

## Texte intégral

1 In *A New World Order* (2001) Caryl Phillips claims that “every writer discovers that his or her main struggle is with this one word: form” (293). His struggle with form bears on questions such as how to write about unbearably painful lives, how to mirror the trauma undergone by his characters, or how to speak about the unspeakable. Phillips seems to have found a stylistic device enabling him to offer the readers a sense of his characters’ traumatic experience and mirror their emotional state: the musicalization of his prose. Phillips’s use of what I call musical writing is striking in his 1997 novel *The Nature of Blood*, especially in the sections devoted to Eva. This essay offers an interpretation of Phillips’s musical prose through close readings of Eva’s story and explores how the author’s musical stylization can also reflect the two different ways of approaching traumatic experience suggested by Dominick LaCapra’s: “acting out” and “working through” (*Writing* 21–2, *History* 54,104). This piece also shows how through stylistic devices akin to music Phillips resorts to a language which both seeks and defies the reader’s understanding, thereby avoiding any easy identification with Eva.

2 “The key to loving the work of Caryl Phillips is to learn to love the cliché” is a bold and arguably inaccurate statement made by Timothy Bewes (47). Firstly because Caryl Phillips’s characters absolutely do not correspond to clichés, if one understands a cliché to be “a very predictable or unoriginal person or thing; a trite or stereotyped idea of someone or something” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This definition does not correspond to Phillips’s morally ambivalent characters, for instance, a white spinster sent to her father’s Caribbean plantation in *Cambridge* (1991) or Eva, a Jewish Holocaust survivor who is part of the *Sonderkommando* and who “is prejudiced towards ‘the dirty, uncultivated people from the east’” (170) in *The Nature of Blood* (1997).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Bewes’s claim does not take into account Phillips’s original musical writing which is unique and deeply meaningful, as this essay will try to bring to the fore, especially in its relation to trauma.

3 In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* Cathy Caruth, whose work has been central to the theorization of trauma, describes it as: “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (91). She furthermore suggests that “[w]hat causes, trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (61). Interestingly, Anne Whitehead explores the implications of Caruth’s argument for narrative fiction and claims “that if trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence” (6). Caryl Phillips seems to have found a stylistic device enabling him to offer the readers a sense of his characters’ traumatic experience and mirror their emotional state: the musicalization of his prose. Phillips’s use of what I call musical writing is striking in his 1997 novel *The Nature of Blood*, especially in the sections devoted to Eva. In what follows, I will suggest an interpretation of Phillips’s musical prose by carrying out close readings of Eva’s story and explore how the author’s musical stylization can also reflect the two different ways of approaching traumatic experience as suggested by Dominick LaCapra’s: “acting out” and “working through” (*Writing* 21–2, *History* 54,104). I will also attempt to show how through stylistic devices akin to music Phillips resorts to a language which both seeks and defies the reader’s understanding, thereby avoiding any easy identification with Eva.

4 Before dealing with Eva’s language which to me seems prominently musical and the challenge that it represents for the readers, it is essential to examine some of the methods put forward by Word and Music scholars when they analyse the presence of music in fiction. Werner Wolf, for example, conducted a pioneering study of the imitation of music in texts. In *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, he provides the different typologies of the uses of music in literature. He makes a bipartite distinction between the thematization and the imitation of music (44). While thematization occurs on the level of the story, wherever a passage of a novel describes a piece of music, or a character discusses or is listening to music, imitation is restricted to the text, wherever linguistic means or literary techniques mimic the structure of music itself (Wolf, 55–6).<sup>2</sup> In the sections devoted to Eva in *The Nature of Blood*, imitation predominates although thematization occurs as well. The presence of thematization, as Irina Rajewsky states, is instrumental in the reception of texts, for, she claims, even a sole mention of the other medium enables the audience to view the media product in light of the foreign medium so referenced (Rajewsky, “Intermedialität ‘light’?,” 48–9, 56, 58–9, 62). Following Rajewsky’s view, it would thus appear that without explicit references to music, the readers would be less attuned to seeing the ability of Phillips’s

writing to embody music itself. In the parts which deal with Eva, music is first mentioned when her uncle Stephan is visiting her family:

As we walked into the cigar-smoke-filled room, Papa cried out with delight.

'Margot! Eva!'

He slapped a knee and jumped to his feet. Then he turned from us to his brother.

'Margot is quite a little pianist. Eva, however, is a newcomer to the violin. You must forgive her mistakes.'

The shock of this betrayal chilled my blood. (NB 74)

5Although this scene may look joyful, Eva feels humiliated and betrayed by her father who informs her uncle Stephan that she has just started to play a new musical instrument, the violin. Throughout the narrative music appears in anxious moments of Eva's life. For instance, music (and the violin) are explicitly mentioned again later in the narrative when Eva's mother accompanies her daughter to school after Jewish people have been brutally persecuted:

We passed out of the filthy courtyard and turned right on to the main street. On this broad thoroughfare the destitute former musicians gathered, and all day the place was awash with mournful song. In a week or two, I knew that most would have been forced to sell their instruments, and they would be reduced to merely standing on street corners. But there were always new musicians to take their places, with old violins wedged hopefully under their chins. (NB 89-90, emphasis mine)

6In this passage, music encompasses both hope and desolation. Destitute former instrumentalists play melancholic melodies and Eva foresees that the musicians will be compelled to give their musical instruments away. However, other musicians will continue to play these old violins, indirectly a reference to the new musical instrument that Eva failed to master very well in the former passage. This double reference simultaneously evokes hope, because music continues to be played, and despair, since former musicians will just stand there empty-handed. Music is mentioned further on in the novel in a dreadful scene which takes place in the concentration camp:

One woman attaches a written message to a stone and throws it hopelessly towards the fence. Frostbite has already removed her toes. She cannot dance. They make her dig her own grave, her shovel scraping against the stubborn earth. [...] She climbs in and lies down with her arms folded about her chest, her shovel by her side. They place the gun barrel almost at her temple. Then shoot. Her head is bent backwards and her bared teeth are visible. One eye stares vacantly into space. [...] Death has swept another soul from off her feet. Sashaying musically across the floor, twirling and pointing, arms thrown wide, head tossed back, death is so happy, so fleet-footed, so free. A tempting invitation. (Emphasis mine, NB 171)

7In this scene, music is explicitly associated with death. This connection will not surprise anybody who has read testimonies by Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi, to whom I will refer later on. Pascal Quignard, a French writer, argues in *La Haine de la Musique*, that music is "the only art to have become instrumental in the extermination of the Jews [...], [m]usic in the camps was [...] an accompaniment to murder" (226). If there is no actual orchestra accompanying this woman to her murder in this scene, death itself becomes music. Phillips guides his readers to connect music and the concentration camp, in an attempt to invite his audience to listen to Eva's language carefully. In the following quotation, which is to be found two pages after this tragic scene, informed readers may recognize an allusion to the "mournful song" (89) to which Phillips refers in an extract quoted earlier. Moreover, unlike the other two excerpts from the novel already discussed, in this case, Phillips's prose displays a form of musicality that will be analysed in more detail later on but already surfaces at first glance:

An early dream. Too early to dream. Six people on a plank of wood, on top of them another layer, below them another layer, one turns, all turn, packed like livestock, frozen nights, reach the bucket or let go on the wood. Hold on. Hold on. And somebody whispers, did your family light Shabbat candles on a Friday night? (And I laugh.) And somebody spits then asks, did you wash any bodies today? (And I laugh.) Everybody laughs. She laughs quietly. Stupid questions. And somebody laughs then asks, did you witness any men reciting the Kaddish today? Too

much. (I cannot laugh.) Six people on a plank of wood. Tonight. (I remember. Sometimes Mama lit the Shabbat candles. A beautiful, delicate glow. No smoke.) No smoke. (173, emphasis mine)

8The recognizable connection between mourning and music is the term Kaddish. One may think of Maurice Ravel's *Kaddish* (Two Hebrew melodies, "Kaddish" is the title of the first of these two songs), which according to the pianist Myron Silberstein, "captures the outermost depths of reverence and mourning" (132). Such reference to mourning is not surprising since the term Kaddish "is often used to refer to 'the Mourners' Kaddish', said as part of the mourning rituals in Judaism in all prayers services as well as at funerals and memorials. When mention is made of 'saying Kaddish', this unambiguously denotes the rituals of mourning expressed in the form of a prayer or blessing." (Marsden, 26)

9Even if the mourner's prayer is not usually sung,<sup>3</sup> the readers, provided they are familiar with Ravel's composition, may be able to link mourning and music.

10Now that the meaning of Kaddish is clarified, one can attempt to understand why Eva cannot laugh when hearing someone recite the Kaddish. About Eva's reaction can be further explained by quoting Catherine Gong, who gives a slightly different definition of the word Kaddish which took on a new meaning during the Holocaust.

Before the Holocaust, the Kaddish was a designated person who said it for the deceased but during the Holocaust, Jews became their own Kaddish as they didn't have time to select a particular person and automatically anticipated their own deaths every minute [...] Pre-emptive recitation of the Kaddish prayer and the reflexive assumption of the Kaddish role were apt responses to a world in which the living were already dead (86).

11One might wonder, however, if the readers who do not know the implications of the word Kaddish will overlook the musical quality of Eva's musings. Not necessarily, because any reader who does not notice the musicality of the language will at least be struck by the frequent repetitions marking the passage quoted from page 173.<sup>4</sup> Some phrases or verbs are repeated without any changes: "six people on a plank of wood", "no smoke", "hold on", while there also are repetitions with variation such as "an early dream"/"too early to dream", "on top of them another layer"/"below them another layer", "one turns"/"all turn", "And somebody spits then asks"/"And somebody laughs then asks". While Richard Middleton insists that "repetition is a feature of all music" (139), Emily Petermann highlights the closeness between repetition and rhythm as she quotes Burns Cooper: "[r]epetition is crucial to our perception of rhythm, for only when we recognize sameness or at least parallelism between events can we organize them hierarchically" (Petermann 50-1). She adds that for Gerard Manley Hopkins rhythm can be "'any recurrent figure of sound', which in language may be an element of phonology, syntactical structure, or of semantics" (50-1).

12Significantly, rhythm is crucial in the passages from *The Nature of Blood* focusing on Eva. As Ledent argues, Phillips's musical writing in this novel is

[c]onveyed mostly through sentences of varying lengths – shorter in Eva's crude accounts of camp life, longer when describing [characters's sections such as] Othello's wanderings through labyrinthine Venice – it also surfaces in percussive verbless or single-word statements, and a restless pace that quickens as the novel switches from one character to the next (160-61).

13Thanks to the economical prose described by Ledent, Eva's prose achieves a fast rhythm, especially in the passage mentioning the Kaddish. Such a hectic pace could exemplify Roland Barthes's *hétérorhythmie*, where one is imposed a rhythm which is not one's own. Barthes claims that "rhythm is the site of power since it involves the whole individual, their gait, and it inhabits their body. It is a site of opposition between individuals and one where the domination of others is imposed" (40).<sup>5</sup> Eva is here constantly confronted with the rhythm enforced by the Nazi regime in the camp, which is reflected in Phillips's prose.

14As the following textual analyses will attempt to highlight, Eva's musical language constitutes an interesting means to convey her traumatic memories. Not only because "music meets memory [...] where narratives fail" (Pautrot 180),<sup>6</sup> but also because music was present in the camps. Significantly Phillips describes them in an intensely musical prose. In order to show why Eva's musings can be considered musical I will rely upon Petermann's *The Musical Novel: Imitation of Musical Structure, Performance, and Reception in Contemporary Fiction*. Even if Petermann suggests, to some extent, "that similar textual means are used

to imitate music of different genres" (216), a great part of her monograph deals with jazz novels and I would like to argue that the use of musical language in Eva's narrative is essentially evocative of jazz.<sup>8</sup> The allusion to jazz music is particularly relevant here as this musical genre can be regarded as subversive as "jazz music was banned, [...] [and] was considered to be 'non-Aryan Negroid'" during the Third Reich ("Music" n.p.).

<sup>15</sup>Petermann defines three different ways to imitate music: 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). The following passage, which takes place when Eva arrives at the concentration camp, displays all these features:

How is it possible to be so angry with people who have done you no wrong? [...] Roll up. Where is God? Where is your God? [...]. Roll up. Roll up. A uniformed adolescent kicks an old man. Then he laughs. The old man stops and stares. I am your father. He reloads his weapon. I am your father. Each time he fires the young man laughs louder. I am your father. And then the young man removes his pistol from its holster and shoots the old man in the head as though he were a sick dog. [...] Here is the towel. Here is the soap. Here is the towel. Here is the soap. Undress, please. You are going to heaven. Sanitary belts are ripped off. Blood everywhere. Shame. Shame. Now! These men without the breeding to look away. Shower. For the lucky ones, no gas. Thank you, God. Uniforms. Barbed-wire everywhere. With electricity. Everywhere barbed-wire. Sky above. Where is God? Where is your God? (162-164, emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup>It is clear that sonority is emphasized in the extract: sound effects are established through the numerous reiterations of phrases or words. I will concentrate on these elements, keeping in mind that, according to Anne Whitehead, "[o]ne of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot" (86). Through the use of repetition of individual words or structures, therefore, these musical features convey the character's mental anguish. I would argue that in this passage, repetition relates to LaCapra's notion of "working-through" which Whitehead summarizes as "the discharging of emotion cathected to loss and the subsequent reformulation of the past" (87). Eva is able to improvise on her accounts of camp life. In other words, Eva's descriptions of the same event fluctuate, in the same way as Whitehead explains that "narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling" (Whitehead 87). Eva's ability to improvise is also shown in the repetitions with variations, already mentioned in the previous passage, such as "where is God, where is your god," which illustrate a feature of the musical novel, the riff, that is the replaying of a phrase with variation, here "a linguistic phrase that is repeated in nearly identical forms" (Peterman 71). Sound is thus emphasized through numerous repetitions for instance there are words which are repeated twice, directly one after the other: "Shame. Shame", "Roll up. Roll up"; there are also sentences that are reiterated twice but at different moments in her account of the event, "Where is God?", "Where is your God?", and sound effects are established through poetic techniques based on repetition, such as chiasmus and "wordplay". Significantly, Petermann argues that in jazz novels "[w]ordplay is often prominent, serving yet again to foreground the sounds of the words used and remind the reader of the auditory element of language, which it shares with music" (130). To strike the reader's ear, Phillips in fact creatively plays with closeness in sounds: "Blood everywhere" becomes "Barbed-wire everywhere" and then "Everywhere barbed-wire"; as if Eva was first struck by the blood and then realizes the fact that all these people are being contained, packed like animals in a place whose fences are wired with electricity, intimating that there is no escape from this bloodshed.

<sup>17</sup>If the musical properties of language are used by Phillips to capture the reader's attention these also encourage the readers to actively participate in the construction of textual meaning (Petermann 44). Reading Eva's musical language proves to be challenging for some readers, who might at some stage be lost in her narrative and cannot always make sense of her prose. For instance, the readers first read the alternating sentences "Here is the towel. Here is the soap. Here is the towel. Here is the soap" and later learn in the narrative that "[i]n order to maintain the illusion that they are going to shower, a group of men dressed in white coats issue each person with a small bar of soap and a towel" (177). They thus retrospectively understand the importance of that sentence which orally reproduces what the victims were told by the guards and thus encompasses a vision of horror. Another way in which Phillips manages to estrange and unsettle the readers is in "his refusal to portray Eva as a saintly innocent" (Craps 200). It seems likely that Phillips resorts to this strategy in order to anticipate "[t]he problem or predicament which testimony raises" that is to say

“how to avoid sympathy turning into over-identification” (Whitehead 8). In the next passage the readers discover that Eva was part of the *Sonderkommando*:

Lick your spoon. Lick your spoon. No clock. No time. Now only work. March to work. The ground wounds easily beneath the foot's heavy passage. Slow, vague thoughts filter through their confused minds. Today, they continue to burn bodies. (I burn bodies.) Burning bodies. First, she lights the fire. Pour gasoline, make a torch, and then ignite the pyre. Wait for the explosion as the fire catches, and then wait for the smoke. Clothed bodies burn slowly. Decayed bodies burn slowly. In her mind she cries, fresh and naked, please. Women and children burn faster than men. Fresh naked children burn the fastest. (NB 170-171, emphasis mine)

18Using a musical language here concurs with what Szymon Laks, who directed the men's orchestra at Auschwitz, says about music in the camps: it “was used to control people through rhythmic injunctions” (Pautrot 178). It also confirms Primo Levi's testimony, which similarly describes music as turning the inmates into “automatons” (51): “Quignard, commenting on Laks' and Levi's narratives, [...] sees musical activity as the barely hidden, ritualized, cultural form of a primitive act of hunting and predation. [...] In music the listener is also an obedient victim—to listen is *obaudire* in Latin, which is to obey.” (223)

19All these assertions could fit the passage where Eva reveals that she was a member of the *Sonderkommando*. Formally speaking, it again contains repetitions with variations: “no clock. No time”, “now only work. March to work”, “burn faster, burn the fastest”, “fresh and naked, fresh naked”. As Petermann argues in the context of an analysis of Christian Gailly's *Be-bop*, the high degree of repetitions of individual lexical items with slight modifications can be regarded as reminiscent of musical improvisation. Here, the numerous reiterations of the word “burn” enable the connotations of the term to be strung out, modified, as a soloist improvises using a repertoire of motifs ready to hand. Clearly, burning bodies is Eva's daily nightmare. As Petermann puts it, in relation to Albert Murray's *Train Whistle Guitar*, “this passage does not merely restate the theme, however, but experiments with it and strings it out” (130). Such a use of language strikes the reader and makes this excerpt particularly memorable, for these linguistic techniques increase the resonance of Eva's voice. However, Craps rightly highlights that “when Eva's reveals her membership of the *Sonderkommando*, the reader's sympathies, which she quickly engaged, become confused. By depicting Eva as a morally ambivalent character [...] Phillips subverts easy identification and forces the reader to renegotiate his or her relationship with her” (200). Throughout Eva's story the reader will therefore be forced to constantly re-negotiate his/her relationship with her, for instance in yet another musical passage, where Eva speaks of the death of her new friend Bella, another member of the *Sonderkommando*:

I have made a friend. Bella. Bella with the dark complexion. [...] I share my bowl of soup with her. Carry me, Bella, and I will carry you. [...] I am twenty. Bella, I want to live to love. To believe in something. To believe in somebody. Because of Bella, I hope with reckless vigour. Men do not know the landscape of women. Your hair is growing back. I am a virgin. Tell me, have you had a boyfriend? A kiss? Yes? In the folding places of your body? I need a piece of bread. We need a piece of bread. [...] It is winter now. Our second winter. And bitterly cold. The roll-call. I am going to be late for roll-call. Dear Bella. [...] Swollen legs? A forgotten head kerchief? A soiled uniform? Step forwards. Goodbye. A scratch on a leg? Puffed with malnutrition? Step forwards. Goodbye. A flick of a riding crop to the right. Goodbye. The other women, they cry now, please, Eva. Eva, please. Bella is gone. My Bella is gone. She is no more. Eva, she is no more. Colour your hair with this charcoal. Twenty and I am going grey! Look strong. Get up. Fresh air. Fresh air. The other women. Their feet wrapped in straw that is held in place with cloth and string. Dirty spoons attached to their waists by cords. I ask them, are you still women? Look at my swollen feet. The other women drag me away from my Bella. I am screaming. Look! In my Bella's crabbed hands there are still signs of life. I cannot leave her like this. [...] Meanwhile, dear Bella. Bella with the dark complexion. Dry my face with your breath. Your refusal of this world has not gone unnoticed. Death will want me too. Death is hungry. Always hungry (180-181, emphasis mine).

20Eva might be said to improvise on this dramatic event. Phillips's use of a musical prose at that moment is again particularly significant since it is reminiscent of the link between death and music in the camps. Moreover, music has also been used throughout history in funerary ceremonies to pay homage to the dead and to express collective support. Similarly to the musical passage occurring on Eva's arrival in the

concentration camp, identical techniques are used to emphasize sound: a chiasmus: “please, Eva. Eva, please”, a riff: “she is no more. Eva, she is no more”, a wordplay “to live to love”. There is also an alliteration – “because of Bella” – as well as a new technique: the setting up of expectations – “to believe in something. To believe in somebody” – which are immediately disappointed. Here the reader expects the repetition of the same sentence, but “thing” becomes “body”, the body which will interestingly be referred to all along the quote with such phrases as “swollen legs”, “a scratch on a leg”, “your hair”, “their feet”, “their waists”, “my swollen feet”, and “crabbed hands”.

21 Again, as in the previous excerpts, one finds repetitions with variation; “Bella is gone. My Bella is gone”, “she is no more. Eva, she is no more”, but also identical repetitions; “Fresh air”, “Step forwards”. Whitehead’s argument that “[r]epetition is inherently ambivalent, suspended between trauma and catharsis” (86) equally applies to Eva’s prose. Eva’s memory oscillates between an inflexible traumatic memory and a capacity to improvise, meaning that she is still fighting to change some parts of the event, an ability that she will lose by the end of the narrative when all she can do is repeat identical sentences. The passage focusing on Bella is thus a landmark in the prose Phillips uses for Eva. Indeed, if in all the passages quoted above Eva is able to improvise by reiterating sentences with slight modifications, at the end of her story, identical sentences are repeated at different moments in the narrative, which exemplifies Whitehead’s claim that “[r]epetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests [...] the disruption of narrative chronology or progression” (86). Such a repetition of unchangeable sentences can also be seen as the outcome of the role of music in the camps. Levi claims that “music in Auschwitz is [...] the expression of a “resolution to annihilate” (51), a lure, an ‘enchantment’, music is ‘infernal’ (50). Phillips would thus cease to musicalize Eva’s language as for many Holocaust survivors “the rejuvenating beverage of music has been poisoned, and even its commemorative power, the inner silence at the core of music, has been lost” (Pautrot 181).<sup>9</sup> This would explain why musical language is no longer used at this stage in the narrative. The phrase “[d]uring the day, I go outside and sit with my back up against a wall. I have discovered a place where I can find what little sun there is. Winter sun. I sit where I can see most of the camp” (NB 186-187-188) is reiterated twice in three pages. This tendency accelerates as two sentences are repeated twice in less than a page: “[t]his afternoon, you’ll see the doctor. Then they’ll get you a private room” (NB 191). Eva compulsively repeats the same immutable sentences, she is unable to improvise, her prose replays the past and defies chronology, which concurs with Roger Luckhurst’s suggestion that “because a traumatic event confounds narrative knowledge, the inherently narrative form of the knowledge must acknowledge this in different kinds of temporal disruption” (88). Eva’s story disrupts temporality in different ways. Indeed, as Beth Rosenberg states.

Eva’s consciousness is disoriented, [...] [her] memories are fragmented and events are not given any logical connection or linearity. After describing her parents’ relationship, she moves to a memory of entering the deportation trains, and then back to the liberated camp where her disorientated perspective ironically gains more focus. [...] The narrative jumps forward and back again, giving [Eva’s] experience a fragmented effect, illuminating her inability to comprehend reality as unified (40, 41).

22 More importantly, Phillips’s disruption of temporality enables him to convey the sense of disorientation endured by Eva to the reader, which fits Judith Hermal’s claim that “[s]urvivors challenge us to reconnect fragments, to reconstruct history, to make meaning of their present symptoms in the light of past events” (3). Indeed, after going to Britain and being committed to a mental hospital which reminds her of the camp, Eva stops using language and reverts to silence. She then kills herself in order to join her family in death. Rosenberg highlights that “in this silence the reader is privy to Eva’s perceptions of the world” (43). Significantly, Eva’s choice of words challenges the reader to once again reconnect her story since just before committing suicide, Eva mentally addresses her dead family, “Mama. Papa. Dear Margot. [...] Don’t worry, I say. Everything will be fine. Please. Don’t worry” (NB 199). These are exactly the same last four words that her mother said to her in the concentration camp:

Mama and Papa are to go one way. Mama squeezes my hand and whispers. Everything will be fine. Papa looks at me and speaks the same words with his eyes. And then it occurs to me. He has known all along. [...] Papa knew then, the day of his friend’s funeral, that one day he would have to say these four words to his youngest daughter. Everything will be fine. But now the time has arrived and Papa has no words left. He turns from me and wheels to the right. Mama’s eyes are full of tears (NB 164, emphasis mine).

23 Just like her father, Eva has no words left to express what she went through. If Phillip's writing is characterized by musical prose, and if he urges his readers to listen to his characters, silence becomes as essential to his prose as his use of music since both draw attention to the realm of sound. Indeed, while Eva uses musicality to express her traumatic experience, the term "silence" itself is all-pervasive in her section. Significantly, in Eva's story the term "silence" recurs nearly thirty times. Except at the very end of her story, silence refers to very distressing situations: for instance, the deportation train (*NB* 156, 161), when her mother feels endangered, and when the family awaits the train that will take them to the concentration camp "[a]ll valuables were to be surrendered, and all who failed to report would be punished. I watched as a defeated Mama and Papa prepared themselves in silence. I could see the terrible truth in Papa's dead eyes" (*NB* 69). Similarly, Eva's narrative opens when the British troops enter the concentration camp. "As the men jump down to the ground, they whistle and shout to each other. Then silence descends over them. They shield their eyes and look about themselves in disbelief. Silence." (*NB* 12). What the liberators see is beyond language; silence replaces any possibility of uttering the extent of horror that they witness. Phillips also draws attention to the resonating sound of silence, which can be more intense than any noise: "I worry that there may be some return to the situation that existed before these men arrived. Camp life. The scream that deafens with its terror, the terror of deafening silence" (*NB* 32). Conversely, silence can also be protective. Eva does not mute herself into silence until the very end of the narrative, for, as Clingman suggests, "silence is the protection of inwardness, holding something inviolate from the world, so that even one's speech cannot be falsely translated within its alien paradigms" (151). Indeed, her fear of not being understood, should she decide to tell of the atrocities that she has witnessed, is explicitly expressed at the beginning of her section:

I dreamt that nobody believed me. That I was in America and I was telling some people my story, the despondent words falling awkwardly from my mouth. [...] They looked at me, their faces marked with respect, and they nodded with cultivated fascination. Nobody wished to offend me. And then a man looked at his watch. [...] Again I had the same dream. [...] This time they were trying hard not to laugh, for they wanted to hear more of my story (34, 35).

24 As Stef Craps states "[f]earing that communicating her experience to others cannot but result in distortion and trivialization, Eva reverts to silence in an effort to keep her inner reality inviolate from the world" (195). Crap's statement on Eva's dream concurs with Judith Hermal's claim that the survivors "who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their own credibility" because they tell "their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility" (1, 2). Hermal also states that it is "difficult to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen" (2).

25 Some critics seem deaf to the importance of sound and rhythm in Eva's narrative, yet, as my analysis has attempted to demonstrate, Phillips seems to have found in musical language a sophisticated stylistic device to narrate Eva's traumatic experience and mirror her disturbed emotional state. My close readings of *The Nature of Blood* have intended to dispute Bewes unsubstantiated assertions that "Phillips cannot—and does not really try to—give 'voice' to the marginalized or subaltern other" (49), or that "one of the most fascinating aspects of his texts is their refusal, or their inability (which amount to the same thing), to strive for some technical means of 'speaking'" (54). Eva definitely has a voice of her own, expressed through various music-related devices, which can be made to include silence, which it needs to be pointed out shares with music a form of wordless expression and might convey the unspeakable that Eva cannot utter. Eva's narrative opens with silence and ends with it, and meaningfully in-between her traumatic memories are evoked in a musically inflected prose. After all, as the pianist David Barenboim claims "[i]n the beginning, there was silence. And out of the silence came the sound" (N.pag.), which as indicated above is only temporary. By using silence in contrast to Eva's musical recollections, Phillips attunes the reader's attention to the auditory, specifically to the verbal resonance of Eva's tale. As Whitehead puts it, "Phillips gestures towards a new way of reading and listening" (116) which, as Whitehead reminds us, for Caruth "the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand" (116).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In in-text citations, this novel will be referred to with the abbreviation *NB*. Further page references to this edition (London: Vintage, 2008) are in the main text.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed this binary distinction in detail with specific examples from Caryl Phillips's novels, including *The Nature of Blood*, in an article titled "'The River That Does Not Know Its Own Source Will Dry Up': Caryl Phillips's Musicalized Fiction".

<sup>3</sup> In most occasions the service leader sings the Kaddish, with some congregational responses. The two main exceptions are the Kaddish recited by people in mourning or observing a death's anniversary [...] and the Kaddish recited after a study session. [...] On these occasions the Kaddish is normally not sung but rather spoken out loud by the mourners or those who finished a study session. (Tarsi n.p. qtd in [www.maurice-ravel.net/hebraiq.htm](http://www.maurice-ravel.net/hebraiq.htm))

4 Catherine Lanone wrote a brilliant article on how Phillips uses repetition (for instance in the guise of rhetorical epanalepsis) in *Crossing the River* (1993) where she interprets the presence of such a stylistic device “to create a threshold for [Phillips’s] versions of ‘unspeakable things unspoken’” (57). However, she does not link Phillips’s use of repetition to a musical device which enhances and draws attention to rhythm as I attempt to do in this analysis.

5 My translation and adaptation of “Le pouvoir—la subtilité du pouvoir—passe par la dysrythmie, l’hétérorythmie [...] Le rythme est le lieu de pouvoir. Il implique la personne toute entière, règle sa démarche, habite son corps; il est un lieu d’affrontement entre les individus et d’imposition de la domination des autres” (40). I owe this quotation to Jean-Claude Schmitt.


6 Phillips claimed in relation to the songs in *The Lost Child* that music, for instance the memory or the snatch of a song, can take one back to a specific place tinged with personal recollections (Mascoli unpublished interview). In other words, music has the ability to bring a person back to a specific time and place, music carries the immediacy and impermanence that is lost in narrative and while music cannot portray the exact events of the past, it can carry their memory in a more important way.

7 Petermann’s monograph is quite unique and has been influential on my work, which is why I have also adapted her methodology to my own analyses in two other articles.

8 For those who are sceptical about the possible link between Ravel and jazz, Carine Perret argues that “[i]n France during the 1920s, some composers were sensitive to jazz. [...] Some works by [...] Maurice Ravel testify to the fecundation of the erudite language by the jazzistic one. To date, the studies which were devoted to [...] the Sonata for violin and piano by Maurice Ravel relate primarily to the analysis of the musical loans to the jazz in the rhythmic and melody fields.” (311)

9 Eva’s ability to subvert the ban of jazz that has been imposed on her by the Nazi regime is lost. She is unable to improvise.

## Pour citer ce document

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URL : <http://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/eriac/index.php?id=440>.

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