Testing Relation: Breaking and Balancing Testimonies of Prisoner, Slave, and Holocaust Survivor in Caryl Phillips's Higher Ground

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There is no life or culture, no art or philosophy separated from the whole expression of human life and being on the planet. It is the separation that is the first strand of barbed wire for the fences at Auschwitz, the more modern versions of southern plantations.

Amiri Baraka

For Édouard Glissant, relation identity is "linked ... to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures," "is produced in the chaotic network of Relation," and "circulates, newly extended" (144). The relation is an occupation of the abyss, of the state of exception. As opposed to the absolute, which is "the dramatic endeavour to impose a truth on the Other," the relational is "the obscure need to accept the other's difference" (Caribbean Discourse 147–48). Difference in relationality is "the difference between (in the sense of relating and connecting) ... is not a liminal space but a creative one" (Cox 18). Relational history, like Marxism, "criticize[s] the concept of a linear and hierarchical History" (CD 64), and because "history is not only absence for us, it is vertigo" (CD 161), it necessitates a "creative approach" (CD 61): "The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present" (CD 63–64).

NADINE FLAGEL holds a PhD from Dalhousie University with a focus on contemporary fictions of slavery. She has taught American and British literature at Simon Fraser University and Brock University. This occurs as "exploded, suffered time" in novels of the Americas (*CD* 144). Relationality implies a paradigm shift in metaphor: "All kinds of evidence are brought to the surface and valued *relationally, alongside*, rather than according to received schemes of repression or denial of certain features that do not fit the mold or that go against the grain" (Cox 8). Ian Baucom comments, "Indeed, this passage from exception to relation, this passage from a vision of exceptional suffering and of those violently excepted from history, to the vision of unity, a solidarity, functions as a shorthand code for, or condensation of, Glissant's entire poetics of relation" (310).

Yet there are clear limits to Glissant's unity. The preliminary definitions of relation imply significant differences between Blacks and other newcomers to the New World: the former group "has not brought with it, not collectively continued, the methods of existence and survival, both material and spiritual, which it practiced before being uprooted" (CD 15). Slaves were "transformed elsewhere *into another people*" (CD 15), as Jews (not directly named by Glissant) were not. If relation is "a word for those new 'transverse' forms of culture, identity, and solidarity that emerge from the act of holding to, enduring, relating, and avowing our (present's) relational complicity with modernity's most violent scenes of exchange" (Baucom 311), then a denial of Jewish peoples (surely participants in one of "modernity's most violent scenes of exchange") might seem to be at odds with this goal. Can relation identity meet a non-transformed identity? Can non-relational identity be used to critique diasporic models?

And if one of the major challenges facing Blacks and Jews is finding common ground, then it might be worth investigating places where they do meet. One of these places is in the novel *Higher Ground*. What Caryl Phillips's novel points to is the necessity for participants in Black culture to be (re)cognizant of Jewish identity, not merely insofar as it enables Black identity but as it is in itself. The text clearly is relational (particularly in its techniques) yet interrogates one of the underlying assumptions of relation.

There is a lengthy, troubled history of Black-Jewish relations, particularly in the U.S., against which Phillips's novel should be read but which must remain peripheral here. Briefly, despite some joint activism in the Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s, and more in the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement, Jewish-American and African-American communities have often failed to identify common causes for various economic, social, and political reasons; instead, "Jews and blacks have each embraced America's conception of the other" (Thomas 207). Division—and the *perception* of division—has grown in the past thirty years, exacerbated by ethnocentric (Black nationalist, Zionist) discourses, by governmental policy

decisions since the 1970s that involve a "large-scale gutting of public life" and result in "little sense of public-mindedness and a narrow obsession with one's constituency and identity" (West xx), and by the assumption that the adoption of ethnic perspectives other than one's own is a political act of appropriation and exploitation. Thus the gesture whereby African-American preachers, narrators, and singers in the nineteenth century unproblematically alluded to the predicament of Hebrew slaves in Egypt, recognizing a paradigm of imprisonment and suffering in such a way as to attract sympathy and mobilize political will, is now almost unthinkable.

Nevertheless there are parallels, links that cannot be eradicated by cultural theories privileging racial diasporic identity, although these links are usually cautiously expressed. Sam Durrant argues: "To link the two modes of racial oppression is not to challenge arguments concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust nor to gloss over the differences between the extermination of the Jews and the many different forms of colonialism few of which were genocidal in intention. What concerns me here is that both histories produce similar problems of memorialization" (3). Durrant sees that postmodernism is haunted by the Holocaust, and that both Jews and Blacks are "figure[s] of an exclusion" (6). Paul Gilroy quotes Morrison linking slavery and the Holocaust by saying that the first's dehumanization made the second possible: "Racism is the word that we use to encompass all this" (221). He also notes that the myth of a "special redemptive power produced through suffering" (216) is a common strain in both Jewish and Black cultures. West calls both groups "pariah people" occupying the "dominant status of degraded Others" who shared mainly progressive liberal politics and a modern sensibility (Lerner and West 4). One commentator on Phillips's work writes, "The horrors of being declared an unwanted stranger, a tribal threat, link the experiences of blacks and Jews, holocaust upon holocaust" (Pinckney 115). Michael Lerner observes that they also share a cultural burden: "The burden is on the most oppressed groups to prove a possibility of transformation, because they have the most interest in it" (Lerner and West 223).

In the two groups' efforts to claim humanity through suffering, and to gain cultural authority from historical recognition, they have come into conflict. Such conflict is evident in debates over the meaning of Toni Morrison's dedication of *Beloved* to "Sixty Million and More," in responses to

¹ See Naomi Mandel's article, "'I Made the Ink': Identity, Complicity, 60 Million, and More," for a summary of this debate. As an instance, Stanley Crouch called Beloved "a blackface holocaust [sic] novel. It seems to me to have been written in order to enter American slavery into the big-time martyr ratings contest" (205).

the Crown Heights incidents (dramatized by Anna Deveare Smith in *Fires in the Mirror*), and in furor over the Nation of Islam's *The Secret Relation-ship Between Blacks and Jews* and Louis Farrakhan's anti-Semitism, to take instances from Black culture (with which I am more familiar). These tensions play out internationally as well as nationally: for instance, in debates over Israeli-Palestinian strife.

While several novelists—among them Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Chester B. Himes—have explored the topic of strained Jewish-Black relations, Ishmael Reed's showdown between a fugitive slave and a Jewish immigrant most explicitly exposes a competition for moral authority based on victimhood, what Adam Newton has termed "scar-rivalry" (22):

The Immigrant looked at him. "Your people think that you corner the market on the business of atrocity. My relatives were dragged through the streets of St. Petersburg, weren't permitted to go to school in Moscow, were pogrammed [*sic*] in Poland.... Your people haven't suffered that much. I can prove it, statistically."

"Oh yeah? Nobody's stoning you in the streets here. You are doing quite well.... What are you bitching about?..."

"There are more types of slavery than merely material slavery. There's a cultural slavery. I have to wait as long as two weeks sometimes before I can get a *Review of Books* from New York.... Your people! Requesting wages and leaving their plantations. They should pay for themselves. Look at us. We were responsible. We paid for ourselves. Paid our way. I earned myself! We never sassed the master, and when we were punished we always admitted that we were in the wrong. The whole world, sometimes, seems to be against us. Always passing resolutions against us. Hissing us. Nobody has suffered as much as we have."

"Nobody has suffered as much as my people," says Quick-skill calmly.

The Immigrant, Mel Leer, rises. "Don't tell me that lie."

The whole café turns to the scene.

"Our people have suffered the most."

"My people!"

"My people!"

"My people!"

"My people!" (67–68)

Reed's technique exaggerates, polarizes, and thereby satirically deflates representative combative perspectives of struggle between men to own suffering, capturing the "hypertrophied moment" of Black-Jewish relations (Newton 17). Not incidentally, he flattens out different histories of victimization and directs more satire at the voluble Immigrant.

A comparison between Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada and Phillips's novel highlights the latter's relational technique. In Higher Ground, dissonant polyphony is the formal counterpart of multiple diverse recollections of traumatic losses.² The novel contains three separate narratives. The first is "Heartland," the narrative of a nameless, tribeless late-eighteenthcentury West African translator and collaborator³ who lives with and is ultimately enslaved by British slave traders; the second, "The Cargo Rap," comprises the letters of Rudy/Rudi Williams, a young African-American incarcerated in the 1960s, whose political sensibility increases while his mental deterioration worsens;⁴ and the third, "Higher Ground," is the story of Irina/Irene, the sole member of her Jewish Polish family to avoid the

- 2 Therapist and theorist Judith Herman's definition of trauma is useful. "Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death," and "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (33). They are "extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" (Herman 33). They can be single or repeated ("chronic"), as in prisons or concentration camps (74), and they can be identified in larger communities: "Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well an individual level" (2).
- 3 I have used this term for convenience, echoing Phillips's own term, "someone who collaborated" ("Worlds Within" 594), although "'complicity' and 'cooperation' are terms that apply to situations of free choice. They do not have the same meaning in situations of captivity" (Herman 116).
- 4 Phillips has described the impetus for writing the story:

That came about because I was in Alabama making a film in 1982-83. I was doing a documentary film in Birmingham, nearly 20 years after the bombings in that city. Obviously, I had an interest before that in civil rights, but in Birmingham, I came face to face with the realities of the movement. I went to Birmingham City Jail where King was incarcerated. I went to Jefferson County Jail which is where a lot of black people were held and continue to be held for a variety of reasons. I really am quite interested in the whole process of the psychology of the 1960s in America. A combination of exposing myself to reading about the 1960s, being aware of the martyrdom many Black Americans went through in the 1960s, their struggles and misunderstandings, the difficulties of Vietnam and the hippie movement, and the actual physical horror, for the first time in my life, of being in a couple of prisons which had huge black populations and were primarily staffed by bigoted,

death camps, who is unable to adjust to life in London. Each section evokes an established body of literature with certain distinguishing aspects: slave narrative (as described by Olney, Sekora), Holocaust writing (Clendinnen, Langer, Kremer, Agamben), and Black prison writing (Franklin, James).⁵

The three disparate sections are brought into proximity by the subtitle of the book: "A Novel in Three Parts." Critical commentators have noted the effects:

[To] claim that *Higher Ground* is a novel—not short stories on the same theme—is to urge readers to see the stories as a unity. The work is a triptych, and it is not only that when we place the three parts together they form a unity—of damaged and hurt lives—but that there emerges a significance which no one part by itself can communicate with such clarity and force. (Sarvan and Marhama 40)

But what is this significance?

I suggest the importance of *Higher Ground* is that it can be usefully read as a fictional intervention in Black-Jewish relations, relations which have been publicly strained and which "[tend] to seal off rather than free up" identities, as Newton has noted (xii).⁶ Although individual sections of the novel may suggest certain exclusionary paths (Afrocentrism, Black nationalism, Zionism), collectively the novel is an exploration of the sources of modern racial politics and identities. It is, therefore, a significant testing site for the possibilities and limits of Glissantian relationality.

Phillips's fractured structure of juxtaposed tragedies avoids the friction of Reed's novel. As an alternative to degenerating argument, Caryl Phillips's polyphonic *métissage* creates a generative space for dialogue and meaning, paradoxically by shutting down and sealing off the speakers. In polyphonic fragmentation, "the strategy is explicit: the reader is

Southern red-necks—I had to write something about all of this. ("Worlds Within" 602)

- 5 Dylan Rodriguez argues against the phrase "prison writing" as it "legitimizes and reproduces the discursive-material regime of imprisonment" and "foregrounds the prison's pedagogical capacities" (409). However, as I understand such writing (like slave narratives and Holocaust writings) as fundamentally noisy and dialogic, and as my argument works against ideals of individual transcendence and amplifies Phillips's production of noise, my employment of the phrase is not distant from Rodriguez's goal of "amplifying the incoherence of captivity" (410).
- 6 These terms Black and Jew "are also not semantically equivalent, the one denoting ... race (as color) and the other, religion, culture, and debatably perhaps, ethnicity" (Newton 9).

expected to compare the various points of view, to discover parallels and differences, and also to notice what remains unsaid" (Viviès 64).7 What readers discover is that the novel's three protagonists have fragmented subjectivities in the teeth of monitored racial boundaries and exploitation among corrupt people and settings, exploitation reinforced by the failure of narrative and other memory strategies to overcome the physical and especially mental illnesses of isolated captivity. What is unsaid is that the separation of three protagonists in space, time, and narrative (as emphasized by the paratextually divisive—and simultaneously linking silent spaces between them) underlines the specificity of their experiences, agency, sufferings, and silences. The novel carefully recognizes the complicated and varied ways Jews and Blacks have created identities, and the ways anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism have operated. It avoids direct examination of Black anti-Semitism or Jewish racism, situates the dialogue outside the contemporary U.S. milieu, and introduces readers to a female perspective—a crucial "depatriarchalizing" (West xix)—of this dialogue. Phillips thus goes beyond essentialist notions of African and Jewish diasporas and resists homogenization of cultural forms—what West has called "an abstract humanism and faceless universalism that refuse to confront the concrete conflicts that divide us" (xvii)—retaining total specificity of experience so readers cannot easily substitute one expression of oppression/resistance for another.

At the same time, Phillips avoids the myths of the healing novel and refuses the restoration of protagonists to their communities (as in Sethe's restoration to her community and Paul D in the final scenes of Toni Morrison's Beloved). This step, in fact essential to healing trauma's scars, 8 is evidence of that "persistent faith in the liberating potential of narrative fiction" that Timothy Spaulding finds in African-American postmodern postslavery novels (124). By refusing such restoration and interrupting the master narrative of emancipation and success in African-American and Jewish-American cultures (see Newton 3–4), the novel asks that readers beware the abstraction or transcendence of Black or Jewish experience, an abstraction that "accepts and maintains the categories (black/white, for

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⁷ While the novel reserves a specially marked place for dialogue between characters, it also creates a space for dialogical contact or a "conversation" with "the languages, styles, world views of another" (Viviès 46); thus a multitude of languages overlap on different planes (48), as captured by Mikhail Bakhtin's powerful musical/sound metaphors of orchestration and polyphony.

⁸ The other two essential steps to healing are "establishing safety" and "reconstructing the trauma story" (Herman 3).

instance) of the status quo," that "is about individuals, not groups, crossing boundaries," and that "comforts and consoles those in power and offers a ray of hope to the powerless" (John Edgar Wideman xxxii). Sara Salih argues that texts treating slavery tend to present slaves empathetically, thereby pleasing the reader, but also depict dehumanizing brutality that disciplines the slave vicariously (see 77, 80). She quotes Marcus Wood: "The dirtiest thing the Western imagination ever did, and it does it compulsively still, is to believe in the aesthetically healing powers of empathetic fiction" (74). This is the all-too-palatable sugar-coating of trauma. As shall be made evident, Phillips's novel is characteristically pessimistic, consoling no one. In *Higher Ground*, the characters' local and isolated ravings into and across the breach enact Phillips's delicate juxtaposition of the Black and Jewish diasporic experiences.9

Higher Ground is a fascinating response to the problem of representing trauma ethically, performatively. Phillips invites empathy then refuses it, pulls away from it, refuses affective pleasure in the discipline of Black and Jewish bodies. Therefore, while prominent critic of Phillips's fiction Bénédicte Ledent suggests a model of "submarine *unity*" between the three novellas (*Caryl Phillips* 56), I propose instead a model of polyphonic submarine *fractures* to describe its heteroglossia—the artistic manipulation of numerous discourses, the relationship between the text's several and incommensurable voices. ¹⁰ The novel shows an unfinished bridge that offers the promise of but defers the realization of common ground.

For a moment, let me consider this "submarine unity." Ledent's phrase is clearly indebted to the phrase, "The unity is sub-marine," which recurs in the theoretical works of Glissant. The phrase is in *Caribbean Discourse* and shows up still more prominently as the epigraph to *The Poetics of Relation* (which then begins with thoughts on the Atlantic slave trade), indicating the centrality of its influence on Glissant's concepts of relationality, diversity, transversality, creolization, Antillanité. Glissant is in fact quoting Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who used the phrase to "[summarize] the third and last section of his study" on "the work done in the Caribbean on our history, our present-day and obviously overlapping histories)"

- 9 Interestingly, Caryl Phillips himself has pathologized the "polyphonic" qualities of his fiction as "structural paranoia" and "schizophrenia" ("Crisscrossing the River" 94, 93).
- 10 Heteroglossia, which is the state of other, different, diverse, and varied voices "within a language" (Bakhtin 67), carries on the "centrifugal" (272) work of interrupting centripetal official languages and thoughts with a dismembering laughter (23, 236–37), and a proximity to unofficial, spoken languages and thoughts (20, 25).

(CD 66). Ian Baucom, in his study of the infamous slave ship Zong and the historiographic questions it raises, notes the recycling of phrase and image and quotes Glissant further: "For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea's abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others. Peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange" (310). My challenge to the phrase "submarine unity" should be understood only partly as a challenge to the basis of relationality; rather, it is meant to suggest the difficult sluggishness of circular exchange and Glissantian errancy (errantry) around the breach between Blacks and Jews. What Phillips's novel provides is a rare and significant intersection, a moment of tested relationality, of ethnicity and identity discussions which yet gives space, specificity, respect to each.

The novel does important work in disrupting received categories. Yet for many reasons, not least of all the complicated identity of its author and its protagonists, it is likely to fall through the cracks of course descriptions or any study with national or geographical limits. In part, Phillips's technical juxtaposition arises from symmetrical influences on his development as a writer and his indebtedness to both Jewish and Black American models of identity, history, and representation. Although Black, born in St Kitts, and raised in Leeds, Phillips found the Shoah personally and positively identity-forming. He has written, "In British schools I was never offered a text that had been penned by a black person, or that concerned the lives of black people" (*The European Tribe* 1). Instead, "the Jews were the only minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for that reason, I naturally identified with them" (54). Although he later learned to appreciate the generation of West Indian writers preceding him, his first identification with Black literature was with the urban experience described vividly by writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. Although his British upbringing and West Indian roots give him some distance from their perspectives, no doubt these writers' references to the "ambivalent" relations between African-Americans and Jewish Americans (Baldwin 59) also influenced Phillips. A provocative creative ambivalence is apparent in Phillips's citation of William Styron's Sophie's Choice as an inspiration for Higher Ground. This novel, in which a young Jewish mother is forced to choose upon arrival at the camps which of her children will be taken away from her, recalled for Phillips the disruptions of slavery, yet slaves "weren't given a choice":

I was aware of some parallels to the great twentieth-century crime against the Jews. It had some parallels and echoes for me as a black kid growing up in Europe. I felt that if white people can do that to themselves, what the hell are they going to do to me? I became interested in Jewish history, and I subsequently visited Auschwitz and Dachau and Anne Frank's house. I was interested in these places as monuments, for they existed. From reading I knew that physical edifices of the slave trade also existed. I started putting together this notion of the family unit breaking down. The idea of the lack of choice. ("Worlds Within" 601)

His acknowledgement of William Styron (critically castigated for his treatment of Jews in this novel as well as for his treatment of the revolutionary Black figure in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*) suggests that Phillips deliberately defies contentious partitions and hierarchies of cultures in favour of creating lateral connections.

Phillips's development as a writer and his development of polyphonic fiction challenge the sometimes essentialist Black literary tradition to appreciate that "all texts participate in larger, intercultural dialogues or polylogues in a complex nexus of literary cross-dressing and back talking" (duCille 24). Literary resonances must be viewed as cutting across racial identities, cultural spaces, and historical moments (duCille 9), not simply defined and taught as movement solely from Black text to Black text, from one Black author to another. No discourse of body of literature, neither slave narrative nor holocaust survivor story, is discrete or pure; all are dynamic.¹¹

The concept of *métissage* or braiding, voiced by Glissant as formal evidence of relationality, and elaborated by Françoise Lionnet, is an answer to this call, as it positively describes a "balanced form of interaction [or] reciprocal relations [that] prevent the ossification of culture and encour-

11 Stuart Hall has commented on the importance of this point for Black cultural studies:

The point of underlying overdetermination—black cultural repertoires constituted from two directions at once—is perhaps more subversive than you think. It is to insist that in black popular culture, strictly speaking, ethnographically speaking, there are no pure forms at all. Always these forms are the product of partial synchronization, of engagement across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than one cultural tradition, of the negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of recoding and transcoding, of critical signification, of signifying. (28)

age systematic change and exchange" (16). Métissage "[encourages] lateral relations: instead of living within the bounds created by a linear view of history and society, we become free to interact on an equal footing with all the traditions that determine our present predicament" (Lionnet 7). 12 Phillips situates *Higher Ground* precisely in this problematic space between postwar Black and Jewish identities where there are symmetries but also divergences. *Métissage* is that tension between Black and Jewish traumatic narratives, and it begins at the most literal and noticeable level in "The Cargo Rap," which is a jarring eruption of narrative and rhetoric that signals and makes parallel (not equivalent) the cultural legacies of slavery and the Holocaust traumas.

Métissage and Thetorical Failure of Slavery in "The Cargo Rap"

Rudi in his letters repeatedly compares prison to the excessively imbalanced power relations of slavery and the Holocaust, and he is the unlikely yet effective mediator between these historical events. Rudi's comparisons between imprisonment and slavery build upon the preceding slave's tale; his comparisons between prison and the Holocaust's concentration camps foreshadow Irene's breakdown. In juxtaposition to "Heartland," with its terrifying conditions of enslavement and its challenge to simplistic models of power, Rudi's frequent analogies between the conditions of twentiethcentury African-American life and the conditions of slavery jar the reader as exaggerated and brash rhetorical flourishes lacking context. They tend to be couched in dismissive metaphors fueling his didacticism and, thus, close doors on the multiplicity of meanings. That which might otherwise be powerful metaphor constitutes a failure. The collaborator's and Irene's experiences make Rudi's overwrought analogies into abuses of metaphor

12 In Lionnet's take on *métissage*, it is a kind of "braiding" or weaving together "of cultural forms through the simultaneous revalorization of oral traditions and reevaluation of Western concepts" (4). She declares that "the word does not exist in English," except in words and phrases—creolization, hybridity, mulatto, half-breed, mixed blood—with strongly negative connotations (13). The alternative word, *métis*, simply means *mixed*, and refers to cloth made of two different fibres (Lionnet 14). Despite problems with the term métissage, such as its removal here from the Francophone postcolonial cultural milieu, the possible tendency to celebrate cultural mixing without attending to its painful disturbances, or its possible reliance on the terms of binary racial thinking (see Prieto 138–39 and Puri 2–5), I persist in thinking that it is important to locate a positive term for cultural mixing (and English is reluctant to yield one up). Prominent and influential francophone critics like Edouard Glissant use it regularly to describe authors working in English, and, in the case of this novel, such braiding as occurs also certainly carries the heavy penalties of cultural interactions.

termed catachresis. Phillips's exposure of catachresis is a useful perversion of language; following Gayatri Spivak, catachresis is a subaltern refusal of appropriation and insistence on the empirical (251–53). The breakdown of figurative language, in addition to the breakdown of communication, signals the failure—Phillips's deliberate failure—to transcend trauma into universal meaning. Timothy Bewes argues that "imperfections" and "difficulties" in works by Phillips constitute "an almost pure example of the *pathos* of literary failure" (35): "No one speaks in his works; or rather, what is spoken is the unspeakableness of the unspeakable" (50).

While Bewes is oriented to cliché and the shame of language in Cambridge and Crossing the River, my parallel project examines instances of intertextual catachresis in *Higher Ground*: in cliché "eloquence and inarticulacy collide" (Bewes 48), as in catachresis. The work reading required by silences and omissions means that the novels have "deferred impact" (42). The apparent dead end of inarticulacy is actually a detour to eloquence; in Glissant's terms, a "working to say without saying" (Poetics of Relation 68). We might think of this as assessing a crime scene by considering the chalk outline of a conspicuous absence. This inscription around has implications not only for the general attitude toward the past but also the text's sites of disappearance, silence, and omission. Phillips's work "[finds] a way of reconciling the aesthetic impossibility of speaking with the ethical impossibility of not speaking" (Bewes 54). "What may seem to be gaps or silences are instead the counter-intuitive voices of dissidence or presumed non-importance, and these must be brought to the surface and included along with official history in order to complete the picture" (Cox 7). It is important to heed Naomi Mandel here, to recall that the unspeakable, "the rhetorical invocation of the limits of language, comprehension, representation, and thought on the one hand, and a deferential gesture toward atrocity, horror, trauma, and pain on the other," is a "discursive production that is re-created and reinforced whenever the limits of language, of comprehension, and of thought are evoked" (Against the Unspeakable 4).

Phillips draws attention to the limits of metaphorical language by using rhetorical tropes of nonfiction Black prison writing of the 1960s and 1970s to show the discursive ways in which Jewishness is linked with blackness, and blackness with slavery. Focusing on intertextual prison writings, I link these catachreses directly to particular prison writers so as to trace Phillips's distinct intertextual practices and thereby to embroider in this paper what has so far been a simplified version of *métissage*; in other words, a complex process of imbrication is going on not only *between* the three sections of the novel but also *within* each section and its generic or dis-

cursive relations. Thus a particular moment in Black men's prison writing is crucial as it functions to create a shared yet splintered discursive space that might be occupied by Blacks and Jews.

In amplifying catachresis in standard metaphors of Black prison writing, Phillips exposes and contests its rhetorical fallacies and ideological constructions. Rudi directs his father "to impart to Moma and Laverne [Rudi's sister] the truth about this plantation society" (67). On the occasion of his grandfather's death, he delivers the following anti-eulogy, deeply offending his family: "Popa was a slave, he behaved like a slave, he lived and died like one, and the sooner our professional slaves die the better for us all. Onwards towards the day of revolution.... So Popa Williams is dead. Let us give thanks!" (73). Like one-time prisoner Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, Rudi frequently uses the word "slave" as a verb to replace the verb "work"; similarly, the noun "slave" translates into "job." That Rudi sees work under capitalism as metaphorically equivalent to enslavement could be a powerful Marxist analogy between types of exploitation of labour (as it is in George Jackson's writing). However, he stops short of a well-argued presentation of the continuity of (neo)slavery in sloppy and raw hyperbole. Phillips preserves and critiques the occasional rhetorical fallacies of Black Power. This gesture does not neutralize the revolutionary claims of Black nationalists, nor deny the reality of contemporary enslavements. Rather, Phillips uses Rudi's references to slavery to question the exploitation and casual overuse of the very idea of slavery. Rudi articulates his oppression in terms of slavery as (to borrow from Carl Plasa's reading of Jane Eyre) "a kind of shock tactic, designed to move the reader into dramatic awareness of the severity of particular conditions of disempowerment.... Yet, on the other hand, the simultaneous counter-effect ... is to lessen and disguise the true meanings—the literality—of slavery" (68-69). If Rudi's metaphors "not only appeal to analogies between forms of oppression that are ultimately incomparable but in so doing also falsify and diminish the true nature of that which is the ground of their own efficacy" (Plasa 69), then Phillips's polyphonic métissage seeks to expose catachresis, to restore and amplify the true nature—the literality—of racial oppression in slavery and the Holocaust.

Rhetorical Failure and the Holocaust in "The Cargo Rap"

Just as Phillips adopts the touchstone of slavery from Black men's prison writing, so too does he adopt their views of the Holocaust. An inevitable comparison between Rudi's figurative speech and the allusions to the

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Holocaust in Irina's story precisely enacts the failure of rhetorical substitution, or catachresis, although here the exposure comes retroactively, when readers realize later that Rudi's comparisons to the Shoah are as startling as those slavery analogies. Rudi Williams calls the prison guards "Gestapo Police" (127) with a "Gestapo-mentality" of cruelty and racism (162), and he wonders "if in Nazi Germany they used to keep the lights on as a form of torture" (72). Similarly, Rubin Carter labels white guards "would-be Gestapo officers" (140), and George Jackson calls white prisoners who assault Black prisoners "Hitler's Little Helpers" (226), reporting that "the white prisoner who is con-wise joins the Hitler party right here in the joint" (285). All term prison a "concentration camp" (Jackson 26, 115; Carter 65; Phillips 76, 92). Jackson signs off letters "From Dachau with Love" (304; see also 307 and 26). Rudi repeatedly calls Maximum Security Row "Belsen" (69; 84; 145). The comparisons between prison and the Holocaust are disruptively blunt in juxtaposition with and anticipation of "Higher Ground," a narrative that sensitively explores these conditions. As Kremer has observed of Holocaust fiction, "no satisfactory analogy exists" for the articulation of atrocity in incarceration (25).

Catachresis issues an imperative of comparison and contrast, demands a measurement of appropriate and ethical language; it is therefore a crucial technology in mapping out fault lines between the parallel repertoires of prison, slave, and Holocaust writing. By making metaphors of slavery and the Holocaust fail, the novel simultaneously refuses simple analogies and invites consideration of its splintered balance.

Turning from catachresis, this assessment considers the following fractured symmetries between the novel's three sections: confinement in desolate and corrupted landscapes, concomitant disease and weakness in human bodies and ethics, the absurdity of social contracts and religious faiths, loss of family and home, fraught interracial boundaries, exploitative sexual relations, betrayal by language and memory, erosion of autobiographical control, and escalating individual alienation and insanity. To reiterate, these points of comparison should serve not as a means of eliding differences between or of calcifying conceptions of slaves, prisoners, and Jews as silent victims but, rather, as encouragements to plural interpretations of individual agents and racial groups they may represent by virtue of the stories they cannot tell.

Decay of Physical Systems

The corruption of human bodies and environments emerges in all three sections, as history literally marks the body and constructs an architec-

ture of dead zones: slave fort, concentration camp, prison. These rigid and enclosed spaces retain their power to break down humanity, even when they corrode and leak. For instance, Rudi's eyesight, like that of many other prisoners, suffers as a consequence of torturous lighting and inadequate medical care in prison as well as excessive reading (Phillips 133, 139). Furthermore, Rudi cannot explain certain injuries since, he says, to do so would be tantamount to accusing the guards of brutality and could lead to further abuse (105, 108, 113). The narrator of "Heartland" connects physical decay to a widespread environmental and moral corrosion: the rat-infested, disease-smeared dungeons ringed with chains, the lifeless and desolate plain near the slave fort, the narrator's prison-like room "three short paces" long (14), the pervasive smell of the slave coffle, the governor's illness and death, the soldier Lewis's increasing degeneration and drunkenness, a fort official's terrible scarring and sexual abuse of the African girl, and the beating suffered by the narrator. Powerful and powerless both are corrupted, diseased, and complicit physical beings. Reminders or threats of slavery are requisitioned to enact enslavement at the end of "Heartland," recalling the overwhelming violations and visceral sensations of the middle passage in slave narratives such as Olaudah Equiano's.

Irina's story connects with Holocaust literature through a series of small analogies, symbols, and affinities to the decay of physical systems and expressly to death and decomposition. Although she has escaped the threat of the camps, Irina/Irene's memories and dreams powerfully propel her to inhabit a concentration camp of her own devising. Irina's journey to England shares topoi with journeys to the death camps: there are her family's photographs, the "winter coat, the hastily gathered possessions, the docile, even eager travelling towards an increasingly problematic destination" (Clendinnen 165). The journey to England is not an escape but a death: "When they finally boarded the ship a man led them with jailer-like silence through riveted corridors which to Irina's tired eyes resembled long iron coffins" (Phillips 201). There is little to choose between the desolate and icy landscape of postwar England as Irene perceives it and the gloomy horror of the camps through which she filters experience: smoking chimneys (183), cats screaming like children, skeletal lampposts and naked trees (176). Irene's contact with "dirty" factory girls shedding dead skin (183) and with the "grime" of London (181) aligns her story with the decay and filth of the other parts of this novel and also with the lack of sanitation and physical deterioration chronicled in Holocaust literature, that "literature of decomposition" (Langer 28). Like camp residents, Irene lives under the judgmental observation of others who can intensify her misery. She also

often has a headache like an "iron handcuff" (177). Ledent has pointed out that the handcuff in particular echoes the "yokes, branding-irons, metal masks" of the slave trade in "Heartland" ("Remembering" 15) and, I would add, the heavy metal shackles and chains of Rudi's time in Max Row.

Rudi's inability to make parole, the slave collaborator's aborted plans to flee, and Irina's deathly survival are multiple variations on the motif of failed escape from decay. Such corrupted and corrupting places weaken bodies and prohibit healing, rebirth, and rehabilitation. The novel moves spiderlike from the prisoner's damaged limbs and eyes to attach threads to other manifestations of physical decay in humans and their environments evident in the slave collaborator's and Irene's stories. In each section, the decay is typical of the discourse; thus each version of corruption remains distinct while relationally it gestures toward the other two.

Rejection of Religious Faith

The loss of trust in human bodies and environments is a fundamental betrayal connected to pervasive spiritual and mental decay. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman reports that most trauma sufferers "experience the bitterness of being forsaken by God" (94). The form of rejection of each god differs according to what is typical in each discursive repertoire but erupts on the surface in each as a sign of a fault line beneath all three. Rudi violently embraces atheism to criticize and alienate his family, as he attacks the baptism of his sister (Phillips 75) and rejects a Christmas card sent by his mother (Phillips 12). Rudi explicitly rejects the Christian morality of "turning the other cheek" and offering forgiveness and love to one's oppressors (Phillips 149-50).14 The suspicion of received Christian religious beliefs crucial to the prison writers' assessment of their mis-education is sustained through the other two sections of the novel: in "Heartland" the narrator asks, "Have all Gods abandoned me?" (15), he does not understand the passages he reads to the Governor from the Bible (51), and he dryly considers Christian conversion as a political sop of slaveowners to appease "the anti-[slave-]trading lobby" (52). Phillips has altered the slave narrative's common position of Christian faith to disbelief; however, the collaborator does echo typical ex-slave condemnations of hypocritical Christian slaveholders and the dishonest uses of Christianity to countenance slavery and to pacify slaves (Olney 50).

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13 As did George Jackson (42).14 Thus following the pattern of Eldridge Cleaver (47–48, 104, 124).
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In the third section, Irene challenges the Jewish faith in ways typical of Holocaust writing. As Clendinnen warns, trivial things are overdetermined, for associations with the Holocaust are irrevocable. Thus, relatively neutral snow clearly evokes the image of ash falling from the sky, ash created by the mass cremations in concentration camps: "Irene laughed and imagined God to be shaking a great celestial salt-cellar before he ate up his children," "We deserve to be eaten up.... This was Irene's fantasy, that everyone was deluding themselves, that only the good and the meek would survive, and she knew none who qualified. She was prepared to be shovelled up on to God's spoon and devoured" (176). In Irene's grotesque image, ash adds flavour to the other "shovelled" bodies. Her spiritual distortion of morality stems from the break between cause and effect in ghetto and camp life, from the Holocaust insight into "the almost totally random nature of death, to the point of extinguishing the significance of the individual" (Langer 249). Irene wonders if God is "unemployed" (as she is in danger of literally becoming), indicating a God who does not or cannot work on behalf of his children. Irene's malevolent, greedy, and absent Jehovah is one of a trio of god figures who obscure meaning and legitimate power in her, Rudi's, and the collaborator's narratives. Phillips glimpses the potential for loss of faith to factor into loss of sanity.

Sexual Exploitation and the Impossibility of Intimacy

In addition to corruption and loss of faith, intimate ambivalence—the characters' participation in and condemnation of sexually exploitative economies—cuts through all three sections. Prison writings of Black men in the 1960s tend to be marked by extreme homophobia, imbricated with these authors' anxiety over masculinity and sexual exploitation. In this context, homophobia focuses hatred of the most intimate forms of prison control. According to Rudi, "Homosexuality is a sick but everyday fact of life in the camps" (107). One may become "a snivelling faggot pervert ready to go down on anything or anybody in exchange for a pack of cheap cigarettes" (107). Rudi explains that the uninitiated prisoner must overreact to the first approach to avoid being trapped in this sexual economy: "You must clench up your fist and crash it into his face" (107). However, near the end of his letters, and unlike most other Black prison writers, he rethinks homosexuality as a viable approach to the problem of intimacy, thus permitting Phillips to implicitly critique the homophobic discourse of his intertexts.

The sharp contrast between Rudi's dismissive language and his reconsideration makes the central section the departure point for the novel's

sexual ambivalence. The narrator of "Heartland" appears to welcome a dream of homoerotic intimacy (14–15) and reserves his disgust for the abuses piled on the African girl, although his intervention is an ineffectual rhetorical question: "Will nobody go to her aid?" (32). At the same time, the narrator is implicated in sexual exploitation, as he explains that when the fort contains slaves, "it will be possible for me to sate my appetite in secret" (37). Later, his affection for the abused girl induces him to listen sympathetically, to aver that between them "There is no exploitation, only shared fear and insecurity as we rock together" (49), and to intervene to end Lewis's sexual abuse of the girl. On the whole, the narrator's growing condemnation of sexual exploitation of Black women echoes slave narratives, which characteristically (and euphemistically) record white male sexual transgressions against Black women.

Even consensual sex in *Higher Ground* is couched in terms of exploitation and abuse. The novel thus abhors trauma made intimate and complicates it, depatriarchalizes it, by pointing to women's traumatic experiences as sexual objects. Although Irene agrees tacitly to sexual relations with factory manager Reg, "[She] knew already that she would suffer intercourse rather than participate in it" (189). The dark, rainy surroundings threaten her with "heavily muscled trees" and dying flowers (188). Reg's actions in intercourse—he "began to race" and "hammered on until he broke into high watery breath" (189)—also threaten the egocentric storm. The resulting pregnancy "caused her lower spine to curve inwards as though somebody had put a boot into the small of her back. Her body was often numb with pain, her movements heavy, and she would trudge the streets, occasionally stopping and staring and wanting to scream in the vain hope that things might be different when the scream died away" (211). The motif of sexual exploitation is developed within the frames of Holocaust writing about women's experience, in that such writing typically shows "the ways female sexuality and motherhood added burdens to the normative Holocaust ordeal" (Kremer 4). Sexual vulnerability and deep ambivalence about sexual intimacy, then, weave together the three sections and express themselves generically, characteristically, and separately in each.

As imprisoned persons confront obstacles to sexual intimacy, the attempts of all characters to reach out (often across racial boundaries) and their overreliance on others secure their final alienation. Rudi's letters exaggerate these aspects and draw our attention to correspondences in the slave's and Irene's stories. Rudi loses contact with his child and her mother and expresses suspicion of a white lawyer who writes to him. He repeatedly distances himself from people with whom he is in contact—his

father, mother, sister, and legal assistant—through excessive and impractical expectations impossible for them to fulfill. His dependency, a feature common to prison writing, leads to disappointment and further alienation. The narrator of "Heartland," like many slave narrators before him, is separated from his wife and child and complains that "Loneliness scales the walls of my being and threatens to destroy my soul" (Olney 51, 15). He is reluctant to reciprocate Lewis's and the governor's attempts to befriend him and then is betrayed by the trust these white men have encouraged. He finds that the African girl's acceptance of him as lover and peer (both he and she have been "ruined" by contact with Europeans) fertilizes his dream of escape from the slave fort. But their love constitutes a transgression of the fort's rules of behaviour; discovery exposes the girl to further exploitation and strips the narrator of his precarious existence as translator. Expressing intimacy ensures vulnerability and slavery.

This characteristic of alienation from home, family, and surrogates is shared by women's Holocaust writings as well, which emphasize the "loss of family" (Kremer 8) and the "violation of home" (9). Irene cannot let go of her home nor accept the destruction of her family. She relives memories of family members' affection and dreams nightmares in which they "callously" ignore her (216); like other trauma survivors, she cannot conceive of a life "if she no longer devotes her life to remembrance and mourning" (Herman 195). Irene's acceptance of a date with Reg is "her first attempt to emerge from behind the wall of shyness that she knew she would have to leap, or step around, or be hauled over, for she could feel it growing higher by the day: she worried that unless she acted it would one day begin to curl around her and eventually become her brick and mortar shroud" (185). Images of death and incarceration collide here with isolation. As the reader learns, building this relationship eventually alienates Irene even more after Reg abuses her and she leaves him. Later, Irene seeks nonsexual intimacy with West Indian migrant Louis before returning to the mental hospital: "It was cruel of her to attempt to make a friend. Still, it would soon be over. But she did not want this man to leave her alone. He was kind" (216). The mixed-race couple confronts racist slurs and "glares of disapproval" (214) in the public eye of London. From the point of view of Louis, who has already decided to return to the West Indies, "It was probable that this woman would extend and demand a severe loyalty that he could never reciprocate. Not now" (216). Her quiet appeal meets his kind but uncomprehending dismissal, and this failed intimacy helps to push Irene into insanity, "for ever lost without the sustaining love" (218).

Alongside fraught sexual connections, the loss of family and friends

As these protagonists' audiences retreat and languages disintegrate, the stories end in deliberate, resonant silence.

leads to loss of self and sanity, although the articulation differs according to each discourse. Rudi loses his family members and legal assistance to distance, death, and his demands; the slave collaborator loses his family and the girl to slavery, Lewis to greed, the governor to death; Irene loses her family to the camps, her husband and child to abuse, and Louis to the pull of home. As these protagonists' audiences retreat and languages disintegrate, the stories end in deliberate, resonant silence. The characters lose themselves, as "Subjectivity and consciousness, in which our culture believed itself to have found its firmest foundation, rest on what is most precious and fragile in the world: the event of speech" (Agamben 122).

Alienation and Incarceration: The Betrayal of Representation and Communication

Obstacles to keeping together family and communicating fluently with others contribute to the loss of moorings that makes alienation and insanity possible. In this last section of analysis, I show that the decomposition of environment, community, belief, and communication system is intricately tied to the breakdown of representation and recollection. Phillips explores memory dysfunction in traumatic incarceration (whether real or imagined). This, accompanied by the extreme mental states and the failures of language—"complicated, sometimes uncanny alterations of consciousness" or "dissociation" (Herman 1)—pulls all parts of the novel toward the disjointed collapse of narrative typical of trauma writing. Herman explains that

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom. (1)

The oscillation of trauma victims between silence and truth-telling is played out in all sections as traumatic ambivalence between coercion and subversion in fragmented memories. While Herman's study is largely concerned with trauma *and recovery*, Phillips's novel braids together three symptomatic versions of trauma *without healing*. These traumas include "profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cogni-

tion, and memory" (Herman 34), and are metonymically indicated by the characters' unknown or split identities (the nameless collaborator, Rudy/ Rudi, Irina/Irene).15

Like dead zones of architecture, dead zones of communication, in which silence seems to overcome truth-telling, proliferate. Rudi's final letter is the first of these to examine, because of its function in facilitating a comparison with the other two sections. Rudi addresses his letter to his mother, although he has been informed of her death. Throughout his narrative, metaphorical references to slavery (such as catachresis analyzed above) grow more frequent, the concept escalating, augmenting, taking weight and shape, until it swallows his perspective on the reality of prison experience. Eventually, slavery recovers its full terrifying meaning in Rudi's final unanswered, unanswerable letter, wherein his prison experience is transformed through a mental breakdown into the slave's experience. Rudi's astounding, unassimilable final letter demands extensive quotation:

Dear Moma,

The overseer has a horse named "Ginger." The plantation is wide and stretches beyond the horizon. The days are hard and long. We toil from "can't see" in the morning to "can't see" at night. The master is cruel, but nobody "knows" him better than his slaves. There is strength in this. I have had to learn a new language so forgive me if I make errors while attempting to temporarily reclaim our own.... Thirty feet above me a man sits on a watchtower with a rifle. I remain agile in mind, and fleet of foot, so you must live with the hope that one day soon you will see and hold me again.... Time stumbles. A month in prison is equal to a year of freedom. We use a different calendar. I have fathered a child, but she (it is a girl) and her mother have been sold to a neighboring estate. I may never see them again. Hold on.

Your son (172)

Rudi holds on to his hopeful resistance, but his fierce grip on the conditions of prison and his struggles for freedom slips. Echoing George Jackson's closing words (86), he admonishes his mother to "hold on," yet this mother has died and so already has not been able to "hold on." Rudi's letter disrupts the temporal order in other ways. Details of prison life fuse with

¹⁵ See Ledent for a thorough analysis of "(un)naming" in all three protagonists (Phillips 57-60).

anachronistic details of plantation life, recalling Glissant's "plantation matrix" (CD 73) and Baraka's substitution of plantation for concentration camp cited in the epigraph to this essay. The possibility of parole (previously one of Rudi's primary concerns) metamorphoses into the possibility of becoming a runaway slave (see James xxxi); Rudi's loss of family—his child and her mother "have been sold to a neighboring estate" (172)—is an explicit nod to the separation of families in slave narratives. "The Cargo Rap," like "Heartland," is the narrative of a man whose reason slips under the recognition of his own slavery. The only situation in which the forced analogy or catachresis of neoslavery in "The Cargo Rap" can converge with the slavery of "Heartland" is insanity and its (il)logical leaps. References to the rifle and watchtower may also evoke the image of a concentration camp and anticipate the dissolution of metaphor in Irene/Irina's experiential memory under the pressure of inner and outer insanities.

Memory and narrative creation ultimately become unbearable burdens for all three protagonists. The slave collaborator of the first section deliberately tells "most of his story in a sometimes clumsy present tense," expressing the "stasis caused by a system that transforms men into pieces of property deprived of an access to time" (Ledent, Caryl Phillips 61). The collaborator writes: "I sit and wait and try hard not to throw my mind either backwards or forwards into new territory, for it is almost certain to be territory too painful to inhabit. Draining the mind is a tedious but necessary business. I am grateful, and would thank the Gods (if there were any to thank) that I have finally mastered this art of forgetting—of murdering the memory" (24). For him, forgetting the past translates into an inability to navigate the future. In contrast to his willed memory "drainage," Irene's "memory-haemorrhage" (180) is involuntary. Memory is an open wound; as Lawrence Langer puts it, "memory ceases to offer consolation but itself becomes an affliction" (78). Through free indirect discourse, in a language tinted by the character's own thoughts and diction, Phillips indicates Irene's mental breakdown through subtly marked yet nonetheless disorienting fissures between past and present. Hence, Irina remembers her journey by sea to England:

Then she withdrew the photograph album from its hidingplace and lay her palm against the front cover. It was still warm. [She is at sea.]

Irene stood up and walked over to the door. [Now she is in London years later.] Her room was one of those that never seemed to get any brighter when a light bulb was switched on. She picked up a towel and crushed it into her face. A wheel turned slowly in the cloying mud, faces smiled, and bread was passed from hand to hand. [Either the ghetto or the journey to the port.] Irene pulled back the curtain [London], rubbed a round porthole [at sea], and peered down into the street [London]. (209–10; see also 213–14)

This instance of memory and narrative dysfunction points to a characteristic of Holocaust writing: the disruption of time, memory, and narrative. "These partial, contested memories, this past and present pain," Inga Clendinnen writes (179), are indicative of "memory in process," not memory as "sacred relic" (178). In fact, this attribute is shared among most survivors of trauma: Herman writes that "long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts" (37), the trauma here being Irina's separation from her family, which intrudes on her present. Rudi's last letter and the collaborator's present tense record similar intrusions. Langer observes that "The literature of atrocity introduces ancestral voices which echo through time despite the survivor's desire for silence, and the result is a temporal dissonance which no modern harmonics—neither reader's nor character's—can resolve into a satisfactory pattern of sound" (252).16 While aberrant memory can be an important survival tactic in the short term, in the long term it inhibits one's healing; it is one of the ways in which atrocities continue to have negative effect well after their cessation.

The Holocaust becomes a tangible experience through memory in "Higher Ground," just as slavery in "The Cargo Rap" escalates to become in Rudi's final letter the dominant articulation of the individual's social death. At the end of her sanity and her freedom, Irina/Irene relives the journey almost certainly taken by the rest of her family, and a journey that is not her experience becomes her own: "In her nightmare there was never any air. Bolted, suffocating, and trying to survive a journey. Then they waited and wept and asked for water. To be burned not buried, to have to wait for a high wind. And then a scattered peace" (218). The operation of memory itself becomes a rough journey in which "the train jerked forward, the carriages nudging into each other" (213). Memory, in other words, delivers

¹⁶ Glissant makes a similar point about novels of the Americas: "Our quest for the dimension of time will therefore be neither harmonious nor linear. Its advance will be marked by a polyphony of dramatic shocks, at the level of the conscious as well as the unconscious, between incongruous phenomena or 'episodes' so disparate that no link can be discerned" (CD 106-07).

her to the very suffering she was to escape. Like the slave collaborator and Rudi, Irina has come to recognize her own incarceration and translate this recognition into the terms of a crisis larger than her own: the remembered attempted annihilation of Jewish Poles in the Holocaust.

The last fault line to be mapped beneath these three stories is that of language itself. Rudi's letters highlight the slippage of meaning and the betrayal of representation. Prisoners rely heavily on letter writing to maintain links with the world outside. Yet the style and content of prison writing is constrained, whether by prison regulations governing a letter's length or by censorship; as Rudi puts it, he is "subject to the usual restrictions of expression" (Phillips 91; see also 63 and 69). Enunciation is provisional. Moreover, every self-defeating letter Rudi writes establishes the need and desire for communication, while it fails to show sympathy, understanding, or forgiveness to its addressee. And of course Rudi's final letter quoted above and the comparison between his metaphors and Irina's and the collaborator's experiences unloose catachresis, which performs a breakdown of language. Although, curiously, Rudi's insanity restores significance to slavery for the reader, the letter is also a faulty translation falling between two languages, a blank or dead letter written to an absent addressee. Ultimately, language—especially in the textual form of the written word—slips away underneath the one who weighs on it overmuch.

This pattern of betrayal by language is maintained in both "Heartland" and "Higher Ground." The collaborator receives a blank letter ostensibly written by the fort's governor and delivered by Lewis and calls it "a stupid deceit. It is the first letter that I have ever received but there are no words.[...] For such as I, who only acquired the skills of writing and reading in their language by the application of much effort, it is a cruel joke" (55). Efforts to attain literacy are often chronicled and valorized in slave narratives (Olney 51), but here the efforts are emptied of significance. Later, when the narrator is sold in America, he decides to "feign ignorance of their language" (60). In this context, language acquisition does not ensure acculturation but serves exploitation and reinforces "us" and "them" dichotomies. Irene's speeches are more missed communiqués; indeed, readers only receive a negative impression of her unrecorded vocal monologues as a hostile neighbour repeatedly shouts through the wall, "Shut up, you crazy Polish bitch" (218; see also 206). The word has lost the power to be spoken and recorded other than as noise. Loss of power characterizes written words as well. Irene, who as a child could lose herself in reading books in her family's home, as an adult refuses to own or to find "comfort in books" (176) and feels distanced from her temporary job in a library. Her

final attempt to communicate her alienation to Louis is partly expressed in terms of her relations to books: "No library. No more. And this time books won't help. I can't forget Irina" (217). Inga Clendinnen has noted that "normally we expect the magic of art to intensify, transfigure and elevate actuality. Touch the Holocaust and the flow is reversed. That matter is so potent in itself that when art seeks to command it, it is art which is rendered vacuous and drained of authority" (164-65). We expect books to heal and help, but Phillips reminds us in each section that language, spoken or written, does not command or control trauma and, moreover, sometimes fails altogether through catachresis or silence. Art does not transform or transcend isolation and difference. Philips appears to suggest there may be no "decorous rendering of such catastrophic events as slavery and the Holocaust" (Budick 205).

Elizabeth Spelman agrees that to deliver superficial analogies between slavery and other forms of oppression (as Rudi does) is to err in the politics of representing and observing suffering. In this moment of rapprochement between Irene and Louis, the doubled Jewish and Black diasporas are linked arm-in-arm in a more personal and promising (if not more permanent) connection than in Rudi's overblown rhetoric which presents the artificial, metaphorical meeting of slave and Holocaust victim. Irene and Louis's abbreviated meeting symbolically suggests the lack of and need for committed listeners in the dialogue between Blacks and Jews.

Each protagonist struggles to maintain language, sanity, and humanity together under the obliterative pressure of racism's traumas. The breaking down of narrative, like the weakness of the body, is symptomatic of the trauma victim's incapacity to heal. The reader is privileged to see that when a trauma victim, such as Holocaust survivor, slave, prisoner, or battered woman, "is already devalued ... she may find that the most traumatic events in her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality. Her experience becomes unspeakable" (Herman 8). Phillips's novel dramatizes the cessation of representation. At the end of each section, the loss of the protagonist's autobiographical function performatively ends his or her story, making each story symptomatic of trauma without resolution, without relation.

The contradictory double recognition for readers of *Higher Ground* is that we recognize the intelligence and humanity of the polyphonic voices, as we also see how these voices are ultimately silenced. Giorgio Agamben explains the paradox thus: "The authority of the witness consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak—that is, in his or her being a subject" (158). Or, most succinctly: "How can a subject

Art does not transform or transcend isolation and difference.

give an account of its own ruin?" (142). Agamben describes the repercussions for criticism: "Commenting on survivors' testimony necessarily meant interrogating this lacuna or, more precisely, attempting to listen to it" (13). The delicacy of this task is contained not only in listening to a lacuna but also in continually oscillating between (not breaking) the reality and the language, recognizing the link between the "impotentiality and the potentiality" (151), "between an impossibility and a possibility of speaking" (157). Phillips's novel occupies precisely this zone of oscillation, moving between and uniting the possibility of speaking (a realized potentiality) and the impossibility of speaking (a gestured impotentiality).

Phillips shows that the attempt to communicate trauma textually, artistically, is in Clendinnen's terms "drained of authority." Through métissage, he can braid together his own varied formative influences and these three characters who speak to each other across historical and geographical distance through silence. Whether in prison, in a concentration camp, or in a slave fortress, the breaking down of the word, the dissonance of polyphony, the catachresis of figurative language, the illegibility of books and letters, the failure of communication, mean that, to summarize Walter Benn Michael's understanding of the deconstructive performative (195), the novel does not represent history as something we might analogically learn from or "resolve into a satisfactory pattern of sound" (and thereby contain, make safe) (187). Instead, it transforms or transmits history into a witnessing or testimony of remembered experience, and reading is an act that brings readers "not the normalizing knowledge of the horror but the horror itself" (190). "It is ... at the moment when the words as words begin to 'break down' that they become performative, that they begin to enact rather than report" (Michaels after Shoshana Felman 191), that they convince readers of the authority of the testimony such characters present, that they convince readers of the humanity, the subjectivity, of such characters. Thus the irreducible shock of the collaborator's inability to stave off torture, of Rudi's letter to his mother depicting re-enslavement, of Irina's re-enactment of her family's journey to the death camps. Art and culture and words fail us, but slavery and the Holocaust keep happening.

A conversation may not be possible between individuals in the novel, and each protagonist becomes silent, but noise is generated in submarine fractures between discourses through relational polyphonic *métissage*. As Bewes claims, "To read the text ... in terms of its failure to communicate, its awareness of its failure, its strategies of materializing failure or of compensating for it—means reading the text in terms of the event as such, the text as *the* event" (41). This noise is not simply noise but testimony: "*Testi-*

mony takes place in the non-place of articulation" (Agamben 130). Phillips defamiliarizes three bodies of literature—slave narrative, prison writing, and Holocaust writing—by juxtaposing the three discourses and by writing with and occasionally against the grain of expectations. He describes a no man's land between the entrenched cultural territories of Black and Jewish experiences. In Ishmael Reed's blunt terms, the novel has no "corner [of] the market on the business of atrocity" (67). Analysis of the tropes of prison writing maps out fault lines that reach underneath the seemingly separate islands of the first and third sections. Gestures of sympathy are suspect substitutions. Rudi's blunt and superficial comparisons to slavery and the Holocaust (typical of prison writing by American Black men in the 1960s and 1970s) gesture rudely toward the other two stories, and these two stories gesture back, sharply alerting readers to catachresis and the inadequacy of analogy, and challenging expectations of three artistic discourses of atrocity, trauma, and endurance: the slave narrative and Holocaust writing. Relationality is slippery and can never be supplied. As Caryl Phillips would go on to do again in 1997's The Nature of Blood, 17 in Higher Ground he passes on to readers the responsibility to "reconnect fragments, reconstruct history, to make meaning" of incarceration narratives (Herman 3), to find symmetry deeply, polyphonically, structurally. What all three stories make clear is that without shared remembrance, without performative narrative, the fragile and threatened stories of suffering and endurance wither in the "impotent creativity" of captivity (Franklin 204). If there is no receptive audience, if there is no communicative speaker, the stories end.

17 Phillips's other novel linking Jewishness and Blackness, The Nature of Blood, uses first-person narratives, omniscient historiographic narrative, free indirect discourse, medical diagnoses, and encyclopedic descriptions to relate three story clusters: Eva Stern, a young Jewish woman who survives a concentration camp, is ground beneath the inadequacy of displaced persons resources and betrayal by a sympathetic British soldier, and her uncle Stephan Stern works at a transition camp in Cyprus and later has an affair with an Ethiopian-Jewish woman in Israel; Othello, having left behind his African wife and child, courts Desdemona in corrupt Venice with its "original ghetto, the model for all others in the world" (The European Tribe 52) and travels to Cyprus to take up his post; and a Jewish community in fifteenth-century Portobuffole, near Venice, is charged with murdering a Christian child and its men are burnt alive.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Marjorie Stone, Anthony Stewart, Jason Haslam, Maureen Moynagh, Victor Li, George Elliott Clarke, Annie Burkes, and readers at *English Studies in Canada* for their helpful comments.

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