

Cosmopolitanism and Subversion of 'Home' in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* Alan McCluskey

The works of Caryl Phillips have largely been approached from post-colonial theoretical perspectives, a trend which appears entirely appropriate given their recurrent themes of immigration, ethnic discrimination and the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, in some of Phillips's more recent work, such as *A Distant Shore* (2003), one can observe preoccupations with issues that strongly resonate with the modern cosmopolitan literary tradition. The analysis below contends that *A Distant Shore* represents a change of direction in Phillips's oeuvre towards a formally less experimental but thematically more cosmopolitan form of writing that sets out to subvert and redefine the idea of 'home'. In the novels that precede it – *Higher Ground* (1989), *Crossing the River* (1993) and *The Nature of Blood* (1997) – Phillips employs experimental narrative structures that interweave disparate voices from different places and historical periods. While each voice in these works relates a separate set of experiences caused by different historical circumstances, they echo each other in their themes of exile, displacement and emotional trauma. In *Higher Ground* we hear the stories of a West African ex-slave, an incarcerated African American convict, and a young Jewish Holocaust survivor. In *Crossing the River* we observe an emancipated slave on a doomed 'civilizing' mission to Liberia, an elderly African American woman fleeing slavery, and an ill-fated love affair between an African American Serviceman and a British woman during World War II. With *The Nature of Blood*, Phillips more controversially juxtaposes the experiences of, among others, an emancipated African slave and a Jewish Holocaust survivor, both of whom struggle to adjust to life in societies in which they are considered outsiders.

A salient effect of these juxtapositions is to draw attention to familiar patterns in history that cause human suffering: prejudice, xenophobia and a reactionary fear of the other. In an excellent comparative essay on *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood*, Stef Craps notes that the narratives of both novels exude humanist and cosmopolitan principles because they 'invite the reader to recognize a common human essence that persists across space and time'.¹ Although Craps does not examine *A Distant Shore* in his essay, these arguments are equally applicable to the latter novel, which also juxtaposes stories of human isolation and trauma. However, it is a much more formally conventional piece of work, with the two chief narrative threads converging largely on a single historical moment, mostly within the same geographical space. Furthermore, the novel is predominantly concerned with depicting a particular type of suffering resulting from static and reactionary conceptions of belonging at the individual, familial, and national levels. Indeed, the discussion that follows contends that an important effect of this focus is to critique the various scales of place-based loyalty in order to promote a critical cosmopolitan conception of home – what Phillips himself has called a 'more fluid' idea of human

¹Stef Craps, 'Linking Legacies of Loss: Traumatic Histories and Cross-Cultural Empathy in Caryl Phillips's *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood*,' *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008), 193.

identity.² This is achieved by undermining the very impulses that inform all exclusive notions of community, from the national to the regional and tribal levels.

Before the manner in which the novel achieves this is explained, the capacity in which the term 'cosmopolitan' will be used is first discussed. Although work in the field of cosmopolitan thought has gained force in recent years, it has been embraced and applied in a broad variety of disciplines, from sociology and political philosophy to cultural theory and literary criticism. The term therefore remains somewhat nebulous and at times frustratingly elusive. What is more, this elusiveness appears to be not just a bewildering concomitant of cosmopolitan thought, but an integral component of the theory itself. We can, of course, identify a number of traits and preoccupations that distinguish cosmopolitanism from other fields of thought. Almost all major scholars that have written on the subject in recent years have recognised that cosmopolitanism is closely associated with certain concepts of belonging or mutual identification. As Sheldon Pollock writes, it involves practices of inhabiting 'multiple places at once, of being different beings simultaneously, of seeing the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller'.³ For David Held, the cosmopolitan must wield the ability to 'mediate traditions [and] stand outside a singular location (the location of one's birth, land, upbringing)'.⁴ Meanwhile, Kwame Anthony Appiah defines the cosmopolitan sensibility as 'an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend [human lives] significance'.⁵

Amanda Anderson helps explain the importance of vision in cosmopolitan practice by arguing that through 'the cultivation of detachment [and the] aspiration to a distanced view',⁶ the cosmopolitan can be liberated from the normative pressures of society that suppress an independent creative spirit and sense of individualism. This prioritisation of distance is echoed by Bryan S. Turner, who contends that 'ironic distance' from one's social or cultural context is an essential step towards gaining the kind of universal vision that gives cosmopolitanism its socio-political valency. 'The principal component of cosmopolitan virtue', he argues, 'is irony, because the understanding of other cultures is assisted by an intellectual distance from one's own national or local culture'.⁷ Such ironic distance has significant socio-political bearing because it 'produces a human skepticism towards grand narratives of modern ideologies'.⁸

Rebecca Walkowitz mirrors Turner in his contention that aesthetic strategies of perceptual and attitudinal distance can be of significant socio-political

² Interviewed by Paula Goodman, *Conversations with Caryl Phillips*, ed. Renee T Schatteman, (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 93.

³ Sheldon Pollock, 'Cosmopolitanisms,' in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 12.

⁴ David Held 'Building Cosmopolitanism for Another Age,' *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 58.

⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2007), xii.

⁶ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 6.

⁷ Bryan S. Turner, 'Globalization and Patriotism,' *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12 (2002), 57.

⁸ Turner, 57.

value. Describing what she calls ‘critical cosmopolitanism’ (a term also used by Walter Mignolo in his more socio-politically-oriented intervention),⁹ Walkowitz maintains that the field’s aesthetic priorities of eclecticism and distance can be linked directly to cosmopolitanism’s socio-political preoccupations in that they stem from ‘an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the centre that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is seen.’¹⁰ Writing specifically on *A Distant Shore*, Walkowitz believes Phillips achieves such a critical cosmopolitan vision by conspicuously subverting ‘several scales of belonging’,¹¹ from the immediate local community, to larger regional and national levels of commonality.

This is a contention that raises some interesting parallels with, as well as differences from, Stephen Clingman’s prolific critique of the novel. Approaching the text from a slightly different theoretical viewpoint, Clingman argues that *A Distant Shore* ‘shows transnational faultlines within national space’.¹² These faultlines refer to the clashing of two highly dissimilar modes of seeing and belonging that is brought about through the somewhat unlikely friendship that develops between Dorothy, a middle-aged private school teacher from northern England, and Solomon, an asylum seeker from a war-ravaged African nation. Clingman argues that, given their radically different experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds, the unusual friendship constitutes the disruption of two singular national narratives which would otherwise stifle alternative modes of seeing the world. While this analysis offers a valuable insight into the transnational and cosmopolitan direction of the novel, the discussion that follows argues that Phillips’s critique of belonging also operates *beyond* the national-transnational model Clingman proposes in order to more thoroughly collapse exclusionary attitudes of community.

Although cosmopolitan thought does not dismiss the concept of the nation state as a socio-political apparatus that can facilitate its conciliatory aims – Gavin Kendall for instance argues that ‘the state [is] an institution that can be productively coopted into the cosmopolitan project’¹³ – it takes issue with the ethics and philosophy that *underlie* nationalism. To return to the words of Bryan S. Turner:

Cosmopolitanism does not mean that one does not have a country or a homeland, but one has to have a certain reflexive distance from that homeland. Cosmopolitan virtue requires Socratic irony, by which one can achieve some distance from the polity.¹⁴

⁹ See Walter Mignolo, ‘The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism,’ *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 157.

¹⁰ Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

¹¹ Rebecca Walkowitz, ‘The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer,’ *Contemporary Literature*, 47 (2006), 542.

¹² Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford & New York: 2010), 94.

¹³ See Gavin Kendall, Ian Woodward & Zlatko Skirbis, *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5.

¹⁴ Bryan S. Turner, ‘Globalization and Patriotism,’ *Theory, Culture & Society* 12 (2002), 57.

‘Cosmopolitanism and Subversion of “Home” in Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore*.’

Alan McCluskey.

Transnational Literature Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Certainly, cosmopolitanism shares some of the conciliatory aims of transnational theory; but its critique of exclusiveness goes further than the latter's preoccupation with undermining reactionary nationalism. Indeed, the current discussion argues that *A Distant Shore* interrogates prescriptive ideas of belonging and mutual identity by exposing and subverting the kind of behaviours that foster their development, rather than attacking the nationalist model in the abstract. Indeed, the crucial distinction between this approach and Clingman's is that the latter appears to presume xenophobia and other exclusive forms of social behaviour are attributable to nationalism instead of other, smaller scales of collective identity. Perhaps the trope that fits on the smallest scale of all, and which forms the primary focus of the current discussion, is that of 'home'.

For Avtar Brah, the concept of home is intimately bound up with the socio-political issues associated with belonging and exclusion in a given material context. As she writes in her frequently cited work, 'The question of home ... is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'.¹⁵ This view of 'home' opens up the concept from its rigid associations with place and origin much in the same manner as Paul Gilroy seeks to expand the rigid adherence of identity politics to geographical 'origins' in order to encompass more tangible considerations of material movement and experience. In his celebrated work *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Gilroy critiques the fact that 'modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes'.¹⁶

Inasmuch as it rejects the notion that belonging is necessarily tied to a fixed geographical space, cosmopolitan thought dovetails with both Brah's and Gilroy's theorisations. However, it bears reiterating that cosmopolitanism is also typified by a motivation to go further and extend this critique so as to more actively pursue the cultivation of *distance* from static modes of belonging and seeing. As Kendall argues:

Ideally, the reflexive cosmopolitan feels little or no ethical and political commitment to local and national contexts and in fact is likely to show an irony, almost bordering on suspicion, toward their own national myths and discourses. This demonstrates a broad willingness to step outside stable, privileged and established power categories of selfhood.¹⁷

This critical cosmopolitan orientation to belonging has also been openly expressed by Phillips. Speaking in an interview with Paula Goodman, he states quite explicitly that his writing has persistently involved an attempt 'to try to convince myself that it's not *necessary* to have a very concrete sense of home. That actually, those of us who don't

¹⁵ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 192.

¹⁶ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 19.

¹⁷ Kendall 122.

have a concrete sense of home are okay'¹⁸. 'And I want to write, and say', he continues, 'that it's okay to have a multiple sense of home. It's okay that home can't just be summed up in one sentence ... it's time to let go of the necessity to be rooted, because with it comes all sorts of unpleasantness.'

The current analysis seeks to illustrate how this subversive handling of home and belonging becomes a primary preoccupation of *A Distant Shore*, one which Phillips achieves largely by exposing the kind of reactionary impulses that lie behind xenophobia and discrimination of the other.

Exile and the Subversion of Place-based Belonging

Dorothy is in many ways worlds apart from the younger Solomon, an African immigrant she comes to befriend. However, the paths of the two protagonists converge on an emotional and psychological level when both become 'exiles' from their respective countries of birth: Solomon literally has to flee his home country to escape death, while Dorothy becomes culturally and socially estranged from the 'old England' she has erstwhile called home. Yet, despite the characters' patent dissimilarities, Phillips draws our attention to the fact that their lives offer a number of parallels. These parallels are subtly evoked through narrative juxtaposition (a familiar technique used by Phillips throughout his oeuvre that prompts the reader to search for some of the universal themes and patterns that underlie human experiences of suffering).

In the case of Solomon's narrative, we witness an exile that has been imposed by the violence of a brutal civil war in an unnamed Sub-Saharan nation that resembles Rwanda or The Congo. Sparked by ethnic divisions, the war that engulfs the country compels all to pledge allegiance to one of the two tribal groups and join in the violence. At this stage in the narrative, Solomon is known by another name: Gabriel. Young and impressionable, Gabriel appears to subscribe to the parochial clan loyalties observed by the mass of the population, and enthusiastically joins the local militia fighting the government forces. What is perhaps more significant about this moment in the character's development is the degree to which he observes a rigid and myopic notion of belonging, one which is bolstered by an essentialist view of humanity. As he informs us:

We were the smaller tribe. We worked hard and we did not harm anybody. We tried to do what was best for ourselves and what was good for our young country. We wanted only to live in peace with our brothers, but it became clear that this was impossible. My father told me that they were jealous of us, for our people ran many businesses; not just in the capital city, but in our tribal land in the south. We formed the backbone of the economy, and therefore we had much influence. (137)

Thus, by repeating the reductive and simplistic logic through which his father accounted for the causes of the conflict, Gabriel's first-person narrative also illustrates the extent to which social divisiveness is entrenched within the prevailing culture.

¹⁸ Goodman 93.

Importantly, Phillips draws our attention to the fact that such an essentialist form of identity emanates from and is nourished by certain impulses that are universally recognisable: jealousy, suspicion and fear. Of course, there may be a germ of truth in Gabriel's insistence that the majority tribe waged war because they were 'jealous' of the economic success of the minority, but in making this parochial utterance the protagonist exacerbates the perception of irreconcilable division between the two ethnic groups, thus further necessitating the need to deploy the binary distinction between 'them' and 'us'. However, after enduring a number of traumatic and painful experiences both in his native country and Western Europe, we begin to see this short-sighted vision undergo significant change, which, as will be explained, appears to culminate in a nascent critical cosmopolitan vision.

These experiences begin when the civil war takes a turn for the worse and Gabriel witnesses the rape of his two sisters and brutal murder of his mother. Realising he must leave the country or face death, he turns to an uncle with strong economic connections. Somewhat shamelessly, the latter has set up a trafficking racket that charges exorbitant sums aiding refugees to escape the country, and Gabriel's ethnic or familial ties do not help him avoid being similarly exploited: 'I want nothing more than to take you in as family', his uncle tells him, '[but if you want to get out of the country you must] bring me two thousand dollars ... This is all I can do for you' (88). In this instance the sense of ethnic unity and loyalty that has erstwhile informed Gabriel's worldview, and motivated his committed participation in the civil war, is irrevocably compromised. This is not the last time he is exploited by members of his own 'ethnic group'. Arriving in London after a hazardous journey across the English Channel, he is cheated by Emmanuel, a fellow countryman he meets in a bar (175).

It is ironic then, that when Solomon gets into trouble with the authorities in England – accused of statutory rape and subsequently held in a detention centre – he only receives help from those of a dramatically different ethnic, national or socio-economic background: there is Jimmy, a beggar who takes pity on Solomon (now named Gabriel) and helps him make a few pounds selling magazines to passersby; then there is Katherine, a legal aid lawyer who goes out of her way to help him escape jail and a group of angry locals. And finally, there is Mike, an Irish lorry driver who picks up Gabriel hitchhiking and brings him home to Weston, where he provides the latter with food, shelter, and eventually a car and job.

The introduction of Mike's highly unconventional 'home' seems to be the only moment in the novel in which the term is used positively, with Gabriel poignantly describing the place as his 'blessed home' (292). The house itself officially belongs to Mr and Mrs Anderson, who use it as a dynamic, open space for people 'who [are] in need of temporary accommodation' (292). In this sense, the notion of home is redefined as an inclusive, egalitarian space inhabited by people out of the virtue of individual choice rather than the coincidence of birthplace. Such an open, inclusive notion of home strikes a chord with the communal places of freedom David Harvey labels 'spaces of hope' (i.e. of collective social empowerment and transformation).¹⁹ Central to this cosmopolitan conception of home is its generous

¹⁹ See David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 116.

handling of the stranger, who is treated not with 'tolerance', but with cosmopolitan conviviality.

Such a distinction strikes a chord with Jacques Derrida's attempts to articulate a new, cosmopolitan form of hospitality: one that is not conditioned and regulated by rigid etiquette or mores. In his much-lauded work on the subject, he argues that 'to be what it 'must' be, hospitality must not pay a debt, or be governed by a duty: it is gracious, and 'must' not open itself to the guest [invited or visitor], either 'conforming to duty' or even, to use the Kantian distinction again, 'out of duty'.²⁰ This inclusive hospitality to the stranger complements Kendall's more theoretically explicit attempts to define cosmopolitan values: 'Cosmopolitanism is a new type of social solidarity; one where strangers are recognized and incorporated, where one's own assumptions and stories are comparable to all others, and where a variety of dimensions of social statuses are opened up, instead of closed off.'²¹ This social inclusiveness, with its open vision of human interaction and relationships, is clearly echoed in the novel, with Gabriel telling us that everybody else in the house 'came and went: businessmen relocating and who were in need of temporary accommodation while looking for a home for their families; executives at conferences; working-men between contracts; or specialists who were required to operate a piece of machinery' (287). But perhaps the most significant feature of the house that crystallises its cosmopolitan subversiveness is portrayed by the forms of address by which the residents know Mrs and Mr Anderson. By having all the residents of the home address these two figures as 'Mum' and 'Dad', Phillips conspicuously decouples the signifiers from their traditional association with blood bonds, thereby suggesting their applicability to all relationships of care, even those between strangers.

However, the apparent unconditional hospitality the 'family' shows Solomon is placed under strain when the house is vandalised by a group of xenophobic hooligans, an action which intimidates the other residents. Although 'Mum' and 'Dad' still accord Solomon the same degree of hospitality, we observe a clear change in their attitude that signals the presence of fear. This fear is subtly conveyed when Mr Anderson attempts to 'explain' to Solomon why the vandals have targeted the house. Interestingly, the rationale Anderson evokes in doing this is one that appeals to a notion of space: 'You see, Solomon, this isn't a very big Island and we don't have that much room' (289). Such an exclusive conception of space, with its primary motivation of fear and paranoia of the other, presents a sharp contrast to the inclusive conviviality of the boundless space of 'home' Solomon praises earlier in the narrative.

Anderson's disclosure also reveals the way in which, by explaining the xenophobic attitude of fear held by the locals, he partially adopts its logic (employing the symbolically divisive 'we' that Gabriel himself subscribed to earlier in his native Africa). Phillips therefore presents the reader with a compelling insight into the ways in which xenophobic impulses can spread in a community, even to those who profess not to 'personally' subscribe to them.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida & Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Cultural Memory in the Present* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 83.

²¹ Kendall 157.

This somewhat paradoxical method by which xenophobia can be observed and propagated is also illustrated in the rambling sequence of arguments used by Mike to 'explain' the reason why some in the community resent immigrants. While insisting that 'I'm not prejudiced' (290), Mike proceeds to play devil's advocate by iterating some of the reasons he thinks multiculturalism has 'failed' in the region. In so doing, he applies a number of crass and absurd stereotypes that reveal not only his own ignorance of the topic, but also simultaneously (and ironically) the very attitude of suspicion of otherness that would make the failure of multiculturalism inevitable:

[These] Indians, they still make their women trail after them, and they have their mosques and temples, and their butcher shops where they kill animals in the basement and do whatever they do with the blood. I mean, they're peasants. They come from the countryside and most of them have never seen a flush toilet or a light switch ... It's these kinds of people that cause others to have bad attitudes and to do things like they've done.
(290)

This paranoid, xenophobic utterance forms a stark contrast with the inclusive, convivial concept of 'home' previously associated with the house and its residents. Significantly, the words also mark the point at which Solomon is compelled to move away from the community and into the 'new settlement' of Stoneleigh, the place where he eventually comes to make the acquaintance of Dorothy, another resident and 'exile'. However, moving neighbourhoods does not allow Solomon to escape the xenophobia that forced his flight from the Anderson residence. Neither does the move to Stoneleigh offer Dorothy a sense of home. Like Solomon, she finds it difficult to adjust to the hostile villagers who inhabit the older region of the settlement and appear to resent the addition of a new element to their 'community'. On walking through the village for the first time, she comments that the people 'stared at me like I had the mark of Cain on my forehead' (6). The landlord of the local pub then gives her a chilling introduction to the insular mentality of the villagers by way of an anecdote. Recounting the story of Dr. Epstein, a General Practitioner of Jewish extraction who moved to the village with her two children a few years earlier, the landlord explains how she 'didn't last long' (8) in the village because the locals 'didn't take to [her]' (9). In a manner similar to the evasive ambiguities with which Mike expresses his adherence to the xenophobic status quo, the landlord starts by first distancing himself from the hostile reactions of the 'community', which 'made her life a misery', declaring: 'Don't get me wrong, I liked Dr. Epstein. Nice woman' (9). However, this appeal to an otherwise inclusive attitude is again heavily qualified by the expectation that the other attempt to adopt the manners of the majority. According to the landlord, the Epsteins' antagonistic reception was their own fault: 'They weren't even trying', he explains, 'You know what it's like, you've got to make an effort' (9).

However, in spite of having 'lived around these parts' all her life, Dorothy's move to Stoneleigh ultimately ends in much the same manner of exclusion and isolation suffered by the Epsteins and, indeed, Solomon. Returning to the area following a painful divorce from a long marriage, Dorothy is clearly lonely and emotionally vulnerable, a state which she appears to tolerate by leading a life

governed by ascetic routine: 'I long ago forswore the vanity of trying to disguise the grey [of my hair] and leaving it natural leaves me stacks of time. Even though I no longer have to be at school at eight in the morning, I've kept the habit of being an early riser. I've generally had a bowl of cereal and some orange juice by the time the cars are pulling out of the driveways and the kids are running off to catch the school bus' (20).

Such conditioned, normative habits appear to complement the conformist attitude she initially appears to share with the rest of the 'community', with the fixed patterns of living forming a prescriptive model which she expects others to follow. Shortly after making the acquaintance of the newly-arrived Solomon, she sees the latter washing his car outside his house and comments censoriously to herself: 'I want to tell him that in England you have to become a part of the neighbourhood. Say hello to people. Go to church. Introduce your kids to the new school ... I've yet to find the proper moment to talk to Solomon about the way he flaunts himself in his driveway with that bucket of soapy water and his shammy' (16).

In spite of this vaguely (and almost comically) xenophobic attitude, Dorothy and Solomon nonetheless strike up a brief but meaningful relationship that brings comfort to both. As we have observed, such comfort is sorely needed to assuage the loneliness both characters suffer. However, while Solomon's loneliness is brought about by the anxiety associated with being physically uprooted from his place of birth, Dorothy's solitude is caused by a sense of detachment that occurs almost within an entirely static space: 'England has changed' (1), she tells us. However, we later learn that this failure to assimilate into the community is not only a problem brought by the changes in the physical composition and appearance of the society and its spaces. Like Solomon, who describes himself as 'a man burdened with hidden history' (300), Dorothy is haunted by a troubled past. As the plot unfolds, the narrative gradually strips away the layers of routine and small-town fastidiousness that regulates her life to reveal a number of unsettling psychological scars. Evoking the story of Eva Stern in *The Nature of Blood*, whose narrative traces an unsettling descent into madness and suicidal depression, Dorothy's mental deterioration develops as a clear consequence of her inability to overcome the events she endured in her past.

Approximately halfway through the narrative, Dorothy discloses to the reader the suppressed trauma she bears after witnessing and wilfully ignoring her father's prolonged sexual abuse of her younger sister. One effect Phillips creates by waiting so long to reveal the character's tortured past is to force us to consider the extent to which the experience informs her blinkered, conformist worldview. We re-examine the seemingly sentimental references to her father she has made earlier in the narrative, seeing their significance to her psychological state in an entirely new light. Her habit of regularly evoking her father as she pursues her mundane day to day tasks therefore adds a layer of emotional distress to her voice that was hitherto unheard, and is all the more disturbing because of its restraint. The physical space of the village also comes to take on a more sinister aspect, being a repository for the character's most painful memories.

Indeed, when we examine closely the personality and beliefs of her father, we gain an important insight into the origins of Dorothy's xenophobic attitudes: 'Dad', she tells us, 'has some opinions about coloureds' (64). Shortly after this recollection,

she pictures her father reacting to the news of her friendship with Solomon: 'Dad has his one ugly word, and I could have predicted it before he even opened his mouth. Slag. He doesn't even want to look at me any more, that's how bad it is' (65). Clearly the outburst she imagines her father making is saturated with the same antipathy to otherness exhibited in various degrees of intensity by Dorothy and others in the community. But the degree of anger in which the utterance is made, with its grotesque presumption of sexual obligation to her own ethnic group, connotes a provocative link between the 'conservative' values of xenophobia and the unpalatable impulses associated with incest.

Phillips therefore appears to suggest that the desire for England to remain unchanged – an England that is static and exclusive of the other – follows an impulse that is, like incest, inherently insalubrious. Indeed, in his essay 'Extravagant Strangers' (1997), Phillips critiques the kind of incestuous image of a 'pure' England as a 'mythology of homogeneity [that] excludes and prevents countless numbers of British people from feeling comfortable participating in the main narrative of British life'²². However, in Dorothy's case it is a myth that she, at least on some psychological level, appears to have endorsed and invested herself in emotionally. Indeed, attempting to subscribe to this myth no doubt contributes to her failure to feel attached to the England she sees changing around her. The perceived gulf that then emerges between this mythical temporality of a 'pure' England and the ever-shifting present eventually leads to a chronic sense of isolation and the onset of psychological illness.

As with Eva Stern, Dorothy's narrative ends in complete mental collapse, which, as in *The Nature of Blood*, Phillips also renders through the highly effective utilisation of syntax. In Eva's narrative, Phillips deploys parentheses to 'bracket' particular strands of consciousness and denote the character's psychological compartmentalisation. By bifurcating her self into different personas, Eva attempts to limit the psychological damage she incurs in the harrowing concentration camps, a strategy that leads to schizophrenia and eventual suicide. Phillips employs similar syntactical techniques to depict the mental anguish Dorothy suffers when Solomon is murdered by racist thugs. However, instead of the bifurcation of self we witnessed Eva undergoing in the camps, Dorothy's narrative becomes syntactically broken up between outside voices and her own. Hers is therefore left quite literally as a single, isolated voice, detached from the changing world outside. The following scene takes place at the novel's end, with Dorothy, distraught and now without friends after Solomon's death, being visited in a mental hospital by her ex-husband. In order to fully capture the effect Phillips achieves here, a lengthy quotation is required:

Why am I laughing? I stop laughing. He's got to go now. I mean, this is embarrassing. I stare at him, which clearly makes him even more uncomfortable ... The nurse puts down her book, and I notice her fold over the corner of the page to mark her spot before she closes it shut. ... ('Dorothy'.) I turn and look at him. He's smiling. He only said my name to get my attention ... ('Dorothy'.) Again he stops. If he thinks I'm going to help him out,

²² Caryl Phillips, *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* (London: Faber and Faber), xiv. 10

'Cosmopolitanism and Subversion of "Home" in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*.'

Alan McCluskey.

Transnational Literature Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

then he's mistaken. I've got nothing to say to him, especially if he wants to sound like a broken record ... He should go now. I shouldn't have to tell him this, or make a fuss in any way, but he's leaving me no choice. (310-11)

By establishing an unconventional relationship with Solomon, a man whom her father and most of the community disapprove of in their vision of a static, traditional England, Dorothy begins to reject a restrictive and paranoid manner of existence. In the sense that she has subverted the rigid precepts of national and regional community, one could say that she has attained and practiced a form of cosmopolitan autonomy –or as Pierre Macherey would put it, speaking not exclusively about cosmopolitanism, the character succeeds in ‘ruptur[ing] ... the historico-social totality’²³ of her context. Of course, the tragic trajectory of the narrative, which results in the violent severance of their friendship and Dorothy’s descent into mental illness, places such a singular triumph within a poignantly restricted frame. This subversion of place-based belonging resonates with Gabriel’s own experiences in the Anderson household and, indeed, in England more generally. By interrogating exclusive conceptions of belonging, particularly that of ‘home’, Phillips appropriates the signifier in a manner that advances a more fluid, more inclusive, and more cosmopolitan idea of the term.

Alan McCluskey works as a teaching fellow at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo China. He is currently writing up his PhD thesis on contemporary cosmopolitan literature (University of Nottingham).

²³Pierre Macherey, *In a Materialist Way* (London: Verso, 1998), 102.