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“The white man is still there. The white duppy”: Gothic Haunting and Colourism in Marlon James’s *A Brief History of Seven Killings*

Cato Marks



Source: *The Jamaica Gleaner*, 1978. In this iconic *Gleaner* photograph, Bob Marley (centre) urges then Prime Minister Michael Manley (left) and then Opposition Leader Edward Seaga to shake hands at the One Love Peace Concert at the National Stadium on April 22, 1978 in Jamaica.

Marlon James’s *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (first published 2014) ostensibly deals with the lead up to and repercussions of the shooting of the Singer (a thinly disguised Bob

Marley) on 3 December 1976. However, the novel also tells of the internecine fighting between Jamaica's political parties in the 1970s and its devastating effects on Kingston's ghettos. The governing People's National Party (PNP), led by Michael Manley, and the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), led by Edward Seaga, oversaw what Obika Gray calls "predation politics": politicians preyed on, armed, and empowered rude boys to intimidate Kingston's ghetto voters (81). The novel traces the effects of this terror and the gang violence that led to the drug culture that infiltrated America in the 1980s and 1990s.

The novel has already generated some excellent scholarship. Lauren Shoemaker and Kedon Willis look at *Brief History's* critique of patriarchy and heteronormativity.¹ Other critics examine the novel's depiction of neocolonialism: America's role in post-independence Jamaica.² However, colourism and the Gothic in *Brief History* have not been explored. Rhone Fraser comes closest to an examination of colourism, arguing that the novel depicts a "small, white elite" that governed Jamaica; but his emphasis is neocolonial: the pressures brought to bear on Jamaica by the International Monetary Fund, American foreign policy, and the Cold War (67–68, 69).

I argue that *Brief History* draws on late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic tropes of haunting and zombification to highlight the centrality of colourism. Caribbean colourism emanates from slavery and is based on white supremacist ideologies, which equated white with freedom, positivity, civilization, and beauty; blackness denoted servitude, negativity, uncivilized, and ugliness. Because of their proximity to whiteness, mixed-race people with lighter skin were seen as more intelligent than their dark-skinned counterparts. Thus a pigmentocratic social stratification arose, headed by white people, then light-skinned people, with black people at the bottom. Colourism in Jamaica is not exclusively about skin colour and can be mitigated by class and education (see Grant 52–53; Thomas, *Modern Blackness* 101–02; Altink, "Out of Place" 256). The novel sometimes reflects this. The rude boy Funnyboy has "skin like white people," yet his class traps him in the ghetto (James, *Brief History* 12);³ and Josey Wales presumes his children can escape the ghetto if they learn to speak correctly. But *Brief History* mostly offers a rigid pigmentocratic stratification in which dark skin serves as a fixed signifier of "difference" (Brown-Glaude 35). This difference fixes dark-skinned individuals as threats to social order who need to be policed and renders their voices less powerful (if middle-class) or seemingly powerless (if poor). For example, the police incarcerate middle-class Mr. Jacobs; Nina Burgess's light-skinned father must rescue him because Jacobs "was too dark-skinned for police to assume he was proper people, even in a gabardine suit" (*BH* 29). Alex Pierce, a white American journalist, notes that "nobody forgets their place" in Jamaican hotels. Staff are "trained" to adopt the "polite" "white tone" for Caucasian clientele. But the busboy refuses to carry an African American's luggage and asks to see his "room key" (60). The Singer's dark-skinned middle-class "haters" are deemed less effective when speaking on race: "Bossman . . . get himself a big fucking degree only to have that little half-white shortass become the voice of black liberation" (87). These examples present a world in which dark skin fixes one as inferior, criminal, and in need of surveillance. Indeed, Burgess's father and the Singer evoke the white/brown saviour trope,

which echoes the words of the nation's brown fathers, Sir Alexander Bustamante (JLP) and Norman Manley (PNP), at rallies during the 1938 strikes: Bustamante cried, "I will think for you!" (qtd. in Gunst 69); Norman Manley similarly said, "[M]y head is wiser than yours" (qtd. in Post 317).

Read alongside the late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic, James's novel reveals its focus on colourism by developing Gothic tropes to explore the genesis and effects of predation politics. Peopling Jamaica with ghosts and terrains haunted by buildings, forts, and plantations from its slave and colonial past, James draws on Jamaican folklore and what Alison Struselis calls "the trope of haunting and Caribbean Gothic" (98). Set in the West Indies, late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic literature reverses negative tropes in British nineteenth-century Gothic texts about the Caribbean, which present the archipelago as haunted by the monstrous black Other: atavistic barbarous Africans whose non-Christian beliefs (obeah) and hypersexuality threaten European rationality and white purity (miscegenation) (Paravisini-Gebert 230). As Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argues, the genre draws on earlier Gothic tropes and literature to create a dialogue with them that questions earlier assumptions about blackness.⁴ Building on Paravisini-Gebert's idea, I argue that these texts are particularly concerned with colourism as a mental slavery that renders individuals zombie-like. Light-skinned characters are enthralled to a system that helps to maintain their place as heirs of their former white colonizers. In turn, dark-skinned majorities internalize self-hatred of their blackness and police and kill other dark-skinned individuals. To tease out *Brief History's* Gothic tropes and its links to colourism, I read it alongside three late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic novels identified by Paravisini-Gebert. V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (first published 1975), set in an unnamed island, explores the exploitation of dark-skinned boys. Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (first published 1984) narrates the tale of a light-skinned Jamaican girl, Clare Savage, who tries to resist succumbing to the ideologies of colourism propounded by her father and society. In Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (first published 1996), Xuela, a Dominican woman descended from a Carib mother and a Scottish African father, seeks to break free from the mental chains of colourism and self-hatred. In nineteenth-century Gothic, the mulatto and Creole are usually presented as fundamentally flawed, uncanny characters who generate fear and terror because they are either contaminated by African blood or too close to African culture.⁵ The novels I explore suggest that the fetishization of whiteness and the failure to side with oppressed black people are sources of mental and physical terror on the islands.

To contextualize my analysis, I briefly outline brown rule leading up to independence, the predation politics of Manley and Seaga, and the legacy of colourism today. Then, drawing on Caribbean Gothic tropes, I read James's character Sir Arthur George Jennings as a Gothic "literary device" partly representing pre-independence "hope" (*BH* 3), but also symbolic of a pre-independence brown elite who failed to reject the ideology of colourism and whose policies paved the way for the predation politics and violence that followed. Jennings's "white duppy" evokes the zombie (335). In Jamaican folklore, a duppy is usually an active "spirit of the dead, believed to be capable of returning to aid . . . or harm living

beings” (Cassidy and Le Page 164). However, Jennings’s duppy lacks agency and is nearer to a zombie.⁶ Originating in Haiti, the zombie figure represents the powerlessness “of the oppressed or the mindlessness of the privileged” and “the continuing struggles that black people have faced since the transatlantic slave trade” (Romdhani 77). Struselis describes a duppy as “a zombie: someone physically alive, but spiritually dead; or an evil spirit” (98). They represent the historically “dispossessed” and “exploited,” and “the poor living in present day Jamaica under neo-colonial influences” (98). In the Caribbean Gothic, slavery is the ghost that entered the world with imperialism, developed into global capitalism, and renders people into zombies—“the living dead” (102). Jennings’s powerlessness is symbolic of failed pre-independence hopes to break free from a colourist hierarchy. He is a brown saviour who cannot save: he appears before rude boys during moments of extreme terror (their brutal murders) yet can do nothing to change their destinies. Jennings is a symbolic reminder that the predation politics that is ultimately responsible for the rude boys’ murders is linked to a longer history of suffering from which the brown elite failed to make a radical break. He becomes representative of the zombie-like “mindless” privileged who cling onto power. In addition, rude boys are partially living a zombie-like existence, enthralled to the ideology of colourism and executing the predation politics of their brown rulers by further oppressing Jamaicans. Through the intertext of Peter Josh who appears as a character in the novel, *Brief History* suggests that to awake from this zombie-like existence requires a radical break with the colonial past.

Historical and Cultural Contexts: Colourism and Predation Politics

Brief History revisits colourism because, despite improvements for Jamaica’s dark-skinned majority, colourism still negatively influences their life choices. Leading up to Jamaican independence (1962) and afterwards, the JLP’s and PNP’s brown elite played down racial tensions by evoking the nation’s post-racial motto of multiculturalism: “Out of Many One People.”⁷ Led by Bustamante, and Norman Manley, this elite promoted a myth of Jamaican exceptionalism: the island’s diverse racial mix coexisted in a unique atmosphere of post-racial harmony.⁸ But Rex M. Nettleford argues that the desire to construct Jamaica as a multicultural space led to the problematic “idealization of mixed blood,” where “the hybrid is the norm,” and “pure blacks must be the aberration” (25–26). While Nettleford’s language is problematic (what is “pure black”?), his point is significant. Afro-Jamaicans were generally sidelined by the dominant culture because this hybridity was based on a hierarchical African European mix where the European element was seen to indicate a link to civility. As Maziki Thame shows, the brown elite, the once oppressed, orchestrated a “creole nationalism” in which hybridity/brownness (African and European) was the “basis of the state’s claims to legitimacy vis-à-vis its status in relation to the former colonial power” (111). To counter Black Nationalism, they distanced themselves from “blackness” and deployed “hybridity/brownness as a mobilizing and integrating force” (113). Black people

could claim “hybridity/brownness” as Jamaican citizenship and aspire to it through marrying light; but “light skin” would “remain the source of status and power” (122). In trying to render “blackness invisible,” Jennings’s generation did not tackle problems of “racial disparities” in relation to privilege or the “racial norms that held blacks as inferior” (122).

When Michael Manley and Seaga battled for power, they paid lip service to Black Nationalism. Superficially, they tried to tackle colourism. During the 1972 election campaign, Michael Manley “mobilized the symbols and rhetoric of black power and Rastafarian redemption” (Thomas, *Exceptional Violence* 81). Seaga had carried out sociological and anthropological research in West Kingston in the 1950s, was well versed in Afro-Jamaican revivalist cults and music, and promoted Afro-Jamaican culture (see Gannon 97; Gunst 79–81; Gray, *Demeaned* 66–72). However, as Gray shows, their actions in pursuit of power increased the terror and murder suffered by Kingston’s marginalized dark-skinned communities. In the 1970s, *primus inter pares* Michael Manley and opposition leader Seaga began a period of what Gray describes as “predatory rule,” in which the brown political elite stole from and assimilated “all possible cultural and ideological tendencies within the society. . . to maintain a [sic] ubiquitous hegemony” (“Predation” 76). They performed a “minstrelsy” by copying popular Afro-Jamaican culture and vernacular (78). They appeared to embody the politics of the poor and their demand for equality through a “simulacrum of poor Afro-Jamaicans’ agonized quest for democracy and cultural regard” (79). Thus Michael Manley and Seaga allowed class and racial consciousness and cultural assertions of the poor to flourish; yet they simultaneously “exercised tight control over efforts to convert cultural social power into” political power (80–81). In the novel, this image of Michael Manley and Seaga is symbolically rendered in Peter Nasser, who appears as a cold, callous brown leader in blackface: “he almost chat as bad as naigger, but still sound like he do schooling in America. Still you can never trust a man who look at everybody as replaceable” (*BH* 134). Nasser employs patois to manipulate the majority, but his anthropological and sociological research is reduced to chatting “bad as a naigger” and exploiting those beneath him: black lives are “replaceable.” This exploitation of black lives was partly achieved through the ghetto practice of “badness-honor,” whereby people demand respect through intimidation. Ghetto rude boys with their code of “badness-honor” were cultivated by the parties to “throttle the poor,” brutally suppress deviant voices, and demand “deference to” their political leaders (Gray, “Predation” 79). While seemingly embracing Afro-Jamaican popular culture, the political elite simultaneously played on the fear of “spiraling street crime,” using it to demonize the “uncooperative poor” while employing “racist caricatures of the poor as a criminal rogue element” (80). Thus they could justify “harsh policing and extra-judicial killing of criminal suspects” (80).

Therefore, rather than dismantle colourism and its effects, Seaga and Michael Manley ensured it continued to plague Jamaican society. Jamaica’s 2011 census found that although black Jamaicans made up 91.6% of the population, only 3.1% attained “jobs in that highest prestige category”: “managers, professionals, and top officials.” This contrasted with white Jamaicans, whose figure for attaining prestigious positions was 16%,

and Chinese Jamaicans at almost 40%—despite both groups accounting for only 0.4% of the population (Kelly and Bailey 697–98). And while the World Bank described wealth in Jamaica as “distributed along racial lines,” the Jamaican government continued the myth of Jamaican exceptionalism (Davis). The government’s own 2010 report to the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) denied racial discrimination, claiming, “All racial groups enjoy equal status before the law” (Kelly and Bailey 695). More worryingly, recent studies show that many young people in Jamaica who bleach their skin associate light skin with beauty and symbolic capital: where people trade on their physiognomy to improve their social status (Glenn 166). For Afro-Jamaicans, this may mean skin bleaching to appear less African or marrying a light-skinned person to ensure that their offspring *benefit* from skin-tone bias. According to researchers, these young people have “little conscious awareness of the social influence that the colonial subjugation of the past has on their motivations to bleach their skin” (Charles and McLean 792; see also Ferguson and Cramer). At the same time, Jamaican health workers expressed concern over the rise in young people arriving at hospitals with burns after using black market skin-bleaching products. This even prompted a government campaign in 2007: “Don’t kill the skin” (Bakare). Recent Jamaican editorials have also lamented the persistence of colourism (see Greaves; Davis).⁹

Caribbean Gothic and Zombification

I read *Brief History* in this context and through the lens of late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic literature to understand James’s return to Jamaica’s past and allusions to colourism’s role in shaping it. Late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic is often concerned with what Lauren Berlant calls “the historical present”: “that seemingly emergent affective crises are actually recurring and ongoing” (qtd. in Dischinger 84). Part of this genre’s concern is with a residual ingrained colourism that haunts and negatively affects dark-skinned Caribbean people. This ingrained prejudice echoes what Mieke Bal terms “habitual memory”: the seemingly innocent and common sense automatic memory used to avoid a puddle. These memories are “so strongly routine-based – so like conditioned reflexes”; but “the underlying ‘rule’ that determines such unreflective acts can surely be reconstructed as an Ur-narrative, learned in childhood, enforced by discipline, and carried along later in life” (Bal vii–viii). *Brief History*’s exploration of predation politics situates contemporary Jamaica’s often “unreflective” obsession with light skin in a destructive history of the subjugation of dark-skinned peoples; and by evoking Gothic tropes, like *Guerrillas*, *Abeng*, and *Autobiography* do, James portrays “a world in which the ghosts of colonialism still haunt the relationships of contemporary men and women” (Paravisini-Gerbert 249). One such ghost is colourism’s spectral legacy and the zombification effect it has on those who fail to make a radical break with its ideology.

Sheri-Marie Harrison reads Jennings as a benign father-of-the-nation figure: a “composite of preindependence-era Jamaican politicians,” a symbol of “hope” and advocate of “global decolonization” (93). James endorses this: Jennings “represents a dream that was murdered” (“My Interview”). But in addition to post-racial hope, Jennings, the zombified “white duppy,” represents the spectral persistence of colourism and colonialist values: a dead brown knight frozen in a white-brown patriarchal pre- and post-independence nightmare. *Brief History* begins with the Gothic haunting trope of the duppy. Jennings is the first character we encounter: the prologue to the story proper. Traditional Gothic literature sometimes uses introductory paratexts to distance the enlightened English reader from the illogical, supernatural, and/or uncivilized events in the main text.¹⁰ However, Jennings is homodiegetic: involved in the novel’s history. He is the first name listed in the cast of characters—a ghost of “GREATER KINGSTON from 1959” (*BH* ix)—signalling simultaneously his importance as a symbol of hope for an independent Jamaica free from colonial ideology and as the haunting spectre of colourism. As James remarks, Jennings’s “world is from the fifties” and “before”: Jennings is “the device that puts” the novel’s narrative “in a far bigger context” (“My Interview”). Thus Jennings is aligned with the pre-independence sentiments and policies of the brown elite who sought to counter Black Nationalism by mobilizing the nation around black-white hybridity/brownness. By attempting to make blackness invisible, this elite maintained pigmentocracy, failed to deal with the legacy of racial inequality, and unwittingly created a fertile ground for predation politics. Jennings aligns himself with Jamaica’s brown elite, Bustamante, and Norman Manley, and describes these figures as a composite “father of a nation” who cried “when he heard I died” (*BH* 3).¹¹ His description of the father of the nation as a symbol of hope, who died thinking he “failed,” might be applied to himself: “when you personify hopes and dreams in one person. He becomes nothing more than a literary device” (3). Symbolic of the brown elites’ inability to effect radical social change, Jennings becomes a “literary device” that embodies failed hopes. He appears before rude boys during their torture and murder yet is unable to change their destinies: “I’m the man no one listens to” (272). In these moments, he brings together the traumatic pasts of slavery, colonization, and pre-independence and predation politics.

This is evident when the police murder Papa-Lo during a sham “routine spot check” (*BH* 358). Time becomes non-linear: Papa-Lo gains a “temporal vantage point” where “time is compressed” and contains “past, present and future” (Hamilton 86). Papa-Lo assumes Jennings’s omniscience and describes Jennings as a composite zombie of white/brown oppression:

Who you, white man? . . . You was following the Singer . . . the singer on a bed getting a needle from a white man who have a German Hitler sign burning in him forehead . . . the angel of death sitting on the Singer shoulder the angel is a white man me see him already me know that now see him standing on a stage like Seaga and Manley and promise poor people sweet

thing . . . don't make no Nazi touch you but the white man
standing across the road the white man I know. (*BH* 355, 360,
361, 362)

A rude boy formed by predation politics, Papa-Lo is the only black figure who gains Jennings's ability to transcend time and so challenges Jennings's narrative on equal terms. Bringing together past, present, and future, and speaking from the ghetto viewpoint, Papa-Lo elides Jennings's pre-independence politics with predation politics. Wales objects to Nasser calling the ghetto "down there": "Jennings . . . never talk like you" (115). But for Papa-Lo, Jennings is the *respectable* face of what Nasser represents: on "stage like Seaga and Manley and promise poor people sweet thing" (111). That Papa-Lo compresses time, bringing Jennings together with living politicians, suggests that Michael Manley and Seaga are living zombies trapped in a cycle of colourist ideology that sustains their power and privilege: Jennings is "like" them; they are "like" Jennings (361). The composite Jennings-Manley-Seaga promises "sweet thing" (361); but this bright future is indefinitely postponed. Papa-Lo is about to be shot, and he and Jennings repeat the Singer's mantra: "Many more will have to suffer. Many more will have to die" (337). Rather than hope or the white/brown saviour, a triumvirate Jennings-Manley-Seaga symbolizes a continuation of suffering and death: "the angel of death . . . is a white man" (361). The elision of "angel of death" with the speaking Jennings-Seaga-Manley associates them with the older sense of angels as messengers: they are harbingers of death. From Papa-Lo's temporal vantage point, Seaga and Michael Manley are Jennings's scions: the ghostly presence that speaks with and through them, suggesting that the message has not changed and the material conditions for poor Jamaicans will deteriorate with more suffering and death. Similarly, Bam-Bam, another rude boy, equates Jennings with the continuation of ghetto suffering. To those who lament that "when Artie Jennings dead . . . he take the dream with him," Bam-Bam says, in 1976, the "dream didn't leave, people just don't know a nightmare when they right in the middle of one" (9). Rather than hope or "the dream," Jennings-Manley-Seaga signifies for Bam-Bam the continuation of a Gothic "nightmare" of brown terror. Nightmare further evokes the zombie-like nature of existence in the ghetto: a condition of being unconscious and unable to break away from pigmentocracy. Moreover, Jennings becomes a composite symbol of racist ideology beyond Jamaica's borders when Papa-Lo further conflates him with a Nazi. The "Hitler sign burning in him forehead" conveys the zombified nature of those who subscribe to white supremacy: racist and colourist ideologies are seared into the psyche of the mindless oppressor.

The novel's multi-vocal element indicates that Jennings's omniscience needs to be framed by marginalized counter-voices and historical contexts. The lack of—or contradictory—detail Jennings provides suggests an unreliable narrator. What he omits is as interesting as what he includes. Toni Morrison says she never describes character "very much" because she "demands participatory reading": she leaves "holes and spaces" where the reader needs to supply "some of the color" and "sound" (164). Can Jennings not access Papa-Lo's

mind in the same way he can Demus's? Or is the gap because what Papa-Lo thinks is too uncomfortable to acknowledge (*BH* 270–72, 431)? Thus, despite Jennings's sympathy for the murdered rude boys, his attitude and holes and spaces invite the participatory reader to assess his seeming inability to acknowledge openly and repudiate "Anglophile sympathies" and abandon his "filial loyalty to the British Empire" (Gray, *Demeaned* 54). For example, when Jennings distances himself from Nasser's homophobia about men of "style or beauty," Jennings identifies with the white segregated colonial English elite of Jamaica: "I saw Noel Coward every summer and called him uncle" (*BH* 113). Unwittingly, in denouncing Nasser's bigotry, Jennings aligns himself with a world that only tolerated black people as "ravishing coal black servants" (Coward 495) who referred to Coward as "master" (Butwin 54). There is silence about Jennings's interactions with dark-skinned Jamaicans, beyond hotel staff. Instead, Jennings seems to operate in exclusive settings dominated by white and light-skinned guests, served by dark-skinned staff. He is killed in 1962 at a hotel, the location of which he is unsure: "Sunset Beach Hotel in Montego Bay" on the north coast or a "hotel on the south coast, a future my country could taste" (*BH* 1, 111).

Henrice Altink provides some of the colour and sound to Jennings's lifestyle by arguing that hotels in Jamaica "are a microcosm of society" reflecting the island's pigmentocratic stratification. Pre-independence hotels were predominantly white spaces frequented by Jamaica's brown elite and served by dark-skinned staff ("Out of Place" 255, 257, 275). Dark-skinned middle-class Jamaicans frequented exclusive hotels post-independence but experienced colourist prejudice and were made to feel unwelcome by predominantly dark-skinned staff socialized "into the ethos 'Black is nuh good'" (275). Even today, clientele are predominantly white, and some black guests feel they are treated as "second- or third-class citizens" (279). The novel's framing of Jennings's hotel death with accounts of colourist prejudice in these establishments invites the reader to fill the "holes and spaces" in his narrative. Pierce says hotels are spaces where black Jamaicans work, "but brown and white men" drink "rum" (*BH* 60). The "high-brown" Burgess is shocked at how much of a white space the Mayfair Hotel is (31). And Papa-Lo recounts how a white woman offers a black hotel manager money for sex. This is after she suggests he is a "Rasta," asking if he washes his "hair," even though he "comb[s] every day" (87). Despite his class, the manager's dark skin fixes him as different, encroaching on a white space, inferior, and someone to be sexually exploited. This echoes Jennings's hotel death—possibly in flagrante delicto—and hints at links between sexual exploitation and tourism. Jennings does not say whether he is married. But moments before his murder he "was inside a woman whose name I cannot remember"; he would not "know where to look for her" and is not sure if it was "love" (112). Is the woman a lover or a sex worker? Jennings is unclear. The fact that Jennings prefaces his story with that of a rich American who "died *inside a woman* that was not his wife" (111; emphasis added) presents a parallelism that invites comparison. This and the fact that Jennings knows so little about her hint that Jennings may be exploiting women. This encourages another comparison with Nasser and the latter's sexual exploitation of ghetto women—Nasser vulgarly terms fellatio a "ghetto vacuum" (405). Echoes between

Jennings and Nasser, and tourism and the exploitation (sexual and otherwise) of Jamaicans, problematize Jennings's narrative. The "future" Jennings thinks his country could "taste" from his hotel room is a problematic one that perpetuates then and now colourism and (sexual) exploitation. Thus Jennings's remarks at the novel's opening, "Dead. It sounds final but it's a word missing an *ing*" (1; italics in original)—his disquisition on the dead and haunting—may be read as indicative of his ghostly presence and the legacy of his pre-independence policies and values, which paved the way for predation politics. The present continuous *deading* symbolizes not only Jennings's own haunting presence but also the present continuous of what he represents as a brown Jamaican vaulted to positions of power: the persistence of a nefarious ideology of colourism initiated under slavery. This is emphasized by his colonial title, "Sir"—a knight of the British Empire—which evokes a colonial past that punctuates his ghostly appearances and serves as a reminder of the Anglophile sympathies of his class and what some in the brown elite still aspire to: endorsement from the former colonizer. In another textual echo that brings together Nasser and Jennings, Wales says Nasser wants to "become a Sir": he wants a "white woman [Elizabeth II] to tell them they arrive" (623).

The novel therefore builds on late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic tales through the figure of the mixed-race character whose flaw is that they make a choice to perpetuate the ideology of the colonizer, or, as in the case of Jennings, they fail to make a radical break with that ideology. For example, Kincaid's Xuela says of her mixed-race father, Alfred, who exploits the dark-skinned population in Dominica, that he "rejected the complications of the vanquished [Africans]; he chose the ease of the victor [white]" (153). In Cliff's *Abeng*, Clare's light-skinned father identifies as white, thinks the Jews provoked Hitler into the holocaust, and forbids his daughter from marrying a Jew or dark-skinned man (72, 73, 127). However, Clare is drawn to the suffering of the Jews: "just as the Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a white one" (77). Clare knows "Black or the white? A choice would be expected of her" (Cliff 37). While Jennings is depicted more sympathetically, his alignment with the brown elite's policies and world view reveals a failure to reject completely the ideologies of the white victors and align fully with the vanquished blacks.

However, it is not only Jennings who is zombie-like; the rude boys and others who do not think outside the ideological confines of colourism also live a zombie-like existence in which their actions are partly prescribed. Willis and Michael K. Walonen warn against reading characters as mere puppets of American indoctrination (82; "Violence, Imperialism" 74). However, *Brief History*'s use of Gothic tropes and metafiction problematizes the concept of full autonomy in the face of colourism and predation politics. The novel's metatheatrical "Cast of Characters" that prefaces the story echoes Macbeth's *theatrum mundi* trope. The world is a stage on which actors/humans sometimes have limited autonomy over the drama of their lives: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then is heard no more" (Shakespeare, *Mac.* 5.5.23–25). In Caribbean Gothic, the lives of the dark-skinned poor are partially mapped

out because of their inability to make a radical break with the colonial past. They become “walking shadow[s]”: the walking dead. To borrow Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony, the ruling classes establish dominance “not [solely] by brute force, but by voluntary consent” (Proctor 26). White superiority is internalized. In *Autobiography*, a gravedigger’s mother names him Lazarus to “protect him from the living death that was his actual life; but it had been of no use, he was born the Dead and he would die the Dead” (Kincaid 117). They are dead because they and the light-skinned elite live a life prescribed by a colourist ideology of self-hate (of their African blood) and mutual distrust of those with too much African blood: “We were never to trust each other. This was . . . a motto repeated to us by our parents” (38). The dark-skinned “did not like” themselves; and dark-skinned and light-skinned “did not like each other” (131). In this way, black lives are held in little regard. As Xuela remarks, “What makes the world turn against me and all who look like me? . . . what really makes the world turn? . . . : Connive, deceive, murder” (110, 112). Similarly, in Cliff’s *Abeng*, “lives of light and dark” overwhelm “reality”: “The real world . . . could be just as dreamlike as the world of make-believe – on this island which did not know its own history” (96). Characters experience life like Clare, “a colonized child” who “lived within certain parameters – which clouded her judgment” (77). That is, characters live a zombie-like existence under the mental slavery of colourism.

Jennings’s summary of *Brief History* echoes the zombie-like nature of the exploited poor: “This is a story of several killings, of boys who meant nothing to a world still spinning” (*BH* 3). They live in a world where things are done to them, rather than a fully autonomous existence. Life narratives are partially mapped out; and James employs the Gothic trope of haunting to emphasize the point through a verbal echo of Jennings. Jennings remarks in the prologue, “Living people wait and see because they fool themselves that they have time. Dead people see and wait” (3). This inversion is repeated by rude boys and others when they talk about the promises made by politicians to transform the ghetto or about a lack of autonomy. This zombie-like existence also extends to Jamaicans who flee the island. When in New York after escaping Jamaica because she fears for her life, Dorcas Palmer (née Nina Burgess) remarks, “Wait and see or see and wait? . . . Like we’re waiting for action, when more often than not action just seems to make me wait” (583). The abstract “action” is given agency. The fact that action happens to a person or makes one wait suggests one is more an actor in a play rather than a playwright or maker of one’s own destiny. This sheds light on the use of this inversion by rude boys and dark-skinned Jamaicans. For example, Bam-Bam remarks of ghetto inhabitants in Copenhagen City and the Eight Lanes, “[I]f change ever going to come then we will have to wait and see, but all we can do down here in the Eight Lanes is see and wait” (8). The Wang Gang, who “see and wait,” are ambushed by the Jamaica Defence Force and shot once they are no longer useful to government (336). Tristan Philips says in prison that there is nothing “to do but see and wait” (451). Action, that is, colourism and predation politics, often seems to happen to them. The verbal echoes suggest they are similar to Jennings’s “Dead people [who] see and wait,” rather than the living.

Wales thinks his use of the inversion demonstrates that he is a master of his own destiny: “People with no plan wait and see. People with a plan see and wait for the right time. . . . People in the ghetto suffer because there be people who live for making them suffer” (*BH* 416). However, as Papa-Lo tells us earlier, when he describes the reaction to the shooting of Wales in 1966 when “politician come” to Balaclava and build Copenhagen City, Wales is transformed into a rude boy: “those who didn’t [run when Wales was shot], see and wait until . . . [a] different man come out of that clinic three weeks later” (89–90). Shot by a rude boy, a political foot soldier, Wales’s subsequent life as a JLP ghetto enforcer and later don of Copenhagen City is shaped by the ideology of colourism and by predation politics. He becomes one of those “who live for making them [people in the ghetto] suffer.” He is transformed into a zombie who has internalized colourism. He prides himself on his chameleon-like ability to appear less intelligent to white CIA operatives: to chat “bad like some bush naigger” (44). He prefers Standard English over patois: “I can’t stand . . . when people chat bad” (41). Caryn Rae Adams interprets this as “a form of liberation” for Wales: Standard English grants “social advancement” for him and his children and is a way of challenging oppressive Western forces intent on “maintaining colonial control” (103–04). But advancement does not materialize: his daughter and eldest son are shot; and Doctor Love leaves Wales with the chilling message that “somebody eventually will” kill his remaining son, but “it won’t be me” (*BH* 667). Moreover, the colonial education system imposed not just Standard English but also Western values. It sought to suppress remnants of a slave oral culture—an African cultural inheritance—that had survived the middle passage (see Brathwaite 75). In this denigration of patois, the novel echoes late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic in showing how hegemony works: Wales validates whiteness as superior and reinforces colonial linguistic and cultural dominance.¹² Thus Wales’s preference for Standard English is “not neutral,” as phrases such as the “Queen’s English” in Jamaica have produced “inequalities” that make the “native believe in a fabricated cultural hierarchy” (Campbell 197). Echoing early Caribbean Gothic fiction, Wales describes patois as semi-literate and a deviation from the norm.¹³ These beliefs are entwined with internalized colourism. Wales believes that in “Jamaica you have to make sure that you breed properly. Nice little light browning . . . so that your child will get good milk and have good hair” (*BH* 41). His daughter is “light like her mother. No future for no dark girl in Jamaica, despite black power bullshit. I mean, look who just win Miss World” (423). Wales sees symbolic capital in *breeding light*: “nice” “light browning,” a “good milk” tinge to the skin, “good hair,” and Miss Worlds. Like the Gothic characters in *Guerrillas*, *Abeng*, and *Autobiography*, Wales is full of self-hatred for his African blood. For Wales, Standard English and Western beauty ideals are part of his armoury to forge an identity that is less African and improve his social status. He therefore shows his zombie-like existence: he reasserts, rather than rejects, colonial control.

The use of Gothic and metafictional tropes shows how the ideology of colourism and predation politics sought to police literally and figuratively the movements of poor and/or dark-skinned bodies, thereby rendering them zombies enslaved by the ideology of

colourism. The Caribbean Gothic is often interested in “the frightening ways that children are harmed and changed by the Gothic cruelty of their worlds” but matches this “by young children’s sometimes exhilarating potential to frustrate and disrupt pathological systems of power” (Roszak 59). The latter part of this statement is true of *Abeng* and *Autobiography*, in which Clare and Xuela resist the dictates of their societies. However, in *Brief History*, attempts to assert an identity outside of predation politics’ remits are curtailed: ambition and talent are murdered by society’s prejudices. Thus we need to take Demus’s claim for autonomy with a pinch of salt: “People who claim they don’t have a choice just too coward to choose” (*BH* 68). In fact, Demus contradicts himself later when he says, looking at a well-dressed schoolboy, “[M]e didn’t have no chance to go to no pretty school in any pretty khaki uniform” (262). Instead, *Brief History* draws again on Caribbean Gothic elements to show how the autonomous self is partly killed. For example, in *Guerrillas*, Bryant, a poor dark-skinned young man, becomes symbolic of the living dead: a youth whose identity is figuratively murdered because society’s prejudices have forced him to the margins and filled him with hatred. When Bryant watches *For the Love of Ivy*, starring Sidney Poitier—a 1968 film about a successful African American couple—he sees in Poitier “a version of himself that no one . . . would ever get to know: *the man who had died within the body Bryant carried*, shown in that film in all his truth, the man Bryant knew to be himself, without the edginess and the anger and the pretend ugliness, the laughing man, the tender joker” (Naipaul 30; emphasis added). Bryant laments an inner death. He is a shadow of himself, a zombie-like creature or “body” with a dead soul. His ambition is replaced with self-hatred and bitterness.

This inner death is echoed in the stories of Demus and Weeper, who are rude boy enforcers in the JLP-controlled Copenhagen City ghetto. But the tales of how they become rude boys show how the actions of dark-skinned bodies are policed and shaped by colourism’s Ur-narrative. Both are metaphorically murdered and rendered zombie-like enforcers. Weeper imagines he can progress socially if he stays “out of trouble,” dresses properly, and draws on his GCE “Maths, English and Technical Drawing” to gain an apprenticeship “for some architect” (*BH* 66). But the narrative evokes the capitalist dream through the trope of the working-class boy making good, while placing it firmly out of reach. The repetition of “Picture Weeper” is apt (66). Weeper’s dream will remain a desire frozen in time: a Tantalus-type snapshot that places a world of opportunity permanently outside Weeper’s grasp. Weeper imagines himself in a Bildungsroman: a narrative of financial and intellectual growth. He assumes autonomy: “he have somewhere to go” (66). However, his dreams are cut short when he enters the so-called decent world outside the slum: he finds himself in a Caribbean Gothic nightmare. His movements are curtailed by the police: “As Weeper make a left to go to Carib Theatre the police draw down in numbers” (66). Weeper *survives* the encounter but undergoes a symbolic death. The *theatrum mundi* symbolism of the arrest happening outside the Carib Theatre or cinema indicates the way life narratives are constructed. As *Abeng*’s narrator observes when speaking of the Carib cinema in Jamaica, it was “named for one of the native peoples of the West Indies . . . exterminated by the Spanish conquerors” (Cliff, *Abeng* 67). For the Arawak, their identity is redesignated as Caribs by the

conquerors. Like the Arawak, Weeper finds himself engulfed in a narrative of subjugation and extermination: a tragedy in which he is renamed and becomes “a walking shadow, a poor player.” The police construct an alternative narrative for Weeper, one formed by the ideology of colourism, in which dark skin and poverty set parameters on ghetto lives: “duttie ghetto boy have no right to palaver in decent clothes like him is somebody, and is thief the bloodcloth boy thief the clothes from decent people and nasty naigger must always know them place” (*BH* 67). Marking Weeper’s symbolic death, echoing the real death of the Arawak people, the police rename him to fit their tragedy: William Foster becomes Weeper because the police say “him cry like a girl” (67). Weeper’s narrative reveals the problematic nature of Wales’s equation of talking properly with social advancement. Weeper’s “smart mouth” attempt to correct the policeman’s English (“accomplices” for the policeman’s “accomplicities”) ends with him being tortured and jailed (67).

Demus’s story echoes Weeper’s. The former is tortured and humiliated by the police for a rape he did not commit and subsequently experiences a succubus or coolie duppy sucking “out him life through him mouth” (*BH* 52). Like Bryant in Naipaul’s *Guerrillas* and Weeper, Demus is transformed into a zombie rude boy: “a sick man and a wicked man and nobody ever wickeder and sicker than me” (*BH* 52). He becomes a shadow of himself: a marionette in a drama of destruction dictated by predation politics and colourism. As Burgess observes, in Jamaica, “If you don’t live politics, politics will live you” (31). Moreover, rude boys have names that indicate their limited roles. Michael Niblett argues that names like Josey Wales (which references Clint Eastwood’s 1976 film *The Outlaw Josey Wales*) show that the rude boys’ “thoughts and perceptions” are “saturated by the clichés” of “mass cultural narratives” (64). However, Wales’s name choice shows him siding with a rebel who fought Union soldiers: those attempting to free the enslaved. This indicates a subliminal identification with white supremacy. Demus’s name is short for Nicodemus, derived from the Greek *nikē* (“victory”) and *dēmos* (“people”). However, the abbreviated form robs Demus or the people of the victory, or *nikē*. He becomes the vanquished. Bam-Bam is given this name and a gun by Papa-Lo, signifying his death and zombie-like existence as a rude boy (*BH* 15). He will terrorize Jamaicans at the behest of government rude boy enforcers.

“Shadow Dancin” and Stepping Out

Unlike Naipaul’s *Guerrillas*, which suggests that colonial terror and exploitation in the Caribbean “has left too deep a wound on the body and psyche of the colonized nation to allow for recovery,” *Brief History* offers a way out of the Gothic haunting of colourism: a radical break from the colonial past and a “deafening denunciation of the evils sustained in the name of colonial expansion” (Paravisini-Gebert 248, 251). *Brief History* therefore echoes Cliff and Kincaid. As *Abeng*’s narrator says, for Clare “to move forward would mean to move away” from her father and his prejudices: to think outside of hegemonic constraints (Cliff, *Abeng* 76). This is what Taitu Heron and Yanique Hume describe as “*stepping out*”:

“to break away from” Babylon and “embrace something else that the stepper carries in the imagination in relation to his/her identity and existence” (29; emphasis in original). To highlight this idea, James incorporates Peter Tosh’s radical Rastafarian voice and sense of identity. James employs a postmodern parody or intertextuality by transcribing Tosh’s outburst at the One Love Peace Concert (22 April 1978). Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern parody or intertextuality is political in its ability to signal “how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference” (89). Consequently, Tosh’s outburst serves as what New Historicists call a co-text to contest past and present Jamaican claims about post-racial harmony and Jamaican identity, and to critique the appropriation of popular black culture by Michael Manley and Seaga.

Rastafarianism offered an important critique of contemporary discussions on Jamaican identity and race, and it attacked the predation politics of minstrelsy. The Rastafari movement was considered a threat to the Jamaican establishment because it reframed “post-independence black identity, African diaspora consciousness, and historical knowledge outside of the frameworks of a colonial and postcolonial Jamaican state seen as complicit in the intellectually and politically stagnating Babylon system” (Mathes 29). Tosh’s Rastafarianism suggests a radical break with colonial colourist ideology and a love of one’s African or non-European identity, similar to Kincaid’s Xuela: “Whatever about me caused offense, whatever was native to me . . . I loved with the fervor of the devoted” (27). As Rachel Mordecai notes, Tosh’s radical “Rasta perspective” was unique among the performers and politicians at the concert (32). Tosh rejects the tenets of the concert: peace and unity between the JLP and PNP. Instead, he partakes in the struggle “over membership in the Jamaican nation” and moves the debate about Jamaican identity away from the battle between capitalism (JLP) and socialism (PNP) (31–32). Tosh reconstructs Jamaicanness around race, putting African heritage centre stage “with blackness as the foundation of belonging, awareness and action”; and he offers a “long historical view” of “diasporic black” suffering (32). James embeds Tosh’s critique within Papa-Lo’s narrative in the “Shadow Dancin’” section of the novel, because these verbatim quotations from Tosh provide a way of reading and contextualizing the novel’s resistance to minstrelsy, which steals from popular Afro-Jamaican culture while keeping poor dark-skinned Jamaicans disenfranchised and in a zombie-like state.

Framed within the “Shadow Dancin’” section, Tosh’s narrative and the section generally draw attention to the ways popular black culture has been appropriated while black people have been sidelined socially. Speaking of James’s allusion to the song “Colon Man,” and other cultural references, Willis argues that allusion serves to remind the reader of anti-blackness imbricated in Jamaican culture and the “seeming irremediable scourges of Black poverty, underemployment and violence in democratic Jamaica” (76).¹⁴ Mike Alleyne shows how “reggae” was appropriated “on the basis of its aesthetically pleasing surface qualities,” with the audience having “largely failed to comprehend what is actually being sung” (Alleyne 15). Instead, white artists often divorced the music from the “political

polemics of Rastafari, and reggae culture in general” (15). In short, audiences are rendered into zombie-like dancers unaware of or unsympathetic to the radical messages of change in the lyrics. *Brief History* refers explicitly to the depoliticization of Jamaican music when the American “white bwoi” lauds the ska hit “My Boy Lollipop” for its “good beat” and laments the Singer’s move away from “sweet little songs like ‘Stir it Up’” (*BH* 130). His emphasis on “beat,” rather than on discussions of race, shows his desire to erase the political message of Jamaican music by ignoring the words. As the “white bwoi” remarks, he does not want the Singer’s “angry nigger music” to stir up Americans from their supine zombie-like state (130). Moreover, the white bwoi draws direct attention to Eric Clapton’s cover of Marley’s “I Shot the Sheriff” and his racist outburst: Clapton “gets onstage and says, Keep Britain white. Chase . . . all the fucking Jamaicans” out (128). Clapton’s version sold more than Marley’s; moreover, as is obvious from Clapton’s racist outburst, it erased Marley’s version, taking it away from Rastafarian politics and a celebration of diasporic African culture.¹⁵ It turned a song about Rastafarian rights into one that sought to expel Jamaicans from Britain.

The novel’s co-texts and allusions to the appropriation of popular Afro-Jamaican music urge one to think about the ways this culture was appropriated by Michael Manley and Seaga. This is why Tosh’s outburst is an important intertext evoking colourism’s grip on characters in the novel and on Jamaican society. It attempts to waken Jamaicans from their zombie-like deference to colourist ideology. Tosh asks the cameramen to stop filming, because

[i]s word sound and power that break down the barriers of oppression and drive away transgression and rule equality. Well right now you have a system or a shitstem wha’ go on in this country fi a long ages and ’imes. Four hundred years and the same bucky massa business and black inferiority and brown superiority and white superiority rule this little black country here fi a long ’imes. Well I and I come with Earthquake Lightning and Thunder to break down these barriers of oppression, drive away transgression and rule equality between humble black people. (BH 339–40; italics in original)

Tosh asks listeners to hear rather than see because he wants to generate an orality that evokes a shared African heritage through, to paraphrase Kamau Brathwaite, the tonal shape, rhythm, structure, and contours of thought inherent in nation language. This emphasis on thinking about the radical nature of nation language demonstrates how Tosh, unlike Wales, recognizes the role of language in perpetuating a Western cultural hierarchy (“brown . . . and white superiority”) produced by an education system that privileges European over black culture (see Brathwaite 75–77, 84). Tosh sees “word sound” or nation language as “power” tools to transform habitual modes of thinking that allow colourism to persist. But Tosh’s triplet of “word, sound and power” goes beyond nation language and is what Heron and Hume refer to as Tosh’s “wordworks”: “a performative, embodied act of consciously being able to use the creative imagination to transform language and the English use of

words, altering meaning and thus making it political” (27; italics in original). This intertext to Tosh and Rastafarian nation language is contrasted with Nasser’s (Michael Manley’s and Seaga’s) use of it in predation politics. Tosh’s transformative idea of language is embodied in his neologism: “shitstem” for system. For Tosh, the minstrelsy and parasitic appropriation of popular Afro-Jamaican culture by politicians and white artists are used to disempower and remove the radical message of black empowerment. Hence Tosh re-familiarizes nation language to encourage listeners to rethink. If white listeners to reggae music divorce the rhythm from the words and political meanings, Tosh focuses on the link between them. He is “*stepping out*,” breaking away from Babylon and embracing black culture. Tosh’s word, sound, and power are crucial because Michael Manley and Seaga used “word” and “sound” by appropriating popular Afro-Jamaican vernacular to appeal to the masses. Simultaneously, they created a political system of predation politics that excluded many black people from “power.” To emphasize the point, Tosh continues this triplet structure. First, he advocates an apocalyptic break—“*Earthquake Lightning and Thunder*”—from the linguistic and ideological constraints of Jamaica’s colonial past: the internalized colourism/“*brown superiority*” prohibiting black advancement. He then continues the triplet pattern to remodel society through three verbs: “**break down** these barriers of oppression, **drive away** transgression and **rule equality** between humble black people” (emphasis added). Reggae and nation language must generate action. In addition, he employs the term used by slaves for their white masters: “bucky” or *buckra*, derived from the Efik language (from Calaber, in present-day Nigeria; “Buckra, *N.*”). In doing so, Tosh (in the use of the triplet structure and anti-colonial language) registers the accumulated imposition of colourism. Thus his use of the Rastafarian “*I and I*” is what Burgess dismissively describes as Rastas taking “the words English people gave . . . as a tool of oppression and spit[ting] them back in their face” (*BH* 155). His use of patois shows a more radical attempt than Wales’s ventriloquism (mimicking the oppressor’s language) to promote black pride and social advancement.

It is in this Rastafarian context with its emphasis on critiquing predation politics that Papa-Lo’s semi-, but incomplete, spiritual and political awakening in the “Shadow Dancin’” section makes sense. He realizes that he and the poor Afro-Jamaican dark-skinned majority are subject to the historical forces of colonization and exploitation that enslaved his ancestors and continue to enforce a mental slavery, which renders many as zombie-like. Or as Willis remarks, Papa-Lo “conjures up a series of cultural markers through interior monologue that showcases his present circumstances as an inescapable reproduction of his forebears’ circumstances” (77). Papa-Lo’s soul-searching is prompted by Tosh’s remarks. Thus looking at the Caribbean Gothic landscape haunted by the island’s violent history, Papa-Lo remarks that, until Tosh’s outburst “me never once think ‘bout the black, even when me drive past plantation still standing” (340). But Papa-Lo does not manage to step out of the constraints of Babylon, and the “past plantation” mentality still dictates his actions. Hence Papa-Lo’s shadow dancing, the locations he observes, and his very actions become metaphorical of the ways he is caught in a colourist system where Afro-Jamaicans suffer because of his zombie-like oppression of ghetto communities—this despite Papa-Lo

echoing Tosh that “Babylon is a shitstem, Babylon is oppressor and Babylon infiltrate with police” (335). However, Papa-Lo does not manage to break away from the shitstem through Tosh’s radical triplet idea: “*break down . . . oppression, drive away transgression and rule equality between humble black people.*” Papa-Lo acknowledges, while looking at the forts around Fort Charles, that Jamaica’s geography is littered by the black dead who have suffered because of the island’s pigmentocratic past and present: “in the fort where Spanish man and British man and Jamaican man dead over years and years, reminding me that one day me too soon dead” (330). As Willis observes, Papa-Lo is reminded of “a paradigm borne from the unnatural horrors of colonialism . . . that survives on the sustained impoverishment of a majority-Black underclass” (79). Unable to break out of this system, as the title of the section suggests, Papa-Lo performs a sort of shadow dance that re-enacts the desires of past colonial masters and the current brown elite. He acknowledges that he has “been dancing with shadow in the dawn and in the night. . . . Shadow dance for true. We shadow dancing” (32–33, 338). As the instrument of predation politics, Papa-Lo perpetuates the idea that dark-skinned Jamaicans are, to cite Kincaid’s Xuela, the “people regarded as not real—the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low” (25). They can be tortured, humiliated, and shot. He spends “four days” rounding up the four men involved in the horse racing con on the Singer (*BH* 333). The symbolic link between “four days” and the “*Four hundred years and the same bucky massa business and black inferiority and brown superiority and white superiority*” that Tosh says has ruled Jamaica become apparent: black lives still do not matter.

Reading *Brief History* through the lens of the late twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic tropes allows us to focus on the novel’s exploration of the legacy of a colourist ideology that continues to negatively affect the lives of Jamaicans. Drawing on Gothic tropes and echoes (such as the idea of the duppy and haunting and the keen interest in skin colour), *Brief History* reveals how characters are rendered the living dead: semi-conscious individuals who live under a form of mental slavery to a colonialist legacy of colourism. As such, they are unable to live truly autonomous lives. In this sense, *Brief History* problematizes Homi K. Bhabha’s celebration of cultural hybridity: that we should “think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities,” and “focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences: these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood” (Bhabha 2). *Brief History* shows that such moves towards hybridity—those “‘in-between’ spaces” between the colonized and colonizer’s cultural identities—are problematic, as they often silence or denigrate the present’s complicated relationship to an African past: a past in which “despising anything that was most like ourselves was almost a law of nature” (Kincaid 42). *Brief History* and the Caribbean Gothic demonstrate that the language and modes of thought that the former colonized subject speaks are often so saturated by the prejudices of the colonizer that the former subject remains mentally enslaved.

Notes

- ¹ Shoemaker suggests that James uses the “femme finale”—the last woman/women “standing” amid male violence—to critique heteronormative tropes of women as “symbols of futurity, continuance or bearing witness” (19). Instead, James’s “femme finales” indict the binary choice of complicity or resistance to “national ideals of respectable femininity and sexuality” (Shoemaker 19). Willis’s queer reading of the novel argues that James registers the legacy of “anti-Black colonial paradigms” of race, gender, and sexuality, which remain encoded in contemporary Jamaica’s cultural artefacts: “songs, sayings, place names and films” (Willis 75–76). James uses queer “male eroticism” to “deconstruct and critique” the colonial legacy of anti-blackness and inherited “white heteropatriarchal codes” (Willis 76).
- ² Sheri-Marie Harrison argues that the novel is haunted by Seaga’s politically motivated clearance of PNP voters from the Back-O-Wall slum, and that the novel’s allusions to global figures “index the destabilization of democratically elected governments in the 1960s in Latin America and Africa” (86–87, 88). Following Deborah A. Thomas’s *Exceptional Violence* (2011), Michael K. Walonen argues that the novel’s examination of Jamaican politics and garrison violence is not coupled to slavery: violence is not national but rather regional and tied to “US imperialist Cold War politics” (“Violence, Diasporic Transnationalism” 2, 4–5). Similarly, Jason Frydman suggests *Brief History* disrupts postcolonial narratives that focus on the formal end of British and French colonization, ignoring the new imperial order of the United States and Soviet Union.
- ³ Hereafter, James, *Brief History* is cited as *BH* followed by page numbers.
- ⁴ Twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic examples include Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966); Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987); and Rosario Ferré’s *Maldito amor y otros cuentos* (1986).
- ⁵ For example, see Charlotte Smith’s *The Story of Henrietta* (first published 1800); Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha in *Jane Eyre* (first published 1847).
- ⁶ Like the fireman who “tries to strike” Josey Wales “but goes right through him. I [Jennings] used to do that with the man who killed me” (*BH* 117).
- ⁷ Norman Manley argued, “[N]owhere in the world has more progress been made in developing a non-racial society in which colour is not significant” (qtd. in Sherlock and Bennet 386).
- ⁸ In 1960, Norman Manley condemned black nationalist and Rastafari leaders as divisive figures “preaching colour . . . and race against race” (qtd. in Gray, *Demeaned* 67–68).

- ⁹ For recent criticism that pushes against the tendency to see skin bleachers as race traitors, see Brown-Glaude; Forbes-Erickson.
- ¹⁰ Prologues and prefaces commented on the unbelievability of the main texts or claimed the novel was a manuscript found in a Catholic southern European country more susceptible to supernatural beliefs. The preface to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* suggests the "principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity" (5). The preface to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* does something similar: "All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact" (4).
- ¹¹ I read this as a composite of Bustamante and Norman Manley because James does not name either, and both have a legitimate claim to father of the nation.
- ¹² In Kincaid's *Autobiography*, the first words Xuela learns to read are "THE BRITISH EMPIRE" (11), but Xuela rejects this vision of the world. In Cliff's *Abeng*, "pidgin is . . . severely discouraged" in Clare's school (85). Students are made to speak Standard English, and the school curriculum consists of "manuals" from the governor's office, "from a department of the colonial office in London" (84). These consist of English poetry, history, and culture.
- ¹³ Compare the ways black characters speak in Smith's "Story of Henrietta." Mulattoes and blacks speak an "odd sort of dialect," which leads Henrietta to associate them with "odd manners" (29).
- ¹⁴ "Shadow Dancin'" alludes to Andy Gibb's 1978 disco hit "Shadow Dancing." Gibb was the younger brother of the musical group, the Bee Gees, and the intertextuality speaks to how African American music was "appropriated egregiously by the white band the Bee Gees and in the movie *Saturday Night Fever*" (Headlam 178).
- ¹⁵ Marley's version was released on the album *Burnin'* (1973), co-written with Tosh and Jean Watt. This album "was much more political in nature, focusing on social issues and Rastafarian philosophy" (*Bob Marley* 27). "I Shot the Sheriff," with the lines "Every time I plant the seed / You kill it before it grow," is sometimes interpreted as referring to marijuana crops regularly burnt in police raids; or more commonly, the seed is read as "a metaphor for the growth of Rastafari so feared by the authorities" (Grant 292–93).

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