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Reflections of a Legend

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Reflections of a Legend¹

David Rudder's "Calypso Music" (1987) describes the Calypso as "a living vibration rooted deep within my Caribbean belly." This "Caribbean belly," preserving the patterns of behaviour of the African folk, contains memories of ancestral practices among which is the role the poet in the community and society. Poetic traditions that survived the practices of New World plantation society have been perpetuated in the Calypso that articulates personal and group experiences, attitudes and emotions. Dr Eric Williams, the nation's Father and Founder, has been the subject of constant calypso celebration and censure, commentary and interrogation from his first election success in September 1956 to his death in March 1981. No other individual occupying the prime ministerial chair has been examined and evaluated as much and in as many ways, and this scrutiny has followed him in death where he is generally remembered favorably as the standard against which his successors are compared to their disadvantage.

Three major interconnected facts can be adduced in support of this. Firstly, Williams served nation in the highest capacity for an unbroken twenty-five years during which time the country experienced constitutional independence as well as rigorous challenges to what Rudder calls in "Hoosay" (1991) the "lovely lie" of island paradise. Secondly, during his twenty-five years as the highest elected official, Williams dominated national public life and was ever the focus of the national collective gaze. Thirdly, although mulatto, he was regarded by Afro-Trinidadians as being African. Afro-Trinidadian perceptions of Williams, reflected and refracted in and through the calypso, derive from ancestral African notions of the hero/villain, notions carried subliminally in the memory of the group.

This paper examines dualistic calypso constructions of the Williams legend. Calypsonians celebrated Williams as hero, but generally they were never so blinded by his aura as to lose their own rooted sense of reality. Generally, Williams is perceived in song as a man, a very special man but a man nevertheless. On the other hand, even while they evaluated him as man and subjected his name to an irreverent—sometimes reductive—*picong*,² their rites of passage into shared communal experience, they seemed wary of the man who was known to have exclaimed publicly: "Don't get me damned blasted vex!" Calypsonians have represented Williams variously as *obeahman*, as *ananse*, as *badjohn*, or *ananse-turned-badjohn*, all concepts deriving from the folk/urban experience that also gave birth to the calypso.³ These representations allowed calypsonians to access Williams imaginatively and to a large extent it was the only way they could make contact with him. Employing the lenses provided by folklore and folk practice, calypsonians negotiated several layers of the Williams mystique to arrive at notions or explanations that are understandable both to calypsonians and their public from whom these populist notions ultimately derive.

The Hero Talks to the Crowd

Williams's first signifying acts in the movement towards claiming political power in Trinidad and Tobago, were his public addresses at what was called The University of Woodford Square, Port of Spain, and at the neighboring Public Library. His intellectual duel with Dom Basil Matthews, the coal-black Trinidadian scholar who represented the Roman Catholic Church, and by extension the socio-politico-economic order represented by that church, generated much attention in the local community. Thanks to this debate, Williams established himself as the champion of those Trinidadians—and especially those Afro-Trinidadians—who resented the marginalized condition imposed on them by the forces personified by the French Creole Roman Catholic elites.

One suspects, however, that while the content of the formal academic discourse of the Williams-Matthews debates may have been beyond the understanding of the man and woman in the street, what would have registered with them was Williams's mastery of erudition and language. The latter achievement would have made a profound impression on a traditional African-based community where "the eloquent speaker is capable of garnering a great deal of power, respect and in many cases admiration through his artful speaking" ("Traditions of Eloquence in Afro-American Communities" 505). Abrahams highlights the importance of the man-of-words in traditional performances and differentiates between the "good talkers" and "good arguers" ("The Shaping of Folklore Tradition" 470). The former are characterized by "the use of long speeches suffused with overly decorative elevated diction and elaborate grammar and syntax," ("Traditions of Eloquence" 506) while the latter are characterized by "strongly colloquial diction and the rapid thrust of invective" ("The Shaping of Folklore Traditions" 470). Abrahams notes further that although one man could be both, his skills were rarely called for on the same occasion:

The man-of-words not only provides the tone and subject for traditional performances, but also serves as principal organizer of the activity... he has an equivalent in the man-of-action, the physically adept one who focuses the proceedings by his leadership and performance abilities. ("The Shaping of Folklore Traditions" 471)

Eric Williams was the hero for whom Afro-Trinidadians had long been waiting. He was at one and the same time the "good talker," "good arguer," and man-of action.

Considering Williams as a personification of continuity in West African traditions of power, expressive and instrumental, prompts this examination of the correspondence between politics and calypso. Politicians and calypsonians depend upon mastery of the word. They pay attention to one another in performance, they rely upon one another for inspiration, and they quote one another appropriately and conveniently. The logical calypso extension of this relationship is The Mighty Chalkdust's "Eric Loves Me" (1978) which avers that Williams's

otherwise inexplicable actions were designed merely to give Chalkdust topics for calypso. This peculiarly “calypsoesque” perception of the politician-calypsonian relationship is confirmed in Manchild’s “Politicians Love Calypsonians” (1999).⁴

Selwyn Cudjoe appreciated Williams’ verbal magic as a function of a calypso-type appeal to a calypso-appreciative audience. He understood that Williams communicated with the general audience which included semi-literates and illiterates by presenting them with the necessary information seasoned with humour, folkloric wisdom, aspects of popular culture and ‘robber talk’” all the verbal weapons in the calypsonian’s arsenal. Cudjoe concluded:

Thus to attend an Eric Williams public meeting was like going to a calypso show at the Queen’s Park Savannah or a Port of Spain calypso tent. It always possessed a dramatic air of the unexpected, an element of the festive, and a shared sense of participation in a common experience. (100)

Cudjoe observes that instead of “Kaiso” or “Dat is Kaiso,” the audience chorused, “Dat is man! He could *really* talk,” (101). Implied in this is the reality that the audiences who crowded the calypso tent to hear calypsonians sing were the voters who congregated to hear Williams talk. Further, the major attraction of both experiences was the practice of the word functioning simultaneously as message and as entertainment.

Cypher’s prize-winning “Last Elections” (1967) translates Cudjoe’s thoughts into the economical verse of calypso. After ridiculing all of Williams’s electoral opponents, the narrator of “Last Elections” ends triumphantly:

Up came a short little fellow
And he turn the whole program yellow
He said to support my party
And don’t vote for no rum and roti
In Princes Town I support Maharaj
He give me a drink, people say I bad
That little man was the public choice
And they for his tone of voice

He say
“The other party they call the *macafouchette*⁵
Only running like loved him that can’t find a hole
[This line is hopelessly garbled]
On the 7th of November the leader and his followers shall go to hell”

Lloyd Best offers another shorthand version of the Williams mystique as represented by his utterances and actions: “The nation at heart still loves and reveres him, because he is still the best guntalker, *picong*-slinger, opposition crusher of all.”⁶ What commentators and calypsonians

agree upon is that Williams was the master of the word, the word as agency of power, the word as key to the hearts and minds of Trinidadians and Tobagonians. It was this mastery as much as his political achievements and actions that endeared him to the calypsonians.

The Twin Portraits of Williams

Sparrow's "William the Conqueror" (1958) and "No Doctor No" (1957) establish the dualism of calypso representations of Williams by delineating the parameters for calypso address to and engagement with Williams. "William the Conqueror" celebrated Williams's 1956 success in this way:

I am sure you've heard the story
About Big Brains and Big Belly
Well, Sparrow ain't fraid to talk
Who don't like it take a walk
Fight finish, no bruise no cuts
But a man fall down on he guts

Chorus

Praise little Eric
Rejoice and be glad
For we have a champion leader here in Trinidad
P.N.M
It have nothing like them
For we have a champion leader
William the conqueror

2

I am no politician
But I could understand
If wasn't for Brother Willie
And his ability
Trinidad wouldn't go nor come
We used to vote for food and rum
But nowadays we eating all the Indians and them
And in the ending, we voting for PNM

3

Many lives were in danger
They murdered a stranger
Then they went and threaten the doctor
Concerning his daughter
It's there I prove he was the man for us

Because he didn't make any fuss
He addressed the crowd with a smile
And when he finished Big Belly was with child

William the Conqueror, the Norman adventurer who captured England in 1066, is transformed in calypso into Eric Williams, the native intellectual who had first scaled the walls of English academia and then conquered the neo-colonial political "kingdom" of Trinidad and Tobago. At the risk of personal injury and threats to his beloved daughter, this folk hero rescued Trinidad and Tobago from the old-style politics and electioneering represented by Albert Gomes and his associates. Williams's victory over the old-style politics promised a bright future for Trinidadians. The last image of Big Belly being impregnated by Big Brains is a calypso euphemism for a sexual yoking which constructs Williams as potent masculinizing actor and feminizes Albert Gomes as the dominated partner.⁷

But while "William the Conqueror" sets the calypso standard for panegyric, its partner song "No Doctor No" establishes the bar for protest. In this second song Sparrow articulates the discontent of the masses, who felt the burden of price increases imposed after the 1957 budget:

Listen, listen carefully
I am a man who does never be sorry
But Ah went and Ah vote some for council men
They have me now in a pen
After promising to give so much tender care
They forget me as they walk out of Woodford Square
Chorus
Because they raise up on the taxi fare
No Doctor No
And they have the blasted milk so dear
No Doctor No
But Ah want you to remember
We support you in September
You better come good
Because I have a big piece of mango wood

Although the second stanza begins by suggesting a softening of this position, this seeming softening is countered immediately, however, by protest against the lifestyle changes imposed by the PNM's drive to support local industry. The charge of neglect, which became popular in the 1970s, was leveled against Williams as early as 1957. To the untutored man-in-the-street, the business of government remains a mystery if he interests himself in his immediate short-term interest and is indifferent to the grand strategies of long-term policy planning, its mystifying rationales and forbidding language. Sparrow wonders at the opacity of transactions whose ultimate result is distress for the man-in-the-street. He further chastises the educated elite for

what he perceives as the unforgivable sin of abandoning the collective good. To his mind education and political position are merely the vehicles by which the man-in-street is empowered and Williams's failure to deliver on promises reeks of irresponsibility.

The final stanza establishes a gulf between the supporting calypsonian and the political directorate and also provides an early instance of that self-abasement adopted by some calypsonians when challenging or confronted with Williams the colossus:

Ah only hope they understand
I am just a calypsonian
What I say may be very small
But I know poor people ain't please at all

At the end of the final chorus, however, the mango wood threat is downgraded as Sparrow reverts to the pose of a sullen grumbling citizen who promises to hold on to his "mango wood". Despite this robust affirmation, the mango wood threat remained just that: the rhetorical aggression of the powerless. Williams who was sufficiently "Trini-to-the-bone" to appreciate Sparrow's mango wood *gran' charge*⁸ for what it was, may have been more concerned about alienating the one calypsonian who had the ability to rally Trinidad's disaffected, discontented and disillusioned. Although Sparrow declared himself "just a calypsonian," Williams may have perceived him as the second political force to have emerged in 1956, the year when both men independently declared a majestic presence on the relevant public stages.⁹ As a consequence Sparrow was called in for what he referred to laconically as "consultations."¹⁰ Sparrow did not elaborate upon this cryptic phrase but I imagine that the Calypso King of the World would have heeded only the summons of Williams himself. I cannot imagine the *sagaboy/badjohn* Sparrow responding to a summons from any of Williams's ministers or associates whose names he never mentions in his songs. The exceptions to this are Patrick Solomon ("Solomon Out" in 1964 and "Get to Hell Out" in 1965),¹¹ and John O'Halloran whose fondness for the illegal sport of cock fighting is satirized in "Cock Fight" (1969). The consultations of 1957 may have been responsible for the PNM-friendly propagandizing in Sparrow's "PAYE" (1958), "You Can't Get Away From The Tax" (1959), "Leave the Dam Doctor" (1960), "Present Government" (1961), "Balisier" ["Wear Your Balisier"] (1961) and "Federation" (1961). Although these songs promote a more favorable image of Williams, they nevertheless treat Williams as man.

Many other singers of the Sparrow and the Independence generations address or engage William as man, shorn of the mystique credited to him by his adoring constituents. It is significant that even faithful calypsonian supporters of Williams perceive him as human. Striker's "Don't Blame the PNM" (1958) satirizes those supporters who rush to Williams for solution to their every situation even their most intimate problems:

Annabella stocking want patching
She want the doctor help she with that

Johnson trousers falling
He want the doctor help he with that
Some want a Zephyr motorcar
Others want a piece of land
Dorothy loss she man
She want to complain to Dr Williams

While this testifies to a public perception that Williams was the source of power, it implies that Williams is merely a mortal man and should be spared the strain of every man's burden. Williams himself cited this fragment in his career autobiography *Inward Hunger* when he recounted how he drafted for the PNM a code of responsibilities designed to relieve "the strain on the Political Leader" (269).

Bomber's "Political Wonder" (1970)¹² affords another example of the calypsonian supporter testifying to Williams as a man. Bomber situates Williams among the pantheon of international twentieth-century giants, but his major concern in "Political Wonder" is the quality of the legacy Williams would leave. Bomber thus engages Williams's mortality, a major feature of the human condition but he carefully ignores Williams' fallibility, which is another major feature of the human condition.

The generation of calypsonians who perceived themselves as being in opposition to Williams inclined to the sternness of "No Doctor No" and eschewed the celebration of "William the Conqueror." Valentino's "No Revolution" (1971) submits a respectful memorandum refuting Williams's theory of revolution and explaining what he saw as the true purpose of the 1970 demonstrations. He acknowledges Williams as a source of power ("Them talking bout power, doctor / But is you who have power") and concedes Williams's restraint ("Yuh give them a inch they take a whole yard"), but this concession does not deter him from threatening Williams with the judgement of history:

A citizen should withstand the wrong things in his country
Regardless of what happen, that is my ideology
All we meeting with is oppression and a set of strain
Trials and tribulations, sorrows and pain
When we try to shake up the government
The result was police ill treatment
But justice must be done otherwise History
Is going to punish you worse than you punish we

Invested with the mantle of People's Calypsonian and encouraged by the restless post-1956 Black Power generation, Valentino was emboldened to more stinging reproach. His "Barking Dogs" (1973) addresses Williams as a man with seeing and hearing impairments that impede communication with the society of which he was the leader. Williams himself had carefully

cultivated the public mystique by persisting with his trademark dark glasses and hearing aid.¹³ In “The Spoiler’s Return,” Derek Walcott has the Spoiler persona confess to what may well have been Walcott’s own fascination with Williams:

and those with hearing aids turn off the truth
and their dark glasses let you criticize
your own presumptuous image in their eyes (*The Fortunate Traveller* 55)

Valentino, undazzled by the Williams mystique and the Walcott reflection, addresses Williams sternly in “Barking Dogs” (1973), a song which answers the *badjohn* rhetoric, “When I talk/ No dam dog bark” of “Get to Hell Out.” Alluding to the chorus of dissent that had resulted in the unrest of the early 1970s, Valentino declares:

Now this word is me
And I am this word
So let my voice be heard
Fix your hearing aid and hear what I say
Wipe your glasses and see things my way
The song that you hear is an angry one
And I’m sure if you see things clear you’ll see that all happiness is gone
But the dogs, the dogs are barking too long
It is a sign that something is wrong

Maestro’s “To Sir with Love” (1974) accuses Williams of betraying the national constituency of African voters with whom he had established a teacher-student relationship in The University of Woodford Square where he had founded programs on political education:

Mister, mister, is me yuh Black brother
Pressure, pressure, indeed inward hunger
The people who oppose you endlessly
They get plenty but you ent care ‘bout we
With the twenty eight percent I vote
Now yuh turn ‘round and stroke a yoke on mih throat
Chorus
Ninety percent of all who buying is of African origin
But they ent hiring blackhen chicken although is my money they banking
The only time they want the knottyhead fella
Is when I come over they counter to spend my dollar
No Bossman, I ent talking race
Ah only tracing what taking place in this place

“Dread Man” (1977) is starker in its condemnation of the effects of Williams’s stewardship on said poor black community:

Dreaming of a dread man
Dread man on an island
Where bigger brother squander
While smaller brother suffer
Dread man mash the small man down
They used to love the ground he walk on
They voting but now they groaning

Williams's actions and policies in the oil-boom period and especially the events of Bloody Tuesday 1975 are highlighted:¹⁴

Plenty money making
Plenty belly aching
Them buy self-loading rifle
To hassle who give trouble
Workman say
They want more pay
They send away for the CIA

In Maestro's mind Williams has graduated from being the Black leader/teacher who abandoned his brother constituents/students to being "Big Brother," George Orwell's futuristic controller of the minds of the people in *1984*.

In reproaching Williams for his "gifts" of oil money to Caribbean governments, and demanding the share due him by virtue of citizenship, Black Stalin's "Piece of the Action" (1976) invokes the equality enshrined in the incurable democracy taken for granted by the calypsonian in performance and adopted unconsciously by many citizens:¹⁵

Oil drilling, money making
Mr. Divider here is a warning
Mih blood in this country
Mih sweat in this country
So when yuh sharing yuh oil bread
Ah say remember me
This ent no Black power talk
This ent no talk 'bout revolution
Ah say Mr. Divider listen to me
This is man talking to man

We can profitably examine the difference between "Piece of the Action" and "No Doctor No". Sparrow's threat to beat Williams into compliance was premised on a personal relationship to Williams, a relationship based on a 1955 association in Gayap.¹⁶ Stalin, however, would have suspected that to Williams he was merely another of the anonymous Black Power boys or the

revolutionaries of the early 70s. By representing himself as citizen entitled to voice his dissent and have it heard, he attempts to distance himself from those agents who had disturbed the peace of Williams's kingdom. Despite this, he still delivers the rhetorical threat "Stalin old and begging/ Is one thing he ain't seeing / Is six feet first I going." Williams, who had outlived the Sparrow *gran' charge* of 1957, the Black Power unrest, the guerrilla movement of the early 1970s, and the challenge to his leadership of the party in 1973 ignored this rhetoric.

Relator, listening to a report from one Dr Aziz that indicated that panmen were gradually growing deaf, and noting that Williams had remained deaf to all appeals, satirized the panmen, and the prime minister in the skillfully constructed "Deaf Panman" (1974):

Ring ting ting ting, ping pong, ping pong
Steelbands going to wail in town
They sounding sweet, they sounding sweet
Masquerade on Frederick Street
Some playing in C, some lost the key
Some are very near to WC
But they going to jam
And the name of the mas' is Dr Williams
Ah hope you understand the masquerade
Pan men in dark shade wearing hearing aid.

Relator follows up this abrasive satire with the plainspeak of "Take a Rest" (1980), which concedes the futility of complaint, censure and satire ("It is useless that we continue to blame / A horse that is tired and almost lame"). Because the traditional calypso weapons have been rendered ineffectual by Williams's silence and disregard, Relator offers direct advice to the nation:

I would like to suggest a good rest for the doc
Before the poor man fall down on the work.

This statement, the equivalent of Delamo's grim vision of "Apocalypse" (1979) that which likened the corruption-laden racing complex to the Laperouse Cemetery, was remembered in April of 1981 when Williams died in office.

When we compare the calypsoes of 1957-1970 and those of 1970-1981, we observe that the praise singers of the earlier period concede Williams's mortality but acknowledge his specialness; the disapproving voices of the later period, however, consistently withhold that celebration of specialness. But celebration and censure have operated as alternating voices in the Calypso on Williams; while one is dominant the other is quieter. In the 1957-1970 period when celebration was the dominant mode, some calypsonians challenged Williams, while some praised him in the years 1971-1981 when censure was the dominant mode. What is common to both periods and both sets of voices is the perception that Williams either as political personality or as

representative of institutionalized power was not a man not to be trifled with. The familiar addresses Deafy, Eric and so on, as well as the calypso *picong* of Prince's "Come as You Are Party" (1974),¹⁷ Kitchener's "Twenty to One" (1974), Squibby's "Streaker" (1975), Scrunter's "Crapaud Revolution" (1981),¹⁸ and so on do not disguise the fact that calypsonians trod warily around Williams. The heavy-handed PNM riposte to Tiger's irreverent "The Doc's Secret Wedding" (1959), which criticized Williams for his one-day marriage, signaled the end of the performing career of an icon of modern Calypso.¹⁹ After 1959 those who protested generally did so with a sense of deference or adopted the mask of satire.

Despite its heterogeneity, however, the corpus of songs on Williams testifies to a fundamental respect for him in his public capacity, which is the dimension in which he has been apprehended. The open disrespect of the calypsoes for his successors may be a function of the degradation of society as much as it is a perception that Williams and Williams alone was worthy of respect.

"Let the Jackass Sing"

Chalkdust falls between the two extremes of perception of Williams defined by "William the Conqueror" and "No Doctor No." His Calypso on Williams is marked by an ambivalence which develops out of his own internal conflict where Williams is concerned. Chalkdust, the tireless Williams-watcher, first come to public attention when his "Brain Drain" (1968) critiqued Williams's own use of the term against those professionals who were fleeing the country in the wake of the first devaluation in the independence period. The fallout from that song was that the Teaching Service Commission and the Ministry of Education and Culture sought to restrain Chalkdust, then a primary school teacher.²⁰ Off the record Chalkdust has claimed that only Williams's personal intervention rescued him from the clutches of officialdom. This admission, one of several contradictory Chalkdust statements about the issue, is all the more remarkable because one would have thought that the institutions were acting to save Williams possible embarrassment at the hands of a junior functionary.

After Williams's censorship of Shorty's "The Art of Making Love" at the 1973 national calypso crown competition, members of the Trinidad and Tobago League of Women's Voters wrote to Williams requesting that Chalkdust be disciplined for his performance of the irreverent "Somebody Mad."²¹ Chalkdust, who had heard from an informant within the Williams household that Williams had privately dismissed him as a jackass, then created a scenario which harmonized the PNM women's public complaint and Williams's private dismissal in "Let the Jackass Sing" in 1974:

PNM women against me
They report me to Deafy
Last year after Dimanche Gras

“Deafy, Chalkie gone too far
How come this young man tell Trinidad
That somebody in Whitehall mad
It’s an insult to your office
Let us take him to court for this”

Chorus

“Leave him alone, women”
Eric Williams tell them
“It’s kaiso men like he contribute to me
When them kaisonians sing
They tourists they bring and is cash coming
For the treasury and the party and some for me
He going to tie a noose around his own throat
Give him plenty rope
Is I who go win
Allyuh, let the jackass sing”

“Let the Jackass Sing” is among many other things a traditional calypsonian endorsement of the economic viability of the Carnival, of the supreme importance of the Calypso to the Carnival, and of its value in commercial advertising and in political propagandizing. Chalkdust’s self-promotion in this regard, however, may not be as significant as projected in the calypso.²² There is no mistaking, however, vital features of Chalkdust’s thinking in respect to Williams.

Several important things emerge from other stanzas. First, Chalkdust seems to think that his enrollment at the St Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies is a personal favour granted by Williams. The generation of 1956 gratefully accepted the benefits of secondary and tertiary education that only became possible under Williams. The corollary of this is that some of the beneficiaries of this privilege—and their parents, in my case—felt that UWI students would be ingrates if they were to criticize the person who had made possible their advancement in society. Chalkdust would have been aware that he would have been so accused and the calypso suggests that he may have felt so. He may have felt especially favored given the state response to his “Brain Drain.”

Secondly, Chalkdust believes that the reclusive Williams appreciates that calypsonians are the voice of the people (“The calypsonian makes me understand public opinion”), but his employ of the derogatory “Deafy” indicates that he thinks that Williams is deaf to the appeals transmitted through Calypso. The employment of reductive *picong* signaled by “Deafy” does not disguise the fact that Chalkdust is aware that Williams controlled institutionalized power of office. According to the calypso, too, the PNM women request that that Williams invoke this power to dismiss the junior teacher “for some stupid breach,” or banish him to remote Toco, or just as easily “out his lamp.” But the Williams persona arrogates the option of spontaneous, terrifying action (“The day Ah pounce on him for singing such tripe /Crapaud smoke his pipe”).

This persona has too much political and business acumen to be provoked to public anger by the lese majesty of Chalkdust or any other calypsonian. He has faith in his own staying power and the record of having outlasted “Many men before he,” among whom he identifies Melody and Cristo (“They dead out you know”). He is perfectly convinced that singing protest is suicidal (“He going to tie a noose around his own throat”) because the colossus is guaranteed ultimate victory (“Is I who go win”). Given all of this, “Williams” can dismiss Chalkdust’s songs with the contemptuous, “Let the jackass sing”.

Chalkdust’s self-designation as jackass, a preemptive self-conscious self-abasement in face of the colossus, is an interesting phenomenon.²³ Sparrow had defined himself as “just a calypsonian” reducing himself to subaltern in the face of William’s “knowledgism.”²⁴ Valentino, Maestro, Stalin and Relator do not consider donning the mask of the subaltern. Chalkdust, however, seems actuated by the conflict within himself where Williams is concerned. As said before, he may have been impressed and humbled by the gift of free tertiary education which Williams had granted him—and thousands of other citizens. He has claimed that he and Williams had met and talked as equals, but he also claims off the record that Williams refused to publicly acknowledge any link between them or to publicly acknowledge his worth as calypsonian. Chalkdust’s relentless targeting of Williams can be explained in part by a need for public acknowledgement and recognition even if this were to take the form of an angry contemptuous outburst.

“Clear Your Name” (1974), another clear response to the Williams comment on “Somebody Mad,” is a clear instance of attempted provocation. In requesting that Williams declare himself to the nation and to posterity, Chalkdust shifts the burden of jackass from himself onto Williams:

In the near future our young children will study you in class
They would want to know if you were a giant or simply a jackass

To this and to several intrusive questions posed about his public stewardship and private life posed in the calypso, Williams characteristically made no public answer. I don’t know if this refusal by Williams to be provoked may have inspired or contributed to “Eric Williams Loves Me” [“Eric Loves Me”] (1980) which is Chalkdust’s confession that Williams remained to him an absolute mystery. Listening to Chalkdust’s calypso odyssey and reading his prose statements outside of calypso, I have concluded that Chalkdust is fascinated with Williams. I suspect that he perceived him as a giant, a giant who in decline could be helped by a Lilliputian calypsonian. And yet this attraction on the part of Chalkdust’s was compounded with the need to maintain safe distance from the man who controlled the power that could so easily “out his lamp.”

The jackass metaphor survived the Williams-Chalkdust interface. In 1998 Luta’s “Pack Yuh Bags” reminds then prime minister Panday, who had put himself on a war course against dissenting calypsonians, that

The culture of the people is what you must understand
You have to learn to handle *mamaguy* and *mauvais lange*²⁵
Take a tip from Eric Williams and let the jackass bray
But listen attentively to what the jackass say

Luta advises Panday that his perceptions and definition of the calypsonian are irrelevant; what matters is that he listens to the calypsonian as attentively as Williams did. This favorable post-facto imaging of Williams against the witness of the many contemporary calypsos, which reproached him for inattention to his supporters and to the national good as a whole, is evidence of the hold he still exerts on the minds of calypsonians.

Badjohn Willie

The image of Williams as leader in the mode of steelband captains of the 50s and 60s is established in Blakie's "Doctah Ent Dey" ["De Doctor Eh Dey"] (1965). In this song Blakie creates the scenario of a concerned citizen who had earlier discussed the problem of resurgent youth violence with Williams. Prominent among the warring youths, were those steelbandmen who had formed Williams's unofficial janissaries,²⁶ and who had been rewarded in the Special Works programs. Blakie, who was an associate of San Juan All Stars, and a major player in this steelband unrest, laments in song that Williams was not present to implement the schemes they had concocted together, according to the fiction of the calypso, and to this end he reproaches the prime minister:

Doctor, Ah find yuh getting on funny
Ah talking mih mind, believe the Lord Blakie
Ah believe is 'fraid you 'fraid
Of San Juan all Stars and Renegades
But remember you is the leader
All you got to do is to pass an order

The irreverent Blakie looks for his prime minister in unexpected places like the madhouse and the prison, echoing a popular *oletalk*²⁷ that Williams was mad or corrupt.²⁸ Faulting Williams with failure to arrest a deteriorating situation has been a common calypsonian reproach against him. Penguin's eulogy "Betty Goaty" (1982) goes as far as to have him gloating over those corrupt subordinates whom he was powerless to control and who would be exposed to their just deserts when he is not there to protect them.

While Blakie was faulting Williams with failure to live up to the authoritarian image of steelband leader in the pioneering age of the 1940s and 50s, Sparrow's classic "Get to Hell Out" (1965) which purports to be Williams's defiance of those who challenged his handling of the

Solomon Affair, reinforces the notion of Williams as politician appropriating the language and posture of *badjohn*:

I am going to bring back Solomon
Who doh like it complain to the Commission
None of them going to tell me how to run my country
I defy any one of you to dictate to me
I am no dictator
But when I pass an order
Mr. Speaker, this matter must go no further
I have nothing more to say
And it must be done my way
Come on, come on, meeting done for the day

Chorus

This land is mine
I am the boss
What I say goes
And who vex lorse

2

Who the hell is you to jump and quarrel
PNM is mine lock stock and barrel
Who give you the privilege to object
Pay yuh taxes, shut up and have respect
I am a tower of strength yes
I'm powerful but modest
Unless
I'm forced to be blunt and ruthless
So shut up and don't squawk
This ent no skylark
When I talk no damn dog bark

Chorus

My word is law
So watch yuh case
If yuh slip yuh slide
This is my place

3

I am going to do what I feel to do
And I couldn't care less who get vex or who blue
And if you want to test how ah strong in a election
Let we bet some money, Ah giving odds ten to one
I control all the money

That pass through this country
And they envy me for my African safari
I am politically strong
I am the weight of town
Doh argue with me
You can't beat me in John John

Chorus

Who's not with me is my enemy
And dust will be their destiny
And if I say that Solomon will be minister of External Affairs
And if you doh like it
Get to hell outa here

It proved impossible for Williams to live down this *badjohn* image that had been inscribed during his heyday. Chalkdust's "Two Sides of a Shilling" (1971) has the Williams persona threatening a defecting Robinson with the words, "Yuh waiting on election but Ah go pound yuh behind like a nail." In a calypso drama preview of the 1976 election, Chalkdust has Williams proclaiming himself a master of electoral warfare and of street rhetoric:²⁹

I accustom fighting wars
That is why they call me 'Jaws'
I eating from kingfish to salmon
In this general election

The Williams of Crusoe's "I Eric Eustace Williams" (1982)³⁰ boasts of his invincibility in national elections and of his uncontested pre-eminence within his party:

Opposition know they never stood a chance
Five elections I whip them on the conscience
In my Party I am absolutely boss
Who defied me I simply told them get lost
With brains, intellect and charisma
My visions were always superior
Anyone who attempted to move me from the head
I just raise my hand and they politically dead

Chalkdust's "Bad John Willie" (1980) ascribes to Williams a *badjohn* attitude, which informs all of his political actions either domestic or regional:

A *badjohn* named Saga went to fete
He got drunk and stabbed a man to death
The police was sent
To get a statement

So this big *bajohn*
Start to say what went on
Same time Mr. Guerra the lawyer was listening
And very abrupt he jump in and stop this *bajohn* man from talking

Chorus

Guerra say, "Learn to shut yuh mouth
Shut yuh mouth
You must always stay calm like Eric William
Man yuh doh see Eric doesn't talk to Manley
Burnham he cut off completely
He blank his permanent secretary
So now we telephones ent working
Is Selby Wilson we blaming
And the real culprit sit down quiet and saying nothing
Shut yuh mouth, shut yuh mouth
You could kill and get way free
Once yuh live like *bajohn* Willie"

The events surrounding Williams's resignation and return (September to December 1973) excited the suspicion among some calypsonians that he was playing high stakes political poker. Composer's "Different Strokes" (1974), for example, presents Williams as a combination of *ananse* and *bajohn*:³¹

They playing with me
Yuh think it easy
Like a *mapepire*³²
Ah come back indefinitely
Ah pretend to resign they had to beg and coax
But now Ah ready to give them rope
Is different strokes for different folks

When asked his reasons for employing "such a creole tact," the "Williams" of Superior's "Why I Left, Why I Returned" (1974), excuses himself on the grounds of being human and politically pragmatic.³³

I have many problems within my party
Don't talk about problems in the whole country
I have to settle this bacchanal
Party groups don't want Kamal
And as you know, the country 'fraid Karl

The issue of Williams's motivations has divided political analysts. Composer and Superior, however, operating out of a cynical street context, are convinced that Williams was playing a cynical game with the creole cunning of an *ananse* and the viciousness of a *badjohn*. They were projecting onto Williams the motivations typical of the folk characters with which they were familiar.

Stalin's "Breakdown Party" (1980) reverses the image of Williams as *badjohn*. In 1979, Stalin's "Caribbean Unity" had advanced a controversial thesis for Caribbean unity declaring that Rastafarianism was the only cohesive to unite the millions divided by insularity. Williams refuted this thesis in a long address at the 21st annual PNM convention. Stalin replied with "Breakdown Party" which blames Williams for the breakdown in services and national purpose: "Mr. Divider start the habit / Brother, Trinidadians copy it/ Now he trying he utmost best to stop it." Having opened the Pandora's box of evils, Mr. Divider is now powerless to reverse his actions. Stalin then offered his street-wise solution to the national debacle:

But if this was my party
Ah woulda stop the dam thing already
When Ah say Stop!"
Stop the jam
Else Ah break a DJ hand

Even if we discount the practicability of this in a society whose "pronounced materialism and disastrous individualism" were recognized by Williams himself,³⁴ the point is that Williams seems no longer able to even summon up the rhetoric of violence to stabilize a society which he kept in some check by his mere presence and his ability to invoke the appropriate rhetoric.

Williams the *Obeahman*

It is impossible to consider West Indian society without considering the presence and influence of the supernatural. Vestiges of the magico-religious power of the West African king/leader/hero are still present in Caribbean society. The fortuitous appearance of Williams in 1955 was seen by many of his followers as nothing less than providential. Ivar Oxaal writes that, "For many lower class Negroes particularly Creole women, Dr. Williams was nothing less than a messiah come to lead the black children into the Promised Land" (100). According to Oxaal, placards carried at PNM public meetings boasted the messages, "The Master couldn't come so he sent Williams" and "Moses 11" (100). This perception has been immortalized in at least two calypsos that celebrated independence. In his offering at the inaugural Calypso King competition of 1962, Douglalluded to this when he sang "Independence" (1962):³⁵

Dr Williams come like Moses in biblical history
And he led us like the children of Israel to independency

Twenty five years later Shadow echoed that sentiment in his “From Then to Now” (1987) when he affirmed that Williams:

Led us like Moses
Led the children to the Promised Land
He built the stages
Then left us to perform

After Williams’s death, Calypso Rose, a member of the Spiritual “Shouter” Baptist faith whose members venerated Williams, offered the unique eulogy of “Balance Wheel” (1982). Rose, who in “I Thank Thee” (1977) thanked Williams for encouraging her to become a calypsonian, begins her eulogy by establishing:

Williams as the balance wheel:
Hold on to the balance wheel
Eric was the balance wheel
Who can’t hear they got to feel
So get to the balance wheel
Now that Eric Williams gone
I know that you’ll miss this son
Do not think his days are done
He gone

In Spiritual Baptist iconography, the balance wheel which graces all Spiritual Baptist churches, is a wheel which is suspended horizontally from the ceiling and which contains holders for lighted candles. This wheel symbolizes the equilibrium that Spiritual Baptists are encouraged to aspire to in their daily lives; the candles represent spirituality. After her semi-mystical introduction, Rose invests Chambers, Williams’s successor, with the mantle first worn by the master:

Hold on to the balance wheel
Chambers is the balance wheel
Watch out Trinidadians
For them crooked politicians
But I know my lips are sealed
Is so much I can’t reveal
Eric tell me, “Peace, be still”
He gone

Rose delivers her message with the air of an initiate reluctant to betray too much of the sacred mysteries. I don’t know if that cryptic reference to crooked politicians implicates those PNM politicians condemned in Sparrow’s “Honesty” (1966), and “Sam P” (1984), Commentor’s “The Opera of the Midnight Opera” (1981),³⁶ Rudder’s “Panama” (1988), and exposed relentlessly in

so much of Chalkdust. Chambers seems to be differentiated from those around him, singled out because of the role that fate had called him to play.

Stanza three of the calypso moves us into the traditional eulogy:

Eric Williams say, "Hold on!"
Eric Williams was the boss
Oh what a great man we loss
His spirit still have a boss
Show remorse
Eric Williams was the balance wheel
Trinidadians make him screele
He still standing behind a wheel
He gone.

Then Rose enters that domain of dream/vision that transcends conventional religious denominational boundaries and carries weight with a large inter-religious congregation of Trinidadians:

I saw Eric in mih dream
Still holding the balance wheel
He say "Rosie tell Chamber
Call election November
And tell Chambers I say
Give the Baptists a holiday
And tell the nation don't mourn
Ah gone"

But popular belief also situates and anchors Williams in *obeah*, that elusive dimension of popular religion.³⁷ Some calypsonians chose to accept that Williams's return after resignation was miraculous. Scrapper described Williams as "the greatest *obeahman*" ("The More You Look the Less You See" 1974)³⁸ while in the same year and adverting to the same situation, Crusoe also arrives at the same conclusion "like he working *obeah*" to explain Williams's successful 'escape.' I am not quite certain how seriously calypsonians and some of their audiences took this matter of working *obeah*. I have heard much speculation about Williams's religious beliefs and practices. It is believed by some that he was either a Spiritual Baptist,³⁹ or had sought out *obeah*.⁴⁰ I do not now know to what extent calypsonians like Scrapper and Crusoe believed this, if they were playing to their audiences, or merely exploiting a popular metaphor.

Chalkdust, nominally a Roman Catholic, makes literary capital of the folk perceptions of a nexus between politics and *obeah*. In "Goat Mouth Doc" ["Goat Mouth"] (1972) he employs internationally renowned seer Harribance Lalsingh as the voice for his own comments on the lunacy which overtook some of those who had opposed Williams:

Quite in a place called Tableland
Obeahman Harribance called me
 And said to me, “Look here, young man
 Watch yuh tail with that man Deafy
 Because yuh tickling him and yuh lying too
 Getting way with murder
 But if that man put his mouth on you
 Well, boy, dog eat yuh supper

Chorus

Shut up yuh big mout’
 Beyond any doubt
 The doc have a light Chalkie
 He does put on his enemy
 The man pass he mout’ on Gene Miles and George Goddard
 Is mad both of them gone mad
 And some like Spence can’t get no wuk for life
 Keep out, Chalkie, keep out
 Eric Williams have goat mout’

In another stanza Chalkdust calls Williams Papa Doc thus equating him to the feared Haitian dictator Francois Duvalier whose mystique was built upon a cultivation of image as *obeahman* backed by arbitrary and generous employ of violence. In parting, Harribance warns Chalkdust that if he persists in his rhetorical attacks he could become the victim of “Eric spirit lash/And end up like Skerritt under a lettuce patch”. This reference to a notorious murder of the early 1970s removes Chalkdust’s fears about his own safety from the nebulous realm of the spiritual to the domain of political assassination.

I don’t know how seriously Chalkdust feared for his life. Certainly the “goat mout’” notion was a literary device, one in the range of masks employed by Chalkdust in his relentless political *picong*. Chalkdust’s fearlessness certainly qualified him for martyrdom or some form of severe censorship as he intimates in “Who Next” (1972), which was composed in the wake of the conviction of a fearless popular journalist. In the climate of fear created by the passage of repressive legislation and the arbitrary house searches and detentions that characterized the early 1970s, it was natural for Chalkdust to anticipate some retaliation, but I’m not sure that Chalkdust thought that Williams would have him assassinated. I haven’t heard or read accusations that Williams himself was complicit in assassination; the nearest I have come across in calypso is Stalin’s “Nothing Ent Strange” (1974) which,⁴¹ apropos of the system’s elimination of the National Union of Freedom Fighters, declares: “The system have a vicious way of operating.” But not even Williams’s enemies have alleged assassination against him personally.

Williams as Sexual Man

Caribbean masculinity is centered on virility. Our calypsonians, cricketers and other popular public personalities seem expected to master the bedroom as they do the stage, the field of play, or the parliamentary chambers. Melody's "Doctor Make Your Love," a song response to those who criticized Williams for his 24-hour marriage, presents and praises Williams as a sexual being. After a snide remark at the maintenance of secrecy and elitism, the calypso engages Williams as man and encourages him in his amorous activities:

I know the wedding confuse they brain
Socialism must be maintained
Mama the wedding confuse they brain
Socialism must be maintained
Doctor yuh right
Man can't be always lonely at night
Doh mind they washing they mouth on you
You have a right to make romance too

Chorus

Hold on to yuh turtle dove
Doctor make yuh love
They jealous you from heaven above
Doctor make yuh love

2

Enjoy yuh life as a man
They want to put you in confusion
They confusing yuh life
Concentrate on yuh lovely wife
Dr. Ah telling yuh plain
Is yuh brain that driving the dogs insane

To Melody's way of thinking, Dr Williams was essentially man and so needed the romance and sexual release that men enjoy and take for granted. But Williams, like politicians and public personalities everywhere, suffered the occupational hazard of having his private domestic situation sensationalized in the public domain. In his defence, Melody first chastises those Afro-Trinidadians who "washed their mouths" on Williams:

The rumour was the Doctor too old
Some people really brass-faced and bold
That is the fault of the Negro race
Putting they mouth in the wrong place
If I was you, Brother, this is what I will surely do

I will build a family
That would be recorded in the pages of history

Melody's final lines here suggest that he, then in his early thirties, may also have felt that Williams was creating history by attempting to start a second family at age forty-eight. Despite what seems as a private doubt or misgiving, he endorsed the effort as a means of silencing censorious and gossiping Afro-Trinidadians.

This done, he denies Indo-Trinidadian detractors the right to pass judgement on the Afro-Trinidadian messiah whose role had made possible a better life for all Trinidadians:

It is Dr Williams apparently brought us all out of slavery
I don't understand this constant provocation
What is wrong with this Indian man
He should be in Calcutta, believe me
Not in this land of milk and honey
He too fas' and outa place

In this way, Melody removes the affair from the purely personal and private domain to the public: Williams the politician supersedes Williams the private individual and the focus shifts from the sexual to the political.

The image of Williams as sexual being is rudely shattered in Shorty's "PM's Sex Probe" (1974). For reasons that are still unclear, Williams had initiated the moves that led to Shorty's being arrested for indecency for his performance of "The Art of Love Making" at the 1973 Dimanche Gras competition. The first stanza of "PM's Sex Probe" sketches the affair:

Newspapers around the globe
Wrote about the PM's sex probe
Never before in our history
Has one calypso caused such a controversy
I did my best to try and educate my people
But my good intentions were made to seem so terrible
How it all began, believe me, I cannot comprehend
All I know is my calypso somehow offend the PM

Unable to read Williams's mind or to penetrate the circle of his confidantes, Shorty then contrives a situation in which Williams confronts Ivan Williams, then chairman of the CDC:

Cause I hear him say
"Ivan Williams, I want to know
Why this love-making calypso
Was put on the Dimanche Gras show

Come on, come on. Come on. Come on, Ivan
Tell me if this is not disrespecting me
I am sitting with company
My legs are crossed quite socially
When this long streak o' misery
Embarrass me with some dam tomfoolery about scoogie-woogie
The audacity
Bernard right to charge his backside with indecency”

Although Shorty’s “Williams” credits then commissioner of Police, F. Eustace Bernard with the arrest, everyone else saw the hand of Williams in the entire matter, which began with the spectacular blanking of television screens when Shorty stepped up to perform “The Art.” Some of the individuals commenting on the matter, and these include Shorty himself, felt that the Shorty affair was a rehearsal for a public censoring of Chalkdust, who it was believed had annoyed Williams by the boldness and recklessness of his exposés of PNM corruption and inefficiency.

The second stanza of “PM’s Sex Probe” purports to present the reaction in Shorty’s private circle to the news of the charge:

When mih wife heard about the scandal
The shock was so great she end up in hospital
From all throughout the country letters came to me
People offering their support and sympathy
A woman say, “Shorty, I go pay all yuh lawyer fee
If you would only teach me the art of love making please
How the PM could object when things like this are happening
Ah have a feeling yuh singing touch him
Where he most lacking”

Whether a literary creation or an actual person impressed into the calypso commentary, Shorty’s unidentified female fan simply echoes the arrogant assumption of the thirty-one year old Shorty that Williams’s sixty-two years were ipso facto evidence of sexual incapacity. “Williams” confess same in the third chorus:

“Ivan Williams, I want to know
Why this love-making calypso
Was put on the Dimanche Gras show
Come on, come on, come on, come on, Ivan
Tell me if this is not disrespecting me
A man such as I way past sixty
Dammit, Ivan, I am no baby

Now who the hell is Lord Shorty
To advise me what to do in case of emergency
Tell him for me 1970 emergency
This finger was no use to me”

In “The Art of Making Love” Shorty had advised his male students to keep the little finger handy “In case of emergency.” This means that lovers must be prepared to be creative when intimate situations warrant deviation from the script. In “PM’s Sex Probe” Shorty supposes that during the national emergency of 1970, the seemingly womanless Williams had found no use for the exercise of the little finger as Shorty had taught.

Shorty’s derogation of Williams implies that Williams did not understand subtlety of sexual innuendo in Calypso. In “The Art of Making Love” Shorty advises old impotent calypsonians to take their dates to cricket and soccer. Apropos of this advice, “Williams” complains in “PM’s Sex Probe,” “Most irregular, he make me look small/ How a man could make love and still play football.” The mere thought that Williams could misread the sexual connotations of a calypso suggests that he was out of touch with his people for whom such connotations and their normative practice form the basis of life. Time, according to Shorty, which sidelined Williams from the game of lovemaking, also rendered incomprehensible to him the informed commentary on the finer points and subtle nuances of that game.

Shorty followed up this derision of Williams with “Oh Trinidad” (1976), which demolishes the image of Williams as paterfamilias. Representing Trinidad as a neglected woman whose children are frustrated, crazy, in exile, or imprisoned, he advises Trinidad to take positive live-saving action:

If the breadwinner of your family
Making mistakes continually
Put him out
He ent care ‘bout you
Is the thing to do

And again:

If yuh man old and falling on he face
Get a younger fella to take he place
Put him out

Shorty’s final stanza crystallizes the reasoning of the post-1970 generation, which is either unaware of or indifferent to Williams’s achievements and aspirations of the 1960s:

You are grateful, yes I know
For things he did long ago

But how long can gratitude last
Oh Trinidad forget the past
With someone new
It might be rough
But I'm telling you now
We'll make out somehow
Change is inevitable
Don't sit on yuh bottom and wait for trouble

Chorus

Too much of one thing good for nothing

Dig it dig it

If you have a hernia that can't get better

Cut it cut it

For twenty years now he holding on

Poor fella he get old and worn

Put him out

It's the thing to do

Images of unhealthy growth, of extreme tiredness and of futility attend Williams in decline. Within twenty years Sparrow's triumphant William the Conqueror has been sadly reduced to Shorty's doddering old man.

"Oh Trinidad", like several other songs mentioned in the essay, echoes those magico-religious practices of some West African communities in which the sexuality of the king is connected organically to the fertility of the land—and thence the well-being of the people. This is yet another of those vestiges of West African kingship which have survived the Middle Passage and remain part of the collective memory of New World Africans. Reflection on all the ways that Williams has been represented in Calypso conjures the thought that calypsonians may have been viewing him through the prism/prison of their own expectations. They expected him to be a Caribbean king invested with all the attributes of a dimly—remembered kingship. When he appeared as conquering hero and as paterfamilias to the nation they felt satisfied. When, on the other hand, he did not live up to their expectations they were scathing in their condemnation.

Conclusion

Poet Eric Roach, reviewing the experience of the Williams's early years in politics, writes in "Hard Drought" (1973):

Williams called us
and we thought we'd won;
we set him on the golden stool,

gave him Kingdom upon Kingdom
of the heart; our pride and love
ringed him with janizaries (165)

Roach creates the impression of West African potentates specifically the asantahenes of what is now modern Ghana. If one recognizes Roach's "janizaries" as the *badjohns* and steelbandmen who formed an unofficial bodyguard around Williams, then one must add to Roach's list the griots like Sparrow, Striker and Superior who championed Williams in song, defended him against the attacks of his enemies, and translated his policies for the people who might have problems understanding his realpolitik. Sparrow et al undertook this agreeable task with energy and enthusiasm, transforming themselves temporarily into the court poets of West African kingdoms. When Williams did not deliver as the African underclass had expected, a generation of calypsonians undertook to censure him. The end result of all this calypso attention, which has followed him posthumously, is a corpus of songs that propagate the Williams legend.

Given the transience of our collective conscious memory and the relative paucity of printed material, the calypso record is the most viable and accessible history of popular attitudes towards Williams. Over two hundred calypsoes have documented his existence and achievement in the public sphere. Unfortunately, the exigencies of the recording industry have marginalized the political commentary and threaten to reduce the calypso record of Williams to the memory of a few scholars and the libraries of a few collectors.⁴² The post-1981 generation barely knows who Williams was and the post-1970 generation can hardly boast of greater knowledge. If they and those coming after them are not introduced at least to the calypsoes on him, Eric Williams will remain that unexplained person after whom the medical sciences complex at Mount Hope has been named.

In parting salute to Williams, Trinidad's great enigma, I wish to cite deFosto's "Reflections of Our Late Prime Minister" (1982):

He lived and died for his country
A death so suddenly
He was the godfather for the Caribbean
A chosen leader, a blessed son universally
It was a dull-looking Sunday night, '81 the 29th of March
Only to hear at 8 o' clock next day our leader passed away

Chorus

The time had come for him to go
Shed no tears, don't prop sorrow
The nation's future lies in your hands
Let honesty prevail as man
It was written and so well done
God did appoint Eric Eustace Williams

Raise your flag red white and black
Supreme colors a living fact

2

Every light carries a reflection
Just like the shadows of yourself
But as for one man who had so much vision
With his three watchwords discipline, tolerance and production
Who is his reflection where could he be if he's not yet born
I hope that chosen one do all his best for our nation

Chorus

The time had come for him to go
Shed no tears, don't prop sorrow
He did his part, his voice was heard
For twenty five years through this third world
It was written and so well done
A king must go for one to come
He used to say "Bring ballot box, cardboard box or onion box for this throne
Still PNM will go marching home"

3

His vibration was one in a million
Just like the power of the rising sun
He was the Right and truly Honourable
A philosopher, author, premier, teacher, the Nation's Father
He put aside luxury which was of no importance to him
He was the people's majority, a simple man, a simple king

Chorus

The time had come for him to go
Shed no tears, don't prop sorrow
An illustrious master that's who he was
A true born savior send from above
It was written and so well done
His number was called his time had come
Together we aspire, together we achieve
Parts of his thoughts and his belief

Everything considered this seems the best calypso tribute to Williams.

Notes

¹ “Reflections of a Legend” was originally presented as part of a panel at the March 2005 conference on Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination. That panel, Policy, Politics, and Promise in Calypso: The Eric Williams Era, was chaired by Dr. William Aho, and organized by Erica Williams Connell, Eric Williams Memorial Collection.

² *Picong* includes a range of repartee that is satirical in nature.

³ The *obeahman* is a shaman and folk healer. *Ananse* is the cunning rascal and hero of many Caribbean and African folk tales; he is always amusing in his greed and selfishness, hence a manipulative, self-centered person. The *badjohn* is a street fighter, or a person who is prone to violence.

⁴ Manchild, “Politicians Love Calypsonians.” No album information available, n.d.

⁵ *Macafouchette* are leftovers, or stale food.

⁶ “God help our gracious king,” *Tapia* 23 May 1971: 8.

⁷ Albert Gomes, a Portuguese Creole, was also a master of the word. His opposition to Williams to whom he had been something of a patron led to his derogation and near erasure from the annals of social history. This is lamentable because Gomes had been the proprietor and editor of *The Beacon* in the 1930s, and had spearheaded the anti-colonial movement in the 1940s and 1950s, championing the steelband as well the calypso. During his tenure as chief minister in the early 1950s the ban on the Shouter Baptists was lifted.

⁸ *Gran’ charge* is bravado, or rhetorical flourish.

⁹ C. L. R. James accepts Sparrow as a political force when he examines two political personalities: Williams and Sparrow. See C. L. R. James, *Party Politics in the West Indies*, 151-72.

¹⁰ Sparrow [Slinger Francisco], personal interview, 24 January 1991.

¹¹ See Louis Regis, *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago*, 29-33.

¹² Bomber, “Political Wonder.” No album information available, n.d.

¹³ Williams admits in *Inward Hunger* (28-29), that his hearing problems may have originated in the knock he had taken at soccer as a young man. Errol Mahabir, his crony who had accompanied him to China in 1974, revealed in 1996 that after they had observed Chinese medicine in practice, he had approached Williams about having his hearing restored. To this Williams replied: “Are you mad?” (“Errol Mahabir” 162).

¹⁴ See Regis, *The Political Calypso*, (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1999) 69-120.

¹⁵Black Stalin, "Piece of the Action." No album information available, n.d.

¹⁶This was one of the many organizations that prepared the way for Williams in 1955. Before formal entry into politics, Williams had built up a network of associations that worked independently of each other.

¹⁷Prince, "Come as You are Party." No album information available, n.d.

¹⁸In the age of streaking, Prince portrays Williams as a participant in a nudist fete while Squibby represents him as a masquerader in a band of streakers. Kitchener wants Williams to jump into a Carnival band with the whole of the police force to offset the imbalance in numbers between males and females. Scrunter represents Williams as being afraid of a revolution started by an orchestra of toads.

¹⁹See Rawle Gibbons, *No Surrender: A Biography of The Growling Tiger*, (Tunapuna: Trinidad Canboulay, 1994) 83-88.

²⁰See Regis, *The Political Calypso*, 47-52.

²⁰ "'Chalkie was disrespectful' say women," *Sunday Guardian* (11 March 1973): 1.

²¹See Regis, *The Political Calypso*, 99-108.

²²As part of his contribution to the conference, *Capitalism and Slavery: Fifty Years After*, held at St Augustine in 1996, Chalkdust revealed that on the request of some of the residents of Diego Martin, he had written a letter to Williams about some or other grievance. According to what he heard from the delegation tendering the letter, Williams had been impressed by the quality of the writing and complimented Chalkdust as writer. When reminded that he had dismissed Chalkdust as jackass, Williams allegedly retorted: "In letter-writing he is good, but in Calypso he is a jackass."

²⁴Epigraph to *Eric Williams Speaks*, edited by Selwyn R. Cudjoe.

²⁵*Mamaguy* is flattery and deception. *Mauvais lange* is malicious gossip, or injurious half truths.

²⁶It is popularly believed that these steelbandmen declared themselves Williams's bodyguards in the wake of the threats on his life and on that of his daughter.

²⁷*Ole talk* is rhetoric or idle talk.

²⁸Gordon Rohlehr, "Calypso and Political Criticism after 1965," Port of Spain: Government Broadcasting Unit, Sunday 10 June 1973: *From Atilla to the Seventies* #20.

²⁹The Calypso drama in which Chalkie sang the piece on Williams was a drama in which singers represented all of the many leaders contesting the 1976 elections. Chalkdust scripted the entire calypso drama for the 1976 seasons at the Regal Calypso Tent in which he had a proprietary

stake. Naturally he assumed the role of Williams performing the stanza in which there is mention of Jaws. At the time the movie “Jaws” had been playing to full houses in Trinidad and Tobago as elsewhere. After the elections he also scripted the sequel, which was presented at the Regal in 1978.

³⁰Crusoe, “I Eric Eustace Williams.” No album information available, n.d.

³¹Composer, “Different Strokes.” No album information available, n.d.

³²*Maepire* is a venomous snake found in the West Indies.

³³Superior, “Why I Left, Why I Returned.” No album information available, n.d.

³⁴Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (278).

³⁵Dougl, “Independence.” No album information available.

³⁶Commentor’s “The Opera of the Midnight Opera.” No album information available.

³⁷Obeah is normally taken to mean the complex of magico-religious practices inherited from West Africa. Earl Lovelace’s “Working Obeah” offers a philosophical disquisition of the phenomenon of *obeah* (217-28).

³⁸Scraper, “The More You Look the Less You See.” No album information available.

³⁹Stephen Glazier comments on Williams’s membership in the Baptist faith in “Funerals and Mourning in the Spiritual Baptist and Shango Traditions:” “I have been unable to determine his true status within the faith. But then again, William’s ‘true’ religious preferences are of minor importance to this discussion. For me the most important thing is that many Baptists believed that he was a member. Also I think it is significant that Williams made no attempt to deny it” (6). I suspect that this silence meant that Williams could not be bothered to answer one way or the other, or felt that leaving credulous people in doubt was useful to the cultivation of his mystique.

⁴⁰Lovelace places the celebrated Papa Neezer [Ebeenezer Elliot] at the call of Williams (“Working Obeah” 219). Lovelace also writes: “Suddenly a difference emerges between C. L. R. James and Williams that explains Williams. James didn’t live here after a while; Williams returned to seek power and power brought him to Obeah” (“Working Obeah” 219).

⁴¹Black Stalin, “Nothing Ent Strange.” No album information available, n.d.

⁴²When Sparrow released his 40-CD suite, he compressed “William the Conqueror,” “P.A.Y.E.,” “No Doctor No,” “Get to Hell Outta Here,” “You Can’t away from the Tax,” “Leave the Dam Doctor” and “Drink Your Balisier” into an Eric Williams Medley on the CD entitled “A Living Legend.” In fairness he does present “Get to Hell Outta Here,” “Honesty,” “Solomon Affair,” “Present Government” and “Popularity Contest” as singles on the CD.

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