"If It No Go So, It Go Near So": Marlon James and Collective Memory

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> *[I]f we cannot . . . speak the true names of politicians and their hired killers . . . what hope is there for Jamaica?*
>
> —Gunst

> *[W]hat could be more vulgar than arbitrarily attributing, in a puerile quest for the effect of the real or, in the best of cases, simply as a commodity, an invented name to an invented character? . . . [W]hat could be more vulgar than an invented character?*
>
> —Binet

Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a historical novel about the Jamaican street gangs, affiliated with the two major national political parties, that waged war in Kingston in the 1970s and then came to dominate the crack cocaine trade as far away as Miami and New York in the 1980s. At the heart of the novel is the failed assassination attempt against Bob Marley in 1976. James's novel about "the day the music almost died" depicts the shooting as a convergence of many of the major political and economic forces in the Western hemisphere at the time, including Cold War proxy politics and the CIA, drug cartels and the War on Drugs, but also cultural forces such as popular music and Hollywood cinema. *A Brief History* thus resembles novels by Don DeLillo or James Ellroy that purport to show us the secret backstory of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and, in the process, to reveal the intersections of power—official and unofficial, economic and cultural—with violence, direct and structural.[1]

DeLillo's and Ellroy's novels presume an audience already familiar with the event of November 22, 1963, and the swirl of conspiracy theory surrounding it. They rely on the fact that Kennedy has entered the cultural imagination of readers and brought a small entourage with him, including his wife, his brother, his assassin, and his assassin's assassin. They bank on that collective cultural memory and, in turn, reinforce it. To speak of cultural memory, here, is, however, to beg the question: whose memory? What difference does it make to center a novel on the shooting of the "reggae superstar of the world" (as Marley is identified in the dramatis personae of James's novel) rather than on that of the American president?

[1] As he waits at the airport for a second attempt on Marley's life, the gang leader Josey Wales thinks of "that grainy newsreel that come on TV every November about Kennedy in Dallas," a reminder that he and Marlon James have the Kennedy assassination in mind (James 403).

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"Where were you when J. M. Kariuki was killed? Or Ruth First, Lumumba, Kennedy, or Malcolm X?," asks the Kenyan narrator of Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ's novel *Unbury Our Dead with Song* (34). Kennedy's inclusion in this list is unsurprising, but non-African readers may not recognize the other names here, or, if they do, may not remember when they were killed.[2] No one should be surprised that global collective memory—here, the awareness among readers on many continents of significant individuals from outside their own country—is not a level playing field, nor if figures from the Global South are remembered differently than Americans or Western Europeans.

A Brief History claims for a West Indian subject, however, the kind of presence in a global collective memory that key moments in recent American history have. It can do this because of Marley's undoubted cultural resonance; the novel would make no sense if readers did not already know who Marley was. Readers outside Jamaica may not remember that the reggae singer was shot—perhaps because he was not killed, his shooting does not occupy the space in the global collective memory taken up by the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., or John Lennon—but Marley himself can lay claim to as large a space in the collective imagination as any of those people. Perhaps only Fidel Castro is as famous a West Indian. Marley is at least as instantly recognizable to novel readers everywhere as anyone on the short list that Brian McHale compiled of people from twentieth-century history who have become characters in the foreground of postmodern fiction: "the Kennedy brothers, Richard Nixon, Chairman Mao, Lenin, Trotsky, Sigmund Freud, Idi Amin, Che Guevara, Sanjay Gandhi, Norman Mailer, Malcolm X, Rudolph Hess, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor" (85).

James's novel does not just rely on a global collective memory, however, but makes that memory a major theme: who is remembered by whom and how? The novel explores why and how people come to figure in collective memory, what happens when they do, and why they may not want to. It also highlights differences between a local and a global collective memory. This article will first explore the conditions under which real people enter the novel under their own names, because those occasions are a measure of the cultural knowledge that readers are imagined as sharing. A preliminary conclusion is that people, to be remembered under their own names in fiction, must first have entered the historical record, meaning nonfiction. But to enter the historical record and have an impact on collective memory is to have one's name travel disembodied through the thoughts of strangers; it means becoming imaginary in the sense of feeding stories and meanings detached from real bodies. In that sense history is like fiction, but the converse is also true: fiction, no less than history, shapes the collective memory. And if that is the case, then, as Greg Dening writes of the mutiny on the *Bounty*, to make history is not to change the world but to change memory (200).

[2] Mũkoma's is not an innocent example. After all, how many Kenyans remember when the anti-apartheid activist Ruth First was killed in Mozambique? Mũkoma himself is American as well as Kenyan, and his narrator's question is a way of both claiming African bona fides and challenging American standards of what counts as memorable.

James's novel does not name Marley but refers to him simply as the Singer, which raises the question of whether West Indians, Africans, or Asians who enter the global historical imagination might have a more allegorical or representative ontological status than figures from the North have. Consider the eponymous dictator in Gabriel García Márquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch* or the unnamed Big Man in V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*. In the case of James's Singer, at least, that is not so. Despite his seemingly generic appellation, the Singer has a single referent which readers everywhere must recognize to make sense of the novel at all. Indeed, many will learn things about the actual man from the novel, including the central fact that he survived an assassination attempt.

Had James called the Singer Rick Marlow, we would have said the character was merely based on Marley. As it is, the mark of his unique stature is precisely that he does not need to be named. He is not just any reggae star or like other reggae stars; he is *the* Singer; you know which one. The Singer could have retained the name "Bob Marley" without any gain of particularity. We only ever see him doing what Marley is known to have done—he lives at 56 Hope Road in Kingston (James 235); he performed at the Smile Jamaica Peace Concert (79); his nickname is the Tuff Gong (257); he is protected by the Echo Squad (63)—and we can go further and assume that he has done whatever Marley has done even if it is not explicitly mentioned. It would not be a category mistake to attribute to the Singer compositions by Marley that the text does not actually name.[3]

At one point the Singer is even referred to as Bob, a slip that feels like a relic from a previous draft (James 80). The seeming inadvertency may, of course, be intentional, a reminder that the act of calling Marley by the epithet "the Singer" is a rule in a game that the novel plays, a rule that can be broken. The rules in James's novel are variations of a familiar code that has long governed migrants from the world of actual people to the world of fiction: (1) to enter fiction real people have almost always had to change their names *unless*, like Marley, they are already established elements of the world that readers are conscious of sharing with other readers; and (2) if people do retain their names or identities when they enter fiction as characters, they need to remain in the background, and readers' access to their thoughts is blocked. For at least a century these rules have no longer applied to historical fiction, where the long dead, such as Virgil, Abraham Lincoln, or Thomas Mann, can be central focalizers whose thoughts are the subject of novels, but the rules have remained in effect, until very recently, for people who are still alive or were alive during the author's own lifetime. They apply in James's novel.

Alex Pierce, a white American journalist, is in Jamaica and assigned to the trail of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, who function in the world of the novel just as they do for most readers: as people familiar from other cultural sources though

[3] The novel names "Midnight Ravers," "Revolution," "Get Up Stand Up," "Small Axe," "Rat Race," "Johnny Was a Good Man," "Them Belly Full," "Natural Mystic," "Crazy Baldhead," "Concrete Jungle."

not known personally. The presence of real people's names in fiction, frequently politicians and celebrities such as musicians and film stars, serves the significant purpose of establishing points of contact between the world of the fiction and the world that readers are aware that they share with others. Such people act as *realemes*, anchoring the novel to an extratextual world and evoking a place and a time in order to solidify the novel's own world building. Pierce's constant name-checking reveals his and his author's knowledge of music from the seventies, both from American pop charts[4] and from Jamaica,[5] establishing his tastes and his personality.

Marley's fellow Wailers, Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh, are also referred to by name, and the implication is that they exist in the same world, even the same Jamaica, as Jagger and Richards. Marley himself figures as just such a *realeme* in the background of other novels whenever a character listens to his music. For example, in Novuyo Rosa Tshuma's *House of Stone*, he appears onstage at Rufaro Stadium in Harare at Zimbabwe's independence celebrations (129). When fictional characters read real books, the titles and authors' names also figure as *realemes* establishing a common world. In James's novel Naipaul's travelogue *The Middle Passage* is cited respectfully by both the CIA agent Barry DiFlorio and the gang member Tristan Phillips (138, 452). Readers who do not catch these references will correctly assume that they can be readily looked up in Wikipedia.

The cultural references that the novel shares with the world of readers are extratextual in the sense of outside the world of the novel, but not in the sense of outside printed text altogether, for if "fictionalized entities," real people who have undergone the ontological transformation "into fictional possible," are to be recognized by readers, readers must already have met their names in print, in the news, in books, or in other forms of nonfiction, or must trust that they can find them there. In other words, to enter fiction under their own names, people must already have undergone a prior "transworld morphing" onto paper and other media (Doležel 85). Marley and other recognizable fictionalized entities have already been *fact*ionalized; before claiming asylum in fiction, they must have traveled through the third country of nonfiction. Napoleon, Goethe, or Shakespeare, but also Rafael Trujillo, Seamus Heaney, or Madame Mao can keep their names in novels because they have achieved status in a collective imagination. They already have identities and stories that fiction writers count on readers knowing or sort of knowing. In many cases, of course, novels themselves help fill in these stories; in addition to relying on the collective historical imagination, they confirm and shape it.

[4] Names include Roberta Flack, Sly Stone, Boney M, "Ma Baker," ABBA, Tony Orlando and Dawn, the Carpenters, the Who, the Velvet Underground, Serge Gainsbourg, Marty Robbins, the Ramones, Chuck Berry, Pink Floyd, Engelbert Humperdinck, Bachman Turner Overdrive, Deep Purple, Jimi Hendrix, Paul McCartney and the Beatles, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Carly Simon, Andy Gibb, Sid Vicious, and John Lennon.

[5] Skeeter Davis, Prince Buster, Desmond Dekker, Delroy Wilson, Millie Small, Lee Scratch Perry, Dillinger, Big Youth, the Skatalites, the Heptones, Ken Lazarus, Jimmy Cliff, Third World, Don Drummond, Jacob Miller, Junior Soul, and Black Uhuru all get name-checked.

James's novel, however, also thematizes the difference between a local and a global knowledge, the fact that not everyone knows the same things. The CIA agent Barry DiFlorio proves his cultural sophistication by name-checking the Beatles' own name-checking of Desmond Dekker in the song "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," a case of British icons explicitly referring to a Jamaican musician, albeit without the expectation that all their fans will catch the reference (James 19). DiFlorio knows the Jamaican connection of the Beatles' song, but he is speaking to a cashier who knows ska but not "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" and for whom Dekker carries more resonance than do the Beatles. James's readers are expected to gauge these different levels of cultural knowledge and ignorance. As we shall see, while Jamaican readers will know that Bob Marley was shot and by whom, people elsewhere are unlikely to know and will learn about it from the novel.

In *A Brief History* the Jamaican prime ministers, Michael Manley and Edward Seaga, and their political parties, the People's National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), retain their names. The politicians do not do anything in James's novel that they did not do in the historical record, but they remain as distant from the other characters as they are from most readers. The closest that they come to the narrative foreground is when the Singer invites them onstage at his April 22, 1978, concert, which is described from the point of view of someone in the audience. People who retain their names upon entering fiction can do things they are not known to have done in actuality, but they cannot, at least not until relatively recently, do things they were known *not* to have done.[6] The type of belief required by realist fiction, while not "based on factual truth," is commonly felt to be "weakened by falsifiable claims" (Michael McKeon qtd. in Jacobs 16).

If Michael Manley were to move any closer to the foreground of James's novel and, for instance, meet the gang lord Josey Wales, who is one of the novel's twelve narrators, he would have had to change his name. Rachel Mordecai explains how "avatars" of Michael Manley work in three popular Jamaican novels about the 1970s:

> *[Tony] Sewell's David Cooper is called "Solomon" (153), recalling the sobriquet "Joshua" that Manley was given by his supporters. [Lee] 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). [Perry] 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."* (72)

In *The Black Peacock*, a novel by Manley's daughter Rachel, her father becomes the Jamaican politician Jacob Strong. (Of course, people whom the author knows

[6] In the twenty-first century it has become possible to write novels in which still-living people become protagonists and keep their names. An example is Hillary Clinton in Curtis Sittenfeld's *Rodham*. In that case the signal that this is fiction is that the biography is flagrantly altered, and people do things they did not actually do: Sittenfeld's Hillary does not marry Bill, for example.

personally almost always must change their names when they enter fiction.) In these books readers must recognize the historical prime minister—"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"—but Manley cannot retain his name (Mordecai 72).[7]

This rule is best illustrated by the case of Edward Seaga. When the opposition leader is teleported into the pages of James's novel, he undergoes a doubled reincorporation. In the background of the narration, he retains his own name and does only what he did in history books, but in the foreground, he also becomes Peter Nasser, who retains Seaga's Lebanese ethnicity (called Syrian), his leadership position in the JLP, his marriage to a Miss Jamaica like Mitsy Constantine Seaga, and his habit of wearing dark glasses (James 112, 134).[8] Nasser is a comment on JLP politicians in general and Seaga in particular, but having shed his source's name, he can interact with the novel's narrators and even order murders and carry out at least one himself while allowing his author to maintain plausible deniability. Just as Seaga appears under two guises in the novel, the name "Nasser" points in two directions at once; away from Seaga, making the character fictional, but also toward the world-historical Egyptian president, thus circling back allegorically to the Jamaican politician as names in a roman à clef do.

Bob Marley belongs to a jet-setting elite who need not change their names when crossing the border between fiction and nonfiction; like Manley or Seaga he remains in the background, and we are not given access to his interiority. The novel, however, is centered on the assassination attempt, and Marley, its target, looms large in the thoughts of characters to whose thoughts we do have access, several of whom are obsessed to the point of addressing their thoughts to him directly. His charismatic sway over others means that his name assumes a disembodied life of its own. As Alex Pierce explains, the Singer is "[a]n allegory kinda, he exists when some girl passes by the hotel window singing that she's sick and tired of the ism and schism" (James 82). Marley's fame makes him of a different order than the novel's narrators, more real but also less. Nina Burgess, who has once been his lover, says he "is so big nobody can see him anymore" (32). In interviews James has explained that he called him the "Singer" to convey that, even before his entry into fiction, Marley "was already an icon and a symbol and not really a person," afflicted by the thinning and flattening out that happen when people enter the imagination of strangers (Jones). In making the passage to mythic status before he entered the novel, the Singer lost the materiality conferred by a proper name and became almost translucent.

Naomi Jacobs identified a new genre in the 1990s that she called "fiction biography," a genre that would include novels such as Caryl Phillips's *A View of the Empire at Sunset*, about Jean Rhys; Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, about Gertrude

[7] In David Dusty Cupples's novel *Stir It Up*, Manley does appear as a character under his own name.

[8] Jason Frydman identifies Nasser as an "Edward Seaga stand-in" (43). Rhone Fraser says James told him Nasser was based on Seaga and Ferdinand Yap (81).

Stein and Alice B. Toklas; and Kevin Barry's *Beatlebone*, about Lennon (xix).[9] Fiction biographers "trust their intuitive sympathy or communion with the subject" and fill in the picture where the nonfiction biographer, limited to the archival record, must remain silent (Jacobs xx). Thomas Mann, John Lennon, and Hadley Richardson, Hemingway's wife, can have fiction biographies written about them because they died before the novelist was born. Their presence in novels provides a more intense version of a process of imagining that has already occurred in nonfiction biographies, which must also engage in imaginative reconstruction built on the hollow left by the absent body. Paul Valéry described literary characters as "living without entrails [vivant sans entrailles]" (Lavocat 531), and the dead who have entered history have in common with fictional characters that their names float free from their bodies.

It is different for the living or the recently dead, those who breathe or have breathed the same air as the author. When these enter fiction, leaving behind their bodies and becoming their names, it is as though they lose rather than gain life. Françoise Lavocat argues that "the representation of the passage from reality to fiction evokes that of death" ("La représentation du passage de la frontière entre la réalité et la fiction évoque, enfin, la mort" [470]; my translation), a point also made by McHale (231). In not giving access to Marley's thoughts, James's novel more closely resembles a second genre that Jacobs calls "fiction history" than it does fiction biography (xx). While fiction biography claims to show a truth inaccessible to the nonfiction biographer, fiction histories "draw back from the historical figure," whose complexities "are simplified into the outlines of the public persona by which that individual has become known" (Jacobs 200). World-historical celebrities who feature in novels can often feel to the reader more invented and artificial than the fictional characters around them. Kingsley Amis writes that, although writers cannot "truly invent anyone or anything," "the closer the likeness of the real interesting person, the less interesting he will be in the novel" (qtd. in Jacobs 19). "It follows," Jacobs explains, "that historical figures can be used only in very limited ways." What Jacobs calls "fiction histories" typically draw "back from the historical figure," whose complexities "are simplified into the outlines of the public persona by which that individual has become known" (200). The persona is "that same person as idealized or vilified in the public imagination, an image projected officially through public acts and unofficially through rumor, caricature, and satire" (19–21).

The Singer is like other larger-than-life figures who have a single referent: the Widow in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, whom the novel itself eventually names as Indira Gandhi;[10] the Auteur in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*, whom readers must recognize as Francis Ford Coppola; or the president code-

[9] Novels that present living people under pseudonyms but require that they be recognized, like Hanif Kureishi's *The Last Word*, about V. S. Naipaul, or Jeet Thayil's *The Book of Chocolate Saints*, about the Indian artist Francis Newton Souza and his circle, could also be considered fiction biographies.

[10] Indira Gandhi sued Rushdie for libel, not for the novel's depiction of her as the mythic figure of the Widow but for the way it depicted her as a *realeme* in the historical background of the fictional narrative.

named Mastodon in Carl Hiaasen's *Squeeze Me*. All of these are afflicted by a hollowing out inseparable from their claim to a place in the imagination of others.

Marcia Douglas's novel *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* imagines Marley differently. He is a central character and focalizer and retains his name, so the fictional nature of the work must be signaled another way, by having Marley do what he is not known to have done. Douglas's Marley has died and talks to Marcus Garvey and Haile Selassie in the world of the dead before being reborn in Jamaica in another body. To enter the world of print is still a form of death, but death has changed its meaning. Douglas's novel works with types, not in the sense of stereotypes but in the sense of Rastafarian typology—an apocalyptic vision, cosmic in scale, of Babylon, slavery, and Exodus. Her Marley wields the mythic stature of the Singerman in poems by Kei Miller, whose songs literally build roads in Jamaica.

The Singer's celebrity in James's novel is an ironic secular parody of the symbolic resonance that Douglas's Marley has. We are not given access to his thoughts, but the novel is very much about the real shooting, an event told, however, from the point of view of the shooters. Pierce, the journalist, is credited with realizing that the real story here is the internecine gang warfare in Kingston: "[E]ven though the Singer is the center of the story . . . there's a version of this story that's not really about him, but about the people around him, the ones who come and go that might actually provide a bigger picture than me asking him why he smokes ganja" (221). Marley was shot by the gang lord Lester "Jim Brown" Coke, who, in James's novel, becomes Josey Wales.

Entering Fiction under Another Name

The world-famous Singer is the center of the novel's plot, in the senses of both the story and the assassination conspiracy, but that center is a deliberately hollow one. The novel's actual unmoved mover and the mastermind of the shooting attempt is Josey Wales. The don is responsible for orchestrating most of the events and for bringing together the distinct worlds of the street gangs, Jamaican politics, anti-Castro counterrevolutionaries, Latin American cartel kingpins, and the drug trade in New York. He controls events but also knowledge of the events, silencing some through violence or fear, and misleading others by laying low and playing dumb.

Lubomír Doležel distinguishes "fictional*ized* entities" (emphasis added), characters who "have counterparts in actual historical agents," from "fictional entities" who are wholly invented, but we need to make a further distinction among fictional*ized* entities: those who appear in the world of the novel much as they did in the world outside the novel and to whom readers do *not* have privileged access, like Marley and Manley; and those whose interiorities become the subject of the novel and are thus what make the narration fiction as opposed to history (84). Because we are given access to their interiorities, the latter have had their identities scrambled to advertise their new ontology. When the dons Lester "Jim Brown" Coke and Claudie Massop enter James's novel, they become Josey Wales and Papa-Lo.

James is doing what fiction writers have always done: to state the obvious, fiction is not bound to referentiality in the way that history writing is. Dorrit Cohn explains that "when we speak of the nonreferentiality of fiction, we do not mean that it *can*

not refer to the real world outside the text, but that it *need* not refer to it." Fiction has two features that distinguish it from history: "(1) its references to the world outside the text are not bound to accuracy; and (2) it does not refer *exclusively* to the real world outside the text" (15). But what Cohn characterizes as opportunity—fiction is free to refer or not—may also be conceived of as a constraint, even if the bonds feel silken: fiction has, until recently, required at least some nonreferentiality and, in many cases, could not directly refer to the real world. That nonreferentiality takes the form of changing names or of inventing manifestly counterhistorical facts.

Of Josey Wales we can say that he does what the real "Jim Brown" Coke is known to have done—his son dies as Jah-T Coke did; he himself dies in a jail fire, as Coke did; and he organizes the assassination attempt against Marley, as Coke did—and that he does not do anything that Coke is known *not* to have done. But he thinks thoughts that we cannot know that Coke thought, so he must be rebaptized to signal his new ontological status as a fictional narrator. James explains to Jeff Vasishta:

> *I'm using a real event as a springboard and I know that one of the consequences of using a real event is that people are going to play, "Spot the real person." Is Josey Wales this guy or that guy? To reclaim it as fiction, a lot of the characters I combine. People may say that Josey Wales is clearly Jim Brown, but Jim Brown has no Chinese features. There are so many aspects of this story that we'll never know. A lot of the real players are dead. A lot of the others are not talking. The internal life of these characters, including the ones that did the shooting, we'll never know, and that's what I'm interested in. So yeah, I did make it deliberate to throw people off because I didn't want the conversation to be just about that.* (Vasishta)

Fiction does not respect the limits of what can be known of other people as nonfiction has to. Only fiction can imagine the internal life of historical actors; if nonfiction does so, critics call foul. If those actors are contemporaries or near-contemporaries, the status of fiction must be signaled by new names and by combining their features with those of others, processes that correspond to the displacement and condensation that Freud says are characteristic of dreamwork.

The distinction between the ontology of the Singer, an anonymous version of Marley inseparable from his fame, and that of Josey Wales and Papa-Lo, pseudonymous versions of actual gang lords, has implications for their entourages. When Marley migrates into fiction and becomes the Singer, his name does not wholly disappear but is merely held in abeyance: as we have noted, at one point he is even called Bob. Marley's name reappears when he makes the further return migration from the world of events in the novel into the textual realm of the news depicted in the novel, which is identical to the news in the world of readers. A piece that Alex Pierce is writing for *Rolling Stone* about the origins of the Jamaican rudeboy figure explicitly refers to "Bob Marley's lyrics" (James 84). So, too, the people closest to the Singer, including his wife, his girlfriend, and his manager, all share his anonymity until they make the further transition into newspaper headlines, at which point they are explicitly named—the Singer's wife as Rita, his manager as Don Taylor, and his back-up singers (incompletely) as the "I-Thr" (253, 257).

By contrast, when "Jim Brown" Coke and Claudie Massop have their names changed to enter the novel as narrators, so must all immediately around them. Their Shower Posse, so called because it rained down bullets, becomes the Storm Posse, who cut down their enemies and bystanders "in a hailstorm of bullets" (672). The changes of the gang leaders' names also affect their territorial bases. Jamaica and Kingston are named as such throughout James's novel, as are the districts of Half Way Tree (28), Concrete Jungle (26), and McGregor Gully (344),[11] but Tivoli Gardens, the JLP stronghold associated with Massop and Coke and built on the clearance of an area called Back O Wall, has its name changed to Copenhagen City, built on the site of the former Balaclava. The dons of the rival PNP gang, Tony Welch and Bucky Marshall, become the composite figure of Roland Palmer aka Shotta Sherriff.[12] Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherriff, unlike the Singer, retain their fictional names when they enter the pages of the *Star* newspaper, as does Josey Wales when his name scrolls across the bottom of a TV newscast (311, 685).[13] In the world of the news and history books that James's novel shares with readers, Marley is consistently Marley, but "Jim Brown" Coke and Claudie Massop do not figure, only Josey Wales and Papa-Lo do. James's non-Jamaican readers may be forgiven for not knowing the names Coke or Massop or that Coke and Massop have Wikipedia pages of their own.

All readers must recognize the Singer as Marley; James does not want readers to identify Josey Wales with "Jim Brown" Coke. The most obvious reason for the asymmetry is an aesthetic one: the novelist is more interested in the gang leaders, so we enter their interiorities and not Marley's. But we can make a further distinction based on levels of cultural awareness. It is as possible (as well as perhaps necessary) to invent a fictional gang lord as it is unnecessary (and perhaps not possible) to invent another Marley, because "Jim Brown" Coke is famous only in Jamaica and not beyond. The generic border between fiction and nonfiction, which, if crossed, mandates the adoption of an invented name, is related to another border, that between two sets of publics, the local and the global.

When James tells Vasishta he wants to block the identification of Josey Wales with "Jim Brown" Coke, it is Jamaican readers who will make that identification. Non-Jamaican readers are likely to assume that Josey Wales and Papa-Lo are

[11] Rema, Waterhouse, Trench Town, Denham Town, St Andrew, Barbican, Maresceaux Road, Wolmer's Boys' School, and Mico College are also all name-checked.

[12] The Southside POW posse becomes the Wang Gang. The Renkers become the Ranking Dons. Burry Boy and Feathermop become Buntin-Banton and Dishrag (Gunst 192; James 454). Schoolie becomes A-Plus (Gunst 198; James 473). The police inspector Trinity becomes Rawhide (Gunst 195; James 455). The anti-Castroist Cuban Luis Posada Carriles becomes Luis Hernan Rodrigo de las Casas, alias Doctor Love, like his model a member of the Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations. Matthews Lane, the PNP stronghold adjoining Tivoli Gardens, becomes Eight Lanes. Riverton becomes Garbagelands (James 255).

[13] Dennis "Copper" Barth, who was killed by police but whose death was plotted by Coke, becomes Dennis "Copper" Brown, who is killed on Josey Wales's orders (Gunst 107; James 389). The retention of the nickname in the novel suggests that, in an early draft, all the characters once kept their real names and only later were other names substituted. The suggestion of inadvertence may, of course, be intentional.

merely types of the gangster. In a review of the novel in the *New York Times*, Zachary Lazar writes, "The man who comes to kill the Singer, icon of peace, is a gangster whose export business is not reggae but cocaine. It doesn't matter whether this hypothesis is factually verifiable. It isn't. What matters is whether the story is persuasive and suggestive."

Readers who assume with Lazar that we cannot verify who shot Marley would, however, be wrong. James, who was born in 1970 and grew up in middle-class suburbs of Kingston, has insisted in interviews that he knew nothing about life in the ghettos and had to do research and use his imagination to write *A Brief History* (Cocozza). One of James's nonfiction sources, easily identified, although James does not to my knowledge ever acknowledge it, is Laurie Gunst's 1995 reportage on Jamaican gangs, *Born Fi' Dead*. In that account, a gang member close to the events, Trevor Phillips, reported that Marley himself identified "Jim Brown" Coke as having been there the night he was shot (197). Nor is this exactly a secret. Jamaicans of a certain generation have long known Coke was responsible, and this well-known secret is the subject of a recent Netflix documentary *Remastered: Who Shot the Sheriff?*; but with Gunst, the identity of Marley's shooter entered the print record.

James told *Guernica* that "[t]he things that people think are made up are actually true,"[14] but it is the nature of fiction that makes people assume that what happened was made up (Greenidge). The transition of the shooting of Marley from history to fiction comes at the cost not of referentiality, as Lazar suggests, but of the appearance of verifiability. Fiction makes it unclear what really happened and what did not. Jamaican readers, who may recognize "Jim Brown" Coke and perhaps shudder, must be prevented from identifying Josey Wales with Coke; non-Jamaicans are misled to think true things have been "made up."

James writes about an actual event in a named country at a very specific historical conjuncture, but one that occupies different spaces in the local oral imagination and the global collective imagination of readers. A pair of epigraphs, both from oral sources, insist on the veracity of the novel's depiction of that event: a lyric by Bonnie Raitt, "Gonna tell the truth about it, / Honey, that's the hardest part," and a Jamaican proverb, "If it no go so, it go near so," which is a claim to be telling something as close to the truth as we are likely ever to get. In much smaller print, however, in the book's edition notice, is the notice that the publisher's legal department insisted be included: "This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental." The epigraphs from oral sources suggest a documentary impulse, the small-print legalese a purely aesthetic one (though, of course, such disclaimers often covertly signal that the resemblance to real persons, far from a coincidence, was the original inspiration).

When Lazar writes that all that "matters is whether the story is persuasive and suggestive," he implies the Aristotelian distinction between history and poetry (or

[14] He also told Kima Jones, "Some of the things that people think are invented are actually true" (Jones).

literature). Literature, because it tells not what happened but what *might* have happened and is interested in general laws of human nature rather than historical accidents, can claim to be truer, in the sense of more faithful to universal principles or to the zeitgeist, than journalism or history writing, which are bound to respect the random and accidental merely because it happened. James's fiction, Lazar says, achieves verisimilitude and mythic resonance, albeit at the expense of referentiality and verifiability. In effect, this is an account not of what happened but of the kind of thing that could happen, and that is all one can expect from fiction. It no go so, but often it go near so.

Gunst herself asks, "if we cannot . . . speak the true names of politicians and their hired killers . . . what hope is there for Jamaica?" (253). She poses the question to journalists and writers of history like herself, as well as to their readers, but not, of course, to writers or readers of fiction. To protect her informants, Gunst invented names for them, such as Brambles or the Ayatollah. In nonfiction genres, by contrast with fiction, anonymity or a change of name are, paradoxically, signs not of fictionality but of a special access to a truth that is being fixed on the page for the first time. When, however, Gunst ushered her informant Trevor Phillips into her print account, he asked her to retain the name on his birth certificate. He reasoned that everyone in the gangs would recognize him anyway: "I was chairman of the Central Peace Council in 1978 and deputy general secretary of the PNPYO—you can't disguise those things, or you wouldn't be telling the true story" (248–49). Trevor Phillips (the reason I use his full name will become clear) wanted to make sure his story was known and believed, and standing behind the story under his own name was a way of underwriting it.

In his oral testimony to Gunst, Trevor Phillips aspired to "history," the written arbiter that ensures that events and experiences are known even to distant strangers and remembered beyond the present moment. Gunst came to feel that author and informant had "traded positions of dominance: in his world, I was the ultimate outsider, the know-nothing, and thus he became my tutor," while he, in turn, appreciated her academic skills, which she "derided and apologized for," as "essential tools," for "he knew that without someone from a 'scribal culture' to listen to hours and days and months of taped testimony, without someone who knew enough written history to make order out of the chaos of sufferation, the lives he had seen snuffed out would never become part of the written, and thus remembered, record" (258). And the publication of Gunst's book likely did cost Trevor Phillips his life. He was tortured and killed, presumably for naming Eric "Chineyman" Vassel, leader of the posse in his home district of McGregor Gully (251). If the ontological move from an oral world to an existence in print can be figured as a form of death, in this case, the move into print resulted in Trevor Phillips's literal death, and his nickname "Bones" took on an ironic, sinister hue (247).

Retaining his name authorized Trevor Phillips's witness, but it also made his courageous stand for the sake of the printed record the meaning of his life. He was unwilling to be subsumed into a type or to be just another Jamaican *shootah*. When migrating posthumously from Gunst's nonfiction to James's fiction, he undergoes the barest of name changes, keeping his surname and becoming Tristan Phillips

and not, say, Tristan Peters.[15] It is as though James felt himself bound to honor the man's wish to appear in print under his own name, but was limited in his power to do so because he was writing fiction. He, too, seems to have felt that to disguise those things was not to tell the true story.

While in Rikers prison, James's character Tristan Phillips tells a visiting white American journalist researching gang violence in Jamaica many of the same stories that Trevor Phillips told Gunst (and a few stories told her by others). And the fictionalized Tristan Phillips goes so far as to tell Alex Pierce: "Yeah, you can use my real name. Then whose name you was going to use?" (James 569). Tristan Phillips's insistence on retaining his "real name" when making the transition to print is undercut by irony, for the novel has already changed Trevor Phillips's name. When a fictional character asks to retain his name in print, what matters is not the referent and its indexical relation to something outside the text, but the dramatic nature of the gesture. Fiction folds the fundamental act of nonfiction, speaking "the true names of politicians and their hired killers," into a performance, an act whose meaning is its repeatable form and not its specific referentiality.

James's irony here is part of a larger deflation: his Tristan Phillips is a lesser person than Gunst's informant, for he has told other gang members about the American journalist who interviews him, in effect selling the latter out (672). It is as though James projected onto the character any guilt that James might have felt about fictionalizing a man who had died because of his insistence that his story be told under his own name.

When I do what James warns readers against and play "Spot the real person," what interests me is not judging James's novel on its accuracy but understanding what James is doing and what fiction does. If there is an ethical charge in my discussion, it is different from the usual ethical questions raised with regard to the depiction of real people in fiction. Those questions have to do with privacy and harm to reputation.[16] Felicia Ackerman, for instance, concludes that a fiction author should not have the right to reveal private information, to suggest something false about real people, or to use others just for their own purposes. But those questions are different when the people involved already figure in the collective imagination or the print record. I am asking about the ethics of resorting to fiction when to do so blurs what actually happened, of taking another's story and making its actual occurrence subsidiary to aesthetic and narrative concerns, of abstracting the moral choices made and the qualities displayed by real people away from those people and giving them to generic others.

In *HHhH*, his "novel" about the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi "Butcher of Prague," Laurent Binet scorns every move to fictionalize, such as to add metaphor or interiorization, for he feels that to do so dishonors the heroism of the resistance fighters Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš. Those who bravely gave their lives

[15] Phillips's fictional namesake is, like his real-life model, a "coolie," meaning partly of East Indian descent, an "old former rudie who runs a youth group and mediates between the gangs," and a Rasta who draws up a peace map and chairs the "Unity Council" (James 83, 427). He has read Eldridge Cleaver and, more surprisingly, Bertrand Russell in prison (83; Gunst 192).

[16] See, e.g., Kolker.

must be named and remembered, especially because they are Czech—in other words, from a minor nation—and their story is less likely to feature in a global collective memory. Any move to fictionalize risks reducing them to the unreal. Binet is concerned that "if I plant this image on paper, as I am surreptitiously doing, I am not sure I am honoring it. I reduce the man to a vulgar fictional character and his deeds to literature" (Mais si je couche cette image sur le papier, comme je suis sournoisement en train de le faire, je ne suis pas sûr de lui rendre hommage. Je réduis cet homme au rang de vulgaire personnage, et ses actes à de la littérature [10]; my translation). The incomplete knowledge we have of the actions of real people reflects their opacity, but also their autonomy and moral responsibility; to take what they did and make it fiction, Binet argues, is to deny the dignity of the people involved. The meaning of the story then becomes the effect it has on readers, and the actual people involved are erased. (One may ask why Binet's book is called a novel at all, when its fictional or at least non-nonfictional elements appear limited to the metafictional discussion of narrative ethics.)

Binet is talking of heroes and villains, but a similar ethical question can be asked of the fictional treatment of victims. Roberto Bolaño's novel *2666* fictionalizes the hundreds of murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, in the last decade of the twentieth century, inventing names for the victims and the town, which is called Santa Teresa and which Bolaño moves further west. Shaj Mathew finds that

> *[o]n one hand, Bolaño is giving voice to the hundreds of murdered women in this section—reclaiming them via art—but on the other, this very effort to document these forgotten women undermines itself: after reading about the manners of death of so many of these women, their identities blur together and become the heap of unrecognized cadavers indistinguishable from one another. This accumulation of so many deaths and the spare, hard prose in which they are written performs in a mimetic sense the general public's (apathetic) view of these women's interchangeability.* (410)

I am not saying James should have named "Jim Brown" Coke and Trevor Phillips—that is, that he should not have written a novel—but rather asking what exactly fiction is and what its relation is to what is revealingly called nonfiction. What happens when testimony, supplied and collected sometimes at great personal cost, is transformed into fiction? If there is hope or even truth in James's novel, it is different from the hope and truth Gunst provided by putting the stories of sufferers into print.

Being Remembered and How

In asking what it means to change the names of real people to make them fictional characters, I am not asking impertinent or deliberately naive questions but ones that James's novel itself raises. In exploring what it means to write history, to invent fiction, and to contribute to a collective imagination, James thematizes both the transition of people into the world of print and the adoption by people of fictional names.

In the novel's final section, set in 1991, Alex Pierce has written for the *New Yorker* a four-part account of events that we have just read about, also called "A Brief History of Seven Killings" (James 654). The white American journalist who, at the

end of *Brief History*, writes a briefer "History" is in a position analogous to that of the colonial District Commissioner at the end of Chinua Achebe's classic *Things Fall Apart*: an outsider-witness who, alone among the characters, is in a position to write of the events we have just read about, but whose account will be troublingly different from the one we have read. Achebe's District Commissioner plans an ethnographic memoir, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, in which the suicide of the novel's protagonist, Okonkwo, will figure as a single paragraph (Achebe 185). The severely limited proportions of the account by the cultural outsider *inside* the novel are the measure of its misrepresentation. In both James's and Achebe's novels, the print version written at the end of events is based on an actual nonfiction book that preceded the writing of the novel: Alex Pierce is a composite of Gunst herself and Mattathias Schwartz, who wrote a piece on Lester Coke's son Dudus for the *New Yorker*; the extratextual model for the fictional ethnography in Achebe is *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* by Arthur Glyn Leonard.

The analogy I draw with Achebe could suggest that James's novel is restoring to its full length a Black Jamaican experience that has been traduced by nonfiction. Fiction would then be to nonfiction as Black is to white, Jamaican is to American, and truth is to misrepresentation. James, however, is not satirizing Pierce or Gunst. Tristan Phillips agreed to collaborate with Pierce, as Trevor Phillips did with Gunst, because he feels "somebody should put all of this craziness together, because no Jamaican can do it, brother, either we too close or somebody going to stop we" (James 568). And Pierce runs the very danger that the real Trevor Phillips ran, miraculously surviving one attempt on his life ordered by Josey Wales, and in the end being shot and wounded by another gangster. After his story has started appearing in print, Pierce is visited by a Jamaican gangster who ties him up and threatens him because he objects to what the journalist has written, including, for instance, a description of one woman as "[s]hort, chubby . . . [and] dark with hair that looked like the extensions were just removed." "Nothing make a white man sound more white," sniffs Eubie Brown, the gangster, "than when he try to sound like a black girl" (857–58).[17] Brown's greatest concern, however, is not so much with Pierce's misrepresentation of events as with his proximity to the truth. If it no go so, it go too near so for some people's comfort.

Michael Niblett suggests that Pierce's article, "A Brief History of Seven Killings," is the novel's thematization of its own "potentially problematic packaging of Jamaican culture for an international audience" (64). If so, the thematization is complicated. Pierce is not satirized for missing the story—he gets the story—but his nonfiction is nonetheless distinguished from the novel in which he appears, because the latter contains him as his own writing does not. Even though he is one of the narrators, Pierce seemingly cannot avoid being a type, the American journalist: his escape from Josey Wales's top hitman feels like stock genre fiction; the scene with Eubie Brown, even as it establishes Pierce's authority within the novel, is hardboiled cliché. Stock gestures are near impossible to escape, in fiction and

[17] Eubie Brown is based on Coke's right-hand man in America, Vivian Blake, whose last name suggested the character's first name.

nonfiction alike. As we have seen, James's novel makes even the act of retaining one's name when entering the printed record into a generic performance.

James's novel also shows the passage of people into print from the perspective of those who are desperate to be remembered. "Somebody goin' write about the judgment of the good and the wicked," says Demus, a Rasta gunman, imagining the great book in which the deeds of humans are recorded (James 52). Demus wants there to be such a book, for it would mean his actions and his suffering were remembered, even if only to be damned. The gunman regards himself as someone with a story to tell, a would-be Trevor Phillips who, in the absence of a Laurie Gunst, interpellates an imagined writer-creator: "*Somebody need to listen* to me and it might as well be you" (52). The don Papa-Lo also needs an audience for his story: in his own interior monologues, he addresses an absent judge and jury: "Listen to me now . . . my magnanimous gentlemens" (23).

Demus's conviction that he is worthy of being written about and his concern for the historical record are attended by the certainty that his story will inevitably be traduced:

> *Somebody, maybe forty years later when God come for all of we leaving not one. Somebody going write about this, sit down at a table on a Sunday afternoon with wood floor creaking and fridge humming but no ghost around him like they around me all the time and he going to write my story. And he won't know what to write, or how to write it because he didn't live it, or know what cordite smell like or how blood taste when it stay stubborn in your mouth no matter how much you spit. He never feel it in the one drop.* (James 52)

Demus is but a poor Jamaican gunman, after all, and if his story is to be told, it will be by someone whose education distances them from his experience.[18] "This is what I want to say before the writer say it for me," says Demus, but that is as impossible a desire as Tristan Phillips's request to Alex Pierce to keep his real name (56). For a fictional character, there is no saying anything before the writer does. The desire to enter the printed record is itself a projection by the author onto a character of his own invention.

The mark of Demus's purely fictional nature, without an existence outside the pages of the novel, is that he has only the one name.[19] Demus is not a person whose name was changed when he entered fiction, but a name around which a character developed. The first appearances of the names Demus, Bam-Bam, Heckle, and Leggo Beast, the moment when readers encounter these gunmen, are also the first moments of their existence. Characters who have no previous existence in nonfiction, let alone in the world of flesh and blood, nevertheless do have origins outside the novel itself in other forms of fiction. Two of the gunmen, Bam-Bam and Heckle (who used to run with Jeckle [James 108]), bear the names of American cartoon

[18] James told *Guernica*, "Actually, the first time I heard a gunshot was in a Martin McDonagh play in New York" (Greenidge).

[19] Perhaps derived from Nicodemus, the actual name of a later Jamaican deejay.

characters.[20] Yet another, the hitman Tony Pavarotti, is named anachronistically in homage to the TV character Tony Soprano. Tony Soprano's migration from one fictional medium to another (as well as from one race to another, one country to another) means that people can say of Tony Pavarotti, "Can't remember him mother nor father, can't remember him growing up or doing the things boys do when growing up or getting into crosses boys get into. It's like he be the sidekick in the movie, the baaaaaaaaad *hombre* who just show up in the middle and start walk and talk like we was waiting for him all this time" (327). Their names advertise that these characters involved in a real event are fictional entities derived from other fictional entities.

Both Alex Pierce and Demus, the writer of nonfiction and the would-be native informant, are stock figures. The impulse to nonfiction cannot, it would seem, escape the already imagined, that is, the fictionalized. Gunst herself expressed the nature of her collaboration with Trevor Phillips in terms of Othello's account of how he won the love of Desdemona: "She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd; And I loved her that she did pity them" (Shakespeare qtd. in Gunst 256). In other words, she understood her relation to her informant in mythic terms derived from Shakespeare about doomed interracial love. The deeds that fill the written record or that are undertaken with an eye to the written record always retain something of the fictional performance.

The lesson to be taken is not that fictionalization always taints and falsifies collective memory, but the converse: fiction, no less than nonfiction, shapes collective memory. The readerly collective imagination includes not only Lincoln, Marley, and Hillary Clinton, but also Tony Soprano, Othello, and Okonkwo.[21] Fiction is not just something done to history, blurring and disguising it, reducing it in scale and making it typical or aestheticizing it. Fiction joins history in peopling the collective imagination.

James's novel makes its own bid for a handful of characters—Josey Wales, Papa-Lo, Nina Burgess, and Weeper, three of whom have models among people with entrails—to enter a larger cultural memory. The force of these characters is precisely their obsession with not occupying space in the imagination of others and their strategic adoption of aliases, nicknames, and pseudonyms.

When the fictional gangster Franklin Aloysius takes on the name "Josey Wales," derived from a fictional outlaw played by Clint Eastwood in an eponymous Western,[22] he is replicating the real Lester Coke's adoption of the self-glorifying sobriquet

[20] Bam-Bam's name is homegrown as well. The Maytals had a hit with "Bam Bam" in 1966: "This man, don't trouble no man / But if you trouble this man it will bring a bam bam." But the Flintstones are part of the world common to the characters: Josey Wales mentions Flintstone vitamins (James 417).

[21] Blakey Vermeule gives a list of characters who cannot travel between works of fiction but nonetheless have entered the literary imagination: "Leopold Bloom, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Anna Karenina, Aziz, Sebastian Flyte, Clarissa Dalloway, Billy Budd, Mr. Bulstrode, Hans Castorp, Clarissa Harlowe, Miss Bates, Madame Merle, Maisie, Humbert Humbert, Uncle Toby, Lovelace, Lily Bart, Isabel Archer, Emma, The Fat Foolish Scullion, Amasa Delano, Kate Clephane, Peter Walsh, Pribislav Hippe, Undine Spragg, Raffle" (51).

[22] We see Josey Wales watching Eastwood in *The Enforcer* in a movie theater (James 75).

"Jim Brown," after the American football player and lone Black actor in the film *The Dirty Dozen* (James 108).[23] "Josey Wales" was the stage name of a 1980s Jamaican "toaster" or deejay associated with dancehall, and Alex Pierce accounts for the Jamaicans' use of the film outlaw's name by explaining, "It's the grabbing of a myth and making it theirs, like a reggae singer dropping new lyrics 'pon di old version" (Evans 56; James 84). "Josey Wales" is a performance that looms as large in the consciousnesses of the narrators as the Singer does.

The name "Josey Wales" points, however, in different directions for different readerships. A Jamaican audience may recognize how the name points both to "Jim Brown" Coke and Joseph Stirling, the toaster, as well as to Eastwood and Ivan Martin in the film *The Harder They Come*, the latter based on the real outlaw Rhygin Martin. Outside Jamaica, the borrowed names of American film stars or roles may seem to advertise a mimic status, like that of the character Bogart in Naipaul's *Miguel Street*. Michael Niblett regards the gang lord as a victim of US cultural imperialism: "[T]he thoughts and perceptions of Josey Wales and his fellow gunmen are thoroughly saturated by the clichés and readymade ideas of the mass cultural narratives they consume" (64).[24] In effect, Niblett feels that, when their imaginations are filled with stock figures, people are emptied out and obey larger narratives beyond their control. To think of the don Josey Wales as mere consumer and slavish mimic of foreign culture is, however, to repeat the misjudgment of the CIA agent Louis Johnson and the JLP politician Peter Nassar, who misread the gang lord and believe they are the ones giving the orders and determining events. The CIA and the political parties think Josey Wales is too uneducated and stupid to do more than follow orders; they grievously underestimate the man and the direction of agency.

Pierce's explanation of the gang lord's use of the film outlaw's name—"It's the grabbing of a myth and making it theirs, like a reggae singer dropping new lyrics 'pon di old version"—is a form of John Tomlinson's argument against the common notion of "cultural imperialism" as a kind of brainwashing of mindless consumers of foreign culture. The idea of cultural imperialism assumes that cultural products carry a single meaning that those who repeat them are doomed also to mean.[25] But new contexts create new meanings, and those who repeat culture can also be playing with it, altering and appropriating its meaning. When the don took the name "Josey Wales," he knew what he was doing.

The far-reaching power Josey Wales exerts in the novel was, arguably, the power the historical "Jim Brown" Coke also wielded. The Kingston gang lords controlled the politicians and not the other way around:

[23] Mentioned as a film that one of the gunmen has seen (James 54).

[24] James's fictional characters often recall American television—Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner, Hannibal Heyes and Kid Curry, *Candid Camera*, Scooby Doo, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Charlie's Angels*, Bugs Bunny, *Hawaii Five-O*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Bewitched*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Dallas*, *Mannix*, *Barnaby Jones*, *Police Woman*, *Sesame Street*—and film: John Wayne, *Born Free*, *Dirty Harry*, *Ocean's Eleven*, Bruce Lee, *High Noon*, Liberty Valance, *The Sons of Katie Elder*, James Bond.

[25] Tomlinson is arguing against Herbert Schiller's *Communication and Cultural Domination*.

> *[T]he enriched Dons replaced the state as the major patrons of inner-city residents, and even replicated state services, providing housing, job opportunities, welfare and even informal systems of justice. With the invasion of the cocaine economy in the 1980s, the localised political gangs of the 1970s morphed into transnational criminal enterprises with a tight hold over local politicians. The wealth that was made from the cocaine business far outweighed any of the handouts that had been doled out by politicians in the years before. The tables were turned, and the power relations between the politicians and the Dons were changed.* (Edmonds 64)

At one point Jamaican posses controlled 40 percent of the crack cocaine trade in the United States (Edmonds 65). To attribute the violence that overtook Jamaica in the 1970s solely to familiar transpersonal forces that are already known—the CIA and Cold War politics, the IMF and neoliberal economics sponsored by the United States—is to imagine the world has only been made by Americans and to reduce all Jamaicans to victims and to mere types.

Josey Wales is responsible not just for the assassination attempt but also—and these efforts occupy a central place in the novel—for what is known of it. He conceals that he speaks Spanish, that he missed Marley on purpose, and that he staged that world-shattering event to gain sizeable control of the drug trade networks between South and North America. His efforts to eliminate witnesses, including all the gunmen involved in the shooting (something that happened), are a major plot engine. Josey Wales understands what others want and does not let them understand him, even as he wields real power. The alias "Josey Wales" makes the gang lord both more visible (the Jamaicans who fear him see him everywhere, and who can blame them?) and less so (he is content to pass under the radar of those who believe they run the world or know how the world works). Josey Wales's control of the narrative is the counter to the impulse of Demus or Tristan Phillips, who seek to be remembered. Josey Wales shapes how everyone else remembers. He helps create the version of events that omits or downplays his own role.

James, too, has grabbed another's version of events and made it his own, "like a reggae singer dropping new lyrics 'pon di old version." He does not obey Gunst's injunction to name the killers, but he does put them at the imaginative center of the novel. He thus reshapes the collective imagination, emphasizing the roles played by Jamaican characters. James's novel is not simply concerned with correcting a version of events to include Jamaican agency but also with showing how the original version was always already shaped by Jamaicans. His account from behind the scenes and inside the heads suggests that the memory of what happened was created by Jamaicans. Like Josey Wales, James's novel plays to a bifurcated audience: non-Jamaicans are allowed to think that what is true has been "made up," while Jamaican readers need to be blocked from identifying "Jim Brown" Coke.

The novel's only female narrator is also its most memorable fictional entity—that is, a character not inspired by a person from nonfiction but invented out of whole cloth.[26]

[26] Nina Burgess, while invented, does borrow traits from real people. In the novel she is the inspiration for the Marley tune "Midnight Ravers," which was actually inspired by Patricia Williams (James 32).

Nina Burgess, inadvertent witness to the shooting of the Singer, spends decades hiding from Josey Wales under false names, first in Montego Bay, then in New York. Nina's birth name, she comes to feel, "is a dead name of a dead woman in a dead city," and she compulsively borrows names from gravestones as aliases—Kim Clarke, Dorcas Palmer, or Millicent Segree—doing to herself what the author does to Coke and Trevor Phillips (James 313). Nina's adoption of new names is a concealment strategy to escape the perpetrator's gaze, yet it is also part of what makes her vivid to readers. Her adoption of new names may be a form of disguise inspired by panic, but it allows for her reinvention of herself and her place in the world. Nina's improvisation is a defining trait around which a character, with its fears and desires, coalesces. She strives to control how others see her and do not see her, and that desire is what makes her so memorable.

Conclusion

Collective memory is a source of symbolic capital and power. People seek space within it by entering the written record, by making history that will be remembered. But entering the collective memory inevitably involves distortion: one only enters the collective memory by performing a role whose meaning is already recognizable. To enter the imagination of others is to risk being hollowed out and rendered imaginable, to become a fictional character. But if there is only fiction, fiction also contributes to the collective memory. An awareness of the performative nature of identity and action is precisely how one can shape how one is remembered and, just as important, how one eludes the imagination of others. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a bid to add to the collective memory of readers everywhere, but at the heart of that bid is a recognition that Jamaicans already have their own collective memory, that they are self-conscious about what it means to come to the attention of others, and that they have always contributed to shaping the larger collective memory, including when they do not appear in it.

* * *

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