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# Rewriting Slavery: Resurgence and Emotion in Caryl Phillips's *The Lost Child*

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## PLAN

Resurgence and rewriting
Thinking and feeling: Phillips's multiple narratives
Narrative discourse as a "quotational form"

## TEXTE

1 Resurgence, when applied to the past and particularly to historical trauma, can suggest the persistence and repetition of pain, but also the acts of resistance and rebellion which signal the overcoming of historical trauma. From this point of view, the rewriting of works from the past can contribute either to the revisiting of pain or the envisioning of avenues for overcoming its consequences. In his novels, plays and essays, Caryl Phillips has made liberal and frequent use of intertextuality and rewriting as ways of exploring the connection between past and present and the persistent effects of slavery. His adaptation of John Newman's ship's log in *Crossing the River* (1993) allowed him to expose the gaps and silences contained in a form of writing initially meant to account for potential losses in a purely financial perspective. *Cambridge* (1991), in its intertextual echoes of the slave narrative, gives resonance to the silences in Emily Cartwright's account of her experience on her father's Caribbean plantation. In several recent novels, Phillips has approached intertextual relations more directly as a form of rewriting. *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018) rewrites the life of Jean Rhys from a perspective that focuses more on her difficulty in communicating than on her writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Dancing in the Dark* (2005) narrativizes the life of an African American entertainer, Bert Williams, who has completely disappeared from the American consciousness. In these two novels, rewriting continues to

involve an exploration of the relevance of slavery to an understanding of people and events which may not appear to have any direct connection to it. In *The Lost Child* (2015), Phillips goes one step further, actually suggesting a rewriting of one of the classics of English literature, *Wuthering Heights*, in a way that links the mysterious origin of Heathcliff to the history of slavery.

# Resurgence and rewriting

2 In considering Caryl Phillips's novel *The Lost Child* as an example of the way in which the rewriting of classics can permit the resurgence of the past, it can be useful to take into account the possible meanings and connotations of the term "resurgence" in opposition to other terms that have been used in a similar context, such as "reclamation" and "revision".[1] In talking about the writing of the novel, Phillips has mentioned the emotional connection between his own childhood in Leeds and his use of *Wuthering Heights* as intertext. He has explained how news coverage of "the Moors murderers"[2] when he was a child became confused with his impression of the moors in his reading of *Wuthering Heights*:

> I remember whispered adult conversations about Ian Brady and Myra Hindley—the Moors murderers. A decade or so later, when I was a brooding adolescent trying to hide from my parents and lose myself in literature, the forbidding moors came back into view courtesy of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. To my mind, both off the page and on it, the ethereal, shadowy, moors bespoke danger. I remember searches for bodies on the television news and disturbing photographs in newspapers, and although the evil culprits were apprehended I was acutely aware that all the bodies were never discovered and there was therefore no real closure to this unspeakably malevolent episode. (Phillips, "Finding the Lost Child" 2015)

The author's remarks suggest that his reading of *Wuthering Heights* as an adolescent produced a resurgence in his mind of the horror associated with the murders he had heard about as a child. If seen in this perspective, it is clear that an aesthetics of resurgence relies on an emotional as well as an intellectual connection with the past. This approach suggests the relevance of observing the way in which

Phillips creates an emotional relation to the past as a means of emphasizing the impact of slavery on situations which seem far removed from the historical context in which it existed. [3] This requires taking into account not only the thematic "matrix", which Roberta Wondrich sees as "produc[ing] a critique of the displaced history of oppression and amnesia of the West" (2020, 295), but also the narrative texture which transforms resurgence into an emotional experience. Wondrich describes the narrative structure of the novel as "prismatic", a structure in which "the text and its characters reverberate through each other" (306–307). I believe that more attention needs to be paid to the narrative technique of the novel, to the voices that Phillips creates as a bridge between the intellectual task of comparing and collating narrative threads and the emotional experience of being confronted with the consequences of the past.

3 *The Lost Child* revisits the past by rewriting the story of Heathcliff's mysterious origins in a way that suggests a connection to the history of slavery. The opening and closing chapters of the novel present a man whom the reader will come to identify as Mr. Earnshaw, who fathers a child with a former slave encountered in Liverpool, suggesting that the child is actually Heathcliff. These scenes involving Mr. Earnshaw and Heathcliff of course invite one to think of the moment in *Wuthering Heights* when Mr. Earnshaw returns from a trip to Liverpool and presents Heathcliff to his family. In the words of Nelly Dean,

> We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk: indeed, its face looked older than Catherine's; yet when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy [4] brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for?
> (Brontë 1847, 31)

4 The final pages of *The Lost Child* pick up once again the thread of *Wuthering Heights*, showing Mr. Earnshaw returning home on foot accompanied by a character we suppose to be Heathcliff. Within the frame of this intertextual connection, Phillips tells the story of a

woman named Monica who has two sons, Ben and Tommy, with a man from the West Indies she met at Oxford. The story of Monica's divorce, her return to Leeds, her struggle to take care of her two sons alone, their placement in foster care, the disappearance of Tommy, and Monica's gradual mental decline constitute the main story line. In the middle of the novel a chapter entitled "Family" approaches the connection to *Wuthering Heights* from a different angle by focusing on the Brontë family and the lack of communication between Emily's brother Branwell and his father, thus extending the theme of lost children to include the Brontë family. The rewriting of *Wuthering Heights* in *The Lost Child* serves both to specify the link between the lost children of the novel and the context of the slave trade, which is not explicitly evoked in Brontë's novel, and to expand the idea of lost children to include the long-term consequences of the slave trade in the social context of twentieth-century Britain. Intertextuality serves as a means of bringing back the past in a way that illuminates its hidden recesses while at the same time exploring its connection to the present.

# Thinking and feeling: Phillips's multiple narratives

5 Anyone familiar with the fiction of Caryl Phillips will immediately recognize a narrative strategy based on the juxtaposition of apparently disparate story lines which are made to resonate in the mind of the reader "through a narrative poetics that weaves together fiction with the biographical and the intertextual in a very knowing, apparently contrived but ultimately effective way" (Wondrich 2020, 300). Ledent and O'Callaghan also emphasize the way "Phillips asks readers to build bridges between the different narratives that make up this novel and others" (Ledent and O'Callaghan 2017, 240). The upshot of this approach to Phillips's use of intertextuality is an emphasis on what Wondrich calls "the interpretive challenge of assembling and combining them [the narrative strands] into a further act of reading" (2020, 300). This view of Phillips's strategy for exploring the relevance of classics like *Wuthering Heights* to the lasting effects of slavery emphasizes the intellectual effort involved. Terms like "matrix" and "prismatic" present the novel under the guise

of a puzzle to be pieced together by an alert and informed reader. [5] While this view of the novel reflects an important dimension of Phillips's artistic strategy, it does not necessarily take fully into account the effect of Phillips's narrative choices and his attention to the way in which what Wondrich calls "the immediate form of readerly experience" (303) contributes to the resurgence of the past. There is a general tendency in the interpretation of Phillips's novels to pay greater attention to the way in which his stories construct broad patterns of meaning than to the textual experience of reading. The most explicit example of this approach to the reading of Phillips's fiction can be found in Rebecca Walkowitz's book *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015). Walkowitz uses the notion of translation as a metaphor, or model, for the processes involved in the writing of novels that she sees as being more concerned with questions of reception than those of expression. For her the notion of translation makes it possible to conceptualise the narrative strategies of novels dealing with issues of migration and circulation in a global context, what she calls "world-shaped novels" (2015, 125):

> Above all, world-shaped novels explore translation by asking how people, objects, ideas, and even aesthetic styles move across territories, and how that movement alters the meaning and form of collectivity. (Walkowitz 2015, 123)

From this perspective, intertextuality is also a form of translation, since it involves looking at one work in its relevance and relation to another one (in other words translating *Wuthering Heights* by suggesting its relevance to the effect of the slave trade on families).

6 Caryl Phillips is one of the authors discussed by Walkowitz, who describes Phillips's novels as "anthologies" "both in their shape and in their accumulation of circulated objects" (128). This approach to Phillips's fiction places the reader's activity of collation and comparison at the very center of the author's narrative strategy. As Walkowitz asserts:

> Approaching Phillips's novels through the history of the anthology, we can see why his work might be more committed to an aesthetic of arrangement than to an aesthetic of expressivity. (135)

While Walkowitz's overall argument is convincing, her insistence on arrangement, on the idea that any narrative "functions comparatively" and "has to be translated" (134) minimizes Phillips's use of narrative voice in ways that may appear unjustified and unbalanced. By returning, precisely, to the idea of "expressivity", one can observe the ways in which Phillips transforms resurgence into a "readerly experience" which is not simply an exercise in "re-reading" or collation, comparison, and all of the terms evoked by Walkowitz, but also an exploration of the relation between voice and emotion. While the relation between the stories he tells is crucial to their impact, the narrative voices he creates, including those of his narrators, play an essential role in shaping the reader's relation to the events being recounted. Walkowitz seems to deplore the absence in Phillips's novels of what she calls "unmediated voices" (123). Yet Phillips, like many other contemporary novelists, understands that the voice as pure presence is unattainable. The gap he makes perceptible between the desire for self-expression and the capacity for achieving it allows the reader to perceive the emotions underlying the complex relations between the characters.

7 In Phillips's narrative project of using intertextuality to explore the aftermath of slavery, the family plays an important role. One of the most serious effects of slavery was the dislocation of families, which in the novel is illustrated by Heathcliff's separation from his mother at her death. By evoking *Wuthering Heights* as an intertext, Phillips places the question of slavery at the centre of his representation of several families both past and present. He thus brings the trauma of separation to the surface through a form of resurgence that suggests the historical roots of the social problems affecting contemporary families.

8 The nineteenth century novel, whatever its cultural or national association, is essentially a history of families, whether you think of Balzac, Dickens, Zola, Hawthorne, Dostoevsky or any number of other examples. The family as the center of social, economic and cultural relations also developed as the essential organizing frame of fiction, and *Wuthering Heights* is no exception. Phillips reminds us of this essential dimension of the novel by giving titles to the chapters that suggest, in the words of Tanya Agathocleous, "a bildungsroman gone wrong" (2015). This comment is interesting because it

underlines the intimate connection between the bildungsroman as a form of family romance, to the extent that it explores an individual's relation to the family, and our expectations as readers about the relation between family and narrative. Brontë gives even greater emphasis to the family in its structuring role by telling the story of an outsider who is adopted into a family and manages to get revenge for his outsider status. Phillips's attribution to Heathcliff of a specific parentage related to slavery roots the fictional status of the child in historical reality. However, it also suggests how the notion of family connections can be extended metaphorically to evoke a tension between relations that are organic and imposed and those that are freely chosen. While the novel encourages the reader to perceive parallels and connections between disparate periods, events, and people, it does this against the background of the intractable reality of family relations. Even more, by constructing its narrative of families and lost children on an intertextual relation, it places the free choice of literary ancestors at the center of its examination of family links, thus extending the notion of family metaphorically to cover the idea of literary heritage. In other words, the idea of the family and the accompanying notions of orphanhood, adoption and belonging are not present in *The Lost Child* only as themes; they can be seen as related to the very structure and functioning of the novel as a form.

9 This thematic orchestration of family connections as the underlying motif linking past and present can be seen as producing a "resonance", to use the term proposed by Clingman, that is not purely thematic, but that finds echoes in Phillips's use of narrative voice. As in other novels by Phillips situated in the past, the author imitates the style of writing which characterizes the period from which his intertexts are borrowed, creating a pastiche that reinforces the feeling of historical estrangement, but that also highlights the linguistic conventions of the period and what they may both hide and reveal. Thus, in the opening pages of *The Lost Child*, in which Heathcliff and his mother are presented (without being named), the narrator expresses himself in a language reminiscent of Brontë's, with its seeming formality and liberal use of metaphor:

> She could see that he was nervous, and some crumbs clung stubbornly to his chin, but he had forsaken drinking while he still remained in full custody of his sensibilities. She looked favorably

> upon him, convinced that integrity and kindness were lodged in his bosom. He removed his satin vest and lace ruffles with impeccable dexterity, which helped to soothe her own nervous condition. (10)

This deliberate adoption of a language and a narrative stance consistent with the context being described suggests the relevance of paying greater attention to the language used by the contemporary characters and to what it reveals about their relation to society. What clues can be detected in their voices as to their relation to the world in which they live and to the way in which the lasting effects of slavery and racism may have affected their capacity for self-expression? As Bénédicte Ledent and Evelyn O'Callaghan explain in their study of the novel, "*The Lost Child* is deeply invested in literary parenthood: the narrative reclamation/adoption of absent stories, the unvoiced account of orphans and stolen or denied children of Empire who are missing from, or only shadowy figures within, official records" (Ledent and O'Callaghan 2017, 231). In spite of the "denied" children's absence from official records, their existence can be expected to have left some kind of trace in people's relationships with one another and with society in general. In this perspective Phillips's use of narrative voice can be seen as an attempt to capture in discourse the constraints imposed by the social uses of language, inherited from a past marked by slavery and its aftermath and to explore the possibility of a freely-chosen language which would allow the "absent stories" to which Ledent and O'Callaghan refer to be heard. From this point of view, language plays an important role in producing a resurgence of painful memories through the traces of the past that it carries into the present. It can also be seen as a potential terrain on which to combat a negative resurgence of the past.

## Narrative discourse as a "quotational form"

10 If one looks closely at the narrative voices used in *The Lost Child*, it is possible to see a connection between Phillips's use of an intertextual connection to a novel about families and the voices through which he constructs the broken twentieth-century family around which the

main narrative revolves. This can be done by looking at narrative discourse as what Richard Aczel calls a "quotational form", a term that suggests a bridge between narrative voice and intertextuality as a broader form of cultural quotation. Aczel draws on Bakhtin's view of the polyphony of the novel, emphasizing Bakhtin's "treatment of narrative discourse as an essentially quotational form where the quoting instance is not unitary and monological, but a configuration of different voices or expressive styles organized into an "artistic" whole by means of a set of identifiable rhetorical principles" (1998, 483). Although Aczel is here referring to the author's tendency to allow a variety of discourses to be heard in his own, the same polyphony can be identified in the voices reproduced by that of the narrator.

11 *The Lost Child* uses two types of narrative voice—third-person narration by an extradiegetic narrator and first-person narration, or interior monologue, which is used in two sections narrated by Ben, one of Monica's sons, and by Monica herself. If we examine these two types of voice in a quotational perspective, we can see, or rather hear the voice of Monica's father Ronald, presented through the discourse of an extradiegetic narrator, as marked by a form of quotation that reflects the pressure exerted by society, a form of haunting or negative resurgence. On the other hand, the monologue pronounced by Monica's son Ben provides the reader with a glimpse of ways in which narrative discourse can free itself from these constraints, producing a voice that is capable of managing and shaping the multiple echoes of the past without falling victim to them. It is through the intertwining of these two narrative modes that Phillips explores the limits and possibilities of any resurgence of a silenced past.

12 When one reads the chapter that opens the narrative about Monica, ironically entitled "First Love", it is not difficult to understand why Ledent and O'Callaghan perceive it as a "flattened realist record" (2017, 242), or why Rebecca Walkowitz in discussing other novels by Phillips, laments the absence of "unmediated voices" (134). There is little dialogue or direct speech, and the narrator describes the thoughts of the characters in a way that indeed tends to make it difficult to distinguish between his/her words and the thoughts of the characters. The effect is a feeling of distance, as if the voices of

the characters were being muffled or coming from a great distance. This is the effect of what Dorrit Cohn calls "psycho-narration". [6] The preponderance of verbs introducing the characters' thoughts helps to explain the effect produced. A paragraph from the beginning of the section, in which Monica, a student at Oxford, is waiting for her father to arrive makes this very clear:

> She [Monica] *had thought long and hard* about what to wear and *had assumed* that her father, *who had fixed ideas* about how women should present themselves, *might even be expecting her* to be decked out in her tutorial garb [...] Although she *knew full well* that she wasn't much to look at, this year men had begun to notice her [...] But she certainly didn't want scrutiny from this warped man, who had already bullied his wife into near-mute submission. By the time Monica was a teenager *she was fairly sure* what type of person she was dealing with, and *it was she who had decided* to generate a distance between them [...]. (16, my emphasis)

The verbs describing Monica's thoughts and expectations, which seem to echo what she imagines to be her father's thoughts, preclude any spontaneity in the encounter between the two characters. The distancing effect is compounded by the repeated use of modals like "might" or verbs that imply hesitation, puzzlement and doubt. This becomes particularly obvious in scenes involving Monica's father Ronald, a man who seems to be out of touch with his own feelings and the feelings of others:

> The mantelpiece and sideboard in the new living room supported a sequence of expensively framed photographs of his daughter flowering into a beautiful girl, and late at night, after everyone had gone to bed, he liked to sit alone and marvel at the images that showed off her poise and self-belief to best advantage, although occasionally he did find himself irritated by the *seemingly* nonchalant path that his daughter *seemed* to be steering between his own indulgence and his wife's silent pride. (29, my emphasis)

In this passage, the effect of the "expensively framed photographs", which like "the new living room" constitute a material expression of the family's achievements, is undercut by Ronald's solitude and his inability to believe in the "poise and self-belief" radiating from the

photographs. Furthermore, the narrator's voice appears to have replaced that of the characters in an intrusive way that amplifies the dismal aspects of a story involving people with few or no communication skills. However, the seeming monotony of reported speech and thought is disrupted by the resurgence of words that betray the thoughts and emotions which have been suppressed in the characters' desire for control. This is evident in the passages devoted to Monica's father, a man who has attempted to work himself up from a modest background. When he learns that his daughter has been accepted at Oxford, he can't help "blurt[ing] it out" to his colleagues at the school where he teaches:

> "Our Monica's going to Oxford." He immediately felt his face colouring up, for after all, he spent most of his working day trying to exhort boys to speak grammatically correct English and now listen to him. "Our Monica." (21)

In using the expression "our Monica", he unexpectedly slips back into an orality that betrays his origins. The way in which Ronald quotes himself to himself makes this slip from his usual middle-class verbal performance all the more noticeable.

13 It is in the narrator's use of free indirect discourse [7] that the struggle over language becomes most obvious, revealing gaps and inconsistencies in his "flattened, realist record". Free indirect discourse blurs the borderline between the words of the narrator and those that belong to the character. To the extent that a character's language may be the reflection of the pressure exerted on him or her by society, free indirect discourse reveals the polyphony, in the Bakhtinian sense, that lies beneath the seemingly smooth surface of individual speech. In the case of Phillips's characters, it undercuts and undermines their attempts to speak a language consistent with their aspirations. The narrator's description of Ronald's reaction to his daughter's birth is a clear example:

> Soon after Monica's birth, his wife had dropped a few broad hints that she wouldn't mind having a second child, but Ronald Johnson had determined that one would suffice. After all, there was a war on, and it was incumbent on all English families to make sacrifices of some kind. (19)

In this case, the clue to the presence of Ronald's voice is the "after all", betraying his impatience with his wife's impracticality. While what follows are most likely also Ronald's words, the rather stilted expression "it was incumbent" and the reference to "sacrifices" suggest that Ronald is reiterating what he felt to be necessary patriotic sentiments in words that he had heard elsewhere. Another passage in which Ronald is reflecting on his daughter's obstinacy in marrying a man from the West Indies exposes the racist and colonialist discourse he has appropriated without realizing it: "Given all her advantages and ability, *it made absolutely no sense* to him that Monica should be *throwing everything away* by getting involved with a graduate student in history nearly ten years her senior who originated in a part of the world where decent standards of behavior and respect for people's families were *obviously* alien concepts" (22, my emphasis). In this passage, the traces of Ronald's impatience, expressed in terms marking his emotional presence in the narrator's discourse, betray the way he has absorbed a racist discourse and allowed it to affect his relations with his own daughter. In terms of what is happening in *The Lost Child*, Ronald's linguistic susceptibility to the language and opinions of others helps to explain why he is unable to establish positive connections to his West Indian son-in-law or with anyone who is different from himself. This handicap lies at the heart of Phillips's concerns in illustrating how children have become lost through a long history of people's inability to understand others.

14 If we examine Ben's first-person monologue in the chapter entitled "Childhood", we can see it as reversing, on a stylistic and narrative level, the negative pattern generated by the use of an extradiegetic narrator in the section devoted to Monica. This is not simply a question of using interior monologue to express a character's inner life in a way that shows how he overcomes the social and historical constraints to which he has been subjected. Ben's monologue gives emotional form to the abstract questions posed by Phillips's "multi-stranded novel". Ben, unlike his grandfather, displays a growing capacity to place the words of others in a perspective which makes them manageable. As he recounts his past life, the disappearance of his brother Tommy and his mother's decline and death, he develops a capacity not only to quote other people without

allowing their words to drown out his own. He also learns to draw on culture, particularly music and cinema, in ways that constitute a form of intertextuality, a type of free-wheeling quotation which is the source and mainspring of his resilience and ability to survive.

15 In order to understand how Phillips is using Ben's monologue to make the impact of intertextuality relevant at the emotional level of narrative discourse, it can be helpful to refer to some of the theoretical studies devoted to interior monologue, a form of narrative discourse that Phillips often uses. Ben's monologue is not what Dorrit Cohn calls "autonomous monologue", a form typified by Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses* in which "the use of the present tense pinpoints the simultaneity of language and happening" in contrast with other forms of first-person narration where "language always follows happening" (1978, 173). It is rather, in Cohn's terms, an "autobiographical monologue" as Ben is narrating the past. [8] Over sixteen sections, or chapters, Ben tells the story of his life with his mother and brother, first of all in London, then in Leeds. His narrative is shaped by memory as an active process; he is trying both to remember and to understand what happened to his brother, who disappeared and was probably murdered by one of his mother's boyfriends, Derek Evans. It displays the quest for objectivity often found in autobiography; as narrator of his own experience, Ben clearly distinguishes between his narrated and his narrating self. In evoking the brothers' separation when Ben is sent to a different school he admits "A part of me liked the idea of us both going to the grammar school in town, but another part of me was ready for a bit of separation" (146). If one considers Ben's monologue from the perspective of its capacity to express the emotional impact of a social, cultural and historical context, one notices the details that Ben uses as signposts of time past and passing. He begins his story with a reference to the "telly":

> It's years since I've seen one of those tellys. They look like a brown ice cube, and all the edges are rounded, and the screen's a bit like a goldfish bowl. […] The old-fashioned tellys are so strange that most people coming across one might well be inclined to think, bloody hell, what's that? That said, were I ever to clap my eyes on one of them, I'd be fascinated because of the memories it would bring up. (137)

The "telly" here fulfills three functions in terms of time. It situates the moment in historical time (technology is a particularly useful signpost for historical moments), it allows Ben to measure the distance between the past and the present of narration ("It's been years since…) and it serves as a mnemonic marker, focalizing his memories of his relationship with his mother, since they often watched television together. In terms of cultural history, or cultural objects as signposts in time, the most interesting aspect of his monologue is the presence of the titles of popular songs as chapter headings for each section. In each section Ben comments on the song and suggests its relation to his narrative, but he never makes any metatextual remark suggesting that the titles are chapter headings in a written text, diary or journal. Dorrit Cohn reminds us that it makes sense, in interpreting interior monologue, to consider the origins of this narrative technique, as a way of understanding its functioning in specific contexts:

> Its sources have been variously identified as confessional literature; narratives based on memory; diary and epistolary novels; digressive narration; the essay; the prose poem; the dramatic monologue; and the stage monologue. (1978, 175)



The song titles suggest a written form that is not actually present, the kind of retrospective objectivity, of taking stock, that we associate with autobiography. It suggests a historical, social and cultural frame for a narrative in which Ben is seeking to achieve some semblance of objectivity in order to understand his own responsibility and that of other people in the death of his brother. [9] This takes us to the heart of Phillips's preoccupation with the aftermath of slavery and its social and cultural progeny. As free-floating monologue, Ben's narrative seems to be chasing an impossible vanishing point at which Tommy's disappearance would find an explanation in individual and collective terms. It exposes the emotion involved in attempting to reach the point of intersection of the novel's many threads. At the same time, it serves as a counterpoint to the narratives of loss that characterize the other sections. While Ben is grieving his brother's loss, he is also describing his own initiation and ultimately successful attempt to come to terms with the difficult conditions in which he has been brought up:

> At school I decided to try harder because that's all there was now. There was no Tommy, and I didn't feel like talking to anybody, and so inevitably I soon discovered that I had no mates. I'd always been a bit of a clever clogs when it came to schoolwork, and the teachers often said if I continued to make an effort, I could do very well. (178)

The term "clever clogs" is clearly a term he has picked up from other people and uses somewhat ironically on himself. But unlike his grandfather, he does not feel belittled or threatened by other people's language. Throughout the monologue, Ben proves to be capable of placing the language of other people, like Mrs. Swinson, in perspective. When Mrs. Swinson gets angry with Ben and begins attacking his mother—"fobbing you off on me so she can carry on like a minx"—Ben simply says, "I watched her face change shape as she began to laugh. There was some spit at the edge of her mouth" (152). He also shows that he can adjust his language to other people in order to obtain what he wants, as when he says, in explaining how he got a job in a garage, "It wasn't a summer job, so I had to tell the bloke who interviewed me that I had ambitions in the auto trade and one day I hope to own a petrol station; otherwise he'd never have given me the time of day" (187). Confronted with clients who were "corporate accounts types, ill-mannered buggers who just signed for their petrol and wanted to be treated as if the sun shone out of their arses", Ben finds ways to shortchange them, a way of both making money and getting revenge. At the same time, he has noticed that "[h]alf his [his boss's) clients were Pakistanis and Indians dressed up in all the gear, but he tried too hard when they came in, and he was always putting it on" (188). The fact that Ben is planning to go to university and become a film director links his growing ability to deal with others to an artistic capacity that will provide him with a way of surviving, both emotionally and financially.

17 If one looks at Ben's artistic potential from the point of view of the novel's overall strategy, it points to the importance of an ability to choose one's family, intellectually and artistically, thus linking Ben's narrative to the intertextual echoes by which it is framed.[10] In reimagining the effects of slavery through a rewriting of *Wuthering Heights*, Phillips is choosing his own literary family, his own heritage. Close attention to his use of narrative voice reveals

how the tension between imposed and chosen relations plays out not only on the thematic level of mismatched couples, broken families and foster care, but also at the level of voice and language. This relation between language, voice and family is expressed by Monica in the narrator's description of her reaction to the use of the expression "Are you partial?" by Derek Evans in her first encounter with him:

> What kind of an antiquated phrase was that? It was like this Derek Evans was talking to somebody twenty years older. She guessed that he probably spent a lot of time with his father, or grandfather, down the allotments or going to dog races, or engaged in some other manly pursuit where the vocabulary of one generation could be casually absorbed by the next without any regard for its relevance to the present time. (86)

There is a deep irony in Monica's inability to detect the gap between Derek's language and his real intentions. But her imagining of a world in which "the vocabulary of one generation could be casually absorbed by the next" reveals the depth of the fissures that traverse language in a world defined by differences in social class and ethnic and racial origins. *The Lost Child* reveals the unhealed wounds of the past precisely by exposing the social and racial fractures that lie just beneath the surface of what appears to be a shared and common language. That these fissures should sometimes go unnoticed is just one sign of the cultural amnesia surrounding the long-term effects of slavery.

18 A close analysis of Caryl Phillips's narrative strategies in the writing of *The Lost Child* enables one to better understand how the author uses his own emotional response to events he has experienced or read about as triggers for an exploration of the ways in which England's past as a slave-trading country may have impacted subsequent periods. Phillips does not simply adopt a seemingly distant narrative voice to explore historical connections that his characters are incapable of perceiving. He carefully modulates the distance between the narrator and the characters. Sometimes he uses psycho-narration to explore a character's inability to connect with his own thoughts. At other times, through the use of narrated monologue, he suggests the possibility of using language as a way of forging one's

own identity, as is the case with Ben. For the reader, through Phillips's subtle modulation of narrative voice, the resurgence of the past suggested by *Wuthering Heights* acquires greater emotional force and brings the traumas of the past closer to the present.

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## NOTES

1 Bénédicte Ledent and Evelyn O'Callaghan speak of the "reclamation/adoption" of absent stories in *The Lost Child* (Ledent and O'Callaghan 2017, 231). Peter Widdowson looks at the idea of revising former texts as a form of re-vision: "Whether sad or seminal, then, this essay seeks to define and promote a relatively recent sub-genre of contemporary fiction whose nominal adjective deploys a tactical slippage between the verb to revise (from the Latin "revisere": "to look at again")—"to examine and correct; to make a new, improved version of; to study anew"; and the verb to re-vision—to see in another light; to re-envision or perceive differently; and thus potentially to recast and re-evaluate ("the original") (2006, 496).

2 Phillips is referring to what came to be known as the "moors murders" involving the murdering of at least five children by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. The murders were carried out in the 1960s and the children were found buried on Saddlewood Moor.

3 Carolina Sanchez-Palencia has suggested looking at the novel from the perspective of the "woman-as-zombie coming back from the dead to disrupt sediments of male civilization". In this perspective, "Emily Brontë could be the spectre that haunts Phillips's narrative seeking to illuminate modern Britain's patriarchal and colonial legacy […]" (2020, 349). Yes, but the phrase "gipsy brat" does not sound romantic but dismissive of the child.

4 Nelly Dean's use of the word "gipsy" in referring to Heathcliff reflects the prevalence of the figure of the gypsy in nineteenth-century literature. While Nelly Dean's use of the term is dismissive, the gypsy also inspired the "imagination of the romantic writers who sought to distance themselves from industrialization, burgeoning capitalism, established religion, the rigid morals and customs of English society […]" (Jamin 2021, 676, my translation).

5 It is interesting to note that Phillips himself in an interview with Stephen Clingman uses the term "orchestrator" to describe his way of assembling narratives, of creating "the overall structure". Clingman picks up on the word "orchestration" and refers to the "the resonance that carries over from section to section, from part to part" (2017, 592). The choice of the metaphor, which is auditory in contrast with Wondrich's use of the visual image "prismatic", suggests the complexity of the reading experience itself, which is interpreted by the reader in terms of experiences that are sensory rather than intellectual. Phillips himself in another interview emphasized the importance of voice as the foundation of fiction and explained that he tells his students at Yale that "[y]ou don't have anything until you have the voice" (Agathocleous 2015).

6 This is the term used by Cohn in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* to describe "the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness" (Cohn 1978, 14) as opposed to the other two modes she identifies: quoted monologue, "a character's mental discourse", and "narrated monologue", "a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse" (14). Cohn justifies her choice of the term "psycho-narration" as opposed to "omniscient description" on her objection to the term "omniscient" as being too general. She sees the term "psycho-narration" as "identif[ying] both the subject matter and the activity it denotes (on the analogy to psychology, psychoanalysis)" (11).

7 This is the term more commonly used for what Dorrit Cohn designates as "narrated monologue": "By leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation" (1978, 103).

8 Dorrit Cohn speaks of works in which "a lone speaker recalls his own past, and tells it to himself—in chronological order.
*Autobiographical monologues*, as will call texts of this type, create a highly stylized rhetorical effect, since reciting one's own biography to oneself does not appear psychologically plausible. Or rather it appears plausible only if the speaker pursues a definite aim with this recitation, an aim of public confession, of self-justification. Despite the absence of listeners, the autobiographical monologue thus retains the meaning of communication, or at least of rehearsal for communication" (1978, 181–182, original emphasis).

9 Sara Brophy describes Ben's use of the records as an example of "autotopography", a term she borrows from Jennifer A. Gonzalez: "A material

manifestation of the work of 'reorientation' (Ahmed 6), autotopography involves, as Gonzalez defines it, a set of semiotic, material, and spatial cultural practices, the arranging of 'personal objects' in order to remember the painful past and possibly invent a new future" (2018, 169).

10 Phillips himself has drawn attention to this aspect of the novel and the importance of art as a way of making sense of life: "So art is a way of organizing that excessive subjectivity that, if left unchecked, can get out of control. In that 'Childhood' chapter, the pop songs that structure it and anchor Ben's memory become the only kind of stepping stones by which he can understand his growth or his development. Without those songs, it's utter chaos" (Agathocleous 2015).

## RÉSUMÉS

**English**

This article examines Caryl Phillips's novel *The Lost Child* (2015) as an example of rewriting that generates a form of resurgence, evoking the impact of Britain's past on the present social context. By inserting scenes imagining Heathcliff as the child of a former slave, Phillips creates an intertextual relation to *Wuthering Heights* (1847) that suggests a possible connection between the main story line and Brontë's novel. Critics tend to highlight Phillips's use of multiple storylines as a way of connecting past and present; this approach emphasizes the intellectual aspect of the author's narrative strategy while failing to take fully into account the emotional dimension of his stories. A closer look at the author's use of narrative voice enables one to measure the emotional dimension of resurgence. Dorrit Cohn's approach to the expression of subjectivity in narrative provides theoretical tools for measuring the ways in which Phillips uses free indirect discourse and interior monologue to explore his characters' ability (or inability) to cope with the pressures of society, thus either overcoming or succumbing to the lasting effects of slavery.

**Français**

Cet article étudie le roman *The Lost Child* (2015) de Caryl Phillips comme exemple de réécriture qui suscite une forme de résurgence et vient rappeler l'impact du passé de la Grande-Bretagne sur la société d'aujourd'hui. En insérant dans son texte des scènes du personnage de Heathcliff comme enfant d'esclave affranchi, Phillips construit un lien intertextuel avec *Wuthering Heights* (1847) sur le plan de l'intrigue. De nombreux critiques ont tendance à souligner l'emploi qu'il fait d'intrigues multiples comme manière de lier le passé et le présent. Cette approche met l'accent sur la stratégie narrative de l'auteur au détriment de la portée émotionnelle de ses récits. Une étude plus approfondie de la

manière dont l'auteur utilise la voix narrative permettra d'évaluer la portée émotionnelle de la résurgence. L'analyse de Dorrit Cohn de l'expression de la subjectivité dans le récit nous propose des outils théoriques pour évaluer les manières dont Phillips utilise le discours indirect libre et le monologue intérieur pour mieux explorer la capacité (ou bien l'incapacité) à faire face aux pressions sociales et ainsi surmonter ou bien succomber à l'impact toujours présent de l'histoire de l'esclavage.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
Phillips (Caryl), The Lost Child, résurgence, esclavage, ré-écriture, psycho-narration

**Keywords**
Phillips (Caryl), The Lost Child, resurgence, slavery, rewriting, psycho-narration

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