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“There are no paths in water”: History, Memory and Narrative Form in *Crossing the River* (1993) and *Foreigners: Three English Lives* (2007)
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Caryl Phillips’s delineation of history in *Crossing the River* (1993) and *Foreigners: Three English Lives* (2007) depends on a narrative approach that is polyphonic in its presentation of different voices and the expression of competing histories in a variety of narrative forms. Phillips’s narrative modes range from the biographical to the epistolary and, in *Foreigners: Three English Lives*, the

juxtaposition of archival accounts of the history of Leeds against David Oluwale's dislocation in the city and its institutions. In the presentation of voices belonging to those both complicit in, and ensnared by, the vicissitudes and intersections of the histories of Europe, the Americas and Africa, Phillips presents opportunities for the reception of narrative without resorting to a didactic approach for the understanding of history. In Walter Benjamin's terms, the narrative technique employed is that of "literary montage" as Phillips draws, in the opening of *Crossing the River*, on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in a narrative move that belies the continuities of the Enlightenment project and its civilizing proclamations. Here Phillips returns to, yet also inverts, Conradian modernism. As with Benjamin's intention in *The Arcades Project*, Phillips "needn't say anything. Merely show". Rather than approach history in Enlightenment terms, as progressive continuity, Phillips's elliptical, disjointed and juxtapositional narratives illuminate time and space in ways that correspond with Benjamin's "constellation" of unfixed points, both vanishing and re-emergent. For Benjamin, "history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance". In *Crossing the River* this remembrance is communal and transcendent of time, space and history as the voice of the African farmer both opens and closes the novel and encompasses the experiences of his three children across two hundred and fifty years and three continents. The farmer claims that "there are no paths in water", echoing the fluidity and malleability of both Phillips's narrative form and history itself.

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Plan

The Middle Passage and Modernity
Modernism and Narrative Form

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Texte intégral

¹Not restricted to any one historical context, Caryl Phillip's work offers a way of thinking about history that resonates with Walter Benjamin's materialist critique of modernity and in which Benjamin's intention, amongst others, is to deconstruct the continuum of history. In various intricately linked narratives, Phillips writes across a broad temporal and geographical range, non-didactically and outside of a linear framework. Such a technique allows him, in Benjamin's words, to "merely show" and not "say anything" (N1a,8, Benjamin's italics) in order to recover the lives of his protagonists by holding them to the light, often the light of those very archives by which his historical subjects have been condemned. The "ruins" (N9, a6) of history are employed by Phillips against history's account of itself, in revelatory condemnation of the chasm between the timeless ideal and the realities of lived experience, in what Benjamin would call an "awakening" (N4,3 and N4,4).

2In *The Grammar of Identity* (2009), Stephen Clingman has drawn on Benjamin's notion of non-linear history as a "constellation" in relation to Phillip's *The Nature of Blood* (1997) and has discussed how, in this work too, Phillips juxtaposes time, geography and experience in the creation of "constellated narratives" to reveal the fault-lines of history and in which "we as readers become part of the constellation" (91). Following Clingman, I wish to explore Phillip's delineation of history and the narrative form of *Crossing the River and Foreigners; Three English Lives* using as my conceptual framework Convoluted N of *The Arcades Project* (1999), "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress", regarded as the nucleus of Benjamin's work. Phillips, like Benjamin, understands the limitations in reading modernity as the linear progression towards some future, higher point of civilisation – a linearity Benjamin calls "empty time" or "[u]niversal history... an affair of obscurantists" (N18,3). They express this understanding, of course, in different modes and from different historical junctures; Phillips, as a postcolonial writer, perceives "enlightenment" as a western project in its exclusory, ideologically charged and disruptive manifestations, Benjamin in wider philosophical terms in which "the object of history is to be blasted out of the continuum of historical succession" (N10,3). In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin insists on how "a resolute refusal of the concept of 'timeless truth'" (N3,2) is necessary for the materialist historian engaged in the clear sighted examination of history's detritus and from which the revolutionary moment may be salvaged. He reorients Marxism away from reductive science and its dialectic certainties and asserts: "Historical materialism must renounce the epic element in history. It blasts the epoch out of the reified 'continuity of history'. But it also explodes the homogeneity of the epoch, interspersing it with ruins – that is, with the present" (N9a,6). Rather than moments or objects in an evolutionary history, once in the ruined form and no longer idealized or fetishized by commodity capitalism, the utopian origins of the object are rediscovered as "aura" and their true meaning, and therefore the true meaning of history itself, can be found. In Benjamin's formulation, the meaning of history is to be excavated from that which survives in the present, even as the "ruin" – a historical moment, an object or, as in *The Arcades Project*, architectural structures – the significance of which can only be truly understood in the instant of the present. Even then, the truth of the past is momentary, a shock "that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means – and only by these – can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost" (N9, 7).

3To make use of the past, its obsolete and discarded moments, the ruins must be recovered and remembered, but not in any continuous way: "In order for a part of the past to be touched by the present instant there must be no continuity between them" (N7,7). Benjamin's understanding of time, history and knowledge as contingent and non-linear finds expression as "literary montage" (N1a,8) in *The Arcades Project*, his modernist collage of sometimes unattributed, often

repeated quotations and apparently unconnected, yet layered reflections that form a palimpsest from which truth can emerge. His theoretical architecture is designed to arouse the bourgeoisie from its dream, its mythical fantasy of technological progress, consumption and urbanization: “Benjamin’s original conception, a politicized version of Sleeping Beauty as a fairy tale of ‘awakening’”, retold along Marxist lines, was intended to “set free the huge powers of history that are asleep within the ‘once upon a time’ of classical historical narration” (Susan Buck-Morss, 49).

4In this reclamation of the past in order to excavate truth, Benjamin reveals his modernism and, in his very critique of modernity, meets Zygmunt Bauman’s understanding of modernism as that moment when “modernity turned its gaze upon itself and attempted to attain the clear sightedness and self-awareness which would eventually disclose its impossibility thus paving the way to the postmodern reassessment” (4). In Benjamin’s materialist model of history, the idea of progress is yet another myth that functions to obscure the modernity project of rationality, civilization and science. It is this central preoccupation with the false continuities inherent in modernity’s accounts of itself that informs his conception of history as a constellation in which the moment may vanish and re-emerge through juxtaposition and the revolutionary shock of epiphany and realization.

5“Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them” (N1a,8). Only the abandoned, the once fetishized but now obsolete object, can be viewed as concrete fact. Terry Eagleton venerates Benjamin as critic of modernity, watchful proponent of materialism and dismantler of literary and theoretical conventions:

Such sacred criticism involves an “aesthetic” responsiveness to the particularity of its object alien to the dominative rationality of the Enlightenment; but it does not thereby become the object’s obedient ghost. For to be “redeemed” into the “truth” of criticism or philosophy, the empirical phenomena must be dismantled, redispersed and rearticulated, drawn into an objective constellation of concrete relations that cuts through the literary and historical categories of conventional theory (117).

6It is in the recovery and, crucially, the remembrance of the discarded object that possibilities for truth lie. It is a matter of exposing the layers in the palimpsest of meaning to illuminate the dialectical relationship between the past and the present: “Being a dialectician means having the wind of history in one’s sails. The sails are the concepts. It is not enough, however, to have sails at one’s disposal. What is decisive is knowing the art of setting them” (N9,8).

7 Benjamin's sailing imagery is compelling, the notion that we must set the sails in a certain way in order to catch the true meaning of history. Benjamin's metaphor resounds in the writing of Phillips, who layers voices emanating from the Middle Passage to form a palimpsest of lived experiences in the form of journals, letters and testimony that, together, constitute a materiality of the diaspora and imperial conquest.

The Middle Passage and Modernity

8 In *The Black Atlantic* (1993) Paul Gilroy appropriates Benjamin's imagery (xii) for his own purpose to locate the ship as the focal point for the analysis of the transnational, transcultural creative expressions of the black Atlantic and their importance as being constitutive of a counter culture to modernity's racial capitalism, its linear time and its binary approach to politics and ethics. Modernist artists and intellectuals working within this aesthetic employ techniques that include creative orality, musical expression, memory and historiography in their disruptions of linearity. Existing within modernity itself, its expressive culture originating in the slave system integral to the development of the west, the black Atlantic nevertheless transcends modernity in its delineations of history, memory and time and is, to return to Benjamin, the corrective that resets the sails of history. In its hybridity, the black Atlantic is inherently anti-nationalist and provides a utopian model in its creative articulation of trauma, memory and survival. The dislocation engendered by the Middle Passage can thus be reformulated; the sea, borderless, flowing and unidirectional, serves as a metaphor for the wide-ranging and multiple explorations of emerging identities.

9 Caryl Phillips In *New World Order* (2001) claims the mid-Atlantic as his own home (304) and takes his place as a writer of the black Atlantic documenting a diasporic history that has its origins in the materiality of the Middle Passage. The farmer at the beginning of *Crossing the River* acknowledges commodity exchange as a fact of this materiality, having sold his children into slavery at a point in Africa "where the tributary stumbles and swims out in all directions to meet the sea" and having "soiled" his "hands with cold goods in exchange for their warm flesh" (1). The rivers flow to the sea as a metaphor for the morass of history in which no clear, linear paths can be found. Within the layering and juxtaposition of different narratives, however, the reader can find meaning, and the novel may be seen, in Gilroy's formulation, as "a utopian eruption of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics which enforces the obligation that space and time must be considered relationally in their interarticulation with racialized being" (198). Critical of Gilroy's later optimism in *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (2004), John McLeod privileges the nuanced utopian impulse in Phillips's work and argues that an "engagement with the somber histories of race, colonialism and diaspora may help negotiate a

different kind of utopian vision – one which I shall call ‘progressive utopianism’ – that is mindful of the presence of the past while offering a tentative, hopeful and non-idealized illustration of diaspora ethics” (3).

¹⁰*Crossing the River* traverses America, Britain and Africa across time, as the children of the farmer witness America’s frontier expansionism, the second World War in northern England, and African repatriation. “But my Joyce, and my other children, their voices hurt but determined, they will survive the hardships of the far bank” (235). Without the essentialism of racial nationalism, Joyce is embraced as a child of the farmer. As modernity’s diasporic children, their narratives are juxtaposed with that of the slave ship captain Hamilton, a trader in flesh and one of modernity’s agents. Extracts from his ship’s journal and letters to his wife back home are interspersed with the voices of the children, juxtapositions which serve, in Benjamin’s terms, to “actualize” lives lived and to shock the reader with cold enumeration of the economics of slavery, recorded for posterity in the archival account. He writes in the journal of two slave girls, “Nos 117 and 127”, who “ill of a flux, died” (116), of purchasing a “man slave of quite unnatural proportions” (111) and records how he uses neck yokes and thumb screws to extract confession and quell rebellion. The horrors of passage are omitted from Hamilton’s letters to his wife, as he substitutes the euphemistic “trading community” (120) in lieu of the details of the Middle Passage and his trade within it. Whilst unable to recognise the humanity of the slave children in his ship’s hold, Hamilton can yet revel “in the imagined joys that our projected children will bless us with” (120); he must dehumanize his cargo of slaves in order to facilitate his own position in a transnational system of racial capitalism, and thereby define himself as human. This resonates with Toni Morrison’s considerations on the origins of racist ideology and practice, and how “the necessity of rendering the slave a foreign species appears to be a desperate attempt to confirm one’s own self as normal [...] The danger of sympathizing with the stranger is the possibility of becoming a stranger. To lose one’s racialized rank is to lose one’s own valued and enshrined difference” (29-30). By contrasting Hamilton’s love letters with the racial logic of the captain’s journal, and alongside the individual voices of the diaspora, Phillips can simply present multiple narratives with the apparent absence of authorial intervention. As Bénédicte Ledent has written:

Phillips does not regard the diaspora as a notion to be exploited theoretically, but rather as an empirical and historical reality that needs to be probed without prejudices and from multiple and ever-changing angles. A pragmatic artist, Phillips has always examined the very concrete social and psychological implications of the diasporic for individuals striving first of all to understand their exilic plight, and leaving his readers and critics to derive the more abstract meaning from the predicaments he approaches imaginatively in his novels (200).

11As well as highlighting Phillips's non-prejudicial approach, Ledent points to the multiplicity of his narrative technique, one we can regard as a montage of perspectives and polyphonic in its expression of competing histories – Phillips has himself referred to his work as polyphonic (interview with Davison, 22). Ranging from the biographical to the epistolary, Phillips's narrative modes in *Foreigners; Three English Lives* juxtapose, for example, the linear “every day time” of the archival history of the city of Leeds against David Oluwale's disorientation on its streets and within its institutions. This intertextuality of official documentation, interviews, media, and testimony is used, without the need for extended metaphor, to expose the British imperial adventure and its consequences for generations of its diasporic subjects. As Michael Rothberg makes clear, this intertextuality is not simply a question of “playful postmodern pastiche” but rather illustrates how “diaspora frustrates all forms of metaphoric identification because it is rooted in, or – better – uprooted by, traumatic history” (169). This history is articulated in Phillips's biographies of Francis Barber, Randolph Turpin and David Oluwale which are themselves indicative of modernist biographical writing. For example, Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909) is experimental in its de-emphasis of plot and setting, modernist in its emulation of, in fictional biography, impressionist and post-impressionist artistic forms. Lytton Strachey, in *Eminent Victorians* (1918), a critique of the bastions of modernity – army, education, church and empire, in biographies of General Gordon, Dr. Arnold, Cardinal Manning and Florence Nightingale – re-orientated the biography as a form of critique. In *Foreigners: Three English Lives*, Phillips recovers and layers, in one volume, the personal histories of Barber, Turpin and Oluwale in seemingly disparate narratives that, taken together, form a constellation of counter narratives to dispel the promulgation of a universal history. There is no stated, explicit continuity in the representation of the three lives, but together they constitute a contrapuntal engagement with received understanding of the past that complicates Britishness and its accounts of colonisation and de-colonisation. In his biographical “sketch” of Francis Barber, for example, Phillips points to the existence of a substantial black British presence long before the Windrush generation of immigrants. David Oluwale, too, does not fit the post-war perception of the pattern of immigration to Britain, and the life of Randolph Turpin, a product of Irish and Caribbean ancestry, complicates our understanding of both British and migrant identity emanating from the colonial encounter. As Abigail Ward puts it:

Phillips's creation of contrapuntal texts may indeed serve to disrupt the notion of one main narrative, with implications for racialised models of British national identity. [...] Phillips aims, via polyphonic voices, to counter the homogeneity of the narrative of received British history (14).

12In Phillips's *Foreigners: Three English Lives* the eighteenth-century figure of Francis Barber is recovered, paradoxically, despite his very absence from most of the first section, “Dr Johnson's Watch”. It is through the nameless narrator, “a

minor literary wit in London society [...] a financial investor, a man of the City” (3) and one of Samuel Johnson’s circle, that we learn of Barber’s history and demise. Francis Barber himself is in a self-proclaimed “state of disrepair” (57), a “ruination” (59) from the past, and his story, in Phillips’s treatment, forces the reader to reassess the place of Barber in eighteenth-century London and his relationship with Johnson. Barber ends his time in poverty in Lichfield, swindled of any legacy but for a memento of a life lived out of time and place, a watch once owned by Samuel Johnson.

¹³The twenty-first-century reader understands more than the complacent narrator who, when asked by Barber where true liberty lies – whether it is enhanced by Dr Johnson’s benevolent interventions or to be found in the fulfilment of Barber’s own desire for a life at sea – answers with a confirmation, on what he believes to be sound moral principles, of his earlier intention to invest in a repatriation scheme, in “the Providence of Freedom, and thereby help prevent this spectacle of negro abasement becoming endemic in our land” (59). Phillips’s narrative technique in “Dr Johnson’s Watch” evokes enlightened eighteenth-century intervention and yet works against the Enlightenment grain in bringing the reader to a critique of those of abolitionist persuasion who “helped” Barber without the slightest contemplation of their own complicity in new colonial ventures that, at the same stroke, displaces the colonised subject once again.

¹⁴Barber lives his life in the aporia implied in Phillips’s title – in the space separating “foreigners” and “three English lives”. The novel is cross-cultural in charting, for example, the engagement between boxer Randolph Turpin and the African-American fighter Sugar Ray Robinson. This transatlantic encounter has its physical dimension in the commercial world of boxing, a sporting encounter between Britain’s waning imperialism and a post war, ascendant America. Having inscribed Francis Barber and Randolph Turpin as “English” men, the mother country discards them as obsolete and, until the release, in Phillips’s redemptive montage, of what Benjamin called in “The Storyteller”, their “germinative power” (90) as disruptive of homogeneous time. Phillips writes in his biography of David Oluwale, “Northern Lights”: “The mother country was welcoming her citizens at the front door, and then quickly ushering them out through the back door” (218), his intention being the restoration of their voices to the narrative of British imperial history. As Francis Barber serves Dr Johnson and Randolph Turpin the chicanery of professional sport as spectacle, so David serves industrial Leeds as an employee at the West Yorkshire Foundries. Incarceration, in Armley jail and as a psychiatric patient at High Royds Hospital, is followed by homelessness. The truth of David’s life in England emerges from Phillips’s recovery and presentation of the civic archival record, police reports, hospital records and first-person narrations that together enable nuanced understanding of Leeds’s imperial and industrial past. David Oluwale’s fractured

experience is set against the economic development of Leeds and its architectural grandeur, the hegemonic materiality of industrialisation and British imperial expansion. As Benjamin, in *The Arcades Project*, recovers the obsolete, once fetishised arcades of iron and glass in his history of nineteenth-century Paris, Phillips, too, invokes the Victorian gothic structures of the prison, the hospital and the town hall, with its vestibule inscription; “Europe – Asia – Africa – America” (209). Their aura, these “ruins” of the city’s imperial past, and David Oluwale’s place within it, remain to be interrogated for the understanding of the present. It is a heritage which, in its very physicality, catches David Oluwale, snagging his corpse on its journey back to the seas that brought him to England, and thereby allowing his story to be told. Had Leeds let him go, David Oluwale would have simply disappeared, his presence literally and figuratively policed; instead, never the victim and stubborn to the end, he remains as visible in death as in his life on the city’s streets, “Forever in Leeds” (260), Phillips disrupting both homogeneous time and essentialised notions of exactly where the diasporic ‘home’ is located:

Twenty years in Leeds is a long time. Perhaps the strong current, down here at Leeds Bridge, was intent upon carrying you all the way back to Hull, and then back to the safety of Africa. Away from your home (257).

Modernism and Narrative Form

15As has been shown the presentation of different voices in a montage that juxtaposes different viewpoints and texts is integral to Phillips’s narrative strategy. For Clingman, the form and structure of Phillips’s work is informed by the ambivalence and dislocation of the diasporic experience itself. Phillips has:

An interest in all those asymmetrical marginalized and excluded people of whatever origins whose routes cross in ways from the complex and complementary to the jagged, tangential and disjunctive – in itself an underlying formal patterning in his work (77).

16Of course, the “jagged, tangential and disjunctive” are also the hallmarks of modernism, the forms of which were shaped by the modern experience itself: urbanization, the technologies of war and new understandings of the disjunctions of time and space. In Terry Eagleton’s terms, Benjamin’s achievements as modernist include his rejection of “the suave schemas of the museum catalogue in the name of a fiercely idiosyncratic passion that fastens on the contingent and unregarded. [...] [A] ‘textualizing’ of history that reclaims repressed and unmapped areas” (61). It is within such a modernist tradition that Phillips can be said to take his place as a writer.

17Clingman notes how the influence of Joseph Conrad, a man of the sea and an outsider, is clear in the work of Phillips. They share a complex, transnational

perspective that promotes more nuanced understanding of the reverberations of empire, its intersections and its connections as well as its vicissitudes of exploitation and dislocation (78). Phillips, unlike Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe who balked at what he identified as Conrad's racism, approaches *Heart of Darkness* (1902) from a European perspective that accommodates the possibility of Conrad situating the darkness of humanity in the metropolitan center rather than at the site of its colonial acquisitions. In "Was Joseph Conrad Really a Racist?" Phillips remarks how he was "raised in Europe" and therefore "undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of European civilization" (208). Marlow, sitting at the Thames, below the "monstrous town", admits that the metropolis of London "has been one of the dark places of the earth" (Conrad, 138). Phillips's European sensibility problematizes Achebe's racially inflected reading of *Heart of Darkness*, as Conrad, for Phillips in his introduction to the Random House 1999 edition, expresses "doubt about the supremacy of European humanity" (xvi). Phillips writes of *Heart of Darkness*:

The modern world continues to explode with change and contradiction as past traditions come face-to-face with modern pressure, and modern pressure imposes itself on past traditions. The fissures and fractures of "modernism" are laid bare in this masterwork whose carefully wrought structure creaks under the strain of transition (xvii).

18The form of *Crossing the River* echoes the "carefully wrought structure" of *Heart of Darkness*, but here Phillips inverts Conrad's narration of Marlow's journey into the African interior in search of Kurtz. In *Crossing the River*, it is Edward Williams's former slave Nash, repatriated to Africa as a missionary, who "goes native". In a reflexive narrative move, it is the black, civilized Christian Nash, who, in a renunciation of the church and its civilizing mission, writes in his last letter to Edward, "I must suspend my faith and I therefore freely choose to live the life of the African" (62).

19As the story in *Heart of Darkness* is embedded in Marlow's story-telling, so too are the disparate stories of Nash, Martha and Travis framed by the African farmer's prologue and epilogue. The "fissures and fractures of 'modernism'" that Phillips identifies in Conrad's novel also find expression in *Crossing the River*, as the farmer remembers the "fractured" experience of the dislocated children of the Middle Passage. The children are "broken off, like limbs from the tree" and from which "There is no return", the diaspora permanently marked by the colonial encounter.

20Phillips writes of how "Conrad explores the multiple ambiguities of civilization, and his restless narrative circles back on itself as though trapped in the complexities of the situation" (xvi). The narrative of *Crossing the River* also returns back to itself, as the father reiterates his understanding that history

cannot be undone, that “there are no paths in water”. The children, however, survive the crossing and the complexities of diasporic existence and, by the end of the novel, have “arrived on the far bank of the river, loved”. This love finds its expression in remembrance, the farmer listening as “the many-tongued chorus of the common memory begins again to swell” (235).

21 This ebb and flow of the past, its significance in materiality, is again reflective of Benjamin’s vanishing and emergent points in the constellation, both being metaphors for history’s discontinuities. What Benjamin sees in the flickering night sky, Phillips finds in the swelling tides of the pathless seas, the object once distant, now close at hand and brimming with revelatory potential for the confrontation of the present. As Benjamin writes:

[H]istory is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance. What science has “determined”, remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete (N8,1).

22 Without such vigilance, history is in a permanent state of crisis, for crisis, the “critical moment” in Benjamin’s schema, means the constant preservation of the “enshrined” status quo (N10, 2). Like Walter Benjamin’s “storyteller”, Phillips draws on communal memory to convey “something useful” in a non-prescriptive and polyphonic aesthetic in which “counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding” (86). The experiences of diasporic exile originating in modernity, Benjamin’s “secular productive forces of history” (84), are redeemed in their articulation as resistance to a deterministic history that functions to over-write time and space.

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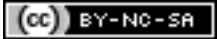
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Justine Baillie, « “There are no paths in water”: History, Memory and Narrative Form in *Crossing the River* (1993) and *Foreigners: Three English Lives* (2007) » dans « *Caryl Phillips. Inhabiting the Voids of History* »,

The present volume proposes to re-read the work of Caryl Phillips through the prism of his engagement with history, both the history of the Middle Passage as

well as the unread and unspoken history of lives which have not yet made it into official history. His work can be approached as an invitation to reflect on the role of literature and in particular on the specificity of the literary author with regards to the writing of history and the specificity inherent in handling historical material. More largely this question prompts another issue which is: where does history start, and where does it stop? In recent decades, the rise of subaltern history, women's history and the histories of minorities has largely broadened the spectrum of what history is about.

Absence and loss, mourning and the impossible return are key tropes which haunt the work of Caryl Phillips to the point that the aesthetics which he has crafted over the years seem to weave complex networks of narrative voices which circle voids that are constantly retold, and sounded out. This way of positing the void at the centre is all the more interesting as it constitutes an aesthetic shift from a choice often made in contemporary literature to represent the body, and in particular the wounded body, as a palimpsest of pain which bears witness to the sufferings of the 20th century subject, the post-modern subject and the post-colonial subject. Rather than engage with a thorough and graphic depiction of a suffering body, Caryl Phillips generates a voice which circulates along tangential lines of transmission and prompts the reader to receive and reactivate the salvaged narratives retrieved from archival oblivion. The present volume constitutes a reappraisal of the work of Caryl Phillips up to his most recent novel *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018).

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