

Annotation of David Farrier's "The other is the neighbour": The limits of dignity in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44.4 (2008), pp. 403-413.

Daria Tunca, University of Liège

David Farrier's examination of Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2003) offers a reflection on the novel's representation of "the dignity which informs the limited participation of the migrant, the asylum seeker, or the refugee" in the "new world order of the twenty-first century" (Phillips, *A New World Order*, 2001, p. 6). More specifically, Farrier's essay focuses on the novel's treatment of two of the concepts evoked by the British-Caribbean author in the above quotation: that of dignity, and that of the limit – mainly (but not exclusively) understood in the double sense of "that which is on the margin" and "that which suffers limitations".

The critic constructs his analysis around several theoretical concepts. Among these is Giorgio Agamben's view of the "camp", a space in which refugees are relegated to the limits of the nation and denied dignity and which, in the figurative sense, acts as a signifier of unbelonging. Farrier also refers to Emmanuel Levinas's idea that proximity entails a sense of responsibility towards the Other. While he links Agamben's theory more convincingly to Phillips's 2001 report of his visit to the Sangatte refugee camp than to *A Distant Shore* itself, the value of Levinas's ethics of responsibility is, by contrast, more readily discernible in the examination of the novel. Indeed, in what is arguably the most stimulating section of the essay, the scholar explores the different views of dignity held by the two main characters of Phillips's book, a middle-aged white Englishwoman named Dorothy and a black African man called Solomon, who falls victim to a racist murder. After arguing that the former protagonist perceives the latter's dignified behaviour as both a limit and a marker of his Otherness, Farrier

uses Levinas's theory to support a cogent analysis of (the limits of) Dorothy's sense of responsibility for Solomon before and after his death.

Despite a somewhat disorienting structure and a heavy, sometimes questionable, reliance on theory, this article constitutes a valuable contribution to the existing scholarship on Phillips's work. As Farrier engages in a close reading of *A Distant Shore* while more generally probing the ethical dimension of the refugee experience as represented in the novel, his essay should prove stimulating reading both for researchers specialised in Phillips's texts and for those interested in the philosophical aspects of literature.