyrics of all calypsoes which were submitted by tent managers to the censors in accordance with official protocols governing the practice of the calypso tent; importers of calypso records also had to submit the lyrics of their imports for official scrutiny. This made possible the writing of the magnum opus *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (1990), a fine testament to Rohlehr’s talents as literary archaeologist whose sources are the calypso artefacts themselves as well as the social history which provides the context for understanding their content.

Calypso and Society is the fulfillment of several starts dating back to “The Calypso” (1969) “The Development of the Calypso 1900-1940” (1972) and the 26-half hour radio series *From Atilla to the Seventies* (1973). Like “The Development”, it begins with the bold affirmation, “The history of the Calypso is that of urbanisation, immigration and Black reconstruction in post-emancipation Trinidad” (1) but the sentences which followed reveal how far the research had progressed. Rohlehr acknowledges that identifying West African roots is the first step in a journey of exploration which must include examination of what happened to the oral tradition in Trinidad and examination of a similar process in the French Antilles. He then locates Elder’s pioneering work within national and international contexts:

The best attempt so far to explore the West African roots of the Calypso is JD Elder’s unpublished doctoral thesis: “Evolution of the Traditional Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago”. This thesis was an outstanding contribution to the type of research that had been pioneered by musicologists and anthropologists such as Khrebiel, van Dam, Cuney Hare, Merriam and the Lomaxes (1).

Although Rohlehr affirms that the Calypso “is related to all Black diaspora musics, regardless of language, and shares with them traditional African functions of affirmation, celebration, protest,

satire, praise, blame and conflict" (5) he makes no attempt to theorise the essences of Black Atlantic music on a global or even regional scale. Although his reading of Elder et al lead him to accept the West African roots of the Calypso he recognises the achievements of Maureen Warner-Lewis whose "two pioneering works provide us with our fist bits of real evidence in support of the strong hypothesis that the African element was a major matrix out of which the Calypso developed" (17). He carefully points out that "it was in the process of the adaptation of the African matrix to the wide and various elements of Creole society in the West Indies (French, Hispanic, English, Hindu, Moslem et al) that the Calypso assumed its various shapes" (17).

While I cannot here examine comprehensively the tremendous achievements of *Calypso and Society*, I note that it represents that continuous expansion of vision and dimension that characterises Rohlehr's approach to his work. To illustrate briefly. "Political Calypsoes", a 1970 mimeographed handout prepared as class material, records without comment Senior Inventor's 1900 calypso

See them climbing the hill
 See them climbing Majuba hill
 See them climbing the hill
 See them climbing Majuba hill
 See them climbing the hill to gain the victory
 On Carnival day
 See them climbing the hill to gain the victory
 On Carnival day

In 1970 when this document was drafted, Rohlehr may have believed that this calypso was of a piece with those others on the British-Boer war in which calypsonians took the side of the British. By 1990, however, an examination of the *Port of Spain Gazette* of 7 February 1900 revealed the truth that Majuba Hill was a renaming of Rose Hill, Laventille. Resident rebels there called themselves Boers in defiance of the prevailing orthodoxy and renamed their enemies, peers and police alike, the British. The refrain "On Carnival Day" refers to Rose Hill's defiance of their rivals and enemies rather than any reference to events in the Boer War. Recording this remarkable incident, Rohlehr acknowledges that the song instances how "[t]he Boer War could be understood in strange and unexpected ways by Trinidad's urban folk" (46). To this I can add that much of Rohlehr's work examines the peculiar parodic spirit which informs Trinidad's reductive, subversive–sometimes self-destructive–humour.

To me, however, the best most concentrated and crystalline example of Rohlehr's expanding and refining of vision, and of this continuous rethinking and rewriting manifests in the essay "Carnival Cannibalised Or Cannibal Carnivalised" (2005). More than any other single piece it is the fulfilment of the Rohlehr theory and practice of Calypso research. Rohlehr discussed "Congo Man" (1964/65) in that inaugural lecture of 1967 and I do not see any mention of it in succeeding essays until it forms the subject of the 2005 essay. I have indicated that "The Calypso" marks a shift away from Sparrow, something that continues in later work. I surmise that Rohlehr came to realise that most – if not all– of the features of calypso irony and narrative construction belong to the Calypso itself; while Sparrow did them better than any other, he had no monopoly of the poetic and dramatic arts. Sparrow's work also benefitted from maximum exposure thanks to his energy and his understanding of the industry. But "Congo Man" may have remained an area of darkness which

Rohlehr needed to explore and in 2005 he had mastered the strategy and the tactics for said exploration. The persistence of "Congo Man" which Sparrow recorded an unprecedented 6 times may have kept alive the consciousness if not the urgency of the task.

"Carnival Cannibalised" is a study in the demystification of one of the most popular calypsoes of all time. It examines how Sparrow carnivalised the cannibal in 1964 and how "Congo Man" cannibalised the Carnival of 1965. Rohlehr locates the "Congo Man" within several distinct though interrelated contexts or even better clusters of contexts. First there is the context of engineered amnesia, "the obliteration of the past along with Caucasian control, dissemination and manipulation of stereotypical images of Africa and Africans at home and abroad, that had made Sparrow indifferent to African sensitivity in his appropriation of the Cannibal/Monster stereotype for the purpose of subversive laughter" (57). Allied to this is "the specific performance context of the Trinidad Carnival which was replete with portrayals of wild, savage men, warriors, Warrahoons, headhunters, devils of all hues and varieties, monsters of the folkloric and cinematic imagination and Juju warriors" (55).

Sparrow's reclaiming of kingship provides another context for interpretation. Rohlehr reads "Congo Man" as "the self-vindication and self-celebration of Sparrow as 'king' and this kingship must be located in the context of Carnival and the conventions that determined the bestowal of kingship and the acclamation of the king" (58). This vindication and celebration must also be read in the context of Sparrow's private life, if as public figure he can enjoy such. According to Rohlehr, "Sparrow had opened himself to attack, first by crossing the historically inscribed racial taboo-lines and secondly by boasting about it" (72). Sparrow's "Everybody Washing They Mouth on Me" is his calypso response to the many blows he received from society, from calypsonian colleagues and an unidentified general public for what seems to be a career-motivated marriage to an American white. Sparrow's career-long love-hate relationship with Trinidad certainly taxed his tolerance, endurance and resilience. Against the background of the reactions to Sparrow's marriage, Rohlehr thinks that "there can be little doubt that part of 'Congo Man's' laughter was focused on the racist absurdities of Trinidad society" (70).

This intricate reading may not have been the intention of Sparrow who in song tirelessly celebrates the sexuality stereotypically assigned to those of African ancestry – male and female equally. In 1977, for example he was specially invited to the Festival of African and Caribbean Arts hosted in Nigeria; his song commentary on his trip was "Du Du Yemi" an account (fictional?) of his sexual account with Natasha, a nubile Nigerian belle. "Gu Nu Gu" (1980) replaced the Congo Man with a less terrifying witch doctor who taught sex, the pleasurable secret of everlasting life, to a woman who had gone to Africa in search of such and who found it much to her delighted gratification. The point to this digression is that Sparrow who projected his phallocentricity with energy and enthusiasm (but also credited several of his heterosexual partners with an even greater proficiency and eagerness), may well have been one of the thoughtless insensitives who may have found nothing offensive about "Congo Man" and may have consumed it on the delightfully simple level of sexual double entendre.

Finally, Rohlehr locates "Congo Man" in the context of Trinidad history, and offers a reading as a revisitation of one of the archetypal themes of the colonial encounter. Examining one song which was generated from the aborted 1805 slave rebellion, Rohlehr reasons that "certain texts, ideas and

types of performance become archetypal, inscribe themselves in a society, and finally achieve permanence via the commemorative process of masquerade" (67). All the above lead to the conclusion that "the Congo Man is society's ultimate Other, the anti-hero at his most offensive, mischievous and anarchic. Yet, paradoxically, the Congo Man represents society's suppressed shadow side, its secretly celebrated yet publicly denied sexuality" (74-75). My position on this is that even though Sparrow and many –if not most– others may have a simplistic take on "Congo Man", the literary critic who reads society in far more complex ways is empowered by his intellect, temperament, sensibility and imagination, the very qualities which Rohlehr himself ascribes to the creative (1992: 1). The coincidence of these produces the high quality criticism with which we have come to associate Rohlehr. Given the general quality of discourse locally, such criticism which is solidly rooted although sometimes subject to flights of fancy necessarily stands alone.

To summarise, in "Carnival Cannibilised" Rohlehr provided us with a psycho-sociological analysis of Trinidad and of the Trinidad Carnival. He also flings back the Carnival masks of respectability and examines the psycho-sexual dimension which underlies the Carnival. All of this is achieved via an examination of "Congo Man" which some see as the signature song of The Mighty Sparrow, the iconic personality whose songs and actions provide the best maps of meaning into the complicated sociology of Trinidad from the late 1950s to the late 1960s.

Legacy

So what has Rohlehr's forty-year odyssey bequeathed to us? First, there is a corpus of invaluable research writing on the Calypso. No one can deny that Rohlehr is the architect and builder of literary research on the Calypso. The many essays and the monumental *Calypso and Society* are the testament of his legacy. The corner stone of this edifice is "Sparrow and the Language of Calypso" which previewed the shape and direction that Rohlehr's future work would take. One supremely interesting development surfaced in Rohlehr's professorial inaugural lecture in 1985 when he considered that the orality alive in street talk, storytelling and the short story were formally extended and shaped in the novel. In a much more pointed comment in the same lecture he observed, "[t]he Calypso helped preserve and formalize a certain twist of mind which I believe helped in the emergence of Selvon, Naipaul and Lovelace (29). The relationship between the oral and scribal conceptualised in 1967 had come full circle as it were.

Just as important as the content of the work is its theoretical orientation. Rohlehr's own numerous writings are the practice of a methodology which has evolved from his preoccupation as literary critic with poetic form, structure and shaping of theme. This is informed by his lifelong interest in history and his own sense of occupying a "liminal location between literature and history" (2007, 344). Literature and history are then married to a social scientist's concern with the phenomenal world of the artiste. This methodology requires researchers to familiarise themselves with the techniques of literary criticism; the history, meaning and development of the art-form, including its patterns of performance; the biography of the practitioners; the political and social history of the country; and relevant information about the particular subject being dealt with in the calypsoes under examination. Noting the continuities in calypso tradition, Rohlehr identifies 'moments' in time and clusters of calypsoes generated by said moments, and he subjects selected texts to a close reading, again in light of the documented reality as well as that of performers' career record and the song (sung) view of their peers. This multi-disciplinary approach originates in a perception of

the Calypso as a complex multifaceted whole, the true value of which can only be apprehended within the social and literary contexts which it seeks to elucidate and illuminate. *Calypso and Society*, for best example, demonstrates that the Calypso is in effect a valid social history of pre-Independence Trinidad.

In his 1991 essay "Researching Calypso", Rohlehr stresses that the Calypso is a form of discourse originating in the underclass and still representing underclass opinions. He cautions that the Calypso is a form of poetry and song which is subject to conscious shaping, selection and edition of information so that the 'facts' presented cannot be interpreted simplistically as reflections of reality. "We may," he advises, "be dealing with a wide range of literary and dramatic devices; and these may be of greater importance than the actual sociological content of the song" (15). Literature rather than anthropology is still Rohlehr's main focus.

It is impossible to discuss Rohlehr's work without paying tribute to what he calls in "Sparrow and The Language of Calypso", "the worth of the mind, the nature of the insight and the quality of the awareness". While these are used to describe Sparrow's achievements they easily and readily describe what Rohlehr brings to the business of literary scholarship on the Calypso. Passionate commitment and dedication to purpose constitute the base of what Lloyd Best calls "hard wuk" which negotiates weariness as just another phenomenon which we need to work through to get the work done. Allied to this and informing it, is a restless spirit of inquiry and investigation which roves between canonical European and Caribbean literary texts, Calypso, reggae, newspaper articles and so on. These qualities continue to generate a corpus of essays, based on a close common-sense reading of calypso texts within several contexts. This reading enriched by a wide-ranging eclectic scholarship makes for surprising, sometimes startling, conclusions. These essays are written in an elegant delightfully readable prose, the counterpoint to the fashionably opaque theorese of some modern scholarship. They are also "seasoned" as Black Stalin would say, with calypso humour and a calypso sensitivity to the nuances of words.

Strangely Rohlehr has been able to inspire only a handful of dedicated literary scholars to take up the multiple tasks of calypso research. As a disciple for the past forty years (1973- 2013) I can attest to the tremendous pressure of keeping pace with the scholar whose imagination and erudition have generated the corpus of which the Calypso is probably the crown jewel. But with the expansion of Cultural Studies programmes students in the not-too-distant future might seek inspiration in his work and some might find him a worthy subject for a dissertation.

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