

"Caryl Phillips's 'Heartland' and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: Revisiting Fear – An Intertextual Approach"

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The journey played an important role as a motif in European colonial literature. It was exploited by many Western writers, who generously answered their readers' need to leave their familiar surroundings and embark on a tour around mysterious and alien worlds. Among these writers, Joseph Conrad seems to have best captured the idea of the unknown, which he develops in *Heart of Darkness* through Marlow's journey to the 'black continent'. Conrad's depiction of the African world has long been a source of inspiration for both writers and film directors. T.S. Eliot, for example, clearly had the Conradian novella in mind when he wrote *The Waste Land*. Francis Ford Coppola adapted it into his film *Apocalypse Now*. And, more recently, Alex Garland used Conrad's setting and shadowy atmosphere in his novel *The Beach*, filmed by Danny Boyle under the same title. *Heart of Darkness* has indeed led a successful life, enchanting, disenchanting, and above all fertilizing the soil of postcolonial writing. In this regard, and as his various novels testify, Caryl Phillips has always been fascinated by Conrad's tale, which, as he explains in his introduction to the novella, should not be considered as a political "pamphlet."¹ In an article about his encounter with the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, Phillips clearly relates to the novella, unlike the African author, and considers it a reference work proposing "no programme for dismantling European racism or imperialistic exploitation;"² the only "programme" of Conrad's tale, Phillips says, is "doubt."³ It is thus not surprising if *Heart of Darkness* is a work from which he garners techniques, and situations that he eventually utilizes in a no less productive and ingenious way. His novel *Higher Ground* (1989) obviously echoes Conrad's earlier story, first serialized in 1899. Phillips's work, as we shall see, and without being exclusively confrontational, is full of intertextual allusions to *Heart of Darkness*, exemplifying his own novel's "revisionary strategy."⁴ In what follows, I shall comment only on "Heartland," the opening section of

¹ Caryl Phillips, "Introduction" to Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Selections from The Congo Diary* (New York: Modern Library, 1999): xv.

² Caryl Phillips, "Out of Africa," *The Guardian* (22 February 2003), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe> (accessed 1 August 2009).

³ Caryl Phillips, "Out of Africa."

⁴ Bénédicte Ledent, "Is Counter-Discursive Criticism Obsolete? Intertextuality in Caryl Phillips's *Higher*

Higher Ground, which offers, among other things, an interesting representation of colonialism and slavery.

Heart of Darkness voices Marlow's obscure and mostly inconclusive seaman's narrative recalling his voyage along the African coast in the late-nineteenth century. The journey takes the form of a quest for Mr Kurtz, the European chief of an interior station and a collector of ivory, whose "nerves [...] went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites," as Marlow reports.⁵

Phillips's "Heartland" is somewhat similarly located on an African coast with a trading fort under Western management. The story is narrated by an African collaborationist, who works as an interpreter for the slave traders of the colonial settlement. His life is conditioned by his fear of his countrymen, who despise his involvement in the slave trade, and his terror of his white employers, who tolerate his presence as long as his human claims are silent. When the narrator wants to assert his love for a local woman, he is decreed a piece of 'Cargo', and shipped to the New World as a slave.

Just like Marlow's travel account in *Heart of Darkness*, the native collaborator's narrative in "Heartland" offers a vista on the dealings of Western colonialism in Africa and its implications for the everyday life of both colonizer and colonized. Each in his own tragic way seems a victim and a prisoner of his fear of the Other. Terror of the enemy – the local's terror of the colonialist and the colonialist's terror of the local – becomes a space of painful connectedness confirming Aimé Césaire's belief that "between colonizer and colonized there is room only for [...] intimidation, pressure, [...] contempt, mistrust, arrogance"⁶ and fear. Taking my cue from these general observations, I would like to explore the perennial state of apprehension that binds the African and Western characters in "Heartland" and *Heart of Darkness*. I shall first examine the status of collaborators in both texts and then discuss the situation of Westerners in Africa as seen respectively by Phillips and Conrad.

In *Higher Ground*, the narrator and protagonist of "Heartland" shares the life of some white soldiers, who are mobilized in Africa. Interestingly, despite his pledged allegiance to the imperial undertaking, the native interpreter is totally excluded from the society of the

Ground," in *A Talent(ed) Digger: Creations, Cameos, and Essays in Honour of Anna Rutherford*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek, Gordon Collier & Geoffrey V. Davis (Cross/Cultures 20; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1996): 302.

⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), in Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Selections from The Congo Diary*, intro. Caryl Phillips (New York: Modern Library, 1999): 61. Further page references are in the main text after "HD."

⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, tr. Joan Pinkham (*Discours sur le colonialisme*, 1950; tr. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972): 21.

colonial garrison, and obviously relegated to a peripheral existence, where he seems to be besieged and almost completely defeated by his fear of the foreign employer. In an autobiographical mode, the local's life is depicted as a tragic reptilian strategy of survival. Almost like a snake preferring the security of the shade to the exposure of daylight, Phillips's collaborator creeps to "darkly shadowed cloisters,"⁷ sneaks "into a pool of shadows" (*HG*, 13), slithers "on to the ramparts" (*HG*, 16), and "[coaxes] open the doors" (*HG*, 14) to avoid the white traders' suspicious gaze. That he has been "purged [...] of Negro habits"⁸ in the vein of Dabydeen's protagonist in *A Harlot's Progress* or Conrad's "reclaimed, the product of the new forces at work" in *Heart of Darkness* (*HD*, 18) does not entitle the collaborator of "Heartland" to live as freely as the other white agents in the fort. His racial affiliation to the allegedly 'inferior' and 'savage' world of the African is his scarlet letter; it excludes him from the fortress, and condemns him to a life of fear and effacement that he himself judges as "low and often unbearable" (*HG*, 19).

To illustrate the notion of fear that corrodes the life of the interpreter, it is interesting to examine the character's interaction with the other residents of the fort. Out of loneliness, Lewis, a low-ranking member of the Western group, tries to befriend the local. Yet his friendship seems "too easily proffered for the interpreter's own comfort" (*HG*, 17), putting him immediately on his guard. In a similar way, the new governor's attempt to make friends with him fills him with an acknowledged "inner alarm" (*HG*, 12), which leads to his commenting twice on the scrutinizing presence of soldiers: "I am aware of idling soldiers looking down upon us," and "men staring at us" (*HG*, 13). Being the focal interest of the Westerners' eyes is dreadful for the narrator. The imperatives of his effacement are so deeply rooted in the survival codes of his existence that he rejects any Western sign of mere interest. I would tentatively add here that the hierarchical structure of the fort, which has relegated the collaborator to its periphery, is rigidly and strictly guarded both by the native interpreter and the Western soldiers, who, in their watchful caution, resemble Conrad's black knitters guarding the door of the company headquarters in Brussels.

The anonymity of the local agent in *Higher Ground* is a further sign that sustains the character's erasure – what Bénédicte Ledent describes as his "existential vacuum."⁹ The native interpreter is not given a name by his Western chiefs. His existence is not labelled, and he has

⁷ Caryl Phillips, *Higher Ground: A Novel in Three Parts* (1989; London: Viking, 1999): 11. Further page references are in the main text after "*HG*."

⁸ David Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress* (1999; London: Vintage, 2000): 164.

⁹ Bénédicte Ledent, *Caryl Phillips* (Contemporary World Writers; Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002): 61.

therefore no claim to inscribe his personal experience on the map of communal knowledge and history. His nominal excision acts, in this regard, like one of Conrad's impenetrable hazes, which makes the character's social, historical, and even physical presence completely imperceptible. One has to concede, however, that the condition of anonymity benefits, in some way, the collaborator's strategy of survival. It makes him nominally undetectable to his employers, thereby guaranteeing his lapse into a state of eternal camouflage.

This situation doubtlessly questions the reasons behind the collaborator's motives in tolerating such a debasing process of existential obliteration. Why not rebel, why not escape and seek refuge in the interior of the country as many African 'tribes' generally did to avoid the colonial invasion? The narrator does not leave these questions unattended and proficiently substantiates the idea of an ever-hovering danger of mistrust and punishment that binds him not only to his white masters but also to his people. In fact, the interpreter's plight is even more tragic in view of the local population's undisguised "disdain" (*HG*, 22) for his association with the white enslavers. Any attempt at escaping would in fact be fatal, since most locals would readily avenge their human losses on him. This leads one to conclude that a consuming state of apprehension clearly presides over the collaborator's *marronnage* between his white employers on the one hand and his own people on the other. It causes him, in Ledent's terms, to "act most *unnaturally*," to lose himself in his "fear of the Other."¹⁰

In terms of intertextual echoes, Phillips's nameless protagonist is obviously reminiscent of the native soldier guarding the ghastly manacled African slaves in the name of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*. Just like the interpreter in "Heartland," the Conradian guard joins the imperial institution after "he [has] been instructed," and rendered "useful" (*HD*, 45) to the trading mission. He is guarding his countrymen, whose "deathlike indifference" excludes him, just like Marlow in this episode, as part of the "insoluble mystery" (*HD*, 18) that had come to them from a still unknown world. The guard's fear of the colonial establishment, shared by Phillips's narrator in "Heartland," is more or less hinted at in *Heart of Darkness* during the encounter with Marlow on the latter's arrival on the African coast. As Marlow reports,

seeing a white man on the path, [the native soldier] hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and

¹⁰ Ledent, *Caryl Phillips*, 62.

with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust. (*HD*, 18)

I would say that Conrad's collaborator's initially panicky attitude, hastily replaced by a show of assurance, is the expression of two conflicting feelings, which submerge him in an immeasurable terror. Interestingly, when he first sees Marlow, the native soldier seems to be unconsciously and involuntarily reclaimed by his belonging to the African community, which regards Westerners as potential enemies. He is afraid, alarmed at the sight of the white invader. Yet, on second thought, the native soldier remembers his new position as a colonial agent, and puts on a large grin to make up for his previous expression of fear. The "rascally grin" (*HD*, 18), a fiendish smile, is a sign of the local's recovered alliance with the white man. It is also the symptom of the fear that he has to smother in the presence of the ruling invader.

Another epitome of Conrad's "reclaimed" (*HD*, 18), whose total abandonment to colonial rule might have largely inspired Phillips in his creation of the interpreter in "Heartland," is Marlow's helmsman, who shares his anonymity with other members of "the new forces at work" (*HD*, 18), such as the poleman, the fireman, and the local guard. They are all "improved specimen[s]" (*HD*, 45), who were, at some stage, educated by the "civilizational Other," to quote Aijaz Ahmad.¹¹

While the attitude of the native soldier guarding the chain-gang might evoke, as discussed above, a local agent's dread of Western authority, the helmsman's conduct, during the attack that Marlow's crew face in the up-river journey, suggests a collaborator's fear of his own African people. In the general confusion of the assault, the helmsman's terror of the local tribe makes him behave in a most inexplicable and strange way. His body seems to be reduced to pure sensation, bereft of self-control and traversed by violent forces: "He held his head rigid, face forward; but his eyes rolled, he kept on, lifting and setting down his feet gently, his mouth foamed a little" (*HD*, 55). The helmsman's body here enacts the character's fear of his own people. It is suddenly seized by uncontrollable convulsions, which develop into a last movement of energy that brings about the character's death. In fact, before passing away, the native agent deserts his post, fires at the shore, shakes the empty rifle at the invisible enemy, and yells at the coast before he falls down dead, a martyr to what Marlow reads as the native's foolishness, madness, and lack of "restraint" (*HD*, 63).

¹¹ Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" (1987), excerpt in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (London & New York: Routledge, 1995): 77.

Despite Marlow's attempts, throughout the narrative, to evade, mask, and deride any possible logic in the natives' reactions, it is more or less clear in this episode that the helmsman's uncontrollable alarm is triggered by his apprehensiveness of the African. As might be expected, the local agent has deeply internalized his employers' fear of the native population, a fear which combines here with his own choking dread of the African community on account of his collaboration. The lethally intoxicating blend of terrors brings about the convulsions, and then comes the unspeakable silence of death: "he died without uttering a sound" (*HD*, 57).

My discussion so far has highlighted the state of fear that yokes Conrad's local agents to the interpreter of "Heartland" in view of their shared existential isolation. My aim now is to show how Phillips goes beyond a simplistic recuperation of Conrad's "reclaimed." Indeed, the Phillipsian interpreter of "Heartland" evokes the local agents of *Heart of Darkness*, but this does not mean that the author of *Higher Ground* duplicates their limitations.

First, Phillips builds up the characterization of his local agent as a kind of synthesis of Conrad's main collaborators: namely, the soldier and the helmsman. In *Heart of Darkness*, each of these characters typifies one facet of fear: there is the dread of the colonial authority and the terror of the local population, which are distinctly epitomized by two different natives. What Phillips does in "Heartland" is to encapsulate the two terrors in the one native narrator of his story. His interpreter simply accumulates fears. Phillips thus manages to render, in a more explicit way, the overwhelming hopelessness of a collaborator's survival under the imperial authority.

Yet Phillips's most significant achievement in the web of connections that he establishes with Conrad's novella lies mainly in his choice of the narrative voice. In *Heart of Darkness*, all native subjects, including the helmsman, the poleman, the fireman, and the soldier of the chain-gang, are denied explicit voices. They exist solely within the bounds of Marlow's dominant discourse, while their own voices lie low, buried in their supposedly inarticulate experiences, which are definitely lost to the reader. Most probably, it is this intentional erasure of the natives' speech in Marlow's account of his African journey and in most travel narratives and journals of the colonial and even post-colonial era that triggered Phillips's concern with the indigenous population – in this case, the local agent – and its still unrelated human experience. As Phillips himself explains in an interview, his main consideration is to

look at that history from a different angle – through the prism of people who have nominally been written out of it, or have been viewed as the losers or victims in a particular historical storm.¹²

It is clear from this statement that his choice of a local narrator is intentional. "Heartland" unseals the lips of Conrad's silent natives, and attests to Phillips's gestures towards an assertion of unknown identities, whose inscrutability to the Western gaze obliterates them from historical and fictional records. From this perspective, the Phillipsian text arises as an overt verbalization of a so far expunged native discourse that Marlow could not, or simply refused to, decipher. It can be assumed, then, that the helmsman's unuttered address in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* ultimately regains articulation in Phillips's *Higher Ground* to present the reader with the standpoint of the imperially subjectified local.

That the native agents are caught in the global machinations of colonialism is clear, but what seems to be equally relevant both in "Heartland" and in *Heart of Darkness* is that Western colonizers experience the same malaise in Africa. Their lives are so deeply conditioned by their fear of the native that they seem to duplicate the misery of the local community. This idea partly ties in with Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, whereby colonialists either perceive the colonial Other as a source of repugnance and fear, or unconsciously adopt him in a universalist mode as a potential reflection of the self. Bhabha makes the point that in his relationship with the colonized, the colonialist aims at a moulding of the colonial subject into "a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*"¹³ Bhabha argues that the Other is "Anglicized" but not "English"¹⁴ and "*almost the same but not white*."¹⁵

In keeping with the idea of imperial malaise experienced by the colonial protagonist, I propose to focus on the character of Lewis and some of the other Western soldiers in "Heartland." Just like Conrad's Kayerts and Carlier, the incompetent colonial administrators of a desolate trading post in the Congo in "An Outpost of Progress,"¹⁶ young Lewis, who came to Africa with dreams of adventures, tarries in the fort waiting for future action. In a retrospective mode, he likens his life within "the high stone walls" (*HG*, 17) of the garrison to

¹² Caryl Phillips, "Crossing the River: Caryl Phillips talks to Maya Jaggi," *Wasafiri* 20 (1994): 26.

¹³ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 126. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 128.

¹⁵ "Of Mimicry and Man," 130. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress" (1897), in *Tales of Unrest* (1898; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977):

"sweating like a rotting apple," which is to him "a waste of time" (*HG*, 19), and he further compares his existence to an imposed process of decomposition, whereby he simply "sits around waiting to get old" (*HG*, 19). The narrator of "Heartland" presents this condition of confinement and aimlessness as a wide-ranging state affecting not only Lewis but most agents in the trading fort. Many soldiers, we are told, resort to "the taunting and torturing of creatures – particularly lizards – [as an] occupation that helps [them] pass time" (*HG*, 17). What these examples and others make clear is the stifling condition of incarceration that colonialists have to endure on the 'black continent.' They find themselves in a state of siege because of their acceptance of the propaganda developed by most colonial countries, which sought to depict the African world as a coliseum of murder and lust. Just like the native in pain, the imperial capturer suddenly becomes a captive, caught in the trap of his own beliefs. However, beyond this image of the trapped Western invader who is condemned to live within the boundaries of the fort and, by extension, of his own assumptions, one must keep in mind that the conquest of Africa was also a military expedition, which implies that soldiers were expected to remain in the garrison in wait for action.

In "Heartland," Mr Price, a leading figure of the trading post, further illustrates the pervasive state of fear which, in Phillips's text, seems to dominate the experiences of most representatives of the colonial institution in Africa. When placed within the familiar boundaries of the fort and among the members of the Western community, this character's demeanour is extremely brutal and arrogant. Yet Mr Price becomes suddenly terrified when faced with the African bush. He adopts "a look of worry" when he approaches the native village and "relaxes his pace until [the interpreter is] in the lead" (*HG*, 22) to use his body as a human shield against any aggression. Mr Price even resorts to a paranoid interrogation of his guide about the friendliness of the locals, and this in spite of his belief "that any hostile act [on the locals' part] would almost certainly bring about the destruction of this village" (*HG*, 23). My point is that the colonial leader, who impudently imposes his rule upon everybody in the fort, gradually shrinks to a frail shadow of himself when placed in the foreign environment of the African Other. Nevertheless, Mr Price can still be regarded as a model of bravura of sorts, in view of the fact that he is the only character in "Heartland" who leaves the fort without the support of a whole detachment. Unlike Price, most soldiers are exclusively fort-bound. Their role on the 'black continent' allows only for limited excursions in the

framework of expeditions, which have the propensity of being a great "mobilization" (*HG*, 35), that is, a massive demonstration of imperial power and prestige.

Interestingly, Phillips's colonizers, Mr Price and Lewis, are hardly distinguishable from Conrad's Europeans in *Heart of Darkness*. In Marlow's account, the white man's fear of the natives is similarly described as an indisputable aspect of the Western experience and psyche in Africa. I shall examine the character of the chief accountant and his fellow agents to show how Conrad's missionaries, just like Phillips's soldiers, each in their own way, try to control their unspoken dread of the local.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the chief accountant of the company station is hailed by Marlow as a "vision" and a "miracle" (*HD*, 21) on account of his remarkable appearance. Living amid the general muddle of the trading post, the agent obsessively cultivates his elegance as a way of safeguarding himself from the danger of 'going native'. The imperial understanding of Africa as a demonic place of primitive rites, "devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril,"¹⁷ to use Achebe's words, induces Conrad's accountant to cling to the accessories of the Western world, his "starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers [...] and varnished boots" (*HD*, 21) as his only way to salvation. Marlow's caricature of the chief accountant as a model of sophistication and aesthetic luxury is revealing, in that it shows how the white man's fear of the native transcends the conventional realm of physical terror, which might remind us of Mr Price's dread of a bodily aggression in "Heartland," or Marlow's fear of attack during the up-river journey. Indeed, the accountant's horror at his black counterpart goes beyond the mere fear of physical aggression: it is of a mental sort. A blemish in his appearance would, in his understanding, bring him into a state of lethal kinship with the native African, and thus banish all his convictions of both superiority and purity.

The fear of the local population is further illustrated in *Heart of Darkness* through the general attitude of European envoys, more commonly referred to in Marlow's narrative as "pilgrims" (*HD*, 27). These obsessively carry their staves as if these were extensions of their bodies. The staves, unimpressive hand-made weapons improvised to ward off intruders or to inflict physical punishment on the native attendants, are recurrently singled out by Marlow as the pilgrims' most distinguishing feature: "they wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands" (*HD*, 27), "white men with long staves [...] strolling up" (*HD*, 24),

¹⁷ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (1988; Garden City NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1990): 12.

and "pilgrims with their staves – all complete" (*HD*, 43). So, just as the Company brick-maker amasses a trophylike "collection of spears, assegais, shields, [and] knives" (*HD*, 28), Conrad's pilgrims seem to value their arsenal of rods as a potential warrant for security and obedience in Africa.

However, the rudimentary weapons of the Western agents are quickly replaced by "Winchesters" (*HD*, 55) when the natives' spears prove too difficult to handle. This happens during the up-river journey, when Marlow's crew is attacked in the fog. On this occasion, the European members of the group abandon their rods and readily brandish their guns to counter the natives' assault. Such a strategy of defence, which consists in alternating exposed batons and secreted rifles, testifies to the pilgrims' chronic fear of the African population; the same colonial terror that handicaps Phillips's colonizers in "Heartland," keeping them fort-bound. In the light of this, one might add that, when the local becomes the enemy as a result of colonial subjugation and his chosen field of action is confrontation, there is definitely something to fear for white colonizers.

Clearly, whether colonized or colonizers, Phillips's characters in "Heartland" largely evoke Conrad's figures in *Heart of Darkness*. Yet, as already mentioned, the British-Caribbean writer is not interested in a mere reproduction of the Conradian types. He is, among other things, concerned with a counter-response to Marlow's colonial discourse. Nevertheless, Phillips's narrative can in no way be reduced to a single discursive strategy that would impose a unique reading-practice, "ignoring whole layers of meaning," for, as Ledent explains, "the counter-discursive paradigm can be reductive if used as the only method of approach."¹⁸

Keeping this idea of plurality in mind, I would now like to go back to both texts and try to show how Phillips addresses Marlow's deliberate omission of the native in pain in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow constantly hints at the general sense of fear that is shared by most pilgrims towards the colonial subject. However, neither Conrad nor Marlow gives us a full view of the reactions and emotions that mount above the imperial attitudes of either fear or greed. The terror that brands the displaced local population and the native collaborationists as a consequence of colonialism is clearly jettisoned. It is conspicuously absent from the narrative, enigmatically evading Marlow's partial gaze, which sees nothing in the locals outside incomprehensible "grin[s]" (*HD*, 18), "filed teeth," and "ornamental scars" (*HD*, 45). The reader is left with a jigsaw puzzle of hints and clues, and very often fails to detect

¹⁸ Ledent, "Is Counter-Discursive Criticism Obsolescent?" 301.

anything beyond Marlow's narrative. Edward W. Said highlights the biased perspective of the Conradian narrator:

If we must [...] depend upon the assertive authority of the sort of power that Kurtz wields as a white man in the jungle or that Marlow, another white man, wields as narrator, there is no use looking for other, non-imperialist alternatives; the system has simply eliminated them and made them unthinkable.¹⁹

As Said's comment clearly conveys, Marlow's account of his African journey functions within the general framework of colonial perspectives, which exclude Otherness and confine it to a realm of sub-humanity. This, as Said explains, clearly accounts for what seems to be Marlow's intentional erasure of all possible references to the locals' share in the colonial experience of fear and terror. It is probably this provocative exclusion of the native in pain from *Heart of Darkness* that Phillips answers in *Higher Ground*, as if "Heartland" were a corrective to Marlow's prejudiced account of his voyage. For the narrator of Phillips's story, even when self-focused, the discursive field is not discriminately selective. On the contrary, it is an all-encompassing space of expression, used to display both the natives' dread of colonizers and the colonizers' deep fear of the locals. The cases of Lewis and Mr Price, as discussed above, largely attest to the narrator's insistence on the cross-ethnic malaise triggered by colonialism. In other words, in Phillips's "Heartland," the narrative presents a panoramic view of a human experience that takes into account both sides of the colonial limbo, colonizers and colonized. It gestures towards a wider and sometimes corrective understanding of colonial reality that most narratives of that period, like *Heart of Darkness*, describe only in part.

In conclusion, I would say that one of Phillips's major accomplishments in "Heartland" is to evoke Conrad's novella, relying on its textual echoes to address some of the issues that make Marlow's travel account in *Heart of Darkness* an essentially colonial narrative. Crucially, Phillips *engages with* Conrad's tale. In fact, the former explains in his article about Chinua Achebe that, although he can understand the Nigerian writer's dismissal of Conrad's novella as an essentially racist story, he himself does not fully identify with Achebe's rejection of *Heart of Darkness*, on account of his own personal history, which, of course, is different from Achebe's and consequently permits other readings. After all, Phillips "[is] not an

¹⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; London: Vintage, 1994): 26.

African," as he himself says.²⁰ He is thus left with the different entities that make up his own identity, and must find his own answers to Conrad's story, as he indeed endeavours to do in the first section of *Higher Ground*. The result is a work too complex to fit into a reductive counter-discursive framework such as that presented in *The Empire Writes Back*.²¹ "Heartland" may be read as Phillips's response to *Heart of Darkness*, but this is only one possible reading among others.

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²⁰ Caryl Phillips, "Out of Africa."

²¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

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