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“Going Home”: Caryl Phillips’s *The Lost Child* as Feminist Decolonial “Yorkshire Noir”

Sarah Brophy

Gothic Leeds and Murder on the Moors

Since the 1980s, Caryl Phillips has developed a reputation as a “cosmopolitan traveller,” “knowing, sophisticated, independent,” as James Procter puts it (185). By the same token, Phillips has, as John McLeod emphasizes, tended to write “at a remove” from the “preoccupations” of his fellow second-generation Black British writers, more concerned with imagining the migrant experience of his parents’ generation than with his own “primary theatre of experience” (“Between” 12). Starting with 2005’s short autobiographical fiction “Growing Pains” and culminating in his 2015 novel *The Lost Child*, however, Phillips has been making a long u-turn, finding his attention drawn back to and sustained by the lonely Leeds and Yorkshire of his childhood and youth. As “Growing Pains” begins to show, the legacies of this past are palpable and haunting, revealing the sense that, as McLeod aptly puts it in his reading of this short piece, “Phillips’s writing remains grounded in those painful experiences of growing up in Britain in the 1960s and 70s,” even as it sees in literature “a space where such pain can be challenged, controlled, and potentially transformed” (10). The son of parents who emigrated from St. Kitts to the UK when he was an infant in 1958, Phillips recalls the spatial marking of class divisions in what he remembers as a “strange school,” where he was “the only black boy”: because his parents owned their own home, he had been told to play on the middle-class side of the “white line” that bisected the playground, but when the primary teacher reads *Little Black Sambo* to the class he is overcome by a sudden visceral wish to be on “other side of the line with the scruffy estate children” (“Growing Pains” n.p.). With a focus on the eerie northern geographies of *The Lost Child* and with critical attention to Phillips’s treatment of affect as a material and spatial force that ongoingly shapes classed, racialized, and gendered lives, this essay asks: what happens when Phillips “goes home,” in an extended work of imagination, to the North?

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In *The Lost Child*, an inherited northern landscape of trepidation becomes an amplifier of “the pain and discomfort” (Phillips, “Finding”) in the narrative of two married Oxford students, a young white undergraduate and aspiring creative writer, Monica Johnson, from Wakefield in Yorkshire, and a Black doctoral student of history, Julius Wilson, recipient of an “island overseas scholarship” (30). Strained by mutual miscomprehension as Julius becomes increasingly involved in the fight for racial justice in late 1950s London and the decolonization movement abroad, and as Monica’s struggles to cope with her growing isolation as a mother at home with two infants (49–50), the marriage dissolves, and Monica returns home from London to Wakefield with the couple’s two young sons, Ben and Tommy. Longestranged from her parents who had disapproved of the mixed marriage, Monica finds accommodation on a newly-built council housing estate in nearby Leeds. (68). The complex is touted as “award-winning,” and emblematic of a “newly revitalized” city, but Monica finds it “bleak, characterless,” a “dump,” the common areas taken over, in her persistently xenophobic imagination, by “foreign men and women,” who “behaved like it was their park, which in a way it was now” (65–69). Increasingly self-isolated, she ekes out a living as a librarian, fantasizing about escape from a world in which she feels “stuck” but also unable to “go on like this for much longer” (69–76). We learn through her son Ben’s narrative that Tommy is lured by Monica’s respectable-seeming white boyfriend, the reporter Derek Evans, a serial predator who has become obsessed with the lonely, talented younger boy. Much later, Ben lets himself remember the “confusion” and the consequences of the “stormy night” in 1972, when Tommy’s disappearance and death at Evans’s hands, and the discovery of his body on the moors, became the subject of tabloid news coverage, leading to their mother’s breakdown, the household’s dissolution, and his own permanent foster care placement by social services with the reluctant, respectable Gilpins, a white middle-class family (172–9). The novel’s fabric is deliberately replete with loose ends: Ben is placed in foster care alone, and neither Tommy nor Julian re-appears (at least not in any conventional emplotted sense). For her part, Monica drifts to the rooming houses and streets of London, and, when she commits suicide, there is no one to claim her remains (199–200, 208).¹

Phillips’s account is riven with violence, grief, and forgetting, and northern locales are coded in contradictory ways that both acknowledge and occlude such histories. As Procter points out, in the postwar period, Northern locales, especially those associated with Romantic-era authors, have frequently been made to signify as sites of “white” English national heritage, imagined as offering a salvific pastoral balm for the troubled national soul (194). Consider, for instance, Merle Collins’s critical exploration of this cultural freight in her 1991 poem “Visiting Yorkshire—Again.” Here, the speaker desires to commune with the celebrated artistic aura of the Brontë family’s

Haworth parsonage and its “mystic moors,” but, as a racialized subject, she is consigned to otherness by “the glances, the stares/the averted eyes/the quickened step” of those who regard her as a stranger (Collins ll. 12, 30–32). With each return to the site, Collins feels herself increasingly distanced from the Brontës, who stand in the exclusionary underpinnings of English national identity and its imperial expression through the formation of the English literary canon (Procter 194–7). Paradoxically, then, while this locale may seem so overdetermined by nativist fantasies as to be unredeemable, the moors nonetheless serve as a powerful sounding board for feelings of alienation on the part of minoritized subjects. Indeed, in recent Black British writing the Brontës’ Yorkshire has taken on more intimate reverberations, as in Jackie Kay’s invocation of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* [1847] to somehow convey the feeling of “a windy place right at the core of my heart” (Kay 45), a sentiment of “painful uprooting” that persists despite the unconditional love of her white adoptive parents (*McLeod, Life Lines* 212).

Contrariwise, in an overt coding of the postwar North as hellish and irredeemable, a recent spate of “Yorkshire Noir” narratives have associated the region with crime, exploitation, and abuse. In David Peace’s *Red Riding Quartet* (1999–2002), set in the 1970s to early 1980s, corrupt police commissioner Bill Molloy toasts his cronies by emphasizing their impunity, “To the North—where we do what we bloody want!” (*Red Riding* 1983). Brian Baker has read this sub-genre as an allegory of the crisis of postwar masculine authority, arguing that “the victims of the Yorkshire Ripper, in particular, stand in for society’s marginalized and victimized, those who suffer at the hands of (white male) power while others look away,” but also suggesting that, by prioritizing the adult male perpetrators and protectors (roles that often collapse into one another), Peace ultimately “offers the reader the hyper-noir pleasures of a rather retrograde individualist and violently masculine subject” (227, 238). It is with reference to a contested terrain, then, that *The Lost Child* revisits the exclusions and suffering caused by patriarchal and (neo)colonial violence. In dialogue with both Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, which functions as a sustained intertext, and contemporary “Yorkshire Noir,” Phillips’s 2015 novel attempts to imagine a healing process that can plumb the depths of loss, without repeating a cycle of vengeance. Combining an emphasis on “journeying” through a landscape of desolation (Phillips qtd in Agathocleous n.p.) with “collative” practices of intertextuality that suggest “related histories rather than fixed analogues” (Walkowitz 128–33), *The Lost Child* models a way of remembering the infamous crimes, scandals, and suffering of the postwar period differently, beyond the limits of heritage culture and beyond hypernoir. In so doing, it calls on readers to feel the plights of the women protagonists and especially the situation of their children through a viscerally imagined transhistorical topography.

Theorizing a “Material and Affective Geography”

Interpreted in light of critical feminist and Black studies frameworks that materialize and spatialize the workings of affect, *The Lost Child* suggests that the lingering of such bleak stories has a power to disturb the inheritances of liberal historiography: the narrative of inexorable inclusiveness and upward mobility in a reformist, more-or-less beneficent capitalist society.² Responding to Phillips’s *Crossing the River* (1993), which traces a 300 year-long arc of diasporic history and culminates in a story of a mixed race child, Greer, born during WWII, and his white mother, Joyce, being reunited in 1963, Yogita Goyal questions the value of Phillips’s predilection for “[c]asting the debate [about diasporic identities] on the terrain of family,” arguing that such a move reifies power, ultimately centring white subjectivity and failing to imagine Black resistance (18–20). But others maintain that this focus on familiarity is not idealizing, but rather that is a way of contending with kinship as a “site of violation” or “sundering” (McLeod, *Life Lines* 199): in this vein of criticism, Phillips emerges as committed to a “different type of project” that prioritizes “responsibility” (Bellamy 143n11, 131), puts an ethical brake on the too-easy reassurances that can arise in response to trauma (Craps 201), and pays “attention to the historical locatedness of matters of vulnerability, surrender, and adoptability” (McLeod, *Life Lines* 88). What is more, while *Crossing the River* centers on the story of a lost child told from a white maternal point of view, *The Lost Child*’s anti-institutionalist and anti-patriarchal critique inheres, by contrast, in the centrality to the narrative of the young Wilson boys as victim and victim-survivor alongside stigmatization, exploitation, and abandonment but also the survival lessons that parents, especially but not exclusively mothers, struggle to impart. Here, resistance is almost but not entirely absent; if it is to be revived, it must be reimagined in and through a social and natural landscape of menace, loss, and disorientation.

“The more I began to scribble on the book,” Phillips recalls, “the more I realised that what I was really dealing with was my own concern with fractured family”: “There are all sorts of tectonic plates that we walk across thinking that they’re solid, but they can slip” (qtd in Wade n.p.). The metaphor of “tectonic plates” suggests deep-seated formations and fissures threatening to shift underneath the surface of the social landscape, rendering precarious the footholds of his protagonists. While her vocabulary is not expressly geological, Sara Ahmed has theorized inheritance as a dynamic that is both “material and affective”—and significantly spatialized (“Mixed” 94). As Ahmed moves in closer to examine her own mixed genealogy, the “objects that seemed to contain whiteness” recede out of reach and become spectral (105). In this process, the “gap between reception and possession” comes into

view as a source of “discomfort” necessitating “reorientation” (6). *The Lost Child*, too, approaches “pain and discomfort” (“Finding” n.p.) as a difficult but indispensable resource, one that, anchored as it is to the murder of young Tommy Wilson and to the recollections of his brother Ben, necessitates movement through and a reckoning with a network of interconnected northern sites—housing projects, foster homes, the moors, a seaside holiday camp—layered with multiple injustices.

Taking up *Wuthering Heights* not only allows Phillips to leverage the authority of a key nineteenth-century “heritage” text, but Emily Brontë’s narrative also offers powerful resources for reimagining social marginality, including its emphases on topography, genealogy, and intersubjectivity. As Tabish Khair writes in a postcolonial assessment, “[i]t is one of the strengths of *Wuthering Heights* that Heathcliff’s terror, coming from ‘elsewhere,’ is situated in the context of the sublime in the ‘English’ moors: far from being simply external to the nation/the home, terror (displacement, fear, violence) resides just as much within the nominally ‘local’” (161). Ruminating on anti-hero Heathcliff’s tragic demise, Brontë’s frame narrator, Lockwood, who has persistently heard, disregarded, and pretended to listen for, the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw, concludes by “wonder[ing] how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (Brontë 338). Placed mid-way in Phillips’s 2015 novel is a brief, lyrical account of Brontë’s own identification with the “ferocity” of “Papa’s boy” and an out-of-body deathbed vision of her own impending burial on her “cherished moors” (Phillips, *Lost* 110–11). The return to the moors signifies doubly at this moment, offering both a vision of death and one of escape, for as Emily watches the grave-diggers she also imagines “that the boy who came from the moors” eventually “went back” and that the “unsettled earth” is in the process of “repair” (109).

Inverting the “nested” structure of *Wuthering Heights* (where the story is mediated by the conventional investments of the respectable new gentleman tenant, Lockwood, as well as by Nelly Dean) and responding to the repeated invitations within the original text to speculate on Heathcliff’s parentage, *The Lost Child* opens by framing its multiple stories of entrapment, loss, and abandonment in the 1960s and 1970s with a speculative eighteenth-century narrative centred on the young boy Heathcliff’s bond with his mother, as they survive on spare coin begrudgingly given on the docks of Liverpool.³ The boy’s mother, who never appears in *Wuthering Heights*, has, we are invited by Phillips to imagine, crossed the Atlantic twice, between Congo and the West Indies, then between a West Indian plantation and a British port city, and continues to cross it “under the stress of memory” (10). At the moment of her son’s transition from baby to young boy, “She is a woman in debt... a diminished woman who, before her time, has yielded to age and infirmity” (3). “Toothless,” “a skeleton hung with rags,” racked by pain and

fever, “she never evokes any compassion from these men, who lurch confidently past her, their aura of superiority fed by excessive familiarity with rum and other strong liquors” (3, 12, 6). Now, if the so-called “Crazy Woman” is regarded at all by men, it is with “a tight smirk of derision” (3–4) or a “dismissive glance” (11)—that is with contempt, which staves off the unsettlement of disgust through what Sianne Ngai has theorized in *Ugly Feelings* as a pattern of “disattendability” (336).

In the midst of death and terror, however, there are traces of struggles, counter-movements, and attempts at inhabitation. *The Lost Child*’s juxtaposition of two single mother-led households—one in 1960s Leeds, and the other in 1760s Liverpool—can be illuminated by critical cultural theories of affect and is, more particularly, cognate with the critical reimagining of inheritance developed in Black and intersectional feminist thought. For despite the brevity of the Crazy Woman’s first-person vignette, this framing prologue also taps into counter-forces that work against the pervasive pattern of dismissal by men in the port city. For while she is still sentient, the “Crazy Woman” can call on memory in the mode that M. Jacqui Alexander, in her discussion of “pedagogies of the sacred” in the Black Atlantic, describes as “expansive memory” (288). In other words, since the “Crazy Woman” can remember that “it hasn’t always been this way,” and because she can “detect that a strong and tenacious heart beats in his tiny body” she can forecast that her future legacies, embodied in her child, may not be so circumscribed either: “all is not lost” (*Phillips, Lost* 6–7). Contrary to reviewer Gregory Woodward’s suggestion that it is in “fathers” that the novel invests its hopes for redemption, then, I argue that, as the neglect, exploitation, and cruelty endured by the Wilson brothers in 1960s and 70s Leeds is made palpable, the novel focuses on the embodied, spiritual navigation of a landscape of loss by those who struggle and live on in the aftermath. The white single mother of Phillips’s postwar narrative, Monica Johnson, and her historical counterpart, “the Crazy Woman,” an imagined mother for Emily Brontë’s imagined adoptee, Heathcliff, are both rendered out of place by the lovers, landlords, employers, and other agents of purported beneficence who govern their lives, and they finally die alone, unattended, their children cast out, profoundly vulnerable to the very authority figures who claim to offer protection. The elder, surviving brother Ben becomes the most important voice as the book proceeds, with his “confusion,” helplessness, and guilt, and his material/spatial practices of remembrance (*Phillips* 172) open up for readers a path to empathize with the terror of that other violently claimed boy, Brontë’s Heathcliff, and to imagine a future beyond what Daniela Garofalo has highlighted in her materialist reading of *Wuthering Heights* as Heathcliff’s search for sexual, legal, financial vengeance against his oppressors (828).

Black feminist critic Hazel Carby’s reflections on her work towards a personal memoir, connecting her postwar childhood to larger political and

cultural cross-currents, makes the survival stakes of such imaginative acts of reckoning with the past clear. Carby reminds us of “the multiple ways” that English identity “is haunted by and dependent upon the invention of the black other,” pointing out that this is an inter-implication that is “forgotten, repressed, and denied” (625). In dialogue with Stuart Hall’s challenge to a “highly exclusive and exclusivist [English] cultural identity” (“The Local and the Global” 20; qtd in Carby 625), and resonating, I suggest, with Ahmed’s prioritization of what can be learned from dwelling in disorientation, Carby’s research extends back and forward and back, first into the era of slavery and abolition, then into postwar and contemporary historicism, before zeroing in on WWII and the immediate postwar years. Through these temporal shifts, Carby’s memoir research models a critical practice devoted to taking the sorts of “critical ‘detours’ into the past” necessary to “make ourselves anew” (625). Place itself is dynamic, for Carby, continually (re)constituted by *how* subjects travel and “arrive”: “Perhaps it is not, in fact, only the place that is significant but also the manner of the journey and arrival, the eager walking or manacled stumble, the panicked flight, or forced or voluntary sailing towards and away from each other?” (629). As my interpretation will show, *The Lost Child* traces the micro processes, or the “how,” of the Johnson-Wilson family’s formation and fracturing and the historical, material, and affective conditions shaping their movements towards and away from one another and towards and away from authorities (patriarchs or their delegates) who wield the power of life and death over delegitimized and disenfranchised women and their children. I suggest that Phillips shares with Carby a commitment to forms of critical praxis that go beyond reified identity categories, instead reading across “racial encounters” and re-narrating loss in order to unearth “both the particularities and the commonalities in experience and history across and within the colonial boundaries of empire that Manichean divisions and hierarchies of supposed racial difference cannot acknowledge” (Carby 626). Imagining location as multilayered and multitemporal, *The Lost Child* enacts a form of memory work that resonates powerfully with Carby’s Black feminist and decolonial understanding of movement’s histories and with Alexander’s Black diasporic theorization of remembering as an embodied spiritual and spatial practice, painful and “expansive” (288). A fictional contribution to anti-patriarchal and decolonial reimaginations, *The Lost Child* conjures the infernal geographies of Yorkshire noir, with particular attention to the violence and abuse meted out by patriarchs and patriarchal and (neo)colonial institutions, from the rise of the white nuclear family as a regulatory ideal to the frequently stigmatizing, intrusive forms of management meted out by the welfare state (*McLeod, Life Lines* 2–3, 88; Attewell 11–13). This a novel in which fear (and sometimes empathy) reverberate backward and forward in time, across multiple,

interconnected northern sites of “home” and heritage that are also revealed to be sites of terror, escape, remembrance, and survival.

Walking: Freedom, or White Patriarchal Predation?

Carby’s invocation of constrained mobility is not coincidental, but deliberately invokes the forms of “unfreedom”—particularly the anti-blackness and gender oppression—that subtend Enlightenment Man, liberalism, and the white nuclear family. The northern English *rural* landscape in *The Lost Child* is overwhelmingly associated with—and claimed by—a seemingly benevolent set of patriarchs, whose affiliation to naturalist pursuits is shadowed by solipsism and by violence committed against the vulnerable. As Wendy Joy Darby has established, walking has been a valorized leisure activity associated with the invigorating free play of the Romantic imagination since the early nineteenth century (59). The relationship to landscape afforded by walking has, in addition, long been “experienced by some people as a bastion of ‘Englishness’”—that is, as “a temporary refuge not only from social and economic changes, but also from the demographic reality of urban England” (245). How does this practice of mobility in nature orient the (masculine) subject, and what objects does it put within (his) reach, Ahmed asks (“Mixed” 97)? Adulterous, predatory, and ultimately murderous, Derek Evans appeals to Monica Johnson, for he is at once ordinary, full of “charm,” and generous with gifts of money; he fills in the affective and material gaps in her life left by the breakdown of her relationships with both her own father and her children’s father (80–92). When they first meet socially at the seedy local Mecca Ballroom, Evans conspicuously performs the role of a well-mannered, attentive suitor, but his attentions quickly concentrate on Tommy. As Ben later surmises, the “beady-eyed bastard ... was just using her to get at Tommy, for he liked nothing more than to impress kids, and football was his way of doing so. Without football he was nothing but a sad, desperate balding fucker who liked rambling on the moors with an anorak and compass, and he knew it” (162; cf. 165). The portrayal of Evans thus fictionalizes the Moors Murderer, Ian Brady, who, aided and abetted by his girlfriend, Myra Hindley, infamously tortured and killed 5 young people between the ages of 10–17, burying them on Saddleworth Moor north of Manchester (Phillips, “Finding” n.p.).

Crucially, through his association with landscape as a venue for leisure, for hunting, and for the covering up of crime, Evans is readable as an indictment of patriarchy’s occluded forms of violence because he serves as a foil to the imagined “gentleman” suitor and benefactor of Heathcliff’s mother. Not only are both white, married, and affluent compared with those to whom they offer aid, but both are country ramblers. In the penultimate chapter of *The Lost Child*, “The Journey,” the Crazy Woman’s gentleman suitor, now clearly

signified as Mr. Earnshaw, philosophizes about his own “eccentricity” in electing to walk the miles between his Yorkshire country home and “the anxious commerce of Liverpool,” with its exploitive, profitable exchanges in “sugar, rum, and slaves”: “walking affords him the gift of exercise and an opportunity to refresh his mind and achieve a clearer understanding of deeds past and tasks present” (241–43, 250). Despite these vaunted aims, though, “an onlooker might take him as a furtive man,” a “sad fellow,” rather than “a man of quality” (241). Earnshaw’s conscience is troubled by the question of what is to become of “the child,” “his child,” “the black-haired child,” and he finally settles on rescuing the boy from a litany of imagination exploitation, being “pressed” into the navy, or into “thievery” or the “workhouse” (251–52). If walking is coded as a way of exercising “freedom,” it is also associated with power to possess land, money, women, and children—to violently embrace and carry them off, or to just as violently leave them behind. This portrait crystallizes the pattern whereby masculine agency is, transhistorically, predicated on the removal—the snatching up—of children from their (single) mothers, who are consigned to die and, it would seem, to recede from all memory.

In the text’s postwar narrative, the significance of walking to the identity of Ronald Johnson, Monica’s estranged father, underscores continuities between “ordinary” lower-middle-class postwar aspiration, Romantic masculinity, and the pedophilic serial killer. When, as a teenager, Monica begins to exercise her willful resistance, the recourse of her father, a grammar school geography teacher still nursing anxieties about his lack of wartime service and lower-middle-class origins, is to propose “a walking holiday in the Lake District, just the two of them, but Monica rolled her eyes and said, ‘No thanks.’ And then after she’d been accepted at university, when he made it clear that he’d love to motor down and explore the place with her, she just laughed and carried on watching a programme on the newly purchased television set” (17). Here, interpreted through the lens of Ahmed’s work on feminist and queer willfulness, we can see that the young Monica is already being marked out by her father as possessed of an excess of “particular will,” an “unjust assignment” that pathologizes difference, independence, and dissent from the rule of the father, which assumes itself to be aligned with “general will” (*Ahmed, Willful* 117, 157). Later, Ronald’s resentment of his daughter’s autonomy boils over when he equates his daughter and grandchildren’s arrival at the train station in Leeds with wartime “evacuees,” and recalls his long-held position that the only reasonable solution for the children’s care can be “adoption” (54–56). The reference to the mass evacuation of working-class children from southern cities not only allows Ronald to disavow responsibility for the children, but also permits him to indulge a twistedly nostalgic fantasy that the survival of the nation is again at stake, under siege from within and without as during the war, but this time threatened by his

daughter and her mixed-race children. As he grows elderly, Ronald becomes, ironically, sharply cognizant of the way the mobility of young people makes them elusive and develops a belated sense of intergenerational obligation: this makes him intent “to track him [Ben] down,” to claim him as “flesh and blood” (194, 208). The murderous perversity of the serial killer no longer seems the opposite of the family man, or of the man of sensibility: walking becomes cognate with hunting, tying together the novel’s white patriarchs, unfolding a critique of those who would imagine themselves as sentimental, beneficent, and even reflective as they exploit and expel, attach and detach. It is Ben Wilson, defined repeatedly by his self-righteous white grandfather as a stranger and only belatedly embraced by the man, who must live on in the aftermath and must find a different way to inherit, one that can map a new personal topography in the midst of a vividly remembered landscape of predation, fear, and estrangement.

In focusing on the seeming inability of Monica and Julius to secure their family’s future as a coherent, intact nuclear unit, Phillips might be criticized as courting the very limitations, perhaps even the pathology, to which he vociferously objected in a 2005 essay critiquing the “myopia” about race in postwar British writing (“Kingdom”). As Timothy Bewes has astutely pointed out, though, the “poetics of failure, inarticulacy, and cliché” so characteristic of Phillips’s fiction can be understood as a method of immersion in the “materiality of shame” (55). I build on this idea of a negative hermeneutics by arguing that, in *The Lost Child*, stories of devastation may not be termini, after all, but starting points for seeing and encountering the inherited world differently. Through her critical autoethnographic reflections on her own mixed ancestry, Ahmed complicates how we see what are conventionally regarded as non-reproductive “end points” in a genealogy (“Mixed” 104). For Ahmed, the problem for queer and mixed subjects of being narrated as “doomed” or an “end point” in a family story is a persistent one, “discomfort” is associated with an “instability” that “allows things to move” and “other worlds” to “come into reach” (106). Indeed, even as *The Lost Child* thus imagines walking as a method of self-fashioning, control, even, at its extreme, a mode of predation, the novel also reimagines what it might mean to walk, to move, to become differently, conveying hopes that the vulnerable might yet embark on necessary and possible escape routes. The Crazy Woman’s dying thought is that: “She taught the boy how to walk, and now she must walk away from him. She must go. A skeleton hung with rags. Another journey, another crossing” (12), while Monica, when pregnant with Ben, speculates anxiously to Julius that “unlike other mammals, our babies spend far too little time in the womb. They come out helpless and unable to run from predators, and that’s just not right. . . . I wouldn’t say no to an extra three or four months of this if it meant the kid might stand a chance of coming out walking” (37). Both the Crazy Woman and Monica bequeath, in

imagination, then, a set of alternative insights into walking as a practice, albeit a precarious one, of freedom.

Certainly, too, neither is the “free” mobility of (white) liberalism nor its perverse underside, predation, the only paternal dynamic imagined in *The Lost Child*. Subtly—even obscurely—more complex narratives of masculine movement are layered into the book. Even though his intellectual pretensions are satirized, Julius Wilson’s enduring commitment to nation-building in the Caribbean sees him take up a job as a university lecturer that will allow him to return “home” and contribute there. The possibility that Julius enjoys a successful return is, oddly enough, given some room to breathe in the text through Ronald’s speculation that “the fellow called Wilson” he had noticed on television “speaking at one of those commonwealth meetings” might be “the scoundrel that Monica ran off with” and “[m]aybe the boy knows the chap, and has found some way to re-establish a connection with his father” (206). While the question of whether Julius is now within, or will come within, Ben’s reach is left as an open one, Ben’s mobility is facilitated in a more direct, material way by Mr. Gilpin, Ben’s foster father after Tommy’s death and Monica’s collapse. While the overall tenor of the time that Ben spends at the Gilpins’ is one of feeling “downcast”—if not frankly “hated” then there on sufferance, and, like his antecedent Heathcliff, a source of “bad feeling in the house”—Mr. Gilpin “occasionally smiled in a pitiful kind of way,” enabling his mobility by giving Ben “driving lessons as a seventeenth birthday present,” and secretly facilitating the teen’s travel to an entrance interview at Oxford (182–4). “All is not lost,” indeed (6).

Living on in the Aftermath

The models for imagining movement and locale that I have discussed so far—the lessons in predation, the promises of escape—play out in Ben’s struggle to overcome helplessness by constructing an alternative “autotopography,” in Jennifer A. González’s phrasing. A material manifestation of the work of “reorientation” (Ahmed 6), autotopography involves, as González defines it, a set of semiotic, material, and spatial cultural practices, the arranging of “personal objects” in order to remember the painful past and possibly invent a new future (133). The extended middle section of *The Lost Child* entitled “Childhood” retrospectively shows Ben finding the resources (beyond the basic support that the Gilpins provide) to survive in a series of strikingly desolate environments. Narrated by Ben in the first person, “Childhood” is structured as a set of short memory sketches, each titled after a specific popular song, spanning the decades and tracing a decolonial arc away from mid-century folk repertoire, exemplified the ukulele hit “Leaning on a Lamp-post” (George Formby 1937) and increasingly controversial for its racism, towards diasporic tracks including “My Boy Lollipop” (Millie Small 1964),

“Dat” (Pluto Shervington 1974) and genderqueer influences such as “Life on Mars?” (David Bowie 1971), and “Dancing Queen” (Abba 1976). This chapter is, in effect, a “collation” nested within a novel that itself resembles an anthology (Walkowitz 128). And, on affective level, Ben’s remembering through popular songs taps into a dissonant array of feelings, to the intermingling of his own hard-won pleasure and belonging with his hazy awareness of Tommy’s suffering and isolation; the background beat of this section is Ben’s knowledge that friendless Tommy would be “down the road kicking his football up against the doors of the empty garages and keeping his own counsel” (171). Ben’s feeling of material exclusion both clouds his recognition of Tommy’s troubles and, in retrospect, provides a way back into remembering their shared troubles. While living with Monica on the estate, “me and Tommy didn’t get pocket money or anything like that so nicking [records] was most likely going to be the only option” (142). Most of Ben’s finds are “45s with the centre bits missing,” “rejects from a jukebox or something, but they seemed okay to me, and then, when the bloke wasn’t looking, I’d slip one or two 45s inside my jacket and trap them against my side by tucking in my elbow, but not so that it looked like I’d broken my arm or anything” (142). Here, prior to Tommy’s death, with these secret “detour[s]” to the market (141), Ben is already engaging, surreptitiously, in a process of self-reconstruction through (stolen, damaged, desired) cultural objects, but, in this metonymic memory, the records are associated with a conspicuous feeling of embodied brokenness that he is desperate to keep hidden.

While loss, frustration, and shame are intimately scored in Ben’s psyche, its causes are traced more emphatically to institutional forces than to personal responsibility on the part of the boys and their parents. Before Monica’s household is broken asunder by Tommy’s death, the state intervenes by sending the boys for temporary fostering, and their weeks at Mrs. Swinson’s home are steeped in outright terror. *Wuthering Heights* proves an especially effective sounding board here, an intertextual resource that can help us grasp the effects of welfare state institutions at their most cruelly censorious. Lurking in the kitchen with her growling dogs, Mrs. Swinson is a latter-day manifestation of the servant Joseph in *Wuthering Heights*, sharing his penchant for moral and sexual chastisement (Brontë 144–5; cf. *Phillips, Lost* 242–4). When, for example, she gets “mad” when the boys secretly stay up to watch a TV special on The Beatles’ break up, Mrs. Swinson threatens them with physical violence and deprivation and then launches a verbal attack on their mother’s “going out” with men, calling her “a fast one” and declaiming the boys’ conduct as similarly “dumb,” “insolent,” and “dirty”:

I’ve got your flaming number. Both of you. After all, you don’t even know how to wipe around the toilet after you’ve used it, do you? But I’m not surprised. I mean,

look at your mother's coat. Red's a common colour; everyone knows that. Frock, coat, or hat, it doesn't matter, it's common. (151–52)

In the face of this invective, the boys' power to console one another is brought to its limits: Ben can only offer to Tommy that "Mam wasn't well and the doctor said she needed a break. She was having a hard time pleasing her boss at the library, and I had a feeling that if she lost her job, she wouldn't be able to afford to look after us anymore. We just had to be patient. I said all of this, but inside I was angry at her. ... That night our Tommy wet the bed for the first time" (152). Their vulnerable, exposed position is mirrored by that of Monica, for when, acting on instinct, she shows up to rescue them, Mrs. Swinson's self-righteous hatred remains unchecked, as the foster mother only continues to declaim the boys as tarnished by what she characterizes as Monica's pathological sexuality, calling them "dragged up" kids with "no manners," inevitable "Borstal material" (doomed to detention in a juvenile reformatory), and concluding with pointed resentment that she "seems to spend half [her] life mopping up the mess people like you make" (154). Subsequently, while the opportunity to spend part of the summer at Silverdale Holiday Camp on the coast at Morecambe is presented as a healthful, improving reprieve, it is experienced as continuous with the atmosphere of contempt exemplified by Mrs. Swinson or the looming threat of Borstal, for Ben is all too conscious that "this was a trip for poor people" and suspicious of its governance and agenda, as exemplified by the fact that Derek Evans "is coming along too in his own car" (164–7). Ben's own status as "popular" is shadowed by a cursory awareness of Tommy's suffering: "Whenever I ran into him at the camp, he looked like some little lost boy you wanted to hug" (167–8).

In an act of symbolic retrieval from the grasp exerted on their lives by Evans, who, Monica later remembers, had asked her to give him photos of the boys (223), the one family memento Ben does not discard is the "snapshot" taken of him and Tommy "when they arrived at Silverdale," suggesting that he remains affectively bound to these painful memories (202). Ben ultimately survives and prospers (gaining a place at Oxford himself), but his narrative of the foster home and summer camp bears witness how each seemingly beneficent state or philanthropically motivated intervention is accompanied by the proliferation of exclusion, loss, anger, and anxiety—and the fracturing of family ties.

Reminiscent of the healing brought about by the second generation in *Wuthering Heights* (the younger Cathy teaches her cousin Hareton to read and he helps her create a garden (*WH* 319–22), Ben's filtering of his identity through popular music is neither simply acquisitory nor a power play. Rather, his affinity to music is a thread of continuity across different homes and times: a form of shelter and a "lifeline" (Ahmed 105) in an inhospitable world, and at times a prompt to remember his lost brother. At

first only accessible to him through pickpocketing, collecting records offers a way for him to belong and to map an escape trajectory. Remembering the story of returning to the council flat triumphantly with a 45 of ‘The Time Has Come’ by Adam Faith, Ben recalls Tommy’s non-response to his find:

he shrugged and said he was starving and asked what we were having for tea. It seemed like he was always starving, which didn’t make any sense as Mam always wrapped us both some dinner money in pieces of paper and left it for us on the kitchen table. ... I knew we wouldn’t be getting a colour telly anytime soon so there was no point in dreaming. About anything. (143–44)

Despite the collapse of communication and the despairing thought of a necessary “end” to dreaming, Ben’s memory sequence, as it unfolds, holds together and revises the broken pieces of his multiple inheritances. As it earns him acceptance amongst his peers, Ben’s persona as record collector and pop music fan is more socially embedded than his mother Monica’s love of books (her interest wanes as she does not have anyone with whom to discuss them [38]), and in turn this practice yields a substitute for the collection of his mother’s letters and postcards, sent to him while in foster care, and the newspaper clippings related to Tommy’s death that he throws away (202). The practice of bringing home records as prize possessions resonates with both his mother Monica’s resourceful combing-through thrift shop stores to furnish her first apartments with “small items ... that might signal the permanence of their shared adventure and put a personal stamp on the characterless flat” (28) and with his father Julius’s excitement over his discoveries of second-hand jazz LPs (40–41). For Monica, who is “dismayed” by her husband’s burgeoning affiliation with Afro-centric styles in attire (“the gaudy African shirt and leather sandals,” “[h]is once trim and neat hair now wide and ludicrous”) as well as annoyed by how his homosocial transnational networks exclude her, Julius’s embrace of jazz is excessively cerebral and self-important (39–40). The practice of collecting is a patrilineal and a maternal inheritance, and Ben’s selections are, by contrast with those of Julius, in a distinctively popular register, consciously attuned not towards reasoned analysis but to memory and fantasy and spanning “English” and diasporic sources. While the songs are upbeat, the memories are not always chosen, nor sunny: the memory of being quizzed by his white foster-sister’s drunken boyfriend about the meaning of Shervington’s reggae tune, for instance, is an especially painful one, for it recalls a following set of humiliating racist questions, in which the boyfriend demands that Ben explain the colour and texture of his bodily self and the foster sister shows that her loyalties are not with him, when she merely laughs and looks away (184). By continuing his autotopographical collecting practices after the loss of his family, then, Ben registers, gathers together, and tentatively starts to imagine beyond his feelings of loss and unbelonging.

The circulation of metropolitan pop culture influences is an especially crucial and effective resource for Ben's identity-making as a mixed-race teenager in 1970s Leeds. Echoing and revising his father Julius's expressive sartorial self-fashioning in the era of decolonization and Black Power, Ben's attraction to glam rock in the early 1970s poignantly calibrates the teen's coming-of-age in foster care with and against the flexible possibilities for masculine subjectivity instantiated by the freewheeling gender play of David Bowie and other pop dandies of the time (Hawkins 10, 32, 125). Ben's plan to see Bowie as Ziggy Stardust with his foster sister, Helen, is scuppered when Ben's curiosity pulls him into Helen's room to explore her potential concert garb, and Mrs. Gilpin discovers him momentarily luxuriating in her daughter's underwear drawer (180–81). When eroticism exceeds its approved (pop cultural) containers, state-orchestrated and supervised affiliative bonds are revealed as fragile, and the pubescent foster child is more emphatically than ever before constituted as a threatening stranger: labelled as "some kind of deviant" (183). Read against the grain of censure, though, youthful sexuality is retrieved from the predatory interpretations of would-be patriarchs: allowed to breathe free from Derek Evan's predation, from Mrs. Swinson's pathologization, as well as from Ronald Johnson's hypocritical dismay at his daughter Monica's bourgeoning sexuality, his fear that she is "loose" (17–23), which rings extra hollow once we learn of the shattering complaint of Monica's friend, Hester, that Ronald had "leer[ed]" at her (208). Extrapolating on Walkowitz's notion of collation as a key formal method in Phillips's practice (128–33), I read Ben's audio-collation-within-a-literary-collation as activating what Stan Hawkins helps us to understand as popular music fandom's "potent force" (Hawkins 10). Ben's actively practiced musical affiliations are thus a vehicle for accessing memories of a painful personal history; this fan praxis, which is at once spatial, auditory, and affective, helps him to survive by re-arranging and holding together everyday vibrations of pleasure and dis/connection.

"Going Home" as "Critical Detour"

The significance of resistant autotopographical self-fashioning to *The Lost Child's* anti-patriarchal critique, and to its imagining of possibilities for survival and for empathy, is crystallized when, legally emancipated from the Gilpins at the age of 18, Ben finds himself *en route* from Leeds to attend university in the south (like his mother before him). As he is leaving, Ben suddenly alters his trajectory:

Once I was sure that I was out of sight, I sped up and turned the van towards the moors, which was the opposite direction to where I should have been going.

I stopped by the side of the road and stared at the depressing landscape. Bloody hell, I thought, even with a full moon it must be pitch black up here at night. And cold, and our Tommy didn't have his duffel coat with him. I shouted. Tommy! I walked a few paces away from the van and looked out into the distance. Tommy! Tommy! But it was no use. . . . I took a few steps onto the actual moorland. There was nobody around, which was just as well, but I really wasn't ready to climb back into the driver's seat and point the van south. Not just yet. I wasn't ready to abandon our Tommy again, so I made up my mind to stay put on the moors. Hours passed as I walked for mile after mile, and as the daylight eventually started to fade in the sky, I could feel the moors closing in on me, and for the first time in ages I began to feel close to my brother. (189)

Recalling the removal of Ben from his home by another van—the Social Services unit vehicle—after Tommy's death (174), what is adumbrated here are the older temporalities and spatialities that haunt a young man's new-found freedom. By changing direction and speeding up to get to the moors, stopping and staring at their "depressing" gloom, and walking there until past sundown, Ben navigates a landscape of literal and symbolic grief, guilt, and fear. This is a reversioning of masculinity in the sense that Ben enacts a radical, necessary, even sacred "remembering of self" that is simultaneously responsive to the plights of others and can dwell in sadness and uncertainty (Alexander 298). *The Lost Child* may not augur the sort of "territorialized cosmopolitanism" that Emily Johansen hopes will envision "an alternative social system" (134), but it does refunction place—the desolate windswept moors—in order to summon and translate "the relationship of terror to displacement, dispossession and power" (Khair 154) across historical time. As Ben's detour suggests, walking in the English landscape does not only reinvigorate and empower the patriarch who inherits the privileges and perversities of English identity, but also can be "experientially reinterpreted and reclaimed" (Darby 246) by the children of mothers who have been cast as strangers, or indeed as threats, to the integrity of the imagined "white" English family and the national body with which it is repeatedly conflated (Carby 648–53).

"Secrets are the stones that sink the boat/Take them out, look at them, throw them out, and float" (347). So writes poet Lemn Sissay in "Something Dark," his one-voice autobiographical play about the way Lancashire child welfare services ripped him away from his mother, an overseas student from Ethiopia, in 1968, after she opted for what she thought was temporary fostering. In Sissay's material metaphor for disregarded or denied memories, the act of examining what lies right beneath one's feet is important because lifting up these heavy stones can lead towards a recalibration of the burdens borne and, in turn, of the way we move in and inhabit the world.⁴ Such alternative approaches that actively negotiate with the felt and lived legacies of racial prejudice, sexual moralism, and institutional harm are markedly

different from the dominant model of Yorkshire noir in that the way that the young survivor in the *Red Riding* series, sex worker and informant BJ, can only name himself as “the one that got away” after he enacts revenge by killing his abuser (*Red Riding* [1983]), and from the adult Heathcliff’s cruelty and self-destruction. Rather, in the spirit of Sissay’s play and of Kay’s and Carby’s memoir texts, Phillips attends to the painful, ugly, “secret” stories of the postwar period and their recursive links to the era of empire and the slave trade—to forms of psychic pain and familial upheaval barely admissible in public memory, or admissible only through a lens of personal moral responsibility and blame. Stories of failure—these heavy burdens, these family secrets—can be, it is suggested, re-navigated and re-arranged, over time, though never fully repaired.

As a reminder that “[c]rossings are never undertaken all at once, and never once and for all” (Alexander 290), the final pages of *The Lost Child* pull us away from Ben’s mourning rite, plunging us back into a small child’s terrified point of view. In the short concluding chapter, “Going Home,” we are left with Heathcliff’s response to Earnshaw’s act of picking him up when the child’s steps falter on their journey across the moors from Liverpool to Wuthering Heights, but also reminded of what Tommy Wilson endured: “The boy stares now at the man in whose company he has suffered this long ordeal, and he can feel his eyes filling with tears. *Please don’t hurt me*. Come along now. There’s a good lad. We’re nearly home” (260; emphasis in original). *The Lost Child* confronts us with wild, distressed, even pleading attention: this moment of “staring back,” as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggests of such defiant looks, silently bespeaks the affective intensity and agency of a disempowered subject caught in the grip of power, demanding a new “beholdenness” on the part of those who witness (194). The intersubjective exchange stands as a query: at the moment when a patriarch like Earnshaw—or his sinister modern counterpart Derek Evans—might be embracing him as a “good lad,” the child’s staring response suggests that there is something awry, sinister, and irreparable in being seized in this way.

Phillips has, in effect, crafted a work of anti-patriarchal, decolonial “Yorkshire noir.” Pivoting on a postwar story of sexual abuse, murder, and breakdown, *The Lost Child* eschews a pathologizing rendition of the Wilson brothers’ story, instead emphasizing “a material and affective geography” (Ahmed, “Mixed” 94) in order to recompose it as a modern tragedy that is “not a neutral record,” but involves the ongoing “selection and valuation of ancestors” (Williams 38) and an impetus to “critical detours” (Carby 625). Delving into “unregarded” (Williams 33) places of “pain and discomfort” (Phillips, “Finding”), *The Lost Child* summons fearfulness, thwarted communication, and the pangs of forced im/mobility in order to offer an alternative genealogy and affective mapping of the prejudicial, violent forces coming to bear on women and children in the postwar period. Such topographical revisioning is significant in the context of a resurgent nostalgic English “geo-piety” that is dangerously aligned with racism

and xenophobia (Gilroy 91). Countering the narration of northern rural landscapes either as an idealized anti-urban “refuge” (Darby 245) or a site of unalloyed brutal violence, *The Lost Child* issues a call to hear, to feel, and to locate materially the point of view of the vanquished and their survivors at what seems like the vanishing point of that possibility. As Ben Wilson’s shifting relationship to his torn family history exemplifies, and as the concluding return to the scene of Heathcliff’s being carried off by Mr. Earnshaw simultaneously shows, these northern landscapes, rural and urban, persist, if we listen, in rumbling with remembered fear. At the same time, the gathering centrality of Ben’s embodied diasporic memory practices (cultural, sexual, spiritual, spatial) to the narrative intimates that reclaiming this sorrowful landscape is, nonetheless, both necessary and possible for those who live on in violence’s wake.

Notes

1. In a different essay, I detail the submerged postwar intertextual references through which Phillips imagines Monica and discuss the ethical and political significance of this “negative” portrayal (in preparation).
2. See Garofalo, Khair, and Rosenberg for astute readings of *Wuthering Heights* as a novel that punctures the illusions of liberalism by emphasizing its hidden “pain and violence,” (Rosenberg 25), especially the exploitative accumulation of capital, land, and children.
3. This opening chapter of *The Lost Child*, entitled “Separation,” is not marked as “Heathcliff’s story,” as it comes temporally prior to his naming by the Earnshaws after the son they lost in infancy (cf. *WH* 36). Phillips’s brief narrative thus registers as a generic or collective story of a Black mother and her mixed-race child in the era of slavery and the slave trade. If Heathcliff’s precise origins remain untold in Emily Brontë’s text, however, then they are also a conspicuous site of speculation. Read by the neighboring gentry, the Lintons, as “that strange acquisition” from “Liverpool—that little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway” (*WH* 48), Heathcliff is imagined as derived from a globally inflected elsewhere of imperial commerce and war. Another pattern in the text is, however, suggestive of submerged or denied filial attachments: first, there is the mystery of Earnshaw’s motivation for refusing to “leave” the child in the miserable conditions (or indeed why the gentleman happened to find *himself* in that place), and, second, the detail that the boy quickly becomes Earnshaw’s “favourite” (36).
4. Amongst other painful traces of institutional and patriarchal violence, Sissay learns that his original case worker had presumptuously named the young Sissay Norman Greenwood, after himself, and that his mother had kept her story secret in part because her pregnancy resulted from a sexual assault (339, 344).

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