

**Happiness is not always fun”: Caryl Phillips’s Crossing the River, part IV(1993) and the BBC Radio Dramatization “Somewhere In England” (2016), Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (1975) and Robert Colescott’s My Shadow (1977) and Knowledge of the past is key to the Future, (St Sebastian) (1986)**

Josiane Ranguin

► **To cite this version:**

Josiane Ranguin. Happiness is not always fun”: Caryl Phillips’s Crossing the River, part IV(1993) and the BBC Radio Dramatization “Somewhere In England” (2016), Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (1975) and Robert Colescott’s My Shadow (1977) and Knowledge of the past is key to the Future, (St Sebastian) (1986). Lectures du monde anglophone, ERIAC - EA 4705, In press, Caryl Phillips: Inhabiting the Voids of History, Lectures du Monde Anglophone, Université de Rouen, n° 4. (4). hal-02021610

**HAL Id: hal-02021610**

**<https://hal-univ-paris13.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02021610>**

Submitted on 6 Mar 2019

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“Happiness is not always fun”: Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River, part IV* (1993) and the BBC Radio Dramatization “Somewhere In England” (2016), Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1975) and Robert Colescott’s *My Shadow* (1977) and *Knowledge of the past is key to the Future, (St Sebastian)* (1986).

Josiane Ranguin

#### Abstract

Robert H. Colescott’s paintings *My Shadow* (1977) and *Knowledge of the Past is the Key to the Future (St Sebastian)* (1986) point to the taboo of mixed-race relationships. The question seemed topical enough for the painter to repeatedly question the terror linked to the evocation of “miscegenation” in the United States in his vivid renderings of triumphant or defeated lovers challenging white supremacy. The intermedial convergence between these works and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)* (1974) also illuminates Caryl Phillips’s overall concern, as stated in his introduction to *The Shelter* (1984), that “[...] the story of the black man and the white woman in the Western world is bound together with the secure tape of a troubled history; and the relationship between the black man and the white woman has always provoked the greatest conflict, the most fear, the most loathing” (10). In *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), Fassbinder carefully examines the plight of a mixed couple in a Germany that is still haunted by Nazi white supremacist ideology, while Phillips, in “Somewhere in England,” the fourth part of his novel *Crossing the River* (1993) and its 2016 re-writing for a BBC radio play, focuses on the thwarted love between an African-American GI and a white English villager during WWII.

I will point to striking parallels in these different works such as the motif of the interracial *dancing* couple, central to both versions of Phillips’s story and also present in Colescott’s and Fassbinder’s works. Indeed, dancing is often used in Phillips’s plays and novels to delineate, within a momentarily pacified Black<sup>1</sup> Atlantic, a space of emotional resistance defying social constraints, with the changing music a period marker that reveals the persistence over time of conflict, fear and loathing around embattled lovers. The three artists record the interplay of emotions in works that converge towards the building of aesthetic empathy and, through that, of social empathy and healing, as indicated most explicitly by Phillips’s revisiting of “Somewhere in England” as a radio play twenty-three years after the publication of *Crossing the River*.

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to the capitalization of Black, I follow the usage of scholars and writers who hold, as Lori L. Tharps argues, that: "Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color."

As an allegory, *Crossing The River* (1993) envisions the African diaspora as originating in an African father's sale of his three children: "Bought two strong man-boys, and a proud girl" (1), as a slave-ship master registers the transaction. The production details of the 1985 BBC radio dramatization underline the centrality of this plot: "A sister and two brothers stretch across two hundred years of black repression" (p. i). In part one and two of the novel, we learn of the fate of Martha and of Nash, one of the brothers. "Somewhere in England," the fourth part of the novel, introduces the avatar of the second boy in the person of Travis, an American GI stationed in Yorkshire, England, in June, 1942. At this point, the historical focus of the novel shifts from slavery and the building of empires, European or American, to daily life in a wartime Britain where the presence of American troops imports Jim Crow laws into a British context.

Also in the village is newcomer Joyce, the focalizing point of the narrative. A withdrawn young woman, Joyce comes from another Yorkshire town, and feels all the more estranged after her husband, Len, has been jailed for black-marketing. Joyce feels beleaguered in the small village. A stranger in the community, an "uninvited outsider" (129), she has developed the sensitivity of the outcast and anticipates the rejection that black GIs will have to contend with. She tries to signal the villagers' narrow-mindedness as soon as the soldiers arrive, but without success: "I wanted to warn them, but in no time at all they were gone. It was too late" (129). Phillips's treatment of the romance, crippled by racism and doomed by war, that develops between Joyce and Travis, an African-American GI, can be related to the works of American painter Robert Colescott (1925-2009) and German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945-1982). These artists shared the same preoccupation with the inevitable encroachment of history on individual lives, the mistreatment of minorities and the related tormenting of interethnic couples. In this essay, I first examine the links that can be made between this section of *Crossing the River* and the works of these two artists that examined what lay beyond the barriers erected by their respective national social conventions and brands of white supremacy. I then focus on how the Joyce-Travis story is presented in the two versions of "Somewhere in England."

In his preface to *The Shelter*, Phillips admits that the representation of mixed couples remains a challenge. He describes interracial relationships as "perhaps the most explosive of all relationships, seldom written about, seldom explained, feared, observed, hated [...]" (10). As S. L. Gilman argues, interracial relationships combine the stigmas that have been attached to both Black and female sexuality:

The "white *man's* burden" thus becomes his sexuality and its control, and it is this which is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as

sexualized female. [...] This need for control was a projection of inner fears; thus, its articulation in visual images was in terms which described the polar opposite of the European male. (237)

In *Crossing the River*, Joyce suffers from an ostracism that is the result of both the condemnation of a sexuality liberated from racialized social conventions and an association with Blackness since “to express sexual desire [*is*] to define oneself as both whore and savage” (Dale and Ryan 8). The racialized conception of sexuality transfers to Joyce the sememes (the smallest units of meaning) associated with Blackness since, in terms of cognitive synonymy, Joyce has become Black in the eyes of her racist beholders: “Associative meaning is subjective. It expresses emotions or attitudes, as well as approval or disapproval, and other subjective states. It shows that natural languages abound in emotional connotations and associations”(Stanojević 197). Phillips conflates the associations around interracial relationships when he tellingly points to the history of lynching in the United States after having mentioned Shakespeare’s *Othello*, uniting the Old and the New World through their rejection of Blackness.

One early mention of *Othello* in Phillips’s works appears in *Strange Fruit* (1981), a play in which an angry Anglo-Caribbean youth, dating a young Irish girl, complains that the pressure of the colour bar, put in place to contain the Windrush generation, is still in place: “Your wonderful parents can’t handle the idea of their virginal lily-white maiden possibly falling prey to the lascivious clutches of an old-black ram. *Othello*, page sixty-one, or whatever” (34). Phillips also notes that the mixed-race couple triggers criticism in both Black and white communities and recalls a comment by a Black woman, a journalist and politician, that “until black writers stopped being obsessed by white women, then black people would never achieve anything as a community, as a people, as a race” (9). The accusation of a lack of intra-ethnic solidarity is echoed by Len, Joyce’s husband, in *Crossing the River*. Joyce describes how: “[b]efore he left he told me that I’m a traitor to my own kind. That as far as he’s concerned I’m no better than a common slut. And everybody in the village agrees with him” (217). In the direct speech of the radio play, Len’s condemnation is more forceful: “You make me sick, Joyce. You’re a traitor to your own kind and there’s plenty around here who agree with me” (scene 42). Later in the same play, he is even more emphatic: “Jesus, your kind sicken me, Joyce. You sicken all decent people” (scene 75).

The story of Joyce and Travis is thus made obnoxious and associated with disgust and loathing, the very same toxic demonstrations of rejection that were keenly perceived by the characters in the second act of *The Shelter*. In 1984, writing about such fraught relationships was not simply a matter of “responsibility” but a challenge not to answer “expectations” (11):

The story of the black man and the white woman has always provoked the greatest conflict, the most fear, the most loathing. For someone to suggest that black writers (or white writers for that matter) should flee from it is to suggest that we turn our backs on what is our arrogant but inevitable task; in other words, to describe that world in which we live, as we see it, for those who also live in it, in order that they may see it clearer, and understand it better for themselves. (10)

Phillips's approach to the question is didactic, not prescriptive. His repeated insistence on portraying mixed couples signifies a will to underline the fact that reflecting on Blackness in Europe is a topic that is not the concern of Afro-Europeans alone.

In *Crossing the River*, Joyce's transgression, as a married, white woman who rejects any attempt to make her respect gender or racial proprieties, is keenly felt by the whole community: "I opened the door to the pub and all eyes were on me" (215). The violent rejection of mixed-race couples has also been one of the focal points investigated by Robert Colescott as part of a reflection on the associative images linked to the concepts of Blackness and "miscegenation," as underlined by Diawara Manthia: "Colescott made irony, allegory and satire reach further in order to bring the representation of black stereotypes, and/or the absence of blackness, to the centre of the American artistic arena" (341, my translation). Manthia adds that: "[...] one of the aims of appropriating the classics of European modernism is also to reveal the absence, the silence or the reification of the black body, to make it both a presence and an agency, revisiting history as a medium guaranteeing a new humanism" (341). Colescott's approach seems to consist in making Black bodies talk back by emphasizing their Blackness and making it both conspicuous and masterly.

The Black bodies displayed are garrulously involved in figurative conversations on race. In "Optical Illusions: Images of Miscegenation in 19th and 20th Century Art," art critic Judith Wilson argues that Colescott engages in the demystification of the white woman's sacredness and the legend of Black male lasciviousness (103), both being concepts that were circulated in an effort to counter the projected guilt and sexual anxieties of white males, which resulted, as demonstrated by Sander Gilman, in the will to control the sexuality of anyone perceived as Other. Judith Wilson also observes that Colescott shatters the notion of complete social disparity between white women and Black men. Thus, against the iconography deployed by Gilman, the happily Black man and the transgressive white woman in Colescott's *My Shadow* (1977) are not depicted as objects offered to the scrutiny of a racialized male gaze. In fact, they joyfully taunt the viewer by their open declaration of war on race and gender barriers, as if re-discovering a pre-slavery era when skin colour had not yet been declared the marker of sexual and economic exploitation. This longing for a rejuvenating innocence is underlined by the predominance of pastel colours and the presence of

Disney characters, although the accent put on showmanship—top hats and matching dance steps—underlines that the couple is cunningly making a show of resistance out of their transgression.



Fig. 1: Colescott, Robert. *My Shadow*. 1977. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 66 in.

Interestingly, the portrayal of a guilt-free interracial relationship in *My Shadow* (1977) alludes both to a poem for children by Robert Louis Stevenson published in 1885 and a 1927 hit song by Al Jolson. The first lines of the poem, stuck to the wall by an arrow in *My Shadow*, represent a declaration of war from the conquered First Nations to Stevenson's male vision of childhood that is both Eurocentric and white. The painting addresses one of the main consequences of this overarching premise: the creation of the concept of “miscegenation” and its representation as a taboo. The Colescott scene is a twofold send-up of the poem, which can then be construed as a sexual double entendre: “I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,” (line 1, p. 24) and “The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow/ Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow; / For he sometimes shoots up taller like an India-rubber ball, / And he sometimes goes so little that there's none of him at all.” (lines 5-8, p. 24) The choreography represented is the antithesis of Ted Lewis’s signature routine in his 1935 “My Shadow”, a vaudeville act redolent of minstrelsy in which each of his gestures was shadowed by a Black comedian. In Colescott’s painting, the Black person is no longer a flimsy presence, a ghostly figure of fun that can be dispensed with at will. Both characters, the formerly infantilized white woman and her Black

partner, are now mature agents in their own right, able to analyze and deflect the negative gaze directed at them.

In a series of works composed in the 1980s and entitled *Knowledge of the past is key to the present*, Colescott leaves comedy behind to equate mixed couples unequivocally with martyrs. In *St Sebastian* (1986), the legacy of slavery on sexuality is symbolized by the lynching noose that condemns a white man and a Black woman to social death while another couple, half Black man and half white woman, morphed into one being through love, has just been crucified and shot by arrows like the ancient saint. Jody B. Cutler (2009, "Robert Colescott") describes the technique used by Colescott to challenge the spectator as one of splashy surfaces covering tough contents and stresses the pedagogical impulse at work behind the scene: "His pedagogy was through his art directly". Colescott's reflection on the impact of the apartheid system and the South African brand of white supremacy evinces a deep understanding of the globality of systemic racial discrimination:

I thought if I split him down the middle, he would represent both races and sexes and show the violence done to everybody," Colescott explains. "The lesson of history is that violence not only hurts the victims, it causes great pain to the perpetrators. I believe that the white people doing all that stuff to black people in South Africa will be greatly harmed by it. The Holocaust damaged the psyche of the German people." (Muchnic "Outrageous Visions")



Fig. 2: Robert Colescott, *Knowledge of the past is key to the Future*, (*St Sebastian*).1986.

Similarly, Phillips's works, from *Strange Fruit* (1981) through *The Final Passage* (1985) to *The Lost Child* (2003), insist that interracial couples and families become inevitably the echo chambers of the interethnic strife played out on the ground. Phillips made this explicit in a recent interview:

I am interested and I have always been interested in the way in which these social questions of race, belonging and identity play out in the family because I think that family is a perfect laboratory for really seeing the damage that society does to individuals because you bring it back into the family.”(Phillips “The 70’s?”)

Racism and social conformism have their bodily translation in gazes that can be interpreted as malevolent, or, at best, cold and distant. According to Frantz Fanon, negative reactions to mixed relationships reveal deep-seated psychological inhibitions refracted onto the social scene: “If the racial situation is to be understood through psychoanalysis, not as a global construct but as felt by particular minds, sexual phenomena have to be taken into account” (Fanon 193, my translation). Thus, in Act 2 of *The Shelter*, a disintegrating mixed-race couple meets for the last time in a pub, and their dialogue records the impact of social rejection both on the history of their relationship and on their respective psyches. Louis, an Anglo-Caribbean man, reveals an experience of racism that warps his perception of the world.

As is starkly shown in Colescott’s paintings, the mixed-race couple is primarily envisioned on a sexual basis, and this persistent debasing of love when race is involved is a form of social harassment. In Louis’s case, the malevolent stares provoke a behavioural change; he stops living his own life and starts performing for a racist audience, since the psychological impact of the racist gaze has a cleaving effect on his psyche. He loses control of his “double consciousness,” the term used by W. E. B. DuBois (9) to define the insidious effect of the white gaze, since it is only Louis’s self as imagined and reviled by the onlookers that is put on display, hardly containing its rage and anger, the saner self being muted. In Colescott’s paintings, as in Phillips’s writing, the annihilating white gaze is a weapon that both condemns and attacks mixed couples. The theme of the malevolent gaze is clearly present in *The Shelter*:

Louis : *People look at us anyway, Irene. Stare at us, for over a year now, like they’re thinking they should be fucking, not out shopping for furniture, not at the pictures enjoying themselves, or on a bus going home, to having a drink, they think we should be fucking.*

[He slaps the table.]

They should be fucking.

[He slaps the table.]

They should be fucking.

[He slaps the table.]

Irene : *Louis, please. People are watching.*

[Louis gets up and starts fumbling with his trousers.]

Louis: We should be fucking, you and I, West Indian man and English woman.

Irene: For god’s sake, Louis, sit down.

[She pushes him down into his seat.]

*Don’t behave like that. Don’t let them get to you like that.*



Louis: *But don't you see how they look*, hoping we don't do anything human like laugh, or cry or kiss.

[...]

Well, if you mean it, just kiss me full and let them watch. (46, italics mine)

The same motif appears twice in the fourth section of *Crossing the River* when Joyce remembers how people reacted to seeing her with Travis:

And again we talked about him, and I tried to avoid the way people were looking. They were looking at me. Not him. They just nodded at him. Some people asked him for a Lucky Strike. He always gave away two, and a smile. I thought that was nice. It made me think nice things about him. But nobody would say anything to me. I knew what they were thinking. That he was just using me for fun. There was no ring on my finger, but I didn't think that they had the right to look at me in that way. Just who the hell did they think they were? (202)

Joyce then comments: "I just kept thinking, I can't see what they're getting out of it. Being so cruel. But I was just making myself more and more angry, and I could sense that it was getting difficult for him" (203). The weight of the stares is now equally felt by both partners, and Joyce relates their psychological effect in less violent but equally moving terms. It is Joyce's behaviour that is now altered, and sensing in Travis the anger she herself feels, she discovers that she has been led to experience from within the consequences of a discrimination based on race. Her reaction is the same as Louis's in *The Shelter* (1984) one of rage and anger:

Louis: Nigger and nigger lover. They don't really hate the coloured man with a brick in one hand and terror in his eyes for they're used to that from slavery days. What they're not used to is a coloured man with a white woman on one arm and a spring in his step. (52)

The observation on averse gazing equates it to a surface symptom of white supremacy. In *The Shelter*, Louis explicitly connects the demonizing of relationships between white women and Black men to the rules set up to self-perpetuate slavery. Happiness in such couples is still considered a threat to white hegemony. Louis is thus proven right through Travis's story in *Crossing the River* (1994), when Travis arrives late at the camp and is mercilessly beaten up because he has been seen in the company of a white woman.

After they dropped me off, they'd driven him down the road to a clearing and told him to get out of the jeep. And then they beat him with their sticks. He said they beat him so hard that he thought his kidneys were going to burst. I closed my mouth, which I now realized had been hanging open. When they took him back to the camp, they'd made a report that said that he'd been drunk and difficult. As a result, the commanding officer had decided that he was to be confined to the camp until further notice (207).

The merciless treatment he is subjected to is the equivalent of a lynching. Joyce's reaction parallels the white GIs' reactions; like them, she is horrified, but for reasons that are diametrically different.

The same malevolence is also unleashed when, in *Higher Ground*), Irene, a Polish refugee, and Louis, on his way back to the Caribbean, have a drink in a bar: “Irene looked around and saw people staring, people who would normally stand at the bar with their backs turned but who now had their heads and bodies corkscrewed around so they could gape directly at them. Irene wondered if the man noticed this” (199). The toxicity of the other patrons’ racism is replicated in their physical postures. Their twisted minds are literally translated into corkscrewed heads and bodies, like cartoon characters gaping at something whose obnoxiousness they alone can see.

Here as elsewhere, Phillips delineates the socio-cognitive aspects of racism through descriptions of individual and group strategies of discrimination and the defense mechanisms they elicit within the psyches of the targeted minority members. In *Higher Ground*, Louis, a boxer, is the one character who is able to evade the mechanism of entrapment in this game of muted harassment:

Louis stood and offered his hand, which Irene shook. Then she turned and marched through the volley of stares and out into the snow. Louis sat down and watched the doors swing back shut. He looked across at the bar where all eyes were upon him, but he held his ground. [...] Then the man next to Louis, a small stooping man, addressed the barman in what Louis had come to recognize as an Irish accent: “There’s a lot of colour in here tonight.” In his mind Louis ducked, then laughed out loud. He paid for his drink and sat back down. Tomorrow would be his last night in England. His boxer’s soul remained unbruised. (200).

Phillips makes clear the cognitive effort involved in dealing with racial hostility, a form of psychological warfare. Irene, for her part, is metaphorically turned into a soldier who has to march out under a fire represented here by a volley of stares. She will finally desert the field and retreat into a world of her own, “forever lost without the sustaining love” (218). As for Louis, he follows the advice that Phillips belatedly gives Othello in *The European Tribe* (1987), which is to go back to a country where he will not be considered only as a disposable war machine. Freedom of movement and freedom of mind are the keys that give Louis the ability to dodge verbal aggression and remain impervious to racism.

In a 2017 interview, “The 70’s? This was a tough time”, Phillips acknowledged an interest in another artist whose work focuses on those who challenge the white, heterosexual order: “There are some other films which have had a big effect. Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. That film had a big effect upon me in the seventies.” In the 1974 film, Fassbinder orchestrates volleys of stares to chronicle another love story “in difficult soil” (*Crossing the River 2*). The film depicts the unlikely romance between Ali, a Moroccan immigrant, and Emmi, an elderly cleaning woman, in a rigidly conservative environment. The subtitle of the film, *Happiness is not always fun*, certainly applies to the various mixed couples evoked above, but, in the context of *Crossing the*

*River*, it carries a melodramatic charge that applies particularly to Nash and Martha. Every seed of happiness they try to sow is uprooted by slavery, colonialism, lynching or old age, and their only weapons against the historical forces pitted against them are love and hope, another of the cardinal virtues.

Fassbinder also studies the collective and interpersonal mechanisms that impose non-verbal pressure on transgressing couples and individuals. The pressure toward conformism is revealed as a desire to erase the expression of difference. When Ali, a Moroccan immigrant, is asked by Emmi whether Ali is his real name (07:49), he answers that it is the collective name given to every *Gastarbeiter*, but that his real name is El Hedi ben Salem M'Berek Mohammed Mustapha (07:55). A “pretty long” name, admits Emmi (07:58), before deciding hastily to leave the pub. Through synecdoche, individual identity is erased and the foreigners become clones whose only function is to offer their labour. They are not recognized as individuals with personal histories and their own stories to tell.



Fig. 3: *Angst essen Seele auf*. Dir: Reiner Werner Fassbinder (5:40)



Fig. 4: *Angst essen Seele auf*. Dir: Reiner Werner Fassbinder (5:56)

As in *Crossing the River*, dancing is the element in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* that brings the two unlikely lovers together under the blank and disapproving stares of patrons in a bar. Fassbinder shoots the scene that emphasizes the distance between the couple and the people observing them, with both groups seen from a low angle and the viewer in position to watch their reactions closely. The words “very nice but no work” (5:40), pronounced by Ali about his native town, remind us of the reluctant migrations from the Caribbean that Phillips sums up as a flight from beauty: “Ambition going to teach you that you going has to flee from beauty, Michael. Panama? Costa Rica? Brazil? America? England? Canada, maybe? West Indian man always have to leave his islands for there don’t be nothing here for him [...]” (*The Final Passage* 42). As for Emmi, she evinces a prior capacity for resistance to prejudice, revealing, on her first evening with Ali, that she

married a Polish *Fremdarbeiter* (a forced labourer under the Nazi regime) who had stayed on after the war. The marriage was frowned upon by her parents who, like Emmi herself, had been Nazi sympathizers. Emmi readily admits that she has been lonely: “It’s good to talk to someone. I am alone most of the time. All the time, really” (10:14). Loneliness is also what brings Travis and Joyce together, or again Solomon and Dorothy in *A Distant Shore*.



Fig. 5: *Angst essen Seele auf*- Dir: Reiner Werner Fassbinder (20:17)

Emmi faces, in addition to the colour bar, the consequences of breaking conventions related to gender, age and social status, but it is Ali who enunciates the film’s key message in relation to the retaliation and ostracism the couple endure:

Ali: Why cry?

Emmi: Because I’m so happy and so full of fear too.

Ali: Not fear. Fear not good. Fear eat the soul.”(20:06-20:07)

Fear is part and parcel of the migrant’s or minority member’s experience, but Ali underlines that the feeling is a luxury for those who only have hope and love as weapons. Seen in this light, *Crossing the River*, too, is a tale of pioneers who dare to break taboos and, like Ali, pay no heed to negative prophecies like the jealous bartender’s: “Of course, it won’t work. So what?” (36:08), which finds an echo in the attitude of the social worker in *Crossing the River* who visits Joyce after Greer’s birth. Joyce detects and resents this negativity: “I could see her looking at me and thinking, poor disillusioned cow” (228). As a close, vivid study of the psychological impact on interracial relationships of the condemning gaze, compounded by ageism, class and gender prejudice, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* perfectly echoes the effects of the discriminating gaze reflected by Phillips through the character of Joyce in *Crossing the River*.

Although the radio dramatization of the “Somewhere in England” section of *Crossing the River* is generally faithful to the novel, it includes eight new scenes, all related to Joyce, Travis and

Emile. As well, the successive traumatic stresses of a father's early death, an abortion and an increasingly aloof mother are absent from the play, which leaves Joyce a more assertive character. If we compare the first reunion between Greer and his mother with the corresponding scene in the novel, which stresses Greer's need for affection—"He was staring at me like he had never been hugged in his life [...]" (scene 1)—Joyce in the radio play is shown to be overwhelmed and less in control of her emotions than in the novel. The last words of the sentence—"[...] and I could feel me knees going" (scene 2)—echo her reaction in the novel to the dance with Travis in 1943: "And for weeks afterwards, every time I thought of him I was sure my knees were going to give way" (223). In the radio play, both son and father elicit the same bodily reaction from Joyce, which contrasts with her reaction in the novel: "I could hear myself breathing. But apart from this, I was calm. I surprised myself" (231). Indeed, what we gather from the novel is that Joyce, a fatherless child brought up by an unsupportive mother who did not even comfort her when she faced the ordeal of an abortion, has learned to hide her emotions: "I just want to cry, but I've promised myself that I'll never let her see me cry again. Never" (196). Joyce reacts in the same way toward Len, the husband she does not love: "I didn't want Len near me. Not now, not ever. And I didn't want him to see me crying"(170). In the radio play, Travis and his friend Emile also become rounder characters. In contrast to the novel, both are allowed to express emotions and exchange reflections :

1. TRAVIS: What choice? I'm a coloured man, no choice in that. And I'm also an American, no choice in that, either. Hell, Emile I ain't got no choice. (*Pause*) Man, let's go fight these Nazi jackasses then get home to South Carolina and start living again. Enough already with the cows and the sheep and this lousy English weather.
2. EMILE: Travis man, you sure about what you're doing?
3. TRAVIS: Emile, truthfully I ain't sure about anything anymore but please, let's just go. This place is breaking my heart. (scene 43)

In the fourth scene, Travis tries to protest when an officer calls him "boy,"(scene 7) but he is quickly reminded of the fact that, although Britons seem unfamiliar with the way they "run things back in the United States" (scene 9), the officer will do his utmost to enforce segregation on European soil.

Both friends complain of being made subservient to the white section of the army: "You think anybody told these limeys that we're bringing two armies over here? A white one to do the fighting and a coloured one to clean up the white man's mess" (scene 8). Travis Johnson is shown increasingly chafing at these discriminatory rules. In the seventh scene of the radio play, Travis notices that English people do not seem to be enforcing segregation, but he finds it hard to channel his frustration until he is invited to the local church, where he and his friends enliven the service. Their religious emotion and fervour draws Joyce to the newcomers: "And then I heard their voices

starting up. I knew it was them for nobody else in the village sings that way. Like they mean it” (146). Yet we later find Travis worrying that his relationship with Joyce might lead to lynching, the punishment meted out to those who risk “miscegenation”: “Man, you crazy? Emile, that’s a white lady in there. I ain’t ready to be strung up from no tree”(scene 25). Finally, he is confronted with an impossible choice, a double bind created by segregation. He cannot stay in England since he longs for home, but he knows that living with Joyce in South Carolina is impossible because of the Jim Crow laws.

Phillips uses dark irony when he underlines the fact that the fierce battles later fought in Italy by the American troops were considered “clean-up” operations. Joyce is dismayed when Travis tells her he is being sent to fight: “Then he said the Yanks would probably have to go over to Italy to clean up. He said he’d miss them. I felt a door closing inside of me. I looked up at him. He asked me again if I wanted a whisky. I nodded. He knew what he’d said” (211). This reflects ironically what Travis earlier described as his and other black soldiers’ menial function in the American army. “He told me that the army only liked to use them for cleaning and the like” (208). This comes as a reminder of the equally subservient role African-American soldiers were said to play during the war, at the cost of their lives.

Nevertheless, the couple appears to be more belligerent in the play than in the novel. Travis’s life as a downtrodden Black American GI is depicted in more detail, but so too is his awareness of the discrimination he faces due to the Jim Crow laws. Joyce becomes much more of a fighter in the play. After her best friend Sandra is shot dead by her husband out of wounded pride, Joyce confronts his friends Len and Terry on their own turf, the local pub. She announces that she has made up a bed on the sofa for Len, and that she will no longer tolerate any violence on his part. In contrast, in the novel Joyce goes to the pub to confront Len but is defeated and sent back home. The best she can do is hide her despair in the marital bed. Again, in the novel, when confronted with the officer who insists on enforcing a colour bar on British soil, Joyce only *thinks* about asking him to take off his dark glasses: “He took his hat off. He should have taken his glasses off as well. I wanted to say to him, it’s not sunny out, you know. So you can take them off, you know. Unless you’ve got something to hide, that is” (145). In the play, she asks him to take his sunglasses off right away: “You can take off the sunglasses if you like. It is overcast today” (scene 22).

Similarly, Joyce in the radio play accepts that she and the villagers will be involved in role-playing after Len is sent to prison: “However, I didn’t much care what they thought for I had a shop to run and they needed me. [...] And so we all performed the pantomime of being civil” (scene18). This is more explicit than Joyce’s understatement in the novel: “And in the shop, no matter how

they look at me, I always ask them for their coupons” (200). The mention of a shared performance places Joyce on a level with the quietly hostile group; she is still part of the game, a rounder character, more at ease with the world and herself. This is suggested by the fact that, while Joyce is first shown shattered by the news of her mother’s death and only thinks of Mr. Miles as an old man who is going to die (182), she sounds more caring and attentive in the radio play: “I’m all right Mr Miles. I’ll be fine. You just take care of yourself” (scene 19). Joyce also appears to be aware of what is at stake with the presence of African-American GIs in Britain: the transfer of an oppressive model to Britain. Her question—“So, you’ve brought us a problem, is that what you are saying?”—echoes W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous remark: “To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word” (4). As with the rewriting of Leila’s character for the film version of *The Final Passage* (Ranguin “Foreign Home,” 241), the lead female character is empowered in the radio play, making the communication of her vision more assertive and adding weight to her final recognition of her son and her assertion of his roots in British soil.

The radio dramatization enables Phillips to suffuse the world described in the fourth part of his novel with a gripping level of emotion through a writing process that can be described as spiraling and accretive (Ranguin “Fonction scopique,” 50).

JOYCE: After you went into care I left the village, the shop, Len, everything and went to live back in the town. For weeks afterwards I wandered around the park looking at women pushing their prams. I got work as a conductress on the buses, and eventually I met Alan, he’s my husband, and while he knows about Len I’ve never said anything to him about you or your dad. But it’s not because I’m not proud of you, it’s just too painful, son. (She begins to sob) It hurts too much.

JOYCE (v.o.): And it was that one word that finally broke the ice. “Son”. As though it was his cue, my son stepped forward and took me in his arms the way his father did on that platform on that cold wintry morning.

JOYCE: (Sobbing) I don’t even have a picture for you, or a letter, because once I married Alan, like a fool, I got rid of everything that Travis had sent to me for. I was desperate to put it all behind me. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me, son. Forgive me.

JOYCE continues to sob. We hear 'Moonlight Serenade' rising.

JOYCE: Now that you've found me, I want to make everything right. And I promise you I will. (Pause) We were something Love, your mam and your dad. You’d have been proud of us the way we took to the dance floor with everyone thinking, “No way, they’re not gonna dance together are they?” But once we got up everyone followed us. That’s what your mum and dad were like, love. (Pause). That's who we were. We recognized each other and in the end we didn't care what anybody thought (scene 51).

The emotional content of this ending is undeniable and differs considerably from the hyper-controlled tone of the novel, which can be understood as reflecting the various policies of

containment it describes (Ranguin “Silence Louder than Any Noise,” 59). The word *son* is repeated four times by Joyce at the end of the radio play. This gives a new dimension to the ending of the novel, whose last word is *loved* (237), since Travis becomes the only one of the three siblings whose love child can be traced. A new family link is acknowledged—and mended—by Joyce when the generic word *child* is actualized in the word *son* pronounced four times by a mother now recognizing as hers the baby she gave away. This emotional but upbeat ending stresses the importance of family and a belief in the healing powers of resilience.

Evoking the dance scene, Joyce describes to her son how daring a couple her parents were. Dancing is at the centre of the radio play, as it is of the novel, symbolizing the decision to enter into a relationship that was still considered obnoxious by many at the time, an expression of both love and independence. In the radio play, Joyce takes the lead, and Travis and she dance to “Moonlight Serenade,” a swing ballad, slower and mellower than the foxtrot in the novel (162) and more in keeping with the melodramatic atmosphere: “I put one hand ever so lightly on his shoulder and I held out the other one. And he stretched out his arm to meet it, and steered me back and into the space that was the dance floor” (scene 33), as opposed to: “He put one hand on my shoulder and held out the other. I stretched my arm out to meet it, and he steered me backwards and into the space that was the dance floor. A foxtrot”(162). The change in music that we actually hear in the radio play, joined to the heightened emotions resulting from a better definition of the characters’ battling spirit and freedom of thought, make the radio play more of a melodrama.

Interestingly, Rainer Werner Fassbinder modelled his film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1975) on Douglas Sirk's melodrama *All that Heaven Allows* (1955):

The story, which Rainer Werner Fassbinder remade as *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* concerns a romance between a middle-aged, middle-class widow (Jane Wyman) and a brawny young gardener (Rock Hudson)—the stuff of a standard weepie, you might think, until Sirk's camera begins to draw a deeply disturbing, deeply compassionate portrait of a woman trapped by stifling moral and social codes. (Kehr "All that Heaven Allows")

In the radio play, Joyce manages to claim her son as her own long after Travis’s death on the Italian front. Fierce antagonisms due to racism and war, thwarted love, untimely death and separation have built up the pathos and heightened emotions which are the foundations of the melodramatic image that concludes the radio play: when the family is finally reunited and wounds healed, the dancing circle is made whole again through memory. In the novel, Greer, the son of Joyce and Travis, is the only known offspring produced by the African siblings in “difficult soil”(1). Nash chooses to disappear into the heart of Africa, and Martha dies still looking for her lost child. The novel thus suggests that Joyce has morphed into the three African children, as she provides the missing link to



rootedness and familial unity and embraces the cause of the marginalized: “But my Joyce and my other children, their voices hurt but determined, they will survive the hardship of the left bank” (235). The 1994 front cover of the Picador edition of *Crossing The River* is a visual rendering of this symbolic recognition.

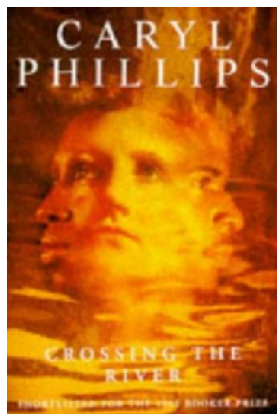


Fig. 6: Crossing the River, cover, Picador edition, 06/05/1994, ISBN 0330333046.

The 2016 radio adaptation of “Somewhere in England” can also be interpreted as a tribute to the British women who showed enough courage and determination to defy the stigma placed on them when they chose to ignore prejudice and the colour bar. That Greer, the child put up for adoption, is finally readmitted to his rightful place is a literary act of historical remediation. Both this and the rounding of Travis’s character in the radio play answer the criticism leveled by critics of the novel such as Yogita Goyal who argue that both *Crossing the River* and *Cambridge* (1991) reveal “the reinstatement of white subjects at the heart of narratives that, though overtly fragmented, are also structured by a containing, totalling urge” (256). Joyce exists at the heart of the narrative not because she is white but because she deliberately ignores the added value supposedly attached to whiteness to become a member of a diasporic tribe whose story Phillips chronicles

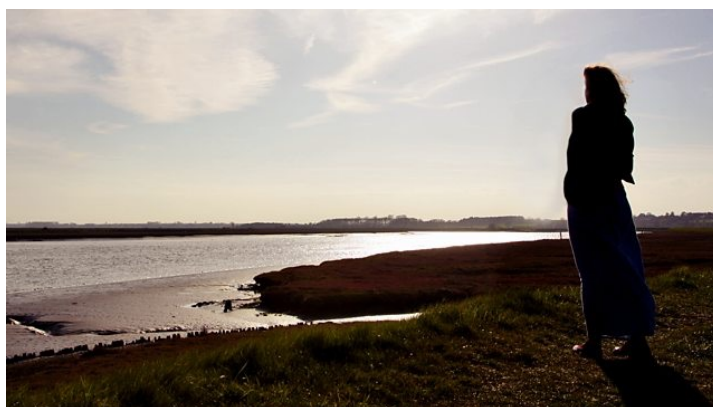


Fig 7: “Drama: *Somewhere in England* written and dramatised from his own novel, *Crossing the River*, by Caryl Phillips” BBC webpage (2016). (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0848cvn>)

This is a tribe whose members can all be represented as pioneers. In *Crossing the River*, Nash Williams is sent back to the continent from which his ancestors were deported to become a pioneer among the “natives”: “I am truly now a pioneer of sorts.” (23) Aged and worn-out, Martha Randolph is nevertheless ready to become a pioneer in her last bid for love, hoping to find on her way west her daughter lost to slavery: “Age was getting the better of her now, and arthritis had a stern hand on all parts of her body. She would pioneer west” (74). In the 1940s, Travis and Joyce decide to brave the glares, “break the atmosphere” (166) and become pioneers of interracial relationships. Through all these characters, Phillips conjures up visions of undaunted diasporic Africans, some abducted, some reluctant, but all pioneers on the social front, motivated by love.

The rewriting of the same story, using different media, from novel to film, or from novel to radio play, changing the tonality of the story and remodeling the characters, implies that Phillips works the way a sculptor would, chiseling a structure through time, changing the relationship of the reader to the characters, establishing new emotional levels from one media to the other. The illustration accompanying the announcement of the BBC drama play confirms the inclusion of Joyce, down by the riverside, looking across the river, among the lost children. The characters start to evolve within forms that become sequels to pre-existing novels and seem to grow through a rewriting process that gives a new dimension to the cognitive experience of reading, thus confirming Caryl Phillips’s special relationship with the present of creation.

Despite our best efforts, some rights holders have not been traced. That those who have not been cited may accept our apologies and come forward to be acknowledged.

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