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Author(s): Njelle W. Hamilton

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"Jah Live": Messianic Time and Post-Traumatic Narrative Disorder in Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings*

Njelle W. Hamilton

Source: Bob Marley captured by Paul Weinberg

Jah live! Children, yeah!

Fools sayin' in their heart

Rasta your God is dead,

But I and I know Jah Jah

Dreaded it shall be: dreaded and dread.

—Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Jah Live"

The New Testament Gospels, or biographies of Jesus of Nazareth, are interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the claim that their subject is the Incarnate God, a claim that arguably ensured Jesus's death. Most unusual is that after Jesus's unexpected and violent death, instead of an account of mourning, the Gospels record his disciples' claim that he had risen and now lives an immortal, eternal life. In fact, the Gospel attributed to the disciple John asserts that Jesus has resumed the immortality and glory that he previously had, "in the beginning," before his first-century incarnation (*New International Version*, John 1:1). Whereas traditional biographical narratives follow the telos of birth, life and death, for the Gospel writers and the founders of the Christian sect, Jesus's resurrection offered a radical new narrative temporality: an eternal life only temporarily interrupted by birth, mortal life and death. In keeping with the messianic tradition, in August 1975 reggae superstar Bob Marley released the single "Jah Live" in response to the announcement of the death of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I, considered the reincarnated God and the black Messiah by Rastafarians. Composed by Bob Marley and Lee "Scratch" Perry, the song illustrates that the Rastafarian rejection of Selassie's death hinges upon a unique conception of being and time. The present-tense construction "Jah live" ("Jah lives") declares Selassie's present and eternal living a mystical "truth" that will manifest at a future time. The song both imagines Selassie as untouched by the ravages of human time and positions the narrator himself outside of time, able to see past, present and future in sequence and out of order and as an enduring present instant. The unusual temporal marker of theological presence-in-absence continues in the second verse alongside Rastafari's unique form of gnosis, "I and I." Shared origins in biblical messianism connect the Christian confession of the indwelling Holy Spirit with the Rastafarian deployment of 'I and I' as an expression of individual communion with Jah and with fellow Rastas (Palmer 39). Whereas followers of Christ "know" that despite his physical death "he lives in us" through the indwelling Spirit (1 John 3:24), Marley suggests that "Jah live" because "I and I know" it to be so.

An ostensible fictionalization of the real-life attempt on Marley's life in the wee hours of 3 December 1976—two days before a much-anticipated peace concert—Marlon James's 2014 *A Brief History of Seven Killings* frames the reggae superstar himself in explicitly messianic terms. Indeed, the novel's version of the assassination attempt is replete with allusions to Jesus's betrayal and Passion. If the New Testament figures Jesus's resurrection as an interruption of the adversary's plan to bring all of humanity into eternal death (Rom. 5), James depicts the ambush as an attempt to prevent the peace concert and all that Marley was anticipated to accomplish through musical messianism. Like Jesus who feeds crowds of four and five thousand (Matt. 14:13–21), "the Singer" feeds three thousand ghetto youth and provides for their schooling (James, *Brief History* 26); but instead of delivering prophetic sermons to the masses, the Singer delivers prophetic messages in his songs. He is imbued with mystical power, able to "talk […] guns […] right back into […] [their] holster" (26), to see into the hearts of gunmen, even to make assailants fall to the ground by evoking the divine name (240).[1] Due to these explicit references, then, even readers unfamiliar with Marley's biography would anticipate the Singer's "beat[ing] death like Lazarus, like Jesus" (255); indeed, at the concert only two days later, the Singer bares his wounds "like Jesus pointing to his side to show the work of the spear" (261). Demus, one of the gunmen, realizes that their ambush failed only when he sees the headlines the following morning (253). Interrupting the imperative forward march of the ambush plot, Demus's confession "Jah live" both evokes the tribute to Selassie as ever living and asserts the Singer's passage into messianic status. The phrase "Jah live" thus constructs continued living as a revolt against the teleological imperative of death.

While previous scholars have focused on *A Brief History*'s depiction of the hauntings of Jamaica's violent political past and its ramifications for the present (Harrison, "Global"; Perejoan), in the pages that follow I unpack the novel's chronotropes[2] or time markers to interrogate the impact of trauma on the perception and narration of time. Drawing parallels with the Christian Messiah and extending the trope of eternal life in Marley's song "Jah Live," I trace the novel's depiction of what I call 'post-traumatic narrative disorder,' a novelistic rendering of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the song and the Gospels alike, narrators posit eternal life to negotiate the sudden death of a messianic figure and its consequences for their own life and death. Tracking the relative clock speeds in the narratives of dead and living characters, I argue that the trauma and anticipation of death disorder and dilate the subject's experience of time. The phrase "Jah live" therefore indexes a messianic and post-traumatic conception of time where the 'at hand,' the 'now' and the 'already' collapse into an extended and disordered narrative instant.

Time, Trauma and Disorder

Resurrection to eternal life was not necessarily a radical notion for first-century Jews: at least one major Jewish sect expected to be resurrected at the end of the age, as prophets such as Isaiah and Daniel foretold.[3] But for Jesus to have been resurrected already, in the present, was certainly out of order. Rather than "the resurrection at the last day," which family friend Martha anticipated, Jesus's raising of her brother Lazarus declared "resurrection and […] life" available now, ahead of time, and it was this outrageous act that precipitated Jesus's arrest (John 11:25–53). Furthermore, upon his Second Advent, Jesus even promised to usher in both the end of the age and the new heavens and the new earth; time will start again, the end will be the beginning. In *The Time That Remains*, a masterful exegesis on the Epistle to the Romans, Giorgio Agamben unpacks the Apostle Paul's language to develop on Walter Benjamin's conception of "messianic time," or, more precisely, the radical rupture in the first-century conception of time ushered in by Jesus's death and resurrection (Agamben 63). The "messianic event" causes time to contract unto itself such that the time of the now becomes indistinguishable from the time of the end (63). In other words, messianic time is initiated by a traumatic event—the sudden death of the purported Messiah before he has fulfilled all he is prophesied to do—that transforms mankind's relationship to life and death and disorders time itself. Paul proposes that even though original sin means that the living are always already dead, with Christ's insertion into human time everyone who dies in Christ is alive now in him and will fully live again at the end of the age. Indeed, "the end" is marked by the destruction of death itself (1 Cor. 15:21–26). While Jesus's crucifixion foreshadowed that his followers would also be put to death if they continued preaching his name, the doctrine of eternal life empowers disciples to face certain and imminent death, even torture, with the hope of the resurrection to come.[4] Messianic temporality thus affects the believer's relationship with death—to anticipate death is to anticipate the subsequent resurrection and eternal life. In effect, messianic time creates theological, temporal, ontological and narrative disorder.

Brian Richardson has highlighted how, in some postmodern novels, the (dis)ordering of plot renders an orderly *sjuzhet* or story impossible to (re)construct. In these novels, "time passes at different speeds for different groups of people […] [while others] invert temporality so that the characters move forward into the past" (78). If according to the second law of thermodynamics disorder increases with time, all things being equal, then disorder not only disrupts our conception of a forward-moving linear "arrow of time," but is also a measure of time—situating the past (evinced by more order) in relation to the present and future (more disorder) (Hawking 130). Instead of exemplifying postmodern anti-

mimesis, however, the narrative disorder of *A Brief History* is, in fact, mimetic of traumatic perception and memory; as a result, I describe the novel's form as evidence of 'post-traumatic narrative disorder.' Indeed, I read disordered temporality as a manifestation of the experience of time in trauma survivors.

Trauma profoundly disorders one's experience of one's body, creating the sensation of being both out of one's mind and outside of one's body. Intriguingly, both Selassie's and Jesus's bodies were said to have disappeared. The Jewish explanation for the disappearance of Jesus's body from the tomb is that his disciples stole it away during the night (Matt. 28:12–15), and the disciples thus built an entire religion on interpreting the significance of its absence. Deposed by the socialist Derg (Ethiopia's armed forces) on 12 September 1974, Selassie died on 27 August 1975. Yet, his 'missing' bones were not found until 1992, and he was not buried until 2000—an unusually lengthy delay between death and burial (Daynes 130). *A Brief History* fittingly begins with a dead body: that of frame narrator, politician Sir Arthur Jennings. It is the shocking and ugly corporeality of seeing his own "pumpkin-smashed head"—his literal out-of-body experience—that throws him into narrative and temporal transcendence (1). Jennings's depiction coheres with the trope of the traumatized narrator that repeats throughout Caribbean fiction. In Lawrence Scott's *Witchbroom*, for example, the hermaphroditic narrator Lavren gains the ability to dive and resurface into various times, all the better to witness and chronicle Trinidadian history, after being hit by a ball during childhood. Likewise, the violence that Jennings has suffered enables him to "see and wait," to access the temporality of witnessing and prophecy (1). His narration is precipitated by his attempts to come to terms with the unexpectedness and injustice of his murder, the shock of which causes his mind to break from its corporeal tent. Whereas near-death experience is often accompanied by a vision of one's entire life rushing before one's eyes in an instant, Jennings sees not his own past but Jamaica's near and distant future. Reflecting the biblical description of the realm of death as "the land of deepest night, of utter darkness and disorder" (Job 10:22), Jennings opens and closes most sections of the novel, collapsing temporally distant events into single sentences and prophesying the far more than "seven killings" to come. His experience frames unexpected death, like traumatic memory, as a radical realignment of time and narrative; normative chronology becomes impossible, beginnings and endings collapse into each other.

Jennings's statement that "dead people never stop talking" (1) attests to the paradox of traumatic experience: it is both unspeakable and must be spoken, thus rendering coherent narration impossible even as it produces a surfeit of words (Philip 193). The novel's larger disordered form registers its narrators' negotiation of this psychic and narrative excess and a time of excessive violence and danger.[5] The 'time' of the novel is one in which men can expect to die suddenly, violently and young. The gunmen who ambush the Singer include several teenage boys, so young that they have not had time to fall in love or have sex. By age ten Bam-Bam had already witnessed his father's murder and his mother's rape, his youth and naivety made even more palpable when his dying thought recalls the nursery rhyme "Ring around the Rosie" (268).[6] His death by asphyxiation tropes the snuffing out of childhood hope and the potential for maturation—a metaphor for a historical moment when local and international factions all converged on a tiny spot on the world map ostensibly to take down a musician who had not yet made his most famous album, but really to snuff out Jamaica's nascent social democracy. Since the times were perilous, the narrative itself becomes excessively violent; narrative disorder thus illustrates the conundrum of narrating a traumatic time and history.

Narrative Time and Relativity

In contrast to the "time-compression" ushered in by modernity where capitalism works to "'destroy' or 'collapse' time through new technologies" (Negus 494), James amplifies time to dramatize the impact of violence and political destabilization on society and on the individual psyche. Keith Negus has argued that popular music allows listeners to retreat from this accelerated, linear temporality into the cyclical and "alternative *slower* temporalities" of recorded music; "if the plot is created through narrativizing the *disordered* events in our lives—then perhaps songs (in harmonizing cosmic time, lived time and measured historical time)—come closer to articulating how plotless time is experienced" (Negus 494–95; emphases added). It stands to reason, then, why a novel undergirded by the rhythms of reggae and dancehall seems not to be pressed for time. Even though it covers only a few days in Jamaica's history (2 December 1976, 3 December 1976, 15 February 1979, 14 August 1985 and 22 March 1991), the novel clocks in at almost seven hundred paperback pages or twenty-six hours of uninterrupted reading time in its audiobook version—in other words, a little more than a single day for the reader (although such uninterrupted reading is nigh impossible). In addition to highlighting the ways that trauma disorders linear and horological time consciousness, James retreats from Eurocentric clock time and invents a narrative chronometer rooted in the alternative modalities of time, memory and historiography germane to Rastafari and Afro-Jamaican music.

James undergirds the novel with extremely slow BPM (beats per minute) that allow for the narration of the threefold present within each historical day, experienced by each character as memory, action and anticipation. This, James suggests, is what "a brief history" looks like: narrating only five days involves retrospective and prospective sweeps that layer the narrative present. This narrative method highlights systemic and cyclical violence, the connectedness of local and global histories, and the haunting of the present by events and time periods outside of the immediate action (Harrison, "Global" 88–89). Packing a single day with "stuff" illustrates the Rastafarian concept of the fullness of time, which itself echoes the Hebraic notion of time as "'full' and concrete and leaves no place for ordering or arranging its episodes" (Goldberg 276). James thus illustrates the conundrum of narrating all that fills up a lived instant, with all the resonance of particles jostling within a container as they fall in. As a result, ends and beginnings become disordered. According to James, the first words he wrote are now located on page 458 (Jelly-Shapiro). To get to that beginning, we need over four hundred pages of antecedents. As imprisoned Rastafarian gang member Tristan Phillips explains near the end of the novel, chronicling the 1970s Jamaica requires "writ[ing] the whole four-hundred-year reason why my country will always be trying not to fail" (579).

The novel's overarching structure can be further mapped to messianic time, with the central event being the ambush on Marley's life. Even as the novel positions the Singer within the messianic tradition, it (dis)orders the narration around the anticipation of his death and the tension between his initial survival and later death. The first section moves from 'not yet' to 'at hand,' the second narrates the 'now' (the ambush) and the subsequent sections the 'already,' which is the temporal marker of a future that can be glimpsed in the now as a past event. While it takes over two hundred pages to arrive at the ambush, the Singer's actual death is delayed for another two hundred pages and narrated four years after the fact. This delay between historical event and its narration contrasts with the extreme accounting of time in the first two sections and reveals that the early focus on the Singer serves as a catalyst for the action; after the ambush, the story diverges from an alignment with the historical Marley to show the impact of this time of violence on the living. For Gospel readers, Christ's anticipated resurrection and Second Advent provide emotional and theological catharsis in the present. Similarly,

the centrality of the ambush to *A Brief History*'s structure provides one level of anticipation—readers know the Singer will survive, but his actual death remains impending and inescapable. Although traumatic anticipation (the perception that violence and death are at hand and the future is pressing in on the present) subverts the order of biblical faith (the anticipation of divine promise to become manifest in the present or near future), both collapse the gap between present and future.

Trauma disorders the perception of lived time such that it passes at different clock speeds for different characters. While narration occurs 'live' within living characters' own time, death enables Jennings to grasp the entire flow of time as both hindsight and foresight. These seemingly discrepant tempos reflect the concept of time dilation at the heart of both the general theory of relativity and the Bible. Numerous scriptures indicate a fundamental discrepancy in God's and man's reckoning of time. The Apostle Peter, for instance, insists that since "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day," the "slowness" of time is a *mis*perception; nevertheless, there is a kind of living and "looking ahead" in the now that can "speed its coming" and collapse the perception of distance (2 Pet. 3:8–9).[7] This temporal disparity anticipates Einstein's postulation that the perception of time and the rate at which time passes depend on the relative motion and position of observers (Hawking 33, 111). The ability to see all of time in an instant depends on where the observer is positioned in space-time and whose past, present or future is being observed. The Bible's positioning of God outside of human time suggests that omnipresence is a temporal rather than spatial location.[8] From the God's-eye level, 'today' spans millennia, rendering Jesus's statement to the sinner on the cross that "today you will be with me in paradise" both impossible and fundamentally correct even if the resurrection is still to come (Luke 23:43). From this relativistic view, *A Brief History* affirms that grammatical tenses are not really time indicators but markers of narrative perspective (Casparis); they indicate the relative position of the narrator in relation to the action. In the language of special relativity, each narrator is a fixed observer trying to reckon with events in motion. In the remainder of this essay, then, I tease out the relative perceptions of time in the narratives of two sets of characters: the dead, like Jennings, and the living whose death is at hand. In both cases, I argue, death—whether past or future—disorders and dilates the subject's experience of time.

Post-Traumatic Chronotropes: The Now, the At Hand, the Already

In *A Brief History*, God's-eye-level narration is the purview of the dead. With his statement that in the realm of "dead-*ing*" time stands still (1), Jennings positions himself at the vector of eternity where all of space-time is available to his perception; he is now able to perceive past, present and future as an extended narrative instant, to see and narrate "the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:10). Death moves him away from the site of activity, which results in a drastic difference in the rate at which time passes for him relative to the living: "You watch [time] move but you are still, like a painting with a Mona Lisa smile. In this space a three-hundred-year-old slit throat and two-minute-old crib death is the same" (2). For the novel's dead(ing), the time of the now is "beyond time"; "now […] is also then. Then is also soon and soon might as well be if" (108). Conversely, the future ("then" and "soon") takes on the appearance of 'already,' occupying the same space as the past and with repercussions for the present.

Jennings frequently foreshadows—prophesies—the death of characters using the term "already dead"; in 1979 he sees the Singer as "a living man who already has death walking with him, killing him from the toe up" (111). On occasion the disordered temporality marked by "already dead" has hilarious implications, as when Tristan Phillips "come off the plane in Miami only to find out say [him] dead

and everybody in the world hear but [him]" (474); he asks his supposed killer, "When you kill me? Last week? Yesterday?" (475). Gunmen boast about "rubbing out" and "cancelling" those they kill in language that evokes erasure from the timeline: "Everything that [your victim] set out to do from sunset you just put a stop to it, just like that. […] [T]his one night, this one man not going see a tomorrow ever again. […] And is you do it. You take it from him" (542–43). With tomorrow foreclosed, violent death shunts the subject from "present tense" to "sudden past tense" (23). In their carnivalesque trial of Papa Lo, the policemen's use of the past tense to frame the area don illustrates their power to subvert temporal order to create or undo criminal events: "*When Papa-Lo and him three cronies fire 'pon the police? When him do that? Right now. Fire!*" (356; italics in original). The temporal disorder created by collapsing the past of alleged criminal activity into the time of "right now" throws Papa Lo into narrative futurity—the prescience formerly exclusive to Jennings. From this temporal vantage point, time is compressed into "one blip" that contains "everything," past, present and future "happening" both in sequence and "all at once" (356). His ascension to the realm of eternity is indexed by the tense of his final words as he apprehends his dead body: "[T]here is me" (362). In this space of witnessing and anticipation, both Papa Lo and Jennings are able to "look ahead" into the realm of the already (272)—much like John the beloved disciple (to whom Papa Lo is compared), who is allowed to look forward in time at events to come (Rev. 1:19), events that from this perspective are "done" or already accomplished (Rev. 21: 6). But whereas the apocalyptic 'already' promises life for the believer, James deploys the temporal mode of 'already' as the herald that death is certain and already witnessed by those in the eternal realm.

As narrative events approach the time of the present, they move into the realm of the 'at hand' or the imminent.[9] While much of Jennings's narration operates in the realm of a God's-eye view of time and action, the other initial narrators—including the gunmen who ambush the Singer, and Nina Burgess, who witnesses the ambush—operate on the ground level of human anticipation as they grapple with the trauma of their own imminent deaths anticipated and foretold from the novel's title.[10] In this way, the novel echoes but subverts the biblical notion of the appointed time (*mo'ed*), which indicates the temporary alignment of God time and human time, as on the weekly or annual Sabbaths (*mo'edim*; Lev. 23:1–4). Appointed time also opens out to prophetic time—moments throughout human time, fixed in advance, when God intervenes to accomplish some act in his larger plan (see Gen. 17:21). While 3 December 1976 and 11 May 1981 are appointed times in Marley's life, the precise time of death of other characters is unknown to them but experienced as imminent and unavoidable. This pressing in of the already into the now results in both temporal disorder and narrative chaos, where even linearity and coherence break down. As such, the trauma at the heart of the novel is not Marley's death itself but the surreal violence and danger of a time when not even the famous and powerful are safe.

A Brief History's numerous references to timepieces amplify the disjuncture between clock time and its subjective experience by those anticipating death and other bodily danger. As Paul Ricœur proposes, "lived time"—the microlevel experience of a human lifespan—is not always aligned with calendrical or clock time (343). Since "nobody have no watch for me to tell the time" (231), most of the local narrators experience time subjectively by feel and perception; otherwise, time is chronicled by those with power over life and death, such as policemen and prison wardens. Demus notes that "little things can fill up a long hour. [...] Ten minutes pass, fifteen minutes, one hour, one day, five year. I don't care, whatever time pass too long" (234). In this time of anticipation, the gunman's singing The Mighty Diamonds' reggae hit "When the Right Time Come" both affirms the fixedness of the time of the ambush and subverts the song's Garveyist and apocalyptic lyric about end-time justice: the gunmen are indeed 'out of order' in taking it upon themselves to initiate judgement ahead of time and on one of their own,

not on their actual oppressors (232).[11] Their ingestion of cocaine only amplifies the temporal disorientation caused by fear and anxiety. For teen gunman Bam-Bam, cocaine provides its own narrative line even as it ruptures linearity; his account of the ambush is rendered in the broken lines of poetry with its punning opening words "no more line for you" (236). He counts down and counts off the action, using his onomatopoeic name to keep time and rhythm, as if he had a mental metronome propelling him along. The valence of Bam-Bam's name in musical timekeeping is made clear in his evocation of the Colón Man folk song:

> One two three four
>
> *Colón* man ah come
>
> With him brass chain ah lick him belly
>
> Bam bam bam. (240)[12]

His gunshots—whether lyrical or literal—are as ineffectual as the Colón man's watch chain; unlike the gunmen, the Colón man 'has' a timepiece, but since he cannot read it, he must rely on gauging time by the position of the sun.

Bam-Bam's excited and terrified anticipation is marked by the tense construction "this going to happen" (237), but even as he anticipates the glory that will result from killing the famous Singer, the time of the now moves at counterpurposes, remaining "slow" and "stretch[ed]" despite his attempts to speed towards the future (240). His narrative thus frustrates culmination; not only is he unable to kill the Singer, whose potent stare and evocation of the ever-living Selassie disarms him, but his chapter—the only one describing the ambush—literally ends midsentence with a series of futile conjunctions: "He twist the wheel and slam the gas and, and, and" (248). The chapter itself is enjambed, its connective tissue picked up on the following page with Demus's post-ambush chapter that extends the time of the now: "And the Datsun dash down another road" (245). Demus's and Bam-Bam's accounts run into each other in the same way that Nina runs into the ambush and her own story runs into that of the assailants. Demus's chapter is almost entirely composed of a single run-on sentence that begins in medias res and is told in a frenetic narrative pace that only ends five pages later when someone speaks (250). The run-on technique, repeated throughout the novel during heightened moments of fear, is a marker of traumatic anticipation. Finding himself in the crowd at the peace concert several days later, Bam-Bam's use of the present-tense form "me dead" ("I am dead") connects narrative time to fate; he is already dead, right now, even before the events have caught up. In this way, James depicts post-traumatic narrative disorder as a delayed re-experiencing of an event that has already happened, an anachronistic replay that collapses the gap between anticipation and experiencing. Being buried alive not only fulfils Bam-Bam's anticipated death (the second of the titular "seven killings") but also provides a further enjambment of narrative and a subversion of the proper order of death and burial. With its unfulfilled reverse countdown and interruptive dash, the end of Bam-Bam's narrative literalizes death's interruption of biological time: "1 breath 2 breath 3 breathe 4 breathe breath breathe fi fi fi fi fiiiiiiiiiiiive breath six breath se se se se sevennnnnnnneight […] Niiiiiiine nuhhhh nuhhhhhhhh nuhhhh huhhhh hhhhhhh hhhh h h hhhh h […] aw shucks aw shucks we—" (268). Bam-Bam runs out of time in the same way that he runs out of breath.

Although Nina is the only local narrator wearing a watch (aptly, a Timex), she too experiences traumatic time dilation. The timescale of the early sections of the novel is summarized by her practice of "counting minutes" in a single day (103). Unlike other narrators who are in motion, Nina spends

most of those twenty-four hours standing still in front of the Singer's gate. Since the living characters are all travelling within the container of the narrative and because Nina is "counting minutes" even as Bam-Bam attempts to speed things up, their relative motions enact a gravitational pull on each other and on the overarching narrative clock. Unlike the watchless "ghetto" assailants who narrate many of the opening chapters, the middle-class Nina's possession of a watch imbues her perception of time with chronometric regularity: "If you can break a day down into quarters, then hours, then half hours, then minutes, you can chew down any stretch of time to bite size." "Counting minutes" is her privileged version of the gunmen's use of cocaine to slip out of time. It is her survival strategy in a time and place where gendered violence "can happen any time, any second now, even in the next minute" (103). The threat of rape and death creates the terrifying anticipation that dilates every second such that "even if it never comes, the point is I'll be waiting for it and the wait is just as bad" (103).

Nina passes most of her time either waiting or running, which index two different orientations to time. Waiting connotes anticipation of the imminent arrival of an appointed time, while running is an attempt to escape a time that has the ability to chase and "catch" one (224). As the sole female narrator, Nina's waiting is markedly distinct from the men's anticipation of their own imminent violent action; instead, she often anticipates the actions of men. Thinking her mother has been raped during a recent break-in, she resolves to flee Jamaica for fear the same will happen to her. Before long, her expectation is fulfilled when two policemen kidnap her in lieu of arrest for breaking curfew (105). The word "arrest" connotes stoppage of time and motion, but here Nina is set in motion for the first time since the story began, even as she must now wait with the awful "knowing deep down that in a few minutes these men will rape you" (121). Nina depicts the space between the 'now' and the 'not yet' as comprised of "all the time in the world," and waiting as a hiatus filled with the illusion of possibility. She eventually interrupts the policemen's control over her time by demanding that they just "rape [her] *already*" (124; emphasis added).[13] Adopting masculine bravado and seeming to acquiesce to the sexual desires of men allow Nina to reclaim agency. By forcing them into the time of the 'already,' she disarms the threat of what they can and might do; indeed, the novel often depicts the police as more adept at wordplay and speech acts than they are at physical danger.

Nina reveals that she is ultimately waiting for something bigger, a "tomorrow" beyond even the peace concert of the calendrical tomorrow when "maybe finally my mother can stop wrapping her body like a mummy just to keep nasty men out of her vagina and keep sane and sleep in peace" (126). For Nina, it is not Marley's peace concert that will usher in peace but an actual outbreak of civil war, when the crowd will rise up to enact a cathartic burning down of Babylon (125–26). The repetition of "peace" here is profoundly disturbing, particularly as this peace is articulated through women's bodies. Whereas the New Testament's negotiation of the time of the now—the absence of Christ's physical body and the time of earthly struggle—is mitigated by the anticipation of a future Sabbath rest when the Prince of Peace is revealed (Heb. 4:9), Nina's precarious present comfort depends on her hope for a Sabbath rest for women from the threat of rape and violence. Indeed, immediately after her escape from sexual violence in the aforementioned scene, her return home to rescue her family is met with their disdain over her affair with the "nasty" Rastaman and the stench it has presumably left on her body (199). Her mother's and sister's vocal and visceral rejection is only exacerbated by a beating by her father, which is shot through with sexual overtones and reads like a fulfilment of the rape she just escaped. Nina's entire Jamaica-based narrative thus hinges on her sexuality: she is a part of the story because her sexual relationship with the Singer inadvertently makes her a witness to the attempted assassination. To gain a visa she has to subject her body to the will of men, including a white American expat whose employment in the bauxite industry telegraphs his exploitative and extractive neocolonial

relationship with both Nina and Jamaica. While she initially leverages her status as sexual prey into one in which transactional sex grants her escape, shape-shifting to evade the long arm of gun violence also affords her a Sabbath rest from sexual predation.

Nina's activity after the beating is marked by a change from waiting to running, as she negotiates not just the terror of anticipated sexual violence but also the repercussions of the ambush. Her account of the ambush is abortive and confused; in fact, with her mind already affected by her father's beating, she is not able to record what is happening in the now (229). We only learn what happens to her from the perspective of others, especially since she suppresses the memory as one mode of fugue. Fugue is a mark of trauma: shock causes the subject to disassociate from (and thus forget) who they are and where they belong, which sets them to wander far from self and home (Rudnicki 8–10). I contend that fugue might also be a 'conscious' choice for those who fear danger or marginalization. In his reading of the *A Brief History* as a meditation on responses to neocolonialism, Rhone Fraser argues that "Kim Clarke [Nina's first alter ego] and Weeper epitomize the type of Jamaican that Marcus Garvey wrote of in 1917 who 'are leaving their homes simply because they haven't the pride, nor courage enough to stay at home and combat the forces that make them exiles'" (74). I argue, however, that these characters flee Jamaica in order to evade certain and always imminent violence. Neither Nina, under constant threat of rape and reprisal killing, nor Weeper, who must mask his homosexuality under toxic masculinity and gun violence, can survive in 1980s Jamaica. Fugue ultimately allows them the space to experiment with liberatory self-constructions, even if they both carry with them the anticipation of discovery and death. It is only once the novel's action moves to the United States that Weeper, previously the only one of the Seven without a self-narrated chapter, is allowed to narrate his own section as a subject rather than as a bit player in someone else's narrative. Even five stories above ground, Weeper does not feel free to enjoy his sexuality without repercussions (498). Likewise, changing identities and physically running from place to place afford Nina the freedom first to escape sexual predation and then to enact social advancement. Flight from Jamaica, self and memory allow her the space to survive all that threatens her life, even if it means repressing her name and language (281, 282). Echoing the author's account of his own fugue from Jamaica to escape anticipated antigay violence and the self-erasure of trying to pass as straight in a homophobic society (James, "From Jamaica"), Nina remembers that "[w]hen [she] landed in Montego Bay [she] knew that whether on a plane or in a box, [she] was going to leave this place" (294).

But Nina's PTSD is also marked by the repression of the memory of the ambush and by her involuntary response to memory triggers. Despite physical and mental flight, she continues to live with the expectation of violence; sudden sounds completely destabilize her and disorder coherent thought (280). Even in the mode of fugue, then, she is still waiting and marking time with chronometric precision, even as trauma affects the recording and retrieval of memory (292). Nina's post-ambush chapters evince a mimetic representation of the interruptive temporality of traumatic memory, with events narrated out of order as repressed memory resurges. For instance, her opening chapter as Kim Clarke in 1979 unspools backwards in time to reveal "*what it takes to finally get it, the passport, the visa, the ticket out of bombor'asscloth Babylon"* (292; italics in original), as the horrific memory of subjecting her body to the desires of a corrupt notary public is triggered. Nina remembers how part of her coping mechanism includes not only disassociation and a fixation on time, "*tapping the seconds and watching the clock on the wall,"* but a reliance on the support of an audience of other women, "*Miss April, Miss May, Miss September and Miss August*" (293; italics in original), similarly reduced to their sexuality for the titillation of men. Her obsession with the minute movements of watches and clocks underscores that "the only way forward is through" (313). Indeed, the novel's form suggests that for characters to move

forward in time, readers have to go through all of it with them—every second, in excruciating time-dilated detail. Temporal dilation creates the impression that time is barely passing, but in a way that contrasts with the eternal present associated with Jennings. In the wake of a trigger, trauma survivors are jolted back into the past. In this way, trauma collapses the gap between the time of the now and the time of the past traumatic event; it also condenses the time of the now and the time of the near future—the anticipated and forestalled re-experiencing of the memory. Nina's fear of remembering the past means that she forces herself to stop thinking and feeling—to become "as blank a slate as slate can be with no memory of anything behind me" (286)—but always with the anticipated future remembering close at hand: "I swear the second I hear of something, or if I realize I'm *about to* hear something, my heart just starts to pound and I want to do nothing more than run to my bedroom, cover my face with a pillow and scream" (301; emphasis added).

Even as fugue allows her to hide from memory and the threat of death, it also prevents her from moving beyond the past. With her memory triggered by the unexpected encounter with a photograph of ambush ringleader Josey Wales, Nina reveals that despite being on the run for almost two years, she has remained trapped in time: "You've never known December 4, […] you only know December 3. That day will never close until he comes to close it. December 3 is coming back for you" (312). Time, like traumatic memory, like gang violence and culture, "follow right back o' we" (635). Slipping out of time and repressing memory provide not escape but delay. In effect, Nina died on December 3; she is not meant to live to see another day beyond the moment she ran into the barrel of Josey Wales's gun. Although she technically remains alive, her experiences mimic those of the dead, who, according to Jennings, "relive a motion, an action, a scream and they're there again just like that" (2). In other words, the dead and those with death at hand experience their own deaths as both repetition compulsion (subconscious re-enactment of the past) and déjà vu (a memory glitch that causes the subject to perceive the present as a repeat experience; Freud 150). Consequently, by shape-shifting into the identities of various dead Jamaican women, Nina seizes agency in erasing her own existence, which in turn allows her to give death the slip and to survive the always-pressing threat of violence even as gang violence "spill[s]" out into the American space and remains close at hand (615).

"Still Living": Disorder as Survival

In 1992, a decade after his death and almost twenty years after its recording, Bob Marley 'released' the song "Iron, Lion, Zion." Beyond creating the jarring sense that the dead reggae star was still alive to release new music, the song's lyric "I had to run like a fugitive / Just to save the life I live" summarizes Marley's initial survival of death threats through fugue and exile. By allowing Nina, out of all of the initial Jamaican narrators, to survive until the end—outwaiting and outliving Josey Wales and the threat he presented to her life—James suggests that it is through willed amnesia and self-erasure that one continues to live in a time of excessive death. Remaining alive to the end enables Nina to begin thinking of the future and to reconnect with her family and her repressed Jamaican identity (686). But even before this, she finally decides, "Fuck the dead. I'm still living. […] I'm still living" (615). By using the present-continuous tense, Nina positions herself in the temporal mode previously enjoyed by messianic men. Whereas even Jennings does not stick around for the end of the story, Nina's survival in the realm of the "still living" echoes the survival of John, the "beloved disciple," whom other disciples presumed "would not die" until the Second Advent (John 21:23). Decades after the original disciples died often-violent deaths and Paul wasted away in a Roman prison, John "remained" alive to witness the transitional periods of the sect, to receive the revelation of the future—the time of the end and the

time of the new world when time resets—and to "write […] down" the end-time events in a book (John 21:24; Rev. 1:11). James shares this task among three characters: Jennings, with his panoptic view of time, Nina, who gets the last word, and *Rolling Stone* journalist Alex Pierce. Pierce himself survives to the end by "wait[ing] till everybody dead," following the advice that Tristan Phillips gives him regarding how not to be killed in reprisal for the secrets he wants to write about in his novel (569). The fact that we are reading this novel, James suggests, is because we ourselves have reached a time when "everybody dead," except those who remained alive to witness and write. James thereby suggests that narration both indicates and ensures survival.

But unlike the book of Revelation, no advent occurs at the end of *A Brief History*—unless we count Marley's ongoing resurrections. In Jennings's final return, out of sync and "already out of time," he chronicles the Singer's legacy as reggae goes international: "[I]n another city, another valley, another ghetto, another slum, another favela, another township, another intifada, another war, another birth, somebody is singing Redemption Song, as if the Singer wrote it for no other reason but for this sufferah to sing, shout, whisper, weep, bawl, and scream right here, right now" (601). Jennings witnesses a future—our past and present—when the Singer's music transcends time, space and even his mortal body. A song written in and for the past is translated to numerous other iterations of "right here, right now." The substance of Jennings's closing revelation is therefore that the time of Marley's reggae songs is the time of a continuous now. In and through his music Marley too is "still living." In an intriguing parallel, even though Marley died before Dick Hebdige's *Cut 'n Mix* is published, the book retains its anachronistic present tense because "Bob Marley never did believe in death. He never had any time for it. He was too busy listening for the future and his interest in roots had nothing whatsoever to do with a morbid fascination for the past. […] [T]he vital mix—Marley's voice and rhythms—are still with us" (Hebdige 16). Hebdige's postscript presages the use of the present tense in both "Jah Live" and *A Brief History* to register lives and echoes that "are still with us."

Although he died of cancer at age thirty-six on 11 May 1981—his messianic promise, like that of Jesus, seemingly cut short at the height of his ascendancy—Marley lives on not only in Jamaican and global cultural memory but also in music. On the 1999 tribute album *Chant Down Babylon*, contemporary artists like Lauryn Hill used recording technology to 'resurrect' Marley in time-shifted duets; and beyond his hallucinatory sonic resurrection in the voices, samples and stylings of his sons,[14] every time we replay Marley's music, he is alive again for the length of the record. Recording in effect preserves presence beyond the body and throughout time. In Jamaican music there is a constant recourse to Marley as the gold standard, as if his death interrupted something vital in the nation's cultural advancement and we must return to his music as a site of repetition compulsion: cultural gatekeepers view dancehall music as an affront to Marley's legacy; the name Marley seems to guarantee Grammy nominations and wins, and even decades after his exit from our own timeline, "Marley still a-lead pon iTunes" (Chronixx). Until someone comes along who is a reincarnation of Marley, the music is always imagined to be in existential crisis. Marley also haunts both the national imaginary and contemporary Jamaican literature, staging resurrections in the fiction of Colin Channer, Kwame Dawes, Marcia Douglas and others. Marley's haunting of Jamaican fiction and music thus rests on the narrative and technological manipulation of time and temporal order. Douglas's experimental, anachronistic novel *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* (2016) in fact turns on the metaphor of the Halfway Tree clock tower to bring Marley and other voices and histories from Jamaica's past into the present of the Manley/Marley moment of the 1970s—a moment of dual political and musical messianic hope whose fulfilment was ultimately frustrated. The post-traumatic narrative disorder in such novels suggests that for Jamaica's sovereignty to progress rather than become prematurely snuffed

out in its teenage years of the 1970s, long-dead heroes must return to the present. As a response to trauma, messianism proposes a resolution to national history grounded in faith in the advent of one who will save and bring justice to the nation at the appointed time. The untimely death of such a one must be resolved through post hoc narration: he will come again, bring an end to time and anticipation, and fulfil the promise that his untimely death interrupted. Ultimately, then, *A Brief History*'s return to the Jamaican past functions as both a seed of an alternative future and a form of countermemory. In the long day of the novel's present, all of Jamaica's past, present and future remain to be written, read and lived.

Notes

[1] Cf. John 18:6.

[2] While Mikhail Bakhtin uses 'chronotope' to marry 'chronos' (time) and 'topos' (place) (84-5), my neologism 'chronotrope' refers exclusively to time markers. In *A Brief History*, these are the Timex watch, tense constructions, and 'already'/'not yet'/'now' phrases.

[3] See Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:1–19; Job 19:26–27; Ps. 16:10; and Acts 23:8.

[4] "The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25).

[5] See the debate on the novel's "poetics of excess" in Ellis, and Harrison, "Excess."

[6] Although uptempo and accompanied by joyful dancing, "Ring around the Rosie" is often thought in popular myth to allude to one or more British plagues or Black Deaths from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

[7] This disparity creates profound theological conundrums. While early disciples understood Christ's second advent as coming soon and that the gap between the now and the end was to be rather short, in Peter's temporal equation the two thousand years since Christ promised "after a little while you will see me" (John 16:16) have only corresponded to two days in God time.

[8] In the Gospel of John, Jesus's interlocutors rightly remark that his use of the divine "I AM" phrase was 'out of order' in at least two respects: it positions himself both as God (the Eternal) and as existing "before Abraham," his ancestor, in chronological time (John 8:58). While "I AM" indexes a transcendence of human time as marked by linguistic tenses, 'before' and 'after' are perspectival concepts that can be circumvented; narrative sequence can be shifted and reordered: the sun can stand still (Josh. 10) or return ten degrees (2 Kings 20).

[9] Although various Bible translations remain undecided over whether Jesus's staple call, "the kingdom of God is at hand," indexes spatial, temporal or theological proximity, in Mark 1:15 Jesus himself connects "at hand" to the fulfilment of time: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand" (*English Standard Version*); "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near" (NIV).

[10] In order, the titular deaths are those of Jennings, Bam-Bam, Demus, Papa-Lo, the Singer, Weeper and Josey Wales (Fraser 68).

[11] I have in mind here the Jamaican phrase 'out of order,' which denotes a departure from respectability and propriety.

[12] Bam-Bam's name also evokes the popular Jamaican musical motif. Originally a winning festival song (The Maytals, "What a Bam Bam"), Sister Nancy's version "Bam Bam" is among the most frequently sampled songs in hip hop, and each version changes both its idiom and tempo.

[13] Compare Jesus's words to Judas at the Passover meal before the latter goes out to betray him: "'What you are about to do, do quickly'" (John 13:27, NIV).

[14] Listen, for instance, to Damian Marley's "Move," which samples Marley's "Exodus"; and Stephen Marley's "Mind Control," which makes audible the eerie similarity in the voices of father and son.

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