

AN ARCHIVAL EXPLORATION OF RADIO DRAMATIC HINTERLANDS:
CARYL PHILLIPS'S *HOTEL CRISTOBEL*

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Caryl Phillips, an internationally reputed and prize-winning novelist and essayist born in St. Kitts, does not require much of an introduction for readers of the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. What needs mentioning about him, however, is that he also has considerable experience as a dramatist, both for the stage and for the radio. In the summer of 2019, his drama generated renewed attention when his very first play, *Strange Fruit*, was staged by the Bush Theatre in London, under the direction of Nancy Medina. This play had originally been produced by the Crucible Studio in Sheffield in 1980 and published by Amber Lane Press in 1981. In the wake of its acclaimed 2019 revival in London, the English publisher Oberon Books, which specializes in drama, produced a collection of three of Phillips's stage plays that had been out of print for some time (*Plays One*). His radio plays, however, have so far received little attention, even if they constitute a compelling body of work that can be read not only in relation to his fiction—which they might be said to complement thematically—but also in their own right, as texts whose generally compact format provides a powerful treatment of Phillips's favourite themes, such as history, migration, (un)belonging and identity.

Nine of Phillips's radio plays were broadcast by BBC Radio 3 and 4 between 1984 and 2016. However, with the exception of *The Wasted Years*, released in 1985 in an anthology of radio drama published by Methuen, none of them has been published so far. His radio drama is therefore not accessible to the general public, except via the Beinecke Library at Yale University where the scripts of the radio plays are kept among the author's archives.¹ These dramatic texts, which I am in the process of editing for a prospective publication, can be roughly divided into three thematic groups: three texts address the history of slavery and racism (*Crossing the River* [1985], *The Prince of Africa* [1987] and *Somewhere in England* [2016]); three have a biographical focus, dealing with such famous diasporic figures as James Baldwin, Marvin Gaye, Richard Wright and C. L. R. James (*A Kind of Home* [2004], *A Long Way from Home* [2008] and *Dinner in the Village* [2011]); and the other three are perhaps more difficult to label precisely but tackle various issues around contemporary life in England

(*The Wasted Years* [1984] and *Writing Fiction* (1991)) and in the Caribbean (*Hotel Cristobel* [2005]).

Radio plays are generally thought to constitute a generic hinterland in most literary traditions (Crook 3; McMurtry 15). This is undoubtedly the case in Phillips's writing career, in the sense that his radiophonic production has not been widely read or discussed, mostly because of its limited availability. My exploration of such a hinterland was made possible in 2003 and 2019 thanks to two scholarships awarded by the Beinecke Library, which allowed me to spend several weeks consulting the writer's archives. In this article, I use the findings of this archival research to demonstrate—through a discussion of one of Phillips's unpublished radio plays—that his audio drama, however marginal it might appear to be in his oeuvre, deserves wider recognition.² By extension, this essay will also show how Phillips's papers can serve as a springboard for critical engagement, illuminating, as they do, not only some of the thematic and formal features of his work but also its context of production.

Phillips's two-act radio play *Hotel Cristobel*, which was broadcast by BBC Radio 3 on 13 March 2005 and has hardly ever been critically examined because it is still unpublished, is an ideal object of analysis in this context. Phillips's archives reveal that this radio play had a complicated genesis and a long history that is worth unravelling. That the drama was eventually aired testifies to its importance in Phillips's journey of the imagination, even if one should not underestimate the role played by such intermediaries as dramatic agents and producers in the airing of any drama.³

Hotel Cristobel actually began as a stage play, with the first typescript in the archives dating back to December 1985 (with corrections made in October 1990). The Beinecke archives contain several subsequent drafts of *Hotel Cristobel* that correspond to different stages in the life of this dramatic text and, as we will see later, attest to the changes that it underwent in the twenty years until its airing as a radio play in March 2005. Unless otherwise mentioned, it is on the basis of the seventy-four-page BBC typescript of this broadcast, dated July 2004, that the discussion included in this article is based, and not on the play as performed. It must be added that the Beinecke archives contain a later typescript, dated February 2005, which does not bear the BBC imprint and, as I will show, presents only a few minor differences from the previous version.

At this juncture, some details about the specificities of Phillips's archives are necessary to clarify the nature and the results of the research that underlie this essay. The collection of Phillips's papers at the Beinecke is extremely rich and comprises some 111 boxes containing various materials, including drafts, scripts, notes and emails, which were

acquired in three successive waves, in 2000, 2006 and 2015. These documents have not yet been catalogued, which means that they are not ordered chronologically and that the papers pertaining to a specific literary work can be found in different boxes—in the case of *Hotel Cristobel*, mostly boxes 15 and 52, acquired respectively in 2000 and 2006, but also other boxes, including those containing correspondence between Phillips and his dramatic agent, Judy Daish. Some detective work has thus been necessary to connect the various pieces of *Hotel Cristobel's* archival puzzle. In spite of my efforts, however, the information I gathered from not only the archives but also from exchanges with Phillips himself about the history of the play and its various productions is still incomplete.

As far as I could ascertain, the theatre play *Hotel Cristobel* was given a first staged reading in October 1994 at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, under the direction of Kate Snodgrass (Poster; Snodgrass). In 1996, it was performed at the Reichhold Centre for the Arts of the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas Campus (Cooper), produced by Summer Theatre and directed by David Edgecombe ("David Edgecombe"), yet this production does not seem to be mentioned anywhere in the Beinecke archives. *Hotel Cristobel* was then to be performed in New York City in November and December 1998 by Rattlestick Productions (Adams). The play had been cast and the rehearsals scheduled (Adams). However, the performance eventually failed to take place, due to problems with subsidiary rights. Phillips explains this cancellation as follows:

The play was cast and ready to start rehearsal. The main actor had flown in from Trinidad and was in New York (it was Michael Cherrie, who had played the lead in the TV production of *The Final Passage*). However, the theatre wanted to take a percentage of the profits should the play move to a larger theatre. I'm not sure of what the actual details were, but the theatre said this is what they did with every production, and Judy Daish said she couldn't allow a play to be burdened with this agreement. So, Judy said that she was not going to agree to this, and there was a stand-off between her and the theatre. Despite the production being quite advanced—it had been advertised and it was ready—the theatre and Judy could come to no agreement so the production was cancelled. (Phillips, Email)

In 1999, another reading of the play took place at the Manhattan Theatre Club, in front of an invited audience (Phillips, Email), but no stage production followed. *Hotel Cristobel* was

finally produced as a radio play by BBC 3 in 2005, directed by Ned Chaillet.

Hotel Cristobel is set in an old-fashioned, English-owned hotel, on the verge of bankruptcy because it is unable to compete with the success of package holidays and all-inclusive resorts. It is located on an unnamed, post-independence Caribbean island—presumably modelled on St. Kitts, as the territory is described as having forty thousand inhabitants (radio play 19).⁴ In spite of this recognizable element, the hotel, which is depicted as an old “colonial building” (2), could allegorically stand for the recently independent island itself or for the Caribbean region as a whole. The title of the play encapsulates its political ambitions. “Hotel” raises the issue of tourism, which can be viewed as a form of neocolonial undertaking affecting the entire archipelago, and, like George Lamming’s fictional island San Cristobal in *Water with Berries* (1971) and *Natives of My Person* (1972), “Cristobel” evokes the place’s first invader, Christopher Columbus, whose Spanish name was Cristóbal Colón, suggesting thereby that the region is still shaped by its colonial past.

The play focuses on the power dynamics between three characters, each of whom carries significant historical baggage. Kathleen, the white English woman who owns and runs the hotel, is in her mid-60s and is nostalgic for Britain’s past imperial grandeur, thinking, for instance, that local people “have no culture except that which we gave to them” (26). John, her black employee of twelve years, is in his thirties and would like to take over the hotel from her to turn it into a bar and leisure centre for local people. Finally, there is the only resident of the hotel: the American Schultz, a man in his early 40s, who visits the place for both business and personal reasons. The two acts consist of the lively exchanges between the three protagonists and take place on the hotel’s gallery, overlooking the Caribbean Sea, the sound of which is heard in the background, as indicated in the stage directions.

This synopsis of the radio play applies, broadly speaking, to the different scripts of the stage play found in Phillips’s papers. The fact that the version for radio is not radically different from the original version for the stage might suggest that Phillips’s drama is by nature more geared towards the aural than the visual, relying primarily, like radiophonic plays, on the interaction between voices rather than on visual effects. This aural aspect is confirmed by the fact that many scenes refer, in both the stage version and the radio version, to the characters’ ability or inability to hear each other, which is also an index of their many communication problems. This is clear from the very first scene, for example, when John tells Kathleen, “I’m not deaf. I heard you” (3), and she responds, “[m]ight I ask you to keep your voice down. I am not deaf” (7), “I’m all ears” (8) and “I can hear you, John” (11).

It is not possible here to conduct an exhaustive genetic comparison of the various typescripts of *Hotel Cristobel* that are available in the Beinecke archives. What seems more important is to establish the general direction of the corrections made over the years. These were particularly extensive in the many drafts dated 1998, revised in preparation for the New York performance that, as mentioned above, did not take place. As the Beinecke papers confirm, Alison Summers—who was to direct the play and, in this capacity, edited the typescript—faxed Phillips copious notes in the summer of 1998, in which she commented on the version of the stage play that had been last revised in May 1995, and then on the subsequent revisions of this script. The suggestions for change that she made were in several cases accepted by the author, even if Phillips did not implement the queries that would have required elaborating directly on the colonial situation of the island. For example, when Summers suggested in a fax dated 21 July 1998 that more details should be given about John's lack of engagement with the history he was taught at school, Phillips wrote in the margin of his copy of the fax: "A bit on the nose. Implicit" (Summers). Otherwise, edits written in pencil on the revised script dated March 1998, and presumably authored by Summers, mostly relate to what this commentator thought was a lack of focus in the plot in the second act and to the characters, particularly the role played by Schultz. Notably, the edits remark that the American had not been given his own agenda, being a mere facilitator between Kathleen and John. In the subsequent versions of the play, Phillips made the second act more concise, while clarifying Schultz's motivation in visiting the island and transforming him from the librarian-cum-tourist that he was in the earlier scripts into a businessman with an interest in buying the hotel, but also a man keen to reconnect with an islander called Denmark Smith, with whom he had had a brief affair in New York.

The radio play keeps this crucial change in the plot, while displaying some minor differences with the stage version. Not only have a few passages been slightly reformulated in the version for radio, but its stage directions predictably contain more references to sonic details. If one takes the opening lines, for instance, we can "*hear* the wind whistling through the trees," "*hear* the occasional shutter bang closed," "*hear* [Kathleen] walk as the planking for the gallery is old," and we are told that "[John] taps his foot" (radio play 2; emphases added). The 2004 radiophonic text, like the 1998 script of the stage play, is also characterized by some cuts, the effect of which is to give us fewer details about the characters' personal lives, as if Phillips's aim was to concentrate as much as possible on their exchanges within the remit of the play rather than on their background, which increases the dramatic clout of the dialogue. In this respect, the February 2005 version of the radio play contains an interesting

cut: a short passage about Schultz's relationship with his parents, suggesting that they had rejected him because of his homosexuality. Schultz's isolation in this final script of the radio play is still implicit, but the details of his life as a social pariah are left for the reader to imagine. In regard to these changes, the Beinecke archives contain quite a few handwritten preparatory notes, not always dated and not always fully legible, where the author outlines how he views his characters or where he lists some elements of their personalities (See Figure 1).

Not only does this confirm the character-centred nature of Phillips's work (Ledent, "Caryl Phillips: A Master" 2005), but it also indicates that even though the writer does not provide his readers with the full particulars of his protagonists' lives, he has a clear vision of who they are and what their existences are like. In the specific case of *Hotel Cristobel*, one can find among the documents acquired in 2000 an early sketch of the characters' interactions, in which Phillips explicates how each of the three protagonists relates to the other two. This undated document states, for instance, that John "resents [Kathleen's] posturing with power" and "wants to set her down gently," while he regards Schultz as "another yankee pretending he likes black people" (Sketch). This comes across in the play, of course, but in a much more roundabout way. Likewise, in several pages of notes entitled "July 13th 1998" and obviously written during a period of intense revision of the play, one can read such statements as "[Schultz] can't be that person in America in the same way that Kathleen can't be in England," as if the author needed to pin down for himself the commonalities between the two white characters whose respective identity conundrums are presented in a much more allusive way in the play. Another observation in the same document, "Keep Kathleen as 'racist' iron fist in velvet glove," similarly suggests that Phillips needed to set himself guidelines clarifying the disposition of the individuals he wrote into his narratives (Notes). Clearly, if the first use of Phillips's archives is to give researchers access to some of his unpublished works,⁵ the Beinecke collection also provides scholars with various papers that can illuminate Phillips's writing process, notably his meticulous portrayal of characters.

Like Phillips's other works, both novelistic and dramatic, *Hotel Cristobel* testifies to his marked preference for atmospheric intimacy and for characterization that revels in ambiguities rather than in certainties, even if all three personalities at the heart of this drama have something of the archetype about them, in the sense that each can be regarded, to some extent, as representative of their community. The play also confirms Phillips's interest in the central role of the past in human affairs, especially in matters relating to identity. In spite of displaying these familiar Phillipsian hallmarks, the play nevertheless has two distinctive

features. The first is that it is one of the few narratives by Phillips—with the exception of the film script of *Playing Away* (1987)—that contains elements of comedy; here they are concentrated in John, who in several places comes across as a joker, even though he also appears to be very serious in the pursuit of his project of taking over the hotel. In addition, *Hotel Cristobel* is one of the rare texts in which Phillips directly addresses the economic and social predicament of post-independence Caribbean societies, a fact that might be surprising if one considers that Phillips's birth in the Caribbean has shaped his vision of the world and that the region has therefore played an essential role in his development as a diasporic writer (Waters). Clearly, then, in depicting the Caribbean as a place with a complex and painful history that is nevertheless often regarded in the context of tourism as a hedonistic backwater, the radio play *Hotel Cristobel* is not only generically marginal in Phillips's large body of work but also thematically so, with the possible exception of a few essays and the 1986 novel *A State of Independence*.

Some detour via this particular novel, as well as Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*, is necessary here. Far from being a gratuitous diversion, a brief comparison between *Hotel Cristobel* and these two texts will not only allow placing this unstudied radio play in Phillips's oeuvre and in Caribbean literature, but it will also help to better appreciate some of the play's specific features, notably its avoidance of a strictly dual vision of the Caribbean pitting former colonizers against formerly colonized people in favour of a more complex, ternary architecture, and its inclusion of the white female voice.

The focalizer of *A State of Independence* is Bertram Francis, who goes back to his native Caribbean island, probably St. Kitts, after a twenty-year residence in England. The structure of the novel is unusually linear and traditional for Phillips, with only a few flashbacks. The narrative concentrates on the failings of this small ex-colony celebrating its independence from Britain. While the island cannot truly liberate itself from this age-long relationship, it is now in the grips of an American cultural and economic invasion, which makes one character declare, "As a people we come like prostitutes just lifting up our skirts to anybody with cash" (132). J. Dillon Brown attributes the relative critical neglect of this second novel to "its ambivalent representation of the United States" (85), which, for the critic, constitutes an "uneasy fit with the conventional modes of postcolonial criticism" (89) that tend to prefer "the easy comforts of [...] Manichean allegiances" (101). As I will argue in the rest of this article, *Hotel Cristobel* too, in spite of differing from *A State of Independence* in terms of plot, offers an unusual, possibly disturbing vision of the Caribbean, a vision that is, to quote Brown again, "[s]usceptible neither to the seductions of celebrating a transnational

global equality nor to the political charms of the customary colonial binary” (101). This subtextual closeness between the novel and the play is not surprising if one considers that the first draft of both texts was written at about the same time, in the mid-1980s. Some minor intertextual elements can even be traced between the two. For example, John, whose real name is Johnstone (*Hotel Cristobel*, radio play 24), has a few common points with Bertram’s putative son in *A State of Independence*, who is called Livingstone. Apart from the patronymic echo, Livingstone too works in a hotel run by a white woman (124), but it is a five-star establishment in his case, not a small resort. There are also similarities between John’s and Livingstone’s hairstyles: while the former uses Afro Sheen, the latter has his hair “relaxed and sheened in the manner of prominent black American entertainers” (101).

Likewise, Patsy, Bertram’s former girlfriend in the novel, declares that “[n]othing in this place ever truly falls into the past” (142), which might be said to echo Kathleen’s declaration in the 1994 version of *Hotel Cristobel*, the stage play: “The past is never dead. In fact, it’s not even past” (stage play 1994 74). In addition to these resonances, which relate both to the letter and the spirit of the two texts, we will see later on in this article that there are other meaningful variations distinguishing the radiophonic narrative from its novelistic counterpart, differences that might have been facilitated by the specific formal possibilities offered by the radiophonic genre as opposed to the rather conventional realistic fiction that one can find in Phillips’s second novel and which may be considered a form of anomaly in his work.

If Phillips’s *Hotel Cristobel* shares features with his novel *A State of Independence*, this radio play is also clearly reminiscent of St. Lucian Walcott’s 1978 play *Pantomime*, which is set in a dilapidated Tobagonian guest house and stages the confrontation between a white Englishman called Harry Trewe and his black employee Jackson Phillip.⁶ Through the two characters’ rehearsal of a pantomime staging a reversed version of the Robinson Crusoe story, the play economically evokes a reenactment of “the history of the British Empire” (np), in which master and servant tear at each other yet finally become aware of their common humanity. The filiation between Walcott’s *Pantomime* and Phillips’s *Hotel Cristobel* is unmistakable, even if Walcott’s play relies more on visual comedy than Phillips’s, which is meant to be heard rather than seen. Both are set in a run-down hotel representative of a crumbling empire, and their white characters are described as isolated individuals cut off from their families; in both plays, the colonizer and the colonized entertain prejudices about each other, and some sort of post-independence, neocolonial change in power dynamics is suggested in the narrative future. The differences between Walcott’s play and Phillips’s *Hotel*

Cristobel can give a measure of the latter's special take on the postcolonial situation. Indeed, instead of having two protagonists facing each other as in *Pantomime*, Phillips portrays a trilateral relationship, involving a local man, an English woman who has settled in the Caribbean but also an American visitor. I am not suggesting here that the dual structure of Walcott's play betrays a simplistic approach to the postcolonial situation—far from it, as Walcott is expert at pointing out the ambivalence of the interactions that he portrays. As Edward Baugh has argued, Walcott proposes in this “two-hander [...] a change in consciousness” (135) and not a perpetuation of the “victor-victim stasis” (135). Rather, what I want to highlight is Phillips's avoidance of any form of binarism, which, as Brown argues, is clearly displayed in *A State of Independence* as well. Phillips's preference for the triangular is to be linked not only to generational specificities and an increasingly complex geopolitical environment but also to his status as an avowedly diasporic individual whose allegiances are even less easily defined than that of his Nobel Prize-winning elder. So, while Walcott could describe himself in his poem “A Far Cry from Africa” as “divided to the vein” between Africa and the English tongue, Phillips's vision of identity is even more intricate, involving at least a ternary structure rather than a binary one. This trend also surfaces in the geographical configurations of such novels as *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991) and *Crossing the River* (1993), three books in which Phillips brings together England, Africa and the Americas. In her examination of Phillips's drama, Suzanne Scafe underlines his tendency to privilege triangular identities for his characters and views this trilateral trend as a way of dramatizing “the continued significance [...] of triangular Atlantic crossings and their echoes in history” (63).⁷

If one considers *Hotel Cristobel*, such a ternary identity could in the first instance be more readily construed as applying to Phillips himself, as an individual who has been shaped by three continents, rather than to his protagonists. Nevertheless, the three figures at the heart of this radio play are neither one-dimensional nor monolithic. They each have a hidden agenda and do not hesitate to lie: Kathleen tells Schultz that her husband has died, while he actually left her to go back to England; John lies to his friends, telling them he has been making out with Kathleen; and Schultz conceals from Kathleen and John the real reason for his visit to the island. However, these secrets and lies are readily exposed as the play unfolds, confirming John's statement that “[t]his island is so small that you sneeze on the south coast, somebody on the north coast is going to say ‘Bless you’” (radio play 40). Such pervasive mendacity at the individual level replicates the historical and systemic deception around the characters, reflected first in the name of the region, the West Indies, but also in the notion of

independence itself, which is shown to be merely nominal, as it also is in *A State of Independence*. In line with this, the characters' identities are far more confused or fluid than they might look at first sight, even if the three protagonists could simultaneously be seen as prototypes of their own racial or national groups. As someone who, according to John, has "[her] body in this century and [her] head in the last" (13), who has her radio "tuned into the BBC World Service day and night" (11), is irritated by BBC announcers' frequent habit of dropping their aitches (48)⁸ and speaks an elevated and occasionally old-school form of English, Kathleen seems to have all the features of the obnoxious, backwards-looking, bossy white expatriate, who is cut off from her surroundings. And indeed, she is overbearing and keeps patronizing John, suggesting, for example, that he is incapable of any "independently conceived ideas" (8) or calling him "impudent monkey" (13). Still, behind this reactionary veneer, one can glimpse a more vulnerable woman, whose use of pronouns, for instance, betrays her own cultural and existential confusion, as the "we" she uses alternately refers to expatriate white English people on the island (18), to the British (54), to white people in general (20) and (mostly when speaking to Schultz) to all the inhabitants of the island (16, 39), regardless of their racial identities. John, too, is a complex individual, in spite of his comic interventions. Clearly a proponent of local culture—he promotes steel-band music (9), for example—he is also obviously influenced by African American fashion since, as already mentioned, he uses Afro Sheen (3), while being fascinated by his African ancestry, which he believes to be of "warrior stock" (33). While he can be cheeky with Kathleen, he is determined to see his business plan succeed and is wary of not being too aggressive towards her. As for Schultz, he too is difficult to place in any definite way. He first comes across as a naive tourist who travels the world "to bond with people who are in touch with their environment" (17), "people who are pure" (17), but we realize as the play unfolds that he is not as innocent as he might first seem to be. In spite of his political correctness, he is shown to be white 'mansplaining' history to the local people. For instance, he explains to John the reasons why his father left the family before he was born and how this places him in regard to the social and historical context of the Caribbean, without really considering the personal impact of such a fact: "You see, you're a part of the most important of all historical movements: migration, in your case for economic reasons. This pattern of importing and exporting labour has been a dominant feature of American life since the time of slavery" (33). In spite of his extensive historical knowledge, however, Schultz does not seem to fully understand how history has shaped human interactions in the Caribbean and how it still determines current relationships, including his own with the islanders. More importantly, his

visit to the island is partially motivated by greed, by the quest for gold that already drove the very first invaders to the Caribbean. Indeed, he works for a company that wants to buy Hotel Cristobel, raze it to the ground and build upscale villas in its place. He is also a sexual predator of sorts, driven by selfishness, as he is trying to contact Smith, his former lover who, as a family man, refuses to respond to his attempts at communication. This, incidentally, reveals another form of mendacity in Caribbean societies: the fact that same-sex relationships are not always openly accepted there, for, as John declares to Schultz, “Denmark don’t carry on with men and that kind of palaver down here. We all know what kind of man Denmark is, but Denmark don’t carry on so down here” (63).

It is interesting to note that Schultz is only referred to by his surname, which is of German origin and “originally denoted a man responsible for collecting dues and paying them to the lord of the manor,” an etymology in line with his role as a neocolonial business middleman (“Schultz Family History”). The absence of his first name in the play indicates that he is still a relative newcomer to the place. Meaningfully, the other two characters, Kathleen and John, representing colonizer and colonized, are on first-name terms with each other, possibly a reference to a form of weird intimacy as “mistress and servant” (61), which has its roots in the shared past of their respective communities on the island. However, it is also significant to learn from Kathleen that John’s real name is Johnstone (24), which she finds “a ridiculous mouthful” (24) and never uses to address him directly—a patronymic truncation certainly suggesting familiarity, but also a form of identitarian castration that has its roots in the island’s slavery past too. While Schultz is historically excluded from Kathleen and John’s age-long love/hate relationship, he is shown to act as an intermediary, a negotiator between the two, occasionally developing a sort of complicity with either John or Kathleen, depending on the situation at hand. As also shown in Phillips’s *A State of Independence*, this new triangular relationship, involving variable levels of bonding between the protagonists and including the United States in the postcolonial equation, seems to have replaced the triangular trade of old and makes it impossible to see post-independence Caribbean territories through a purely dualistic lens, as more constituencies are at stake than just yesterday’s colonizers and colonized.

For all the subtextual and contextual closeness between *A State of Independence* and *Hotel Cristobel*, there is a difference between the two texts: the presence in the radio play of the white female point of view, while the novel—written, unusually for Phillips, in conventional third-person narrative form—concentrates on a single storyline, that of black Caribbean-born Bertram.⁹ Arguably, the inclusion of the white female voice in *Hotel*

Cristobel is facilitated by the formal possibilities offered by the radio-play format, a format that, as I have argued elsewhere (Ledent, “Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*” and “Radio Drama”), has become a model for Phillips’s most formally daring novels and their concern with giving the floor to marginalized voices. Testifying to Phillips’s cross-generic radiophonic imaginary, such a formal choice promotes a form of empathetic understanding of characters who are far from flawless but tend to be disregarded in mainstream narratives, and therefore need to be listened to.

One could argue that both John and Schultz are in some regards marginalized people who also deserve to be heard,¹⁰ but it is certainly Kathleen who is the most tragic character of the three, in spite of her annoying bossiness and the undeniable privilege linked to her whiteness. While she claims that the hotel and the island are “her home” (*Hotel Cristobel*, radio play 56), she finally decides to go back to Britain, which for her amounts to being dead (47) because of her “pitiful [...] status” there (28). While John tells Schultz, “Just go home. Back to America” (67), and Kathleen imperiously orders John to “go home!” at the end of the play (74; actually, the last words before the final stage descriptions), it is quite telling that she herself has no real home to go back to and comes across as the ultimate outcast, although not a mere victim either. As shown in the following extract, if her voice is not always heeded by the two male figures, she is also the one who interrupts and silences them:

KATHLEEN. [...] Have you listened to anything that I have shared with you
about what this hotel means to me?

SCHULTZ. I listened to you, ma’am, but ...

KATHLEEN. But you heard nothing. (52)

Yet, in spite of her irritating intolerance and her many racial and class prejudices, Phillips obliges us to listen to her, to feel for her, thereby bestowing on her the dignity that she thinks it is her duty to maintain (50).

It is quite fascinating to consider what Kathleen shares with the character at the heart of Phillips’s latest novel, *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018), which was written about forty years after the play. The novel dramatizes, in a puzzle-like narrative, white Dominican Jean Rhys’s return to her native Caribbean in 1936, after many years spent in England. Like Rhys, whose real name is Gwen Williams, the elderly expatriate in the radio play comes across as a homeless, ambiguous figure and does not understand what she perceives as the hostile attitude of black people towards her, even if she was not, like Rhys, born in the

Caribbean. Strikingly, Kathleen plans to take “the name of [her hotel] with [her] and drop it into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean” (*Hotel Cristobel*, radio play 72), in the same way as Rhys is shown to drop “a piece of her heart [...] into the blue water” (*View* 324) of the ocean at the end of the recent biographical fiction. It is equally fascinating to read that, after Kathleen decides to allow John to run the hotel so as to turn it into an “upmarket ‘Roots Cabin’” (*Hotel Cristobel*, radio play 71), she tentatively asks him in a reconciliatory scene if there might “be a little garret in this ‘Roots Cabin’ for a relic of the past” (71), which evokes Rhys’s famous white Creole protagonist, Antoinette, who ends locked up in an English attic, on the verge of madness. In these two texts, *Hotel Cristobel* and *A View of the Empire at Sunset*, Phillips asks us to not judge but just understand such dislocated beings. The only way to do so is to listen to what they have to say, and radio drama seems to be the perfect medium for us to do so.

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Notes

¹ The Beinecke archives do not contain the radio play entitled *Somewhere in England* which was broadcast in 2016 and is adapted from the last section of Phillips's 1993 novel, *Crossing the River*. One can find several versions of a projected film adaptation of the same section in Phillips's papers; a comparison between these scripts and that of the radio play is likely to be enlightening.

² See Ledent, "Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*" and "Radio Drama," two articles that do the same for other radiophonic texts by Phillips.

³ I owe this remark to one of the two anonymous readers of this article. I would like to thank them both for their constructive comments.

⁴ The earlier versions of the stage play mention that the island had its public library destroyed by fire, which actually happened in St. Kitts in 1982.

⁵ In addition to the nine radio plays already listed in this article, the archives contain the scripts of a radio drama called *Settling Down*, written in 1979–80, which was never aired. One can also find the texts of two very short radio plays, titled *Going It Alone* and *A Desire to Work*, which were written for an educational programme called *Speak*, broadcast by BBC Radio in 1981 and 1982 (Caryl Phillips Papers, box 20).

⁶ At least two other Caribbean plays are set in a hotel and combine serious issues with humour: Trevor Rhone's *Smile Orange* written in 1970 and Mustapha Matura's *Independence*, written in 1979. However, these plays have an extended cast and for this reason do not have the same allegorical resonance as Walcott's and Phillips's texts. I owe these references to participants in the 38th West Indian Literature conference that was held in Georgetown, Guyana, in October 2019, where I presented an earlier version of this piece.

⁷ Here Scafe is actually referencing Ulla Rahbek, another critic of Phillips's stage plays, who was herself inspired by Stuart Hall.

⁸ These lines about the BBC, described by John as "old style" (11), already feature in the 1994 and 1998 versions of the stage play (14, in both manuscripts).

⁹ Walcott's play disregards the female point of view completely, whether black or white.

¹⁰ Schultz is also a Jewish (Ashkenazic) name, which might suggest that, in spite of his hegemonic nationality, this character is ethnically marginalized. His sexual preferences also point to some form of ostracization.