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Remembering Beyond Words: Jazz and Musicality in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* [1993]

By *Giulia Mascoli*

Caryl Phillips, a contemporary British author of Caribbean descent born in St. Kitts, was brought up in Leeds and now lives in the United States. Like his life, his novels evoke complex identities that are at the crossroads between the Caribbean, Europe, the United States and Africa. His work repeatedly gives voice to those who were silenced by history, to those who are not usually represented: lonely, marginalized characters, such as an African father selling his children into slavery or a British woman giving up her mixed-race son for adoption. Tales of family disruption, displacement, dis-membering, dispossession and loss are at the heart of his work. His fictional texts, which transcend time and space, race and gender, have been the focus of many books and essays. Scholars have examined his writing through the lens of immigration, the Black Atlantic and even the Holocaust. However, one point that has not been widely discussed by critics is the role of music in shaping Phillips's literary production, both thematically and formally. Countless references to music can be found in the titles of his books (*Higher Ground* [1989] is taken from a Stevie Wonder song), in scenes involving musical performances (*Dancing in the Dark* [2005]), in the use of musical terminology such as "tune" or "beat" (*The Final Passage* [1985]), in intriguing structural analogies with musical forms (*Crossing the River* [1993]) but also through characters who are musicians (Dorothy in *A Distant Shore* [2003]) or who wish to write about music (Keith in *In the Falling Snow* [2009]). His latest novel *The Lost Child* [2015] confirms this inclination. In this novel, popular music is again integrated on a structural level, in a long section entitled "Childhood," in which each chapter heading relates to a song that Ben, the protagonist, associates with a particular moment of his life. Phillips's radio play on Marvin Gaye entitled "A Long Way from Home" [2008], his television documentary about Curtis Mayfield, "Darker than Blue" [1995], and his novel *Dancing in the Dark*, which is entirely devoted to Bert Williams, a famous vaudeville entertainer, further testify to the significance of popular music in his work. Interestingly, Phillips has revealed in an interview that he turned to prominent African American musicians for cultural and social insight:

“And it seemed to me that the people who had the strongest narratives and the most profound insights were people like Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and Curtis Mayfield, artists who were writing music that was not just passionate, but music that actually was incredibly socially engaged” (Wilkin 131). Phillips, who grew up in the seventies as the only black child at his school, used to listen to these artists, and their music helped him engage with his own cultural identity. He says, “Marvin Gaye could be singing about what’s happening in Washington, but I was able to relate that to what was happening in Brixton, or what was happening in Notting Hill, or what was happening in Leeds” (Wilkin 131).

The role of socially-engaged soul artists in Phillips’s engagement with his own identity could explain why the Anglo Caribbean author has incessantly represented diasporic experience through music in his work. Among his novels, *Crossing the River* most extensively explores the theme of the African diaspora and testifies to a prominent jazz influence. This narrative not only addresses diasporic themes, such as uprootings and family disruption, but very much like jazz — which is for the Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite “a cry from the heart of the hurt man” (Brathwaite 277)—gives a voice to the victims of history, to shattered individuals in pain.

Among critics, Bénédicte Ledent and Daria Tunca discuss the musicality of Phillips’s writing, acknowledging that “the lyrical beauty, the almost choric arrangement and symphonic structure of the author’s fictional texts testify to the musical quality of his prose” (Ledent & Tunca xiv). It is, Ledent further argues, “in his organization of thematic motifs on contrapuntal or symphonic modes, that the full impact of music on Phillips can be traced” (Ledent 8). Significantly, the author himself has declared that “My model—if I have a model—is music” (Clingman 108). Yet no one has so far attempted a detailed, cross-disciplinary study of what exactly this musicality consists in and what purposes it serves. To my knowledge, only two articles have been published on the presence of music in *Crossing the River*: “Three Words toward Creolization” by Antonio Benítez-Rojo and “Orchestrating the ‘Many-Tongued Chorus’: Using Music to Analyse Polyphony in Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory* and Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*” by Chloe Nuttall Musson. The former draws attention to the importance of rhythm in Phillips’s writing, as Benítez-Rojo argues that Phillips performs his own literature to the rhythms that come from within himself: “his choice of punctuation—along with the number of syllables in his words and the syntax that

connects them—gives a rhythmic meaning” (Benítez-Rojo 57). However, he only provides a brief analysis and does not explain how this “rhythmic meaning” appears in Phillips’s prose and what functions it fulfills. Brathwaite’s observation that it is difficult “to make wholly convincing correspondences from music into literature” (Brathwaite 43) could account for the lack of specificity in Benítez-Rojo’s statement that “it is obvious that Phillips, as a son of the plantation, brings his own literature toward the rhythms of the samba, calypso, and jazz” (Benítez-Rojo 57). Despite this brevity, Benítez-Rojo’s argument paved the way for other musical interpretations such as Nuttall Musson’s, which contains a more sophisticated discussion, with clearer examples based on the cultural context (especially the representation of slavery) and the musical structures that permeate the narrative.

Despite the sophistication of Nuttall Musson’s argument, I am skeptical about her claim that “the phonological texture of Phillips’s concluding passage gestures to the rap aesthetic with its short, punchy sentences” (Nuttall Musson 291). Firstly, the statement is rather vague and makes me wonder what the phonological texture of Phillips’s passage is, in Nuttall Musson’s view, and further what exactly is meant by the rap aesthetic. Nuttall Musson argues that a punchy sentence links Phillips’s phonological texture and the rap aesthetic, but a short sentence could also be musically interpreted as an imitation of staccato, “an individual note in performance, usually separated from its neighbors by a silence of articulation” (Chew and Brown np). This term can apply to any musical genres. Therefore, it is crucial to justify an assertion like Nuttall Musson’s with specific examples from the novel, especially as she also uses the term “staccato” later on in her analysis: “The drum becomes audible in the short, staccato sentences that ‘pound’ beneath the polyphonic variation of each chapter: ‘My Nash. My Martha. My Travis’” (Nuttall Musson 289).

In order to avoid facile analogies and vague metaphorical models, the main focus in this article will be to show why *Crossing the River* can be considered a jazz novel and specifically how its rhythmic quality is achieved. Indeed, while in the sixties Brathwaite argued that it is difficult to make convincing comparisons between music and literature, the field of word and music studies has developed in the last several decades, building on Calvin S. Brown’s seminal work: *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* [1948]. This monograph laid the foundation for Steven Paul Scher’s influential typology of musico-literary relationships (*Literature in Music, Literature and Music, Music in Literature*). These categories helped scholars all over the world to

define this interdisciplinary field. Moreover, Werner Wolf, another scholar of Word and Music Studies, refined Scher's typology in *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* [1999]. Wolf's monograph provided a clear scheme of correspondences from music into literature and a compelling extension of it can be found in Emily Petermann's *The Musical Novel: Imitation of Musical Structure, Performance, and Reception in Contemporary Fiction* [2014]. Petermann expands on Wolf's work, for instance, by including jazz in her close readings. To demonstrate that *Crossing the River* is a jazz novel, I will thus build on Petermann's methodology to explore Phillips's musical prose through close readings of key passages of the narrative. Before attempting to prove precisely why *Crossing the River* is a jazz novel, it is important to note, as Petermann states in *The Musical Novel*, that "jazz in novels is always a particular idea of jazz [...] and it is only a relatively small groups of elements that are in fact seized on as characteristic and imitated by the novels" (Petermann 45, 46). In her monograph, Petermann defines three different ways of imitating jazz in musical novels: sonic effects in prose (alliteration, rhyme, meter), structural patterns (the riff, the call and response pattern, chorus) and the performance situation (imitating orality, improvisation, use of repeated lexical items). As Jan Czarnecki puts it, "Petermann focuses on the aesthetic and formal aspects of jazz [...] rather than on its extramusical (political, social, racial) significance" (Czarnecki np); nevertheless, her formal analysis of jazz enabled other scholars to link the sonic and structural aspect of jazz to the social and political content/context and provide answers to such questions as 'why did the author choose to use a musical prose within the narrative or in a specific scene?'. My point will be to show how the imitation of jazz occurs in moments of utter distress for Phillips's characters; that it to say, I will endeavor to highlight the meaning of this musical adoption. To put it differently, I will not limit myself to a formalist approach but link the musical aspects of the work to the narrative. I will show how Phillips uses musicality—the musical properties of language, such as rhythmic structure and sonic effects—to give voice to those whom John McLeod describes as "not readily visible on the radar of history," and to convey these characters' emotions to the reader. In other words, I will examine how Phillips's formal use of music, through rhythmic (ir)regularities or the recurrent and creative use of repetition, contributes to the emotional impact of his distinctive prose and plays a performative role by enacting the duty of remembrance ingrained in the diasporic experience. However, what matters is not only why a novel is "musical" (whether that musicality is jazzy or not) but rather how this "musicality" influences one's reading of the narrative and the

implications of such stylistic and narrative choices. My own examination of Phillips's *Crossing the River* is in fact informed by Jeppe Stricker's observation that the "notion of music in novels should somehow be significant, carry meaning, and influence the way we read the novel" (Stricker 243).

The main purpose of this article is to develop an informed understanding of Phillips's use of music in a way that reflects its significance in the postcolonial context. Indeed, this novel not only illustrates the thematic overlaps between Phillips's narrative and the issues addressed in the lyrics of the African American musical tradition, such as discrimination and family disruption, it also exemplifies how music formally influenced Phillips's writing, through the recurrent and creative use of meaningful variations in rhythm and of repetitions, which are again focal constituents of jazz. My contention is that Phillips's musical language, particularly his creative use of repetition, crucially contributes to the emotional impact of his distinctive prose, which prevents the readers from forgetting the characters' stories, making them resonate in the readers' mind long after reading them, much as one remembers an insistent piece of music. Moreover, the idea of disruption of expectation might also be woven in with the reality of diaspora: being displaced or being a foreigner means waiting for something but not knowing what will happen. In the same way as the jazz listener is faced with an unknown future (Brathwaite 43), the diasporic subjects are confronted with a very uncertain future which in some cases does not fit their expectations.

Crossing the River begins and ends with the lament of a guilt-ridden African father who has sold his three children, Nash, Martha and Travis, into slavery and who has listened to them for more than two hundred years. In between the mythical father's voice, which frames the narrative, there are four sections that tell us what happened to his children and the slave trader who bought them. Describing Michael Ondaatje's novel *Coming Through Slaughter*, Emily Petermann writes that its polyphonic structure is one "in which various instruments are simultaneously present and yet remain distinct from one another, they play together but can still be heard individually" (Petermann 123). This description applies just as well to *Crossing the River*, a novel in which the polyphonic structure appears as a musical rendering of life. A few sentences of each child's narrative are indeed integrated into the choric epilogue among the stories of other "children" of the diaspora; the different voices play together but can still be heard individually. For instance, the African father's voice, his son's voice and his daughter-in-

law's voice are intertwined: "For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. To my Nash. My Martha. My Travis. *Joyce*. *That was all he said. Just, Joyce. I could see now the gap in the middle of his teeth. At the bottom. And then he reached out and pulled me towards him. I couldn't believe it. He'd come back to me*" (CR 236).¹

Furthermore, according to Caroline Brown's analysis of polyphonic voices in Morrison's *Jazz*, "in the jazz moment, voices demand recognition, inserting themselves, vibrating with the intensity of emotional fullness; the individual plays against the collective, which forms the larger work, the greater truth" (Brown 633). Similarly, the choric ending of *Crossing the River* is an affirmation of the life of the group, the collective which breaks the fragmentation of the whole novel and which therefore forms the larger "picture". Not only are the different narratives of the African father's children integrated in the epilogue but the father claims that he listens to "the many-tongued chorus of the common memory" (CR 235), he basically hears any child/survivor of the African diaspora "In Brooklyn a helplessly addicted mother waits for the mist to clear from her eyes. [...] A barefoot boy in São Paulo is rooted to his piece of the earth, [...] [i]n Santo Domingo, a child suffers the hateful hot comb" (CR 235).

The polyphonic structure shapes not just the end of the novel, but also the entire narrative structure. As Christin Hoene argues "music sounds in harmony through polyphony; it relies on the coexistence of various and different voices to come together" (Hoene 156). This description of harmony and polyphony is appropriate to describe the narrative structure of Phillips's novel. Indeed, each panel can be understood on its own, but the different sections echo each other emotionally and linguistically, and make a whole by completing one another as though talking in harmony. A part of every section can be found in the epilogue, where the ancient father recognizes some pieces of his children's stories. Based on the criteria of sonic effects and repetitions, the prologue and the epilogue are the most jazzy parts of the novel. In those two passages, the musical prose creates a memorable medium—that will not be easily forgotten by the readers—for a previously absent voice to be heard, that of the African father who is, as mentioned before, speaking in these introductory and concluding parts.

¹ In in-text citations, this novel will be referred to with the abbreviation CR. Further page references to this edition (London: Vintage, 2006) are in the main text.

It could also be argued that the novel is constructed on a call and response pattern, which in music is “the performance of musical phrases or longer passages in alternation by different voices [...] used in such a way as to suggest that they answer one another” (Petermann 89). Phillips’s novel exemplifies this structure in the manner that the various narratives of the African father’s children answer each other and yet have distinctive and recognizable voices. The framing of the novel with the voice of the mythical father mirrors a call and response pattern. The prologue could be interpreted as the “call,” an interpretation suggested by the ancestral father’s words, “For two hundred and fifty years I have *listened* to the many-tongued chorus. And occasionally, among the sundry restless voices, I have discovered those of my own children” (CR 1, emphasis mine). His “call” is then followed by the responses of his children and the slaver who bought them. One could also say that the children answer each other, their sections thus being themselves built around a call and response pattern: for instance, Nash’s question to his master whom he considers his adoptive father, “Why have you forsaken me?” (CR 42) is echoed in Martha’s same question to God “Father, why hast thou forsaken me?” (CR 73), which could be an echo of, and thus response to, Nash. After the bulk of the novel, focused on the children, the novel’s epilogue mixes the voice of the African father, his children’s voices, the slave trader who made them cross the ocean and the children of the African diaspora, forming a kind of final chorus.

This chorus in which each child’s voice is integrated is also built around a call and response model, a swinging back and forth from solo to chorus, from chorus to solo:

“Survivors. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel. *I praise His holy name that I was fortunate enough to be born in a Christian country, amongst Christian parents and friends* [Nash’s voice] [...] Enduring cities which whisper falsehoods through perfectly wooden lips. *A dream began to wash through her mind. Martha dreamed that she had travelled west to California, by herself, and clutching her bundle of clothing* [Martha’s voice]. [...] For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. To voices in the streets of Charleston. [...] I have listened. To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the Caribbean. I have listened. To the saxophone player on a wintry night in Stockholm. A long way from home [ancestral father’s voice]” (CR 236).

Robert Cataliotti identifies the call and response pattern as a tool of resistance, one essential block in the African-American oral tradition,

which is present “from the earliest expressive forms, such as spirituals and work songs, to the musical dialogue between a gospel singer and a choir or a jazz soloist and a horn section” (Cataliotti xii). According to James Snead, repetition, an inherent part of the call and response pattern, shows “the necessity for every culture to maintain a sense of continuity about itself” via the “experiences that have helped or are helping to lend self-consciousness and awareness to a given group” (Snead 63). The call and response structure thus lends itself perfectly to the description of the children of the African diaspora, bought into slavery and dispersed around the world.

Crossing the River embodies this call and response structure in more than one way, for its epilogue can in fact be read as a response to Brathwaite’s volume *Masks*, in which a section is entitled “Crossing the River” and begins with a poem named “Bosompra” which starts like this:

So crossing the river
and walking the path
we came at last to Kumasi.

You there on the other
bank, walking away
down the slope,

can you hear me
can you hear me? (“Bosompra”, *Masks*, 51)

Emily Williams argues that in the poem “Bosompra,” the poet “places himself on one side of the river bank and his ancestor(s) on another in a simulation of the painful separation of ancestors from one another in the massive pillaging of the continent to satisfy the economic appetites of the Europeans” (32, 33). In the same vein, in *Crossing the River*, the African father desperately tries to hear what happened to his children on the other riverbank, the difference being that he is the initiator of such a painful separation. *Crossing the River*’s epilogue opens with the line, “I hear a drum beating on the far bank of the river” (*CR* 235) and the symbolic African father repeats incessantly “I have listened” as if to answer Brathwaite’s call “can you hear me?”

Moreover, Williams claims that Brathwaite’s poetry “moves the reader historically, socially, and psychologically through a world of dichotomized existence brought on by the ravages of European colonization” (13). She also states that Brathwaite’s poetic language attempts “to make sense of the past for living in the present” (13).

These two assertions are certainly true in the case of Phillips's fiction, especially in *Crossing the River*. Abiola Irele suggests that *Masks* focuses "on the African foundation of diaspora black history" (155), an assertion that can again apply to Phillips's *Crossing the River* since this novel deals with African children who are sold into slavery by their own father. *Crossing the River*, can be said to be what Williams calls, describing *Masks*, "a return to Africa in terms of synthesis of the past with the present" (Williams 23).

The jazz novel typically contains various poetic meters, as well as other repetitive devices such as rhymes and alliterations to emphasize rhythm, as Petermann explains in her study (49). Throughout *Crossing the River* there are examples of what can be described as a poetic meter "Me, I took the **sack** and went out the **back**" (CR 172), as well as of alliteration: "**wailing** their **warning**" (CR 176), "**white-washed walls**" (CR 124), all of which create a sonic pattern in the reader's mind. The most striking emphasis on sonic effects and rhythm is found in the prologue and epilogue of the novel where the variation of rhythm through stressed/unstressed syllables and the reiterated elements invade the reader's psyche. For instance, in the prologue:

"*A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. I remember. [...] And soon after, the chorus of a common memory began to haunt me. **For two hundred and fifty years I have** listened to the many-tongued chorus. And occasionally, among the sundry restless voices, I have discovered those of **my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis.** Their lives fractured. Sinking hopeful roots into difficult soil. **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. **There** is **no** return. [...] *A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children*" (CR 1, 2).²*

In the same way as "black music sets up expectations and disturbs them at irregular intervals" (Snead 72), the passage above establishes, through a repeated structural pattern, a rhythmic expectation of "no" followed by a stressed syllable, which is then disrupted as if to strike the reader's attention, as in "There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return."³ Petermann argues that "it is the upsetting of

² Bolded text indicates repetition, bolded and italicized text indicates repetition of sentences, bolded and underlined text indicates repetition of a clause.

³ Stressed syllables are underlined.

expectation that creates interest” (Petermann 70) and after “no paths in water. No signposts” readers expect to have a stressed syllable after “no”, but their expectation is defeated since “no” is followed by an unstressed syllable “no return”. Readers are thus struck by the word “return”. The change in rhythm is asserted through this unstressed syllable and as John Kouwenhoven notes, “it is the distinctive rhythm which differentiates all types of jazz from all other music” (qtd. in Petermann 50). In the same passage, another structural pattern is set up only to be disrupted, and then reestablished:

*“A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children.
[...]⁴For 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. There is no return. [...]
A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children”*
(CR 1, 2).

While the first three lines establish what sounds like a poetic meter—a regular structure of fourteen syllables—the fourth disrupts this pattern, even if it is only a syllable longer than the one expected. The last line takes the readers back to the familiarity of the fourteen-syllable-pattern. As with the defeated rhythmic expectation in the disruption of the pattern of “no” followed by a stressed syllable, the shift in poetic meter from fourteen to fifteen syllables serves again to draw the reader’s attention to the sentence that does not fit the expected pattern: “There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return”. In that way, Phillips warns against the belief in a return to the idealized homeland, thereby unsettling a major trait of diasporic thought. He emphasizes that there is no possibility of a return for the children of the ancestral African father. Moreover, the reader’s expectancy is again disrupted when the father says “I have longed”, whereas “I have listened” is expected. Coupled with syntactical deviation, this defeated expectancy outlines the length of time that the father had to wait to be able to hear his children. Other language uses, for instance the repetition of individual words or syntactic parallelism such as “My Nash. My Martha. My Travis,” indicate that the father needs, in the words of Geoffrey Leech, “to express himself superabundantly on matters which affect him deeply” (Leech 84), as “Linguistic parallelism is very often connected with rhetorical emphasis and memorability” (Leech 67). These parallel constructions strike the readers and make this excerpt particularly memorable, for these linguistic techniques increase the

⁴ While the word *desperate* technically contains three syllables, in colloquial speech it contains only two.

resonance of the African father's voice, which could become what Roland Barthes calls "the grain of the voice" in his eponymous article [1972] devoted to a new way of listening to music: the "grain of the voice" as "a dual production — of language and of music", "the impossible account of an individual thrill that [one] constantly experiences in listening to singing", "[...] something is there, manifest and stubborn [...] beyond (or before) the meaning of the words" (Barthes 181). Barthes's description of the speaking voice as "that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language — not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters — where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work" (182) perfectly applies to the ancestral father's voice as well as Phillips's musical prose in general. My argument is in line with Hoene's expansion of Barthes's claim to the music written into novels. Moreover, Hoene also linked Barthes's argument to postcolonial literature, arguing that "In the context of the postcolonial novels [...] the power of the voice [...] to displace meaning is crucial" (Hoene 8). As Hoene writes,

Music in literature, that is, music transformed into text and transformed into language, suddenly signifies language. Music in literature becomes, to extend Barthes's argument, the diction of language, and the friction of representation that arises when authors write music into literature and thereby transpose music into language. (Hoene 8)

By placing the same sentences "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children." (*CR* 1, 2, 237) at the beginning of the prologue and then at the end of it (as well as the end of the epilogue), Phillips creates a refrain that emphasizes circularity. Readers will be able to make sense of this only after reading every section and realizing that some events repeat themselves. For instance, in the same way the ancestral African father sold his children to the slave trader, his daughter-in-law Joyce gives up her mixed-race son for adoption two hundred and fifty years later. In addition to the recurring theme of parental guilt and abandonment, failing crops recur; failed crops precipitate the mythical father's sale of his children into slavery and the sale of Martha by her new owners. (*CR* 1, 2, 79, 237). The sense of circling repetition that results from these recurring themes suggests that nothing much has changed for the children of the diaspora, whom, at the end of the epilogue, the father claims "arrived on the far bank of the river, loved" (*CR* 237). As Di Maio argues, "while history tends to repeat itself, people's only chance to survive its circumstances is to acknowledge its presence by lending an ear to all its voices — and, if possible by becoming one" (Di Maio 443). This ties in with Claude

Julien's argument that the ancient African father "builds some solace from this communication with his sons and daughters" (Julien 91), which, I believe, is achieved in the epilogue, where the aural nature of the novel is even more apparent because of rhymes and continual repetitions:

"For two hundred and fifty years I have listened [...] I have listened. To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the Caribbean. **I have listened.** To the saxophone player on a wintry night in Stockholm. A long way from home. **For two hundred and fifty years I have listened.** To my Nash. My Martha. My Travis. [...] **For two hundred and fifty years I have listened.** To the haunting voices. **Singing: Mercy, Mercy Me.** (The Ecology.) [...] **Listened** to voices hoping for: Freedom. Democracy. **Singing: Baby, baby.** Where did our love go? Samba. Calypso. **Jazz. Jazz.** Sketches of Spain in Harlem. [...] **I have listened** to the sounds of an African carnival in Trinidad. In Rio. In New Orleans. On the far bank of the River, a drum continues to be beaten. A many-tongued chorus continues to swell." (CR 236, 237)

Over the three page epilogue different permutations of the word "listen" occur ten times, encouraging the reader to pay attention to sonic elements but, most of all, urging the reader to listen to what this guilt-ridden man has to say. As Estelle Mathey argues, repetition is far from being meaningless as each repeated word reveals its importance (Mathey 42), and in this passage, reiteration is even more visible than in the prologue. This makes sense because the dispersal of the ancestral father's children has increased his need to maintain a sense of continuity, which is achieved through recurrences. In fact, the numerous reiterations ensure that the reader will remember this extract. Since the prologue begins and ends with the same sentences, "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children," the reader skips back to a "beginning" that (s)he has already heard. Through recurrence, the father's guilt, like the traumatic experience is not "placed in time with a beginning, a middle and an end" (Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart 177) but is represented as timeless. Like Freud's idea that repetition "is a remedy for the failure of memory" (Snead, 76), the reader, like the guilt-ridden protagonist, cannot help remembering how everything started. The reiterated elements go on like a mantra, evoking the father's quasi-obsessive quest to hear about his children and their traumatic experience.

This obsession is highlighted by another feature of a jazz text, the riff, that is the replaying of a phrase or clause with variation, in other words, "a linguistic phrase [or clause] that is repeated in nearly

identical form” (Petermann 71). In this case it is the repeated clause “I have listened for two hundred and fifty years”: “[f]or two hundred and fifty years I have listened [...] I have listened. [...] For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. [...] Listened to voices hoping for: Freedom. [...] I have listened to the sounds of an African carnival in Trinidad” (CR 236, 237). According to Jimoh Yemisi, quoted by Tracey Walters, jazz riffs often “resound and [...] reformulate an important concept or key idea found within the narrative” (Jimoh 37). Clearly, through this clause, the reader is encouraged to pay particular attention to the voices of all the children of the African diaspora, a core concept in this novel.

Phillips’s musical prose, by which I mean a writing style that emphasizes the musical properties of language such as rhythm and sound effects, achieves what Hoene claims about music. Like music, and through its musicality, his writing transcends “times and places, and in this dislocating function that forestalls politics of location, it brings people together on an aesthetic level that stresses commonality rather than difference” (Hoene 152). Interestingly, *Crossing the River* never mentions precise locations, as suggested by the titles of the different sections: “The Pagan Coast”, “West”, “Somewhere in England”. Regarding to such a lack of geographical accuracy, Yogita Goyal suggests that in *Crossing the River* “diaspora emerges not as difference but as a simultaneity of experiences and memories, and as a collapse of time and space” (224). Most importantly, in *Crossing the River*, Phillips’s writing tries to achieve what Edward Said suggested, in *Parallels and Paradoxes*, about music: that it “enables a recognition of the other” (qtd. in Hoene 156) because it goes beyond borders, beyond time and space, to create a communal identity through shared experiences which broaden perspectives and alter the self, thus opening up to “otherness”. A tangible example of transcendence of time and space can be found in the epilogue: “There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return. A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my beloved children. [...] But they arrived on the far bank of the river, loved” (CR 237). The mythical African father’s children are loved mostly by readers themselves — perhaps the ultimate example of transcendence conveyed by the novel since reading *Crossing the River* requires crossing spatial and temporal boundaries. To take the case of Martha, she does not actually arrive, loved, on the far bank of the river, other than in the mind of the reader. Her life is a series of loss and pain: after being sold into slavery, she sees her daughter and husband auctioned and is forever separated from them. Threatened to be sold again by her new owners, she runs away. Martha then lives ten years

with her new husband but his murder by white people revives her previous loss. Abandoned by her own people, impoverished and haunted, Martha dies dreaming of her reunion with her beloved daughter, Eliza Mae. The epilogue's final sentence is particularly significant if the reader is the one who loves Martha, and this "love" is made possible through empathy and thus the acceptance of her, "the other", which is facilitated by the musical nature of the text.

If the epilogue is written as music, it also contains many musical references. The mythical father finally finds his descendants not in a geographically mappable place but in music. Miles Davis, the Supremes, and Marvin Gaye are evoked through the titles of their songs or albums; so are other forms of music typical of the diaspora, such as reggae, calypso, samba. Phillips's epilogue presents musical references as an important element in the cultural legacy of the African diaspora and mirrors not only Simon Frith's claim that "music gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it" (108) but also Paul Gilroy's argument that, in the context of slavery, music can speak the unspeakable (37). Indeed, by using musicality as a way to present the unrepresentable, Phillips confirms Gilroy's statement about music: through the imitation of music, Phillips made audible the unsayable, especially through the chorus discussed at the beginning of this article. Conversely, Phillips is also at variance with Gilroy's stance that "words, even words stretched by melisma and supplemented or mutated by the screams which still index the conspicuous power of the slave sublime, will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth" (37), for Phillips manages through his musical prose to say the unsayable, to transmit the painful occult parts of history, collective and personal.

Phillips's use of techniques such as the call and response pattern and the riff, along with rhythmic and sound-related effects of language, demonstrate the significant influence of jazz on *Crossing the River*. This is further illustrated in Phillips's reference in the novel's epilogue to his popular musical influences. Phillips's stylistic choices give a voice, a melody, to those who were silenced, and palpably breathe life into the reader, who is compelled to listen to the immense force of their narratives, which resonate long after closing the book. Phillips's musical prose thus reenacts the duty of remembering inherent in the diasporic experience by revisiting the past, and creating a sonic "spectral" haunting that echoes in the reader's imagination.

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