e-ISSN 2499-5975

Il Tolomeo
Vol. 23 – Dicembre | December | Décembre 2021

Caryl Phillips's Rewriting of the Canonical Romance as a Genre

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Abstract The paper considers Phillips's rewriting of the canonical nineteenth-century romances in three of his novels – *A State of Independence* (1986), *The Lost Child* (2015), and *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018). The three texts resettle the romance genre through the postcolonial concept of 'home'. In *A State of Independence*, Phillips rearranges the role of one of Jane Austen's most orthodox characters, the landowner Sir Thomas Bertram of *Mansfield Park* (1814), by transposing the Austenian character's features to his protagonist Bertram Francis, a Caribbean man who comes back to his ancestral homeland after twenty years in Britain. In *The Lost Child*, chronicling literary-historical events in the present tense by transferring the life of the Brontë family into the protagonists of *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is for the author one way of calling into question the real sense of literature. It is for this reason that Phillips constructs a cyclic narration around the figure of Branwell Brontë, fictionalised by his sister Emily in the romance protagonist Heathcliff, and mirrored in *The Lost Child* in the character of Tommy Wilson. In *A View of the Empire at Sunset*, Phillips definitely overturns the colonial and genre categories by reassessing the in-between life of the Dominican-born writer Jean Rhys through her personal return journey to Dominica: as a result, the author of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) (an intense rewriting of *Jane Eyre*) becomes a fictional character, and the literary events of her life sum up the vicissitudes both of the two 'Bertrams' – of *Mansfield Park* and *A State of Independence* – and the protagonists of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Lost Child*.

Keywords Romance genre. Postcolonial literature. Caryl Phillips. Postcolonial rewriting. Brontë sisters. Jean Rhys.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Postcolonial Approach to the Romance Genre in Caryl Phillips's Works. – 3 Intertextuality and the Search for Home in Phillips's Rewriting of the Romance Genre. – 4 Conclusion.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

Peer review

Submitted 2021-07-15
Accepted 2021-09-17
Published 2021-12-20

Open access

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Citation Polatti, A. (2021). "Caryl Phillips's Rewriting of the Canonical Romance as a Genre". *Il Tolomeo*, 23, 119-134.

DOI 10.30687/Tol/2499-5975/2021/23/021

1 Introduction

All along its history, the romance has often been underestimated as a genre. The general definition delineates it as simply "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (Regis 2003, 54). However, the history of the romance has provided an important revaluation of the genre which has been able to change and develop through time. And, in fact, another characteristic of the romance novel is its popularity in its own day at a time (from seventeenth to nineteenth century) of changing values and practices concerning the social order and the relationships between men and women in terms of marriage and courtship. The changing role of women and heroines is well reflected in the romance genre, as well as the conflicts derived from this progressive social revolution. As a result, three main social trends meet and clash on the pages of the romances: the rise of affective individualism, the relevance of companionate marriage, and the subordination of women to the marriage contract (56).

In approaching the canonical romance as a genre, Caryl Phillips recalls these features by dismantling the personal and fictional world not only of the heroines and the heroes of the romances, but also of their authors. Consequently, he manages to combine the romance genre and postcolonial fiction, questioning the colonial heritage. Phillips reminds us that the form of the romance always involves aspiration to freedom; from the barriers of society, or between sexes. In this regard, his intertextual references to the romance genre in his postcolonial novels serve to underline this feature, by placing a contemporary situation (i.e. twentieth-century migration) within a historical frame represented by works of art which people assume they are familiar with (canonical romances). In this tight connection between history and literature, the role of intertextuality is to "smooth an outsider's passage towards acceptance by insiders" (Sell 2008, 202). This means that the invention of a story-line involving the Brontë family and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in *The Lost Child* (2015), or Jean Rhys's life in *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018), or the references to a canonical text such as Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) in *A State of Independence* (1986), help the reader to perceive the linkage between contemporary and past migrant themes of freedom. As a result, Phillips's rewriting of the romance genre actually looks for a post-national world where identities and home(s) can be forged through multiple migrant flows all over the world. In this light, the romance mode is particularly useful if we also consider Northrop Frye's definition of the genre as a transfiguration of the world of everyday reality. This is not to suggest that romance longs for total freedom from that everyday world or ordinary life: rather, "the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfil-

ment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality" (Frye 1957, 193). This reference to the role of reality in the romance is of huge relevance in Phillips's subversion of the genre. The postcolonial author manages to connect the canonical romances written by the Brontë sisters or Jane Austen to a contemporary scenario which recalls the current search for liberty and a free home by migrant people. In this context, Jean Rhys is the *fil rouge* linking past and present: her own life manages to relate the vicissitudes of the nineteenth-century protagonists of the canonical romances to the harshness of a migrant life.

2 The Postcolonial Approach to the Romance Genre in Caryl Phillips's Works

In his subversive approach to the romance genre, Caryl Phillips underlines an extremely pressing and current theme: the search for home and freedom by past and present migrant people. In his perspective, 'home' should identify a safe harbour, although Phillips is well aware of the fallacy of such an expectation. In his interview with Dereck Walcott (1992), the two Caribbean authors talk about what 'home' means, especially referring to Walcott's statement "I have one home, but two places" (Phillips 1992, 9). Walcott clarifies:

> I'm not talking to people or looking at people [of St. Lucia] as if they're subjects that I would write about. I really feel, unembarrassedly privileged to talk to anyone in St. Lucia, about anything. (9)

In Phillips's fiction, however, that sense of respect and connection with homeland, or a place to be called home, does not always produce fruitful results. In *The Lost Child*, for instance, the two mixed-race brothers Ben and Tommy Wilson actually and metaphorically "don't have a home to go to" (Phillips 2015, 224) after their father's return to the Caribbean and their mother's mental breakdown. They are veritable outcasts like Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*: this is the reason why Phillips creates a parallel story connecting them and the destinies of all those who are seeking home. In Phillips's view, 'home' is always somewhere else, always to be searched for, so that it can embody both a loss and a lack according to the different perspective from which we observe it: in *A State of Independence*, the protagonist Bertram Francis is a Caribbean man migrated to Britain who consciously decides to come back to his native island after twenty years in the UK. Although "there had been moments in the last twenty years when he felt sure he would never have the courage or the means to set foot once again on his island" (Phillips 1986, 27), he ultimate-

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ly desires to re-experience life in his "homeland", that is his birthplace. He simply thinks that he could start a new life in his native island (12), even though he has to deal with the Caribbean territory, described as still anchored to a past that seems to laugh at Bertram.

In other words, Bertram has to face the backwardness and the cold welcome of his own people. Even his family does not welcome him in a proper way: the first question his mother asks after twenty years of silence is "when you planning on taking off again?" (50). The disapproval expressed by Bertram's mother is not so surprising, as homecoming may not necessarily reunite people with their families or their familial homesteads (Markowitz, Stefansson 2004, 26), and it is justified by twenty years of disinterest from Bertram. Once back he becomes aware also of the island's changes imposed by the new American hegemony, which has replaced the British empire (embodied by Sir Bertram, the romance alter ego of the protagonist). This form of neo-colonialism sponsors the tendency of globalisation to promote a sort of homelessness rather than the search of a stable homeland, an inclination inherited from the wanderings of the first age of explorations and colonialisation and expressed also by Austen's Sir Bertram. Both Bertram Francis and Sir Bertram have travelled and experienced the world; the main difference between the two conditions, however, is due to their dissimilar role in this same world. Sir Bertram has the possibility to come back to a stable home, while Bertram Francis ironically desires to go back and forth between the English mother country and the colonies, without understanding that his condition of black man does not allow him to have a veritable liberty of movement.

Bertram can easily be compared to Julius Wilson in *The Lost Child*. He is another first-generation migrant who has naively hoped to find happiness and a better life in Britain in the 1950s, driven by his student's aspirations. However, "shortly after the talks between the British government and the delegation from his country collapsed" (Phillips 2015, 49), he realises the evanescence of his ambitions:

> He had no real interest in giving anything to this country [Britain] that had now been his home for over a dozen years. After all, what had he received in return from these people? A late-night beating from some hooligans, and the problem of an increasingly sloppy wife who insisted that the children call her Mam as opposed to Mommy, or even Mama, […] The opportunity to go home and make a contribution, and perhaps try again to revise his dissertation and turn it into a book – this, he told her, was his true future. (50)

Julius's attempt of integration into the British system has failed both in the public sphere – due to the shipwreck of the diplomatic relations between the British government and his home-country – and in his

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private life – because of the collapse of his marriage with an English girl, Monica. He cannot find support in his white wife, so he transfers the frustration for his personal defeat to the relationship with his sons, Tommy and Ben. His family has turned into a frustrating problem for him (152); he cannot recognise even his own children, maybe because they are too English, and they belong to the country that has never accepted him as a real citizen. Hence, he needs to return home, to his birthplace, in order to find a place where he can feel accepted. However, Julius's expectations about 'home' are not sure to be fulfilled, and he simply disappears from his children's lives in the attempt to achieve his ambitions. This situation may be due to an innovative awareness about homeland: the concept of home is not dead, but it has changed perspective, depending on the individual's ability to find home in movement, giving rise to a sort of "homeless mind" which moves away from any notion of fixity (Bender, Winer 2001, 334). Globalisation too has helped to change the concept of home by pluralising it, because migrants have no one home, but many, and they wish to write about them as much as to come to terms with their fragmented condition.

Caryl Phillips has always been fascinated by this notion of migrant discontinuity. Many of his characters have been inspired by it, and in *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018), he has identified the Dominican-born writer Jean Rhys as an emblem of such a discontinuous condition. Such conviction also influences Phillips's personal relationship with his host country, marked by a constant wavering between engagement and disengagement. Phillips has often expressed his need

> to turn my back on Britain. As the years tick by, I feel the necessity to engage with Britain, rather than disengage, because I see that not everybody is going to be able to get up and leave. (Sharpe 1995, 161)

So, he has chosen to re-write the immense and dense web of information and speculations at the heart of Rhys's private life in order to investigate the condition of being a

> migrant to Britain who simply never settled. Like many migrants, she lost a sense of 'home', but instead of capitulating to a certain grief with this loss she found a way to turn it into art,

as Phillips pointed out in a recent interview (Gonzalez 2019). Rhys's literary production and her ability to move between the colonial and the postcolonial world sums up Bertram and Julius's conditions, as well as Sir Bertram's role. As Salman Rushdie affirms, imagination can definitely "falsify, demean, ridicule, caricature, and wound as effectively as it can clarify, intensify, and unveil" (1991, 143). And

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postcolonial literature is actually able to recollect and exploit feelings and emotions in order to redefine the world and its boundaries, more than romances had done.

According to Phillips, Jean Rhys has firstly found her personal relief in her imagination and in her novels. Indeed, the protagonist Gwendolen/Jean Rhys manages to link the materiality of her migrant experience in Britain and the immateriality of her homeland's memories, and she uses her fiction to cope with the inevitable emptiness of her homeland. When abroad, she creates a perfect memory of her past in Dominica, but once back home, she has to deal with "the full extent of her disappointment" (Phillips 2018, 305): the island of her dreams was just a false projection inspired by her desires, especially because people and objects of her parental house have been destroyed by the passing of time. Therefore, in describing the Caribbean homeland, Phillips considers the relationship between the material spaces people live in – such as the cities with their public and private places – and people, objects, occurrences, and events which have some linkages with them. Moreover, in his fiction Phillips represents

> the way this space is lived through emotions and the imagination. The spatiotemporality of a dream, a fantasy, a hidden longing, a lost memory or even a peculiar thrill as we walk down a street can be given representation through works of art. (Harvey 2006, 280)

It is for this reason that migrants constantly preserve a sort of fondness and attachment to homeland as a fantastic and primordial land.

In this regard, the role played by imagination is remarkably thought-provoking. Gwen/Jean Rhys has found a way to escape from reality thanks to her fiction, and she has managed to come to terms with this condition also through her personal rewriting of the romance genre. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), she struggles to reassess a new dignity to subaltern and migrant people through the character of Antoinette/Bertha Mason. And in *A View of the Empire at Sunset* the identification with her character becomes even more evident:

> she smiled sweetly and managed to distil the narrative down to the skimpiest of plot lines: colonial girl comes to England to seek her fortune and eventually escapes the misery of the postwar years by leaving for the Continent, where she quite unexpectedly takes up writing in a series of melancholic hotel rooms. (Phillips 2018, 237-8)

This same use of a melancholic literary imagination in response to the romance genre can be traced back in the life of Ben and Tommy and their mother Monica in *The Lost Child*. They have created a dreamworld through which they hope to cope with the disappointments of

real life after the dissolution of their family (Phillips 2015, 57), thus recalling the interpersonal relationships of the Brontë family, as we will see in the next paragraph. In a similar way, Bertram Francis too in *A State of Independence* constantly escapes from his responsibilities by seeking refuge into a mere fantasy:

> He played a game with himself that he often did when disturbed. He would pick out a spot on the horizon, focus on it, then close his eyes and try and imprint it on his mind. Then he would reopen his eyes and look again, and try to pick out a spot beyond it, close his eyes, imprint, then open his eyes again and try to look even further beyond that spot. This way he was trying all the while to see further into the distance so that he might one day see another island that nobody else had ever seen, and then proceed to people it with persons from his mind so that he had his own world that nobody could touch. (Phillips 1986, 97-8)

Bertram's fantasy further underlines his naivety and his

> simplistic dreams of returning 'home' as if nothing has happened in the intervening twenty years […]. In depicting Bertram as childish and out of touch, Phillips suggests that his protagonist's isolationist rhetoric of sovereignty is unable to account for the true complexity of the contemporary situation. (Brown 2013, 98)

Indeed, when he states that nobody can stop him simply because he was born there (Phillips 1986, 113), his ex-friend Jackson laughs at him, suggesting a return to England:

> Things have changed too much for you to have any chance of fitting back […] You English West Indians should just come back here to retire and sit in the sun. Don't waste your time trying to get into the fabric of the society for you're made of the wrong material for the modern Caribbean. (136)

So, re-inhabiting the past is an impossible aspiration for migrants. However, it is also relevant to note that, during his stay in Britain, Bertram had known moments of frustration and discomfort too, so that he had started to think about returning to the Caribbean as a good solution for his constant sadness. In ways similar to what is experienced by Julius Wilson and Ella Gwendolen Rees William, his British life had gradually turned into a delusion; the problem for Phillips's diasporic souls is that they do not feel at home in the Caribbean either, thus confirming a general condition of "displaced Caribbeanness" (Ledent 2002, 42) which characterises the Caribbean area and its inhabitants' processes of identity formation. As mentioned

before, Caryl Phillips also manages to exploit a dense intertextual framework to represent this phenomenon of displacement, and it is now time to focus on it.

3 Intertextuality and the Search for Home in Phillips's Rewriting of the Romance Genre

The considerations above show that, in quite a paradoxical way, the more a country like the UK reveals globalised characteristics, the more it is probable that its migrant inhabitants desire to return 'home'. In other words, the global system denies to migrants the same freedom of movement that is at the base of contemporary globalisation. This is especially true of the Caribbean area, where tourists are generally more welcomed than returnees. The problem is how to coexist with a geographical space that is more and more globalised and expanded. As Pamela Gilbert underlines,

> spatial relations would reveal to us a complexity and materiality which was being hidden away by narrative. […] place could be claimed as home, as related to the construction of identity. (2009, 103)

This means that considering space as a sole continuum of global connections favours the processes that contribute to the formation of hybrid identities, shedding light on their linkages with ideas of home and homeland. However, Homi Bhabha warns against the possible negative effect of an overall spatial approach. In Bhabha's view, such an approach can articulate problems of identification by transforming the diasporic aesthetics into an uncanny temporality, that is "the time of cultural displacement, and the space of the 'untranslatable'" (Bhabha 2000, 302). By contrast, Bhabha supports the importance of the migrants' dream of survival, the act of living on borderlines and, as he adds by citing Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), of letting "newness enter[-] the world" (Rushdie 1988, 272), in which newness stands for the diasporic condition.

Such an approach is relevant to Caryl Phillips, who manages to integrate the categories of space and time by playing with both the spatial and the temporal setting of his intertextual novels. Hence, Emily Bronte's brother Branwell can live in the spirit of the young second-generation migrant Tommy Wilson, and Austen's land-owner Sir Thomas Bertram can be reversed into the Caribbean migrant Bertram Francis. If we consider that

> the fate of romance as a form is dependent on the availability of elements more acceptable to the reader than those categories for which some adequate substitute must be invented, (Jameson 1975, 143),

it seems that Phillips actually seeks to provide an intertextual background for the interpretation of contemporary racial relations and their spatial connotation. As a result,

> the cognitive challenge posed by intertextuality may become an exercise in intercultural empathy which, if carried out with any degree of success, will equip us better for life in a multicultural or cosmopolitan society. (Sell 2008, 209).

Such a process is possible because, according to Jonathan Sell, an intertextual fragment can be understood only thanks to the reader's literary competence, the reader's familiarity with other texts, themes, and society's mythologies (204).

So, in his personal approach to the romance genre, Phillips tries to make the relationship to the Caribbean colonial world explicit by subverting the subtext of the romances and transferring them into a clear part of the contemporary plots of his novels. He starts from the creation of an upside-down character (Bertram Francis) in *A State of Independence*; then he proposes both a plot twist of *Wuthering Heights* – by supposing that Heathcliff is the Caribbean son of Mr. Earnshaw – and a fictionalised account of the Brontë family's story in *The Lost Child*; and he finally offers a fictional biography of Jean Rhys in *A View of the Empire at Sunset*, whose description of the Dominican novelist might recall that of her own character of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Phillips creates a series of interconnections that reassess the whole history and the narration of the British colonies in a real innovative way by connecting them to the search for home of the diasporic protagonists. They all feel unstable and unsatisfied both in the UK and in the Caribbean: in Phillips's imagination nobody is completely at ease and they all manage to come to terms with the fragmentation of their diasporic condition. In such a controversial world what is interesting is that the authors of the canonical English romances become characters of Phillips's fiction: the personal accounts of their lives are at the core of his investigation, from the difficult relationship between the Brontë siblings and their father, to Jean Rhys's unhappy marriages and her problems with alcoholism.

3.1 Caryl Phillips's Subversive Relationship with the Canonical Romances

Firstly, what it is worth noting in Phillips's 'rewriting' of Austen's masterpiece *Mansfield Park* is the similarity in the characterisation of Sir Bertram and Bertram Francis. As Ledent points out, Bertram Francis's voyage has much in common with Sir Bertram's expedition to Antigua: both travellers look for financial profits from the is-

lands and their inhabitants by means of exploitation and prevarication, and this situation also affects their personal relationships because of their self-centredness and their lack of empathy (Ledent 2002, 49). Moreover, they both spent a significant part of their lives out of their own homelands, and they both have a precise idea of independence. Sir Thomas Bertram is a typical patriarchal figure, a man who cannot accept to lose control over the other members of his family. When he spends a significant period of time in Antigua to administrate his own profits, he returns really upset by discovering that, during his absence, his children and his niece Fanny Price lived freely and self-indulgently, without considering his far but oppressing shadow (Austen 2007, 173). In a similar way, Bertram Francis considers just his own need for independence: when he migrated to Britain in the 1960s, he took into consideration neither his mother's pain nor his brother's difficulties, nor his girlfriend's necessities. Like Sir Bertram, he thinks of being the centre of his own community, and they are both surprised at discovering that things have changed during their absence, and that people can live without them. Furthermore, the situation is further complicated by the romances' colonial context, one which, in Said's words, favours an oppressive Eurocentric standpoint:

> the authority of the observer, and of European geographical centrality, is buttressed by a cultural discourse relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural ontological status. (1993, 59)

Phillips tries to escape from this condition by giving a voice to his postcolonial Bertram. To do so, the author adopts Sir Bertram's point of view in the Caribbean Bertram, who ironically behaves in a colonialist and imperialist way towards the British dominions. In this light, Phillips exploits Austen's irony to subvert the colonial order and criticise the unequal relations of power imposed not only by colonialism, but also by decolonisation and globalisation in the current world-system (Nyman 2009, 41). As a result, Phillips fabricates an overturning which reconciles Austen's textual wit with his own purposes of 'abusing' the canon.

A second step in Phillips's intertextual representation is found in *The Lost Child*. Phillips's personal re-reading of British culture and history emerges through his characterisation of Branwell Brontë who, according to the author, was firstly fictionalised by his sister Emily in the figure of Heathcliff and, later, turned into the character of young Tommy Wilson featured in *The Lost Child*. The complex structure of the novel is functional to blurring the boundary between text and intertext: the introduction of the Brontë family in the middle of the narration is the element of transition that allows Phillips

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to construct a cyclic narration in which characters repeat patterns from the past. Branwell is portrayed as a boy who

> lived with a ferocity that frightened the gods themselves, […] He deserved to be loved and protected, but it was the wickedness of the world that corrupted him, (Phillips 2015, 111),

in a description that recalls the resolute nature of Heathcliff. At the same time, Heathcliff is unfamiliar with his adopted country, an aspect that finds an echo in the abandonment and loneliness felt by Tommy Wilson in the desolation of his mixed-race British family. From this perspective, Phillips has transposed the story of the foreign lost child Heathcliff into a new place – a multiracial family in Britain – and a new time – the 1960s. Heathcliff is embodied in the character of Tommy, a boy who refuses to be acclimatised to both his place and time, maybe because he feels that his mixed origins have condemned him to fail the "blood-line test that legitimates the child in the main plot of the foundling theme" (Estrin 2003, 43). Furthermore, Phillips's peculiar re-reading of the English romance is possible thanks to continuous changes of perspective, which create a polyphonic dimension breaking down the temporal restrictions and the boundary between reality and fiction. At the end of the novel, Phillips also suggests that Heathcliff is the son of Mr. Earnshaw: as a result, he seeks to fill the most important gap in Brontë's romance, that is the question of Heathcliff's origin, a mystery that has fascinated so many readers. He tries to do so through the peculiar addition of the migrant search for home, a parallel story that is not a mere re-writing of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, but a veritable dialogue with nineteenth-century British fiction and history. This is particularly interesting especially considering the ambiguous and enigmatic nature of the original Heathcliff, who cannot be properly understood if we remain locked in the older categories of the individual psyche. Phillips's approach to the romance genre contributes to solving the false problems to which a generic misreading of the form has given rise. Indeed, such an addition leaves a glimmer of hope for the future of the multiracial British society. The abrupt introduction into the family of the orphan child actually serves as a mediator or a catalyst designed to restore the family fortunes:

> They [Mr. Earnshaw and Heathcliff] have survived the worst of the upheaval, and the man knows full well that their odyssey across the inhospitable moors will soon be at an end. He seizes the exhausted boy's hand in his own and focuses his attention on the ghostly blackness before them. Let's go now. […] We're going home. And then the man repeats himself. The boy looks into the man's face, and again he asks him to please take him to his mother. Home. Quick, come

> along, let's go. Between sky and earth the boy skids and loses his footing, and the man stoops and picks him up. For heaven's sake, one foot in front of the other. The boy stares now at the man in whose company he has suffered this long ordeal, and he can feel his eyes filling with tears. *Please don't hurt me*. Come along now. There's a good lad. We're nearly home. (Phillips 2015, 259-60)

This deviation from the basic structure of Brontë's romance, with the focus moved to the parental relationship between Heathcliff and Mr. Earnshaw, thus makes it possible to perceive and to respect the specificity and the originality of the novel's inner structure. Moreover, this passage comes from the last part of Phillips's novel entitled 'Going Home' to recall the diasporic process of seeking home in movement. In this light, 'being at home' acquires a distinctive connotation: all along the twentieth century, globalisation has significantly changed and pluralised the concept of 'home'. As a result, its literary and cultural aspects are analysed in relation to the fragmentation and porousness of borders of the current world system and to postmodern and poststructuralist theories (Jay 2010, 23). The problematic search for a place to be called 'home' influences Phillips's life too: not surprisingly, he describes himself as a man with "three homes" (Sharpe 1995, 161), who has sometimes felt like an outsider. This feeling is

> very commonplace in British life. […] The question of parentage, the question of belonging, is very central to *Wuthering Heights*, and some of those echoes in that novel obviously began to resonate with me when I was thinking about the more contemporary story. (Simon 2015)

Therefore, Phillips has decided to engage with Britain's literary history in order to deal with the problematic "historical nonsense" (Sharpe 1995, 161) related to the complex question of belonging that has affected black people throughout the centuries. His rewriting of *Wuthering Heights*, one of the most representative texts of the English literary canon, can also be read as an attempt to come to terms with that past. Mr. Earnshaw and Heathcliff have to take small steps, "one foot in front of the other", in order to reconstruct their relationship, just as white and black people, fathers and children, have to learn to love and respect each other. Consequently, Phillips's Heathcliff cannot be identical to Brontë's, and his characterisation reveals the author's desire to elicit an imaginative response on the part of the reader. Although they are temporally distant, different young outcasts like Branwell, Heathcliff, and Tommy, share the same tragic experience in their parental relationships: they represent unrooted children looking for home in an alienating system, the same experience lived by Phillips's Jean Rhys in *A View of the Empire at Sunset*.

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Phillips's latest work is not the rewriting of a canonical romance, but of the early life of Jean Rhys. As in *The Lost Child* – where Phillips deals with Emily Bronte's family criticising their internal mechanisms – in *A View of the Empire at Sunset* he proposes a gloomy perspective on the personal story of a novelist. That said, Phillips's purpose is to relocate Jean Rhys into a Caribbean context after her recognition as a canonical English writer (Hite 1992, 19), shedding a new light on the connection between Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams and the author Jean Rhys – the great rewriter of *Jane Eyre* (1847). Phillips seeks to explain how much the Dominican girl influenced the British writer, and how much a colonised life can include a British existence. Hence once again he deals with a hopeless childhood, and this is confirmed by Gwendolen herself when she declares, "[a] child can never run away from an unhappy childhood" (Phillips 2018, 215). However, the most significant part of the narration is the protagonist's final return-journey to Dominica. The novel actually begins with a section entitled 'Going Home', in a sort of cross reference to *The Lost Child*'s ending. At the same time, however, both Gwen's journey and her birthplace are incorporeal in Phillips's description, so it could be quite difficult to actually find a home where to return. This incorporeality is particularly evident in the happy memories of her past and her glad childish aspirations. Gwendolen has to accept the impossibility of solving her past troubles because "[p]eople say that time heals, but it doesn't. You just train yourself to forget the ugly incidents, but it only takes one thing to bring it all back again" (287). Moreover, it is quite interesting to note that she describes her beloved home as an "empty world" (299), and this is also due to the absence of her father, another leitmotif of the three intertextual narrations by Phillips here examined. The constant sense of lack and grief felt by Gwen both in Europe and in Dominica demonstrates that the Caribbean author does not espouse either colonial or postcolonial categories affirming that one geographical area is better than the other. This neither-nor situation is further exemplified by a dream after which Rhys character in the novel wakes up and goes to the beach to watch the sun rise (303) – a dream that hearkens back to Antoinette's dream in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when she wakes from a troubled dream to discover that the world has changed and that she has to accept her loneliness and homesickness in the "cold dark dream" of London (Rhys 1966, 47). Gwendolen's world has changed too; it has collapsed, so that migrants – Phillips suggests – cannot find a real home even in their birthplaces. So, the "lost child" trope and a sense of disillusion and frustration haunt Rhys's account in Phillips's novel, and they reconnect Jean Rhys not only to her character Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but also to all the diasporic subjects in *A State of Independence* and *The Lost Child*.

e-ISSN 2499-5975

4 Conclusion

The relevance given by Phillips to a rich intertextuality in *A State of Independence*, *The Lost Child*, and *A View of the Empire at Sunset* certainly helps to introduce and fully exploit an innovative conceptualisation of romance as a postcolonial genre. It would seem that this genre has a code, since "its contemporaries must feel their society torn between past and future in such a way that the alternatives are grasped as hostile but somehow unrelated worlds" (Jameson 1975, 158): Phillips's rewriting of the canonical romances of the nineteenth century confirms this tendency by constantly calling into question both the literary works and their authors, colonialism and postcolonialism. According to him, the gossiped side of a life is precisely what allows a novelist to treat "a historic character very similarly to how one would treat a 'fictional' character" (Gonzalez 2019). In this sense, Phillips's aim is to relocate our thinking of Jean Rhys – as well as of Jane Austen, the Brontë family, and their masterpieces – in a contemporary space characterised by diasporic and global relations. He seeks to do so in order to reconsider the role of colonialism (and its ending) in shaping whole lives, migrant identities, and the ancestral search for home of diasporic subjects, in an innovative depiction of what 'being at home' means in a borderless context. The constant sense of no-belonging which troubles the protagonists is the actual key for them to look for an unceasing idea of home in movement fuelled by the overcoming of an ancient historiographic and historicist approach and a subversive relationship to the canon. Romance may then be understood as an imaginary solution to these conflicts, a symbolic answer to the question of how the Other can be thought of as being 'Other' than myself, when what is responsible for his/her being so characterised is simply the identity of his/her own conduct. In the romance, this conceptual dilemma is overcome by a dramatic passage from appearance to reality, and Caryl Phillips too has managed to exploit this feature in his intertextual novels, thus giving a new life to the romance as a postcolonial genre.

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