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# « The Answer is Blowing in the Wind »: Emotion and the Rewriting of History in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*

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J'étais comme un vase brisé dont les morceaux ont été dispersés et dont on vient par miracle de retrouver quelques pièces, que l'on a rapidement recollées... le vase prend forme mais il manque l'essentiel, le contenu, ma vérité. Notre vérité. Et la vérité n'est vérité que lorsqu'elle est dite, en entier, sans fard ni détour. (Sansal 251-252)

It's almost like I've crafted this wonderful ceramic fruit bowl, and I'm two pages from the end of the book just doing the final glazing, and I deliberately drop it, and it shatters, and then I have to start again. In some way, it's like I don't trust the linearity of time. (Iyer 43)

## **Introduction**

Commenting on his love for Beethoven's Sixth Symphony and the influence it may have had on his writing, Caryl Phillips declares:

What fascinated me about it was form and structure, because of the way in which Beethoven kept returning to the same theme [...] it's about how you score emotion basically – how you move and keep a theme going, you keep moving forward but remind us where we've been; there is a viable parabola, and it rises and falls away gently to a conclusion. (Clingman 109)

The author carefully draws the reader's attention to the specific structure of *Crossing the River* when he chooses to name and number the four parts of his novel in the table of contents, leaving out the framing chorus which, in fact, ensures the fluidity of the plot in spite of its syncopated form, setting the initial plaintive tone which reappears as a leitmotiv till the final crescendo transforms it into an urgent call for action. Each part appears as a « song of experience » anchored in a new historical and

geographical background, relating the sufferings of an individual trapped in historical circumstances. Playing on a variation on the same theme, the successive narrative techniques read like a consistent attempt to convey the individual pain of each character. To the disrupted plot line correspond several attempts at finding a new effective narrative voice to convey the pain of the characters who are usually left out of the main historical discourse. From submission to rebellion, from resignation to escape in dream, from administrative recording to private questioning, these subsequent voices prepare the reader for the first-person narrative of part IV, questioning the official accounts of World War II through a series of very personal vignettes, putting into perspective the progression from past to present. Finally, the chorus which frames the plot orchestrates these tonalities, reminiscent of the Negro Spirituals, « scoring emotion » by using a device from the ancient tragedy which helps incorporate the experience provided by the plot of the novel into the collective memory of history. Thus time is reintroduced in this discourse out of time to celebrate the power of the novel to integrate private experience into the historical discourse. To be able to say with Bob Dylan that « the answer is blowing in the wind » is a way to endow the novel with a moral, if not political, mission.

**« Songs of experience » or the « mise en intrigue »<sup>1</sup> of history**

Phillips dedicates his narrative to « those who crossed the river », that is to say to the survivors whose stories are still to be told, to those for whom « [t]here is no return » (Phillips 2); « [t]heir lives fractured » (Phillips 1). This dedication conveys an emotional charge which is immediately amplified by the first-person narrative, giving a voice to the father: « I sold my children » (Phillips 2). The flat yet broken rhythm of the prologue evokes the anxiety of an individual trapped in the worse imaginable nightmare, while the juxtaposition of short clauses, putting various events on the same level, as if they were all natural catastrophes, evokes the form of ancient annals and suggests the impossibility to make sense of these events. It underlines the powerlessness of the father who has failed in his role as protector. Yet, the sense of his responsibility becomes overpowering when his toneless voice intertwines with the factual account of the slave trader. And the moment of « shameful intercourse » (Phillips 1), enclosed in a nominal sentence, becomes the

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<sup>1</sup> « La mise en intrigue est l'opération qui tire d'une simple succession une configuration » (Ricoeur 102).

traumatic episode which gives shape to the collective tragedy. « I could feel their eyes upon me » (Phillips 1): like Cain after he has slain his brother in Victor Hugo's poem, the father is pursued by an inner sense of culpability and his story becomes part of « the legend of the ages » (Hugo). The following stories give shape to this guilt.

Evoking « The Pagan Coast » where the tragedy started, Part I opens in *medias res* with disturbing news about the hero Nash: « It was true. Nash Williams, sent to Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, having undergone a rigorous program of Christian education, and being of sound moral character, had disappeared from the known world » (Phillips 7). Starting with a mystery, the narrative unfolds from the ambivalent quest on the part of Edward Nash, the slaveholder who is responsible for Nash's destiny to recover his lost property or misguided child, to Nash's own quest for recognition as an independent being. « Not that the American Colonization Society was ignorant of the dangers that would accompany their policy of attempting to repatriate former slaves on the west coast of Africa » (Phillips 8). In a plot clearly set within a very specific historical context, the hero is first presented as the instrument of a policy decided by others. First diluted in an historical third-person narrative which accounts for the chronology of the project of repatriation, for the arguments vindicated by the disappointed master to go in search of his lost protege and the actual beginning of his voyage out, Nash's own experience only becomes available once the reader has been fully informed of context.

Although contextualization also plays a part in the presentation of the heroine of part II, « West », it no longer seems to prevail over personal experience. Historical data is revealed through the memory of the dying heroine who, in a dream-like fashion, reconstructs not just the story of her own life but also the history of her fellow-slaves through the evolution of the American economy and progressive conquest of the west. « I stand with the rest of the Virginia property. Master's nephew, a banker from Washington, is now our new master. He has no interest in plantation life. He holds a handkerchief to his face and looks on with detachment. Everything must be sold » (Phillips 76). The succession of flat statements about the situation, the occupation of the master as a banker lead to the use of the modal « must ». Economic decisions and a new way of life trigger the tragedy of families being torn apart because they are denied a human identity. This reactivates the necessity for displacement, though, as Martha leaves Virginia for Kansas and when her next masters decide they have to go west to California, Martha decides she cannot be sold

« back across the river » (Phillips 80): the choice of phrase revives the initial trauma, but times have changed, she is part of the historical westward movement. After a few years of pause in Leavenworth (a place now famous for its penitential facility), « Martha ha[s] a strange notion that she, too, must become a part of the colored exodus that [i]s heading west » (Phillips 87). And the description of the wagon train takes up the descriptions in pioneer narratives, with its routine, the monotonous landscape, the buffalo, the rationing... (Phillips 90-91). Only here, the pioneers are black pioneers. The Rockies are the final obstacle she cannot overcome and like many other pioneers in American history, she finds herself stranded in Denver. This failed attempt at reaching the golden state, is followed by a new narrative interrupted in mid-sentence, so as to underline the idea that there is indeed no return: « They huddle together, and sing their melancholy lamentations. We have lost sight of Africa » (Phillips 124). Part III, « Crossing the River » allows for a different reading of the initial trauma. The dates in the log-book, from 1752 to 1753, as well as the slave-trader's journal and letters home remind us that remind us that America is still a British colony and that Britain is therefore directly involved in the shameful trade. The name of the ship, « The Duke of York », suggests the responsibility of the Royal family and the whole Establishment. Ironically, it also recalls the name of Nash's son, buried in Africa, thus intertwining distant destinies. The contrast between the narrator's cold official tone and his capacity for compassion in the letters shows that a process of self-justification is necessary, revealing some awareness of guilt. From then on, the novel goes back to the geographical heart of the colonial system, Britain, while moving forward to the contemporary aftermath of racial discrimination.

The title « Somewhere in England » plays on the notion of centrality and on the impossibility to define the exact centre. The dated chapters, as so many entries in a personal diary, draw the attention to the period when Britain is fighting to maintain not just its freedom but also its international power and to the period of economic crisis that preceded it. Right from the beginning the threatened position of Britain is felt through the perception of the local population: « It's all over the papers. We're having an invasion all right, but it's not Jerry. We've been invaded by bloody Yanks » (Phillips 134). References to specific corps, Home Guards (Phillips 136), Air Raid Wardens (Phillips 139), Local Defence Volunteers (Phillips 168), to war propaganda, « "Wings for Victory" and "Salute the Soldiers" weeks » (Phillips 197), the multiplication of acronyms, WVS (150), ATS (162, 180), LDV (164), ITMA (170, 199),

WAAF (173), ARP (174, 181), UXB (174), WVS Mobile Canteens (183), Mps (203), PX (212)), bring forth the contextualization and reinforce the illusion of reality. The violence done to language conveys the everyday violence characters are suffering from. The dates are chosen in relation to Joyce's personal story within this difficult period: meeting her future husband, his arrest for dealing on the black market, her mother's death in the Blitz, getting to know the black soldiers stationed in her village, falling in love, getting married during Travis's « compassionate leave » (Phillips 225), the birth of her beautiful child, the telegram announcing her husband's death.

**Variation on the theme of suffering: in search of a new tonality**

All the historical landmarks serve to focus on the people's suffering; the white population of Britain and the black soldiers who « looked sad, like lost little boys » (Phillips 129) are united in pain. The feeling of helplessness is echoed in the inner turmoil of the dislocated society which has forgotten the basic value of charity: « None of the other villages had been designated as reception areas. Before us stood a dozen frightened children, the farmers eyeing the husky lads, the girls and scrawny boys close to tears. And then a decision reached that while it was still light we should send them back » (Phillips 144). Empathy for the black soldiers, who are like children, and the white children, who are considered as goods to be appraised, is a way to revisit the violence of the slave auction which tears Martha away from her daughter: « My Eliza Mae holds on to me, but it will be to no avail. She will be a prime purchase. And on her own she stands a better chance of a fine family » (Phillips 77). Martha's guilty conscience shapes her memory of the moment of separation:

I look on. The auctioneer cries to the heavens. A band strikes up. A troupe of minstrels begins to dance. Soon the bidding will begin. "Moma". Eliza May whispers the word over and over again, as though it were the only word she possessed. This one word. This word only. (Phillips 77)

The blaring noises of the show drown the girl's whisper for all but the mother who, like the father in the chorus, is helpless. The minstrel show, grotesque in itself, signifies the cruelty of a society which makes fun of human suffering. Similar scenes have been described in American literature, in Ernest Gaines's *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* for

instance, but the auction is also reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's tense depiction of the fair in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* during which Henchard sells his wife and daughter. The feeling of tragedy prevails along with a strong sense of disgust.

The separation of Joyce from her « GI baby » (223), taking place on a less public stage, is but a re-enactment of the same form of violence and feeling of guilt. In 1963, the identity of the child is still determined in war terms. And on Victory Night, experienced in a very detached way by the war widow, the last moment of communion between mother and son is also a fake moment of recognition by society: « Some of them even spoke to me and smiled at Greer. Just before midnight, I took him inside, out of the evening chill. A week later she turned up. The lady with the blue coat. With her dog, Monty. [...] And so we were sensible my son and I. Into the care of the County Council as an orphan, love » (Phillips 230). The flat tone of the whole narration with the juxtaposition of brief clauses, the absence of quotation marks to separate the elliptic oral address, becomes even more bitterly ironic when the social worker shows up with a dog bearing the nickname of General Montgomery who, while strongly criticizing the American management of the campaign, supervised the British operations in Italy, the country where Greer's father died. Even official marriage is no protection against ambient racism and the separation from the child is presented as a favour to the mother: « You're going to have to start a new life on your own » (Phillips 230). Joyce, who so far in her life had made her own decisions without listening to the voice of reason, lets herself be convinced to act against her own feelings. The tragedy of the mother deprived of her son gives rise to no attempt at self-justification, no violent accusation against the system on the heroine's part: « And so we were sensible, my son and I. My son who hadn't asked me to turn him over to the lady with the blue coat and maroon scarf » (Phillips 228). The allusion to Monty when the child is put in care has taken the place of the implicit allusion to marooned slaves in the first description of the social worker, underlining the mother's initial admission of guilt. Responsibility is shared, not diminished, leaving the emotion intact.

The separation of family members is already a major theme in Part I; it is experienced again and again by Nash who has lost his genetic father, has to leave his genetic mother behind when he emigrates. Then his son and wife die of African fever. But the main focus is on the master-slave relationship perceived as a father-son relation. Nash addresses his first letter to his « Dear Beloved Benefactor » (Phillips 17),

the following ones to « My Dear Father » (Phillips 23, 29), then to « Dear Father » (Phillips 38, 60) without the possessive. The absence of answers does not totally erase the delusion since the character has been brainwashed into accepting his dependence as a blessing. To a reader familiar with the unconscious dimension of language, the way Nash phrases his thankfulness to his master sounds revealing of the deep trauma he is not aware of:

I praise His holy name that I was fortunate enough to be born in a Christian country, amongst Christian parents and friends, and that you were kind enough to take me, a foolish child, from my parents and bring me up in your own dwelling as something more akin to son than servant. (Phillips 21)

The sentence reappears in italics in the epilogue (Phillips 236), as a false dream, a symptom of what Du Bois calls the « dual-consciousness » which plagues the black man (Du Bois 38). The kindness to take a child away from his parents who are said to be good Christians seems dubious to a modern reader. The satisfaction to be born far from the land of one's ancestors goes against the grain of finding one's roots and against the character's own wish to become acquainted with this land. As to the honour of becoming « something », neither son nor servant, it offers little opportunity for a stable sense of identity. The unanswered letters of the missionary to his surrogate father thus underline the impossibility to ensure a real dialogue between unequal beings. The failed correspondence takes up and inverts the motif of the father addressing his departed children in the chorus.

In *The Content of the Form*, Hayden White explains that, in an historical account, « [t]he events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence » (White 5). The disrupted time line which characterizes the macro-structure of the novel as well as the micro-structure of each plot creates a disturbance, moves the reader out of their comfort zone. As an historian, Phillips presents elements for a rational approach to slavery, especially through the use of historical sources such as slave-narratives or logbooks, that is to say he writes an historical narrative and, as a novelist he transforms this factual knowledge by provoking the emotion of the reader.



« Scoring emotion »

The use of recurrent motives ensures the fluidity of the segmented plot and the shift from narrator to narrator orchestrates the overlapping layers of human suffering. To follow Sartre's theory: « L'émotion n'est pas un accident, c'est un mode d'existence de la conscience, une des façons dont elle *comprend* (au sens heideggérien de "verstehen") son être-dans-le-monde » (Sartre 116). Indeed, each part of the novel shows how perception is shaped by the psychological need to cope with the specific circumstances of reality. And as a whole, the novel offers a magic world structured by horror (Sartre 111)<sup>2</sup>. « L'horrible ne peut paraître que sur un monde tel que ses existants soient magiques. [...] En un mot, saisir un objet quelconque comme horrible, c'est le saisir sur le fond d'un monde qui se révèle déjà comme horrible » (Sartre 114).

The rhetoric of submission as well as Nash's tendency to mimic the voice and even the action of his master can be unnerving for a modern reader but his confusing the figure of the master with the figure of the father signals the mental pressure on an individual deprived of a true identity as the natives seem to realize: « they call us all white man » (Phillips 31). Nash goes as far as to refer to himself as « this *white man* » (Phillips 32). Not content with accepting this duality, he even gets carried away into thinking himself superior to blacks and whites:

At this juncture I often protest, and talk about the ingenious nature of native embroidery and craft, my contention being that our God has blessed the natives with as much sense as any white man if only they would put this in exercise. The native is generally resigned to finally admitting that this *white man* does talk true, for I think they have become very fond of me. (Phillips 32; original emphasis)

Here, to « talk true » means to adopt the paternalistic tone of the white master, to call the other blacks « natives », to consider them as children gifted with practical talents and to seek their love. The use of the passive form (« is resigned ») for a verb which does not express much freedom of choice in itself underlines the narrator's actual condescension. It seems but a way to praise his own ingenuity. Even worse, his behaviour savours of new colonialism and he admits being blamed for his « *dictatorial*

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<sup>2</sup> « Simplement la magie première et l'émotion viennent du monde, non de nous-même » (Sartre 111).

manner » (Phillips 33). As a consequence, the emotion of the reader is not always a feeling of empathy.

In part two, the tone of the third-person narrative shifts from the historical account to romance. Martha is indeed introduced as a victim to be pitied:

Curling herself into a tight fist against the cold, Martha huddled in the doorway and wondered if tonight she might see snow. Beautiful. Lifting her eyes without lifting up her head, she stared at the wide black sky that would once more be her companion. (Phillips 73)

The contrast between a position of utter physical helplessness and a mood of contemplation evokes scenes of death or scenes of last minute rescue in nineteenth century romances and novels; it increases pathos as when Brontë shows Jane Eyre guided by destiny to her cousins' house. The motif of the vacant sky suggests the absence of God and reinforces the prevailing feeling of abandonment, associated to the haunting question « *Father, why hast thou forsaken me?* » (Phillips 73) which ensures the continuation with the prologue. However, it might also bring to mind Guthrie's *The Big Sky*, part of a popular trilogy (*The Way West*, *The Big Sky*, and *Fair Land, Fair Land*) that has contributed to the myth of the wild west and its lonely heroes. Martha's own decision to go west does not have to be explained since it belongs to the widely shared American dream and the sacrosanct pursuit of happiness. The « emotional portrait » (Rabalais 180) is set in a context that differs from that of part one so as to bring out new features. The reader feels closer to this new character because Martha is definitely a character of fiction whereas Nash is more of a composite. The geographical and historical backgrounds are familiar so they represent less of a strain on the imagination of the reader who can fully yield to the suspension of disbelief. This probably accounts for the relative brevity of part two, as if, with the intensity of a short story, the narrator was providing a close-up on what could have been a character encountered in Twain's epic *Roughing It* or episodes in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. Once pathos has been established, the dark sky can be coloured in Martha's first-person « remembrance of things past » (Proust) as it is in the paintings of the wild west: « The evening sky is streaked with red and yellow. I watch as the sun prepares to go down beneath the horizon. To my left, there is panic. Voices begin to climb. A pioneer has broken an ox

by driving it too hard. It has to be slaughtered » (Phillips 89). The opposition between the slow repetitive process of nature and the violence of man's action is rendered in the gaudy colours of an Albert Bierstadt's painting and of some of Remington's nocturnes<sup>3</sup> which serve as a backdrop to a western movie, complete with sound and action in the heroine's memory. As the reader easily recognizes one of the archetypal scenes of the genre, the only out of character element is the ageing black woman, the heroine whose individuality is thereby set off in silhouette. Within the plot, Martha remains a dark character to the woman who comes to her rescue because she cannot communicate her feelings and can hardly talk. Whereas for the reader, her memories are partly transcribed in a first-person inner monologue, partly in a third person narrative which provides the main chronology of events. The moments she remembers directly are the most traumatic and defined as alien to the general atmosphere surrounding her personal experiences.

In contrast to this stream of consciousness effect, Joyce's segmented first-person narrative appears as an over-controlled form. The flatness of tone created by the succession of short, matter-of-fact sentences expresses the oppressive feeling of a day-to-day existence; there is no transcending the dreariness of everyday life into a spiritual experience. Each vignette denies the possibility of a transcendental experience, as if Joyce's name was an ironic reference to the Irish novelist's, till in the 1963 sections, her narrative turns into a more confused inner dialogue mixing what she would like to be able to say to her son and what she needs to say to the reader, or herself, in self-justification. Long flowing sentences intertwine with brief non verbal clauses, meant to set-off the graceful apparition of the long lost son staged as a Joycean epiphany against the dreariness of everyday experience: « I was in the kitchen, wringing out clothes in the sink. I happened to glance up. I saw him, standing at the front gate. I knew that it was him » (231). Unlike this moment of recognition, the events of 1963 remain unrecorded by the narrator, although the reader must realize that it is the year Alabama tried to fight against desegregation, the year the Civil Rights March on Washington was organized, the year Martin Luther King delivered his most famous speech, « I have a dream », the year Kennedy

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<sup>3</sup> See *Scouts in the Moonlight*, 1902, Private Collection for the technique; *Sunset on the Plains*, 1905-1906, West Point Museum Collection, United States Military Academy for the colours; *The Hungry Moon*, 1906, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa Oklahoma for the mood and theme.

was assassinated. And the year the KKK murdered four young black girls during an attack on a church, an event which was immortalized, under the title *Alabama*, by Coltrane who « patterned his saxophone playing on Martin Luther King's funeral speech. Midway through the song, mirroring the point where King transforms his mourning into a statement of renewed determination for the struggle against racism, Elvin Jones's drumming rises from a whisper to a pounding rage. He wanted this crescendo to signify the rising of the Civil Right movement »<sup>4</sup>. Against this untold background, Joyce's moment seems a tenuous note of hope. Yet, it transforms the meaning of the whole novel and it is brought to a glorious explosion in the epilogue, as the answer to the father's question « blowing in the wind »:

I hear a drum beating on the far bank of the river. A breeze stirs and catches it. The resonant pounding is borne on the wind, carried high above the roof-tops, across the water, above the hinterland, high above the tree-tops, before its beat plunges down and into the interior. I wait. And then listen as the many-tongued chorus of the common memory begins again to swell, and insist I acknowledge greetings from those who lever pints of ale in the pubs of London. (235)

Along the allusion to Coltrane's piece, the implicit reference to Bob Dylan's song, also officially released in 1963, adds to this crescendo of the political voice that has remained discreet so far. The African drum becomes the leading instrument, imposing its pervasive rhythm through time and space. The suspended voice of the father, first heard in the prologue, has become aware of the details of the stories which compose the novel. This voice has become universal; the voice that the author can hear in his London pub but also the voice of the author himself whose emotion is raised by other voices, by music, by political discourse:

For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. To voices in the streets of Charleston. (The slave who mounted this block is now dying from copping a fix on some rusty needle in an Oakland project.) I have listened. To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the

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<sup>4</sup> See

[http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=385x492009](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=385x492009)

Caribbean. I have listened. To the saxophone player on a wintry night in Stockholm. A long way from home. [...] To the haunting voices. Singing: Mercy, Mercy Me. (The Ecology.) Insisting: Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong. Declaring: Brothers and Friends. I am Toussaint L'Ouverture, my name is perhaps known to you. Listened to: Papa Doc. Baby Doc. Listened to voices hoping for: Freedom, Democracy [...]. (Phillips 236)

Beyond the refrain and the inclusion of the three lost children, the lament addresses and concerns all those who, through time and all over the world, have suffered from the initial betrayal of the father. The shift from present perfect (« I have listened ») to simple past (« I listened ») reveals the repetition of deception and disappointment, while the use of the present tense combined with contemporary phrases enhances the urgency to react now that young people kill themselves for an illusory dream of oblivion in drugs. The varied rhythms of music have evolved but the pain remains. « Nobody Knows my Name. I have listened to the voice that cried: I have a dream [...] » (Phillips 236). From the articulate voices of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Malcolm X, or Martin Luther King to the diffuse « sounds of an African carnival in Trinidad. In Rio. In New Orleans. On the far bank of the river, a drum continues to be beaten. A many-tongued chorus continues to swell » (Phillips 237). The multiple answers « blowing in the wind » now form a chorus gathering political as well as emotional momentum.

From the very beginning, the ancient tragedy is amplified by this modernized form which relies even more on pathos. Indeed, beyond the repetitive use of the present perfect which ensures the survival of pain, the biblical image of the severed limbs of the tree, meant to find roots in a new soil, conveys the fragility of hope against the certainty of blame:

There is no return. To a land trampled by the muddy boots of others. To a people encouraged to war among themselves. To a father confused with guilt. You are beyond. Broken-off, like limbs from a tree. But not lost, for you carry within your bodies the seeds of new trees. (Phillips 2)

The allusion to *The Book of Revelations*<sup>5</sup>, transforms purity and clarity

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<sup>5</sup> « And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. / In the midst of the street of it and on

linked to the certainty of redemption in the Bible, into the image of a land « trampled by the muddy boots of others », so close to T.S. Eliot's modern « Wasteland », and the father pictures his lost children « [s]inking [their] hopeful roots into difficult soil » (Phillips 2). The oxymoronic phrasing enhances the pangs of a guilty conscience. Meanwhile, the reference to *Revelations* suggests to the reader that the full meaning of the story can only become clear at the end. The initial chorus is indeed but a prologue, the first movement of the symphony interrupted to be taken up towards the end, when, in the epilogue, the full force of the combination of multiple cultural references to set the trauma into perspective<sup>6</sup> can be felt.

### **Conclusion**

Phillips structures his novel with a chorus to establish a shared sense of responsibility which is not meant to exonerate the slave-traders from their guilt but to underline « the ramifications beyond the pain being caused to an individual » (Jaggi 82). The successive but also intertwining voices sing the pain of human beings trapped in historical circumstances. The evolving tonality puts responsibility for this pain in perspective. It corresponds to Sartre's conclusion: « Le passage à l'émotion est une modification totale de "l'être-dans-le-monde" selon les lois très particulières de la magie » (Sartre 123). The mythic image of the guilty father draws the outline of a new perception of time beyond the limits of a single experience. The old man, who finally appears also as a figure of the author, can thus be perceived as the great artificer who sets off the action of this all too true tale of suffering, a tale of exile which only literature can turn into a positive experience. And the novel *per se* may begin as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ends:

So be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. [...] Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead ». (Joyce 228)

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either side of the river was there the tree of Life [...] » *Revelations* 22, 1-2)

<sup>6</sup> « La mise en perspective temporelle du passé met l'accent sur les conséquences non voulues, l'histoire tend à affaiblir l'accent intentionnel de l'action elle-même » (Ricoeur 208).

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