

April 2013

'From Silent Wounds to Narrated Words': Calypso Storytelling in Lawrence Scott's Night Calypso

Njelle Hamilton

Plymouth State University, njhamilton@virginia.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium>

Recommended Citation

Hamilton, Njelle (2013) "'From Silent Wounds to Narrated Words': Calypso Storytelling in Lawrence Scott's Night Calypso," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol10/iss1/3>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal by an authorized editor of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.

'From Silent Wounds to Narrated Words': Calypso Storytelling in Lawrence Scott's *Night Calypso*

Cover Page Acknowledgments

This article is excerpted from a dissertation entitled "Sound Writing: Music and Memory in the Contemporary Novel" which uses the metaphor of the phonograph to examine the ways that four contemporary Caribbean novels interrogate and rethink Caribbean literary aesthetics and identity through music, and the range of ways that music informs novelistic narration. As such, I would like to thank the members of dissertation committee, Faith Smith and Ulka Anjaria of Brandeis University, and Donette Francis of SUNY Binghamton, for their rigorous feedback at the various stages of writing this piece. I am also indebted to the Caribbean Studies Association and the Northeast Modern Language Association for allowing me a forum to present my early research and to dialogue with experts in the field.

[S]tories of deep trauma, fear and pain ... are to be understood less as tales of heroic triumph over adversity, than as truncated, wounded quasi-narratives that call out to be heard, impossible stories that the victims and survivors nonetheless have to tell. ... For without such conversion from aphasia to testimony, from silent wounds to narrated words (however stammered or inarticulate), the survivors could not survive their own survival. (Kearney 60-61)

In his 2004 novel, *Night Calypso*, Lawrence Scott interrogates the capacity of Trinidad's calypso music form to narrate the experience of persons marked by trauma. The novel tells the story of the physical, psychological and political struggles experienced during the Second World War by a group of lepers, and their caregivers — French nuns; a white French-Creole Trinidadian doctor, Vincent Metevier; an Indo-Trinidadian pharmacist, Krishna Singh; and an Afro-Creole boatman, Jonah Le Roy — all virtually marooned at St. Damian's leprosarium on El Caracol, a fictional island off the coast of "Sancta Trinidad."¹ Vincent, the point-of-view narrator, has come to care for an eight-year-old orphan named Theo, after the boy has traumatized his previous caregivers with his macabre tale that demands the active participation of his listeners.

The novel allegorizes the Caribbean postcolonial condition with its focus on several traumatized and wounded characters: Sister Thérèse, the Jewish nun who works as Vincent's assistant then later becomes his lover, Madeleine, and whom we first meet in a state of shock, having awakened to shattered glass and cut feet from a dream, haunted by a voice interrogating her repressed Jewish name and identity; Ti-Jean and the other disfigured, anesthetized lepers; and Theo, bearer of mysterious physical and psychic wounds that are given voice in his sporadic nocturnal tales. These wounded characters struggle to find the appropriate method to narrate their trauma.

When he first arrives on El Caracol at around eight years old, Theo is described as mute, and it takes many overtures by Vincent and others before he responds (selectively and unevenly) not only to touch, but also to conversation. But from the very first pages of the novel when we 'hear' him gush out his 'night calypso,' we realize that Theo's silence is not a physical disability but a psychological one, a retreat from human communion due to sexual and physical abuse. Theo's silence signals his having buried inside him a story that demands to be told. At first mute by day, Theo at night arrests his hapless listener with the sound of his voice as he tells — in bits and pieces and in fits and starts — a wrenching, "truncated, wounded, quasi-narrative" of his own and his ancestresses' sexual abuse and its devastating aftermath (Kearney 61). In 'sleeptalking' mode, Theo tells his listener: "I know at first I don't want to talk. Like cat bite my tongue, like fish bone stick in my throat. I choking. I know all that horrify you, to see me choking on my own words. Till one day you find I speak with the force of the waterfall, drum on the rock, drum in the hills, *Pampadam*. But you don't like what I say" (NC 37). Despite "choking on [his] own words" — or "snic't by the word" like the title character of Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *Solibo Magnificent*² — Theo must find a mode of telling that will allow him to give voice to his trauma.

In what follows, I examine *Night Calypso*'s depiction of the relationship between trauma and calypso narrative, particularly the ways in which the music form is constructed in the novel

¹ El Caracol is based on the real-life island of Chacachacare, now a Venezuelan dependency.

² *Solibo*, the traditional storyteller, chokes on his own words near the beginning of the novel, launching an investigation and a clash between the modern Francophone police and the premodern creolophone hustlers.

as an apt narrative mode for traumatized and wounded peoples. I take as my point of departure Caruth's elaboration of Freud's theory of trauma "as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind."³ In *Night Calypso*, the wounds of Vincent's patients are both physical and psychological, with the physical wound a legible yet silent testimony to profound trauma — what Toni Morrison (1998) calls "unspeakable things unspoken." Through an examination of the relationship between the legible physical wounds and voluble psychic wounds of Vincent's patients, and Theo's struggles to articulate his trauma through calypso storytelling, I argue that the novel proposes calypso storytelling, with its linguistic and formal displacements, reenactments and masquerades, as a means by which traumatized postcolonial peoples wrest agency over their past, present and future. By extension, calypso functions for Theo, as for the novel, as a model for a type of narrative that *sounds* rather than *silences* traumatic experiences and traumatized voices. By reading *Night Calypso* as a novel that models innovative narrative tactics that can allow for the speaking and hearing of suppressed memories and narratives, I attend to both the *listening* practices of the doctor, and the *narrative* practices of the patient.

Over a span of six years, in approximately ten night calypsoes, Theo sounds out two essential stories, although, as it turns out, they are actually the same: an "ancestry of ... interference" (151) that runs from the time of slavery to the present. Shortly after indenture, his great-grandmother Christina Dellacourt went to work as an indentured house-servant in a plantation house of the de Marineaux family, a white French Creole landowning family in the cocoa business (149). The male head of the household, Mister Pierre de Marineaux, henceforth 'Mister,' begins the first recorded "ancestry of such interference" in Theo's line (151). Theo tells Vincent that "Ma Dellacourt was the first that was pure, till... the Monsieur de Marineaux of the time make his way into [her] body" (286; 151). Ma Dellacourt's daughter, Alice, presumably the fruit of one such encounter, is a mere child when she too "get take, on a quiet afternoon, to the tune of the catechism class downstairs, under the house, teach by the mistress of the house" (150).

Like a broken record, this story repeats itself through the generations. After giving birth to Theo's mother, Emelda and her twin Louis, Alice decides to end her painful life by hanging herself on a mango tree after aborting her latest de Marineaux pregnancy. Emelda, in her turn, also enters into a relationship with the Mister of her generation, although in Theo's memory, it seems a romantic relationship, despite the obvious close blood and the racial divide between them. With the Dellacourt women choosing to abort or murder their own daughters rather than continue the history of 'interference,' thus leaving no more female children "to get take" (286), Theo becomes the last in the line of abuse. Mister encounters Theo in the cocoa fields of the de Marineaux plantation, flogs him severely — leaving scars on his back — and forces the young boy to perform fellatio. The traumatized Theo sets the great house on fire (414), but whether by accident or on purpose, Theo's neo-slave revolt leads to his mother's perishing in the fire. When Theo is then sent to a monastery, he again becomes the victim of physical and sexual abuse, as one of the priests, an unfit 'Father', leaves a key *inside* Theo's room to enable him to admit his violator into his room at night. With the constantly intertwining stories, it is unclear if this violator is the same Mister, or a priest. What is clear is that Theo has not only inherited the story and memory of Ma Dellacourt and Emelda, a story silenced for generations, he has also inherited

³ For Caruth, this psychic wound, "is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that ... is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4).

their status as sexual victims. More importantly, Theo's mode of telling, which he calls his 'night calypso,' combines calypso music and calypso narrative techniques of linguistic displacement, and physical and narrative masquerade in order to articulate the unspeakable sexual trauma he and the women in his family have endured.

In drawing on calypso music as narrative form, Scott builds on an established tradition, particularly in Trinidadian writing, of transposing onto literature the aesthetics of calypso lyrics, the themes of calypso songs, the cultural function of calypsonians, and even the ideology of calypso and carnival. Calypso writing, like the calypso itself, has functioned as a way to interrogate history, culture and politics using a seemingly simple, fun-loving narrative form. In his 1956 novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, about a group of West Indian migrants to London in the 1950s who must negotiate the economic, racial and cultural adjustments of life in an inhospitable city, Samuel Selvon uses the calypso as a narrative form in the novel, rather than using actual calypso music or an identifying 'rhythm.' In contrast, Earl Lovelace's 1979 novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* has an even more explicit appropriation of the calypso, describing carnival and calypso music in detail, and structuring the novel with key figures of the carnival scene, including a calypsonian character, Philo. These two classic examples of the calypso novel, or what Funso Aiyejina (2007) calls the 'novelypso,' have established conventions of the genre: overt versus metaphoric appropriations of calypso.⁴

Although the title of *Night Calypso* suggests a Lovelacian treatment of Trinidadian popular music, in Scott's novel, calypso becomes a metonym for carnivalesque storytelling. There are two types of calypso in the novel. Lyrics of actual calypso songs of the World War II period appear in chapter titles and are sung by characters, and function to comment on the story and to frame the 'real' narrative in a similar way to the classic use by Lovelace. These 'real' calypsoes are juxtaposed with the 'night calypso' of the title, a type of storytelling that Theo performs, employing, like Selvon, the narrative and rhetorical strategies of calypso.

Music has a primal connection to personal, cultural, and ancestral memory, and Caribbean music forms like calypso, and Caribbean music figures like the calypsonian draw on this function of music in order to engage with memory and trauma. Calypso, the novel suggests, offers Theo a way out of the aphasia that his trauma has caused by allowing him access to the stories of his ancestresses that are recorded in his memory. Indeed, Paquet, Saunders and Steumpfle (2007) see calypso as a repository of collective memory: "music," they argue, "is one of the 'sign-posts' that allows us to reconstruct our past out of the splintered recollections in the recesses of our minds and bodies" (xix- xx). As a record of what Theo calls 'living history,' calypso is the best playback mechanism for the "splintered recollections" and collective memory of historical trauma that have marked the Trinidadian landscape, and the bodies and minds of its people.

THE WOUNDS OF HISTORY

Framed by two brief sections set in 1983, the novel spans World War II and the immediate postwar period (1938-1948). In the frame story, Theo, now fifty-three years old, tells an unnamed interlocutor, "It's that time which lays down a challenge to me to be imagined, urgent

⁴ Literary appropriations of calypso are legion, from poetry and plays of Derek Walcott, to the fiction of V.S. Naipaul and Ramabai Espinet. See Keith Warner's discussion in *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982).

with its danger, its unspeakable cruelty” (21). “That time” of which Theo speaks is not only his childhood during which he assailed Vincent with his interminable story, a symptom of his internal war, but also a time of major cultural and political upheavals on the colony, in the nation and in the world. Greg Forter calls events like the war “‘punctual’ traumas: historical events of such singularity, magnitude, and horror that they can be read as shocks that disable the psychic system” (259). I consider World War II and the concurrent upheavals in Trinidad as punctual traumas that dealt a severe blow to Trinidad and its inhabitants, resulting in wounds in the physical and political landscape, and wounds of both body and mind. The physical and psychic wounds of the war and the surrounding period manifest in a silent script writ on the body and the nation, which points to a suppressed story. It is this story that calypso storytelling recuperates.

While its location in a bay at the southernmost tip of the Caribbean archipelago — at the frontier of the Americas, as one of the first land masses and ports of calls between Europe and America — made Trinidad a site of frequent turf wars as European colonial powers wrestled for control in the Americas during the 17th to early 20th centuries, it also placed Trinidad, like other eastern Caribbean islands, at the frontline of the war. Trinidad was a strategic point in Hitler’s reputed remapping of the world, and German U-boats would find their way into Trinidadian waters, while the U.S. set up naval bases on the island to monitor and launch attacks against German incursions into the region (Brereton 1981, 191). As Vincent muses, “The [characters] were transported from a desert island to a theatre of war. ... Sancta Trinidad and El Caracol were now part of Mr Hitler’s and Mr Churchill’s World War. El Caracol was the front line. And Mr Truman had his Marines right in the backyard” (NC 325; 351).

Outside of the “terrible, terrible torments” of the World War, Trinidad was facing its own ethnic, political and cultural upheavals during the period leading up to and after the war. Scott (2009) calls this moment “a very important historical moment, a watershed: 1937, the labour riots and the political coming together of all the elements of Trinidad... I wanted to return to that sort of iconic, or symbolic, political moment” (262). It was a time of incredible foment: the American presence, the war and the recent discovery of oil meant the economy was rapidly changing from a plantation economy to a modern one, exacerbating labour, ethnic and political strife. 1937 also saw the labour riots in Fyzabad, a community of predominantly Indo-Trinidadian sugar cane workers who set fire to the canefields to protest their paltry wages and inhuman living conditions, a hold over from indentureship. From this upheaval arose the labor leaders of Tubal ‘Uriah’ Butler (Afro-Trinidadian), Arthur Andrew Cipriani (white Creole), and Adrian Cola Rienzi (Indo-Trinidadian), important figures in the pre-independence nationalist struggles of the island for self-representation and freedom from the British, following two centuries of French rule (Brereton 160-170).

The novel thus functions in some ways as a fictionalized record of this turbulent history. We have in Vincent, a type for the white French Creole planter class; in Krishna Singh, the Indo-Trinidadian political leader, and in Jonah Le Roy, the charismatic Afro-Trinidadian folk leader. These three men, all Trinidadian by birth, ostensibly fictionalize the triumvirate of Cipriani, Rienzi and Butler, and the ethno-political tensions of the day are represented by the constant tension between the three men and their different approaches to addressing the welfare of the lepers: Vincent, the doctor, believes in love and holistic healing, soothing rather than inciting turmoil; Krishna the pharmacist wants to stir them to violent revolt against the religico-political order, while Jonah the boatman’s approach is to stir the people to an emotional frenzy through his Shango Baptist preacher oration, as the lepers clamor for ‘Bread and Justice’ (NC 120-4). The island of El Caracol is also populated by French nuns of the Order of Martha and Mary, and

lepers from the various surrounding islands and *bocas*. While this plurality seems to mirror the syncretic mythology of later Trinidadian nationalism under Prime Minister Eric Williams, the war exacerbates the underlying divisions that exist at all levels in this society. Choosing this period in history, and the allegorical figures of the Indian, the Afro-Creole, the French Creole, not to mention the self-abnegating nuns and the amnesiac, anesthetized masses, allows Scott to allegorize the rifts, ruptures and wounds that atrophy the nation's emergence, with the leprosarium a trope for the Caribbean.

In "Region, Location and Aesthetics: An Interview," Scott compares the Caribbean landscape to a type of written document, both in the erasure and palimpsest of names reflecting the islands' heritage, and in the traces of wars and conquests left on its surface (267). He goes on to reveal that "the body in my work is as important as landscape and they are very much linked. There is a Jeanette Winterson phrase: 'Written/ on the body.' ... The body is the site where things are enacted. ... the enslaved body, the indentured body. ... So the body is written on ... like braille" (267). This notion of history as wounding both the body and landscape is echoed in the novel in a passage where Vincent comes to terms with a graphical depiction of the island at wartime:

El Caracol had been transformed. Vincent had seen the map in Major McGill's office at the lighthouse, pinned to the wall... The line indicating the barbed wire fence, the boundary, the frontier, over which no one must trespass, looked like the knots in a line of stitches. It was a tight cordon around the leprosarium and convent. It was as if the map had been sewn together at that point, a zigzag over the contours of the island, a suture, a wound that needed time to heal. (229)

This sutured wound, depicted by the barbed wire that scars the landscape like stitches, is a reminder of the lingering effect of the wounds of history, even long after the bombs, destroyers and army bases have left. As the novel shows, both memory and the body record the violence of personal and political history.

This view coheres with numerous other works of African Diaspora fiction and poetry, which feature the body as bearer of tales of pain. Wounds — particularly the trope of the body as text — have often been used in postcolonial narratives to represent the exploitation, silencing, and repression of subjugated peoples, since the body represents a site of often violent inscription.⁵ As such, these texts suggest that we might have to look at the body to recover history, because some stories have not been recorded anywhere else.⁶ Roberta Culbertson argues,

⁵ Katherine Fishburn (1997) has theorized the embodiment of formerly enslaved peoples as "a new kind of knowing — one based in the body" (xii). Her central thesis is predicated on "the body's recollection of being" through a survey of American slave narratives. Speaking of Igbo culture in Equiano's narrative, she shows how "cultural and/or ancestral memory is instilled in the body" and consequently, "slave narrators carried in their very bodies the memory or knowledge of human connectedness denied by [European philosophy] of the time" (53).

⁶ In the tradition of emancipatory accounts of slavery, neo-slave narratives such as Maryse Condé's *Moi Tituba... Sorcière (I, Tiuba... Black Witch of Salem)* (1994), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), use bodily wounds to show the viciousness of slavery and the legacy of violence writ large on the body, leaving its mark as a simultaneously silent and voluble testimony to an unspeakable history. In *Beloved*, the landscape of the slave south is marred by the 're-memory' of physical horrors, including the mutilated bodies of would-be runaway slaves swinging in the trees. Sethe's murdered daughter, Beloved, in a literalization of the resurgence and reemergence of repressed trauma, returns embodied to haunt her mother and murderess, the scar on her neck where her throat was slit a visual reminder and a poignant testimony to the wound rent in the fabric of black lives and black psyche caused by slavery, what Culbertson calls "the memory of the event" (174).

“wounding, the penetration of the skin, is the baseline, the reference point, of all violence, and of all power relationships sustained by violence. Wounding is itself partly about neurologically-registered pain — searing, quick, causing the body to recognize harm and a threat to its existence” (172).

In his essay, “The Muse of History” (1998), Caribbean poet Derek Walcott critiques the obsession in African Diaspora imaginative writing with fetishizing the shackles and wounded bodies of slaves. Yet, in his masterpoem, *Omeros* (1990), wounds abound, from the wounded leg of the fisherman Philoctete, brandishing his injury for the titillation of tourists, to the mythological wounded heel of Philoctete’s romantic rival Achille. According to Jahan Ramazani (1997), far from double-speak on Walcott’s part, the St. Lucian poet animates Philoctete’s wound as “a resonant site of ... the black Caribbean inheritance of colonial injury and at the same time deconstructing the uniqueness of suffering,” and transforms the Greek figure of suffering into “an allegorical figure for the postcolonial condition” (405; 409). Similarly, Patricia Krus (2009), in her examination of the economies of trauma in postcolonial narratives like Astrid Roemer’s *Trilogy of Suriname*, sees Walcott’s and Roemer’s contemporary deployment of the wound as reflecting “the need to excavate the wounds left by a colonial and postcolonial history in order to effect a healing process” (183).

I read the motif of the sutured wound in Scott as both an intertextual reference to Walcott’s use of the motif, and a signal of the novel’s insistence on the crucial work of memory and storytelling in healing the lingering traumas of Caribbean history. This is enabled through the novel’s setting in a leprosarium, and the focus on leprosy, a disease of skin and bone, that takes this notion of the postcolonial wound to its extreme. In a reflection of biblical attitudes toward contagious skin diseases,⁷ the outbreak of leprosy on mainland Trinidad in the early 1900s, as on other Caribbean islands, resulted in the quarantine of victims of the disease on offshore leper colonies such as Saint Damian’s sanatorium, where the novel is set. Whole families were ejected from their communities at the first visible sign of deformation of whitening skin, and, as poignantly depicted in the novel, (suspected) infected children were often ripped from their parents and shipped to the colonies, in a macabre mirroring of the traumas of the forced crossings of the Middle Passage and the Indian *kala pani*. Not only was treatment ineffectual — as seen in the novel’s disparagement of the endless injections of Chaulmoogra Oil — but once ostracized, the would-be leper stood little chance of being reintegrated into society even if cured. The horrifying specter of severely deformed and mutilated bodies was enough to cause their healthy countrymen to shun their presence. The leper is thus a poignant symbol of the traumatized postcolonial body, “the permanent token of a past trauma” (Krus 190).⁸

Vincent is both doctor and healer, skeptic and Messianic figure, compared to “Jesus [who] heals the leper” (57). When the novel begins, we learn that Vincent has come to care for Theo because Father Dominic, the boy’s previous guardian, “was very taken by [Vincent’s] attitude to healing, [...] to healing the stigma of disease, healing the whole person” (29). Unlike the revolutionary, Singh, who sees the patients as cogs in his revolt against the system, Vincent sees “their rotting limbs, their blind eyes, their legless bodies; casualties of a war that was fought along their nerve ends. This would be his war effort, the life and health of these patients, shunted

⁷ See Leviticus 13, and Luke 17.

⁸ See also Michelle Cliff’s Jewish Maroon leper in *Free Enterprise* (1994), and Tiphonie Yanique’s *How to Escape from a Leper Colony: A Novella and Stories* (2010). Yanique’s title story is set in the same time and location as *Night Calypso*, and tells the story of a Theo-like 14-year old orphan leper named Lazaro, echoing the biblical narrative of the resurrected Lazarus. Like Theo, Lazaro’s physical and psychic trauma manifests in horrifying ways.

onto this island with a voluntary nursing force. Who was the war for? Not them” (390). His life’s goal is their complete rehabilitation, restoring them to their families and full society on the mainland island of Sancta Trinidad (428). Vincent’s ability as healer comes from his capacity for love and empathy, echoed in the repeated song of the German soldier stranded in the *bocas*, “*die Liebe ist’s allein*” (it’s love alone). As doctor, his role in the novel is two-fold: to provide healing by listening to the narrative of symptoms, and to read the signs or wounds of the body. He is often depicted in the novel as “reading” scars with his eyes or hands, dressing or checking wounds, and verifying the progress of degeneration on the bodies of his leper patients. Vincent’s role as doctor, healer, and lover is amplified by also being a perfect listener — crucial for his task of helping both Thérèse-Madeleine and Theo. Vincent is thus depicted as surrogate audience, the one who must assemble the ‘symptoms’ into some kind of narrative.

Like most other characters in the novel, Theo bears bodily scars, a written testament to physical abuse. According to Vincent, “Along [Theo’s] side were stitches: a suture, a stitched wound, running from the base of his neck to the coccyx” (26) — echoing the wound of history that mars the map of El Caracol due to the war. On the one hand, Theo’s scar is legible, a type of “braille,” “a story for those who were blind” (28). On the other hand, like the infested and sutured wound of Walcott’s *Philoctete*, whose injury Theo’s echoes, there is a certain inscrutability, or what Edouard Glissant (1989) calls ‘opacity,’ to this scar that speaks volumes yet cannot tell its story. In Ramazani’s reading of the motif of the wound in *Omeros*, “*Philoctete’s* injury is a piece of body language that, like many literary wounds, signifies its status as a polyvalent sign by resembling a ‘mouth.’ But this sign also signifies its inarticulateness: ... it remains mysterious, turned inward, folded and guarded” (412). Unlike the wounds of Ti-Jean and Thérèse-Madeleine, which have a medical narrative, the scar on Theo’s back is inarticulate; it cannot speak its name. Despite his nocturnal tales in his “voice like a drum, ... it had not told the story of the scar on his back” (*NC* 27). As Theo tells his interlocutor in the frame narrative, “I’ve got a scar right down my back, and yet another scar you cannot see” (459). The legible physical wound maps on to his voluble psychic wound, which is also inscrutable and invisible, a trauma that, in Caruth’s words, “simultaneously defies and demands our witness” (5), and is so profound as to render him dumb during the day. This numbing and dumbing wound reanimates when Theo awakens at night in a terrible state of fright, depicted in the novel as a state of wide-eyed perch on the edge of Vincent’s bed like a *jumbie* bird, and his ‘night calypso’ is his only means of release.

Silenced and suppressed, Theo’s psychic wounds demand to be given a voice. Theo is “choking on [his] own words,” rendered silent by an overflow of words, voices and sounds backed up inside his throat, which need to be released through a “bloodletting of words,” as is the case in Thérèse-Madeleine’s healing (163). Theo’s trauma has produced a censorship of sorts that he must break through with storytelling, echoing Caruth’s assertion that “trauma ... is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4).

The novel insists on the importance of what Vincent calls ‘the talking cure’ for dealing with subjects marked by trauma. As a medical narrative, a story about a doctor and his patients, the novel’s narrative arc follows Vincent’s quest for his patients’ healing, although Ti-Jean and Theo do not actually achieve it — the one dies, the other keeps telling his story even in the frame narrative some thirty years after the main narrative ends. Indeed, the frame narrative returns to storytelling, to stories that continue to “repeat themselves” (21). However, while the novel, which is set in a radio-based society, emphasizes the primacy of the voice, it goes beyond

conventional trauma studies' focus on recuperating the voice. For Theo, it is a *particular* type of telling — one that draws on calypso techniques in order to counteract the inherent impossibility of speaking the unspeakable — that will allow him to sound out not only his story, but also that of others. It is thus the *specificity* of *calypso* storytelling that allows Theo to accomplish what Ti-Jean and Thérèse are unable to. At the heart of postcolonial accounts of trauma like Scott's, then, is the need to find a new mode of *telling*, a narrative language and form that can accommodate the burden of history and trauma. For Scott, this new mode of telling is peculiar for its reliance on calypso music, with all the valences of music in narrating subaltern Caribbean experiences where official history and official documents have excluded and silenced them.

CALYPSO: "LIVING HISTORY"⁹

The most readily accepted accounts of calypso see it as a creolized residual form of storytelling brought to Trinidad from West Africa,¹⁰ gathering in its development French troubadour song forms, African rhythmic *paseo* patterns, and South Asian instruments such as the *tassa* and the Hosay drums. As Brereton, Rohlehr and others have shown, calypso developed from the chantwell tradition of the post-Emancipation period (1838-), when female itinerant singers or *chanterelles*, the main voice of (ex-) slave fancy dress performance 'societies' would extemporize witty choruses to laud the 'king' and 'queen' of their own performance society, as well as to disparage the rival society using now-common calypso rhetorical techniques of *mépris* (scorn), *picong* (insults) and *fatigue/fateeg* (heckling). By the turn of the 20th century, however, as Trinidad was transitioning from French to English, the first generation of *male* calypsonians arose, now fully integrated with Carnival, providing the topical entertainment in the carnival tents, and the *lavways*, the popular road march songs for the street parades on Jouvay morning, the opening Sunday of Carnival. Carnival is a space for parody, subversion and masquerade: it allows unparalleled license to urban poor blacks, disenfranchised in other areas of life and throughout the rest of the year, to mock and criticize the élites, and to express outrage, joy and unorthodox sexualities, thus establishing a perfect space for a music form like calypso.

During the time in which the novel is set, calypso was in its heyday, and four major circumstances of the 'turbulent thirties' contributed to its emergence in its present form; the emergent recording industry meant that calypsonians inked lucrative recording contracts with RCA Victor, Okeh and Columbia Records in the U.S., and several calypsonians, including Lion, Atilla and Radio, embarked on recording and performing sessions in New York City (Rohlehr 1990; Quevedo 1983). Back at home, the presence of American marines in calypso tents further professionalized the song form, and the money they freely spent in the tents and in the towns created a bustling economy in the demi-monde centered on calypso and prostitution (Neptune 2007). Added to this, as a result of the Theatre and Dancehalls Ordinance (1937-1951), calypsonians had to present their songs for censorship before recording or performing, as the upper classes tried to snuff out the rising working-class political voice and the merriment of black bodies. Ironically, while censorship led to the dumping of many records into the sea, it also led to a variety of alternate recordings, particularly in newspapers, pamphlets, booklets, collections, and histories, as well as to some particularly censorship-evading linguistic

⁹ *Night Calypso* 356.

¹⁰ See, for example, Maureen Warner-Lewis' "The Influence of Yoruba Music on the Minor-Key in Calypso."

techniques. Despite the Theatre and Dancehalls Ordinance, then, irrepressible calypsonians found other ways of expression (Rohlehr 125). In the novel, for example, Vincent notices that,

[t]he calypsonians kept their commentary going on the time; words for an era. The Doctor's House was a buzz of humming and singing, replacing the ban on carnival by the governor. Theo kept up with the calypsoes of the day. '*Hand me the papers let me read the news, because ah puzzle and I'm so confused.*' ... A month later, ... they heard the news on the BBC, that the Germans had entered Paris. '*France after fighting desperately, Got retarded and surrendered to Germany.*' The fishermen were the calypsonians. (171)

Called the 'poor man's newspaper,' calypso has served as a keen rival to the newspaper as the most relevant and believable source of news and commentary, in a culture where print documents have a history of complicity with colonization. Contemporary calypsonian David Rudder calls calypso "an editorial in song that describes our life and times" (Dunn 2004). Shut out of representation in written texts, the unlettered masses of 19th and 20th century Trinidad cultivated a justified mistrust of the written word. Owing to their position as "the people's spokesman," and "the conscious and unconscious bearers of folklore," the calypsonian was often in before the news (Rohlehr 152). Packed with patrons from all walks of life, the calypso tent was the place where the illiterate masses (and sometimes the elites as well) went to hear the news. The stiff competition between rivaling calypsonians for the (physical) crown or (audience-bestowed title) of calypso king, for lucrative record deals and performing gigs meant that they had to keep abreast of both local and international news in order to "creat[e] compelling op-ed music" (Rohlehr 111).

More importantly, the contemporary calypsonian, descendant of the African griot and the early chantwell, developed a unique positioning with regard to history, writing, authority, and truth: situated on the margins of society, he is a skeptic and critic of the foibles of both high and low culture. He functions as a shaman and trickster figure, mediating between the 'masses' and structures of power. The call-and-response structure of many calypsoes is emblematic of this relationship between singer and audience, making calypso a participatory form, a compact between the calypsonian and the audience for whom and to whom he performs. This is modeled not only in Vincent's crucial role as audience to Theo's calypso tale, but also in the novel form, which requires a compact between narrator and reader.

Speaking from a general posture of skepticism, but usually in alignment with the 'masses,' the calypsonian uses a variety of formal or narrative strategies that have not only become associated with the form, but have been extrapolated to non-musical arenas as well. Among these are the employment of an I-narrator, a first-person but displaced narrative mask that allows the calypsonian to make trenchant critiques without revealing his own ideological position. According to Rohlehr, "The job of the calypsonian was to make graphic the everyday; to create fictions out of the stuff of experience. In these fictions, the calypsonians often presented themselves as witnesses of the action being described, thus creating the dramatic 'I' as a major feature of Calypso-narrative" (122). This masking often extends to language, as seen in the bombast, big-words and word-trickery mastered by some of the most skilled practitioners of the art form, as well as the use of sobriquets, warrior-like stage names that function — like the *batonnier's* sticks of old, and the dragon masks of traditional carnival costumes — to make oneself more terrifying to the enemy (Rohlehr 54). At some point in the song, the listener witnesses a merging of the persona and the calypsonian, and the mask falls, having served its

purpose. According to Earl Lovelace, calypso novelist extraordinaire, “where chantwell and chorus combine to render a piece — whether in pan, in calypso or folk songs — I see expressed an awareness of self, of the I as well as a sense of the other. I and I.”¹¹ This concept is useful for thinking of the form of Theo’s night calypso: it is an “I and I” form, a story of self and other in which the teller creates self-awareness through an awareness of history and the legacy of slavery, indenture and colonization.

Theo’s night calypsoes intersect with their musical counterparts in several key ways, beyond often beginning with or including couplets and refrains from actual calypsoes: firstly, like calypso songs, each fragment is topical, speaking to the social events of its listeners. Secondly, both ‘night’ and ‘real’ calypsoes have a recombinant aesthetic: they recycle texts, wresting them away from their initial or intended uses. Thirdly, calypso narratives often transpose “personal” stories into the arena of larger geopolitical events, as the novel’s epigraph, from John Berger suggests: “The true stories of our time have to be able to reconcile a pile of clothes in a drawer with world historical upheavals.” More than just “I” narration, Theo’s night calypsoes are ‘I and I’ stories, merging ‘personal’ history and ‘collective’ history. The novel thus imports a potent and tried-and-true musical form with close relationship to storytelling and narrative, capable of reaching both the masses and the élites, and recording history for faithful replay in the present. It is because of this function of calypso and the calypsonian that the novel insists on equating Theo’s “truncated, wounded, quasi-narrative”¹² with calypso — there is something that calypso allows that Theo needs in order to recover both the personal and collective memory of sexual violence.

THE NIGHT CALYPSO: “WORDS [THAT] HEAL”¹³

Throughout the novel, Theo manipulates a multiplicity of media and technologies of broadcasting in order to “comment... on the time” (171), and in his quest for an apt narrative mode that will counteract silence, amnesia and trauma — among them: radio, newspapers, storytelling and calypso singing. One of his earliest attempts at narrating his trauma comes in the form of his “theatre of war,” a wall of words and history:

Newspaper cuttings were stuck to every wall [of Theo’s room]. ... Vincent noticed that it was the entire room, not a single inch of wall was not covered. ... The boy had hoarded *The Gazette* and *the Guardian*. He looked at the familiar photographs, and began reading the news below them. The photograph he settled on was one of a fire in Fyzabad in 1937, when the oilfield rioters had captured the fallen policeman, Corporal Charles King, who had had a leg injury. ... The well known story was there, pasted on the walls. (157-8)

As we see here, Theo creates a record of recent local history on his wall, and as the novel progresses, he also maps the developing war (172). Like the calypsonian, Theo’s methodology is

¹¹ Lovelace’s use of the term “I and I” (Aiyejina 2003, 34) echoes the Rastafarian narrative posture. Rather than the singular ‘I,’ Rastafari use the I and I construction to signify a collective psyche in which the speaker and the Emperor/deity Haile Selassie I (pronounced like the first-person pronoun, I) unite. For a discussion of the language of Rastafari, see Pollard’s *Dread Talk* (2000).

¹² Kearney 61.

¹³ *Night Calypso* 84.

one of pastiche and recombination, linking stories and media, for example: “The collage of newspaper cuttings could be seen between the cracks of maps with intriguing juxtapositions: Marcus Garvey and Jesse Owens disappearing behind Abyssinia, while a boatload of Jewish refugees landed on the jetty at Nelson Island, on a torn photograph from the *Porta Espana Gazette*” (172). Even the text of the novel in sections describing Theo’s theatre of war becomes a type of pastiche, with italicized quotations from letters, and calypso song lyrics fissuring the novelistic text; and with the suturing of texts from different times, places and contexts, a narrative constructed out of stitching together local and international ‘histories.’ This calypso technique of repurposing current events for his own narrative gets taken to its extreme when Thérèse-Madeleine finds fragments of her father’s letters to her on Theo’s wall of history: “‘Letters, Theo. Other people’s letters. Letters written not to you but to others,’” — to which Theo responds: “‘Yes, but if I find them throw away, then they come like something I find on the midden. They belong to history. Not pre-history. But history. Living history. Is as if I dig them up. They is one of my find’” (356).

What Theo has revealed here is the function of calypso, and by extension, calypso storytelling, as recording ‘living history.’ This then speaks to form and content as well: a calypso narrative recombines different elements into the fodder for social commentary. Personal stories become calypsoes, and are transformed into history. A collector and bearer of tales, Theo collects both oral and written personal histories and makes them his own as he struggles to record and narrate a history that is larger than the personal. In the same way that he assembles scraps of text into a larger text, with his night calypso he assembles memories and stories in order to tell a tale of trauma that encompasses his own but also gives voice to a larger Caribbean history of abuse. While Theo attempts to construct his own narrative and his own version of history by cutting up newspapers and pasting them on his walls, he later abandons this by ripping down his ‘wall of history’ and burning the newspapers and clippings to hide the real story underneath: that he murdered his mother. Ultimately, it seems only the night calypso allows him to narrate and recover the histories of the voiceless: his personal history as well as that of others. Because of his wounds, he cannot tell this story straight or plain: he must speak these traumas through displacements.

As Scott shows in his first novel, *Witchbroom*, the calypso form is not the bildungsroman, progressive, linear narrative of classic Western novels, but a tale of ‘fugues and fragments,’ of chaos and interruptions. Notice the similarity in Vincent’s description of the form of Theo’s storytelling: “The fluency of this night-time tale, this calypso, as the boy had called it in the nights before, was as if it were written down. Indeed, it did go here and there and then come back to the main road, as Father Dominic had said it would” (94). For his part, Lavren, the hermaphrodite narrator of *Witchbroom*, notes, “If there was method in this [type of narrative] it was the method of memory. The clear balanced sentence, the sequential paragraph would not always do, the linear logic would not hold” (96). Theo, like Lavren, will have to give way to digressions, fugues and fragments rather than linearity in order to voice his traumatic tale. The attempt at a forward narrative in both novels stems from the writerly mode, which is constantly interrupted by the fragments of calypso songs and written texts, the irrepressible sounds of “a multitude of voices in the boy’s voice” (NC 32), and the vagaries of memory-narrated personal, familial and national history and herstory.

Although Theo has wounds of his own, symbolically and narratively his wounds repeat throughout history, place and time, in the traumas of others. Further, not only is he telling the story of his ancestresses’ legacy of abuse, he also inhabits their voices to tell their story, which

sounds out, and allows him to recover, his own voice and story. He would often “[tell] it as he had heard it, rendering the tones of the voices which possessed him” (151). Theo’s voice often sounds “like many voices all at once” (92), a collective ancestral voice that simultaneously sounds out layers of experience and layers of voices. During his accounts of the Dellacourt family secrets, his voice “mimic[s] the laughter of his great-grandmother, and under that laughter, the sadness of the story of herself and her daughter Alice, the boy’s grandmother” (152). His mimicry bears remarkable fidelity: he has faithfully recorded overheard tales and is able to replay them, across space and time, for new listeners. Vincent is astonished to notice that, by evidence of the voice, “Theo *was* his great-grandmother” (154). Theo’s narrative, like calypso, works by displacement: a deeply personal trauma is articulated and reckoned with by filtering it through the voices of others.

Under these layers, however, particularly in the story of the Dellacourt women and the generations of Misters, we hear faint traces of Theo’s own voice and perspective cutting through the mimicry in order to comment on the story. In his account of Alice’s suicide by hanging, we notice that while the voice and historical perspective might have been Ma Dellacourt’s, this is entirely Theo’s narrative; it is his story — his account of an event no one else had or could have witnessed; a silent and invisible tale, re-imagined by the boy:

But the grave that that young girl make in a ditch far beyond the shade of the mango tree, which she choose for her secret, before she kill sheself, will go unattend, unmark and trampled by the cattle. Except that in the night, when people passing, they only hearing somebody calling, Mercy. And a next voice crying, Mammy. (154)

Theo thus displays a mastery over the tale, stopping, restarting and remixing it for his own purposes and to create a contemporary truth, as he did with his wall of news. From a multi-voiced narrator transcending time and space, moving between generations, making links between the experiences of characters and connecting antagonists by their ‘Mister’ moniker, Theo in his night calypsoes evolves to depict “himself [as] a [third person] character in his own story” (93). As a result of this verbal mask, Theo’s own voice and first-person narrative, supported by the full weight of history, finally emerges.

That Theo’s mimicry allows him to recuperate and articulate the stories and voices of these women reveals an unusual imbrication of history and herstory. His mother and great-grandmother, by default of having “no more girl children,” have passed on to him their ancestral memory, stories of slave and free black women as sexual slaves. Theo tells us that his “Mama, Emelda, know more than Mister. She have history lesson too. She give it to her boy. What she know was from where she come from, down in the gully, in the barrack yard, below the big house on top of Pepper Hill. ... She carry in herself a long memory which take her, herself, back to herself, back to the young girl, Christina Dellacourt” (149). This is a story passed on from mother to son, “when she not even know she telling me” (152-3); Vincent calls Theo “a child umbilically tied to a great-grandmother’s story, a grandmother’s story, a mother’s story” (155). Although we currently conceive of calypsonians as male, and Caribbean feminist scholars like Shalini Puri and Tejaswini Niranjana have contested the exclusion of women from the calypso tent while women’s half-naked bodies are paraded on the Carnival streets, originally, the chantwell was female as its etymology from the French suggests, and as I showed above. Thus, while the posture of calypso and its narrative mode is derived from female oral narrative forms, contemporary calypso songs, especially sung by men, do not tell stories such as these. The

typical calypso depictions of women and gender relations of the period and beyond feature unfaithful, greedy or loud women as spouses or mates to the hapless male chantwell. Nor is the calypso form, with its characteristic posture of skepticism, able to bear a tale of sincere and loving relationships between the sexes.¹⁴ In some crucial ways, then, calypso songs are unsound records of female experiences, even when mimicking the voice of women. While works from slave narratives to their fictional neo-slave counterparts have long tackled some of horrors wrought by the plantation system on the bodies and psyche of women and men alike, there is something about the text or context of such stories of historical trauma that cannot be told in traditional calypso song form.

In Theo's nighttime tale, however, we find a revised and reinvigorated type of calypso that tells a different kind of story from contemporary calypso songs. There is a story Theo has to tell — “it is not a story to pass on” as Toni Morrison's narrator in *Beloved* notes (324) — transmitted through the generations by the women in his family who have also passed on to him the sexual vulnerability that caused their own suffering. Theo thus transcends the limits of the calypso traditions of his day to bring back the voice of the *chanterelle* that has been silenced by male calypsonians (Rohlehr 22, 32). It is thus significant that Theo speaks in, dresses as, and sounds out the sexual traumas of women. Theo is thus transgendered by his tale, reanimating the figure of the transgendered carnivalesque storyteller, *Witchbroom's* Lavren.¹⁵ This transgendering is echoed in Theo's victimization by his sexual abusers, for by having inhabited the same abject physical, sexual and subject positions as his ancestresses, he connects to their stories in a fundamental way.

It is significant, then, that Vincent calls Theo's recuperation of the “ancestry of ... interference” a type of history lesson or ‘living history.’ Like the calypsonian's song, Theo's night calypso tells a very contemporary tale through the frame of history, but importantly, records and narrates events that would not necessarily make it into official history. Indeed, calypsonians as we have seen, often tell official history at a slant, simultaneously producing the day's news and a critique of that news from below. The novel uses Theo's night calypso to speak to contemporaneous Trinidadian history by modeling how the calypsonian takes recent events as fodder for his compositions, in the same way as Theo ‘borrows’ Thérèse's letters about the war for his wall of news. This first historical story of Theo's great-grandmother Ma Dellacourt not only bends in time to connect with the story of his mother Emelda and his grandmother Alice, but it also layers and is contiguous with Theo's recent experience, and the current events in the novel. Indeed, near the beginning of his first nighttime tale, and throughout the story of Theo's ancestresses' experience at the big house of the de Marineaux, Theo actually decodes the novel's historical allusions and illuminates the recent events in the novel using a combination of calypso singing and storytelling. Vincent wonders, “How had [Theo] imbibed the Labour riots of the last

¹⁴ See the accounts of pseudo-romantic calypsoes in *West Indian Rhythm*, in which male-female relationships are either rendered with the male calypsonian's suspicion of his female partner, or the genuinely in love calypsonian distancing himself from his feelings either by anticipating his male peers' derision, or framing the song in the woman's deceit. ‘Love’ songs are merely a pretext for trenchant critiques of male-female relationships and gender politics.

¹⁵ Lavren, the hemaphroditic narrator of *Witchbroom*, tells carnival tales not only of the Macajuelos and Monagas families, but of the Caribbean. Lavren is able to do this because of his/her split-sites and characteristics: “S/he was born in the waters of the new world a hermaphrodite, a young boy who might have been mistaken for a girl. ... S/he levitated between worlds. S/he hung between genders. S/he trembled between loves and desires. S/he was pigmented between races. S/he stretched her young body between continents and hung about her neck this archipelago of islands” (12).

few years so clearly? Butler and Cipriani, political figures entered as principal players of his drama. Vincent marvelled at this orchestration of voices, this recall, this living history” (94). In decoding the novel’s context, Theo presents the reader with a history lesson of the World War II period, but also shows how history repeats itself like a broken record, excavating as he does so the source of Trinidadians’ postcolonial trauma. Indeed, Theo’s silence is symbolic of a larger cultural silence owing not only to historical, personal, and political trauma, but also to (post-)colonial amnesia, and the erasure or palimpsest of foundational stories, voices and texts.

In his function as calypsonian, Theo also reveals the layers of abusive Misters and fathers/Fathers as well. In the narrative connection between Alice’s experience and Theo’s own, and in the various historically repeating Misters, “the Mister de Marineaux of the time,” Theo uncovers how it is not only the names that repeat, but also the power relations which result in the sexual violence, the “ancestry of ... interference” (151). This is a trauma that is a consequence of colonialism, and thus has large-scale ramifications. ‘Mister,’ then, is a symbolic name for the white Creole authority figure who preys on the bodies of young women and men; the doubling of Father/Mister reflects the (re-)enactment of the role of Mister/slave master/colonial figure, symbolic of repeated, systemic, historic and continued rape of the Caribbean person. Thus the repeating Misters throughout Theo’s tale of trauma connect him to his mother, grandmother, and great grandmother, while his gender suggests that the abuse is not merely sexual; rather, sexual abuse is here symbolic of powerlessness and abasement.

The colonial legacy revealed in Theo’s history lesson also highlights Vincent’s own complicity as a peon of a white French Creole planter family, and it brings him to terms with his own secret, which, interestingly, finds its double and reverb in Theo’s story of the Dellacourts and the de Marineaux. Vincent himself is a type of Mister. In the “History Lesson” chapter of the novel as the war is just beginning, Theo decides to become Vincent’s cook and housekeeper, excavating from the doctor’s cupboard and closets relics from his family’s colonial past: the serving implements that belie a moneyed and propertied class with European pretensions.¹⁶ Vincent now recalls his own mother “ringing the bell at Versailles, ringing it between courses for the table to be cleared, for the vegetables to be served. He had witnessed as a child the elaborate training that new servants went through when they first took up their posts” (248). By insisting on their roles in this pantomime as servant and master, Theo reveals Vincent’s own complicity in the types of scenes Theo needs to evoke. When Theo says of the de Marineaux house that it was a “[b]ig house on the hill. This is a house that hide secret in turret room” (92), Theo unwittingly brings Vincent’s own turret room secret to memory. As a teenager, he developed a sexual relationship with Odette, the daughter of his family’s servant, Sybil, which produced a son he’s never seen and is part of the reason he has emotionally adopted Theo as his own son (382). Earlier, listening to Theo’s story, Vincent’s “own past began to creep close. ... The boy’s history lesson was teaching him something, reminding him of something he did not like to remember. ... Vincent found his memories tumbling out an ancestry, a shared legacy, grounded in the source of the wealth of the creoles, much like Theo had described on the same hillsides” (155-6).

¹⁶ According to Brereton, speaking of traditional (pre-Independence) Trinidadian society, “The French Creoles were the most numerous group among the [ruling] white Creole sector. ...They greatly valued family traditions and kinship; to be a true French Creole, one had to belong to one of the ‘good’ families, one had to bear one of the ‘respected’ names. ... Even more crucial, a member of the French Creole elite had to be ‘pure white’ and a Roman Catholic. ...Ownership of land was a significant measure of status, for this group was essentially a land-owning aristocracy. The critical points, for the French Creoles, were racial purity and aristocratic tradition... There was an exaggerated deference for birth and breeding” (116-117).

The effect of Theo's calypso is profound: Vincent is brought to remembrance, even though he never recognizes or acknowledges his complicity. In fact, the novel suggests a sort of colonial amnesia on Vincent's part: he has forgotten about the colonial relics that he has brought with him from his family estate on mainland Sancta Trinidad to the leper colony on Saint Damian's, and he has suppressed the memory of Odette and his own son. Most significant in the above scene are the repeated phrases "Vincent dozed," even during moments of heightened emotional anguish on Theo's part. It is when Vincent plays for truth, fully awake to and aware of the multiple layers of historical meaning and traumas embedded in Theo's tale, that he can finally accomplish his role as healer.

This underscores the significance of the novelistic employment of participatory calypso storytelling, the compact between audience and calypsonian that the I-and-I form affords. It is through this participatory technique, and through the carnival techniques of masquerade and displacement, that Theo not only gets Vincent to reenact both their historic and symbolic roles, but it is also the way Theo gets from the story of others to his own story. In order for Theo to "work through" his past, Vincent needs to assume the role of Mister. This is also relevant to *Vincent's* own working through — *he* must acknowledge his complicity with structures of power. In the chapter "Girl in the Window," Vincent returns home from the clinic to find a strange girl — in dress, heels and professionally applied make-up — in his house. Realizing this is Theo, Vincent is compelled to play along — in pantomime — the historical roles of master and servant. This daytime drama then leads to a night calypso in full masquerade form, where Theo begins to reenact his abuse, with Vincent in the roles of Mister and the nameless priest.

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank (1995) sees wounds resulting in absolute chaos, which resists narrative. The wounded storyteller must rise above chaos in order to successfully accomplish narration and potentially find healing.¹⁷ Yet, as we have seen, Theo's night calypso at first 'progresses' in "fits and starts," an interrupted and ruptured tale whose form belies the psychological condition of its teller. Calypso, however, allows Theo to rise above 'chaos' and speak with distance. Having used evasive mechanisms to survive the original trauma, Theo can only recount it using carnivalesque language, the linguistic masking of calypso: he describes his mounted abuser as a "*borokeet*" the half-man, half-horse character (378). Shortly afterwards, Theo describes him as the devil character in the Carnival mas', "*jab molassi* and red devil and *moco jumbie*" all at once. It is as if he needs an excess of language with which to narrate this evil that consumes children as its occupation. The recourse to Carnival also underscores the importance of calypso and Carnival in ritual healing for postcolonial peoples: it requires all participants to reenact their historical parts, hence why the characters in the novel all begin as historical types; each of them are players in the mas'.

As such, it is when Vincent acknowledges his symbolic link to the role of Mister that Theo becomes exorcised — at least temporarily. The reenactment is graphic and horrid, yet Vincent realizes the importance of Theo's masquerade: "The boy needed to be doing what he was doing, and he, Vincent, needed to play this part, so that Theo could in turn play his. If he stopped it, he might prevent some important retrieval" (283). In the protracted, macabre drama, Theo's calypso descends into graphic and unbearable realism, combining first-person narration and enactment (402-4). Aside from a physical key that Theo has somehow produced and is using

¹⁷ Frank notes that chaos stories are 'anti-narrative': "those who are truly living the chaos cannot tell in words. To turn the chaos into a verbal story is to have some reflective grasp of it. The chaos that can be told in story is already taking place at a distance and is being reflected on retrospectively" (98).

to reenact being sodomized, without Vincent's help, the real key here is Vincent's acknowledgement of the crime:

'Yes, Theo... I hear what you say. I see what you do. It's all acknowledged now. It won't ever happen again. You are safe with me. ... Theo, Theo. There's no need for this. You don't have to do this. You don't have to do this anymore. There's no Mister, no horse, no key, no gallop through the air. There's you Theo, and me, Doctor Metevier, Vincent, your friend. This is not what I want you to do. I want you to eat this bread, drink this water. I want you to go to bed and sleep, peacefully.' (404)

In this scene that suggests a new type of communion, with Vincent offering the sacrament in the guise of a surrogate father/Father, Vincent must acknowledge the symbolism of their respective roles in order to free them *both* from the cycle of repetition. It is crucial that, while Vincent is present at the reenactment, he does not *literally* reenact it with Theo. The speech act is enough. Healing cannot take place without Vincent, not only as listener, reader, priest, doctor, and carnival tent audience, but also as Mister, and father figure.

In this way, the novel signifies a new and fully integrated role for white French Creoles in Trinidad, and continues the work Scott began in his earlier novels and short stories, particularly *Witchbroom* and "King Sailor One J'ouvert Morning." In both texts, Scott, who is himself of French Creole descent, re-centers the French Creole character in Trinidadian culture through the conduit of calypso and carnival. Having recounted the history of the Caribbean in *Witchbroom* and acknowledged the historical role of amnesiac landowning French Creoles in the wounding of the landscape, he shows the interstitial narrator Lavren uniting black and French Creole narrative traditions, and becoming a sort of everyman figure on J'ouvert morning. In "King Sailor," the French Creole character devolves into a jab molassi quite by accident: instead of the neat, middlebrow sailor figure he intended to play, a role reflective of his phenotype, he becomes stuck between two steelpan drums and ends up helping a group of black calypso players with their instruments. By the end of J'ouvert he has stripped his Creole pretensions and has become, without molasses and disguise, a Jab Molassi 'in truth,' with a sense of belonging with the masses. Taken together, a central theme running throughout Scott's oeuvre is that white Trinidadians cannot pretend away the history of race relationships because 'Massa Day Done,' but that all members of society have to work through in order to heal, to connect, to love. The displaced reenactments of calypso and Carnival offer a language and form to engage with and move beyond the past, perhaps suggesting why Scott finds J'ouvert such a fruitful metaphor throughout his work. Like Theo's key, which simultaneously is the source of his trauma and the tool to free himself by opening a new door, J'ouvert morning, whether its origination as the new day of Emancipation on August 1, 1838, or in its current iteration as the opening day of Carnival, is symbolic of rebirth.

The emancipatory J'ouvert theme also connects to the power of the masquerade. It is Theo's use of calypso masquerade — whether linguistic, narrative, theatrical or sartorial — that eventually leads to his voicing his own story and doing so plainly. Theo has moved from silence to sound, from wound to words. It is not until quite close to the end of the novel, after he has reenacted his sexual abuse with Vincent and told his story in his own voice, that he is able to reveal his attempted flight back to Africa, and the consequent fire that consumes the big house and his mother. He now tells his truth in the plain and simple sentences that characterizes his dialogue with the psychiatrist in the frame story, now some forty years after his repetition of his

act of neo-slave revolt: “I tell Chantal to go and sleep by her cousin that night. I alone. I have my plan. First is the big house, then the dolly house down in the gully. [...] I leave the whole place to burn. It burn, pretty, pretty, pretty...” (414). This last night calypso is ever so brief, emerging after Vincent and Thérèse-Madeleine catch him trying to light some newspapers afire in the middle of their bedroom — newspapers which ironically, have always held a record of the incident, linked in the novel to the second fire, also lit by Theo, that destroys the leprosarium and the marine base. Where Jonah and Singh have failed with their overt political revolution, Theo with his act of neo-slave revolt succeeds in releasing the lepers from their virtual prison on the island, forcing their rehabilitation into mainstream society and the dismantling of the army base.

While Errol Hill, Earl Lovelace and others see carnival and calypso becoming emptied of political power in the real world, Scott’s novel suggests that calypso still holds the potential to heal these wounds of history. Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, although taken as a model novelypso, critiques the facile ‘all o’ we is one’ rhetoric of calypso and Carnival which is not borne out in lived experience outside of carnival time. In *Dragon*, focused as it is on the erosion of (black) masculinity in the face of American capitalism, the rhetoric of calypso and carnival is mere ‘ole talk’ and Robber Talk — symbolic rather than real, since it not only excludes Indo-Trinidadians like Pariag, but also belies intra-black class and color tensions. *Dragon* also affords a critique of the calypsonian character, Philo, whose focus on status and popularity distances him from the ordinary folk of the Hill, and he comically and ironically ends up ensconced in the sterile middle-class suburbs. Yet Lovelace himself continues to draw on the potent cultural and political function of the calypsonian in his novels. In his 2011 novel *Is Just a Movie*, for example, Lovelace uses a calypsonian narrator to interrogate the neocolonialism and dehumanizing tendencies of American filmmakers who use as mere backdrop to white film stars, black Trinidadian bodies dressed in grass skirts and paid to die on cue. Taken together with the fact that, for all his foibles, it is Philo whose perspective frames *Dragon*, and whose music, even at the end, chronicles and satirizes the times, Lovelace’s continued recourse to the calypsonian narrator underscores the fact that the cultural, political and *literary* valence of the calypsonian continue to resonate.

Regardless of the real content and function of *calypso songs* in Trinidadian culture, the *calypsonian*’s traditional function remains crucial to the continued working through of persistent cultural and social traumas. If, as I have shown through my reading of *Night Calypso*, both memory and the body record the violence of personal and political history, it is the calypsonian, if he is worth his salt, who is able to slip out of time and space to capture these experiences in song and on record. In the same way that the wounds on the body and on the mind become legible testimonies or recordings, calypso narrative, like phonograph technology, functions as a playback mechanism, replaying these physically and psychically recorded narratives, and transmuting the silence-inducing graphs of experience into sound and meaning.

Works Cited

Aiyejina, Funso. *Self-Portraits: Interviews with Ten West Indian Writers and Two Critics*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: UWI School of Continuing Studies, 2003.

- . “Unmasking the Chantwell Narrator in Earl Lovelace’s Fiction.” *Music, Memory, Resistance: Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination*. Ed. Patricia J. Saunders, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Stephen Steumpfle. Kingston/ Miami: Ian Randle, 2007. 151-62.
- Brereton, Bridget. *A History of Modern Trinidad: 1783-1962*. Kingston: Heinemann, 1981.
- Dunn, Geoffrey, Michael Horne (Dir.). *Calypso Dreams: The Roots of Kaiso in Trinidad and Tobago*. Geoffrey Dunn. 2004.
- Chamoiseau, Patrick. *Solibo Magnificent*. Trans. Rose-Myriam Rejouis, Val Vinokurov. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.
- Cliff, Michelle. *Free Enterprise*. 1994. New York: City Lights, 2004.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Classic Calypso Collective, The. *West Indian Rhythm: Trinidad Calypsoes on World and Local Events — Featuring the Censored Recordings 1938-1940*. Bear Family, 2007.
- Condé, Maryse. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Ballantine, 1994.
- Culbertson, Roberta. “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self.” *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 169-95.
- Fishburn, Katherine. *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African American Narrative*. Connecticut: Greenwood, 1997.
- Forster, Greg. “Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form.” *Narrative* 15.3 (2007): 259-85.
- Frank, Arthur W. *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989.
- Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*. Austin & London: U of Texas Press, 1972.
- Kearney, Richard. “Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis.” *Paragraph* 30.1 (2007): 51-66.
- Krus, Patricia. “The Ethic of Postcolonial Healing in Astrid Roemer’s *Trilogy of Suriname*.” *Perspectives on the ‘Other America’: Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture*. Ed. Michael Niblett, and Kerstin Oloff. Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2009. 175-96.
- Lovelace, Earl. *The Dragon Can’t Dance*. London: Longman, 1979.
- . *Is Just a Movie*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2011.
- Morgan, Paula. “With a Tassa Blending: Calypso and Cultural Identity in Indo-Caribbean Fiction.” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*. 3.2 (2005).
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Knopf, 1987.
- . “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature.” *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. University of Michigan, October 7, 1988. July 31, 2011.
- Naipaul, V.S. *Miguel Street*. London: Vintage, 2002.
- Neptune, Harvey R. *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Mobilizing India : Women, Music, and Migration Between India and Trinidad*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

- Pollard, Velma. *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.
- Paquet, Sandra Pouchet; Saunders, Patricia J.; Steumpfle, Stephen., ed. *Music, Memory, Resistance: Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination*. Kingston: Ian Randle, 2007.
- Puri, Shalini. "Canonized Hybridities, Resistant Hybridities: Chutney Soca, Carnival, and the Politics of Nationalism." *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*. Ed. Belinda Edmonson. New World Studies. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999. 12-38.
- Quevedo, Raymond. *Atilla's Kaiso: A Short History of Trinidad Calypso*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, 1983.
- Ramazani, Jahan. "The Wound of History: Walcott's *Omeros* and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction." *PMLA* 112.3 (1997): 405-17.
- Ramcharitar, Raymond. *Breaking the News: Media and Culture in Trinidad*. San Juan, Trinidad: Lexicon, 2005.
- Regis, Louis. *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago, 1962-1987*. Gainesville: University of the West Indies Press; University Press of Florida, 1999.
- Rohlehr, Gordon. *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. Port of Spain: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990.
- Scott, Lawrence. *Witchbroom*. Oxford: Heineman Caribbean Writers Series, 1992.
- . "King Sailor One J'Ouvert Morning." *Ballad for the New World and Other Stories*. Oxford: Heineman Caribbean Writers Series, 1994. 9-16.
- . *Night Calypso*. London: Allison & Busby, 2004.
- . "Region, Location and Aesthetics: An Interview." *Perspectives on the 'Other America': Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture*. Ed. Michael Niblett, and Kerstin Oloff. Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2009. 257-70.
- Selvon, Samuel. *The Lonely Londoners*. London: Longman, 1956.
- Walcott, Derek. *Remembrance & Pantomime: Two Plays*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1980.
- . *Omeros*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990.
- . "The Muse of History: An Essay." *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998. 36-63.
- Warner, Keith Q. *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982.
- Warner-Lewis, Maureen. "The Influence of Yoruba Music on the Minor-Key in Calypso." *Guinea's Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidad Culture*. Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1991. 141-58.
- Yanique, Tiphonie. *How to Escape from a Leper Colony: A Novella and Stories*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2010.