

Caribbean Literature: Looking Backward and Forward¹

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"From extension of other voices. We became voices of our own".

Linton Kwesi Johnson²

I do not know if you are familiar with Caribbean culture. You probably know about rum, reggae and beaches. But, as we shall see, there is much more to Caribbean culture than these things. Literature, for example, is one of the area's major sources of richness. My intention at the start was to cover in this talk the whole field of Caribbean literature, but I have had to narrow down, for obvious reasons. My lecture today will focus on the fiction of the generation of Anglo-Caribbean novelists who came of age in England in the 80s. I will attempt to give you an overview of this transitional generation of writers, most of whom were born in the Caribbean but were brought up or educated in Britain. I will try to give you an idea of how their writing tries to cope with this cultural tension, the sense that they have of belonging and yet simultaneously not belonging to Britain.

After an introduction in which I will contextualize the writers under study here, my talk will be divided into three sections. First of all, I will try to circumscribe my subject; then, I will focus briefly on poetry; finally, I will discuss a (subjective) selection of novels which seem to me representative of the generation of writers in question.

Let's first start with some background information. I guess that the name 'Empire Windrush' rings a bell for some of you. As you may know, it is the name of the boat which, in June 1948, brought over some 492 Jamaican passengers to the UK. This arrival is often regarded as the starting point of twentieth-century Caribbean migration to Britain, but it could also be seen as one of the last steps in a long history of migration which started with the nomadic Amerindians, then went on with the European settlers, the African slaves, the Indian indentured labourers and all the other groups which now make up the Caribbean, one of the most cosmopolitan areas in the world. Anyhow, in 1948, the Empire Windrush West Indians were enthusiastically welcomed as so many helping hands in a country suffering from labour shortage. The event was given wide coverage in the British press at the time for -- its

symbolic value aside -- it had some factual importance: it was the first massive landing of West Indians on British soil, and it inaugurated a wave of large-scale migration that was to last for two decades. Yet one should not forget that there had been a significant Caribbean presence in Britain for centuries. As early as the end of the eighteenth century, several thousand black people from the West Indies were living in Britain, but this presence was somehow forgotten. As one commentator points out, 'Traces of black life have been removed from the British past to ensure that blacks are not part of the British future'.³ And as you will see later, the generation of writers we are going to examine today will endeavour to fight this amnesia about the black presence in Britain.

Be it as it may, *The Empire Windrush* was the start of a huge exodus that brought thousands of Caribbean people into Britain, which made David Dabydeen, one of the writers examined in this essay, say, as a joke, that at the end of the twentieth century, Britain was the third largest Caribbean island, after Jamaica and Trinidad, with about half a million West Indian citizens.⁴

There was a significant proportion of artists and writers among the post-war Caribbean settlers in Britain. The best-known are Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Edgar Mittelholzer, Sam Selvon, and V. S. Naipaul. Their position is paradigmatic of that of the average Caribbean immigrant, since their motivations were also two-pronged. On the one hand, they were driven by economic motives: there were no major publishing houses in the Caribbean and most important publishers had their seats in London. Migrating meant therefore the possibility of being published and thus gaining access to a wider readership. On the other hand, the Caribbean writers' urge to go to Britain was also fuelled by emotional and metaphysical factors. Suffice it to say here that colonial education had made Caribbean people look up to Britain as the real world, the place where things could happen. For their art to develop to the full Caribbean artists needed to confront Prospero in his own land and come to terms with their colonial status, a process described by George Lamming in his seminal collections of essays *The Pleasures of Exile* published in 1960.

If the expectations of the Caribbean migrant to Britain were very high, both economically and emotionally, since they thought they were going 'home', reality turned out to be very different from the myth, and the ensuing disillusion was all the more shattering because the myth had remained unshakeable for centuries. It was true enough, at least up to the end of the 1960s, that there were jobs to be found. But the pay was low and many West Indians were underemployed. Housing, too, was a source of deep frustration. Many landlords refused coloured tenants and when they did accept them it was often to put them up in run

down and substandard accommodation for which they charged high prices. Discrimination in employment and housing brought home to Caribbean immigrants the fact that before being Britons they were blacks who were likely to be discriminated against. While one cannot deny the traumatizing effect of this experience, it did have positive effects which only became visible with the passing of time. The difficulty of integration forced Caribbean people to re-assess their status as colonials and rediscover their own identity and values. That is why immigration to Britain also helped to create a feeling of 'Caribbeanness', or rather 'West Indianness', among the immigrants. According to Lamming: 'No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory. ... In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England'.⁵

This process of self-discovery is nowhere better illustrated than in the prolific creativity of the Caribbean writers exiled in Britain from the 1950s onwards. They not only wrote extensively about their experience as exiles but also about their Caribbean home, which they saw with more clear-sightedness from a distance. And interestingly, the journey to the former colonizer's country provoked an unprecedented creative boom which, in turn, signalled the birth of a specifically Caribbean literary consciousness. We are going to examine its repercussions on the second generation of Caribbean writers who are now also part of the British literary tradition and whose main achievement has been to build bridges between the past and the future.

Histories of Caribbean literature are notably difficult to write because they demand that the scholar respect national or regional differences while paying attention to the commonalities inherited from the past.⁶ The chronicler of the new voices within that tradition faces the extra challenge of dealing with a body of writing still in the making, and in which, therefore, it is harder to perceive general trends. As this survey is not able to benefit from the vantage point afforded by distance, it is bound to be tentative and to raise questions which will remain unanswered. But this difficulty of capturing a still unfolding tradition has not been the only problem, for, as we will see, more specific questions concerning appellation and criteria of inclusion have proved of more immediate concern.

The generation of writers I am going to examine here comprises, among others, such novelists as David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, Caryl Phillips, and Joan Riley. It seems important to note from the start that these authors should not be seen in isolation, for they are a transitional generation, the inheritors of a complex tradition. Their writing owes much to the ground-breaking generation of artists who -- from Jean Rhys in the 1930s to Wilson Harris,

George Lamming, Sam Selvon, and V.S. Naipaul after WWII -- preceded them to the so-called 'Mother Country'. While the younger writers did not have the same cultural shock as the first group who arrived in England as adults and with a colonial experience, they live like their predecessors on the cusp of at least two cultures. Therefore, like the first generation, they still 'found themselves trying to deal with loneliness, ambivalence, and confusion about their relationship to British society', as Caryl Phillips put it in a piece entitled 'The Legacy of Lamming and Selvon'.⁷

Even if it is necessary to attempt to circumscribe these writers, though one may wonder whether it is desirable or even possible to define the contours of an essentially nomadic tradition, in principle resistant to containment. The following parameters should, for that reason, be regarded only as analytical categories that helped me to delineate my literary sample, not as ways of constricting a fluctuating reality.

The group of writers I have undertaken to examine here is sometimes subsumed under the label 'Black British' which, like most categories, is convenient but ultimately unsatisfactory, because basically misleading. As Fred D'Aguiar argues, this designation not only assumes that blackness and Britishness are homogeneous wholes, but also restricts creativity to racial or national experiences, thereby negating individual artistic licence.⁸ Moreover, because it sets artificial boundaries to the creative imagination, it seems particularly inappropriate with reference to a writer like Caryl Phillips, whose work posits a cross-cultural vision of the world. Regardless of these general objections, I also find 'Black British' unsuitable to describe the new generation of Caribbean writers in Britain because, as an umbrella term, it covers too large a literary territory to be of any critical use. Indeed, it can be employed to identify writers as divergent as Ben Okri from Nigeria or Salman Rushdie from India, two artists who do not have much more in common than their post-coloniality. What I propose to use instead is 'The New Caribbean Diaspora in Britain', or 'The New Diaspora' for short. A less static formula, it not only covers what these writers are but also, more fittingly, what they write, and thus better matches my critical concern with their post-migratory sensibility, while also implying (at least in its longer form) the participation of this body of writing in a changing British society.

I shall now set out to address the question of who 'The New Diaspora' includes and along what temporal and geographical norms. I have decided to narrow down my focus on writers of Caribbean heritage born in the 1950s, and brought up and/or educated in Britain where most of them arrived as children or teenagers. This criterion necessarily excludes a novelist like Beryl Gilroy, even if most of her work was published in the nineties and often

deals with preoccupations dear to The New Diaspora, as in her significantly entitled *Boy-Sandwich* (1989),⁹ which features Tyrone, a young man who comes to terms with his Britishness after a return to his parents' Jamaica. Yet, Gilroy belongs to a generation imbued with the myth of Britain as the land of milk and honey, one which came to England with very different expectations from those individuals who arrived as children.

My geographical option also explains the absence from my corpus of such a major figure of diasporic Caribbean literature as Jamaica Kincaid who is based in the USA. Although her origins affect her writing in the same way as that of other writers of her generation living in the UK, her art springs from a different social and literary context to that of her fellow writers based in Britain, where a strong imperial tradition has done little to accommodate minority cultures within its institutions, although things have started to change. The ambivalent approach to Britain of Anglo-Caribbean writers, at once assertive but also appreciative of their own partly European cultural heritage, is bound to lead, as we shall see, to distinctive modes of writing. This ambiguity affects Caribbean writers in the USA to a lesser extent, for their integration into the multicultural American canvas, facilitated by a well-established African-American tradition,¹⁰ may allow the artists to find their own voice more easily, even though it also tends to ghettoize them.¹¹ But Kincaid is not the only one to be left out of this brief survey. The same could be said of Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo and Neil Bissoondath writing from Canada.

Finally, my selection of writers might give the misleading impression that we have to do with a neatly defined group. However, 'The New Diaspora' is a very flexible category, full of borderline cases with multiple locations. Fred D'Aguiar and Caryl Phillips, for example, spend much of their time in the USA for professional reasons, but their outlook remains basically shaped by their British experience. So, while it is essential to raise questions about who the new Caribbean voices are, it is even more important, in view of their diasporic fluidity, to examine what they have to say and how they do it.

Though not the focus of this talk, poetry deserves more than a passing mention for the transitional role it played between the first and second generations of Caribbean writers in Britain. Verse has often been a popular genre with budding literary traditions, because it requires less time than prose while allowing more immediacy in expression. That much, at least, can be said of the new Caribbean voices in Britain. But the fact that Caribbean verse is often intended to be performed may be a more specific reason for its success. An obvious legacy of the Caribbean oral tradition, performance literature, with the link between artist and

audience it implies, can indeed be instrumental in strengthening a young community dispersed by exile.

One can make out two main trends in the poetry of The New Diaspora. One is a poetry centering on the Caribbean past, whether history or childhood memories, or often a mixture of the two, as in Grace Nichols's *i is a long memored woman* (1983) and Fred D'Aguiar's *Mama Dot* (1985). It is no coincidence that most of the poets who belong to this group later turned to fiction. David Dabydeen's work best illustrates such a development: starting with an exploration of his diasporic East Indian ancestry in the collections *Slave Song* (1984) and *Coolie Odyssey* (1988), he only turned to fiction in the 1990s. Moreover, the journey back in time at the heart of this poetry reminds us, like the fiction examined later, that the diasporic imagination often needs to look backward before coming to terms with its present predicament.

Protest is the second trend in the poetry of The New Diaspora. Though clearly rooted in the present British reality, what is commonly called 'dub poetry', i.e. poetry spoken to a reggae rhythm, is nonetheless a way of 'mekkin histri' according to Linton Kwesi Johnson, its most famous representative in the UK, a selection of whose work was published in 2002 in the Penguin Modern Classics series as *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*.¹² His now classic 'Inglan is a Bitch' (1980) voices the frustrations of his contemporaries through the disappointment of a first generation immigrant, a further proof of the close links between the two generations in spite of different circumstances:

w'en mi jus' come to Landan toun
mi use to work pan di andahgroun
but workin' pan di andahgroun
y'u don't get fi know your way aroun'

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runnin' whey fram it
[. . .]

mi know dem have work, work in abundant
yet still, dem mek mi redundant
now, at fifty-five mi gettin' quite ol'

yet still, dem sen' mi fi goh draw dole

Inglan is a bitch

dere's no escapin' it

Inglan is a bitch fi true

is whey wi goh dhu 'bout it?¹³

In his rendering of race riots, police violence and the rage of black youth, Johnson never advocates a return to the Caribbean but rather pleads, especially in his later pieces, for more political awareness and continued resistance in what Rastafarians call ' Babylon'

Although there is a sense that rage, like history, needs to be addressed before a post-migratory identity can be achieved, this revolutionary poetry has not spawned any major novelist, which, incidentally, could be an indication of the crippling effect of anger on art. Nor have its themes led to major developments in fiction with the exception of early novels like Norman Smith's *Bad Friday* (1982) and David Simon's *Railton Blues* (1983).¹⁴ Written in the wake of the Brixton riots in the early 1980s, both convey the anger of the new generation who have come to the realization that their parents were lured to England by vain promises.¹⁵ Like the marginalized youths in Linton Kwesi Johnson's poems, they experience exile in Britain as a new form of colonization or slavery. Yet nowhere is there a sense of nostalgia for the Caribbean. *Bad Friday* and *Railton Blues* are, it is true, only minor novels. Yet they raise important issues for the second generation of Caribbean writers in Britain. One of them is that Caribbean dispersal has not made regional characteristics altogether redundant, which might seem paradoxical if one considers that the vision developed by several writers of the new generation tends to be supra-national. Like most 'dub poets' and most novelists writing in the tradition of social realism, Norman Smith and David Simon are of Jamaican descent. This is hardly surprising since a keen political consciousness has been the hallmark of most writing from Jamaica, the birthplace of Marcus Garvey and the home of Rastafarianism and reggae.¹⁶ Similarly, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar's distinctive poetic imagination can be linked to Guyanese history and landscape.

Significantly, one of the first novels of The New Diaspora is *The Unbelonging* (1985) by Joan Riley, another Jamaican writer, whose work comes closest to the protest writing just described. As its title indicates, this book dramatizes the dilemma of a generation which feels at home neither in England nor in its native Caribbean. It tells the story of Hyacinth, a teenager who arrives in England in the 1970s. Faced with an abusive father and hostile

schoolmates, she retreats into her dream of an idealized Jamaica which turns into a nightmare when, after taking a degree, she journeys back to the Caribbean. There, she is brutally confronted with her ultimate homelessness when the "Go back whe yu come fram" of destitute Jamaicans echoes the "Go back where you belong"¹⁷ of racist Britons. The difficulty of ever returning to the Caribbean 'home', understandably a major preoccupation of The New Diaspora, is also evoked in Caryl Phillips's *A State of Independence* (1986).

Apart from its emblematic value for a whole generation, *The Unbelonging* is worth mentioning because it is a pioneering work.¹⁸ One of the first novels published by a Caribbean woman writer in Britain since Jean Rhys in the 1930s, it prefigures the emergence of a tradition of women's writing still in the making, since, with the exception of Pauline Melville, partly British, partly Guyanese, the author of a novel entitled *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997), post-war Anglo-Caribbean writing did not at first produce major female novelists.¹⁹ Things have changed recently with the publication of *White Teeth* (2000) by half Jamaican, half British, Zadie Smith and of *Small Island* (2004), by Andrea Levy, also of Jamaican descent. Also worth mentioning is Leone Ross, of Jamaican and British heritage too, whose novel *Orange Laughter* (1999) marks her out as a talented novelist. Yet, it seems to me that these writers belong to a newer generation who feel British in the first place, and cannot therefore be easily described as partaking of Caribbean literature.

But let us go back to *The Unbelonging* which was published in 1985. Even if it is not artistically successful, mostly because of a form of crippling realism, *The Unbelonging* contains in embryo some of the concerns that inform the ethos of Riley's fellow novelists. Chief among these are the disrupted family as a metaphor for the post-migratory condition, and an obsession with memory as part of a quest for a post-migratory identity. In what follows, I will attempt to examine how these two issues are handled by the generation of writers under study here.

Most novels of the New Diaspora deal with the family as a site of disruption. David Dabydeen's *The Intended* provides a good example of this. It centres on a nameless teenager who, away from his native Guyana and in the care of the English social services, grapples with the excitement and temptations but also the roughness of multiracial London. As several commentators have pointed out, it is a variation on the traditional apprenticeship novel,²⁰ a favourite genre with the Caribbean writers of the 1950s and 1960s in which the child's coming of age paralleled the coming of age of nations on the eve of independence, the major difference being that it is the social services, thus an institution, that here play the role of surrogate parent providing for the material, not the affective needs, of the child.²¹ This shift

symbolically focuses attention on the inhospitality of England. It is as if the new generation of Caribbean immigrants had rejected the idea of ever finding a mother(land) or even stepmother(land) in England.

The arrival in England of Dabydeen's protagonist, and of Riley's too, conveys more than coldness and indifference: it points towards a re-enactment of colonization and enslavement. The colonial trauma has not vanished with exile; it only seems to have been displaced at the level of the family, which, as Milan Kundera reminds us, functions with the same psychological mechanisms as society at large.²² The abusive behaviour of Hyacinth's father has clear colonial overtones and is but one instance of The New Diaspora's frequent conflation of sexual and colonial victimization. Like the immigrants of the previous generation, the young girl is sent for to meet her father's needs. His violence, both physical and mental, and his voice, sounding 'like the crack of a whip',²³ immediately evoke the plantation owner. In Dabydeen's novel too the Boys' Home, into whose care the hero has been abandoned by his father, is described as a 'prison for youth'²⁴ where newcomers have to undergo 'a period of seasoning',²⁵ just as the slaves of old had to on arrival in the Caribbean.

However, parental surrogacy can also feature in the writing of The New Diaspora in a more positive though still ambiguous light. This is particularly the case in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1993), a novel with visionary accents that addresses cross-culturality through imaginative journeys in the history of the African diaspora. Perhaps the most powerful image of surrogacy in that novel is that of an African father who sells his three children into slavery, and thereby triggers off the African dispersal, but eventually takes Joyce, a white English woman, as one of his own children.²⁶ In Phillips's *A Distant Shore*, published in 2003, Gabriel, a refugee from Africa whose family has been decimated by war, is taken in by a couple of older Britons who regard him as the son they never had.²⁷

Interestingly, this recurrent preoccupation with genealogy and filiation is also reflected in The New Diaspora's extensive use of intertextuality. Caryl Phillips's *Higher Ground* (1989), for example, relies on a complex intertextual web (including, among others, Joseph Conrad, JM Coetzee, George Jackson, and Anne Frank) which conveys not only his affiliation to but also displacement from the West Indian, African American and European literary traditions. A similar ambivalence obtains in David Dabydeen's *The Intended*, which, as its title indicates, is built on a web of references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

An obsession with memory is another major concern in the writing of The New Diaspora. It is interesting to note that out of the two or three dozen novels written by this generation, relatively few take place in contemporary Britain, and when they do, it is often

with flashbacks set in the native land or in Africa, as if the writers had to come to terms with their past before handling the present in a straightforward way. For example, it took Phillips six novels before he could address contemporary England in *A Distant Shore*, even though he had dealt with it in his drama and all previous novels were to some extent allegories of the present. For the majority of younger Caribbean writers, migration seems to have lost the mimetic appeal that underlay most novels of the previous generation. The exilic experience has acquired a symbolical, even mythical quality that is best explored in a foreign setting, away from the potentially explosive scene of today's Britain. This choice, coupled in many cases with a journey back in time, cannot be simply put down to escapism or nostalgia, which Jason Cowley has described as a form of sterile archaeology.²⁸ Rather it seems to originate in the writers' urge to examine their present post-colonial (or, to some, neo-colonial) situation from a meaningful vantage point. As Fred D'Aguiar writes in relation to Black British poetry: 'Even when [it] is ostensibly preoccupied with some other place, it is often instructive as allegory about life in Britain'.²⁹ Similarly, he points out that a novel can talk 'about contemporary issues in terms of a past event'.³⁰ His fiction and that of his generation should definitely be read with this in mind.

Part of the search for a new Caribbean exilic sensibility caught between the old and the new, past and present, home and host country, the exploration of the past informs many novels whose ambition is to uncover the long-hidden complexities of history, not only of plantation societies but also of Britain. Worth mentioning are David Dabydeen's *The Counting House* (1997) which explores the arrival of Indian labourers in nineteenth-century Guyana and *A Harlot's Progress* (1999) which, as its title indicates, retrieves the characters from a series of prints by eighteenth century English artist Hogarth, among them Mungo who, like the prostitute of the title, is exploited by the colonial metropolis. Other texts in the same vein are Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994), and *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) a poetic tale which concentrates on the history of the *Zong*, an eighteenth-century slave-ship whose captain threw more than a hundred slaves overboard to claim the insurance money, a sombre event dramatized in a painting by Turner. Finally, there is Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge* (1991), a sensitive exploration of the violence and intricacies of plantation life in nineteenth-century Caribbean society, and *Crossing the River* (1993) which covers two hundred and fifty years of the African diaspora.

There is no time to discuss all these novels in detail I shall therefore only focus on one text representative of that trend: D'Aguiar's deceptively simple first novel, *The Longest Memory*. This novel offers a reconstruction of the past, not as a retaliative move, but rather as

a way of understanding its intricacies and, if possible, revising its biases. Far from being a retreat from the present reality, it starts with the pregnant premise that 'the future is just more of the past waiting to happen'.³¹ Clearly, history functions here as a starting point, not as an end in itself. Set on a Virginian plantation at the turn of the nineteenth century, *The Longest Memory* is built around the figure of Whitechapel, an old, obedient slave who unwittingly causes the death of his runaway son, Chapel, by reporting to the master the direction he has taken. From this central event, the novel then branches out into the testimonies of its many protagonists: Mr Whitechapel, the liberal master; Sanders Senior, the overseer who actually fathered the runaway slave; Lydia, the master's daughter who taught Chapel to read and write; Chapel, the slave cum poet; the unnamed editorialist of a local paper; Sanders Junior, the overseer's son who whipped his own half-brother to death.

The formal techniques used in *The Longest Memory* (also adopted in the other novels by Dabydeen and Phillips just mentioned) call attention to major developments in the fiction of The New Diaspora. On the one hand, the kaleidoscopic approach is the expression of a revisionary intent. By uncovering the long-hidden complexities of plantation societies, this form efficiently undermines a system that, very much like today's racism and essentialism, relied for its survival on a simplistic dichotomous logic and therefore rejected ambiguity as a 'sign of weakness'.³² Yet, if it successfully jettisons binarism, the novel avoids facile self-satisfaction by conveying that the 'knotted mess' brought about by slavery 'cannot now be undone, only understood'.³³

On the other hand, the polyphonic structure of *The Longest Memory* – like that of the other historical novels mentioned above – signals a compassion for the dispossessed and the victims regardless of their race or origin, as if exile had blotted out the particular responsibilities for past suffering, leaving only the pain of dispossession. The words of a character in *Witchbroom*, a novel by Lawrence Scott who shares many of the features of The New Diaspora, capture this new mood: 'My pain is not like your pain, but the edges blur'.³⁴ Like the Beurs, i.e. the second-generation North African immigrants in Europe, The New Diaspora 'instinctively identify themselves with oppressed groups in many parts of the world'.³⁵ The colonial system might be officially over, but there remains a larger oppressive order, either economic or patriarchal, to which these writers are very sensitive because of their origins. For instance, the growing concern, on the part of both female and male writers, for woman as other and outsider, as well as the focus on more domestic issues such as man/woman relationships or the generation gap partake of this change in sensibility, whose

aim it is to integrate the voiceless, or to use Carole Boyce Davies's formulation, the 'unheard' into the narrative of history.³⁶

Of all the novels mentioned in this survey, it is probably Caryl Phillips's which best exemplify this empathy with the 'other'. It shows in his sensitive recreation of female voices, his understanding but never sentimental engagement with marginalized characters, both black and white, and above all his interest in the Jewish experience admirably shown in *The Nature of Blood* (1997). One would need another lecture to render the originality and maturity of Phillips's diasporic vision which is expressed in *Crossing the River* through 'the many tongued chorus' of all the children of a world-wide diaspora who have left their homeland for good but have nonetheless achieved some sense of belonging to a community, with all the suffering and love this experience can imply. Suffice it to say here that Phillips's vision is rooted in the Caribbean exilic experience to suggest a cross-cultural conception of the universal, one which departs from the traditional model because it offers a creolizing, instead of Eurocentric, model. It is also important to point out that his contribution to the English novel, and that of his fellow writers, is not limited to the narrative techniques and the subject matters outlined in this paper, but it is above all one of new meanings and values which call into question the myth of British homogeneity and gradually lead to a redefinition of Britishness which accommodates plurality and thus includes the outsider. As Phillips himself points out in the introduction to *Extravagant Strangers*, an anthology devoted to writers born outside Britain, but who are part of its literary tradition, 'Britain has developed a vision of herself as a nation that is both culturally and ethnically homogeneous, and this vision has made it difficult for some Britons to feel that they have the right to participate fully in the main narrative of British life'.³⁷ His own writing and that of his fellow Anglo-Caribbean writers should therefore be viewed as exponents of the long-lasting vibrant British heterogeneity which has for too long remained unrecognized.

By way of conclusion let me recap the main features of The New Diaspora and focus once again on their originality. The preoccupations at the heart of their vision, like the past, the family or the construction of an identity, have always been key pieces in the Caribbean literary puzzle. What distinguishes the new generation's approach from that of their predecessors is a 'changing sameness',³⁸ a matter of different emphasis rather than diverging interests. David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe remind us that the project of the first generation of Caribbean artists in Britain was essentially based on the desire to voice a specific identity in the face of a dehumanizing colonization:

the writer from the colonies felt a need and duty to represent colonial societies, to reveal the humanity of the people to a British society maliciously ignorant of that humanity. The urgent task was to address and convince a British readership of the human values that resided in black communities.³⁹

This 'burden of revelation' no longer affects the second generation, who can rely on the audience created by their precursors.⁴⁰ Far from the writers of the second generation the idea of being 'missionaries in reverse',⁴¹ although, as Caryl Phillips regrets, 'the missionary approach -- the idea that the black writer should explain black people to white people -- dominates the thinking of some publishers and many critics'.⁴² While still writing for an overwhelmingly Western audience, The New Diaspora is driven by a more confident sense of identity, however multi-faceted or fluctuating. Freed from the 'Caliban complex',⁴³ i.e. the colonial complex, that plagued some writers of the previous generation, the younger writers now address the conundrum of Othello, i.e. that of the Westernized foreigner, who is one of the major figures in Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*. Their writing has become more of an assertion of their right to belong to British society and a repossession of a history too often silenced or partially represented.

The shift perceptible in the writing of The New Diaspora towards a more catholic -- by which I mean open and universal -- perspective is sustained by an interaction between the personal and the collective, a conceptual pair in fact constitutive of the exilic condition and productive of a tension that keeps the creative momentum alive. Exile has led first to fragmentation, which results in a confrontation with oneself, followed by an attempt to heal this disintegration by resorting to a larger political and historical frame of reference that often goes beyond the Caribbean condition, to include the diasporic world at large. This process of transformation and recovery was already at work in the writing of the previous generation, most notably in that of Wilson Harris, but generally theirs remained a more subdued affirmation of cosmopolitanism.

As I have attempted to show, what also characterizes The New Diaspora is an increased emphasis on the individual, an autobiographical trend perhaps prefigured in Naipaul's watershed though long-winded novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, which concludes with the idea that history is very much a personal matter as it 'can reside in the heart'.⁴⁴ As Margaret Joseph points out, this growing interest in the individual as opposed to the group also prevails among contemporary Caribbean writers outside Britain:

To Lamming and Selvon (and other West Indian writers of the 1950s and 1960s), Caliban was the oppressed inhabitant of colonized islands, the 'disconnected' inheritor of a traumatic past. ... A shift in focus is apparent in younger Caribbean writers such as Earl Lovelace, Erna Brodber, and Jamaica Kincaid, who have switched their attention to other concerns. ... These writers have achieved a sense of their own identity and are interested in the individual for his own sake.⁴⁵

Yet to counterbalance this focus on subjectivity, and the psychological explorations of suffering it entails, the writing of *The New Diaspora* has simultaneously turned to a universal and not just colonial historical memory, with the view of explicating, but also interrogating and revising the past. With the exception of Joan Riley, who significantly affirms 'as a writer, I am responsible only to myself and my conscience',⁴⁶ the other writers surveyed here have a sense of collective responsibility not only to their 'tribe' but also to the human race at large which results in a complex network of connections that goes well beyond the Caribbean and Britain.

However, as Bruce King remarks, Caribbean literature, especially its recent offshoots, needs to be examined 'piece by piece'

for large generalizations will not take us very far because generalizations have inscribed within themselves, within the theories on which they are based, the results they claim to investigate.⁴⁷

It is therefore necessary to examine individually all the writers that I have too rapidly mentioned here and thereby to probe deeper into the complexities of their displaced Caribbeanness.

[1] This essay is the text of a lecture that was given at the University of Huelva in Spain in March 2004.

[2] Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Voices', in *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (London: TRJ Publications, 1974), p. 23.

[3] John Solomos et al., quoted in Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), p. 399.

- [4] David Dabydeen, 'On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today', in *Tibisiri: Caribbean Writers and Critics*, ed. by Maggie Butcher (Sydney/Mundelstrup: Dangaroo, 1989), pp. 121-35 (p. 133).
- [5] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960; London: Allison & Busby, 1984), p. 214.
- [6] On this subject, see Albert Gérard, 'Problématique d'une histoire littéraire du monde caraïbe', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 245.1 (1988), pp. 45-56.
- [7] Caryl Phillips, "Following On: The Legacy of Lamming and Selvon", *Wasafiri*, 29 (Spring 1999), pp. 34-36 (p. 36).
- [8] Fred D'Aguiar, 'Against Black British Literature', in *Tibisiri: Caribbean Writers and Critics*, ed. by Maggie Butcher, pp. 106-14. Some of the points made here are also raised in Bénédicte Ledent, 'L'Afrique dans le roman de la diaspora anglophone', *Critique*, 711-712 (août-septembre 2006), pp. 739-750.
- [9] Beryl Gilroy, *Boy-Sandwich* (London: Heinemann, 1989).
- [10] This mostly applies to Afro-Caribbean writers. For Michelle Cliff, a white Jamaican, identification with the Afro-American tradition is less direct though not impossible. On this subject see Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the Subject* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 123.
- [11] See 'Jamaica Kincaid: From Antigua to America', in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, ed. by Frank Birbalsingh (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 138-51 (p. 142).
- [12] Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2002).
- [13] Johnson, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, pp. 39-41.
- [14] Norman Smith, *Bad Friday* (Birmingham: Trinity Arts Association, 1982. Also published by New Beacon, London, 1985); David Simon, *Railton Blues* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1983).
- [15] See Ferdinand Dennis, *Behind the Frontlines: Journey into Afro-Britain* (London: Gollancz, 1988) for research into this phenomenon.
- [16] It is interesting to note that David Simon dedicates *Railton Blues* to Bob Marley.
- [17] Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), p. 142.
- [18] It is one of the few novels, along with Caryl Phillips's *The Final Passage* (1985), to offer a woman's perspective on Caribbean migration to the UK.
- [19] Major contemporary Caribbean women writers like Erna Brodber, Michelle Cliff, and Dionne Brand do not belong to the Caribbean-British tradition.

[20] Apart from Margery Fee, 'Resistance and Complicity in David Dabydeen's "The Intended"', *ARIEL*, 24.1 January 1993, see Mario Relich, 'Literary Subversion in David Dabydeen's *The Intended*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 6.1 (July 1993), pp. 45-57 (p. 46) and Benita Parry, 'David Dabydeen's *The Intended*', *Kunapipi*, 13.3 (1991), pp. 85-90 (p. 85).

[21] Which is the case to some extent too of some heroines in Caryl Phillips's fiction. Leila in *The Final Passage* is taken care of by a health visitor, while both Irina and Eva leave their family in Poland and in Germany to land in the care of a landlady and the National Health Service.

[22] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. by Linda Asher (1986; London: Faber & Faber, 1988), p. 109.

[23] Riley, *The Unbelonging*, p. 29.

[24] David Dabydeen, *The Intended* (London: Martin & Secker, 1991), p. 79.

[25] Dabydeen, *The Intended*, p.81.

[26] Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

[27] Caryl Phillips, *A Distant Shore* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2003), p. 287.

[28] Jason Cowley, 'Fictional Failure', *Prospect*, December 1997, pp. 26-29.

[29] Fred D'Aguiar, 'Introduction', *The New British Poetry*, ed. by Gillian Allnutt et al. (London: Paladin, 1988), p. 3.

[30] Christina Koning, 'The Past, Another Country', *Independent on Sunday*, 23 July 1995, p. 32.

[31] Fred D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p. 1.

[32] D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory*, p. 133.

[33] D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory*, p. 137.

[34] Lawrence Scott, *Witchbroom* (London: Heinemann, 1992), p. 96.

[35] Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Resistance and Identity in Beur Narratives', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35.1 (Spring 1989), 87-102 (p. 91). Beur writers share several other characteristics with The New Diaspora, for example their predilection for the Bildungsroman and for multiple perspectives.

[36] Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 108.

[37] Caryl Phillips, *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. xiii.

[38] I owe this formulation of a differently focused continuity to Deborah E. McDowell, *'The Changing Same': Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), who in turn borrowed it from Leroi Jones (a.k.a. Amiri Baraka), 'The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)' in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. by Addison Gayle, Jr (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1971), pp. 112-25.

[39] David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (Sydney/ Mundelstrup: Dangaroo, 1987), p. 83.

[40] Frank Birbalsingh, 'An Interview with Fred D'Aguiar', *ARIEL*, 24.1 (January 1993), pp. 133-45 (p. 141).

[41] Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 83.

[42] Caryl Phillips, 'Living and Writing in the Caribbean: An Experiment', *Kunapipi*, 11. 2 (1989), 44-50 (p. 47). This article was also published in *Us/Them*, ed. by Collier, pp. 219-23 (p. 221). Phillips expresses a similar rejection of the role of missionary for his generation in 'The European Tribe', in *The European Tribe* (1987; London: Faber & Faber, 1988), pp. 119-29 (p. 129).

[43] Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (New York/London: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 123.

[44] V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 318.

[45] Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (New York/London: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 114.

[46] Joan Riley, 'Writing Reality in a Hostile Environment', in *Us/Them*, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 213-18 (p. 214).

[47] Bruce King, 'Caribbean Conundrum', *Transition*, 62 (1993), pp. 140-57 (p. 156).