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While the intersections between politics and culture in the Jamaican 1970s have received extensive and ongoing scholarly attention, these discussions have focused largely on the genres of music, theater, and, to a lesser degree, film. Some attention has more recently been paid to literary renderings from and about the period, but this work has mostly confined itself to what might be called the "respectably literary": texts deemed to have, or to aspire to, a degree of aesthetic merit. Very little, if any, critical attention has been paid to the small but coherent body of texts that engage the Jamaican 1970s in a popular-fiction mode. This essay responds to Curdella Forbes's explicitly provocative call for Caribbeanist scholars to address ourselves to the "pop lit" genre and consider its intentions, its aesthetics, and its effects, and also to questions Chris Bongie raises in his work on postcolonial popular fiction. It is also, of course, in conversation with Belinda Edmondson's important study *Caribbean Middlebrow*, which suggests that "Caribbean society's consignment of literature and entertainment to separate spheres has produced a schizoid perception of its own culture."[1]

1 Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 6. See also Curdella Forbes, "X Press Publications: Pop Culture, 'Pop Lit,' and Caribbean Literary Criticism; An Essay of Provocation," *Anthurium* 4 (2006): issue 1, article 2, scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1103&context=anthurium; and Chris Bongie, "Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature,"

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If the Jamaican 1970s were (as has been argued) a defining postcolonial moment, in which ideas of race-class, gender, nation, sovereignty, and citizenship were in contestation and under pressure, what does it mean to render that moment by way of popular fiction—a genre that, we are told, eschews political and epistemological complexity in favor of stoking and sating desires both narrative and erotic? More broadly, what role does popular fiction have to play in making sense of moments of crisis, convergence, and emergence? Must we regard it primarily as sociological evidence, a cache of artefacts that reveal prevailing and under-interrogated ideologies that structure, without challenging, the uses to which we put the past? Or are there conditions under which we can see popular-fiction texts as cultural-political agents that enter, interrupt, and potentially reformulate the discursive field surrounding critical conjunctures like the Jamaican 1970s, opening them up for new audiences and toward new meanings? Here I should also reveal my opinion that my object texts—and popular fiction more generally—deserve more critical respect than they get; I find them not only instructive but to varying degrees complex, clever, and fun to read. In what follows, therefore, I am trying to mine these texts for what they can tell us about the project of representing the 1970s, but I am also examining them on their own terms and as (unruly) exemplars of their genre.

The three novels I consider here—Lee R. Duffus's *The Cuban Jamaican Connection*, Perry Henzell's *Power Game*, and Tony Sewell's *Jamaica Inc.*—are counterfactual histories that invoke the political-thriller formula to retrospectively reanimate the salient features of the Jamaican 1970s; all were published within thirteen years of the era's dramatic end (1983, 1982, and 1993, respectively) and are therefore relatively early forays into the field of 1970s literature. This essay argues that each of these novels invokes and disrupts pop-fiction conventions in ways that subvert the genre's habitual reenactment of social and epistemological stability. Further, each novel, through its imaginative reworking of the consequential decade of the 1970s in a counterfactual mode, constitutes a rumination on historiography, illuminating the symbolic mechanisms and conceptual limitations that will animate and bedevil attempts, across a range of genre and modes, to figure that period. Finally, the degree to which these novels comply with or resist the more-or-less standard masculinism of the political-thriller genre, and the roles to which they consign, or from which they liberate their female characters, are key to the epistemological interventions they achieve and the political critiques they articulate.

Some Notes on Genre

This essay takes as foundational one of Stuart Hall's interventions from his 1981 "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular.'" While Hall acknowledges that defining "popular" as artefacts that "masses of people" consume or enjoy is a "commercial definition . . . [that is] quite

Postmodern Culture 14, no. 1 (2003), www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/18/exiles-on-main-stream-valuing-the-popularity-of-postcolonial-literature.

rightly associated with the manipulation and debasement of the culture of the people," he declines to entirely reject or abandon that definition, because "very substantial numbers of working people must be included within the [large] audiences for such products," and to conclude that people enjoy these products purely because they are being manipulated or duped is to be "deeply unsocialist." Like Hall, I am deeply suspicious of the elitist presumption that whenever large numbers of people consume a particular type of cultural artefact, that enjoyment is evidence of those people's poor aesthetic and political judgement. As Hall puts it, "I don't know that this is a view which can survive for long as an adequate account of cultural relationships."[2]

Also, a couple of notes on genre. First, the category into which the texts examined here fit most comfortably is the political thriller, whose salient features are outlined by Pablo Castrillo and Pablo Echart as follows: political thrillers "emphasize [the] struggle" between "the hero and a threat, which often times presents itself as a conspiracy"; they "must achieve a rather obvious goal: To thrill, that is, to cause intense emotional states"; they depict "a world gone awry";[3] and, finally, they "tend to . . . take as a starting point for their narratives certain historical events that have left a significant imprint."[4] While not all political thrillers end with truth revealed and order restored, these are the typical end points of the thriller's narrative arc, rewarding the audience for having endured the emotional disruptions of the narrative and reinstituting a sense of the world as a stable and knowable place.

The family saga genre also deserves a mention here, because Sewell's *Jamaica Inc.* makes some of its most interesting interventions through forcing an engagement between the conventions of political thriller and those of family saga. Like (and perhaps more than) political thrillers, family sagas tend to depict the world as stable and knowable, primarily by means of foregrounding reproductive continuity and legible genealogies. They are, on the whole, seen as nation-building projects: they traditionally function to naturalize the relationship between a territory and a community and to project specific ideas of who constitutes the nation.[5] They also often betray an interest in historiography, mapping events of national or community significance against familial history. We shall see what uses Sewell makes of these generic features, in uncomfortable yet productive engagement with the conventions of the political thriller.

2 Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in John Storey, ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (London: Pearson, 1998), 446.

3 Pablo Castrillo and Pablo Echart, "Towards a Narrative Definition of the American Political Thriller Film," *Communication and Society* 28, no. 4 (2015): 112.

4 Ibid., 118. While Castrillo and Echart's essay is concerned with political-thriller films, the authors are specifically interested in those films "from the perspective of narrative content" (110), as a result of which their sketch of the genre's characteristics is applicable to the fiction considered here.

5 See, for example, Carol Hoggart, "A Layered Landscape: How the Family Sagas Mapped Medieval Iceland," *Limina* 16 (2010): n.p.

The Cuban Jamaican Connection

Lee R. Duffus's *The Cuban Jamaican Connection* focuses on the efforts of journalist Richard Blaine as he pursues a lead into "a plot to subvert the government of Jamaica by seemingly constitutional means."[6] The 1983 novel is set in the "summertime" of an unspecified year, the only temporal marker being a reference to the "now distant days of the Michael Manley administration" (31). Yet it bears unmistakable traces of being a 1970s novel, not least of them the complicated ideological battles that underpin the plot. The main conceit is that a cabal within Jamaica's left-wing government is secretly colluding with Cuba to unite the two countries, thereby creating the kernel of an eventual socialist bloc in the Caribbean. The plot is named "Peenywally," in the only instance of Jamaican patwa's appearance in the book.[7]

Through a fairly typical storyline of locating witnesses, debunking falsehoods, and surviving attacks, Blaine uncovers the truth and reveals it to two allies within Jamaican law enforcement. One or both of these people is/are responsible for the dramatic denouement: sabotage resulting in a balcony collapse during the governing party's convention kills the prime minister and all other Peenywally conspirators. Although the details of the Peenywally plot have been turned over to law enforcement, the new government concludes that national unity is best served by keeping the information secret. Surprisingly for a journalist, Blaine goes along with this decision and makes no attempt to publish the story.

On its face, Duffus's novel seems obedient to political-thriller conventions: a lone male protagonist up against powerful, malign forces as he unravels a far-reaching conspiracy. The few female characters seem largely peripheral to the action, except as objects of the male gaze and potential love interests for Blaine. The most prominent female character—Janet Martin, who later marries Blaine—is first seen climbing out of a swimming pool: "It was the woman in swimwear who caught his attention. And held it." A detailed description of her body—laden with modifiers such as "exhilarating," "heady," "perfectly formed," and "flawless"—follows, to the extent of an entire paragraph (62). This, too, seems a fairly reliable convention of the political thriller: sexual adventures with willing women who form part of the novel's visual landscape.

The attention to Janet Martin's body in this scene is particularly striking because it omits explicit mention of her race. The color of her hair and eyes, the "perfectly tanned" (62) quality of her skin—all receive comment, but she remains un-raced, as does the other woman in the scene, who is apparently her domestic helper.[8] I find this interesting both in the context of a novel that so insistently evokes the Jamaican 1970s—a time-space during which race was very centrally at issue—and also because few other characters in the novel go racially

6 Lee R. Duffus, *The Cuban Jamaican Connection* (Kingston: Kingston Publishers, 1983), 26; hereafter cited in the text.
7 *Peenywally* is the Jamaican equivalent of "firefly."
8 The reader later learns that Janet Martin is white—as are all the other women in the novel who are rendered as sexual prospects and visual adornments.

unmarked. Blaine himself is described as the idealized embodiment of racial creolization: "Tall and handsome, with wavy black hair, a sharply chiselled nose and a wide generous mouth. His skin colour reflected his mixed parentage. Black and white. Out of many, one people. The Jamaican society, an ethnic stew" (45).[9] This cavalier deployment of what Nigel Bolland might call creolization as ideology—positioning Blaine at the center of Jamaican identity via his mixed-race status—is exemplary of the shallowness of the novel's engagement with the central issues of the decade it invokes.[10] Race is routinely remarked on (except with reference to the female characters) but is instrumentalized rather than engaged with. This tendency—along with the fact that not a single line of narration or dialogue (the word *Peenywally* excepted) is in patwa—threatens to render the novel's 1970s setting more incidental than constitutive. However, as I will argue later, the novel does ultimately offer a warning about the difficulties posed by the 1970s for knowledge production and historiography.

Power Game

Of the novels discussed here, Perry Henzell's *Power Game* has had the longest afterlife and the widest exposure. First published in Jamaica in 1982 by Ten-A Publishers, it reappeared in multiple English editions from minor presses throughout the 1980s and 1990s, was translated into German in 1987, was reissued in English by Macmillan in 2009, and was translated into French in 2014. A partial explanation for this may be found in the fact that it is saturated with the zeitgeist of the 1970s, or with the trappings thereof: Rastafari, reggae, antiestablishment mass social movements, and patwa, which infuses both the dialogue and—intermittently—the narration.

Where Duffus remains largely detached from the political and economic stakes of the period, Henzell takes pains to evoke both the context and its implications: "But while the sixties brought independence, the seventies brought the oil shock and an end to innocence. Only ten years had passed since the fireworks lit up the sky for the freedom night celebrations, and already the cupboard was bare."[11] Within the context of this deepening economic crisis, Henzell forges a plot from the coincidence of two other identifiably 1970s elements: a dispute with foreign mining corporations (a clear reference to the bauxite-levy issue of the early 1970s) and the army's slaughter of young gunmen from both political parties on a deserted beach (a fictionalization of the 1978 Green Bay Massacre). From these occurrences—compounded by divergent agendas, missed opportunities, and complicated family dynamics—Henzell conjures an escalating series of events, each bringing the country nearer to chaos. At the novel's climax, the prime minister and two cabinet ministers have gone into exile, the island's

9 Curiously enough, this description of Richard Blaine might easily have been applied to a young Michael Manley.
10 See O. Nigel Bolland, "Reconsidering Creolisation and Creole Societies," *Shibboleths* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1–14.
11 Perry Henzell, *Power Game* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2009), 4–5; hereafter cited in the text.

telephone system has been switched off, a rogue army officer has taken control of Kingston in a partial coup d'état, and the United States is days away from invading.

In a departure from political-thriller conventions, *Power Game* features an ensemble cast, which allows Henzell to sketch some sense of the intersections of race and class in Jamaica. At the center of that cast are Percy Sullivan (prime minister), Winston Bernard (finance minister), and Mark Bernard (minister of security)—all members of the same elite black family.[12] The other key player is Michele Azani Bernard, who is married to Winston, had a prior relationship with Mark, was the media genius behind Percy's electoral campaign, and now runs Jamaica's premier radio station. Unlike the black Sullivan-Bernards, Michele is the kind of racially creolized character that Duffus makes of his "out of many, one people" protagonist: "[Michele's] eyes were the brown eyes of her Parsee grandfather, gentle yet perceptive, able to sparkle in an instant. . . . Her lips were from another world, African and Arab. Her temperament came mostly from an English granny" (26).

Beyond these four are multiple other characters from various race-class locations who play auxiliary but important roles and who also serve as narrative focalizers. This creates a continually shifting landscape of perception in the novel, a reiterative perspectival displacement that, while perhaps unremarkable in literary fiction, represents a significant departure from the conventions of the political thriller. This continual displacement, which arguably democratizes the novel's genre, also effects a kind of hiccup, a persistent, low-key interruption, in that urgent forward motion of the plot that is another of the genre's most representative traits.

Posing a significant contrast to Duffus, Henzell allows his female characters a central role in the action. This is especially true of Michele, whose influence as a media actor is given considerable significance: apart from her role in Percy's election win, she is responsible for bringing both Zack Clay (reggae star) and Burru (Rasta preacher) the fame that makes each, for a time, a grassroots political leader. Toward the novel's end, she organizes the international media event that reestablishes the legitimacy of Percy's administration in the eyes of the world. But the novel does not allow Michele's professional efficacy to be disentangled from—and it is ultimately overshadowed by—her personal relationships with men.[13] Here political drama is reconfigured as family melodrama: the misunderstandings and conflicts among the Sullivan-Bernard men that impede an effective, coordinated response to the escalating political crisis are brought to a head by the revelation of Michele's affair with Zack Clay. The novel proposes

12 Their racial identity aside, the Sullivan-Bernard family is clearly intended, by means of various markers, to evoke the Manley family and its dominance of late-twentieth-century Jamaican politics; as just one example, Winston and Bernard's mother is named Edna (31).

13 That Michele's power and influence derive centrally from her relationships to men is foregrounded during a confrontation with an army corporal who is abusing a young woman. When Michele intervenes, and is challenged, she responds with a litany of the important men to whom she is connected: "I am Michele Azani Bernard. . . . I am the wife of Winston Bernard, the Minister of Finance, I am the sister-in-law of Mark Bernard, Minister of Security, I am the sister of Eddie Azani[,] . . . I am the cousin by marriage to Percy Sullivan[,] the Prime Minister of the country, I am the producer for the Burru program on Sun Radio, I was loved by Zack Clay when he recorded [his hit songs], and I say you are to leave that girl alone!" (354).

that this event—the infidelity and its revelation—produces the ensuing familial and societal breakdown because it costs Michele her most valuable role: the facilitator of communication among the powerful men of her family.

Thus Michele's "special gift" (26) as a communicator is reduced to one, superordinate purpose: keeping the family together and getting the men to talk to each other. This is reinforced at several junctures in the novel but nowhere more explicitly than in the chastening conversation Michele has with the wealthy American Molly Clifford. Molly refuses to help Michele and the Bernard brothers with their plan to reestablish order in Jamaica until Michele will confess herself at fault for the rift in her family:

> "What went wrong between Mark and Winston? What went wrong between you and Mark?" Molly paused to look Michele in the eye, "What went wrong between you and Winston?"
>
> The question hit Michele like a slap. A hard one. She'd made it up with Winston! She'd put all that behind them! But for Molly Clifford it was still the key. Whatever happened, it had caused a civil war. Death and destruction. Molly wanted an accounting. . . . Now. (385)

Once Michele has confessed and expressed contrition, Molly swings into action to help her, powerful levers are pulled, and order is restored to the nation. The novel's last paragraph is a roundup of the ensemble cast that ties up various plotlines, beginning with the execution of the last remaining major antagonist and ending with Michele feeling her baby "kick for the first time" (426). Nonfamily actors in *Power Game* are either allies or antagonists, but in either case they are auxiliary. The novel concludes with Jamaica's democratically elected government securely back in place. Moreover (and inconsistent with the democratizing desire that its narrative structure suggests), it ends with brothers reconciled, a marriage restored, and a long-awaited child on the way—all within the Bernard family. Thus are national crises resolved at the level of elite-family breaches healed; the novel's highest virtue is domestic.

Jamaica Inc.

Tony Sewell's *Jamaica Inc.* appeared in 1993, ten years after *Power Game*, to which it bears many similarities of plot and character. One significant difference, however—from both Henzell's and Duffus's novels—is that *Jamaica Inc.* refuses the narrative closure offered by way of the restoration of political order (*Power Game*) and the apparent unraveling of the plot's central mysteries (*The Cuban Jamaican Connection*) at the novel's end. Sewell's novel also rejects closure's implication that the political sphere is functional or redeemable. It takes, in the end, a far more jaundiced and cynical view of politics than *Power Game* does: Henzell's leaders are misguided but ultimately corrigible, while Sewell's are, and remain, corrupt and self-seeking. His is a cannibalistic as well as a predatory political elite.

Like *Power Game*, *Jamaica Inc.* takes up the trope of one family dominating Jamaica's political elite (a situation that Henzell renders as largely desirable, and Sewell as ruinous).

Even more than does Henzell, Sewell endows that family, and its history, with clear similarities to the Manleys. The entire plot unfolds within one compressed narrative frame: the dying moments of prime minister David Cooper at a concert ostensibly meant "to help bring unity to the island."[14] This is an invocation of the 1978 One Love Peace Concert (with the important difference that no one died at the actual event). Cooper has already been shot, onstage, when the novel opens, and he bleeds out slowly as the story unfolds; the novel's last line relates the official certification of his death. The primary narrative engine of the novel is the drive to reveal the person, and the motivation, behind Cooper's assassination, with the prime suspects conveniently gathered around him onstage in the first scene: "These were the warlords, the power players who would fight over the spoils of the David Cooper legacy. . . . Ken Williams—the young Brigadier General, Rodrigues Cooper—the PM's brother and leader of the opposition, and Trinity—Jamaica's most notorious gunman gathered in a semicircle above David" (2). Each of these men is revealed, as the novel unfolds, to have a motive and a plan in place for assassinating Cooper; each is also shown propositioning Cooper's wife, Marva, a former beauty queen. Yet the novel closes with only a suggestion about which suspect is actually responsible, and the method of the killing—two shots coming from different directions—leaves open the possibility that more than one conspiracy has been fulfilled in that moment (181).

The novel's periodic returns to this narrative frame (almost entirely focalized through Cooper's fading consciousness) are inserted around long sections reaching back into familial and national history. As mentioned above, in *Jamaica Inc.* political thriller meets family saga—both of which often have a nationalistic bent. I contend, however, that Sewell's hybrid thriller-saga is neither generically obedient nor comfortingly nationalist. The family-saga genre presents Sewell with the opportunity to (as I have argued Henzell does) render the nation as a family that can/must be preserved via the observance of appropriately familial values: unity, cohesion, fellow-feeling, and so on. This opportunity Sewell roundly rejects, presenting readers instead with a family irrevocably disarticulated from within.

Sewell thus puts very different pop-fiction genres productively in harness together. The historical interludes of the family-saga mode disrupt the forward drive of the political-thriller plot structure. These interludes, moreover, are all focalized by female characters, which further destabilizes the conventional masculinism of the thriller. And in another refusal of generic convention, Sewell recounts the Cooper family saga through the voices of three women who are not themselves Coopers but have become part of the family history through their painful, contentious relationships with Cooper men. This makes the family line (the treasured heart of any family saga) the decentered object of scrutiny rather than the affective and perspectival core of the novel. Finally, Sewell takes the conventionally masculinist libidinal energies of the

14 Tony Sewell, *Jamaica Inc*. (London: X Press, 1993), 1; hereafter cited in the text.

political thriller (such as we saw, for example, in Duffus) and unleashes them on the family saga, but inverted: here it is not men's but women's sexual autonomy and adventurism that hold the reader's attention.

The women in question are David Cooper's grandmother Mary, a black woman living on the edges of a sugar estate in St. Catherine in the aftermath of emancipation; Cooper's mother, Virginia, a white English woman who meets Cooper's father when they are both students at Cambridge and later moves to Jamaica and marries him; and Marva, a black Jamaican from a middle-class family in Oracabessa who wins the title of Miss Jamaica World. That the reader is privy to detailed sex scenes is par for the pop-fiction course. What is significant, however, is that Sewell foregrounds the sexual autonomy of these female characters, portraying them as lustful, agentic subjects who survey men's bodies with an assessing gaze, seek out sex with men they desire, and use sex in service of their own ends, which range from social advancement to the satiation of lust. (It is worth noting that there is no queer desire in evidence here; this, like Duffus's and Henzell's, is a relentlessly heterosexist novel.)

Marva and David's first sex scene provides evidence of this centering of female sexuality. Despite not finding the much-older David very desirable—in part because "he was brown skin and she preferred her men black like the night" (129)—Marva enjoys being wooed by him and is cognizant of the strategic advantages of an alliance with the future prime minister. Upon their first sexual encounter, however, Marva's ambivalence seems swept aside by admiration for David's body, which "was in supreme condition for a man his age," and for his seduction skills. The graphic quality of the narration is of less interest than the word choice emphasizing Marva's agency: "Her hands gripped his backside as *she pushed him* deeper inside her, *refusing to let him* go or stop" (134; emphasis mine).[15] The scene bears notable resemblances to the first sexual encounter between David's parents, especially in that both women vocalize powerfully and both men experience fear: "Marva let out one almighty scream that seemed to go on forever. . . . David was terrified that she would tear into his ribs" (134), while "[Gladstone] came with a loud groan and [Virginia] followed with a yell that slightly frightened [him] as he lay exhausted" (81).

Ancestor Mary's sexual experience—which includes rape and abandonment—is more traumatic than those of the later women. Still, like them she makes strategic choices about how her sexuality will serve her purposes. Further, the first sexual encounter the reader sees Mary having is with a man whom she chooses freely because of the pleasure he brings her during and outside of sex. Noteworthy also is the fact that Mary's partner in this relationship is "the blackest man in Eden Park—they say his grandparents were Maroons" (8). Not only does this prefigure the later Marva's preference for black men, but Mary's recognition of her

15 Compare this to almost any of Duffus's sex scenes, which foreground male desire ("a powerful, burning desire propelled him forward"), male agency ("he savagely probed her inner recesses"), and female passivity ("her . . . eyes beseech[ed] him to come closer") (152).

mother's beauty as a black woman ("Her mother was tall and proud and black as the night sky. Her face was perfectly carved and her head rested carefully on her neck" [9]) anticipates Marva's status as "the most stunning woman in the island—black and beautiful" (2). As the object of nearly universal male sexual desire in the novel's narrative present, Marva is Sewell's equivalent of Duffus's Janet Martin (white) and Henzell's Michele Bernard (brown), with the significant difference that she is black. In other words, Sewell's novel departs from its predecessors in its marked and reiterative celebration of blackness as not only a proudly held racial identity but a premier site of libidinal pleasure.

The sexual autonomy of Sewell's female characters sets the novel starkly apart from its predecessors in this discussion: Sewell not only rejects the masculinist orientation of Duffus's sex scenes but also resists the romanticization, and resulting domestication, of sexual relationships in Henzell's universe. For Henzell, female infidelity is a blow struck at the heart of family and nation. For Sewell, female infidelity and other sexual adventuring is just that: adventure, and sometimes strategy.[16] Occasionally regretted, it nevertheless ranks nowhere on the novel's list of the moral flaws that threaten the nation. Those are sins of arrogance, wrath, greed, deceit, and violence, and they are almost exclusively the province of men (including David Cooper, who is revealed as a narcissist, opportunist, and collaborator with drug dons). It is those sins, and their ubiquity among the male characters, that produce the despoiled moral and political landscape of the novel's ending, in which the question of who killed Cooper and why becomes meaningless. Within that landscape, the prospect of a new generation of Coopers (for, like Michele Bernard, Marva Cooper exits the novel pregnant) signals not hope and restoration but a kind of ominous inevitability: "The *sharp twinge* inside her stomach reminded her that come what may there was a Cooper on the way inside her" (171; emphasis mine).

Implications: Time, History, and the Counterfactual

In the preceding sections, I traced the invocations and disruptions of pop-fiction conventions by my three object-texts and suggested the ends to which they function. In broad strokes: all three novels reward readings that attend to race-class and (especially) gender, but they themselves are differentially attentive to the particular significance of these categories for 1970s politics and discourse. In many ways *Jamaica Inc.*—published at the greatest distance from the decade's end—seems to most embody its contentious, redefinitional energies, especially with regard to race. Beyond their (mis)uses of generic conventions, there may be questions to be asked about the readerly pleasures (erotic and narrative) offered by these texts, because, as Belinda Edmondson reminds us, we run risks when we ignore "the role that popularity

16 Sewell thereby overhauls the predominant model of the adventure novel, in which the adventurer is almost always male.

and pleasure play in determining the meaning of books or other artifacts of culture."[17] But in trying to suss out what these novels might contribute to our thinking and rethinking, imagining and reimagining the 1970s, I would like to focus instead on something else that they have in common: their counterfactual postures, their what-if gestures, their enactments of history as plastic rather than fixed.

The novels discussed here are not precisely counterfactual or alternate histories (which Hilary Dannenberg defines as "thought experiments" that "cent[er] on counterfactual speculations about alternative outcomes of key moments in history"),[18] but all skirt that territory. All are fictionalizations of an era with identifiable markers and ongoing reverberations. As just one example, there is the ubiquity of the Michael Manley figure—Sewell's David Cooper is called "Solomon" (153), recalling the sobriquet "Joshua" that Manley was given by his supporters. Duffus's Keith Lehmann (his surname an inversion of the syllables of "Manley") physically resembles Manley, with his "lean, muscular body" and "lean, ascetic features" (52, 53); habitually attired in a black kareba suit, he is endowed with powerful charisma and overweening ego, and is famously attractive to women (305). Henzell's Percy Sullivan, likewise, is handsome, athletic, charismatic, oratorically gifted, and sexually successful; the catchphrase that marks his political ascent—"Love, love is the key!" (33)—is a clear reworking of Manley's "The word is love."

In the consistency of their depictions of a Manley-like figure, these novels pick up on and throw into relief symbolic tendencies in the depiction of the 1970s that are characteristic of other, ostensibly more "serious" genres. I have argued elsewhere that 1970s narratives, across multiple genres, have in common a tendency to treat Manley as *the* exceptional individual whose personality, more than any other, defines and explains the period, and to structure their portraits of him around the twin figures of the cocksman (preternaturally attractive to, and successful with, women) and the warrior (disposed to, and skilled in, combat).[19] These types are evident across the Manley-avatars in the three texts I examine here (the cocksman rather more consistently than the warrior), but what these pop-fiction texts remind us is that the cocksman-warrior-exceptional-individual is, preeminently, a staple of adventure novels. In other words, reading these novels reveals to us how nonfictional and literary-fictional renderings of the 1970s (including novels, newspaper reports, and scholarly texts) are symbolically indebted to popular fiction.

Beyond this, these novels have in common an interest in history—how it is made and how it is told. This registers in some (Henzell, in particular) as a fixation on time at the micro

17 Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow*, 9.

18 Hilary Dannenberg, "Fleshing Out the Blend: The Representation of Counterfactuals in Alternate History in Print, Film, and Television Narratives," in Ralf Schneider and Marcus Hartner, eds., *Blending and the Study of Narrative* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 122.

19 See Rachel L. Mordecai, *Citizenship Under Pressure: The 1970s in Jamaican Literature and Culture* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2014).

and macro scales and in others as generic disobedience, as in Sewell's (ab)uses of the family saga. Somewhat surprisingly, given that I have dismissed it as the most generically orthodox and the least engaged with 1970s issues, it is Duffus's novel that offers what may be the most instructive take on historiographical and epistemological questions, through its revelatory use of the counterfactual mode. Duffus takes one of the hallmark events of the 1970s—the Orange Street fire—and supplies a fictional explanation for it from within his plot: the fire is an attempt to assassinate a witness who threatens the Peenywally conspiracy. Duffus then ends the novel with the journalist-protagonist agreeing (with no apparent scruples) to hide the truth about events of national significance. The invocation of the historical event reanimates for readers the baffling, sometimes terrifying moments punctuating the collective memory of the 1970s (arguably, it is in fact this succession of events that *comprises* whatever collective memory of the 1970s may exist), while the reimagined explanation followed by the diegetic burying of that truth reiterates the opacity of those events—placing them radically, even threateningly, beyond the horizon of knowability.

Janet Martin Blaine is an additional complication. The last scene involving Richard Blaine presents as a moment of connubial bliss, in which Janet exults in the fact that she will be living permanently in Jamaica and Blaine delights in his luck at having met her. In the last moments of that scene, she kisses him, saying, "Thank you, my husband. Thank you for so very much." Because Blaine's eyes—in his blissful state—are closed, he misses "the curious half-smile playing on her lips" as she says this (328), but the reader takes notice (because it is the last line of the section). That enigmatic gesture, and its terminal location, suggests that Janet—despite previously figuring in the novel entirely as a site of visual and erotic pleasure—knows more about what has happened than Blaine does, and may in fact be the mechanism by which the Group (an anonymous, apparently omnipotent cabal that is distinct from the Peenywally conspirators and whom the reader gradually understands to be operating at a still deeper level of subterfuge) manipulated Blaine to their ends. On this reading, the text ends not with revelation (as a good political thriller should) but with multiple layers of epistemological obstruction: Blaine withholding what he knows from the Jamaican public; Blaine's wife withholding from him the full story of what has happened; and the novel withholding from the reader both the identities of all members of the Group and the details of their role in the raveling and unraveling of the plot.

The stealthy uses to which Duffus puts Janet at the novel's end bring us back to the discussion of gender that has percolated throughout this essay. In many ways (and perhaps predictably), it is in the fortunes of their female characters that these novels most clearly reveal both their instructive possibilities and their conceptual and ideological limits. While both Michele Bernard and Marva Cooper are figured by their creators as powerful, autonomous women in their own right and within their respective spheres, each departs her novel defined by (if not reduced to) her reproductive function, symbolic mother to either a renewed

national order (Henzell's Michele) or an irredeemable one (Sewell's Marva). Thus the extent to which women cannot, in the imaginations of these authors, escape their ideologically constructed "destiny" as (biological, cultural, and perhaps political) reproducers of the nation constitutes a limit to the what-if gestures these novels produce and to the plasticity of the histories they project. Duffus's Janet Blaine, on the other hand, presents for almost the entirety of the novel as most discounted by her author, most reduced to her erotic and narrative utility as decorative feature and reward for the triumphant hero. Yet her occluded agency—or rather, the possibility of that agency, because the reader never *knows* what she has or has not done, and that is exactly the point—becomes key to registering the novel's epistemological intervention.

Conclusions and a Coda: Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings*

I have suggested that these pop-fiction texts are worthy of consideration on their own terms because they offer pleasure (aesthetic and libidinal), are productively insubordinate of the genres they invoke, and contain the sometimes-realized potential for surprisingly radical political gestures. I have argued further that, from their vantage point of the years most immediately following the end of the 1970s, they (especially Sewell's and Duffus's) dramatize the horizons of unknowability that do and will continue to trouble efforts to narrate that decade. Finally, I have proposed that these texts presage the decade's tendency to summon forth popular fiction's symbolic resources, even when represented in more intellectually and aesthetically valorized modes (nonfiction, scholarship, and literary fiction). The reasons for this are opaque but may have something to do with the particular appeal of myths of (masculine) heroism and individual agency during (or when reflecting on) troubling times.

The latter two assertions speak to my question, in the introduction to this essay, about whether there is work to be done by popular-fiction texts toward rethinking critical conjunctures like the Jamaican 1970s. I also asked what role those texts might play in relation to constituting, or expanding, audiences for the representations of such conjunctures. While Edmondson's assertion that "the work of continuously identifying and defining the Caribbean middle class, its desires and its parameters, is the point of middlebrow literature" enjoins us to reflect upon what work these novels may be doing for and among the Jamaican middle class, their publication and circulation histories—and those of their successors—urge us toward examining their representational work among wider audiences.[20] Sewell's *Jamaica Inc.* was published in London and may have been largely targeted at the Jamaican-descended black-British community, but Henzell's *Power Game* was not only republished but *translated* outside the region, which seems to reliably indicate a broader audience (or at least the publishers'

20 Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow*, 15.

expectations thereof). And a more recent title—Marlon James's 2014 *A Brief History of Seven Killings*—has garnered the kind of attention that renders it effectively *the* novel of the Jamaican 1970s in the minds of readers across the world.[21] A quick consideration of James's novel seems, therefore, a productive coda to this discussion.

Like the other texts treated here, *Brief History* invokes the political thriller, especially through the characters of multiple CIA operatives and a hapless but dogged investigative reporter. However, the official political sphere is not the novel's primary center of interest: Michael Manley is named a few times, but is peripheral to the action, and very few elite Jamaican figures appear. (It seems significant that the only politician who gets a narrative voice in the novel—Sir Arthur George Jennings—is dead.) *Brief History* thus operationalizes a "bottom-up" perspective on the decade by obscuring major personalities (with the exception of Bob Marley, appearing as "the Singer") and foregrounding more ordinary Jamaicans (especially the urban poor). This arguably constitutes a gesture of alignment with that kind of 1970s historiography that directs our attention away from the perspectives and preoccupations of the political and socioeconomic elite.

At first glance, the novel seems also to suffer from what I have critiqued as the gender failures of the earlier texts. Of twelve characters who are given narrative voices in *Brief History*, only one is a woman (although James engages in sleight-of-hand, for most of the novel's duration, to present this one speaking woman as four). However, it is worth saying that while *Brief History* is as relentlessly masculinist as the other texts, it revises their heteronormativity, exploring with poignancy and nuance more than one sexual and romantic relationship between men. Further, while James does marginalize women's voices, Nina Burgess (alias Kim Clarke/Dorcas Palmer/Millicent Segree) is reminiscent of Sewell's Marva Cooper as an autonomous, desiring, and sometimes strategic sexual subject. And unlike her antecedents, Nina is not reduced to her reproductive function or framed as any man's conquest or reward.

One might raise the objection here that *Brief History* is literary rather than popular fiction, and therefore not a proper object for this essay. James, after all, has been considered a literary writer up to the point of *Brief History*'s publication, and the awards and critical attention garnered by the novel seem to suggest that it is largely being received in that light. Yet the text undeniably draws on pop-fiction energies. It is a masculinist adventure tale full of cocksmen and warriors—albeit without the singular protagonist—and renders Jamaican realities according to such readily recognizable tropes as reggae music, the drug trade, and spectacularized violence.[22] It therefore fulsomely bears out the notice given by my primary object texts that the symbolic resources of popular fiction would repeatedly be pressed into service

21 Marlon James, *A Brief History of Several Killings: A Novel* (New York: Riverhead, 2014). James won the 2015 Man Booker Prize, among other literary awards; the novel has to date been translated into German and French (the same languages as Henzell's translations) and is reportedly slated to become an Amazon TV series.

22 *Brief History* does offer the noteworthy revision that some of the cocksmen are queer.

for representing the 1970s, no matter the mode. Further, I propose that *Brief History*—with its literary cachet, sensationalist tropes, and critical and commercial successes—reminds us that what divides the literary from the popular is less a line than a hazy, shifting, liminal space: productive to explore but impossible to map. James's novel exploits the potentialities of that space to considerable aesthetic and political effect, while telling metropolitan readers a story about Jamaica that they are already disposed to hear, using frames long familiar to them.

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