

Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict

Series Editor

Ihab Saloul
Berlin, Germany

Rob an der Laarse
University of Amsterdam
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Bret Baille
Center for Advancement of Scholarship
Gauteng, South Africa

Aim of the series

This book series explores the relationship between cultural heritage and conflict. The key themes of the series are the heritage and memory of war and conflict, contested heritage, and competing memories. The series editors seek books that analyze the dynamics of the past from the perspective of tangible and intangible remnants, spaces, and traces as well as heritage appropriations and restitutions, significations, musealizations, and mediatizations in the present. Books in the series should address topics such as the politics of heritage and conflict, identity and trauma, mourning and reconciliation, nationalism and ethnicity, diaspora and intergenerational memories, painful heritage and terror spaces, as well as the mediated re-enactments of conflicted pasts.

Dr. Ihab Saloul is assistant professor of cultural studies, and academic coordinator of *Heritage and Memory Studies* at University of Amsterdam. Saloul's interests include cultural memory and identity politics, narrative theory and visual analysis, conflict and trauma, Diaspora and migration as well as contemporary cultural thought in the Middle East.

Professor Rob van der Laarse is research director of the Amsterdam School for Heritage and Memory Studies (ASHMS) and Westerbork Professor of Heritage of Conflict and War at VU University Amsterdam. Van der Laarse's research focuses on (early) modern European elite and intellectual cultures, cultural landscape, heritage and identity politics, and the cultural roots and postwar memory of the Holocaust and other forms of mass violence.

Dr. Britt Baillie is a founding member of the Centre for Urban Conflict Studies at the University of Cambridge, and a research fellow at the University of Pretoria. Baillie's interests include the politicization of cultural heritage, heritage and the city, memory and identity, religion and conflict, theories of destruction, heritage as commons, contested heritage, and urban resistance.

More information about this series at
<http://www.springer.com/series/14638>

Leila Kamali

The Cultural Memory
of Africa in African
American and Black
British Fiction,
1970–2000

Specters of the Shore

palgrave
macmillan

Leila Kamali
Department of English
King's College London
London, UK

Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict

ISBN 978-1-137-58485-4 ISBN 978-1-137-58171-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-58171-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016958536

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover image © Andrea Matone / Alamy Stock Photo

Cover design by Paileen Currie

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Springer Science+Business Media LLC New York

The registered company address is: 233 Spring St, New York, NY 10013, U.S.A.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has traveled with me through a number of communities. First and foremost, this work would never have happened had it not been for the ongoing intellectual and moral support of my supervisors at the University of Warwick, Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus. I am grateful to have had their scholarly, academic, and collegial example to aspire to, and I delighted, during my PhD years, in their readings of my work almost as much as I enjoyed the vigorous debate which our supervision sessions always occasioned. I thank them for keeping me motivated to see my PhD through, and for being staunch supporters in the years since.

At Warwick, I also benefited from the comradeship of Chris Campbell, Jenny Terry, Jane Poyner, and Sharae Deckard. I am grateful to my examiners Rashmi Varma and Mark Stein, for reading the thesis in its entirety and for offering valuable and specific advice for the moment of its publication. Mpalive Hangson Msiska has been a great champion of mine and I am grateful for his guidance and friendship. I thank Karen O'Brien for her help in enabling my transition to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as part of the work of completing this project.

In Madison, I benefited from the exceptional partnership of Rob Nixon and Nellie Y. McKay, as well as the sterling teaching of Brenda Gayle Plummer and Richard Ralston. I was fortunate to have access to resources at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, and Jim Danky's help in using the collections was invaluable.

I am grateful to all of the writers, scholars, thinkers, artists, and activists whose work and passion informs these pages. It has been a delight to share my work in person with Ishmael Reed and with S.I. Martin; having their blessing in going forward with reading their work has been something special indeed. I thank Keith Piper, who has been especially generous in sharing his work for this book. In the latter stages of completing

the manuscript, I have been lucky enough to work with Joan Anim-Addo, and to witness so much more about the kind of academic I want to be. I am grateful to Nicole King for reading parts of this work, and for giving me strong encouragement at every step on the way to getting it published. Thanks to Lucienne Loh, Anshuman Mondal, and Paul Gilroy for their solidarity and support. I thank all my colleagues at Palgrave Macmillan who have been so helpful, supportive, and present at all stages. Special thanks to Ryan Jenkins, who has been an exceptional editor, managing the volley of emails from me, as I neared submission, with considerable poise. Thanks also to Peter Cary for swiftly showing interest in my manuscript. Paloma Yannakakis's assistance has been invaluable in keeping me on track with the publication schedule, and Tomas Rene's advice on the preparation of the manuscript has also been especially helpful. Thank you also to Amanda Speake for her work in preparing the index.

Special appreciation to all of my family. With love and thanks to my father Mohammad Hashim Kamali for his care and support in every area of my life, and for providing my first example of scholarly commitment, integrity, and passion. To my mother Margaret Kamali for being my foundation, for nurturing me and educating me, and for keeping me buoyed up with her support. Russell, Lisa, Chloe, and Arlo always bring sparkle and their special brand of craziness into my life. Thanks to Sue and Chris Denny, for making space for me by the sea, as I completed the manuscript. I am grateful to my wider family, on all sides, and reaching back generations. I am mindful of the struggles of all who have come before me, and who have paved the way for me, and for this accomplishment.

I thank all those who accompany me in yoga practice, which is the earth upon which this work is grounded, and without which I would not have come this far. I thank my teachers Sandra Robinson and the 'Circle of Women', Ana Forrest, and Judith Hanson Lasater for their continuing inspiration and wisdom. I am thankful for the practice of Forrest Yoga, which has given me the strength and courage to achieve more than I ever thought I could.

I am so thankful to have my beautiful sons Kamal and Jai in my life—thank you for always holding me in love, and apprenticing me in trust and patience. The pauses in my formal academic career which my babies' births and early years occasioned have only made this book richer in the end. To my partner and soulmate Richard Denny, who came into my life at just the right time, you make me blessed every day. With gratitude, this book is for you.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
Part I African American Aesthetics		29
2	“Drumbeats From the Aeons”: Ishmael Reed’s <i>Mumbo Jumbo</i>	31
3	“Solomon’s Leap”: Toni Morrison’s <i>Song of Solomon</i>	61
4	“Worse Than Unwelcome”: Alice Walker’s <i>The Color Purple</i>	93
5	“Something About the Silence”: John Edgar Wideman’s <i>Philadelphia Fire</i>	119
Part II Black British Interventions		151
6	“Words Without Sound”: Caryl Phillips’s <i>Crossing the River</i>	153

7	“Circular Talk”: S.I. Martin’s <i>Incomparable World</i>	185
8	“Awakening to the Singing”: Bernardine Evaristo’s <i>Lara</i>	213
9	“I Can Change Memory”: David Dabydeen’s <i>A Harlot’s Progress</i>	243
10	Conclusion	267
	Bibliography	277

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1	Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, the African American aviator known as “The Black Eagle”, in France, on his way to London to enter the London to Melbourne air races, 1934. ©Bettman/Corbis	65
Fig. 5.1	MOVE members and the Philadelphia police, Thursday, May 4, 1978. © AP/PA Images	122
Fig. 5.2	Aerial view of the aftermath of the fire on Osage Avenue, May 1985. © Corbis	123
Fig. 7.1	© Keith Piper, “Ghosting the Archive”, 2005. Thanks to Birmingham City Archive	189
Fig. 9.1	William Hogarth, Plate 2, <i>A Harlot's Progress</i> , 1732. © The Trustees of the British Museum	247

Introduction

This book offers a new comparative approach to late twentieth-century African American and Black British fiction, offering a detailed consideration of the treatment of the cultural memory of Africa, and reading the ways in which these literatures contribute to debates about cultural identity in the contemporary world. The cultural memory of Africa emerges as a distinctive and important theme in African American and Black British literary responses to the legacy of the Civil Rights movement and Black Power, and is equally established, I argue in this book, as an organizing principle for thinking through the possibilities for Black British identity in the wake of Thatcherism and the crumbling British Empire. The “African” iconography of the Black Power movement forms important inspiration and provocation in both cases, and approaches toward themes of “remembering” Africa present a clear contrast in narrative techniques in African American and Black British fictional contexts, which can be seen to contribute importantly to debates around a returning historical sensibility seen as characteristic of the contemporary era.

The comparative impetus that drives this book arises in no small part from the “transnational connection [...] between the United States [and] Britain” and the “widely held perception during the 1960s that the two countries were on a shared trajectory with regard to race matters”.¹ “The

United States and the United Kingdom did, indeed”, Stephen Tuck writes, recalling the words of Winston Churchill, “enjoy a ‘special relationship’”—but it was “one rooted in histories of Empire, white supremacy, racial inequality, and neoliberal policies”.² The critical period between 1970 and 2000 sees African American writers grappling with the legacies of a Civil Rights movement, which is often felt to have fallen short of its promise, and asking questions about the relationship of African and African American tradition to the contexts of the past and the present. It is a period, also, in which Black British writers explore a wide range of cultural inheritances and allegiances, looking for ways to speak of their experience in Britain, and come to establish bold and original approaches toward identity made for the present and for the future. It is a time of some uncertainty in both African American and Black British cultural politics: a moment when the optimism afforded African Americans by the triumphs of the Civil Rights movement may have lost some of its shine,³ and when Black Britons frequently find that neither “British” nor “post-colonial” models for identity offer simple answers about what it means to be Black in Britain.


The depiction of a cultural memory of Africa is a characteristic of a great number of African American and Black British works of fiction published in the period between 1970 and 2000 by Black writers in the USA and the UK. Africa is situated in these fictions, more often than not, as a “landscape of the mind”,⁴ an ambivalently represented space that usually says more about how cultural identity is situated in African American or Black British experience than it does about the African continent itself. In this study I show that narrative approaches toward Africa are affected, in both literary traditions, in ways which are complicated by dynamics relating to cultural imperialism, racism, and histories of multiple migrations.

The African American relationship with the cultural memory of Africa in this period occurs against the historical backdrop of various ideological forms of pan-Africanism which can be traced to the influence of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century maroon revolutions in Haiti, Jamaica, and Surinam, and to the rebellions on American soil of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner in the 1820s and 1830s.⁵ The early twentieth century saw the establishment, by the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and its flamboyant leader Marcus Garvey, of the Black Star Line, a shipping company built with the express intention of taking African diaspora people “back to Africa”. The founding of the Nation of Islam in the 1930s coincided with, and drew upon, the resistance struggle across colonized

territories in Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean, with the Nation's emphasis upon a united struggle against imperialism with the people of what it referred to as "Afro-Asia". Malcolm X's departure from the Nation in 1964 occurred amid his own reformed views for the possibilities of racial harmony influenced by his travels in Africa and the Middle East, which were only beginning to shape his thinking at the time of his assassination in 1965. In the wake of Malcolm's death, a younger generation represented by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) carried forward Malcolm's legacy, and spawned the call "We want Black power". The 1960s' struggle for Civil Rights in the USA coincided with the decolonization of a number of African states, and many Black Power leaders invoked the struggles of African peoples against imperialism and neo-imperialism as vitally linked to the liberation struggle at home.⁶

In Britain, meanwhile, following Britain's call for colonial subjects to fill the labor shortage left at home by the war effort, the mass migration of Caribbean people to Britain was epitomized by the Empire Windrush in 1948. The 1950s gave rise to "nationalist groups across the British Empire", displaying "distinctly more combative political methods of resistance to colonial power",⁷ and as first India (in 1947), then African nations, then a number of Caribbean states gained their independence from European colonial powers, decolonization did nothing to slow the flow of migrants to Britain. Immigrants to Britain did not receive the unequivocal welcome they had been led to expect, with tensions epitomized by Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968. In response to the 1971 Immigration Act, by which Commonwealth citizens lost their right of abode in the UK, photographer Neil Kenlock responds: "It was outrageous—you can't take us from Africa, enslave us, and after we've built the country up after the war, tell us to go back. No. That's not on."⁸ During this period, antiracist struggle in the UK was influenced by the highly visible US Black Power movement, "the British Panthers adopt[ing] the strains of Black Power made accessible through the style and communication strategies of the U.S. Panthers",⁹ but it was an influence that was largely unofficial and improvised. The discussion in this book is grounded against a fascinating current historiography, in which US Black Power, so long glamorized and criminalized in equal measure in the popular imagination, is only in recent years beginning to be discussed as a subject of serious historical research. While this book is not exclusively about Black Power, that movement's cultural legacy points to significant questions about the perpetual commodification of Blackness

in US contexts, and the comparative perpetual erasure of Black cultures in British history, which are at the heart of my concerns. It is salutary to note, for instance, that “U.S. civil rights demonstrations [were] staged for dramatic effect, [and that] the British media followed the action like a soap opera”,¹⁰ while “Britain’s Black Power movement is in danger of being written out of history”.¹¹

Histories of the term “Black British” reflect, among other things, the trajectory of a changing relationship with “Blackness” as it is defined by US culture, to a position which links that identification to an effort to represent the commonality of nonwhite experiences in Britain. Alison Donnell identifies 1970, the height of the Black Power movement in the US, as “a historical moment from which Black as an identificatory category began to establish itself within Britain”,¹² and as Mark Stein notes, “it was deployed by the Caribbean Artists Movement in the late 1960s, a movement which, in the words of its chronicler, Anne Walmsley, ‘bridged the transformation of Britain’s West Indian Community from one of exiles and immigrants to Black British’”.¹³ During this period, the term “Black” is described by Stuart Hall as “‘hegemonic’ over other ethnic/racial identities”,¹⁴ and by Kobena Mercer as a moment “when various peoples—of Asian, African and Caribbean descent [...] invoked a collective identity predicated on political and not biological similarities [...], signalling an] alliance and solidarity among dispersed groups of people sharing common historical experiences of British racism”.¹⁵ This movement indicates a differentiation from US influence. In the 1980s, Alison Donnell writes: “The need to acknowledge multiple perspectives and the pluralisation of cultural forms and positions within the arena of Black British culture was an almost inevitable consequence of the growth of interest and work being done in this area” nnell). As James Procter puts it, “what Kobena Mercer refers to as ‘the burden of representation’ has created a desire to ‘say it all’”, where attempts at theorization of “Blackness” are constantly, inevitably, disrupted by a “kind of politicised, untidy, ‘lived’ version of Blackness”.¹⁶

The shift from the 1980s to the 1990s may broadly be represented by Stuart Hall’s contention that “people don’t use ‘Black’ in quite that way any longer, because they want to identify more precisely where they come from, culturally”.¹⁷ James Procter comments:

[The] ‘burden of representation’ lifted during the 1980s and 1990s as certain Black cultural formations became ‘centred’. [...] What is also striking

about the literature of this period is its new attention to the *historicity* of the Black British experience [...], testimony to the fact the Black British past is not simply an amoral site of postmodern play but also a politically loaded, politically active site of remembrance from which we all must learn.¹⁸

Where the burden of representation positioned one rarefied speaker (the artist or writer for instance) to speak on behalf of whole, disparate, and shifting communities, there is a sense of a false notion of representation being imposed upon the word spoken, a false “frozenness” upon diverse and living histories, an inevitable consequence of a culture where non-white is equated with “other”. When all this is taken into account, the term “Black British” is most usefully identified for me as functioning, in relation to these contemporary novels, as

a collective term that covers an imagined experiential field of overlapping territories. While at its narrowest it merely refers to writers with an African-Caribbean background, at its widest, it can include writing that takes recourse to domains such as Africa, Asia or the Caribbean and attendant cultural and aesthetic traditions. [...] [the] space denoted by the label in question is far from homogenous; on the contrary, its heterogeneity is one of its defining features.¹⁹

Despite the fact that Black British writers register an interruption (or multiple interruptions) in the transmission of historical memory, they do present the capacity of historical memory to “possess” the present in the same way that African American writers do. African American texts make a strong suggestion that this is a distinctive African trait which is felt in African American culture, through Vodoun or other traditional forms (but which can also be felt simply as “memory”). Black British texts do not link this to any particular tradition—it is figured more as simply a function of text, and reflective of histories that remain untold, and hover, like ghosts, at the peripheries of the archive.

It is my argument in this book that analysis of the cultural memory of Africa in the literatures of this period crystallizes an understanding of how the trajectories of African American and Black British cultural politics have used fiction to explore two contrasting modes of cultural identity, two paradigms that serve as helpful for understanding identity and the relationship to tradition more broadly in the contemporary time. The “specters of the shore” which I argue emerge in African American fiction of the period 1970 to 2000, exist as part of a past that can be evoked

in the textual present, within the familiar structures of African American tradition, gesturing toward an African ancestral presence that exists both within and far beyond what can be named. Such “hauntings” exist, in Black British fiction, as a past which can barely be seen beyond the veil of Britain’s forgetfulness about its African history, yet is written back to life in the way Stuart Hall has begun to describe as a process of “rediscovery”.²⁰

Importantly, I argue that the way in which African cultural memory functions in the African American novels espouses the values and aesthetics of community life, and communal storytelling, as part of the fundamental fabric of African American tradition. African American writing in this period has been deeply concerned with the multiple threats to community and to tradition by the forces of capitalist hegemony—whether through the fracturing of community which leads from under-resourcing, or through the rampant commodification of Blackness by multinational corporations and resistance movements alike. The general view in African American literature, to one extent or another, is that the African ancestors “come as they are. They come as people whose world view is shaped according to African religion”, even if that African religion, as such, “exhibit[s] *intra-African syncretism* at [its] roots”.²¹ All of the African American novels discussed here find that individuality disconnected from (African American and African) tradition and community leads to alienation—yet part of the process of reconnecting to these traditions lies in understanding the aesthetics of fluidity, flexibility, and openness to change which is an inherent part of African American tradition. In the Black British setting, community is not linked as closely to place or to group identity, and therefore the relationship with the cultural memory of Africa appears in more individualized ways.

Black British cultural identities are frequently situated in the recognition of hybrid, diasporic sites for community, in which idiosyncratic relationships with African cultural memory are emphasized, and the possibilities of finding links between disparate sites of culture can allow improvised sites of identity for the individual. As such, I show through the course of this study that African American fiction of this period reveals what Julia Kristeva would call a “semiotic chora”, where the presymbolic and the symbolic meet one another in dialectical relationship, and that Black British fiction, by contrast, situates remembrance of Africa at a point which gestures toward “the infinite semiosis of language”.²² In these identity formations, the Caribbean is continually present, the connection to African cultural memory via Caribbean religious forms being of foundational importance

to African American culture, while the value of paradigms of cultural discontinuity and multiplicity exists alongside commonality, which animates a number of Caribbean theorists' work, and is frequently read in Black British literature through what Joan Anim-Addo terms a "carnival" use of tradition.²³

The close reading approach that I employ in tracing the cultural memory of Africa in the narrative language and structure of texts is exemplified by Heidegger's insistence that "[l]anguage speaks by saying; that is, by showing. Its saying wells up from the once spoken yet long since unspoken saying that permeates the rift-design in the essence of language".²⁴ This sense that language gestures to memorial traces which emerge from forgotten pasts is of utmost importance, I show throughout this book, in reading literature of the African diaspora. The role of language in gesturing toward forgotten pasts acquires special resonance in light of colonial and slave economies. Thinking about Africa as a subject matter has been deeply imbricated by processes of imperialism at work in the USA, in Europe, and in Africa alike, and by the compromises necessitated by survival among colonized peoples, not to mention the multiple traumatic sites of modernity. In the novels I discuss, by African American authors Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and John Edgar Wideman, and Black British writers Caryl Phillips, S.I. Martin, Bernardine Evaristo, and David Dabydeen,²⁵ the signification of the cultural memory of Africa is only tangentially connected to any attempt to comment upon Africa as "a vast continent that incorporates a diverse range of nations and cultures—from Libya to Zimbabwe, the People's Republic of the Congo, Morocco, Nigeria, and Sudan—whose populations, borders, fortunes, and roles in world history have changed continually".²⁶ Africa appears instead in a wide range of narrative approaches which, if anything, are defined by epistemological vagueness. The narrative reach toward this cultural memory is established here in fictions which describe, variously, travel to Africa, epistolary narrations of Africa, myths of African ancestry and of ancestral return to Africa, artistic African inheritances, the use of "Africa" as a name, evocation of "African time", symbolic personifications of Africa, self-consciously literary constructions of Africa, and patently fantastic images of Africa that are used, as V.Y. Mudimbe would have it, as "signs of something else".²⁷ In fact, it is, as Dave Gunning writes, "the very materiality [of Africa] that makes it such a potent focus for antiracist political identity" but that at the same time "creates an impediment between the utility of claiming Africa and the actual circumstances in which diasporic black people may find themselves".²⁸

The narration of Africa as cultural memory is informed by the distinction identified by Pierre Nora, between “memory—social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past”.²⁹ The ways in which the cultural memory of Africa appears in African American and Black British literary texts of this period, I argue, navigates the uncertain and yet powerful arena *between* a social and exemplified practice of memory (which might be thought of as being represented by African diaspora arts and traditions), and a forgetful, organized practice of history that forms the basis of much cultural imperialism which has been inflicted upon African peoples. The historical past of the African diaspora, which includes Africa itself, is present in the narrative language of African American and Black British fiction, I suggest here, but it is present in ways which are not always “organized” within a narrative practice shaped by notions of linear time. The practice of reading a cultural memory of Africa in African diaspora literature requires a sophisticated negotiation of histories of trauma, whether relating to the cultural memory of the Middle Passage, of centuries of slavery and subjugation in the Americas, or of British imperialism abroad and homegrown racism. Roger Luckhurst has written that “no narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way: it has a time signature that must fracture conventional causality”,³⁰ and it is certainly due in part to the traumatic nature of the relevant histories, in African diaspora experience, that a memory of Africa cannot be approached in any straightforward (“linear”) narrative way. To compound this difficulty, Africa is simultaneously constantly spoken *of* in Euro-American imperialist discourse. Part of the cultural legacy of the Atlantic slave trade, the colonization of Africa, and the establishment of imperialism within Euro-American culture as well as on African soil, was the frequent characterization of Africa as a “nullity”, a ‘blank slate’ void of culture”.³¹ When situating identity in the context of an African diaspora, then, Stuart Hall comments appositely: “Where Africa was a case of the unspoken, Europe was a case of that which is endlessly speaking—and endlessly speaking us.”³² Where Africa and Africanness appear in imperialist discourse as both curiously silent, and endlessly spoken about, the subject of Africa can almost be read as representative of a broader hegemonic discourse that speaks over, and speaks about, the Black subject. This discursive territory bears special significance in the quest for establishing cultural identity in the literatures of the African diaspora.

A number of critics who present brilliant contributions to reading African diaspora culture, nevertheless betray an anxiety as readers not to comment upon the critical function of a “vague” idealization of Africa, and it is the purpose of this work to discover what is at stake in these “African” narratives in which the sign of Africa is so equivocal.³³ Keith Cartwright argues that

we must be wary of easy separation between the ideologies (Althusser’s “imaginary relations to the real”) of America’s Africanist discourse and the reality of what Morrison calls the “varieties and complexities of African people and their descendants who have inhabited this country”.³⁴

Though Cartwright asserts that “in some of the most engaging American works Africanist ideology is often intertwined with real Africanisms”, the distinction which he makes here between “Africanist ideology” and “real Africanisms” does not seem helpful, as a cultural memory of Africa and a racial fear of Africanness are in fact two separate phenomena.³⁵ To my mind the term “real Africanisms” is a vast oversimplification of the territory Cartwright is indeed sensitive to when he cites “the parallax effect of a contrapuntal, often polyrhythmic consciousness that is our true New World heritage”.³⁶ It is not the primary concern of the writers discussed in this study to trace recognizable current cultural modes to distinct or localized sources located in a verifiably “real” Africa. Rather, what African American and Black British writers are concerned with, first and foremost, is the articulatory constraints of working within, and against, the impossible dominance of imperialist views of Africa.

A key cultural resource that the African American novels I discuss in this study respond to is the framing of Africa and Africanness in the Black Arts Movement (BAM). In some versions of the cultural history presented by BAM, the Middle Passage and the period of enslavement in the Americas is constituted as “a sort of Edenic [...] fall into history that needs to be transcended,” and a “religious or quasi-religious ritual” is enacted to “reconstitut[e] an ahistorical or transhistorical symbolic African space”. In this endeavor, there was “little reference to the historical Africa since the advent of slavery in the Americas,”³⁷ but it is also the case, and perhaps of even greater importance to the writers examined in this study, that some aspects of the rich and established African American tradition, which drew upon the experiences of slavery as well as upon remembered African art forms and ways of communication, were downplayed in the assertion

of a “new Black aesthetic”.³⁸ As Paul Gilroy comments in relation to Afrocentrism, a close descendant of some strands of BAM, “Tradition provides the critical bond between the local attributes of cultural forms and styles and their African origins”; in the case of some BAM narratives, as with Afrocentrism itself, “the use of the term ‘tradition’ take[s] it outside of the erratic flows of history”.³⁹ Part of the work that I do in this book is to show the ways in which disrupted relations to tradition can be read as a distinctive mark of trauma in African American history.

In counterpoint to any sense of “vagueness” around the ways in which Africa might be figured through the refracted lenses of imperialism, resistance, and African diaspora culture, Africanness is invoked in the 1960s’ US discourse of Black Power, and its cultural corollary, the BAM in new and definitive ways:

Racial pride, advocates believed, could and would replace the crippling sense of inferiority and self-hate inculcated by white racism. In a 1964 speech, Malcolm X told the crowd that “the cultural revolution” was necessary to “unbrainwash an entire people.” Hoyt Fuller, the Black Arts writer and philosopher, explained: “Part of the struggle of Africans in America has been the affirmation of our special beauty in a land where everything about ourselves—our heritage, our physiognomy, our determination to survive—has been degraded and ridiculed.”⁴⁰

Jane Rhodes describes how “[t]he [US] news media played a crucial role in delivering th[e] developing strain of Black protest to a national audience”, with “Black power surfac[ing] as a regular news item in the spring of 1966”.⁴¹ It is important to note that the Black Power movement and BAM comprised a wide range of organizations and individuals who represented divergent views on a range of questions of culture and resistance, but on the whole, “Black radical culture of the 1960s and 1970s [...] created an iconography whose power lay much more in its translatability to commodity culture than in its distance from it.”⁴²

In the African American novels I read here, the process of gaining knowledge of the African American past, in which the memory of Africa is shown to be inherent in known and familiar forms of African American speech and music, is shown ultimately to be experienced through surviving practices linked to African diaspora formations of possession by spirits or by ancestors. This knowledge, evident in Haitian Vodoun but also in American jazz, the blues, and, as this study will show, in contemporary narrative language, is positioned against the specific challenge of American imperialism, but also against a broader obsession with consumer

culture. Consumerism, the valorization of the “new”, is an aesthetic in which spectacle, divorced from tradition, is seen to characterize many aspects of both white hegemony and Black resistance culture. As such, Adolph Reed writes: “Black Power consumerism (as distinguished from Black Power ideology) [...] was regularly criticized as superficial, an inadequate proxy for concerted political thought and action.”⁴³ All the African American writers considered here raise some objection to the performance of “Africanness” epitomized by the Black nationalism of the late 1960s and 1970s, which typifies an American aesthetic of performance and a tendency to emphasize “progress” away from the past. Central to this preoccupation is a certain theatricality, which itself embodies a sense of a fractured temporality. According to Ann Douglas,

Constance Rourke, the finest cultural historian of the [1920s], saw all American culture past and present—politics, religion, advertising, *everything*—as “theatrical”; “Everybody doubled. Everyone had precarious adventures.” [...] Dorothy Parker wrote of that “accursed [American] race that cannot do anything unless they see, before and after, a tableau of themselves in the deed”.⁴⁴

The theatrical sectioning of time between the “before” and the “after” of representation, characteristic of the consumer society, is seen by African American writers to characterize some aspects of Black Power politics. This characteristic of representation is seen as the manifestation, in the realm of signification, of a similar impulse to forget the aspects of African cultural memory that reside in familiar African American traditions, and which typifies an American tendency to situate a present that “progresses” away from the past. The same tendency is seen in Fredric Jameson’s characterization of postmodernism, which (as some would have it) marked the period under discussion in this book, and in which, as Jameson argues, “linguistic malfunction” can be compared to “the psyche of the schizophrenic [...] by way of a twofold proposition”:

first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present; and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.⁴⁵

As Jameson witnesses what he calls a “weakening of historicity”, he perceives a separation between the past, present, and future of signification in postmodern aesthetic forms, which assumes that a historical consciousness can only be made comprehensible if signification occurs in a linear manner.⁴⁶ The African American writers discussed in this study work in a way that is completely contrary to Jameson’s suggestion, emphasizing a restitution of the past through the present *without* the need for signification to be constructed according to a strictly linear temporality. All four writers achieve this by deferring to a realm in which their writing can evoke, or be “possessed” by, the known African American past, which contains remnants of Africanness articulated in ways appropriate for the African American present.

This is the realm of Afro-diasporic traditional cultural and artistic practice which encompasses spirit-possession, and the implications of such traditional practice forms an understanding of the way in which memory and language shape the experience of time. Religious and cultural practices that have been specific to the African diaspora presence, particularly in the Americas and the Caribbean, include Vodoun, Candomblé, Santería, and Obeah, and these

“diasporan religions” [...] share a Western African or Central African heritage (or both); their various gods, rituals, theologies can easily be traced to common roots. But their most characteristic trait is their dynamism. Not only do they differ from each other in significant ways, but even with a system such as Haitian Vodou the vitality and heterogeneity of beliefs belie the notion of a single tradition. If all of these religions can be said to coincide perfectly in one area, it is in their promotion of a ritualized union of the people with the spirit world, in the reciprocity of the link between the spirits and the community.⁴⁷

The dynamic quality of these traditions, their capacity to epitomize the practice of crossing boundaries between worlds, models in this study a similar dynamism in the narrative language of African diaspora fiction, and its capacity to transition between different kinds of knowledge; that is to say, knowledge that is depicted as “everyday”, knowledge of memories of the past, and the knowledge of other worlds accessed through spirit-possession. The cultural memory of Africa thus gains its unique power, I argue in this study, by being located in the *interstices* of narrative language, the spaces where past becomes present and present becomes future, offering in these spaces exciting possibilities for cultural identity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

AFRICA IN A HISTORICAL GAZE: BLACK CULTURAL NATIONALISMS AND THE COLONIAL RELATIONSHIP

If some Black Arts Movement artists were “digging [...] ritualized history”, and its capacity to situate “Africa [...] as a sort of alternative to history”,⁴⁸ Reed, Morrison, Walker and Wideman are all interested in the route of ritual, but instead see this ritual as grounded in a recognizable African American tradition and practice. John Edgar Wideman talks about the

primal language, [...] the language I learned feeling through. [...] That for me is the basis of African-American culture in general—that speaking voice, the voice of the mothers *and* the fathers.⁴⁹

The relation to memory here, as it is felt *in* language, not necessarily as a past which is complete before it encounters language, provides an alternative to the economy of authority which is put in place by a Euro-American modernity, which has been so inextricably linked to a history of separatism and racism. In this way the past is shown to be continuous with—an integral part of—the present. African American writers’ understanding of the relationship between writing and speech, then, and equally between language and memory, more closely corresponds to the perspective suggested by Julia Kristeva, which

disputes the absolute separation of signification from the presymbolic, maternal function. She calls this already-signifying space of the mother the ‘semiotic chora’, which is also ‘the place of the maternal law before the Law’. [...]

The semiotic and the Symbolic are in a particular (Kristevan) dialectical relationship to one another. Maternal signification is chaotic, fluid, involving sound as echolalia, a kind of *music* between mother and child. This unique mother-child relationship [...] threatens the Symbolic order by threatening to do away with difference. The one becomes the other and the word becomes the thing.⁵⁰

The importance of this Kristevan perspective, to the ways in which the African American novelists discussed in this study express the memory of Africa, lies in its capacity to dispute the absolute authority of the present over the past, and of language over the prelinguistic realms (with which memory, in both psychological and cultural terms, has such a dialogic relationship). In Kristeva’s understanding, memory is not separate from

language, and the past is not separate from the present—the relationship between these realms is that of “a difference but [...] not a distinction”.⁵¹ What Kristeva then recognizes, which Jameson does not, is a historical consciousness which acknowledges that signification need not always proceed in linear fashion from the past toward the present; instead, the past can be alive in the present, and this can provide a powerful alternative historical consciousness. Such a perspective is seen in African American fiction as knowledge of both American and African pasts is communicated most effectively when language and memory are discernibly continuous with one another. Where Black writers in America have had to assert a sense of their tradition against the insistence upon a lack of tradition in America, the land where everything is imagined to have begun anew, Black writers in Britain have had to resist, in a somewhat opposite scenario, a hegemonic British insistence upon tradition which is so omnipresent that it threatens to eclipse all other histories.⁵²

The approach toward the cultural memory of Africa, for Black British writers, has also involved an engagement with the ways in which Britain’s historical relationship with Africa, and even more immediately, the Black presence in Britain, has been represented. Peter Fryer has famously written “There were Africans in Britain before the English came here”,⁵³ but in spite of a long history of Black settlement in Britain, reaching back far earlier than the large-scale settlement that occurred in the postwar “Windrush” period, the rhetoric of British politics has always rehearsed the frosty welcome epitomized by Margaret Thatcher’s famous pronouncement:

People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture....The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world, that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.⁵⁴

These words were spoken in January 1978, 30 years after the 1948 Nationality Act, which recognized Commonwealth citizens as British subjects with the right of entry into the UK, and typify a persistent culture of British exclusion of the “other”, which is always accentuated during periods of economic recession. The sheer willful blindness of Thatcher’s pronouncement, what Benita Parry calls “re-presenting the British Empire as a virtuous and successful project” could only be achieved “by deliberately neglecting that imperial conquest meant dispossession, the abuse of

human labour and the pillage of natural resources, the political subordination of indigenous populations, and the racist denigrations of their cultures".⁵⁵ Thatcher's comment, and many other similar comments made by individuals privileged by Britain's ruling structure, could only ever be made in a culture where the long-established imperial and neo-imperial relationship with Africa is never fully acknowledged, and where such continuous and willed acts of forgetting allow for Black people to be seen as "other". Black British fiction, by filling in the spaces and silences of a dominant British history, rereads hegemonic history with a specific knowingness about what has been left out, in order to flag up a lack of innocence amid a British cultural hegemony that takes pride in claiming to have been instrumental in the abolition of slavery, and trumpets its "multicultural" status today.

In this context where Black cultural politics in the USA has such a high profile, and where Britain provides a consistent prevarication over whether Black citizens are considered welcome or not, Black British writers of this generation frequently speak of a personal process of casting about for definitions, role models or points of identification in the process of deciding what it means to be Black in Britain. A perspective represented by Caryl Phillips in "Following On: The Legacy of Lamming and Selvon" is typical of Black British writers of this "second generation":

Given the fact that in the seventies there was not, in this country, what we might term a Black British literary tradition, I looked to the United States. [...] Although I was born in St Kitts, I had been raised and educated in the inner city, in Leeds, and I knew something about the reality of the cold, concrete streets of the city. I could connect with the frustrations of the African-American writers, and I could certainly identify with the dark faces that stared out from their book jackets.⁵⁶

There is here a profound excitement at the assertive ways in which Black identity is framed in US contexts. Yet Phillips also finds that "there was still something missing. Like the British writers such as Golding or Lessing, they [African Americans] were, at least to my eyes, from a different world". Interestingly, the initial excitement at the assertiveness of US Blackness is quickly tempered by a realization of an African American cultural hegemony over the space that Blackness occupies, which then, perhaps surprisingly, can become comparable to a white British cultural hegemony which does not fully recognize Black British identity.

Phillips's vignette illustrates with deceptive simplicity a central axis to the relationship between African American and Black British culture during this period, as he goes on to describe feeling alienated "at this stage [by a] Caribbean literature [...] whose texts had the annoying habit of continually making reference to fruits and flowers and trees which bore no relationship to those I grew up with in Leeds".⁵⁷ Phillips describes his discovery of the writing of Sam Selvon and George Lamming as changing his mind about Caribbean literature, yet it is of significant interest here that what he values in this writing is a Caribbean aesthetic that is articulated in a British setting:

Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* was a revelation to me. I recognized the urban landscape, even though it was presented to me in the most striking Caribbean vernacular. [...] I also recognised the contradictory tension engendered by Selvon's attraction to and rejection by England. [...] The literature was shot through with the uncomfortable anxieties of belonging and not belonging and these same anxieties underscored my life and the lives of many people of my generation in the Britain of the 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁸

While Black British writers draw influence from African American and Caribbean literatures as part of the process of working out a previously uncharted Black British cultural positionality, there is a striking realization at some point that African American identity, for the Black British reader, exerts its own hegemony—it is a hegemony which occurs from the assumption that Blackness situated in the United States can be representative of all Black identities, despite the fact that it does not reflect Black British experience. This hegemony, though of course very different in character, nevertheless becomes comparable here in Phillips's account, and in the different Black British fictions I read here, with the hegemony of white Britain. The compromise which exists at the heart of this Black British gaze toward the USA suggests that African American racial politics of the era bestowed a dual legacy for Black British cultural identity, serving as a point of identification and celebration, and equally as a point of realization that a paradigm which was fully relevant to the experience of being Black in Britain did not currently exist, and thus that new terms needed to be created. These new terms draw from the influence of both US- and Caribbean-situated cultural nationalism, but are made for a new cultural scenario emerging in Black Britain.

This is the "Black Atlantic" in action, what Paul Gilroy has called the "rhizomorphic, fractal structure", which refers to a historical "circulation

of ideas and activists as well as [...] cultural and political artefacts” “across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean”.⁵⁹ Gilroy notes that “the style, rhetoric, and moral authority of the civil rights movement and of Black Power [...] were detached from their original ethnic markers and historical origins, exported and adapted, [...] and rearticulated in distinctively European conditions”.⁶⁰ Gilroy does not elaborate much on this Black British appropriation and “rearticulation” of African American influence, going on instead to emphasize a “common fund of urban experiences, by the effect of similar but by no means identical forms of racial segregation, as well as by the memory of slavery, a legacy of Africanisms, and a stock of religious experiences defined by them both”.⁶¹ The present study might be seen to step into the space that is gestured to here by Gilroy for future scholarship; the dynamic of adaptation and “rearticulation” which Gilroy identifies as characterizing the Black British relationship to an African American cultural legacy bears a structural and aesthetic similarity to what Stuart Hall has called an “essence, of Caribbeanness”,⁶² in which “we might think of Caribbean identities as ‘framed’ by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity and the vector of difference and rupture”.⁶³ Where Hall references the specific contexts of continuity and diversity between African peoples mixed together on slave ships, as well as between diverse Caribbean islands, the persistence of this logic of continuity and disruption can be understood as foundational for African diaspora aesthetics, and provides a key part of understanding the ways in which Black British culture responds to an African American cultural legacy. If African American writing represents an aesthetic of continuity with tradition (in ways which are nevertheless flexible enough to embrace new circumstances), Black British writing embodies a disrupted relationship with tradition and a reach toward innovation.⁶⁴

For the purpose of this comparison, I invoke the Derridean notion of language as a closed system, a discourse beyond which truth can never really be addressed. Derrida’s suggestion that “writing [...] itself has no model, no authentic source to fall back on”⁶⁵ is especially problematic when taken in relation to African American writing, and the instrumental role which is played within the language of these narratives by spirit-possession, or “memory” of the past. While it may be the case, as Juliana de Nooy explains, that “the *chora* and *différance* are provisional names given respectively by Kristeva and Derrida to the unnameable”, for Derrida it is also the case that “the signifier functions in the radical

absence of any permanent link to an immutable signified”.⁶⁶ For Derrida, language itself does not reference the past—his insistence upon “a gap between writing and reading” evokes a view of history which does not credit the possibilities suggested by the presence of ancestors or gods as is known in African diaspora tradition.⁶⁷ Derrida’s view is that language simply references itself, and his theory is thus in radical contrast to Kristeva’s approach: “Although she devotes a great deal of attention to written texts, Kristeva frequently seems to privilege the voice. When the semiotic irrupts into the symbolic, it acts on the signifier by working on syntactical ellipses and gaps in logic, but above all on sound, rhythm, prosody and phonation.”⁶⁸ The implications which can be read from these theories about signification, for understanding what history is, and how it relates to the present, are foundational for this study.

The historical engagement with Derrida’s notion of *différance*, by African American critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Jamaican/Black British thinker Stuart Hall, respectively, serves as an interesting and culturally influential model for my thoughts about language and memory in the novels I read here. *Différance* is

a neologism that Derrida coined in order to suggest how meaning is at once ‘differential’ and ‘deferred’, the product of a restless play within language that cannot be fixed or pinned down for the purposes of conceptual definition. [...] [I]n Derrida’s view, [...] meaning is nowhere punctually *present* in language, [...] it is always subject to a kind of semantic slippage (or deferral) which prevents the sign from ever (so to speak) coinciding with itself in a moment of perfect, remainderless grasp.⁶⁹

Derrida’s insistence that meaning is not present in language is a position which I argue is disputed in African American fiction and yet affirmed in Black British fiction. The contention that meaning is not present in language reflects a “postmodern” view that history has disappeared. African American fiction of this era registers the tendencies to take such a view, particularly in some Black nationalist approaches, and yet makes very clear the presence of the past within the narrative present, through tropes of spirit-possession.

I show then, in this book, that African American authors eschew any understanding of language as unconnected to the past, by drawing upon a rich Afro-diasporan tradition of spirit-possession, in which the past continually, and with the greatest of ease, visits the present. Yet, Derrida’s

particular formulation, which suggests that language has no “past”, and has only an unattainable future, is conversely, peculiarly apt for the comparison between language use in African American and Black British fiction—for in the Black British case, what Stuart Hall calls the “infinite postponement of meaning” which is invoked by Derrida’s notion of *différance*, serves well in a setting where Black British identity is felt to have a paucity of reference points in the past, and to signify with utmost creativity and promise as it signals toward the future.

In spite of Derrida’s view of language which, I would argue, works according to a logic completely alienated from the possibilities of possession embodied by African diaspora tradition, Gates turns to Derrida for a key part of his framework on “Signifyin(g)” (his term for vernacular language play).⁷⁰ In this way, Michel Feith has observed, “the cultural facts of diaspora can be theorized as *différance*”⁷¹:

Some historical Black community of speakers [...] defined their ontological status as one of profound difference vis-à-vis the rest of society. What’s more, they undertook this act of self-definition [...] within the process of signification.⁷²

To my mind, Gates invokes *différance* as a way of bringing attention to the place of human agency in the space between signifier and signified (or language and memory) in African American cultural practices of “Signifyin(g)”. As part of what he calls a concern with “defin[ing] a carefully structured system of rhetoric”⁷³ at the heart of African American vernacular culture, Gates invokes the gesture embodied by Derrida’s naming of *différance*, to encompass “the relationship that Black ‘Signification’ bears to the English ‘signification’ [as], paradoxically, a relation of difference inscribed within a relation of identity”.⁷⁴ By situating Derrida’s figure of signification as representative of a very human and contestatory intervention into language as a tool of representation, Gates’s account of African American vernaculars curiously contradicts Derrida’s contention that language does not contain meaning or history. In Gates’s use of Derrida, he represents *différance* as a moment in which the action of historical agency is very much felt as present—a relationship to signification where, just as in the action of the archetypal Afro-diasporan trickster, meaning evades grasp, but the action of the trickster is inappropriately situated as *différance*. Gates, then, I would suggest, allows us to see, in language as well as in a theory of language, an acute prevarication at the

heart of Black nationalist cultural politics in the 1970–2000 moment in African American culture.

Writing from Black British contexts, Stuart Hall emphasizes, by contrast, the future-orientation of the process named *différance*; the ever-deferred site of meaning. In “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation”, Hall envisions a “Caribbean” sensibility which I argue forms an important template for Black British approaches to memory and historiography, and invokes Derrida’s notion of *différance*:

[T]he idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification.”⁷⁵ This second sense of difference [...] shows how meaning is never finished or completed in this way, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings, which, as Norris puts it elsewhere, “disturb the classical economy of language and representation”.⁷⁶ [...] [W]hat is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialized.⁷⁷

Coincidentally or not, Hall’s words invoke (or are invoked by) the Soul II Soul anthem “Keep On Moving” (1989), which Paul Gilroy cites as emblematic of the “special mood of restlessness” dominating “the expressive cultures of the Black Atlantic world’ a Black transatlantic conversation”.⁷⁸ These words, used by Hall, Gilroy, and Soul II Soul, testify not only to patterns of migration past, present, and future, which inform Black British experience, but even more interestingly for the purposes of my argument, to the processes of *signifying* identity in modes where representation is potentially ever deferred to the future. Hall’s is a concept so articulate and widely relevant in its application, that it can be thought through as applying to this study in a way that is threefold: to conceptualize the vivid channels of tension and inspiration which form the relationship between African American and Black British writing and culture; to formulate a sense of the particular circumstances in which Black British culture finds routes beyond tradition into contemporary modes of self-fashioning; and as a model particularly applicable to *being contemporary* in an age where many of us, whatever our ethnic or cultural *habitus*, find ourselves in ambivalent relationship with tradition and the past. Gates’s emphasis, in his use of Derrida’s theory, is upon the space between memory and utterance, while Hall’s is upon the future toward which language gestures. The contrasting ways in which Gates in his account of African American aesthetics, and Hall in his account of Caribbean and Black

British identities, engage with Derrida's theoretical turn, forms part of my foundational argument about the time of narrative language and its relationship to memory.⁷⁹

I read the novels I have selected to discuss here, in chronological order of their dates of publication. My aim throughout this work is to assess the legacy of key moments in race relations, in the shaping of what "Africanness" means, in African American and Black British writing, focusing upon the survival and rearticulation of the cultural memory of Africa as it relates to both tradition and innovation in British and American texts. With an eye to the importance of the framing of "Africa" during the Black Power era of the Civil Rights movement, I show how Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) comments critically on the preoccupation with African "origins", which he sees as a recurrent concern central to post-Civil Rights ideologies of both racism and resistance, and indeed as formative to Western culture itself. Reed's "Jes Grew" figures a fluid living link between African American culture and African tradition through an aesthetic which allows for the practice of "possession" and the language of the "semiotic" to exist alongside an acknowledgment of a linear historical mode. The difficulty of articulating this fluid link in narrative language is, I show with reference to Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), grounded in the exploitative history of imperial approaches toward Africa and African peoples, so that the cultural memory of Africa is most frequently found to reside in the "silent" parts of language. These are what Morrison herself calls the "nonlinear, nonliterate spaces" which are gestured to symbolically, to vividly illustrate the concept of the semiotic as an economy of signification that apprehends the possibility of moving free of the inequities of imperial relations. Such an emancipatory field of discourse, which African American literature frequently inhabits, is also found, I show, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983). In this novel, Walker inhabits reconciliatory processes related to a tradition of West African "mother wit", as a powerful practice of overcoming notions of "difference", but she sabotages the potential for speech to navigate freely across differentials of time and space in approach toward Africa, as a result of anxieties around the hybrid possibilities of African American culture and the sexual conflict at the heart of Black Power politics. With my reading of John Edgar Wideman's 1990 novel *Philadelphia Fire*, I move toward the ways in which trauma, experienced on a systemic scale in the contemporary urban environment, engenders a widespread amnesia signified by the relationship to the cultural memory of Africa. Yet even as Africa might represent fracture in that scenario, it also holds the

possibility for healing, as Wideman's writing reveals a common "language that comprehends all the senses", grounded in his own African American community as much as it is in traditional African knowledge, and thereby accessing a "semiotic" sensibility for a multimedia age.

Black British writing explores the significance of the cultural memory of Africa in part through the influence of the visibility of a Black Power inheritance hailing from the USA, but often very quickly reaches the limits of the usefulness of that African American inheritance. Black writing in Britain is centrally concerned with Britain's equivocal relationship with the representation of its Black populations before and since "Windrush", and so often must reach beyond what has been preserved by the historical archive in order to discover meaningful ways of relating to the cultural memory of Africa. In *Crossing the River* (1991), Caryl Phillips uses pastiche of historical documents to show the ways in which language has been used to record a particular version of memory, from which Britain's Black presence has frequently been excised, and defers instead to the fragile quality of the spoken voice in order to emphasize the role of individuality, in establishing the fluid category of Black British cultural identity. S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World* (1996) imagines the lives of Black people in eighteenth-century London, and brings a keen emphasis to the role of fiction in bringing to life histories which have been systematically suppressed, offering an embodied sense of the Black British historical enterprise of bringing history *back to life* (to recall another Soul II Soul classic); in this celebration of the space of fiction, there is a *return* to a Caribbean space identified as "creolized", an oral space where histories that do not fit into the textual can be told. Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997) effects an exemplary instance of the practice of "utter[ing] the mysteries of the spirit" which recalls the form of memory identified as "African" in African American writing, but which in this context instead represents the sheer diversity of cultural influences that contribute to the creation of a Black British identity. David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* (1998) posits a scheme of "creative amnesia", which allows a complete forgetfulness through which "memories" of Africa might paradoxically emerge. Through the appeal to the individual imagination, Dabydeen's work serves as a powerful response to African diasporic traditions of possession so central to African American perspectives, *but* emphasizes yet another dimension of a Black British approach that affirms memory as an individualistic, idiosyncratic process capable of establishing identity in a manner that is unashamedly composite. Though African American and

Black British legacies both encompass multitudes of lost and unrecorded stories, African American fiction emphasizes *retrieval* through the action enabled by possession of the past, while Black British writing elevates the role of performance and imagination as space for breathing life into lost archives. In presenting these readings, I seek to affirm a renewed sense of hope in the depth of possibilities for communication through narrative language, when we take the time to see the ways in which our histories are articulated, and can never be fully articulated, through the written and spoken word. There is a huge potential here, I want to show, for cross-cultural understanding which can be explored on a number of levels, in the ongoing crises of race relations in the contemporary time.

NOTES

1. Stephen Tuck, "Black Britain, and the Special Relationship on Race," *American Historical Review*, 118.1 (February 2013): 79.
2. Stephen Tuck, Introduction to *The other special relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, ed. Robin D.G. Kelley and Stephen Tuck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015: 3.
3. See Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007 [1984, 1991]).
4. I borrow this term from Alan Rice, "'Heroes across the Sea': Black and White Fascination with African Americans in the Contemporary Black British Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Jackie Kay," in *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez (New York: Routledge, 2004), 229.
5. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 8.
6. Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, (New York: Henry Holt Co. 2011); Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Nico Slate, *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).
7. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
8. Vice website, "The Amazing Lost Legacy of the British Black Panthers," http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/neil-kenlocks-photos-give-the-british-Black-panthers-the-legacy-they-deserve/page/0

9. Anne-Marie Angelo, "The Black Panthers in London, 1967–1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic," *Radical History Review* 2009 Volume 2009, Number 103: 17–35.
10. Stephen Tuck, *The Night Malcolm X Spoke at the Oxford Union*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 181.
11. Conrad Landin, *The Independent*, cited in, Robin Bunce and Paul Field, front matter in *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015 [2014]). In the preface to the paperback edition, the authors ask "why the history of grassroots Black struggle against racism in Britain had, for the most part, been neglected by mainstream historians and commentators. Why is it that so many British schools teach the history of the civil rights movement in the United States, but so few teach the history of Black Power in Britain?" (Bunce and Field, *Darcus Howe*, viii).
12. Alison Donnell, introduction to *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, ed. Alison Donnell (London: Routledge, 2002), xii.
13. Mark Stein, "Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature", *Kunapipi*, 20.2 (1998), 79. Citing Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement* (London: New Beacon, 1992), xviii.
14. Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities", in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 164. Reprinted from *ICA Documents. Black Film British Cinema*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts), 7 (1988), 27–31.
15. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 291.
16. James Procter, "General introduction: 1948/1998 Periodising postwar Black Britain," In *Writing Black Britain, 1948–1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Procter. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 6. Citing Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 233–58.
17. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "A Reporter At Large: Black London," in *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu, (London: Routledge, 2000), 178. Reprinted from *The New Yorker* (April 28 & May 6, 1997).
18. Procter, "General introduction," 194–96.
19. Stein, "Cultures of Hybridity," 80.
20. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 211.
21. Douglas E. Thomas, *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 7. Thomas cites John Mbiti, in turn cited in Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral*

- Traditions of Abundant Life*, 6, quoting Burleson, *John Mbiti: The Dialogue of an African Theologian with African Traditional Religion* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986), 12. Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 3. Daniel says an “example of intra-African syncretism is found in the name for one of the Afro-Brazilian religions, Candomblé, a Yoruba-based religious practice that is also called Nago/Ketu for the prominence of particular types of Yoruba peoples, those of the Nago and Ketu nations. The word ‘Candomblé’, however, comes from Bantu language origins in Central Africa, and not from the heavy West African religious core of the belief system. Thus, a West African religion came to be known by a Central African title.” (Ibid.)
22. Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation”, 216. I argue for the distinctiveness of African American and Black British semantic approaches toward the cultural memory of Africa, not therefore distinguishing for instance between novels where travel to an African setting is represented, and those where it is not. All of the novels discussed here are influenced to some extent by the notion of Africa as a “natural utopia”, even if their response is to rail against such an idea (Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2002. 23–35).
 23. Joan Anim-Addo, *Touching the Body: History, Language and African-Caribbean Women’s Writing*. (London: Mango Publishing, 2007), 22.
 24. Martin Heidegger, “The Way to Language”, trans. David Farrell Krell, orig. 1959, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell, (Krell. London: Routledge, 2011 [1978],) 295.
 25. Phillips and Dabydeen can both also be thought of as Caribbean writers.
 26. Michelle M. Wright, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 50.
 27. V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
 28. Dave Gunning, *Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 24.
 29. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*”, *Representations* 26. (Spring 1989), 8.
 30. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 8.
 31. Keith Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables and Gothic Tales*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004 [2002]), 5. citing Miller, 1985, 23.
 32. Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” 218.
 33. I am thinking here particularly of Cartwright, Gilroy 1993 and Wright 2014.

34. Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature*, 6.
35. Ibid. Cartwright's terms arise from Morrison's use of the term "Africanist" to describe the racial prejudice, fears and unconscious longing which governs a multiracial (and yet nominally "white") American culture (Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. London: Picador, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1993 [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992].
36. Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature*, 6.
37. James Smethurst, "Black Arts Movement," In *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 77–81.
38. Mary Ellen Lennon, "A Question of Relevancy: New York Museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971", *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. ed. Lisa Gail Collins & Margo Crawford. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 96.
39. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. (London: Verso, 1993), 191.
40. Mary Ellen Lennon, "A Question of Relevancy", 95.
41. Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*. (New York: The New Press, 2007), 60.
42. Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 52.
43. Adolph Reed Jr., "The Allure of Malcolm X and the Changing Character of Black Politics," In *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 209.
44. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, (London: Picador, 1995), 55.
45. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (London: Verso, 1991), 26–27.
46. Ibid., 6.
47. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds., *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 3.
48. Smethurst, "Black Arts Movement," 78, 82.
49. Matteo Bellinelli, dir. *In Black and White: Conversations with African-American Writers—Part Six: John Wideman*. (RTSI-Swiss Television, 1992), emphasis added.
50. Susan Huddleston Edgerton, "Re-membering the Mother Tongue(s): Toni Morrison, Julie Dash and the Language of Pedagogy," *Cultural Studies*, 9.2 (May 1995), 350–51. [Huddleston cites Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 46.]
51. Ibid.

52. Interestingly, Ishmael Reed makes a comment at one point in *Mumbo Jumbo* which specifically foregrounds this contrast with the comment that, "if in the 1920s the British say 'The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire', the American motto is 'There's a Sucker Born Every Minute'", evoking a historical context in which a sense of linear time, in one way or another, dominates a hegemonic cultural sensibility—in the American case denoting an obsession with escaping the past, in the British case an elevation of the past.
53. Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. (London: Pluto Press, 1984).
54. Ibid., 397. As quoted, *Daily Mail*, January 31, 1978, 1.
55. Benita Parry, address at the University of York upon receipt of Honorary Degree, July 12, 2006.
56. Caryl Phillips, "Following On: The Legacy of Lamming and Selvon," *Wasafiri*, 29 (Spring 1999), 34.
57. Ibid., 35.
58. Ibid.
59. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 4.
60. Ibid., 82.
61. Ibid., 82–83.
62. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 211. Reprinted from *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, 1990.
63. Ibid., 213.
64. I am referring to African American literature in "traditional" (antebellum) contexts here (and throughout this work), not the newer literature which comes from Africans settled in the contemporary USA.
65. Christopher Norris, *Derrida*. (London: Fontana Press, 1987), 51.
66. Juliana de Nooy. *Derrida, Kristeva, and the Dividing Line: An Articulation of Two Theories of Difference*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 21; 102.
67. Ibid., 101. Myrian Sepulveda Santos comments: "Like Foucault, and Nietzsche before them both, Derrida does not believe that social and political thinkers can bring the past into the present, either by recognition, or by the interpretation of its form or content without carrying all the constraints that are within the present. History, oral history, cultural history, tradition, memory, reflexive memory, mnemonic memory, psychoanalysis, none of them hold the possibility of going beyond the order of name." [Myrian Sepulveda Santos, "Memory and Narrative in Social Theory: The contributions of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin," *Time & Society*, 10 (2001): 174].
68. Ibid., 101–102.

69. Norris's summation of Derrida is cited here for its economical elegance. Derrida writes: "The signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences." Jaques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 286.
70. Feith argues that Gates's perspective represents a level of compromise reflective of the imperiled status of African American culture in the academy at the time.
71. Michel Feith, "Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Signifying Monkey*: A Diasporic Critical Myth," In *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 73.
72. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 47.
73. Ibid., 44.
74. Ibid., 45.
75. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 32.
76. Norris, *Derrida*, 1987, 15.
77. Hall, "Cultural Identity," 215.
78. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 111.
79. In this argument I differ from that offered by Yogita Goyal, who asserts a reclaim of "temporality and territoriality" from the atemporal web of Gilroy's Black Atlantic, her notion of "diaspora time" is still fundamentally linear in nature, "recalling the trauma of the Middle Passage and looking forward to the Jubilee"—my study, by contrast, finds through its specific analysis of language an important and contextualized negotiation of *nonlinearity* in the literatures it examines. Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.

PART I

African American Aesthetics

“Drumbeats From the Aeons”: Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*

In the first part of this book, I show the ways in which four important African American novels published between 1970 and 2000 make a case, in diverse ways, for a cultural memory of Africa which is living and accessible in known African American artforms and speech. This presents a strong contrast with the treatment of the cultural memory of Africa in Black British fiction, which reaches toward a tendency, not to argue for recognizable forms of African cultural memory which are found established in Black British tradition as such, but instead to dramatize the ways in which Africanness might form part of a Black British culture which can articulate its own inventive and innovative relationship with the past.

Mumbo Jumbo positions a serious, almost exhaustive, and yet highly sardonic, cultural history in which Afro-diasporic possessive traditions are traced back to Ancient Egypt. Reed situates practices epitomized by Caribbean, Latin American, and African American artforms including Vodoun, jazz, and a range of dance forms, simultaneously as specific to African diaspora culture, and as an aspect of human experience which is, quite simply, open to anyone. Reed documents the persistence of an obsession (both Euro-American and African American) with African origins, and how it is tied to imperialist theft. Here the author responds to Black Power and Afrocentric paradigms which have sometimes been seen to situate an African inheritance in terms of a lofty idealism lodged in an

ancient past, while simultaneously forgetting African diaspora tradition altogether in favor of a “new” Black culture. In contrast to that tendency, Reed elaborates a system of African diaspora culture which is both ancient and endlessly innovative, which is not only linked to Africa but also forged in the experience of transatlantic diaspora. He also makes a deliberate case for the distinctive and established power of African American and African diaspora culture and tradition as modes of “remembering” the cultural memory of Africa in the Americas. To this end, Reed builds a pastiche of a wide range of written texts and images, as part of a practice in which previously existing texts can be seen to “possess” the novel. He thus figures the troubled question of “cultural appropriation” as potentially equated to the possession of the textual present by the past.

This existence of the past in textual form occurs in distinctive contrast to the way in which the Black British author Caryl Phillips, for instance, uses pastiche (Phillips’s work is the subject of Chap. 6). Phillips mixes archival records with fictional invention in order to evoke a sense of the real lives which were lived in the Black British past (which includes the encounter with Africa), but not recorded, and which exist “beyond the page”. Reed’s clear insistence upon the survival of fluid forms of African cultural memory in “text” (even if text is also conceived as an oral text), is in marked contrast to the Black British writing in which the documentation of the past is explicitly invoked to show the ways in which language has been used to exclude Britain’s Black presence. In those contexts, explored later in the book, narrative approach toward Africa may invoke African diaspora tradition, but does so in a way which reinvents identity for the present and the future.

Mumbo Jumbo opens in the midst of the “Jazz Age” in 1920s New Orleans, and characterizes the era as a manifestation of a “psychic epidemic” called Jes Grew, which is causing people to be “twisting they butts and getting happy”.¹ As the novel’s “anti-plague”,² “Jes Grew spreads through America”³ and Reed’s animated descriptions of “Jes Grew Carriers” show them “rubberlegging for dear life; bending over backwards to admit their loa”.⁴ Jes Grew is figured in the novel as being expressed through distinctive African American cultural forms which characterized the 1920s “Harlem Renaissance”—“The Blues is a Jes Grew, as James Weldon Johnson surmised. Jazz was a Jes Grew which followed the Jes Grew of Ragtime. Slang is a Jes Grew too.”⁵ Jes Grew is also, however, shown to be both a repetition of and a parallel to the culture of previous eras, as the end of the novel also depicts the 1970s as a time when “Jes

Grew was [again] latching onto its blood",⁶ and its lineage is furthermore charted to an Ancient Egyptian "theater accompanying [...] agriculturalists' rites".⁷ Even as Jes Grew is shown to be illustrative of an African American and African tradition, it is also a possessive force—"Jes Grew is life"⁸ itself—and the novel shows that it can arise at any given moment, and is available to anyone who presents the frame of mind to receive it.

Reed's figure of "Jes Grew" may be imagined, then, to be a collective term for possessive forces, as well as for the state of being possessed, and while it is linked to a tradition specific to African American, Caribbean and African cultures, it is also a state which may be known to have an allegorical character, that is to be available at any time, to anyone who is able to present the right frame of mind to receive it.⁹ In total and complete denial of this fluid character of Afro-diaspora culture, the Harlem Renaissance was a moment when, as Ann Douglas puts it, the term "New Negro" was used to "signal [...] a fresh beginning",¹⁰ in line with making Black artforms marketable to white patrons, in the process imposing a false break upon Black artistic tradition. The sheer transcendental power of African diaspora culture was thus denied, and as Robert Elliott Fox puts it, these "attempts to create discontinuities in the tradition" leads Reed to ask "What is really 'new' about the New Negro?"¹¹

Instrumental to Reed's work of allowing diverse relationships to Africa to co-exist in *Mumbo Jumbo* is the turn that he makes toward the African diaspora culture represented by, and linked to, Haitian Vodoun. Vodoun (also Voodoo, Vodou and Vaudon), is "the oldest, least understood, and perhaps most maligned of all Afro-Caribbean belief systems, [...] born in the Dahomedan, Congolese, and Nigerian regions of West Africa and [...] filtered through Roman Catholic symbolism and liturgical traditions".¹² Vodoun's hybrid forms, in the Americas, have served to connect disparate realms, and to situate "over there" (Africa) in the here and now (Americas). Its thorough and brutal defamation in US culture (particularly as signified by Hollywood) not only underscores the history of an American repression of its own "dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence"¹³ but also serves as one way of explaining why the practice of remembering Africa, in African American culture, often enters into covert realms of representation (this important point will be discussed further in Chap. 3).¹⁴

Reed terms his own expression of this culture "Neo Hoodoo because it doesn't begin with me", and elaborates upon this in some depth in *Mumbo Jumbo*, as well as in other works such as his poetry collection *catechism of a neoamerican hoodoo church* (1970) and his volume of essays *Shrovetide*

in *Old New Orleans* (1978).¹⁵ Explaining that “hoodoo involved art [...], dancing, painting, poetry, it was multi-media”,¹⁶ Reed understands it to be “what Black Americans came up with”,¹⁷ “as opposed to Obeahism in Jamaica and other islands and Voodooism in Haiti”.¹⁸ Reed’s use of Vodoun/Hoodoo therefore allows him to emphasize the connection which has been established between African American and Caribbean cultures, via the Southern states, through slavery and the antebellum period. These cultural forms are “based upon African forms of art”¹⁹; they reference a living connection to a cultural memory of Africa which is significant and known, yet the specific geographical provenance of their African cultural antecedents, due to the various enforced and voluntary migrations which have shaped African diaspora culture, may often be diffuse.²⁰

The novel’s “astrodetective” PaPa LaBas,²¹ figures as only one incarnation of Reed’s “trickster” aesthetic, which is of key importance in his approach toward the cultural memory of Africa in *Mumbo Jumbo*. LaBas works in Harlem, in his “Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral”, ensuring that the loa (the Vodoun/Hoodoo term of possessive spirits) are each “fed, celebrated, drummed to until it deserts the horse and *govi* of its host and goes on about its business”.²² The trickster figure Legba is the god who, in Vodoun ritual practice, is always called upon first, in order that any other god can travel through or do their work. PaPa LaBas’s name, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes, “is a conflation of two of the several names of Esu, our Pan-African trickster [...] and his presence unites ‘over there’ (Africa) with ‘right here’”.²³

Trickster, in African diaspora ritual tradition:

Speak[s] eloquently of an unbroken arc of metaphysical pre-supposition and a pattern of figuration shared through time and space among certain Black cultures in West Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and the United States.[...] Esu[-Elegbara] is the guardian of the crossroads, master of style and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane.²⁴

Trickster represents a historical and cultural linkage between the Americas and Africa, and also embodies an aesthetic of communication between those sites of culture, between the worlds of the living and the dead, and far beyond even that, between the worlds of cultural history and divine comedy. The trickster (known in one of his Caribbean manifestations as Anansi the spider) also represents the possibilities of evading and slipping through the boundaries of a master discourse through the fluid and

flexible tool of humor, an aesthetic which works in Reed's novel to allow multiple and often contradictory histories and perspectives to stand alongside each other. So remarkable is the trickster that as well as being specifically representative of the linkages which constitute a distinctive and continuous African diaspora culture, it is *also* potentially universal, a symbol of global culture which nevertheless has specific localized provenances and manifestations. Ricki Stefanie Tannen writes:

Trickster is of worldwide origin and is [...] one of the most universal of folk tales. There is Coyote of the North American Plains Indians, Great Hare of the Woodland tribes of the North and East who became the inspiration for the Br'er Rabbit stories of the American South, and Raven and Blue Jay from the North West American Coast. From Africa come many tales of the signifying monkey and Anansi the Spider. Recently discovered tales of archaic origins have been found in Maui, Polynesia, Australia and New Zealand. From Europe we have Reynard the Fox, Loki the Mischief Maker and a variety of clowns and buffoons. [...]

Trickster figures have been with us for between 30,000 and 50,000 years.²⁵ The first Trickster tales come from those North American Indians who travelled from Asia over the Bering Straits when there was a land bridge between the continents of Asia and North America.²⁶

The African diaspora, then, is only one of the sites of trickster—and trickster functions both as a signpost recalling a universal common ancestry *and* as a constantly contemporary, ever adaptable mode of expression which communicates across boundaries of difference or distance. This aesthetic is formative to the complex and brilliant approach to the cultural memory of Africa in *Mumbo Jumbo*.

Through a trickster aesthetics, Reed conceives of a cultural memory of Africa as part of a perspective so fluid and flexible that it can be interpreted to lie at the center of a narrative of racial essence, and at the same time function at the heart of a non-racial ideology. Reed thus simultaneously resists and circumvents the ongoing racist approaches of much hegemonic American discourse about Africa and its diasporic culture. Reed's purpose in doing this is to restore the status of African American tradition, in all its brilliance, against what he sees as consistent and violent attempts to essentialize, co-opt, and sell African and African diaspora culture (for either monetary or political gain), which have recurred across a number of historical and cultural sites. Reed asserts the continuous nature of African cultural memory within African American traditions which are distinctive

yet well established—he positions this in counterpoint to Black Power aesthetics which insist on a “new” Black culture.

PaPa LaBas enables Reed to comment in highly equivocal terms upon the notion of a “linear” relationship with African ancestors, and its importance for the African diaspora present:

Some say his ancestor is the long Ju Ju of Arno in eastern Nigeria [...] Whoever his progenitor, whatever his lineage, his grandfather it is known was brought to America on a slave ship mixed in with other workers who were responsible for bringing African religion to the Americas where it survives to this day.²⁷

A lineage drawn “back to Africa” may be more or less well remembered, and in such terms could be established in the “serious” realms of cultural history, yet Reed’s description also highlights the attributes of a diaspora historical inheritance in which uncertainty itself is a key feature. Reed occupies quite a radical position, writing in the context of the African American cultural politics of the early 1970s, when Black political choice may have seemed at most times limited to a choice between tradition represented as linked to the antebellum period, or an alternative which valorized ancient African empires. By situating PaPa LaBas’s “African lineage” as one which is affirmed for the importance and the richness of its tradition, and yet which may not be precisely mappable, Reed reserves the value of uncertainty and its humane importance, as a site of resistance against the dehumanizing possibilities sometimes associated with more affirmative notions of Blackness.

Reed’s novel situates an obsession with the “new” as a cornerstone of American consumer culture, and *Mumbo Jumbo* presents the settings of the 1920s “Harlem Renaissance”, alongside an Ancient Egyptian history, to show how the concern with cultural “originality” has always been set up *against* knowledge of tradition, and how such moments of extraordinary African diaspora creativity have occurred, in conjunction with a notable cultural amnesia as regards tradition, in ongoing historical cycles. In the cultural history which is presented at all times in this novel with both probing seriousness and high comedy, Africa is situated not as a site of cultural “origins” or beginnings (and the novel makes any such notion highly problematic in any case) but as a site where the notion of origins, crucially, was first situated in contestation with tradition.

Hilariously enough, it is *Atonism itself*, the impulse to “Knock [Jes Grew] Dock It Co-opt It”,²⁸ which is shown to have “originated” in

ancient Egypt, and yet the notion of firsts or "origins" of culture is also sent up, as the young Osiris's jealous brother Set "establish[es] his own religion based upon Aton (the Sun's flaming disc)".²⁹ Just as Set may be understood as "a frustrated control freak who epitomizes the constraints of a civilization invested in promoting only a single vision",³⁰ a certain amnesia with regard to the multiplicity of experience and the plurality of historical memory is regarded as symptomatic of a Euro-American neurosis, which also has characterized the historical encounter with Africa. Ending up "in such a state that he believed that the Sun was dependent on him and thus he would walk around in circles all day thinking that when he walked the Sun made its course about the planet",³¹ Set is identified as "the 1st man to shut nature out of himself".³² Even this appellation may reveal a sardonic approach toward the naming of "firsts", as Reed spoofs the obsession with identifying origins. Set's friends, the "legislators, an unpopular group of poets" are for instance "sarcastically called [...] The First Poets because in Egypt at the time of Osiris every man was an artist and every artist a priest".³³ The naming of a "Black aesthetic", so central to the impetus behind the Black Arts Movement (BAM), is insidiously identified by Reed as reaching toward a realm of commodification and forgetting which becomes alienated from the holistic view of time illustrated by African diaspora spiritual and artistic traditions.

Through his trickster aesthetics, Reed evokes the 1920s, which according to Ann Douglas, was also a moment in which America became obsessed with the "new", and Reed engages with that period in order to send up his contemporary culture of the 1960s and 1970s, including postmodernism *and* any "new" Black aesthetics, as much as the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and its white patronage of "the New Negro". Reed articulates a discomfort with the idea of a "new" Black culture, as sometimes represented in BAM aesthetics, because it represents the insidious presence of a rationale which begins in an imperialist and racist degradation of African and African diaspora tradition. Writing in the immediate wake of the Civil Rights movement, Reed comments satirically in *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) on the preoccupation with African "origins" (another way of articulating the notion that culture itself could ever be "new"), which he sees as a recurrent concern in Western culture, and as central to ideologies of both racism and resistance in the American racial politics of the period. Reed makes merciless fun of an effort which he observes in Black nationalist politics of the 1960s–1970s period to elevate the notion of a "new" Black aesthetic, as being more important to a culture of resistance, than the inventive and adaptable artforms of an established African American tradition.

The Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s was considered “in many respects [...] the cultural wing of the Black Power Movement”.³⁴ Reed emerged as part of the “vanguard”³⁵ of the BAM, and he has indeed paid tribute to BAM founders Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, respectively as “revolutionar[y]”³⁶ and as “the impetus for my Neo Hoodoo Manifesto”.³⁷ Yet Reed, in common with all the African American writers discussed in this study, is vitally concerned with challenging BAM’s notion of a “Black aesthetic ideology [that] severed Black art from Black traditions”.³⁸ BAM promoted the “self-conscious construction of a *new* Black aesthetic”³⁹; and while attempts to define the parameters of this “new Black aesthetic” were by no means uniform across the wide range of artists encompassed by BAM, one of the key ideas was the view given by Maulana Ron Karenga, and taken up principally by Amiri Baraka and Haki Mukubuti (Don L. Lee), that Black art “should expose the enemy and raise Black consciousness”.⁴⁰ Some BAM practitioners explicitly differentiated this “new” Black culture, in which resistance was of key importance, against existing African American traditions as encapsulating a modality in which resistance was seen to be absent: “Karenga, for example, complained that the blues enabled an acceptance of existing realities, while Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) remarked in his poem ‘Don’t Cry, Scream’: ‘All the blues did was / make me cry.’”⁴¹ The “countercultural” Black nationalist “claim to ancient Egypt”, McAlister notes, “would eventually fuel the rise of Afrocentrism in the 1980s”,⁴² and promoted the notion that “If ancient Egypt was reclaimed as a Black civilization, then ‘civilization’ could be claimed for Blacks. And this was not just *a* civilization, but *the* foundation of ‘Western civilization.’”⁴³ This perspective is one strongly objected to by Paul Gilroy who notes the way in which it asserts the “anteriority of African civilisation to western civilisation [...] not in order to escape this linear time but in order to claim it and thus subordinate its narrative of civilisation to a different set of political interests without even attempting to change the terms themselves”.⁴⁴

All four of the African American novels discussed in this study voice a clear protest against this aspect of Black Power, in which established traditions of African American arts, culture, and folkways were sometimes interpreted to represent a culture of resigned suffering, in comparison to BAM’s professed desire, as Amiri Baraka famously put it, for “poems that kill”.⁴⁵ Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and John Edgar Wideman, though they may differ stylistically and often politically, are all committed to the power of resistance which is exerted by a literature which lives within a distinctive and known African American tradition, and which speaks resistance as a living language of the everyday in contemporary and

historical African American communities. The culture which Reed draws "back to Africa", then, is a culture of transcendental knowledge—it presents almost the broadest possible interpretation of cultural belonging, and it is Atonism, which encapsulates a regime of domination, cultural theft, uniformity and imperialism, which is seen in Africa, in Europe *and* in America in Reed's scheme, to exemplify a history of traumatic severance from this ecstatic realm of knowledge.

By evoking 1920s America, Reed also dramatizes a moment in which, Ann Douglas has identified, "America-at-large was separating itself culturally from England and Europe, [while] Black America, in an inevitable corollary movement, was recovering its own heritage from the dominant white culture."⁴⁶ Douglas comments that the 1920s was "the first age of the media, [and] the first generation to grasp the supremacy that mass culture would acquire".⁴⁷ Melani McAlister observes that "Reed establishes the [...] three narrative times [of the novel—the 1920s, the 1970s and Ancient Egypt –] as allegorical transpositions of each other",⁴⁸ and imagines "each moment [...] in a kind of continuous awareness of and interdependence with the others".⁴⁹ The 1920s, according to Ann Douglas, was characterized by a perspective that "looked histrionically to the imminent end of Western civilization" but chose a "route there [that] was pure theater".⁵⁰ The symptoms of Jes Grew are indeed described with an overblown theatricality expressive of the 1920s moment:

He said he felt like the gut heart and lungs of Africa's interior. He said he felt like the Kongo: "Land of the Panther." [...] He said he felt he could dance on a dime.⁵¹

The performance of an "Africanness" is situated, laughably, as entirely unrelated to African diaspora tradition, and can be read as Reed's pointed commentary upon Black Power in the 1960s, and the possibility that its own version of commodification represents a "theatrical" sectioning of the time of signification, to present "Blackness" as an iconography or artifact which can be bought or sold.

RADICALLY PRESENT: WHEN THE DEAD ARE NOT DEAD

It is highly ironic, given the care that Reed takes to situate his work within an established and variegated African diaspora tradition, that Fredric Jameson, in his infamous text, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, lists Reed among "producers of culture [who] have nowhere to turn but to

the past [and] the imitation of dead styles".⁵² Jeffrey Ebbesen remarks that "voodoo and western poststructuralist theories are not really based on the same beliefs",⁵³ and comments, crucially, that "in Reed's case [Jameson's] global claim [...] forgets African-American artistic history".⁵⁴ While Jameson's notion of the "dead" indicates a past which has simply disappeared, leaving behind only its "dead language",⁵⁵ Reed's conceptualization of the "dead" draws from a worldview which is completely other. Like the "loas"⁵⁶—the Vodoun/HooDoo term for gods or spirits—the dead in Reed's work (and in much African American culture besides) are regarded as actively participating in the life of the living; the past, as such, is recognized as a vivid part of the present. Reed sets up an alternative notion of time itself, in which "the dead" are not gone (belonging only to the past), but are present in the now, can be interacted with, and profoundly affect present experience. The ignorance of the potential importance of African diasporic tradition, even in the era of so-called postmodernist US culture, which Jameson's argument signals, is representative of the very culture-blindness which Reed so heavily satirizes in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Reed's engagement with "the dead" articulates something very different from Jameson's view of the contemporary culture of the late twentieth century, which argues for the "death of history", and the obliviousness of Jameson's critique to this entire alternative lifeworld is so extremely striking that his position might be characterized—playfully, of course—as being rather similar to some of the positions lambasted by Reed's satirical pen.

The American political establishment is caricatured as the "Wallflower Order", epitomized by its "creed" which asserts grumpily, "*Lord, if I can't dance, No one shall*".⁵⁷ The Wallflower Order is bent on trying to control or "curb Jes Grew",⁵⁸ and in contrast to those afflicted by Jes Grew, its members are described as wholly inflexible, "*the marrow of my spine, plaster, my / back supported by decorated paper*".⁵⁹ Reed makes a robustly comic commentary upon the notion of African "origins" here, as he situates Africa unexpectedly *not* as the site of the origins of African diaspora culture but instead of the "Atonist" perspective itself which he figures as a particularly Euro-American neurosis toward tradition and the past. If Jes Grew, which recognizes a fluid relationship between language and memory, is life itself, Reed figures "the Atonist Path",⁶⁰ the architects of "Western civilisation", as suffering from "Vital Resistance".⁶¹ While "atonal" can be understood to indicate "tone-deafness", Henry Louis Gates observes a mischievous joke of Reed's by noting that while "'Atonist' signifies multiply here [...] one who lacks physiological tone, especially of a contractile organ, is an Atonist".⁶²

Jes Grew is said to be "yearning for The Work of its Word or else it will peter out as in the 1890s, when it wasn't ready and had no idea where to search".⁶³ In this history of the "Stolen Legacy", Jes Grew seeks its "Text", and the chaos which ensues speaks of a cultural dysfunction which occurs when dogmatism overrules cultural expression. The inscription of Jes Grew's "Text" "originates in the dancer's body [so that] it was never the page as read, but the page as danced that conferred meaning",⁶⁴ and the linearity of signification—the notion that text might ever proceed in linear fashion from the pre-linguistic, is thus entirely undermined. As the "original" text written by Thoth in Ancient Egypt is said to have made an epic journey through the hands of, among others, Moses and Jethro, it is brought to America by Hinckle Von Vampton, yet when LaBas comes to reveal the text, the box containing the text is, in the manner of the best detective spoof, anticlimactically found to be "empty!!"⁶⁵ Satirizing the convention of the detective story as an easily fulfilled quest for a linear history and a unitary "truth", Reed has his detective PaPa LaBas open his "history" of Jes Grew, in what Joe Weixlmann calls "a hyperbolic parody of the traditional detective novel's scene of confrontation and disclosure".^{66,67} As he proceeds through no less than 34 pages of Ancient Egyptian history, explaining that the dances of Osiris begin to "hit [people] at all times of the day" and "interrupt their tilling of the soil",⁶⁸ he tells how Osiris's scribe Thoth suggested that "the outbreaks occurred because the mysteries had no text to turn to. No litany to feed the spirits that were seizing the people".⁶⁹ The same is said to happen "*In the 1890s [when] the text was not available and Jes Grew was out there all alone [...] broken-hearted and double-crossed ++*",⁷⁰ Jes Grew appearing in the form of Ragtime, the "pre-decessor" to jazz, which "developed in the late nineteenth century among Blacks in the cities of the Mid- and Southwest",⁷¹ and failed to take as firm a hold as jazz did in the 1920s. Through Jes Grew, Reed represents the insistent and formless nature of a cultural memory of Africa; an inheritance which can indeed be traced, but whose recognizable nature exists both within and beyond specific cultural manifestations.

As well as being a tradition manifested in specifically African American and African forms of expression, the phenomenon known as Jes Grew may thus also be understood to indicate particular forms of signification, resembling the realm of Julia Kristeva's "semiotic", in which "meaningful but nonsignifying aspects of language—rhythm, tone, music—are just as important in poetry as the signifying elements of language".⁷² As in Kristeva's semiotic, Jes Grew's appearance in "text" or language is entirely

continuous with its appearance in the pre-linguistic. Where Fredric Jameson's understanding that the "temporal unification of past and future with one's present [...] is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time",⁷³ Reed, like Kristeva, "disputes the absolute separation of signification from the presymbolic".⁷⁴ Jes Grew, therefore, may be recognized by its "texts", like "Ragtime. Jazz. Blues",⁷⁵ but may also be felt in its pre-textual "bleeblop essence; [...] the unknown factor which gives the loas their rise".⁷⁶ Just as signification in this scenario does not imagine a moment when the pre-linguistic, proceeding steadily through time, might enter the linguistic realm, so African tradition does not, in Reed's novel, bear a strictly linear antecedental relationship to African American culture.

Reed invokes the Harlem Renaissance, Black Power and Egyptomania; three phenomena which link the 1920s and the 1970s to a cultural memory of Africa, and he objects to the commodity culture he sees operating in these moments by showing the various ways in which an image of Africa is performed without any meaningful connection to the African diaspora culture which lives throughout the Americas. Reed's invocation of the interest in Ancient Egypt is in part a response to the phenomenon which McAlister calls "Tutmania", which itself offers an example of an ancient Egyptian history situated within the cultures of the 1920s and the 1970s, and an illustration central to contemporary culture of the way in which a memory of Africa has been divorced from tradition by American interests. McAlister recounts "the fascination with the ancient Egyptian king Tutankhamun that swept the United States from 1977 to 1979, when a collection of objects from Tutankhamun's tomb toured six American museums".⁷⁷ In the history which McAlister describes, the forgetfulness of the tradition in which the objects became "artifacts" is seen to initiate a discourse whereby the objects themselves are transformed from their function in one role and put to an entirely new purpose. This is a critique of mass production which separates the aesthetic value of art from its ritual significance. Walter Benjamin observes:

Two polar types [of art] stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. [...] The elk portrayed by the man of the Stone Age on the walls of his cave was an instrument of magic. He did expose it to his fellow men, but in the main it was meant for the spirits.⁷⁸

The aestheticization of artifacts allows a universalizing discourse which separates them from a tradition in which they held ritual significance. The emphasis on "exhibition value" over and above "cult value", in other words, transforms the transmission of cultural artifacts from a process which is communicative of tradition, to a process which denies all knowledge of tradition—that is, from a creative to a destructive act. As the possibility is presented of selling replicas of historical objects, the work of art loses its ritual value as it gains commodity value—as Benjamin puts it, "mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual".⁷⁹ This can be read as commentary on the commodification of Blackness and Black cultures which Reed objects to in hegemonic contexts and resistance movements alike.

Mumbo Jumbo figures the 1920s itself as a struggle for historical memory: "Picture the 1920s as a drag race whose entries are ages vying for the Champion *gros-ben-age* of the times, that aura that remains after the flesh of the age has dropped away."⁸⁰ Reed explains that "They have in Voodoo a thing they call *gros-bon-ange*, and the *gros-bon-ange* is that which separates from the person after death. It carries all of his essential elements, the qualities that make him unique."⁸¹ Yet Reed also invokes what Walter Benjamin refers to as the desire, "related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life", to "overcom[e] the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction", and thus "destroy its aura", "its unique existence at the place where it happens to be".⁸² As Reed sees it, every historical moment is not only unique but also continuous with tradition.

As Reed calls America "the protector of the archives of 'mankind's' achievements",⁸³ it is the specific discourse, called "imperial stewardship"⁸⁴ by McAlister, and the total disregard for the tradition within which the artifacts functioned, which is being satirized. As McAlister puts it, "the logic of imperial stewardship depended on combining universalist rhetoric with a presumption of American and Western superiority so profound that it remained unspoken".⁸⁵ The *Mu'tafikah* are clearly indicted as "They pass a drinking vessel shaped like an Inca warrior's head and filled with good old California vermouth",⁸⁶ separating the work of art from its ritual use and therefore turning it into commodity. Both the Harlem Renaissance and the "countercultural" Black nationalist "claim to ancient Egypt" which, McAlister notes, "would eventually fuel the rise of Afrocentrism in the 1980s",⁸⁷ are sites which rely, in their respective moments, upon a fiction of a "new" Black culture, and which exact a commodification of

Blackness. Though it is important to emphasize the nature of Black Power as both politically nuanced and contradictory:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the proliferation of Black Power *chatchke* washed out the boundary between ideology and fad and exposed the inherent limitations of inferring outlook from either choices made among the artefacts of mass consumption culture of the vagaries of tonsorial and sartorial style. Anyone could cultivate an afro, listen to the Last Poets, wear a dashiki or red, Black, and green button, and doing so was in no way a reliable indication of any concrete views concerning political, social, or economic life.⁸⁸

This situation is indicative of what occurs when the sign is treated as separate from the “presymbolic”, or the memory of what it might once have indicated. As Kobena Mercer suggests:

the fate of the Afro in particular might best be understood by an analogy with what happened to the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.[...] When rich white patrons descended on Harlem seeking out the salubrious spectacle of “the New Negro,” it became clear—to Langston Hughes at least—that the Africa being evoked was not the real one but a mythological, imagined “Africa” of noble savagery and primitive grace.⁸⁹

As the history of Osiris, and especially Moses’s misadventure in Egypt, has shown, a text should not be simply taken and played in a different context—this is simply theft—it needs to play through the sounds embodied by the times. The *Mu’tafikah*, Erik Curren comments,


practice the instrumental and violent morality developed by Atonism itself. Thus discredited, violent separatist cultural activism takes a back seat to an explicitly non-instrumental practice whose [...] model is the synchronic practice of Reed’s own novelistic strategy in *Mumbo Jumbo*.⁹⁰

Where the *Mu’tafikah* intend to “send the [...] loot back to where it was stolen and await the rise of Shango, Shiva and Quetzalcoatl”,⁹¹ their purpose of using text to summon the gods may sound like they are “provid[ing] a metaphor for Reed’s own attempts to render a true Black aesthetic by rescuing it from co-option, misunderstanding, and dogmatism”,⁹² as Robert Elliott Fox deduces. But in fact, their practice is entirely antithetical to that which is more broadly endorsed in the novel, as the


Mu'tafikah's strategy fails to account for the traumatic and dynamic history of diaspora.

Indeed, what happens when texts are developed away from the site of their earlier history is found simply to be what has occurred through the process of diaspora, as LaBas's sidekick Black Herman comments:

That's our genius here in America. We were dumped here on our own without the Book to tell us who the loas are, what we call spirits were. We made up our own. The theories of Julia Jackson. I think we've done all right. The Blues, Ragtime, The Work that we do is just as good.⁹³

The text egory itself, as Robert Elliott Fox puts it, is "not a literary artifact; it is, rather, an ongoing process",⁹⁴ and Black Herman's words are designed to encourage a sense of the validity of African American cultural forms, which even as they may be entirely separate from an African "text", can nevertheless be seen to work in the same tradition which is open to possession, and which also recognizes the fracture which has been engendered by trauma, by modernity, by diaspora.

Reed's critique of modernity is such that mass production inhibits artistic creativity, which is "Multitudinous, individual—like the 1000 1000000000 stars of a galaxy" (204). The repeated trauma of Atonism, then, is related to the claim made by Walter Benjamin, as Susan Buck-Morss notes, that following World War I, the "battlefield experience of shock 'has become the norm' in modern life":

In industrial production no less than modern warfare, in street crowds and erotic encounters, in amusement parks and gambling casinos, shock is the very essence of modern experience. [...] The motor responses of switching, snapping, the jolt in movement of a machine have their psychic counterpart in the "sectioning of time" into a sequence of repetitive moments without development. [...] Perception becomes experience only when it connects with sense-memories of the past [...] and] as the synaesthetic system is marshaled  to parry technological stimuli in order to protect both the body from the trauma of accident and the psyche from the trauma of perceptual shock [...], its goal is to *numb* the organism, to deaden the sense, to repress memory.⁹⁵

The shock of modernity is that it positions every moment not only as new but also as infinitely reproducible, as potentially identical to the last, so

that history is no longer properly thought of “in the unfolding sense”⁹⁶ but instead as a “continuous present, [...] a beginning again and again, the way they do in making automobiles”.⁹⁷ Reed uses African diaspora tradition to situate a discourse of resistance to the conditions of mass production and the standardizing processes of modernity.

While the pre-symbolic is not necessarily separate from the symbolic in Jes Grew, the phenomenon also seems to register a traumatic moment, or repeated moments of trauma, which might interrupt its fluid entry into language or text. This may be imagined to correspond to the scenario illustrated by Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history”:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁹⁸

The notion that the Text’s mysterious disappearance may be read as a metaphor for the trauma of the Middle Passage is suggested as Richard Swope comments that one of the “‘anonymous [...] Jes Grew Carrier[s]’ says ‘We had invented our own texts and slang’,⁹⁹ meaning the Text’s absence does not close the book on signification but actually opens a space in which Jes Grew can continue to signify indefinitely.”¹⁰⁰ As a mode of cultural memory, Jes Grew is thus able to register the key shifts of diaspora, slavery and modernity.

It is this allegorical relationship which the *Mu’tafikah* strategy fails to recognize. In this scheme which actually argues *against* a return of artifacts to “Africa, South America and China”, then, Reed comes head-to-head with Afrocentric arguments, and shows that neither artifacts nor people necessarily can or should travel to a place separate from their existence in the present, without the ritual possession by the past which is epitomized by the flexible aesthetic of Jes Grew. When Derrida insists upon signification as a process in which signs reference only themselves, he presents a

strongly secular (and to my mind, Eurocentric) view which depends upon a linear view of time and history, and which does not acknowledge the possibility of any pre-linguistic world interacting with the world of signs. In the worldviews suggested by both Reed's Jes Grew, and Kristeva's notion of the semiotic, by contrast, the relationship between the sign and the pre-linguistic is not linear, and the possibility of their co-existence strongly suggests the possibility of actions on the present which are determined by ancestors, or gods (the two are, in African diaspora spiritual systems, often thought of interchangeably).

Michael Chaney suggests that for Reed, "Blackness is not simply an effect of shared performative affectations, as Reed seems to indicate elsewhere, but it is also endogenous—originating internally", and furthermore, that the novel "registers a central anxiety regarding the decoupling of Blackness from Black bodies".¹⁰¹ I would argue, quite to the contrary, that Reed puts in place, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, a ferocious yet understated critique of any too-easy slippage between the sign of Blackness and the cultural memory of Africa, which again, he perceives as a recurrent theme in American culture. For Reed, the very perception of Blackness as "endogenous" to Black bodies occurs as a result of racism and the impulse to destroy the fluid connection of signification to the pre-symbolic. In fact, Reed offers an outrageous send-up of the fetishization of Black bodies by a white cultural establishment with the anecdote given about the white supremacist Hinckle Von Vampton, whose "nosy landlady" who "peers through his keyhole and finds the man [...] kissing some ugly nigger doll" until he "utters a strange cry [and] in reverie leans back into his chair".¹⁰² Rather than perceiving what Chaney calls an "essence [...] linking the deep structures of African Americans to Jes Grew and antediluvian Africa",¹⁰³ which "is transmitted and transformed by culture into a code that can then be mimicked or reproduced"¹⁰⁴ (and this speaks interestingly to Jameson's notion that "Modernist styles [...] become postmodernist codes"¹⁰⁵), Jes Grew is simply life itself.

Reed has his trickster detective PaPa LaBas begin the unraveling of the mystery of Jes Grew with "It all began 1000s of years ago in Egypt" (160), thus both earnestly attributing, *and* mercilessly satirizing the African origins of Jes Grew. The spoofing of the detective story genre in *Mumbo Jumbo*¹⁰⁶ is also a spoof of Afrocentric and Black Power tales of an "original" Black civilization in Ancient Egypt. Sending up the convention of the history textbook,¹⁰⁷ which betrays a desire to "read" memory in only one way, through linear time, LaBas introduces the story of Osiris with the

laughably non-specific words, “At this time in history” (161), and then goes on to play absolutely freely upon temporal indeterminacy, marking various events as having occurred, for instance, on “midsummer, the 10th day of July” (165)—without mentioning the year to which he apparently refers—then, on “October 24th” (166), on “October 31st” (166) and finally, ridiculously enough, at “12:00 midnight June 26, 363” (171). The desire to attach dates to an African history in order to locate its “origins” is exposed here by Reed as composing part of the same neurosis which is afraid of the past. While loas are characterized as “Multitudinous, individual—like the 1000 1000000000 stars of a galaxy” (204), the Atonist mind which might seek such a linear history is described as “a mind which sought to interpret the world by using a single loa. Somewhat like filling a milk bottle with an ocean” (24). Memory itself, then, may be known through the signs mapping linear time on a calendar, but it may also be known in ways which are indifferent to calendar time. Reed frustrates, evades and laughs out loud at the nagging insistence upon a history which can only be “known” if it is attached to a calendar date system, and figures this tendency as symptomatic of the American neurosis toward the past. Such a preoccupation, the novel suggests, is characteristic of repeated historical attempts to deny the past, and the fluid, possessive nature of memory.

Reed is relaxed and equivocal as regards the meaning of Blackness as it relates to Africa here—the Ancient Egyptians may be Black, but their Blackness need not signify a particular thing. McAlister reminds us that:

Part of the continued currency of the claim that Africans had never managed to create “real culture” before European colonization depended, among other things, on the conscious exclusion of North Africa, including Egypt, from the “real” Africa—sub-Saharan Africa. [...] The argument that Egypt was a Black, or African, or Negro, nation had a long history in the African American community.¹⁰⁸

Reed negotiates the question of the ancient Egyptians’ “Blackness” with characteristic composure, by beginning his Egyptian history as follows:

A certain young prince who was allergic to thrones attended a university in Nysa, a town in Arabia Felix (now Yemen). It was a land of dates coffee goats sheep wheat barley corn and livestock. Across the Red Sea were Ethiopia and the Sudan where the young man would commute bringing his

knowledge of agriculture and comparing notes with the agriculturalists of these lands. There were agricultural celebrations; dancing and singing, and in Egypt this rhythm was known as the Black Mud Sound.¹⁰⁹

If we fall into the trap of attempting to map Reed's cartography here, or the significance he attaches to Blackness itself, we discover the general meaninglessness of the exercise. As Reed narrates the history with an easy acceptance of the circulation of culture across the whole region, stretching from the Middle East to North and East Africa, he is relaxed about the question of attaching his history of culture to particular gradations of skin color or very specific notions of "race". While the Blackness of the ancient Egyptians may not necessarily be in question—and is evident, dubiously enough, with the mention of Isis's "firm Black breasts"¹¹⁰—Reed does not enter into the lengthy discussions on the meaning of Blackness. As McAlister puts it, he may not only "see [...] Egypt as a Black African heritage" but also "undercut [...]s a reading of the Egyptian myth as a seamless story of essential, resistant Blackness".¹¹¹ So Blackness as a site of resistance is far more ambiguous for Reed than it might have been for some in the BAM.

The politics of Black Power can be seen to have used the notion of a return to Africa in a manner that did not take account of African tradition or the history of diaspora, as William Van Deburg shows when he quotes some people who "returned" to Africa and complained that

one couldn't "crack a joke and have someone ... *really* understand it." [...] Upon reflection, some concluded that cultural misconceptions had contributed to their sense of alienation. As one expatriate confessed, their concept of Africa all too often was formed in America—an Afro-American Africa "based primarily on a reaction to the white man's Africa and what we thought Africa would be like."¹¹²

Jes Grew, in its own way an African inheritance, insists that an African diaspora tradition exists, not in some pre-existing and unchanging Africa, but instead in practitioners' own time with their own texts. As Benoit Battraville, a "high up member of the Haitian aristocracy", says to Nathan Brown, an African American poet: "Open-Up-To-Right-Here and then you will have something coming from your experience that the whole world will admire and need."¹¹³ Benoit Battraville seems to suggest a linear sense of history, in which a relationship to Africa occurs *before* other sites of diasporic identification, as he comments that "we Haitians ... [are]

closer to Africa than yourselves" (198), and furthermore, "We do not work the way you do. You improvise here a great deal; we believe in the old mysteries" (134).¹¹⁴ Yet, even in the Haitian context, the connection to Africa also works through a distinctly possessive force:

You actually have been talking to a seminar all night. Agwe, God of the Sea in his many manifestations, took over when I found it difficult to explain things.¹¹⁵

The historical and the possessive nature of the relationship to Africa is implicitly recalled by a Vodoun perspective, as Barbara Browning reminds us:

Haitians figuratively link mortality to Africa by saying that when a member of the vodun community dies, his or her spirit goes "back to Guinea." Brazilians similarly speak of death as a passage "back to Luanda." Such statements are not merely poignant or nostalgic; they mark a political, historical affiliation that transcends the life of the individual.¹¹⁶



The threat to individuality is another aspect of the exploitative erasure of the sense of a Black artistic tradition which Reed observes as enacted by the American culture and entertainment industry—for the tradition of possession allows for a proliferation of styles and forms—"Multitudinous, individual—like the 1000 1000000000 stars of a galaxy" (204).

SOUNDS ON HOME

If the practice of trying to reverse a historical migration of culture cannot approximate the creative potential of improvisation, neither can the "Griffin politics"¹¹⁷ of Abdul Sufi Hamid. Although it has been argued that "the collage effect of Abdul Hamid's education and technique [...] mirrors Reed's own",¹¹⁸ Hamid does not respect rules as Reed insists is necessary. Hamid's tale of educating himself in prison following the abuse of his mother is strongly reminiscent of the life of Malcolm X,¹¹⁹ who toward the end of his life was known as El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Yet Hamid seems also to "predict [...] the coming of Malcolm X",¹²⁰ as he says "Maybe I won't be around but someone is coming. I feel it stirring. He might even have the red hair of a conjure man but he won't be 1. No, he will get it across. And he will be known as the man who "got it across"."¹²¹ As Hamid both prefigures Malcolm X and *is* Malcolm X, similarly, Hamid and Malcolm X are both allowed to cascade into the

memory of Osiris, as "In the Sudan and Ethiopia he became known as "the man who did dances that caught-on".¹²²

Malcolm X's visits to the Middle East and North Africa shortly before his death formed a significant marker in his changing thoughts about his own cultural identity, and that of African Americans more broadly, in relation to "whiteness" and the rest of the world. At the time of his assassination in 1965, Malcolm's understanding of African race politics and what it meant for African diaspora identity was beginning to effect a complete sea change in his racial politics. Where Malcolm had for many years railed against "white devils", he found in Africa and the Middle East a sense of peaceful community between colors and creeds which looked set to have a powerful influence upon his strategy at home. Reed comments that "Malcolm X was a universality, a humanist, and a global man."¹²³ As Malcolm offers Islam as an alternative, as "a special religion for the Black man",¹²⁴ Reed suggests that Malcolm X might have forged the most powerful of connections between everyday African American life and African and Middle Eastern culture.

Reed's first criticism of the Hamid/ figure in the novel is that his perspective is limited by a tautological teaching (reminiscent of the teachings of the Nation of Islam). The limitation of Hamid/ perspective is particularly highlighted in his assertion that

I believe that you 2 have something. Something that is basic, something that has been tested and something that all of our people have, it lies submerged in their talk and in their music and you are trying to bring it back but you will fail. It's the 1920s, not 8000 B.C. These are modern times. These are the last days of your roots and your conjure and your gris-gris and your healing potions and love powder. I am building something that people will understand. This country is eclectic. The architecture the people the music the writing. The thing that works here will have a little bit of jive talk and a little bit of North Africa, a fez-wearing mulatto in a pinstriped suit. A man who can say give me some skin as well as Asalamilakum.¹²⁵

As Hamid recognizes the need to engage with the contemporary, he does not, however, see that the past can possess the present, and does not recognize, therefore, the link with an African tradition which is present through contemporary forms. Malcolm X can be seen to have been quite disparaging about Black Christians "getting out of their heads", when he mentions the "little evangelical storefront churches", whose "congregations were usually Southern migrant people": "three or four nights a week, they were in their storefront rehearsing for the next Sunday, I guess, shaking and

rattling and rolling the gongs with their guitars and tambourines".¹²⁶ As Reed would see it, Abdul/Malcolm fails to recognize the value of a tradition of possession, which far from simply being co-opted from the white man, is *specifically African American*, and as Reed shows through his genealogy, *also specifically African*. Reed's Abdul character treats time as linear, and traditions as mutually exclusive, one simply taking over from another which is no longer relevant:

Hopefully, one day all of us shall be able to express a variety of opinions, styles, and values, LaBas, but for now we need a strong man, someone to "whip these coons into line." Let the freedom of culture come later! I know this sounds contradictory but I don't have God's mind, yet!"¹²⁷

Hamid does not see the fluidity of the process, that Black culture already *is* employing diverse inheritances. Cornel West observes that "like most Black nationalists, Malcolm X feared the culturally hybrid character of Black life",¹²⁸ and Reed, while largely approving of Malcolm's international vision for African American identity, nevertheless pokes fun at his tendency to see African American tradition as simply a countrified folk art,¹²⁹ rather than recognizing the web of transnational, diasporic connections it may embody. Lisa Slappey comments: "Although Abdul Hamid, who predicts the coming of Malcolm X, is in general an admirable character, here Reed criticizes the Black Muslims for departing from what he considers the original African spirituality by submitting to yet another form of institutional monotheism, and as Black Herman warns, 'That bigoted edge of it resembles fascism.'"¹³⁰ Very astutely, Reed satirizes the approach which sees hybridity as something new, rather than rooted in African American tradition.

Reed displays openness to the hybridity of African American culture and its symbiotic nature in relation to Africa past and present, yet as he focuses largely on the notion of possession in a tradition linked to the Ancient Egyptian past, his commentary upon the space occupied by a contemporary Africa in the shaping of African American, or African diaspora, identity, is in many ways strangely elusive. Almost buried amid the multiple actions of the *Mu'tafikah*, and therefore showing the ease of slippage between a destructive and a constructive internationalist perspective, however, Reed shows:

Another man, a South African trumpeter, "Hugh," is in L.A. transmitting Black American sounds on home. He realizes that the essential Pan-Africanism is artists relating across continents their craft, drumbeats from the aeons, sounds that are still with us.¹³¹

This reference to South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, who settled in the United States, corresponds with an understanding of the communication of African American expression as symbiotic with contemporary African forms of expression, a perspective which is similarly suggested (though from the opposite perspective), when Black Herman comments that "I'll bet later on in the 50s and 60s and 70s we will have some artists and creators who will teach Africa and South America some new twists".¹³² As Gilroy points out,

The mutation of jazz and African-American cultural style in the townships of South Africa and the syncretised evolution of Caribbean and British reggae music and Rastafari culture in Zimbabwe [...] the impact, on what is thought of as authentic African culture, of music played by the slaves who returned to Nigeria from Brazil in the 1840s. With these and other illustrations in mind, it may make sense to try and reserve the idea of tradition for the nameless, evasive, minimal qualities that make these diaspora conversations possible.¹³³

These comments add subtle modern dimensions to Gates's "arc of influence" from a pre-colonial Africa to a contemporary African America, situating specific hybrid forms at the intersection of African American influence in contemporary Africa.

Concurrent to this commentary upon the instrumental role of African American culture on a global stage, however, a contemporary African cultural presence is situated in ways which gesture to what Toni Morrison, in the next chapter, calls "the unspeakable". Morrison references a realm of knowledge in African American culture in which a relationship with African "otherness" can barely be negotiated without entering into the realm of representation in which Africa and Africans have been systematically colonized by Euro-American imperial and racial discourse. Reed approaches this "unspeakable" territory through satire, in a strange little encounter during PaPa LaBas's visit to Abdul Sufi Hamid, when he comes across

the figure of a monkey-like Portuguese explorer, carved by an Angolan. He is obviously juiced and is sitting on a barrel. What side-splitting, bellyaching, satirical ways these ancient craftsmen brought to their art! The African race had quite a sense of humor. In North America, under Christianity, many of them had been reduced to glumness, depression, surliness, cynicism, malice without artfulness, and their intellectuals, in America, only appreciated heavy, serious works.¹³⁴

Reed appears to be satirizing the tendency to perceive Africa *only* in the past, in an ancestral relationship to African Americans, or as a linear precedent to African American culture. What Reed also does here, though, is navigate with incisive reflexivity the difficulty in African American speech of addressing Africa, African culture, and African people, outside of the ravaged discourses situated by the imperialist endeavor. Attempts to read PaPa LaBas's, and Reed's, view of the African American, the African, and the European explorer in the above motif stimulates an awareness of the difficult combination of insurmountable injustice, shocked silence, and radical creativity which informs not only Reed's work but also the work of many artists of this period. Though Reed's chosen approach is satire in this work, the underlying political and affective terrain which he gestures to is the same as that which Morrison reveals, as one deeply affected by the simultaneous workings of irrepressible joy and unbearable sorrow.

NOTES

1. Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1972), 34.
2. Ibid., 6.
3. Ibid., 13.
4. Ibid., 49.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 216.
7. Ibid., 161.
8. Ibid., 204.
9. Walter Benjamin understands the practice of allegory, which takes signs from one historical era and applies them to a separate context, to work as follows: "the words and the names remain behind, and, as the living contexts of their birth disappear, so they become the origins of concepts, in which these words acquire a new content, which is predisposed to allegorical representation; such is the case with [the concepts of] Fortuna, Venus...and so on." Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne. London: NLB, 1977 [1963]), pp. 225–26.
10. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, (London: Picador, 1995), 4.
11. Robert Elliott Fox, *Conscientious Sorcerers: The Black Postmodernist Fiction of Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, and Samuel R. Delany*, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 2.
12. Fernández Olmos, Margarite and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 4.

13. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (London: Picador, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1993 [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992]), 5.
14. See Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Women Possessed: Eroticism and Exoticism in the Representation of Woman as Zombie," in Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 37–58.
15. Gaga [Mark S. Johnson], "Interview with Ishmael Reed," in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick and Amritjit Singh, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 54. Reprinted from *MWENDO*, No. 4 (fall 1973).
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Al Young, "Interview: Ishmael Reed," in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick and Amritjit Singh, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 45. Reprinted from *Changes*, 12–13 (November 1972), 33.
19. Joseph Henry, "A MELUS Interview: Ishmael Reed," in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick and Amritjit Singh, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 209. Reprinted from *MELUS*, 11.1 (Spring 1984), 81–93.
20. Ibid., 209.
21. Ibid., 64.
22. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 50. Reed's knowledge of the Vodoun system is rooted in close research of this cultural history, as is evident from his use of terms. As Karen McCarthy Brown writes, "When Haitians refer to the religious dimension of their lives [...] they say they 'serve the spirits.'" [Karen McCarthy Brown, "Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case Study," in *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers*, eds. Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2006), 4.]
23. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 222–23.
24. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.
25. Vicki K. Janik, *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bibliographical Sourcebook*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998.
26. Ricki Stefanie Tannen, *Female Trickster: The Mask That Reveals*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 123–4.
27. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 23.
28. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 118.
29. Ibid., 174.
30. Lisa Slappey, "Nature as Sacred Text: An Ecocritical Reading of *Mumbo Jumbo*," in *The Critical Response to Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, (Westport CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 42.

31. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 174.
32. Ibid., 62.
33. Ibid., 164.
34. James Smethurst, "Black Arts Movement", *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 239.
35. Ibid., 116.
36. Gaga, "Interview with Ishmael Reed," 56.
37. Henry, "A MELUS Interview," 209.
38. David Smith, "Black Arts Movement." *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. (2006). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3444700138/Black-arts-movement.html>
39. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000*, (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 2001), 104.
40. Ron Karenga, "On Black Art," (Modern American Poetry, <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/Blackarts/documents.htm>.) Reprinted from Black Theater 3, 9–10.
41. Smith, "Black Arts Movement."
42. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 149.
43. Ibid., p. 142.
44. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, (London & New York: Verso, 1993), 190–91.
45. It is also important to note that even Baraka himself moved between divergent positions over the course of his career.
46. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 5.
47. Ibid., 20.
48. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 119.
49. Ibid., 116, 119. Emphasis added.
50. Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 39, 55.
51. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 5.
52. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London & New York: Verso, 1991), 17–18.
53. Jeffrey Ebbesen, *Postmodernism and Its Others: The Fiction of Ishmael Reed, Kathy Acker, and Don DeLillo* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), 168.
54. Ibid., 168, 171.
55. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 17.
56. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 40.
57. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 65.
58. Ibid., 64.

59. Ibid., 65.
60. Ibid., 18.
61. Ibid., 18.
62. Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, 225.
63. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 33–4.
64. Donald L. Hoffmann, "A Darker Shade of Grail: Questing at the Crossroads in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*," *Callaloo*, 17.4 (Fall 1994): 1253.
65. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 196.
66. Joe Weixlmann, "African American Deconstruction of the Novel in the Work of Ishmael Reed and Clarence Major," *MELUS*, 17.4 (Winter 1991–2), 25–26.
67. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 160.
68. Ibid., 164.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., 6.
71. Ibid., 74, 364.
72. Kelly Oliver, "Introduction: Julia Kristeva's Outlaw Ethics." In *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.
73. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 26–27.
74. Susan Huddleston Edgerton, "Re-membering the Mother Tongue(s): Toni Morrison, Julie Dash and the Language of Pedagogy", in *Cultural Studies Special Issue: "Toni Morrison and the Curriculum"*, eds. Warren Crichlow and Cameron McCarthy, 9.2 (May 1995), 350–51.
75. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 152.
76. Ibid.
77. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 125. Though, clearly, the tour itself occurred after *Mumbo Jumbo's* publication, McAlister's report that Thomas Hoving, the man who "was originally unsuccessful in making a bid to Egypt for a loan of the Tut objects", was "director of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1967 to 1977" [McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 127], suggests that negotiations for the Egyptian treasures were well underway at the time that Reed was writing.
78. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 218.
79. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 226.
80. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 20.
81. John O'Brien, "Ishmael Reed," in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* eds. Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi,

- 1995), 35. Reprinted from *Interviews with Black Writers*, ed. John O'Brien, 165–83, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1973).
82. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 217, 214.
83. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 15.
84. Ibid., 129.
85. Ibid.
86. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 84.
87. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 149.
88. Adolph Reed, Jr., "The Allure of Malcolm X and the Changing Character of Black Politics," in *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 209.
89. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 113.
90. Erik D. Curren, "Ishmael Reed's Postmodern Revolt", in *Literature and Film in the Historical Dimension: Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film* ed., John D. Simons, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 144–45.
91. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 89.
92. Fox, *Conscientious Sorcerers*, 51.
93. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 130.
94. Fox, *Conscientious Sorcerers*, 52.
95. Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October*, 62 (Fall 1992), 16–18.
96. Ebbesen, *Postmodernism and Its Others*, 165.
97. Cited in Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 121. Originally Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937).
98. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, Random House, 1999 [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970]), 249.
99. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 194.
100. Richard Swope, "Crossing Western Space, or the HooDoo Detective on the Boundary in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*," *African American Review*, 36.4 (Winter 2002), 618.
101. Michael A. Chaney, "Slave Cyborgs and the Black Infovirus: Ishmael Reed's Cybernetic Aesthetics," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49.2 (Summer 2003), 275, 280.
102. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 55.
103. Ibid., p 280.
104. Ibid.
105. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 17.


106. For discussion of *Mumbo Jumbo* as detective story, see Helen Lock, *A Case of Mis-Taken Identity: Detective Undercurrents in Recent African American Fiction*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1994); Lizabeth Paravisini, "Mumbo Jumbo and the Uses of Parody," *Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review* (Spring 1986): 113–127; Richard Swope, "Crossing Western Space, or the HooDoo Detective on the Boundary in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*," *African American Review*, 36.4 (Winter 2002): 611–28; Joe Weixlmann, "Culture Clash, Survival, and Trans-Formation: A Study of Some Innovative Afro-American Novels of Detection," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 38.1 (Winter 1984–5): 21–31.
107. See Beth McCoy, "Paratext, Citation, and Academic Desire in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*," *Contemporary Literature*, 46.4 (2005): 604–35.
108. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 143–44.
109. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 161.
110. *Ibid.*, 181.
111. *Ibid.*, 118, 121.
112. William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 151.
113. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 152.
114. "It can be argued that Haitians are more religious than people from many of the other former slave colonies and also that Haitian Vodou is close to its African roots than most other forms of New World African religion. Vodou's closer ties to its African origins are primarily a result of Haiti's virtual isolation from the rest of the world for nearly a century following its successful slave revolution (1791–1804). The strength of religious belief in Haiti can be accounted for, in part, by the poverty and political oppression that have characterized life for most Haitians from independence to the present." Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Updated and Expanded Edition. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001 [1991]), 5.
115. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 138.
116. Barbara Browning, "Babaluaiye: Searching for the Text of a Pandemic," in Emmanuel S. Nelson, (ed.), *AIDS: The Literary Response* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 85.
117. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 39.
118. Slappey, "Nature as Sacred Text," 45.
119. Santiago Juan-Navarro: "Some religious and political leaders of the time are represented by the dogmatic Abdul Sufi Hamid. Abdul's career primarily recalls that of Malcolm X. [...] However, all of Reed's critics overlook the fact that a Sufi Abdul Hamid actually existed." [Santiago Juan-Navarro, *Archival Reflections: Postmodern Fiction of the Americas*

- (*Self-Reflexivity, Historical Revisionism, Utopia* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 141.]
120. Slappey, "Nature as Sacred Text," 45.
 121. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 39.
 122. Ibid., 162.
 123. Walt Shepperd, "When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed," in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick and Amritjit Singh, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 7. Reprinted from *Nickel Review*, 28 August–10 September 1968, 4–6.
 124. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (London: Penguin Books, 1968 [1965]), 320.
 125. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 38.
 126. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 318, 319.
 127. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 20.
 128. Cornel West, "Malcolm X and Black Rage" in *Malcolm X in Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), 54.
 129. Reed's satirization of this is seen in the figure of W.W. Jefferson's Reverend father—Reed hyperinflates the way in which Malcolm X is disparaging of country ways.
 130. Slappey, "Nature as Sacred Text," 45. Quoting Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 40.
 131. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 83.
 132. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 130.
 133. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 199.
 134. Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 96.

“Solomon’s Leap”: Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*

Toni Morrison’s 1977 novel *Song of Solomon* illustrates the relationship with the time of narrative language, which is distinctive of African American fictional treatment of the cultural memory of Africa in the late twentieth-century period, and which I argue marks a significant contrast with the treatment of this theme in Black British fiction. In this chapter, I argue that there is a periodic stoppage of speech communicated in the narrative language of Morrison’s novel, and that this is expressive of an approach toward a cultural memory of Africa fraught with the difficulty of finding ways to speak of Africa outside of the “othering” context of Euro-American imperialism.¹ In this novel, there is a silence, a curtailment of speech that occurs at the center of the remembrance of Africa—as a trope, it is inextricably attached to conditions of belonging in America, and its narration in language frequently encompasses moments of silence or speechlessness which indicate the reservation that occurs when approaching the expression of the cultural memory of Africa. The cultural memory of Africa is evoked, in these veiled moments, in ways that signal key historical figures and events from the Civil Rights movement and its relationship with Africa, culminating in a fascinating commentary upon the “other” history envisioned by Malcolm X shortly before his death, in which a fraternal sensibility provides the possibility of escape from the patriarchalist chokehold of the imperialist’s language. This cultural memory, however, appears most clearly at a level of narrative which does not bear a linear

relationship with language, and which encompasses a rich and fluid communicability with the ancestral past. Thus is presented a powerful contrast with the way in which the cultural memory of Africa enters narrative language in Black British fiction, where the possibilities of narrative begin to emerge not through an engagement with the ancestral past, as such, because that past has been so heavily “deleted” by Britain’s fiction of itself, but by the ways in which the past may be rewritten in the future, through a future-oriented textuality.

At the beginning of *Song of Solomon*, Morrison presents us with an image of a man flying through the air. The novel opens with “the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent[’s] promise[...]” to “take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings”, as the agent Robert Smith “leap[s] from [the] cupola” of the “charity hospital”, in the fictional Michigan town of Mercy.² Smith’s flight recalls a complex perspective on the notion of flight to Africa in African American cultural memory, a history that speaks both to a common trope of African folklore of African peoples throughout the Americas, the story of the “ flying African”, and to the entry of African Americans into aviation in the early twentieth century. Morrison reads the cultural memory of Africa in this novel through an extended focus upon the nature of Black male flying heroes, and I argue in this chapter that this focus speaks of Morrison’s concerns with the cultural heroes of Black nationalism. The insurance agent’s flight is figured long before Morrison’s protagonist Milkman identifies the story of a “flying African” in his own ancestral past.³

The trope of the flying African is a cultural memory which, Olivia Smith Storey notes, “specifically refers to African born slaves flying from slavery in the Americas”.⁴ It was first recorded in print in *Drums and Shadows*, a compilation of interviews with the Gullah residents of the Georgia coastal Sea Islands, whose cultural memory of Africa was retained in language for longer than in many African American communities. One of the testimonies, given by an individual named Prince Sneed of White Bluff, reads as follows:

Muh gran say ole man Waldburg down on St. Catherine own some slabs wut wuzn climatize an he wuk um hahd an one day dey wuz hoein in duh fiel an duh dribuh come out an two un um wuz unuh a tree in duh shade, and duh hoes wuz wukin by demsef. Duh dribuh say ‘Wut dis?’ an dey say, ‘Kum buba yali kum buba tambe, Kum kunka yali kum kunka tambe’, quick

like. Den dey rise off duh groun an fly away. Nobody ebuh see um no mo.
Some say dey fly back tuh Africa. Muh gran see dat wid he own eye.⁵

Morrison comments: "My meaning is specific: it is about Black people who could fly. That was always part of the folklore of my life; flying was one of our gifts."⁶ The trope is repeated in a number of late twentieth-century African American and Latin American novels, short stories, musical recordings, and films, but also "manifest[s] a recurrent pattern of imagery that is more vast and less knowable in oral genres."⁷ This trope most often figures "[t]he African, the American born or Creole, and the Overseer [...] look[ing] at each other from the three points of a triangle [...], examining and defining each other. [...] The African [...] runs away from a future limited to hard labor and to the psychological terror of becoming accustomed to slavery, a future represented by the Creole figure in the trope."⁸ In the traditional story of the flying African, the hopes and fears of the community seem to be pinned upon the figure in flight, who embodies the radical possibility of escaping enslavement in the New World, to "return" to a distant Africa whose presence in cultural memory appears and disappears according to how much "acclimatized" the African American community becomes to the watchful, frequently demeaning, gaze of a white hegemony. Thus the trope of the flying African is peculiarly representative not only of the cultural memory of Africa in African American tradition, but also of the way in which that gaze has been singularly caught within the troubled questions of belonging for African Americans in America.

In the same uncanny way that Walter Benjamin's "well-known 'angel of history' might be hovering in *Song of Solomon*", the figure of Morrison's insurance agent in flight recalls the myth of the flying African only as an ancient forerunner to a more modern phenomenon—that of African Americans entering into aviation in the early twentieth century.⁹ Both instances of flight evoke the sad feeling of hope cut through with hopelessness, epitomized by the notion that "African Americans hoped to enter this new arena [of aviation], in part to put to rest society's deeply held belief that Blacks were an inferior race".¹⁰ This is an emotional tone which is particularly resonant with Abraham Chapman's description of the African American predicament:

The Negro in America has been denied a proper location and place, has been in perpetual motion searching for a proper place he could call home.

During slavery, the flight to freedom was the goal—the search for a home, a haven, the search for a possibility of secure belonging. After the Civil War, and to this day, this historical reality has expressed itself in the great migration from the South to the North and the patterns of flight and migration which are inherent in the spatial and plot movements in the novels of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. This opposite reality, of uprooting and dislocation, gave the Negro writer, to use the language of [Cleanth] Brooks, a different “special focus upon the world”, a focus of *denial* of a place, which we hear so clearly as far back as in the spirituals.¹¹

The “possibility of secure belonging”, set against the “opposite reality”, of “denial of a place”, is the dynamic which informs both the trope of the Flying African, and the history of African Americans in aviation. A deep pathos emerges from this dynamic juxtaposition of the intense exaltation of an imagined escape from oppression, to a longed-for “home” or experience of triumph, with the futile reminder of ongoing and insurmountable racial inequity in the USA.

If the legend of the flying African imagines the flyer as hero, African Americans entering aviation in the twentieth century provided ample opportunity for that hallowed cultural memory to be opened to ridicule by racist white patriarchy. It is thus that the cultural memory of Africa in this novel is so thoroughly imbricated in the dismissive discourse of racism that its very narration in language becomes a tremendously embattled negotiation. The first Black aviators emerged in the 1910s, and Morrison’s narrative makes allusion to the first (white) aviator, Charles Lindbergh, who crossed the Atlantic in 1927, and comments that “Mr. Smith didn’t draw as big a crowd as Lindbergh had four years earlier”, and yet also recalls the tragicomic figure of the aviator Hubert F. Julian, “dubbed the ‘Lindbergh of His Race’”, who “in the spring of 1924, [...] announced he would pilot a plane alone from New York to Liberia”.¹² The entry of African Americans into aviation during this period was frequently narrated in the national press at the time, in terms which evoked Black nationalist hopes of settlement in Africa, and not always in the most flattering light. Smith’s “wide blue silk wings curved forward around his chest” seem to recall the occasion of Julian’s “first leap over Harlem, [when] the daring parachutist had worn a bright red devil suit, complete with horns and tail”, and as “Julian in many respects had become merged in the public mind with [Marcus] Garvey”, who was similarly mocked for his “donning of academic robes”.¹³ As “white journalists [...] cast even [Julian’s] most



Fig. 3.1 Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, the African American aviator known as “The Black Eagle”, in France, on his way to London to enter the London to Melbourne air races, 1934. ©Bettman/Corbis

heroic exploits in terms of updated minstrel comedy”, and after his highly publicized 1924 attempt to fly from New York “around the world and to Africa” ended as the “plane ... ‘hopped off’ for four miles and then ‘flopped’ right down into Flushing [B]ay”, even the Black newspapers made comments such as “No old boat and no defective airplane will ever take them to Africa—or to Flushing Bay (Fig. 3.1)”.¹⁴

This battle with the belittling and emasculating forces of white patriarchy plays an instrumental hand in a history which protagonist Milkman discovers when he travels South and learns about his grandfather Macon Dead, who “had come out of nowhere, as ignorant as a hammer and broke as a convict”, who “with nothing but free papers, a Bible, and a pretty Black-haired wife”, had managed to cultivate “one of the best farms in Montour County. A farm that [his community remembers] colored their lives like a paintbrush and spoke to them like a sermon”.¹⁵ Again, the sheer joy of triumph over adversity is glimpsed as the message which Macon Dead’s farm seems to impart to his African American community is this:

Here, this here, is what a man can do if he puts his mind to it and his back in it. [...] We live here. On this planet, in this nation, in this county right

here. *Nowhere* else! We got a home in this rock, don't you see! [...] Grab it. Grab this land!¹⁶

These words echo those of a traditional Negro spiritual called "I Gotta Home in Dat Rock", which is cited by Chapman to show that the tension between security and insecurity in the American landscape is a "theme [which] is expressed time and again in [...] different spirituals".¹⁷ The poignancy that is felt in this song is similar to that which is seen as the story of Macon Dead unfolds to reveal his ultimate defeat by whites: "But they shot the top of his head off and ate his fine Georgia peaches. And even as boys these men began to die and were dying still."¹⁸ Yet even as the men tell stories, "they came alive [...], they hooted with joy".¹⁹ Memory of the African American past may be suffused with sadness, but can at least, it seems, be sung or spoken about. When the same forces converge upon a glimpse toward a "return to Africa", even if that return is figured only symbolically, the narration becomes fraught with moments of speechlessness.

The flying man Robert Smith is shown in *Song of Solomon* to have been known by his community—"He came to their houses twice a month to collect one dollar and sixty-eight cents", but like Benjamin's speechless angel, his presence is apparently shrouded in silence—he "said nothing in church but an occasional 'Amen'. He never beat anybody up and he wasn't seen after dark, so they thought he was probably a nice man."²⁰ Even in her critical commentary upon the novel, in "Unspeakable Worlds Unspoken", Morrison seems to suggest that Smith's flight is accompanied by a failure of language:

The note [Robert Smith] leaves asks for forgiveness. It is tacked on his door as a mild invitation to whomever might pass by, but it is not an advertisement. It is an almost Christian declaration of love as well as humility of one who was not able to do more.²¹

As Smith's silent flight leaves memories of "return" to Africa figured, but not openly named, the notion that Smith also regards his community with a sense that he was "not able to do more" is implied, and Smith's few words appear as a sign of language which is traumatized by the past, and cannot fully narrate the historical memory toward which it gestures.

As the novel opens by remembering the basic trope of the Flying African, it does not explicitly narrate a link to that memory. While the possibility

of the mythical flight’s African destination is mentioned by Prince Sneed in his rendition of the oral history, Morrison’s opening tableau mentions only “the other side of Lake Superior” as Smith’s destination, and even in her own separate critical commentary upon the novel, Morrison claims that Smith’s “flight [...] toward asylum” may be toward “Canada, or freedom, or home, or the company of the welcoming dead”.²² If the novel is, as John N. Duvall would have it, “obsessed with names and naming”, Morrison’s opening scene is nevertheless characterized by a clear reluctance to name any memory of Africa, the narrative paying a great deal of attention, instead, to the “half a hundred or so people gathered there” to watch Smith’s flight, from the “unemployed”, to the “very young children”, to the “dark-jacketed business and personnel clerks”.²³ If this novel’s “favoured ontology” is, as Linden Peach alleges, “distinctly African”, the figure of Robert Smith’s flight is representative of the novel’s tendency to remember the trope of the flying African in such a way as to make any associated memory of Africa entirely *indistinct*.²⁴

Commenting on an earlier recorded version of the trope of the Flying African, Julius Lester’s “People Who Could Fly”, Michael Awkward notes that “[A] young witch doctor is himself struck by an overseer [and then] instructs “Everyone” to escape: “He uttered the strange word, and all of the Africans dropped their hoes, stretched out their arms, and flew away, back to their home, back to Africa.” Awkward comments:

What is striking about this traditional version of the myth, particularly in comparison to its updating in *Song of Solomon*, is the communally beneficial nature of the witch doctor’s employment of the (liberating Black) word. [...] In *Song of Solomon*, the empowered Afro-American’s flight [...] is a solitary one; [...] the liberating Black word—is not shared with the tribe.²⁵

Morrison, Awkward suggests, offers “a radically transformed version of this legend which suggests the immense, and in many respects injurious, changes that have occurred over the course of the history of Blacks in America”.²⁶ This “change” which Morrison’s text embodies in the approach toward remembering a mythical return to Africa, then, is made visible through a curtailment of language, a closure of the capacity to name.

Morrison uses the memory of African American entry into aviation, like her reworking of the myth of the flying African, to make commentary upon the negotiation of African American community in the Civil Rights

era by charismatic Black patriarchal leaders, and the ways in which a “liberating Black word” may fail to be “shared with the tribe”. In a scene in which Milkman, at the age of 13, is thrown out of “Feather’s pool hall” with his friend Guitar, for being “Macon Dead’s boy”²⁷:

The half-dozen men there playing pool turned around at the sound of Feather’s voice. Three of them were air force pilots, part of the 332nd Fighter Group. Their beautiful hats and gorgeous leather jackets were carefully arranged on chairs. Their hair was cut close to the skull; their shirt cuffs were turned neatly back on their forearms; their white scarves hung in snowy rectangles from their hip pockets. Silver chains glistened at their necks and they looked faintly amused as they worked chalk into the tips of their cues.²⁸

These men represent African American aviators during the Second World War, who are described by Von Hardesty and Dominick Pisano as follows:

Between 1941 and 1945, the “Tuskegee Experiment”, as the training of Black fighter pilots became known, was proof that Blacks in great numbers could be trained and mobilized for the sophisticated task of combat flying. In the air war over Europe, the 99th Fighter Squadron joined three other all-Black fighter units to compose the 332nd Fighter Group.²⁹

Morrison presents these pilots in clearly admiring terms, which speaks of the sense of excitement which she claims to associate with the notion of Black male “flight”:

That has always been to me one of the most attractive features about Black male life. I guess I’m not suppose to say that. But the fact that they would split in a minute just delights me. It’s part of that whole business of breaking ground, doing the other thing.³⁰

The sense of excitement represented by Black male instances of leaving the tribe, and thus serving as examples of hope being triumphant, speaks to the fact that the Tuskegee Experiment was conducted in a climate where “those in charge both expected and wanted African Americans to fail”.³¹ Indeed, as the young Guitar and Milkman encounter “the owners of the barbershop, Railroad Tommy and Hospital Tommy”, and Guitar complains to them that Feather “wouldn’t even let me have a bottle of beer”, Railroad Tommy gives an exquisite litany of “some other stuff you are not going to have”, and finishes with³²

"and you can join the 332nd if you want to and shoot down a thousand German planes all by yourself and land in Hitler's backyard and whip him with your own hands, but you never going to have four stars on your shirt front, or even three [...]"

Guitar opened his eyes wide with horror and grabbed his throat. "You breaking my heart!"

"Well, now. That's something you will have—a broken heart." Railroad Tommy's eyes softened, but the merriment in them died suddenly.³³

Railroad Tommy reflects, as Philip Page argues, "the pervasive sense of denial of access, hope, rights, and privileges that dominates the Black community"³⁴; the knowledge that regardless of what the African American airmen might achieve, the possibility of a sense of "secure belonging" will never be available to them. With the voicing of this painful truth, Railroad Tommy's speech, appropriately enough, falters and dries up. While the image of Black aviators, figuratively linked to the memory of flight to Africa, can inspire deep admiration and hope, such hopes are frequently and painfully dashed by the realities of oppression and inequality suffered by the majority of African Americans, and not addressed by the flying hero.

"THE WHOLE TRUTH": NARRATING AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN PASTS

Morrison draws attention to the relationship between signs (both linguistic and symbolic) and historical memory in this novel as highly problematic, a difficulty of narrative continuity frequently appearing between the two. In the novel's opening scene, what accompanies Smith's flight instead of a named memory of Africa, or even a "liberating Black word" issued by the flyer, is a "singing lady"'s lyric: "*Sugarman cut across the sky/Sugarman gone home...*"³⁵ This song snippet appears early in the novel without any context; its orator, who we later discover is the protagonist Milkman's aunt Pilate, is described as wearing "a knitted navy cap"³⁶ and is "wrapped [...] up in an old quilt instead of a winter coat".³⁷ Pilate has a "brass box dangling from her ear",³⁸ her name "copied [...] out of the Bible [and] folded up in that earring",³⁹ and as Anne Pankhurst argues, this "earring [as] the means of identifying Pilate", can be understood "as a metonymic means to identify a person".⁴⁰ Metonymy may also be used to describe the way in which the insurance agent's flight is associated with the snippet

of a story told by Pilate's song, which is "listened [to] as though it were the helpful and defining piano music in a silent movie".⁴¹ Pilate's name is "housed" in her earring, and the novel goes on to show that she carries around a bag of bones without fully understanding whose bones they are. As in Reed's novel, the relationship between language and memory in *Song of Solomon* may well be imagined to correspond with Kristeva's notion of the semiotic. Susan Huddleston Edgerton, in her critique of Morrison's later novel *Beloved*, draws upon this realm where "the semiotic and the Symbolic are in a particular (Kristevan) dialectical relationship to one another", and comments that the power of the semiotic is that it "threatens the Symbolic order by threatening to do away with difference. The one becomes the other and the word becomes the thing".⁴² Morrison has commented that "I want [the reader] to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would",⁴³ and *Song of Solomon* is constantly negotiating a realm of knowledge which is conscious, which is continuous with language, but which does not always enter into that which is named. Morrison uses language to gesture to that space of knowledge, which I argue is a territory we could ascribe to a "memory of Africa", and I suggest here the reasons why she takes this nonlinear approach to signification.

Early in the novel, Morrison throws down the gauntlet for her questing hero Milkman, with his father Macon's sad contemplation of a lost ancestral connection: "Surely, he thought, he and his sister had some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. [...] But who this lithe young man was, and where his cane-stalk legs carried him from or to, could never be known. No. Nor his name."⁴⁴ This wished-for onyx-skinned ancestor is endowed with sufficient ambiguity for him to represent either an Afro-Southern *or* an African past, and as Milkman journeys into the southern past, he finds that the memory of where his ancestor Solomon flew *from* is triumphantly signaled, as "the whole damn town is named after him".⁴⁵ By contrast, the question of where his legs might have carried him *to* remains, by the end of the novel, only half-answered. If Milkman discovers, in the South, "Names that bore witness",⁴⁶ the witnessing that is being done is largely of an American history of hardship and survival—that memory of Africa, which defines the ever-present trope of flight, remains largely unnamed. Similarly, as Pilate is described at one point "decid[ing] how she wanted to live",⁴⁷ we are told that "Her mind traveled crooked streets and aimless goat paths",⁴⁸ in a phrase which is a clear echo of a line from Jean Toomer's novel *Cane*: "The Dixie Pike has grown from a goat path in

Africa."⁴⁹ Yet as recourse is made to information both intertextual and extratextual to suggest Pilate's Africanness, it is noticeable that Toomer's explicit reference to Africa is, in Morrison's text, omitted, leaving a phrase which, like "true to the palm oil that flowed in her veins",⁵⁰ is suggestive rather than descriptive of Africanness.

When Milkman journeys to the South on a quest for the gold he imagines to be his family "inheritance", what he discovers instead is a history of his ancestral past, revealed to him through pieces of stories about a half-Indian grandmother called Sing, and the "flying African" Solomon himself, through "real names of people, places, and things. Names that had meaning."⁵¹ Morrison might almost have placed the terms "real" and "meaning" here as a tease to her questing reader, as what follows does not resemble what Fredric Jameson describes as the "temporal unification of past and future with one's present" through "the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time",⁵² but is something altogether more remarkable:

Names that bore witness. Macon Dead, Sing Byrd, Crowell Byrd, Pilate, Reba, Hagar, Magdalene, First Corinthians, Milkman, Guitar, Railroad Tommy, Hospital Tommy, Empire State (he just stood around and swayed), Small Boy, Sweet, Circe, Moon, Nero, Humpty-Dumpty, Blue Boy, Scandinavia, Quack-Quack, Jericho, Spoonbread, Ice Man, Dough Belly, Rocky River, Gray Eye, Cock-a-Doodle-Do, Cool Breeze, Muddy Waters, Pinetop, Jelly Roll, Fats, Leadbelly, Bo Diddley, Cat-Iron, Peg-Leg, Son, Shortstuff, Smoky Babe, Funny Papa, Bukka, Pink, Bull Moose, B.B., T-Bone, Black Ace, Lemon, Washboard, Gatemouth, Cleanhead, Tampa Red, Juke Boy, Shine, Staggerlee, Jim the Devil, Fuck-Up, and *Dat Nigger*.⁵³

With this litany of names, Morrison gives a palpable sense of a sweep of history spanning African American life in the Southern states of America, through the Great Migration, and into the Northern towns, a history in which, as the First World War led "northern industry [...] on a massive campaign to recruit Black workers[,] emigration from the Deep South jumped from 200,000 in the decade 1890–1900 to half a million in 1910–1920", and grew "during the twenties and thirties" to "about 1,300,000", until "by 1940, over 2,000,000 Blacks had migrated".⁵⁴ Concurrent with this massive movement of people is a history of trauma and bitter injustice, palpable in the novel in a manner suggested by Melissa Walker:

The year 1931 appears in the opening lines of the novel. That year nine African-American youths boarded the Chattanooga-to-Memphis freight train only to find themselves accused of rape and their lives in jeopardy. The Scottsboro case [...] became a cause celebre of the 1930s, keeping the issue of racial injustice before the public for years. [...] Though [such] outside events are not specifically mentioned in the text, [...] they inform the context and have consequences in the novel.⁵⁵

Morrison's list of names, as Walker's commentary seems to suggest, indicates a history which is *known* in the novel, but which is not openly narrated. A whole African American history, stretching back at least through the twentieth century, if not earlier, is seemingly contained in names whose meaning is felt even as the memories of their lives remain unspoken. If such a "sentence" constitutes what Jameson calls "the breakdown of the signifying chain", it does *not* seem to "reduce [...] experience [to] a series of pure and unrelated presents in time".⁵⁶ Jameson's contention that "If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life",⁵⁷ in this case, simply does not apply. Nevertheless, even as linear narration becomes interrupted in the face of traumatic memory, there is indeed discernible in Morrison's rollcall of names the quality described by Jameson as

[a] heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect, here described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, a high, an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity.⁵⁸

Such "intensity" *is* in evidence as Morrison approaches the memory of the African American past, but this does *not* arise from the evocation of the past as "speech in a dead language",⁵⁹ as Jameson imagines it. Despite its only partial signification in language, the past in Morrison's novel is vibrantly alive.

The functioning of historical memory in a way which resembles the trope of "possession" dramatized by Ishmael Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo* alongside more linear means of knowing history, is apparent in a scene where Macon Dead introduces a history to his son, explaining "if you want to be a whole man, you have to deal with the whole truth".⁶⁰ In an instance of what Philip Page identifies as "individual characters fail[ing] to interpret things around them",⁶¹ Macon proceeds to give a strictly linear

account of his relationship with his wife, beginning, ironically enough, with "I married your mother in 1917",⁶² and ending with "Tonight".⁶³ Like the unfortunate "Atonists" of Reed's novel, Macon can be seen to misidentify the "whole truth" as a history which is constrained within the bounds of linear time. As Joseph Skerrett comments, "Macon [...] thinks that Milkman's access to his 'information', his rational, cause-and-effect 'tale of how come and why' will clarify reality for Milkman. But Milkman [...] sees no place for himself in this history".⁶⁴ Part of the "truth" which is revealed in this scene, in fact, appears not in the words which Macon speaks to his son, but in the narration which accompanies his tale, and which works in a manner in the text which is entirely *nonlinear*, to reveal a memory of Africa.

Some pages before this scene takes place, Macon is shown to have said to Milkman: "If you ever have a doubt we from Africa, look at Pilate. She look just like Papa and he looked like all them pictures you ever see of Africans. A Pennsylvania African. Acted like one too. Close his face up like a door."⁶⁵ At one point during Macon's telling of the tale of his marriage, then, the omniscient narration comments that "his face looked like Pilate's. He closed the door."⁶⁶ And again, a few pages later: "Macon looked up at his son. The door of his face had opened; his skin looked iridescent."⁶⁷ What Morrison achieves here, while appearing to offer a simple narration of the past as recalled by the character's telling, is also what she calls "urg[ing] the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text".⁶⁸ While witnessing the character's interpretation of the past, Morrison is simultaneously able to manipulate the reader's own memory, positioning the faces of Pilate, then of Macon Dead Sr., and then even of the second Macon Dead, as a succession of "doors" which lead to some sense of a memory of Africa. Morrison constructs her text here in a way which offers the reader a sense of creating links in his own memory, because, as she says, "I want to subvert [the reader's] traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination".⁶⁹ Macon may be the embodiment of patriarchal values, and yet, Morrison's narration suggests that attention to another narrative, beneath and behind his spoken words, points toward the "presymbolic", in which difference between patriarchal and other ways of "knowing" may be done away with, in which the very perspective of patriarchal power that Macon appears to represent when he says "[o]wn things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too"⁷⁰ may

be discredited. Milkman, of course, betrays little sensitivity to this realm, coming away from the conversation saying to himself “‘What the fuck did he tell me all that shit for?’ He didn’t want to know any of it. There was nothing he could do about it. The doctor was dead. You can’t do the past over.”⁷¹

On one of only three or four occasions in which the novel actually *names* a memory of Africa, Milkman and his friend Guitar are described as “Breathing the air that could have come straight from a marketplace in Accra”.⁷² If Karla Holloway and Gay Wilentz claim, respectively, that Pilate is “reminiscent of an African queen”,⁷³ and is a “female ‘ancestor’ [...] whose scent is of African ginger”⁷⁴ such critiques betray a failure to register the fact that Pilate’s characteristics are rarely, in the novel itself, openly *named* as African. Where a memory of an African American history, spanning the history of slavery and the move from the South, then, is seen to be contained in names whose meaning is felt without always being spoken, the memory of Africa is similarly discernible in the text, but is even less frequently named. As Melissa Walker suggests, the novel’s approach to the African American domestic history might be seen to be characterized by historical traumas that can barely be narrated:

Walking through the streets meditating on what he has been told, [Milkman] suddenly notices that hordes of people are walking on the other side of the street in the opposite direction. Readers will soon know what Milkman does not know, that crowds are gathering to protest the murder of Emmett Till, an event that has the Black community in an uproar. [...] Milkman remains absorbed in his own personal world, in this scene literally walking against the tide of history.⁷⁵

Milkman, like Mr. Smith and like Benjamin’s “angel of history”, can be seen to “fly in the face of” this history, embodying a speechless reaction of terror at what cannot be undone. The memory of Africa occupies a position in the novel which forms part of this aspect of terror.

“I LOVED YOU ALL”: MORRISON’S CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND THE GAZE TOWARD AFRICA

Robert Smith’s flight is also watched by a “cat-eyed boy [who] listened to the musical performance with at least as much interest as he devoted to the man flapping his wings on top of the hospital”.⁷⁶ This boy is Guitar, “five

or six years old"⁷⁷ at the time of Smith's flight, and later a member of the same secret organization, the Seven Days, which we discover motivated Smith's leap. According to Guitar,

[i]t's made up of a few men who are willing to take some risks ... [W]hen a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by *their* law and *their* courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can.⁷⁸

If Reed's flexible scheme remains perplexed by the difficulty of representation of any contemporary Africa, Morrison can be seen to show the circumstances in which African American writers find themselves in this discursive position. The relationship between language and the memory of Africa functions in this novel to reflect the author's conceptualization of African American identity which, despite first appearances, and unlike that broad American trend which forgets the past and forgets all that is outside of the American territory, is keenly aware of its problematic relationship with life outside of America.

As Pilate speaks an ancestral memory of an African past, Guitar may be understood to represent a gaze toward a more contemporary Africa. The staging of Guitar and Pilate as diverse witnesses to Smith's flight might be considered to dramatize a particular historical confrontation which occurred in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, between the politics of Black Power, and the politics of Black feminism, which will be discussed further in Chap. 4, and which was sometimes characterized by a particular tension around the subject of ancestry, as described by William Van Deburg:

Instead of treating members of this group, out of hand, as "the enemy", it was suggested that they be seen as potential allies. Perhaps these oldsters weren't very well versed in the latest styles, but they understood adversity and could relate countless stories of the struggle against it. None could deny that they composed a fair share of the "Black masses" for whom the revolution was being waged. Moreover, they were to be valued as living repositories of African-American folk wisdom. As noted by poet Alice Walker, they "knew what we/*Must* know/Without knowing a page/Of it/Themselves". If, on the surface, some might seem a bit Tomish, it nevertheless was possible that they could become invaluable assets to the movement, instructing the younger generation in familial love. Certainly, the capacity "to love, to protect, to cherish, our young, our old, our/own", could not be considered the least important attribute to any activist seeking to promote group solidarity and empowerment.⁷⁹

The implicit criticism is that “oldsters” may not situate themselves in the context of relating African American oppression to global, and particularly African, struggles against colonial and former colonial powers. When Guitar, as a twelve-year-old, approaches Pilate with his young friend Milkman, she admonishes him for not “say[ing] what you mean”,⁸⁰ so that he “ha[s] to pay careful attention to his language”.⁸¹ The tension between Guitar’s perspective and Pilate’s is palpable as he witnesses Pilate’s “Aunt Jemima act”⁸² for police; Milkman “remember[s] how Guitar glared at her as she walked away from the car”,⁸³ and “anger [is] like heat shimmering out of his skin”.⁸⁴

Guitar’s equal attention, in the opening tableau, to the song sung by Pilate, the novel’s “culture bearer”, and to the function of Smith’s flight, may be seen as indicative of his attention to two different forms of cultural work that are carried out to try to protect the African American community against the diverse forms of violence which are perpetrated against it. As Smith’s flight remembers the tale of the flying African through unspeaking action, Pilate remembers the tale through speaking song, and Guitar, along with the rest of the community, is shown to witness the function of speech to enact a preservation of tradition, alongside the function of the unspoken to register trauma. These are the two functions of memory in Morrison’s communities.

Guitar explains: “If it ever gets to be too much, like it was for Robert Smith, we do *that* rather than crack and tell somebody.”⁸⁵ In spite of an alarmingly dismissive tendency in much Morrison criticism toward Guitar’s political stance,⁸⁶ I suggest that Morrison is inquisitive toward the perspective represented by the Seven Days, which she clearly positions as having learned something from both the nurturing matriarch who incorporates the past by speaking about it, and the militant patriarch who acknowledges the unspeakable nature of the past through silence. After all, as Pilate’s dying words, at the end of the novel, are “I wish I’d a knowed more people. I would of loved ’em all. If I’d a knowed more, I would a loved more.”⁸⁷ Robert Smith declares “I loved you all”,⁸⁸ and Guitar himself cries “It’s about loving us. [...] My whole life is love.”⁸⁹ Love is shown to inform both a nurturing protectiveness *and* a defensive violence in this novel, and the two are of course shown to overlap at times—for instance, as Pilate is shown stabbing a man who harms her daughter Reba.⁹⁰ Love, in this novel, is shown to inform both communicative speech, *and* shocked silence. Ralph Story comments:

For Black folk "to love so much they would kill" is a profoundly radical idea yet one which can be clearly discerned in the poetical works of the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s, especially the writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka.⁹¹

Like Harry Reed, I consider Morrison's position to be "a simultaneous affirmation and criticism of Black cultural nationalism";⁹² and would suggest that Guitar's position is not opposed to Pilate's, but rather continuous with it, just as silence is continuous with interrupted speech. To note that this is the condition that Morrison observes in her characterization of Guitar and the Seven Days is not to say that she endorses violence. Morrison, writing in the middle of a period of American history which saw considerable violence, is doing something more important than showing approval or disapproval of violence—she is showing *how* violence comes about under conditions of oppression, and its *effect* upon the survival of a culture and a community. Guitar is like Frantz Fanon's "native who [...] is ready for violence at all times", for whom "from birth it is clear [...] that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence".⁹³

Morrison takes ample opportunity to evoke sociopolitical history in the novel, but it must be said that these evocations lie largely in the African American domestic realm. On perhaps the only occasion that a perspective showing awareness of the world outside of the USA is explicitly evoked in the novel, it is articulated, significantly enough, by Guitar. An exchange between Milkman and Guitar bears extended citation:

"... Bet you thought tea grew in little bags."

"Oh, Christ."

"Like Louisiana cotton. Except the Black men picking it wear diapers and turbans. All over India that's all you see. Bushes with little bitsy white tea bags blossoming. Right?"

"Gimme the tea, Guitar. Just the tea. No geography."

"No geography? Okay, no geography. What about some history in your tea? Or some sociopolitico—No. That's still geography. Goddam, Milk, I do believe my whole life's geography."

[...]

"Oh, Jesus."

"He's a Northerner too. Lived in Israel, but a Northerner in His heart. His bleeding heart. His cute little old bleeding red heart. Southerners think they own Him, but that's just because the first time they laid eyes on Him, He was strung up on a tree."⁹⁴

Guitar's speech pattern here is wholly fractured here, into questions which he answers himself, and parts of stories which never come to resolution. Though this speech pattern may be expressive of the fact that Guitar is trying, in veiled ways, to raise his friend Milkman's awareness of his secret membership of the Seven Days, it is also indicative of a certain failure of language that arises when a perspective on the world outside of the USA is sighted. Melani McAlister explains how the Middle East as a site of identification appeared in African American popular expression as "the story of the biblical Exodus was actively invoked as part of the civil rights struggle from the 1940s on", but that "Black culture in the United States turned toward other models, beyond the exodus/Zionist model, attending particularly to the complex religious affiliations that also linked African American identity with the Arab and Islamic Middle East".⁹⁵ As Guitar refers to Jesus and Israel, with some perceptible lack of reverence, he may be seen to signal a turn toward an alternative, Islamic identification, particularly as Milkman comments: "You sound like that red-headed Negro named X."⁹⁶

THE MEMORY OF AFRICA AS SITE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Where, in the approach toward memory of the American past, a certain rupture occurs between one name and the next, preventing a spoken narration of the total history in which they reside, in the approach toward the memory of Africa, the rupture more frequently occurs somewhere between language and the prelinguistic. The difference between a memory that can be named, however provisionally, and a memory whose naming appears more difficult, is, as Susan Huddleston Edgerton puts it, "a difference but, Kristeva argues, not a distinction", in the same way that the "already-signifying space of the mother[,] the 'semiotic chora', [...] is also 'the place of the maternal law before the Law'".⁹⁷ Morrison recognizes this "difference without distinction" when she comments:

The gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present does not exist. It's bridged for us by our assuming responsibility for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for. They are those that died en route. Nobody knows their names, and nobody thinks about them. In addition to that, they never survived in the lore; there are no songs or dances or tales of these people. The people who arrived—there is lore about them. But nothing survives about ... that.

I suspect the reason is that it was not possible to survive on certain levels and dwell on it. People who did dwell on it, it probably killed them, and the people who did not dwell on it probably went forward.⁹⁸

A whole history of an African American past, then, may be contained in songs, dances, or tales, and although stories are lost with the Africans who are lost, their memory is still present, but must be engaged with through what Morrison describes as "assuming responsibility".

This notion of "assuming responsibility" for the difficulty of narrating the historical past *must* therefore explain Morrison's reluctance to situate a memory of Africa squarely at the center of her language. This begins to be explained as the author comments that in the early part of her writing career, she "would do no research" in the area exploring links between African and African American literatures, "because [she] distrusted the sources", which to her contained a "scholarly vocabulary used [...] to describe *how* we say and how we are [which] is a code designed for destruction".⁹⁹ In light of the historical role played by Africa, as a canvas upon which various imperial projects have been drawn, and the uncomfortable resonance between such projects and what has been, in effect, an American imperialism at home, Morrison identifies language itself as one of the sites in which such imperialism has occurred. For the African American writer, then, language becomes a troublesome currency with which to deal with the memory of Africa. Morrison writes, in *Playing in the Dark*:

I am using the term "Africanism" [...] as a term for the denotative and connotative Blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. As a trope, little restraint has been attached to its uses.¹⁰⁰

The suspicion of a neocolonial taint to any scholarship that might claim to identify the "African" in African American culture, Morrison comments, has led her to

rely heavily and almost totally on my own recollections and, more important, on my own insight about those recollections, and in so doing [I] was able to imagine and to recreate cultural linkages that were identified for me by Africans who had a more familiar, an overt recognition (of them).¹⁰¹

As Morrison makes clear her intention to name only that which she knows—the stories and songs of her own African American community—the act of naming for her performs the important function of acknowledging that which has too often been perceived as a “discredited knowledge” that Black people had”.¹⁰² In later chapters, we shall see, a Black British approach to cultural memory has less certain foundations of community and tradition as reference points to rely on, and leads to narrative language taking on a more improvisational, future-oriented dimension. These African American authors, meanwhile, reference what is known in the African American past, even if that knowledge is partial, and their narration is therefore “possessed” by the spirit of the past.

The approach toward naming a memory of Africa is stalled by the complexities of an African American sensibility which feels its “third world” status in the midst of the first world. As Morrison writes, in her “Introduction” to Camara Laye’s *The Radiance of the King*:

Such a beautiful word, Africa. Unfortunately its seductive sound was riven by the complicated emotions with which the name was associated. Unlike starving China, Africa was both ours and theirs; us and other. A huge needy homeland none of us had seen or cared to see, inhabited by people with whom we maintained a delicate relationship of mutual ignorance and disdain, and with whom we shared a mythology of passive, traumatized otherness.¹⁰³

The African American gaze toward a memory of Africa, as Morrison sees it, struggles, through language alone, with the demands of two equally pressing, and almost impossible tasks; first, to differentiate itself from the mythology promoted by a hegemonic and imperialistic Euro-American perspective toward Africa, and second, to avoid the confirmation of *African American* “otherness” which such a perception of Africa would encourage. The memory of Africa is approached in *Song of Solomon*, I suggest, in ways which attempt transcendence of these extremely troubled politics of language.

Like Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history”, who is speechless as he apprehends historical memory as “wreckage upon wreckage”, Robert Smith’s flight remembers, without specifically naming, repeated instances from African American history in which the trope of flight has been associated with the notion of “return” to Africa, and acts, Michael Rothberg suggests, as part of the novel’s “textualizing [of] the trauma of slavery”.¹⁰⁴

In Morrison's scheme, while speech and silence are certainly figured as complementary parts of language, speech is most frequently positioned as having the capacity to preserve tradition, while silence occurs as a response which articulates the importance of traumatic memory. In these terms, Benjamin's angel may be imagined to have been rendered silent by the repeated traumas of history, illustrating effectively a memory that cannot be narrated, that can barely be figured in language. Elaine Scarry shows that "not only is physical pain enormously difficult to describe in words—confronted with it, Virginia Woolf once noted, 'language runs dry'—it also actively destroys language, reducing sufferers in the most extreme instances to an inarticulate state of cries and moans".¹⁰⁵ The trauma of painful memory can have a similar effect, and while the memory of an African American history situated in America can, it seems, be assimilated into language in Morrison's novel, the memory of Africa, which exists, as it were, "beyond" the lives lost on the Middle Passage, and implicated as it is within a complexity of imperialist dynamics, is less easily spoken.

When Milkman tells his lover Sweet that Solomon "went back to Africa",¹⁰⁶ her immediate response is "Who'd he leave behind?"¹⁰⁷ This reaction is most frequently read by critics as drawing attention to a gender question—the fate of women left behind to care for children. Hovet and Lounsberry comment that "Morrison persistently ... forc[es] the reader's eye back down to those the flyer left behind",¹⁰⁸ highlighting the author's effort to draw attention to the broader effect of the African's flight upon the African American community. Even when Milkman is told the story of Solomon's flight, by his distant cousin Susan Byrd, the memory of Africa, to which Solomon may or may not have flown, is barely hinted at before the narrative focus is once again bounced back, almost compulsively, toward the African American community:

He flew. You know, like a bird. Just stood up in the fields one day, ran up some hill, spun around a couple of times, and was lifted up in the air. Went right on back to wherever it was he came from. There's a big double-headed rock over the valley named for him. It like to killed the woman, the wife.¹⁰⁹

Even as Susan Byrd speaks, a vast unexplored imaginative space beyond the "double-headed rock" is palpable; attention is almost drawn to it by the refusal to name it. Yet the possibility that "wherever it was he came from" might encompass an ancestral Africa is barely mooted, as the attention is drawn back immediately to the wife left behind. What we see here

is, again, the preoccupation with the condition of oppression which the wife, and the rest of the African American community, cannot escape as easily as the flying African seems to.

MALCOLM X AND AFRICAN FILIALITY

Guitar's view reveals a whole internationalist spectrum to the novel, which Morrison would be uncomfortable broaching through the language of the colonizer. Like Guitar himself, she encodes it. If Morrison can be understood to be signifying on Malcolm X's contribution to history, such a move is once again enacted by the sign of flight. As Milkman takes an airplane, from Michigan to Pittsburgh, the text reads as follows:

The airplane ride exhilarated him, encouraged illusion and a feeling of invulnerability. High above the clouds, heavy yet light, caught in the stillness of speed ("Cruise", the pilot said), sitting in intricate metal become glistening bird, it was not possible to believe he had ever made a mistake, or could. Only one small thought troubled him—that Guitar was not there too. He would have loved it—the view, the food, the stewardesses. But Milkman wanted to do this by himself, with no input from anybody. This one time he wanted to go solo. In the air, away from real life, he felt free, but on the ground, when he talked to Guitar just before he left, the wings of all those other people's nightmares flapped in his face and constrained him.¹¹⁰

In contrast to Milkman's experience of air travel, which he luxuriates in for its capacity to make him feel his solitude and independence, Malcolm X, in his *Autobiography*, describes a key, and unprecedented, experience of community for him as he flies from Cairo to Jedda, to take the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca:

The co-pilot was darker than [the captain] was. I can't tell you the feeling it gave me. I had never seen a Black man flying a jet. That instrument panel: no one ever could know what all of those dials meant! Both of the pilots were smiling at me, treating me with the same honor and respect I had received ever since I left America. I stood there looking through the glass at the sky ahead of us. In America, I had ridden in more planes than probably any other Negro, and I never had been invited up into the cockpit. And there I was, with two Muslim seatmates, one from Egypt, the other from Arabia, all of us bound for Mecca, with me up in the pilots' cabin. Brother, I *knew* Allah was with me.¹¹¹

If we can imagine Morrison to be signifying on Malcolm X's jubilant experience of flight, some subtle conclusions can be drawn. First, as Malcolm depicts a flight that occurs completely outside the USA—in fact, *from* Cairo toward Jedda—Milkman's experience of air travel, by contrast, represents a domestic flight within the USA. Significantly, Malcolm's experiences on the flight teach him something about how the common faith of Islam can enable community across national, racial, and linguistic boundaries, and as he is shown "honor and respect" he has never known before, the possibility of life outside of American racism. If Milkman experiences "honor and respect", it is, by contrast, of the variety which is provided upon payment of an airfare—the solicitations of air stewardesses.

Of particular interest in this intertextual dialog which may be perceived between Morrison's novel and Malcolm X is the way in which the ending of Morrison's novel may be read as responding to that concept of "brotherhood" which was in the end central to the perspective which was revealed to Malcolm X toward the end of his life. The notion of "brotherhood" is a feature which, of all the flights depicted in *Song of Solomon*, is introduced only by Milkman's final flight at the end of the novel. Milkman says "Over here, brother man! Can you see me?"¹¹² and the narration tells us that as he flies "toward Guitar", "it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother".¹¹³ It may not be true that Guitar "cannot progress beyond th[e] 'fascist' [...] position and remains fixed in pain, anger, exasperation, and racial hatred",¹¹⁴ for after all, as Morrison has commented, "it is important that Guitar put[s] his gun down".¹¹⁵ Malcolm X, during his stay in the Middle East, penned an open letter in which he wrote the following:

America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered 'white'—but the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen *sincere* and *true* brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.¹¹⁶

He goes on to comment: "The single worst mistake of the American Black organizations, and their leaders, is that they have failed to establish direct brotherhood lines of communication between the independent nations of Africa and the American Black people."¹¹⁷ Here is the possibility of visualizing a relationship with Africa in the present, that escapes what Johannes Fabian calls "the time-distancing discourse of evolutionism" that allows an "understanding of such terms as primitive".¹¹⁸

Yet Morrison's hopes for the untapped potential represented by Malcolm does not mean that she espouses Islam as panacea. Nada Elia is concerned with what is perceived as Morrison's failure to name African resources for her story, and suggests some serious implications to Morrison's "poetic liberty" as she remembers the stories told in *Drums and Shadows*, inherited from "Muslim Africans who lived in Sapelo Island off the coast of Georgia".¹¹⁹ Elia notes a "confluence of names"¹²⁰ between those remembered in one interviewee's narration of the Flying Africans trope, and those which Morrison represents as the names of Solomon's numerous children, which include "*Belali Shalut/Yaruba Medina Muhammet [...]/Nestor Kalina*".¹²¹ If Kimberly Benston says the song "allud[es] to a crazy-quilt of cultures, regions, religions, and affiliations",¹²² Elia's objection relates in particular to Morrison's perceived failure to acknowledge the Islamic (and African) etymology of the names of Solomon's children, and of the occurrence of the Flying Africans trope itself:

[A] nod of acknowledgement remains insufficient, especially if [the Islamic genealogy is] used primarily to lend one's narrative a touch of the exotic and mysterious. [...] Morrison does not address the Muslim genealogy, and is, at best, "curiously coy" about her borrowing the stories of Belali's descendants.¹²³

However, any "coyness" that Elia may perceive in Morrison's refusal to "name" cultural sources is not unique to the author's approach to Islam—it is, rather, a feature of her approach toward the cultural memory of Africa in general. Morrison is not inclined to name the memory of Africa in the way that Elia suggests she should, because of the very great difficulty in the relationship with language. To Morrison, an African Islamic inheritance may be just as patrilineal as any Euro-American imperialist inheritance. Keith Cartwright's attention to the presence of Islam in the ancient Senegambian context itself may give a clue as to why Morrison does not rush to acknowledge an Islamic connection:


Practitioners of indigenous African religions—and women in particular—found themselves excluded from the new literacy, and as illiterates, found access to authoritative readings of power increasingly limited to realms marginalized by orthodox Islam.¹²⁴

If Islam may once, in the African context, have constituted a "new literacy" which threatened traditional forms of oral storytelling, so we might see replayed that scenario set out at the very beginning of Morrison's

novel—of “city legislators” writing over a Black community’s own oral history—and it is therefore no wonder that Morrison hesitates to champion the Islamic genealogy of her tale.

If Morrison does not openly embrace Islam in her novel, then, the notion of brotherhood that Islam reveals to Malcolm X might nevertheless be seen as infinitely attractive to her. Brotherhood, this vital concept arising for the first time in the flight which characterizes the novel’s ending, is something which is capable of completely dismantling the endlessly oppressive triangular dynamic that ordinarily typifies the African American trope of flight and keeps the African American male, in particular, in a terribly vulnerable position. William Van Deburg writes that “during the Black Power era, pan-Africanists of all stripes echoed the Muslim leader’s view that Black Americans had erred in neglecting to establish ‘direct brotherhood lines of communication’ with African peoples”.¹²⁵ Morrison’s play upon this perspective introduced by Malcolm X can reveal her sensitivity to the space that might have been opened up, in that “blind spot” in African American memory, if the more international basis of identification recommended by Malcolm had been espoused; a relationship with Africa which moves free of the tensions of imperialist representation. This space of mutual respect which enables the possibility of apprehending human commonality even amid the gulf of cultural difference that may be felt to exist between people living in America and in Africa, is a space that is explored further in Chap. 4, in the work of Alice Walker. Where Morrison’s articulation of the “unspeakable” allows a generous spaciousness around the traumatic histories which affect identification with Africa, and which cannot always be described, Walker’s corresponding *lack* of appreciation for the value of acknowledging what cannot be articulated, leads her to speak for, and speak *over*, African experience as part of the otherwise vital work of enunciating oppressed African American women’s subjectivities.

NOTES

1. Marion Berghahn’s *Images of Africa in Black American Literature* (London: Macmillan Press, (1977) analyses in detail this othering tion of imperialist views of Africa, and its effect for African American writers.
2. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, (London: Vintage, 1998 [1977]), 3, 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 322.

4. Olivia Smith Storey, "Flying Words: Contests of Orality and Literacy in the Trope of the Flying Africans," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 5.3 (2004). <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/175971>
5. Georgia Writers' Project, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986 [1940]), 79.
6. Thomas LeClair, "The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, 122. Reprinted from *New Republic*, vol. 184 (March 21, 1981): 25–29.
7. Smith Storey, "Flying Words."
8. Ibid.
9. Michael Rothberg, "Dead Letter Office: Conspiracy, Trauma, and *Song of Solomon's* Posthumous Connection," *African American Review*, 37.4 (Winter 2003), 508.
10. Betty Gubert, "Aviators, African American," in *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience*, eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 152.
11. Abraham Chapman, Introduction to *Black Voices: An Anthology of African-American Literature*, ed. Abraham Chapman, (New York: Signet Classic, 2001 [1968]), 40–41.
12. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 3; Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, (London: Picador, 1995), 458; Jill D. Snider, "'Great Shadow in the Sky': The Airplane in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 and the Development of African American Visions of Aviation, 1921–1926," In *The Airplane in American Culture*, ed. Dominick A. Pisano, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 130.
13. Snider, "'Great Shadow in the Sky'," 128, 137, 132, 129.
14. Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 457; Snider, 'Great Shadow in the Sky', 132–133.
15. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 235.
16. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 235.
17. Chapman, Introduction to *Black Voices*, 40–41.

I got a home in dat rock,

Don't you see?

Poor man Laz'rus, poor as I,

When he died he found a home on high,

He had a home in dat rock,

Don't you see? Ibid.

18. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 235.

19. Ibid., 236.

20. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 8.

21. Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XXVIII.1 (Winter 1989), 28.
22. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 3; Morrison, 'Unspeakable Words Unspoken', 28.
23. John N. Duvall, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 74; Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 6, 4, 5, 6.
24. Linden Peach, "Competing Discourses in *Song of Solomon* (1977)," in *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon (Modern Critical Interpretations)*, ed. Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia, 1999), Reprinted from *Modernist Novelists: Toni Morrison*. St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1995.
25. Michael Awkward, "Unruly and Let Loose: Myth, Ideology, and Gender," in Bloom, ed., *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, 97. Reprinted from *Callaloo* 13.3, (Summer 1990).
26. *Ibid.*, 96.
27. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 56, 57.
28. *Ibid.*, 57.
29. Von Hardesty and Dominick Pisano, *Black Wings: The American Black in Aviation*, (Washington D.C.: National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1983), 3.
30. Robert Stepto, "Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, 26. Reprinted from *Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977): 473-89.
31. Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Tuskegee Airmen," in *Africana*, eds. Appiah and Gates, 902.
32. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 58, 59, 59.
33. *Ibid.*, 60-61.
34. Philip Page, *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 91.
35. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 6.
36. *Ibid.*, 5.
37. *Ibid.*, 5-6.
38. *Ibid.*, 36.
39. *Ibid.*, 53.
40. Anne Pankhurst, "Recontextualization of Metonymy in Narrative and the Case of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," in *Metonymy in Language and Thought*, eds. Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 387. Chris Baldick defines metonymy as "a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it". Chris Baldick, *The*

- Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 135.
41. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 6.
 42. Susan Huddleston Edgerton, "Re-membering the Mother Tongue(s): Toni Morrison, Julie Dash and the Language of Pedagogy," *Cultural Studies*, 9.2 (May 1995), 350–51.
 43. Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," *Thought*, 59.235 (December 1984), 385.
 44. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 17–18.
 45. *Ibid.*, 328.
 46. *Ibid.*, 330.
 47. *Ibid.*, 149.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. Jean Toomer, *Cane*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1993 [1923]), 10.
 50. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 149.
 51. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 329.
 52. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and the Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster, (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 26, 27.
 53. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 330.
 54. Stokely Carmichael, and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, (London: Penguin Books, 1969 [1967]), 156–57.
 55. Melissa Walker, *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966–1989*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 135–36.
 56. Jameson, "Postmodernism and the Consumer Society," 27.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. *Ibid.*, 27–28.
 59. *Ibid.*, 17.
 60. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 70.
 61. Philip Page: "Macon widely misinterprets Pilate, thinking of her as a snake who bites the man who feeds it (Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 54.) Guitar wrongly concludes that Milkman's desire to go to Danville is designed to betray him and then erroneously assumes that the box Milkman helps load onto the train must contain the gold (*Ibid.*, 259 and 299.) Even Pilate, despite her sensitivity, misinterprets her father's ghost when he bids her to remember Sing, and she draws the wrong conclusion about the bones she finds in the cave." Page, *Dangerous Freedom*, 95.
 62. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 70.
 63. *Ibid.*, 74.
 64. Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., "Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction*,

- and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 194.
65. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 54.
 66. *Ibid.*, 70.
 67. *Ibid.*, 74.
 68. Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," 387.
 69. *Ibid.*
 70. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 55.
 71. *Ibid.*, 76.
 72. *Ibid.*, 185.
 73. Karla F.C. Holloway, "The Lyrics of Salvation," in *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, ed. Bloom, 68. Reprinted from *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Karla F.C. Holloway and Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1987).
 74. Gay Wilentz, "Civilizations Underneath: African Heritage as Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," in *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon: A Casebook*, ed. Jan Furman, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 141–42. Reprinted from *African American Review*, 26 (1992). Wilentz continues, "African values and African culture, exemplified in Pilate, are privileged in the text [...] Pilate has all the qualities Morrison associates with an ideal African woman: She has stature, strength, presence. [...] she constantly has a 'chewing stick' between her lips, much like a West African market woman [...] Pilate's house resembles one in an African village compound". Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 145.
 75. Walker, *Down from the Mountaintop*, 39.
 76. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 8.
 77. *Ibid.*, 7.
 78. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 154.
 79. William L. Van Deburg, *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*, (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 271.
 80. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 36.
 81. *Ibid.*, 37.
 82. *Ibid.*, 209.
 83. *Ibid.*, 208.
 84. *Ibid.*, 207.
 85. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 158.
 86. Critics remark, variously, that "[a]lthough he is a self-declared avenger of his people, the love of Black life is eventually twisted into a love of power", Jan Furman, "Male Consciousness: *Song of Solomon*", in *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, ed. Bloom, Reprinted from *Toni Morrison's Fiction* (University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 201; that Guitar is "driven mad by material

- greed for gold and by internalized racism”, Joyce Irene Middleton, “From Orality to Literacy: Oral Memory in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*”, in *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, ed. Valerie Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36; that “Guitar’s claim to kill for love [...] is not about love but something else indeed—male power and possession”, Duvall, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison*, 89, 91; that “[i]nstead of love, Guitar becomes co-opted by his hate into the evil practices of the dominant social system he wishes to escape [...] and therefore, like Macon, Guitar exemplifies the dialectical reversal”, Page, *Dangerous Freedom*, 93.
87. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 336.
 88. *Ibid.*, 3.
 89. *Ibid.*, 159.
 90. *Ibid.*, 93.
 91. Ralph Story, “An Excursion into the Black World: The ‘Seven Days’ in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*”, in *Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon*, ed. Bloom. Reprinted from *Black American Literature Forum*, 23.1 (Spring 1989), 86.
 92. Harry Reed, “Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* and Black Cultural Nationalism,” in *Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon*, ed. Bloom. Reprinted from *The Centennial Review*, 32.1 (Winter 1988), 75.
 93. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London & New York: Penguin, 1990 [1961]), 29.
 94. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 114–15.
 95. Melani, McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 87, 123.
 96. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 160.
 97. Huddleston Edgerton, “Re-membering the Mother Tongue(s),” 350–51. Citing Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1993) 46.
 98. Marsha Darling, “In the Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison,” in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie. Reprinted from *Women’s Review of Books* 5, (March 1978), 247.
 99. Christina Davis, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Taylor-Guthrie. Reprinted from *Presence Africaine: Revue Culturelle Du Monde/Cultural Review of the Negro World*, 1145 (1988), 225.
 100. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (London: Picador, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1993 [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992]), 6–7.
 101. Davis, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” 225.
 102. Toni Morrison, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” in *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*. ed. Mari Evans, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 342.

103. Toni Morrison, introduction to *The Radiance of the King*, by Camara Laye, (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), xi.
104. Rothberg, "Dead Letter Office" 502.
105. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4. Citing Virginia Woolf: "'[L]et a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.' [...] Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned." Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill," in *Collected Essays*. Vol. 4, (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 194.
106. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 328.
107. Ibid.
108. Grace Ann Hovet and Barbara Lounsberry, "Flying as Symbol and Legend in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Song of Solomon*," *CLA Journal*, XXVII.2 (December 1983), 134.
109. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 323.
110. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 220.
111. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 436.
112. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 337.
113. Ibid.
114. Page, *Dangerous Freedom*, 105. Page cites William E. Cross, Jr., *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity*, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991), 205.
115. Charles Ruas, "Toni Morrison". In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 111.
116. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 454.
117. Ibid., 461.
118. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 [1983]), 39.
119. Nada Elia, "'Kum Buba Yali Kum Buba Tambe, Ameen, Ameen, Ameen': Did Some Flying Africans Bow to Allah?" *Callaloo*. 26.1. (Winter 2003), 183.
120. Ibid.
121. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 303.
122. Benston, "Re-Weaving the 'Ulysses Scene'," 104.
123. Elia, "'Kum Buba Yali Kum Buba Tambe, Ameen, Ameen, Ameen'," 189.
124. Keith Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables and Gothic Tales*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004 [2002]), 29.
125. Van Deburg, *Modern Black Nationalism*, 149.

“Worse Than Unwelcome”: Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker, in her definition of “womanism”, explained in multiple ways in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, offers the following beautiful lines: “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.”¹ She also, however (perhaps with a wink and a smile), comments that womanism is “[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of an entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health.”² In this chapter, I want to suggest that Walker’s *The Color Purple* sets out a loving aesthetics which can be seen to be the pulse at the heart of many manifestations of African American women’s politics in this period, but that this aesthetics which has the potentiality to extend a harmonious and powerful reach toward an identification with a cultural memory of Africa is instead frequently compromised in Walker’s text, as a result of a profound sexual conflict within Black Power politics. This conflict generates unresolved tensions in Walker’s text.

Walker has said: “One of the things I love about *The Color Purple* is that no matter what happens I can go to that book and, if I read the language to myself, I can hear my grandmother speak. That is the gift of the book to me.”³ This “speaking” quality of Walker’s narrative has much in common with a practice which Mae Gwendolyn Henderson has named

“speaking in tongues”, which is identified as having formed the “interlocutory character of Black women’s writings”, and which is established as a distinctively African American practice, named after the practice “in the Holiness church (or as we called it, the Sanctified church), [where] speaking unknown tongues (tongues known only to God) is in fact a sign of election, or holiness”.⁴ “Speaking in tongues” is, in theory, perfectly placed in Walker’s novel to enable an identification with a cultural memory of Africa which might reside in the realm of the “semiotic” observed in the previous chapters. “Speaking in tongues” encapsulates “a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or ‘generalized Other’, [and] a dialogue with the aspects of ‘otherness’ within the self”,⁵ and also resembles what Audre Lorde calls the “erotic”:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. This sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.⁶

Lorde’s notion of the erotic, as Keith Cartwright shows, emerges from the African American tradition known as “mother wit”, “an occult(ed) realm of birthing and language acquisition, song and culinary art, [which] finds location in a female/spiritual zone”.⁷ Mother wit, Cartwright argues, is related to a (Senegambian) Mande concept of “*badenya* or ‘mother-child-ness’”,⁸ which in turn forms part of an ideal of gender complementarity:

Ideas of mothering and fathering developed from polygamous marriage engender much of Mande ideology around a fertile tension between *fadenya* or “father-child-ness” [...], rivalry between a father’s children from different wives, and *badenya* or “mother-child-ness” [...], the affection between full siblings of the same mother. *Fadenya*-oriented behavior tends toward innovation and individualistic social transgression, while *badenya*-oriented behavior tends toward conformity, social cohesion, and group-affiliated action. This engendering of ways to assimilate foreign or wild material for the benefit of the community [...] leads to an orientation toward tradition that values dialogic openness and improvisation without undue fears of losing identity.⁹

Cartwright comments that “[p]olyrhythm and complementarity are so fundamental to West African worldview[s] that we may speak of the soul

itself as being a polyrhythmic unity". Such polyrhythmic unity can be understood to thrive, as Henderson puts it, as "Black women's speech/writing becomes at once a dialogue between self and society and between self and psyche", in short, to offer a communal space of exchange in which the potential of the individual is supported.¹⁰ Even as Lorde emphasizes the erotic as a sharing of joy, "a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual place, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling",¹¹ however, she elides what first appears as a metaphysical realm, with another, political realm, pronouncing that the "world [...] values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men",¹² and that "we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society". Here Lorde rehearses a move which is also made by Walker, and while I personally find this hemming in of the practice of mutuality to a female realm limiting to the possibilities of the practice, I understand this gesture to arise from the particularly fraught gender politics that follow from the Black Power era, around which there has existed a culture of silence for some decades, and which is only now being subjected to proper analysis by scholars including LaDonna Forsgren, Tracye Matthews, and Rhonda Y. Williams, who are beginning to show that while the "general character of Black Power [was in many ways] male-oriented, neither was it monolithic."¹³ Reading Walker here offers an opportunity to build up a picture of African American culture of the post-Civil Rights era as complex and multivoiced and to consider the cultural memory of Africa as a conversation occurring across diverse communities, both within African American settings and across the African diaspora.

Walker enters into this dialogic and profoundly creative space in *The Color Purple*, and yet what happens to this space as the cultural memory of Africa is approached is similar to what Patricia Hill Collins identifies as "a slippage between the real and the ideal" in womanism itself, which can erase the "distinction between describing Black women's historical responses to racial and gender oppression as being womanist, and using womanism as a visionary term delineating an ethical or ideal vision of humanity for all people".¹⁴ This kind of slippage is also evident in Lorde, and in this chapter I will show the ways in which this elision of the female and the feminine creates particular difficulties in Walker's approaches toward Africa.

By positioning Walker's womanism beside Henderson's descriptions of speaking in tongues, and Lorde's notion of the erotic, I am highlighting a

key resource and power which is drawn upon, arguably, in much literature from across the African diaspora, but which is particularly spoken about in Black women's writings. These poetic forms resonate with the forms of signification seen in Chaps. 2 and 3, in which the "semiotic chora", the space where the prelinguistic is continuous with language, is accessed, and which generates a sense of a known African American tradition in which a *covert* knowledge of African tradition exists. To my mind, there is also in this space a trickster aesthetic at play—there is the action of a boundary crosser and a "divine linguist" (which not coincidentally invokes a semiotic space in which a cultural memory of Africa can communicate fluidly with the present). Whether this aesthetic of mutuality is thought of as essentially female or whether it embodies the possibility of commonality between all beings is a question negotiated by the slippage identified by Hill Collins between the "ideal" and the "real".

The Color Purple (1982) opens with protagonist Celie, aged 14, appealing to "God": "Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me."¹⁵ Routinely raped by the man she believes to be her father, Celie is experiencing the first of two pregnancies, and after her babies have been taken from her and, as far as she knows, "kilt [...] out there in the woods",¹⁶ she is married off to a man initially referred to as only "Mr. _____", who beats her and treats her as little more than a servant. Celie's younger sister Nettie runs away from home to join her, but is quickly thrown out by Mr. _____ when she does not reciprocate his amorous attentions. Nettie, Celie, and the other women characters of *The Color Purple* may be read as being the same Black women "left behind" by the men in flight in Morrison's novel; they are the focus of Walker's novel—Black women who either lived in the South or migrated from the Southern states to the North, and who, as Barbara Smith puts it, "appeared able to do everything, at least everything necessary to maintain a home. They cleaned, cooked, washed, ironed, sewed, made soap, canned, held jobs, took care of business downtown, sang, read, and taught us to do the same".¹⁷ They are also, Walker writes, "great-great-grandmother[s] who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer's lash", whose bodies were "broken and forced to bear children (who were more often than not sold away from her)".¹⁸ These women serve as an important prototype for the contours of Black feminism in African American and Black British traditions alike—women who may be politically engaged or not, but whose activism takes the form of work maintaining the home and raising children, as much as it does formal intellectual work.¹⁹

Africa enters into Celie's Southern world when Shug Avery, singer and long-time lover of Mr. _____, comes to stay, and makes the discovery that Mr. _____ has been hiding a stash of letters written by Nettie, from a missionary posting in an imagined West African land. The letters reveal that following separation from Celie, Nettie found her way to the home of a preacher and his wife, and was asked "if I would come with them and help them build a school in the middle of Africa".²⁰ Nettie writes to Celie as she travels first to New York, then to London, then to "Monrovia, Liberia" via "Lisbon, Portugal" and "Dakar, Senegal",²¹ and finally to "Olinka, some four days march through the bush".²² Nettie's narrative describes the encounter with the Olinka, Walker's "imaginary African people", among whom the missionaries make their settlement.²³

The novel's entire story is told first through Celie's letters to God, and then, upon discovery of Nettie's posting in Africa, through a transatlantic correspondence (which is nevertheless deeply problematized and interrupted) with her sister. As if to generate a discursive chasm between the novel's American and African spaces, and the way they appear in discourse, Walker goes to extraordinary lengths to prevent actual communication between the African and American realms. For instance, as Celie and Shug purposely remove all Nettie's letters from their envelopes before beginning to read them, and "put the envelopes back inside the trunk",²⁴ Nettie's narrative is explicitly separated from the stamps and postmarks which would act as markers to locate it temporally and spatially, in order that the pages might be read as those of a storybook. The epistolary form itself is described by Linda Kauffman as a form which expresses precisely the potential *failure* of speech, in which information or "knowledge" may be lost in transmission:

Letters are repeatedly lost, withheld, seized, misdirected, or misplaced. [...] An addressee who is absent, silent, or incapable of replying is one of the distinguishing characteristics of epistolarity.²⁵

Nettie writes to Celie with a suspicion that knowledge of her African experience may not be successfully transmitted through her epistles, but nevertheless affirms the importance of the dialogic engagement which the act of writing represents:

Albert is not going to let you have my letters and so what use is there in writing them. That's the way I felt when I tore them up and sent them to

you on the waves. But now I feel different.[...] when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart.²⁶

Communication with Africa, then, is entirely interrupted by the choice of discursive form itself; where letter-writing is for Celie about her ability to represent herself, in the dialogue with Africa it is manipulated so that it shows "failed exchange", whereby "the ideals represented by social exchange are, in fact, effaced by the practice of exchange itself".²⁷ Celie's letters "are written not to communicate so much as to express what the soul cannot hold within",²⁸ and Nettie, after saying that writing is better than not writing, is never again troubled by the thought that she may not have a reader. Crucially, her letters are also "written in Standard English with only an occasional [non-]standard phrase". In contrast to Celie's speaking text, "[b]y the time Nettie arrives in Africa together with her missionary employers, her language has become thoroughly standardized".²⁹

This explicitly interrupted dialogism, in the context of a novel where the dialogic is otherwise so clearly prioritized, may account partly for the sense many readers have had that it is not always clear why Nettie's letters are included.³⁰ The question of why Africa is there in Walker's novel is, incredibly enough, the same as why Africa is there in the discourse of empire: to support the narrative of the centered self.³¹ If, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. alleges, the language of Celie's letters demonstrates a form of writing which is continuous with speech, thus encouraging a sense of the close identification between the writer and those written about³²; Nettie's letters, as Brita Lindberg-Seyersted's observation emphasizes, introduce a form of discourse in which difference between speech and writing is all of a sudden foregrounded, and what is more, the conventions of a hegemonic "writerly" discourse are thoroughly embraced. Walker has commented:

I know that there are people who don't like [Nettie's] letters as well, but that, too, in a way is part of the plan. I was trying to show the reader that standard English, missionary English, does not hold a candle to the southern, country vernacular which Celie speaks, and her letters, which you would think people would puzzle over, are always the letters that are the vibrant ones.³³

Walker is quite explicit about the fact that even if a link to African tradition is mooted, in the final analysis, the African encounter is couched clearly in the language of imperialism.

The centered African American self which Walker's novel supports, I suggest here, is not especially concerned with recognizing any hybrid aspects of African American tradition—it is more concerned with asserting a uniformity in African American aesthetics in a historical and cultural moment in the 1980s when importantly, Michel Feith has argued, "the fight for the recognition of this discipline [of African American literature] is not yet over in the American academy", and that "too much emphasis on impurity might weaken the cause".³⁴ Feith argues that "the rule of the game is that disciplines must be self-contained",³⁵ and it is interesting to consider the possibility that the moves that have been made, post-desegregation in the USA, to establish African American studies as a "respectable" discipline in the context of the academy, may also have encompassed certain moves away from recognizing the hybrid aesthetics inherent to African American tradition. This tendency, which Feith observes in the work of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., can also be seen to inform Walker's perspective. As the Black woman finds voice, in *The Color Purple*, she does so by situating the cultural memory of Africa in two separate ways, which correspond roughly with the maternal and paternal inheritances remarked upon earlier by Cartwright, and by aligning herself with a maternal African inheritance while differentiating herself from a paternal African heritage. Thus the aesthetics of complementarity which the novel otherwise aspires to, because of the difficulties in African American history, are not fully functional.

There are therefore two ways in which the cultural memory of Africa is approached in this novel. There is first a repetition of imagery associated with Black women in Georgia, which is found to recur in the encounter with a roughly sketched African experience, through what Deborah McDowell calls "correspondences between the sisters' experiences [which] are striking, even strained and overdetermined".³⁶ So, as Nettie depicts the Senegalese people she encounters upon arrival in Africa as being "so Black ... they shine",³⁷ Celie describes "Shug's bright Black skin [...] Her hair shining in waves".³⁸ Similarly, Nettie's hut in Africa, which is "round, walled, with a round roofleaf roof",³⁹ and upon which she comments "My only desire for it now is a window!"⁴⁰ is mirrored by Shug's dream house: "It a big round pink house, look sort of like some kind of fruit. It got windows and doors and a lot of trees round it."⁴¹ The way that Walker is most comfortable representing African inheritance is as a shadow-image to the well-known yet long-suppressed African American feminine aesthetic of the domestic arena. She writes, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, published in 1983:

[P]erhaps in Africa over two hundred years ago, there was just such a mother; perhaps she painted vivid and daring decorations in oranges and yellows and greens on the walls of her hut; perhaps she sang—in a voice like Roberta Flack’s—*sweetly* over the compounds of her village. [...] Perhaps she was herself a poet—though only her daughter’s name is signed to the poems that we know.⁴²

Much of Walker’s discursive approach toward Africa in this novel is made within the contours seen in the above citation—this African ancestor or relation is imagined, and is of interest, because she is recognizable from a well-known and familiar African American experience. What could be a clear opportunity to recognize and embrace difference as a part of recognizing the hybrid ancestral inheritance of African American culture is instead collapsed into a sameness, which turns the “other” into a simplistic mirror image of the self.

This is seen also in Nettie’s account of the Olinka being driven by European colonizers from their village, which “has a steady supply of fresh water”,⁴³ to “a barren stretch of land that has no water at all for six months of the year. During that time, [the Olinka] must buy water from the planters”.⁴⁴ The injustice of being forced to buy back what nature gives freely seems to resonate particularly with a situation which Sofia is forced into by her white employer. “Miz Millie” offers to drive Sofia to see her children, whom she has not seen in “five years”, but when the car breaks down, and Millie protests that “I couldn’t ride in a pick-up with a strange colored man”, Sofia ends up spending only “fifteen minutes with my children”.⁴⁵ The intervention of white colonizers, in the established relationship between the Olinka and their access to natural resources, forms a parallel with Miz Millie’s callous interruption of Sofia’s maternal bond, to position the African colonization as identifiable with African American domestic servitude. In this way, Nettie’s African narrative is introduced, as Lindberg-Seyerstedt puts it, “as a footnote to Celie’s overwhelming documentation of homegrown oppression”.⁴⁶

The kinds of identification with Africa which are shown here accord with Barbara Christian’s observation that Walker’s ideal of the value of an African inheritance, to African Americans, lies particularly in its practical use in daily life:

[A] “heritage must continually be renewed rather than fixed in the past”.⁴⁷ ...[T]he idea of heritage is perpetually subordinate to the fact of a living tradition, a tradition in which one generation remains in touch with its pre-

decessors by means of homely skills—quilt-making and butter-churning, among others—that get passed on. The quilts remain appropriate for “everyday use” so long as the art of their manufacture remains alive.⁴⁸

Until the point when Walker attempts to represent African speech, the drawing of these “everyday use”-type of correspondences is reasonably successful, functioning much in the manner that Pilate’s “Africanness” is established in *Song of Solomon* through the “palm oil flowing in her veins”.⁴⁹ For Walker, a sense of African “tradition” is identified in a most useful way as it is felt through everyday African American practice.

What happens, however, when the novel approaches the representation of African speech (the second way in which Africa is narrated here) is something else entirely. The moment when Nettie describes the missionaries’ arrival in the Olinka village is illustrative:

You never saw such curious faces as the village folks surrounded us with. At first they just looked. [...] then they moved up a little bit—nobody saying a word yet—and touched our hair. Then looked down at our shoes. We looked at Joseph. Then he told us they were acting this way because the missionaries before us were all white. [...]

Then one of the women asked a question. We looked at Joseph. He said the woman wanted to know if the children belonged to me or to Corrine or to both of us. [...] Then another woman had a question.⁵⁰

We begin to see how Lindberg-Seyersted comes to call Walker’s narration of Africa, quite straightforwardly, “boring”.⁵¹ Even when Walker does allow individual Africans to break from the uniform mass of humanity—who all seem to “move” as one—in order to allow one or two of them to “say a word”, she shows no concern with either direct citation, or even description, of their spoken language, in marked contrast to the priority the novel accords to Celie’s vernacular. The Africans’ speech is interpreted through Nettie’s bland, standard English in a way that suggests the total unimportance of seeking any kind of faithful representation of people who are simply “too different”.⁵² If, as Gates puts it, “Celie speaks herself free”,⁵³ and if, by the same token, Walker speaks her grandmothers and great-grandmothers free, the same is not achieved for the speech of any Africans who are encountered. Thus the radical bridging of difference, which is suggested by the linked aesthetics described by the semiotic, by speaking in tongues, by womanism, or by the erotic, as an “ideal”, encounters very *real* restrictions in the field of Black Power politics, and

the narrative approach toward the cultural memory of Africa becomes caught here in the breach.

Walker's text works through reconciliatory narrative process which Henderson situates as an "internal dialogue [...], a dialectic neither repressing difference nor, for that matter, privileging identity, but rather expressing engagement with the social aspects of self ('the other[s] in ourselves')." ⁵⁴ When it does this, it inhabits a realm which shows almost infinite potential for overcoming difference, to represent multiple subjectivities, "to make connections, to heal unnecessary divisions". ⁵⁵ Yet the slippage in this "erotic" aesthetics which *The Color Purple* exemplifies occurs as a result of an important quarrel with some aspects of Black Power, and this in turn shows a problematic encounter between a politics of radical self-love, and a dogmatic rejection of Black patriarchy. The erotic form of identification is described by Shug's exposition of her spirituality:

God is inside you and inside everybody else. [...] I believe God is everything. [...] Everything that is or ever was or ever will be [...] My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people....that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. ⁵⁶

Shug's message provides the promising possibility of a perspective which can overcome difference, and yet in *The Color Purple*, issues of sexual oppression in the Black nationalist struggle become inseparable from the question of approaching the cultural memory of Africa.

Walker's aesthetics of mutuality and love of all beings, suggested by the imagistic correspondences which "connect" women's experience in Georgia with the novel's African experience, is compromised by a strong reaction against the moment in which

Black Power ideologues emphasized the African cultural past as the true heritage of African Americans [...] and] also lambasted older African Americans, opposing them to the lofty mythical models of the ancient past. These older men and women, they claimed, had become Uncle Toms and Aunt Jemimas who displayed little awareness of their culture and who, as a result of the slave past, had internalized the white man's view of Blacks. ⁵⁷

Walker claims that her principal intention, in writing *The Color Purple*, was to create "a memorial" to her own grandmother, who "was stuck in the house with my grandfather, and never went anywhere, so I decided that

in my novel, the person who would represent her [...] would have a much richer life".⁵⁸ The vernacular which Walker uses in the majority of *The Color Purple* enacts an imaginative rescue of the generations of her mother and grandmothers. Yet her positioning of this rescue is almost in competition with a cultural memory of Africa, which it appears she can only see through the lens of a patriarchal and sometimes misogynistic Black Power politics that valorized a mythical Africa in strongly heteronormative terms, and against which a Black woman had to fight for her life.⁵⁹

WALKER'S APPREHENSIVE AFRICANISM

Walker's deployment of a cultural memory of Africa in this novel, then, emerges from a womanist protest against some elements of the gender politics of Black Power. Lauri Umansky writes that this wave of Black nationalism emerged "contemporaneously with the publication of Moynihan's incendiary report" in 1965, which famously claimed that the overt dominance of Black women was the cause of African American familial breakdown.⁶⁰ The role of women in the Black Power movement is a field of history which has been relatively unexplored until recent key interventions. Cherrie L. Moraga tells how "men of color tried to determine what 'revolutionary' meant, censoring women from voicing their opposition within the people of color movements of the late 60s and early 70s".⁶¹ Joyce Hope Scott comments: "The Black Muslim movement, Stokely Carmichael, Imiri [sic] Baraka, and Maulana Ron Karenga—all key opinion shapers of the turbulent 1960s and 70s—uniformly espoused a rhetoric of female subordination and role assignment based on traditional biological function".⁶² As Melani McAlister writes, "Elijah Muhammad taught 'respect' for women but also the necessity of controlling them",⁶³ and similarly, Tracye A. Matthews tells how the Black Panther Party "tended to rely heavily on biological determinism and notions of 'natural order' in assessing and assigning separate roles for Black women and men",⁶⁴ but also that female Panthers such as Elaine Brown, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur "often tested and stretched the boundaries of the largely masculinized Party structure".⁶⁵ With Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael's comment, the most memorable of all—"The only position for the woman in the revolution is prone"⁶⁶—it is not surprising that "as a few Black women within the movement pointed out by the late 1960s, Black nationalist pronatalism contained within it a starkly sexist and traditionalist message about Black family and sexual politics".⁶⁷ Joyce Hope

Scott comments that “Black women have appeared as the bitch or ancient ‘terrible mother’ who, as Moynihan put it, emasculates and tyrannizes the Black male, depriving him of his opportunity to flourish and grow into a healthy American man”.⁶⁸ It is to this specific discourse that Walker responds, when she writes that although Black women have been called “‘Matriarchs’, ‘Superwomen’, and ‘Mean and Evil Bitches’”, their true strength is not malignant, but rather lies in the simple ability to maintain an inner core of creativity in the face of unbelievable oppression”.⁶⁹

Where Ishmael Reed’s and Toni Morrison’s novels, discussed above, situate ways to relate to the cultural memory of Africa through a distinctively African diasporic tradition of possession, which is either explicitly or implicitly linked to Vodoun and other religious practices, Walker does something rather different. During an episode related by Nettie, she tells of meeting “the mayor’s wife and her maid”,⁷⁰ (who is also Celie’s friend, named Sofia) in the local town, prior to her departure for Africa. Nettie writes: “She suddenly sort of erased herself. It was the strangest thing, Celie! One minute I was saying howdy to a living woman. The next minute nothing living was there. Only its shape.”⁷¹ Walker appears to be suggesting Nettie’s understanding that Sofia, by enacting a form of “shape-shifting”, may be displaying, within the domestic situation in Georgia, an “everyday use” for forms like “voodoo and conjuring [which] were also used to preserve and pass down African cultural beliefs and traditions, [and] to resist oppressors”.⁷² Nettie continues, “All that night I thought about it”,⁷³ and then goes on to say:

In the morning I started asking questions about Africa and reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject.

Did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Milledgeville or even Atlanta, thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the bible meant all of Africa?⁷⁴

What Walker does here is to gesture to the everyday sites in which traditional African diaspora culture might be known in the midst of American life (as we have already seen in Chaps. 2 and 3). Yet what she then does is to link this diaspora tradition to a narrative of African greatness which, as Paul Gilroy has suggested, reverses imperial terms without changing them at all. In this way, Walker makes an immediate shift in her approach toward Africa, in fact situating it in a space of imperial discourse. While

the aesthetics and speech of the semiotic/erotic, and all its potential for mutuality and the overcoming of difference, is laid out in Walker's novel, a distinct choice is made not to employ its potential in the approach to Africa. This is a clear example of the ideals of African American women's politics of the time being compromised by the *real* conditions of "interlocking" systems of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression", constituting a "simultaneity of oppression".⁷⁵

So while Celie, in the Southern setting, is learning under Shug's tutelage, to love herself, Sofia is learning to resist exploitation by her white employers, and even Harpo's subservient wife Squeak is speaking up, the picture of women's lives observed by Nettie in Africa is rather different. An example is given as Nettie comments on the Olinka's use of roofleaf in constructing their huts:

They pick it and dry it and lay it so it overlaps to make the roof rainproof. This part is women's work. Menfolks drive the stakes for the hut and sometimes help build the walls with mud and rock from the streams.⁷⁶

If we are in any doubt as to the point Walker is making with her dramatization of African gender roles, Nettie comments in her next letter:

It is as if Olivia fears the food from these wives because they all look so unhappy and work so hard. Whenever they see her they talk about the day when she will become their littlest sister/wife. It is just a joke, and they like her, but I wish they wouldn't say it ...

Why do they say I will be a wife of the chief? asks Olivia.

That is as high as they can think, I tell her.

[...]

You will grow up to be a strong Christian woman, I tell her. Someone who helps her people to advance. You will be a teacher or a nurse. You will travel. You will know many people greater than the chief.⁷⁷

If Walker situates an identification with African spirituality in the well-known Southern setting, her representation of the mores of Olinka society presents another, more highly defensive narrative, where an African patriarchy is represented as utterly intractable, and serves as a platform for Walker's feminist protest. In another context, her film *Warrior Marks*, made with Pratibha Parmar, which addresses the practice of female genital mutilation in Africa, Walker contends that "all I care about is why is the child crying"⁷⁸ :

"I want to grab and imprison these women who are abusing this child; I don't care how Black they are, whose 'culture' it is, or what anyone else thinks about it whatsoever."⁷⁹

Walker displays what Stanlie M. James calls, mildly, an "insensitivity" to "the specificity of cultural context".⁸⁰ What is more, where Walker is concerned that in her representation of the grandmothers' generation, "you can actually hear them speak when the novel is read aloud",⁸¹ her approach toward depicting African speech shows no such concern, as is evident when she writes, in a note "To The Reader" at the end of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, "sequel" to *The Color Purple*:

Tsunga, like many of my 'African' words, is made up. Perhaps it, and the other words I use, are from an African language I used to know, now tossed up by my unconscious. I do not know from what part of Africa my African ancestors came, and so I claim the continent.⁸²

While Walker's practice seeks to enable effective representation across differences of time and historical forgetting for African American women, her approach toward Africa works to effect the opposite. The ideal of "commitment to survival and wholeness of an entire people" has, in effect, been compromised by the reality of a separatism which occurs as reaction against the patriarchal discourses of white and Black society alike, but which couches itself in a discourse that, just like imperialism, de-centers Africa and fails to offer the same aesthetics of mutuality which are so desired in the American realm, and are ironically usually so epitomized in the approach to African traditions.

Given the powerful connection that Ishmael Reed and others identify between African American artistic and spiritual practices and the practices formalized within Vodoun, the slippage which is shown around this powerful connection, in womanist discourse, and in *The Color Purple* specifically, is notably strange. Monica A. Coleman writes that "womanists have often assumed that Black women's religious experiences are Christian" and that "intentionally or not, womanists have created a Christian hegemonic discourse within the field".⁸³ Even in this critique, though, Walker's self-identified "'born-again pagan' spirituality" is positioned differently from "non-Christian religions [such as] voodoo".⁸⁴ LaDonna Forsgren describes National Black Theater founder Barbara Ann Teer's "ritualistic revivals [as] reflect[ing] a major [tenet] of Holiness, Baptist, and Pentecostal

church worship practices”.⁸⁵ At the same time, however, these are vitally and explicitly linked to a practice of channeling a broader African diaspora tradition, when “liberators and participants perform a Haiti voodoo rites ceremony to summon Oshun and ask her for protection”.⁸⁶ Reflecting upon the hybrid nature of African diaspora tradition, what we have learned from Reed, however, and particularly his perspective on Malcolm X who did not recognize the hybrid nature of Southern African American church folkways, it is interesting that Walker, Henderson, and others situate these traditions as largely Christian, incorporating only a shadow-presence of an African inheritance. Perhaps an apprehension about the “Africanness” of some recognized African American traditions comes to express itself in a number of these womanist narratives, as a kind of cultural amnesia about the circulation of African diaspora culture.

The slippage between the real and the ideal which Walker demonstrates intensifies in interesting and troubling ways in contexts that bring Black feminist aesthetics into direct conversation with white feminism. Here the effort to unravel patriarchal boundaries and dialectics can be seen by the same token to threaten to forget the cultural memory of Africa in new ways. Catherine Colton discusses how



ary Daly offers *The Color Purple* as one of three examples of a Fairy Tale, as it is defined in her *Wickedary*: “an Archaic story that transports the Hearer into Fairy Time,” which is defined, in part, as “[t]ime that moves Counterclockwise and is accessible to those who ask Counterclock Whys”,⁸⁷ questions taking the questioners beyond the boundaries of the patriarchal world.⁸⁸

Daly’s *Wickedary* is a feminist text which claims to reveal “the Wild reality hidden by the falsehoods of the patriarchal foreground”.⁸⁹ Its interest is in an alternative women’s realm of knowledge, which again, like the visions of Walker, Lorde, Henderson, and others, seeks to unravel oppressive binaries. However, in a very interesting counter-narrative which might serve as some commentary upon the ways in which an aesthetics of African diaspora possession, if disassociated from the traditional forms and contexts of their emergence, might be mistaken for a “fairy tale”, Audre Lorde has addressed Mary Daly’s neglect, in her other volume titled *Gyn/Ecology*, of African goddesses as sites and repositories of traditional female power. Lorde writes:

Your words on the nature and function of the Goddess, as well as the ways in which her face has been obscured, agreed with what I myself have discovered in my searches through African myth/legend/religion for the true nature of old female power.

So I wondered, why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess images only white, western european, judeo-christian? Where was Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan? Well, I thought, Mary has made a conscious decision to narrow her scope and to deal only with the ecology of western european women.⁹⁰

In a response to Lorde which was not published until recently, Daly admits her ignorance and invites further discussion on this subject.⁹¹ The difficulty which Lorde highlights, of the erasure of an African diaspora tradition during the process of resisting patriarchy, is also evident in Walker's own position. Walker consistently turns away from the connections between African American culture and the culture of a hybrid African diaspora, almost using her protest against Black Power patriarchy as the excuse. In another instance,

[s]he publicly took Panther leader David Hilliard [...] to task for the Panther's "machismo" that, according to Walker, made them less afraid of the police or the FBI than of being called a "punk" or coward. Horrified by the machismo and self-destructiveness of the Black Panther leadership, Walker derived new political conclusions by suggesting that the "revolution must occur within".

If "Walker's apparent convergence with Gloria Steinem's self-help individualism [...] is hardly adequate",⁹² her embrace here of nondogmatic feminist theories is nevertheless accomplished in ways which identify difference after all, between a 'masculine' and a 'feminine' politics. This slip-page occurs in reaction against the oppression of women, but it is voiced as part of an aesthetic that can situate Africa itself as a site of irreconcilable difference. The reason may, again, be a kind of anxiety around the hybridity of African American culture.

"AND GUESS WHAT ELSE..."

Lauren Berlant has commented that "the last half of the novel returns 'Africa' to the space of disappointment and insufficiency".⁹³ The fantasy of African American identification with Africa has fallen away to reveal the

reality of the distance between cultures, and African unresponsiveness is now the object of African American anger:

It's worse than unwelcome, said Samuel. The Africans don't even *see* us. They don't even recognize us as the brothers and sisters they sold....We love them. We try every way we can to show that love. But they reject us.⁹⁴

In order to avoid confrontation with the reality of difference which would render all their (Afrocentric) ideals of Africa invalid, Nettie and Samuel turn to the only avenue of fantasy left to them: "[C]oncern and passion soon ran away with us....I was transported by ecstasy in Samuel's arms."⁹⁵ Ultimately, then, Walker's valorization of a self-help individualism, even in the realm of Black Power politics, and her imposition of these values upon an imaginary African context which she makes little effort to understand on its own terms, means that

[t]urning away from Mr. _____ allows Celie both to "change words" with Shug and to foster an alternative economy. Similarly, Samuel and Nettie are able to realize their conversational romance only after they first give up on fighting the Europeans and prepare to leave Africa altogether. Tashi and Adam emerge from the forest as sweethearts precisely at the moment that Adam takes Tashi away from the fighting Mbeles.⁹⁶

Just as *The Color Purple* is able to turn a wife-beating rapist into an affectionate sewer of pants whose "mind [is] really on the slant of his next stitch",⁹⁷ Walker's novel is governed by the notion that "kinship [is] the key to transforming bad listeners into good ones".⁹⁸ Though the novel's approach to Africa concludes that "maybe it is kinfolks",⁹⁹ the discovery which is made alongside this is that some "bad listeners cannot 'hear' because they are too different".¹⁰⁰ Nettie and Samuel leave the tribe literally hidden in "a place set so deep into the earth that it can only really be seen...from the air".¹⁰¹ As Keith Byerman comments, "such a space is essentially an escape from rather than an engagement with the oppressive world".¹⁰² The family's miraculous survival from the sinking ship which attempts to bring them home underscores the novel's "anxiety" about the Middle Passage,¹⁰³ and the only symbol of the encounter with Africa which is brought back to America is a reminder of what is represented as its most oppressive practice—the scarification which Tashi suffers, and which Adam undergoes in sympathy with her. Tashi is brought to Georgia

with the promise that “in America she would have country, people, parents, sister, husband, brother and lover”.¹⁰⁴ Celie, meanwhile, has a final story to tell about the relationship with Africa:

Guess what, I say to [Mr. _____], folks in Africa where Nettie and the children is believe white people is Black peoples children.¹⁰⁵

Celie’s tale here uses the strange myth of African origins described by Malcolm X—“the demonology that every religion has, called ‘Yacub’s History’”.¹⁰⁶ The point, apparently, of evoking this myth, told in the highly laborious style reminiscent of Nettie’s attempt to represent African speech, is to respond to the Nation of Islam’s contention that

in one generation, the Black slave women in America had been raped by the slavemaster white man until there had begun to emerge a homemade, handmade, brainwashed race that was no longer even of its true color, that no longer even knew its true family names. The slavemaster forced his family name upon this rape-mixed race, which the slavemaster began to call ‘the Negro’.¹⁰⁷

This parable also formed the basis of Amiri Baraka’s play “A Black Mass”, which, as McAlister comments,

allegorically represents the rape of Black women by white men, [and] also constructs “Woman” as the first and most susceptible base for the spread of “whiteness,” reproducing the tendency of many nationalist ideologies to make women’s bodies the sites of both nationalist reproduction and potential cultural impurity.¹⁰⁸

Walker’s addition to the history is to comment that

[s]ome of the Olinka peoples believe [...] folks might start growing two heads one of these days, for all us know, and then the folks with one head will send ’em all someplace else. But some of ’em don’t think like this. They think, [...] the only way to stop making somebody the serpent [who is thrown out of the Garden of Eden] is for everybody to accept everybody else as a child of God.¹⁰⁹

The point that is apparently being made here is that someone will always be excluded, or marked as different, but that they are really all the same—and as Celie speaks the world in a certain way, it seems that, as

Carla Kaplan notes, “talk (alone) can meld difference into sameness”.¹¹⁰ Irreconcilability of perspective, and an inability to understand the African “other”, is allowed to exist, apparently without conflict, then, alongside a notion of talk which reconciles difference. Furthermore, in the scheme of Olinka beliefs Celie describes where a snake is shown to represent African Americans, she says:

And guess what else about the snake? [...] These Olinka peoples worship it. They say who knows, maybe it is kinfolks, but for sure it’s the smartest, cleanest, slickest thing they ever seen.¹¹¹

Celie completes her newfound happiness by allowing any failure of exchange to lie undisturbed alongside a groundless fairy tale fiction of love, rejecting the reality of Olinka indifference to African Americans, in favor of a fantasy version of Africa, where the African American is the most admired of all creatures.

The novel ends thus: “White people busy celebrating they independence from England July 4th, say Harpo, so most Black folks don’t have to work. Us can spend the day celebrating each other.”¹¹² Melissa Walker comments:

Public history, then, is something that happens to white people; Black people must create their own separate and mainly private history. [...] The early 1980s, after all, were a kind of lull in political activism, a time when activists might have felt that they would have to wait—do something different—before changes could occur. Some readers might have concluded that the 1980s were a time for enterprising individuals to profit, as Celie does when she begins to make pants.¹¹³

Alice Walker’s recourse to a “happy ending that is unambiguously materialistic”¹¹⁴ might reveal a perspective which is preoccupied by a dialogue with the Black nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s, but which encounters it through an opportunism formative to economic boom of the 1980s. As Chap. 5 will show, the 1980s saw African American urban communities bearing the brunt of investment directed away from the inner cities by a historical “white flight” to the suburbs, and as a result crippled by social decay. Walker’s decision to move away from historical representation into a scheme of fairy tale that supports a “clean” and “slick” African American subjectivity far removed from any messy hybrid cultural flows associated

with diaspora, and which, moreover, emphasizes personal pleasure over communal welfare, is suspiciously close to a forgetful (“Atonist”) American tendency in which the past is left behind to allow for a “progress” into the future. The cultural memory of Africa, when approached in ways which acknowledge the sheer messiness of articulating African American experience in the light of traumatic histories, as is seen in John Edgar Wideman’s work in Chap. 5, can encompass the unspeakable pain and loss of the brutal histories encompassed by African diaspora experience, and can also contain the tools for learning how to heal from those experiences in the contemporary time.

NOTES

1. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, (London: Women’s Press, 1984 [1983]).
2. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*.
3. Christopher Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation, Volume Two*, (Norwich: Arthur Miller Centre for American Studies, University of East Anglia, 2001), 217.
4. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 258–9. Reprinted from *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Meridian Press, 1990.), 262.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power,” *Sister Outsider*, (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 56–57.
7. Keith Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004 [2002]), 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 10.
9. *Ibid.*, 11.
10. Henderson, “Speaking in Tongues.”
11. Lorde “Uses of the Erotic,” 53.
12. Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” 53–54.
13. Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the twentieth Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 23. See LaDonna Forsgren, “‘Set Your Blackness Free’: Barbara Ann Teer’s Art and Activism during the Black Arts Movement”, *Frontiers* 36.1 (2015); Tracye Matthews, “No One Ever Asks What a Man’s Role in the Revolution Is: Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party,” in *The*

- Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles Earl Jones. (Black Classic Press, 1998); Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*. University of North Carolina Press, 2005; Rhonda Y. Williams, "Black Women and Black Power," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History*, 22.3 (July 2008), 22–26.
14. Patricia Hill Collins, "What's in a name? Womanism, Black feminism, and beyond," *The Black Scholar*, 26.1, (Winter/Spring 1996), 9.
15. Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, (The Women's Press, London, 1983), 3.
16. *Ibid.*, 4.
17. Barbara Smith, Introduction to *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), xxii. Originally published New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983.
18. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 402.
19. "Not all Black women intellectuals are educated. [...] Rather, doing intellectual work of the sort envisioned within Black feminism requires a process of self-conscious struggle on behalf of Black women, regardless of the actual social location of where that work occurs." Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2009 [2000], 18. Collins makes a similar point about feminism in Black British contexts, in Patricia Hill Collins, *Against the Grain: A Celebration of Survival and Struggle*. (Southall: Southall Black Sisters, 1990).
20. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 112.
21. *Ibid.*, 117.
22. *Ibid.*, 127.
23. Kadiatu Kanneh, "'Africa' and Cultural Translation: Reading Difference," in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, eds. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry and Judith Squires, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), 285.
24. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 106.
25. Linda S. Kauffman, *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 195, 166, 186. Kauffman is quoted by Carla Kaplan in *The Erotics of Talk: Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 131.
26. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 110.
27. Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk*, 126.
28. Cheryl A. Wall, *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition*, (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 153.

29. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, "Who Is Nettie? and What Is She Doing in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 24.2 (1992), 89.
30. Ibid.
31. This phenomenon is discussed in detail in Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), and V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
32. Gates writes: "Through Celie's mode of apparently reporting speech, underscored dramatically by her written dialect voice of narration, we logically assume that we are being shown discourse, when all along we never actually are. Celie only tells us what people have said to her. She never shows us their words in direct quotation. Precisely because her written dialect voice is identical in diction and idiom to the supposedly spoken words that pepper her letters, we believe that we are overhearing people speak, just as Celie did when the words were in fact uttered. We are not, however; indeed, we can never be certain whether or not Celie is showing us a telling or telling us a showing, as awkward as this sounds." Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 249. For Gates to allege that because Walker does not use quotation marks she is not citing speech is indeed to make too rigid a differentiation between speech and writing, even as he attempts to show how these two "quantities" merge into each other.
33. Bigsby, *Writers in Conversation, Volume Two*, 220.
34. Michel Feith, "Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Signifying Monkey*: A Diasporic Critical Myth." In *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, eds. Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 72.
35. Ibid.
36. Deborah E. McDowell, "'The Changing Same': Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists." In *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Meridian, Penguin Books, 1990), 105. Reprinted from *New Literary History*, 18 (Winter 1987): 281–302.
37. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 119.
38. Ibid., 64.
39. Ibid., 134.
40. Ibid., 135.
41. Ibid., 177. Wall, McDowell and Lindberg-Seyersted all note these parallels.
42. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 409.

43. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 192.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 92.
46. Lindberg-Seyersted, "Who is Nettie?" 95–6.
47. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 87.
48. David Cowart, "Heritage and Deracination in Walker's 'Everyday Use,'" in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed. Ikenna Dieke, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 28.
49. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, (London: Vintage, 1998 [1977]), 149.
50. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 128–29.
51. Lindberg-Seyersted, "Who Is Nettie?" 91.
52. Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk: Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 140.
53. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 253.
54. Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," 264.
55. Nancy K. Bereano, introduction to *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, by Audre Lorde, (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 8.
56. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 166–67.
57. Barbara Christian, Introduction to *Alice Walker, Everyday Use*, ed. Barbara T. Christian, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 10–11.
58. Spielberg, Steven, dir. "Conversations with the Ancestors: The Color Purple from Book to Screen." In *The Color Purple, Two-Disc Special Edition, Disc Two: Bonus Features*.
59. While "the speeches and writings of Malcolm X while he was a member of the Nation [of Islam] were laden with misogynistic statements. [...] Once separated from the Nation of Islam Malcolm X began to reconsider the role of women both in revolutionary movements and within the community. [...] Nevertheless, Malcolm X did not, in the last eleven months of his life, provide an explicit theoretical understanding of gender and the Civil Rights Movement [and] continued to cast the movement in masculine terms." James Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 35.
60. Lauri Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 79.
61. Cherrie L. Moraga, "From Inside the First World: Foreword, 2001," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldua (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002 [third edition, first edition 1981]), xv–xvi.
62. Joyce Hope Scott, "From Foreground to Margin: Female Configurations and Masculine Self-Representation in Black Nationalist Fiction," in

- Nationalisms & Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 304.
63. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000*, (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 2001), 97. “The woman is man’s field to produce his nation”, Muhammad wrote. “You protect your vegetable crops from worms and thieves. Is not your woman more valuable than that crop of corn, that crop of cotton, that crop of cabbage, potatoes, beans, tomatoes?...Yet you are not careful about your women. You don’t love them.” McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 96.
 64. Matthews, “No One Ever Asks What a Man’s Role in the Revolution Is,” 236.
 65. *Ibid.*, 244.
 66. Cited by Joyce Hope Scott, “From Foreground to Margin,” 305.
 67. Lauri Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 80.
 68. Hope Scott, “From Foreground to Margin,” 303–4.
 69. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. Defense of the patriarchalist approaches apparent in Black Power can be staged as James Smethurst suggests, by registering first that “women in the Black Arts and Black Power movements who fought against sexism were not marginal within those movements” and, second, that the movements “were often not nearly as sensitive to the particular interests of Black women as they should have been, but that was true of almost every segment of American society”. James Smethurst “Black Arts Movement.” In *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience*, eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 87, 85. It would, indeed, be incorrect to suggest that Black women were silent within the Black Power movement, but that does not mean they did not have valid grounds for protest. Analysis of Black women’s art can situate the *ideal* situation for Black women’s lives being a complete freedom from oppression, not stopping short of that position because of the “real” situation in which there is “always” oppression of some kind.
 70. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 111.
 71. *Ibid.*
 72. Catherine A. Colton, “Alice Walker’s Womanist Magic: The Conjure Woman as Rhetor,” in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed. Ikenna Dieke, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 33.
 73. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 111.
 74. *Ibid.*
 75. Barbara Smith, “Introduction”, xxxiv.

76. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 128.
77. Ibid., 133–34.
78. Alice Walker, *The Same River Twice*, (Washington: Washington Square Press, 1996), 160.
79. Pratibha Parmar and Alice Walker, *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993).
80. Stanlie M. James, "Shades of Othering: Reflections on Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol 23, no 4, (1998), 1036.
81. Lewis McAdams and John Door, dirs., *Lannan Literary Videos 14: Alice Walker*, (Lannan Foundation Literary Series, 1989).
82. Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, Random House, 1993 [1992]), 267–68.
83. Coleman, Monica A. "Must I Be Womanist?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22.1, (Spring 2006), 89.
84. Ibid., 90.
85. Forsgren, "Set Your Blackness Free", 147.
86. Forsgren, "Set Your Blackness Free", 152.
87. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 123.
88. Colton, "Alice Walker's Womanist Magic," 40. Citing Mary Daly, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, (Women's Press Ltd, 1998).
89. Mary Daly, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, xvi.
90. Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Audre Lorde, (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 8.
91. See Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006). Daly responded to Lorde after a pause of six months, and invited further discussion; it may seem a little unfair to Daly that Lorde never revealed having received a response, but perhaps underscores a larger point which Lorde sought to make by allowing her published "Open Letter" to appear unheard.
92. Samuel Farber, *Social Decay and Transformation: A View From the Left*, (Lexington Books, 2000), 77. Citing Alice Walker, "They Ran on Empty," *The New York Times*, Op-Ed section, May 5, 1993, A23 and Elaine Brown, "Attack Racism, Not Black Men," *The New York Times*, Op-Ed section, May 5, 1993, A23. Walker's words here invoke Gloria Steinem, *Revolution From Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).

93. Lauren Berlant, "Race, Gender, and Nation in *The Color Purple*," in *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & Kwame A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press, 1993), 226.
94. *Ibid.*, 201.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk*, 134.
97. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 231.
98. Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk*, 140.
99. Walker, *The Color Purple*.
100. Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk*, 140.
101. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 234.
102. Keith Byerman, "Walker's Blues," in *Alice Walker*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 62. Reprinted from *Fingering the Jagged Grain* (University of Georgia Press, 1985).
103. Celie highlights news of the sinking ship as "The only piece of mail Mr. _____ ever put directly in my hand", and as coinciding with "all the letters I wrote to you over the years come back unopen." Walker, *The Color Purple*, 216—the epistolary form is again used to reveal the impossibility of a living link with Africa.
104. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 235.
105. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 231.
106. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (London: Penguin Books, 1968 [1965]), 258.
107. *Ibid.*, 256.
108. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 107.
109. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 233.
110. Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk*, 140.
111. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 233.
112. *Ibid.*, 243.
113. Melissa Walker, *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966–1989*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 71–72.
114. *Ibid.*, 72.

“Something About the Silence”: John Edgar Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire*

Philadelphia Fire focuses on the 1985 bombing by the police of MOVE, a Black nationalist-influenced “back to nature” group who were living in West Philadelphia and whose members all took the last name “Africa”. John Edgar Wideman’s novel seeks to explain the almost inexplicable events surrounding MOVE, and if, as James Kyung-Jin Lee remarks, “the MOVE tragedy is the novel’s absent presence”,¹ the novel seeks after an attentiveness to the past as alive in the present as the only possible means of integrating the shocks of traumatic and exploitative histories into a communal knowledge. What Wideman puts in place in this novel is a means of remembering, which he situates as related to an African past, not in such a way as to remember Africa in narratively sequential fashion, but in a manner that enables a sensitivity to the effect of past trauma upon the American present. If “healing is at the heart of the religions that African slaves bequeathed to their descendants”,² and just as Ishmael Reed figures his narration of history as a response to possession by *loa*, Wideman’s narrative process may frequently be imagined to heal traumatic memory through “possession” by the voices of the past. The imperative to tell stories, which offer some kind of faithful representation of his African American community, arises in Wideman’s writing as a result of his own social mobility, his sense that he has “been fortunate enough

to do everything from run with a gang of juvenile delinquents to being a Rhodes scholar and university professor".³

Through the course of Wideman's novel, a paradoxical relationship emerges between the practice of "naming-after" Africa, signaled by MOVE, and an African "Great Time", which situates a kind of narrative time that can act as an all-encompassing medium, allowing for a witnessing of individual scenarios of traumatic historical and communicative fracture. MOVE was founded in Philadelphia in the 1970s by Korean War veteran Vincent Leaphart, who named himself "John Africa", and bestowed "Africa" as a surname upon each of his followers—this choice of name was loosely connected to a Black cultural-nationalist heritage, but beyond that, to all intents and purposes, bore little or no relationship to Africa as a place past or present. In this chapter I suggest that Wideman responds, in *Philadelphia Fire*, to MOVE's use of the name "Africa" as just one symptom of an urban African American landscape that has seen ruptures from tradition enacted by the multiple, continuous traumas of communal disenfranchisement, rampant deresourcing of poor urban areas, and police abuse and oppression. Wideman's novel witnesses MOVE's troubled use of "Africa", and situates it within a larger and longer spectrum of connection to African diaspora tradition—a tradition which the author is eventually able to employ to point toward fragile hopes of recuperation of community memory. This chapter thus argues that Wideman's approach to the cultural memory of Africa registers the multiple traumas encapsulated by contemporary lives lived in urban poverty, which are represented by the narrative as fractured, discontinuous, and composed of unexplained fragments. Yet it also ingeniously positions these within an expanded awareness of memorial time represented by a fluid connection to past, present, and future, and epitomized by a connection to both African American and African tradition. Ideas of Africa and Africanness thus, paradoxically and diversely enough, come to represent *both* a partial communal memory which is fractured and traumatized by shattering historical experience, *and* a boundless field of memory that surpasses birth and death, which holds knowledge of the past, present, and future in its expansive gaze. The field in which the past can possess the present is the same as that referenced in the previous three chapters, a field of Afro-diasporic possession which makes itself known in these narratives through language, and which in Wideman's novel has a specific role to play in the functioning of communities and the survival of the individual.

The novel moves around the historical event of a fire which started on May 13, 1985, when the City of Philadelphia police dropped a satchel of explosives onto a house in which members of the MOVE organization were living. The house, 6221 Osage Avenue, was in the middle of a Black neighborhood in West Philadelphia, and the fire killed 11 people and left 262 others homeless. In this horrific culmination of a years-long wrangle between MOVE and the City of Philadelphia, six adult members of the group and five children died under bombardment of gunfire, water cannon, and explosives. The attack occurred within conditions which Manning Marable identifies as follows:

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Black community experienced [...] distinct crises which threatened to pull apart its social fabric [...], generated by the federal government’s retreat from equality and the consolidation of mass conservatism under the administration of Ronald Reagan, which was aggressively hostile to Blacks’ interests.⁴

Two people, a woman named Ramona Africa, and a nine-year-old boy, Birdie Africa, escaped the fire alive. A large part of Wideman’s fiction is told from the perspective of protagonist Cudjoe, a Black man and an absent father, who has returned to Philadelphia from self-exile in the Greek islands, motivated by a quest for “the story he crossed an ocean to find. Story of a fire and a lost boy that brought him home”.⁵ As Cudjoe plans to “writ[e] a book [...] about the fire. What caused it. Who was responsible. What it means”,⁶ he interviews Margaret Jones, a character who is described by Wideman as a “former member of [...] the group inside the book who parallels or figures the actual MOVE organization”.⁷ If Cudjoe desires a narrative to “explain” the unspeakable history of the MOVE bombing, Margaret Jones says, bluntly: “Don’t need no book. Anybody wants to know what it means, bring them through here. Tell them these bombed streets used to be full of people’s homes. Tell them babies’ bones mixed up in this ash they smell.”⁸ Jones thus challenges the idea Cudjoe has that constructing a narrative can act as a healing balm in the face of a “fear of a rapid and final disappearance” of the past.⁹ Cudjoe’s response, “I want to do something about the silence”,¹⁰ may be likened to Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, who with “eyes [...] staring” and “mouth [...] open” “would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed”.¹¹ Cudjoe’s response here is marked by what Susan Buck-Morss identifies as the “shock [which] is the very essence of modern

experience”.¹² In this, specifically African American case, a response to historical experience is *multiply traumatized* by the shocks of modernity *and* the role of racial slavery within it, by the history of traumatic racial othering which has characterized African American experience, as well as by the specific traumatic history of the MOVE bombing. It is this repeated experience of shock and trauma which, I argue, affects MOVE’s use of “Africa” as a name in this devastating and perplexing chapter of Philadelphia’s history, and it is this experience of history to which Wideman seeks an appropriate narrative response throughout the text of *Philadelphia Fire* (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

At the time of the police attack on MOVE in 1985, the group characterized themselves with a particular representation of Blackness, wearing their hair in dreadlocks to invoke “the way nature intended [it], uncombed and uncut”.¹³ Commenting upon the politics of dreads and the Afro, Kobena Mercer comments that “these hairstyles were never just natural, waiting to be found: they were stylistically *cultivated* and politically *constructed* in



Fig. 5.1 MOVE members and the Philadelphia police, Thursday, May 4, 1978.
© AP/PA Images



Fig. 5.2 Aerial view of the aftermath of the fire on Osage Avenue, May 1985. © Corbis

a particular historical moment as part of a strategic contestation of white dominance and the cultural power of whiteness”.¹⁴ Though Mercer suggests that “it was only ever an imaginary ‘Africa’ that was put into play”,¹⁵ the “imaginary” nature of such Africanness is nevertheless significant in its own right, I suggest, as part of an expression of cultural and systemic trauma which is a major factor in the shaping of African American artistic tradition.

Wideman’s interest, then, in the processes by which naming and narrative might fail or succeed in responding in appropriate and healing ways to traumatic histories, is inspired, I suggest, by the unexpected and often inexplicable relationship of MOVE’s practice of naming and signification, and the troubled link it represents with tradition, as epitomized by their use of the name “MOVE” as well as the name “Africa”. While it might be imagined that MOVE’s name could have been taken from the public cry made by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, which was seen as an initiatory moment in the Black Power movement, “Move on over or we’ll move over you”¹⁶ (and some MOVE members were indeed former

Panthers), nowhere in MOVE literature does the group itself emphasize such a connection. As Robin Wagner-Pacifici comments, “[g]roup members are insistent, in fact, that the name MOVE itself does not stand for anything”.¹⁷ John Anderson and Hilary Hevenor tell the story of MOVE from its very inception by its founders John Africa and Donald Glassey:

Together, they called themselves the American Christian Movement for Life, or else the Christian Life Movement. Eventually, the name would be shortened to “MOVE”; the reference points “Christian” and “American” eliminated, and the name capitalized. In later years, when asked what the name meant, MOVE people would shrug their shoulders and look unblinking at their interrogators and say, “Means MOVE”.¹⁸

The trauma of an existence in a city where, as Cleaver puts it, the “police ranked among the most brutal in their blatant terrorism against poor Blacks”,¹⁹ is palpable. The explanation given, in MOVE’s own accounts, for their use of the name “Africa”, does not draw a linear narrative either from a “remembered” Africa, or from any particular Black nationalist group’s figuration of cultural memory. As naming fails in any way to explain the past, another narrative emerges, and MOVE have been describing their name as follows for years:

The word MOVE is not an acronym. It means exactly what it says: MOVE, work, generate, be active. Everything that’s alive moves. If it didn’t, it would be stagnant, dead. Movement is the principle of Life, and because MOVE’s belief *is* Life, our founder, JOHN AFRICA, gave us the name “MOVE.”²⁰

In other accounts of MOVE’s history, the relationship between historical or cultural memory and the practice of naming after “Africa” is similarly fractured and enigmatic. Although Kathleen Cleaver comments that “the rise of Black nationalism during the sixties and seventies influenced the group, and its adoption of the family name ‘Africa’ incorporated the continent’s mythical power into their eclectic beliefs”,²¹ MOVE themselves do not foreground either any relationship with the African continent, or with a history of Black protest, instead explaining:

All committed MOVE members take the last name “Africa” out of reverence for our founder JOHN AFRICA, and to show that we are a family, a unified body moving in one direction.”²²

The choice of the name is further contextualized by MOVE cofounder Donald Glassey, who claimed that "it was chosen not out of racial solidarity but by way of paying homage to "the continent where all life began."²³ Even when "Africa" is used as a signifier which alludes to a memory of the continent, it does not necessarily progress through any linear narrative of racial solidarity, and yet this discursive peculiarity, interestingly enough, accesses a field of signification which Wideman identifies as "African"; a realm of storytelling, ritual, and simple presence in which the past and the present commune together, and the past may thus be intimately known, without necessarily being housed in linear narrative.

Wideman describes this realm in his semi-autobiographical work *Fatheralong*, which as Mary Paniccia Carden notes, "contains many interesting echoes of *Philadelphia Fire*,"²⁴ Wideman identifies an understanding of an ancestral African notion of time in which the experience of the past can be accessed at any time in the present, as having been introduced to him by reading Achebe's famous novel:

At the beginning of *Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe mentions a story the people of Umuofia pass down from generation to generation, concerning the founder of their clan, the ancestor who wrestled a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights, earning for himself and his descendants the right to settle on the land they've occupied ever since. Told countless times, countless ways, in each recounting the fabled bout happens again, not in the past, but alive and present in Great Time, the always present tense of narrative where every alternative is possible [...] The wrestling match [...] is an intersection like the one drawn with chalk on an earthen floor to summon Loa, like the crossroads sacred to Damballah where living and dead pass one another.²⁵

Wideman and Achebe both characterize an "African" scheme of temporality in these descriptions, an experience of time which offers transformative ways to narrate the past, and which Wideman uses as having a specially healing capacity in the approaches to the memory of African American communities' traumatic experiences.

In this context, I argue that Wideman's novel links the problematic of naming in interesting ways with the evocation of the cultural memory of Africa in order to comment upon the cult of personality which can be seen to have played a part in twentieth-century Black cultural politics, and which reflects upon the trauma of commodification that has frequently

been imposed upon African American identity. The importance of naming is a key theme in African American literature since the advent of slavery in the Americas where Africans were stripped of their own names and given names chosen by slaveowners. The theme of naming is asserted as the novel opens with a story Cudjoe learns on the island of Mykonos, of "Zivianas named for the moonshine his grandfather cooked, best white lightning on the island"²⁶; the desire to name, to link language to memory, is essentially the same as Cudjoe's desire to "do something about the silence"; a way to find a language which explains the inexplicable past. Cudjoe is indeed "slightly envious" of Zivianas: "He would like to be named for something his father or grandfather had done well. A name celebrating a deed. A name to stamp him, guide him."²⁷ In this part of my discussion, I want to show the ways in which Wideman, in *Philadelphia Fire*, plays with the theme of naming as holding the possibility of connection to ancestry and tradition, but that he also demonstrate show this capacity to name is ruptured by devastating histories of disenfranchisement. Just as Wideman perceives "a call-and-response between his work and that of Toni Morrison's",²⁸ Cudjoe's desire for a patronym, introduced at the very start of the novel, responds almost unexpectedly to the call issued by Morrison in *Song of Solomon*, as Macon Dead wishes for a cane-stalked ancestor "who had a name that was real".²⁹ Wideman establishes Cudjoe as a protagonist who feels the lack of a name, and the "silence" that he worries about in the wake of the MOVE tragedy is the silence of a culture which has forgotten the power of naming, or narrative, for remembering and making sense of traumatic pasts, and is instead driven by ideas of "progress" toward the future.

Wideman's narrative in *Philadelphia Fire* is thus able to reference "Africa" as a signifier fractured from its signified amid a terrain of widespread traumatic loss, yet at the same time situate that within a broader way of remembering which is associated with African forms of memory. The significance of MOVE's use of the name "Africa", then, and of the group's relationship to a history of Black protest more generally, is linked by Wideman to an older tradition where the past can appear in the present, where "[y]ou could stare forever and the past goes on doing its thing".³⁰ This form of memory occurs in the context of what Wideman describes as

the Great Time of our African ancestors, a nonlinear, atemporal medium in which all things that ever *have been, are, or will be* mingle freely, the space that allows us to bump into relatives long dead or absent friends or children unborn as easily, as significantly, as we encounter the people in our daily lives.³¹

The form of memory which Wideman thus positions as "African", in common with the spiritual traditions signaled by Vodoun and other African diaspora religions, perceives the past as alive in the present. Wideman situates tradition itself in a knowledge of "Africa" which is represented by fluid notions of time, where generational ways of being, which might otherwise have little knowledge of each other, come to reside in easy communion with one another. Crucially for Wideman, such knowledge is located in, and accessed through, the language of everyday life—through stories and conversation, as well as through the landscape of African American life in the cities Wideman knows intimately—Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Wideman's sense of the particular urgency of telling stories in ways that honor the experiences and the losses of disenfranchised communities, arises with acute importance from his own personal experience. Having grown up in humble circumstances in Pittsburgh, Wideman's early adulthood quickly began to be typified by opportunity and extraordinary achievement; he gained a sports scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, played basketball for his state, and went on to become only the second African American, after Alain Locke, to be awarded the Rhodes Scholarship by the University of Oxford. In 1976, however, while Wideman was working as a Professor at the University of Laramie, Wyoming, he experienced the first of a series of rude shocks about the significance of his move away from his community, when his younger brother Robby was arrested, back in Pittsburgh, for first-degree murder and armed robbery. Robby was sentenced, two years later, to life in prison, where he remains today.³² The tragic aspects of Wideman's personal and family life do not end there; in 1986, his own son Jacob was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder, after stabbing a classmate on a school camping trip. Jacob also remains imprisoned today.³³ Jacob suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, and it is from this circumstance in particular that Wideman's novel, which moves in and out of Cudjoe's story, as well as encompassing a more "personal" authorial voice, seems to provide an explicit response to Fredric Jameson's contention that

[i]t is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time. [...] The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time.³⁴

Wideman meditates upon Jacob's predicament, at a point roughly halfway through the novel, and asks: "How does it feel to be inhabited by more than one self?"³⁵ Wideman comments that Jacob "must live many lives at once, yet have no life except the chaos produced by divided, warring selves".³⁶ Identity, here, is fractured by trauma, but I show in this chapter that trauma is actually enacted, not by the absence of linear time, but by the *tyranny* of linear time which composes part of the Eurocentric rejection of, or oblivion to, any sense of the past existing in the present. Any narrative imposed upon memory may never be able to do the work of that African memory that could easily produce the meaning of the past in the present, giving context for a sense of self: "Can this story he must never stop singing become a substitute for an integrated sense of self, of oneness, the personality he can never achieve?"³⁷

Karen F. Jahn identifies Wideman's writing as characterized by what Craig Werner calls

[t]he jazz impulse (grounded in blues and gospel) [which] engages basic (post)modernist concerns including the difficulty of defining, or even experiencing, the self; the fragmentation of public discourse; and the problematic meaning of tradition. [It] engages the question of how to communicate visions of new possibilities.³⁸

Heather Russell Andrade, also, comments that, in Wideman's work, "words ebb, spill, flow, converge, fragment. At times, there is a sense of complete fragmentation or, more accurately, complex free association".³⁹ But this free association of language, and the "visions of new possibilities" Wideman's writing encompasses, occurs not *just* a postmodern "euphoria" born of a failure to "unify the past, present, and future"⁴⁰ of experience—it does not emerge from a death of the past. It is, rather, an indicator of a past fully alive in the present, and is a form of memory that emerges from Wideman's central concern with depicting the voices of his community. This jazz impulse, then, is what motivates Wideman's comments, when speaking about his decision to write about the MOVE tragedy, that "if we look at certain events long enough and hard enough through the lens of fiction, maybe we can learn more of what we need to know".⁴¹ "What we need to know" serves as a peculiarly apposite way of naming the approach toward the historical event, and of pitching the desire, framed by Cudjoe, to create a narrative in which to house and understand a history. This desire is akin to what Pierre Nora calls "the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the

present as well as the total preservation of the past”.⁴² Wideman articulates the sense that the process of knowing the past must be a reflexive and an interrogatory one in which we examine our own motives, desires, and blind spots in the practice of telling the stories of the past. This perspective is one that Wideman situates as accessible through African “Great Time”.

If jazz, that very American phenomenon, was developed by African Americans in the context of a history of enforced transportation, plantation slavery, and continuing racially inscribed conditions of inequity, Wideman’s jazz writing is a response to what he calls, startlingly, “a second Middle Passage [...] afflicting Black communities in America today”,⁴³ where “young African Americans”⁴⁴ are “separated from traditional cultures, deprived of the love, nurturing, sense of value and identity these cultures provided”.⁴⁵ In *Fatheralong*, Wideman speaks of a loss of a sense of connection to tradition, for young Black people, which has more than a little to do with the emasculation of Black men in American society:

Ideas of manhood, true and transforming, grow out of private, personal exchanges between fathers and sons. Yet for generations of Black men in America this privacy, this privilege has been systematically breached in a most shameful and public way. [...] Whites own the country, run the country, and in this world where possessions count more than people, where law values property more than person, the material reality speaks plainly to anyone who’s paying attention, especially Black boys who own nothing, whose fathers, relegated to the margins, are empty-handed ghosts.⁴⁶

Wideman figures the “devastatingly traumatic forces [which] have severed a generation from its predecessors”⁴⁷ as commensurable with the earlier enforced separation of Africans from Africa. He understands young Black people in America to be alienated from a tradition in which memories of the past would once have helped to draw meaning from bewildering experience, and thus to understand their identities:

The African voice, the conduit of traditional wisdom [teaches that] the dead are those who don’t speak and are not spoken of, those not connected by vital words, those whom the stories have forgotten, who have forgotten the stories. Why am I in this American land? Why do I claim it? Why should anyone respect my claim, respect me? Who listens when I speak? Who will treat my story not as entertainment, not as a product to be sold or consumed?⁴⁸

Like Ishmael Reed, Wideman sees disconnection from a fluid form of memory (such as that epitomized by African diaspora forms of “possession”) as

enabling the commodification of Black identity, through the isolation of Blackness as a “sign” from a distinctive tradition and lineage. The alienation of both father *and* son, in the history Wideman describes, from the African form of memory which produces a sense of belonging and identity, means that there is nothing that Wideman can say to his own son to explain their common history or identity. They do not share a cultural memory, or tradition, in other words, in the context of which language would make sense: “Words between us have become useless. Decorative. [...] But the phone rings and he’s two thousand miles away so all we have to work with are words. I can’t hug him. Smile at him. See how big he’s growing.”⁴⁹

From the unsettling starting point where the name “Africa” refers to something barely known or understood in the postmodern landscape, the relationship between names, identities, and subjectivities becomes increasingly unstable throughout the novel. As John Africa hovers behind a number of diverse male identities, his memory appears as a kind of original repeatedly reinscribed in slightly altered form, in the way that Walter Benjamin describes “[t]he cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, [which] preserves not the unique aura of the person but the ‘spell of the personality,’ the phony spell of a commodity.”⁵⁰ It is not, for Wideman, just movie stars or cult leaders who are subject to losing their unique “aura”, which according to Benjamin “is tied to [a person’s] presence; there can be no replica of it”.⁵¹ Instead, Wideman enacts an extremely sophisticated fragmentation of the notion of the unified subject. He explains his fascinating perspective in interview:

There’s been such a psychic fragmentation, and so much more input—and powerful input—from different kinds of technologies and different kinds of cultures clashing, that most of us are many many in one. [...] I believe that the next real revolution in human consciousness, if we don’t blow ourselves off the face of the earth, will be a readjustment of the notion of continuous personality. [...] Because a single personality is, when you get right down to it pretty much a kind of superstition. From that a lot of guilt follows, a lot of prejudice, gender confusions, and [so on]. If we can face up to and acknowledge and begin to use the diversity we find inside ourselves, then maybe we’ll be able to start to tolerate diversity in the world outside of ourselves.⁵²

This speaks in interesting ways to the problematic of the denial of hybridity that has begun to become apparent in the shaping of African American identities. *MOVE*’s own use of signification, of a⁵³ “spectacular Blackness” which uses striking signifiers of African or Black identity that are alienated

from any knowledge of tradition, but also registers a history of “sporadic guerrilla warfare between police forces and poor Blacks [which] ha[d] been under way for at least the past thirty years”.⁵⁴ MOVE’s self-fashioning in the face of this history, I argue, is informed by an aesthetics of shock and discontinuity, and their use of the name “Africa” appears in this somewhat surprising setting, disconnected from any indication of a link to African cultural memory, place, or practice, but commenting instead upon the conditions of alienation from history, in which “urban renewal and model cities programs, [...led,] through massive demolition projects, life-giving ethnic hubs [to be] transformed into “semi-inhabited desert[s]”.⁵⁵

Throughout *Philadelphia Fire*, Wideman riffs upon John Africa’s creation of a cult of personality with his intriguing choice of name, and shapes a commentary upon the inhibiting construct of linear narratives (of personality, and of history itself). These fractured narratives of identity are positioned in lieu of participation in circular and communal forms of exchange that might situate African diaspora tradition, and which could potentially give identity a context linked to a sense of community that reaches across space and time. The first of these, apparently “unified”, characters is central to this process of the fragmentation of personality:

Zivianias would hold his boat on course with his foot. Leaning on a rail, prehensile toes snagged on the steering wheel, his goatskin vest unbuttoned to display hairy chest, eyes half shut, humming an island ballad, he was sailor-king of the sea.⁵⁶

The novel’s figure which represents John Africa is named King, and is described in a very similar posture:

[S]itting the way he is on the cinder blocks, cocked back and pleased with hisself, smiling through that orang-utan hair like a jungle all over his face, it’s like he’s telling anybody care to listen, this funk is mine. I’m the funk king sitting here on my throne.⁵⁷

Later in the novel, the notion of the unified identity is further problematized, as a protagonist introduced as “J.B.” may, after all, be another manifestation of the figure encountered earlier: “[H]is name is James. James Brown.”⁵⁸ As the novel goes on, we discover that John Africa, Zivianias, and King may be merely three aspects of a potentially endlessly faceted adult male persona who occupies the center of the narration. To

problematicize identity in this way, as Wideman hints, and as is increasingly apparent through the course of his novel, is to renegotiate a relationship with the notion of linear time—narrative is separated from the illusion of linear development, identity is presented as a series of postures which may indicate the “many in one”,⁵⁹ or equally, as it were, the “one in many”, and the *fiction* of a unified identity is exposed as just that.

For Wideman, contrary to Jameson, it is not the absence of confidence in linear time that creates a “schizophrenic” problem of personality. It is in fact the tyranny of linear time, which insists that the past disappears, and that identity must be understood as a linear narrative running from past to present to future. The illusion of linear time has been disrupted by the multiple traumas visited upon African American peoples, in the form of transatlantic and plantation slavery, the shock of modernity, the experience of massive urban disenfranchisement, and the attendant commodification of Blackness. While Wideman is therefore in agreement with Jameson that there has to be a connection with the past to nurture personal identity *and* an understanding of history, he profoundly disagrees that this connection has to be found through the medium of linear time.

Given the unspeakable nature of events affecting Wideman’s own family, his writing is inflected with a particularly urgent sense of the importance and yet paradoxical difficulty of telling the stories of his own endangered community. He explains during an interview conducted while he was employed at the University of Massachusetts:

[H]ere I am in Amherst, Mass., writing these books about Homewood, a Black, economically depressed community in Pittsburgh—what’s all that mean, what do all these words on the page have to do with that reality, and if I’m really bothered by that reality—of Pittsburgh—it exists now, this moment, my people are there, my relatives are there, and suffering various forms of oppression and danger and pain, why don’t I do something about it? What’s it mean to make stories up about it? What’s it mean to, in a sense, exploit it in a narrative or a poem?⁶⁰

Wideman’s ethical concerns about the exploitative potential of writing are paired with an equal conviction that “our grief and our history, the stories of Homewood’s beginnings [...], such rituals, such tellings must survive if we as a people are to survive”.⁶¹ The particular nature of Wideman’s class mobility, then, leads him to an accentuated focus upon the representational demand that community histories exert upon narrative, which cannot be satisfied by any linear account couched in a past which is located in a prior

moment to the present. Instead, Wideman comments that an “explosion of doubt and skepticism that is part of everything I do [is...] one thing that keeps me from writing traditional narrative, because I frankly don’t believe in it, the tricks of it, the conventions of it”.⁶²

As he approaches the history of the City of Philadelphia’s attack on MOVE, Wideman’s central concern is to construct a narrative which might act as an adequate memorial to the children killed in the fire. This is an exercise which entails accessing a language where the memory of the past is alive in the present, and is consistently a difficult task because, as Harry Harootunian comments, we live in a society in which the “present” constantly threatens to overwhelm the memory of the past:

[O]ur present—indeed, any present—can be nothing more than a minimal unity that I call the *everyday* that has organized the experience of modernity. Consisting of the primacy of the now, this minimal experience of unity is always unsettled by the violence of events that the receiving consciousness disaggregates not as memory as such but as trace, not as a figured image but as “cinders,” remains left by a devastating trauma. These remains roam about like the dead (or perhaps the undead)—what Benjamin once called “involuntary memory”—who wait for their hour to return among the living and upset their present, like specters waiting to avenge themselves if the present fails to remember them.⁶³

In order to find a language which is equal to the task of representing the “specters” of the past, Wideman recalls a memory of Africa which he finds right within the bosom of his intimately known African American community, and which provides a language in which the past and the present are intimately connected. He calls this the

language of feeling [...], the language that comprehends all the senses. It’s [...] the language that your mother sings to you when she holds you and rocks you, it’s the language that you learn if you’re lucky enough to lean against a breast and feel the blood. [...] That is where I begin to identify what is Afro-American about me, with that primal language, [...] the language I learned feeling through. [...] That for me is the basis of African-American culture in general—that speaking voice, the voice of the mothers and the fathers. And that’s a voice that [...] came partly from across the ocean, from an African experience, and African languages, and African cosmology. [...] The way we speak and think is enriched, is still a strong carrier of those African dimensions.⁶⁴

An African tradition, as Wideman conceives of it, is capable of containing memory just as a “Western” tradition attempts to overwrite it. It situates the past as alive in the present, in contrast to a Western tradition in which the present serves as a platform from which to manage the narrative of the past, and in which the consideration of narrative as work of art can easily assert its ascendancy over lives which are being remembered. The retrieval of this African tradition, then, is vitally important where narrative approaches the situation where lives have been lost, and the stories of those lives are buried or contested.

Philadelphia Fire approaches the events of the MOVE bombing and its legacy with a sustained effort to establish a narrative as memorial not only to the lives lost, but also to the irreparable breach of trust represented by this act of state violence at the heart of a suburban neighborhood. Ironically, though Wideman establishes a narrative time scheme as rooted to a well-known, ancient African tradition rooted in the past, it can all at once also provide something of a medium for a truly contemporary, up-to-date, and endlessly malleable way of being, which communicates with immediacy in a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century African American setting.

“GRASP THE PATTERN. MAKE SENSE OF ME.”

Though Jean-Pierre Richard comments that “the second part [of the novel] comes as a shock to the reader [...as f]ragmentation reigns supreme through dozens of separate items juxtaposed in what looks like haphazard or chaotic fashion”,⁶⁵ I would argue that the serialization of identity—its separation from a fiction of linear development—has in fact already begun in Part One, having been merely wrapped up in some semblance of a linear narrative, which, as the novel goes on, is revealed to be increasingly redundant. At least one recognizable joke is made in Part One of the novel, upon this notion of identity as a matrix of different personalities, as Cudjoe tells his friend Timbo, “Timbo. I had a dream”, and Timbo, without missing a beat, responds “You too?”⁶⁶ Martin Luther King, earlier present in the book in the pun on John Africa’s name, is this time associated with Cudjoe, who may, after all, be only another aspect of that same “identity”.

As Part Two begins, Wideman himself is presented as the protagonist, followed swiftly by Caliban, the “Abhorred slave”⁶⁷ of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, tellingly described as having “heavy, heavy dreadlocks resembling chains drag[ging] nearly to the floor”,⁶⁸ and recalling once again the dreadlocked figure of John Africa. As Caliban riffs, “Why he swoop down

like great god from the sky, try make everybody feel high?"⁶⁹ an almost direct citation is made from Bob Marley and the Wailers' "Get Up Stand Up", thus immediately identifying Caliban with Marley, and recalling that site where dreadlocks as a signifier, particularly when paired with a memory of Africa, might once have constituted some allegiance to a perceived African identity:

[D]uring the 1960s, [...while] the Afro was synonymous with Black activism and Black militancy,... Bob Marley adopted dreadlocks to reflect his Rastafarian religious beliefs. Dreadlocks (rope-like twists of hair) embody the "dreadful" power of holiness for Rastafarians and are a symbol of the Mau Mau rebellion by Kenya's Kikuyu soldiers, who resisted British rule in the 1950s.⁷⁰

Mercer comments that "the Afro symbolized a reconstitutive link with Africa as part of a counter-hegemonic process helping to redefine a diaspora people not as Negro but as Afro-American. A similar upheaval was at work in the emergence of Dreadlocks".⁷¹ If the initial African American or Rastafari adoption of dreadlocks signified on "the Mau Mau in Kenya when they adopted such dread appearances in the 1950s",⁷² and just as "by the 1970s, the Afro faded, along with its social and political context",⁷³ there is also a certain failure of MOVE's adoption of dreadlocks to "remember" the earlier resonance of the style, in the same way that their use of "Africa", and even of "MOVE", seems to be detached from a meaning it might once have had.

Wideman alludes repeatedly to this sense of a failure of signification, as Cudjoe wonders: "South Africa, the PLO, Vietnam War, civil rights, marches and protests, [Timbo]'d dealt with that time of their lives in five minutes. How could Cudjoe have thought it would fill novels?"⁷⁴ Fredric Jameson has written:

[The] approach to the present by way of the art language of the simulacrum, or of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage. Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way. It cannot therefore be said to produce this strange occultation of the present by its own formal power, but rather merely to demonstrate, through these inner contradictions, the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.⁷⁵

The present, in Wideman's novel, certainly fails to sit neatly in a linear relationship with a known and ordered "history". The condition which Marc Augé calls "supermodern" reflects this crumbling significance of notions of historical time as well as unified notions of place, which in light of contemporary technologies, no longer apply:

What is new is not that the world lacks meaning, or has little meaning, or less than it used to have; it is that we seem to feel an explicit and intense daily need to give it meaning: to give meaning to the world, not just some village or lineage.⁷⁶

Wideman epitomizes his notion of a contemporary historical consciousness with the image of "Push-button scanning of all available channels",⁷⁷ which enables us to "Cut. Cut to whatever, wherever with electronic speed",⁷⁸ and comments drily, "That's how I learned about the Philadelphia fire".⁷⁹ If, as Mercer suggests, dreadlocks never had anything to do with anything African, MOVE's dreadlocks are doubly, or even triply, removed from a cultural memory of Africa, through a historical landscape which suggests the exact *opposite* of a story that can say "You can grasp the pattern. Make sense of me. Connect the dots".⁸⁰ The fact that a cultural memory of Africa can be indicated by a hairstyle, but never fully *signified* as such, foregrounds the significance of trauma in the establishment of contemporary African diaspora subjectivities. These subjectivities can only be approached through a "jazz" aesthetic (which might also be named, by some, "post-modern"), and thus present specifically African American versions of an "African" worldview.

FINDING THE VOICE

Just as trauma has fractured identity for Black children in their relationship with their fathers, the novel itself is a narrative response to the tragedy enunciated by Margaret Jones:

The whole city seen the flames, smelled the smoke, counted the body bags. Whole world knows children murdered here. But it's quiet as a grave, ain't it? Not a mumbling word. People gone back to making a living. Making some rich man richer. Losing the only thing they got worth a good god-damn, the children the Lord gives them for free, and they ain't got the good sense to keep.⁸¹

As Margaret Jones seems to suggest, and as we have already seen in Chap. 3, speech, or signification, seems to break down in the face of traumatic memory. As the text tracks Cudjoe’s attempt to find the story of the lost boy, then, it reads:

What Cudjoe has discovered is that the boy was last seen naked *skin melting, melting, they go do-do-do-do-do-do-do like that, skin melting Stop kids coming out stop stop kids coming out skin melting do-do-do-do-do-do like going off—like bullets were going after each other do-do-do-do* fleeing down an alley between burning rows of houses.⁸²

At first sight, this passage might appear to signal a collapse of narrative into nonsense. However, when we read the words of Birdie Africa, the nine-year-old child who escaped from the burning MOVE house, something more shocking emerges:

It was ‘do-do-do-do-do,’ like that, like going off, like bullets were going after each other⁸³

Elsewhere in his testimony, Birdie says:

den, the fire got—with all that smoke started comin in, an you could hear the stuff droppin upstairs, and den that’s when they started um just hollerin things an “the kid’s comin out!”, an stuff ...⁸⁴

Suddenly we realize that Wideman’s narrative is not merely collapsing, but with jarring clarity, actually speaking the words of a child as he recalls being in a burning row house, surrounded by gunfire. When we remember that the fire and the bullets were issued by Philadelphia’s own police force against the city’s residents, in what, ironically, is referred to as the “City of Brotherly Love”, the full force of the pain and shock of this memory is felt through Wideman’s disjunctive narrative process. It is through a “jazz” narrative, a witnessing of the past without corraling it to the interests of the present, through an “African” time where past can possess the present, the pain of a child’s traumatic loss can be seen. Through this practice of witnessing, Wideman’s narrative provides as healing a crucible for these devastated pasts as is possible.

“GATHER UP THE FAMILY”: NARRATION AND LINEAGE

Wideman's valorization of the relationship with African foremothers and fathers, in which the voices of the past are felt within the very texture of contemporary African American speech, is commensurable with the scheme suggested by a Vodoun tradition. Wideman cites the following from Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*:

Damballah Wedo is the ancient, the venerable father; [...] the great father of whom one asks nothing save his blessing [...] Damballah is himself unchanged by life, and so is at once the ancient past and the assurance of the future....

Associated with Damballah [are] divinities [...] To invoke them today is to stretch one's hand back to that time and to gather up all history into a solid, contemporary ground beneath one's feet.

One song invoking Damballah requests that he “Gather up the Family”.⁸⁵

The entry of Wideman's text into “African time” enables the “specters” of involuntary memory to arise and be witnessed and, as in Ishmael Reed's work, invokes a Vodoun tradition. In this way Wideman enables a view of modernity that coincides with African diaspora tradition. As Wideman emphasizes the importance of a perception of a language of the past as part of contemporary forms of expression, however, he draws from the traditional Vodoun scheme an explicit emphasis upon family relationships.

Cudjoe, Wideman's sometime narrator, is, as Mary Paniccia Carden puts it, “textually fatherless”, and “had developed an unsatisfactory, competitive father-son relationship with his white editor, now dead”.⁸⁶ As Cudjoe, like Macon, is shown to have approached his fathering role with some negligence, having fled Philadelphia a decade earlier and thus “failed his wife and failed [his] kids”,⁸⁷ Cudjoe's response is, Carden notes, to “seek [...] the creative power of fathership”.⁸⁸ Cudjoe “must find the child to be whole again”.⁸⁹

As he seeks “the boy who is the only survivor of the holocaust on Osage Avenue, the child who is brother, son, a lost limb haunting him since he read about the fire in a magazine”,⁹⁰ Cudjoe's desire to construct a narrative of belonging occurs particularly strongly because his sense of an attachment to lineage is all but lost. Cudjoe's fraught attempts to explain the tragedy never seem to get beyond his attempts to make sense of his own identity. For instance, as he tries to imagine the scene of the fire:

Cudjoe hears screaming *stop stop kids coming out* as the cop sights down the blazing alley. Who’s screaming? Who’s adding that detail? [...]

Cudjoe reminds himself he was not there and has no right to add details. No sound effects. Attribute no motives nor lack of motive. He’s not the cop, not the boy.⁹¹

The impulse to narrate, throughout this novel, is struggled with as it frequently betrays an impulse to impose narrative upon memory in order to consolidate the stable narrative of identity, and history, which is so thoroughly endangered by the fact that children could be killed in a suburban neighborhood in America as a result of a bomb dropped by police. As Cudjoe seeks the story of the boy, named Simba in Wideman’s novel, Margaret Jones comments pointedly, “You want Simmie’s story so you can sell it. You going to pay him if he talks to you?”⁹² The problem of seeking a child’s story in order to affirm one’s own identity is as central to Cudjoe’s quest for “creative fatherhood” as it is to the act of representation itself in this novel.

The city as the site of Cudjoe’s quest for identity through fatherhood sees the fragmentation of family relations drawn into a fascinating relationship with a sense of place. As Marc Augé puts it, “[i]f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place”.⁹³ The third part of the novel sees a homeless war veteran walking the Philadelphia streets:

He is always everywhere at once. Never a rush, a reason to leave here and go there. He inhabits many places, no place. Not really a difficult trick. No trick at all. The end of tricks and trickery because he is no one, nowhere. [...]

Lost soul. If found, return to sender.⁹⁴

The figure in Wideman’s novel who seems to represent John Africa is first introduced by Margaret Jones:

Because he was so sure of hisself, bossy, you know. The big boss knowing everything and in charge of everything and could preach like an angel, they called him Reverend King behind his back. Had to call him something to get his attention, you know. *James* didn’t sound right. He wasn’t a *Jimmy* or *Jim*. *Mr. Brown* wouldn’t cut it. *Mr.* Anything no good. Reverend King slipped out a couple times and then it got to be just King.⁹⁵

As the memory of the MOVE leader is evoked, the name “John Africa” is nevertheless completely excised, and replaced, not once but twice,

first, laughably enough, with “James Brown” (the “Godfather of Soul” himself) and then with “Reverend King”. Wideman might be seen to be making his own silently sniggering commentary here upon the practice, discussed in Chap. 2, of divorcing Blackness as a signifier from a recognition of a Black tradition—a situation in which, as Melani McAlister puts it, “Black cultural style became incorporated into a comfortable generational identity that [...] could only happen once the signifiers of race began to be de-essentialized, to be removed from the body and to circulate like (and *as*) commodities”.⁹⁶ Wideman’s evocation of Martin Luther King, Jr. is a reference to the specific circumstances in which, as Nikhil Pal Singh notes, “this “King-centric” account of the civil rights era has become central to a civic mythology of racial progress in late twentieth-century America.”⁹⁷

Part Three of the novel, J.B. carries a sign claiming “*I am a vet. Lost voice in war. Please help*”,⁹⁸ and we are told that “J.B. wears army fatigues, camouflage issue, [...] filthy from six months in the field”.⁹⁹ Wideman is perhaps alluding to the fact that the historical figure known as “John Africa” was a veteran of the Korean War,¹⁰⁰ but also to the fact that, as Robin Wagner-Pacifici has shown, the MOVE crisis itself was entrenched in the discourse of the Vietnam War, the specter of that conflict manifesting itself in the discourses of both MOVE members and those critical of MOVE. Interestingly, in the MOVE hearings,

six police officers referred to having been in Vietnam, the military reserves, or other occasions of military combat. [...] Neighbors suggested that MOVE children could be wired with explosives as were children of the Vietcong. [...] Media reports of the day’s events continuously made reference to a sensation neighbors had that they were back in Vietnam: “How do you like our Tet offensive?”¹⁰¹

All this, as Wagner-Pacifici comments, “[t]en years after the war was over”.¹⁰² The particular concern which the discourse of the Vietnam War excavates, as has been discussed by Melani McAlister, and is shown in Wideman’s novel, is a discourse of the failure of American masculinity, whereby the increasing implication is to a messy and brutal war, where the cost to childhood was more visible than ever before. McAlister reminds us that “[a]s the war escalated, television news in particular brought it home, making Vietnam ‘the living room war’”.¹⁰³ The father, aside from his inability to explain the child’s identity or his own as the past recedes, can now no longer even *identify* the child with any degree of confidence. The

Tet Offensive, McAlister notes, shattered any “illusion of [a] rapid victory in Vietnam” as “U.S. and South Vietnamese troops”¹⁰⁴ were forced to fight:

Vietnamese communist forces in the courtyard of the American embassy in Saigon, with television cameras there to record every moment of the battle. For the American public, which had been told for years that the United States was winning—had almost won—the war, the fact that the communists had enough strength to launch such a daring campaign was in itself a shock. [...] Just as the United States began to look like an imperial power in the eyes of some of its citizens, it began to look like an imperial power in decline, unable or unwilling to shore up its own ambitions.¹⁰⁵

If the notion that fathers (or father figures) cannot explain identity to their sons (or son figures) is felt as a failure on the father’s part, this is a failure that is not then exclusive to African Americans, but which infiltrates the whole society. It is a breakdown of memory and signification engendered by multiple traumas, and by “Greed” which has always “got the deepest pocket”.¹⁰⁶

Yet, even as we begin to identify J.B. with this “known” historical scenario, it turns out that

J.B.’s not a vet, [...] but half his crew who went to war killed over there in the jungle and half the survivors came home juiced, junkied, armless, legless, crazy as bedbugs. Fucked over good in Asian jungles whiles this Philly jungle fucking over J.B. and the brothers left here to run it. Casualties just as heavy here in the streets as cross the pond in Nam.¹⁰⁷

If MOVE were characterized as “them fools on Osage [who] want their block to the jungle”,¹⁰⁸ if the “funk king” was accused of having “hair like a jungle all over his face”,¹⁰⁹ and if the implicit suggestion of “jungle” in these contexts was of a return to primitivism, which is associated with “them and their dreadlocks”,¹¹⁰ and in which the association with Africa barely even needs to be spoken in order to be palpably present, all of a sudden, with the figure of J.B., a homeless resident of the city, those associations are knocked into another formation. The “jungle” which might have been assumed to evoke an established prejudice toward a premodern Africa, or to refer to the warfare in Vietnam—is linked, even more immediately, to the current “war” in the city of Philadelphia. As we are told that “[t]he old town’s dying behind J.B.’s back. [...] City in flames

crackling against the horizon. [...] And he stares where the city should be. Hurts like his own eyelash on fire”,¹¹¹ the figure of J.B. “remembers” the “sharpshooter on a roof. [...] The SWAT-team rifleman [who] can’t hear, barely sees what is quivering in the cross hairs. Is it one of his stinging eyelashes?”¹¹² As the suggestion arises that the sharpshooter’s identity collides with that of J.B., and therefore with that of John Africa himself, the question “Did he pull the trigger?”¹¹³ takes on magnified resonance which begins to be suggested by Cudjoe’s sense that “[w]e are all trapped in the terrible jaws of something shaking the life out of us”.¹¹⁴ As all these diverse identities collapse into each other, it is not simply the sharpshooter, not simply the mayor who ordered the bomb to be dropped, but potentially *all* of the protagonists, and all of us, who are guilty of the children’s deaths.

Late in the novel, as Cudjoe attends a “memorial service for the dead of Osage Avenue”, some means of learning how to narrate memory finally begins to be offered up:

Two Black men, chests bare, dreadlocks to their shoulders, drum their way into the ceremony. They sit facing each other [...] A slow, easy rhythm rises from African drums clasped between their knees. Cudjoe’s program doesn’t mention them. Invited or not, they become as necessary, as natural as a heartbeat to the event.¹¹⁵

As a “younger man [...] chants and the drums respond”,¹¹⁶ what is evoked here is a means of negotiating memory which, uncannily, has been available to Cudjoe all along, if only he might allow himself to perceive it.



A more appropriate response to memory begins to be apprehended as Cudjoe finds himself, in the middle of the night, on the basketball court in the city’s Clark Park where he played as a youngster. He hears a “sound, barely louder than the sawing crickets [...] voices teasingly close to intelligible”.¹¹⁷ As these voices then become recognizable as “Kids talking in the hollow in the middle of the night”,¹¹⁸ Cudjoe begins to play ball, at some level realizing that “a ball pounding the asphalt would be like a drum summoning the kids. They’d share their secrets with him as they played through the night”.¹¹⁹ The allusion to the West African talking drum is not accidental, as for Wideman, Jacqueline Berben-Masi notes,

basketball is as much a cultural ritual for the African American community as the intricate, patterned beadwork that retraces timeless symbols of the interpretation of life and the realms that constitute it among the Yoruba

peoples of Africa. Like beads, it has become part of Great Time: timeless, permanent, formative, defining. And like beads sewn into age-old designs of the cosmos that guide life in the here and now, the past, and the hereafter, Wideman implies that the movement on the basketball court, the apparel, the colors and textures, and the body language are all-determining for a lifetime in a Black man’s existence ¹²⁰

The final few pages of the novel show Cudjoe attending a memorial procession for the victims of Osage Avenue. This historical event, which took place in Philadelphia on the first anniversary of the bombing, is shown in Louis Massiah’s documentary film, *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*, and is shocking for its poor attendance. So Cudjoe feels:

The emptiness of the square means something has already happened that Cudjoe should know about, but doesn’t. So here he is expecting lots of people to be gathered and instead of a crowd greeting him, hiding him, confirming his reason for arriving, here he is out in the open with a couple other fools. ¹²¹

The memorializing function which is felt by narrating the memory of trauma, in a language drawn organically from the voices of the city itself, is required for both personal and public reasons—for the comfort of the individual, and for the incorporation of the stories of  lost into a history which will be passed on. The sense that Cudjoe has  having “missed something”, when the memorial seems inadequate to the occasion, might be seen to occur as a result of an imbalance between the inadequate response of a city which fails to remember, and the loud demands of the voiceless—those killed and those disenfranchised by the Philadelphia tragedy. Toni Cade Bambara’s narration sums up the position of the local Cobbs Creek community caught in the unresolved quality of a collective trauma which awaits healing:

The loss of privacy, of confidence, the loss of lives—caught, between the hunger for the rhythms and rituals of normalcy, and the obligation to struggle against forgetfulness. ¹²²

Just as the people of the community have to rebuild their lives by reconciling the need to remember with the need to live, Cudjoe, if he can hope to tell the city’s story, and indeed the story of his own identity, must find the words to reflect both the city’s historical memory, and its everyday experience. In the end, the novel suggests that such a language might be offered by the city itself, as the closing words tell:

Cudjoe hears footsteps behind him. A mob howling his name. Screaming for blood. Words come to him, cool him, stop him in his tracks. He'd known them all his life. *Never again. Never again.* He turns to face whatever it is rumbling over the stones of Independence Square.¹²³

The words "Never again" are appropriately borrowed from the chant of the memorial procession that spring day.¹²⁴ Simply by listening to memory, by getting beyond narrative as construction or as embodiment of ego, Cudjoe can inhabit an experience of African 'Great Time', and allow the city to give him a story to tell.

The past, then, moving fluidly in relation to the present, is made available in Wideman's novel as a site for possible healing, through a language that encompasses knowledge of African American and African tradition. This particular relationship to the past, epitomized by the cultural memory of Africa, marks a decisive contrast with the use of the past in Black British writing, a site where the cultural memory of Africa is instead continually revised, and used as part of the source material for improvisation of identity in the present and the future.

NOTES

1. James Kyung-Jin Lee, *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 104.
2. Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn (3rd Edition)*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001 [1991]), 4–5.
3. Jacqueline Berben-Masi, "From *Brothers and Keepers* to *Two Cities*: Social and Cultural Consciousness, Art and Imagination, An Interview with John Edgar Wideman", in *Callaloo*, 22.3 (Summer 1999), 569.
4. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform Rebellion, The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001[1984]), 188.
5. John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, (London: Picador, 1995 [1990]), 7.
6. *Ibid.*, 19.
7. Rebekah Presson, "John Edgar Wideman", in *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 107. Published from a transcript of *New Letters on the Air*, originally aired February 1991 over National Public Radio.
8. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 19.

9. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26. (Spring 1989), 13.
10. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 19.
11. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn, (London: Random House, 1999 [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970]), 249.
12. Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October*, 62 (Fall 1992), 16.
13. MOVE, *25 Years on the MOVE* (1996), 71.
14. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 108.
15. *Ibid.*, 110.
16. Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want", in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, eds. Judith Clavir Albert and Stewart Albert (New York: Praeger, 1984), 137-44.
17. Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11.
18. John Anderson and Hilary Hevenor, *Burning Down the House: MOVE and the Tragedy of Philadelphia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 4.
19. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "Philadelphia Fire," *Transition* (1991), 155.
20. MOVE, *25 Years on the MOVE*, 71. Assefa and Wahrhaftig's suggestion, that "MOVE is short for 'The Movement,'" Hizkia Assefa and Paul Wahrhaftig, *Extremist Groups and Conflict Resolution: The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 9, is widely cited among accounts of this history, but this suggestion does not appear to be substantiated anywhere in MOVE's own literature.
21. Cleaver, "Philadelphia Fire," 156.
22. MOVE, *25 Years on the MOVE*, 70.
23. Anderson, *Burning Down the House*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 4.
24. Mary Paniccia Carden, "'If the City Is a Man': Founders and Fathers, Cities and Sons in John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*," *Contemporary Literature*, 44.3 (Fall 2003), 475 (footnote 4).
25. John Edgar Wideman, *Fatheralong*, (London: Picador, Macmillan, 1996 [1994]), 62.
26. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 3.
27. *Ibid.*, 3.
28. Bonnie TuSmith, introduction to *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, (University Press of Mississippi, 1998), ix. Reprinted from *Sports Illustrated*, March 7, 1983.

29. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, (London: Random House, 1998 [1977]), 17.
30. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 5.
31. John Edgar Wideman, Preface to *The Homewood Books*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), xi. I am fascinated by Michelle M. Wright's bold and innovative proposals in her new book, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). While I hesitate to deliver my last word upon her approach toward reading Blackness through "Epiphenomenal spacetime" (5), I am struck by the notion that the 'African Great Time' which Wideman describes appears to do something other than showing "the spacetime of the Middle Passage Epistemology [...] represented by a line (or an arrow)" (Wright, 20); Wideman's notion of African time, is in fact, rooted in African and African diaspora tradition, but presents itself as experientially available to anyone, and as transcending the experience of the Middle Passage in order to offer a site of identification which is conceptually far broader.
32. Free Robert Wideman website, <http://www.freerobertwideman.org/>
33. Pittsburg Post Gazette, <http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2011/05/18/Jacob-Wideman-denied-parole-for-1986-killing/stories/201105180254>
34. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and the Consumer Society", in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 119.
35. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 110.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Karen F. Jahn, "Will the Circle be Unbroken? Jazzing Story in *Hoop Roots*," in *Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman*, eds. Bonnie TuSmith and Keith Byerman, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006). Citing Craig Werner, *Playing the Changes: From Afro-Modernism to the Jazz Impulse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), xvii.
39. Heather Russell Andrade, "Race, Representation and Intersubjectivity in the Works of John Edgar Wideman," in *Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman*, eds. TuSmith and Byerman, 44.
40. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 27, 28.
41. Charles H. Rowell, "An Interview with John Edgar Wideman," in *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. TuSmith, 58. Reprinted from *Callaloo*, 13.1 (1990), 47–61.
42. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 13.
43. Wideman, *Fatheralong*, xxii.

44. Ibid., xxiii.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 64–65.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 63–64.
49. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 99.
50. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Arendt, trans. Zorn, 224.
51. Ibid., p. 223.
52. Michael Silverblatt, "John Edgar Wideman," in *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. TuSmith, 121–22. Interview prepared for publication from the videotape "John Edgar Wideman", *Lannan Literary Series*, No. 33, produced by the Lannan Foundation in Los Angeles, 1993. Interview conducted on April 6, 1993.
53. Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).
54. Cleaver, "Philadelphia Fire", *Transition*, 1991, 155.
55. William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 114.
56. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 4.
57. Ibid., 12.
58. Ibid., 155–56.
59. "E pluribus unum", the motto of the United States, which Wideman interprets in an unusual way by suggesting the notion of diversity within *the individual*.
60. Renée Olander, "An Interview with John Edgar Wideman," in *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. TuSmith, 166. Reprinted from *AWP Chronicle* 29.3 (December 1996): 1–8.
61. Wideman, Preface to *The Homewood Books*, x.
62. Olander, "An Interview with John Edgar Wideman," 166.
63. Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 18.
64. Matteo Bellinelli, dir., *In Black and White: Conversations with African-American Writers—Part Six: John Wideman*, (RTSI-Swiss Television, 1992).
65. Jean-Pierre Richard, "Philadelphia Fire, or the Shape of a City," *Callaloo*, 22.3 (1999), 608.
66. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 93.
67. Ibid., 139.
68. Ibid., 120.
69. Ibid., 121.


70. *Hair Stories* exhibition flyer (Chicago: Chicago Cultural Center, 2004). Text adapted from materials prepared by the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art.
71. Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 107.
72. Ibid., 112.
73. *Hair Stories* exhibition flyer.
74. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 83.
75. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 21.
76. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Trans. John Howe, (London: Verso, 1995), 29–30.
77. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 99.
78. Ibid., 101.
79. Ibid., 103.
80. Ibid., 44.
81. Ibid., 19.
82. Ibid., 8.
83. “Young Birdie Africa Survives Philly’s ‘MOVE’ Bombing and Is Reborn As Michael Moses Ward,” *The People Weekly* (December 2, 1985), 68.
84. Louis Massiah dir., *The Bombing of Osage Avenue* (WHYY Pennsylvania/Pennsylvania Public Television Network/Corporation for Public Broadcasting), 49m50s.
85. John Edgar Wideman, *Damballah*, (London: Flamingo, Fontana, 1986 [1981]), 7 [but unpaginated]. Citing Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1953).
86. Carden, “If the City Is a Man,” 481.
87. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 9.
88. Carden, “If the City Is a Man,” 476.
89. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 7–8.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., 8–9.
92. Ibid., 19.
93. Augé, *Non-Places*, 77–78.
94. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 184.
95. Ibid., 10.
96. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 153–54.
97. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4–5.
98. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 173.
99. Ibid., 170.

100. Craig R. McCoy, “Who was John Africa?” *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, Jan 12, 1986. <http://themoveorganization.com/johnafrica.html>
101. Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction*, 137.
102. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 137.
103. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 155.
104. Ibid., 157.
105. Ibid.
106. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 83.
107. Ibid., 173.
108. Ibid., 81.
109. Ibid., 12.
110. Ibid., 81.
111. Ibid., 155.
112. Ibid., 8.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., 22.
115. Ibid., 196.
116. Ibid., 196.
117. Ibid., 49.
118. Ibid., 50.
119. Ibid.
120. Jacqueline Berben-Masi, “Of Basketball and Beads: Following the Thread of One’s Origins,” in *Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman*, eds. TuSmith and Byerman, 32–33.
121. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 190–91.
122. Massiah, *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*, 56m39s.
123. Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 199.
124. Massiah, *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*, 55m46s.

PART II

Black British Interventions

“Words Without Sound”: Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*

In this chapter, I show the ways in which Caryl Phillips, in *Crossing the River* (1991), negotiates the limits of language as a tool for representing the lives of the past, and dramatizes the lives of his characters in diverse ways *beyond* the written word, appealing to future unwritten spaces in which they might perform their identities with freedom. In response to a received textual record of history which may or may not include Britain’s historical Black presence, the second part of this book shows how Black British writers position a form of memory in which lived experience—the lives of individuals—are remembered, often with recourse to a realm which asserts itself as being very much *external* to the historical record, which emphasizes its own orientation toward future, *unwritten* possibilities. In African American fiction, part of the relationship between the present and the past exists in tropes of spirit-possession which appear powerfully in the African cultures of the Americas. In Black British writing, while the relationship with Afro-diasporic traditions of possession are still relevant, they do not bear the same resonance as they do for the African American writers discussed here, who are very much  focused upon the power of community and retrieval of the narratives of the past. If the spirits of the past do not speak clearly through tropes of possession, as they frequently do in African American fiction of this era, language itself cannot encompass that

“discredited knowledge”, the tradition which, according to Toni Morrison, is known to Black people.¹ In Black British writing, instead, there is an appeal to that which *remains unspoken*, as an imagined narrative arena in which possibilities for the performance of identity appear most clearly.

James Procter’s allusions to the burden of representation “lifting” in the 1990s, to a *new* historicity, and to the “postmodern”, are instructive here, inasmuch as they encourage us to imagine that with the burden of representation came a death of history—a suppression of historical voices with the sense that *the* unrepresented community had to be represented. This periodization would concur with the periodization of postmodernism, and the notion of the death of history, may in some senses, I suggest, be more applicable for Black British writers of this period than it is for African Americans. For African American culture, the postmodern notion of the death of history cannot be a convincing one while the past (in African diaspora tradition) is felt to be alive in the present. In the Black British context, however, there *is* some sense that history disappeared for a while—but this is not necessarily attached to the moment of postmodernism. It is, instead, figured as a colonial/postcolonial moment of submerged histories. Jan Verwoert identifies a recent (contemporary) historical moment in which this “disappearance” of history is felt to have come to an end, and figures this moment as felt in the language of art:

The re-emergence of a multiplicity of histories in the moment of the 1990s, then, resembles the return of [...] ghosts to the centre of the discourse and equals the sudden realisation that the signs speak as multiple echoes of historic meaning that begin to reverberate in their hollow body—the insight that what was deemed dead speech has indeed manifest effects on the lives of the living.²

The sense of a death of memory, and its spectacular revival, applies in a special way to the context of Black British fiction. Where African American literature enters into a “semiotic” realm where the prelinguistic is immediately accessible in the linguistic present, for Black British writers, memory is certainly made accessible, but attention is also drawn to the specific role of the textual and the archival in evoking and, equally, obscuring memory.

In the second part of this book, I show that in contrast to the role played by the cultural memory of Africa in African American fiction, to represent the transcendental possibilities of tradition, in Black British fiction, the cultural memory of Africa is not explicitly accessible through known Black

British experience. The interruption in the relationship with the historical past, which is engendered by a widespread silence positioned by British cultural hegemony around the historical Black presence, is in the first instance regarded despondently by Black British writers who seek to define their relationship with Britain. However, it soon comes to be employed as an opportunity to reimagine, recreate, and fully explore the possibilities which exist for knowing Britain's Black past through the survivals which the archive provides, and *also* through the gaps and the spaces in historical records which represent lives and experiences untold. In Caryl Phillips's novel, this negotiation of written and unwritten histories manifests in ingenious and equivocal negotiations of textuality in the approach to historical memory; in revealing the sites where historical subjects' written legacy has been preserved, due to the racial politics which would have deeply influenced what parts of their story were told, writing itself must be read as only a *partial* preservation of their experience. S.I. Martin, in *Incomparable World*, goes even further in the articulation of the possibilities of the partial memory represented by archival material, by placing a strong emphasis on the role of imaginative invention in order to ask questions of the past, and to draw attention to the broad silences effected by the politics of the archive. In Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*, a poetic use of speech draws links between diverse cultural inheritances, and foregrounds the hybrid nature of contemporary British identity which contains African influences among its many cultural provenances, and thus overcomes the alienating and exclusionary effects of a hegemonic history. David Dabydeen, in *A Harlot's Progress*, can also, through distinctive narrative strategies, be seen to defer to a space of absolute individualized creativity, in order to place the relationship with the cultural memory of Africa in such a way that it can help overcome the limits placed upon representation of the self by the slave past.

Black British writers occupy language as an assertive act against a historical trend where the memory of Britain's African past was "frozen" out, but paradoxically, they do so *precisely by* drawing attention to the fractures which have occurred in their narrativization—by drawing attention to the ways in which the narration of Black British history has been stymied. Where African American writers negotiate a dominant language with recourse to a realm where language and memory are continuous (the semiotic), there is not the same need in Black British writing to appeal to this realm, because Britain's Black presence has precisely *not* been defined in language. The language of the dominant British history has instead left huge spaces and silences, into which Black British writers must simply speak. This corresponds to what Verwoert identifies as a

sudden realisation that words and images, as arbitrarily construed they may be, produce unsuspected effects and affects in the real world that could be said to mark the momentum of the 1990s. A key consequence of this momentum is the shift in the critical discourse away from a primary focus on the arbitrary and constructed character of the linguistic sign towards a desire to understand the *performativity* of language and grasp precisely how things are done with words, that is, how language through its power of injunction enforces the meaning of what it spells out and, like a spell placed on a person, binds that person to execute what it commands.³

Black British fiction of this period, then, in contrast to African American literature which opens to possession by the spirits of the past, articulates the power of the word in the present and the future, to reimagine the lost stories of the past. This dynamic is not as innocent, however, in the British scenario, as Verwoert's commentary might suggest. If the era in which the generation of Black British writers I consider grew up was "historyless", this was not principally to do with the fall of modernism or the onset of the Cold War. It was due, rather, to the impossible dominance, through mainstream British society, of a monocultural history of nationhood. In this context, the cultural memory of Africa is not signified through a perceptible continuity of distinct African traditions with the contemporary context, as it is in the African American scenario. Instead, Africanness is approached and held in balance alongside a diversity of other cultural inheritances. Africanness is located, crucially, as fractured and hybrid within itself, as signifying multiple contemporary possibilities which also, crucially, bear distinct *similarities* to other cultural inheritances. The cultural memory of Africa in Black British literature therefore locates another way of negotiating the contemporary, not reconnecting to the presence of African tradition in contemporary society as in African American writing, but situating Africanness as a site of an identifiably contemporary hybridity.

Crossing the River begins with a "Prologue", in which the figure of an African "father" appears frozen at the traumatic moment when "[t]he crops failed. I sold my children".⁴ This figure seems to represent Africa as little more than a receptive ear, "listen[ing] to the many-tongued chorus" of his lost children, "My Nash. My Martha. My Travis".⁵ with, as Anthony Ilona puts it, a "hunger for history", to mitigate that loss.⁶ The memory of Africa functions here in much the way that Stuart Hall has perceived it in the Caribbean imagination:

The original "Africa" is no longer there. [...] History "normalizes" and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the "primitive, unchanging past". [...] it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered. [...] To *this* "Africa," which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can't literally go home again.⁷

Africa emerges as a space of insufficiency, frozen in time, unable to "speak" to the diasporic present, and desiring, more than anything, to be redramatized by the diasporan children. As the African father figure speaks here only to emphasize his incapacity to communicate, lamenting that "[f]or two hundred and fifty years I have longed to tell them",⁸ his function is very different from the African ancestral presence which can be seen to "possess" the present through dynamics which we have seen are located in the everyday speech of African American communities. Here, instead, the cultural memory of Africa is approached as fractured from the present, but as anticipating a future space where speech may be possible. This corresponds to the ways in which Black British identity is frequently structured in these literatures, strongly suggestive of a cosmopolitan, "global citizenship" approach to historicism which may be understood to inform one important approach to contemporary identity.

The space where cultural identity is formed in this novel is situated not within narrative itself, but in the dialogic spaces which emerge between one story and another. So the text constitutes a future-oriented cosmopolitanism which "makes a decisive break with the celebration of 'communities of descent' in favour of individual choice and multiple affiliations".⁹ *Crossing the River* is composed of what Lars Eckstein calls "narrative fragments [...], seemingly independent pieces of narration, which nevertheless silently comment on each other", and which might also be thought of as easily representative of the "competing and overlapping temporalities" which according to Verwoert characterize the contemporary.¹⁰ Following the novel's brief Prologue, are four main narrative sections which cross time and space to imagine the stories of each of the three children, and even of the slave-trader to whom they were sold, in diverse historical periods. Parts I–IV variously depict an African American missionary in nineteenth-century Liberia; an aging Black woman on a wagon trail heading for America's "Wild West"; the trade conducted by a slaver on the West Coast of Africa, and his account of the transatlantic voyage; and a white Yorkshire woman who falls in love with an African American GI posted in her village during the Second World War. All of the protagonists of

this novel appear to feel painfully excluded by distinct narratives of community, attached to a notion of place and people, which appear to have silently formed before their arrival. In Part I, for instance, Nash Williams, serving as a Christian missionary in nineteenth-century Liberia, reports in letters to his former master Edward Williams, that his “*native* style of living” leads him to be “shunned by [his] fellow Americans” in the African settlement.¹¹ In Part II, Martha Randolph, having escaped slavery after her husband and daughter are sold away from her, is nevertheless described as “assaulted by loneliness”¹² as she attempts to move “West” across America with a Black wagon trail, which is eventually forced to abandon “this old, colored woman...like a useless load”.¹³ Even the slave-trader Captain Hamilton, who is encountered with little sympathy in Part III, nevertheless describes himself, in love-letters to his fiancée, as a victim of “a frenzy of hostility” from his crew, for unlike them, “being pleased with a drunken debauch, or the smile of a prostitute, can never give one such as I pleasure”.¹⁴ In Part IV, Joyce has moved to a village from “town”,¹⁵ and feels “the uninvited outsider” even before she has an affair with the Black American GI Travis¹⁶—himself labeled as one of the “not very educated boys”, who are “different”¹⁷—and is called “a traitor to [her] own kind”.¹⁸ If these five protagonists are symbolically bound together by the traumatic moment of enslavement—the “shameful intercourse” depicted in the prologue¹⁹—and by the scattered processes of diaspora, their stories also resonate with each other by being stories of alienation from a narrative of collective identity which is monolithic and resistant to change. Phillips’s approach to narrative itself responds to a sense of national or regional community as closed fictions which do not always resonate with a diaspora sensibility which is inherently more aware of historical loss, discontinuity, and fracture.

Caryl Phillips was born in St Kitts, brought to Britain by his parents “at the portable age of twelve weeks”, and raised in Leeds. Phillips left the UK in 1978, “for the first time since arriving in England as a four-month-old baby”, and as he says, “began a process of border crossing which I have continued to this day”.²⁰ Phillips currently divides his time between the USA, Britain, and the Caribbean, and is discussed here in relation to an understanding of “Black British” which may be understood as an indicator for a flexible category which has “heterogeneity [a]s one of its defining features”.²¹ Phillips reminds us that “I don’t feel that Britain or Europe constitute resolved business”,²² and that “What produced Joyce, Edward and Captain Hamilton [white British characters in *Crossing the River*]

produced me".²³ Yet he also comments that "I wish my ashes to be scattered in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America [...]; a place that, over the years, I have come to refer to as my Atlantic home".²⁴ James Procter identifies Phillips as an example of a "cosmopolitan celebrity",²⁵ a term explained as follows:

A dispersed, diasporic [...] community of intellectuals living predominantly in the US and Britain who share a preoccupation with 'a *world* literature whose traditional national boundaries are (for them) meaningless', which privileges 'international' debates over 'internal' ones. They are, in short, 'not so much an elite *at home*, as spokespersons for a kind of perennial immigration'.²⁶

One of the responses frequently made by Black British writers to a national culture, in which the historical Black presence has not always been truthfully represented, is to choose instead a framework for identity which could be described as "cosmopolitan". Ulrich Beck writes:

In the cosmopolitan project historical time is no longer conceived as a national culture of memory, with individual remembering enclosed within it, but as fragmented and plural, in other words, a cosmopolitan and therefore optional remembrance and memory with all the resulting contingencies, complexities and contradictions of individual memory.²⁷

Cosmopolitanism puts in place a sense of conversations which can occur and be heard beyond the "closed" histories of nation-states, or even of regional sites of identification. Cosmopolitanism, Beck has it, "anticipates [...] a deterritorialized concept of society" in a way which is strongly oriented toward the expression of individuality, and it is this foregrounding of the individual which organizes and shapes process of remembering. This fascinating dichotomy between a "national culture of memory" which "enclose[s]" individual remembrance, and a cosmopolitan approach to remembering which embraces the optional, contingent, and contradictory, resonates strongly with Phillips's approach, and is intimately linked to the way he approaches narration in this novel.

Phillips's work exemplifies Stuart Hall's suggestive notion of "identity [as] an unfinished conversation",²⁸ by insisting upon the *conversations* which can be begun within and beyond the field of hegemonic master narratives. Narrating the past therefore begins as a profound act of resistance, which navigates the territory between "real memory—social and

unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past”.²⁹ Though the notion of “real memory” might be said to oversimplify the myriad ways in which responses to the past can manifest (and do manifest, even in this one novel), the notion of “memory” as a body of knowledge which is less “organized” than “history” is helpful for engaging a sense of “memory” as inherently more truthful and more disruptive than “history”. Black British authors of this period are *intensely* preoccupied with the rewriting of a British national narrative which has tended to exclude the Black presence, and their tremendous ambivalence to nation extends also to a disruption of the traditional novel form. Like “Third World” writers, they are engaged in a “lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of nation-forming [...] whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven [them] into a kind of exile”³⁰; their ambivalence toward “history” itself is reflected in the formal ways in which they evoke and respond to the archived past through grappling with the novel genre.

Phillips describes growing up in Leeds, “the only Black boy” in “predominantly white working-class areas”, and “mainly white-dominated middle-class schools”, and his “fundamental problem” one of “reconcil[ing] the contradiction of feeling British, while being constantly told in many subtle and unsubtle ways that I did not belong”.³¹ His sense of exclusion may be attributed not only to specific incidents of “blind bigotry”, but also to his sense of being marginalized by a dominant historical narrative which has figured national or regional identity as wholly linear and rooted to one place³²:

I grew up in Yorkshire which is a very [...] rooted part of England—very working class, extended family, everybody’s going to see their mam and their gran. [...] I didn’t have any grandparents, or aunts and uncles, or cousins, because they were all in the Caribbean. [...] So [...] I suppose the primary displacement I felt was growing up in such a tight-knit family community without the sense of family, and I think that engendered in me a very deep desire to have all those things such as family, and a sense of place, and a sense of home. [...] But I don’t really feel that so much any more, [...] maybe because of the amount of travelling I do, and maybe because [...] my literary influences, and people I consider to be my peers have changed, and a lot of those people don’t have a sense of home, and I sort of began to think it’s OK not to have a sense of home.³³

Embracing the role of the "cosmopolitan citizen", Phillips approaches a notion of community which cuts across narratives of nation, as a flexible and democratic alternative to the problem of alienation, exclusion, and unbelonging which confronted him growing up Black in Britain. Even as Phillips describes the shift in his perspective as a very personal process, it is possible to discern here a radical historical shift from what Verwoert refers to as "the standstill of history", to the emergence of "a multitude of competing and overlapping temporalities".³⁵ To grow up "without the sense of family" in such a family-oriented community, as Phillips did, presents a notion of self as compromised by a "momentary suspension of historical continuity",³⁶ effected, in the case of Black British writers, by the tyranny of a narrative of Britishness which has, apparently, been uniform and unchanging. Black writers in Britain of the 1980s and 1990s present a narrative of the individual self fractured by a Great British amnesia as regards the Black presence in the British Isles. Closely linked to the mighty hush which commonly falls over the history of Britain's extensive imperial exploits more generally, the silence which surrounded the history of "people of colour" living in Britain had the maddening supplement, for Black writers growing up in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, of telling them that they, as Black Britons, *did not exist*. Where colonial subjects were given narratives of the "motherland" to learn by rote, to which their own "native" experience was (implicitly or explicitly) unfavorably compared, for Black people on British soil, the narrative of the very ground on which they stood did not include them. Grappling with this pervasive silence around the historical Black presence in Britain has a material effect in Black British writing which can be compared to what Verwoert calls "a radical temporal incision", which "seemed to bring modern history to a standstill".³⁷

This silence enshrouded by Thatcher-era Britain's myopic narrative of itself is wholly analogous to the disrupted narrative approach to the cultural memory of Africa which can be found in Black British fiction. Black British culture is not invested as African American tradition is in any notion of mythical "return to Africa"—any traditional story of the "flying African" being available only via inherited African American or Caribbean narratives, so that frequently Black cultural nationalisms in British contexts seem faintly bizarre. The fracture which is enacted upon the individual personality by the monolithic memory of Englishness is commensurate with the effect of the Middle Passage upon the memory of an "African father" who stands speechless, apparently frozen in time. The memory of Africa

awaits a narrative which is similarly sensitive to historical discontinuity, what Stuart Hall describes as “what Africa has *become* in the New World, what we have made of Africa”. “Africa”—as we retell it through politics, memory, and desire”.³⁸ Identity itself, in the case of Black British writers, almost mirrors the role of the cultural memory of Africa—that memory frozen in time and “no longer there”—as Stuart Hall writes in another context:

[D]oesn't the acceptance of the fictional or narrative status of identity in relation to the world also require as a necessity, its opposite—the moment of arbitrary closure? [...] every full stop is provisional. The next sentence will take nearly all of it back. So what is this “ending”? It's a kind of stake, a kind of wager. It says, “I need to say something, something...just now.” It is not forever, not totally universally true. It is not underpinned by any infinite guarantees. But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am.³⁹

“Crossing the River”, as a title, responds implicitly to Kamau Brathwaite's poetic call which begins “So crossing the river / and walking the path / we came at last to Kumasi”, and the African father's call recalls Brathwaite's lines “can you hear / can you hear me?”⁴⁰ Phillips plays to the indeterminate perspective elucidated by Brathwaite's poem, in which the lines may be spoken either by a “returning” diasporan subject, *or* an African “father”. Yet Phillips also offers a departure from this inheritance by conceiving of the more important “crossings” as those which are made, not by any “return” to Africa, but by the continuing conversations represented by all the criss-crossing voices of the novel. These are voices which suggest a contemporary moment where “history sprang to life again [...], releasing a multitude of subjects with a visa to travel across formerly closed borders and with unheard histories to tell”.⁴¹ In Phillips's novel, the cultural memory of Africa functions just like other structures of identification such as nation or race, as a moment of arbitrary closure which may be spoken in the “just now”, but which is always insufficient, and which signals toward a future space in which the potential for identity, beyond its expression in the structures of narrative language, resides.

If historical texts may be seen as “closed histories”, then, Verwoert's comment upon the practice of “appropriation” is apposite not only to Phillips's work, but also to all of the Black British fiction discussed here:

Appropriation [...] is about performing the unresolved by staging objects, images or allegories that invoke the ghosts of *unclosed* histories in a way that allows them to appear as ghosts and reveal the nature of the ambiguous presence.⁴²

Phillips and others who narrate Britain's historical Black presence are frequently engaged in appropriation of "closed" historical texts, *performing* them in such a way that acknowledges the silenced, unrecorded, and unheard voices which reside either at the margins, or completely beyond the bounds of those texts. This space *beyond text itself* is a space of sheer indeterminacy, one which might encompass hopelessness just as much as hope. In spite of the uncertainty of its promise, I argue in this chapter that such a space of indeterminacy is for Phillips a preferable setting for the working out of cultural identity against a historical backdrop of fragmentation, than any established tradition from the past might be. For Black British writers of Phillips's generation, established traditions offer limited value for identification, and the space of self-expression must be forged partially, therefore, on uncharted ground.⁴³

"I LONG TO HEAR": READING CULTURAL MEMORY AS FUTURE-ORIENTED

For the African American writers discussed in the first part of this study, a living connection with a cultural memory of ancestral Africa is figured as part of the process of retrieving an African American tradition under threat; for Caryl Phillips and other writers shaped by the "Black British" experience, a cultural memory of Africa does not speak in the same way to a known or established tradition, and is therefore treated as part of a diversity of material which the individual can use to establish his or her own cultural identity. This improvisation upon the fragmented material of the past has a clear corollary in the formal attributes of some Black British writing. Phillips has commented:

I keep trying to write a book with a sort of beginning, a middle, and an end, in that order, and failing spectacularly. I mean, something happens during the process where the linear structure seems to break down and [it's as if I've] crafted this wonderful ceramic fruit bowl, and I'm sort of two pages from the end of the book, or just doing the final glazing, and I sort of deliberately drop it, and it shatters, and then I have to start again in some way. And I

think it's because I don't trust the linearity of time [...] The old nineteenth-century realistic novel does not seem applicable to the subject matter that I'm addressing, and I think that's why I drop the bowl every time.⁴⁴

What is enacted by “dropping the bowl” of linear narration is an attempt to shift both characters and settings free of textual representation, which to Phillips seems always to be constrained by linearity, and into a new kind of relationality. Phillips’s “cosmopolitan” perspective works to privilege individuality, and if the novel presents a sense of its “mnemonic design”⁴⁵ beyond what is indicated by the presence of the Prologue and Epilogue as figurative “bookends”, I suggest that this appears in a way which emphasizes the very personal and subjective nature of the relationship between text and reader.

This future-orientation of the narrative exercise is thus reflected, in the case of *Crossing the River*, in the form of the novel. Clarence Major, commenting upon Phillips’s strategy of placing diverse stories side by side, reflects: “I find it interesting to speculate: Did Caryl Phillips start four separate novels, change his mind, and end up saving the best parts, finally bringing them together as this book?”⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Lars Eckstein, commenting upon Phillips’s earlier novel *Cambridge*, which similarly positions “separate” stories side-by-side, points out that “a second reading reveals that Phillips’s novel evinces a unique mnemonic design”.⁴⁷ The critical shift from seeing the narratives of *Crossing the River* as “separate”, to the perception of a “mnemonic design” between them, is fundamental to the cosmopolitan notion of community which Phillips establishes in this novel. An initial encounter with the novel, as Clarence Major seems to suggest, might yield little sense of any connection between the stories of the separate parts, other than that which is contrived by positioning an African “father” figure in the Prologue, and by repeating memorable sections from each narrative in a diasporic “symphony” in the Epilogue. Yet by positioning the fragile quality of the spoken voice, clear appeal is made to the sensitivity of the reader’s own intensely personal process.

To lend my critique a sense of how this process works, I can observe that during the course of researching this chapter, it was only *after* having read the novel, and upon hearing Phillips reading aloud from each of its six parts,⁴⁸ that I began to perceive the effect of what I call “echoes” between the voice of the “African father” in the book’s Prologue, and its other parts. The particular instance of “echoing” which was revealed to me by Phillips’s reading occurs in Part II of the novel, which follows

protagonist Martha Randolph's escape from slavery in nineteenth-century America, and her attempt to move West with a Black wagon trail. Martha is remembering the painful moment when, as a slave, it became clear to her that her daughter would soon be sold away from her:

I run my hand across Eliza Mae's matted hair. On Sunday I will pull the comb through the knots and she will scream. Outside, I can hear the crickets, their shrill voices snapping, like twigs being broken from a tree. "Master dead."⁴⁹

As I heard these words read aloud by Phillips, they immediately echoed, for me, with the earlier words spoken by the African father of the Prologue: "You are beyond. Broken-off, like limbs from a tree. But not lost, for you carry within your bodies the seeds of new trees."⁵⁰ What I was experiencing, as a reader, was of course my own memory, manipulated ever so subtly by Phillips, and functioning in the same way that is illuminated by Walter Benjamin's commentary on Proust:

Proust tells us how poorly, for many years, he remembered the town of Combray in which, after all, he spent part of his childhood. One afternoon the taste of a kind of pastry called *madeleine* (which he later mentions often) transported him back to the past, whereas before then he had been limited to the promptings of a memory which obeyed the call of attentiveness. [...] Proust, summing up, says that the past is 'somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), although we have no idea which one it is. As for that object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die or whether we never encounter it.'⁵¹

Phillips draws attention to a remarkable function of memory, intimately known to us all, which seems to transport consciousness to the past in the most powerful of ways, while the "call of attentiveness" might always have found that past beyond reach. What Phillips does here is to give us a sense of the novel's stories, and the connections between them, in a powerful way, as a part of our own personal experience and memory. This manipulation of the reader's memory is reminiscent in a way of that which we observed in Morrison's novel, where the memory of Africa appeared at a level somewhere beyond the symbolic realm of the narrative, through a succession of "doors". However, Phillips's text differs from Morrison's here, in that as he allows a far greater expanse of "real time" to elapse, in

the reader's encounter with the text, between narrative moments which clearly echo each other (74 pages pass in the instance cited above), we are given a much greater sense that we have stumbled across a fragment of the past only *by chance*. Within that chance encounter, and the suggested possibility that it might just as easily have escaped the notice of the present, lies the seed of Phillips's historicism in this work—the past is evoked in ways which gesture to the impossibility of its communication through writing, and which allow for the freedom of its reach beyond the practice of reading, into the textual future.

The African father's voice "echoes" in this way through all parts of the novel. An initial instance is given in a "passage [...] that [is] marked typographically", providing, just as Eckstein comments with regard to *Cambridge*, "some initial assistance to the reader towards an awareness of his referential design".⁵² The Prologue reads:

Approached by a quiet fellow. Three children only. I jettisoned them at this point, where the tributary stumbles and swims out in all directions to meet the sea. *Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl.* I soiled my hands with cold goods in exchange for their warm flesh.⁵³

When we come to the account of Captain Hamilton, the slave-trader of Part III, one narrative voice absorbs and obliquely engages with another:

Approached by a quiet fellow. Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl. I believe my trade for this voyage has reached its conclusion.⁵⁴

Anthony Ilona comments upon a point in Part IV of the novel, where the Englishwoman Joyce recalls giving up for adoption, the child conceived with the African American GI Travis:

[I]f we listen once again to Joyce's words: For eighteen years I hadn't invited Greer to do anything. Your father and I, Greer. We couldn't show off. We had to be careful. And bold, their cadence is almost identical to those uttered on the first page of *Crossing the River*.

For two hundred and fifty years I have longed to tell them: Children I am your father. I love you. But understand. There are no paths in water. No signposts.

The matching rhythm provides a forceful association between the two confessions which once again links the personal memory of Joyce to the wider historical process.⁵⁵

The adoption of Greer, the child conceived by Joyce and Travis, functions as another echo of the history of children sold into slavery, and the words of the African father can be seen to resonate with Joyce again, at a point where she is walking down the street she used to live in, which has just been bombed by the Luftwaffe, leaving behind "mountains of rubble"⁵⁶:

It occurred to me that I was lost. That all the familiar landmarks had gone....
I walked on knowing that there was no longer any such thing as a familiar route.⁵⁷

The reader experiences memory through textual signs which recall a moment described, not earlier in the life of an individual, or in the life of their town or nation, but in the life of *another protagonist*, who may live in an entirely different time and place. Such an exercise works to create vivid connections, felt on an intensely subjective and momentary basis, between narratives not necessarily bound by a linear sense of time or a settled sense of "home". Just as Phillips described his own progress to a point where he could feel that "it's OK not to have a sense of home", so his constant interruption of linear narrative, by placing diverse stories side by side, can be seen to help dramatize a sense of the "cosmopolitan" community. In this way, the memory of Africa begins to be dramatized in the present, in the way suggested by Stuart Hall, "as we retell it through politics, memory, and desire". Phillips's cosmopolitanism functions as a route to celebration of individuality and difference within community, and of the potential for writing to access unwritten realms, signaling a potentially radical narrative act which undermines the dominant center of textuality.

If echoes are heard between these moments in the novel, what is communicated is a lament for humanity on a scale which is both epic and intimate, of which Martha losing her daughter at a slave auction, or Joyce losing her home, and later her child, are merely the tiniest snapshots of personal moments, that can help us understand why Phillips has commented that Joyce's narrative was "probably the most painful thing I ever wrote".⁵⁸ As empathy with others is felt *via* intense individual feeling, we will recognize what Audre Lorde called the "self-connection shared" of the erotic (seen in Chap. 4), in which Phillips allows us to participate in the most remarkable of ways. But of course, where the erotic may, in some African American articulations, have been implicitly related to an "African" form of memory, here it is encountered in a way that the reader can understand on her own terms. Phillips's positioning of the ancestral

African figure as simultaneously able and unable to communicate with the diaspora, is representative of a cultural memory of origins which is felt to be stuck in the past, unrelated to lived Black British experience, but which can nevertheless be *replayed* in different ways to resonate in the present. A community is then created by the “music” heard between the periodical “echoes” throughout the novel, evoking even more than the “mythological Africa”, which Alan Rice identifies in the novel as a “landscape of the mind [...] that links diasporan Blacks across the Atlantic and [...] the reason that jazz music has such transatlantic resonance for Africans in Europe and America”.⁵⁹ This community, first of all, includes white as well as Black characters, and also allows the terms which might recall a memory of Africa to carry the equal resonance of other historical and personal moments.

INTO THE INTERIOR: BEYOND NARRATION

In the section of *Crossing the River* where a lived experience on African soil is represented, narrative moves beyond language in yet more remarkable ways. Nash Williams, writing from his missionary settlement in Liberia, tells his story exclusively through letters to his former master. In an instance of “writing back” to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, his tale is given in a narration so highly mediated as to exaggerate Conrad’s likening of the experience of Africa to some impenetrable solidified past distant from the modern present. Where the encounter with Africa is spoken, in Conrad’s novel, by Captain Marlow, and relayed by a narrator who is listening in on the account, Phillips’s narration of Africa here is removed from the textual present through multiple narratological strategies. Before we even encounter his reports of his experiences in Africa, Nash’s letters are clearly bracketed within the story of Edward’s experience. Nash initially enters the story as a kind of ghost, his death introduced as “news [which] reached [Edward] after dinner”,⁶⁰ in an envelope carried by a servant. Later, we discover that a letter written by Edward to Nash “was uncovered by Edward’s wife, Amelia, and not conveyed”.⁶¹ It further emerges that Amelia, jealous of Edward’s apparent closeness to his servants, had also “destroy[ed] the colored man’s letters”,⁶² so that, importantly, the correspondence we finally witness must be read as an altogether *interrupted*, *partial*, and *abbreviated* version of the narrative which Nash had apparently written, correspondent in some sense to the presence of Black people’s stories in Britain’s historical archive.⁶³ Nash Williams,

writing from his missionary settlement in Liberia, tells his story exclusively through letters which are bracketed within his former master's story, and, Timothy Bewes writes, "punctuated by the contributions of a third-person narrator who seems to share Nash's imprisonment in a strangled nineteenth-century literary discourse".⁶⁴ As Phillips, then, takes Conrad's cue and exaggerates the extent to which his portrait of Africa is "filtered" away from the center of the narration, we find that the portrait of Africa given by Nash begins to break in half, as it were, into something which is on the one hand increasingly monolithic, stuck in a past which is almost unknown to the present, and something which on the other hand finally comes to *shift free* of representation, indicating a potential future living beyond the bounds of text.

Nash has been stationed in Africa by the American Colonization Society, which expresses the hope that "the natives would...welcom[e] home their lost children",⁶⁵ and Nash's own language might easily have been lifted wholesale from the Society's own most enthusiastic propaganda:

A colored person can enjoy his liberty in this place, for there exists no prejudice of color and every man is free and equal....I doubt if I shall ever consent to return again to America. Liberia, the beautiful land of my forefathers, is a place where persons of color may enjoy their freedom. It is the home for our race.⁶⁶

While Nash, Kathie Birat notes, "is simply transposing the American discourse of slavery and inequality onto what Edward describes as 'the inelegant shape of Africa'",⁶⁷ the reader is given the sense that neither Nash nor the truth of his experience of Africa can really be known through the text of his letters. By the time we come to Nash's third letter, written when he has been in Africa for four and a half years, we begin to see more clearly a fracture emerging in the speaking subject, as Nash's fine-sounding assertion that "[i]t was intended that Africa should be a land of freedom, for where else can the man of color enjoy his liberty?"⁶⁸ is immediately followed with "I have been in Africa a long time and I wish to come home as soon as possible".⁶⁹ Nash goes on to deny a rumor that he has fathered a child by a native woman,⁷⁰ and reports, moreover, that he "expects to be wedlocked to" an African American woman.⁷¹ In his fourth letter, however, written only a year and a half later, he says he is marrying "a native woman...[who] discharges the office of mother to a child I possess by another, less successful, connection",⁷² a child that Nash has

not mentioned before this point! While Bénédicté Ledent contends that “one realises [Edward’s story] is full of significant truncations whose main goal is the concealment of his homosexuality”,⁷³ it also begins to become clear that the truth of Nash’s experience of Africa itself may lie some distance from the way he represents it upon the page. Birat comments that “Gaps gradually appear at the fictional and metafictional levels, creating a silence which eventually fills the entire narrative space...[and] Nash gradually slips out of language back into what he calls ‘this dark and benighted country’ and disappears”.⁷⁴ As gaps in narration open up, however, it is not only that Nash disappears, but also that his identity *and* the Africa he describes begin to be imagined as teeming with possibilities which are not indicated in the text itself. Yet as he disappears into Africa, he simultaneously, and paradoxically, comes more clearly into focus than ever for the reader, his transcendence of the borders of a distorting colonial discourse suggesting the possibility of this character’s survival beyond the page, and furthermore, in his own language as yet unspoken by the text.

Following Nash’s fourth letter, the novel turns back to the plight of Edward, who upon learning of his servant’s disappearance, has traveled to Africa to investigate matters for himself. At this point, we are reminded of the role of another former servant of Edward’s, called Madison, who has been asked to track Nash down, and reports to Edward that “Nash Williams is dead”,⁷⁵ delivering to him Nash’s final letter (the echo of Conrad’s infamous line, “Mistah Kurtz he dead”, may be heard). Against the framework of Nash’s already highly mediated narrative, Madison’s role as messenger adds another complicating factor to our interpretation of Nash’s fate. The “seemingly objective extradiegetic narrator”⁷⁶ informs us early on that

Madison had, at an earlier time, borne Nash some feelings of ill-will, having reasoned, and to some degree correctly, that his master’s affection for himself had been usurped by this younger interloper. But Edward trusted that the passage of time, and a change of climate, would have healed these old wounds, and that Madison would not resent the task with which he was now being entrusted.⁷⁷

Edward can be understood to take a significant leap of faith in requesting, against this background of the relationship between the three men, that Madison act as intermediary to communicate Edward’s concerns to Nash, and to report Nash’s fate back to Edward. The possibility of yet another

intervention into the communication of Nash's story and his experience of Africa (including the possibility that Nash's death may be pure fabrication on Madison's part), makes very possible the older servant's instrumental role in a narrative occurring beyond the words on the page, and is subtly underlined by Madison's "scornful glare upon his former master".⁷⁸ As one version of Africa becomes more thoroughly entrenched in a monolithic colonial discourse than ever, with the narration's emphasis upon "the fetid African air"⁷⁹ and "this savage environment",⁸⁰ then, another simultaneous narration of Africa begins to move outside the terms of representation altogether.

"SOMETHING FRACTURED": THE DISQUIET OF REMEMBERING

To allow for the possibility of narrative "echo" between protagonists in this novel, or indeed for an imaginative space beyond text where they may find freedom from the limits of hegemonic discourse, is to find moments of celebratory triumph in Phillips's novel. However, the triumphant is by no means a uniform outcome of the narrative strategies collected here. If Stuart Hall, cited in the Introduction, invokes Derrida's notion of *différance*, to emphasize a break in signification which defers identity, potentially, ever to the future, a striking instance of this deferred process of signification is seen in Phillips's use of the letters collected in Bell I. Wiley's anthology of slave letters, *Slaves No More*, and in particular the "Letters of the John McDonogh Negroes". In the Nash Williams letters, which always address Edward Williams "Dear Father", Phillips redramatizes what Wiley identifies as an instance "indicat[ing] an unusually affectionate relationship between the writers and their former master. The Black correspondents saluted McDonogh variously as 'Dear Father', 'Honored Parent', 'Dear Beloved Benefactor', 'Dear friend & benefactor', 'Dear Beloved Sir', [etc.]"⁸¹ Furthermore, Nash's letters are found, if we refer to this archival record in any detail, to bear uncommon resemblances to the letters written by a particular individual. Wiley remarks:

Perhaps the most remarkable of the Blacks sent by McDonogh to Liberia, and the one who wrote him the most letters, was Washington Watts McDonogh. This Negro was reared in the McDonogh home and the term "father" that he so often applied to his former master reflected the closeness of their relationship. [...] He was the only one of the migrants who refused

on arrival in Africa to settle at Monrovia; instead he proceeded more than one hundred miles beyond to Settra Kroo where he became a teacher in a mission school maintained primarily for native Africans.⁸²

An illustrative instance is the following from Washington Watts McDonogh's letters, which Phillips has "lifted" from this source, making his own, apparently minor, but not insignificant changes. McDonogh's letter reads:

Hon Sir, I have taken this opportunity of addressing you a few lines to inform you that I am still in the land of the living and enjoying the rights of man for although I am in a land of darkness I have nothing to fear. My wants are few and of course easily supplied, Not like you who are liveing in a land of milk & honey and yet never satisfied. I have lived in the same land myself and had the pleasure of enjoying all that the heart could wish for or that would make one happy and yet I was not willing to denie myself of the lease thing. But alas, what a change has since taken place. Things that seemed to have been of so much value to me in those times are no more to me now than idle dreams. When compared with my present views of them, all that I now wish for is just enough to make me comfortable and happy while I live in this world, for we are told in scripture that we can carry nothing out of it when we go hence.⁸³

Phillips's text reads as follows:

Since the passing of my wife and child, my wants are few, and of course they are easily supplied in this land of darkness. I have nothing to fear. America is, according to my memory, a land of milk and honey, where people are not easily satisfied. Things that seemed to me then to hold so much value are now, in this new country, and in my new circumstances, without value. All that I now wish for is enough to give me comfort and some small happiness whilst I dwell in this world, for I have learned, by means of sad experience, and by close study of the scripture, that we carry nothing out of this world when we go hence.⁸⁴

It is noticeable, when comparing Phillips's version to the "original" letters, that as spelling and grammatical errors are "corrected", and as the text is apparently "abbreviated", or made more concise, Phillips seems almost to employ an editor's critical eye. The effect is to obscure the very humanity, the sound of the speaking voice which comes through the historical record, and which occurs in marked contrast to Nash Williams's more featureless

voice. Phillips's prose has been called "flat", and "lifelessly prosaic"⁸⁵ by critics, and one effect of Phillips's noticeable "flattening" of the language of the historical archive here is to push knowledge of Nash's character off the page, so that it might be imagined to exist somewhere beyond the written word, in a historical experience which has not been wholly documented, and therefore can never be fully "known". The effect is to emphasize the hollowness, the meaninglessness, *even of his own prose* as it purports to be a textual historical record, particularly if it begins to resemble a linear narrative which is taken to be "representative" of a moment in history.

While Phillips's figuring of the real power of the memory of Africa through subtle instances of "echoing" is a clear attempt to undermine dominant narratives, his narrative strategy also betrays some lack of conviction as to the possibility of doing so. Lars Eckstein has found, in the Caryl Phillips papers collected at Yale University Library, a fascinating exchange between Phillips and Paul Edwards, the scholar and editor of Equiano's narrative, in which Edwards criticizes the manuscript of *Cambridge* for its failure to add much of value to the historical record. Edwards writes:

[T]he Cambridge section uses so much material from Equiano and other sources in a wholly undisguised way that I doubt the value of the narrative. It is not as you thought, simply a problem of plagiarising your sources, I think rather that the narrative degenerates into easily recognisable pastiche, a kind of impersonal patchwork with little contemporary value, since the original sources have said it all already. I think that the narrative of Cambridge must derive much more from your own imagination, but as it stands, what you do is repeat material from the past. That's not what a modern novelist must do with material like this (e.g., Wide Sargasso Sea), which is to make a new thing.⁸⁶

In his reply to Edwards, Phillips's comment upon his use of historical documents is singularly revealing as regards the author's attitude toward historicity:

The novel is an attempt to dramatically rewrite, using the sources and what skills I possess as a novelist, material which is largely (though by no means totally) inaccessible to the general reading public. I am attempting to make something 'new' out of something 'old'. In the process I hope I have created two characters (and a supply cast) the memory of whom might linger in the minds of those who read this "fiction." It might even send them back to the original sources to find out more.⁸⁷

Here, Phillips presents his process of rewriting “older” sources with a certain ambivalence as to his stated aim or intent. The writing is intended perhaps to entertain, perhaps to reinvent, perhaps to take the reader back to the original text. How Phillips values the “original” in comparison with his own composition is far from clear, and his approach, frustratingly evasive of simple interpretation, presents a situation where the past may be rediscovered and retold, yet to what purpose is essentially undecided. It begins to appear that while Black British approaches to the past may frequently take a celebratory tone in the embrace of freedom from known traditions, the underside of such celebration can also encompass doubt, uncertainty, and inconclusiveness. Like Pierre Nora’s account of markers of the past as “lieux de mémoire”, they signal *both* remembrance and forgetfulness, “moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded”.⁸⁸ Standing at the crossroads which marks the historical present, for writers shaped by Black British experience, can be deeply disconcerting, encompassing the hopefulness of finding new sites of memory which configure the past anew for vibrant expression of individuality, and yet also bringing into view the very real possibility of “[b]eing invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice”,⁸⁹ as another classic Black literary ancestor might have put it.

Such ambiguity becomes particularly acute in light of Phillips’s published discussion with the African writer Chinua Achebe, on the subject of Joseph Conrad’s narration of Africa, which serves as such a foundational pre-text to *Crossing the River*. Achebe takes the unambiguous position that Conrad was “a bloody racist”, that *Heart of Darkness* is “an offensive and deplorable book”, and that “there is a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind”.⁹⁰ Phillips counters Achebe’s protest initially with a degree of sympathy for the position of Conrad as a European author:

It is nonsensical to demand of Conrad that he imagine an African humanity that is totally out of line with both the times in which he was living and the larger purpose of his novel....[T]he main focus of the novel is the Europeans and the effect upon them of their encountering another, less “civilized,” world....Conrad’s only program is doubt; in this case, doubt about the supremacy of European humanity, and the ability of this supposed humanity to maintain its imagined status beyond the high streets of Europe.⁹¹

In another, later encounter with Achebe, the older writer restates his objection to Conrad:

I am an African....[Y]ou cannot compromise my humanity in order that you explore your own ambiguity. I cannot accept that. My humanity is not to be debated, nor is it to be used simply to illustrate European problems.⁹²

This time, Phillips's reaction is one of disorientation:

The realisation hits me with force. I am not an African. Were I an African I suspect I would feel the same way as my host. But I was raised in Europe, and although I have learned to reject the stereotypically reductive images of Africa and Africans, I am undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of European civilisation. I feel momentarily ashamed that I might have become caught up with this theme and subsequently overlooked how offensive this novel might be to a man such as Chinua Achebe and to millions of other Africans.⁹³

In his nonfiction, Phillips charts his own conflicts and shifts of opinion or feeling with almost disarming honesty; he allows his reader access to the about-turns which may occur in his own thinking. As a result, the reader becomes informed about the merits of each side of a particular moral conundrum—and yet, the most striking impression which is left is that of Phillips himself, the narrator who is left unsure what to think. Such an exchange seems the very performance of identity as an unfinished conversation, and the impossibility of arriving at definitive answers to the questions raised signals precisely the possibility that some conversations reach dead ends, cul-de-sacs or impossible positions; the hybrid nature of identity in the late twentieth-century Black British scenario will not always lead to scenes of ecstatic celebration—it encompasses irresolvable doubts also.

Phillips can be seen to dramatize this position of almost excruciating doubt in the final paragraph of "The Pagan Coast". In the context of Nash Williams's narrative "disappearance" into Africa, the narrative center shifts to African soil as the white master Edward is taken by his servant Madison to view "the final Nash Williams settlement":

Madison took the lead and ushered Edward forward and into the unkempt filth of the place. Everywhere he turned, Edward's eyes were assaulted by natives who squatted idly, their bodies resting awkwardly on their foundations,

like their infantile shack. Edward [...] was ill-equipped to disguise his true feelings of disgust in the midst of this spectre of peopled desolation. [...] The natives stared at him, and watched as the white man's lips formed the words, but no sound was heard. Still, Edward continued to *sing* his hymn. The natives looked on and wondered what evil spirits had populated this poor man's soul and dragged him down to such a level of abasement. Their hearts began to swell with the pity that one feels for a fellow being who has lost both his way and his sense of purpose. This strange old white man.⁹⁴

This ending signals an explicit response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which Phillips cites as an example of "passages that seem terrifyingly contemporary in their descriptive accuracy":

Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence.⁹⁵

Phillips appears explicitly to rewrite Conrad, yet allows a shift of narrative perspective to encompass the consciousness of those silent and objectified African "others", by endowing them with the power of judgment and feeling, and the capacity to look back at the colonial master. Phillips's rewriting here situates a narrative position which is able to identify, to greater or lesser degrees, with the position of the servant Madison, his white master Edward, *and* the Africans themselves. Phillips engages the scenario provided by Conrad, which is somewhat akin to the tripartite narrative formulation of "Creole-Overseer-African" envisaged in the flying African tales referenced in Chap. 3, and yet the nature of his intervention is indeterminate. Does he inhabit a particular position, or "make a new thing" in this particular act of appropriation? The answer does not appear that simple—instead Phillips can be seen to assert the freedom to enter into history as a conversation; to situate his own perspectives, and his subjects' identities, as unfinished. It is in the conversational and the indeterminate that the function of his art lies. As Eric Neel points out, this representation of history as conversational, and of identities themselves as unfinished, bears a very particular ethical weight:

Each figure [Phillips] introduces, *including himself*, has an identity entrenched in the history of the [slave] trade, but the nature of their stories and experiences and how they relate to each other is ambiguous. Phillips,

wary that coherence might make the twisted history digestible, is committed to the idea that the trade's enduring aftermath is something fractured.⁹⁶

Phillips's narrative strategy does not therefore offer unambiguous restoration to the injustices of the past, but instead perhaps provokes questions around what such restoration might signify. Marcus Wood's critique helps to identify one of the most perplexing implications of Phillips's ambiguity as he remarks that one of the means by which Phillips "rewrites" the slave-trader Newton's *Journal* is by altering the numbers accorded to particular slaves by the slaver:

[Phillips] could be seen to destroy that one small vestige of historical identity [the slave] possessed—her number. Number 72 has been removed from her place in the historical archive into another space, a space hard to identify, perhaps harder still to justify.⁹⁷

Wood's charge is an uncomfortable one, and one which we would do well to ponder. Yet, is it equally possible to suggest that Phillips's aim, in "renumbering" the slaves of the trader's log, might be to undermine the hegemony of this historical document, the slave-trader's log surely being as close as a text could become to being a murderous weapon? Might it be argued that number 72 never *could* stand in for the woman's name, and that nameless, beyond the narrative frame, her identity might exist within the realms of far greater possibility? By undoing the slave-trader's naming, Phillips in one sense frees the memory of the enslaved and murdered from the bounds of the historical record into a "space" which, we will see in the following chapter, is not so "hard to identify" after all—it is the space of the imagination, which, analysis of S.I. Martin's work in the next chapter shows, is vital to the process of engaging with and understanding the historical archive at all. Black British writing, I will show in the next Chapter, treads in the footsteps of Caribbean thinking which asserts the value of the literary imagination as a space of "knowing" that which cannot always be communicated through the historical chronicle.

WRITING BEYOND TEXT?

Crossing the River's Epilogue reprises the voice of the African "father", which is finally interspersed with the echoes of those longed-for voices representing the diverse experiences of diaspora, thereby dramatizing a

cosmopolitan ideal of community, “oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local”.⁹⁸ Here is, in a sense, an attempt to record that space “beyond the text”, where imagined pasts and futures relating to the cultural memory of Africa can be seen to converge:

*And then he reached out and pulled me towards him. I couldn't believe it. He'd come back to me. He really wanted me. That day, crying on the platform, safe in Travis's arms. For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. To the haunting voices. Singing: Mercy, Mercy Me. (The Ecology.) Insisting: Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong. Declaring: Brothers and Friends. I am Toussaint L'Ouverture, my name is perhaps known to you. Listened to: Papa Doc. Baby Doc. Listened to voices hoping for: Freedom. Democracy. Singing: Baby, baby. Where did our love go? Samba. Calypso. Jazz. Jazz.*⁹⁹

Here, in a sense, is dramatic resolution. And yet my own response is similar to that expressed by Jamal Mahjoub when he writes that “it sounds like the rather desperate warbling that a singer might strike upon reaching the end of an ambitious aria and realising that the notes remain, after all, beyond the range of his abilities”.¹⁰⁰ Phillips, speaking about *Crossing the River*, claims, “[t]hese people were talking in harmonies I could hear”¹⁰¹; he insists that in his work, “there is faith. I don't necessarily mean faith with a religious gloss on it. I mean the ability to actually acknowledge the existence of something that you believe in, something that helps you to make sense of your life”.¹⁰² All this may be true, and yet the ambiguity of the textual space which Phillips establishes through the course of the novel, and its irreconcilability to straightforward norms of representation, means that this articulation of a kind of easily expressed sonic community remains unconvincing, and certainly not unproblematic if it invokes “possession” by an African diaspora past. This novel's true power, until this point, has resided in the unarticulated space “beyond text”.

What happens, then, when Phillips attempts to broach this space beyond narration, the space in which a Black British relationship with a cultural memory of Africa is most meaningfully gestured to, and almost to shepherd it into the realm of the textual? It is almost as if the words and song snippets chosen each resonate powerfully with a world of their own making, and yet clustered together, those worlds, far from being amplified into any kind of sonic landscape of belonging, seem to ring a little hollow. I am struck by Timothy Bewes' insight when he remarks that

it is far from clear that the "voices" Phillips gives to his characters are really intended to "belong" to them, that his characters meaningfully own the discourses they make use of, or that, as an author, Phillips is remotely engaged in an attempt to capture authenticity of voice—all this notwithstanding his own statements on the matter.¹⁰³

Perhaps, it is the relationship between speech and silence, between what is written and what can never be written, which gives the stories of *Crossing the River*, and of the Black musical cultures referenced above, their power. Perhaps, the practice of bringing those sounds and stories into such close association with one another, as Phillips seems to do in the Epilogue, is to create a dissonance which not only "sounds" wrong to the ear, but also which attempts to parade a particular relationship with the discursive which is not in evidence anywhere else in the novel. Perhaps, after all, the space for the performance of identity which emerges in this novel resides not only in the relationship of identification which resonates between disparate voices, but also in the even more uncertain territory which lies *between* that which can be spoken and that which cannot, *between* that which can be heard and that which cannot. It might then be possible to read the "Epilogue" as the very antithesis of the "final word" it purports to be, as questioning the very possibility of language to deliver any conclusive history. *Crossing the River* might then, be read like other of Phillips's novels which are similarly structured, not as the text which displays an act of faith finally finding voice, but as a continuation of the struggle with history, so that those disparate voices are ever fighting to be heard, sounds now waxing, now waning, in the interstices of discourse.

NOTES

1. Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*. ed. Mari Evans (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 342.
2. Jan Vorwoert, "Apropos Appropriation: Why Stealing Images Feels Different Today," *Tate Triennial 2006: New British Art*, ed. Beatrix Ruf and Clarrie Wallis, (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 19.
3. Ibid., 19–20.
4. Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River*, (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2000 [1993]), 1.
5. Ibid.

6. Anthony Ilona, "Crossing the River: A Chronicle of the Black Diaspora," *Wasafiri*, 22 (Autumn 1995), 5.
7. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 217.
8. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 1.
9. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18.
10. Lars Eckstein, "Interview with Caryl Phillips," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 32:2 (April 2001), 65–66.
11. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 41.
12. *Ibid.*, 79.
13. *Ibid.*, 92.
14. *Ibid.*, 109.
15. *Ibid.*, 130.
16. *Ibid.*, 129.
17. *Ibid.*, 145.
18. *Ibid.*, 217.
19. *Ibid.*, 1.
20. Caryl Phillips, *The European Tribe*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1999 [1987]), 8.
21. Mark Stein, "Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature," *Kunapipi*, 20.2 (1998), 80.
22. Stephen Clingman, "Other Voices: An Interview with Caryl Phillips," *Salmagundi*, 143 (Summer 2004), 115.
23. *Ibid.*, 29.
24. Caryl Phillips, "The 'High Anxiety' of Belonging," *A New World Order: Selected Essays*, (London: Vintage, 2002 [2001]), 304.
25. James Procter, "General introduction: 1948/1998 Periodising postwar Black Britain," in *Writing Black Britain, 1948–1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Procter, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 237.
26. *Ibid.*, 84. Procter is quoting from Timothy Brennan, "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities," *Race & Class*, 31.1 (July/Sept 1989).
27. Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology in the Second Age of Modernity," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 82.
28. John Akomfrah (dir.), *The Unfinished Conversation*, (Autograph ABP, 2013).

29. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26. (Spring 1989), 8.
30. Brennan, "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities," 63.
31. Phillips, *The European Tribe*, 3, 9.
32. *Ibid.*, 125.
33. Caryl Phillips, "Interview with Pico Iyer, 7 March 1995," *Lannan Literary Videos: Caryl Phillips* (44), dir. Dan Griggs, (Los Angeles: Lannan, 1995).
34. Phillips, "The 'High Anxiety' of Belonging," 304.
35. Vorwoert, "Apropos Appropriation," 16.
36. *Ibid.*, 15.
37. *Ibid.* Vorwoert's comments refer explicitly to a post-Cold War sensibility in the broader Euro-American context, but are relevant here to describe the approach taken by Black British writers toward the narration of individual identity and the relationship to the cultural memory of Africa.
38. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," 218.
39. Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Reprinted from *Identity*, ed. Lisa Appignanesi, (London: Institute for Contemporary Arts. Document 6, 1987), 117.
40. Edward Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973 [1967, 1968, 1969]), 136.
41. Vorwoert, "Apropos Appropriation," 16.
42. *Ibid.*, 17.
43. This also reflects the fact that for Black British writers, as James Procter argues, "dwelling and dwelling places are not fixed, monolithic, rooted or absolute acts or locations, but are themselves conditional and contingent [...] dwelling is a spatial and temporal *process*, rather than a signifier of closure or resolution." James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003: 15.
44. Phillips, "Interview with Pico Iyer, 7 March 1995."
45. Eckstein, "Interview with Caryl Phillips," 69.
46. Clarence Major, "Caryl Phillips, Crossing the River," *Book Reviews, African American Review*, 31.1 (Spring 1997), 172.
47. Eckstein, "Interview with Caryl Phillips," 69.
48. Phillips, "Interview with Pico Iyer, 7 March 1995."
49. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 76.
50. *Ibid.*, 2.
51. Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zorn

- (London: Pimlico, Random House, 1999 [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970]), 154–55.
52. Eckstein, “Interview with Caryl Phillips,” 106.
 53. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 1.
 54. Ibid., 124.
 55. Ilona, “Crossing the River,” 8. Ilona is quoting Caryl Phillips. *Crossing the River*, 223, 1.
 56. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 179.
 57. Ibid., 179–80.
 58. Maya Jaggi, “Crossing The River: Caryl Phillips talks to Maya Jaggi”, *Wasafiri*, 20 (Autumn 1994), 27.
 59. Alan Rice, “‘Heroes across the Sea’: Black and White Fascination with African Americans in the Contemporary Black British Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Jackie Kay.” In *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez, (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 229.
 60. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 7.
 61. Ibid., 11.
 62. Ibid., 56.
 63. Ledent suggests that “the epistolary narratives [...] can be equated with ‘dramatic speeches’ in so far as they give the reader the impression of existing in a continuous present “at the cutting edge of the character’s suffering, analysing, experiencing mind.” Bénédicte, Ledent, *Caryl Phillips*, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 10. Riemenschneider asserts that Joseph Conrad’s classic depiction of Africa as ‘nowhere’ is “counterpoised and reversed by Nash’s precise mapping of his world and his locating himself in it” Dieter Riemenschneider, “One Hundred Years of Darkness: ‘I am no longer of Monrovia, having relocated into the heart of the country’: Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River* (1993) writing back to *Heart of Darkness* (1902),” in *Being/s in Transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation*, ed. Liselotte Glage, (Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 2000), 88. Neither critique takes account of the position of Nash’s own discourse in the novel, which begins to be more accurately identified by Anthony Ilona’s observation that “Nash’s story is rendered through letters of response to his mentor Edward who occupies the main narrative space in the novel” Ilona, “Crossing the River: A Chronicle of the Black Diaspora,” 6.
 64. Timothy Bewes, “Shame, Ventriloquy, and the Problem of the Cliché in Caryl Phillips,” *Cultural Critique*. 63. (Spring 2006), 42–43.
 65. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 8.
 66. Ibid., 18.

67. Kathie Birat, "'Re-visionary Strategies': History and Fiction in the Novels of Caryl Phillips and Wilson Harris," in *Theory and Literary Criticism*, ed. Jean-Pierre Durix, (Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon, 1999), 24, quoting Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 13.
68. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 32.
69. Ibid., 35.
70. Ibid., 33.
71. Ibid., 34.
72. Ibid., 38.
73. Ledent, *Caryl Phillips*, 116.
74. Birat, "Re-visionary Strategies," 25.
75. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 58.
76. Birat, "Re-visionary Strategies," 24. Baldick defines this term as follows: "The diegetic level of a narrative is that of the main story, whereas the 'higher' level at which the story is told is extradiegetic (i.e., standing outside the sphere of the main story.)" Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 57.
77. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 8.
78. Ibid., 59.
79. Ibid., 47.
80. Ibid., 53.
81. Bell I. Wiley, ed. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 117.
82. Ibid., 118.
83. Ibid., 148.
84. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 25.
85. Bewes, "Shame, Ventriloquy, and the Problem of the Cliché in Caryl Phillips", 35., citing Michael Shapiro, "Diasporas and Desperations," review of *The Nature of Blood* by Caryl Phillips, *New York Times*, May 25, 1997, late ed., sec 7:7.; and J.M. Coetzee, "'What We Like to Forget,' review of *The Nature of Blood* by Caryl Phillips," *New York Review of Books* 44, no. 17 (November 6, 1997), 40.
86. Eckstein, "Interview with Caryl Phillips," 70-71. Citing Paul Edwards, letter to Caryl Phillips, Aug. 10, 1990, in "Cambridge Words and Early Writing," Uncat MSS 15, box no. 10, folder 6.
87. Eckstein, "Interview with Caryl Phillips," 71-72. Citing Caryl Phillips, handwritten draft of a letter to Paul Edwards, undated, in "Cambridge Words and Early Writing," *Caryl Phillips Papers*, Uncat MSS 15, box no. 10, folder 6.
88. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.
89. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, (London: Penguin, 1965 [1952]), 468.

90. Caryl Phillips, introduction to *Heart of Darkness, & Selections from The Congo Diary*, Joseph Conrad, (New York: Modern Library, Random House, Inc., 1999), xiv, xv.
91. Ibid., xv–xvi.
92. Caryl Phillips, “Out of Africa,” *The Guardian*, (February 22, 2003).
93. Ibid.
94. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 69–70.
95. Joseph Conrad, *Heart Of Darkness* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007 [1899]), 64. Cited by Phillips in introduction to *Heart of Darkness*, xvii.
96. Eric Neel, “Sound Travels: ‘The Atlantic Sound’ by Caryl Phillips,” <http://www.newcitychicago.com/chicago/words-2000-11-16-791.html>. Emphasis added.
97. Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 58.
98. Vertovec and Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, 4.
99. Phillips, *Crossing the River*, 236.
100. Jamal Mahjoub, “The Nature of Blood, Caryl Phillips,” *Reviews, Wasafiri*, 28 (Autumn 1998), 62.
101. Jaggi, “Crossing The River,” 28.
102. Graham, Swift, “Caryl Phillips, Interviewed by Graham Swift,” *Kunapipi*, XIII.3 (1991), 102–03.
103. Bewes, “Shame, Ventriloquy, and the Problem of the Cliché in Caryl Phillips”, 46.

“Circular Talk”: S.I. Martin’s *Incomparable World*

S.I. Martin’s *Incomparable World* is positioned squarely as a response to a British national amnesia about its historical Black presence, by setting the semi-forgotten presence of eighteenth-century Black Londoners in the very streets of St Giles and Covent Garden which are trodden by tourists, theatergoers, and office workers today, as “escaped convicts, runaway slaves, [...] thieves and beggars, Black and white”¹ share space with “well-dressed drinkers”,² and free-born Black Britons behave “as if they’d never known bondage”.³ Set amid the rookeries of Dyott Street, near Tottenham Court Road, this novel offers a sense of being rooted in the “known” city, yet also brings to life the city’s significant eighteenth-century Black presence, which has been obscured by what artist Keith Piper calls

an aggressive forgetfulness which can surface at any point in the prevailing political discourse, often enforcing a singular official memory and drowning out the diverse, multiple, complex, but all too often ephemeral, voices from the margins.⁴

Though “Black people [...] have been living in Britain for close on 500 years”,⁵ and in the period in which the novel is set, “numbered between 10 and 15,000 among 800,000 residents”,⁶ Martin’s novel establishes that “aggressive forgetfulness” of this historical Black British presence has been

a recurrent feature of British political and cultural life. Published in 1996, in the lead-up to the 50-year commemorations, in 1998, of the docking of the *Empire Windrush*, which brought 492 people from Jamaica in response to Britain's appeal for workers from the colonies to fill the labor shortage following the Second World War, Martin's novel nevertheless underscores James Procter's point, that "it is important to distinguish between 1948 as an *initiatary* rather than an *originary* moment, in terms of Black settlement in Britain [particularly since] the narration of that year has tended to erase a Black British presence before it".⁷ Martin has commented that "[i]f there was one thing I wanted to establish more than anything else it was [...] the fact of the Black presence before the Windrush in June 1948",⁸ and the novel offers a distinctive response to the particular void in historical memory which characterizes Britain's relationship with its Black history. Appearing, then, in direct response to a dominant narrative of Britain which forgets its imperial African past, there is a strangely ghostly quality to the presence of the characters evoked in this novel's Black London, a quality which nevertheless communicates powerfully the nature of a characteristically Black British historicism.

Martin is one of a wave of Black British writers who have devoted the fictional enterprise to remembering and redramatizing the lives of Black people who lived between cities and ships, in the Caribbean, the United States, Europe, and beyond, in the eighteenth-century.⁹ In this chapter, I will argue that the particular relationship with the past which is established in Martin's novel shows another example of a closed or "finished" story of the past, represented by hegemonic approaches to Britain's history, and that the cultural memory of Africa is dramatized in a narrative space "beyond" the presence of Black Britain in documents and archives, the only place where, in a conventional view, the past is understood to truly survive. I want to suggest, by taking the lead offered by the novel itself, that situating a kind of reading practice in which imagination itself compensates for some of the work of knowing the past which is inhibited by the compromised and partial nature of archived or official records, we read the cultural memory of Africa in Black British fiction not in a way that can "in any simple sense be merely recovered", but that is an "imaginative geography and history", which helps "the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the difference between what is close to it and what is far away".¹⁰ After all, as has been argued in Caribbean contexts,

our history (or our histories) is not totally accessible to historians. Their methodology restricts them to the sole colonial chronicle. Our chronicle is behind the dates, behind the known facts: we are Words behind writing.

Only poetic knowledge, fictional knowledge, literary knowledge, in short, artistic knowledge can discover us, understand us and bring us, evanescent, back to the resuscitation of consciousness.¹¹

Martin's novel establishes in exceptional ways that Black British history is composed of stories which are only partially documented, and therefore finds revised uses for tropes of identity which have emerged from Caribbean histories such as that outlined above. Lyn Innes observes that "so much of the writing by Black and Asian people in Britain throughout the [last] two centuries [shows] the extent to which individual selves as well as visions of Britain may be continually invented and reinvented. Indeed they *must* be reinvented in resistance to the persistently experienced pressure to confine people and communities within rigid categories".¹² Kwame Dawes, similarly, contends that contemporary Black writers "reject any lineage with the writers of the fifties and sixties and [...] assert a new invention: the Black British voice".¹³ Reinvention, then, a feature of both Caribbean and Black British identity, is not an attempt to deny the past—it is a stance which is adopted entirely out of necessity, *as a result* of a history which is inherited in disrupted form. Mark Stein has written that "the Black British novel of transformation reaches out beyond the text", and calls this "a *performative function*".¹⁴

DECODING THE ARCHIVES

Martin wrote *Incomparable World* over a three-month period in 1995, as he says, "in a fever dream",¹⁵ after having spent over a decade researching Britain's Black history in London's library and community archives. Martin comments:

[A]rchival research is where [the] subject [of Black British history] comes into its own, because we have only begun to scratch the very surface of this. I spent a year and a half in Lambeth Archives [in south London], and there's just masses and masses and masses of stuff. It will be a good thirty or forty years before there's a body of knowledge where we will feel that we can move forward.¹⁶

Archival research represents, as Martin tells it, a process of recovering the past, but also of discovering the limits of processes of documentation. If we consider historical archives to be the site where the past is "documented", then, we find, I suggest, a deeply disrupted relationship with a

sense of Black British heritage—a disruption which is accentuated by the politics of the archive—what it conserves, what is recoverable from it and for whose benefit, as well as the histories it does not represent. This politics of the archive is of course reflective of the politics of the broader hegemony, and the investment of interest and resources which goes toward the preservation of some histories over others.

Martin has expressed his concern for the accessibility of Britain's archives to Black and minority ethnic users, who in a 1999 survey were found to constitute only “2 per cent of the archive-using public”.¹⁷ The heritage sector in Britain, and specifically in Black communities, Martin says, “has a uniquely low image and poor profile. The crude view is that museums, galleries and archives are still places which tend to be *about* us rather than *for* us”.¹⁸ *Incomparable World* responds to a history of Black Britain, then, which has been incompletely recorded or archived, and which *also* is incompletely released by the archive to a community which would find it useful. Martin's novel is then testament to a powerful truth—that the remnants of the past which may be found in historical records or archives *must*, in a very material sense, be responded to with an empathic and imaginative effort in order for a history to begin to become “known”.

Piper's 2005 photographic project “Ghosting the Archive” constitutes a remarkable analogue to Martin's novel, by foregrounding the disparate, politically motivated shifts which occur at the moment of archiving, and again at the moment of “recovering” material from the archive, so that the role of the historian as “inventor” of new histories, which leave many aspects of the past untold, is represented in a completely undisguised way (Fig. 7.1). Piper's project draws from the Ernest Dyche collection at Birmingham City Archive, and shows photographs of the space of the archive room, overlaid with sepia prints of the Black and Asian figures drawn from the collection itself.¹⁹ Piper writes:

[T]he archive itself is far from transparent. It reflects absolutely the social and political priorities, which prevail at any given moment, determining which object is ‘collectable’ and which is garbage. In turn, each object, text and image also carries its own internal framework of implied and applied meaning—encoded into it at its moment of construction and decoded differently at every subsequent moment of viewing.²⁰



Fig. 7.1 © Keith Piper, “Ghosting the Archive”, 2005. Thanks to Birmingham City Archive

In each “decoding”, or viewing of the photographs as artifacts of the past, Piper’s work shows, what is seen as much as the past moment which is immortalized by the photographer’s lens, is the politics of the present moment which allows the archive to articulate, or be articulated, in particular ways. What is revealed by situating a representation of the historical Black figure in the contemporary archive space is the role which the viewer plays, as part of the contemporary society in which the archive resides, in resituating the past within every present moment. Within each viewing, Piper seems to suggest, the possibilities of “subsequent” viewings, and all that might once again be lost or gained in other, future, moments is also felt. This is a dynamic to which Assia Djebar speaks (in another context) when she writes of the capacity of photographs to offer “a convenient, accommodating picture”, and comments that in the moment of viewing she “must try to stop them telling lies”.²¹ Through the process of viewing and engaging with the archive, then, the viewer plays a part in articulating what the archive actually says. The nature of the cultural memory of Africa, which in the Black British novels discussed in this book, occupies a

similar discursive position as Blackness itself, is informed by this distinctive and precarious relationship which is seen between the history of a Black presence in Britain, and its presence in historical documentation.

The wider context in which archival material is recovered—that is, a forgetful contemporary London engaged in the day-to-day busyness of life, is a key context which Martin draws upon in his frequent museum and heritage talks, and on the walking tours he leads around the city. Martin, like Piper, reminds us that it is not just in history books that the Black British past is forgotten, but that it hovers and haunts the practice of everyday life in Britain.²² During one of these walks, recorded for a radio feature about London's Black history, Martin emphasizes the living context of the contemporary London streets for a Black history which may be partially known, but which benefits from being retold and reimagined in the present:

Billy Waters[...] 1823 funeral was immortalised in that famous image “There goes old Billy”, and it occurred just along this street we’re standing on now. You see beggars on both sides of the street, with the funeral cortege moving between them, the beggars with doffed caps. This was someone who would have been very widely known [...] he was the “King of the Beggars”—that was his title.²³

The precariousness of the Black subject's survival, as part of the fabric of Britain itself, is felt in the choices which are made by the engagement with the archive, a reflection of a vast unrecorded space, in which the image of the represented historical figure exists only as a ghost, representing or failing to represent the lives of many others which go either completely unrecorded, or endlessly contested. It is this unabating contestation of the history of Britain's Black presence, by a hegemony which habitually denies the existence of Britain's African history both at home and abroad, that makes the work of this novel meaningful beyond being a “romping adventure story”.²⁴

In Martin's work as a historian and educator, he not only “unearths” Black history from the archives, but presents the little-known stories of London's Black historical figures in a wide variety of discursive genres. In working with schools, museums, and borough councils in London, he involves young people in the process of historical recovery and rediscovery, for instance in a project entitled “Black Performers on the nineteenth Century London Stage”, coordinated for Islington Borough Council in 2004, Martin asks: “Have you ever wondered how Black performers made

the transition from minstrelsy to serious roles on the London stage? How the legacy of slavery affected their careers? How Black actor Ira Aldridge blazed a path for the acting career of Paul Robeson?"²⁵ In these pedagogical questions aimed at school groups, imaginative work plays a functional role in the situation where the past drawn from historical records is "incomplete". In *Black Georgians: The Shock of the Familiar*, the recent exhibition curated by Martin for the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, there is the same use of educational questions, aimed in part at young people, but also emphasizing the partial nature of information about Black Britain which is disclosed by documentation, and the way in which the history must become known through imaginative engagement.

The protagonists of Martin's novel are African American soldiers, lured to the side of the British in the 1775–1783 American War of Independence with the promise of freedom, only to "exchange [...] the life of a slave for that of a starving beggar on the London streets".²⁶ We first meet these protagonists three years after their arrival in London—the poverty-stricken Buckram has just been released from Bridewell prison, while William is making a comfortable, if insecure, living in Covent Garden's gambling dens. The majority of Martin's narrative plays out in the months before the April 1787 departure of three ships for Sierra Leone as part of a "resettlement scheme" represented by the British government, as "the only way of removing the 'Burthen' of the Black poor 'for ever'",²⁷ (perversely enough, only three years after African American soldiers were welcomed to London). "The lives of the characters", Christopher Campbell comments, "are led under the shadow of the imminent Sierra Leone settlement scheme",²⁸ and as protagonist Buckram puts it, "[e]veryone's talking about it".²⁹ With the novel's action beginning in May 1786, when the African settlement proposal began to be considered seriously as a viable scheme, Martin comments:

[T]he Sierra Leone project [...] added an edge, an additional pressure, to the circumstances under which these people lived in the 1780s—they could literally have been taken off the streets, or been obliged to sign up for this project. I was interested in finding out how people would have lived under those conditions.³⁰

The specific proposal to deport Black Londoners to Africa constitutes one among a number of dramatic figures which occur in the novel to represent a grindingly cyclical history of exclusion and forgetfulness, which Martin

suggests has always characterized Britain's relationship with its Black history. As part of this scheme of Britishness which excludes Blackness or so-called others, and which has occurred in cycles or waves throughout the course of British history, Africa itself is perpetually invoked. There is a simultaneous horizontal and vertical historicism at play here, where Africa serves as a sign both for a site of exclusion where Black "others" could be consigned, *and* as the perpetually forgotten, absent presence to Britain's, and London's, imperial history. Imagining "how people would have lived", then, plays a central role to the discovery and delivery of historical stories, *particularly* when, "a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression"³¹ forms a key part of the way in which Britain perpetuates a fiction in which Africa and Africans are "outsiders".

Martin seems to suggest that it is *through the work of the imagination*, and of interpretation, not merely as a result of his path-breaking archival research, that the contemporary subject "finds out" how people would have lived through this period of history. As Campbell puts it, Martin "does not merely breathe life into historical notes and sources but adds an energy, dynamism, humour and depth of pathos to his characters' lives; this can be the achievement of only fiction".³² Winfried Fluck, similarly, argues that "the fictional text can employ 'official' discourses of the real as host for the expression of yet unformulated dimensions of the self", and that "this would tie the fictional articulation effect primarily to the expression of socially repressed impulses".³³ We are reminded of the vital importance which is held for the place of fiction in resisting a hegemonic British history which perpetually forgets its past. The relationship between the narrative of the historical document and the empathic role of fiction is also reminiscent of that formation which occurs between what Stuart Hall has called a distinctively "Caribbean" process of simultaneous "rediscovery [and] *production* of identity".³⁴ In a commentary on Armet Francis's photographs of peoples of the African diaspora in his book *The Black Triangle*, Hall writes: "Crucially, his images find a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas. He does this by representing or 'figuring' Africa as the mother of these different civilizations."³⁵ Where disconnection exists, it is precisely through fiction that the memory of Africa is "reproduced". While awaiting a hoped-for historical continuity, then, in some unspecified future, the gaps are filled in imaginatively in the textual present. Reading the stories of the past from the archive thus takes on a peculiarly future-oriented dimension.

The plan to "resettle" London's Blacks in Sierra Leone in the 1780s was accompanied by its own public relations campaign, very similar in tone to the rhetoric of the American Colonization Society seen in Chap. 6, whose narrative of industry and wholesome partnership Martin mimics here, drawing attention to its veiling of a larger reality of established exploitation of Black people:

[T]he Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor [...] had a handbill printed telling the Black poor that 'no place' was 'so fit and proper' for them as 'the Grain Coast of Africa; where the necessities of life may be supplied by the force of industry and moderate labour, and life rendered very comfortable.' The Black poor themselves were much harder to persuade, largely because the Sierra Leone coast was a notorious slaving area.³⁶

For Britain's Black population, Martin shows, this narrative of enticement to African shores, delivered by the British ruling structure, was neither a new story, nor a benign one. In 1596, and again in 1601, Queen Elizabeth I herself had called for "those kinde of people ... [to be] sent forth of the lande", "who are fostered and relieved here to the great annoyance of her own liege people, that want the relief, which those people consume".³⁷ The novel comments:

It was just as William Supple had said, Buckram reflected: there would always be Black people starving about the streets of London. Every now and then there would be a public outcry and demands for their expulsion would be followed by yet another cruel, half-baked scheme to drive them from the land. For two hundred years this had been their condition here. Would another two centuries bring any change?³⁸

As the parallel is drawn between the context of the Sierra Leone scheme in the 1780s, and the earlier Elizabethan context, an additional parallel is suggested in the citation above, between the eighteenth-century scenario, and "two centuries" later, evoking the climate of the late 1970s and 1980s, which saw Margaret Thatcher's claim that Britain was being "swamped" with immigrants, and large-scale urban disturbances in London's Brixton, Liverpool, Bristol and Harmondsworth in Birmingham related to police hostility toward Black populations. Part of the way in which Martin's novel responds to the peculiar British suppression of its African past is in fact to situate a future-oriented *performance* of Africanness, which may have little to do with African tradition in many of the ways shown in

African American literature, but which is one of the ways in which Black British possibilities for identity are positioned:

Suddenly [Buckram] was seized by a delirious vision of this land, this London, in time to come, teeming with generation after generation of his kinfolk, freedmen, English-born and bred; transforming this wet, cold island with African worship and celebration. Imperial orphans in communion with a fractured past—his present—leading Albion's hag-masses to a greater, more wholesome dance of life.³⁹

For the contemporary reader, the effect of Buckram's vision is that of a "haunting" from the past, in which a performance of Africanness is imagined in Britain's future (our present). As such, Martin weaves a complex historicity, situating Buckram as the eighteenth-century figure looking forward to the twentieth/twenty-first century, but also as the twentieth/twenty-first century figure looking forward again. If "[h]istory 'normalizes' and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the 'primitive, unchanging past'", inpresenting "*this* 'Africa,' which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, [to which] we can't literally go home again",⁴⁰ Martin's novel emphasizes the possibilities, within the novel's present and future, for the cultural memory of Africa to serve as the basis for a future-oriented performance of identity which is distinctively Black British.

As a timely reminder that Britain's institutionalized xenophobia is far from past, and that Africa and Africans continue to be invoked as part of a hegemonic discourse to suggest a realm of chaotic "otherness" which Britain must keep at bay, the Conservative British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, in 2015, made the following comments:

So long as there are large numbers of pretty desperate migrants marauding around the area [of Calais] there will always be a threat to the [Channel] tunnel's security. Now, that is not a sustainable situation because Europe can't protect itself and preserve its standard of living and social structure if it has to absorb millions of migrants from Africa. We have got to be able to resolve this problem ultimately by being able to return those who are not entitled to claim asylum back to their countries of origin. That's our number one priority.⁴¹

Leaving aside the numerical or geographical accuracy of Hammond's claim with regard to the contemporary migrant crisis, the analysis given

here of Britain's relationship to African "marauders", and even to continental Europe, falls back upon the same tropes as those used by Elizabeth I and by Margaret Thatcher, a cyclical xenophobic narrative which forms the basis of an impenetrable British hegemony which nevertheless considers itself to be under threat by dark-skinned outsiders. Martin has also referred to

a horrible rite of passage [...] by which one of the routes of claiming Englishness is by joining the pogrom. [...] The comments that I hear from young teenagers of African and Caribbean origin talking about "these people in my country", with no irony at all! It's a game that I really don't think we can afford to play, because in another generation, these people from Croatia, and Latvia, and Poland, are not going to be visible, or even audible—they're going to vanish! And when people of Afro-Caribbean origins have been in Britain for four or five generations we will still be taking the flak.⁴²

The exclusion of Black people from a full and unconditional sense of British citizenship, Martin suggests, is a condition which is never far from the surface in British society, and which, while skin color continues to be perceived as a marker for "difference", is likely to continue indefinitely.

Any sense that the past is repeated through the present, then, and forms the basis for predicting the future, occurs in Martin's novel not so much in a manner engendered by the practice of spirit-possession, and the corresponding links to African diaspora tradition, observed in Reed's novel in Chap. 2, but instead in the depressing historical context of a denial of full citizenship for Black people in Britain, which has never fully disappeared. A cyclicity of time, then, has little to do with perceiving African diasporic gods or ancestors as living in the present, as might have been suggested in the African American texts. In bittersweet, pragmatic contrast to that tendency, Martin's narrative is infused with a particular knowingness about Britain's unsavory habit of erasing its African past.

Martin thus situates questions of the identity of Britain's historical Black citizens as being contingent upon practices of reading—reflecting upon what aspects of the history of Black Britain are being read today, and by whom, knowing the history of Black Britain depends as much upon imagination and rearticulation as it does upon empirical evidence. So the Black characters in Martin's London frequently question their own "realness", and sometimes appear as a ghostly presence, described at one point as "mov[ing] soundlessly through the morning shoppers",⁴³ or "wasting away

in grotty, sunless corners across the city, waiting to die”.⁴⁴ In similar ways to Phillips’s articulation, discussed in Chap. 6, of his characters “talking in rhythms I could hear”⁴⁵ beyond the written page, we are particularly drawn in *Incomparable World*, to thinking about how histories are recorded, and what effect their telling might have, firstly for the identities of those who are remembered, but also for those lives which are not recorded, of which there are many in this transient and inherently mobile community.

HUMANIZING THE HEROES

In this relation to the past, Wilson Harris accentuates the role of a process similar to *différance*, the deferral of meaning in the process of engaging the archive with the imagination, when he describes “the unfinished genesis of the imagination” as “a necessity written into the collective unconscious to return to, and take up, [a] theme [...] differently from the way it is enshrined as a museum text”.⁴⁶ Harris presents one of the key articulations of a “Caribbean” sensibility which is illuminated with great power and complexity in David Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress*, and is discussed in Chap. 9 of this work. Martin’s sensitivity to the *performance*, the reconstruction of meaning, which is enacted even at the moment of viewing archival documents, is figured in palpable ways by his notion to illustrate his children’s books *Jupiter Williams*, about the early twentieth-century Black entertainers Bert Williams and George Walker, with photographs overlaid with line drawings.⁴⁷

The pleasure which Martin derives from emphasizing his own freedom to perform even as he engages with unearthing endangered histories is nowhere clearer than when Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cuguano, the authors of the earliest Black British slave narratives, crop up in the novel as mischievous caricatures. Martin comments: “[T]hese people were incomplete, and it’s their very incompleteness which gives power to what they’ve done”.⁴⁸ As Equiano is described, irreverently, as having “the sort of face to which only outright victories could bring a smile”,⁴⁹ and Cuguano is depicted as having the “look of a well-flogged ex-slave”,⁵⁰ Martin describes his approach to bringing them to life in his fiction:

[P]rimarily I wanted to demystify them, demythologise them, because too often in literatures of ‘peoples of colour’, especially when dealing with historical or noteworthy figures, there is that attempt to mythologise, so that everyone has to be perfect, they have to be church-going, god-fearing, beyond reproach. I wanted Equiano, who is one of my heroes, to come

across as someone that people could relate to, so I wanted him to be imperious and haughty, and standoffish, and maybe a bit vain [...]—I wanted him to be *human*, rather than the Equiano which has been built up by history departments as this person beyond reproach—which apart from being untrue, is *boring*.⁵¹

The practice of humanizing the history which comes from the archival records, Martin emphasizes, is one which speaks to current (and recurrent) conditions of racial profiling of Black and Asian people, and resists the politics of hegemony, which are present at the moment of interpretations, by using archival material as the basis for imaginative reconfigurations. Loosening these figures' humanity from the fossilizing effects of the historical archive, particularly in a political environment where such figures might be expected to carry a "burden of representation" for whole communities, shows the important function of performance as a means of asserting the humanity of those remembered, as well as of those doing the remembering, even as historical records may be partially lost. What comes to be "known" about the past, and the human beings who are remembered as representatives of it, then, is that it is, like the present, contingent, open to interpretations, and equally affected by the prejudices we inhabit in the present.

As Equiano and Cuguano are depicted engaged in "intellectual" battle, Martin is asserting his right to improvise, freely and not without humor, upon the traditional notion of history as a practice of "studying" the surviving memory of these figures for clues to a past which is already "finished":

You do me wrong, Otto. I would not seek to undermine the gravity of our situation, I sought only to state that our numbers here increase and that we will become, if indeed we are not already, an ineradicable element of this nation's character.

So, they frequent our clubs, sing our songs, dance our dances and eat our foods. They do all that in the Caribbean and still flog us to death on a whim. Dammit, Ola, there are no ineradicable elements to these people, they're a composite of those they've conquered, and nothing more.⁵²

This imagined Equiano/Cuguano argument seems to move, roughly, around questions of whether the cultures of Black people are recognized by the British as they are imitated and co-opted in the British environment. It is a question which arises again later as Georgie George comments,

“their blood, our heartbeat, their heartbeat, our blood, it’s all the same to them”.⁵³ However, if we attempt to take the terms of this debate too seriously, in order, for instance, to try to construe what *exactly* Martin is saying about the politics of eighteenth-century Black Abolitionists, we find ourselves the butt of the joke—after all, what is the difference between “ineradicable” and “composite” anyway? The larger point which we should perhaps draw from this is about the falsity of reading historical figures, as it were, as complete “texts”, and furthermore, about the way in which Equiano and Cuguano themselves, were accepted as voices valuable to the Abolitionist cause, in no small part due to the fact that they *performed* the acceptable role of the chaste, Christian, middle-class Black, and indeed of a version of “African” identity which was most conducive to the political aim of the Abolition of slavery. As Buckram is publicly humiliated by the discovery that he is peddling pornography, the pious Equiano chastises him with a specific invocation of African “solidarity”—“You’re nothing but a Piazza pimp, preying on the weakest daughters of Afric.”⁵⁴ As Vincent Carretta emphasizes, Equiano’s performance of “Africanness”, in his own memoir, was positioned with considerable care:

[A]s the phrase “the African” reminds us, the author was very aware that his readers would assess him not just as an individual but as the representative of his race, as a type as well as a person. He was the first Anglophone writer of African descent to use the definite article to refer to himself: James Ukawsaw Gronniosaw was “an African Prince”, Wheatley simply “a Negro Servant”, Sancho “an African”, John Marrant “a Black”, and Cugoano “a Native of Africa”.⁵⁵

Buckram’s lover Charlotte later intimates that “Ottobah and Ola[’s...] concern for our people weighs on them as a daytime duty, but by night they choose to consort with white women”⁵⁶; such a “corruption” of the figure of the pious Christian citizen is not one which would have been seen to support the cause of the “noble African”. As Martin underscores the very constructed nature of these figures’ public roles, and of Africanness itself as it is invoked as part of the Abolitionist struggle, his irreverence nevertheless brings the conflicted racial politics of eighteenth-century history into sharp focus for a contemporary reader. The notion that Equiano, furthermore, may have employed the role of “the African” as a basis for political leverage, becomes increasingly interesting with the possibility, suggested by Carretta’s findings, that Equiano may not have been born in Africa after all.⁵⁷

The relationship between Martin, as storyteller, and the historical archive, may be discerned in Walter Benjamin's commentary:

It has seldom been realized that the listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. [...] *Memory* creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation.⁵⁸

Tradition has been interrupted because the history of the Black presence in Britain's past has not been passed on. Martin and other contemporary Black British writers thus play the vital part of passing the story on—and because memory as "chain of tradition" has been disrupted, the storytelling function becomes not only the more important, but also takes on some self-consciousness. Just as in Hall's *Africa* which is "normalised" by "History", but "becomes" something else as it is retold, Benjamin writes:

One ties on to the next. [...] In each of them there is a Scheherazade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop. This is epic remembrance and the Muse-inspired element of the narrative. [...] It is, in other words, *remembrance* which, as the Muse-derived element of the novel, is added to reminiscence, [...] the unity of their origin in memory having disappeared.⁵⁹

This sense is also found in the notion that the excavation of historical archives produces a sense of performance as drawing a live story out of a dead story. This is particularly appropriate in the Black British scenario, where the history often can *only* be found in the archive, having been obliterated from popular memory or "official" accounts—a story is recreated, performed, and this is very much the context in which a memory of *Africa* is reproduced.

THE MEMORY OF AFRICA AND ADVERSARIAL TWINSHIP

Adversarial twinship refers to Harris's "conviction that 'adversarial contexts' (the encounter of inimical cultures) can generate creativity",⁶⁰ and both Martin's novel, and David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*, discussed in Chap. 9, play with notions of *Africa* and *London* (or *England*) existing in a creative duality with one another. It is not, therefore, only the memory of *Africa* which is replete, in this novel, with the sense of being

performed. London itself, we find, is illustrated as a city which seems to be reborn with each individual's experience of it. Martin clearly regards eighteenth-century London in this way, where individuality is constructed from moment to moment:

[E]ven when you look at society at its lowest levels in the eighteenth century, [...] you can see, not just the vocabulary [...] ordinary people had, but the facility they had with it, and you just realise they were *switched on*. Unless they were chronically ill, they had to be switched on, all the time, mentally and physically, because your life depended on your strength of arms and your presence of mind.⁶¹

In this novel, we see that the individual's self-presentation is everything, the performance of individual identity rooted in the communal present of the city, rather than in the individual's own past. Sukhdev Sandhu situates Martin's novel amid a recent "outpouring of novels, plays and poetry, by Black and Asian authors [in Britain], all of which engage powerfully, viscerally, with Black metropolitan history across the centuries", in which,

London is variously seen as a heart of darkness, a passage to nowhere, a moral abattoir. Equally though, London is viewed as a lifeline, a chandelier, a place of rebirth, luminescent centre of the imperial world, a pleasure-palace and epicurean banquet, [...] celebratory, joyful, giddily utopian.⁶²

Sandhu's use of the term "heart of darkness" to describe London is perhaps not accidental, and says something important about the performance of history in these texts—Africa and London may be played in similar roles—they are both ancient and timeless, but both can also always be rediscovered anew. The sense of dispossession occasioned by the burial of Black history in British writers encourages a sense that any site, whether London or Africa, may be performed anew in a utopian role. As Sandhu seems to suggest, for Black writers, any of those sites of utopian hope might also be sites of complete disillusionment. While the submersion of historical records might lead identity to be set free from both the benefits and the constraints of a sense of "lineage", both London and Africa can appear, in a performative function, both powerful and also potentially pointless.

The cultural memory of Africa is first encountered as a utopian fantasy which is already owned by others, and is first thought about in the novel as Georgie George asks Buckram a question designed to manipulate him into

participating in a scheme to rob London's American Embassy, and reveals one way in which Africa might be situated, as escapist fantasy:

"A question; tell me, what would you do if you had two thousand pounds? Where would you go with that sort of money? As a Black man, I mean."

Buckram didn't have to think long. "Africa", he said. "I'd be there tomorrow had I the money today."⁶³

Africa exists as a fantasy right alongside its possibility as a prohibition, prison, or xenophobic site of deportation. For Buckram, Georgie George's suggestion undoubtedly contributes to the appearance of the memory of Africa in his dreams that night, in a formation that is distinctly reminiscent of the trope of the flying African seen in Morrison's novel in Chap. 3, but which does not offer the solace of community to which Morrison persistently draws our attention:

In his sleep he dreamed of Africa, an Africa he'd never known. The scene was a forest clearing—everywhere was hot and damp, with rotting vegetation just like Virginia in August. Smoke rose from chimneys, grass huts had windows and all the people dressed in the same cloth, the slave material: buckram. Roasting, fatty meats turned on spits. The whole village sang, call and response, with the rhythms knocking out in the background.

Warm breezes gathered under his outstretched arms and carried him, spiralling slowly into the sky.

"But you cannot fly, you who have never known Africa", a dream voice informed him.

[...]

"Let me dream. To the devil with ye! Just for once, let me dream!"

But dreaming again, he remembered.

He was running through Carolina nights and breaking into storehouses.

[...]

And all the while, throughout the war and throughout the dream, Neville and his Bible readings; doleful psalms and grim monodies promising deliverance.

Suddenly Neville's voice was gone, to be replaced by the African drumming and lamentations from Ivy Street. And now he was back in the early campaign, just after they'd taken Camden, Carolina.⁶⁴

Yet Africa is a fantasy owned by others—if it holds the unrealistic possibility of freedom, it is also owned by an African diaspora tradition which does not appear to belong to the protagonists. It is another "finished" story.

Though, as Sean Coughlan comments, the characters in Martin's novel are "only a generation away from another history in Africa",⁶⁵ Buckram's identification with Africa functions like an inherited fantasy, its dramatization seeming to betray a hollowness, a sense that identity is floundering without a connection to lineage or tradition. As Buckram dreams he is flying above Africa, it is an Africa that is nevertheless not entirely distinct from the American and British scenes he knows. The intervention of a "dream voice" sets this dream in the register of rickety pantomime performance rather than uplifting and culturally resonant trope, reminiscent of Bernardine Evaristo's anachronistic (and rather hilarious) contrast drawn between "Morrison, Naylor or Walker[']s] steaming swamps" and "the wonderful steaming swamps of Woolwich" (an unglamorous suburb of south-east London).⁶⁶ The cultural power of Africa, in the context of a second generation, in which any achievements British Black Power may have made, are forgotten, fails to resonate. Any fantasy of "return" to Africa that these protagonists might nurture is co-opted by the overwhelming cyclical scheme of exclusion in British society. The possibility of happy settlement in Africa seems to occur against enormous odds, any such utopian hope of freedom dismissed almost as a matter of course against a more likely possibility: "Imagine the Englishman inviting us to return to Africa. We'd end up in chains, for sure."⁶⁷

Georgie George's question is devised as a means to encourage Buckram's fixed contemplation of his migratory dreams, in order to better manipulate him into acquiescence to a money-making scheme. So even as William, who "desperately wants to believe he dreams of being with his family",⁶⁸ responds to the same question with yet another utopian ideal, a similar sense of hope and hopelessness is again felt:

"A question", said Georgie. "Tell me, what would you do if you had two thousand pounds? Where would you go with that sort of money? As a Black man, I mean."

William didn't have to think. "I'd fulfil my promise to my family. [...] We'd go to Nova Scotia and start a farm. Like I should have done in the first place."⁶⁹

William's utopian dream has a similar status as the dream of Africa and of London—containing the hope and despair of a present which functions free from the past. Almost any option is a possibility, and holds the option of a new present and future.

When Buckram and William realize that Georgie has asked this same question of them both, "Buckram stare[s] at [William] like a condemned man."⁷⁰ They are reminded of their eternal dependence, in the insecure world which they inhabit, upon such schemes which speak of hopes of freedom, but which contain the more likely possibility of repeated disaster. As Frank Kelleter writes, "after having literally 'earned' his freedom, the Black self-made man must discover that his legally and financially certified self-ownership does not amount to much in a racist world".⁷¹

As such, William appears to be less easily seduced by the dream of return to Africa than Buckram is, perhaps as a result of his friendship with an African slave on "Blackstock's Plantation",⁷² which offers William some notion of his African ethnicity, and even that of the "shoeless, shuttling messenger-boys" he lives among in London⁷³:

Bambara, *Mandinka*, Wolof, Fulani, Ibo, *Whydah*, Ashanti, *Coromantee*, *Fanti*, Ga, Hausa, Yoruba, Angola, William knew them all, even if they didn't know themselves. William was a Wolof. That's what Gullah had told him. [...] Gullah talked of a world so unlikely William took it to be imaginary. It was a Black world of Black kingdoms where Black people did Black things.

William was glad Gullah wasn't here with him in the Charioteer to see just how much cheap London gin could tame an Ashanti like Old Morris, or how extreme poverty and isolation had compelled an Angola woman like Molly to market her maidenhood.⁷⁴

Yet William still approaches the African history presented by Gullah as "imaginary", and his relationship to it as vague and generalized. For both Buckram and William, there is a distinct sense that any way in which the cultural memory of Africa might feature as part of a meaningful tradition is undermined by the loss of lineage in London, where Africanness now only appears as a role performed upon the stage of an endlessly repeated present.

The condition of orphanhood in the novel draws a graphic scenario by which individuals are alienated from a sense of their past. This sense appears at the most incongruous of moments amid the endless social buzz of the novel, such as in the middle of the "heist" scene itself, when William hears "American voices" and feels "four years old again, back on the auction block in Charlestown, being examined by business-like eyes and callous hands".⁷⁵ And, as Buckram is introduced to the parents of his lover

Charlotte, "Buckram was paralysed. This was something he could never have imagined: seeing a Black adult in the company of their parents".⁷⁶ A loss of lineage in terms of the specific fracturing of families which occurred under slavery may be read here as a figure representative of the submersion of Britain's Black history. Against this sense of loss, the novel foregrounds the performance of identity with the repeated refrains "it could have been anyone or nobody",⁷⁷ and connects such figures of performance with a loss of identity, or lineage, indicating an orphaned condition.

The Black subject who finds himself in Britain must bargain with these inheritances in almost comedic ways in order to negotiate any kind of relationship with them. The cultural memory of Africa can appear so abjectly meaningless for the protagonists, being a narrative partially formed by imperial narratives of Africa, and partially formed by Black nationalist narratives of response or resistance, whose meaning and significance belong to a time and place entirely *other*, and which offer choices so repellent for the protagonists that they become the source of tragedy and comedy all at once. From this site of failed resonance are gathered the resources which, however desperately, inspire a Black British reach toward new terrains for identity.

With Georgie George as canny instigator, Martin deftly draws a meaningful and active connection between the role which an inherited fantasy of Africa plays in the lives of these homeless men as site of desire, and as site of catalytic performance—a performance which has the potential, not only to change their lives, but also even, in a small though nevertheless real way, to undermine the institution of slavery itself. Yet even as the performative is felt to have a distinct political function, it is equally felt, potentially, to be hollow and pointless. As might be suggested by the staged nature of the "heist" convention, playful posturing as it is epitomized by this episode may represent the freedom to perform, but it also signifies something far more frightening than that—that performance is an "intense, shallow circular talk",⁷⁸ which belies a disconnection to lineage. As Georgie George frames the scheme:

William Supple, you remember our old sessions at the Golden Cross where for the price of a measure of ale, we'd play Princes of Araby for provincial fools? You have the soul of an actor, the royal role becomes you. For the price of two thousand pounds, will you be our king for a day?⁷⁹

The performance of Africanness in this scenario, like every other performance through the novel, offers something that fills in a historical gap in

a way that is always provisional, that recognizes, as Stuart Hall puts it, that the performance of identity is "not totally universally true. It is not underpinned by any infinite guarantees. But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am".⁸⁰ As this staging of imagined African identities occurs beside the possibility of migration to Sierra Leone (the unattractive prospect of return to Africa offered by the English), and beside Buckram's own dream of "return" to Africa, the hollowness of such a performance which is not supported by a sense of lineage is emphasized.

In the latter part of the novel, a stereotypical performance of Africanness comes to figure centrally as part of a scene which, Campbell notes, "in the terminology of [...] typical gangster movies [...] could be called the 'last big job' or 'the heist'".⁸¹ The novel recovers the memory of Africa from the position of unsatisfactory utopian lure, and finds a way for it to be performed by these former slaves, who seek to undermine the system of slavery, certainly, but whose most immediate aim is to save themselves, by earning £2000 apiece. Georgie George explains the plan:

I have here a letter from Mr Hayden Irving, who will be a guest of Minister Adams next month. He has consented to meet with an African delegation headed by a Chief Birempon Kwaku, Mansa of Obomi in an attempt to secure trading rights in human cargoes from an area of the Niger Delta. Due to the nature of his business, Mr Hayden will be travelling with a sum of approximately twelve thousand pounds in notes and gold coin. Needless to say, there is no such land as Obomi and no Chief Kwaku. So far, our imposture has been successful, confined as it is to mere correspondence.⁸²

In this adventure, the protagonists employ a performance of an African stereotype to their advantage. Georgie George is shown to have perceived his companions' desperation for an escape from the condition of dispossession, which informs Buckram's fantasy of return to Africa, and to channel this desperate impulse into a scheme to make the beneficiaries of slavery finally pay for what they take:

"Dreams, dreams and dreams", he continued. "Let me tell you about your dreams. Friend Buckram, you are a born horseman, you rode the Long Chase with Tarleton's Legion through the Carolinas. That was your happiest time, was it not? And what did you gain for your efforts but wounds and a whipping? For two thousand pounds, will you be our escort and ride with us but for one day?"⁸³

Having fought together in Carolina, Martin's protagonists experience Britain from an African American perspective, where *de jure* segregation and the plantation system led to Black people being automatically accorded the position of second-class citizenship—in the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, being “shut out from their world by a vast veil”.⁸⁴ In London, however, their experience is more ambivalent. Buckram, for instance, at a moment when he finds himself in Covent Garden, face-to-face with a white American, “someone who could once have owned him”,⁸⁵ realises, as “a gaggle of onlookers” gathers,⁸⁶ that as long as he “raise[s] his voice and [speaks] *London* English for all to hear”,⁸⁷ he might define himself as an “insider” against the presence of this other, alien “outsider”: “I asked where you came from, rebel. Answer me!”⁸⁸ As the crowd might offer Buckram provisional acceptance, with cries of “Dob ’im one on, Blackie!” and “We’re with you, darkie!”,⁸⁹ Buckram also knows the experience of “hav[ing] to compete and sometimes fight with the legions of native poor (crossing themselves whenever you cross their path), [...] your gaze never leaving the ground for fear of meeting another’s bewilderment”.⁹⁰

HISTORICITY AND THE POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE

Martin's novel represents “the pastoral” which Mark Stein contends “is a constant in Black British writing”, even though “these are precisely the terms that exclude Black Britons”.⁹¹ As the novel ends, Buckram actively pursues this possibility as he is seen leaving London for the Staffordshire countryside, by the “fields, common and heathland” of Edgware Road.⁹² Interestingly, beyond London, Buckram thus reaches for the settled Black presence which Charlotte represents, and the possibility of family life represented by their newborn son “Hosea”⁹³:

He enjoyed the feeling of being gloved and muffled on horseback. With just his eyes visible, he could have been anyone or nobody at all. A harsh wind buffeted them as they hit the open spaces along the Hampstead Road. He spurred Juno to a gallop and raced under the darkening skies, glad to be leaving London, if only to relish the taste of sweet, clean air.

He's charging through the white of winter, a Black man on a Black horse. He throws back his head and laughs in the cold, wild air. He is heading north now and speeding into Christmas Day, ready to claim whatever present the heart of England holds for him.⁹⁴

For Buckram in this moment, Blackness is situated as lacking identity, but is full of possibility for that reason. This is a way of "refusing the logic of historians, [...] in favour of the imaginative freedoms of fiction, [creating] the impression of the Black British in history as able to determine their own fates, free from [...] politically motivated readings of their actions".⁹⁵ The indeterminacy of identity which arises from being separated from a sense of historical lineage has been central to Buckram's experience in London, as well as in America, and has been repeatedly suggested by the phrase "it could have been anyone or nobody".⁹⁶ Where African American writers might seek to reconstitute any sense of lineage interrupted by a forgetful history by instituting a sense of the past felt in the present, Black British writers represent and dramatize the alienation from lineage as a site in which identities, for better and for worse, are repeatedly revised. By allowing Buckram to end the novel moving away from the social circles of the urban context, Martin figures this character, appropriately masked, ready to enter into whatever new performance may await him. But perhaps, this time he may have the opportunity of establishing the beginning of a *new* lineage.

If Ishmael Reed shows his character Abdul Sufi Hamid (discussed in Chap. 2), both *predicting* the coming of Malcolm X, and *also as* Malcolm X himself, this similar image in Martin's novel (which also bears hallmarks of Benjamin's "Angel"), does not reference Vodoun/Hoodoo possession by the past, but instead situates a heightened sensitivity to what happens as history is unearthed from the places where it has been buried, and is given new kinds of "truth". Much as is invoked by Wilson Harris's suggestive term "imaginative truth",⁹⁷ Martin can be seen to produce his own "truth" from the historical record, when, for instance, he nicknames his character Georgie George the "King of the Beggars".⁹⁸ Just as Martin draws components from the documented history of Black London, weaves them into and develops them in his fiction, there are certain Caribbean contours to the workings of the Black British relationship with the cultural memory of Africa, but if Caribbeanness has represented many ways of improvisating upon the old, Black Britishness shows that such newness is never immune to being updated in still fresher and unforeseen ways. This relationship with the established order of history is seen to be reworked in the explicit dynamics of poetic form, in the work of Bernardine Evaristo, examined in the next chapter. Evaristo negotiates a wide range of cultural inheritances, and in particular the features of an international poetic inheritance, to show the ways in which explicitly hybrid forms of narration

have so much in common with “classic” poetic and aural inheritances hailing from African American, African, Greek, and English settings, as to profoundly question what is indeed so new about a hybrid Black British positionality.

NOTES

1. S.I. Martin, *Incomparable World*. (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1997 [1996]), 3.
2. *Ibid.*, 5.
3. *Ibid.*, 111.
4. Keith Piper, in *Necessary Journeys*, eds. Melanie Keen and Eileen Daly (London: Arts Council England, 2005), 70.
5. Peter Fryer, “Preface,” *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984), ix.
6. S.I. Martin, *Britain’s Slave Trade* (London: Channel 4 Books, Macmillan, 1999).
7. James Procter, “General introduction: ‘1948’/‘1998’ Periodising post-war Black Britain,” in *Writing Black Britain 1948–1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.
8. Chris Campbell and Leila Kamali, “Interview with S.I. Martin,” *New Formations*, Issue 55 (Spring 2005): 153.
9. Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), and Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge* (1991), are just two examples of this powerful trend which uses fiction to reimagine this key historical period when both the slave trade and the Abolitionist movement reached a dramatic peak. This important social history is brought to life in Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), and in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina’s *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
10. Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), quoting Edward Said, (1979).
11. Bernabé *et al*, “In Praise of Creoleness,” 896.
12. C.L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 244.
13. Kwame Dawes, “Negotiating the Ship on the Head: Black British Fiction,” *Wasafiri*, 29 (Spring 1999): 19. R. Victoria Arana seems to sug-

- gest something similar when she says that Black British writers "lay a proprietary claim on English history." R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey (eds.), *Black British Writing* (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 21.
14. Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004. 36.
15. In personal communication. See Leila Kamali, 'S.I. Martin, April 24, 1961- ', in R. Victoria Arana (ed.), *Contemporary 'Black' British Writers* (Dictionary of Literary Biography series, Brucoli Clark Layman, Inc., *forthcoming*).
16. Campbell and Kamali, "Interview with S.I. Martin," 134.
17. S.I. Martin, "Inheriting Diversity: Archiving the Past," in *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*, eds. Rishi Naidoo and Jo Littler, (London: Routledge, 2005), 196. See also Kamali, "S.I. Martin, April 24, 1961- '." Martin confirmed in conversation with me, in 2016, that this picture of the Black British archive-using public may have changed since the relaunch of the Black Cultural Archives in their new space in Brixton, but that the data on this have not yet been collected.
18. Martin, "Inheriting Diversity," 197-98.
19. See Piper, in *Necessary Journeys*, 68-71. These photographs can also be viewed at [http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/Downloads%20\(pdf%20etc\)/ConnectingHistoriesNews3.pdf](http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/Downloads%20(pdf%20etc)/ConnectingHistoriesNews3.pdf) and at <http://keithpiper.info/ghostingthearchive.html>. Dyche was a self-taught photographer whose studios served Birmingham's Black and Asian from 1910 to the mid-1980s.
20. Piper, *Necessary Journeys*, 70.
21. Assia Djebar, *Women of Islam*, trans. Jean MacGibbon (London: Andre Deutsch, 1961), 9.
22. S.I. Martin: Museums, Archives, Libraries, Schools," <http://www.simartin.org.uk/>
23. S.I. Martin speaking on "The Sunday Feature: Black London's Story," *BBC Radio 3*, January 12, 2003.
24. <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-8076-1436-5>
25. http://www.islington.gov.uk/pdf/education/cea/bhm_programme_final.pdf
26. Fryer, *Staying Power*, 91.
27. *Ibid.*, 196.
28. Christopher Campbell, "Writing, Representation and Rescue: Narrating an Eighteenth-Century History in S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World*," *New Formations*, 55 (Spring 2005): 161.
29. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 72.
30. Campbell and Kamali, "Interview with S.I. Martin," 140.

31. Stuart Hall, "Racism and Reaction," in *Five Views of Multi-cultural Britain*, (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1978), 25.
32. Campbell, "Writing, Representation and Rescue," 170.
33. Fluck, Winfried. "Fiction and Justice." *New Literary History*, 34.1 (Winter 2003), 25.
34. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 212.
35. Ibid.
36. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 59–60.
37. Fryer, *Staying Power*, 10, 12.
38. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 175.
39. Ibid., 40.
40. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," 217, quoting Said 1979, 55.
41. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-33842861>
42. Campbell and Kamali, "Interview with S.I. Martin," 140.
43. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 35.
44. Ibid.,
45. Maya Jaggi, "Crossing The River: Caryl Phillips talks to Maya Jaggi", *Wasafiri*, 20 (Autumn 1994), 28.
46. Wilson Harris, "Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition." *Wasafiri*, 20, (Autumn 1994): 41.
47. This idea occurred to Martin as I was speaking to him about the *Jupiter Williams* project in March 2006; it has clearly been one which has since hit the cutting-room floor, but is nevertheless illustrative of the specific use of the performative in recovering and redramatizing history which I am arguing is of importance in Black British aesthetics.
48. Campbell and Kamali, "Interview with S.I. Martin," 154.
49. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 96.
50. Ibid.
51. Campbell and Kamali, "Interview with S.I. Martin," 131.
52. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 98.
53. Ibid., 119.
54. Ibid., 101.
55. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 294.
56. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 107.
57. Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition*, 20.3 (1999).

58. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, Random House, 1999 [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970]), 96–97.
59. *Ibid.*, 97.
60. Hena Maes-Jelinek, 'Dream, Psyche, Genesis: The Works of Wilson Harris', <http://www.ulg.ac.be/facphl/uer/d-german/L3/whlife.html>
61. Campbell and Kamali, "Interview with S.I. Martin," 135.
62. Sukhdev Sandhu, speaking on 'The Sunday Feature'.
63. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 16.
64. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
65. Sean Coughlan, "'Soldiers of Misfortune' in Features: Books," *The Times*, December 7, 1996.
66. Bernardine Evaristo, "New Writing Worlds: Writing and the Past," at www.newwritingpartnership.org.uk/fp/aspen/public/getFile.asp, 2
67. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 73.
68. S.I. Martin, speaking at the University of Warwick, February 19, 2003.
69. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 59–60.
70. *Ibid.*, 77.
71. Frank Kelleter, "Ethnic Self-Dramatization and Technologies of Travel in The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (1789)," *Early American Literature*, 39.1, (2004): 79.
72. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 76.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*, 76–77.
75. *Ibid.*, 148.
76. *Ibid.*, 130.
77. *Ibid.*, 27, 77, 177.
78. *Ibid.*, 76.
79. *Ibid.*, 121.
80. Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 117. Reprinted from Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Identity*, (London: Institute for Contemporary Arts (Document 6, 1987).
81. Campbell, "Writing, Representation and Rescue," 169.
82. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 121.
83. *Ibid.*
84. W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1996 [1953]), 4.
85. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 63.
86. *Ibid.*

87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid., 64.
90. Ibid., 27.
91. Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), 78–79.
92. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 38.
93. Ibid., 173.
94. Ibid., 177–78.
95. Dave Gunning, “S.I. Martin’s *Incomparable World* and the Possibilities for Black British Historical Fiction,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Volume 43, Issue 2, (2007): 213.
96. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 27.
97. Harris, “Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror,” 40.
98. Martin, *Incomparable World*, 35, 55.

“Awakening to the Singing”: Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara*

Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* (1997) responds, like Phillips’s and Martin’s novels, to a hegemonic politics, in which Britishness is equated only with whiteness, and in which British history is regarded as “closed”, “finished”, and articulated as such by the power of the written word. Evaristo undoes this supremacy of writing associated with whiteness in powerful ways, by excavating the multicultural histories of her own family in ways which accentuate the aural and dialogic quality of language itself. Where Evaristo’s subsequent works such as *The Emperor’s Babe* and *Soul Tourists* take for a large part of their subject matter the “foreign” (often specifically African) cultural inheritances which constitute historical figures and cultural icons commonly associated with British culture; in this, her first novel, Evaristo discovers hybridity and cultural dialogism within Britishness, through *her use of poetic language itself*, setting up a dialog at once intimate and culturally resonant between the diverse strands of her multiethnic family. *Lara*, written in the unusual novel-in-verse form, encapsulates a “hybrid literary form[...which] cross[es] boundaries, mix[es] genres, [and] challeng[es] established ‘ways of saying’”,¹ and Evaristo’s use of form corresponds to her uses of imagery, plot, and narrative voice to situate a cultural memory of Africa amid a proliferation of other cultural memories, influences, and inheritances, enabling Lara

eventually to assert her place with ease in a contemporary British society that is inherently hybrid and polyglot. As a novel-in-verse, *Lara* conforms to the conventions of a volume of poetry, as it is composed of verses, set out one to a page, and appended by an “Index of First Lines”²; yet the work also establishes itself as a novel, as its verses are grouped into numbered chapters, and the work in its entirety tells the story of a protagonist’s coming-of-age, in the manner of a *Bildungsroman*.³ While Evaristo is scrupulously dismissive of the role of high-flown theoretical constructs in her expressive process—she has written, irreverently in relation to the work of Homi Bhabha, “hybriditycosmopolitanismculturaltransformationdiscursiveconstructednessauthenticatingidentitybestowingfunctions—will not be at the back of my mind when writing a poem”⁴—she nevertheless positions unprecedented levels of fluidity at levels of temporality, narrative perspective, form and character, as well as in the way she situates the role of fiction/verse in dialogic relation with historicity. In these diverse ways, a fluid interpretation of cultural and national identity which allows accessibility for diverse subjectivities is enabled. Edouard Glissant’s description of “[i]dentity as a system of relation”⁵ is of relevance here; Evaristo’s use of language, like Glissant’s, displays a process of changing awareness occurring at the center of discourse, rather than in some “pre-discursive” moment which is simply recorded in text. What Evaristo is *not* doing, interestingly, is “reveal[ing] *other ways of knowing* that challenge the normative discourse”, which Heidi Safia Mirza identifies as “black women [...] see[ing] from the sidelines, from our space of unlocation, the unfolding project of domination”.⁶ Reading Evaristo’s work here underscores the key importance of asserting a creolized British space which is specifically *not* “alternative”, “other”, or “Third”; it is Evaristo’s use of the dialogic which enables this specific integration of Blackness into the center of Britishness past and present.

Evaristo’s text follows protagonist Lara da Costa as she grows up in suburban south London in the 1970s and 1980s, and spans the history of her family “across seven generations and three continents”.⁷ Lara, like Evaristo herself, is the fourth of eight children born to a mother of English, Irish, and German extraction, and a Nigerian father whose forebears were transported to Brazil as slaves, and returned to Nigeria. *Lara* uses hybrid literary form to put into place the practices of possession which exemplify the African diaspora traditions that are specifically referenced by Ishmael Reed in the work discussed in Chap. 2. Yet her adoption of boundary-crossing practices, or practices of possession, is not *explicitly* linked either

to African American or to any broader African diaspora tradition. She uses these aesthetics of fluid cultural communication, instead, to encapsulate a wide range of cultural inheritances within the dramatization of her protagonist's individual identity. If Evaristo evokes a practice which could constitute a cultural memory of Africa here, she goes on, through the text of *Lara*, to position the "speaking" function of her text as continuous also with *other* traditions, including Greek drama and traditional English verse, so as to emphasize a living and potentially limitless fluidity between diverse cultural positions, which might be seen to constitute not only Black British identity, but Britishness itself. She achieves this through the use of poetic form itself. As Evaristo has commented, with regard to her second novel, *The Emperor's Babe*, but which is equally apt here, "the culture is mongrel, I'm just going to make it even more mongrel."⁸

Evaristo's own ancestral relationship to Africa contrasts with the tendencies seen in all the other novelists discussed so far—as the author's own father was born and raised in Nigeria, a cultural memory of Africa might be said, in one sense, to be only one generation away from her upbringing in Britain. Yet Evaristo's more immediate "blood-tie" to Africa does not make her relationship to Africa any less complex than that of Black British writers descended from Caribbean parents, because, as she reports, "[my] Nigerian father [...] never spoke about his family or culture back home",⁹ and "little of my father's Yoruba culture was passed on to me; not his language, his food or his traditions."¹⁰ Crucially, a West African connection can be absorbed into a "Black British" sensibility just as easily as a Caribbean inheritance may be.¹¹

The novel's opening immediately situates the suggestion of a cultural memory of Africa, long before narrating anything of Lara's childhood and adolescence, in which she suffers a Britain in which "I searched but could not find myself", and also long before she travels, as an adult, to Nigeria and to Brazil, to piece together the inheritances which form her ancestral past. As such, the cultural memory of Africa is placed in this novel as inherently known in a space preceding the protagonist's conscious awareness of any desire for it. What is put in place then is an extra-discursive framework which suggests the presence of the spirits of the past inhabiting the present, as is enabled by Vodoun (discussed in Chap. 2), but never situates these spirits as linked to any specific tradition. Evaristo puts a process similar to spirit-possession in place at the start of *Lara* through her use of poetic technique:

1 8 4 4

Sugar cane, damp musky earth, saccharine, vanilla
 journeys in from eighteen forty-four, scenting Lara.
 Disembodied chords pluck the air. 'Tolulopé
 – the scarred one [...]'.¹²

As the voice of Lara's African great-great-grandmother Tolulopé is situated here alongside the third-person narration of Lara's own experience, it is neither Tolulopé's voice, nor Lara's own, which "speaks", or is given what might be called "narrative agency", but rather the expressive process of communication itself, as the text is apparently "possessed" by diverse historical agents.¹³ Through poetry, then, Evaristo presents a sense of the past possessing the present, first through a depiction of an exoticized ancestral terrain (which may be Africa, or may just as easily be Brazil), and then through Tolulopé's voice. The "possession" by the past of Lara's everyday existence in this opening verse of the novel may recall the function of the "divine trickster figure of Yoruba mythology, Esu-Elegbara",¹⁴ also known as Legba, to whom "all living creatures must address themselves [...] before they can be understood by the gods".¹⁵ As with the invocation of Vodoun "loa" in Ishmael Reed's work, Legba is the first loa to be invoked in Vodoun rites, often with the phrase "eh la bas, ouvrez po' moi"¹⁶; Legba can be understood, then, in a way which is very accessible, and yet also very specific to African diaspora spirit traditions, to *control* discourse—every aspect of communication with the spirit-world must come through him. Just as Legba is characterized as opener of the gate of discourse, it is discourse *itself* here in Evaristo's verse, rather than any particular character or narrator, which has narrative agency.

While *Lara* might also exemplify the specific processes of possession known as "speaking in tongues", which are seen in Alice Walker's work in Chap. 4, where diverse historical subjectivities as well as temporalities flow together in "a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self",¹⁷ and which Mae Gwendolyn Henderson argues is typical of "black women's speech/writing",¹⁸ Evaristo does not in the early part of the book link this explicitly to African diaspora practices. Instead, these processes are located in ways which simply allow characters' voices to be heard, but to be heard in a special communion with other characters:

'I was carried over
 the ocean, burst into life, watched over Baba until
 he joined us a century after my death.
 So you have it.'¹⁹

As the first verse ends, the recognizably English colloquialism, "So you have it", positions the relaxed way in which Evaristo is able to allow diverse memories of Africa, of Brazil, of the Middle Passage, America, Greece, and so on, to negotiate (or "possess") what is recognized as a "quintessential" Englishness, and thus serves as an example of a "postcolonial [...] reappraisal of the verbal not as the given but as the constructed".²⁰ Evaristo's idiosyncratic lightness of touch belies her sensitivity to the subterranean echoes, which, through the process of speech/memory, and as is also seen in Phillips, link narrative voices to enable connections not only between the different generations of Lara's family, but also, and just as easily as, between its diverse cultural formations and settings. The opening verse, then, tells a history in a form which situates past and present as part of the same fluid realm, positioning a history as already "finished" and as simultaneously being performed, allowing diverse traditions to inhabit the same self-contained and relaxed form of writing.

Evaristo's work can therefore be read in an interesting dialogic relationship with the perspective positioned by Ishmael Reed's work (discussed in Chap. 2). Reed's novel shows that improvisation, a trickster aesthetic, is a key part of an established African American tradition, as well as a signpost recalling a universal common ancestry. Reed's achievement in *Mumbo Jumbo* is to situate the cultural memory of Africa in ways which, like the trickster, can be understood within the range of African diasporic traditional and contemporary practices, but which also makes itself understood as part of a common, human language. By employing a politics and aesthetics that is influenced by the trickster, Reed can insist upon the richness of an African American culture which is linked to a cultural memory of Africa, but which does not become limited by a recognition of that heritage into believing in any inherent "difference" between human cultures. Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Evaristo's *Lara* both relate tropes of possession to specific Afro-diasporic traditions such as Vodoun and Candomblé found in the Deep South/Caribbean/South American cradle of Afro-diasporic culture. Both novels inhabit a world-cultural practice of trickster which enables them to situate poetics of possession not only with Caribbean-located cultural practice, but also more broadly as part of a global and inherently heterogeneous view of culture. Yet, while Reed is careful to specify from the outset the precise parameters of the traditions of Vodoun and Hoodoo in which he locates these practices (in the knowledge of just how endangered and vilified these cultures have become), Evaristo is *equally* careful *not* to situate the parameters of such

African diaspora culture at the outset, by allowing poetic form itself to be the container of cultural syncretism. Evaristo speaks just as well as Reed does to a mutuality which allows for the most humane of multicultural identifications, but crucially, she emphasizes the sense of stumbling across this aesthetics of mutuality only *by chance*, just as Caryl Phillips's text was read in relation to Morrison's in Chap. 6. The African diaspora tradition is not, then, loaded with the importance of connection to tradition as it is in the African American scenario—it is something which is found as a useful tool, which may be picked up or put down as is felt appropriate, in service of the vital expression of the self.

Black British writers typically receive African American cultural influence as something initially to aspire to, subsequently to reject as inappropriate, and finally to appropriate and manipulate to their own ends. Evaristo notes with characteristic wit:

I'd ask myself who on earth would want to read about a mixed-race girl growing up in a devastatingly dull suburb of Woolwich in south east London as I did, when they could read Morrison, Naylor or Walker, with their steaming swamps, slaves escaping through forests, smouldering hick towns and dusty roads cutting through corn fields, rickety-shack houses peopled with ghosts and secret family histories, and their downright cool colloquialisms? [Eventually, however,] I wrote *Lara*, a novel-in-verse about seven generations of a mixed-race English-Nigerian family (yes, living in the wonderful steaming swamps of Woolwich) with roots in Ireland, Nigeria, Brazil and Germany.²¹

Even as Evaristo registers a striking anachronism in the inheritance of this American version of “Blackness” in a Black British experience, she shows how it may be adopted, alongside a multiplicity of other cultural influences, and adapted or performed anew, in order to dramatize a notion of individual identity. In parallel to observations made by Paul Gilroy and by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. about the relevance of African American experience and cultural output for Black Britain, the same occurs in the realm of Black feminism, as is discussed in the Black British feminist text *The Heart of the Race*:

Thanks to our sisters in the United States, this silence is at last beginning to be broken, and for the first time ever Black women have a voice. But that voice comes from America, and although it speaks directly *to* our experience in Britain, it does not speak directly of it.²²

African American paradigms of identification are received on most levels in Black British culture as being of interest, but not fully relevant, to Black British experience. In common with Phillips's cosmopolitan approach, which registers a discomfort with almost any kind of cultural identity positioned by a fixedness to place or people, Evaristo approaches theoretical, narrative, or aesthetic paradigms which situate a closedness of received or given structures, and specifically accentuates a desire to transcend the limits of them. Through the deceptively simple act of speech, Evaristo embodies a response to an African American legacy, yet also models a hybrid, creolized cultural paradigm which allows for full expression of a "hyphenated" self. In this way, what is invoked is a

Creoleness [that] is not monolingual. Nor is its multilingualism divided into isolated compartments. Its field is language. Its appetite: all the languages of the world. The interaction of many languages (the points where they meet and relate) is a polysonic vertigo.²³

Evaristo may invoke both Caribbean and African American aesthetics, yet she does so in the service of something which does not pledge allegiance to anything apart from full expression of the self, located at the *center* of contemporary Britain.

Crucially, then, while Evaristo may adopt some features of an aesthetic inspired by African American literary antecedents, the poetic tools she uses simultaneously recall a number of other traditions which are identifiable and have traditionally been presented as completely distinct from African diaspora tradition. Her narration in *Lara*, given in "blank verse",²⁴ is the "10-syllable line [which] is the predominant rhythm of traditional English dramatic and epic poetry".²⁵ The fact that this English verse form was adapted from Greek verse already says something about how hybrid and culturally indebted the so-called "pure" English form really is. Evaristo has said that she "love[s] Greek drama" and "still re-read[s] *Antigone*, many years after having studied the play at school"²⁶; her blank verse form also recalls the Greek choral device which traditionally "provid[ed] the playwright with a means of filling in the necessary time while the three available actors changed costume, mask, and role behind the scenes, and describ[ed] or respond[ed] to unseen events".²⁷ A trained actress,²⁸ Evaristo writes partly out of a dramatic tradition, and she characterizes this influence as one which emphasizes the speaking quality of text: "I realise now that my writing has been very informed by my theatre training as an

actress and a playwright. [...] I like my characters to leap off the page, to be seen and heard, to exist as if they really are alive and not as wooden characters embedded in text.”²⁹

THE PAST A PIT TO FALL DOWN

Evaristo’s fluid dialogism is especially important because Lara’s experience is characterized by a particular *stoppage* of speech, a historical amnesia which can be traced to various different historical scenarios of forgetfulness. Evaristo is able to use speech, or a “speaking” form of writing, in this novel, as a fluid medium through which common ground can be discovered between diverse cultures, in a manner which suggests their distinctiveness, without insisting upon their “difference” from each other. This is the “poetics of relation”, in which Glissant describes coming to know oneself through relation to the other. So the focus upon “progress”, by a character like Edith, might be seen as a deep-seated anxiety about engaging with memory: “Edith invested in the future, the past was a pit to fall down.”³⁰ Taiwo, despite himself, mirrors his mother-in-law’s perspective later when he learns of his own mother’s death: “The pit I build for grief this time will be infinite.”³¹ As Karen McCarthy Woolf observes, “[t]he way that the stories mesh together is via the dramatic poetic monologues of the characters”³²; the sheer power of the dialogic is thus emphasized, as it draws routes of communication even between subjects who attempt to distance themselves from the past altogether. Through the dialogic, the possibility of spirit-possession is established as undifferentiated from the possibilities of individual memory itself, and is seen to occur on the African *and* the English sides of Lara’s family, prefiguring her own later encounter with “Daddy People”. So it is that Lara’s relationship with ancestral memory is shown to be constituted by its easily felt presence in her everyday experience, as she is depicted, at a young age, “kneel[ing], face squashed against the misted window”³³:

In the front garden before her through splattering rain,
she sees people watching her, young, old, so strange,
sitting motionless in a semi-circle among the tall grass,
lips unmoving but eyes alive with the singing of a song:
“Lara kiss, Lara kiss, we love you always, Lara kiss.”³⁴

Lara understands, here, that her very identity is being made through a communicative connection with her paternal African inheritance, as she

tells her mother: "Mummy, I saw Daddy People in the garden *singing me*."³⁵ Lara observes and knows that her identity is formed through the discursive, and the potential which it can allow for connection with the past. At this point, then, Lara has an easy and instinctive knowledge of these ancestral spirits, which is bestowed upon her in spite of her lack of experience of Nigerian "language, food or traditions". Lara's practice of "utter[ing] the mysteries of the spirit",³⁶ as Mae Gwendolyn Henderson would have it, represents a private and unconscious connectedness with a form of memory which subsequently comes to be marginalized or written over, but which, because it is already established, finally transcends the temporary interruptions which are incurred through individual failures of speech.

Henderson claims that "black women writers weave into their work competing and complementary discourses—discourses that seek both to adjudicate competing claims and witness common concerns".³⁷ Evaristo thus uses narrative itself as a starting point for undoing oppositional binaries, in the way that Edouard Glissant has asserted in his writings. Evaristo may be seen to employ such a process of adjudication in order to make textual links between characters, even as the characters themselves might attempt to escape the dialogic relationship with the past or with the other. So the narrative comes to introduce Lara's English grandmother Edith, who, despite her determination to distance herself from the past, is shown, through an allusive figure of language, to recall the voice of Tolulopé which was able, at the novel's beginning, to dramatize a perfect fluidity between diverse positions. Edith's account of her experience of the Blitz in 1939 reads:

Thunderous explosions outside made Guy Fawkes Night
sound like the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, and I felt as if
my bones were cracking into pieces like broken crockery.³⁸

The allusion to the quintessentially English figure from *Alice In Wonderland* features here as part of a longer phrase in which Edith's words recall Tolulopé's earlier description of her kidnapping: "I heard my bones jangle/like wooden sticks shaking in a bowl."³⁹ Through the discursive, in *Lara*, then, relationships which are otherwise inimical can be made meaningful and productive. Furthermore, Edith, normally so determined to distance herself from the memory of the past, is shown as a child, experiencing a communion with memory which speaks directly to the form of "possession" epitomized by Tolulopé:

[S]ometimes long-dead Nan would tap her shoulder,
 draw her back to a childhood where Nan was a spindly old
 form in front of the kitchen fire, black bonnet and shawl,
 brown-spotted, knobbled hands knitting skeins of wool.
 Edith: long brown ringlets, petticoats, button-up boots,
 avidly studying Nan's dexterous fingers with a learning frown.⁴⁰

The pasts of Lara's English and African ancestors are thus drawn into a powerful dialogic relationship with each other, working to unite the broad and diasporic family history across its differences, and even drawing in the most aggressive of narratives, where characters imagine themselves to be altogether different from an African "other". Evaristo uses her "speaking" prose verse to "adjudicate" between even the most hostile positions. As Edith and Taiwo meet for the first time, the sense of animosity could not be more fraught if pistols had been drawn:

A pyramid of trimmed and quartered sandwiches
 separated Edith's high collar from Taiwo's blue-tied
 Adam's apple. [...] Taiwo [...] gritted
 his back teeth like a pestle grinding corn in a mortar,
 smiled mechanically at the diminutive devil opposite.⁴¹

In the geometric symmetry of this scene, Edith and Taiwo are shown to be in corresponding positions. Evaristo is careful to situate Edith's attitude toward Taiwo as a consequence of her own experience—"Edith's script had been written some fifty years earlier",⁴² as she and her "seven siblings"⁴³ are born to Mary Jane, daughter of "Emma of the O'Donoghue clan who fled the hardship/of the garrison town of Birr in southern Ireland".⁴⁴ While Edith's "glassblower pa, struggl[es] to be The Provider/on his paltry pay, returning at midnight from the factory",⁴⁵ Edith herself works alongside her mother as a seamstress: "Between chores Edith hemmed herself out of adolescence, [...] aspired to a husband, a child, a home/in the suburbs and entry to the middle classes."⁴⁶ Just as Taiwo seeks to leave his African home behind him, Edith drives herself toward her goal of suburban advancement as a means of escaping the difficulties of her past.

If the process of establishing cultural memory occurs in fractured and uneven fashion, the stoppage of memory is, by contrast, decisive and progressive, the pressures upon a fluid connection with memory accumulating so that Lara is discouraged from both sides of her family from developing a relationship with her African heritage. Ellen is, "[l]ike Taiwo, ... the product of a post-colonial diaspora; caught, to use Roy Foster's words, 'in

the interstices of the Irish-English relationship”⁴⁷ If Taiwo is fixated on escaping the past in a linear drive to the future, Ellen inhabits a narrow and ceaseless present which looks neither back nor forward—dedicated to her life of “babies, shopping, food,...[and] soapy water”.⁴⁸ The 1980s, the era in which Lara grows up, is characterized in the novel in the way described by Dick Hebdige:

The Thatcher years saw a particular investment in a set of images and myths designed to “put the ‘Great’ back into Great Britain again” (to quote a 1980s Tory Party campaign slogan). The ideas of British “grit” and rugged island independence, of Britain as a nation of “hardworking, home-loving ordinary people” were regularly invoked to secure popular support for the Thatcherite project of “regressive modernization”.⁴⁹

Edith and Taiwo are shown to be part of this same British imperial and postimperial history, a history which has affected Africans as much as it has affected the English, with a sense of the need to run from the past. The African cultural memory as overarching narrative principle makes it clear to the reader, however, that such notions of escape from the past are futile, and moreover, psychically harmful.

In Evaristo’s comments upon the process of writing *Lara*, she suggests that her use of the novel-in-verse form, rather than the more usual prose form, occurs as a response to some urgent demand made upon her by her own experience:

Lara began as a prose novel of 200 pages, which, after three years of struggle, didn’t work at all. I then transformed the story into poetry and it really took off.⁵⁰

Whenever the author discusses her use of form, she conveys a sense that her challenge to established forms has not been wholly of her own volition, and has occurred instead in some realm not entirely within her control:

I never intended to be a maverick, but that is what I’ve turned out to be. I simply have not been able to write a novel-by-numbers, and it is a curse and a blessing—trust me. [...W]hen I try to slot into traditional forms I end up abandoning them. My novel-in-verse *Lara* was originally a straightforward prose novel [...] which I changed into poetry. *The Emperor’s Babe* was originally a few poems which grew into a novel-in-verse. So I’ve written plays that were poems, prose that became poetry, poems that became novels and now I’ve written a novel [*Soul Tourists*] which has all sorts of weird things in it.⁵¹

We may recall Caryl Phillips's reference to his "ceramic bowl", deliberately dropped, and the almost comic intersection between artistic purpose and chance accident this implied. What is suggested as both these writers invoke the sense of a happy accident in their encounters with literary form is something approaching the notion of being "possessed", as it were, by memory, or simply by their own experience. If a sense of African tradition is encountered through the forms of expression used in *Lara*, this is felt to be a chance encounter, and is absorbed into a fluid and hybrid form whose main purpose is to find ways to communicate the diverse experience of the individual.

The dialogism which comes about through speaking in tongues also speaks across notions of the "difference" between fiction and real life. The author describes this novel as "about my family history, loosely",⁵² and to anyone who discovers anything about Evaristo's background, the parallels between the author and her protagonist present themselves easily. Evaristo was born in Eltham, and grew up in nearby Woolwich, and Lara maps quite precisely the site of her birth—"I was born in Westmount Road, Eltham".⁵³ As Evaristo allows an easy continuity, unremarked upon within the text, to exist between her own life story and *Lara*'s narrative, we are introduced to a relationship between "fact" and "fiction" which is fluid and continuous, indeed must be so, as in Martin's novel, in order to fill in the gaps of a history which has been received in palpably partial form. This occurs not only, in Evaristo's case, because of an interruption in the history of Britain's Black presence, but also because of an interruption in the transmission of the history of her own family.

As the novel shows Lara growing up ignorant of her family history, she is shown to be powerless to respond to the racist taunts and remarks upon her so-called "difference", which typify her British childhood:

"Where'you from, La?" Susie suddenly asked
 [...]
 "My dad says you must be from Jamaica," [...]
 "I'm not Jamaican! I'm English!" "Then why are you coloured?"
 Lara's heart shuddered, she felt so humiliated, so angry.
 "Look, my father's Nigerian, my mother's English, alright?"
 [...]
 "Where's Nigeria then, is it near Jamaica?" "It's in Africa."
 "Where's Africa exactly?" "How should I know, I don't
 bloody well live there, do I!"⁵⁴

Such examples of childish ignorance about the world, and particularly about the history of British imperialism, clearly learned from parental

influence, occur in the novel as a result of what Stuart Hall calls the "decisive mental repression [among] the British people",⁵⁵ and contribute to Lara's sense that Britain is a "Home [where] I searched but could not find myself".⁵⁶

Taiwo's first letter home to his mother Zenobia, after four years in London, elicits her recriminations, but more than that, the heartbreaking news that Taiwo's "precious twin"⁵⁷ sister, Kehinde, has died in childbirth. Taiwo's pain is reflected in an anguished lament in which an elemental desire to return to Africa is symbolically bound up with a desire to return to the mother's womb, or perhaps simply to die:

Mama! Let me crawl back!	Kehinde	dead
Back into your womb, Mama!	dead	dead
Undo me. Rock me unborn!	dead	Kehinde
Back to water, back to water	dead	dead ⁵⁸

In response to the question, "Do you sense any influence of Yoruba or African poetry in Lara? Do you know any Yoruba poetry?", Evaristo has said:

That's a really interesting question because I don't; I haven't studied Yoruba poetry. [...] And yet there is a bit in *Lara* where Taiwo's twin sister dies and it's shaped on the page; it is almost like a drum beat and you can read it as a sort of chant. A Nigerian friend of mine said that it was like the kind of ritualistic drum beat chant that you would have at a funeral in Nigeria, and yet that wasn't intentional. I don't know anything about that. So I could almost say that something passes through me even though it is not conscious.⁵⁹

Evaristo voices here the shaping and determining influence of a cultural memory of Africa, and responds almost unconsciously to both an African American influence, and a Yoruba influence, and names the notion of being "possessed" by diverse traditions. The process of possession, crucially, is not linked here to a tradition established through community or relation to place, instead potentially occurring across borders and through bloodlines, to emerge in an individual experience which is wholly idiosyncratic.

Lara's cultural amnesia is very quickly noted by her cousin Beatrice, who visits from Liverpool, the city which, S.I. Martin observes, "made its fortune from the slave trade and is home to one of Britain's oldest and least assimilated Black populations".⁶⁰ Beatrice, in her "Angela Davis wig" and "lime green flares",⁶¹ is outraged by Lara's suggestion that "I'm not black, I'm half-caste, actually",⁶² and introduces a politicized Black perspective, influenced by African American forms of Black nationalism, and displaying some of its "spectacular" signs:

“Lara, lovey, so long as you’re of negroid
 stock, diluted or not, you’re black, ask me how I know?”
 “How d’ya know, Miss Africa?” ‘The P word, prejudice.
 So it’s about time you learnt some African ways, eh?’¹⁶³

Despite the fact that Beatrice flicks open “a map of Africa lighter”, the influence of African American cultural nationalism in this context speaks to a “performance” of Africanness as suggested by Kobena Mercer “stylistically *cultivated* and politically *constructed*”⁶⁴ Beatrice’s brand of cultural nationalist wisdom is a caricature which may touch a nerve and begin to unsettle Lara, and yet our protagonist’s reaction is one of extreme ambivalence: “Lara yawned, assumed a bland/disinterested expression, studied the sky, intensely.”⁶⁵ Beatrice’s is a perspective which is constructed of “a Black identity [which] is not something inherent, but something often worked upon in response to white hostility.”⁶⁶ It is stylized and does not in any way recall her own experience of possession by “the Daddy People”.

SITUATING BLACK BRITISHNESS, AND AFRICAN AMERICAN INFLUENCE

If the instances, in the novel, of speaking with spirits, or “speaking in tongues”, implicitly recall the African American tradition identified by Henderson, this does not mean that Evaristo wholly identifies herself with an African American inheritance. The phase in Lara’s story signposted as “Summer 81”⁶⁷ might be seen to be a light-hearted satirization, on the author’s part, of a corresponding phase in her own experience, in which she describes herself as having become “militant”,⁶⁸ by which we might understand her to mean that she aligned herself with positions indicated by the notion of the “simultaneity of oppression” among African American women. She describes the importance of US Black feminism for her own trajectory: We responded by producing our own anthologies with names such as *Charting the Journey*, *Watchers and Seekers* and one I co-edited, *Black Women Talk Poetry*. In the editors’ introduction to this we declared: ‘As black women we experience oppression due to our race, sex, class and sexuality on a daily basis and this is reflected in every area of our lives.’”⁶⁹ Evaristo goes on to comment, however, on the limits of this identification in practical terms, upon the formative yet ambivalent position which the African American feminist poetics held in the formation of Black British poetics: “Unfortunately, the American imports didn’t open up the publishing industry here to our homegrown writings. Publishers told us outright that there was ‘no market’ for our work.”⁷⁰

Here is an instance of the Black British "inheritance" of an African American legacy of protest, discussed in this study's Introduction, which, Evaristo's satirical tone might suggest, may not have been wholly relevant to her own experience after all:

I denounced my patriarchal father [...] saw the rapist in every homme, the worms in every phallus, the bigot in all whites, the victim in every black woman, [...] I divorced my honky mother.⁷¹

Following from this phase of influence, Evaristo, like Lara, might nevertheless be understood to have moved on to adopt an entirely new attitude toward African American cultural influence:

For many years I believed that my literary inheritance began with African-American women writers. [...] Then I realised that we were worlds apart. They were writing out of an African-American tradition, drawing on their history, their cultural specificities, their regional vernaculars. None of this was mine. [...] Then I began to discover my own literary voice, or multiple voices, and thankfully there was nothing American about it. [...] *What I had inherited from the American writers was the confidence to write out of my own experience.*⁷²

Evaristo expresses here a crucial aspect of the uneven dialog which emerges between African American and Black British positions throughout this book. While this author is inspired by the example of African American writers, she is not, in the end, at all concerned with the privilege placed upon certain forms of expression as *especially* characteristic of African American tradition. If Evaristo adopts expressive forms seen by African Americans as "typical" of African American writing, she treats this site of tradition with a lack of seriousness, actually situating it, as she experiences it, as *similar* to *other* diverse cultural inheritances, and, moreover, as simply characteristic of an individual experience of memory itself.

Lara goes on to seek some answers from her father about what Africa should mean to her, but Taiwo's decision to turn his back on the past means he is unwilling or unable to help her evoke that connection with memory she needs: "he didn't want to go tomb raiding."⁷³ As Lara grows up, she explores further her relationship to Africanness through romantic dalliance with a Nigerian named Josh. The "vivacious tableaux of Atlantic faces" which invokes all at once both the local history of Brixton's Atlantic

Road, and the transnational context of Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" which she encounters as she explores Brixton with Josh is as foreign to her as "the moon"; for Lara, having grown up in suburban Woolwich, is described as "born into whiteness".⁷⁴ In response to flirtatious attempts made by Black men toward her, Lara would previously have "[worn] my grandmother's stiff back, her deaf ear"⁷⁵—her sense of her whiteness inhibiting her comfort in a Black community. Despite the common Nigerian thread, the relationship flounders as Josh hinders rather than helping Lara's desire to find her relationship to African identity:

'You'll not marry a Nigerian if you can't obey me
 ... you don't even know what
 Jollof rice is, let alone how to cook it. You're strictly
 a fish fingers and mash girl. You'll make a sorry wife.'⁷⁶

Josh presents another notion of "Africanness" which is alien to Lara's own experience, and cannot, therefore, connect with her own, more intimately known, cultural memory of Africa. As Patricia Murray comments: "[Lara's] searching and poetic interrogation of Africanness is constantly interrupted by difference and hybridity, and by racial constructions that only partially give her voice."⁷⁷ While Lara fails to realize her communicative relationship with her own dialogic memory, the connections which reveal the fluid quality of "difference" are hidden from view.

MEMORY FIGURED, JOURNEYS TRAVELED

The failure of communication with all of these forms of "Africanness" finally leads Lara's confusion to a point of crisis—"Fury rode me"⁷⁸—and as a student at art college, she seeks refuge in alcohol, before finally choosing to save herself through travel: "I s'pose I am escaping. I'll soon know if it's from myself."⁷⁹ As she "trundle[s her] way across Europe"⁸⁰ with her friend Trish, the oppressiveness of race-consciousness which is felt when in Britain begins to lift:

We become
 more British, Trish and I, darker with the Turkish sun,
 yet less aware of race for we are simply: Ingiltere.⁸¹

"London retreats, [becomes] a dislocated memory, immaterial now",⁸² and soon afterward, as Lara is able to loosen her preoccupation with defin-

ing her identity according to other people's narratives, her own connection to her personalized, inherently known African memory returns with its full power and strength, evoking a voice from her ancestral past, the fulfillment of whose request proves to be of utmost importance to Lara's own survival in Britain. Jan Verwoert's commentary is pertinent:

The stalemate situation of the Cold War seemed to bring modern history to a standstill, freezing the forces of progress. [...] After 1989[,] when the superpowers could no longer hold their breath and the Wall was blown down, history sprang to life again. The rigid bipolar order that had held it in a deadlock dissolved, releasing a multitude of subjects with a visa to travel across formerly closed borders and with unheard histories to tell.⁸³

In Lara's case, it is not the fall of the Berlin Wall which encourages her to travel, but simply her restlessness with the restrictive narrative of identity presented by British society. "Here, travel is one element among others in Evaristo's rhetoric of genre, and in many ways seems to perform a different function for cultural memory than other genres."⁸⁴ Through travel itself Lara's relationship with the dialogic is resumed, reminding her that there are other stories to hear, outside of a monocultural version of Britishness, and allowing a return of a sense of simultaneous temporalities.

With Edith's death comes a dramatic return of Lara's sense of connection with memory, and patterns of communication are drawn across the two sides of the family:

When Nana died the sea began to surge,
rushed into my ears at night, a conch shell,
One morning I awoke, not sure if I'd slept at all,
the sun, a Tibetan-monk-orange sprung easily above
the cascade of red-tiled houses down Camden Road
– sunrise at sea. Someone materialised in my room,
like darkroom paper in developer, an image formed,
a woman, I thought, dark-skinned, tall, I was not sure
for it quickly faded out into murkiness, then air,
but the music, the wind, the tune, encircled me.
"Bring him home," it sang, "Bring him home."⁸⁵

If Edith, earlier in the narrative, was connected through the dialogic process of memory with the ancestral figure Tolulopé, that connection is echoed by others as Edith's death signals not only the birth of a white-looking child who is figured in her image—"Mother Returns', named by my father, identikit/of Nana"⁸⁶—but the appearance of another

African matriarch, Taiwo's own mother Zenobia, whose earlier cries Taiwo had "ignored".⁸⁷ As cultural diversity is revealed as inherent to Britishness after all, a voice within the familiar British environment initiates knowledge of diverse simultaneous narratives. However, it takes travel to Africa, and then to Brazil, to reveal this to Lara, not only because of any inherent African tradition which may be encountered in those sites, but because like the experience of being possessed by memory, the encounter with diverse places and peoples has the capacity to loosen the bonds of Britain's forgetfulness. In Africa, Lara discovers, paradoxically, that her Africanness is something she has always known, and which, beyond the fiction of linearity, may always reside at the heart of a Britishness which is inherently diverse, and within which she can claim her place.

The latter part of the novel sees Lara journeying to Nigeria, musing, "This is the land of my father, .../I wonder if I could belong",⁸⁸ and then "crossing/over to Brazil, completing her own three point turn" (108). Meanwhile, Evaristo mentions that "[d]uring the writing process [of *Lara*] I travelled to Nigeria and to Brazil, both for the first time, and these trips enabled me to write the chapters set in those countries".⁸⁹ She comments that during these trips, "I became aware that travel brings alive the senses, and that sensory detail brings alive literature".⁹⁰ Evaristo thus indicates that travel also has helped to reveal to her the continuous, dialogic relationship which exists between life and fiction. The section of *Lara* which depicts the protagonist's impressions of Lagos, rich in sights, smells, and sounds, encourages a sense that this "fictional" writing is infused with the presence of Evaristo's own experience:

Sliced dodo⁹¹ browned, crisped, in hot oil pans,
were wrapped, sold for a few naira on the streets;
knived meat salivated on stalls, pink vulva flesh
exposed, was skewered, to excrete over flames;
herons elegantly plundered smoking refuse tips –
mobile daffodils; storm drains festered pungently;
fuji⁹² pounded out of door-size speakers, rattling
the ribs of those passing, vibrating through soles.
"Yaba! Yaba! Yaba!—Yaba! Yaba! Yaba!" clanking
jalopies hurtled past, sardined, men hanging off.⁹³

In the introduction to a volume in which Evaristo is a contributor, Melanie Keen comments upon the practice of describing "time passing (or life pro-

gressing) by using the metaphor of travel and journeying".⁹⁴ Travel, as it is represented by the encounter with "otherness", makes flexible any previously imagined notion of difference, and certainly seems, in the above "fictional" excerpt, to offer a vivid, brighter than ever, sense of life. This, I would suggest, is potentially because of the relationship that travel bears with memory. As Verwoert suggests, travel loosens the bounds of linear time imposed by the narrative of the nation. Thus, immediately following this vivid sense of connection across diversities enabled by travel, the full power of memory returns to Lara as she "sleeps on a sun-bleached pillow":

"Lara kiss, Lara kiss, we love you always, Lara kiss."
 She awakes to the singing, calling her. "Daddy People!"
 she cries out astonished before her brain registers,
 shoots upright, dark brown eyes swivel at the chorus
 around her. There they are, straight out of childhood,
 there she was, back in her bunk bed in Woolwich:
 the old man with tight white curls, a teenager, scarred,
 a young woman—the spitting of her father, a fierce man
 in a hat, someone so old she is toothless, hunched.
 Her eyes rest on a woman whose fathomless
 gaze unravels such love in Lara she feels faint with it –
 her grandmother, recognised from the sepia photo
 Lara treasures from nineteen thirty-five. It is Zenobia.
 She speaks,
 "My Omilara, now we take you into memory
 Sleep now, sleep."⁹⁵

Just as memory functions by both maintaining and undermining notions of "difference" between times, places, and narratives, the experience of travel to Africa reveals its similarly ambivalent role. Lara is shown, as the "Daddy People" reappear to her just as she has known them since childhood, that her own Africanness is not *only* something she will find in Africa—it has been a part of her all along, even through her apparent disconnection from memory in London. Yet simultaneously, the fact that this realization occurs to Lara *in* Africa, that the "Daddy People" choose this moment to appear to her, also suggests that her connection to Africanness *is* to be found in the African setting, suggesting a dialogism between two modes of experience, between knowing a cultural memory of Africa intrinsically, and discovering it in Africa.

If we add to this the fact that researching family history in Nigeria, for this novel, involved talking to “elderly relatives [...who] did not believe in talking about the dead”,⁹⁶ we find that engaging with African memory, even across only one generation, does not, in Evaristo’s experience, *necessarily* encourage easy access to the past, as seen, for instance, in Reed or Wideman. This contrasts particularly with African American notions of African memory as alive in the present, to which access is nevertheless blocked by the residual effects of trauma of what is frequently figured as occurring initially with the Middle Passage. In Evaristo’s case, poetic license is used to surpass this particular instance of the failure of speech; notably these encounters with relatives who refuse to speak are not dramatized at all in *Lara*. Evaristo instead positions the appearance of Lara’s grandmother Zenobia, who speaks to Lara to say “My Omilara, now we take you into memory”,⁹⁷ and beyond that, as the narrative navigates the generations, a “magical memory grandmother” some generations earlier, who

‘spoke dip dip down into the deepest part of she-self,
churning stories into a babbling stream of poetry oratory
[...] as she voyaged back to the early time.’⁹⁸

Evaristo overcomes an impediment to memory here through poetry itself, so as to situate an African inheritance, in the novel, as wholly concerned with the fluid communication of memory, where in her own experience of her African relatives, that may not necessarily have been the case. As Evaristo uses writing to “journey [...] into my own childhood and into the childhood of my parents and their forebears”,⁹⁹ she uses this process to render less debilitating to the communication of history the silence which surrounds particular aspects of her ancestry. In the novel she keeps the emphasis, in the interrupted communication of memory, upon Taiwo’s running away from the past. Though Baba commands Taiwo to “shut up and listen/as if you were a bat with no eyes”,¹⁰⁰ Baba tells his tale and then dies, and Taiwo deserts his memory, focused instead on his English future¹⁰¹—Taiwo is oblivious to the fact that “Baba’s journey ha[s] begun.”¹⁰² As Evaristo positions her speaking text, she writes against a *number of* cultures, including the British *and* the African, which seem to impose upon her the expectation that she should live in a present which is separated from the past. Nevertheless, she also situates the African inheritance in *Lara* as being that which more naturally encourages communion with memory, initiated at the novel’s start, and which is epitomized by the

Daddy People. This strategy is seen again later, as reconciliation between Lara and her uncommunicative father Taiwo is never quite achieved, but Lara's relationship with his African homeland can nevertheless surpass that ruptured link:

He boasts to his cronies that
He has two women to boss around in Lagos until her eyes
Shoot ice darts at him, decades of frozen anger, and his
Words quake, spring off the floor, stream back into his mouth.¹⁰³

Instead of turning a slightly uncommunicative relationship between Lara and Taiwo into a fully communicative one, Evaristo bypasses the blockage in cultural memory he represents to figure a powerfully imaginative relationship with Africa—once again we see the power of writing to overcome rifts which appear non-negotiable in lived experience.

Where Henderson claims that "the objective of [Black women] writers is not [...] to move from margin to center, but to remain on the borders of discourse, speaking from the vantage point of the insider/outsider",¹⁰⁴ Evaristo is not content simply to position herself as writing "from the margins"—she is more fundamentally concerned with exploding the idea of a margin/center dichotomy in British society altogether.

I denounced my patriarchal father, deconstructed
my childhood, regurgitated appropriated ideas
like closing-time vomit, [...]
I was a walking irradiated automated diatribe.

As Evaristo has come to discard some of the Black feminist agenda, perhaps as a result of, certainly as part of, the experience of travel, she speaks as though she encountered some surprising truths—for instance, that her encounter with Africa turned out to be an experience through which she "came to terms with [her] white side"¹⁰⁵. Just as Lara, when she visits Lagos, is called "Oyinbo", meaning "Whitey",¹⁰⁶ the phase of Evaristo's life where she encountered Africa for the first time initiated what she sees as her "acceptance of [her]self as mixed race".¹⁰⁷ The "emancipatory impulse"¹⁰⁸ that Henderson speaks of is thus taken a stage further by Evaristo, dialogic poetry enabling a coming to terms with self in whatever ways that might appear.

Immediately following the vivid appearance of the Daddy People, the narrative moves smoothly into the stories of Lara's African ancestors—the connection to ancestral memory, temporarily blocked by Taiwo's (and Edith's) fear of engaging with the past, now flows freely, opened up by the practice of travel. By traveling into the Lagos environment, Lara/Evaristo literally opens access to the formerly stifled narrative voice of Zenobia,¹⁰⁹ who, prefiguring the fate of Evaristo's next protagonist Zuleika in *The Emperor's Babe*, is “plucked...by Gregorio, treble her years,/and desirous of a madonna negra to reproduce himself”,¹¹⁰ and cries, “Why oh why, must I be chosen but cannot choose?”¹¹¹

“DIFFERENCE” AND THE RETURN TO BRITAIN

“Lagos”, Pilar Cuder-Domínguez comments, “is only one step in [Lara's] journey of self-discovery”,¹¹² and the truth of Lara's identity and connection with memory, as it may or may not lie in the encounter with Africa, is actually revealed in the broader encounter with diversity which travel enables. As Lara travels to Brazil, Brazilian society itself, like Lagos, is able to epitomize diversity as effectively as London might ever have:

I [...] follow
 my singing ears, Catholic hymns hybridized by drums,
 it is a hilltop church, Indian congregation, holding flowers
 and palm fronds. It is Palm Sunday! I hum from the door,
 witness to one culture being orchestrated by another,
 yet the past is gone, the future means transformation.¹¹³

As Lara is able to trace her lineage to the “Brazilian Quarter”¹¹⁴ in Lagos, and goes on to witness, in Brazil itself, “Salvador [which] grips its Yoruba mother like a shawl,/...as if no sea,/no history separates them”,¹¹⁵ it becomes clear that the undermining of the notion of “difference” is important in ways which are far more than simply symbolic. London, Evaristo makes us see, is not the only place where diverse cultures have met, mixed, and become part of the landscape, and the twentieth century is not the first time such mixing has occurred. With this realization, Lara is able to return to Britain reborn into the dialogic process of memory:

I am baptised, resolve to paint slavery out of me,
 the Daddy People onto canvas with colour-rich strokes,

their songs will guide me in sweaty dreams at night.
 I savour living in the world, planet of growth, of decay,
 think of my island—the "Great" Tipped out of it –
 tiny amid massive floating continents, the African one
 an embryo within me. I will wing back to Nigeria again
 and again, excitedly swoop over a zig-zag of amber lights
 signalling the higgledy energy of Lagos.
 It is time to leave.
 Back to London, across international time zones,
 I step out of Heathrow and into my future.¹¹⁶

There is power here in realizing that Britain is not the beginning and end of the story. Evaristo is able, in this conclusion to *Lara*, to take account of history, yet also to lay it to rest, as her heroine is able to "paint slavery out of me" and move "into *my* future" [my emphasis]. Evaristo takes a firm stance toward British history, claiming her protagonist's—and her own—right to be freed rather than trapped by it. The process of travel reveals Lara's relationship to her African inheritance, it in all its flexibility, and enables Evaristo to assert for her a comfortable place in British society, by refusing to credit the validity of the notion of "difference". In *Lara*, Evaristo's stunning first novel, the author thus can be seen to be coming to terms with this memory of Africa as part of the process of preparing the ground for the exercise to which she addresses herself in earnest with her next work, *The Emperor's Babe*—as she puts it, "challenging a holy cow of British history—that Britain was a white nation until the twentieth century".¹¹⁷

Evaristo's position is one of resounding triumph over the exclusionary British hegemony which once told a young girl a story about how she did not belong, and her narrative certainly takes the most unequivocally celebratory tone of the four Black British texts discussed here. In comparison, I show in my analysis of David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* that there remains for some Black British writers a great uncertainty at the site of responsibility which is felt for narrating the pasts not preserved by the archive of history. Dabydeen shows an acute sensitivity, reminiscent to that discovered earlier in the work of John Edgar Wideman, to the lost histories of the people of an ancestral Guyana, and troubles the limits of the celebration of contemporary individuality, in the light of a duty he feels to represent those pasts. In spite of negotiating this difficult territory, though, Dabydeen comes to an even more committed embrace of the need

to revel in an individual experience of creative narrative; he shows the ways in which sheer invention of a cultural “memory” of Africa, in its own way, does the work of invoking the ghosts of beleaguered colonial histories.

NOTES

1. Stewart Brown, “Lara, Bernardine Evaristo”, *Reviews, Wasafiri*, 29 (Spring 1999), 84.
2. Bernardine Evaristo, *Lara*, (London: Angela Royal Publishing, 1997), 145–47. *Lara* was “republished” in 2009, with revisions and the specific addition of the Irish side of Lara’s ancestral story. I read the 1997 edition here in order to remain in keeping with the historical period addressed by this book, and also because the discussion of the Irish side of Evaristo’s family, which the later edition encompasses, has little bearing upon my concerns here.
3. Vedrana Velikovic, “Melancholic travellers and the idea of (un)belonging in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* and *Soul Tourists*,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 2011, iFirst Article: 1–15.
4. Bernardine Evaristo, ‘Reinventing Britain: A Forum’, *Wasafiri* 29, Spring 1999, 49.
5. Edouard Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*, 142.
6. Heidi Safia Mirza, “Introduction: Mapping a genealogy of Black British feminism,” *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 5.
7. Bernardine Evaristo speaking at *My Africa: four journeys of genealogical self-discovery*, event at Borders Charing Cross Road, London, September 28, 2005.
8. Sofía Muñoz Valdivieso, ‘Interview with Bernardine Evaristo’, *Obsidian III*, 5.2 (Fall-Winter 2004), 17.
9. Bernardine Evaristo, “The Road Less Travelled”, in *Necessary Journeys*, eds. Melanie Keen and Eileen Daly (London: Arts Council England in association with *bfi* Black World, 2005), 19.
10. Bernardine Evaristo “New Writing Worlds: Writing and the Past,” <http://www.newwritingpartnership.org.uk/nwp/site/writers.acds?context=1105158&instanceid=1105160>, Evaristo PDF doc, 1.
11. None of the authors discussed in this study were born or raised in Africa—and this work does not undertake any detailed exploration of any “memory of Africa” in the case of African-born writers.
12. Evaristo, *Lara*, 1.
13. “The concept of agency can be likened to having a voice and being free to use that voice or not to use it”. Harlene Anderson, “Self, Narrative

- Identity and Agency," In *Conversations, Language and Possibilities*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
14. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.
15. *Ibid.*, 23–4.
16. See Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009[1938]).
17. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 142. Reprinted from Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed., *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Meridian Press, 1990).
18. *Ibid.*, 258–59.
19. Evaristo, *Lara*, 1.
20. Sauerberg, "Repositioning Narrative" 460.
21. Evaristo, "New Writing Worlds".
22. Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, (London: Virago Press, 1985), 1.
23. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar, "In Praise of Creoleness," p. *Callaloo*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Autumn, 1990): 901.
24. Lars Ole Sauerberg, "Repositioning Narrative: The Late-Twentieth-Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess, and Bernadine Evaristo", *Orbis Litterarum*, 59, 458.
25. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/glossary-term/blank%20verse>
26. Toh Hsien Min, "Never Forgetting The Source", *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, 3.2 (January 2004) <http://www.qlrs.com/issues/jan2004/interviews/bevaristo/html>, 2.
27. Edith Hall, introduction to *Sophocles: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Electra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, xxx.
28. Evaristo attended Rose Bruford College for dramatic arts.
29. Karen McCarthy, "In Conversation: Bernardine Evaristo on Updating Lara," <http://opennotebooks.co.uk/2010/09/bernardine-evaristo-on-updating-lara/>
30. Evaristo, *Lara*, 12.
31. *Ibid.*, 57.
32. McCarthy, "In Conversation".
33. Evaristo, *Lara*, 48.
34. *Ibid.*

35. Ibid. My emphasis.
36. Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," 262.
37. Evaristo, *Lara*, 263.
38. Ibid., 18.
39. Ibid., 1.
40. Ibid., 12.
41. Ibid., 37.
42. Ibid., 83.
43. Ibid., 13.
44. Ibid., 12.
45. Ibid., 13.
46. Ibid.
47. Patricia Murray, "Stories Told and Untold: Post-Colonial London in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*", *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing*, XXI.2 (1999), 45.
48. Evaristo, *Lara*, 47.
49. Dick Hebdige, "Digging for Britain: An Excavation in Seven Parts", in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 121. Revised and reprinted from *Come on Down: Popular Media Culture in Postwar Britain*, eds. Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (London: Routledge, 1992).
50. Hsien Min, "Never Forgetting The Source", 1.
51. Bernardine Evaristo, "Extract from *Soul Tourists*—Analysis", at <http://www.crossingborders-africanwriting.org/writersonwriting/bernardine-evaristo/soultourists-analysis/>
52. Bernardine Evaristo speaking at *My Africa*.
53. Evaristo, *Lara*, 45.
54. Ibid., 65.
55. Stuart Hall, "Racism and Reaction", in *Five Views of Multi-cultural Britain* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1978), 25.
56. Evaristo, *Lara*, 69.
57. Ibid., 26.
58. Taiwo's cry here strongly echoes the words of the character in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1973]) called Eva, who kills her son Plum, a veteran from the First World War, who is shell-shocked and debilitated by drug addiction. Eva says, "he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well...I ain't got the room no more even if he could do it. There wasn't space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin' back." Morrison, *Sula*, 71. Evaristo has described Toni Morrison as her "favourite novelist" (Hsien Min, 2), and if the condition known as "shell shock" is one of the mind's own strategies for cutting off from a memory which

- causes great emotional pain, Taiwo’s reaction to his strong desire for comfort can be seen as Evaristo signifying upon Eva’s extreme act of severance. Eva explains her act as providing “a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb” Evaristo, *Lara*, 72, and Taiwo’s own act of severance from memory (and in the process from both mother and motherland), in the attempt to live “like a man”, can be seen as an equally misguided—but nevertheless instinctive—attempt to protect the self from the pain which memory can engender.
59. Valdivieso, “Interview with Bernardine Evaristo”, 15–16.
 60. S.I. Martin, *Britain’s Slave Trade*, (London: Channel 4 Books, Macmillan, 1999), 144. See also Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (London: Vintage, 2001 [2000]), 87–9, and Jacqueline Nassy Brown and Deborah Thomas (eds.), *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).
 61. Evaristo, *Lara*, 73.
 62. Ibid., 74.
 63. Evaristo, *Lara*, 76.
 64. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 108.
 65. Evaristo, *Lara*, 74.
 66. Koye Oyediji, “Prelude to a Brand New Purchase on Black Political Identity: A Reading of Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* and Diran Adebayo’s *Some Kind Of Black*,” in *Write Black Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2005), 357.
 67. Evaristo, *Lara*, 88.
 68. Evaristo, speaking at *My Africa*.
 69. Bernardine Evaristo, “Why is it still rare to see a black British woman with literary influence?” *The Guardian* December 13, 2013.
 70. Ibid.
 71. Evaristo, *Lara*, 92.
 72. Evaristo, “New Writing Worlds,” 1–2. Emphasis added.
 73. Evaristo, *Lara*, 81.
 74. Ibid., 88.
 75. Ibid.
 76. Evaristo, *Lara*, 90.
 77. Murray, “Stories Told and Untold,” 45.
 78. Evaristo, *Lara*, 92.
 79. Ibid., 95.
 80. Ibid.
 81. Ibid., 97.
 82. Ibid.

83. Jan Vorwoert, "Apropos Appropriation: Why Stealing Images Feels Different Today", *Tate Triennial 2006: New British Art* catalog, ed. Beatrix Ruf and Clarrie Wallis, Tate Publishing, 15–16.
84. Jan Rupp, *Genre and Cultural Memory in Black British Literature*. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010: 110.
85. Evaristo, *Lara*, 101.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 25.
88. Ibid., 104.
89. Evaristo, "The Road Less Travelled", 20.
90. Ibid.
91. *Dodo* is plantain. Evaristo, *Glossary* in *Lara*, 143.
92. Evaristo's *Glossary* describes *fuji* as "modern type of Nigerian music," 144.
93. Evaristo, *Lara*, 104.
94. Melanie Keen, "From There to Here," *Necessary Journeys*, (London: Arts Council England in association with *bfi* Black World, 2005), 4.
95. Evaristo, *Lara*, 109.
96. Karen Hooper, "On the Road: Bernardine Evaristo interviewed by Karen Hooper," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 41.1 (2006), 5.
97. Evaristo, *Lara*, 109.
98. Ibid., 124.
99. Evaristo, "The Road Less Travelled," 21.
100. Evaristo, *Lara*, 120.
101. Ibid., 130–131.
102. Ibid., 131.
103. Ibid., 108.
104. Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," 264.
105. Evaristo, speaking at *My Africa*.
106. Evaristo, *Lara*, 104.
107. Ibid.
108. Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," 264.
109. Heard only once before, as she scolded Taiwo for his abandonment (Evaristo, *Lara*, 26), Evaristo positions Zenobia as a forgotten voice in the context of the narrative. Evaristo dedicated her first published volume of poetry, *Island of Abraham* (London: Peepal Tree Press, 1995), "For my grandmother, Zenobia Evaristo".
110. Evaristo, *Lara*, 113.
111. Ibid.
112. Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, "(Re)Turning to Africa: Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses*", in *Write Black Write British: From*

Post Colonial to Black British Literature, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2005), 310.

113. Evaristo, *Lara*, 139.
114. Ibid., 105.
115. Ibid., 138.
116. Ibid., 140.
117. Evaristo, ‘The Road Less Travelled’, 21.


“I Can Change Memory”: David Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress*

David Dabydeen’s novel *A Harlot’s Progress* is named after the 1732 series of prints by English artist William Hogarth, and bases its protagonist upon the figure of the African boy who features in Plate II of Hogarth’s series. This figure, initially named Mungo in Dabydeen’s novel, is a former slave who is prevailed upon at the start by a scribe for the Abolitionist Committee to provide “[a] beginning”,¹ and to act as a “source of information” to complete the story which is sketched by “Hogarth’s portrait of Mungo as a boy-slave to the harlot Moll Hackabout”.² As we first encounter Mungo, he is “advanced in age”,³ and a specific demand for remembrance of Africa is made upon him by a narrative already put in place, first by Hogarth’s print, then by the Abolitionist Pringle, who “orders his notebook with a series of chapter headings”,⁴ and waits with “his hand [...] poised over the inkwell”.⁵ As this novel recalls slave narratives such as those of Equiano and Cuguano, which were used in the interest of the cause of the Abolition of slavery, memory is elicited in the most prescribed form here, in order to fit a version of the national past which is already constructed and decided, which is, in a sense, “finished”:

Mr Pringle [...] wants a sober testimony that will appeal to the Christian charity of an enlightened citizenry who will, on perusing my tale of undeserved woe, campaign in the Houses of Parliament for my emancipation and that of millions of my brethren.⁶

In exchange for the ordering of his memory of Africa in a certain way (“one moment I was a dusty Black child playing in a sand-dune, crinkle-mouthed from the sun, then many rivers later I found myself in an English boudoir”),⁷ Mungo himself might profit from telling his memory of the past (in the same way that Hogarth is commercially successful): “in return for [...] the shilling here, the new breeches there”.⁸ The coercive modes of exchange in which the protagonist’s history plays a part, then, mean that survival (or its close relation, material comfort) depends upon the recounting of his memory of Africa and of the Middle Passage according to the preconceived account decided by a hegemonic order. Mungo, however, has become habituated to editing memory, even for his own consumption, and his response is: “Memory don’t bother me, that’s why I don’t tell Mr Pringle anything. I can change memory.”⁹ If Mungo’s listener demands that he “change memory”, there are also other demands he must appease, as ghosts of his African past “emerge from the gloom of smoke to greet me with curses for bringing death to them”,¹⁰ and “petition [...] me to remember them in the best light”.¹¹ These competing demands exert such a pressure upon narration, the construction of identity, and memory itself in this novel, that the effect upon the cultural memory of Africa is a fragmentation which is nevertheless brought into often unexpected relationship with other cultural inheritances, to give it a renewed resonance and to place Black British identity in idiosyncratic ways which have special resonance for the contemporary time.

The cultural memory of Africa is continually represented and re-presented, throughout *A Harlot’s Progress*, as uncertainly known, and barely communicable. So, again, Mungo describes falteringly: “I cannot remember them either but they existed, for one was called Rima.”¹² The psychic space where a remembrance of Africa is sought in this novel describes a strange and frustrating process, for Mungo as much as for the Abolitionist scribe, of remembering and not remembering, knowing and not knowing. The process of narration is continuously haunted by stories that must be told, but that remain ultimately unspeakable on a number of levels. So just as the Abolitionist scribe’s “manly strength” is contrasted with the “wasted and spectral existence”¹³ of the figures of Mungo’s memory, the process of remembering pasts which reference Africa and the Middle Passage is, for the Black subject of this novel, a far more insubstantial and inconclusive exercise than is suggested by Mr. Pringle’s “hand [...] poised over the inkwell”,¹⁴ his series of chapter headings:

1. Africa. 
2. Voyage to the Americas in Slave Ship.
3. Plantation Labour.¹⁵

The proliferation of narratives which come to Mungo as he attempts to narrate the lost past seems to recall "what Kobena Mercer refers to as 'the burden of representation'[, which] has created a desire to 'say it all'",¹⁶ and which constitutes an important aspect of Black British representation. James Procter cites "The Black British film collective Sankofa [who] have spoken of this problem in relation to their early film *Passion of Remembrance* (1986):

There was a sense of urgency to say it all, or at least to signal as much as we could in one film. Sometimes we can't afford to hold anything back for another time, another conversation or another film. That is the reality of our experience—sometimes we only get *one* chance to make ourselves heard."¹⁷

If the "burden of representation" is seen to have exerted a particular pressure upon the Black artist in Britain during the 1980s, it is imagined to have been superseded by a more recent emphasis upon the heterogeneity of what "Blackness" is understood to stand for, and a greater emphasis upon the potential for diversity inherent in the individual. Yet this periodization is given a contrasting inflection in Dabydeen's case, where the burden of representation is not confined to the sense that the author is speaking for a Black community or communities in Britain.

In this and other works, Dabydeen "explores the (im)possibilities of postcolonial autobiography, [...] deliberately disclos[ing] how the past is newly imagined and constructed by the postcolonial writer".¹⁸ Indeed, as is seen in Martin's novel, "[t]he kind of fictional re-imagining of the past of slavery undertaken by both Mungo and Dabydeen may be both 'fable' and burdensome, but is nonetheless necessary when faced with an absence of historical accounts concerning either indentured labourers or African slaves".¹⁹ Dabydeen himself was born on a sugar plantation in Guyana, the son of an Indian-indentured laborer who became a schoolteacher, and moved to Britain at the age of 12. Examining Dabydeen's work in the context of this study thus reinforces an understanding that the term "Black British" may be understood as an indicator for a flexible category which has "heterogeneity [a]s one of its defining features".²⁰ Phillips, Martin, and Evaristo display an emphasis upon the performance of individual

identities as constituted of a great diversity of cultural inheritances which interlock in the contemporary British experience. Dabydeen exhibits an initial difficulty with inhabiting such a position because of the responsibility he feels to a distinct ancestral Guyanese community, whose experience is largely unknown about in Britain. This historical experience is situated in Dabydeen's work as inhabiting realms which exist beyond that which can be easily articulated through narrative, and yet occupies, in interesting ways, the same semantic territory as the cultural memory of Africa.

In Dabydeen's work, there is some preoccupation with the ways in which the colonizer's imagery fills the landscape, and this affects the ways in which a cultural memory of Africa is placed. He has commented:

We grew up in the Caribbean without a visual memory. In Guyana I could never remember seeing any African image apart from the bodies of the people. There was nothing like African painting in the house, there was nothing like Indian art in the house. The closest you could get to Indian images were the pictures of deities. One's visual field was dominated by Christian, Western images, either by the copies of Constables or the pictures of Jesus.²¹

Dabydeen's scholarly work, which includes the volume *Hogarth's Blacks*, has addressed the representation of Black people by eighteenth-century English artists such as Reynolds and Turner, and has been centrally focused upon the practice of filling in an absence in the commentary of art historians on what has been a visible, yet invisible African presence as typified by the boy-servant in Hogarth's print:

Of eighteenth century English artists, William Hogarth was the most prolific painter and engraver of Blacks. [...] Countless critics have repeatedly marvelled at the elaborate narrative structure of the artist's work, at the fact that each detail within a particular work is purposefully placed to yield specific meaning or to create a specific effect, no detail being gratuitous or accidental. [...] Even so, no attempt has been made to place Hogarth's Blacks in the narrative contexts in which they occur. If, as Ian Duffield has written, the Black is "the invisible man" of English social history, the same observation can be made of English art history.²²

Dabydeen's novel is written in artistic and oppositional dialog with this critical historical context, showing how a Black presence in Britain, even as it was documented by an artist as commercially successful as Hogarth, still comes to be metaphorically "erased" over and over again in commentaries



Fig. 9.1 William Hogarth, Plate 2, *A Harlot's Progress*, 1732. © The Trustees of the British Museum

upon Hogarth, and beyond, and the erasure of an African presence in the British situation is, in the context of Dabydeen's work, a repetition or an echo of what occurred in the Caribbean under colonial rule. The role played by the Black figure in Hogarth's art is also addressed by Vincent Carretta (Fig. 9.1):

Eighteenth-century visual satirists increasingly employed the image of the obvious outsider to comment on English behavior. [...] In many [...] prints a Black servant observes and mocks the actions of the whites, thus serving as the moral norm within the visual text and morally equivalent to the viewer outside the text. [...] In the second plate of Hogarth's series *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) an exotically dressed Black boy attends a young harlot and her older "keeper." [...] As a stranger in a strange land he recognizes what goes unnoticed by those to whom the immoral is so familiar that it appears normal.²³

Mungo frequently imagines himself, in Dabydeen's novel, as a Christ-figure; in line with the eighteenth-century artistic tradition, he is the moral norm to the immorality in English life. Dabydeen also fuses this with a notion of Mungo as the "blue god" Krishna, the god from Hindu tradition. Mungo serves the purpose of representing a number of different social roles in the art, as are demanded of him by different communities. The demands of representation spill beyond the bounds of what is possible for the individual to show. Just as Mungo feels that he cannot remember his own name or where he comes from, or what has happened to him, he also no longer has the language to describe those who demand representation. While the memory of "our village" momentarily "so revive our senses that speech returns, not in the grunting of whiteman but in the melody of our own language",²⁴ that moment passes, so that "only a broken foreign language is left to us".²⁵ Mungo's offer to describe the ghosts with "such pulchritude that the poets of England will cower at my eloquence" is responded to by the ghost Ellar with "Can't you talk words I know?"²⁶

Having migrated from Guyana to the United Kingdom at the age he did, Dabydeen differs from the other Black British authors discussed in this study because he can claim a more significant formative experience of life elsewhere. Where Phillips and Evaristo, in particular, locate the acceptance of diversity in the world through an acceptance of diversity in the self, Dabydeen struggles with the notion that the individual *can* be representative of multiple communities, instead placing particular emphasis upon a sense of his "otherness" in Britain which, one suspects, neither Phillips, Martin, nor Evaristo would feel completely comfortable with. He says: "I feel that I am different, not wholly, but sufficient for me to want to contemplate that which is other in me, that which owes its life to particular rituals of ancestry."²⁷

Dabydeen therefore expresses a specific concern about his role as a writer in Britain, and the relationship he has with Guyanese ancestral communities that he feels destined to misrepresent, simply because, while he is strongly motivated by the desire to preserve their speech, his own experience is something quite different from theirs. He has commented:

I cannot have nostalgia about my folk because they were born in dread and poverty. Nevertheless, I want to find the narratives. [...] There is a dialogue going on between myself and my dead grandmother, where she says to me: "You are just being stupid; you are just educated. We are not like texts waiting to be written by the children. We are dead and gone like dog bone and dry

well. We are nothing". [...] I am saying that it is almost a pity one has to write at all. I am almost saying that an immigrant in Britain lacks genuine audience. What is your audience? You don't have an audience in Guyana because you have moved away and are reconstructing Guyana fictionally, perhaps falsely, because of your absence from the place. You are forced to address the Whites, and you address them on issues that have to do with dispossession, and they are such personal experiences that to have the Whites consume them is painful and shameful. It is almost like saying, "I am naked before you".²⁸

Where Dabydeen uses the term "audience" here, I understand him to be referring to a community with which a writer can share a language, as in Wideman's case. Part of Dabydeen's ambition here is to "articulate in the local idiom the perceptions and dreams of the historically muted, that is, to express what 'they themselves cannot verbalize because of their lack of words'".²⁹ In Dabydeen's approach to telling the stories of communities he has known, he is faced with a similar dilemma to that expressed when Wideman has spoken of "my people", a "Black, economically depressed community in Pittsburgh [which is] suffering various forms of oppression and danger and pain". Dabydeen is preoccupied with the same question which Wideman has asked: "What's it mean to, in a sense, exploit [them] in a narrative or a poem?"³⁰ This dilemma arises from the radical discomfort of being an educated person of privilege, with access to tools of representation, who feels compelled to contribute in some way to the survival of stories, voices, and cultural forms which exist in contexts of underprivilege and underrepresentation. Wideman's approach is to turn toward what he recognizes as traditional African and African American ways of telling story, which occupy a vital yet beleaguered space within the American city. Dabydeen's quite different approach toward this comparable scenario reveals much about the key contrast documented throughout this study between African American and Black British approaches to the cultural memory of Africa.

Dabydeen claims to identify with African diaspora experience in a number of clearly distinct ways, thus underscoring the complex relationship between Indian, Caribbean, and African identities which his experience encapsulates, even before he locates his identity in relation to Britain. He explains in interview:

I encountered the slave past in two ways. One was just by growing up in a kind of plantation environment, where, whilst the African Guyanese no longer cut cane, they are there—in terms of being buried in the cane fields—there are Black ghosts, Black jumbies. So it's there because it's the cane

experience, it's the parent experience. But then also through study. I mean, my academic work has been on the eighteenth century which was the period of enslavement of Africans. So you recover the stories in the way that *Beloved* was triggered off by a story that Toni Morrison read about the killing of little children.³¹

Dabydeen's description here of his relation with an African inheritance gestures in interesting ways to the cultural flows of diaspora relationships—between Africa, the Caribbean, the USA, and the UK, which have become apparent throughout this book. While an African presence is described almost as preceding recorded memory in the cane fields of the Caribbean, that very presence is also one which is so much forgotten in British experience that it must be explicitly relearned through “academic work”. Dabydeen's last point, interestingly, is presented as a reading of an African American (Morrison's) approach to history, and yet it suggestively navigates one of the key differences which this study proposes between African American and Black British fiction: while Morrison does indeed claim that her novel *Beloved* arose from research, it is also very clearly a work in which the present is possessed by a known African American past, through which further knowledge of a cultural memory of Africa becomes discernible. Dabydeen's recovery of stories, I want to suggest in this chapter, comes about in a different way. A more urgent concern with the unrecorded and unverifiable nature of Britain's Black history (on British, Caribbean, and African soil), which as commented upon in Chaps. 6 and 7, treats the archive as a ruined space, a space of erasure and institutionalized forgetting. Even as Dabydeen appears to explain in clear terms the “two ways” in which he encounters a memory of African slavery, then, this is something of a trickster's representation, in which the diversity of the experiences he addresses spills beyond the bounds of the neat enumeration he provides us with. In *A Harlot's Progress*, Morrison's *Beloved* is again recalled, in passing, “I couldn't eat another thing”,³² suggesting the psychological trauma of memory which is not only unspeakable, but ultimately unthinkable.

TRUTH AND FORGETTING

As Mungo makes a show of searching for his memory of Africa, whether for the benefit of Mr. Pringle or for the voices of the past which assail him, differing versions of his foreign past emerge:

My father howled when he first set eyes on me, thinking that I was a harbinger of a new darkness, a new sterility.³³

It was mother, not my father, who, seeing my sex, wailed at my birth, a long and futile wailing.³⁴

It was Rima, not my mother or father, who greeted me to the new world with a long and futile wailing.³⁵

As he is thrown from encounter to encounter with London's high and low societies, and equally with varied Africas which bear uncertain hallmarks of either memory, dream, or invention, Mungo must ultimately respond that "I had many beginnings",³⁶ the novel representing a "constant re-invent[ion] or revis[ion of] his past and identity, so that no single legitimate version remains standing".³⁷ Dabydeen has said that the novel "is set in eighteenth century London but it's also set in an imagined Africa", and is really about "England *in relation* to Africa, India [and] the Caribbean".³⁸ Due to the entangled nature of relations between upper and lower classes, and between white British "natives" and African slaves and servants in eighteenth-century Britain, which Dabydeen explicates with great care throughout *A Harlot's Progress*, the novel presents a scenario in which stories of England and Africa which have long ago been decided, are seen to mirror each other in an extended creative invention which nevertheless produces new ways of situating the past, the present, and the future.

Among the memories of Africa which Mungo recounts, saying "Put this down in your book Mr Pringle, properize it in your best English",³⁹ is a narrative which appears at first barely contextualized or comprehensible, which frustrates and evades the demands of the Abolitionist narrative by raising more questions of interpretation than it provides answers or possibilities of truth: "What is the katran bush? It is the sleep in my eyes. It is the white slick on the face of Afric's land. [...] a boundary between our village and another, thick with mist."⁴⁰ Such descriptions contain a strong sense of referring to a world that the reader is somehow expected to know, but which can seem elusive. In fact in many ways the descriptions of a remembered or invented Africas in this novel refer to systems of association established in Dabydeen's earlier works, including *The Intended*, *Turner*, and *The Counting House*. The world which the reader senses may be beyond the pages of this novel can actually be found to be operating elsewhere within the realm of Dabydeen's imaginative schema.

In situating *A Harlot's Progress* in overt conversation with his own previously published poems and fiction, what Dabydeen does here is different

to Caryl Phillips's practice of using comparable narrative and structural techniques across various novels (such as *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River*, and *The Nature of Blood*). Dabydeen does not, in fact, repeat use of the same discursive tools in the self-referential patterns he builds up throughout his oeuvre, but rather continually revisits the trails of histories (and surely inventions) he has already told. This way of reinventing the past then both lends renewed interpretations to previously told stories, *and* grounds what can appear otherwise to be spurious and often outrageous imagination, in events which, crucially, may have happened before, in other tellings. There is a degree of delight in the irresponsibility of this practice, yet the referential parallels with Dabydeen's other works then counterbalance this by grounding a more complete understanding of the terms in which identity operate in the novel. The implication, then, is that "truth" can be deciphered, or felt, when there is a relation perceived between two concepts—whether either of those concepts is true, or even plausible, in the first place does not appear to be of relevance.

Mungo's description of his remembered Africa contains distinctive rewritings of similar passages from Dabydeen's own earlier works, thus situating this cultural memory as being created through what Wilson Harris has called "the unfinished genesis of the imagination". When the uncertain memory of Africa described here is read beside the setting which is seen in *The Intended*, and which is located, far more explicitly, as Guyana itself, a kind of uncanny doubling begins to appear. So at one moment Mungo remembers bullying Saba and taunting him with "Come to the katran bush with me"⁴¹:

Saba is before me but as a goat foreruns its keeper to a place of slaughter. He pauses slyly to look around for another route but there is none. He makes to turn back and bolt past me but I block him, I drive him to the katran bush. In a last panic he will try to rebel and charge at me, but words comes to my mind from somewhere strange and *I will brook no disobedience*, I am come armed with knives of stone.⁴²

In *The Intended*, another character Peter is "led [...] through the bush behind my grandmother's house"⁴³:

Now, as I saw Peter cowering before me I wanted to forgive him, to let him go, but found myself laughing at him instead. [...] It was the most natural thing in the world to hurt him. "I go tell all the other boys", I shouted in his

ears. He covered his face with his arms to hide the tears, "You're a fat, stupid, ugly, country coolie", I cursed, and picked up a stick to lash his head.⁴⁴

By engendering a kind of imagistic repetition across his works, in which the landscape and certain features of the action repeat themselves, so Mungo's "Africa" can also recall another memory, apparently, of Guyana, the land where Dabydeen grew up, but which he feels he lacks the ancestral language to represent. The same relationship is seen, then, between *Harlot* and Dabydeen's *The Counting House*, which is set in India, another of Dabydeen's ancestral homes, which it describes as follows:

Each village on the way looked like their own; a group of mudhuts set down in baked or waterlogged earth, each as paltry as his pile of coins. Goats wandered through the litter of excrement, rags, balls of straw, eating everything, even sniffing at the children put out to play in the dirt.⁴⁵

Again, this earlier imagined world seems to be recalled by the use of common descriptive elements in Mungo's memory of Africa, albeit in a tone of heightened irony regarding the embedded prejudices about Africa within which Mungo must speak:

I was, I believe, a normal malnourished child existing on an African diet of animal droppings⁴⁶

If the rains didn't come soon, Tanda would lose his goat to starvation. [...] Kaka looked at the goat chewing on its rope, its lips painfully dry, its side shrunk so deeply that its bones were nearly exposed.⁴⁷

If such descriptions partially satirize broad cultural prejudices about the base poverty of African and/or Indian experience, and their cultural "nullity",⁴⁸ they also draw attention to what *is* a historical nullity for Mungo because the colonial erasure of history has been effective. This practice of doubling memories of Guyana and of India with the notion of a remembered Africa parallels a process which Dabydeen describes as follows:

The potential that the past has [...] for throwing up a bewildering array of stories which deny and transcend that suffering and those grievances, [...] if you revisit that point through memory, you can choose through your imaginative penetration of the material: you can remember it in a different way, even though it never happened like that.⁴⁹

By choosing the point of entry into remembered or imagined pasts, Dabydeen openly revels in the risk of exploiting community through narrative, and chooses not to aim for faithful representation in any way. Because such representation is arguably impossible, he turns precisely to the creative imagination as a space of interplay between memory and forgetfulness from which new ways of remembering the past might occur.

A Harlot's Progress is thus a text which appears to have signifiers floating free of any moorings, but which in fact are connected with a tradition which is of Dabydeen's own making. This aesthetic approach parallels, in a sense, the discrepancy seen in Chap. 2, between Fredric Jameson's reading of Reed as historyless and Reed's use of a rich African diaspora tradition which Jameson does not see. African American and Black British traditions can be "unseen" within a hegemonic view, and even while African American tradition may be established in widespread diaspora practice, Black British tradition in contrast encapsulates qualities of reinvention. The relationship of both to hegemonic history bears testament to a Black "invisibility". The author's situating of his own fictional works as "archive", then, raises questions around whose imaginative work comes habitually to be read as "chronicle", and whose is merely invention.

UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS

This field of abstract cultural exchange within Dabydeen's own work also gestures toward another feature of Black British aesthetics which this novel might be seen to epitomize, which is the formation of cultural identity through the conversational. By this I mean to suggest the ways in which Black British writers locate themselves in relation to other Black British writers, by reading and responding to each other's work, but also, as Black British writing is a modest-sized literary scene, simply by socializing together. Dabydeen's novel evidences particular conversational relationships with Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (observed by Abigail Ward), with Laurence Scott's *Aelred's Sin*, which also features a protagonist named Mungo and comments on Joshua Reynolds,⁵⁰ as well as with S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World*. Indeed, Dabydeen has commented:

Steve Martin gave a talk at Warwick in 1999 in which he said reading my *Hogarth's Blacks* set him off writing *Incomparable World*. I then read his novel, got some good advice from him on eighteenth century texts and wrote *A Harlot's Progress*, which was certainly inspired by my friendship with Steve and my love of his novel.⁵¹

The influence of Martin's novel can be seen particularly in Dabydeen's descriptions of London (Martin's "suet puddings with lumps of fat as large as walnuts[,] pea soup, hot eels and sheep's trotters"⁵² become "Saloop, barley-broth, furmety, hot-pea-cods, oysters"⁵³ in Dabydeen). Observation of the ways in which these contemporary Black British texts have been shaped alongside each other, through a dialogic process of exchange of ideas, information, and technique between Black British writers whose work thrives from a *social* relationship with each other, situates Black British literature as engaged in the creation of its own tradition, through a process invoked by the helpful term "the unfinished conversation". If the relationship of Black British writing to African diaspora tradition is more complex than that situated by an African American aesthetics which frequently draws upon African diaspora spiritual practices which are extant at some level in community speech and popular artforms, Black British aesthetics is continually generated, drawing upon inheritances old and new, through a *conversational* dialectics.

Alongside the field of English visual art which this novel so obviously writes back to, in which Britain's relationship with its Black presence is situated either not at all, or in the margins of a white hegemony, Dabydeen also situates another kind of conversational relationship with Guyanese artist George Simon. Dabydeen refers in the novel's "Acknowledgements" to "Wilson Harris, George Simon and Pauline Melville for reminding me of Amerindian myth",⁵⁴ and Dabydeen's reference to Simon's work, and to the indigenous culture of Guyana, may do some of the work of "filling in" the visual memory which Dabydeen claims was absent in his experience of the Caribbean. Simon's artistic process is described as

one of continuous layering and re-layering of transparent films of paint and differing textures onto the canvas, and with the breaking down and re-constituting of these surface tensions, gradually images emerge. Simon then focuses on certain sections with a loosely constructed, semi-abstract composition which may be wiped away, or eventually reformed into another image.⁵⁵

Simon himself has explained: "I have great faith in the subconscious. So I would let the paint remain on the canvas and look at it and gradually images come out and I would develop those images."⁵⁶ Simon's style of painting appears to invoke the quality greatly admired by Dabydeen in a commentary on the work of Paul Klee:

[H]e can invest a small, flat piece of paper or canvas with a kind of a depth you believe is impossible. What I find absolutely fascinating is the way he layers images upon images upon images. It becomes like a *palimpsest*. And how he could do that with a piece of paper, I just find stunning—I remember leaving the Paul Klee museum and thinking, “If I could write as Paul Klee paints, then I would be a great writer”. If you could find a form of writing which is layered, endlessly layered, and yet have a kind of narrative thread, or a set of discernible, readable stories, then that would be a triumph.⁵⁷

Simon’s work is centrally concerned with Amerindian myth, and he is also credited by Pauline Melville in her novel *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*, suggesting a conversational relationship which is contributing something vital to a contemporary engagement with traditional myth, in both Guyanese and British contexts. While it is likely that the layering of multiple stories of cultural memory, dream, and desire which is evident in Dabydeen’s novel is indeed inspired partly by Simon, there is also a specific context of Amerindian tradition which Simon and Dabydeen both reference. In his painting, Fiona Saffron Wilkes explains, Simon:

[d]raw[s] from Waiwai cosmology, a cassava griddle, *erepó*, occupies the sky, and refers to a “big bake stone or great cassava pan”, and is a derivative of *Erepóimo*, the Father of all Fish, an anaconda spirit “boasting a thick body and short tail”.⁵⁸ Formed from five layers, Waiwai cosmology is characterised by particular ancestral spirits and humans residing in each plane, within which the Waiwai belied that the sky (original idea of heaven) took the form of a large rock, shaped like a griddle, resting on three upright rocks (pot rest), and that celestial water fell through the holes in this griddle, and subsequent floods were the work of anaconda spirits spitting out water and vomiting flood waters abounding with fish.⁵⁹

Fiona Darroch remarks that “Manu, a name Dabydeen ‘plucked out from memory’, slipped into [...] recent works *Turner* and *A Harlot’s Progress* as a slave drowned after being thrown overboard the painter Turner’s famous slave ship. However, Manu is also the law-giver and god of deluge in Vedic scriptures [...]; Hindu mythology merges seamlessly with the Middle Passage of African slavery”.⁶⁰ Evidently, as Manu “disappears into the sea”,⁶¹ in *A Harlot’s Progress*, and then returns, “opens his mouth [and] Instead of words, fish tumble out, gorgeous and bizarre and dreadful in shape and hue”,⁶² the figure from Hindu mythology also becomes fused in Dabydeen’s creative scheme with the WaiWai *Erepóimo*. While Dabydeen

may be inspired by George Simon's creative method, then, he also draws from the cultural contexts Simon illustrates, and layers these in turn, in his own palimpsestic creation. This method may at first appear astonishing not only in the complexity of its derivations, but in the ways in which it leaves trails back to various cultural memories which the interested reader can follow. It is also, however, quite logical that as the Caribbean visual field, as Dabydeen says, was so dominated by English art as to create a silence around any other cultural memory, that a position which might try to counteract that would lead to a burden of representation, a need to say it all, and thus a practice of multiple layering of stories. Dabydeen comes to this "palimpsestic" approach toward the cultural memory of Africa by way of an almost irreconcilable struggle with the responsibility of representing the histories of voiceless communities, until the struggle to tell any story in a way that does it justice, gives way to a choice to tell *all* the stories, all the fantasies, all the dreams of Africa, and thus to create a total plenitude *and* erasure of meaning within cultural memory. The palimpsest contains both a profusion of narrative, and a complete erasure or blankness—two qualities which may appear to be conflicting, but which are in fact compatible, and which encourage a tremendous freedom in the approach toward creativity, eventually leading to a discovery of a relationship with the historical past.

As stories proliferate, then, Dabydeen's approach to narrating forgotten pasts, in contrast to African American ways of connecting with community speech and known traditions, is described, perhaps unexpectedly, as a kind of "creative amnesia". "Instead of attempts of a 'truthful' recovery of history, Dabydeen champions what he calls the politics of 'creative amnesia', a term indebted to Derek Walcott. [...] This state is not conceived of as extending beyond the realm of the artistic, and will thus always be temporary in nature. [...] Still, this temporary state harbours massive transfigurative potential in the individual perception of the past."⁶³ This term, which Dabydeen borrows from Derek Walcott, denotes an approach toward historiography which recognizes the kinds of difficulties negotiated by the practice of attempting to tell the stories of those whom history has forgotten, and whose very language is unknown and unspoken about in a British hegemonic experience. Dabydeen explains:

Creative amnesia means the desire to forget. [...] It is a sense of restlessness in yourself, of knowing that you never know what you are at any one stage. Therefore it is best just to envelope yourself in a kind of total forgetfulness out of which something might emerge.⁶⁴

This is also an idea gestured to by Heidegger when he writes that “[f]orgetting is not nothing, nor is it just a failure to remember; it is rather a ‘positive’ ecstatic mode of one’s having been—a mode with a character of its own”.⁶⁵ Creative amnesia may be understood to manifest as a state of storytelling which can emerge in place of a secure sense of belonging to tradition, and in this context its reach toward the practice of invention is also a form of revelry in individuality and idiosyncrasy. So Dabydeen’s novel sees the representation of “the harlot Moll Hackabout”⁶⁶ bleed into representations of a whole host of other female figures, for instance, as it is claimed that a remembered African woman Rima “was not my mother” and yet “was all my mothers”,⁶⁷ while Betty, a “simple unschooled English washerwoman”,⁶⁸ and Ellar, the ghost of an exterminated African tribe, all come to merge⁶⁹ into a figure representative of multiple past realities, in which a terror of being “banished to the wilderness” of forgetfulness is nevertheless a shared concern. Mungo says, “I mix her face up”,⁷⁰ and if the memories of diverse settings cannot be faithfully recalled each in their own right, they are brought into artistic alignment with each other to reflect alternative possibilities for identity. We will recognize here from Chap. 7 the contours of a historicity created via imaginative invention as the only appropriate, or the only available, response to the partially archived history of Black Britain, which can only ever provide an incomplete explanation of the past.

What is particularly distinctive about the practice of creative amnesia, and its relevance for a writer in Dabydeen’s position, is that it encapsulates a mode in which history itself is invoked by creativity. For Dabydeen who resides in an uncertain relationship with tradition, this capacity for the individual imagination to help to create history (as indeed was also discussed in Chap. 7) introduces the possibility for whole new realms of identity. What happens to the “signifying chain” in this scenario (to borrow Fredric Jameson’s term) is that rather than the past being continuous with, and offering itself up easily to, the present of narration, the past (in the case of Black Britain) is closed—it is a narrative which the writer cannot necessarily engage with. With the function of creative amnesia, he has the present and the future at his disposal, he can shape and influence these, and they in turn may bring a different inflection to the past. Interestingly, then, Dabydeen has commented that *Harlot* is “a novel by Equiano”, that “Equiano is somebody who has definitely entered into my writing, almost like a posthumous spirit or a posthumous presence.”⁷¹ Jan Verwoert comments that “in the relationship with a spectre and the one who invokes it,

who controls whom will always remain dangerously ambiguous and the subject of practical struggle". Citing Derrida, Verwoert continues: "The task is to 'learn to live *with* ghosts' and this means to learn 'how to let them speak or how to give them back speech' by approaching them in a determined way that still remains undetermined enough to allow them to present themselves."⁷² Both of these suggestive quotations present the notion that the past is dead, finished, and does not speak of its own accord, that the writer, entering into the process of creative amnesia, performs a functional role, with his own unique individuality, of allowing the past to perform anew. This, as I have argued throughout this work, presents a radical contrast with the possibilities of spirit-possession which can be read in African American literature.

What then emerges from this process of creative amnesia is an excess of parallels, and an excess of signification, in which, eventually, the inconclusively remembered Africa, and England itself, begin to mirror one another. So the "katran bush" which is initially signified as a "boundary" where "no one is permitted to walk",⁷³ and appears in its first manifestation to be remembered from a childhood Africa, returns in the novel in transmuted ways in the home of Lord Montague, in whose servitude Mungo lives in London:

Everything in his household was marked by a quiet efficiency. [...] And I was glad for such ambience, after a lifetime of screeching from Rima, sobbing from Betty, and especially the vulgar and chaotic interruptions in my inner-ear by Tanda, Kaka, Ellar and the rest, tormenting me with either descriptions of a devastated past or else with prospects of return to the innocence which was our village. In the [time] I spent in Lord Montague's household they never once appeared; as if they knew [...] the rules of England's decorum: that as lesser beings they must never trespass on noble ground, ground that was forbidden by ancient and venerable rules of social behaviour as our katran bush was forbidden by dark superstition.⁷⁴

In the drawing of such parallels, England and its "ancient" past, purportedly represented by its nobility and its impenetrable social strata, is related explicitly to a barely known African cultural code which imposes similar restrictions upon the connection to cultural memory. The African and the English working class are also drawn into parallel with each other: "See, we are one and yet not one? [...] Colour divides us though we meet."⁷⁵ Interestingly, the figure of a "blue god" functions as a sign of sacredness

which overlaps across all of the cultures referenced, potentially invoking Mungo himself, as a “blue-Black” African, Krishna of Hindu tradition, the English painting of Gainsborough’s “blue boy”, and Jesus dressed in blue robes. Englishness then parallels Africanness, and the English also are engaged in a process of mourning for a lost homeland, with the advent of industrialization. The parallels which emerge between these settings have nothing to do then with connecting to any African tradition of “possession”, and everything to do instead, with establishing new creative schemes based on the material of the past from which the locus for an improvised identity can emerge. The Black British writer here is not bearing witness to a past which can “possess” the textual present through deferral to traditional processes implicitly known within African American communities. Dabydeen here is asserting a powerful, almost unashamed, and yet entirely necessary, role for the Black British writer, who must reach toward future, imaginative possibilities for identity in order to invoke the buried possibilities of the past.

ADVERSARIAL TWINSHIP AND THE GENESIS OF THE IMAGINATION

Using a principle which borrows from Wilson Harris’s notion of “adversarial twinship”, Dabydeen allows the memory of Africa, in this novel, to mirror what is figured as a memory of Englishness, and to offer creative possibilities, in this way, for understanding all of the pasts which are implied in the dynamic, as well as understanding the potential of the present and the future. Adversarial twinship refers to Harris’s “conviction that ‘adversarial contexts’ (the encounter of inimical cultures) can generate creativity”,⁷⁶ and is a process which begins to allow diverse historical experiences to parallel one another: “Wilson Harris deploys adversarial twinning as means of transfiguring catastrophic experience into creative potential.”⁷⁷ This story which takes place on the brink of the Industrial Revolution positions instead a history where the pastoral myth of Englishness is exploded for the upper classes by the knowledge of England’s dependence on the trade in human cargo. Similarly, if Africans are shown to have been wrenched away from their African land, the relationship which the English lower classes have with the land is also interrupted by industrialization and the move to the city. The move from rural to urban settings, rather than occasioning any steady move up the social scale, introduces a shock encounter with the turbulent social order of eighteenth-century London

we have already seen in Martin's work, where the move may just as quickly be down as up, and the white and Black poor are equally expendable.

There is a relation in the unfinished genesis of the imagination, to the rhetorical gesture observed in Martin's novel in Chap. 7, of drawing a live story from a dead one. Dabydeen, similarly, draws "imaginary" parallels, thus reaching back into "dead" stories to create living ones from them—so invocation as a practice comes from the future to the present to the past. Ultimately, then,

sudden realisation that words and images, as arbitrarily construed they may be, produce unsuspected effects and affects in the real world that could be said to mark the momentum of the 1990s. A key consequence of this momentum is the shift in the critical discourse away from a primary focus on the arbitrary and constructed character of the linguistic sign towards a desire to understand the *performativity* of language and grasp precisely how things are done with words, that is, how language through its power of injunction enforces the meaning of what it spells out and, like a spell placed on a person, binds that person to execute what it commands.⁷⁸

Through creative amnesia, Dabydeen's performative language, entirely arbitrarily located in relation to tradition, also parallels Walcott's notion of a "Caribbean [...] place without history [which] offers a place to begin. [...] It is not history itself that is the goal; creativity is, and history is its inevitable result. That is to say: creative interventions make history".⁷⁹

As a result of having retained a sense of the burden of responsibility to ancestral communities, even as that burden is transcended and returned to via creative amnesia, there is a very sad tone to the endgame of this novel, in contrast to the other Black British novels discussed here which end with a tone of exhilaration and a claiming of individual freedom (however provisional). Dabydeen serves as a reminder that the Black British situation encompasses remembered migratory communities as well as forgotten ones, and where they are remembered, the "burden of representation" model becomes more relevant than ever. In the end, Moll, whom our protagonist has renamed Ceres, becomes the focus of a creative turn which recalls Niels Fock's description of the practice of the WaiWai people whose treatment of ghosts includes the practice of deadbodies being stripped by a medicine man to bring them back to life.⁸⁰ In the novel, ghosts appear, but it is Lady Montague who is stripped and treated by a quack doctor Mr. Gideon, who "unbuttons her smock to inspect the coloration of her skin"⁸¹ (among other scandalous forms of examination), and yet in "Mr

Hogarth's art", it is Ceres who "stripped or was stripped in ways so ingenious that no caption could distract the curious eye".⁸² The narrative of Hogarth's art is not kind either to Mungo:

[A]s to me, Mr Hogarth lied too. [...] a New World Negro is what I craved to be, but the glimpse he offered of me was as servant to Moll and to the oldest profession. [...] Mr Hogarth's prints will last forever. Centuries from now, when your descendants think of a Negro, they will think of a pimp, pickpocket, purveyor of filth.⁸³

With this commentary on the criminalization of Blackness, what is invoked is what Paul Gilroy describes as "one of the definitive characteristics of contemporary racism [...] its capacity first to define Blacks in the problem/victim couplet and then expel them from historical being altogether, [so that] anti-racism must be able to respond by revealing and restoring the historical dimensions of Black life in this country".⁸⁴ A hegemony which is racist, then, in Gilroy's view as well as in Dabydeen's, is one which represents a history closed to interrogation. As strange as the concept of "creative amnesia" might at first appear, it is ultimately, to Dabydeen, the only way to insert dialogic questioning into such hegemony, and thus, perhaps, one of the few discursive options open to combating racism in Britain.

NOTES

1. David Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, London: Random House, 1999), 1, 8.
2. Ibid., 4.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 6.
5. Ibid., 7.
6. Ibid., 5.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Ibid., 2.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 24.
11. Ibid., 60.
12. Ibid., 27.
13. Ibid., 102.
14. Ibid., 7.
15. Ibid., 6.

16. James Procter, "General introduction: 1948/1998 Periodising postwar Black Britain," in *Writing Black Britain, 1948–1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Procter, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–12.
17. Ibid.
18. Asako Nakai, "Autobiography of the Other: David Dabydeen and the Imagination of Slavery," *Postcolonial Text*, Vol 6, No 2 (2011): 3. At <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewFile/1257/1167>
19. Abigail Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar: Representations of Slavery*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 127.
20. Mark Stein, "Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature," *Kunapipi*, 20.2 (1998): 80.
21. Kevin Grant, *The Art of David Dabydeen*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1997), 163.
22. David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art*, (Munderstrup DK: Dangaroo Press, 1985), 9. Citing *History Today*, Sept. 1981. Even despite Dabydeen's comprehensive study of significance of Hogarth's Blacks, Christine Riding, curator of the 2007 Tate exhibition on Hogarth, comments that Yinka Shonibare's set of photographs responds to Hogarth's "anonymous" Blacks.
23. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 280–282.
24. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 98–99.
25. Ibid., 100.
26. Ibid., 118–119.
27. David Dabydeen, "On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today," in *Tibisiri*, ed. Maggie Butcher (Munderstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1989), 134.
28. Wolfgang Binder, "Interview with David Dabydeen, 1989," in *The Art of David Dabydeen*, ed. Grant, 172.
29. Grant, *The Art of David Dabydeen*. 53.
30. Renée Olander, "An Interview with John Edgar Wideman," in *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, edited by Bonnie TuSmith, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998,) 166. Reprinted from *AWP Chronicle* 29.3 (December 1996): 1–8.
31. Kwame Dawes, "Interview with David Dabydeen, 1994," In *The Art of David Dabydeen*, ed. Grant. 201.
32. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 141.
33. Ibid., 33.
34. Ibid., 39.
35. Ibid., 42.
36. Ibid., 27.

37. Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 144.
38. Mark Stein, "David Dabydeen talks to Mark Stein," *Wasafiri* no 29 (Spring 1999): 28. My emphasis.
39. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 11.
40. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
41. *Ibid.*, 14.
42. *Ibid.*
43. David Dabydeen, *The Intended*, (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2005 [1991]), 158–59.
44. *Ibid.*, 111.
45. David Dabydeen, *The Counting House*, (London: Vintage, 1997 [1996]), 4.
46. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 27.
47. *Ibid.*, 86–87.
48. Keith Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables and Gothic Tales*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004 [2002].)
49. Dabydeen in Lars Eckstein, 158: "Getting Back to the Idea of Art as Art: An Interview with David Dabydeen," *World Literature Written in English* 39.1 (2001), 27–36:35.
50. This was pointed out to me by Zoran Pecic.
51. In personal communication, e-mail July 27, 2005.
52. S.I. Martin, *Incomparable World*, (London: Quartet Books, 1996), 2.
53. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 159.
54. *Ibid.*, 282.
55. Fiona Saffron Wilkes, *Guyanese Amerindian Art: Imagery, Identity & Memory*, (dissertation, University College London, 2002), 257–264.
56. George Simon, "Art Looking Inland: George Simon Talks to Anne Walmsley" *Kyk-Over-Al*. 46/47. (December 1995): 67–76. Retrieved August 14, 2012.
57. Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 148.
58. Niels Fock, *Waiwai: Religion and Society of an Amazonian Tribe* (Copenhagen: The National Museum, 1963), 32.
59. Wilkes, *Guyanese Amerindian Art*, 296–301.
60. Fiona Darroch, *Memory and Myth: Postcolonial Religion in Contemporary Guyanese Fiction and Poetry*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 138. Citing Kwame Dawes, "Interview with David Dabydeen, 1994", 204. Details here: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=jdWs3B-emegC&pg=PA138&lpg=PA138&dq=dabydeen+turner+manu&source=bl&ots=niT1x0RBt5&sig=FNmtocHmifCYvwUv_aJvhXzZWK4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi5mIuBtDLAhWETHQKHUi4Bd4Q6AEILzAD#v=onepage&q=dabydeen%20turner%20manu&f=false

61. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 95.
62. Ibid., 97.
63. Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 163.
64. Heike Härting and Tobias Döring, "Amphibian Hermaphrodites: A Dialogue with Marina Warner and David Dabydeen," *Third Text*, 30 (Spring 1995): 39–45.
65. Nicomedes Suaárez-Arauúz, *The Amnesia Manifesto*, republished in *The Stiffest of the Corpse*, ed. Andrei Codrescu, (New York: City Lights Books, 1989).
66. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 4.
67. Ibid., 41, 45.
68. Ibid., 108.
69. Ibid., 136.
70. Ibid., 12.
71. Stein, "David Dabydeen talks to Mark Stein," 29.
72. JanVerwoert, "Apropos Appropriation: Why Stealing Images Feels Different Today," *Tate Triennial 2006: New British Art*, edited by Beatrix Ruf and Clarie Wallis. 14–21. London: Tate Publishing, 2006.
73. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 12.
74. Ibid., 176.
75. Ibid., 108.
76. Hena Maes-Jelinek, "Dream, Psyche, Genesis: The Works of Wilson Harris," at <http://www.ulg.ac.be/facphl/uer/d-german/L3/whlife.html>
77. A.J.M. Bundy, "Appendix—El Dorado and the Grail Legend: a memorandum with references to Wilson Harris's fiction," in "Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination A.J.M. Bundy," (London: Routledge, 1999), 263.
78. Verwoert, 'Apropos Appropriation', 19–20.
79. Falk, *Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera, and David Dabydeen*. (Dissertation, Karlstad University Studies, 2007). At <http://www.divaportal.se/smash/get/diva2:6399/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
80. Fock, *Waiwai*, 82–4.
81. Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*, 232.
82. Ibid., 275.
83. Ibid., 273.
84. Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, (London: Routledge), 18.

Conclusion

Examining the cultural memory of Africa as it appears in African American and Black British fiction reveals a number of common interrogatory touchstones, and situates particular concerns with the negotiation of multiple and heterogeneous pasts, through dynamic interplay between community and tradition, individualism and improvisation. Through sustained argument and close critical readings, this book has shown how selected African American and Black British literatures can be seen to approach comparable questions of racism, nationhood, and tradition by either invoking or evoking a cultural memory of Africa. Through diverse dramatizations of the time of narrative language, the samples of African American literature read here associate the cultural memory of Africa with contexts offered by notions of belonging to a broad African diaspora tradition which has an established, yet fluid and flexible, set of coordinates. The Black British fictions discussed here, instead, associate a cultural memory of Africa with various closed stories, situated in the realms either of British imperialism or African American spectacular culture itself, and generate new ideas about Africanness with the freedom associated with individualistic performance. These contrasting sites for cultural identity are brought to life through this study's attentive readings of the dramatic time inhabited by narrative. Whether the present is ever connected to the past through narratives of

possession, or moves toward the future by gesturing to the performative dimensions of narration, African American and Black British fictions offer diverse and useful templates for the negotiation of the complex modes of *being contemporary*.

In the contemporary era of information saturation, dominated by speed and the overwhelmingly arbitrary nature of the digital landscape, I conclude this study by suggesting that the insight into the relationship between narrative pasts, presents, and futures, which emerges from comparative readings of African American and Black British writing, has clear and profound consequences for debates which frame the role of historical memory in the African diaspora, as well as for the nature of identity, and its relationship to tradition, in the contemporary moment. Whether the cultural memory of Africa is addressed in the remembered tradition of African pasts, or whether it forms part of the inventiveness of the individual imagination, it speaks strongly to questions of historical returns and haunting which characterize the contemporary.

The contemporary period is usually thought of as dating from around 1990 to the present day, and as Giorgio Agamben comments, “‘contemporariness’ with respect to the present” is defined precisely by “disconnection and [temporal] out-of-jointness”.¹ A number of commentators have diagnosed the nature of contemporaneity as bearing hallmarks of the “uncanny”, which as a concept configures the sense that, as Sigmund Freud described it, “a hidden, familiar thing [...] has undergone repression and then emerged from it”.² The experience of the uncanny encompasses a sense of temporal disjuncture where the familiar is perceived to have disappeared and reappeared; part of the definition of the uncanny is therefore that it “holds diverse times together”, and because the contemporary has been exemplified by a particular sense of repressed histories “returning”, following the time of postmodernism when history was felt to have died,³ the contemporary involves uncanny forms of memory where familiar, sometimes even conventional, histories are evoked, but in unfamiliar or almost inassimilable ways. This way of thinking of the past as having disappeared and reappeared is particularly appropriate to a diaspora sensibility, where temporal distance from the past is frequently cross-hatched with imperialist suppression of history, as well as with ideas about distance and alienation from ancestral “homelands”. In Stuart Hall’s words:

[T]he truly traumatic character of “the colonial experience” [is felt in] the ways we have been positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of

representation [which] had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as “other”. [...] [H]istories have their real, material, and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But this is no longer a simple, factual “past”, since our relation to it is, like the child’s relation to the mother, always-already “after the break”. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth”.⁴

If this book has shown anything, it is that African American and Black British literatures present contrasting paradigms for approaching the practice of “being contemporary”, and that reading the cultural memory of Africa as it enlivens these literatures offers a window onto an ontological experience of time in which the past that “speaks” in the present can be understood to do so, either refracted through the lens of specific traditions, or, indeed, in ways which account for traditions and yet move beyond them. Though the cultural memory of Africa is not always framed as spirit-possession in these literatures, and equally, spirit-possession does not always reference the cultural memory of Africa, in the contemporary time it is important to note the flexibility of this practice and its application, that “spirit possession is not [just] a premodern or ‘traditional’ phenomenon”,⁵ but that it is relevant to contemporary ways of engaging with “returning” pasts. As diverse known and unknown pasts can inhabit the present, either through encounters with living community languages which enrich African American literature, or through individualized negotiations of the cultures of the world as they shape Black British identity, the contemporary can be seen as a moment in which the important negotiations with tradition that are witnessed in these American and British literary moments can model the practice of living with the past and the present in ways which are applicable to anyone.

If, as Agamben comments, “the contemporary [person] is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time”,⁶ for the African diaspora writer, this “darkness” can be interpreted as referring literally to the silenced histories of colonialism, and it is that voyage into history’s darkneses, or traumatized silences, which creates the temporal narrative “break” which so complicates the narration of the cultural memory of Africa in these fictions. The uncanniness of trying to narrate a biography with multiple and uneven geographical provenances, uncertain settlement, and unknown and unimaginable future trajectories brings to mind the urgency of the contemporary, what Agamben has called “a ‘too soon’ that is also a ‘not yet’”,⁷ and offers a reason why

diaspora itself, and the uneven, disconnected experience of historical time it implies, is a good way to read the practice of being contemporary. Yet the contemporary also sees the changing face of Black America—with an African American in the White House (at the time of going to press) who traces his lineage not specifically to the transatlantic slave experience, or to the “Great Migration” from South to North, but instead to a Black Kenyan father and a white Irish-American mother, and an upbringing neither in the South nor on Northern city streets, but on the islands of Hawaii and Indonesia, framing African American experience around the cultural memory of which invokes the Middle Passage is clearly not the only story to be told. As African American identity is now more and more commonly thought of as diversifying beyond such frameworks, so as to also include recent African immigrants to the United States, Kamari Clarke argues that

diaspora is being invoked as a statement of inclusion as a result of a new and significant migration pattern that has actually led to the changing face of the American academy, one in which first-generation American sons and daughters of African immigrants are entering American university and community colleges alongside second- and third-generation Caribbean Blacks, as well as sixth- and seventh-generation American Blacks. These patterns of integration and participation highlight the changing face of African American membership and the necessary reconceptualisations of the use-value of the African diaspora. For what we are seeing is a certain diasporic formation that has its roots in very different paths of linkage and engagements with Africa but that come together within the spectre of contemporary capitalist plunder in a post-cold war era.⁸

While it is true that the face of Black America is changing, and that the use of the cultural memory of Africa in African American culture will no doubt differentiate according to the diverse strands which live under the sign of “Blackness” (perhaps even in ways more similar to the trajectory of Black British cultural memory of Africa which has been described in this book), nevertheless the sign of imperialism in all of these arcs of culture remains more relevant than ever in uniting the concerns of different subject-positions as they approach a concern with Africa. There is a particular hope that is presented in this discussion of the cultural memory of Africa in two very different settings (which are each in their own right extremely diverse). In the two important paradigms examined here, there are two useful possibilities to consider for the use of tradition in the quest for living at ease with our cultural inheritance in the contemporary time.

Wherever and however we live, African American literature presents us with the possibility of embracing tradition, and acknowledging its potentially fluid and humane function throughout cultural history, in order to learn to live with acceptance of difference. Black British literature, on the other hand, models ways of using and adapting tradition, recognizing its limits and having the courage to speak beyond those limits in articulating our individuality. Both of these possibilities display a great tolerance toward notions of community, as well as choices for those whose reach for full expression of the self cannot be held within the bounds of the community they experience. Reading African American and Black British literature, then, can be profoundly useful for *anyone* seeking to articulate cultural identity in the twenty-first century.

On a final, slightly irreverent note, it has not escaped my notice during the period of researching this book that in the emerging body of resources which compare African American and Black British cultural identity and experience in the wake of the Black Power era, there is a language and style epitomized by an African American activist tradition which is inherently attractive and exciting to Black British writers, which inspires an assertion of the value of Blackness, but which also sometimes leaves Black Britons at something of a loss, because the parameters which appear to define African American Blackness do not speak to a British lived experience. Black British poet SuAndi puts this anachronism in striking terms: “In America there were people who seemed to live out their lives on stoops, de-stringing green beans as all those magnificent heroes of the Black Power and Civil Rights Movement popped by to chat—*words that only grown ups got a right to listen to.*” She goes on, saying “my growing-up days had only seen my mother stooped over a kitchen sink trying to make boiled potatoes interesting”.⁹ With her poetic play upon the perceived romance of American “stoops”, versus the far less glamorous British “stooping”, and her wistful evocation of African American “grown ups” to the Black British “growing-up”, SuAndi makes a point about the kind of attractiveness of African American community experience, learned in Britain no doubt largely from the spectacular media culture of the 1960s and 1970s, but also from a rich African American literary tradition. SuAndi’s comments also point to the perceived vibrancy of an outdoor social life, whether characterizing American fields or city streets, which is very different to the ways in which many Black British writers of this generation grew

up—sometimes (though not always) isolated within the British suburban home, discovering their Blackness behind closed doors.

These combined dynamics of an African American cultural influence which was extraordinarily powerful, yet which sometimes failed to resonate, repeatedly raise quite comic anachronisms. Stephen Tuck writes:

American Black Power's calls for Black community control, cultural nationalism, and armed self-defense were somewhat lost in translation because non-white Britons represented less than 3 percent of the population, half were from Asia with their own long-established cultural traditions, and virtually none owned guns.¹⁰

Lord Taylor of Warwick makes the following, bittersweet comment:

Many of my positive Black role models came from *Ebony*—people like Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, Jesse Jackson, Quincy Jones. [...] That encouraged me, because I could see that there were and are successful Black people. That was the sweet part of it. The sad part of it was they were all American. They were untouchable in that sense.¹¹

Sharae Deckard notes another example:

On 5 December 1964 Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., visited London en route to Stockholm. [...] Dr King urged [...] representatives to publicize Britain's deteriorating racial relations and employ non-violent strategies of direct action to combat discrimination. [...] However, Britain lacked a tradition of philosophically driven direct action such as existed in the southern churches of the United States. [...] As Farrukh D[h]ondy states, British Black Power leaders preached apocalyptic US rhetoric: "When the time comes we have to organise.' We thought the time had come but nobody was offering us an organisation to join."¹²

As Mike Phillips writes, this "concept of Blackness [which] has roots in the experience of the Civil Rights struggle in the USA [contributes to] a notion which has been partly constructed in Britain, but not for Britain".¹³ This sense of an image of "Blackness" received from the USA, managed in Britain, but not wholly satisfactory for the British experience, occurs in the context of a tendency in Black British writing which is, in general, this study shows, thoroughly preoccupied with the need to adopt and adapt diverse cultural inheritances in order to fit what is frequently presented as a

quite individualized experience. The laughable sense of anachronism which flies up from a comment such as Dhondy's is testament to the depth of the contrast which emerges between the historical African American and Black British experiences, and which means that even as African American performances of Black identity may be inherently attractive to Black Britons, they simply fail to communicate in such a way that wholly fits the British situation. The same is seen, memorably, in Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending* which opens with protagonist Moses in bemused confrontation with his friend Galahad, who is preaching Black Power:

"It is good for Our People to make progress. But you must not forget the struggle."

"I'm glad you appreciate that I struggled to get where I am," I say.

"Not that struggle," he wave my words away. "I mean *the* struggle [...]. The revolution has come. At last the Black man is coming into his own."

"Exactly," I say. "I am coming into my own, and I just want to be left in peace."¹⁴

My intention is not to suggest that Black Britain lacked a tradition, indeed "British immigrants had plenty of other examples of protest from around the world to draw from, not to mention a tradition of protest of their own."¹⁵ Black Britain's traditions were diverse, and its approaches toward the use of tradition, rather than relying upon what was established in community and in shared artforms in the United States, instead found what was of value from various traditions, in the construction of a *usable past*.

It is a feature, no doubt, of both the spectacular nature of US Black Power, and the consistent erasure in Britain of the history of the Black presence, that leads Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd, curator of a 1997 exhibition in New York, of Black artists working in Britain, to comment that

there remains, here in North America, a tremendous lack of knowledge about the history of people of color living in Britain, and hence a particular unfamiliarity with visual artists living and working in England. [...] My [...] discussions with other Americans about my ideas for this project were often met with the following recurrent and resounding question: "Are there many Black people in England?"¹⁶

Alan Rice accuses film director Spike Lee of “willful ignorance” for his rhetorical question “How many years have Black people been here? Fifty?”, and cites Tara Mack’s disingenuous comment that “[i]t always amazes me how much Black people in Britain seem to know about and identify with Black Americans. Sometimes I want to say, you do realise that Black Americans are barely aware you exist”.¹⁷ If it is possible that the role of neo-imperialism, as well as the unprecedented patterns of migration which shape Black identity in the US today may lend complexity to the ways in which Africa and Africanness is invoked as part of contemporary US-based formations of Black identity, the hope remains that a vital Black British literature, and the pressure it consistently applies for the remembrance of a Black British past, might raise the specter of Britain’s intimate relationship with Africa at the heart of what constitutes Britishness today.

NOTES

1. Giorgio Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?” in *What is an Apparatus? And other Essays*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 40.
2. Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, (1919) 217–256, at http://layoffthel-and.net/archive/ART6933-2012/weeks6-12/Freud_TheUncanny.pdf
3. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. (New York: Free Press, 1992).
4. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, in Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, Ruth H. Lindeborg (eds.), *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 213.
5. Heike Behrend and Ute Luig, introduction to *Spirit Possession: Modernity & Power in Africa*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), xiv.
6. Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?”, 45.
7. *Ibid.*, 47.
8. Kamari Maxine Clarke, “New Spheres of Transnational Formations: Mobilizations of Humanitarian Diasporas,” *Transforming Anthropology*, vol 18, no 1, (2010): 58–59.
9. SuAndi, “Cultural Memory and Today’s Black British Poets and Live Artists,” in *“Black” British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 32.
10. Stephen Tuck and Robin Kelley, eds., *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 184–185.
11. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “A Reporter At Large: Black London,” in *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu (London:

- Routledge, 2000), 179. Reprinted from *The New Yorker* (April 28 & May 6, 1997).
12. Sharae Deckard, "United States of America, Britain, and the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, ed. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 496–97.
 13. Mike Phillips, *London Crossings: A Biography of Black Britain* (London: Continuum, 2001), 143.
 14. Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1984 [1975]), 11–12.
 15. Tuck, *The Other Special Relationship*, 184.
 16. Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd, introduction to *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian & Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966–1996*, ed. Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd, (New York: The Franklin H. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute, 1997), 12.
 17. Alan Rice, "'Heroes across the Sea': Black and White British Fascination with African Americans in the Contemporary Black British Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Jackie Kay", in *Blackening Europe: The African-American Presence*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez (New York: Routledge, 2004), 217.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott, Ruth, and Ira Simmons. 1995. An Interview with Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 74–95. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 2009. What is the Contemporary? In *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Akomfrah, John. 2013. *The Unfinished Conversation*. London: Autograph ABP.
- Anderson, Harlene. 1997. Self, Narrative Identity and Agency. In *Conversations, Language and Possibilities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Anderson, John, and Hilary Hevenor. 1987. *Burning Down the House: MOVE and the Tragedy of Philadelphia*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Angelo, Anne-Marie. 2009. The Black Panthers in London, 1967–1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic. *Radical History Review* 2009(103): 17–35.
- Anim-Addo, Joan. *Touching the Body: History, Language and African-Caribbean Women's Writing*. London: Mango Publishing, 2007.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. eds. 1999. Tuskegee Airmen. In *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience, 1902–03*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Arana R., Victoria. 2007. Aesthetics as Deliberate Design: Giving Form to *TigrITUDE* and *Nommo*. In “Black” *British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Arana R., Victoria, and Lauri Ramey (ed). 2004. *Black British Writing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Assefa, Hizkia, and Paul Wahrhaftig. 1988. *Extremist Groups and Conflict Resolution: The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Atwood, Margaret. 1989. *Car's Eye*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. London: Verso.
- Awkward, Michael. 1999. 'Unruly and Let Loose': Myth, Ideology, and Gender. In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom, 159–176. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Baldick, Chris. 1990. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baraka, Amiri. 1997. Speech to the Congress of African Peoples, 1970. In *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*, ed. William L. Van Deburg, 145–157. NYU Press.
- Bartlett, Lee. 1995. And That History Is Subject to the Will: Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 258–270. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Beauchamp-Byrd, Mora J. (ed). 1997. *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian & Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966–1996*, 16–45. New York: The Franklin H. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2002. The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology in the Second Age of Modernity. In *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec, and Robin Cohen, 61–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Behrend, Heike, and Ute Luig. 1999. *Spirit Possession: Modernity & Power in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey/ Kampala: Fountain Publishers/ Cape Town: David Philip / Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bell, C. Rosalind. 1991. Worlds Within: An Interview with Caryl Phillips. *Callaloo* 14(3): 578–606.
- Bellinelli, Matteo, dir. 1992. In *Black and White: Conversations with African-American Writers—Part Six: John Wideman*. RTSI-Swiss Television.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1963. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London: NLB, 1977.
- . 1999a. On Some Motifs in Baudelaire. In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (trans: Zorn, Harry), 152–196. London: Pimlico, Random House, [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970].
- . 1999b. Theses on the Philosophy of History. In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (trans: Zorn, Harry), 152–196. London: Pimlico, Random House, [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970].
- Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, Random House, 1999 [London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970]).

- Benston, Kimberly W. 1991. Re-Weaving the 'Ulysses Scene': Enchantment, Post-Oedipal Identity, and the Buried Text of Blackness in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. Hortense J. Spillers. New York: Routledge.
- Berben-Masi, Jacqueline. 1999. From *Brothers and Keepers* to *Two Cities*: Social and Cultural Consciousness, Art and Imagination, An Interview with John Edgar Wideman. *Callaloo* 22(3): 568–584.
- . 2006. Of Basketball and Beads: Following the Thread of One's Origins. In *Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith, and Keith Byerman, 31–41. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Bereano, Nancy K. 1984. Introduction to *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, by Audre Lorde, 8. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.
- Berghahn, Marion. 1977. *Images of Africa in Black American Literature*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Berlant, Lauren. 1993. Race, Gender, and Nation in *The Color Purple*. In *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., and K.A. Appiah, 211–238. New York: Amistad Press.
- Bernabé, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar. 1990. In Praise of Creoleness. *Callaloo* 13(4): 886–909.
- Bewes, Timothy. 2006. Shame, Ventriloquy, and the Problem of the Cliché in Caryl Phillips. *Cultural Critique*. 63: 33–60.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1992. The World and the Home. *Third World and Post-Colonial Issues* 31(32): 141–153.
- Bigsby, Christopher. 2001. In Conversation with Alice Walker. In *Writers in Conversation*, vol 2, 213–223. University of East Anglia, Norwich: Arthur Miller Centre for American Studies.
- Binder, Wolfgang. 1997. Interview with David Dabydeen, 1989. In *The Art of David Dabydeen*, ed. Kevin Grant. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Birat, Kathie. 1999. 'Re-visionary Strategies': History and Fiction in the Novels of Caryl Phillips and Wilson Harris. In *Theory and Literary Criticism*, ed. Jean-Pierre Durix, 21–31. Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon.
- Bobo, Jacqueline. 1989. Sifting Through the Controversy: Reading *The Color Purple*. *Callaloo* 12(2): 332–342.
- . 2003. The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers. In *The Audience Studies Reader*, ed. Will Brooker, and Deborah Jermyn, 305–314. London: Routledge.
- Boehmer, Elleke. 2005. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bowers, Maggie Ann. 1998. Acknowledging Ambivalence: The Creation of Communal Memory in the Writing of Toni Morrison. *Wasafiri* 27(Spring): 19–23.

- Boyer, Jay. 1993. *Ishmael Reed*. Boise State University Western Writers Series, 110. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University.
- Boyette, Michael. 1989. *Let It Burn!': The Philadelphia Tragedy*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. 1988. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Brathwaite, Edward. 1973. *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brennan, Timothy. 1989. Cosmopolitans and Celebrities. *Race & Class* 31(1): 1–19.
- . 1990. The National Longing for Form. In *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, 44–59. Routledge.
- Brown, Elaine. 1992. Attack Racism, Not Black Men. In *The New York Times*, Op-Ed section, May 5, 1993. Steinem, Gloria, *Revolution From Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Brown, Jacqueline Nassy, and Deborah Thomas (ed). 2006. *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Brown, Karen McCarthy. 2006. Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case Study. In *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers*, ed. Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, 1–26. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, Stewart. 1999. Lara, Bernardine Evaristo. Reviews. *Wasafiri* 29(Spring): 83–84.
- Browning, Barbara. 1992. Babaluaiye: Searching for the Text of a Pandemic. In *AIDS: The Literary Response*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Twayne.
- Bryan, Beverley, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe. 1985. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Virago Press.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1992. Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered. *October* 62(Fall): 3–41.
- Bunce, Robin, and Paul Field. 2010. Obi B. Egbuna, C. L. R. James and the Birth of Black Power in Britain: Black Radicalism in Britain 1967–72. *Twentieth Century British History* 22(3): 391–414.
- . 2015 [2014]. *Front matter, Darcus Howe: A Political Biography*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Bundy, A.J.M. 1999. Appendix—El Dorado and the Grail Legend: A Memorandum with References to Wilson Harris's Fiction. In *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, ed. A.J.M. Bundy, 263–267. London: Routledge.
- Burleson, Blake Wiley. 1986. *John Mbiti: The Dialogue of an African Theologian with African Traditional Religion*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.

- Byerman, Keith. 1989. Walker's Blues. In *Alice Walker*, ed. Harold Bloom, 59–66. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Campbell, Christopher. 2005. Writing, Representation and Rescue: Narrating an Eighteenth-Century History in S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World*. *New Formations* 55(Spring): 159–171.
- Campbell, Christopher, and Leila Kamali. 2005. Interview with S.I. Martin. *New Formations* 55: 147–157.
- Carden, Mary Paniccia. 2003. 'If the City Is a Man': Founders and Fathers, Cities and Sons in John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*. *Contemporary Literature* 44(3): 472–500.
- Carmichael, 1984. What We Want. In *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, ed. Judith Clavir Albert, and Stewart Albert, 137–144. New York: Praeger.
- Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton. 1969 [1967]. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. London: Penguin Books.
- Carretta, Vincent. 1999. Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity. *Slavery and Abolition* 20(3): 96–105.
- . 2005. *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Cartwright, Keith. 2004 [2002]. *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables and Gothic Tales*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Cesar, Samson. 1834. Liberia Letters. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/liberia/intro.html>
- Chaney, Michael A. 2003. Slave Cyborgs and the Black Infovirus: Ishmael Reed's Cybernetic Aesthetics. *Modern Fiction Studies* 49(2): 261–283.
- Chapman, Abraham. 2001 [1968]. Introduction to *Black Voices: An Anthology of African-American Literature*, ed. Abraham Chapman. New York: Signet Classic.
- Chrisman, Laura. 2000. Journeying to Death: Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*. In *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu, 453–464. London: Routledge.
- . 2003. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Reading of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Christian, Barbara. 1984. Alice Walker: The Black Woman Artist as Wayward. In *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Mari Evans, 457–477. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- . 1994. Introduction to Alice Walker. In *Everyday Use*, ed. Barbara T. Christian, 3–17. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Christian, Mark (ed). 2002. *Black Identity in the 20th Century: Expression of the US and UK African Diaspora*. London: Hansib Publications Limited.

- Clarke, Kamari Maxine. 2010. New Spheres of Transnational Formations: Mobilizations of Humanitarian Diasporas. *Transforming Anthropology* 18(1): 48–65.
- Cleaver, Kathleen Neal. 1991. Philadelphia Fire. *Transition* 51: 150–157.
- Clingman, Stephen. 2004. Other Voices: An Interview with Caryl Phillips. *Salmagundi* 143(Summer): 113–140.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1997. 'What We Like to Forget' (review of *The Nature of Blood* by Caryl Phillips). *New York Review of Books* 44(17): 38–41.
- Cohen, Robin. 2008. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Coleman, Monica A. 2006. Must I Be Womanist? *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22(1): 85–96.
- Collins, Lisa Gail, and Margo Natalie Crawford (ed). 2006. *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Colton, Catherine A. 1999. Alice Walker's Womanist Magic: The Conjure Woman as Rhetor. In *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed. Ikenna Dieke, 33–44. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Conrad, Joseph. 2007 [1899]. *Heart Of Darkness*, London: Penguin Classics.
- Cooke, Judy. 1996. Fiction. *The Mail on Sunday*, November 17.
- Cooke, Nathalie. 1992. Reading Reflections: The Autobiographical Illusion in *Cat's Eye*. In *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. Marlene Kadar, 162–170. Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press.
- Coughlan, Sean. 1996. Soldiers of Misfortune. *The Times*, December 7.
- Cowart, David. 1999. Heritage and Deracination in Walker's 'Everyday Use'. In *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed. Ikenna Dieke, 21–32. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Crouch, Stanley. 1995. Interview with Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick and Amritjit Singh. 101. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Transcript from "House of Magic", a WBAI radio talk show produced by Steve Cannon.
- Cudar-Domínguez, Pilar. 2004. Ethnic Cartographies of London in Bernardine Evaristo and Zadie Smith. *European Journal of English Studies* 8(2): 173–188.
- . 2005. (Re)Turning to Africa: Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses*. In *Write Black Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay, 300–313. Hertford: Hansib Publications.
- Curren, Erik D. 1994. Ishmael Reed's Postmodern Revolt. In *Literature and Film in the Historical Dimension: Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film*, ed. John D. Simons, 139–148. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Bernardine Evaristo, and Gabriela Pearse (ed). 1987. *Black Women Talk Poetry*. London: Black Womanstalk.
- Dabydeen, David. 1985. *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art*. Munderstrup, DK: Dangaroo Press.

- . 1989. On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today. In *Tibisiri*, ed. Maggie Butcher, 121–135. Munderstrup, DK: Dangaroo Press.
- . 1997 [1996]. *The Counting House*. London: Vintage.
- . 1999. *A Harlot's Progress*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- . 2005 [1991]. *The Intended*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Daly, Mary. 1998. *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. Women's Press Ltd.
- . 2006. *Amazon Grace: Re-Calling the Courage to Sin Big*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Darling, Marsha. 1978. In the Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison. In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, 246–254. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Women's Review of Books* 5: 5–6.
- Darroch, Fiona. 2009. *Memory and Myth: Postcolonial Religion in Contemporary Guyanese Fiction and Poetry*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Davey, Kevin. 1994. Mongrelisation is Our Original State: An Interview with David Dabydeen. In *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture*, ed. Mark Perryman, 174–191. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Davis, Christina. An Interview with Toni Morrison. In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, 223–33. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Presence Africaine: Revue Culturelle Du Monde/Cultural Review of the Negro World*, 1145 (1988): 141–50.
- Dawes, Kwame. 1997. Interview with David Dabydeen, 1994. In *The Art of David Dabydeen*, ed. Kevin Grant, 199–221. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- . 1999. Negotiating the Ship on the Head: Black British Fiction. *Wasafiri* 29(Spring): 18–24.
- de Nooy, Juliana. 1998. *Derrida, Kristeva, and the Dividing Line: An Articulation of Two Theories of Difference*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc..
- De Veaux, Alexis. 2006. *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Deckard, Sharae. 2007. United States of America, Britain, and the Civil Rights Movement. In *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, ed. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones, 496–497. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1982. *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dick, Bruce Allen. 1999. A Conversation with Ishmael Reed. In *The Critical Response to Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, 228–250. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

- Dick, Bruce Allen, and Amritjit Singh. 1995. *Introduction to Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, edited by Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Dickson, Johanna Saleh. 2002. MOVE: Sites of Trauma. *Pamphlet Architecture* 23.
- Djebar, Assia. 1961. *Women of Islam*. Trans. Jean MacGibbon. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Doctorow, E.L. 1985 [Macmillan, 1976]. *Ragtime*. London: Picador, Pan Macmillan.
- Donnell, Alison (ed). 2001. *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Dorothea, Drummond Mbalia. 1991. Song of Solomon: The Struggle for Race and Class Consciousness. In *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness*, 125–139. Susquehanna University Press.
- . 1995. *John Edgar Wideman: Reclaiming the African Personality*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press.
- Douglas, Ann. 1995. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. London: Picador.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1996 [1953]. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Modern Library Edition.
- Dubey, Madhu. 2002. Contemporary African American Fiction and the Politics of Postmodernism: Introduction. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 35(2/3): 151–168.
- . 2003. *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dudziak, Mary. 2000. *Cold War Civil Rights*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Duvall, John N. 2000. *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Early, Gerald. 1994. 'Black Herman Comes Through Only Once Every Seven Years': Black Magic, White Magic, and American Culture. In *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*, ed. Werner Sollors, and Maria Diedrich, 234–243. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ebbesen, Jeffrey. 2006. *Postmodernism and Its Others: The Fiction of Ishmael Reed, Kathy Acker, and Don DeLillo*. New York: Routledge.
- Eckstein, Lars. 2001. Interview with Caryl Phillips. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 32(2): 33–43.
- . 2006. *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Elia, Nada. 2003. 'Kum Buba Yali Kum Buba Tambe, Ameen, Ameen, Ameen': Did Some Flying Africans Bow to Allah? *Callaloo* 26(1): 182–202.
- Ellison, Ralph. 1965 [1952]. *Invisible Man*. London: Penguin.

- Evaristo, Bernardine. n.d. *European Odyssey: An Other Story*. www.babelexpress.org/ebooks/DownloadServlet/biblio/pdfa4/orig/orig158en-
- Evaristo, Bernardine. n.d. Extract from *Soul Tourists—Analysis*. <http://www.crossingborders-africanwriting.org/writersonwriting/bernardineevaristo/soultourists-analysis/>
- Evaristo, Bernardine. n.d. *New Writing Worlds: Writing and the Past*. New Writing Partnership. <http://www.newwritingpartnership.org.uk/fp/aspen/public/get-File.asp?>
- Evaristo, Bernardine. 1995. *Island of Abraham*. London: Peepal Tree Press.
- . 1997. *Lara*. London: Angela Royal Publishing.
- . 2002. *The Emperor's Babe*. London: Penguin.
- . 2005. The Road Less Travelled. In *Necessary Journeys*, ed. Melanie Keen, and Eileen Daly, 19–23. London: Arts Council England in association with *bfi* Black World.
- . 2006. *Soul Tourists*. London: Penguin.
- . 2013. Why is it Still Rare to See a Black British Woman with Literary Influence? *The Guardian*, December 13.
- Ewing, Adam. 2014. *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ewing, Jon. 1995. The Great Tenure Battle of 1977. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 111–127. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Originally published in *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*, 1978.
- Fabian, Johannes. 2002 [1983]. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Falk, Erik. 2007. *Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera, and David Dabydeen*. Dissertation, Karlstad University Studies. <http://www.divaportal.se/smash/get/diva2:6399/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Fanon, Frantz. 1990 [1961]. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin.
- Farber, Samuel. 2000. *Social Decay and Transformation: A View From the Left*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Faith, Michel. 2004. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Signifying Monkey*: A Diasporic Critical Myth. In *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, ed. Geneviève Fabre, and Klaus Benesch, 59–80. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Fernández Olmos, Margarite, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (ed). 1997. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Fluck, Winfried. 2003. Fiction and Justice. *New Literary History* 34(1): 19–42.
- Fock, Niels. 1963. *Waiwai: Religion and Society of an Amazonian Tribe*. Copenhagen: The National Museum.

- Forsgren, LaDonna. 2015. 'Set Your Blackness Free': Barbara Ann Teer's Art and Activism during the Black Arts Movement. *Frontiers* 36(1).
- Fox, Robert Elliott. 1987. *Conscientious Sorcerers: The Black Postmodernist Fiction of Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, and Samuel R. Delany*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1919. The Uncanny. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217–256.
- Fryer, Peter. 1984. *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press.
- Furman, Jan. 1995. Male Consciousness: *Song of Solomon*. In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, ed. Harold Bloom, 195–207. Reprinted from *Toni Morrison's Fiction*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Gaga [Mark S. Johnson]. 1995. Interview with Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick and Amritjit Singh. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *MWENDO*, No. 4 (fall 1973): 32–35.
- Garvey, Johanna X.K. 1999. Passages to Identity: Re-Membering the Diaspora in Marshall, Phillips, and Cliff. In *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*, ed. Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. 1986 [1985]. Writing "Race" and the Difference it Makes. In "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, 1–20. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2000. A Reporter At Large: Black London. In *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu, 169–180. London: Routledge. Reprinted from *The New Yorker* (28 April & 6 May 1997).
- Georgia Writers' Project. 1986 [1940]. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Gerzina, Gretchen Holbrook. 1995. *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Gilroy, Paul. n.d. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Routledge.
- Goyal, Yogita. 2010. *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grant, Kevin (ed). 1997. *The Art of David Dabydeen*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Greene, Christina. 2005. *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham. North Carolina*. University of North Carolina Press.

- Grewal, Gurleen. 1998. *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Griggs, Dan, dir. n.d. *Lannan Literary Videos: Caryl Phillips (44)*.
- Gubert, Betty. 1999. Aviators, African American. In *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience*, eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. 152. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Gunning, Dave. 2007. S.I. Martin's Incomparable World and the Possibilities for Black British Historical Fiction. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43(2).
- Gunning, Dave. 2010. *Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hair Stories* exhibition flyer. 2004. Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago.
- Hall, Edith. 1994. Introduction to *Sophocles: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Electra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 1978. Racism and Reaction. In *Five Views of Multi-cultural Britain*. London: Commission for Racial Equality.
- . 1988a. New Ethnicities. In *Black Film British Cinema*, 27–31. British Film Institute/Institute for Contemporary Arts, Document 7. [Based on an ICA Conference, February 1988.]
- . 1988b. *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. London: Verso.
- . 1991. The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity. In *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, ed. Anthony D. King, 19–39. London: Macmillan.
- . 1993. Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams, and Laura Chrisman, 392–403. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Reprinted from *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 1990.
- . 1996a. Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation. In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, 210–222. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1996b. Minimal Selves. In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, 114–119. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Reprinted from *Identity*, edited by Lisa Appignanesi. London: Institute for Contemporary Arts. Document 6, 1987.
- Halloran, Vivian Nun. 2000. Family Ties: Africa as Mother/Fatherland in Neo Slave Narratives. *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Activist Association* XXVIII(1): 1–13.
- Hardack, Richard. 1996. Swing to the White, Back to the Black: Writing and 'Sourcery' in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. In *Literary Influence and African-American Writers*, ed. Tracy Mishkin, 271–300. New York: Garland. Previously

- published in *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 49. 4 (Winter 1993): 117–138.
- Hardesty, Von, and Dominick Pisano. 1983. *Black Wings: The American Black in Aviation*. Washington, DC: National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.
- Harootunian, Harry. 2000. *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Harris, Wilson. 1994. Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition. *Wasafiri* 20: 38–43.
- Härting, Heike, and Tobias Döring. 1995. Amphibian Hermaphrodites: A Dialogue with Marina Warner and David Dabydeen. *Third Text* 30(Spring): 39–45.
- Hayek, Ghenwa. 2014. 'Carrying Africa', Becoming Lebanese: Diasporic Middleness in Lebanese Fiction. In *Diasporas and Cultures of Mobilities. Vol 2: Diaspora, Memory and Intimacy*, ed. Sarah Barbour, Thomas Lacroix, David Howard, and Judith Misrahi-Barak, 99–114. Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée (PULM).
- Heidegger, Martin. 2011 [1978]. The Way to Language. Trans. David Farrell Krell, orig. 1959, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell, 285–306. Krell. London: Routledge.
- Henderson, Mae Gwendolyn. 1989. *The Color Purple*: Revisions and Redefinitions. In *Alice Walker*, ed. Harold Bloom, 67–80. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- . 1993. Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition. In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams, and Laura Chrisman, 257–267. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Reprinted from *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. 116–25, 136–40, 142. New York: Meridian Press, 1990.
- Henry, Joseph. 1984. A MELUS Interview: Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 205–18. Reprinted from *MELUS*, 11.1: 81–93.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 1996. What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond. *The Black Scholar* 26(1): 9–17.
- . 2009. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Hoffmann, Donald L. 1994. A Darker Shade of Grail: Questing at the Crossroads in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. *Callaloo* 17(4): 1245–1256.
- Hogue, W. Lawrence. 2002. Historiographic Metafiction and the Celebration of Differences: Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. In *Productive Postmodernism: Consuming Histories and Cultural Studies*, ed. John N. Duvall, 93–110. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Holloway, Karla F.C. 1999. The Lyrics of Salvation. In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom, 57–71.

- Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. Reprinted from *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Karla F.C. Holloway and Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1987.
- hooks, bell. 1993. Reading and Resistance: *The Color Purple*. In *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., and K.A. Appiah, 284–295. New York: Amistad Press.
- Hooper, Karen. 2006. On the Road: Bernardine Evaristo Interviewed by Karen Hooper. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41(1): 3–16.
- Hovet, Grace Ann, and Barbara Lounsberry. 1983. Flying as Symbol and Legend in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Song of Solomon*. *CLA Journal* XXVII(2).
- Howlett, Philip G. 1998. Letter from the Publisher. In *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Sports Illustrated*, March 7, 1983.
- Howley, Colin. 2003. 'Ball and Chain': The Basketball Court and the Trope of the Prison Yard in Contemporary African American Narratives. *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature* XXI(1/2): 79–91.
- Huddleston Edgerton, Susan. 1995. Re-membering the Mother Tongue(s): Toni Morrison, Julie Dash and the Language of Pedagogy. *Cultural Studies* 9(2): 338–363.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. 2009 [1938]. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Ilona, Anthony. 1995. Crossing the River: A Chronicle of the Black Diaspora. *Wasafiri* 22(Autumn): 3–9.
- Innes, Lyn. *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700–2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaggi, Maya. 1994. Crossing The River: Caryl Phillips talks to Maya Jaggi. *Wasafiri* 20(Autumn): 25–29.
- Jahn, Karen F. 2006. Will the Circle be Unbroken? Jazzing Story in *Hoop Roots*. In *Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith, and Keith Byerman, 57–70. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- James, Stanlie M. 1998. Shades of Othering: Reflections on Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23(4): 1031–1048.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1983. Postmodernism and the Consumer Society. In *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press.
- . 1991. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Janik, Vicki K. 1998. *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bibliographical Sourcebook*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Jessee, Sharon. 1996. Laughter and Identity in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 21(4): 127–139.

- Jones, Bessie W., and Audrey Vinson. 1994. An Interview with Toni Morrison. In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Juan-Navarro, Santiago. 2000. *Archival Reflections: Postmodern Fiction of the Americas (Self-Reflexivity, Historical Revisionism, Utopia)*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1988. Performative Acts: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal* 40(4): 519–531.
- Julien, Claude. 1999. Surviving through a Pattern of Timeless Moments: A Reading of Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*. In *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*, ed. Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen, 86–95. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kamali, Leila. S.I. Martin, April 24, 1961-. In *Contemporary 'Black' British Writers*, ed. R. Victoria Arana. Dictionary of Literary Biography series, Columbia: Brucoli Clark Layman, Inc., *forthcoming*.
- Kanneh, Kadiatu. 1997. 'Africa' and Cultural Translation: Reading Difference. In *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires, 267–289. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Kaplan, Carla. 1996. *The Erotics of Talk: Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kauffman, Linda S. 1992. *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Keen, Melanie. From There to Here. In *Necessary Journeys*, eds. Melanie Keen, and Eileen Daly. 4–5. London: Arts Council England in association with *bfi* Black World, 2005.
- Kelleter, Frank. 2004. Ethnic Self-Dramatization and Technologies of Travel in The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (1789). *Early American Literature* 39(1): 67–84.
- Kelley, Robin, and Stephen Tuck (ed). 2015. *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. 2002. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- King, Bruce. 2004. *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 13: The Internationalization of English Literature, 1948–2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Korkka, Janne. 1999. Language and Identity in Caryl Phillips's Fiction. In *Approaches to Narrative Fiction*, eds. Jon Buscall, and Outi Pickering. 109–124. Anglicana Turkuensia, 18. Finland: University of Turku.
- Kunen, James S.. 1985. Young Birdie Africa Survives Philly's 'MOVE' Bombing and Is Reborn As Michael Moses Ward. *The People Weekly* December 2, 1985.
- Kyung-Jin Lee, James. 2004. *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. *PUBLISHER*.

- Lannan Literary Videos: Caryl Phillips*. 1989. Lannan Foundation Literary Series.
- Lauren, Paul Gordon. 2003. Seen from the Outside: The International Perspective on America's Dilemma. In *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer, 21-43. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Lazarus, Neil. 1999. *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LeClair, Thomas. The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison. In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, 119-28. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *New Republic*, vol. 184 (21 March 1981): 25-29.
- Ledent, Bénédicte. 1999. From a New-World Poetics to a New-World Vision: African America in the Works of Edouard Glissant and Caryl Phillips. *Commonwealth Essays and Studies: Interspaces* 21(2): 29-36.
- . 2002a. *Caryl Phillips*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- . 2002b. 'One is exiled when one refuses to obey the commandments of Conquest Mission': Religion as Metaphor in Caryl Phillips's Diasporic Philosophy. In *Missions of Interdependence: A Literary Directory*, ed. Gerhard Stilz, 121-130. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Lee, James Kyung-Jin. 2002. Where the Talented Tenth Meets the Model Minority: The Price of Privilege in Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* and Lee's *Native Speaker*. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 35(2/3): 231-257.
- Lennon, Mary Ellen. "A Question of Relevancy: New York Museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971", *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. ed. Lisa Gail Collins & Margo Crawford. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 92-116.
- Lima, Maria Helena. 2004. The Politics of Teaching Black and British. In *Black British Writing*, ed. R. Arana, and L. Ramey. London: Palgrave.
- Lindberg-Seyersted, Brita. 1992. Who is Nettie? and What is She Doing in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. *American Studies in Scandinavia* 24(2): 83-96.
- Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. 2000. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Link, Franz. 1994. In Search of the Figure in the Carpet of History: Thomas Pynchon, Ishmael Reed, and Umberto Eco. In *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature*, ed. Bernd Engler, and Kurt Muller, 185-196. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Lock, Helen. 1994. *A Case of Mis-Taken Identity: Detective Undercurrents in Recent African American Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984a. An Open Letter to Mary Daly. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, by Audre Lorde. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.
- . 1984b. *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power. Sister Outsider*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.

- Luckhurst, Roger. 2008. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge.
- Ludwig, Sāmi. 1994. Dialogic Possession in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*: Bakhtin, Voodoo, and the Materiality of Multicultural Discourse. In *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*, ed. Werner Sollors, and Maria Diedrich. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Maes-Jelinek, Hena. n.d. Dream, Psyche, Genesis: The Works of Wilson Harris. <http://www.ulg.ac.be/facphl/uer/d-german/L3/whlife.html>
- Magesa, Laurenti. 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Orbis Books.
- Mahjoub, Jamal. 1998. The Nature of Blood, Caryl Phillips. *Reviews, Wasafiri* 28(Autumn): 61–62.
- Major, Clarence. 1997. Caryl Phillips, Crossing the River. *Book Reviews, African American Review* 31(1): 172–174.
- Malcolm, X., and Alex Haley. 1968 [1965]. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. London: Penguin Books.
- Marable, Manning. 2001[1984]. *Race, Reform Rebellion, The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Martin, S.I. 1997 [1996]. *Incomparable World*. London: Quartet Books Limited.
- . 1999. *Britain's Slave Trade*. London: Channel 4 Books, Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
- . 2005. Inheriting Diversity: Archiving the Past. In *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of "Race"*, ed. Roshi Naidoo, and Jo Littler, 196–201. London: Routledge.
- Mason, Theodore O. Jr. 1988. Performance, History, and Myth: The Problem of Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. *Modern Fiction Studies* 34(1): 97–110.
- Massiah, Louis, dir. n.d. *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*. WHYY Pennsylvania/Pennsylvania Public Television Network/Corporation for Public Broadcasting.
- Matthews, Tracey A. 2001. 'No One Ever Asks What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is': Gender Politics and Leadership in the Black Panther Party, 1966–71. In *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas, and V.P. Franklin, 230–256. New York: New York University Press.
- McAdams, Lewis, and John Door, Dirs. 1989. *Lannan Literary Videos 14: Alice Walker*. Lannan Foundation Literary Series.
- McAlister, Melani. 2001. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McCarthy Brown, Karen. 2001 [1991]. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, 3rd edn. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- McCarthy, Karen. n.d. In Conversation: Bernardine Evaristo on Updating Lara. <http://opennotebooks.co.uk/2010/09/bernardine-evaristo-on-updating-lara/>
- McCoy, Beth. 2005. Paratext, Citation, and Academic Desire in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. *Contemporary Literature* 46(4): 604–635.

- McDowell, Deborah E. 1990. 'The Changing Same:' Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists. In *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. 91–115. New York: Meridian, Penguin Books. Reprinted from *New Literary History*, 18 (Winter 1987): 281–302.
- McGee, Patrick. 1997. *Ishmael Reed and the Ends of Race*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Mercer, Kobena. 1994. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Middleton, Joyce Irene. 1995. From Orality to Literacy: Oral Memory in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, ed. Valerie Smith, 19–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mirza, Heidi Safia. 1997. Introduction: Mapping a genealogy of Black British feminism. *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Montelaro, Janet J. 1996. *Producing a Womanist Text: The Maternal as Signifier in The Color Purple*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.
- Moraga, Cherrie L. 2002. From Inside the First World: Foreword, 2001. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie L. Moraga, and Gloria E. Anzaldua, xv–xvi. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, [third edition, first edition 1981].
- Moretti, Franco. 1996. *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez*. London: Verso.
- Morrison, Toni. 1984a. Memory, Creation, and Writing. *Thought* 59(235): 385–390.
- . 1984b. Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation. In *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Mari Evans, 342. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- . 1984c. Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation. In *Black Women Writers*, ed. Mari Evans. New York: Anchor.
- . 1989. Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature. *Michigan Quarterly Review* XXVIII(1): 1–34.
- . 1993. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. London: Picador, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992].
- . 1997 [1981]. *Tar Baby*. London: Vintage.
- . 1998 [1987]. *Beloved*. London: Vintage.
- . 1998 [1992]. *Jazz*. London: Vintage.
- . 1998 [1977]. *Song of Solomon*. London: Vintage.
- . 1998 [1973]. *Sula*. London: Vintage.
- . 2001. Introduction to *The Radiance of the King* by Camara Laye. xi–xxiv. New York: New York Review Books.
- Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. 1978. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MOVE. 1985. *MOVE: May 13, 1985 Bombing and Fire*. MOVE.
- . 1990. *20 Years on the MOVE*. MOVE.

- . 1996. *25 Years on the MOVE*. MOVE.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Murdoch, H. Adlai. 2013. Édouard Glissant's Creolized World Vision: From Resistance and Relation to *Opacité*. *Callaloo* 36(4).
- Murray, Patricia. 1999. Stories Told and Untold: Post-Colonial London in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*. *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* XXI(2): 38–46.
- Nakai, Asako. 2011. Autobiography of the Other: David Dabydeen and the Imagination of Slavery. *Postcolonial Text* 6(2).
- Nazareth, Peter. 2001. Dark Heart or Trickster? *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad* 20(1): 60–79.
- Neel, Eric. Sound Travels: 'The Atlantic Sound' by Caryl Phillips. <http://www.newcitychicago.com/chicago/words-2000-11-16-791.html>
- Niven, Alastair. 2001. Alastair Niven in Conversation with Bernardine Evaristo. *Wasafiri* 34(Autumn): 15–20.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. *Representations* 26: 7–24.
- Norris, Christopher. 1987. *Derrida*. London: Fontana Press.
- Nünning, Vera. 2004. The Importance of Being English: European Perspectives on Englishness. *European Journal of English Studies* 8(2): 145–158.
- O'Brien, John. 1995. Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Dick, and Amritjit Singh. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Interviews with Black Writers*, edited by John O'Brien. 165–83. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1973.
- Olander, Renée. 1998. An Interview with John Edgar Wideman. In *Conversations with John Edgar Widemassn*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *AWP Chronicle* 29.3 (December 1996):1–8.
- Oliver, Kelly. 1993a. Introduction: Julia Kristeva's Outlaw Ethics. In *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver, 1–22. New York: Routledge.
- . 1993b. *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Ongiri, Amy Abugo. 2010. *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Oyedemi, Koye. 2005. Prelude to a Brand New Purchase on Black Political Identity: A Reading of Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind Of Black*. In *Write Black Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay, 346–374. Hertford: Hansib Publications.
- Page, Philip. 1995. *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

- Pankhurst, Anne. 1999. Recontextualization of Metonymy in Narrative and the Case of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *Metonymy in Language and Thought*, ed. Klaus-Uwe Panther, and Günter Radden, 385–399. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Paravisini, Lizabeth. 1986. *Mumbo Jumbo* and the Uses of Parody. *Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review*: 113–127.
- Parmar, Pratibha, and Alice Walker. 1993. *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Parry, Benita. 2006, July 12. Address at the University of York upon receipt of Honorary Degree.
- Paul, Edwards. 1990, August 10. Letter to Caryl Phillips. In *Cambridge Words and Early Writing*. Uncat MSS 15, box no. 10, folder 6.
- Peach, Linden. 1999. Competing Discourses in *Song of Solomon* (1977). In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom, 159–176. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. Reprinted from *Modernist Novelists: Toni Morrison*. St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1995.
- Phillips, Caryl. 1991. Caryl Phillips, Interviewed by Graham Swift. *Kunapipi* XIII(3): 96–103.
- . 1995. Interview with Pico Iyer, 7 March 1995. *Lannan Literary Videos: Caryl Phillips (44)*, directed by Dan Griggs. Los Angeles: Lannan.
- Phillips, Caryl. *The European Tribe*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999 [1987].
- Phillips, Caryl. 1999a. Following On: The Legacy of Lamming and Selvon. *Wasafiri* 29(Spring): 34–36.
- . 1999b. Introduction to *Heart of Darkness, & Selections from The Congo Diary* by Joseph Conrad, xi–xviii. New York: Modern Library, Random House, Inc.,
- . 2000 [1993]. *Crossing the River*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.
- . 2001 [2000]. *The Atlantic Sound*. London: Vintage.
- . 2002a [2001]. *A New World Order: Selected Essays*. London: Vintage.
- . 2002b [2001]. The 'High Anxiety' of Belonging. *A New World Order: Selected Essays*. London: Vintage.
- . 2003. Out of Africa. *The Guardian*, February 22.
- . 2005a, August 20. Growing Pains. *The Guardian Review*.
- . 2005b. Necessary Journeys. In *Necessary Journeys*, eds. Melanie Keen, and Eileen Daly, 7–15. London: Arts Council England in association with *bfi* Black World.
- Phillips, Mike. 2001. *London Crossings: A Biography of Black Britain*. London: Continuum.
- Plummer, Brenda Gayle (ed). 2003. *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Prescott, Lynda. 2000. The White Man's Burden: *Kim*. In *Literature & Nation: Britain and India 1800–1990*, ed. Richard Allen, and Harish Trivedi, 67–77. London: Routledge.

- Presson, Rebekah. 1998. John Edgar Wideman. In *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith, 105–12. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Published from a transcript of *New Letters on the Air*, originally aired February 1991 over National Public Radio.
- Procter, James. 2000. General Introduction: 1948/1998 Periodising Postwar Black Britain. In *Writing Black Britain, 1948–1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Procter, 1–12. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- . 2002. Cosmopolitan Celebrity & Caryl Phillips. In *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, ed. Alison Donnell, 84–237. London: Routledge.
- . 2003. *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Rao, R.M.V. Raghavendra. 1993. Afrocentricity in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *The System of Dante's Hell*. *The Literary Griot* 5(1): 17–32.
- Reed, Harry. 1999. Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon and Black Cultural Nationalism. In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom, 159–176. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. Reprinted from *The Centennial Review*, 32.1 (Winter 1988).
- Reed, Ishmael. 1972. *Mumbo Jumbo*. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction.
- . 1978. *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc..
- . 1988. Of One Blood, Two Men. In *Writin' Is Fightin': Thirty-Seven Years of Boxing on Paper*, ed. Ishmael Reed, 85–93. New York: Atheneum.
- . 1990 [1938]. Foreword. In *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, ed. Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Perennial Library, Harper & Row.
- . 1995. The Writer as Seer: Ishmael Reed on Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 59–73. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. From *Black World*, June 1974. Also published in *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans* as “Ishmael Reed—Self Interview.” 1978, 129–44.
- . 1997. Introduction to *MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*, ed. Ishmael Reed, xv–xxviii. New York: Viking, Penguin Books.
- . 2003. Booker Versus the Negro-Saxons. In *Another Day at the Front: Dispatches from the Race War*, 76–91. New York: Basic Books.
- Reed, Adolph Jr. 1992. The Allure of Malcolm X and the Changing Character of Black Politics. In *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood, 203–232. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rhodes, Jane. 2007. *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*. New York: The New Press.
- Rice, Alan. 2004. ‘Heroes Across the Sea’: Black and White Fascination with African Americans in the Contemporary Black British Fiction of Caryl Phillips

- and Jackie Kay. In *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez, 217–231. New York: Routledge.
- Rice, Jon. 2003. The World of the Illinois Panthers. In *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Richard, Jean-Pierre. 1999. Philadelphia Fire, or the Shape of a City. *Callaloo* 22(3): 603–613.
- Riemenschneider, Dieter. 2000. One Hundred Years of Darkness: ‘I am No Longer of Monrovia, Having Relocated Into the Heart of the Country’: Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River* (1993) Writing Back to *Heart of Darkness* (1902). In *Being/s in Transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation*, ed. Liselotte Glage, 83–92. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Robbins, Bruce. 2001. The Village of the Liberal Managerial Class. In *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker, 15–32. New York: Routledge.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2003. Dead Letter Office: Conspiracy, Trauma, and *Song of Solomon*’s Posthumous Connection. *African American Review* 37(4): 501–516.
- Rowell, Charles H. 1998. An Interview with John Edgar Wideman. In *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Callaloo*, 13.1 (1990): 47–61.
- Ruas, Charles. Toni Morrison. In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Rupp, Jan. 2010. *Genre and Cultural Memory in Black British Literature*. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.
- Russell Andrade, Heather. 2006. Race, Representation and Intersubjectivity in the Works of John Edgar Wideman. In *Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith, and Keith Byerman, 43–56. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Sandhu, Sukhdev. 2003a. *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City*. London: HarperCollins.
- . 2003b. The Sunday Feature: Black London’s Story. *BBC Radio* 3: 12.
- Santos, Myrian Sepulveda. 2001. Memory and Narrative in Social Theory: The contributions of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin. *Time & Society* 10: 163–189.
- Sauerberg, Lars Ole. 2004. Repositioning Narrative: The Late-Twentieth-Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess, and Bernadine Evaristo. *Orbis Litterarum* 59: 439–464.
- Scarry, Elaine. 1985. *The Body in Pain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scott, Joyce Hope. 1992. From Foreground to Margin: Female Configurations and Masculine Self-Representation in Black Nationalist Fiction. In *Nationalisms*

- ✧ *Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, 296–312. New York: Routledge.
- Selvon, Sam. 1984 [1975]. *Moses Ascending*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Shadle, Mark. 1999. A Bird's Eye View: Ishmael Reed's Unsettling of the Score by Munching and Mooching on the Mumbo Jumbo Work of History. In *The Critical Response to Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, 59–69. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Shepherd, Walt. 1995. When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 258–270. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Nickel Review*, 28 August–10 September 1968, 4–6.
- Silverblatt, Michael. 1998. John Edgar Wideman. In *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*. In *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TuSmith, 119–125. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Interview prepared for publication from the videotape “John Edgar Wideman”, *Lannan Literary Series*, No. 33, produced by the Lannan Foundation in Los Angeles, 1993. Interview conducted on 6 April 1993.
- Simon, George. 1995, December. Art Looking Inland: George Simon Talks to Anne Walmsley. *Kyk-Over-Al*. 46/47: 67–76. Accessed 14 August 2012.
- Singh, Nikhil Pal. 2004. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sivanandan, A. 1991. Black Power: The Politics of Existence. In *A Different Hunger*, ed. A. Sivanandan, 62–63. Pluto Press. First published in *Politics and Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, (February 1971).
- Skerrett, Joseph T. Jr. 1985. Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryse, and Hortense J. Spillers, 192–202. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Slappey, Lisa. 1999. Nature as Sacred Text: An Ecocritical Reading of *Mumbo Jumbo*. In *The Critical Response to Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, 41–46. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Slate, Nico. 2012. *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Smethurst, James. 1999. Black Arts Movement. In *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Henry Louis Gates Jr., 239–240. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Smith Storey, Olivia. 2004. Flying Words: Contexts of Orality and Literacy in the Trope of the Flying Africans. *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5(3). Project Muse: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v2005/5.3storey.html
- Smith, Barbara. 2000. Introduction to *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Originally published New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983.

- Smith, David. 2006. Black Arts Movement. *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3444700138/black-arts-movement.html>
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2001. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Snider, Jill D. 2003. 'Great Shadow in the Sky': The Airplane in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 and the Development of African American Visions of Aviation, 1921–1926. In *The Airplane in American Culture*, ed. Dominick A. Pisano, 105–146. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Sofía Muñoz, Valdivieso. 2004. Interview with Bernardine Evaristo. *Obsidian III* 5(2): 9–20.
- Southall Black Sisters. 1990. *Against the Grain: A Celebration of Survival and Struggle*. London: Southall Black Sisters.
- Soyinka, Wole. 1976. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Speilberg, Steven, dir. n.d. Conversations with the Ancestors: *The Color Purple* from Book to Screen. In *The Color Purple, Two-Disc Special Edition, Disc Two: Bonus Features*.
- Stein, Mark. 1998. Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature. *Kunapipi* 20(2): 76–89.
- . 1999a. David Dabydeen Talks to Mark Stein. *Wasafiri* 29(Spring): 28.
- . 1999b. Review of S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World*. *Wasafiri* 29(Spring): 89.
- . 2004. *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Stepito, Robert. Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison. In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, 10–29. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977): 473–89.
- Story, Ralph. An Excursion into the Black World: The 'Seven Days' in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, ed. Harold Bloom, 85–93. Reprinted from *Black American Literature Forum*, 23.1 (Spring 1989).
- Stuckey, Sterling. 1987. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory & The Foundations of Black America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Suaárez-Arauúz, Nicomedes. 1989. *The Amnesia Manifesto*. Republished in *The Stiffest of the Corpse*, ed. Andrei Codrescu. New York: City Lights Books.
- SuAndi. 2007. Cultural Memory and Today's Black British Poets and Live Artists. In *"Black" British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana, 31–49. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Swift, Graham. 1991. Caryl Phillips, Interviewed by Graham Swift. *Kunapipi* XIII(3): 96–103.

- Swope, Richard. 2002. Crossing Western Space, or the Hoodoo Detective on the Boundary in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. *African American Review* 36(4): 611–628.
- Tannen, Ricki Stefanie. 2007. *Female Trickster: The Mask That Reveals*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, Andrene M. 2007. Black British Writing: 'Hitting Up Against' A Tradition of Revolutionary Poetics. In *"Black" British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana, 16–30. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Thomas, Douglas E. 2005. *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc..
- Toh, Hsien Min. 2004. Never Forgetting The Source. *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* 3(2). <http://www.qlrs.com/issues/jan2004/interviews/bevaristo/html>
- Toomer, Jean. 1993 [1923]. *Cane*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation.
- Tuck, Stephen. 2013a. Black Britain, and the Special Relationship on Race. *American Historical Review* 118(1): 76–103.
- . 2013b. Malcolm X's Visit to Oxford University. *The American Historical Review* 118(1): 76–103.
- . 2014. *The Night Malcolm X Spoke at the Oxford Union*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- TuSmith, Bonnie. 1998. Introduction to *Conversations with John Edgar Wideman*, ed. Bonnie TiSmith. University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Sports Illustrated*, March 7, 1983.
- Tyner, James. 2006. *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space*. New York: Routledge.
- Umansky, Lauri. 1996. *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties*. New York: New York University Press.
- . 1996. *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties*. New York: New York University Press.
- Valdivieso, Sofia Muñoz. 2004. Interview with Bernardine Evaristo. *Obsidian III* 5(2): 9–20.
- Van Deburg, William L. 1997. *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*. New York: NYU Press.
- . 1992. *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Van Dyke, Annette. 1992. *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality*. New York: New York University Press.
- Velickovic, Vedrana. 2011. Melancholic Travellers and the Idea of (un)belonging in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and *Soul* Tourists. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, iFirst Article: 1–15.
- Vertovec, Steven, and Robin Cohen. 2002. *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Verwoert, Jan. 2006. Apropos Appropriation: Why Stealing Images Feels Different Today. In *Tate Triennial 2006: New British Art*, ed. Beatrix Ruf, and Clarrie Wallis, 14–21. London: Tate Publishing.
- Vice website. n.d. The Amazing Lost Legacy of the British Black Panthers. http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/neil-kenlocks-photos-give-the-british-black-panthers-the-legacy-they-deserve/page/0
- Wagner-Pacifici, Robin. 1994. *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Walcott, Derek. 1998. The Muse Of History. In *What the Twilight Says*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Walker, Alice. 1983. *The Color Purple*. London: The Women's Press.
- . 1984. Writing *The Color Purple*. In *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Mari Evans, 453–456. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- . 1984 [1983]. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Women's Press.
- . 1988. *Living by the Word*. London: Women's Press.
- . 1993 [1992]. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. London: Vintage, Random House.
- . 1993. They Ran on Empty. *The New York Times*, Op-Ed section, May 5.
- . 1996. *The Same River Twice*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Walker, Melissa. 1991. *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966–1989*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wall, Cheryl A. 2005. *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Ward, Abigail. 2011. *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar: Representations of Slavery*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Warhol, Robyn R. 2001. How Narration Produces Gender: Femininity as Affect and Effect in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. *Narrative* 9(2): 182–187.
- Wasserman, Jerry. 2000. Queen Bee, King Bee: *The Color Purple* and the Blues. *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30(3): 301–316.
- Weixlmann, Joe. 1991–1992. African American Deconstruction of the Novel in the Work of Ishmael Reed and Clarence Major. *MELUS* 17(4): 57–79.
- Wideman, John Edgar. 1986 [1981]. *Damballah*. London: Flamingo, Fontana.
- . 1992. Preface to *The Homewood Books*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- . 1995. Introduction to *Live from Death Row* by Mumia Abu-Jamal. New York: Avon Books.
- . 1995 [1990]. *Philadelphia Fire*. London: Picador.
- . 1996 [1994]. *Fatheralong*. London: Picador, Macmillan.
- . 2001. *Hoop Roots*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

- Wikipedia. n.d. Mary Daly. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Daly#Gyn.2FEcology
- Wilentz, Gay. 2003. Civilizations Underneath: African Heritage as Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon: A Casebook*, ed. Jan Furman, 137–163. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Reprinted from *African American Review*, 26 (1992): 61–76.
- Wiley, Bell I. (ed). 1980. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833–1869*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Wilkes, Fiona Saffron. 2002. *Guyanese Amerindian Art: Imagery, Identity & Memory*. Dissertation, University College London.
- Williams, Rhonda Y. 2008. Black Women and Black Power. In *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 22(3): 22–26.
- . 2015. *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Wood, Marcus. 2000. *Blind Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- . 2002. *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1967. On Being Ill. In *Collected Essays*. Vol. 4. New York: Harcourt.
- Wright, Michelle M. 2010. Black in Time: Exploring New Ontologies, New Dimensions, New Epistemologies of the African Diaspora. In *Transforming Anthropology*. 18(1): 70–73.
- . 2015. *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Young, Al. 1995. Interview: Ishmael Reed. In *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Allen Dick, and Amritjit Singh, 258–270. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted from *Changes* (November 1972): 12–13.
- Young, Julian. 2003. *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*. London: Routledge.