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Traumatic Memory and History in The Fiction of Caryl Phillips

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Abstract: This paper seeks to examine how Caryl Phillips in his neo-slave narratives, revisit the history of slavery by allowing their characters reveal their traumatic memories. It aims to demonstrate how slave victims uncover and recover the forgotten and manipulated histories of their bondage. The neo-slave narratives under study include *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River* and *The Nature of Blood*. The analysis of these novels is based on the assumption that the characters reconstruct history by recounting their experiences through memory. Informed by psychoanalysis and new historicism theory, the study finds that memory recovery takes place through a constant shift from present to past both in the characters' psyche and in the narrative. It reveals that the narrative methods used by Phillips to revisit the history of slavery, re-centers the voice of slaves giving them therefore the occasion to tell their own tale. These narrative methods highlight the way that the dismantling of a monolithic, static and unquestioned history gives place to the predominance of a revisionary narrative impulse to "historicize the event of the de-historicized" in Homi Bhabha's terms (*The Location of Culture*, 198). The paper concludes that the characters' process of recovery through actual recount of their past experiences release them of their trauma.

Keywords: memory, trauma, history, slavery, blacks

Introduction

This paper seeks to examine how Caryl Phillips in his neo-slave narratives, revisit the history of slavery by allowing their characters reveal their traumatic memories. It aims to demonstrate how slave victims uncover and recover the forgotten and manipulated histories of their bondage. The neo-slave narratives under study include *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River* and *The Nature of Blood*. The analysis of these novels is based on the assumption that the characters reconstruct history by recounting their experiences through memory. Informed by psychoanalysis and new historicism theory, the study finds that memory recovery takes place through a constant shift from present to past both in the characters' psyche and in the narrative. It reveals that the narrative methods used by Phillips to revisit the history of slavery, recenters the voice of slaves giving them therefore the occasion to tell their own tale. These narrative methods highlight the way that the dismantling of a monolithic, static and unquestioned history gives place to the predominance of a revisionary narrative impulse to "historicize the event of the dehistoricized" in Homi Bhabha's terms (*The Location of Culture*, 198). The paper concludes that the characters' process of recovery through actual recount of their past experiences release them of their trauma.

Phillips' *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River* and *The Nature of Blood* delineate the reconstruction of history through memory recollection. Indeed, Phillips' treatment of the theme of slavery is not intended to reproduce it in its social or historical verisimilitude. Rather, it aims at bringing out the multifarious symbolical and

imaginative potentialities of the woven complexity which the enslavement of Africans by Europeans has produced. Quoting Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, Benedict Ledent presents the reason for which Phillips attaches more attention to slavery. She holds in "Remembering Slavery: History as Roots in the Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar" that it was because of Britain's attempt to both exclude blacks as forming part of British history, and to erase slavery from her history. Carl Plasa and Betty Ring in *The Discourse of Slavery* suggest that: "In Britain the subject of racial oppression has been examined primarily in relation to colonialism, postcolonialism and imperialism but much less fully with regard to the problematic of slavery" (xiv). If slavery has often been obliterated from the critical debate in Britain, it has also been markedly absent from imaginative writing. However, as many post-colonial critics have shown, slavery has always lurked in the literary background, all the more conspicuously so for being left out of the master narratives of empire. It is this remarkable absence that Phillips seeks to transform into an eloquent presence by underscoring that slavery is an indelible past that links black history to Western history. Quoting D'Aguiar, Ledent observes in "Remembering Slavery" that:

There is simply too much history between us all [...]. What began as a single thread has, over the generations, woven itself into a prodigious carpet that cannot be unwoven. There is no good in pretending that a single thread of cause and effect exists now when in actual fact the carpet is before us with many beginnings and no end in sight. (The Longest Memory, 33)

She however notes that the dislocated, ternary topography of slavery, covering Africa, the Americas and Europe, provides one clue to these potentialities. These three continents are the spatial, imagined anchor points of the web of diasporic identities and concerns which Paul Gilroy has called the black Atlantic. Slavery is a meaningful and fecund site for black Atlantic memory. As Gilroy explains in *The Black Atlantic*, such remembering suits the diasporic in-betweenness of African American and Afro-Caribbean artists because uncovering the often

erased intricacies of slavery enables them to escape the sterile fixity and Manichean logic of both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism.

Phillips gives voice to subaltern subjects to construct their history. Only, Phillips does not limit himself to the marginalised black people to show the effect of traumatic past experiences on their life. He goes beyond to explore the trauma of other historically marginalised groups of people such as the Jews. This exploration enables him to juxtapose slavery and holocaust and to conclude that trauma as a result of a painful past can affect any group of people, and both events resolve to a common way of working through traumatic experience.

Phillips' *Cambridge* presents two distinct narrative voices: Emily's and Cambridge. While Emily's account of life on the island represents Western historical records of slavery, Cambridge's perspective of slavery will be paid more attention, since with his account, he revisits history through memory recollection. However, instances exist where Emily mediates the voices of slaves. Such instances will be highlighted in order to perceive the experiences of blacks during slavery.

In the meantime, the traumatic experience suffered by Cambridge in slavery is narrated by Cambridge himself while in captivity as he says in the beginning of his narrative: " Pardon the liberty I take in unburdening myself with these hasty lines [...] Soon I know not when, I am to be dispatched. To where, I know not" (133). This shows that his experiences are in the past, and he makes use of his memory to recollect them. However, his account concerns his experience both of the slave trade in the coast of Guinea, and the Middle Passage. In his narrative, he begins by condemning the natives who easily fell prey to the western business of trading human beings. Cambridge observes that:

Many natives in my home country are canting, deceitful people about whom one must exercise great caution. The treachery of some of our petty kings, encouraged as they are by so-called Christian customers, leaves one no doubt that gratitude, that most desecrated of words, has long since fled their crude language. In their dealings my people are

great traders and bargainers, having much in common with the Hebrew people in these other respects. But one should be ever alert and remember from whom my people imbibed the new chicanery. These Christian inheritors of Hebrew tradition have corrupted the virtues of former times. (133-134)

Cambridge in the above assertion accuses white Christians for corrupting the natives to participate in the slave trade. To him, his people (the native) were known for their human virtues and good skills in trading. But when they had contact with whites, they abandoned these virtues and applied their commercial skills perversely to fetch human cargo destined for the slave trade. In his reflections, Cambridge regrets the encounter between white and black that has resulted to this other type of business, the black slave trade. He says: "it sours my blood that in the Guinea of my youth it was not to be the good fortune of my brethren to meet such men, for unfortunately our shores were visited by those whose eyes were blinded, and hearts stupefied, by the prospect of profit" (134). It is this encounter that is responsible for Cambridge's captivity and present situation as a slave in the West Indies. This reminds him of his capture back in his native Africa as he points out: "When I imagine myself to have been not yet fifteen years of age, I was apprehended by a band of brigands and bound by means of a chain to hand and foot. I must confess, to the shame of my fellow Guinea-men, that I was undoubtedly betrayed by those of my own hue" (134-135). Cambridge moves to describe the conditions of their detention before their transportation across the Atlantic Ocean, what is otherwise known as the Middle Passage. He notes that while in captivity, they were:

Shackled unceremoniously to a fellow unfortunate at both stern and bow, we unhappy blacks formed a most miserable traffic, stumbling with jangling resignation towards our doom [...] I was forced to endure pain the like of which I had never suffered [...] native conversation was punishable by the lash. Day and night our ears were forced to admit their English talk which, at this stage, resembled nothing more civilised than the manic chatter of baboons. (135)

Cambridge's account of the Middle Passage in *Cambridge* shows that it was the first dreadful experience that he went through as a slave. His description of this painful moment in the life of slaves is a way that he contributes in the construction of the history of slavery. In this respect, Cambridge's story of his painful experience can be considered as efforts to account for those whose names have been erased from the history of slavery. His vivid description of the treatment of slaves during their transportation to the Americas is illustrative of Phillips commitment to highlight some aspects of black history that were crossed over by hegemonic history. In this engagement, Phillips participates in the reconstruction of black history, mainly the history of slavery. However, some of these aspects elided by Western history are the atrocities that accompanied slave deportation, that is the traumatic pain they endure during the Middle Passage. Cambridge recaptures these hard moments in his long memory as he says:

We bondaged brethren were herded aboard the vessel with less regard than one might bestow upon the basest of animals [...] These human flesh merchants (...) acted towards us with such savagery and brutal cruelty that it remained difficult to believe that they expected profit to be extracted by our eventual sale. We were addressed by one common word, nigger, as though we all shared this harsh name. Clearly it was a word lacking in affection for when it was applied it was commonly partnered by a snarl and a cuff of lash. I was later to learn the truth of this vulgar and illiberal word; it is truly a term of great abuse. (137)

Cambridge proceeds in this account with the description of the conditions in which blacks were detained, the pain they endured and the survival some fought for. He narrates that:

With much rough handling and unnecessary ferocity, we were now ushered down into a place of perpetual night. Once below our bodies received a salutation of supreme loathsomeness in the form of a feter, which affected a manifold increase in the constant grieving and pining which echoed among we brethren. The heat of the climate, the number of

cargo, the necessity for loathsome deeds in this common space, soon rendered this wretched situation impossible. It was to be some days before the vessel set forth. In this time many died where they lay, some on top of others, until the whole scene become one unconceivable horror. The white men came below with eatables. Those who found the strength to refuse were lashed, often to death. (138)

Rape and physical torture were constant brutalities which the white men onboard submitted black women to, as Cambridge remarks: "Their most constant practice was to commit violent depredations on the chastity of female slaves, as though these princesses were the most abandoned women of their species" (138).

It can therefore be observed that the tragic experiences of black slaves during the Middle Passage were beyond compare. By describing these horrors Cambridge partakes in the uncovering of the hidden aspects of the history of slavery. This participation is his contribution to the construction of black history, namely, the history of slavery. However, in *Cambridge*, Emily also offers her own account of the history of slavery. In her account she allows the voices of some slaves to echo. It is these voices that will be extracted from her narrative, at this level, to present blacks' experiences of slavery in the island.

One of these black voices echoes the situation of slave women whose role apart from working on plantations, was to populate the plantations. They were therefore considered as breeders whose role was essential to the maintenance of the plantation economy or slavery. One of the black women who has just put to birth remarks to Emily, "See misses, see! Here nice new nigger me born to bring for work for misses" (67). A similar case is observed by Emily who narrates it in the following terms:

Stella's own sister explained to me that she had 'twelve whole children and three half ones, by which she meant miscarriages. And should one chance to hear of a 'one-belly woman, she will be labouring under 'the pleasing punishment which women bear', and is therefore discharged from all severe labour [...] Happy is the mother who survives this harpy-

trial; her issue is added joyously to the list of the slave population in the plantation-book. But sadly, her joy will not endure beyond a few weeks, for these women are soon pressed again into service and driven afield. I heard complaints from one such bearer who claimed, 'Misses me have pickaninny two weeks in de sick-house, den out upon the hoe again and we can't strong that way, misses, we can't strong.' On the mothers' return to the fields their progeny are lost to the charge of these self-same midwives. It is only to be expected that before long the pleasures of field-gossip far outweigh the burdens of that weary duty known as motherhood. (68)

Another instance of black's account of slavery is rendered by Cambridge when he tries to explain the reason behind Christiana's madness. Cambridge contends that Christiana, his wife, suffers from sexual abuse on the part of Mr Brown who after having used her for several years abandons her for Emily. Cambridge helplessly remarks that:

Mr Brown's obsession with this woman, and his lack of attention to my wife, caused my wife further to enter that region of the mind whence all attempts to retrieve her are rendered futile [...] my wife's mind was no longer her own [...] she now considered herself little more than a common animal. (164-165)

The above quotation shows the treatment black slave women received from their masters. In fact, they were the sexual object of their white masters, regardless if they (black slave women) were married, pregnant for their husbands or not.

In the meantime, female slave accounts of the traumas of slavery through the voice of Emily can be read as the filling of gaps which western records of slavery consciously left out. Their intrusion into Emily's narrative is symbolic of the slave's perspectives which Phillips seeks to integrate in the Western discourse on slavery. Admittedly, the point of view of those who create events is as important as the point of view of those subjected to these events. Therefore, by allowing the voices of black slaves to creep into Emily's, Phillips reconstructs the history of slavery placing side by side the Western perspective and the perspective of black slaves. This

interruption of the voices of slaves can also be interpreted as a form of challenge of local narratives to the master narratives or hegemonic discourse which Emily's journal represents.

In *Crossing the River* the construction of history by black characters is portrayed in "West", through Martha who through her memory recollection tells what she encountered while in slavery, and still continues to encounter as a free slave. She starts by describing how their master places her and her entire family on the auction block to sell them. She first of all wonders to her husband, "Lucas we going to be sold?". On the auction block she sorrowfully expressed the pain she endures, as she will soon be separated from her family. She describes the scene thus:

The lawyer grabs the iron-throated bell and summons the people to attention. Then the auctioneer slaps his gavel against a block of wood. I fall to my knees and take Eliza Mae in my arms. I did not suckle this child at the breast, nor did I cradle her in my arms and shower her with what love I have, to see her taken away from me. As the auctioneer begins to bellow, I look into Eliza Mae's face. He is calling out the date, the place, the time. Master would never have sold any of us. I tell this to my terrified child. Slaves. Farm animals. Household furniture. Farm tools. We are to be sold in this order. (76)

After their exhibition on the market place, Martha now describes the dislocation of her family following their purchase. Of the auctioneer, she remarks:

Then he slaps this instrument against the wooden block with a thud. Now again he gestures towards us. My throat is dry. Eliza Mae moves restlessly, so I take her hand. She cries. I pinch her to quiet her. I am sorry. But it is for her own good [...] the families in need of domestics, or the farmers in need of breeding wenches, they look across at us and wait their turn. I am too old for breeding [...] My Eliza Mae hold on to me but it will be to no avail. She will be a prime purchase. And on her own she stands a better chance of a fine family. I want to tell her this, to encourage her to let go, but I have not the heart to look on. The auctioneer cries to the heavens. A ban

strikes up [...] Soon the bidding will begin. 'Moma'. Eliza Mae whispers the word over and over again, as though this were the only word she possessed. This one word. This word only. (77)

Martha's reminiscences take her back to Virginia where slavery was still enforced. Her description of the various stages of her auction and the one of her family on the slave auction block is a traumatic experience which still haunts her even though she now lives in Kansas. The dislocation of her family and the horrors she endured in slavery are painful events that have marked her life all through even when she encounters her daughter Eliza several years after. The narrator describes the effect of her trauma on her when he writes:

In this Kansas, Martha sometimes heard voices. Perhaps there was a God. Perhaps not. She found herself assaulted by loneliness, and drifting into middle age without a family. Voices from the past. Some she recognised, some she did not. But nevertheless, she listened. Recognizing her despair. (79)

Martha therefore constructs the history of slavery by revealing the atrocities she endured in slavery: Her forced immigration from Africa, the oppression she suffered, her pain, humiliation and dehumanisation are traumatic experiences that were erased by official records of slavery. By revealing these terrors, she contributes together with other blacks, victims of slavery, to the reconstruction of the history of slavery.

In *Higher Ground*, the author goes back to the African coast to depict the way blacks are captured and sold into slavery. Through the voice of an unidentified character who acts as a translator and guide to white slavers, and through the voice another unidentified black girl, the experiences of Africans in the history of slave trade and slavery is also revealed. In the opening pages of the novel, the black guide clearly explains that the presence of the Governor on the coast is due to slave business or slave trade. The guide explains that black captives are exchanged against objects and are then shipped to the Americas. A situation that justifies why coastal villages have been stripped from their working force, the young

men. The guide contends: “The village is denuded. It contains mainly women and old men, with a few children (the seedlings) running wild. They will soon blossom into the young exportable goods of this trading continent (22). He notes that:

The men, women, and children wear heavy wooden collars that are secured with rod rings and linked the person in front and the person behind by means of a cumbersome chain. The soldiers eye their captives, rope whips poised, muskets cocked, and it is written clear and bold on their faces that this return march to the coast has left them near drained of energy. They will have walked through fields of tall grass, past villages freshly deserted save for the smoke that billows idly from straw roofs, along river banks [...] at the end of each day the soldiers will have handed the captives a small measure of grain and watched as they tried but failed to rest their heads on the ground [...] they know that today they must again trudge with the dew on their bare feet and the wood and iron around their necks. The soldiers snap their whips and instruct the man at the head of the coffle to strike a steady drum to which the captives will march. (57)

This narration describing the hunt for slaves then their channelling to the coast for shipment follows the black girl's experience of slavery. She describes the rape which Price, the assistant Governor, submitted her to. She says about Price that:

He burned me with fire, but he also entered me at the smallest end. Is this something that gives these people pleasure? He seldom spoke with me. For each mark of fire that he made on my body he entered me again but he never seemed to break into satisfaction, do you understand? [...] And then my mouth, he took pleasure there, but again he could not break into satisfaction and I found it as painful but even more shameful for I could not scream. When he did not like the noise that I would sometimes make when he took pleasure at the back end, he would use my mouth to quieten me and say that if he felt my teeth he would kill me. (45)

So far blacks' experiences of slavery have been a bitter one. It exposed the inhumanity of the white man. The slaves' account of their stories in slavery show that white men were responsible for the

humiliation and dehumanisation of the black man in the history of slavery. This perhaps explains why the atrocities of slavery were silenced in hegemonic history. They however resurfaced in counter narratives of the subalterns where slaves are given voice to tell their own stories of slavery. And this attempt to reconstruct the past has been the agenda of Phillips when he revisits history in his neo-slave narratives.

In *The Nature of Blood*, Phillips moves on to explore the trauma of the holocaust on Jews which he then juxtaposes with the trauma of slavery. He puts his reader in contact with a wide range of black and Jewish characters all suffering from traumatic memories of oppression and violence. While this study focuses on the construction of the history of slavery as a traumatic experience in the life of blacks, an analogy can be made with the suffering endured by Jews during the holocaust. This parallel is done for the purpose of cross-cultural solidarity which the black Atlantic seeks to foster. However, many critics have commented Phillips' shift of focus from black concerns to Jewish history. Tuba Gonel in “Traumatic Memory, Diaspora and Caryl Phillips: *The Nature of Blood*, *Higher Ground* and *Crossing The River*” argues that through his courageous attempt to describe the persecution of the Jews Phillips, in a way, intends to shift light on his own history. He quotes Stef Craps who writes:

The bloody excesses of colonialism, the pillage and rape of modern Africa, the transportation of 11 million black people to the Americas, and their subsequent bondage were not on the curriculum, and certainly not on the television screen. As a result I vicariously channelled a part of my hurt and frustration through the Jewish experience. (“Linking Legacies of Loss”, 191+)

According to Gonel, *The Nature of Blood* points to the surprisingly similar experiences of humanity, and invites his reader “to recognize a common human essence that persists across space and time” (Craps, 191). However, the despair and psychological trauma that echo throughout the novel are depicted in the following lines:

It was a long hot summer that second year, and the heat served only to increase the stench and the sadness. People continued to fall dead in the street from starvation, but an increasingly common practice was the taking of one's own life, and that of one's family. Jumping from a high window was a popular individual method, while rat poison administered to food was a common way of dispatching a household at one sitting. By utilizing these and other procedures, one remained master of life and death. A precious gift. (66)

In the pages in which Phillips tells Eva's story, he invites the reader to gain insight into the world of a refugee who had to experience the worst atrocities, humiliation and fear caused during the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Just like the traumatic experiences and the dehumanisation process blacks went through during slavery, Phillips also paints in *The Nature of Blood*, the destructive influence of the fear and dehumanisation process that the holocaust survivors had to go through. Eva mutters:

... And it is a dark night. I lie suspended without sound, without sight, without distraction. Focusing on myself and my fears. Worried about everything. Simply about everything. The tinned meat. A layer of lard on top, the meat underneath. Should I eat it? Can I eat it? And does the weight of the dead add itself to the earth? And if so, will the earth stop moving? Will it? Mama. Papa. There is not even a place where I might wear an uneven circle into the matted grass around your graves. And still I try to master these new gestures of life. How to use a toothbrush. How to fold toilet paper. How to say hello and goodbye. How to eat slowly. How to express joy. The rediscovery of smell. The smell of a tree. The smell of damp. The smell of rain. I worry about smell. A flower's perfume would knock me over. I worry about everything. (The Nature of Blood, 32)

Eva's alienation from her community not only weakens her but also enfeebles the image of her past, present and the future in her mind, as she says:

Cunning was a skill worth acquiring. As was endurance. Community formed the basis of our lives, but then came the long march, and yet another train,

and then this place, which offered not community, no planning, no hope for survival. No work. Merely death. And waiting. And here, without community, without routine, only the strongest can survive. Everyday I have stared death in the face. To become weak is to disappear. And eventually I felt myself becoming different. [...] we have forgotten how to think of tomorrow. [...] The sun rises, gloriously ignorant of the fact that a new day is not necessarily a good day. As though I want to survive. I remind myself that this sunrise has already happened in some other place. And later, our sunset will be somebody else's sunrise. (17-18)

Like blacks in slavery, holocaust victims also witnessed loss of self-respect, hope, home, the repetition of unbearable humiliation and deprivation positions. Trying to capture this humiliation, Eva notes of her father:

Papa had already been forbidden to practise medicine, [...] Like Papa, he [Papa's friend] was no longer permitted to practise as a doctor and, his elderly mother apart, had no family. What else was there? There was humiliation. There was the daily anxiety of being easy prey to groups of men who ran through the streets yelling slogans. [...] There was the fear of being betrayed by the gesture, a slip of the tongue, or an accent. There was waiting and worrying. [...] There was the constant bullying. [...] There was blackmail. [...] And everybody dreamt of escape to America. But in the meantime, there was humiliation. Forbidden to ride on a trolley-car. Forbidden to sit in a park. Permitted to breathe. Permitted to cry. (85-86)

In juxtaposing the trauma of slavery and holocaust, Phillips primarily aims to reveal the fact that "differences between people ... are to be only skin-deep" (Craps, 191). This explains Craps' assertion that "[t]he equation between different historical experiences ... can be interpreted as evidence of Phillips's adherence to the confident humanist universalism..." (191). Another motive that drives Craps to claim this may be Phillips's effective first-hand narration, in other words his "inhabit[ing] the minds and voices of his characters". "It seems as if neither chronological or spatial distance nor race or

gender differences are allowed to set limits to the power of the sympathetic imagination, which goes inside the characters, no matter how deeply they may be traumatized, without meeting any obstacles" (191). Gonel remarks that because Phillips embraces the common experiences and traits of separate people in distance, space and time, his works are of great importance when it comes to insights into the vulnerable personalities and memories of people who have to endure various historical catastrophes. It is in this perspective that Hasan Sarvan and Charles Marhama in "The Fictional Works of Caryl Phillips: An Introduction" conclude that Phillips is "a writer who can penetrate the inner being of people vastly different from himself in time, place, and gender, yet people very much like us all in common and eternal human inheritance of pain and suffering" (40). By depicting so vividly the life of blacks in slavery through his storytelling, Phillips aptly describes the trauma of black slaves. It is through this vivid description that both writers provide a space that enables black characters to construct their history. Judith Lewis Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* suggests that "[a]t each point in the narrative [...], the patient must reconstruct not only what happened but also what she felt. The description of emotional states must be as painstakingly detailed as the description of facts" (177). And each character's narration of their horrors, as illustrated above, is a contribution to this gesture.

Phillips also relies on narrative technique to portray construction of his characters' history of slavery. He uses these techniques to indicate his commitment to the reconstruction of history by offering voice to the two parties involved in slavery, the white masters and the black victims. In this way he most effectively makes use of polyphony to express the views of various characters in his novels under study. The interpretative method of his texts combined with writing techniques such as non-linear narrative and flashbacks foster the importance of the relationship between present and past and help to revisit black history. In *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River* and *The Nature of Blood* narratives sound disrupted but in reality, they have an undercurrent. Although these novels have the main plotline, the

characters' memories of the past and interfering narrator's comments deviate from the main plotline thus emphasising the importance of flashbacks to the past. As stated earlier, disruptive narrative technique creates a specific effect on the novel: through constant shift in past and present the importance of the relationship between past and present is stressed; the past is seen as an important precondition of characters' present state.

Conclusion

Memory has played an important role in literary discourse. In depicting the history of slavery, especially its tragic side and its impact on blacks' psyche Phillips not only present the relation between trauma, memory, history and fiction, but they also explore in his writing how scarred individuals can come to terms with the atrocities they experienced, in order to reconnect with the present and hope for a better future. The traumatic memory of characters in captivity enables them to fill the gaps of the history of slavery. As this paper has demonstrated, the psyche of slaves is full with the havocs of slavery. This shock irrupts into the present and is indicative of what Pierre Janet, quoted by Kathleen Brogan in *Cultural Haunting*, calls "traumatic memory" (7). According to Janet, this type of memory is characterized by inflexibility and by the mechanic non-verbal repetition of the past as evident in Caryl Phillips' *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River* and *The Nature of Blood*. Reference to the past through memory recollection does not only fill the silences of the history of slavery, but it also constitutes a process that leads to the characters' healing.

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