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Caryl Phillips' *The Lost Child*: A Story of Loss and Connection

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Abstract: Through a reading of Caryl Phillips' most recent novel, *The Lost Child* (2015), this article examines a paradox at the heart of Phillips' work: the tension between the ruptures and continuities brought about by the historical encounter of north and south (specifically, eighteenth-century northern Britain and the Caribbean). The novel focuses on the lot of the lost children who were born in the wake of such a fateful meeting and whose narratives are often missing from the literary and historical records even as their ghostly traces haunt today's British society and indeed the British literary canon. Yet, as this essay demonstrates, the family disruptions and sense of loss, a legacy of slavery that mars the lives of the characters, are compensated at the fictional level by a form of literary parenthood. The novel relies on a fruitful intertextual conversation with other novels that, like *The Lost Child*, invest in the narrative reclamation of absent stories, the unvoiced accounts of orphans and lost, stolen, or denied children of the Empire. These texts include Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) as well as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and some of Phillips' earlier works, notably *Cambridge* (1991).

Keywords: Caryl Phillips, *The Lost Child*, *Wuthering Heights*, intertextuality, family

I.

This essay focuses on loss as a condition and consequence of the violent meeting of the northern and southern hemispheres and, more specifically, Britain and its African "others" in the theatre of the Caribbean.

We ask how it might be possible to conceive of the "lostness" of those who centuries ago were brought from one world to another under coercion, or who came with expectations of transformative possibilities that often proved devastatingly illusory, and who were all bound together by a sense of exile in whatever "home" they found themselves. It would appear that, in the absence of a balanced and unbiased official record, the most effective imaginative evocations of this state of lostness have been articulated in Caribbean literature. Writers like Maryse Condé, George Lamming, Caryl Phillips, Jean Rhys, and Derek Walcott—to name only some of the best-known—have engaged with the (historical and literary) colonial archive of this world-changing contact and clash of cultures and races. Such an engagement is framed by the dialogue between two literary traditions, that of the British canon and that of the tropical south, which revisits and rewrites the narratives of the former, thereby claiming those lost, silenced, and invisible children of Empire whose presence (or absence) haunts the pages of British fiction. We focus on Phillips' latest novel, *The Lost Child* (2015) and how it combines such historical loss with connections between these two worlds. Paradoxically it is set exclusively in England and covers a time span that ranges from eighteenth-century Liverpool, through nineteenth-century Haworth, to Leeds, London, and Oxford between the 1950s and 1980s. In particular, we consider how this many-stranded narrative puts the northern English realm of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in conversation with writing from the Caribbean and its diaspora, thereby performing what Walcott calls the "gathering of broken pieces" to restore "shattered histories" ("Antilles" 69). For Phillips, as for Walcott, this re-membering is at the very heart of Caribbean writing.

From its opening, *The Lost Child* calls attention to the lost children of the first encounter of eighteenth-century northern England and the Black Atlantic, meaning formerly enslaved Caribbean people who, for various reasons, found themselves in Britain; it also tells the story of their lost children and their children's children. Through our discussion of the text's conversation with *Wuthering Heights* and works by other Caribbean writers (specifically those of Rhys and several of Phillips' earlier works), we unravel how *The Lost Child* engages in an intricate

web of intertextuality and elaborate on the structural and hermeneutic patterning of its dialogue with other writers and their books. Like Phillips' historical fiction *Cambridge* (1991), *The Lost Child* is deeply invested in literary parenthood: the narrative reclamation/adoption of absent stories, the unvoiced accounts of orphans and stolen or denied children of Empire who are missing from, or only shadowy figures within, official records. The haunting trope of the lost child and the liminal and savage landscape of the heath pervade Phillips' new work, a text in which narrative disjunction mirrors the broken and disjointed families that are its subject. At the same time, these legitimate and "illegitimate" family connections parallel similarly uneasy connections between the various strands of the novel, a narrative construction that challenges us to experience a rewarding simultaneity in our reading praxis.

II.

In Phillips' essay collection titled *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), which denounces the amnesia surrounding the transatlantic slave trade, he writes of sitting on the Liverpool docks and remembering his first reading of Brontë's novel. At that time, he was particularly struck by the scene in which Mr. Earnshaw embarks on a three-day walk to Liverpool on unspecified business and returns with a gift for his children. Unwrapping a "dirty, ragged, black-haired child" who speaks an incomprehensible language, Mr. Earnshaw declares "it" a "gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (Brontë, *Wuthering* 77). "This seven-year-old dark stranger . . . 'rescued' from the streets of Liverpool in 1771," Phillips recalls, "was one of the first literary characters to seize my imagination" (Phillips, *Atlantic* 92). More recently, in a conversation with John McLeod, Phillips speculated on why this "dark stranger," Brontë's Heathcliff, is one of the most fascinating of the multiple orphans and foundlings that feature in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English fiction. He suggests that Heathcliff made readers uncomfortable, uneasy, and puzzled as to how to place him as he eludes extant categories (McLeod and Phillips). Phillips' fourth novel, *Cambridge*, deliberately references *Wuthering Heights*. This is suggested in the name of one of two central narrators: Emily, an unmarried young

woman and the daughter of a cold father, who comes from northern England. The literary allusion is confirmed by the older widower whom her father has arranged for her to marry. His name, Thomas Lockwood, recalls Mr. Lockwood, one of two narrators in Brontë's novel. Like the anomalous presence of the black general Othello in the Venetian court of Shakespeare's tragedy, the enigma of the dark alien child in *Wuthering Heights*, adrift in a major eighteenth-century slaving port, haunted Phillips' imagination for a long time. Decades later, *The Lost Child* is in part an attempt to solve the puzzle of Heathcliff's backstory.

Of course, Phillips is not the only Caribbean writer to engage with the world of the Brontës.[1] One thinks of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Condé's *Windward Heights* (1999), which transplants Emily Brontë's plot to Guadeloupe. Interestingly, Theo D'haen claims that Condé's novel knowingly reframes *Wuthering Heights* "through the prism of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and even of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (80). He does not elaborate, but the deliberate foregrounding of these links alerts the initiated reader to a web of literary connections that Phillips expands in *The Lost Child*. Rhys and Condé share with the Brontës a secondary status as women writers. And as Caribbean writers, their fictions are as interested as Phillips' in highlighting the marginalization of the "dark Others" demonized in the early texts. Another crucial aspect of the Brontë imaginary that has also imprinted on these Caribbean writers, particularly Phillips, has to do with specific qualities of the English landscape. In an interview with Tanya Agathocleous, Phillips recalls that during his urban childhood in Leeds he became aware that "there was this wild strange place" on the periphery, a bleak desolate moorland that he recognized from *Wuthering Heights* in which, he insists, "the heath is the character" (qtd. in Agathocleous). His observation identifies another point of connection that binds northern Britain and the Caribbean: both places have been depicted in ways that fix the character of the place. The heath is an elemental space that projects onto the landscape the darker side of human consciousness, the repressed, sinister, magical, and other-worldly qualities that are more easily intuited than analyzed.[2] For writers from the New World tropics, whose own space

has been for centuries configured in similar ways (as wild, savage, unpredictable, changeable, and dangerous, full of mysterious forces that can overpower reason), the northern imaginary is one with which they can, to some extent, identify and therefore connect. For example, Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes lists *Wuthering Heights* among the books that were important to him precisely because of Brontë's literary recognition of unreason, of the inexplicable as intrinsic to human experience, an acknowledgement that seems more readily sensed by writers from outside the center, whether in parochial northern England, the New World islands of the West Indies, or, in Fuentes' case, Latin America. Brontë, Fuentes asserts, was "the outcast within the center" (212) who offered an alternative to "the religion of Reason, the bedrock of the bourgeoisie" (213). The literary evocation of the moor, then, and all that it signifies to these writers from a different hemisphere, at least partly accounts for their continued engagement with the Brontës' writing.

Eighteenth-century northern Britain also contained some of the largest mercantile centres and ports engaged in business, including the slave trade, with the West Indies: Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, and, of course, Liverpool, which by the 1770s outstripped London and Bristol. In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips observes that "by the end of the [eighteenth] century Liverpool was by far the largest and most vigorous participant in the English slave trade, its docks playing host to more slave ships than London and Bristol combined" (31). Profit and loss are more important than human lives in such places. Barry Unsworth's *Sacred Hunger* (1992), which begins in a Liverpool shipwrights' yard, eviscerates the capitalist philosophy that compromises ethical responsibility in favor of material gain. *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s Antoinette refers to her husband's English mansion, which is financed by his West Indian properties, and concludes that "Gold is the idol they worship" (Rhys 122). Similarly, in the penultimate section of *The Lost Child*, Earnshaw, who does business with Antigua where he has "sugarworks" (Phillips 243), enters Liverpool dreading his commerce with "men whose hearts were hard like stone, and whose Christian charity went no further than the looking glass" (243). *Wuthering Heights*, like *Jane Eyre* and so many nineteenth-century British fictions, is haunted by the guilty secret of British complic-

ity with and profit from the history of slavery, in the same way that *The Lost Child* is dominated by the "burdensome secret" surrounding the unofficial relationship between the (unnamed) former slave woman abandoned on the Liverpool docks and the respectable and gentlemanly Earnshaw (Phillips 11).

The invidious corruption of all involved in "the peculiar institution" is, in the Caribbean at least, not a matter of the past: even centuries after its abolition, the madness of slavery continues to infect the memory of generation after generation. This is why it is obsessively revisited by the region's writers at home and, increasingly, in the far-flung diaspora where the wound may be less acknowledged or even silenced by the host society, a practice that paradoxically reinforces the impact of the repressed past on the present. One might think here of a novel like Trinidadian-Canadian writer Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999). In this tale of marronage through generations of a family, an estranged daughter writes to her absent mother in a vain quest for family genealogy, aware that history is being lost: "[W]e forget who we were. Nothing is changing, it is just that we are forgetting. All the centuries past may be one long sleep" (234). It is against this forgetting that Caribbean writers position themselves, perhaps especially those, like Phillips, who have spent much of their lives in the diaspora. They are alert to the long shadows cast by history and, in Phillips' case, the shadows that haunt the north of England where he grew up, particularly in texts like *Wuthering Heights* and cities such as Liverpool "where history is so physically present, yet so glaringly absent from people's consciousness" (*Atlantic* 93). In *The Lost Child*, Ben, the son of troubled female protagonist Monica, performs this disposal of the archive when, after his mother's death, he attempts to exorcize his painful past by throwing out "all of her letters and postcards to him. He also [gets] rid of the newspaper clippings" about his brother's tragic death (Phillips 202) and later refuses to take possession of the documents left behind by his mother. But even though the material record is expunged or ignored, the novel demonstrates that the afterlife of trauma persists in memory, as testified by the chapter "Childhood," which registers Ben's painful remembrances of his early life, which was tragically shaped

by his mother's chronic depression. As Phillips notes in his interview with Agathocleous, the descendants of all those whose lives, feelings, hopes, and dreams were erased from history are driven to "attempt to repair memory or repair amnesia." Quite significantly the novel opens in the present tense, with the story of an ex-slave woman from the West Indies who is dying on the Liverpool docks in late eighteenth-century England; thus begins the remembering process that her lost child and all those who come after are encouraged to dismiss.

III.

In *The Lost Child*, Phillips revisits the northern imaginary but he does so in novel and complex ways that not only acknowledge losses, as do Rhys and Condé's works, but work toward cultural and historical connections. Certainly, like other Caribbean authors, he writes back to the English literary canon in which *Wuthering Heights* has an established place: the subtext of colonial dominance and its consequences is played out in the early and more contemporary sections of *The Lost Child* in the stories of damaged characters. The novel contains three strands: the story of increasingly troubled Monica and her two mixed-race sons; the story of the unnamed mixed-race boy fathered by the Earnshaw figure, who takes him home when his mother dies; and the story of Phillips' imagined Emily Brontë on her deathbed. All of the characters struggle with loss, anger, and the betrayal of love. Like *Cambridge*, the novel is deeply invested in the textual reclamation of the orphans, the abandoned, denied children of Empire (both black and white) whose stories may be missing from the official history but, as Phillips' texts insist, are nonetheless inextricably interwoven into the British national narrative. Both Rhys and Condé set up a dichotomy between centre and margin but privilege the Caribbean perspective, so that Britain will always be that "other place." While the main figures in their stories ultimately return to the Caribbean, spiritually if not physically, the tensions between centre and margin in *The Lost Child* are played out on British soil. In the section titled "Childhood," the specificity of the images, television jingles, pop songs, and lexicon of each period of Ben's memories from age six to seventeen ("telly," "clot," "Mam," "Ta, love,"

"rag and bone man," "nicking it") economically evoke the quintessentially local working-class north of England world he inhabits but in which he remains a racial other. Belonging to a different generation of writers and with a different background than Rhys and Condé, Phillips brings together both cultures: his characters are not faced with a choice between England and the Caribbean but with the ambivalence of being "of and not of" Britain (Phillips, *New World Order* 4). *Wide Sargasso Sea* rescues the Jamaican Bertha from British erasure and stereotype; *The Lost Child* writes back to canonical texts but also "writes in" aspects of key Caribbean classics, most notably by Rhys herself. It is worth noting that those *The Lost Child* seeks to recuperate from silence, forgetting, and stereotype are children of Britain: like "the dark stranger" brought back from Liverpool in *Wuthering Heights*, the white Monica and her mixed-race boys Ben and Tommy are British-born. The novel has a wide trajectory in that it juxtaposes the nineteenth-century stories of Rhys, Brontë, and Condé with the relatively recent history of multiracial Britain.

As both Tommy and Ben discover, "the idea of talking about family in general was completely off the agenda" (Phillips, *Lost* 196). For a long time, the same applied to acknowledging the "family" of Empire: the matrix of British-Caribbean connections and migrations that made the presence of mixed-race British families possible, as well as diasporic families with roots in both Britain and the Caribbean. The West Indies, "the tropics," the colonies, and of course Africa constituted the other vectors of the flow of commodities, including human bodies, that was a crucial part of the British imperial project. This trade chained together these disparate geographical sites for centuries, creating a web of links and connections. Phillips' text suggests, we argue, that the dysfunctional nature of the "family" that results from this history needs to be talked about not just via the fractured families and lost children that are the novel's subject but through a reclamation of literary family ties: with the Brontës, with Rhys, and with Phillips' own literary progeny. Such connections, and the complex structure within which they are brought together, might help to clarify Phillips' idiosyncratic way of imagining a "lostness" that can nevertheless be shared.

While both *Cambridge* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* take on early British constructions of the Caribbean "other," *The Lost Child* is more ambitious in the sense that its web of connections goes beyond the unity of time and action that characterizes the earlier texts and privileges an assortment of narratives that take readers across time and space in an unpredictable manner. Wendy Smith's review of *The Lost Child* in the *Boston Globe* perceptively describes it as a "riff on Emily Brontë's masterpiece . . . like a jazz improvisation: Phillips plucks the themes that resonate most deeply with him and transposes them into a polyphonic narrative." Her musical analogy highlights the plurality of Phillips' riddling narratives, composed of apparently discordant and unrelated stories, some told in the present tense and some in the past, by multiple narrators who are often unheard by each other within the text but whose interconnections are nevertheless forged by Phillips' readers. The disorientation caused by such an intricate narrative fabric is part of the "lostness" inherent in *The Lost Child*, but which is partly compensated for by its numerous literary ramifications.

While Phillips' historical fictions (like *Cambridge*) write to and, in the sense of a palimpsest, *over* texts from the colonial narrative archive, other works that feature twentieth-century British life (like *The Lost Child*) are equally invested in historical concerns. One way that Phillips effects this constant bond with the past is by "writing back to [him] self, which might be described as a form of auto-intertextuality" (Ledent 85). Certainly, allusion is crucial in both novels referred to above. Lady Nugent's *Journal*, Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative, and Matthew Lewis' planter's log are liberally mined in *Cambridge*, and, as noted, the fictional worlds of Emily Brontë and Rhys in particular are very much a presence in *The Lost Child*. But so are *Cambridge*, *Colour Me English*, and *The Atlantic Sound*: indeed, Phillips channels his earlier work in audacious auto-intertextuality that deepens and enriches the multiple contexts of his newest novel. Talking to Agathocleous, he acknowledges that *The Lost Child* is "'in conversation with [his] earlier works,' but [he's] not quite sure what's going on in the conversation."

One example of these multiple textual family resemblances is the similarity between the figures of Antoinette/Bertha in *Wide Sargasso*

Sea, Emily in *Cambridge*, and Monica in *The Lost Child*, each of whom is traumatized to such an extent that she manifests a psychopathological state that is exacerbated by incarceration. For all three women, mirrors are both reassuring and deeply unsettling. And it is striking that both Antoinette and Monica come to the realization that in their claustrophobic spaces—whether the attic of an English mansion or a mental home—"there is no looking-glass here" (Rhys, *Wide* 117) and "there's no mirror in this room" (Phillips, *Lost* 236). This awareness, arresting in its resemblance, signals Antoinette/Bertha's and Monica's inability to see and recognize themselves, which suggests the *loss* of themselves at an ontological level. *The Lost Child* also contains several incarnations of Rhys' iconic "madwoman in the attic": the "Crazy Woman," a former slave from the West Indies, encountered in the novel's first pages (Phillips, *Lost* 3); "the crazy woman" (221) who lives in the first floor flat of the squalid building in which Monica temporarily finds shelter; Monica herself, at some stage living in a "tiny attic room" (214) and always subject to a "flighty state of mind and proclivity to wander in her head" (27–28), whose husband tells her that her "mind is full of all sorts of craziness" (37); and, finally, the fictional Emily Brontë who continues "to wander in her mind out onto the moors" (105). These connections are further enhanced when one considers Monica's resemblance to another of Rhys' characters. In this respect, a particularly meaningful scene occurs when Monica's act of sunbathing in her underwear fuels the outrage of her prissy neighbor (Phillips, *Lost* 231) and leads to a court case, and consequent forcible institutional commitment. The episode clearly echoes Rhys' story of another disturbed and incarcerated woman, "Let Them Call it Jazz," in which West Indian Selina is, very much like Monica, set up in a flat by a male friend and ends up in prison for being a nuisance to her self-righteous neighbors. These troubling literary echoes within a novel that some critics find fragmentary reinforce the subtle demarcation of Phillips' fictions from the canonical ones he references. For instance, one of the male characters who figures prominently in Brontë's novel (Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*) is unnamed in Phillips' texts; in *The Nature of Blood,* the Othello figure is similarly nameless. It is as if Phillips invokes these

famous literary presences and simultaneously establishes that his are distinct, separate literary characters. Although such literary presences are associated with specific literary contexts, they signify differently for his contemporary readers.

Phillips' decision to keep one of his central characters in *The Lost Child* nameless is also part of the indeterminacy of his writing; quite unsurprisingly, the riddle of the eponymous lost child is never solved. There are several abandoned boys in the text: the Heathcliff figure; the wild boy from the moors in the character Emily Brontë's feverish dreams; her dead brother Branwell Brontë, to whom her father is referred in her musings as never getting over the loss of; and Monica's children, both her disappeared son Tommy and Ben, who is for all intents and purposes orphaned from a very early age. Moreover, if we widen our focus to include *Cambridge*, the notion of lost children extends to daughters: not only Julius' "child from his first marriage" (Phillips 33) but also Monica and the Emily of both novels. The latter three women are lost to their fathers by virtue of their inferior gender and willful determination to escape the rigid limitations imposed on "these children of a larger growth" (*Cambridge* 4), who end up vulnerable and defeated. As Monica puts it, "I've lost myself" (*Lost* 52). The Emilys of *Cambridge* and *The Lost Child* share with Monica a dysfunctional relationship with their fathers, who, though outwardly benevolent, are sinister patriarchs. In the former novel, Emily and Cambridge are both lost to their parents and have themselves lost children. It is ironic that in *The Lost Child* the interactions of an extended and mutually supportive family of immigrant Pakistani parents and children that Monica avoids in the Leeds park (65–66) contrast so tellingly with the novel's failed English nuclear families: parents and children are estranged, siblings disappear, and single mothers buckle under the task of childrearing. Such family crises are hardly alleviated by either fostering or sibling solidarity and tend to repeat themselves. The Emily Brontë character grieves over "Papa, who has shown no desire to present himself at the bedside of his ailing daughter. Half the family gone, but still, he refuses to bestir himself and offer his fading Emily the comfort of his company" (Phillips, *Lost*

106). Three hundred years later, Ben and Tommy's father is "increasingly removed from his two children" (44).

If familial rifts and losses are pervasive in *The Lost Child*, its zones of connection may be less obvious. This pattern of connection underpins a comment made by Kathryn Sutherland, in one of the most perceptive reviews of the novel, that it is "a serious work," which, like *Wuthering Heights*, coaxes readers "into reading signs and gathering details into patterns that might prove adequate to explain the mystery at the book's heart"—in other words, patterns that can teach them to read the text more perceptively. As for the mystery at the novel's heart, one might wonder what connects Brontë's dark, wild Heathcliff with Phillips' abandoned or missing brown-skinned boys in 1970s Britain. As always, Phillips asks readers to build bridges between the different narratives that make up this novel and others. What they share is a key consequence of the colonial encounter: the pathologized human products of racial and cultural contact, those creolized and miscegenated, often illegitimate, children of empire, in most cases unwanted and unacknowledged, who are still wandering in search of a textual home. Phillips' concern in *The Lost Child* is less with the historical context of *Wuthering Heights* than with the notion of family, the broken bonds between parent and child and the burden of care this failure of parenting places on traumatized offspring, both in eighteenth-century Liverpool and twentieth-century Leeds. The lost boy from the moors who haunts the fictional Emily Brontë's imagination in *The Lost Child*, Phillips' dark seven-year-old boy on the Liverpool docks, and Monica's son Ben are all outsiders, the result of parental transgression of racial boundaries. Yet the children suffer the consequences of their parents' defiance, no matter how founded in fleeting love the liaison from which they issued. The moving plight of such innocents having to pay society's price for their parents' desire forcibly brings home the continuities across the centuries of Britain's "outside" children.

To return to the notion of patterning, what is the effect of these multiple textual conversations on the reader? What story, what text(s) are we reading? How do they hang together? (Or is the point that they do not cohere in any easy way?) How do the sections that echo *Wuthering*

Heights, or the Brontë family's intimate yet uneasy relationships, interface with the narrative of Monica and her boys? On one hand, bringing together these stories, these voices and the worlds they inhabit, in a northern space, suggests a form of reconciliation. Yet the text works against such a positive ascription, and it is worth trying to unpack this contradiction.

Going back to Smith's musical analogy, Phillips' narrative voices are, on first reading, so disparate as to be discordant. This is deliberate because the story moves the different characters and their histories both toward and away from mutual recognition, in the same way that the reader is torn between a sense of dislocation and one of possible, if difficult, consonance. *The Lost Child* attempts to recognize and legitimate the denied and forgotten children of Empire by employing a literary form in which narrative disjunction is commonplace and supposedly illegitimate connections are taken for granted. A few reviewers suggest that, just as northern England and the Black Atlantic are worlds apart, neither the stories comprising the novel nor the characters hang together. Alex Clark describes the book as a "frustratingly patchwork novel," and Todd McEwen states that it may be difficult to "discern where [the opening narrative] is heading." But look at today's Britain, the novel seems to suggest, and see the "patchwork," the multiplicity of peoples and cultures that share the same space. Who belongs together, and who does not?

To give just a few examples of what we mean by these "illegitimate" narrative and intertextual connections, consider the titles of the different sections, which are misleading, to say the least, and suggest some form of plot development, which is then undermined. In her interview with Phillips, Agathocleous remarks that the "chapter headings . . . are like a bildungsroman gone wrong. All the developmental stages are out of sequence." For instance, the opening section, "Separation," establishes the text's connection with *Wuthering Heights* and explains Heathcliff's dark skin (as noted in Brontë's novel) and why he is brought to Thrushcross Grange in the first place. The next section is titled "First Love" and, quite naturally, readers anticipate the introduction of Cathy and the central passion of Brontë's novel. Instead, the

entire quality, period, and subject matter of the prose shifts: in the first segment, the diction is archaically eloquent, employing stylistic traits common to nineteenth-century narratives such as periphrasis and investing the squalor with a gothic quality. Monica's account, which follows, is a flattened realist record of a romance that quickly dulls into mutual silence and resentment. One could also examine the clashes of genre and register that recur in the text. For instance, Phillips moves from what Christopher Tayler, with reference to Phillips' *In the Falling Snow*, terms "low wattage realism"—a nod, perhaps, to the 1950s–1960s tradition of "gritty" northern working-class fiction—to a highly charged, disturbed, and disturbing inner monologue, especially in the section "Alone," in which Monica's descent into marginalization and madness is conveyed in a poignant first-person narrative. The same kind of disparity occurs in Emily's various narratives in *Cambridge*: the perky, garrulous, and naïve voice of the travelogue stockpiling information for the sake of the record clashes with the repressed rage and frustration palpable in the jarring syntax of the prologue, which gives way to the disconnected, dreamlike collage of memory and sensation and jumbled phrases in the epilogue. All that is elided in *Cambridge* to fit the specific formula of the travel journal bubbles to the surface in the impressionistic pieces. As in Rhys' work, the "abyss of silence" (Phillips, *Lost* 23) that defines the characters' relationships is not in fact silent in Phillips' writing; it contains a surfeit of echoes. In *Cambridge*, it is as if a kind of barely contained mania can be detected under the polite surface of the one genre being employed for the majority of her account which then sends shockwaves rippling outward via the disjointed prose used to represent Emily's much-altered final state. In the same way, the Emily Brontë character in *The Lost Child* exists both in the world of her family and the world of her own fictions and is even more aware after death that "[s]he lives now in two worlds" (112). We argue that Phillips' *The Lost Child* challenges us to experience the same simultaneity in our reading, divided as we are between an acute sense of disruption and one, less obvious, of kinship.

IV.

Broken in terms of structure and fractured in terms of narrative, the form of *The Lost Child* parallels its subject matter of disrupted childhoods and shattered families, whether blood relations or the displaced community of the African-Caribbean diaspora. Like much of Phillips' work, the novel calls attention to the walls built between people—by themselves or others and because of race or cultural differences—and how these divisions, so difficult to dismantle, isolate and damage the psyche. Repeatedly, variations on the phrase "all communication between the two of them had totally broken down" (Phillips, *Lost* 17) occur in a novel in which silences paper over buried feelings. For example, Monica and her husband "abandoned the ability, or desire, to converse with each other . . . beyond the minutiae of daily coexistence" (38); relations between Julius and his politician compatriot "had finally broken down" (49); and Monica deliberately refuses familiar exchanges with her father, "this warped man, who had already bullied his wife into near-mute submission" (16). Yet despite these barriers to communication, there is an inextricable bond between Britain and the Caribbean, a relationship of blood (in many senses of the word) that has existed since the seventeenth century. In the chapter entitled "The Journey," the Earnshaw figure visits the landlord of his dead black mistress, the "Crazy Woman" who is the mother of the dark child he has come to claim. The revolting slum proprietor tells the "gentleman": "I have a final reckoning. I take it you'll be settling her accounts" (250). *The Lost Child*, like much of Phillips' writing, underscores the point that Britain's account to the Caribbean is long overdue, yet here the scene ends with a father finally taking responsibility: "Come to me, son, and let's go home" (252). The family connection is legitimated in the text (and potentially in society); in the modern sections, too, there are tentative attempts at rapprochement and reunion. In his review of the novel, Gerard Woodward argues that Monica's father, in his heart, never gives up on his daughter and reaches out to his grandson after her death: "[H]e still has something to offer his own flesh and blood" (Phillips 208). Equally belatedly, the Heathcliff character's white father claims his dark son in some fashion, perhaps as Britain now—through shame, guilt, awareness, or

simple recognition—might acknowledge its colonial bastards who are, after all, no longer colonial but British.

The word "home" ends both the penultimate and final sections of *The Lost Child.* This repetition functions much like the word "England," which recurs in *Cambridge*'s prologue and epilogue: it undercuts any simplistic understanding of the term. The accommodation offered by their only remaining family to the orphaned boys in *The Lost Child*, whether Ben or the Heathcliff figure, is a kind of promise of home. But a long shadow is cast by the dark child's unspoken words, directed at the man he does not know is his father: "*Please don't hurt me*" (Phillips, *Lost* 260; emphasis in original). Evoking the possibility of undisclosed child abuse, they recall the lost Tommy, lured to his death on the moors by a father figure and echo *Higher Ground*'s Irina, who silently addresses her father in her thoughts: "Papa, you hurt me" (Phillips 177). And they may resonate in relation to Monica, whose possible abuse at the hands of her father is so subtly suggested in the *Lost Child* that it has been overlooked by most reviewers.[3] Certainly, knowing the outcome of *Wuthering Heights* shapes our expectations of what Phillips' illegitimate "dark boy" can expect and connects his future place in the family with that of other non-white northern British children of the 1950s and 1960s: a difficult and contested place at home.

In Phillips' *Crossing the River*, the captain of a slave ship (based on John Newton, another northern Briton, who repented his involvement in the nefarious trade and is the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace") alternates between his observations of human abasement and cruelty in his log and loving letters to his wife. But the purchase of three African children from their father implicitly corrupts his own future family; in tearing apart the one to help fund his own, the perversely intimate nature of "the enterprise" is manifest. In "Somewhere in England" in the same volume, the longed for reunion between the adopted Greer and his birth mother Joyce is anti-climactic. So freighted is she by eighteen years of loss, guilt, and anxiety that she does not feel she has the right to even touch him. There are no easy accounts of fragmented families put back together in Phillips' fictions, yet several contain a muted vindication of those with the courage to try, painful as it is, to strive for connections,

relationships, and the possibility of love. For all the ruined families, lost children, and failures of communication that might have allowed the formation of alternative families/communities of alliance, *The Lost Child* ends with two moments of possible reconnection: Ronald Johnson's love for his grandson, Ben, and the Earnshaw figure's love for his orphan son. Perhaps in this love lie the seeds of their redemption, their own "Amazing Grace."

Does *The Lost Child* suggest that Britain, while owning and legitimating those products of cultural contact within its borders, still cannot guarantee that home will be either happy or safe? There is a shock of recognition when we read of mixed-race Tommy enduring his first day at a new all-white school (Phillips, *Lost* 117) and recall another outsider child, the brown "oriental apparition" Ali, terrified in the face of a similarly estranging group stare, in Phillips' introduction to *Colour Me English* (4). The allusion deepens the impact of such casual cruelty and demonstrates—as Phillips' work always does—the often unrecognized connections across difference. Further, the simultaneous experience of reading one character and remembering reading another underscores the contemporary consequences of ignoring such connections and perpetrating persecution of the outsider. What happens to the vulnerable outsider black child in the fictional Leeds of the 1960s is reinforced by referencing how similar discrimination affects an outsider Asian boy in 1960s Leeds or, indeed, how it impacts an outsider Muslim child in today's Birmingham. Now more than ever, readers of the novel might have to ask similar questions about the contemporary situation in Britain, and indeed in Europe. This novel is, once again, evidence of what Phillips asserts in *Colour Me English*: his faith in the power of the worlds opened up to us by fiction, in which grasping the potential of connections makes it possible to feel empathy and compassion for those so different, so other—compassion that may perhaps be acted upon in the other of the two worlds we inhabit, not the fictional world but our own.

Notes

1 Several postcolonial critics have also expressed interest in this character. See, for example, Khair, who in his discussion of the Gothic novel brings together

Heathcliff and the figure of the terrorist (61–71). Thanks to Delphine Munos for pointing this out to us.

2 Interestingly, this spatial referent calls to mind the homophonous Shakespearean "Moor," Othello, whom Phillips evokes in *The European Tribe* (1987) and revisits in *The Nature of Blood* (1997) and who, like the eponymous landscape, has been construed as both fascinating and threatening.

3 Monica's relationship with her father radically changes when she is twelve, maybe from the point when "he lean[s] over and snake[s] his hand around her midriff" (Phillips, *Lost* 21). One understands better why Monica speaks of her father as "this warped man" (16) when later in the novel Ronald recalls to himself the accusations that a friend of Monica's levelled at him, saying that she did not "much care for the way [Monica's father] leer[s] at her" (208). The ambiguity remains as Ronald dismisses these charges while at the same time remembering that his wife "forgave him" (208).

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