Re-Membering the Black Atlantic

On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory

Lars Eckstein
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Amsterdam - New York, NY 2006
NOTE ON THE COVER The background of the montage illustrating the cover uses a detail from Sir Joshua Reynolds’ “A Young Black” (1770?), oil on canvas, 78.7 x 65 cm. Reproduced by courtesy of the Menil Collection, Houston, Texas.

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Printed in The Netherlands
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Introduction

It has become fashionable in recent years to proclaim the end of memory. “Memory is constantly on our lips,” argues the French cultural historian Pierre Nora, “because it no longer exists.” Nora sees us as captured in a moment of transition in which we are experiencing the inevitable replacement of ‘memory’ as “embodied in living societies” by an anonymous ‘history’. Owing to the effects of globalization and the disintegration of traditional communities, we are about to enter an age that will be dominated by the “reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.” It is because of this development that we are presently witnessing a boom in what Nora calls les lieux de mémoire, realms of memory. Among these he numbers archives, public holidays, monuments, historiography, and, together with many more, as if in an afterthought, literature. “In an epoch devoid of real novels,” Nora writes, literature is only left to “mourn” in the face of the great sell-out of memory to history.

The present study sets out to show that the reverberations between literature and memory are not quite so simple as this: literature not only challenges or sustains social dimensions of memory in many ways by preserving or subverting cultural meaning, or by commenting on or dispersing it. More than this, literature must also be reckoned as a special form of cultural memory in itself: as a complex lieu de mémoire with its very own forms and strategies of observation and writing from older memories and their diverse representations. But on what premisses does this complex mnemonic machine called literature work? And what are the shortcuts it takes to the social

3 “General Introduction: Between Memory and History,” 20.
forms of memory that we are familiar with? It is these questions concerning the poetics and politics of literary memory that form the core of the following discussion.

I hold this to be relevant since, especially in times of an alleged crisis of memory, the role of the arts and literature appears to be of particular importance. According to the German literary and cultural critic Aleida Assmann,

> it is apparent […] that the arts turn towards memory precisely in the moment when society is in danger of losing it or tries to get rid of it. […] Today, it is mainly the arts that have discovered the crisis of memory as their particular theme and try to come up with new forms in which the dynamics of cultural memory and forgetting manifest themselves.4

Assmann’s statement applies particularly to attempts to recall the Atlantic slave trade creatively in literatures in English since the mid-1980s. While the trauma of the African diaspora had hitherto been treated only hesitantly in imaginative writing, the past twenty years have brought to the fore a number of writers with a renewed and wide-ranging interest in the African slave trade, the Middle Passage, and plantation slavery. This trend has resulted in a considerable and growing number of challenging literary works by authors in all parts of the diaspora, ranging from Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson and Sherryl Anne Williams in the USA, to Dionne Brand in Canada and Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D’Aguiar in the Caribbean and Britain. In order to describe the multi-layered, hybrid “spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean” both represented and plotted out by these writers and many other artists and thinkers, Paul Gilroy, in his seminal study with the same title, coined the term ‘Black Atlantic’. The Black Atlantic, perceived as a “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of […] transcultural, international formation,”5 primarily denotes a complex chronotope or spatial and temporal extension calling for certain reading practices. However, I will also be referring to it as a unique metaphor evoking the formative historical experience of the Atlantic slave trade, a metaphor charged with the fate of those millions who suffered and lost their lives before, on, and after the countless crossings between continents.6 “That rapport with death,” Paul Gilroy writes,

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emerges continually in the literature and expressive cultures of the black Atlantic. It is integral [...] to the narratives of loss, exile, and journeying which [...] serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and social memory.7

Gilroy’s use of the term “group” here prompts further questions: which ‘group’ exactly is it that Black Atlantic literature refers to, and according to what criteria is the group constituted? Is the mnemonic function of this literature directed at an ethnically defined community (e.g., a specifically black diaspora)? Does it address a trans-ethnic form of social memory, or are there texts that might subvert or shun altogether the dynamic of the social manifestations of memory? These questions call for an awareness of the political dimensions of mnemonic writing; they touch the ideological intersections between memory and literature, which are largely left aside in Nora’s discussion of history and the realms of memory. In this study they acquire particular relevance: in a close analysis of three exemplary Black Atlantic novels – Caryl Phillips’s Cambridge, David Dabydeen’s A Harlot’s Progress and Toni Morrison’s Beloved – I wish to show how different types of text employ radically distinct strategies of remembrance, both in the sense of their poetic association with older manifestations of memory in text, image or sound, and in their political positioning against social discourses of memory and their ideologies.

Generally speaking, the study of interconnections between memory and literature is not at all new, and has received increasing attention in recent years. Aleida Assmann, in an historical survey, distinguishes between two major approaches hitherto taken to the analysis of memory and writing, which she subsumes under the Latin labels ‘ars’ and ‘vis’.8 The term ars is to be understood in its older sense of the technical aspect of literary memory. It is rooted in the Roman tradition of mnemonics, a tradition that has more recently been returned to the attention of modern readers by Frances A. Yates’s study The Art of Memory.9 Ancient mnemonics proudly claims a long history increasingly read across national and regional boundaries; see, for instance, Günter Lenz’s study “Middle Passages: Histories, Re-Memories, and Black Diasporas in Novels by Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, and Caryl Phillips,” in Crabtracks: Progress and Process in Teaching the New Literatures in English, ed. Gordon Collier & Frank Schulze–Engler (Cross/Cultures 59; Amsterdam & New York, 2002): 235–52.

8 Aleida Assmann, Erinnerungsräume, 27-32.
which can be traced back to a founding legend that was first set down by Cicero. According to this legend, Simonides of Keos, a choral poet, was the sole survivor of a festive banquet in which the host and all the other guests were crushed to death beneath a collapsing roof; because Simonides had earlier memorized the seating arrangement, he was later able to identify each disfigured victim. The point Cicero wishes to illustrate with this legend is Simonides’ procedure of associating certain locations with specific images, a spontaneous mnemonic strategy that proved resoundingly successful. With this model in mind, ancient mnemonics developed a rhetorical technique by means of which complex speeches could be reliably memorized and recalled. The temporal aspect is of little importance in this context; mnemonics is, rather, a purely spatial technique, arranging certain images at certain places in an imagined landscape and thereby creating a visual mental script which, when desired, can be translated back into verbal language.

The present-day importance of the ‘artistic’ tradition of memory resides less in the narrow sense of rhetorical tradition than in the fact that it has been used as a point of departure for recent studies dealing with the mnemonic structure of texts from a literary perspective. In this regard, Renate Lachmann, in her study Memory and Literature, was the first to link ideas of mnemonics and memory productively with notions of intertextuality as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, for example. Lachmann argues that literature ultimately has to be considered as a “mnemonic art par excellence,” as an art form that opens up mnemonic spaces in which earlier writings are inscribed by procedures that either continue, dispute, or transform this earlier material. The memory of a text thus reads as “the intertextuality of its references, [which] arises in the act of writing considered as a traversal of the space between texts.” Unlike Roman mnemonics, time does play a central role in Lachmann’s concept. By focusing on literary practices that reconstitute older texts and their established meanings and intentions transformatively within new and diverse contexts, Lachmann proceeds diachronically.

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11 Lachmann, Memory and Literature, 16. Lachmann refers to strategies of “Writing as Continuation, Writing as Rejoinder, and Rewriting.”
Aleida Assmann juxtaposes the perception of memory as *ars* with a focus on memory as *vis*. This alternative approach takes up issues that are left out of a limited concentration on an ‘artistic’ (aesthetic and poetic) view of memory. It is, instead, concerned with the “interconnections between memory and identity: i.e. with cultural acts of memory, commemoration, immortalization, referring back, projecting into the future, and not least with the forgetting included in all these acts.”\(^{12}\) Assmann herself, together with her husband Jan, has undertaken much research into memory as a ‘force’.\(^{13}\) Regarding the intersections between memory and literature, this perspective centres on questions relating to the interdependence and reciprocal influence of texts and their historical, political and social contexts. In her cultural analyses, Aleida Assmann distinguishes three different dimensions of social memory: individual, collective, and cultural.\(^{14}\) On all three levels, memory interacts with the arts in various ways. Literature may be employed by writers as a medium of individual, collective and cultural self-realization, a medium in which models of memory and forgetting are acted out and critically positioned against contemporary discourses of social commemoration.\(^{15}\) Instances of social memory may in turn influence texts and their mnemonic potential. A ready instance of this would be the deforming force of historical trauma on both the content and the textual form of a narrative, and Assmann examines such effects, devoting special attention to traumatic experiences in the Third Reich.\(^{16}\)

The division into *ars* and *vis* of approaches hitherto taken towards the analysis of memory and literature exemplifies a more general dilemma in recent literary studies. Here, after what has been termed the ‘cultural-studies turn’, we also find two schools of thought that have been regarded as largely incompatible. Theories of intertextuality and deconstruction still engage the critical imagination, whereas approaches in postcolonial and cultural studies emphasize a need to return to material conditions and perspectives. At the


\(^{15}\) Aleida Assmann demonstrates this by analyzing Shakespeare’s histories und Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (*Erinnerungsräume*, 62–113).

\(^{16}\) See Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 258–77, as well as Assmann & Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit*. 

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end of the day, however, there need not be an either-or choice between the two. On the contrary, one of the most fundamental tasks of literary studies should surely be to find ways of analyzing literature in its historical, political and social contexts without ignoring the achievements of the modern and postmodern periods. There is a crucial need for approaches that combine analysis of the politics of literature with a thorough understanding of its aesthetic and poetic strategies. The present study accordingly posits that there is indeed a fundamental connection between memory as *ars* – in the sense of a text’s perceivable *structure of dialogic reference* – and memory as *vis* – in the sense of its *identity-giving potential*, directed at a specific historical reality.

The first part of the book discusses the conceptual groundwork necessary to sustain this thesis in the second part’s readings of three ‘mnemonic’ fictions of the Black Atlantic. In tracing a way towards a ‘poetics of mnemonic strategy’ in writing, it will be necessary to review briefly several approaches to memory and literature in earlier critical debates. The discussion of mnemonic structures will then be conducted in two basic steps. Under the heading “testimonies,” a category that Paul Ricoeur employs to capture the intersection between memory and history, it is possible to address the issue of how and under what circumstances experiences of past events enter the realm of written texts in the first place. As will be shown, the testimony remains a problematic category, in that neither the factuality of reported events nor the emotional sincerity of the witness can be satisfactorily verified. The problematic nature of testimonies will be highlighted in a separate chapter addressing the genre of the slave narrative in general and Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* in particular.

The examination of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave narratives is particularly relevant in the context of this study, since contemporary Black Atlantic writers like Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Toni Morrison, through a variety of mnemonic procedures, are overtly or covertly writing back to this older textual tradition. Such dialogic reference between texts and earlier concrete memorial materials – which may be written texts, but also

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17 One can detect, especially among writers considered to be ‘postcolonial’, a growing resistance to the critical reduction of their works to political content. Vincent O’Sullivan uses a poignant metaphor from popular culture to express this unrest: “Superman was enormously powerful until confronted with a fragment of Kryptonite, a fragment of the planet he came from, Krypton. And sometimes I think that some postcolonial theorists react like Superman reacted to Kryptonite when you say the word *aesthetics*. It is a word that inspires horror if not terror.” Lars Eckstein et al., “Literary Missions and Global Ethic,” in *Colonies, Missions, Cultures in the English-Speaking World: General and Comparative Studies*, ed. Gerhard Stilz (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2001): 453.
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visual or musical resources – will be discussed in a second step under the heading “palimpsests.” This will involve the organization of the various forms and manifestations of intertextual and intermedial references occurring in narrative fiction; it is also essential, however, to look at the ideological implications of ‘lifting’ older resources into new texts and contexts. With reference to the ‘function’ of mnemonic strategies, the discussion will then revolve around the identity-giving potential that emerges from a relevant fictional mnemonic construct and its political projection against an historical reality beyond the boundaries of the text.

Drawing on the theoretical framework I have just outlined, the second part of this study will then conduct illustrative readings of three literary ‘palimpsests’ and their specific mnemonic strategies and procedures. In each case study, I will analyze how, and with what resources, historical experiences of the Black Atlantic are made accessible to the reading public. I will show how Caryl Phillips, in his novel Cambridge, draws heavily on written material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whereas David Dabydeen, in A Harlot’s Progress, engages in an ekphrastic dialogue with a number of visual representations of slavery; last but not least, Toni Morrison locates her novel Beloved in a decidedly musical tradition. Beyond questions concerning the nature of mnemonic resources and the various ways of integrating them into new texts, however, particular attention will be paid to the ideological stance of the writers towards the materials they use, as well as to the political positioning of their mnemonic fictions. The three novelistic approaches are vastly different in this respect as well: Phillips locates his mnemonic performance in the dimension of social memory that Aleida Assmann terms ‘cultural’, whereas Dabydeen and Morrison position their works in the realms of individual and collective memory respectively.

Rather than offering a broad panorama of contemporary fiction engaging in remembrance of the Black Atlantic, the bulk of this book thus discusses a narrower selection of three novels which lend themselves particularly well to the analysis of memory and literature. There are, however, good reasons for such a limited focus. First of all, the three novels in question reveal an extraordinary degree of aesthetic and ideological complexity, and close investigation of their multiple layers of reference yields rich rewards. This in turn allows the study to draw comparatively on a wealth of Black Atlantic discourses, from the early slave narratives through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting to the music of John Coltrane. Secondly, an in-depth reading of these novels by Phillips, Dabydeen and Morrison permits a systematic charting of both the artistic options involved in mnemonic writing (references to texts, images or music) and its political strategies (choices that are made in empowering individual, collective or cultural aspects of social memory). Each
novel, in short, illustrates two central dynamics – poetic, and political – in a twofold triangular grid with which literary approaches to ‘re-membering’ the Black Atlantic may be mapped out. This should provide a useful framework for situating other Black Atlantic writers and their texts.
My first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have.

– V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*

The interpretation of fact, the history of event, is in the end a fiction. On the other hand this fiction is history. The memory is a muse that is continually fretting and changing.

– Lawrence Scott, *Witchbroom*
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Towards a Poetics of Mnemonic Strategy in Narrative Texts

In what I tell you, there’s the almost-true, the sometimes true, and the half-true. That’s what the telling of a life is like, all that one plaits in the white Indies currant’s hair to make a hut. And the true-true comes out of that braid. And Sophie, you can’t be scared of lying if you want to know everything …

– Patrick Chamoiseau, Texaco

As my introductory remarks have indicated, there is quite some controversy regarding the intersections of ‘literature’ and ‘memory’. I shall therefore start out by surveying the structures and features of a text which may be subsumed under the generic term ‘memory’. On this basis, it will be possible to decide specifically which aspects of ‘literary memory’ are most fruitful in the context of this study. At the same time, the discussion of earlier approaches will reveal a number of shortcomings which call for an expansion of current perspectives.

In order to categorize the various aspects of mnemonic strategies in writing, it is advantageous to turn to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue and its critical reception. For Renate Lachmann, whose study Literature and Memory, with its notion of memory as unfolding in the intertextual dimension of literature, draws heavily on Bakhtin, literary memory relies on dialogic reference between texts and older textual representations. Lachmann here differentiates among three aspects of dialogism as developed by Bakhtin and his interpreters: “ontological,” “descriptive,” and “functional.” To clarify the implications of the intersections between literature and memory, I shall briefly comment on each aspect in turn.

The ‘ontological’ aspect

Renate Lachmann refers to the ‘ontological’ aspect of dialogism as “a global dimension of texts in general (the text as part of a ‘universe’ of corresponding texts, as the ‘culmination of textual experience’), which one could call its implicative structure, an all-encompassing textual immanence.”

This definition of dialogism and its consequence for an understanding of the memory of literature become clearer if seen in the light of Bakhtin’s reception in 1960s France. Let me therefore briefly sketch Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia and then outline – albeit roughly and in a necessarily simplified form – how it was transformed into a concept of intertextuality by Julia Kristeva and her followers.

Bakhtin perceives both society and literature to be in perpetual tension between regulative, authoritative forces, which he labels ‘monologic’, and decentralizing, disputatious forces, which he calls ‘dialogic’. The genre of poetry, for Bakhtin, is traditionally monologic, while he attributes the dialogic potential of literature to its narrative genres. In the novel specifically, dialogic heteroglossia arises from the interaction between various characters, each of whom imports his or her own dialect, sociolect and idiolect, but it also comes from the novel’s capacity to appropriate other genres – poetry, letters, reports, etc. Finally, Bakhtin emphasizes the ‘double-voicedness’ of the word in prose texts, in that every utterance consists of both the immediate voice of a narrator or character and the – possibly refracted – voice of the author. The concept of heteroglossia reverberates in the linguistic theory of Bakhtin and Voloshinov as well. They assume that the meaning of a word – which manifests itself in specific speakers in specific historical situations – is never stable, but is constantly challenged by other meanings constituted by other speakers in different contexts. According to Bakhtin, the individual word loses its entitlement to absolute, canonized meaning altogether; instead, it is always situated at a distance from itself, and is perpetually disputable.

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2 Renate Lachmann, “Vorwort” to Dialogizität (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1982): 8 (my tr.).
It is this subversive potential of Bakhtin’s view of literature and language – a view that owes much to the oppressive presence of totalitarian tendencies in Soviet cultural politics in the 1920s and 1930s – that Julia Kristeva takes up in her reading of Bakhtin in the 1960s. Her target, this time round, is the bourgeoisie, whose self-deceptive ideologies, according to the Parisian Tel Quel group, largely relied on the successful closure of meaning, thereby generating the illusion of secure identities and unchallengeable autonomy. Kristeva, in the course of her project, transforms two aspects of Bakhtin’s theories. First, she radically extends the term ‘text’, which, in the larger sense of a general cultural semiotics, for her is a universal category; for Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and others, all reality is thus read as text (“il n’y a pas de hors-texte”). Secondly, this extension is accompanied by a radical deconstruction of subjectivity; in Kristeva’s (debatable) reading, Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia implies a transition from intersubjectivity to intertextuality: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity.”

If seen in the light of Kristeva’s assumptions, the memory of a literary text is thus manifested in its participation in an anonymous and universal textual universe in which newness occurs by combinations of what has always been – in Roland Barthes’ term – “already read” in constantly evolving variations.

In the following, I do not wish to support this poststructuralist perspective uncritically as an all-encompassing conceptual model of mnemonic writing. While it is true that the erasure of textual subjectivity and the championing of the free play of the “already read” do have the potential to delegitimate and destabilize allegedly fixed ideologies and truths, the ultimate consequence of this approach leads to a radical loss of all legitimacy. It necessarily implies that alternative memories entertained by those marginalized by dominant, often Western discourses also fall prey to this alleged loss of subjective agency. Especially in view of histories of suffering and deprivation (such as the Atlantic slave trade and slavery), the consequences of this ‘ontological’

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7 “The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: […] the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotation marks without inverted commas.” Roland Barthes, Image – Music – Text, tr. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977): 160.
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approach to textual memory are not only conceptually\(^8\) but above all ethically dubious. There is therefore good reason to revert to Bakhtin himself, who insists on the “contact of personalities” within the “dialogic contact between texts.”\(^9\) While aware of the essential semiotic openness of any system of signs, I would like to revive the figure of an author whose strategies for narrowing down the inherent ambiguity of textual representations are ultimately traceable and open to analysis. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that a text may aim at the diffusion of meaning – this, however, will be viewed as just one among a number of ideological writing strategies.

The ‘descriptive’ aspect

Rather than the ‘ontological’ aspect, the dialogism which Renate Lachmann terms ‘descriptive’ is of more immediate importance to my conception of literary memory. Rather than referring to poststructuralist approaches, it takes its cue from the Bakhtinian original. According to Lachmann, a (text)-descriptive perspective offers the chance to “describe dialogism as a specific form of constituting textual meaning: i.e. dialogue with other texts (intertextuality), dialogue with various social dialects competing in cultural context (heteroglossia), or dialogue with other sites of meaning.”\(^10\) Textual meaning, according to Bakhtin, is continuously negotiated between competing ideological voices, which are also to be found, if not exclusively, in older texts and their memories. The procedures and strategies adopted within this process of constructing meaning can be described; Lachmann herself has tried to organize and interpret such instances of intertextuality in her seminal study Memory and Literature.

Lachmann assumes that mnemonic concepts “are sketched and acted out in the memory games of certain cultural groups (of artistic or intellectual avant-

\(^8\) Barthes’ and Kristeva’s conception of an anonymous realm of texts fundamentally contradicts the speech-act and communication theories of Austin, Searle and Grice, and even Bakhtin himself. Each of these approaches posits that all utterances are essentially subjective acts of communication which always refer to specific contextual situations.

\(^9\) Bakhtin, “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences,” in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, ed. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, tr. Vern W. McGee (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986): 161. Bakhtin continues: “If we transform dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the divisions between voices (changes of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme […], then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill).”

Towards a Poetics of Mnemonic Strategy

gardists)”11 – more than just a passive medium that saves data, literature is the realm of active designs of memory which engage critically with earlier literary recollections. Thus, the memory of a text manifests itself as a “result of complex transformations, rearrangements [Verstellung] and disfigurements [Entstellung] of other texts.” The act of reading thus becomes a “constantly repeatable attempt to describe in the manifest text the traces, ramifications, stratifications, hollowings-out, and notchings that the work of transformation left behind.”12 The memory of literature, from this ‘descriptive’ point of view, is thus to be found in strategies of covering and re-covering other representations, strategies that can be identified and described by the reader.

The metaphor of the palimpsest expresses this idea quite clearly. A writer uses (materially, in the literal sense; in certain modes of dialogic reference, metaphorically) an older textual representation, on which he or she inscribes a new text. In the process of covering the material with a new layer of print he or she usually leaves marks and traces – signals of reference which allow the reader to un-cover the original material. The complex result may perhaps be best illustrated with reference to the German word ‘Aufhebung’ (a term more famously employed by Hegel in other contexts). The verb ‘aufheben’, in fact, carries three different aspects of meaning, all of which paradoxically apply to the literary palimpsest. In a first sense, ‘to delete’, it implies that the original material disappears beneath the layer of the new text. It is appropriated into the context of a new semantic whole and initially loses its individual identity. In a second sense, however, aufheben also denotes ‘to save’ or ‘to keep’, and thus relates to the markings and traces by which the earlier material may be wholly uncovered. It is thus only superficially deleted, and at the same time paradoxically memorized within the new structures. A third sense of aufheben, finally, is ‘to lift up’. And indeed, as Gérard Genette’s term “literature in the second degree”13 suggests, the older material, by being appropriated in a new context, is ‘lifted’ onto a new semantic level. Here, ‘innocent’ readings of both new text and older material are impossible. Rather, meaning has to be negotiated by entering into a complex dialogue which traces the implicative reverberations between the manifest text and earlier material. These reverberations, for Lachmann, constitute what she refers to as intertextuality, and this is where she locates the memory of literature.14

11 Renate Lachmann, Memory and Literature, 23.
12 Lachmann, Memory and Literature, 24 (inclusion of the German terms L.E.).
14 “The memory of a text is its intertextuality.” Renate Lachmann, Memory and Literature, 15.
Juxtaposing the terms intertextuality and memory has produced impressive results, as Lachmann’s studies demonstrate; however, it also represents a considerable diminishing of perspective. While poststructuralist theories of intertextuality have extended the boundaries of the ‘text’ to denote a universal concept covering all areas of human perception (termed the “universal intertext” by Manfred Pfister), those theorists concerned with what Pfister calls “specific intertextuality” implicitly restrict the object of their studies to a rather narrow understanding of ‘texts’. Critics like Gérard Genette posit that there are concrete, traceable references between texts and pretexts, while the term ‘text’, in theory, may refer to all sorts of genres. In practice, however, it is exclusively literary works that both Genette and Lachmann use to illustrate their points – above all, literary examples of canonical, Western works. The result of this is the exclusion of eminently important texts, especially if one is interested in memory less as a purely artistic phenomenon than as a product of the intersecting spheres of art and social, historical or political realities – texts such as diaries, memoirs, reports, and also historiographic or philosophical writings. Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia renders somewhat doubtful the focus on strictly literary material, as this immediately contradicts a basic element of dialogism, which one could term its ‘generic inclusiveness’. I will therefore be considering both ‘literary’ and ‘non-literary’ writings in my analysis of mnemonic dialogue in Black Atlantic fictions.

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16 Genette uses a different terminology; in Palimpsests, he speaks of hypo- and hypertexts and prefers the term hypertextuality to intertextuality. For simplicity’s sake, however, I will use Pfister and Broich’s terms intertextuality, text and pretext.

17 “The novel permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra-artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others). In principle any other genre could be included in the construction of the novel, and in fact it is difficult to find any genres that have not at some point been incorporated into a novel by someone.” Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 320–21. Bakhtin’s focus here, it has to be noted, is intratextual rather than intertextual: He is not immediately concerned with pre-texts, but with voices within the text, and thus does not initially conceive of dialogism in a diachronic perspective. Rather, the truly polyphonic novel ideally includes “all the social and ideological voices of its era” (“Discourse in the Novel,” 411). The diachronic turn of Bakhtin’s concept by his interpreters, however, has either neglected the aspect of generic inclusiveness, or else took it too far in the poststructuralist extension of the term ‘text’.
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It is not enough to stop at this point, however, if one considers the fact that the representation and evocation of memory is not restricted to expression via verbal signs. This is made quite clear by Monika Schmitz–Emans and Manfred Schmeling in a study of visual memory in literature:

Literary texts do not merely recall [...] written material, they do not merely save verbally and literarily phrased texts, but they also recall the results of cultural performances of memory that are composed in different ways. Here, the images call for our special attention, a “medium of memory” of its own kind which can be, and always has been, short-circuited with texts in various forms.18

In the same sense in which the intertextual relation between a concrete text and its pre-text is grounded in a mechanism of transformation, the intermedial relation between a text and a non-verbal representation of memory also engages in processes of covering and re-covering. Additionally, however, such an intermedial palimpsest is confronted by an issue that intertextual relations do not have to deal with – the question of whether certain mnemonic content can indeed be translated from one sign-system into another. This is not only an ekphrastic issue (verbal references to visual representations), but also concerns the relation of written texts to auditory media. In order to approach a more comprehensive understanding of the memory of literature, both the intermedial relations between literature and the visual arts and those between literature and music will play a central role in further discussion here.19

The ‘functional’ aspect: memory, text and context

If, on the basis of its ‘descriptive’ aspect, one ventures to locate the memory of literature in textual strategies of reference, one must keep in mind the fact that textual communication always occurs within the broader context of cultural communication. Not to be neglected, therefore, are the intersections between text and context, which Renate Lachmann refers to as the ‘functional’ aspect of dialogism. This fulfils the demand for a “critical approach to the term text which falls into place alongside the ontological and descriptive approaches” and provides an answer to "issues concerning the function of texts


19 A comprehensive analysis would also have to include ‘hybrid’ media such as video, film, radio plays that combine elements of sound, image and text: This, however, has to be set aside for reasons of space and clarity.
Two fundamental questions need to be tackled in this connection. First, how do real-life events as we experience them with our senses enter the semiotic system of a text? And second, to what extent, and with what aims and results, do texts affect sociocultural memories?

As Lachmann puts it in a “prospect,” cultural semiotics based on the theories of Yuri Lotman perceive “culture as the non-inheritable memory of a collective […] which manifests itself through trans-individual mechanisms of saving and transforming cultural data.” Such a collective requires “common texts, constant codes and a certain set regularity in the transmission of cultural information” in order to guarantee the stability of cultural meaning, but also to ensure that older patterns of meaning may be transformed in line with the generative potential of cultural memory. “Texts in which culture is realized,” Lachmann argues, “function as impersonal vessels of memory, in that they appear as ‘accumulators’ of cultural meaning on the one hand, and as its ‘generators’ on the other.” The idea of treating texts as both accumulating and generating cultural meaning is fundamental to understanding literary memory. Still a problem, however, is the question of whether, and if so how, the reciprocal influences between texts and social forms of memory can be described. Lachmann raises this question herself in *Memory and Literature*, yet does not seem willing or able to give a clear-cut answer: “One may ask,” she writes,

> whether this problem could better be solved with recourse to a cybernetic model, assuming non-personal bearers of memory, or with reference to a model of cultural description in the proper sense, assuming the existence of individual cultural agents, or text producers, whose work on the cultural text admittedly requires a knowledge of the relevant cultural grammar.

I venture to answer this question for the purpose of this study. On several grounds it seems reasonable to choose Lachmann’s second option and revive the authorial function of texts after the proverbial “death of the author.”

First of all, it is hardly possible to address the issue of how personally experienced reality enters the realm of texts without positing the presence of a personal agent who lives through real-life events (apart from reading other

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texts, contemplating visual images, or listening to music). This is particularly relevant if we try to understand how factual historical events such as the Atlantic slave trade and plantation slavery relate to their material representations: i.e. textual memory. Texts such as diaries, memoirs, travelogues – which will be treated as ‘testimonies’ in the further course of this study – are fundamentally concerned with the idea of transforming the individual, sensory perceptions of a witness (as yet present merely in mental images, sounds or narratives) into manifest (or concrete) signs – and thus, through more durable fixation, to escape potential amnesia. Cybernetic approaches (and Lachmann’s) hardly account for this perspective, taking as they do little interest in the personal psychology of writing. I therefore wish, after including non-literary and intermedial references, to extend the field of analysis to yet another dialogic dimension: namely, references to personal mental memories. This perspective raises its own problems and questions; these I will try to address later under the rubric of “testimonies.”

The assumption of personal agency behind a text is also helpful in clarifying the relationships between a once-established text and its contexts. The space of cultural productivity is not at all singular, as Lachmann mentions in passing, but is “divided into subgroups, which have created their own ‘dialects of memory’ and thus contribute to a mnemonic pluralization of the system.” Of special interest here – particularly in a postcolonial context – are the power-relations between these subgroups and their mnemonic systems of meaning, as well as the tensions within them. As such, these would be describable in a cybernetic approach – left aside, however, would be questions concerning the specific (political) aims and intentions of the mnemonic efforts involved. It is instead possible to evaluate the ideological positioning of narrative procedures and strategies in a social and cultural context if they are attributed to a personal agent who, as a writer, is surrounded by certain social discourses of memory and commemoration, and who responds to these discourses with his or her own fictional mnemonic design. The ‘vis’ of literary memory, its identity-giving potential, results precisely from this tension between “fictionalizing acts” which express a writer’s ideas, ideals and desires, and a given, critically embraced historical reality.

Clearing the ground: testimonies and palimpsests

Having looked at the intersections of memory and literature from an ‘ontological’, ‘descriptive’ and ‘functional’ point of view, it is now possible to formulate more discretely what I will be referring to when speaking about the ‘memory’ of literary texts. To start with, I claim that the memory of a text is

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23 Renate Lachmann, “Kultursemiotischer Prospekt,” xviii.
revealed in its *describable strategies of dialogic reference*. The mnemonic referent a text evokes in this context may be either ‘manifest’ (existing in other texts, music, images, or genres of texts, music, images) or ‘mental’ (sensory data resulting from the personal perception of the writer). In the following, I will treat those texts that refer to mental resources as ‘testimonies’; these will be juxtaposed with those texts referring primarily to manifest resources (i.e. second-hand experience), which, following Genette, I will call ‘palimpsests’, or literature in the second degree. The point of reference distinguishing both categories is the individual historical event. A text claiming to reconstruct such an event by means of primary, immediate experience performs as testimony; a text drawing on other sources will perform as palimpsest or second-degree narrative.

Obviously, the differentiation between testimonies and palimpsests can never be a clear-cut one; many texts do indeed have recourse to both mental and concrete data in the reconstruction of events and thus cannot be assigned exclusively to one or the other category. How, for instance, would we deal with a pre-text that is irretrievably lost, or with a text based on an oral report? In neither case can we identify a manifest source of reference, yet we would have to speak of texts in the ‘second degree’, and would thus have to count them among the ‘palimpsests’. It should be quite clear, therefore, that the differentiation between testimonies and palimpsests is but a helpful theoretical construct for discussing the specific questions raised by references to mental and manifest resources. The difference between testimonies and palimpsests is neither ontological nor epistemological, but is essentially performative in nature. What comes in the guise of a testimony and what in the guise of a palimpsest will therefore largely depend on the choice of certain rhetorical strategies of presentation, strategies which, in turn, owe much to the specific historical conditions and social processes of memory and forgetting surrounding an author. How these influences may be perceived will now be discussed by first investigating the category of testimonies.

**Testimonies: recourse to mental mnemonic resources**

The term ‘testimony’ opens up the question of how historical events enter the realm of literature in the first place.\(^{24}\) The main challenge is that of mimesis: to what extent is it at all possible to imitate experienced events verbally and thus to memorialize them adequately in written form? It is astonishing how

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\(^{24}\) It should be noted again that historical events may also enter the realm of literature by taking detours: Since this study is primarily concerned with the ‘memory of literature’, I will not be analyzing images or music as testimonies *per se*, but only when they are referred to in literary palimpsests.
often mimesis is cast aside or ignored altogether when texts report events involving extraordinary brutality and suffering. Referring to testimonial accounts by victims of the Holocaust, James E. Young, for example, notes:

writing from and about the Holocaust has not been called upon merely to represent or stand for the epoch whence it has derived, which would be to sustain the figurative (i.e., metonymical) character of its “literary documentation.” But rather, writers and readers of Holocaust narrative have long insisted that it literally deliver documentary evidence of specific events, that it come not to stand for the destruction, or merely point toward it, but that it be received as testimonial proof of the events it embodies.25

Particularly in cases of catastrophe, suffering and death, we experience the collision between an ethical imperative calling for undiluted, authentic commemoration of events and knowledge of the problematic nature of mimetic representation. This mnemonic dilemma can be traced back as far as Roman Antiquity, as is illustrated by the legend of Simonides of Keos – referred to in both Renate Lachmann’s and Aleida Assmann’s approaches to memory and literature. Its fame rests on the fact that it has not only been classified as the founding myth of the ancient mnemonics, but also constitutes one of the founding texts illuminating the interconnections of memory and literature in a larger sense.

**Exposition: Simonides of Keos and the founding legend of mnemonics**

Legend26 has it that Simonides of Keos (c. 557–467 BC), who was one of the first professional poets to compose songs for both gods and mortals, received an invitation by the pugilist Skopas to deliver a festive eulogy in his house. However, Skopas, unhappy about Simonides’ song, which not only addressed the boxer himself but added a lengthy section praising Castor and Pollux, paid the poet just half of the arranged sum, adding sarcastically that Simonides would have to try and get the rest of the money from the Dioscuri, whose praises he had sung half of the time. This very moment, Simonides was called outside, where two men had asked for him. But nobody was to be seen – and

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it was at this instant that catastrophe struck: the roof of Skopas’s house collapsed, burying him and all of his guests. Simonides, according to the legend, was the sole survivor – apparently compensated by the gods for what Skopas had refused him. Still, Simonides’ services were further needed: when the dead bodies had been unearthed from the ruins and were to be buried, they were too disfigured to be identified (in Quintilian’s version, even heads and body-parts had been torn off). But because Simonides had earlier memorized the seating arrangement, he was able to identify each victim, and in effect to assure the relatives that they would be mourning and honouring the right body. What had started out with a commissioned praise-poem thus become a lament – a song designed to conquer forgetfulness and chaos (symbolized by tumbling roof and walls) through mental recall of the earlier order.

The legend of Simonides of Keos is important within the framework of this study not least because it points to the fundamental, originary links between literature, commemoration, and memory. The myth had already been around for a long time before Cicero first recorded it. Stefan Goldmann remarks that “many generations had contributed” to Cicero’s text and “intertwined historical events with mythical ones.”27 Before Cicero came in, however, the importance of the legend was seen not so much in Simonides’ memory-work as in the larger context of ancestor-worship, in the laments immortalizing the names of the dead. Cicero’s point is made, in fact, by meaningfully concealing the legend’s mythic background.

Cicero uses the legend – without ever mentioning its earlier significance as a tale of successful mourning – as a foil to illustrate the specific art of rhetorical mnemonics. Ancient mnemonics combines a certain spatial order with a choice of mental images: in a previously established mental landscape (represented, in the legend, by Skopas’s house), a number of images are set down in fixed locations, in place of actual objects or names. In this way, they are securely removed from temporal decay and destruction (represented by the crushed house and the disfigured victims), and can be securely revived by pacing out the virtual space and recollecting the mental images. This technique, which, as Cicero implies, was innocently invented by Simonides, is now consciously employed to memorize texts and speeches, the content of which may just as easily be encoded in images and arranged in a mental landscape, in order to recite them effectively later. The details of Cicero’s translation of a tale about ancestor-worship into a parable illustrating rhetorical mnemonics shall not be laid out here in detail.28

What is more interesting in the present context is the question of how Cicero and Quintilian perceive the process of memorizing objects by translating them into mnemonic images (imagines). In Cicero’s version, the mimesis of the events (or parts of a speech) which are to be memorized seems to be unproblematic: imagines, for him, denote nothing but “the things themselves” (res ipsas). Looked at more closely, however, the imagines are not at all mimetic representations of objects or persons, but substitutions, images that have been stylized specifically for the purpose of being memorable: they are to “transfix” the recipient’s sense of perception. In contrast to Cicero, Quintilian seems to be quite aware of the figure of doubling inherent in the specific choice of imagines and warns, in Renate Lachmann’s words, of the “false” or “deceptive” sign. Mnemonic images, indeed, are not mimetic at all; rather, they are grounded in a process of transformation during which the objects and events are consciously linked with certain affective responses to increase their mnemonic stability – and are thus being manipulated. The first step in encoding images is followed by a further step of transformation when the imagines are eventually decoded, a process simply referred to as “reading” (lectio) in the third source of ancient mnemonics, the anonymous Rhetorica ad C. Herennium.

If one carefully reconsiders the founding legend of mnemonics – as an illustration of a rhetorical technique, in its older sense as a parable commenting on the commemoration of the dead, and as a founding myth of the inextricable association of literature with memory – the tale of Simonides already indicates the problematic nature of textual recollection. It implies that the act of representation is in itself anything but ‘natural’, but always manipulated by processes of selection and transformation. A final, brief excursus into Quintilian’s version of the legend underscores this fact. Quintilian, who re-told the legend of Simonides about a century after Cicero first set it down, sticks largely to Cicero’s earlier version. In one specific detail, however, he expresses doubt: where the factuality of the appearance of the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux is concerned, he is not so sure and does not want to give any

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29 “Cerleriterque percutere animum possint.” Quintilian, Institutiones oratoriae, XI.2.22.

30 Renate Lachmann, Memory and Literature, 10. Quintilian questions whether non-material concepts, as well as complex sequences of words, may indeed be adequately fixed in images; Institutiones oratoriae, XI.2.24–XI.2.25

guarantees. He considers their inclusion in the text as a decorative element – something, however, he is prepared to tolerate if it serves the case: i.e. makes the story more impressive and memorable. Quintilian thus quite consciously accepts manipulation of the narrative if such manipulation serves a specific purpose in a certain context.

Testimonies are not mimetic representations of experienced events, even if they perform as such. One does not have to take the mnemonic detour to language via the memorization of *imaginés* to realize that all testimonies are always representations *in place of* actual events, and as such are based on a figure of doubling; this doubling will be addressed in the following as the inevitable *discursiveness* of memory. At the same time, acts of memory are always subject to the psychological disposition of the person who remembers and are thus, as Aleida Assmann convincingly demonstrates, also subject to manipulation in retrospective mechanisms of (re)structuring (the affecting force of the mnemonic image in Cicero and Quintilian already indicates this). Finally, and this is also already hinted at in the legend, an act of memory is always to be seen in the light of certain ideas and purposes – Cicero’s pragmatic translation of Simonides as laudable mourner into the founding father of rhetorical mnemonics speaks for itself. Inevitably, testimonies are positioned in a specific cultural context and engage with certain discourses of power.

*The discursiveness of memory*

Even if the authenticity and immediacy of testimonies have to be seriously doubted, they still remain the crucial points of intersection between texts and real-life events. Paul Ricoeur, in his essay “La marque du passé,” introduces the testimony as a “new element,” in which we are to perceive “the structure of transition between memory and history.” However, Ricoeur adds, “the testimony introduces a verbal dimension, […] namely the voice of the witness who reports what he has seen and wants us to believe.”

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32 *quamquam mihi totum de Tyranidis fabulosum videtur*; Quintilian, *Institutioes oratoriae*, XI.2.16.


34 Paul Ricoeur, “La marque du passé,” *Revue du Métaphysique et de Morale* 1 (1998): 14 (my tr.). This essay has to my knowledge not yet appeared in English; it is seminal, however, in its proclamation of a necessary shift from the Platonic and Aristotelian approaches to memory evoking the ‘enigma’ of the ‘impression’ to the ‘enigma’ of the testimony. In the abstract, Ricoeur formulates: “This article […] argues that the plural memory retained by a number of individuals cannot simply be derived from this
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that memory is inevitably discursive; it is not to be seen as a ‘representation’ (Ricoeur uses the French term représentation or the German Vorstellung), but merely as ‘representational’ (in the sense of the French représentance or the German Vorstellung) of past events. “The representationality,” as Ricoeur puts it, “expresses the opaque mélange of recollection and fiction in the reconstruction of the past.” But how can we conceive of the intrusion of the fictional element into memory?

Ricoeur investigates the individual operations involved in the “refiguration” of past events in his work “Mimesis and Representation,” which lays down his distinction between mimesis₁, mimesis₂ and mimesis₃, and serves as the basis for his large-scale project Time and Narrative. Ricoeur’s category of mimesis₃, in this regard, is immediately concerned with the question of how past events are configured in writing. The operations of their “emplacement” are based on the notion that historical occurrences are contingent – an occurrence is simply something that happens, no matter whether it is irrelevant, important or consequential, whether it was initiated or suffered by a subject, or whether or not it is unique. It is only when refigured in a narrative that the contingency of initially ‘detached’ instances is transformed into a story. Ricoeur distinguishes among three aspects of emplotment. First, certain occurrences are selected and thus raised from the level of contingency to the status of ‘events’, which are qualified by their “contribution to the progression of a plot.” This first narrative operation thus transforms the irrational contingency of occurrences into a meaningful and rational contingency. In a second step, the meaning of this “rational contingency” is specified. The initially detached occurrences are placed in relations that are determined by specific purposes, reasons, or coincidences; thus, the “emplacement brings together such heteronomous factors as circumstances, agents, interactions, ends, means, and unintended results.” Finally, a third narrative operation is performed with respect to the temporal organization of the events. Ricoeur posits that a nar-

traditional presupposition [i.e. the metaphor of the impression] concerning memory. Memory that is at once plural and public, and is the source of historical research, most directly concerns the testimony of witnesses, the possibility of confronting different testimonies, each with the others, which constitutes the basis of the credibility of the historian’s argument” (7–8).


Paul Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation,” 146.
tive is always more than just a sequence; rather, it establishes a configuration from the succession of events resulting in a relation of beginning, middle and end.

The crucial turn in Ricoeur’s argument with regard to memory is that he claims these narrative operations to be a fundamental element in human cognition at large. The narrative operations employed in writing – be it fictional, historiographic or everyday – are to be seen in a continuum Ricoeur marks with the terms mimesis and mimesis3. Mimesis3 is essentially concerned with the effect that texts have on the reader, and is conceived of as “the intersection of the world unfolded by fiction and the world where actual action resides.”

The specific way a narrative configures past occurrences thus always harbours transfigurative potential. These transfigurations, in turn, again structure our cultural prefigurations about the world (mimesis): i.e. the “pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, its symbolism, its temporality.” These pre-understandings, then, already have a narrative quality; and only by articulating past experience narratively do we make sense of the world in the first place. As Ricoeur puts it in *Time and Narrative*: “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”

If Ricoeur thus does not doubt the factuality of historical occurrences, he insists that there is no innocent imitation. In the act of mnemonic perception, all historical occurrences are inevitably configured narratively, and are thus discursively manipulated.

By looking at Hayden White’s wide-ranging studies of historiography, this line of thought can be confirmed and supplemented. White, like Ricoeur, assumes that events do indeed occur in an existing reality, but that at the same time we can conceive of them only by interpreting them as we would narratives. This insight is not limited to the main focus of White’s studies, historiographic texts; he conceives of narrative more generally “as the appearance in discursive form of one of the tropological possibilities of language use. […]”

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38 Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation,” 148.
39 “Mimesis and Representation,” 142.
40 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 52 (emphasis in the original).
Narrative is a cultural universal because language is a human universal."\(^{42}\) White’s main argument here is that emplotment is oriented towards pre-existing, acquired narrative patterns. The testimony is thus also likely to use these “generic plot types […] – tragic, epic, comic, romantic, pastoral, farcical, and the like”\(^{43}\) in the process of refiguring memory. White’s insights suggest that testimonies are quite closely associated with the category of palimpsests, since most will involve some form of generic intertextuality. This will be made more explicit a little further on in an excursus on the slave narrative. For now, I wish to investigate in closer detail the criteria that influence narrative operations – the selection, meaningful combination, and temporal configuration of events.

(Re)structuring manipulations
of memory: affect, symbol, trauma

Between the occurrence and the telling of an event, time passes, so that there is always a period of reflection in which memorized events are undergoing structuring and restructuring. The passage of time may be rather brief, as in the case of a diary, longer, as in a journal, or even cover most of a lifetime, as in memoirs and autobiographies. In all cases, however, aspects and amounts of the originally “irrational contingency” of occurrences will be remembered, others forgotten. Together with Aleida Assmann, one may ask what “internal mechanisms of memory […] struggle against the general tendency to forget and render certain memories more memorable than those which elude us right away.”\(^{44}\) Assmann looks specifically at three “stabilizing”\(^{45}\) factors of memory: affect, symbol, and trauma.

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\(^{42}\) White thus reduces Ricoeur’s conception of the narrative to a pragmatic, if universal, dimension. He is a little hesitant about Ricoeur’s stylization of narrative as an “epiphanic manifestation of a metaphysical ground of being” (“Literary Theory and Historical Writing,” in \textit{Figural Realism}, 22).


\(^{45}\) Assmann uses the term “stabilizing” while conscious of the fact that it contradicts constructivist research into memory, which posits a model of continuous reconstruction due to functional processes of adaptation to present circumstances. For Assmann, however, the exclusive focus on present states neglects the physical inscriptions of memory, which often refute processes of voluntary adaptation. Nevertheless, I prefer to speak of “(re)structuring” factors instead of “stabilizing” ones, particularly since traumatic influences seem to contradict the implications of stabilization.
The dimension of affect has already been touched on in the context of the legend of Simonides. As already mentioned, the three sources of ancient mnemonics recommend the stylization of imaginæ – for instance, by mentally dressing them pompously, or by disfiguring them with blood or gaudy colours – in such a way that they physically affect the recipient. However, while the procedures of mnemonics deliberately affect mental images, this is precisely not the case with personal recollections of experienced events. Here, the individual cannot control which event will be ‘affected’ and which not. However, a once-established subjective, emotive relationship with a specific event equally possesses the potential for massive distortion. As Aleida Assmann illustrates by referring to the autobiography of Mary Antin (who emigrated from White Russia to the USA in 1909), affective memory is based on “a psychophysical experience which eludes not only external, but also personal verification.”

Salman Rushdie, in a memorable anecdote, confirms this, pointing out how the distortions of memory may result in evident contra-factuality:

I myself have a clear memory of having been in India during the China War. I ‘remember’ how frightened we all were, I ‘recall’ people making nervy little jokes about needing to buy themselves a Chinese phrase book or two, because the Chinese Army was not expected to stop until it reached Delhi. I also knew that I could not possibly have been in India at that time. I was interested to find that even after I found out that my memory was playing tricks my brain simply refused to unscramble itself. It clung to the false memory, preferring it to mere literal happenstance.

The complex affective processes that led to these distortions will most likely never be uncovered. But the question of why Rushdie sticks to his personal memories despite the fact that their factuality has been cast in doubt may be addressed by looking at another mnemonic process. Next to the affective component of memory (an aspect closely related to Ricoeur’s first narrative operation, selection), Assmann posits a second component addressing the ‘symbolic’ structuring of memorized events. The term ‘symbol’ matters in the investigation of how older memories that have assumed importance in the retrospective interpretation of one’s own life are composed in a specific configuration of meaning (the parallel with Ricoeur’s second narrative operation,

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46 Aleida Assmann, Erinnerungsräume, 253.
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which puts events into meaningful relations, is again quite clear). Thus, Rushdie’s memories, despite being objectively improbable, may have assumed a specific place and role in the biography of the writer; they may have teamed up with other experiences and, together with these, formed part of his identity and self-conception. The influence of the symbol, as opposed to the affect, thus does not enter immediately into the act of experiencing, but later, in the act of retrospective interpretation within the context of other events and their implications.48

The third formative, or rather de-formative, aspect that Assmann mentions is trauma. Trauma ultimately renders the narrative operation impossible, in that neither a meaningful relation of events nor their temporal configuration succeeds:

If an affect exceeds a tolerable measure and turns into excess, then it ceases to stabilize recollections, and instead destroys them. This is the case with trauma, which inscribes itself immediately on the body and therefore renders the experience inaccessible to verbal and interpretational efforts. Trauma means the impossibility of narration. Trauma and symbol are mutually exclusive; physical force and constructive meaning seem to be the opposite poles framing our memories.49

The aspect of trauma introduces the dimension of massive suffering that I referred to at the start of this chapter. The Jewish Holocaust was not chosen accidentally in this respect; no other historical crime has triggered such intense debate over the connections between trauma and testimony. For most critics and writers, discussion revolves around the central aporia of having to testify against the dangers of forgetfulness while at the same time experiencing the impossibility of putting into words what has been too inhuman to be speakable. Foucault’s statement, “boundless misfortune, the resounding gift of the gods, marks the point where language begins,”50 eventually faces its inversion; it is precisely here that language seems to end. The failure of

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48 “Contrary to affects, the meanings of [memories which gain the force of symbols] are not already inherent in perceptions or recollections, but are retrospectively created. A large part of our memories depends on the question whether such meanings can indeed be invented or not. […] While a curriculum vitae consists of objectively verifiable data, a life relies on interpreted memories which blend into a form that can be remembered and narrated.” Aleida Assmann, Erinnerungsräume, 257.

49 Aleida Assmann, Erinnerungsräume, 264.

narrative operations in cases of trauma thus further illustrates the ‘representationality’ and fictionality of the testimony, in that language is perceived to be too trivial and weak to be able to capture the horror of certain experiences.

**Manipulations of memory in social discourses of power**

In contrast to testimonies about the Holocaust, testimonies by victims of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery rarely refer explicitly to the aporia of trauma and narration. This, I venture to argue, has less to do with the ‘quality’ of suffering induced by the different historical crimes, the evaluation of which permits little ethical leeway. Both the content and the form of such testimonies have, rather, to be seen in a third context of manipulation, which I will subsume under the Foucauldian concept of power. While discussion has so far touched mainly on inner processes of distortion based on the psychological structuring of perception and memory, Michel Foucault offers a view of the external mechanisms influencing memory; mechanisms rooted in the forces regulating societies.

Foucault, like Ricoeur and White, posits a fundamental contingency of events. His interest, however, lies in demonstrating how external power-relations dominate the sanctioning of what are considered true or false, or adequate or inadequate, forms of representation, in specific social contexts:

"Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general" politics of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true [...]" \(^{51}\)

Foucault here establishes five characteristics of the "‘general’ politics of truth." So-called truth, he argues, is bound to specific institutions, constantly exposed to political and economic incitements; ‘truth’ is the object of various forms of distribution and consumption, largely controlled by a few large political and economic apparatuses; and finally, ‘truth’ is employed in persistent ‘‘ideological’ struggles.’’\(^{52}\) In this respect, discursive power is seen as an ambivalent phenomenon, as Foucault’s studies testify. On the one hand, it is restrictive, especially if distributed in hegemonic ways.\(^{53}\) On the other, power

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is also a productive force: “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it indices pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse.”

Testimonies, like all texts, are inevitably subject to the ambivalent force of social discourses of power. To start with, an obvious example of the external manipulation of testimonies is the specific language that dominates a certain social realm. As such, it constrains the witness to adhere to its social conventions, rules and accepted forms of expression; at the same time, it also offers an immensely generative potential and the opportunity for expression in the first place. Furthermore, one could look at such issues as the prevailing moral and aesthetic taste of a prospective audience that restricts evocations of certain ‘uncouth’ or sordid experiences. All this raises questions about the complex intersections between society, authority and censorship which cannot be discussed in detail at this stage, but shall be examined via the specific instance of the slave narrative. Important for now is the fact that testimonies are subject to a number of social conditions which manifestly influence the process of mnemonic refiguration.

Towards a discursive legitimation of testimonies

Testimonies, conceived of as the points of intersection between event, memory and the textual realm, present a twofold dilemma. The first concerns the question of mimesis. With regard to the various sources of manipulation just outlined, it is hardly possible to decide whether a text actually relates to the events it evokes by immediate and faithful imitation. Rather, one must always take into account the possibility that the individual interpretation has enhanced quite a number of distortions. The second dilemma supplements the issue of ‘true’ representations with the issue of ‘truthful’ representations. Testimonies bear the “imprint of earlier occurrences”; before a witness speaks, Ricoeur argues,

he has seen, heard, felt (or believes that he saw, heard, felt, this is of little matter). In short, he was affected, perhaps stunned, shocked, hurt, in any case struck by the event. […] Through the narrative, the listener, who has become a witness in the second degree, finds himself in turn exposed to the effects of the event, to the energy and violence, yet sometimes also the jubilation which are transmitted in the testimony.55

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54 Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 120.
In this light, we are no longer dealing with the issue of true or false representations, but with the issue of a subjective ‘truthfulness’ which honestly expresses a witness’s emotive relation to an event. The (affective) truthfulness of a witness, however, also cannot be verified to the last. He or she may easily perform, as well as disguise, an excess of affect – for Ricoeur, the “ultimate indecisiveness of the statutes of truth fidelity [vérité fidélité] of memory.”56 The character of testimonies, for the recipient, is thus not to be found in a specific ‘authenticity’, since it cannot actually be verified. How then, under these premisses, can we conceive of testimonial accounts without having to sacrifice them to contingency? – wherein resides their legitimacy?

The legitimacy of testimonies will ultimately have to be located in a discursive effect rooted in the specific performance of authenticity. The specific rhetoric of authenticity can be traced and interpreted with regard to its specific intentions – the testimony is the location of specific narrative strategies which try, often desperately, to convince the reader of both the truth and the truthfulness of certain experiences. In this performative sense, the text turns into a speech act answering to the social discourses of power surrounding it (“The struggle of man against power,” Salman Rushdie writes, “is the struggle of memory against forgetting”). It is in this vein that James E. Young also reads the special importance of testimony:

> even if narrative cannot document events, or constitute perfect factuality, it can document the actuality of writer and text. [...] Narrative strategy, structure, and style all become forms of commentary on the writing act itself, now evident by the text it has produced.58

The text, as a performative expression of lived-through events, enters the discourse and sides with or challenges other representations. In a world where, as Foucault and others claim, ‘truth’ has become discursive and is to be consistently negotiated, testimonies design specific, subjective ‘truths’ that engage in “ideological struggles” with hegemonic or repressive mnemonic structures.

Like Young, who focuses on Holocaust testimonies, William Andrews locates the legitimacy of the slave narrative in the performative strategies of writers who are restricted in their efforts by certain circumstances of textual production, yet at the same time plead for a change in social and political conditions. Andrews notes:

58 James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 37 (italics in the original).
today, our sensitivity of the relativistic truth value of all autobiography
and the peculiar symbiosis of imperfect freedom and imperfect truth
[…] makes it easier for us to regard fictive elements of black autobio-
graphy as aspects of rhetorical and aesthetic strategy, not evidence of
moral failure.59

In the following, I wish to take a closer look at precisely these rhetorical and
aesthetic strategies in the slave narrative in general, and in Olaudah Equiano’s
Interesting Narrative specifically. An excursus into the slave narrative, of
course, is of special interest within the framework of this study, since the
novels to be discussed in Part II recall – and critically review – this early
tradition of Black Atlantic writing in altogether different ways.60

Interlude: the testimony of Olaudah Equiano

The beginnings of the ‘genre’ of the slave narrative are generally dated to the
year 1760, when the Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising
Deliverance of Britton Hammon, A Negro Man was published – the first sur-
viving narrative of a chapter in the life of a black person in the English lan-
guage. The term ‘genre’, of course, raises a number of problems, because
Hammon’s narrative – apart from the protagonist’s skin colour – fits seam-
lessly into the genre of captivity narratives, as John Sekora demonstrates by
reading it against the example of the Plain Narrative of the Uncommon
Sufferings and Remarkable Deliverance of Thomas Brown.61 The two titles
already hint at the intimate generic intertextualities in testimonial writing.
Furthermore, the term ‘genre’ implies a structural and thematic unity within
the slave narratives which – not least due to changing political and historical
conditions – is not necessarily given. As a matter of fact, the first eighteenth-
century narratives differ considerably in both style and content from the infla-
tionary wave of narratives which arose after the 1830s under the supervision
of about eighty anti-slavery societies on the North American continent.62

59 William L. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American
60 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for instance, recognizes the slave narrative as the foun-
dation of African-American literature: “The narratives of ex-slaves are, for the literary
critic, the very foundation upon which most subsequent Afro-American fictional and
non-fictional narrative forms are based”; Gates, “Introduction” to The Classic Slave
61 John Sekora, “Is the Slave Narrative a Species of Autobiography?,” in Studies in
In the following, I will concentrate on one specific example of the slave narrative as a form of testimonial autobiography: Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, the first edition of which was published in 1789. The choice of Equiano is not accidental here; Gates assumes that his text laid the generic foundations of the slave narrative and served as a fundamental point of reference for later writers such as Frederick Douglass. Equiano’s narrative may be divided into three major thematic sections. The narrative opens with a description of the protagonist’s childhood in Africa (presumably present-day south-eastern Nigeria), where he was kidnapped at the age of about ten and carried off to the coast. What follows are the experience of the Middle Passage to the Caribbean, and a further passage to Virginia, where he was bought by an English marine officer and ‘imported’ into England. After serving in the English navy for seven years, Equiano was for the second time forcibly transported to the Caribbean, where he engaged in several trading activities and thus finally managed to buy his freedom (the manumission papers are proudly reprinted in the middle of the *Narrative*). In the first phase of the tale, thus, a change from the innocence and naiveté of an African youth to experience and freedom in the West is evoked, a freedom gained by acquiring an understanding of the mechanisms of the English (mercantile) world. The second phase deals with Equiano’s life as a free businessman. He takes a number of different jobs, serving on various trading vessels, on an Arctic expedition in search of a north-eastern sea passage, and finally as an overseer on a plantation in Central America. All this time, Equiano on occasion refers to issues of his Methodist faith, which, however, is not centre-stage as yet. In a third phase, this changes. The closing chapters of the narrative describe how Equiano, who is frustrated by sobering experiences with other slaveholders in Central America, returns to London, where he becomes increasingly involved in his own spiritual redemption and in the spiritual and physical freedom of his fellow blacks. He gets in close touch with members of the ‘abolition society’ and takes a leading role in the repatriation project that

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63 Equiano’s text has appeared in various editions. The authoritative ones in this context are the facsimile reprint of Equiano’s first edition of 1789, brought out by Paul Edwards (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969), and the reprint of the ninth and last edition published in Equiano’s lifetime, edited by Vincent Carretta, together with other surviving texts, in *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995). In the following, I will refer exclusively to this latter edition.

64 “I am not the only scholar who believes that Douglass was [revising another classic slave narrative, one whose forms and themes he could appropriate and ‘rewrite’], and that the 1789 slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano was his ‘silent second text’”; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Introduction,” xiii–xiv.
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was to resettle English blacks in Sierra Leone. The focus of this last phase is on moral and spiritual instruction.

The three-part structure of Equiano’s tale, in this context, is clearly reminiscent of the genre of spiritual autobiographies, which were exceptionally popular in eighteenth-century England. Such autobiographies usually adhere to a similar formula – a fall from innocence via a phase of sin and repentance to a final rebirth into true faith. Another feature typical of this genre would be the stylization of the hero as an ‘everyman’, something one also finds in Equiano: “I own I offer here the history of neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant” (31). Very much in the sense of Hayden White’s findings, Equiano used pre-existing generic models, according to which he organized what he had to say. It is even possible to speculate about the texts Equiano may have had in mind when writing his Interesting Narrative.

It is probable that Equiano was familiar with earlier slave narratives by James Marrant or Ukasaw Gronniosaw, and he certainly knew his close friend Ottabah Cugoano’s Thoughts and Sentiments; all of these works were heavily influenced by the spiritual autobiography in different ways.65 What has caused some furore in the critical world after a phase of celebrating ‘slave narratives’ as newly rediscovered, immediate testimonies of slavery, however, were claims that Equiano had probably also used fictional autobiographies such as Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe as models. In the 1980s, the Nigerian critic S.E. Ogude pointed to a number of close associations between Defoe’s novel and Equiano’s text. Ogude claims there are analogies in terms of content, arguing, moreover, that these analogies involve “a whole complex of the paraphernalia of narration such as verisimilitude, context of narration and indeed even verbal mannerisms and imply[ing] a conscious echo of an existing pattern of narration.”67

Ogude ventures to doubt the factuality of many aspects of Equiano’s account. Especially the first chapter of the Interesting Narrative, which is set in Africa and conveys the author’s memories of his childhood as well as a


66 For instance, Equiano’s final estimation that Africa stood on the verge of becoming an industrial society and should be treated as a potential market, a view also conveyed in Defoe’s text.

description of the manners and customs of the African society he grew up in, is submitted to sceptical scrutiny. Ogude asks whether, after more than forty years, a man – even if exceptionally talented, as Equiano obviously was – may exactly recall the childhood memories of his first ten years without some source of external reference. And indeed, Ogude manages to show convincingly that Equiano must have used travelogues and other texts by white Europeans such as William Snelgrave, Anthony Bezenet and Thomas Astley to prompt his memory.68 Astley, for instance, has the following to say about adultery among African societies:

In case of adultery, both the offenders [...] are sold out of the country without redemption; [...] the Negroes are very jealous; and if they can surprise their wives in any act of infidelity, the husband will kill the adulterer, and repudiate the wife.69

The corresponding passage in Equiano reads thus:

Adultery, however, was sometimes punished with slavery or death; a punishment which I believe is inflicted on it throughout most of the nations of Africa: so sacred among them is the honour of the marriage bed, and so jealous are they of the fidelity of their wives. (33)

What Equiano performs as an authentic memory, it has to be assumed, is thus – at least where the first chapter is concerned – more of a palimpsest than a testimony. Ogude goes so far as to dismantle Equiano, whom he considers to have been a simple servant who dramatized his life according to picaresque models such as Defoe’s Crusoe, as a fraud: “much of Equiano’s Interesting Narrative is pure fiction.”70

Recently, Vincent Carretta provided further arguments for those doubting Equiano’s sincerity by publishing new documentary evidence revealing that Equiano may not have been born in Africa in the first place, but was possibly a native of South Carolina. Carretta’s argument is threefold: first of all, the African name Olaudah Equiano does not appear in any registers or correspondence pre-dating publication of Interesting Narrative, and only once afterwards, which indicates that it merely served as an authorial persona for a man

who was otherwise known exclusively by the name Gustavus Vassa. Furthermore, Equiano, while very precise in recounting his later business life (much of which can be verified from documentary evidence), must, for reasons unknown, have erred with regard to the date of his deportation from Africa. By setting the temporal logic of Equiano’s own account against available historical data, Carretta shows that Equiano could not have been eleven when he left Africa, but should have been between six and eight years old. Finally, in two documents Equiano is indeed referred to as American-born. His baptismal record refers to “Gustavus Vassa a Black born in Carolina 12 years old,” while the register of the ship taking him to the Arctic in 1773 identifies him as “Gustavus Weston,” twenty-eight years of age and born in South Carolina.71

At the same time, however, Carretta warns us not to draw easy conclusions. While he claims that “there can be no doubt that Vassa manipulated some facts about his autobiography”72 such as his probable age of arrival in America, Carretta also points out that there may have been pragmatic reasons for these changes, as well as for Equiano/Vassa’s appearance as American-born in the registers (which could also be simple confusions). On the basis of both documentary and literary evidence, it is thus still uncertain whether Equiano based the accounts of his adolescent life – including his passage out of Africa – on personal experience, or whether he relied entirely on the intimate accounts of African friends and other writers.

The sole perspective on the question of testimonial factuality, however, unfortunately neglects the fundamental expressive and pragmatic dimensions of Equiano’s text. It once more has to be stressed, as does Paul Edwards, that we need to see the slave narrative not necessarily in terms of either credible or unreliable factual records, but possibly more as a dramatization of the authorial self; with all the potential that this must bear for seeming incoherence or self-contradiction.

Only in this way, Edwards goes on to argue with reference to William Andrews, will we be able to reveal and analyze a language “through which the unknown within the self and the unspeakable within slavery might be expressed.”73 The slave narrative, I will further argue, has indeed to be conceived of

72 Carretta, “Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa?” 103.
as rooted in a fragile ‘balancing act’ between a decidedly pragmatic component (which aims at selling the autobiography as much as possible and with the utmost political effect) and an expressive component (which aims at an affective truthfulness or adequate expression of the sufferings induced by slavery and racism).

The pragmatic component of slave narratives can be conceived of as an interplay between narrative strategies that appeal to and confront contemporary public taste and convictions and strategies that vouch for the authenticity and truthfulness of the account. It can be assumed that Equiano, as a successful businessman, had a clear understanding of the mercantile requirements and conditions of his time. He wrote his narrative in the 1780s, when England was torn ideologically between the planters’ lobby and the abolitionist movement around Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, George Whitefield and others, a movement that was constantly gaining ground, as is demonstrated by such legal cases of the time as the seminal Somerset case (1772) and the Zong affair (1783). Not surprisingly, then, Equiano’s testimony is written directly against the propaganda of the planters and sides with the Christian propaganda of the abolitionists. First of all Equiano had to convince his readership of the fundamental humanity and intellectual giftedness of Africans, something that had not yet lodged itself in contemporary thinking – most Britons would have gone along with David Hume, who, as late as 1771, could still maintain that he was “apt to suspect the Negroes […] to be naturally inferior to the Whites.”

We therefore have to read Equiano’s textual practice in relation to contemporary stereotypes. His unacknowledged use of European travelogues which testify to the moral integrity of African marriages, for instance, is immediately directed at the cliché of the promiscuous, carnal African. But his exploitation of the spiritual autobiography and the picaresque novel, too, becomes more comprehensible in this light. Both genres were exceptionally popular in

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74 The Somerset case has to be seen as the spectacular culmination of a number of cases, which eventually entitled blacks in England to habeus corpus and thus officially guaranteed that they could not be dragged from England to the Caribbean against their will any longer. The case involving the slave ship Zong put the actions of its captain on trial, who threw 132 sick or allegedly sick slaves over board in order to cash the more profitable insurance sum for ‘lost cargo’.

75 David Hume continues that “[t]here never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, or even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No indigenous manufacturer among them, no arts, no sciences. There are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptom of ingenuity”; Gentleman’s Magazine (1771): 594. Hegel, Kant and other intellectual contemporaries largely shared Hume’s view.
eighteenth-century England and thus sold eminently well, so that the guise assumed by the *Interesting Narrative* ensured widespread reception of Equiano’s arguments. Additionally, however, the spiritual autobiography also requires that its readers accept the fallen hero after his or her rebirth in faith, both as a fellow Christian and as a fellow human being.

The adaptations to public taste by picaresque and spiritual dramatization are always, at the same time, counterbalanced by rhetorical strategies aimed at assuring the readership of the authenticity of the events narrated. As William Andrews comments, “the perception of [the slave’s] narrative as truth depended on the degree to which his artfulness could hide his art.” The slave narrative’s strategies for generating authenticity are visible in both text and paratext. The first noticeable instance is the cover illustration for the first issue of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*, which depicts the author in elegant European clothing, on his lap a bible opened to Acts 4:12. The illustration already expresses Equiano’s claim to belong fully to the enlightened Christian society of England. The next paratextual strategy is to be found in the title, which states that Equiano’s narrative was “written by himself,” a phrase typical of the slave narrative in general. Equiano was indeed one of the very few, and certainly the first, to manage to publish his tale without major editorial interference; in most cases, the narratives were dictated to (white) members of the abolitionist societies, as indicated by the words “related by him/herself” in the title. The editors usually claimed not to have influenced the narrative content in any way, as the example of Thomas Pringle, a secretary to the antislavery society who famously edited the *History of Mary Prince* (1831), demonstrates. De facto, of course, these editors explicitly or involuntarily manipulated the stories extensively. Moira Fergusson, for instance, notes of the relationship between Mary Prince and Pringle:

> Given Mary Prince’s economic dependence and the fact that her narrative was intended as propaganda for the anti-slavery campaign, she would presumably have constructed what she wanted to say very care-

76 The picaresque element loses importance under the gaining impact of the abolition societies, especially on the American continent since the 1830s, and is replaced by a thorough emphasis on Christian piety and modesty.


78 Next to many other biblical passages, Equiano explicitly deals with Acts 4:12 within the context of his narrative: “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, but only Jesus Christ,” in Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 192, in a larger context 189–93.

fully in accordance with what she knew of the aims of the Anti-
Slavery society.80

While editors thus either actively or passively influenced the texts, any whiff of editorial distortion was demonstratively denied.

Further paratextual strategies vouching for the authenticity of the text consist, for instance, of letters of recommendation and extensive subscription lists which intimated positive connections with a number of respected historical persons (the ninth edition of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* boasts over 900 subscribers, whose names appear before the actual narrative). Finally, the authenticity of memory is supported by the inclusion of documentary evidence, such as Equiano’s manumission papers, yet increasingly also letters from respectable (white) patrons vouching for the factuality of the events recounted. A perfect example of this is Henry Bibb’s *Life and Adventures* (1849), whose account is, in Toni Morrison’s words, “loaded” with such documents.81

The actual textual strategies for enhancing narrative credibility have already been touched on. What is repeatedly noticeable in this respect is a specific rhetorical style devoid of metaphoric mannerisms, a style that had already impressed the early reviewers of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*. In June 1789, the *Monthly Review*, for instance, attested thus:

We entertain no doubt of the authenticity of this very intelligent Afri-
can’s story […] The narrative wears an honest face; and we have con-
ceived a good opinion of the man, from the artless manner in which he 
has detailed the variety of adventures and vicissitudes which has fallen 
to his lot.

The reviewer’s impression of “a round, unvarnished tale […] written with much truth and simplicity,”82 derives from the presence of a quite specific

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81 Henry Bibb, *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: Negro UP, 1969); the term “loaded” is brought in by Toni Mor-
82 The latter quotation is taken from a benevolent review in *General Magazine and Impartial Review* in July 1789; there may be an ironic undercurrent, of course, in the evocation of Shakespeare’s Othello (“I will a round unvarnished tale deliver / Of my whole course of love,” *Othello* L.iii.106–107). Both reviews are reprinted by Equiano in later editions of his *Interesting Narrative* (starting with the fifth edition in the first case, and with the third in the latter); *Interesting Narrative*, 12–13. 13.
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Technique of focalization – a division of the narrative consciousness through the installation as focalizers of both a young experiencing “I” and an older narrating “I.” In this way, Equiano manages to both preserve the impression of an immediacy of events challenging the naivety of the witness, and to comment on and vouch for these events retrospectively from an intellectually and morally superior position.

Where, however, after having discussed the pragmatic dimension of slave narratives – their political employment and the performance of authenticity – is it possible to locate the expressive dimension of such texts? Toni Morrison, in this regard, argues that the pragmatic constraints in fact suffocated all attempts at expressing a subjective, emotive relationship to events:

The milieu […] dictated the purpose and the style. The narratives are instructive, moral and obviously representative. […] But whatever the level of eloquence or form, popular taste discouraged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience. Whenever there was an unusually violent incident, or a scatological one, or something “excessive,” one finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day. “I was left in a state of distraction not to be described” (Equiano).83

And indeed, Equiano is rather hesitant about articulating the brutality and inhumanity of Atlantic slavery. While there are a few passages that go drastically into the “sordid details” of the experience of slavery, they are expressed with a certain degree of detachment and come packaged in a rather functional, matter-of-fact style. A brief passage from Equiano’s description of his experience of the Middle Passage may illustrate this:

This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become unsupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror almost unconceivable. (58)

Again, one could enter into arguments at this stage about whether Equiano (rather: Gustavus Vassa), as an historical person, had indeed gone through the Middle Passage himself and whether the above sequence carries the imprint of a personal, affective experience at all. At any rate, since Equiano was cer-

83 Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” 301; Morrison’s reference to Equiano here relates to his separation from his sister, who was kidnapped along with him (see Interesting Narrative, 48).
tainly emotionally involved in the traumatic plight of his fellow black slaves, he must have had an interest in conveying a sense of his own horror, as well as that of his friends, at occurrences above and below deck. But Equiano, given his pragmatic goals, will have been very much aware of what he could ask of his readers; save for a few descriptions of life aboard the slavers, he keeps silent about the emotions or trauma that such horrors may have induced. These remain, as it were, silenced, absent.

In trying to locate the expressive dimension of slave narratives, we have, then, to concentrate on – indeed, listen to – precisely these silences and absences. It is through the traceable gaps and fissures that emerge from beneath the pragmatic constraints that suppressed emotive potential may surface. As William Andrews puts it,

> When we find a gap in the slave narrator’s objective reportage of the facts of slavery, or a lapse in his prepossessing self-image, we must pay special attention. These deviations may indicate a temporary loss of narrative control, or a deliberate effort by the narrator to grapple with aspects of his or her personality that have been represented out of deference to or fear of the dominant culture.84

The following excerpt from Equiano’s *Narrative*, again referring to the Middle Passage, may serve to illustrate this:

> Many a time we were near suffocation, from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days altogether. This, and the stench from the necessary tubs, carried off many. During the passage I first saw flying fishes, which surprised me very much: they used frequently to fly across ship, and many of them fell on deck. I also now first saw the use of a quadrant. (59)

The casualness of such sudden switches from death and horror to the marvellous wonders of travelling the seas inevitably hints at a missing link, a gap in need of explanation, yet evaded through silence. “In this manner,” writes Equiano a little earlier, “we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate” (59). It is in the silences beneath such phrases, in precisely what Equiano, for specific, well-calculated reasons, chooses not to relate that the expressive potential of the slave narratives resides.

Today, the recovery of this unarticulated potential lies at the heart of fictional efforts to re-write the Black Atlantic experience. The novels to be analyzed in the second part of this study centre on this issue. Caryl Phillips,

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David Dabydeen and Toni Morrison are all well aware both of the dilemmas posed by the slave narratives and of the fact that the latter are the sole surviving testimonial accounts by victims of Atlantic slavery. The novelists’ mnemonic strategies therefore consist in adopting different narrative approaches to exploring the obvious gaps and silences in slave narratives. Their fictional mnemonic designs engage in a project which, for John Sekora, involves developing “radical strategies to hear the imposed silences of the narratives. It will attend to the gaps, the elisions, the contradictions, and especially the violations. It will decode suppressed texts and recover concealed lives.”

Before investigating the mnemonic structures and designs of these novels, however, it is necessary to bring this anticipatory excursus to a close by clarifying the basic processes of narrative reference to earlier mnemonic sources – of which the slave narratives are but one instance. This will now be tackled under the heading of ‘palimpsests’.

Palimpsests: recourse to manifest mnemonic resources

The following discussion will be concerned with the question of how events that have already explicitly found manifest expression are preserved, yet also transformed in the memory of succeeding texts. The central metaphor of the palimpsest here indicates that the material of reference is covered and displaced (verstellt) in mnemonic writing, yet in no way deleted. Material that has been covered with a new layer of print may, rather, be carefully recovered in a retrospective act of analysis. It is important to note again that the original restriction of the metaphor of the palimpsest to the textual realm (originating in medieval shortages of parchment, which was therefore simply used several times over) has to be extended to include reference to visual and musical resources. This extension raises a number of issues that have to be briefly addressed: are visual images and music suitable media at all for the commitment of events to memory, hence appropriate sources of reference for mnemonic fictions? And if so, to what extent is it possible to transfer their

85 John Sekora, “Is the Slave Narrative a Species of Autobiography?”, 111.
86 The focus, here, will be on mnemonic strategies in narrative texts specifically. This, of course, does not imply that lyrical or dramatic texts are less suitable for discussion in the context of memory and mnemonic procedures; they are indeed subject to very similar techniques of commemoration as narrative texts. The focus on narrative rather has to do with the fact that the concentration on three exemplary novels in Part Two requires a terminological specialization to provide a theoretical foil against which these texts may be read. Poetry and drama, just like historiographic and other writings, will however still play an important role in those instances where they are used as sources of mnemonic reference.
memories from the specific visual and audio codes into the semiotic system of texts?

**Manifest mnemonic resources: texts, images, music**

Not surprisingly, it has been the relatively unproblematic recourse of texts to other written material that has received most critical attention in discussing the mnemonic structure of literature. Texts are doubtless able to refer to specific events and to serve as vessels of ‘memory’; at the same time, the dialogic references between texts (the very domain in which Renate Lachmann locates the memory of literature) are fairly unproblematic semiotically, precisely because they do not involve processes of transposition from one sign-system to another. And finally, the analysis of intertextual phenomena has long been a highly productive field of enquiry, generating a number of diverse approaches which serve as a backdrop before which more specific investigations of the intersections between memory and literature, such as Lachmann’s, can be enacted. In discussing the premisses underlying literary palimpsests, this study will inevitably also be drawing heavily on theories of intertextuality.

Regarding the relationships between texts and mnemonic material encoded in a non-verbal sign-system, theories on memory and literature are, by contrast, rather scarce. This is surprising, given that recent years have witnessed a steadily growing number of publications dealing with the connections between texts and other media.87 A notable exception is the volume dedicated to the *Visual Memory of Literature*, whose editors point out that pictures have in fact always been ‘saved’ in the memory of literature throughout the ages; they thus employ an empirical argument addressing the issue of whether it is possible to transpose visual material into written form.88 Nevertheless, it must be noted that there can never be immediate congruity of visual and verbal representation. One of the founding texts arguing for the incompatibility of the two media is, of course, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laokoon*, where it is claimed that images are manifested in a purely spatial arrangement of signs.


while poetry and narrative art rely on an exclusively temporal order. The assumption of a fundamental antinomy of both art-forms, however, is questionable in several respects. While, in a primary sense, text and image indeed appear as temporal and spatial arrangements, this dichotomy blurs when seen in the light of their reception. In the process of reading, a text inevitably evokes spatial images in the mind of the recipient; similarly, visual images are not absorbed by the viewer as spatial entities, but have to be decoded in temporal sequences of spatial perception. Still, Nelson Goodman, in his attempt at an all-encompassing theory of symbolic communication, holds that despite these facts a difference remains, which he refers to as the “density” of the image. In contrast to verbal language with its specific syntactic and semantic order, images, for Goodman, are not so easily pinned down semiotically (hence rationally); rather, they invite the viewer to dwell on them, within necessarily incomplete processes of contemplation.

The dispute about the essential difference between verbal and visual representations, however, does not have to be resolved here. With regard to the mnemonic structures of literature, it is enough to posit that there are indeed dialogic relations between texts and images. Instead of trying to decide

89 “I reason thus: if it is true that in its imitations painting uses completely different means of signs than does poetry, namely figures and colors in space rather than articulated sounds in time, and if these signs must indisputably bear a suitable relation to the thing signified, then signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive”; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Laokoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry, tr. Edward Allen McCormick (1766; Baltimore MD & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984): 78.

90 See Ernst H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (London: Phaidon, 1960). The understanding of an image is inevitably coded in linguistic terms, there is no such thing as a pre-verbal contemplation of images.

91 Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols (London: Oxford UP, 1969): esp. 225–32. What Goodman conceives of as the ‘density’ of the image pointing at the impossibility of completely dissolving images into language is similarly expressed in Michel Foucault’s interpretation of Velázquez’ “Las Meninas”: “But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that developed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax.” Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, tr. Didier Eribon (New York: Vintage, 1994): 9.
whether it is possible to translate images into texts in a one-to-one relationship, it is more useful to pay close attention to the very processes of transposition involved, and to consider the subsequent transformation of the image in the text. Texts that memorize manifest images in fact rarely aim at an exact translation of the image into verbal language (in the sense of an accurate mimetic description); rather, and especially since modernism, concrete images have been used as fundamental sources of inspiration, as points of departure for the transformative literary imagination.92 According to the basic idea of the palimpsest, a text thus mnemonically stores an image, and, if marked sufficiently, allows the reader to recover it accordingly; at the same time, however, the text also transposes the image into a new context by mechanisms of selection and transformation, comments on it in various ways, and consequently also ‘displaces’ it.

In cases of mnemonic references to music, we face different problems. While it is hardly debatable that manifest images are capable of capturing and memorizing real-life occurrences, this is more difficult to answer with regard to music. Theodor W. Adorno, in “Music Composition and Language,” warns:

> Music is similar to language. Expressions like musical idiom or musical accent are not metaphors. But music is not language. Its similarity to language points at its innermost nature, but also to something vague. The person who takes music literally as language will be led astray by it. Music is similar to language in that it is a temporal succession of articulated sounds that are more than just sound. They say something, often something humane. […] But what is said cannot be abstracted from the music; it does not form a system of signs.93

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92 This argument is also brought up by Monika Schmitz– Emans in “Das visuelle Gedächtnis der Literatur: Allgemeine Überlegungen zur Beziehung zwischen Texten und Bildern,” in Das visuelle Gedächtnis der Literatur, ed. Schmitz–Emans & Schmeiling, 17–34.

93 Theodor W. Adorno, “Music, Language and Composition” (1956), in Essays on Music, tr. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002): 85. This is already expressed in Arthur Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Idea. Schopenhauer writes: “But it must never be forgotten in the investigations of these analogies [of for instance the expression of human sentiment in the minor and major keys] that music has no direct, but merely an indirect relation to them, for it never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itsel of all phenomena, the will itself: It does not therefore express this or that particular and definite joy, this or that sorrow, or pain, or horror, or delight, or merriment, or peace of mind; but joy, sorrow, pain, horror,
According to Adorno, music differs from language precisely because it has no immediate signified, but remains self-referential and can only be conceived of in the act of performance: “To interpret language means to understand language. To interpret music means to make music.”

If music does not specifically signify, how can it then memorize events in the first place, and thus contribute to the memory of literature?

The assumption of a fundamental antinomy, again, is also questionable with respect to music and writing. First of all, literary language may indeed tend towards music, as has been attempted with, for example, poésie pure, a form of poetry essentially intended to be largely self-referential and reduced to associations evoked by certain patterns of sound. Also, music does bear a potential, if not to signify, then to transport “meaning”. This meaning may indeed betray a degree of “vagueness,” which Adorno warns against, yet it is there nonetheless. Werner Wolf, in his volume *The Musicalization of Fiction*, remarks that

> it is possible to ‘feel’ that both arts [i.e., music and literature] (as any art for that matter) can use their signs for the expression of emotions or for the creation of certain emotional states in the receiver […] Music may develop, and in fact did develop in historical times, a codified system of emotional ‘expressions’.

Whereas Wolf illustrates his argument with examples taken from the musical rhetoric of the baroque age, it is more relevant in the context of this study to point to the coded systems of meaning that have emanated from the musical styles of the African diaspora. Black music has been a particularly important realm of meaningful emotive expression, since – as the slave narratives testify – the expressive potentiality of black writing was largely checked or censored. It was therefore often precisely the musical realm, the collectively organized musical forms of the blues, spirituals and jazz, that allowed for group communication and individual expression. The African-American writer Gayl Jones notes:

> Of course much of the music’s refinement is due to its remaining, as an art form and ritual, an unbroken though modified continuum of the


oral tradition, whereas the “writers” (griots) had to readjust to written literature in an environment that discouraged or banned such efforts as criminal, from the black codes of slavery to the Jim Crow laws and attitudes in the South.96

This unique, largely unbroken continuity of musical expression suggests that the realm of music has to be considered as a central lieu de mémoire in the African diaspora. The different variations of call-and-response patterns or the blues mood do not signify individual, specific historical events as such; nevertheless, they rely on specific cultural codes which are grounded in a collective historical experience, and are well able to ‘evoke’ – albeit with a degree of vagueness – the occurrences and consequences of Black Atlantic slavery.

The question remains whether literary language is able to absorb the mnemonic potential of music. Again, as was the case with images and language, an exact translation of musical expression into verbal language is certainly impossible. The musical vocabulary (phrase, theme, rhythm, melody, harmony, etc.), admittedly, is as well employed in the analysis of literary texts; the analogies, however, with the possible exception of rhythm in metrical poetry, are somewhat remote.97 Another problem is rooted in the fact that, while music may operate by using several voices synchronically, literature is – at least superficially – bound to temporal linearity. Despite these difficulties, however, the adaptation of musical forms and their coded systems of emotive content has been successfully attempted in literary practice.98 Instead of thinking in terms of translation, again, it is important, rather, to conceive of the intermedial dialogues as processes of transposition which necessarily imply modes of transformation. Seen in this light, certain performative qualities of music (such as a call-and-response pattern which may be evoked in textual structures), certain formal aspects (one may think of the tension between solo and chorus in jazz), or certain associative moods (i.e. the blues mood) may well be integrated into the mnemonic organization of a literary text.

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Mnemonic reference by thematization

In the following, I will try to categorize and structure the different narrative forms of establishing mnemonic dialogues with manifest resources. The emphasis of this project will be on references to specific individual, or specific systems of texts, images or music. What is at stake is not what was referred to earlier as the ‘ontological’ dimension of textual memory, but specific, verifiable strategies of establishing reference which may eventually be evaluated as functional in a certain context of interpretation. Such an understanding of mnemonic references rests on two premises. First, it assumes that a specific reference has been consciously established by the author; and, second, that the recipient is able to recognize the reference as being important for the process of understanding. What is necessary, therefore, is to negotiate a process of aesthetic production (i.e. the associations entertained by an author during the process of writing), and a process of aesthetic reception (i.e. the associations occurring to a reader), both of which have to be conceived of as initially contingent.

Such a negotiation succeeds if it is assumed that a text possesses certain signals indicating its references, referred to by Ulrich Broich as “markings.”

On these grounds, then, unconscious references are not marked by an author. Of course, it is also possible to have writers who quite deliberately leave their conscious references unmarked; a perfect example would be cases of plagiarism where, on the contrary, the references to other texts are meant to be obscure.

Broich also points out that there is a category of deliberate references which may go unmarked – cases where the material quoted or evoked is well-known to a broader audience in a specific cultural context (e.g. popular passages from the bible in Western societies). This material, he argues, can be uncovered without being hinted at by means of certain signals. Wherever necessary, markings of references can be placed in various ways in narrative texts; instead of being discussed at this stage, these will be addressed later.

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100 Harold Bloom’s view to the intertextual dimension of literature, laid down in The Anxiety of Influence (New York: Oxford UP, 1973), claims that all authors are determined to escape overpowering influences of earlier writers. According to Bloom, this often results in conscious attempts at hiding all traces of such influences. However, I see the demonstrative turning away from earlier texts as just one option of mnemonic behaviour; Bloom’s anxiety, I venture to criticize, owes much to a limited focus on a specifically Western, canonized genealogy of writing.

101 Broich himself distinguishes markings in side-texts (Nebentexten; e.g. title, subtitle, footnotes, pre- and postscripts, etc.), in the “inner system of communication”
in relation to the various options for establishing reference in mnemonic narratives.

I assume that we can distinguish two fundamental forms of mnemonic reference. The distinction is indebted to the Platonic differentiation of modes of representation into diegesis or telling (straightforward, non-dialogic narration) and mimesis or showing (indirect, dramatized representation). I will further use the term “thematization” to refer to those references that are established by directly naming, or by speaking about the content of earlier texts, images, or music (i.e. references rooted in the figure of diegesis). They will be juxtaposed against what I shall refer to as “dramatizations” of older mnemonic material (references rooted in the figure of mimesis). These cover all those references in which – unlike cases of thematization, where the material entering the text is explicitly specified – a largely mimetic adoption of specific aspects of the material itself is being attempted. Dramatizations are thus concerned with implicitly adapting specific content or structures of older material without necessarily explicitly naming it. Of course, thematization and dramatization are not to be conceived of as mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they often work hand in hand, as many dramatized references are marked – signalled to the reader – by explicitly naming or speaking about the material adapted.

Thematizations of older mnemonic material may occur on three different levels: first, in the actual text itself; second, in the paratext; and third, in contextual utterances such as letters, interviews or essays by an author referring to his literary work. The difficulties involved in intermedial reference are of little relevance here, since by simply mentioning an image or piece of music, it is not necessary to transpose any of the manifest signs into the context of a literary text. The contextual form of thematization, here, cannot be conceived of as part of the literary work in itself; still, it functions as an important mode of marking, as a signalling of dramatized mnemonic references, and should therefore not be disregarded.102

The most obvious form of thematizing mnemonic resources, however, occurs in the actual narrative itself. It is possible to distinguish two methods of textual thematization, which can be referred to as “figural” and “narr-
torial” respectively.103 The first denotes those cases when a fictional character reads, writes, or speaks about a specific book (or genre), when a character contemplates, paints, photographs, or speaks about an image, or when a character listens to, plays or sings, composes, or speaks about music. The second, complementary form of ‘narratorial’ thematization accounts for the fact that texts, images or music may also be explicitly thematized in a narrator’s voice (all the while this distinction blurs when, in cases of first-person narratives, narrator and fictional character blend).

Finally, mnemonic references may be located in the paratext. This option of thematizing, hence also of marking narrative references, includes all those areas of published literary works that Gérard Genette, in his seminal work of the same title, defines as the paratext of a text:104 i.e. titles, subtitles, epigraphs, mottoes, dedications, annotations, etc. An obvious case of paratextual thematization will be discussed in Part Two when looking at David Dabydeen’s novel A Harlot’s Progress; here, the title immediately calls William Hogarth’s 1732 series of engravings to mind. Examples of this way of establishing reference are plentiful and fairly obvious. After this brief discussion of textual, paratextual and contextual thematizations, it is important to turn to the much more complex issue of dramatized references to mnemonic sources.

Mnemonic reference by dramatization

A dramatized mnemonic reference involves more than what is at stake when merely talking about books, paintings, music, in that here specific structures, techniques of representation, or parts of the content of other manifest representations are integrated into the new text. In trying to organize and structure these kinds of references, it is helpful to turn to Seymour Chatman’s fundamental narratological distinction between story and discourse.105 Shlomith Rimmon–Kenan, who takes up Chatman’s differentiation between narrative content (story) and the techniques of representing content (discourse), presents two subcategories with regard to the first: events and characters.106

In the dramatization of events, there is always a distinct possibility of intertextual reference. Most of the examples analyzed in Genette’s study Palimpsests have to be located here; Genette’s focus on intertextual genres – parody, travesty, pastiche, transposition, translation, transstylization, etc. – generally

103 Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction, 56.
concerns cases where elements of the ‘story’ are taken over into new texts, while instances of ‘discourse’ such as language, style and register undergo transformation. Manfred Pfister indicates in this context that references to a single text are “in any case more concise than references to a group of texts.”\textsuperscript{107} However, systemic references are also conceivable if certain groups of texts evoke a typical sequence of events; a case in point would be the American slave narrative after 1830, which conventionally had a three part structure involving the deprivation and humiliations of slavery, followed by escape to the north, and finally the reception by, and work for, an abolition society.

With regard to \textit{intermedial} references to events encoded in images or music, things are a little less straightforward. This does not so much concern references to images, which are relatively unproblematic, as the compatibility between musical and verbal content. Werner Wolf assumes that music is indeed able to evoke specific impressions and associations which may be represented in narrative texts; he refers to this as an “imaginary content analogy.” The transposition of emotive associations of musical content into narrative is necessarily a rather subjective and thus vague process, yet not altogether arbitrary, in that it does rely on certain shared cultural codes. Still, because of the vagueness of musical content, its associative reference relies heavily on the external mechanism of marking in order to be recognized as such by the reader. This may be performed either by explicit thematizations, or by clearly dramatizing the musical reference on the level of ‘discourse’.

Where Rimmon–Kenan’s second aspect of ‘story’, the characters, is concerned, immediate narrative references to music are also limited, since musical content, \textit{per se}, does not involve characters.\textsuperscript{108} Certain musical styles do, however, involve certain characters who sing, play, or compose music. By taking a detour via musical artists who may of course appear in narrative texts (i.e. the blues hero), certain musical genres may thus nevertheless be evoked. Admittedly, we are facing a borderline case here between thematized and dramatized reference. For characters depicted in texts or images, the case is again less problematic. They may well be transferred into the configuration of a narrative text – but the reference may be of varying intensity. The degree of intensity may be located along a continuum ranging from the adaptation of a character with all his or her attributes, name and referent being identical in


\textsuperscript{108} Hybrid forms such as opera or musical of course also feature characters; this, however, has to be attributed to the literary/dramatic element and not to the musical content.
both the new text and the older text or image (think of Pamela’s appearance in Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*), to the adaptation of a character who merely bears another character’s name without any resemblance to him or her. Of course, references to specific persons depicted in specific texts or images are more intense than systemic references. The latter, however, also occur when certain stock characters (for example, the fugitive slave) evoke an entire genre of texts (for example, the slave narrative).

A specific way, in its own right, of establishing references to earlier mnemonic sources is the quotation. I venture to locate quotations on both the level of ‘story’ and that of ‘discourse’, since both the content referred to and – when speaking about a pretext – the techniques of narrative representation are in such cases being transferred to a new narrative context. There are different ways of marking quotations. They may, of course, be acknowledged explicitly in the form of textual notes or footnotes; there are, however, also graphic ways of marking – putting them in inverted commas, separating them from the main text, or using different fonts or styles (italics, boldface, size, etc.). In cases where no graphic or other ways of marking occur, there are still further, if less intense, ways of signalling quotations to readers. Ulrich Broich notes that explicit marking techniques may be omitted if a quotation results in a perceptible rupture in a characteristic style of writing; also, there are texts that establish a “context of permanent intertextuality” inducing the reader to be alert for quotations in unmarked passages.109 ‘Regular’ quotations in the strict sense, moreover, have to be distinguished from ‘impure’ quotations which rephrase individual words or phrases in passages ‘lifted’ from earlier texts. It is thus possible to conceive of a continuum ranging from literal quotation to mere paraphrase, the latter located somewhere between actual quotation and references to contentual elements on the level of ‘story’.

While largely restricted to the intertextual domain, one can also conceive of intermedial quotations in cases where images, or details of images, are reprinted in literary texts. Again, these would be borderline cases situated somewhere in between thematization and dramatization – on the one hand, visual signs are indeed transposed to the context of a narrative; on the other, they are not transformed into verbal signs. By reproducing musical notation, such a procedure is also conceivable when referring to musical data. But this would require a musically literate reader able to decipher and then to translate such data into imagined sounds; music, as Adorno noted, can indeed only be interpreted by being exposed to it. The option of notated musical quotation thus amounts to a somewhat marginal form of reference.

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Finally, a text may establish mnemonic references entirely independent of elements of the ‘story’ by alluding instead to formal aspects and narrative techniques of representation. On the level of ‘discourse’, dialogic relations may be evoked on virtually all linguistic levels, as Monika Lindner notes with regard to intertextual phenomena, starting with the phonetic level (patterns of sound, metre, etc.) via the lexical and syntactical level (single words, topoi, registers, styles, etc.) up to the pragmatic level (fictive speaker/listener constellations) [...] On all these textual levels, an integration of pretextual elements is conceivable, not just taken from single texts, but also from groups of texts since patterns of sound, topoi, styles, fictive positions of speech and other items may also contribute to the formation of text-groups to which a new text may refer.¹¹⁰

How intensely another text is evoked here depends largely on questions of marking, specificity, and sheer quantity. A single phonetic coincidence or a corresponding narrative situation alone will not be sufficient to mark a concise reference, whereas a corresponding organization of chapters or the choice of a specific stylistic register often will.

It is important to repeat in this context that a text may also establish structural dialogic relations with other media. Images or music encode their content differently from texts, so that an immediate translation of their structural aspects into verbal signs would seem to be impossible. This does not, however, mean that texts cannot structurally approach or tend towards other media. Here, the intermedial dialogue between visual and verbal representations seems to be especially privileged regarding the evocation of space. While the content of images may be adapted on the level of ‘story’, the level of ‘discourse’ gives way to mimetic approaches to such aspects as colour choice, painterly technique (e.g., impressionistic haziness), evocation of mood, and so forth. The discussion of David Dabydeen’s texts in Part Two, for instance, will investigate the inspirational dialogue between visual and verbal techniques of aesthetisizing historical events such as the Atlantic slave trade.

With regard to music, the figure of onomatopoeia suggests a close association between verbal language and sound. What Werner Wolf terms “word music,”¹¹¹ however, remains a rather general and vague phenomenon when

¹¹¹ Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction, 58.
not supported by additional markings indicating the specific melody or musical genre in mind. Dialogic evocations of music may be more convincingly established by allusions to musical form, its expressive qualities, or performative practices. Such narrative evocations of music may be manifest in the lay-out of a text, its formal segmentation into stanzas, chapters or paragraphs, typographical devices, thematic or motivic recurrences creating patterns suggestive of musical forms, and devices giving the impression of ‘polyphonic’ simultaneity […] The effect may be the imitation of musical microforms and compositional devices […] as well as the imitation of macroforms or musical genres.112

By looking at the example of a specific jazz text in Part Two – Toni Morrison’s Beloved – I shall endeavour to explain how such musical references may be conceived practically. At this stage, by way of conclusion, it should suffice to provide an overview of the various options for establishing a mnemonic relationship to written, visual or musical resources (see Table A, overleaf).

**Intensities of mnemonic reference**

It has already been mentioned that not all forms of reference are equally intense. This is important: the question of whether or not specific mnemonic sources really enrich the memory of a text will depend largely on the intensity with which they are evoked. It is therefore helpful to establish criteria with which to gauge the intensity of mnemonic references. It is useful here to draw on a model established by Manfred Pfister, designed to measure the intensity of intertextual references113 yet since adopted by Valerie Robillard for the analysis of literary references to images.114 Like her, I employ Pfister’s criteria in a broader sense which includes both intermedial and intertextual dialogue in narrative texts. The individual parameters in this model are not to be seen as independent or mutually exclusive; rather, in order to gain an idea of the intensity of a particular reference, it is necessary to negotiate all six of the individual categories involved.

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112 Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction, 58.
### Table A:
Possible ways of establishing reference to manifest mnemonic sources

First of all, the intensity of mnemonic references depends on questions of sheer *quantity*. Manifest resources which are repeatedly evoked evidently have to be regarded as more important than single references. Aspects of quantity, however, always have to be negotiated along with those of quality. An essential parameter here is the *communicativeness* of references. This in-  

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115 With the parameter of quantity, I replace the first of Pfister’s criteria which he refers to as *referentiality*. Pfister tries to get at the quality of a reference which, for him, is all the more intense “the more a text thematizes another text by ‘revealing’ its very own characteristics” (26). For me, this rather vague and general parameter lacks specificity; instead, it blends perfectly into the criteria *auto-reflexivity, communicativeness, and structurality*. Valerie Robillard, in her adaptation of Pfister, is similarly irritated and also makes a similar replacement.
vestigates how ‘visible’ certain references are for the reader. Communicative—hence quite pronounced—references will therefore be very clearly marked in the text, or are otherwise obvious enough to go without much marking. A very special way of marking, in this context, consists in narrative strategies of auto-reflexivity. These make up the third criterion of intensity and apply to cases in which a text explicitly reflects upon and comments on its own mnemonic limitations or achievements in a form of meta-communication.

The fourth criterion concerns the structurality of dialogic relationships between texts. The intensity of a reference, according to this parameter, further depends on questions of “syntagmatic integration.” In this context, it can be assumed that references carry more weight if they go beyond the mere mention of older works and instead dramatize them in the new text (in Pfister, this distinction between thematization and dramatization is not made). Furthermore, the ‘structurality’ of a reference is all the more poignant if it does not merely occur in passing but serves as a “structural foil to an entire text.”\textsuperscript{116}

The fifth parameter refers to the selectiveness of references. A selective—hence also intense—reference to a literary text will take recourse to a specific, distinguished unit of earlier material instead of simply evoking it as a whole or merely alluding to generic conventions or certain topoi. Perfect examples of selective reference are quotations, which cut out clearly demarcated blocks of pre-existing material and insert them into new texts. Such cases of high selectiveness must be seen in the light of the rhetorical figure\textit{pars pro toto}: “together with the detail, the entire context which it is taken from will be called upon, together with the quotation; the entire pretext will be involved in the new constitution of meaning.”\textsuperscript{117}

The last criterion of intensity is indebted to Bakhtin: by referring to different qualities of dialogism involved in different references, Pfister argues that relations between a text and the material it evokes are particularly intense if their configurations of meaning imply an ideological conflict—thus a form of dialogic, challenging interaction instead of monologic agreement. Explaining this takes us from a descriptive approach to literary memory into the semantic and ideological implications of mnemonic references.

\textit{Towards a dialogic conception of the ‘semantic explosion’ in palimpsests}

Having dealt with the different means by which reference to manifest mnemonic material may be established, we have to address a number of follow-up questions: which effect do such references have on the generation of meaning

\textsuperscript{116} Manfred Pfister, “Konzepte der Intertextualität,” 28.

\textsuperscript{117} Pfister, “Konzepte der Intertextualität,” 29.
in a narrative text? What ideological positions may a text assume towards the material it evokes? And finally, how can we come to terms with the presumed social ‘function’ of such mnemonic strategies in literature? The answers to these questions should serve to link the poetics of mnemonic writing with its politics. I wish to enter this territory by mapping the manifold surpluses of meaning that result from the Aufhebung of older material in new texts.

The generation of meaning in mnemonic narratives, if we are to take seriously the initial claim that the memory of literature is located in the dialogic relations between a new text and the older representations it writes back to, is exceptionally complex. Not only does it involve the processing of the semantic data of the new text in itself, but it has to take into account the multiple implications between new and old material in a process yet to be described. Renate Lachmann speaks here of a “semantic explosion” in mnemonic writing. While it gives an impression of the complexities involved, the term is misleading, in that the generation of meaning is by no measure as uncontrollable and eruptively instantaneous as ‘explosion’ would suggest. By again taking recourse to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, it is possible to arrive at a conception of the individual processes involved in this ‘explosion’.

In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin implies two essential ways how dialogism is generated. I will refer to the first one as a ‘vertical’ dialogue, as it establishes communications that run vertically, as it were, in a hierarchical model of narrative levels, between characters and author. As Bakhtin argues, in the polyphonic novel, speech is to be conceived of as double-voiced:

> It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while, these two voices are dialogically interrelated [...]. A potential dialogue is imbedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world-views, two languages.

The rather nonchalant use of the terms ‘author’ and ‘character’ should not disturb us with their lack of differentiation: “characters who are speaking” may in fact refer both to narratorial voices and to the voices of narrated characters. Obviously, some of these speakers may purport to bear more authority than

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others; it is essential to Bakhtin’s thought, however, that none of the speakers can indeed claim absolute authority. Rather, meaning is arrived at by negotiating the voices of all speakers dialogically in a narrative. This dialogue is essentially ‘horizontal’, since it occurs on one and the same level of narrative communication. The ideological position of an implied author, for Bakhtin, can be approached by reading the narrative voices horizontally against one other:

The author is not to be found in the language of the narrator […] – but rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party on the quarrel between two people (although he may be a biased third party).^{121}

The configuration of meaning in novels thus relies on two intricately interlinked dialogues: a horizontal dialogue between the voices and languages^{122} of the various speakers in the text; and a vertical dialogue accounting for the fact that each utterance by any speaker in the text also inhabits the voice of the author, who is to be conceived of as implicit in the horizontal dialogue. The two embedded voices in these utterances will, more often than not, be in ideological conflict.

This dialogic conception of how meaning is generated in narrative texts has so far merely accounted for relations within the framework of a novel. Of course, the voices in narrative texts may also establish multiple relations with external resources of memory. If this is taken into account, it is possible to further extend the scope offered by Bakhtin and to see such voices as not merely double-figured, but as triple- or multiple-figured^{123}. As such, they contain the immediate, unrefracted voice of a narrative speaker; further, they encompass the possibly refracting, conflicting voice of the implied author; and, in this new light, they also contain within themselves the voices of other, external texts, or evoke material which is coded in another medium. Such an

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^{122} For Bakhtin, the term ‘language’ implies socially rooted, ideologically employed speech: “The speaking person is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, […] one that strives for social significance”; “Discourse in the Novel,” 333.

^{123} I use the term ‘-figured’ instead of Bakhtin’s ‘-voiced’, since the latter seems to be restricted to verbal references. The first, in contrast, is more neutral and allows for dialogic relations between verbal and non-verbal media.
extended model of the configuration of meaning in narrative texts may be sketched as in Table B below.

In this diagram, the various divergent voices and languages are, in a Bakhtinian sense, arranged on a horizontal axis; the vertical axis reflects the different competing levels within each individual speech: author, narrative speaker, and the associated manifest mnemonic material evoked. A fourth level accounts for the fact that the external pre-texts, images or music referred to may in turn engage in intertextual (or intermedial) dialogue with other mnemonic sources; it is even possible to conceive of a *regressus ad infinitum*, in that this material again refers to other data, and so on. But this serves, rather, to pay tribute to the ‘ontological’ aspect of memory. References that are traceable merely through references in other representations are indeed very difficult to assess as intentional.

The configuration of meaning in literary palimpsests depends on all spaces within this matrix being in a dialogic relation to each other. The parties involved in these dialogues do not, of course, initially cover the same ground. Not every speaker in a novel purports to possess the same degree of authority and presence, just as the mnemonic references featured in a narrative may be unequally intense, both in quality and in quantity. With these presuppositions in mind, however, it can be argued that each mnemonic referent enters into three different kinds of dialogue in the configuration of a narrative text (Table B).

![Table B: Matrix of dialogic relations within narrative texts](image)

First of all, the mnemonic source confronts the context of speech within which it is being evoked. Depending on the chosen form of reference and the
methods of narrative integration, the evolving dialogue may be reflected in the consciousness of the narrative speakers – for instance, in cases of narratorial or figural thematization, or in cases where narrators or narrated characters consciously quote earlier material. In most cases, however, the dialogue will unfold on a superior level of consciousness indicating authorial involvement. The correspondence, in this respect, reaches beyond both the specific element of the older text, image or music referred to – let us say a quoted passage, or a transferred character – and the immediate context in which it is evoked. As mentioned above, the entire pretext, image or music, particularly in cases of selective reference, will enter the dialogue pars pro toto. Moreover, rather than just confronting one voice, its ideological position will inevitably also contest or side with all other narrative ideologues. This is particularly true of those kinds of reference not linked up with a specific voice in the first place, as with paratextual thematization or many forms of discursive dramatization.

Secondly, the various mnemonic sources of reference will enter dialogic relations among themselves. Bakhtin’s claim that the meaning of a novel has to be approached by negotiating its individual voices horizontally, if taken seriously, also applies to the third level of the model presented above. Being attached to the dynamically interacting voices within the text, the various pretexts, images or manifestations of music are set into motion analogously: apart from challenging the voices of the new text, they also confront each other’s ideological positions dialogically.

Finally, the mnemonic referent confronts the ideological positions attributed to the level of the implied author: i.e. the assumed authority who organizes the text and thus also its mnemonic design. Such positions may, of course, be sought in contextual comments by the historical author himself – for instance, in essays or interviews; on the textual level, however, they will have to be inferred by negotiating the various voices of a text as well as the mnemonic resources in the previously mentioned dialogues. It is in these dialogues that modes of authorial refraction (irony, playfulness, satire, etc.) become traceable. In the following, further detail will be given on the different kinds of ideological position an implied author may adopt with regard to the mnemonic sources evoked. It is important here to recall that the ‘semantic explosion’ produced by the dialogic relations “always refers us back to a social space that possesses certain cultural propensities. It is only within such a space that dialogue can function as a dialogue.”124

124 Renate Lachmann, Memory and Literature, 39.
Forms of ideological positioning in palimpsests

A way of categorizing the various ideological strategies within the “matrix of dialogical relations in narrative texts” can be found by drawing on the work of the French critic Laurent Jenny. In his essay “The Strategy of Form,” Jenny is particularly aware of the ideological potential rooted in intertextual processes (which are also intermedial):

Works of literature are never mere ‘memories’, they rewrite what they remember, they ‘influence their precursors’ as Borges would put it. The intertextual attitude is thus a critical attitude, and this it what defines it. 125

Jenny outlines four different mnemonic attitudes, which will be retraced here under slightly different rubrics. The four categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, a text may tend towards more than one of the ideological attitudes involved.

The first position is the participation in and conservation of memorized sources. Participation in earlier mnemonic traditions of representation by ‘re-writing’ them is here conceived of as an act of repetition, whereby ‘innocent’ repetitions are impossible: the figure of imitation, which conserves certain content or formal aspects, always implies an element of transformation, since each new text is inevitably surrounded by new cultural as well as textual contexts. It is precisely in this element of renewal, however, that Jenny sees the strength of participating references to mnemonic sources. Renewal implies a “reactivation of meaning,” in that the ossification of associated contents in certain syntactical structures may be overcome. The integration of older representations in new contexts “is a definite rejection of the full stop which would close the meaning and freeze the form.” 126 Participation in the memory of older texts, images or music is especially relevant when reviewing histories of great suffering. In cases like the holocaust or the Atlantic slave trade, the always-repeated, ever-renewed conservation of their horrors in memory is more often than not seen as an ethical imperative. This raises questions about what adequate literary commemoration should look like – questions which will be addressed in Part Two with regard to the three Black Atlantic novels by Phillips, Dabydeen and Morrison.

A very different ideological attitude consists of strategies of transformation and subversion. Such techniques are generally adopted when the semantic

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tic potential of earlier texts, images or music is perceived as dominant, or even ‘tyrannical’ in certain sociocultural contexts. In this situation, “since it is impossible to forget or neutralize the discourse, one might as well subvert its ideological poles.” The term ‘subversion’ applies to a number of different referential registers; Gérard Genette, for instance, in his attempt at an encompassing categorization of intertextual references, notes six such registers: a literary ‘transformation’ may thus rewrite earlier material in a playful, humorous, serious, polemical, satiric, or otherwise ironic manner. It is even possible to identify entire transformative genres such as parody or travesty; often, however, the subversive potential of a narrative resides precisely in the covert carnivalesque play with certain generic conventions, as well as in the syncretist mélange of various references to seemingly incompatible sources.

Laurent Jenny sees a third ideological position as rooted in the growing modern and postmodern awareness of the inevitably fictional character of represented events. There is no need to go into detail here, since the section on “testimonies” has already indicated at some length how compromised the validity of purportedly mimetic and truthful representation can be. Conscious of the fact that ‘true’ or ‘truthful’ evocations of past events do not per se exist, writer and reader can adopt another ideological attitude by approaching valid historical meaning via the discursive negotiation of an as-comprehensive-as-possible number of representations. This position I shall term the attempt to encircle meaning. As Jenny observes, “Literary truth, like historical truth can be constituted only in a multiplicity of texts and writings – in intertextuality. […] To constitute an event is to juxtapose all possible forms, to work out an exhaustive catalogue.”

While the latter position desperately grasps onto the idea of making sense of past events discursively, being “obsessed by the process of meaningfulness,” Jenny describes a last ideological attitude which ultimately turns against this very process; I will refer to this as the diffusion of meaning. While owing much to poststructuralist thought, Jenny is careful to note that this attitude is not to be conceived of as apolitical – strategies of diffusion are often directed at the ‘mummified’ ideological inscriptions of Western discourse. For many writers, “it is necessary to get outside of this language, constructing one in which certain falsifications inherent in all the languages of the Occident cannot be formulated.” The supposedly radical questioning of the logical, ethical and aesthetic foundations of bourgeois Western thought has
led many postcolonial critics to call for techniques of diffusion in narratives that ‘write back’ to the former colonizers. It should be obvious, however, that strategies of diffusion and strategies of subversion, while initially seeming to take similar paths, arrive at very different results. While subversive attitudes remain dedicated to the establishment of alternative truths and legitimacies, diffusions aim at a final dispersal of meaning by inevitably also sacrificing the validity of their own position.

The political location of palimpsests in the individual, collective, or cultural memory

The ideological attitudes inherent in literary palimpsests – in strategies for conserving or subverting mnemonic sources, for the encirclement or diffusion of meaning – eventually always refer to contextual, social dimensions of memory. Narrative attempts at conserving or freshly encircling meaning, for example, would appear to correspond to sociopolitical processes that the writer perceives as conducive to the communal forgetting of certain historical events, or as otherwise promoting the delegitimizing or displacement of certain manifest representations. Similarly, it can be assumed that means of subverting or diffusing (official) meaning will be employed by an author who positions his or her text against dominant or restrictive sociopolitical dimensions of memory. We must guard against applying terms loosely when we speak of literature as having a ‘cultural function’ with regard to contextual discourses of memory. The notion of eventually being able to verify any immediate social ‘effects’ of literature is, after all, an illusory one; Marxist approaches in this vein, according to Winfried Fluck, traditionally fail to notice “that it is indeed ultimately impossible to make any reliable statements about the actual realization of a social function in a complex social field of interaction.”131 Fluck, by the same token, is very careful to note that it is nevertheless worth holding on to the concept of the ‘function’ of literature: i.e. if novels (which are the object of his study) are being treated as attempts at structuring existence. As such, they appear as a medium in which “hitherto diffuse and unspeakable” associations are formed into objects of conception. Seen in this light, the ‘functional’ aspect of artistic writing concentrates on literature as a domain in which the existing world is given form through negotiations with personal interests and desires. “If fictions gain cultural meaning and cultural influence,” Fluck argues, “they largely also do so because of their

131 Winfried Fluck, Das kulturelle Imaginäre: Eine Funktionsgeschichte des amerikanischen Romans 1790–1900 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997): 12 (my tr.).
Towards a Poetics of Mnemonic Strategy

capacity to restructure certain contexts of experience which generate the possibility of aesthetic experience in the first place.”

Such restructurings are essentially also performed by specific compositions of literary memory. By selecting, combining and disclosing mnemonic sources, narrative fictions bring certain mnemonic configurations within the aesthetic experience of a readership. By means of certain narrative techniques of reference (i.e. aspects of the *ars* of memory) they thus draft mnemonic realms which are often significantly different from existing sociohistorical processes of memory. It is within these discrepancies between fictional visions and social realities that the political potential of literary memory can be located. *Ars* and *vis* are thus by no means oppositional phenomena, but are inextricably entwined components in the complex functions of literary processes of memory. Certain mnemonic techniques employed by specific authors always align with ideological intentions; the fictional, alternative re-structuring of an historical experience gives expression to a challenging force which is directed at an external, social reality, with inevitably political reverberations.

The term ‘sociohistorical processes of memory’ and the various forms of memory it comprises require narrower specification here, not least because fictional mnemonic designs may focus politically on highly specific social manifestations of memory. In this context, it is again helpful to refer to Aleida Assmann’s work. She suggests that we can distinguish three categories of social memory according to parameters of stability and temporal extension: “the memory of the individual, of the collective, and of culture.”

Individual memory constitutes the smallest manifestation of memory, its lifetime being basically coextensive with that of the person holding it. For obvious reasons, it is highly subjective, since there is no compelling need here to justify personal recollections to others *per se*, even if sociologists such as Maurice Halbwachs have pointed out that individual memories are indeed largely constituted by communicative interactions with other people. Still, a politics of literature that positions itself in the realm of individual memory

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132 Winfried Fluck, *Das kulturelle Imaginäre*, 18 and 12.
will largely insist on the legitimacy of very personal recollections, disregarding possibly conflicting ‘official’ or ‘received’ versions:

Seen from the point of view of personal memory, the homogeneous construction of ‘history’ breaks down into a multitude of fragmentary and contradictory experiences, because recollections are as limited and partial as are the perspectives of perception and the forms of evaluation.  

The next level of memory at stake transcends the individual realm both in terms of its temporal extension and the number of persons involved. In order to secure its durability in both respects, collective memories correlate with the establishment of a political collective. This group and memory, according to Assmann, are mutually supportive: “The collective carries the memory, the memory stabilizes the collective.” In contrast to individual memories, it is very much subject to external control and is dependent on processes of pragmatic standardization; in short, “the collective memory is always a politically employed memory.” Depending on the kind of collective involved and its formative historical experience, Assmann ventures to distinguish four different subtypes: the memories of the winners and the losers, as well as those of victim and perpetrator. Typically, all these show a tendency to connote historical events affectively and emotionally, and develop defensive attitudes towards perspectives that pose a challenge from without. Moreover, the specific collective memory is configured to present the group with certain normative values providing clear-cut guidelines for future actions. The ideological potential of narrative fictions that wish to serve the cause of such social mnemonic structures will, given these premises, also be found in the text’s exclusive focus on the achievements of the group. Attempts at commemoration will largely be content with doing justice to the group’s aesthetic, poetic and political aspirations. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that such fictions will fundamentally question or criticize the norms and values of the collective. The imagination, however, remains strictly within its own horizons.

On the last level of memory, which Assmann refers to as ‘cultural’, individual and collective interests are eventually transcended. What is at stake here is a long-term social memory that, contrary to the “restrictions of content, the high symbolic intensity and the dense psychological affectivity” of collective memory, relies greatly on resources of “external media and institutions” –

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136 Assmann & Frevert, Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit, 37.
137 Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit, 40–41.
archives, schools, libraries, etc. – and thus largely escapes simple appropriation for political ends.\textsuperscript{138} The cultural memory of a society serves “to communicate in a long-term historical perspective and ensure an identity which is generated by belonging to a trans-generational tradition and an encompassing historical experience.”\textsuperscript{139} Given these premisses, the politics of narrative fictions that direct their mnemonic efforts at this ‘cultural’ dimension of memory will subscribe to democratically open modes of discourse, as well as to a fundamental truthfulness regarding the mnemonic sources they evoke. The fictional realms of memory drafted in these texts are explicitly directed against individualistic, or one-sided, collective employments of memory.

The following case studies will investigate in closer detail what the location of the politics of mnemonic strategies in the individual, collective, or cultural memory may look like. By turning to three brilliant examples of literary palimpsests dealing with issues of Atlantic slavery – Caryl Phillips’s \textit{Cambridge}, David Dabydeen’s \textit{A Harlot’s Progress}, and Toni Morrison’s \textit{Beloved} – what I hope to highlight is the underlying interaction between impressive aesthetic creativity and its ideological and political scope. In these readings, the poetics and politics of mnemonic strategy can be seen as two sides of the same coin. I shall introduce each analysis by shedding some light on the life and oeuvre of the writer concerned; this contextual information will serve to frame the specific poetic and political choices made within the literary palimpsests under scrutiny. The first of these three quite distinct approaches to ‘re-membering’ Atlantic slavery that I shall be examining is Caryl Phillips’s novel \textit{Cambridge}.

\textsuperscript{138} This line of reasoning is, of course, debatable considering that curricula at schools and other institutions are more often than not ideologically streamlined and thus indeed restrictive. Moreover, many archives, especially universities, do not willingly open their doors to everybody but rather restrict access to the academic, and in most cases rather well-to-do few.

\textsuperscript{139} Assmann & Frevert, \textit{Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit}, 49–50.
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Where are all your monuments, your battles, martyrs? Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, in that great vault. The sea. The sea has locked them up. The Sea is History.

– Derek Walcott, *The Sea Is History*

Keep ya Cross
keep ya Christ
keep ya nun dem

walkin’ fine
pon de goun’
o’ dem fait’ dem

water dark
water dark
water dark o

Sookey dead
Sookey dead
Sookey dead o.

– Kamau Brathwaite, “The Stone Sermon”

The sea is slavery.

– Fred D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*
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My grandmother distrusts writing. She says all writing is fiction. Even writing that purports to be factual, that puts down the date of a man’s birth and the date of his death, is some sort of fabrication. Do you think a man’s life is slung between two dates like a hammock? Slung in the middle of history with no visible means of support? It takes more than one life to make a person.
– Pauline Melville, The Ventriloquist’s Tale

Caryl Phillips’s writing and his personal life have been critically influenced by the riddles of diasporic identity. If the term ‘home’ often has irritating connotations for members of the African diaspora, this is particularly true in his case. For a long time, Phillips completely ignored it in his essays and has only comparatively recently endeavoured to work out what ‘home’ might mean for him. In a 1999 interview, he claimed to be at home where his books are, evoking a nomadic point of reference which stresses the essential importance of reading and writing in his notion of identity. In his essay “The ‘High Anxiety’ of Belonging,” finally, he attempts a more precise geographical orientation. Responding to his lawyer’s somewhat sombre question about how his body should be ‘disposed’ of, Phillips claims to have answered unhesitatingly: "I wish my ashes to be scattered at the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America’, a place, as he puts it, “I have come to refer to as my Atlantic home.” There may be some pathos in this statement, but it is based on personal experience; Phillips feels equally connected to Britain and Europe, to the African continent, to the Caribbean, and to the USA, yet

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always with an ambivalent sense of (un)belonging, – in all cases “of, and not of this place.”

Phillips was born in St. Paul’s, a village on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, in 1958. Already at the age of twelve weeks, he left the Caribbean in the arms of his mother and grew up in Leeds, and later in Birmingham, in white working-class neighbourhoods. His childhood and youth in the 1960s and 1970s were spent “riddled with the cultural confusions of being black and British.” Neither his mother – who, in order to facilitate his integration into the new society, was determined not to burden her son with his past – nor the syllabuses of the schools and university (Queen’s College, Oxford) he attended provided any answers to his questions. Britain’s imperial involvement in Africa and the Caribbean was essentially excluded from the teaching of literature and history at that time. Phillips therefore often emphasizes his first trip to the USA, where, for the first time, he came across Richard Wright’s Native Son and Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man. This discovery of an alternative, black tradition of writing, if we are to believe his accounts, eventually also led to his decision to “confront [his] confusion and write.” In 1980, he returned to the Caribbean for the first time and spent much of the 1980s dividing his time between London and St. Kitts. But he also tried to trace his European heritage on an extended journey through the continent, spent some time in Ghana, and has lived in the USA for longer stretches of time, fulfilling teaching obligations at Amherst, Massachusetts and, since 1998, at Columbia University in New York.

Phillips’s career as a writer commenced in 1980, not quite a year after he finished his studies at Oxford ‘with honours’, when his first play, Strange Fruit, was staged and published, followed by two other plays, Where There Is Darkness (1982) and The Shelter (1984). After that, Phillips undertook further dramatic work for other media – film, radio and TV – and continued

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4 Phillips gives some insight into this confusion in his introduction to The European Tribe (London: Faber & Faber, 1987).


6 Caryl Phillips, The European Tribe, 8.

7 Two works that deserve special mentioning here are The Wasted Years, which was published in 1985 and awarded “Best Radio Play of 1984,” and Phillips’s screen-play for Horace Ové’s film Playing Away (1986).
with journalistic writing (about literature, music and sports); he considered all of these activities as his “second jobs,” however, as his real goal was to make it as a novelist. In 1985 his debut novel *The Final Passage* appeared, followed by *A State of Independence* (1986), *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), *The Nature of Blood* (1997), *A Distant Shore* (2003), and *Dancing in the Dark* (2005).

The thematic core of Phillips’s fiction is the human experience of uprooting and displacement, and the ensuing sense of intense loneliness. Many of the themes traced in his novels have already been tackled in his plays. *The Final Passage*, for instance, deals with the fate of a West Indian family emigrating to England, and the protagonist of *A State of Independence* returns to the island of his birth after years of English ‘exile’. They thus closely correspond to Phillips’s early plays, which likewise concentrate on the tensions and turmoil between both first- and second-generation immigrants in England, and the Caribbean and British cultures respectively.

*Higher Ground*, his third novel, turns toward larger issues of Atlantic slavery and its aftermath, a thematic complex he had already experimented with in his later plays. The novel thus marks a point in his fictional oeuvre when Phillips expands his initial (largely autobiographical) focus on the British-Caribbean axis to the “intercultural and transnational formation” of the Black Atlantic. This shows both in the novel’s content and in its polyphonic, rhizomorphic form: *Higher Ground* is composed of three individual narrative fragments, the first of which deals with an African on the West African coast who, in the last days of slavery, is forced to collaborate with the traders; another fragment depicts the fate of a young African American in a Southern prison, while the last narrative stages the brief encounter between a lonely Caribbean immigrant and a destitute Polish Holocaust-survivor in London. The narrative technique Phillips introduces with *Higher Ground* – the

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8 “I always wanted to be a novelist [...] I was serving a long apprenticeship reading and trying to understand the form of the novel.” Phillips, in Lars Eckstein, “The Insistence of Voices,” 34–35.

9 Phillips has kept on writing for other genres: *The European Tribe* (1987) consists of a number of travel essays resulting from a nine month trip through Europe. In these essays, Phillips assumes the position of a sceptical outsider and thus subverts the European tradition of travelogues about the so-called Third World. *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) is made up of essays which reflect his journalistic as well as personal quest for surviving traces of slavery in Liverpool, Ghana, the US-American South, and Israel. Moreover, in 2001, Phillips published a collection of his essays in *A New World Order*.

juxtaposition of seemingly independent pieces of narration, which nevertheless silently comment on each other – is to become characteristic of his later novels.

_Crossing the River_ takes up seamlessly from _Higher Ground_ in theme and structure. Here, four competing narrative fragments together span 250 years of Black Atlantic history. The story of Nash, a freed American slave resettled in Liberia, is followed by the tale of Martha, who is separated from her husband and child on the auction block and tries to make a life in the American West; the heartless logbook of a slave-ship captain – interrupted by two elegiac letters to his young wife – is followed by the diary entries of the white Englishwoman Joyce, who falls in love with the black GI Travis during the Second World War. When compared to _Higher Ground_, the polyphonic representation of the African diaspora gains still more of an epic quality here. This has largely to do with the suspension of the four narrative fragments in an encompassing narrative frame featuring a quasi-mythical African father-figure who identifies Nash, Martha, and Travis as his children, whom he had sold to a slave trader after a drought. Riddled by guilt, he listens to the “chorus of common memory” reaching him in discernible voices from the distant shores of the Atlantic. The lyrical off-beat rhythm of this musical chorus resonates in the voice of the African father, who, significantly, ends up adopting the white Joyce as one of his children. He thus embodies an identity-giving counter-balance to the sufferings of displacement – “which is love,” Phillips writes, “an affirmative quality present everywhere I looked in those children of the African diaspora, from Marvin Gaye to Jimmy Baldwin to Miles Davis.”

The affirmative, optimistic quality of _Crossing the River_ gives way to a bleaker vision in the next novel, _The Nature of Blood_. Once again, four different narrative threads feature, this time covering some 450 years of history. These are, compared to Phillips’s earlier works, still further fragmented and more intimately interwoven with each other, both thematically and formally. Moreover, with _The Nature of Blood_ Phillips daringly sets discourses of racism and antisemitism side by side. The novel’s central plot-line concerns the German-Jewish Holocaust-survivor Eva Stern and her family; their story,
however, is continuously intersected by other narratives. In fifteenth-century Venice, three members of the Jewish community fall prey to false antisemitic allegations of child murder; an African general in the Venetian army is portrayed through his attempts to gain social acceptance by secretly marrying a respectable Venetian girl – although the name “Othello” is never mentioned, it is quite clear that Phillips is writing back to Shakespeare’s play; and finally, Eva Stern’s uncle, now an elderly ex-partisan, encounters a young Ethiopian woman in Tel Aviv in the 1990s. The last narrative fragment points to a deeply racist element in a society that has itself been built on the experience of collective persecution, and thus exemplarily negates any hope of a prompt victory over European tribalisms.

More recently, Phillips has reduced his narrative scope to smaller temporal and less polyphonic dimensions. In his latest novel to date, Dancing in the Dark, he concentrates on a single voice in an intense piece of biographical fiction tracing the life of the first black vaudeville star, Bert Williams. In his previous novel, A Distant Shore, winner of the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 2004, he similarly continues to deal with cultural displacement, loneliness and suffering, yet limits his scope to the tragic encounter of two characters at the end of the twentieth century. A Distant Shore carefully traces the memories and mutual encounters of a West African refugee and an ageing English lady in a small town somewhere in northern England. The concentration on two essential voices and characters replicates a narrative approach which Phillips had already employed in his fourth novel, Cambridge. In this chapter, I will be concentrating on this latter novel, on its special mnemonic strategies, and on the politics of memory they imply.

Cambridge is, in a way, situated between the two first novels and Phillips’s later work beginning with Higher Ground. Like large portions of The Final Passage and A State of Independence, Cambridge is set on a fictive Caribbean island which bears a strong resemblance to the author’s native St. Kitts, and also focuses on the cultural tensions between the Caribbean and Britain. More in line with Higher Ground, Crossing the River and The Nature of Blood, however, is the engagement with larger historical contexts of diasporic experience. In Cambridge, Phillips chooses a coherent setting and a specific historical period, which he examines in exemplary depth. While there is no indication of specific dates, the novel is set at some time between the abolition

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of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in the English colonies in 1834.

*Cambridge* is composed of three main parts: Part One is dedicated to the travelogue of Emily Cartwright, the unmarried daughter of an absentee plantation owner; she embarks on a journey to her father’s Caribbean estate in order to escape an arranged marriage to a much older man. The journal she keeps on her trip takes up over two-thirds of the novel; it contains her impressions of the Caribbean, which she diligently notes down in pseudo-scientific style. Apart from the new flora and fauna, Emily is particularly interested in the English, Creole, and African population she gets in touch with on the island; and while she initially sympathizes with the liberal agenda of the anti-slavery campaigns, her journal bears witness to a gradual turn toward the planters’ mind-set. This goes along with the fact that she ends up having an affair with the overseer of her father’s plantation, Arnold Brown, a man she had initially detested. Emily’s journal also refers briefly to her confrontation with an educated Christian slave called Cambridge; their meeting, however, is a fleeting one, tainted by an obvious conflict between the slave and the overseer, Brown. Emily’s journal entries end with an account of Cambridge’s murder of Brown, whose child she bears.

The second part of the novel is much shorter than Emily’s journal and gives us Cambridge’s view as set down by himself before he is to be hanged. He recounts his life, starting with his childhood in the West African hinterland, where he grows up as “Olumide.” He is kidnapped and carried off to the coast, survives the Middle Passage, and is immediately returned to England, where he serves as “Black Tom” in a rich man’s household. Here he comes into contact with the Christian faith, has himself baptized as “David Henderson,” and marries a white servant. Freed after the death of his master, he preaches the cause of the abolitionists throughout England. After the death of his wife and newborn child, and upon coming in to an unexpected inheritance, he sets out to do missionary work in Africa. On board ship, however, he is robbed and once more sold into slavery; his third and last crossing of the Atlantic eventually takes him to the Cartwright plantation, where he acquires the name “Cambridge.” He takes another outsider on the plantation, Christiania, who practices obeah, as his partner, refuses to cooperate with the overseers, and seems content to accept his fate. Things get out of hand, however, when the plantation overseer Brown seduces Christiania and accuses Cambridge of stealing provisions. Cambridge’s account ends with the confession of his murder of Brown and the expectation of his own death.

A third, very brief section of the novel supplements the perspectives of Emily and Cambridge with a another report of Brown’s murder. It comes in the guise of an anecdotal account stylistically reminiscent of West Indian
journals or chronicles, and clearly takes the planters’ point of view. It speaks of brutal murder and insists that Cambridge, “his mind destroyed by fanciful notions of a Christian life of moral domestic responsibility” (171–72), has acted out of undue jealousy at a commonplace and “innocent amour” (171) between Brown and Christiania.

The three parts of the novel are framed by a prologue and an epilogue written in the third-person, and featuring a decidedly modern style that is quite distinct from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century language of the main parts. The events recounted, however, are focalized exclusively through the eyes of Emily Cartwright: the prologue renders her thoughts and feelings in free indirect style shortly before her ship leaves England for the Caribbean, while the epilogue renders her state of mind after she leaves her father’s estate with her black servant Stella for a small island cottage. There, her child is still-born, and she envisages a bleak future in solitude and seclusion.

The poetics of memory: the art of montage

Already on the surface level, Cambridge is a complex, polyphonic novel. Its individual parts clearly evoke different generic contexts. Emily’s narrative fits in with the tradition of the numerous travelogues written by British visitors to the colonies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; similarly, Part Three is reminiscent of the historiography of the colonial “contact zones,” as Marie Louise Pratt has defined them, and its focus on history and society through “imperial eyes.”14 Cambridge’s narrative writes back to the early slave narratives of the eighteenth century, such as Olaudah Equiano’s Interesting Narrative, discussed in some detail in the first part of this study. However, the dramatized mnemonic references in Cambridge go far beyond mere correspondences in genre and language. The truly fragmentary and polyphonic dimension of the novel only unfolds fully when these generic and linguistic coincidences are further scrutinized and Cambridge is read as a palimpsest which assembles specific passages from older texts in an artistic montage. A second reading reveals that Phillips’s novel evinces a unique mnemonic design, to which I shall now turn my attention.

14 “I use [the term ‘contact zone’] to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated came into contact with each other and established ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” Marie Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London & New York: Routledge, 1992): 6.
Exposition: the correspondence between Caryl Phillips and Paul Edwards

To start with, I would like to trace an exchange of letters – unpublished, but accessible to the public at Yale University, New Haven, where Phillips’s manuscripts and correspondence are archived. It concerns the communication between Caryl Phillips and Paul Edwards during the summer of 1990, shortly before Cambridge was published. At that time Phillips had already completed the manuscript of the novel, and had sent it from London to his older friend in Edinburgh, asking Edwards for personal correction (“‘mark up the manuscript liberally, if you deem necessary’”15) but also for his general opinion. Edwards, who died shortly afterwards, was certainly a demanding reader; he was a world-renowned expert on eighteenth-century literature; more significantly, he was involved in the ‘rediscovery’ of early writings by black people in England, not least as editor of the first modern editions of the works of such witnesses as Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho.

Edwards’ letters to Phillips reveal that he had no quibbles with the first part of the novel: i.e. Emily’s narrative. “Dear Caryl,” he writes on 20 June 1990,

Here are the first 50 or so more pages. […] My only slight feeling of unease at working on your script is that I might seem a bit presumptuous at times in the changes I propose. But the sculpture is yours, and I’m just sanding it down to bring out some of the grain. The girl [Emily] is a bit of what, were she a boy, one might call a prick, but I’m taking quite a liking to the silly bitch.16

In his next letter to London, however, Edwards sounds seriously worried. Having arrived at the part of the MS dedicated to Cambridge’s perspective, he thinks he has detected a fundamental flaw. On August 10 he writes:

Dear Caryl,

Here is part 1 completed, but I have a problem with the Cambridge section. The account of the girl seemed largely to come from your own head and consequently I only had to look at the language. But the Cambridge section uses so much material from Equiano and other sources in a wholly undisguised way that I doubt the value of the

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narrative. It is not as you thought, simply a problem of plagiarising your sources, I think rather that the narrative degenerates into easily recognisable pastiche, a kind of impersonal patchwork with little contemporary value, since the original sources have said it all already. I think that the narrative of Cambridge must derive much more from your own imagination, but as it stands, what you do is repeat material from the past. That’s not what a modern novelist must do with material like this (e.g. Wide Sargasso Sea), which is to make a new thing. […] Nor does the Cambridge narrative seem to use its material more than mechanically, you haven’t really thought out the man […].

Edwards ends his message by proposing that Phillips change the character of Cambridge by looking at a new model, and he suggests the historical figure “Robert Wedderburn, the Jamaican radical living in London in the late 18th and 19th centuries.” By revising the character, Edwards argues, Cambridge would eventually become “a better book, I believe, for having the Cambridge narrative more fully thought out, and a bit less found out.”

This, of course, is a serious challenge and raises critical issues in several respects. The first concerns the use of source-material in a way that is too permeable, a narrative procedure which, for Edwards, lacks creativity and imaginative performance. Furthermore, he admonishes the way the older texts are integrated into the new, the result being mere mechanical “patchwork.” And finally, what is at stake are differences in a more general understanding of what modern literature is to do and be like. Fortunately, there is a carefully crafted, handwritten draft of Caryl Phillips’s answer to Edwards’ letter among the manuscripts collected at Yale. Here Phillips writes:

Dear Paul,

Many thanks for sending on the rest of the novel. I am pleased you found the time to run your judicious pen across it, and I have certainly incorporated many of the excellent suggestions you make regarding the language.

I am sorry that you feel so negative about the Cambridge section. I had hoped that you may see that the whole novel is a ‘pastiche’ of sorts. The sources for the girl (Mrs. Flannigan, Janet Schaw, ‘Monk’ Lewis etc.) appear to me at least as ‘easily recognizable’ as Equiano et al. The novel is an attempt to dramatically rewrite, using the sources

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and what skills I possess as a novelist, material which is largely (though by no means totally) inaccessible to the general reading public. I am attempting to make something ‘new’ out of something ‘old’. In the process I hope I have created two characters (and a supply cast) the memory of whom might linger in the minds of those who read this “fiction.” It might even send them back to the original sources to find out more.

I could have, as you suggested, attempted to ‘do’ a Wide Sargasso Sea but I did not attempt such a Journal rewriting for my material did not seem suited. The very formal 1st person narrative was a style which seemed not only to mirror the original material, but one which I trusted to attempt. Again I am sorry that you feel it is an ‘impersonal patchwork with little contemporary value’. I am no more worried about being ‘found out’ with reference to the Cambridge material, than I am with reference to the girl’s. I drew freely upon many sources, which is my right. I am, however, a little more concerned about being ‘found out’ as the author of a narrative that ‘degenerates into easily recognisable pastiche’, or as somebody who has used the same material ‘mechanically’! To this end I will look again at the novel as whole, for I value the time and trouble you’ve taken. In the end, I must write the novel as best I can. I truly do not believe that I’ve spent the last two years and finished up with a character (‘Cambridge’) who I’ve not ‘thought out’. I may be clutching at straws, but perhaps you see the seams and the stitching all too clearly given your familiarity with the original material. Some craft has gone into the meaning of this new fabric. But, as they say, ‘he would say that, wouldn’t he’! […]

Anyhow, thanks again for your work on Cambridge. It will be a much better book because of your editor’s pen and general thoughts on the matter. I’m about to leave St. Kitts to spend the academic year 1990/91 as Visiting Writer at Dept. of English, Amherst College, Amherst, Mass. 01002 U.S.A. Do keep in touch, and I will let you know when the novel is likely to see the light of day.

Cheers,

Caryl

This draft of a letter to Paul Edwards is the only document that I know of where Phillips explicitly calls his novel a ‘pastiche’ and even mentions some of the sources that he used. The term ‘pastiche’ has a somewhat equivocal meaning in contemporary criticism, and a word of definition seems necessary at this stage: Phillips and Edwards both use the term in the sense that the Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory initially defines it: “pastiche (It pasta ‘paste’) A patchwork of words, sentences or complete passages from various authors or one author.”¹⁹ For reasons of terminological coherence, however, I shall henceforth refer to precisely this phenomenon by using the word ‘montage’. This has to do with the fact that Gérard Genette’s important narratological analyses have already given the notion of ‘pastiche’ a different connotation: namely, the mere imitation of the style of one or several writers, imitation which in fact does not, or not necessarily, involve the open quotation of pre-existing fragments.²⁰ The Penguin Dictionary, indeed, refers to this understanding of pastiche by continuing: “an elaborate form of pastiche is a sustained work (say, a novel) written mostly or entirely in the style and manner of another writer.”²¹ Both ‘montage’ and ‘pastiche’ as they have just been defined are fundamental elements of the composition of Cambridge. As I wish to show, the novel is composed of numerous, in most cases slightly modified fragments of older texts (montage); at the same time, these fragments are supplemented and interconnected by passages which merely imitate the source-material stylistically while relying entirely on Phillips’s own imagination (pastiche).

The aspect of montage has received little attention in the critical reception of Phillips’s novel so far – quite contrary to Paul Edwards’ worries, who of course assumed that the first part of the novel was a piece of writing which had “largely […] come from [Phillips’s] own head” (which it had, but in a more complex sense). There is one notable exception: Evelyn O’Callaghan made it quite clear in an article in 1993 that Cambridge is also to be read intertextually as specifically writing back to an older tradition; in effect, she claims,

Emily’s (fictional) travel journal is a pastiche [i.e. a ‘montage’ in my terms] of similar writings by Monk Lewis, Lady Nugent, Mrs. Carmichael et al. I do not refer simply to the narrative’s conventional form and use of nineteenth-century “polite” English, but to specific incidents, phrases, even whole passages in the novel which are deliberately “lifted” from the source documents.\(^{22}\)

O’Callaghan illustrates her argument by comparing several short passages from Phillips’s novel with passages from the three sources she identifies for Emily’s journal; similarly, she discovers passages from Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* in Phillips’s text. Her findings, however, while acknowledged in most later critical writing, have not been taken any further than that,\(^{23}\) and the focus of most investigations of the novel has been on textual rather than intertextual narrative strategies.\(^{24}\) Despite Evelyn O’Callaghan’s promising probes into the novel’s dimensions of montage and pastiche, therefore, its larger intertextual dimension has to date gone practically unacknowledged. As I will argue, the montage of bits of earlier texts is not merely an occasional referencing technique in *Cambridge* but much more – it constitutes the backbone of the novel.

Caryl Phillips used significantly more texts in the composition of *Cambridge* than Olaudah Equiano’s *Narrative* and the journals of Lady Nugent, Mrs Carmichael and “Monk” Lewis. There are at least twenty sources that Phillips integrated into the fabric of his narrative. In an appendix to this study, I have compiled a considerable number of source-passages which correspond to passages in the novel; these are listed in the chronological order of their appearance. Together, they cover about twenty per cent of the body of text in


the three parts of *Cambridge*. The true percentage of montage, I assume, is considerably higher than that, for the simple reason that I will have passed over quite a number of corresponding passages in the sources identified; moreover, it is quite likely that *Cambridge* draws on further sources that I missed completely during my research. While the manuscript material of the Caryl Phillips Papers at Yale University – which Phillips deliberately opened to public access – provides a good number of sources and many corresponding source-passages, it is unfortunately by no means comprehensive. A considerable portion of the recovered material was therefore compiled at the British Library, where Phillips had researched and drafted *Cambridge*.

Merely identifying the novel as a montage and pastiche, however, is not enough. A clear-cut answer will have to be found to the main question raised in the above letters by Phillips and Edwards. Does Phillips employ the mnemonic resources he adapts “mechanically,” or do we, rather, have to see his composition – the homogenizing and supplementing of diverse source-materials – as a major imaginative and creative performance? It should perhaps be made clear from the outset that the following argument will fully sustain Phillips’s overly modest claim that “some craft has gone into the meaning of this new fabric.” By further uncovering the technique of ‘montage’ employed in *Cambridge*, I wish to *contradict* explicitly all charges of plagiarism levelled against the novel. Such charges are short-sighted and mistaken, for two reasons: first, they ignore the sheer craft and aesthetic brilliance of Phillips’s montage technique. An imaginative performance belying any charge of dull repetition, *Cambridge* clearly brings newness into the world. Secondly, such charges under-estimate the mnemonic functionality and ideological complexity of Phillips’s approach. These latter aspects will be addressed with regard both to the ethical dimension of Phillips’s narrative scope and to its political goals.

*Imperial travelogues and histories: on the composition of Emily’s voice*

The first, and by far the largest part, of *Cambridge* (covering almost 130 pages), Emily’s journal largely consists of carefully revised fragments of historical travelogues and historiographic writing. The most important source texts in this respect are Janet Schaw’s *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, which recounts the impressions of an aristocratic Scottish lady on her travels to the Caribbean in the 1770s; Mrs Carmichael’s *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833), and “Monk” Lewis’s *Journal of a West India Proprietor*; the latter’s nickname and literary fame rest on his Gothic classic *The Monk* (1796), but he also owned a Jamaican plantation, which he visited on two trips between 1815
and 1818. A number of other travelogues are exploited less frequently: for instance, F.W.N. Bayley’s *Four Years’ Residence in the West Indies* (1830), Henry Nelson Coleridge’s *Six Months in the West Indies* (1825), J.B. Moreton’s *Manners and Customs in the West India Islands* (1790), and Lady Nugent’s *Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*. All of these texts have a common ground, in that they observe the Caribbean plantation system and plantation slavery through first-hand accounts; the readership they have in mind are essentially British friends or the British public at large, for whom a ‘true’ picture of the situation in the remote colonies is to be drawn. The travelogues thus perform as testimonial accounts, as allegedly ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ first-hand observation of the Caribbean question, which at home in London appeared to have become wholly obscured by the ongoing propaganda battles between abolitionists and absentee planters.

This is also largely true of the historiographic texts adapted in *Cambridge*, which likewise mostly appear when they purport to convey first-hand experience of the Caribbean. The most important source here is Mrs Flannigan’s *Antigua and the Antiguans* (1844), a large historical sketch of the island interspersed with a wealth of anecdotes and legends, as well as with very personal and subjective observations by the author. There are also less frequent references by quotation to specific descriptions of Caribbean society in Thomas Roughley’s *The Jamaica Planter’s Guide* (1823) and Brian Edwards’ *Civil and Commercial History of the British West Indies* (1794) – Edwards was a Jamaican planter and one of the most renowned and eloquent defenders of slavery in late-eighteenth-century London.

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27 Mrs. Flannigan, *Antigua and the Antiguans: A Full Account of the Colony and Its Inhabitants from the Time of the Caribs to the Present Day. Interspersed with Anecdotes and Legends. Also, an Impartial View of Slavery and the Free Labour System, the Statistics of the Island, and Demographical Notices of the Principal Families*
A last important source of reference seems oddly out of place among the others. Phillips evidently used extensive passages from another historiographic text, Lowell Joseph Ragatz’s *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1833*. In the chapter that Phillips particularly draws on, an introductory account of “Caribbean Society in the Eighteenth Century,” Ragatz in fact bases his evidence largely on such testimonial sources as Edwards, Lewis, Coleridge and Flannigan; his account, then, is in itself essentially a palimpsest of earlier texts. Published in 1928, *The Fall of the Planter Class* was clearly written much later than all other pre-texts adapted by Phillips. The question of why he included this particular work among the other largely testimonial, late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century sources is not readily answered. I will have to postpone such an answer for the moment, and will instead examine the specific strategies and procedures involved in the mnemonic composition of the sources outlined.

This can best be demonstrated by looking at a representative excerpt of Emily’s narrative; for the rest of the tale, the Appendix may be consulted. Phillips’s approach to artistic adaptation will be demonstrated by focusing on a passage about half-way into Emily’s journal. In the following excerpt, I have juxtaposed Emily’s text from the novel on the left with passages from the sources on the right. Those passages in *Cambridge* which obviously correspond to the earlier texts are printed in bold type; this means that those parts in regular print are either ‘pastes’ (i.e. phrases Phillips added in corresponding style) or quote source-texts that I have overlooked. The broader context of the specific scene under scrutiny is the following: Christiania, a slave in Emily’s (i.e. her father’s) possession, has chosen to dine at Emily’s table in the mansion. The servants, who are unanimously afraid of the obeah-woman, refuse to put an end to Christiania’s impertinence, so that Emily furiously flees to her “soft and feminine chamber” (74), where her personal servant Stella soon finds her. Emily’s journal recounts the following conversation which ensues between the two women:

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**Cambridge, 74–76**

According to Stella’s testimony, the negro belief in obeah involves the possessions of a variety of strange objects which are used

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**Sources Employed**

He found means to have him surprised, and on examination there was found upon him a bag containing a great

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for incantations: cats’ ears, the feet of various animals, human hair, fish bones, etc., all of which make their vital contribution to the practice of the magical art. One skilled in the practice of obeah is able to both deliver persons to, and retrieve them from the clutches of, their enemies. Such practitioners hold great sway over their fellow blacks, and they sell medicines and charms in profusion, thus acquiring a status unsurpassed within the community. It would appear that this traffic in charms and remedies is the business of Christianity, which manifestly explained the reluctance of my other slaves to cross the woman, but did not explain Mr Brown’s desire to have her share his table. Putting aside all modesty, I felt it only proper that I investigate further. I asked if the black Christianity was indeed a slave and the property of my family. ‘Yes, missy. She in your service.’ But what is her role on the estate? ‘Missy, she just in the house. She don’t have no use as such.’ I began to grow impatient. I asked if she was something to Mr Brown, but Stella professed ignorance of what I was suggesting. I informed Stella that I had been sufficiently alert to realize that it is sometimes the custom for white men to retain what they term housekeepers. These swarthy dependants elevate their status by prostrating themselves. Stella was vociferous, in defence of whom I am not sure. She spoke against these liaisons with such force that I recalled the proverbial saw that ‘the lady doth protest too much’. I did not think that I imagined a conspiracy of black womanhood against white, but I knew that I would find this difficult to prove. Therefore I thought it best to reveal to Stella my awareness of such amours, in the hope that she would realize that by speaking frankly, she was unlikely to cause me grief. This phenomenon arose chiefly from his transitory residence there. Comparatively few wives were brought out and concubinage was universal. The highest aim of a colored girl of tolerable person...
husbands. As a result concubinage appears to have become universal. I revealed to Stella that I was also aware that the highest position on which a sable damsel could set her sights was to become the mistress of a white man. They seek such unions with planters, overseers, bookkeepers, doctors, merchants and lawyers, and when their beauties fail, they seek similar positions for their daughters, knowing that success will assure them of a life of ease and prestige among their own people. This much I have gleaned from my brief perusal of the tawdry newspapers, from conversation, and from a knowledge of human conduct observed not only in these parts but in England also. Naturally, the children of such unions receive the status of the slave mother, unless manumitted by their fathers. They seldom achieve recognition as full heirs, and rarely rise above the skills of the artisan. These hybrid people, who hold themselves above the black, but below the white, abound throughout these island possessions as physical evidence of moral corruption.

All this I conveyed to Stella in the hope that she might be persuaded to share her knowledge with me, but I succeeded only in arousing her ire. It appeared that she took offence at the manner in which I portrayed the ambitions of black womanhood, but she manifested her rage not by overt onslaught, but by covert smouldering. I asked her if it were not true that young black wenches are inclined to lay themselves out for white lovers, and hence bring forth a spurious and degenerate breed, neither fit for the field nor for any work that the true-bred negro would relish. She would not answer. I asked her if it was not entirely understandable that such women would become licentious and insolent past all bearing because of their privileged position? Again, she would say nothing in response. I informed her that I have even heard the intelligence that if a mulatto child threatens to interrupt a
black woman’s pleasure, or become a troublesome heir, there are certain herbs and medicines, including the juice of the cassava plant, which seldom fail to free the mother from this inconvenience. At this point Stella seemed ready to leave the chamber.

Investigation of this excerpt from Emily’s journal reveals a specific rhetorical strategy of the Aufhebung of older texts that is representative of the first part of the novel as a whole. Phillips essentially accomplishes two feats: first, he integrates the source-passages into a coherent, self-sustaining narrative plot; second, he creates a credible, unique narrative voice from stylistically heterogeneous fragments.

To start with, it is apparent that the content of the above passage – the impertinent black rival who dares to share her mistress’s table – is not based on any pre-textual model as such; the plot as well as its specific configuration – Emily and Stella, Brown and Christiania – obviously transcend the individual sources. How, then, is this newness generated? By looking at the changes between what I have marked in bold type as passages in montage, and unmarked passages which are likely to be pastiches, it is possible to get an idea of how Phillips went about integrating his source-material. Note, for instance, how the first passage appropriating “Monk” Lewis’s text dealing with obeah is followed by a pastiche which comments on the new plot: namely, Christiania’s special position on the plantation as obeah-woman. Similarly, the next section, again based on Lewis’s original, is briefly interrupted by a pastiche which places the problematic topic of “housekeepers” in the specific context of Christiania and Brown, and so forth. More particularly: Stella’s reactions to Emily’s claims and allegations seem to be in most cases added to those parts ‘lifted’ from older texts.

The semantic integration of the source-passages into the context of the new narrative falls largely within the rhetorical figure of metonymy. The elements appropriated from earlier texts give way to pastiches and back again, the chief purpose being to lend momentum to the narrative plot. In cases of metonymic isotopy, Laurent Jenny argues, “a textual fragment is used, called on because it allows the narrative to be furthered.”29 In this fashion, Emily’s narrative participates, as it were, in the source-material. There are hardly any instances of ideological inconsistency between the older source-passages and the new text; rather, they harmonize in style and theme. This accords with Renate

Lachmann’s observation that metonymic intertextual references are “repeating, preserving gesture[s]”\(^{30}\) which initially absorb the semantic content of older mnemonic data without any degree of refraction.

The artistic composition of an idiosyncratic plot from bits and pieces of historical testimonies (plus Ragatz’ historiographical work) and supplementary pastiches, however, is just the first step in the generation of Emily’s journal. The second step involves the creation of a unique and credible narrative voice. This “transvocalization”\(^{31}\) – i.e. the transposition of narrative voices from the sources into the novel – covers a number of stylistic and rhetorical strategies that Phillips must have adopted when revising his manuscript. This was certainly necessary due to the fact that the assembled fragments of his composition, while homogeneous semantically, differ greatly in style. This variety is inevitable, given the publication dates, ranging from the 1770s (Janet Schaw’s *Journal of a Lady of Quality*) to 1928 (Ragatz’ *Fall of the Planter Class*), the social standing of their authors, and not least also their gender. It is quite possible that Phillips modelled Emily’s voice on the rhetorical and stylistic fashion of one specific source, which could have been Mrs Carmichael’s *Domestic Manners and Social Condition*, a book which Phillips drew on extensively in the first part of the novel. Just like Emily, Carmichael is a female observer of the Caribbean situation and thus narrates from a marginal position in the patriarchal planter’s world; as the young wife of a plantation owner, she has a very similar social background to Emily’s; finally, her sojourn in St Vincent and Trinidad between 1820 and 1826 coincides roughly with the period covered in the novel.

The generation of a superficially homogeneous voice initially requires mere *formal* standardizations – something that is obvious in, for instance, the replacement of Janet Schaw’s spellings of “Negro” and “mulattoe” by “negro” and “mulatto.” A lot more work, however, has clearly been invested in stylistic strategies to bring the heterogeneous fragments in line with the new voice. This required mechanisms to *archaize* or *de-archaize* Emily’s voice; appropriations from Janet Shaw’s text, for instance, needed quite a bit of stylistic rejuvenation, as the passage quoted above testifies. Phrases such as “and as even a mulatto child” in Schaw’s original are smoothed out to “if a mulatto child” in Phillips’s text. Conversely, Lowell J. Ragatz’s writing has too much about it of modernist factuality and thus had to be modified to fit in better with a late-Romantic linguistic sensibility – Ragatz’s phrase “the high-

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est aim of a colored girl of tolerable person,” for example, appears as “the highest position upon which a sable damsel could set her sights.” Generally, Phillips tends to stretch those passages by Ragatz and others which betray too much paratactic sobriety by inserting clauses (cf. above, the first quotation from Ragatz), while excesses of linguistic playfulness – for instance, in “Monk” Lewis’s style, are effectively tightened.\footnote{Compare, for instance, Lewis’s summary of obeah-instruments, “thunder-stones, cats’ ears, the feet of various animals, human hair, the teeth of alligators, etc.,” with Phillips’s text, which excludes “thunder-stones” and “teeth of alligators.”} Additionally, the narrative voice is also feminized. Note, for instance, how, in the above example, Lewis’s discussion of “housekeepers” (black mistresses) with his lawyer is largely congenial in nature, with a touch of manly jesting (“and then, after a pause, he added in a lower voice, ‘It is the custom, sir, in this country, for unmarried men to have housekeepers’”), and how Phillips introduces an undercurrent of bitterness into the conversation between Emily and Stella.

Finally, Phillips also employs strategies of rhetoric dramatization. In the above passage from Cambridge, this is most obvious in the final section, which rewrites a fragment of Janet Schaw’s text. Schaw, in this instance, merely summarizes the behaviour of black concubines on Caribbean plantations as a plain narrative report; in Cambridge, by contrast, this report is effectively dramatized in a reported dialogic confrontation between Emily and Stella. Further, by rephrasing the source-material in the form of successive rhetorical questions addressed to Stella, always interrupted by brief notations of Stella’s increasingly frustrated response, Phillips effectively intensifies the dialogue:

I asked her if it were not true that […] She would not answer. I asked her if it were not entirely understandable that […] Again, she would say nothing in response. I informed her that I have even heard the intelligence that […]. At this point Stella seemed ready to leave the chamber.

As this example shows, Phillips ‘uses’ his sources in any way but “mechanically.” On the contrary: by means of rhetoric and stylistic modifications, Emily’s voice succeeds in gaining a unique and initially independent quality; Phillips’s major imaginative achievement, in fact, is for Emily’s voice to function on two levels: intertextually, as an artistic ‘patchwork’ of earlier texts and their memories; and textually, as a rigorous narrative voice in its own right. As such, Emily’s speech dialogically confronts, on equal terms, the ideologies of the older texts it writes back to. At the same time, it can be
It is particularly apparent in this regard that Phillips created a narrator who, compared with the narrators of the sources that he used, writes from a more decidedly marginal social position. Emily is conceived of as an innocent newcomer to the Caribbean; moreover, the patriarchal British society of the early nineteenth century largely confines her to a role within the household, a role she is restricted to even more evidently on foreign West Indian soil; and finally, as a woman travelling without any male company, Emily is portrayed as highly paranoid about sexual harassment. Despite the fact that she is actually representing the owner of the estate she visits, her position as a foreign, rather wealthy, and unmarried woman is thus marked by social as well as sexual insecurity in what she perceives as a fascinating, yet vulgar, new environment:

In this West Indian sphere there is amongst the white people too little attention paid to the difference of class. [...] The [...] men, perhaps because I am a woman, have shown little courtesy in affording the attentions proper to my rank. They converse with me as freely and as openly as they wish. This is barely tolerable among the whites, but when I find the blacks hereabouts behaving in the same manner I cannot abide it, and see no reason why I should accommodate myself to the lack of decorum which characterises this local practice. (72)

Not least thanks to these deliberately designed insecurities, Emily appears as "one of the most skilfully created unreliable narrators in contemporary fiction,"33 whose narrative is full of contradictions and self-delusions. In Phillips’s carefully composed plot, Emily begins her journey with fairly liberal notions. She is initially determined to convince her father, whose "heavy-pocketed manner[,] to which he has come accustomed," she explicitly criticizes, of the "increasingly common, though abstract belief in the iniquity of slavery" (7, 8) by confronting him with her own first-hand accounts. Emily’s liberal façade soon crumbles, however. Contrary to her intentions to set down strictly neutral and ‘scientific’ observations, she soon uncritically takes over the racist ideology of the plantation’s physician McDonald, the overseer Brown, and the other whites. Thus, she promptly subscribes to McDonald’s conviction that “the West Indian negro […] steals, lies, is witless, incompetent, irresponsible, habitually lazy, and wantonly loose in his sexual behaviour” (52; the phrase, which quotes Ragatz verbatim, is framed by frag-


As a matter of fact, as soon as Emily arrives in the Caribbean, her perception, juxtaposing English civilization and noblesse with oriental inferiority, is seen to conform to colonial ideology. She typically attributes childlike or animal qualities to her slaves, “there being little to choose in such cases between savages and children” (127). Adult slaves are portrayed as lamenting children at the hospital (34, adapted from Carmichael), a group of playing children is represented as a herd of monkeys (22–23, adapted from Schaw), the cabins in the slave quarters are referred to as “nests” (67), the language of the slaves as “braying” (32). The imperial gaze becomes caught up in obvious, intriguingly moralizing self-delusions – for example, when instances of prostitution (cf. the passage quoted above) or allegedly insufficient maternal love (68, adapted from Lewis) are attributed to a ‘natural’ moral defect among slaves, blithely ignoring the brutalizing effects of the “breeding system” and plantation life as such.

Emily is progressively seduced by the purely economic logic of Brown, and eventually also falls for the man himself. Her affair with Brown, hesitantly surfacing in the narrative, gradually betrays a more fragile and sentimental aspect beneath Emily’s façade; a marked change in reciprocal affection is initially signalled solely by a sudden switch to the use of Brown’s first name, Arnold (100–101). One of the many ironies involved in Emily’s tale thus consist in the fact that she ends up being mercilessly exploited – economically and sexually – by the white man Brown, who abandons the run-down estate and leaves her pregnant, whereas she had always been worried about sexual and economic assaults by the “teeming presence” (32) of her slaves. To the very end, Emily never openly admits her disgrace in her journal, trying throughout to live up to “the white man[’s] efforts to preserve some scrap of moral decency” (86). Still, Phillips indicates that all those imperial securities she has clung to from her own marginal position in the Caribbean in the

34 In Edward Said’s sense, the term ‘oriental’ extends to all those whom Cromer held to be colonial “subject races,” and thus includes Africa and the Caribbean; see Said, Orientalism (1978; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995): 37–38.

35 Frantz Fanon explains the use of zoological vocabulary as a very common tool to render fellow humans ‘other’. This act of ‘othering’ is more often than not performed if the security of one’s own position is in danger of displacement. See Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, tr. Constance Farrington (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984): 32–33; or, more generally, Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, tr. Charles Lam Markmann (1952; New York: Grove, 1991).

course of her encounters crumble in the end: “I don’t know. How can I know? I still have so much to learn” (127).

**Early black writing in Britain:**
**on the composition of Cambridge’s voice**

The sheer extent of ambivalence in Emily’s narrative will only emerge, however, when it is juxtaposed dialogically with Cambridge’s story. His quite brief autobiographical account and defence against the allegations of cold-blooded murder (covering merely 35 pages) makes up the second part of *Cambridge*. Like Emily’s journal, it is based on montage and pastiche. The most important sources Phillips draws on for Part Two are the very first texts produced by black people in Britain, towards the end of the eighteenth century: James Albert Ukasaw Gronniosaw’s *A Narrative of the Life of James Albert Gronniosaw* (c.1770), Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* (1789), Ottobah Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787), and Ignatio Sancho’s *Letters* (1782).37 Gronniosaw’s, and above all Equiano’s, slave narratives occupy by far the largest space among the composed fragments. Again, we are largely dealing with first-hand accounts of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery; this time, though, the witnesses represent the perspective of those who crossed the Atlantic in shackles.

Apart from the texts already mentioned, Phillips adapts further historical writings, among which Henry Angelo’s *Reminiscences* (1828)38 has a somewhat peculiar place. Angelo served at the court of the duchess of Queensberry, who was the patron of one of the most famous black Englishmen of his time, Julius Soubise, and instructed him in riding and fencing. At one stage, Cambridge’s narrative takes recourse to Angelo’s reminiscences about Soubise, thus incorporating a white man’s voice into the black man’s character (151–52, see Appendix). Moreover, Cambridge’s narrative evokes a number of other texts written by white authors, but solely on those occasions where

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Cambridge explicitly quotes such texts himself (for example, newspaper postings of runaway slaves or slave auctions\(^{39}\)), or when he indirectly reports other people’s speech. Reported comments by his English master, for instance, refer openly to writings by Edward Long, Samuel Johnson and John Pugh.\(^{40}\)

Again, all of the source-passages and fragments I could find are gathered in the Appendix. Altogether, I assume that Cambridge’s narrative – contrary to Paul Edwards’s initial impression – consists of a much less immediately discernible montage than Emily’s tale. Whether Phillips further revised the second part of his novel after he received Edwards’s somewhat disheartening letter or whether it looked like this already, the source-material in Cambridge’s tale is hardly ever adapted in long, coherent phrases. Considerable stretches of the novel merely correspond in very short fragments to slave narratives and other writing, and consist of phrases or single words that do not allow any cases of pointed reference to be confirmed. Often, Cambridge’s narrative thus seems to be more of a pastiche than a montage, especially since it is rather unlikely that many more sources than those that I have already mentioned are involved. Whereas, for Emily’s tale, Phillips could have drawn upon a considerable number of further travelogues by British visitors to the Caribbean – one thinks of James Stewart (1823), R.R. Madden (1835), George Pinckard (1806) or Alexander Barkley (1826) – but apparently did not do so, the number of available texts by black people in the eighteenth century is limited. Since Phillips apparently restricted his range of reference to English sources without drawing on early slave narratives published on the American continent by John Marrant, David George, Boston King, Venture Smith, John Jea and others,\(^{41}\) it is very probable that most parts of Cam-


\(^{41}\) “The slave view of plantation life in the West Indian colonies was never recorded,” according to Michael Craton, James Walvin and David Wright. “Unfor-
Caryl Phillips, Cambridge

bridge’s tale are indeed written in the style and manner of Gronniosaw and Equiano. Nevertheless, there is a considerable degree of montage involved here as well, as the following passage confirms. It occurs immediately after Cambridge’s introductory remarks and deals with the memories of his enslavement in Africa:

Cambridge, 134–35

No longer was I to tarry in my Africa, where my father and my mother loved me with a sincere warmth. A storm broke about our dark heads and I, who can remember only my true Guinea name, Olumide, from amongst the many words of youth, was washed towards the coast and away from my rich and fertile soil by Christian Providence, whose unlikely agents were those who drink deep of strong liquors, which serve only to inflame their national madness, the slave trade. The Lord intended commerce to enable man to develop the friendly bent of his social affections. Finding his brothers in scattered locales it was hoped that man might forge the sweet blessed security of peace and friendship, while diffusing the goods and commodities of his native land. Such enterprise, with Christian religion as its true companion, would be of profound benefit to any shore fortunate enough to be rewarded with the arrival of traders with soldier-like fortitude, and honest values. It sours my blood that in the Guinea of my youth it was not to be the good fortune of my brethren to meet such men, for unfortunately our shores were visited by those whose eyes were blinded, and hearts stupefied, by the prospect of profit. These men violated the principles of sound commercial policy, and imposed upon their own nation a heavy burden, both moral and financial, for the main-

Sources Employed

In Africa, the poor wretched natives – blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil – are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing; – the Christians’ abominable Traffic for slaves – and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty Kings – encouraged by their Christian customers – who carry them strong liquors, to enflame their national madness – and powder and bad fire arms, to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping. (Sancho, 138)

Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth in every part – to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love, society, and mutual dependence: – the enlightened Christian should diffuse the Riches of the Gospel of peace, with the commodities of his respective land – Commerce attended with strict honesty, and with Religion for its companion, would be a blessing to every shore it touched at. (Sancho, 138)

Fortunately, for the West Indies, there are no examples of the type of slave and ex-slave narrative published in large numbers in the United States.” Michael Craton, James Walvin & David Wright, Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation, 65. Perhaps because it was not published in the USA, the authors omit mention of Mary Prince’s History, which indeed does recount Caribbean plantation life.
tenance of their addiction to slavery. Worse still, they involved the good people of their country in the sorrowful guilt of upholding such a system, thus fusing prejudice into their souls and hardening their hearts.

When I imagine myself to have been not yet fifteen years of age, I was apprehended by a band of brigands and bound by means of a chain to hand and foot. I must confess, to the shame of my fellow Guinea-men, that I was undoubtedly betrayed by those of my own hue. But it remains true that without instruction and encouragement my native people would never have hardened their hearts and tainted the generous customs of their simple country. Shackled unceremoniously to a fellow unfortunate at both stern and bow, we unhappy blacks formed a most miserable traffic, stumbling with jangling resignation towards our doom. About my neck I sported a decoration of gold placed there by my mother’s own fair hand, and from my ears hung larger and less delicate gold pieces of shape, though mercifully not size, resembling the orange fruit. These paragons of virtue who had possession of my body, if not my soul, soon divested me of these trappings, thus breaking off my tenderly formed links with my parents. In addition to this loss, I was forced to endure pains the like of which I had never suffered.

The rhetorical strategies Phillips employed in the process of composing Cambridge’s narrative voice are pretty much identical to those found in Emily’s narrative. Again, the embedding of the source-fragments is largely metonymic, and there are hardly any instances of semantic refraction or ideological disjunction between the earlier sources and the new narrative context. As in the first part, the dominant figure of memory consists in the conserving of older voices in the new text. The quality of Cambridge’s voice is reminiscent of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*, in terms both of his very assured use of the English language and of its stylistic variety. Of all the sources, Equiano’s text is the most frequently evoked in Cambridge; it is therefore quite likely
that it served as a stylistic and rhetorical model. In the above excerpt, it is
evident that Phillips has reworked and modified his source-material in a
sustained way in order to conform to this model; still, the original texts remain
discernible beneath the surface to the reader who is sufficiently acquainted
with them. Phillips's efforts in transvocalizing the source-fragments can be
easily traced, for instance, in the lengthy passage adapting a letter by Ignatio
Sancho: note how Phillips first of all deleted the numerous dashes and then re-
grouped and compacted the sentences until Sancho’s rather baroque and
‘wounded’ style gave way to a pragmatic and lucid, if somewhat mannered
ductus reminiscent of Equiano.

While, in most cases, Phillips appropriates his material without any initial
sense of refraction: i.e. without fundamentally altering the semantic or ideo-
logical context, it is important to note that there are a few exceptions to this
rule. One occasionally encounters cases of what Genette calls the trans-
motivation or semantic transformation of source-passages. A perfect ex-
ample in the above excerpt would be Phillips’s recourse to Gronniosaw’s
Narrative precisely where Gronniosaw describes how the slave traders stole
the golden jewellery he was given by his mother. In the novel, Cambridge
expresses pain at his loss, less for the money the gold was worth than because
it was “breaking off [his] tenderly formed links with [his] parents”; Phillips
thus places the instance taken over from Gronniosaw in the broader thematic
context of his protagonist’s alienation and humiliation. In this particular case,
then, he departs considerably from the significance Gronniosaw attributes to
the event. In contrast to Cambridge, he expresses relief at the loss of his
jewellery. This stance of alleged relief has to be seen in the light of the
author’s dedication to the Calvinism he absorbed in England by way of the
abolitionists, and its rejection of material idolatry. Obviously, Phillips decided
not to furnish his protagonist with the same degree of radical devotion.

As such cases of transmotivation indicate, Cambridge’s voice, like
Emily’s, is more than a mere patchwork of heterogeneous fragments. It is,
rather, an ideological vehicle in its own right, with a largely coherent style
and tone, and as such harbours its very own complexities and contradictions.
Just as Emily, whose marginality in West Indian society makes her an ambi-
valent character who does not easily fall into the simplifying category of the
‘perpetrator’, Cambridge is a character who does not easily accord with
stereotypical notions of victimization. As Paul Sharrad puts it, “Cambridge’s
‘noble sufferer’s’ view of things is not allowed […] to become a simple sub-
stitute for Emily’s […] and we can see in his own stilted prose how he has
been mentally, as well as physically enslaved by the discourse of civiliza-

\footnote{Gérard Genette, \textit{Palimpsests}, 330–35.}
tion.”

In Phillips’s composition, Cambridge, just like Gronniosaw or Equiano, meets the challenge of his ‘otherness’ in British society by striving to assimilate. His career in British civilization is mirrored in the names he acquires, and which are to furnish him with a new identity: “Olumide” soon turns into “Thomas,” who learns the English language in a household where he is tellingly styled “Black Tom.” His education goes along with the discovery of the Christian faith, and yet another name, David Henderson, reflects his progress in society as a re-born Christian. Literacy and sociability for a black man in eighteenth-century Britain were, as a matter of fact, hardly available without some degree of commitment to the bible. As Phillips explains,

> For a slave to be able to talk in the 18th or 19th century meant that in all likelihood they would have to digest and accept Christianity, because you were not just taught English by some benevolent foreign language teacher. It was the King James’s Version. It was not a free lunch, you were going to get the Biblical deal with it. [Some] bought the whole deal, began to speak like their masters. [...] Cambridge became a different guy in my mind when I suddenly came up against the problem of how did he learn to speak. I had him as a sort of nicer guy and then suddenly I realized he can’t be. He must have been a bit brainwashed by all this stuff.

While Equiano, Gronniosaw and Cugoano embrace Christian teachings as a means of salvation, both physically and spiritually, in Cambridge’s account Phillips assembles more drastic passages which show us the other side of the coin. Thus, it quickly becomes apparent how Cambridge uncritically absorbs all teachings concerning the moral superiority of the Christian religion and, in consequence, of English civilization (“Truly I was now an Englishman, albeit a little smudgy of complexion! Africa spoke to me only of a history I had cast aside” 147). This, of course, does not prevent him from fighting for the rights of his fellow Africans as an abolitionist preacher; his mind-set, however, in doing so is a deeply paternalistic one. Convinced of his own superiority, he comes to think of himself as endowed with the “character of a man in upper

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44 Aaron Ashby & Artress Bethany White, “Interview with Caryl Phillips,” 97.
Caryl Phillips, Cambridge

rank, and a superior *English* mind, inferior only to the Christian goodness in my heart*" (155). Cambridge remains true to this attitude even after his second enslavement and transport to the Caribbean, where he is again put on a level with "base African cargo" (156). The new name he acquires there, “Cambridge,” becomes a deeply ironic symbol of his addiction to the doctrines of English moral and intellectual superiority. He largely keeps to himself, declining to mingle much with the other slaves, with the exception of his wife, Christiania, whom he treats with a strong touch of paternalism (“as it is well known, a Christian man possesses his wife, and the dutiful wife must obey her Christian husband” 163). If Emily, who faces her own marginality as a single woman in a man’s world, desperately holds on to colonial ideas of white supremacy, Cambridge, himself a victim of racial discrimination, compensates for his marginality by turning to the ideologies of Christian and patriarchal superiority.

In his narrative composition, Phillips stages a brief personal confrontation of the two protagonists which shows how inextricably both characters are caught up in their manichaean arrogance. The meeting between Emily and Cambridge comes about because Christiania, to Emily’s horror, engages in ritual chanting and dirt-eating beneath her window; Cambridge is called to Emily’s door to ‘protect’ the lady from his own common-law wife. The accounts of this encounter by Emily and Cambridge are, to my knowledge, not assembled from pieces of older material, but are a form of stylistic imitation. Emily recounts:

> I opened my door a few inches so I might gain a sight of my Negro sentinel. To my astonishment I recognized the negro as Cambridge [...] My dark sentry looked up at me, and I noted that I appeared to have disturbed him in the most unlikely act of studying the Bible. I asked if this was his common form of recreation, to which he replied in his highly fanciful English, that indeed it was. You might imagine my surprise when he then broached the conversational lead and enquired after my family origins, and my opinions pertaining slavery. I properly declined to share these with him, instead counter-quizzing with enquiries as to the origins of his knowledge. At this a broad grin spread over his face, as though I had fallen into some trap of his setting. Indeed, so disturbing was the negro’s confident gleam, that I quickly closed the door, for indeed this negro was truly ignorant of the correct degree of deference that a lady might reasonably expect from a base slave. (93)

If this, the only opportunity for the novel’s protagonists to get together, fails tragically, then it is Emily’s priggish attitude that is to blame. Her priggish-
ness, however, is rooted in deeper anxieties. For her, Cambridge embodies a fundamental threat to her sense of security – the natural superiority of her race and breeding, and the courtesies a ‘lady’ can rightfully expect. But it is not only Emily’s racism that renders their meeting fruitless. Cambridge’s self-defensive arrogance also plays its part. He remembers:

I mounted a guard at the door of the woman, Emily. She was white with fear that my wife might enter and cause her harm. I assured the fair one that she had nothing to fear, and enquired if she were a Christian believer, to which she answered that she was. I asked from which part of fair Albion she originated, and if her father approved of the institution of slavery, to which she replied that she imagined that he did, but her attitudes were her own and somewhat different. She declined to share them with me, but seemed truly fascinated by my knowledge and fluency in her language, the origins of which I, in turn declined to share with her. (165)

Such pastiches again testify to the massive creative input in the novel. One of the major achievements of Cambridge, it has to be repeated, is the fact that it works on both the textual and intertextual levels. Intertextually, it poetically ‘re-members’ a variety of historical writings by arranging them in a thoroughgoing montage. The creative decisions, specific strategies of stylistic assimilation and rhetorical engagement, and extensive supplementation with ingenious pastiches, however, result in a textual surface that can be read without noticing its mnemonic scope. Phillips’s narratives and narrators possess their very own intriguing dynamic, psychological depth, and complexity.

The composition of the prologue, Part III, and the epilogue

Discussion has so far been devoted to the first and second part of Cambridge, and it is now time to turn our attention to Part Three as well as to the prologue and epilogue of the novel. The third part of Cambridge (occupying a mere four pages) is based on a single source – Mrs Flannigan’s Antigua and the Antiguans – a text that also features prominently within the mnemonic framework of Emily’s journal. I assume that, in this last part, Phillips attaches a slightly revised version of the very historical document that served as his initial inspiration for the novel. The anecdote recounted in Flannigan’s history already features three of the main characters whom Phillips fleshed out: Brown, Cambridge, and Christiana (spelled “Christiana” in Flannigan’s original). Moreover, the source-passage also contains the rudimentary plot-line – Brown’s sexual relationship with Christiania, Cambridge’s alleged pilfering of provisions, Cambridge’s murder of Brown – which Phillips imaginatively
extends and intercalates with the Emily-plot. As the juxtaposition of Flannigan’s anecdotal report with Phillips’s text will show, both the new and old versions, save for the elision of specific dates and place-names, are almost identical to the word:

Cambridge, 171–72

In the year 18__, another murder was committed, the details of which are as follows: — A person of the name of Brown was living as overseer upon an estate called ——, now in possession of Messrs. —— and ——. The negroes upon this property had been for a long time in the habit of pilfering, and in many instances Mr Brown had discovered the pilferers (offenders), which caused him to be disliked, and determined one among them, more heartless, perhaps, than the rest, to undertake his destruction. On Christmas day, the Christian Mr Brown rode to church at ——, and upon his return in the evening, between the hours of six and seven, he met with his untimely death.

The mature slave to whom Mr Brown had rendered himself particularly obnoxious was named Cambridge, and this insane man had long lain in wait for an opportunity of completing his crime, and for the purpose had sharpened an old copper skimmer, (used in boiling sugar), which he thought would prove an effective weapon.

Mr Brown, like too many other white men in this island, carried on an innocent amour with a woman belonging to the property, named Christiana, and it appeared that this Cambridge had for many years held the poor Christiania in bondage, his mind destroyed by fanciful notions of a Christian life of moral and domestic responsibility, which he, in common with his fellow slaves, was congenitally unsuited to. When the unfortunate Christiana would not submit to his thraldom, Cambridge cruelly cast
her from his hut and vowed that he would one day seek revenge for her disloyalty.

On the Christmas day, Cambridge dressed himself in his best suit, and proceeded to the Methodist Chapel at — —, intending upon his return home to this day brutally murder Christiania, who would never choose to darken a place of Christian worship, being fatally addicted to the superstitious belief in witchcraft to which Africans are so prone. In pursuance of his plan, he hurried out of the chapel immediately after service, and hastened back to the estate. After waiting in vain for a long time, a group of jolly negroes at length sauntered by. Cambridge, whose stock of patience was exhausted, joined them, and asked if they knew where Christiania was? In answer to his query, they informed him that she was visiting a neighbouring estate. Thus thwarted in his views of obtaining revenge, Cambridge's designs upon Mr Brown gained double hold of him. He returned to his hut, disrobed himself, put on his working dress, and first thing telling his Good Lord, “That he had lost an opportunity, but he would take good care he did not lose the next,” quitted the house, taking the old copper skimmer with him.

Considering the degree of correspondence between the single source and the novel, what is of special interest here are less stylistic or rhetorical strategies of narrative integration than those few instances where Phillips decided to depart consciously from certain aspects of meaning in Flannigan’s original. I therefore suggest taking a look at those parts in the above text that are not marked in bold type: i.e. those passages that Phillips has added as pastiches in order to accommodate Flannigan’s text to his extended imaginative scope. Thus, it becomes obvious how Phillips establishes a domestic relationship between Cambridge (Brown’s murderer) and Christiania (Brown’s lover), who in the original have nothing to do with each other. Moreover, it is apparent
that Phillips fitted out his rather flat models with a religious background that establish one of the novel’s points of ideological tension.

In Cambridge’s case, Phillips supplies his protagonist with Christian conviction. This serves to echo the marked biblical inflection in Equiano, Cugoano and Gronniosaw; as well as this, Phillips, by making Cambridge a devoted Christian lends more emphasis to the fact that the slave’s story managed to survive fictionally in the first place. The bible, as already mentioned, was often the only way for a slave to acquire literacy in order to set down the story of his life. Moreover, opportunities for publication and a prospective readership were crucially dependent on Christian funding and organizations. “In a rather peculiar way,” Phillips points out, “Christianity was both oppressing and liberating the colonised” by providing some with “the capacity for self-analysis and self-expression.” Only by virtue of Cambridge’s Christianity can we logically receive an account “written by himself.”

This becomes clearer if we compare Cambridge to Christiania, whom Phillips dramatizes as an ideological counterpart to the adoption of the colonizer’s religion and beliefs. Phillips’s conscious move in this respect shows in the way “Christiana,” who in Flannigan’s original attends the “Methodist chapel at Parkham,” has been transformed to a person “who would never choose to darken a place of Christian worship, being fatally addicted to the superstitious belief in witchcraft to which Africans are so prone.” She thus perfectly embodies the ‘Other’ in colonial discourse – irrationality, emotionality, sexuality, magic. All these are ideals which, for instance, Senghor and Césaire celebrate in the poetry of Négritude; Frantz Fanon argues that, particularly in the conscious recourse of the Négritude writers to colonialist stereotypes of the ‘Other’, it is in fact possible to escape imperial rationality initially and regain a sense of agency. And indeed, Christinia’s radical denial of the planters’ logic affords her a considerable amount of authority on the plantation. She escapes the breeding system (“she refused to produce children”), and her obeah makes her susceptible to both whites and blacks on the plantation, who dare not approach her. Of course, Christinia, as is typical of Phillips’s characters, remains in many ways ambivalent, and it is unclear how much of her social immutability she owes to her reputation as a sorceress, and how much to the authority of her lover, Brown, who dumps her as soon as Emily better fits his plans. Still, Christiania embodies an alternative; even though she pays for her denial of the colonizing discourse with isolation bordering on insanity, she simultaneously preserves her unique integrity. What is

46 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 120–29.
crucial, however, is that her voice, in contrast to Cambridge’s, is lost. No concrete testimony of her life survives; she is merely written about in other people’s texts. Consequently, Phillips also grants her no first-person voice in the novel.

The very fact that the three main parts of the novel are devoted exclusively to three narrative voices based on written, manifestly surviving testimonial accounts is indeed striking. Their choice, moreover, is not accidental, as I hope to demonstrate further by briefly discussing the generation of the novel as far as this can be traced in the manuscripts at Yale. To judge from the anecdotal account of Cambridge, Brown and Christina provided in Flannigan’s Antigua and the Antiguans, it would appear that Phillips experimented with a quite different narrative format, as some initial typed or handwritten drafts show. While it is impossible to retrace fully the intended structure of the discarded early version, some differences in the plot-line are fairly obvious. In the jettisoned version of the novel, Christina was not conceived of as Cambridge’s wife, but as his daughter; he adopts her after her mother, whom he was in love with, is sold off to another plantation. At the age of twenty-one, Christina is seduced by Brown and bears his child; unable to cope with the situation, she refuses to raise her daughter, and goes insane. The child, called Missy or Etty, is in turn adopted by Emily and Stella, who raise her in the very cottage that features as the setting for the epilogue in Cambridge as eventually published.

More importantly, there are also crucial differences in the choice of narrative technique. The discarded drafts of the novel unfold their content not in the first person, as in the final version, but in third-person narratives and a decidedly late-twentieth-century style of language. Each individual chapter was to have been focalized through a single character, such as the teenage “Etty,” her friend “Claude,” Emily and, above all, Christina. The latter’s perspective was to be represented in a long interior monologue, as Phillips’s manuscripts reveal: “Pt. 3 is an ungrammatical poetical 25 pages prose poem hymn of love to this daughter who she hates for the white blood in her but can’t help love her.” As a matter of fact, in this first draft at least, Cambridge was thus much closer in style to Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea, which Paul Edwards champions in his letter to Phillips as a perfect example of a ‘modern’ creative rewriting of older sources. It therefore has to be assumed that Cambridge, in its eventually published form, differs quite intentionally

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47 “Cambridge Words and Early Writing,” Uncat MSS 15, box no. 10; most of the manuscripts concerned with the disregarded early draft of Cambridge are stored in folder 2.

48 “Cambridge Words and Early Writing,” Uncat MSS 15, box no. 10, folder 2.
from a *Wide Sargasso Sea* format in limiting its scope to the artful combination of historically surviving voices in first-person narratives.

Still, some elements of the early draft are still present in the published version. The Prologue and Epilogue consist of revised fragments taken from the chapter which initially was to provide Emily’s perspective, whereby the Prologue renders Emily’s recollected, stream-of-consciousness, thoughts and feelings at her departure from England. The free indirect style of the Prologue is central to establishing the fact of her marginality:

> England. [...] And daughters sacrificed to strangers. A woman might play upon a delicate keyboard, paint watercolours, or sing. A woman must run the household, do the accounts, command the domestic servants, but her relations with her children were to be more formal. (3)

The Epilogue likewise employs fixed internal focalization; it is concerned with Emily’s personal situation after what has been dealt with in the three main parts – the murder of Brown, Cambridge’s execution, her pregnancy and shame. As in the Prologue, the reader obtains access to her innermost feelings, feelings that never surfaced in her journal from under the stilted prose and its armour of self-censure. It is only in the Epilogue, then, that Emily’s deeply tragic experience suddenly assumes a sombre presence in the narrative. A return to England in shame seems impossible, all hopes for a future in the West Indies together with her one-time servant Stella seem to have been symbolically suffocated with the still-birth of her child. Still, Phillips also indicates that Emily has grown emotionally, albeit at the price of disillusionment and suffering as her manichaean arrogance gives way to the more differentiated perception of someone “whose only journeys were uprootings” (180). This shows particularly in her change of attitude towards Stella, whom she perceives not only as an equal human being but also as a friend; in fact, the novel closes with the words “She remembered. Journeying up the hill to Hawthorn Cottage. With her friend. Stella. Dear Stella” (184). Phillips’s decision to reserve both Prologue and Epilogue for Emily’s intimate feelings thus creates a final ironic twist, since, as he argues, “the supreme irony in Cambridge is that the black man becomes the character you like the least, because she grows, he shrinks.”

The Prologue and Epilogue, however, are also important in another respect. If the main parts of the novel strike the reader as slightly odd, with all their mannerisms and eighteenth-century linguistic conventions, and seem to speak of events safely distant from our times, this distance is bridged by the

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narrative frame. In the Prologue and Epilogue, Emily’s thoughts come across in a decidedly late-twentieth-century style. For today’s readers, they are thus immediately accessible, in contrast to Emily’s or Cambridge’s first-person accounts, as the following poetic passage with its modern rhythm and diction shows:

Emily stood before the mirror. And now sunrise. She knew that she must bear the weight of yet another day. She knew that she must endure the undignified mêlée of dawn. She knew that, in all likelihood, she would have to visit the dying of the sun come dusk. She understood this. (183)

Here, the paratactic sentence-structure but above all the pattern of sound and rhythm immediately appeal to our senses. Note, for instance, how the anaphoric use of “she” and “she knew” establishes a broken, repetitive beat which underlies the finality of Emily’s stranded situation. Note also how this beat accompanies a thematic movement from sunrise to dawn which metaphorically links the inevitability of her fate to the indifferent coming and going of days. The intensity of this prose helps the reader to finally (re)engage with Emily more immediately; it crucially closes the historical distance from her journal and, by extension, from Cambridge’s account and the anonymous voice in Part Three.

The politics of memory: empowering culture

What, however, are we to do with our awareness of the novel’s textual, but above all intertextual, make-up? Surely there is a political motivation behind the mnemonic design as it presents itself to the attentive reader, with reverberations within the larger social discourses of memory and Black Atlantic history. Indeed, the mutual dependence of the aesthetic and the political in literary works of art lies at the heart of Phillips’s creative self-conception:

I have something to say about the societies that I find myself living in. I want those bloody societies to change. Deeply political. But at the same time, I’m also deeply interested in aesthetics […] aesthetics will feed the politics, but without the politics, aesthetics on its own is just some kind of literary masturbation. It doesn’t mean anything.50

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While Paul Edwards considers narrative techniques of montage and pastiche to be out of place in contemporary writing (“That’s not what a modern novelist must do with material like this”), for Caryl Phillips, conversely, they seem to have a special appeal on ethical and political grounds. In the following, I will try to approach the politics of memory in *Cambridge* in two steps. First, it can be argued that Phillips’s selection and artistic disposition of older first-hand accounts are to be seen in the light of a specific ethics of writing about Atlantic slavery. What is at stake here are the complex intersections between ethics, poetics, and politics when it comes to histories of immense collective suffering and pain. Secondly, *Cambridge* can be read as a differentiated and elaborate critique of contemporary discourses of Black Atlantic memory. The characteristic strategies involved in the mnemonic design of *Cambridge* specifically, but also in Phillips’s later work, are rooted in the desire to propose an alternative, democratic model of cultural memory.

**Writing suffering: on the ethics of memory**

The long history of the Atlantic slave trade is a history of unrelieved suffering. According to recent estimates, around twelve million Africans were carried off to the Americas, most of them into plantation slavery.\(^{51}\) The number of those who did not make it to the colonies was even higher, the death-toll during the Middle Passage being matched by the trade’s devastating consequences on the African continent.\(^{52}\) The overwhelming historiographic data with their facts and figures are, however, of little help when it comes to gaining an understanding of what it meant to be subject to the relentless economic logic of the trade, the Middle Passage, and plantation slavery, and what individual and collective suffering this involved. Often, literary articulation is called for here; but literature faces its very own problems. Is it at all possible to make the horror and suffering of Atlantic slavery accessible to aesthetic experience in any convincing way? And, if so, how can the writer do literary


\(^{52}\) James Walvin assumes that about half of all slaves died even before they were put on board the ships. If figures are at all able to capture the fatal consequences of the slave trade, it is interesting to note that in 1850, around 25 million people lived in all of Africa. According to recent estimations, the population would have been around 46 to 53 million without the trade. Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (Washington DC: Howard UP, 1994): 321.
justice, as it were, to the victims? Such questions have so far played a surprisingly small part in the reception and discussion of Black Atlantic writing. Analogical representation may help. To resolve the tensions between fictional aesthetic representation and ethical responsibility when it comes to histories of immeasurable suffering, it is thus instructive to turn to another historical crime and its depiction in writing and art.

The Jewish Holocaust triggered worldwide critical debate on the possibilities and problems of writing about what happened at Auschwitz and elsewhere. To cast some light on Caryl Phillips’s choice of narrative strategy, I will review some of the voices involved in Holocaust studies. This is in no way meant to blur the fundamental historical and ideological differences between the Holocaust and Atlantic slavery, or to pit them against each other. As Paul Gilroy argues in *The Black Atlantic*, setting the Holocaust and Atlantic slavery in relation “need not in any way undermine the uniqueness of the Holocaust. It is therefore essential,” he continues, “not to use that invocation of uniqueness to close down the possibility that a combined if not comparative discussion of its horrors […] might be fruitful in making sense of modern racism.” This, I should add, is also true for any comparative analysis of how historical suffering is dealt with in the domain of imaginative literature.

The fundamental problem of literary representations of suffering has perhaps been best put in a nutshell by Theodor W. Adorno; some years after his provocative proclamation that poetry writing after Auschwitz was an act of barbarism, he stated the following dilemma:

> The morality that forbids art to forget [the suffering] for a second slides off into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic stylistic principle […] make[s] the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed. By this alone an injustice is done to the victims, yet no art that avoided the victims could stand up to the demands of justice.

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The mnemonic design of Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge* owes much to the endeavour of coping with this dilemma; what Adorno refers to as historical “justice” to the victims and their lives lies at the heart of Phillips’s narrative attempts to memorialize them.

Unlike David Dabydeen, whose alternative mnemonic approach to Atlantic slavery will be traced in the next chapter, Phillips views the term ‘aesthetics’ as being restricted largely to the formal aspects of writing. Dabydeen claims that he is trying to aestheticize suffering in his fiction – such a thing is inconceivable for Phillips:

I wouldn’t lay claim to anything as grand as the aesthetics of suffering […] the only type of aesthetics I am interested in [is] the form, formal aesthetics. As for the lives of the actual people – I would not want to lay claims to whether or not anybody’s suffering can be aesthetic or not. People who suffer suffer.56

Consequently, for Phillips it is not so much the idea – of aestheticization, for instance – that counts in a novel but, rather, a fundamental sense of responsibility to the characters whose life is to be told with utmost sincerity and care. He notes, “the idea isn’t enough. […] If a character doesn’t speak to me, no matter how strong an idea I have, if I don’t feel I can engage him or her to some extent and arrest that character and be their guardian, then I won’t pursue it.”57 The fact that he needs his characters to speak to him – a poetological concept he took over from his friend and mentor James Baldwin58 – is repeatedly emphasized by Phillips in several interviews. It seems to be paramount for him that his characters gain something of a quasi-autonomous quality and integrity: “Unless I hear [a character] speak, I don’t have a novel, I don’t have a character because it will be my voice in [his or] her body.”59

Phillips’s statements thus reveal an acute sense of sincere dedication to both historical figures and the fictional characters in his writing. In this light, his montage of historical testimonies in new fictional contexts can be seen as

58 See C. Rosalind Bell, “Worlds Within: An Interview with Caryl Phillips,” 595.
a deliberate ethical choice. By means of his metonymic conserving rhetoric of integration, he initially avoids projecting too much of his own “voice” onto his characters’ “bodies,” and grants them the historical authenticity and autonomy necessary for him to engage with them in dialogue. Similarly, if we are to believe George Steiner, exclusive recourse to testimonial accounts was the key to the legitimate representation of the Holocaust. In his essays in Language and Silence, Steiner seriously doubts the value of fictional strategies of coming to terms with the persecution of European Jews; he claims that “fiction falls silent before the enormity of the fact, and before the vivid authority with which that fact can be rendered by unadorned report.”

Steiner’s claim (which, suspiciously, refers only to reports and testimonies by victims of the Holocaust) is at the same time questionable, albeit argued with dexterity, since it attributes an authenticity and factuality to the “unadorned report” which is somewhat problematic. I pointed out earlier that testimonial accounts are in themselves inevitably fictional – what they recall is discursively structured, largely manipulated by psychological processes of anamnesis, and, last but not least, subject to ideological constraints and social discourses of power. Phillips, in his use of testimonies, however, is fully aware of the problematic nature of testimonies in general, and of the ideological discourses surrounding them in particular. Thus, on the one hand, he expresses fundamental respect and ethical responsibility towards the witnesses, as shown in the seamless amalgamation of historical testimonies and the fictional narrative voices. On the other hand, he is also careful to intimate the limited vision and ideological masquerade of the texts. This is achieved mainly by juxtaposing the voices of all three parts of Cambridge in a dynamic dialogue exposing the vanities and silences on all sides – but more about that later. In themselves, moreover, the individual narrative voices expose a number of contradictions in Phillips’s novel. These carefully inserted narrative ‘unreliabilities’ sow seeds of doubt regarding the objectivity of the accounts rendered.

If this effect relies largely on the fact that Phillips managed to compose coherent, self-sustaining narrative voices from the assembled source-material, it is important to note another important side-effect. Instead of merely deconstructing the fictional element in testimonial accounts, Phillips stresses the importance of fiction alongside documentary evidence. It is precisely the fic-

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60 George Steiner, Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman (New York: Atheneum, 1967): 388. Steiner, of course, violated this dictum himself with his controversial novel The Portage to San Christobal of A.H., which does not approach the problem of representing Nazism and the holocaust in an “unadorned report,” but metaphorically and metaphysically.
tional component of writing about histories of suffering that has endless positive potential when compared to the mere focus on documents and “reports” favoured by Steiner. With regard to the Holocaust, this has been made quite clear by the German writer Günther Anders, who sees a growing danger of abstraction if the only legitimate representation of history is reduced to purportedly factual accounts and figures. Anders argues that the impersonal facts of the Holocaust are actually too gigantic to be digested or comprehended as such, and are thus increasingly denied *tout court*. It is in strategies of fictionalization, in dramatizing the impact of the Holocaust on individual subjects, that this denial and the desire to forget can be confronted and overcome. Thus, in his essay “Nach ‘Holocaust’” (in response to critical reactions to the movie *Holocaust* claiming that it personalized and thus played down the historical horrors) he states: “This lesson must not be unlearned: It is only through fiction that the facts, only through singular cases that the uncountable will become clear and unforgettable.”

It is essential, therefore, to acknowledge both the impressive achievement of *Cambridge* as a fiction and its mnemonic *Aufhebung* of earlier testimonies of slavery.

Finally, a third area of ethical implication in the formal composition of the novel should not be overlooked. It is in the form, after all, that Phillips locates aesthetic significance. Phillips’s decision to construct *Cambridge* as a montage of textual fragments is of particular note here, inasmuch as the book, on the level of form, remains very much cracked and fissured beneath a largely homogeneous surface. At first glance, *Cambridge* seems to be located in a typically Western tradition: Emily’s journal and Part Three are rooted in European ethnography, while Cambridge’s tale largely conforms with what Marie Louise Pratt has termed “autoethnographic” writing – subaltern texts that engage with the colonizer’s terms and conventions. From underneath, however, there emerges a truly hybrid aesthetic.

In his essay “The Novels of the Americas,” Édouard Glissant argues that Caribbean poetics are rooted in an historical experience which makes any claims to temporal linearity and spatial unity as implied in much of Western

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62 Marie Louise Pratt coins this term in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*: “‘autoethnography’ or ‘autoethnographic expression.’ I use the terms to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) Others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (7).
thought both deeply suspect and impossible. In the experiences of the Antilles, Glissant writes,

exploded, suffered time is linked to "transferred" space. I have in mind African space as much as Breton space, the "memory" of which has become stamped on the spatial reality that we all live. To confront time is, therefore, for us to deny its linear structure. All chronology is too immediately obvious, and in the works of the American novelist we must struggle against time in order to reconstitute the past [...] 63

Read intertextually as a clash between numerous fragments of heterogeneous text, Phillips's literary montage perfectly embodies the "explosion" of formal and temporal unity as Glissant describes it. As such, the subcutaneous dissolution of the appearance of coherence on the skin of the narrative also powerfully reflects the suffering and disorientation of the characters whose voices we experience.64 In an intriguing parallel, the experiences of 'dispossession', 'uprooting' and 'displacement' suffered on the story-level by Cambridge and Emily correspond in a way to the basic discursive practice of montage. Phillips's narrative technique also consists of 'uprooting' and 'displacing' the material of older texts about slavery and the slave trade. More important, however, is this subliminally fissured, fragmentary textual presence, mirroring the inner turmoil and painful marginality behind the seemingly composed façade of the protagonists’ circumstances.

The formal, aesthetic dimension of the Holocaust, too, is seen as promising a way out of the ethical dilemma outlined at the beginning of this discussion. While Adorno holds that one must at all costs avoid making historical suffering a central element in the story, he suggests that a purely formal representation in fact may succeed by dramatizing the work of art as a mirror of its own impossibility.65 I am, in fact – as Phillips would be as well – somewhat


64 "If you are writing about diaspora, dispossession, historical fracture, people being uprooted and displaced,” Caryl Phillips argues, “then perhaps it doesn’t make any kind of logical sense to try to do it with one set of unities [...] If I am writing about these kinds of diasporic topics then the structure will move in that direction.” Phillips in Lars Ecksstein, “The Insistence of Voices,” 39.

65 "In den Formen,” Adorno claims, “wird Grausamkeit zur Imagination: aus einem Lebendigen, dem Leib der Sprache, den Tönen, der sichtbaren Erfahrung etwas heraus-schneiden. Je reiner die Form, je höher die Autonomie der Werke, desto grausamer sind sie” [In the forms, cruelty is rendered to the imagination: to cut something from
sceptical about the exclusivism detectable in Adorno’s mirror-theory, and about his elitist dismissal of all but avant-garde art. But the ideas of Adorno or George Steiner or Günther Anders can hardly suffice to explain the creative impulse behind Cambridge. Rather, the mnemonic design of the novel is also rooted in an ethic that carefully negotiates all three different ways out of the dilemma without sacrificing any of them. The novel engages simultaneously in respectful conservation, in effective fictional configuration, and in the expressive formal dramatization of the mnemonic resources it writes back to.

The democratization of cultural memory

There remains the question of how Phillips’s mnemonic design in Cambridge positions itself vis-à-vis external, social discourses of memory. There certainly must be a political motivation in the make-up of the novel, not least since the author himself repeatedly affirms his social responsibility as a writer. In order to determine how Phillips tackles the “redressing” of Black Atlantic history in Cambridge, I will now look at the parameters of intensity of mnemonic reference outlined in the first part of this study with reference to Manfred Pfister – the communicativeness, structurality, selectiveness, and dialogic potential of the mnemonic system of the novel.

The first, and fundamental, question: is it really possible for the reader to perceive the intertextual dimension of the novel? The communicativeness of Phillips’s mnemonic design is of paramount importance here – after all, a political motivation can ultimately only be attributed to mnemonic references that are marked clearly enough for the reader to be able to properly acknowledge them. In the critical reception of Cambridge, little attention has been paid to the dimension of montage (with the exception of Evelyn O’Callaghan’s excellent essay). This certainly has to do with an apparent lack of something alive, from the body of language, of sound, of visual experience: The higher the autonomy of works of art, the crueler they are]. Theodor W. Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, in Gesammelte Schriften (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), vol. 7: 80.

66 “You do become aware of the possibility of being somebody who can identify a history and perhaps do something about redressing the imbalance of some ills and falsehoods that have been perpetrated by others about your own history.” Phillips, in Carol Margaret Davidson, “Crisscrossing the River: An Interview with Caryl Phillips,” ARIEL 25.4 (October 1994): 96–97.

67 The parameter ‘auto-reflexivity’ does not play any considerable role in the discussion of mnemonic intensity: The novel hardly communicates about its references on a meta-level. This does not mean that memory is largely unimportant; on the contrary, the prologue and epilogue for instance prominently feature a ‘frame within the frame’, in that both the third and the fifth last sentence of the novel states: “She remembered.”
marking in text, paratext,68 and context. In individual instances, this absence has even provoked heated criticism; Françoise Charras, for instance, writes, in reaction to O’Callaghan’s findings:

This gross impression of déjà vu, illustrated by O’Callaghan’s references to Phillips’s sources, cannot be felt as intellectually satisfactory, and the use of pastiche to the point of plagiarism is barely acceptable from a literary point of view. The abusive usage of the models is obviously the most controversial and objectionable aspect of Phillips’s novel, a point that should not be so easily dealt with or eluded. Even in fiction, there are ways of acknowledging one’s sources, were it only by the use of an epigraph or typographical conventions.69

I hope to have made sufficiently clear by now that Phillips’s creative composition of narrative voices from bits and pieces of older text does everything but use its material “abusively,” in an imaginative achievement that belies all claims of plagiarism. Charras’ allegations fail to take account of the dimension of montage in Cambridge. Acknowledging all sources would have meant to include an improbable list of over twenty titles in the paratext; her alternative suggestion, of marking all quotations typographically, would have meant the typographical disfiguration of the entire novel. Charras also fails to notice that there are in fact exemplary passages that are marked typographically. In the first couple of pages, for instance, there is a straight quotation from Coleridge (8) which is indented and printed in italics; furthermore, there are two passages (about “sea terms”) taken over directly from Lewis (8–9, 10, see Appendix) which use different print and spacing. Phillips thus does provide some initial assistance to the reader towards an awareness of his referential design. The fact that Phillips goes no further than this has, I assume, more to do with wanting his novel to work both on the narrative surface, as a psychologically complex juxtaposition of two narrators and their tales, and as a fragmentary, intertextual work of art. The explicit marking of all sources would have immediately reduced the novel to an exercise in intertextuality.

I take it that Caryl Phillips could reasonably expect his readership to take the step from initial déjà vu to the discovery of his pervasive use of montage.

68 A paratextual marking in the foreword was indeed intended in the first draft of Cambridge, where the reference to the most important source passage from Flannigan (later adapted in Part III of Cambridge) was to be included.

As the Cuban critic and writer Antonio Benítez–Rojo has underscored, attention to the referential quality of texts should be paramount in reading literature from and about the West Indies: “the time has come for postindustrial society to start rereading the Caribbean, that is, to do the kind of reading in which every text begins to reveal its own textuality.” And certainly, Phillips’s novel does not express any ‘anxiety of influence’, but instead quite deliberately refers to older texts to re-familiarize them for today’s readers. In his letter to Edwards, Phillips accordingly wrote: “I am no more worried about being ‘found out’ with reference to the Cambridge material, than I am with reference to the girl’s”; moreover, in this admittedly private correspondence, he even expresses his hopes that Cambridge will eventually make readers consciously seek out the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century originals: “It might even send them back to the original sources to find out more.”

Nevertheless, it is still difficult to explain why Phillips decided not to mark his references a little more explicitly, even though they are communicative, if not to the degree that they might be. The communicativeness of the novel’s intertextual dimension relies largely on the intensity of another parameter – the structurality of narrative reference, which is extremely high; Phillips’s use of montage is pervasive in all three main parts of the novel. More than this, quotation actually serves as the constitutive generative principle of Cambridge. The centrality of mnemonic reference to the fundamental structure of the novel adds considerably to its communicativeness; we are dealing with what Ulrich Broich calls a “context of permanent intertextuality which makes the reader search for less overt or completely unmarked allusions.”

A third parameter of intensity that is vitally important for the interpretation of Cambridge is the selectiveness of mnemonic reference. This essentially distinguishes more general allusions to earlier mnemonic data from specific references that focus on discrete units of pre-text, image or music. Quotations are highly selective in this regard, since they cut discrete words, phrases or sentences out of specific earlier writings and transpose them into new literary contexts. This is particularly relevant in the case of Cambridge, where selective intertextual references function synecdochically: if a reader spots the source of a quotation and is sufficiently familiar with it, the entire pre-text

enters into the mnemonic dialogicity of the novel. It is more than selective passages that contribute to the new configuration of meaning – the individual source-texts themselves are being lifted, as it were, onto a new level of mnemonic valency. To understand better the implications of this phenomenon, it is helpful to return briefly to Aleida Assmann’s conception of two “Modes of Memory.”

Assmann traces a modern philosophical development from Friedrich Nietzsche to Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora that expresses an increasing dichotomization of the spheres of recollection into ‘memory’ and ‘history’. The term ‘memory’ here corresponds to a notion that Assmann calls “inhabited,” where memory belongs to an individual, group, or other agency that actively derives norms and values from it, and uses it to negotiate identity. At the opposite remove, history is seen as “uninhabited memory,” comprising all those manifestations of memory that are not linked up with any individual or collective agency, such as the resources of libraries, archives, universities, etc. In these uninhabited realms, knowledge is merely anonymously stored without any sense of priority; norms and values are, in effect, suspended. Crucial with regard to Cambridge is Assmann’s rejection of the radical opposition of inhabited and uninhabited memories posited by Pierre Nora, for instance. Instead, she proposes the employment of the terms “working memory” (Funktionsgedächtnis) and “storage memory” (Speichergedächtnis), which posit a constant flux of mnemonic content between them. The disappearance of mnemonic elements from working memories is in fact something that happens all the time; the data, however, does not get lost altogether but more often than not remains within the realm of storage memory and can thus be re-activated into working memory:

Nothing is more familiar to us than the permanent removal of forgetting, the irretrievable loss of valued knowledge and vital experiences. Underneath the roof of the historical sciences, these uninhabited relicts and abandoned resources can be stored; they can also be refurbished.

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72 “Together with the quotation, the entire pretext will be involved in the new constitution of meaning.” Manfred Pfister, “Konzepte der Intertextualität,” in Intertextualität, ed. Broich & Pfister, 29 (tr. L.E.).


again in a way that they offer new possibilities of connecting to working memory.75

Precisely such a refurbishing of “abandoned resources” lies at the heart of Cambridge. In his montage, Caryl Phillips uses material which, as he explained to Paul Edwards, “is largely (though by no means totally) inaccessible to the general reading public,” and thus banned from social working memory to the storage facilities of archive and academy. Throughout the novel, these older texts are resurrected into a communicative sphere of memory where they can be considered afresh in negotiating contemporary norms and values. In this context, the dual operation of Cambridge as immediate textual surface and as fragmentary, intertextual work of art is of central importance: only through his elaborate integration of the sources into more or less coherent, unique narratives can Phillips compel his readers to engage fully with the voices they encounter, and to negotiate their own position ideologically as twentieth- or twenty-first-century readers against the ideal readers implied in the older narratives. Cambridge enlists arresting narrative voices that encourage an emotional engagement instead of a merely intellectual one, in order to enable the Aufhebung of mnemonic content into the realm of working memory.76

The specific mnemonic design of Cambridge thus encourages, or even demands, the incorporation of its source-texts into a negotiation of contemporary values. By looking at one last parameter of mnemonic intensity – the dialogic potential embedded in the specific constitution of narrative meaning – it is possible to see how this impulse to renegotiate arises. In doing so, I would like to recall the “matrix of dialogic relations” in narrative texts posited in the first part of this study by extending one of Mikhail Bakhtin’s fundamental arguments. I argued that the meaning of a narrative palimpsest essentially unfolds by negotiating a horizontal and a vertical axis of dialogue. The vertical axis bridges the different levels of narration – the level of an implicit author; the level of character; the level of the mnemonic referents – while the horizontal axis covers the various ideological facets of voicing on each individual level. In a Bakhtinian sense, the dialogic potential in any of the con-


receivable variations of dialogue in the resulting matrix will increase in intensity in step with any sharpening of ideological conflict between voices.

The strictly vertical dimension of dialogue in *Cambridge* is largely devoid of ideological conflict. This is due, first, to the metonymic integration of the sources, which largely preserves the ideological stance of the original passages. Surprisingly enough, this is not only true of the discrete units of pre-text that are quoted, but it also applies roughly to the entire source texts as such. Thus, the characterization of Cambridge simply expresses powerfully such traits – for instance, his English patriotism or his Christian ideals – as were already present in Equiano, Cugoano or Gronniosaw. In a quite similar way, there is ideological coherence between Emily’s journal and the sources that it writes back to. Apart from certain individual nuances, interests, and regional as well as temporal contexts, the overall ideology insinuates a more or less pronounced adherence to the idea of abolishing slavery – a goal, however, that is jettisoned as a romantically humanist notion in the face of the dire economic and moral circumstances obtaining on the plantations – and therefore as something that must still await its time. Conspicuously present in both Emily’s tale and its sources is the ‘colonial gaze’, the perspective on the Caribbean situation through ‘imperial eyes’. Further, the vertical dialogue in *Cambridge* betrays a low level of conflict, since there is little overt authorial judgement to be perceived throughout. Phillips does have a point, therefore, when he responds to the question “what makes a novel, for you” as follows:

I’m not present, the characters are totally in the force. I’m invisible.
I’m able to submit to the drive of the characters in the fictional world.
At the same time the themes and ideas that it’s tackling are absolutely essential to my own growth, intellectually and emotionally. I hide behind the characters and let them have the issues.77

On the whole, the full potential of ideological conflict is rooted in horizontal and diagonal dialogue between competing voices. This involves, first of all, the negotiation of Emily’s and Cambridge’s voices: an understanding of the novel depends on the reader’s coming to terms with their fundamentally different ideologues. Furthermore, Phillips’s pervasive use of montage requires the reader – provided he or she is aware of the intertextual dimension – to account for the source texts as well. On the one hand, these enter into dialogue with the competing narrative voices of the novel; on the other, in accordance with the dialogic tension between Emily’s and Cambridge’s accounts, they will also be pitted ideologically against each other. It is thus that Phillips

manages to stage not only the confrontation between two fictional characters, but also that between two entire literary and ideological discourses. In this confrontation, a representative party of early black British writers in the late eighteenth century encounters a considerable number of British romantic and early Victorian writers of travelogues and histories, equally representative of an entire ideological tradition.78

In this dialogic confrontation of two oppositional traditions and their first hand accounts of slavery, Phillips effectively reveals the pervasive manipulations and distortions in the testimonies, with respect both to the accounts of the white advocates and to those of the black victims of slavery. It is within the process of dialogic confrontation, then, that the mnemonic design of Cambridge transcends strategies of participation and conservation. Particularly the testimonies’ complicity with certain discourses of power is starkly dramatized. In Phillips’s mnemonic design, participation and subversion thus go hand in hand: “I enjoy reading first-person historical material,” Phillips puts it, “because it gives the most interesting window on the past. But I’m also interested in subverting, if you like, the form, because all too often there’s a self-serving nature behind these narratives.”79

The subversion of pre-texts in Emily’s journal is quite evident in this respect. The colonial perceptions of Caribbean slavery and the individual slaves, ranging from ‘beasts’ through unspoiled ‘noble savage’ to ‘childlike brutes’, are challenged by the sophisticated accounts given by Cambridge and, by extension, such chroniclers as Equiano. It is only in the dialogue with the ‘Other’ that the ideological masquerade and self-delusion of the colonial texts surfaces. But critical light is cast not only on the imperial writings but also on

78 The prominence of “Monk” Lewis in the mnemonic design of the novel indirectly associates further literary figures such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who celebrated the Journal of a West India Proprietor in Table Talk (20 March 1834) as Lewis’s most valuable achievement: “Lewis’s Jamaica Journal is delightful; it is almost the only unaffected book of travels or touring I have read of late years. You have the man himself, and not an inconsiderable man, – certainly a much finer mind than I supposed before from the perusal of his romances, etc. It is by far his best work, and will live and be popular” (quoted from Mona Wilson, “Introduction” to M.G. Lewis, Journal of a West India Proprietor, 1). Caryl Phillips stresses that also the “Brontës knew all about slavery, as did Jane Austen. The Brontës were right there; they weren’t in favor of slavery, but they knew what the deal was” (Louise Yelin, “An Interview with Caryl Phillips,” 54). For insight into Jane Austen’s ambivalent position concerning Caribbean slavery, see Edward Said, “Jane Austen and Empire,” in Culture and Imperialism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993): 95-116.

the genre of the slave narrative. The immediate juxtaposition of early testimonies by British slaves with the accounts of white travellers to the Caribbean makes it very clear that, despite the fundamentally different views of slavery, there are a number of discursive parallels which indicate a mental indebtedness to aspects of the colonizer’s discourse. A case in point would be the ready identification of Cambridge, Equiano and Gronniosaw with the superiority of British civilization, as well as their constant recourse to patriarchal Christian ideas.

However, there is more than mere subversion involved here. The dialogic confrontation with Emily’s voice and its sources essentially serves as an expressive supplement to Cambridge’s narrative. At no stage in the three parts of the novel do we come across an explicit expression, in all its sordid detail, of the sufferings of the African diaspora, yet this suffering is evoked \textit{ex negativo}, as it were, in the pervasive racism of the British travelogues and histories. The ostensible absence of trauma in the narratives of Cambridge, Gronniosaw or Equiano is evoked artistically by having the reader fill in the gaps and fissures resulting from the massive discrepancies between their accounts and the dehumanizing perspective of the British travellers and historians.

This renegotiation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century testimonial accounts within the realm of working memory, then, is essentially concerned with the \textit{democratization of cultural memory}. Phillips’s mnemonic design clearly suggests that simply by dialogically juxtaposing a representative number of different points of view, both marginal and central, we may arrive at a deeper, and approximately just, understanding of historical phenomena. It is only in the multiplicity of perspectives that unfolds in the subterranean polyphony of \textit{Cambridge} that history and its stories can be made sense of in a democratic dialogue between equal partners, a sense that is to be transformed into a sense of responsibility for both the past and the future. The allegorical quality of \textit{Cambridge}’s mnemonic design is all the more powerful for being written against a \textit{monologic} tradition of history-writing that reaches far into the twentieth century. In this context, it is finally possible to make better sense of the incorporation of Lowell J. Ragatz’ \textit{The Fall of the Planter Class in the Caribbean}, dating from 1928, which precisely accounts for the documentary evidence of just one party. As has already been shown, the semantic potential of this purportedly objective piece of twentieth-century historiography fits almost seamlessly into Phillips’s montage alongside the much older testimonial accounts of Flannigan, Shaw, Lewis, Carmichael and others (see the Appendix). In this way, \textit{Cambridge} points unmistakably to a broader continuity of racist thought that has survived the abolition of slavery.
The framing of the novel with a prologue and epilogue which feature a decidedly modern and familiar language and style hints at the importance of renegotiating much older texts for our understanding of today’s realities. While most colonial testimonies of slavery have long disappeared from the working memory of today’s Black Atlantic societies into the realm of storage memory, the prejudices and stereotypes they conveyed have in fact not. With *Cambridge*, Phillips is thus taking a representative number of texts that lie at the root of contemporary racism and reactivating them within the working memory of Black Atlantic societies. The dialogic confrontation of their configurations of meaning with their ‘Other’ in form of the slave narrative aims at subversion – not only affecting the earlier writings, but above all effecting the revision of today’s racist philosophies:

The root of our problem – of all those people, white and non-white, who live in Europe or the Americas – is to do with the forces of the ‘peculiar institution’. You can’t expect something to characterise the relationship of Britain and the outside world for over two-and-a-half centuries and for it not to have deep reverberations still today. If we don’t understand, and I don’t think we do, the ‘multiple ironies’ […] then we have no possibility of understanding where we are or where we might be going.\(^80\)

The democratization of cultural memory in an egalitarian dialogue embracing those voices marginalized by dominant discourses – this is what constitutes Caryl Phillips’s politics of memory.

I would also propose that the specific mnemonic design outlined by focusing on the novel *Cambridge* is not a singular manifestation; it is, rather, typical of Phillips’s œuvre. A brief excursus into the two novels that come after *Cambridge* – *Crossing the River* (1993) and *The Nature of Blood* (1997)\(^81\) – will have to suffice here. In “The Pagan Coast,” the first part of *Crossing the River*, for instance, Nash’s letters from Liberia to his former owner and patron are written in montage and pastiche. At least some of the historical letters by repatriated African-American slaves used by Phillips are collected in Bell I. Wiley’s *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833–1869*.\(^82\) As such, they dialogically confront the third part of the novel, "Crossing the River," which

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quotes verbatim from the *Journal of a Slave Trader* by John Newton.\(^3\) Newton’s (rather, Hamilton’s, as Phillips’s fictional character is named) journal represents the inhuman log of a slave trader who subscribes to a purely economic logic and tragically manichaean world-view that is dismantled through juxtaposition with the penetrating voices of the African diaspora.

While Phillips, in *Crossing the River*, thus re-negotiates Black Atlantic voices, he turns to another demanding project in *The Nature of Blood*: This time, he tackles the difficult relations between the Jewish and African diasporas in Europe, again drawing on historical testimonies. The voice of Eva Stern, for instance, harbours dialogic reference to a number of Holocaust testimonies (which are not quite so obvious, owing to the intense poetic revision of her narrative, but present nevertheless). Some of these are the autobiographies of Eva Schloss, Trudi Briger, Isabella Leitner and, above all, Anne Frank.\(^4\) Their texts are set in dialogic relation to the experiences of black Europeans; thus, they are juxtaposed with the story of a young Ethiopian Jewish woman in 1980s Israel and with a further voice evoking the probably most famous black man in European literature, Othello.

This latter instance indicates that Phillips’s political conception of literary memory goes beyond the subversion of dominant historical voices; in fact, he emphasizes the importance of avoiding discursive closure against any manifestation of the ‘Other’. Any nation, any ethnic or religious group, and any individual is always tempted to reject “other narratives [...] and their difference,”\(^5\) and thus to marginalize others. The novel, for Phillips, is a site where the highly selective, monologic recollections of subjugation and suffering can be broken up and negotiated beyond the borders of ethnic, religious and

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national belonging. It is the very realm where Phillips can hope to give expression to a central desire:

a new world order of the twenty-first century [where] we are all being dealt an ambiguous hand, one which may eventually help us to accept the dignity which informs the limited participation of the migrant, the asylum-seeker, or the refugee.86

Caryl Phillips’s narrative mnemonic design conveys the vision of a transnational political and social culture whose return to Black Atlantic history involves less the attribution of guilt than the recovery of a sense of sincere responsibility for past, present and future.

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David Dabydeen, *A Harlot’s Progress*

My dizzy brain was half-caught, half-liberated, in Pacal’s sailing temple and it flew with the wings of art through Oblivion to the Conquest, into the fleet of the Middle Passage, running from Africa to America, into market places for the arts of flesh. I was liberated, in some degree, to see such a transaction within the home of Oblivion, Oblivion’s subtle and complex transfiguration in arts that are so alive they made me see abused flesh and blood, my own abused flesh and blood.

– Wilson Harris, *The Dark Jester*

David Dabydeen and Caryl Phillips are often closely associated when it comes to talking about the younger generation of British-Caribbean writers who have successfully established themselves over the past two decades or so. With regard to the mnemonic strategies in their writing, however, both writers take completely different paths, as I hope to demonstrate by investigating Dabydeen’s 1999 novel *A Harlot’s Progress*. This difference involves not only their mnemonic poetics but also, and above all, the political location of their art in the social discourses of memory. Besides using written testimonial accounts of eighteenth-century slavery, Dabydeen writes back to a visual tradition of representing Atlantic slavery in engravings and paintings. This is already indicated in the novel’s title – it is no accident that it matches the title of a set of engravings by William Hogarth dating from the year 1732 (see Figs. 1a–1f below). The novel’s intermedial mnemonic references to Hogarth, but also to a number of other painters and their pictures, will therefore form the focus of this chapter. It will become clear that Dabydeen’s way of appropriating his sources differs fundamentally from Phillips’s largely metonymic, conserving rhetorical strategies. On the basis of Dabydeen’s specific poetics of memory, I will throw some light on his correspondingly very different attitude to the role and potentiality of literature when it comes to the commemorative recuperation of Atlantic
slavery and the suffering it created. His politics of memory has very little indeed to do with Caryl Phillips’s notion of the ethical and aesthetic responsibilities of a writer. To start with, however, some relevant biographical facts providing a broader context within which A Harlot’s Progress can be read.

Dabydeen’s biography shows a number of parallels with Phillips’s, but a number of fundamental differences as well. Like Phillips, Dabydeen was born in the Caribbean in the 1950s (in December 1955, in Berbice, Guyana), attended English schools, and was one of the few coloured students of his time to obtain access to Oxbridge. Similarly, Dabydeen, who lived in Brixton in the 1970s, experienced the racist turmoil on British streets and the exclusion of Caribbean history and literature from English syllabuses. In contrast to Phillips, however, Dabydeen spent the first thirteen years of his life in the Caribbean; the experiences and landscapes of his childhood, he insists, have been highly relevant to his later writing. “The first ten, twelve years of your life are the formative years,” Dabydeen claims: “The imaginative part of me is Guyana.” His biographical point of reference is not primarily the African diaspora, but the (East) Indian diaspora. As a descendant of Indian indentured labourers, he grew up in an Indo-Guyanese neighbourhood, “surrounded by half-eclipsed memories of India that were gained through watching films or through […] observations of Hindu rituals.” Relations with the mainly urban Afro-Guyanese population were at best neighbourly, yet at times also tense: the Guyanese race riots between 1962 and 1964, for instance, forced his family to move out of New Amsterdam, where Dabydeen went to school, and retreat to rural Berbice, an experience still vivid in the writer’s memory. His interest in the history of the Atlantic slave trade and the representation of Africans in Western literature and the visual art thus only partly came about for biographical reasons; mostly, it belongs to an intellectual project he engaged in within the context of his postgraduate studies after shifting to England. The knowledge Dabydeen gained about Africa in his academic work, his partly biographical, partly intellectual Indian roots, and the ancient Amer-
David Dabydeen, A Harlot’s Progress

Indian heritage of Guyana – all this comes together in a dynamic, transcultural hybrid that he regards as an advantage and a privilege rather than an obstacle in his conception of self:

I am glad I’m a three or four-footed creature, a kind of latter-day Anansi as many West Indians are, a spider figure with one foot planted in Africa through my scholarship […] one in Europe, and one in our own society, Guyana, which has its own foot planted in South America. So it is potentially an endless series of poetic feet, landscapes, modes of feeling and thinking, and experiences that are available for us. We should see it as such as a privilege.5

In 1969, Dabydeen’s father decided to have his son with him in London (his parents had divorced by that time), yet took little interest in the teenager, who made a life for himself in multicultural South London, supervised only by the local youth office; his fascination for the arts and literature eventually gained him a scholarship to Cambridge. The experiences of these years formed the backbone of his first, largely biographical debut novel *The Intended*, which was published in 1991. Dabydeen’s literary career, however, started much earlier than that, with poetry. His first book of poems, *Slave Song* (1984), was received with much enthusiasm, as well as with isolated instances of severe irritation. Much critical praise has been lavished on the lyrical use of Guyanese creole in his poems, which revolve around the secret desires of impoverished cane cutters on a Guyanese plantation.6 The content of the poems, their drastic delineation of erotic, often violent interracial fantasies, has also provoked some voices to call for more ethical restraint.7 The taboo of eroticism in colonial relations, however, is something that Dabydeen wishes to overcome not only in *Slave Song*, but in all of his writings. With regard to his first volume of poetry, he notes that

the empire has been looked at from the perspective of sociology, history, political economy, etc.; but the empire was also an enormous erotic project. I was interested in bringing to the surface the latent eroticism of the encounter between black and white, because it seemed

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5 Dabydeen, in Frank Birbalsingh, “David Dabydeen: Coolie Odyssey,” 175.
6 In *Slave Song*, Dabydeen juxtaposes each Creole poem with a translation into Standard English.
In 1988, Dabydeen published *Coolie Odyssey*, another book of poems, and after *The Intended* (1991) two further novels saw the light of day. *Disappearance* (1993), in this respect, steps away from the biographical perspective of his debut novel to engage in a dialogue with an older generation of Caribbean writers. The narrative is again set between memories of Guyana and this time a rural southern English setting, and centres on the encounter between a young Guyanese engineer and his elderly, mysterious and well-travelled English landlady; in the course of this encounter, the rational, scientific worldview of the engineer crumbles, exposing the cracks and fissures in his post-colonial identity. The novel openly adverts to Wilson Harris’s oeuvre (particularly *The Secret Ladder*, a character in which, Fenwick, turns up in *Disappearance*), yet above all writes back to V.S. Naipaul and his novel *The Enigma of Arrival*: “I was writing my own novel about the English rural landscape very much writing to Naipaul and imitating, as far as possible, his style,” Dabydeen explains. “I wanted to write like Naipaul and undercut him with a series of disappearances and traumas that weren’t there in *Enigma of Arrival*.”

A critical engagement with the literary father-figure Naipaul can also be detected in the next novel, *The Counting House* (1996). Here Dabydeen turns from the British-Caribbean axis to the Indian-Guyanese history of indentured labour by recounting the fate of a young Indian couple who follow the prospect of landownership to the Caribbean. The promised land, however, receives them with a number of disillusionments and forces them to come to terms with their estrangement from their home cultures, families, and eventually also each other. The protagonist, whose name, ironically, is the same as Naipaul’s first name, Vidia, is referred to by Dabydeen as a typically “Naipaulian character” with a desperate desire for money and status.

More central to the specific poetics of memory I will focus on in this chapter, however, are Dabydeen’s epic poem “Turner,” which was published

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10 “And he is very weak and vulnerable and concerned with money. He can’t make love with relish. In my mind I was thinking of a Naipaulian character.” Dabydeen, in Chelva Kanaganayakam, “David Dabydeen,” in *Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and Their World* (Toronto: TSAR, 1995): 30.
in 1994 in *Turner: New and Selected Poems,* and above all, of course, his 1999 novel *A Harlot’s Progress.* In these works, the historical imagination and its artistic rendering are bound up more closely than before in a dialogue with the visual arts. “*Turner*” and *A Harlot’s Progress* thus engage in a literary project that largely builds on Dabydeen’s postdoctorate research at Oxford, Yale and Warwick during the 1980s. The publications that grew out of this period investigate the black presence in British art and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The literary presence is tackled in editorial projects such as *The Black Presence in English Literature* and the anthology *Black Writers in Britain* (in collaboration with Paul Edwards). It has been the visual presence of blacks and the larger context of slavery, however, that has fascinated Dabydeen, particularly in his 1985 study *Hogarth’s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art.* It is rooted in the observation of the conspicuous presence of black people in eighteenth-century England, which was consequently also reflected in the arts; this presence, however, has been largely overlooked or wilfully ignored in most critical reflections. This was particularly true of William Hogarth’s works, and this absence was a cue for Dabydeen to examine closely the role and ideological employment of black figures in Hogarth’s paintings and engravings. Dabydeen’s familiarity and engagement with eighteenth-century arts in general and Hogarth specifically has also resulted in another study, *Hogarth, Walpole and Commercial Britain* (1987), the scope of which extends beyond the presence of individual black characters to encompass the larger perspective of exploitation and corruption. Exploitative political, financial and clerical elites, in this context, relied largely on a constant flow of money from Caribbean plantations. Hogarth, Dabydeen argues, was very much aware of these processes – his cycle “*A Harlot’s Progress*” is not to be read as a simple moral tale but, rather, as a political allegory.

In the epic poem “*Turner,*” Dabydeen applies his academic expertise in the visual arts to the creation of a stunning piece of ekphrastic literature: i.e.

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writing that engages in an intimate dialogue with manifest images. The starting-point for, and aesthetic foil of, “Turner” is the painting “Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhon [sic] Coming On” by the English Romantic artist J.M.W. Turner, which was first exhibited in 1840. The image, also simply known as “Slave Ship,” depicts a stormy, sublime seascape dominated by hues of brown and red; just left of the centre, a ship struggles in a turmoil of waves, while at the bottom right, the shackled leg of an African slave, attacked by fish and seagulls, emerges from the waters (Fig. 6). While it is most likely that Turner’s inspiration for “Slave Ship” is to be found in James Thomson’s poem “The Seasons,” 15 it is probable that he was also referring to the events on the slaver Zong in December 1781.16 Justifying his acts with an alleged shortage of water and the danger of epidemic among his ‘cargo’, the ship’s captain, Luke Collingwood, dumped 132 living slaves into the sea; his true motivation for this mass murder, however, was rooted in a purely economic calculation which relied on the fact that the insurance money for ‘lost cargo’ would have exceeded the estimated profit from selling the surviving slaves. It was Olaudah Equiano who got word of Collingwood’s actions and reported them to the renowned abolitionist and philanthropist Granville Sharp; Sharp, in turn, managed to bring the Zong case to court, where Collingwood and his crew, with enormous public interest, were put on trial before Judge Lord Mansfield.17

In “Turner,” Dabydeen gives voice to the drowned African in the foreground of Turner’s “Slave Ship,” lyrically mirroring the endless rhythm of the raging Atlantic:


My poem focuses on the submerged head of the African in the foreground of Turner’s painting. It has been drowned in Turner’s (and other artists’) sea for centuries. When it awakens it can only partially recall the sources of its life, so it invents a body, a biography, and peoples an imagined landscape. (Turner, ix)

The re-creation of idyllic pasts and futures, however, is suddenly interrupted when the speaker confronts a stillborn child dumped by a later slaver. He tries to serve as both father and mother to this latest victim of the trade (he calls the child “Turner,” just like the pederast captain of his own aborted middle passage) and offers his fantasies of an African idyll as consolation. The child, however, “his unconscious and his origin,” as Dabydeen explains, “cannot bear the future and its inventions, drowned as it is in memory of ancient cruelty” (Turner, x). Much more could be said about “Turner,” and its relevance to Dabydeen’s conception of ekphrastic writing about the memory and forgetting of histories of suffering. I propose delaying this discussion, however, as Turner’s “Slave Ship” also matters in A Harlot’s Progress. The novel, in fact, partly rewrites the earlier poem “Turner” in prose style and thus incorporates it into its specific mnemonic design.

A Harlot’s Progress is a novel consisting of a prologue followed by nine narrative sections, these parts varying considerably in length. The Prologue establishes an extradiegetic frame which is repeatedly taken up throughout the following parts. Thomas Pringle, the young secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, tracks down “Mungo,” the oldest living black person in late-eighteenth-century London, to try and solicit his story, which he hopes to publish in a slave-narrative format. What attracts him particularly is Mungo’s long-forgotten fame as a character in Hogarth’s popular cycle of engravings “A Harlot’s Progress,” which depicts him as the young black servant to the prostitute Mary “Moll” Hackabout in Plate II.18 Mungo’s story, in the form of “a sober testimony that will appeal to the Christian charity of an enlightened citizenry” (5),19 would, Pringle suspects, bring good money for the abolitionist cause, provided it stays with the popular convention of the slave narrative

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18 Hogarth’s cycle (see Figs. 1a–1f) recounts the “progress” of the prostitute Mary “Moll” Hackabout in six images. It begins with Moll’s arrival in London, depicts her as a mistress to a rich Jew, shows her conviction for theft and successive labour in a prison, and ends with her death of venereal disease. I will go into the images in closer detail at a later stage; the second image, which portrays Moll as mistress to the Jew, features the little slave boy whom Dabydeen promotes to the protagonist in his version of A Harlot’s Progress.

and spiritual autobiography. He thus already outlines a narrative grid – based mainly on what he infers about Mungo’s life from Hogarth’s prints – in which he intends to accommodate Mungo’s accounts:

He orders his notebook with a series of chapter headings:

1. Africa.
2. Voyage to the Americas in Slave Ship.
4. Voyage to England with Captain Thistlewood.
5. Service in Household of Lord Montague.
6. Purchase of Mungo by Mr Gideon, a Jew.
8. Descent into the Mire of Poverty and Disease.
9. Redemption of Mungo by the Committee for the Abolition of Slavery.

Mungo, however, refutes Pringle’s notions of linearity and rationality. In the chapters that follow, he creates – in a similar manner to the speaker in “Turner” – a number of alternative, yet throughout contradictory, versions of his biography. His stories, it can be assumed, are often based on instances of memory – much of what he narrates, however, seem to be outright fictional inventions of a mind burdened by traumatic experiences, yet also full of malice in the face of Pringle’s selfish plans: “I can change memory like I can change my posture,” Mungo claims, “and babble into [Pringle’s] blank pages the most lively of syllables” (2).

The nine individual parts of the novel, which initially seem to conform with Pringle’s grid yet soon jump its grooves, are all introduced by a small visual detail reproduced from one or other plate of Hogarth’s “A Harlot’s Progress.” For Part One, the detail chosen represents the boy slave in Plate II (Figs. 1b and 1i). The subsequent narrative accordingly introduces us to Mungo’s childhood in Africa, revolving around his native village and its inhabitants, such as his parents, the spiritual leader Manu, Kaka the beggar, the lame Ellar, and the rich man Tanda. They will all return repeatedly in later narrative versions of Mungo’s past and in his dreams in new configurations and associations. This particular story involves a young companion, Saba, whom Mungo forces to eat a dish intended as a sacrifice to the village gods – a severe transgression, for which Mungo is branded with the sign of evil on his forehead by the village headman.

In the second part of the novel (introduced by the image of falling and shattered china in Hogarth’s Plate II), the previous story is immediately contradicted by a narrative version claiming that Mungo did not in fact grow up with his parents, but with the widow Rima. Rima, in accordance with village
custom (“Rima explained to me the anthropology of our tribal doings, or else I dreamt them out of selfloathing” 28), was expelled from the village after she failed to bear the children of other villagers after her husband died. The second part, in fact, depicts several variations of Mungo’s childhood, closing with an account of how the slave-ship captain Thomas Thistlewood raids his village, kills Rima and all the others, and carries him off to the coast.

The third and fourth part of the novel are concerned with Mungo’s crossing of the Atlantic with Thistlewood. Thistlewood burns his initials on the boy’s forehead to mark him as his possession and introduces him to the English language, culture and religion, while he takes sadistic pleasure in sexually abusing him. The details from Hogarth’s second plate chosen to introduce these sequences ironically comment on Thistlewood’s mistreatment: Part Three is illustrated with Moll’s escaping lover; Part Four features a reproduction of a white mask and a mirror, hinting at the schizophrenic moral standards of the captain. Both parts describe in intimate detail the shipboard suffering and torture of fellow slaves, whom Mungo, in a state of delusion, identifies as his former fellow villagers; their African lives are intermittently recounted in new variations, in which Mungo assumes constantly new roles.

The fifth, and by far longest part of the novel (introduced by the image of the maid in Hogarth’s Plate III) takes the story to London. The new setting Mungo finds himself in is a damp basement in which he is to be cleaned and fattened up for the auction block by the poor laundrywoman Betty. Throughout, Mungo is still haunted by his African past, which constantly crops up in his dreams – one version, for instance, recounts a legend according to which his tribe had been colonized by the Greeks, whose knowledge Mungo inherits, as the mark on his forehead, a peia, shows. Apart from Mungo’s memories, however, it is also Betty’s past that unfolds in a similarly confusing array of different accounts which cannot be pinned down to one authoritative version. Elements of her story involve her flight from rural Yorkshire, her friendship with the young and beautiful Mary while working in the household of the Montague family, Mary’s execution for stealing, and eventually Betty’s new job as a laundrywoman for Thistlewood.

Part Five and Six are set in the Montague household. Lord Montague, a diplomat in the royal service, buys Mungo (and a Pietà by Mantegna) as a present for his wife. Mungo is bought essentially to replace Lady Montague’s deceased pet monkey (a reproduction of the pet monkey in Hogarth’s Plate II accordingly introduces this chapter; see Figs. 1b and 1h); moreover, Mungo is also there to distract Lady Montague, who is increasingly violating her ‘rightful’ domestic position by meddling in political issues. In particular, she frustrates her husband by insisting on discussions of the “Thistlewood case” (obviously modelled on the historical Zong case) and various newspaper reports
of slaves dumped in the sea. The gift of Mungo, a real-life survivor of Thistlewood’s Atlantic crossing, is designed to bring the Lady back to her senses.

Part Seven is illustrated with Moll’s Jewish patron in Hogarth’s Plate II; it recounts Lady Montague’s increasing domestic frustration, which she initially tries to compensate for by getting personally involved in the classical education of Mungo (now called Perseus). Her mental and emotional unrest, however, go hand in hand with a decline in physical health which eventually makes her summon a Jewish quack doctor, Sampson Gideon. Mungo, who is tormented by the Montague’s servants Lizzy and Jane (mother and daughter, who were responsible for killing the monkey), and Gideon take a liking for each other, and when the Jew has to flee the house and return to London – he is caught in the act of spooning a specimen from the Lady’s bowels – Mungo decides to follow him.

Part Eight of the novel recounts how Mungo drives Lizzy and Jane away, flees to London with a number of items he stole from the Montagues, and settles in with Gideon, who cares for London’s destitute prostitutes in an asylum. Gideon, to whom Mungo becomes an assistant, is an ambivalent character. On the one hand, he kills sick prostitutes with a deadly potion; on the other, he appears as a Christ-figure. This much is indicated by the description of the stable he works in, as well as by the religious devotion attributed to him by the African voices in Mungo’s head. Paradoxically, they remember him as the caring and self-sacrificing surgeon on board Thistlewood’s slave ship. And indeed, Mungo eventually convinces Gideon the leave the asylum to his own care and continue his messianic work on English slavers.

Parts Eight and Nine are each introduced by reproductions of Hogarth’s Moll Hackabout: Part Eight chooses the dying Moll in Plate V, Part Nine depicts Moll in Bridewell prison. After all the other prostitutes have died, Mungo takes loving care of his favourite, Moll, who is rendered as an apathetic but divinely beautiful evocation of her namesake, the Virgin Mary. In the end, he ‘releases’ Moll from her sufferings by using Gideon’s deadly potion and buries her along with his memories. He eventually buys his own freedom and continues to live in a secluded place in London. Here he archives his “Perseus Collection,” a vast assembly of newspaper clippings about black Britons and slavery, and is eventually hunted down by Pringle in old age. Before he buried Moll, he and Gideon, as Mungo remembers, were visited by the painter William Hogarth in the London asylum, where the artist interviewed the prostitutes and promised to portray them in his paintings in the best light. In Mungo’s opinion, however, the man broke his promise:

Moll, to his mind [was] a foul spectacle and willing victim to her fallen state, an object of pity and desire. Yet for all the seeming real-
ism of his art, he lied. [...] the glimpse he offered of me was a servant to Moll and to the oldest profession. And servant to the Jew who was the oldest Jew in the book, in terms of his cunning, his hoarding of coin, his purchase of Christian women. I fear that I will be forever associated with the indecencies of merchants and whores, for Mr Hogarth’s prints will last forever. (273)

The alternative reminiscences Mungo comes up with in the novel, therefore, not only contradict Pringle’s idea of a reasonable slave narrative, they also write back with a vengeance to Hogarth’s representation of himself and his friends.

The poetics of memory: the art of ekphrasis

Dabydeen’s A Harlot’s Progress unfolds in a creative dialogue between a written and a visual tradition of representing Atlantic slavery – this much is clearly signalled by the narratorial thematization of slave narratives and Hogarth’s engravings. In the following discussion, I wish to explore how Dabydeen dramatizes these and the other sources he uses in the mnemonic design of his novel. Over and above slave narratives, this will involve consideration of further pictorial representations and references to other artists. Dabydeen’s ekphrastic technique is pervasive throughout, not only with regard to the story, but also to the narrative discourse. On the one hand, Dabydeen appropriates visually represented events in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art as well as visually depicted characters (always in relation to their ideological relevance); on the other, within the discourse, the inspirational dialogue with images extends to associations of narrative with visual structures and the appropriation of certain representational techniques and their aesthetic effects. The art of memory in A Harlot’s Progress is thus to be seen as highly ‘visual’. Nevertheless, there are a few important mnemonic references to older texts as well. To start with, I wish to engage briefly with the intertextual dimension of the novel before investigating the intermedial dialogue with images in closer detail. Two characters specifically inscribe a textual tradition into the mnemonic framework of A Harlot’s Progress: Thomas Pringle and Thomas Thistlewood.
Exposition: the dialogue with slave narratives and the Thistlewood diaries

By employing a character called Thomas Pringle in his story, Dabydeen establishes an unmistakable reference to an historical person by the same name who, just like his fictional counterpart, served as the secretary of the English Anti-Slavery Society. The historical text immediately evoked by the name Pringle is The History of Mary Prince, published in London in 1831. Famously, it was the first slave narrative ever produced by a woman, and edited by Mary Prince’s employer, Thomas Pringle. This coincidence, of course, also gives rise to associations with other slave narratives, particularly the eighteenth-century accounts of Olaudah Equiano and James Albert Ukasaw Gronniosaw, which fit well into the time-frame of the novel and match the gender of its protagonist.

With regard to Equiano’s Interesting Narrative – a text which Dabydeen seems to have had particularly in mind – I have already pointed to the precarious balance between pragmatic requirements and expressive needs which Equiano and others had to negotiate in the performance of their testimonial accounts. Dabydeen’s fictional Thomas Pringle, in this respect, clearly embodies the pragmatic side of this balance. He stands for a repressive and, in the end, profoundly egoistic reduction of the expressive potential of the slaves’ accounts. A brief excursus into Mary Prince’s History and the historical Pringle’s editorial influence on it will reveal how Dabydeen writes back subversively to the ideological constraints of the slave narrative; it will also become obvious, however, how he goes beyond his historical models imaginatively in his hyperbolic and ironic dramatizations.

Mary Prince’s History recounts her life in the three-part structure typical of slave narratives. Prince’s fairly happy childhood in the Bermudas in the bosom of her family gives way to years of brutal exploitation and harassment...

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20 There are some differences between the fictional and ‘factual’ contexts: Whereas the fictional Pringle interviews Mungo sometime at the end of the eighteenth century (“22. April 17—. Mr Pringle sits at the table in Mungo’s garret” 1), the historical person saw the light of day only in 1789 in Scotland, and assumed his post at the Society only in 1827. For information on Thomas Pringle’s life, see Jane Meiring, Thomas Pringle, His Life and Times (Cape Town & Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1968), and (for Pringle’s vita before he became secretary of the Anti-Slavery society) Thomas Pringle, Narrative of a Residence in South Africa (1834; Brentwood: Doppler, 1986).

21 Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, ed. Moira Fergusson (1831; London: Pandora, 1997).

22 “The writer who has really influenced me emotionally has been Equiano”; in Mark Stein, “David Dabydeen Talks to Mark Stein,” 29.
after the death of her benevolent first mistress. Eventually taken to England, she comes into contact with Christianity and flees into the open arms of the Anti-Slavery Society. Prince, who was in continuous strife with her last owners, who forced her to work as a laundrywoman despite alleged rheumatic pains, eventually found employment in the household of Thomas Pringle. There she dictated her story to a visitor, which was published shortly afterwards by Pringle himself, who added to it a “Supplement” roughly equal in length to the actual narrative. In this extended essay, Pringle goes out of his way to verify every detail of Mary Prince’s account through various references by white persons who came in contact with her, and to testify to her moral character. Apart from this, Pringle claims that he exerted no influence whatsoever on the narrative itself. Thus he writes in the “Preface”:

The narrative was taken down from Mary’s own lips by a lady who happened to be at the time residing in my family as a visitor. It was written out fully, with all the narrator’s repetitions and prolixities, and afterwards pruned into its present shape; [...] no fact of importance has been omitted, and not a single circumstance or sentiment has been added. It is essentially her own, without any material alteration farther than was requisite to exclude redundancies and gross grammatical errors, so as to render it clearly unintelligible. After it had been written out, I went over the whole, carefully examining her on every fact and circumstance detailed [...] 23

While Pringle is indirectly confirmed in this estimation by critics such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who holds that Prince’s voice is largely authentic (“Prince is a convincing narrator, one who combines a fine sense of metaphor with the compulsion to testify and indict her oppressors”24), recent criticism is more cautious. Moira Fergusson, for instance, in her introduction to the latest edition of Mary Prince’s History,25 comes to a very different conclusion about Pringle’s input. She points to Prince’s immediate economic dependency on Pringle, who gathered her from the street and gave her employment, and suggests that this must have resulted in a number of conscious strategies to please her benefactor. One or two instances in Prince’s story will have to suffice to illustrate the doubts about the unvarnished truthfulness of Prince’s account

23 Thomas Pringle, “Preface” to Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, 55.
and the neutrality of Pringle’s stance. One example concerns Prince’s rheumatism. Fergusson writes:

> it is conceivable that she exaggerated her ill health to assert the only form of power that lay at her disposal – that of her labor. She also could not admit to pretense – feigning – for lying would be anathema to Pringle. The need for slave narratives to double as moral testimony would have mattered more to him than any subversive declaration of independence on Mary Prince’s part.26

One may also turn to the references from white acquaintances in Pringle’s “Supplement.” One of these clearly states that Mary Prince had had “a connexion with a white person, a Capt. —,” while still in the Caribbean; something that the observer does not consider to be in any way morally downgrading.27 In the actual narrative, however, this rather important biographical fact has clearly been censored. One cannot fail to sense, according to Fergusson, a repressive editorial presence in Prince’s testimony:

> Mary Prince for her part might have viewed a white lover as sexual self-expression and a form of control over her circumstances. Once again, this is an issue […] censored in Mary Prince’s text by Pringle or even by Mary Prince herself, in recognition of Pringle’s desire to launder or morally and psychologically simplify her History.28

Such questions regarding the actual neutrality of the historical person Thomas Pringle with regard to the chronicle he sought to publish on behalf of his slave are taken up in Dabydeen’s fiction. But they are also taken further than this via a process of imaginative transformation whereby the historical foil is subjected to satirical exaggeration. Thus, the fictional Pringle is presumed to harbour a deeply self-serving interest in Mungo, whom he sees as a symbol of the evils brought to England by the slave trade; these evils, here, are to be seen less in the plight of Africans than in the infiltrating Jewish and Papist merchants who are casting a blot on Anglican society: “It is inevitable that the sin England commits overseas would visit it at home in the form of Jews and Papists and Jacobites. Saving me from the degradation of slavery will be to save England’s Christian soul from the contamination of the foreign…” (144). More than this, Pringle’s attempt to cram Mungo’s account into the strait-jacket of the conventional popular slave narrative is in itself associated with

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27 Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, 111.
financial exploitation. Pringle, first of all, intends to make good money by selling Mungo’s story:

A book purporting to be a record of the Negro’s own words (understandably corrected in terms of grammar, the erasure of infelicitous expressions, and so forth) would bring great dividends for the Committee for the Abolition of Slavery. (3)

For juicy items of biographical information, Pringle is therefore prepared to pay Mungo off with a coin or two; Mungo, it is suggested, is indeed the “Harlot” of the novel’s title, prostituting his past: “[Pringle] makes me feel like a strumpet undeserving of his coin” (178). Mungo, of course, frustrates and subverts Pringle by celebrating all those aspects in his narrative that are anathema to his prospective editor: sex, lies, constant contradiction, and money.

*Harlot’s Progress* thus quite explicitly writes back to the slave narrative. Whereas, in Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge*, the silences and gaps in the testimonies only begin to speak through mutual confrontation with their ‘Other’, their counterparts in imperial writing, Dabydeen exposes these silences immediately via imaginative, satirical transformation on the page. And he does not stop there. The abolitionists’ exploitation of Mungo’s story is repeatedly described in metaphors of sexual rape and set against Mungo’s pederastic abuse by the slave-ship captain Thomas Thistlewood: “Mr Pringle will nail him down with the nib of his pen and he will struggle to wriggle from his page, as from Thistlewood’s bed” (156).

Just as was the case with Thomas Pringle, the fictional captain again evokes an historical person by the same name. Thomas Thistlewood was a Jamaican planter in the eighteenth century who has more recently attained a degree of notoriety for his extensive private diaries amounting to some 10,000 pages; excerpts were edited and published in 1989 by Douglas Hall under the title *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750–86*. Much critical attention has been devoted to the diaries not only for their detailed account of everyday life on a Caribbean plantation and its casual brutalities, but especially because they testify to the gigantic “erotic project” of imperialism, as Dabydeen calls it. Thistlewood meticulously noted each and every one of his insatiable copulations with his female slaves, including information, mostly in Latin, about the slave’s name, the location, sometimes the position, and his reaction to the sex: “Wednesday, 19 April 1758: About 2 p.m. Cum mea Abba, Sup. Lect (sed non bene).” Thistlewood generously

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shared the objects of his lust with his guests – “Saturday, 19 May [1959]: at night, Mr Cope come. Slept here, had Little Mimer; but suspect he has the clap” – all the while, neither his own frequent venereal diseases nor those of his guests would stop him in his pursuits (five days later, he again sleeps “[c]um Little Mimer, a Creole, Sup. Lect in meo dumo”). 30

The deliberate evocation of Thistlewood’s diaries obviously stands for the often silenced sexual intricacies of colonialism. “The British Empire,” Dabydeen wrote even before Douglas Hall’s publication, “as the Thistlewood Diaries show, was as much a pornographic as an economic project.” 31 There are several obvious instances of immediate correspondence between the source-material and the fictional text, the most obvious being the passage in the novel recounting Mungo’s memory of his being branded on the forehead aboard Thistlewood’s ship with the initials “TT” (66). The historical Thistlewood branded some of his slaves with the same sign. Moreover, as is shown by the following excerpt from the diaries concerning the slave Sally, who escaped and was recaptured in 1768, this also happened in the context of rape and sexual possession:

Put a collar and a chain about Sally’s neck, also branded her with TT on her right cheek. Note that her private parts is tore in a terrible manner, which was discovered in the morning […] Being threatened a good deal, she confessed that a sailor had laid with her while away. 32

As was the case with Pringle, however, the historical Thomas Thistlewood again merely serves as a foil for an imaginative transformation within the fictional framework of the novel. The fictional character is obviously inspired by more than one mnemonic source. For the phonetic similarity, it is very likely that at least one other historical person has gone into the making of captain Thistlewood: namely, Luke Collingwood, captain of the infamous slaver Zong. Indeed, the fictional “Thistlewood case” featuring in Part Six of the novel (192–93, 196–99) is clearly reminiscent of the historical Zong case and the furore it created in the English press and among the general public. Rather than being located within an intertextual dialogue, however, the mnemonic reference to the Zong is mostly established intermedially, through an engagement with J.M.W. Turner’s representation of the horrifying events of 1781 in

30 Douglas Hall, In Miserable Slavery, 83, 86.
32 Douglas Hall, In Miserable Slavery, 149–50. After Sally’s recuperation, Thistlewood immediately fell back on her: “20. October: p.m. Cum Sally, mea, Sup Terr at foot of Cotton tree by new ground side, West north West from the house”; his comment “sed non bene” is hardly surprising, given Sally’s past experiences.
his painting “Slave Ship.” But this brings us to a different category of mnemonic reference: what follows will involve the dialogic relationship between *A Harlot’s Progress* and a number of images rather than texts – images created by Turner, but also by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Enoch Seeman, even Paul Klee, but, above all, by William Hogarth.

*Writing back to visual events: “Mr Hogarth lied”*

The manifest images most firmly rooted in the mnemonic design of the novel are the six plates of Hogarth’s cycle “A Harlot’s Progress.” The originals in oil on canvas are lost (though there are copies); the surviving engravings, however (Figs. 3–8), have continued to be highly popular to this day. Mun-go’s assumption that “Mr Hogarth’s prints will last forever” (273) is true enough for Dabydeen to assume that his readership would be familiar with the prints of the “Progress” or that readers could easily look them up in a number of easily available publications. And indeed, Dabydeen gives the reader every reason to do so by marking the reference to Hogarth in all possible ways. The coinciding titles go hand in hand with the reprinted visual details introducing each chapter; and the prints are frequently thematized in the story, to the point where Hogarth himself appears as a fictional character towards the end and conducts his research for “A Harlot’s Progress.” However, from what he saw in Gideon’s London asylum – Gideon, his assistant Mungo, Moll and the other prostitutes – Hogarth, it is implied, fashioned a purely fictional tale. If we are to believe Mungo, the events he recorded in paint are simply made up: “Mr Hogarth lied” (273).

As can be seen in Figs. 1a–1f, Hogarth’s original “Progress” recounts the following tale.33 Plate I (Fig. 1a) portrays the naive Yorkshire girl Moll Hackabout upon her arrival in London. Already, she is being approached by a lady identified as the infamous bawd Mother Needham, and closely observed by two other men in a doorway; these are Colonel Charteris, a notorious womanizer who had been repeatedly on trial for the rape of under-age girls, and one of his pimps, John Gourlay. Charteris fixes his gaze on Moll in anticipation of possible adventures, while his right hand is at work in his pocket, with an erection indicated beneath the bulging cloth; a clergyman on a horse turns his

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33 The most comprehensive and still most lucid analysis of the cycle is to be found in Ronald Paulson’s *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times*, vol. 1 (New Haven CT & London: Yale UP, 1971): 238–98, as well as in his *Hogarth’s Graphic Works*, vol. 1 (New Haven CT & London: Yale UP, 1965). It is here that all historical models of the characters mentioned in the following discussion (such as Mother Needham, John Gourlay, Colonel Charteris, Magistrate Gonson, Dr. Misaubin or Dr. Rock) are identified and discussed.
back on the scene. In Plate II (Fig. 1b), Moll has fallen prey to luxury: she is depicted as the mistress of a rich Jewish merchant (probably inspired by Sampson Gideon,\footnote{At least Dabydeen himself is rather confident that the historical Sampson Gideon – one of the richest stock traders in eighteenth century England – is caricatured in this scene; see David Dabydeen, \textit{Hogarth, Walpole and Commercial Britain}, 111. He bases his argument on Ronald Paulson, who explains in a footnote: “The Jewish merchant is also probably identifiable, but without contemporary testimony and portraits to go on, a guess will have to suffice. Sampson Gideon, the greatest Jewish merchant in London during the first half of the century, was born in 1699 and would have been the right age for the harlot’s keeper in the 1730s.” Paulson, \textit{Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times}, vol. 1, 534.} in his time one of the most successful traders on the London stock market). She betrays Gideon, however, with a younger lover, who steals out the door while Moll tries to distract the merchant by knocking over the tea table; a baffled slave boy watches the scene at the bottom right. In Plate III (Fig. 1c), Moll is no longer being served by a slave boy, but is given her tea by a corpulent English maid. Not only has she fallen from the Jew’s grace, she is also about to be hunted down by a man identified as Magistrate Gonson. Gonson, who was one of the most relentless prosecutors of prostitution in his time and responsible for the transportation of innumerable prostitutes to the colonies, has her imprisoned for stealing a watch. In Plate IV (Fig. 1d), Moll thus finds herself with other convicts – among them a pregnant African slave – in Bridewell prison, beating hemp. Plate V (Fig. 1e) shows Moll aged and weary (her teeth lie on a handkerchief on the right margin of the image). She has a little boy by now, who is oblivious of the quarrel between two quack doctors identified as the skinny Dr Misaubin\footnote{Misaubin was a physician of French descent whom Fielding also caricatured in \textit{The Mock Doctor}. See Frederick Antal, \textit{Hogarth and His Place in European Art} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962): 99 and 103.} and his fat colleague Dr Richard Rock. Both were well known in their time for certain potions against venereal disease. While they argue about the effectiveness of their cures, Moll dies. The sixth and last plate in the series (Fig. 1f) depicts Moll’s funeral. Her son plays at the foot of her coffin, and a number of other prostitutes surround it. Only one of these, however, takes a real interest in Moll. The others are concerned with questions of manicure and similar issues, one lady chats up the undertaker. On the left, a clergyman is exploring the thighs of the girl next to him, who tries to cover the smutty business with her hat. This much is suggested by the detached look on her face and the spilling of his glass, suggesting an ejaculation.\footnote{If older interpretations such as Paulson’s merely carefully hint at the smutty business between the clergyman and the prostitute, more recent analyses by Dabydeen}
The fundamental re-writing of “A Harlot’s Progress” in the novel endeavours to expose this story as untrue. It destabilizes Hogarth’s configuration of meaning, and subverts his employment of themes and characters. The differences between Hogarth’s and Dabydeen’s “Progress” are most obvious with regard to the second plate. While, in Hogarth, it is purported that Mungo was a boy-slave to Moll Hackabout, who rose to be Sampson Gideon’s mistress, the novel exposes this as pure fiction. Here, Mungo cared for Moll but never served her, instead performing his duties in the house of the Montagues, and this at a much late point in his life, at the age of 16 or 17. Hogarth, this much Mungo implies, simply came up with a story that suited his satiric ends without taking any real interest in the real-life persons that he built it on. Not surprisingly, the painter seemed to care very little when he and Dabydeen’s narrator meet briefly in Gideon’s asylum: “He did not acknowledge me, thinking my action no more than a slave’s duty. Nor did he have any money to give” (271).

Paradoxically, the process of re-telling the events from Mungo’s perspective remains tinged by Hogarth’s original prints: the novel, while subverting the engravings, is at the same time deeply indebted to them. In fact, the alternative stories that Mungo comes up with seem to be based less on ‘normal’ recollection than on an imaginative refiguring of Hogarth’s visually encoded themes and events. The narratives he unfolds are full of Hogarthian echoes – for instance, when he depicts figures who bear a strong resemblance to the painter’s depiction of Moll Hackabout. Thus, one version of Mungo’s account of his own mother refers to her as “veiled from head to tow and sworn to absolute silence” (37), evoking an image strikingly reminiscent of Moll in Plate V; and his surrogate mother Rima “in moments of uncertainty […] resembled what I have dreamt of my mother since I first set sight on Moll: a firm-breasted woman doomed to wastage and disease” (40). But also the two laundrywomen Betty and Mary, as well as Lizzy and Jane, servants in the Montague household, strongly recall the poor Yorkshire girl Moll.

Such resemblances extend to affinities in thematic configuration. The theme of the first plate, for instance, the seduction of an innocent country girl, reverberates in the stories of Mary and Betty, who also leave Yorkshire for

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himself (in Hogarth’s Blacks, 109) or Sean Shesgreen are less inhibited. Shesgreen writes: “Their spiritual leader, the clergyman (identified by Hogarth as ‘the famous Couple-Beggar in The Fleet’), who is supposed to give a religious tone to the event, has his hand up the skirt of the girl beside him. His venereal preoccupation causes him to spill. The face of the girl who covers his exploring hand with a mourning hat is filled with a look of dreamy satisfaction.” Engravings by Hogarth: 101 Prints, ed. Sean Shesgreen (New York: Dover, 1973): n.p.
work in London, only to be subjected to financial and sexual exploitation. The thematic context of Plate II, Moll’s concubinage to Gideon, is reflected both in the re-invention of Mungo’s African past (Rima is his father’s concubine), and in the relationship between Lord and Lady Montague, the latter’s alleged affair with Sampson Gideon clearly modifying Moll’s betrayal with a younger lover. Moll’s theft of a watch and her conviction, depicted in Plates III and IV, is taken up in connection with Betty and Mary, who may or may not have stolen a “snuffbox” and “handkerchief,” which may or may not have led to Mary’s execution and Betty’s expulsion from the Montagues’ service. And finally, the context of the doctors’ botched attempts to cure the sick Moll in Plate V reappears in modified form in Sampson Gideon’s and Mungo’s poisoning of those prostitutes they deem beyond cure; further examples would not be hard to find.

If Dabydeen’s novel not only subverts Hogarth but at the same time writes back to him in an act of ‘homage’, this also shows in the appropriation of the cycle’s larger thematic context of financial and sexual exploitation. As Dabydeen convincingly argues in his studies of Hogarth’s Blacks and Hogarth, Walpole and Commercial Britain, “A Harlot’s Progress” works not only as the simple moralizing tale it appears to be at first glance but also as a harsh satire of social and political conditions. It is not Moll and the other prostitutes that are under moral scrutiny so much as the corrupt social institutions surrounding them. The sexual harassment of Moll by Colonel Charteris (Plate I), for instance, needs to be seen in the context of a political and judicial system that repeatedly shelves legal prosecution of the Colonel for raping minors and ignores his shady business activities, fuelled by bribery. Magistrate Gonson (Plate III) – who briefly appears in the novel at one of Lady Montague’s banquets – is representative of the tyranny against those who are already economically and sexually exploited. While the likes of Charteris get away scot-free, Gonson relentlessly hunts down prostitutes and sends them into forced labour, either in prisons such as Bridewell (Plate IV), or to Caribbean plantations.37 This, in turn, is the source of the money with which Charteris and others sanction their crimes or rich speculators like Gideon afford themselves English concubines. The church, as Hogarth implies with the presence of the clergymen in Plates I and VI, either turns its back on all this or is itself implicated in the process of exploitation.

One might argue that by comparing Dabydeen’s and Hogarth’s “Progresses” one is talking about two different kettles of fish. Dabydeen’s novel, after all, focuses largely on the exploitation of slaves and on Mungo in par-

The overall statement on human existence that emerges from the series is that money breeds rot which breeds money which breeds more rot, and the pregnant black slave is a crucial element in such an analysis: slavery produces wealth which produces prostitutes who end up in the plantations, contributing to the production of more wealth. The pregnant black woman symbolizes the relentless, circular economic progress: she bears in her belly a future slave who will continue the process of victimization and enslavement.38

The close association of the blacks and the white poor in eighteenth-century London, which, in Dabydeen’s reading, is already indicated in Hogarth’s “Progress,” is accordingly dramatized in the novel. Mungo’s fate and stories are constantly set against stories of destitute white characters who are financially or sexually exploited. Betty, Mary and Moll are cases in point: all three – London’s blacks, poor, or prostitutes – are equally rendered as ‘harlots’ of a hypocritical system, both in Dabydeen’s novel and in Hogarth’s prints.

This crucial narrative ambivalence of writing both against and from Hogarth (and a number of other painters) is indeed striking. But it is firmly anchored in Dabydeen’s logic of mnemonic writing on Atlantic slavery, a logic that, in a figure of doubling, applies on two narrative levels: that of character, and that of the (highly self-conscious) author himself. Thus, on the level of character, Mungo struggles against the heteronomous assertions of his identity and those of his friends, denouncing them as fictional; at the same time, his alternative narratives are also mere fictions of his life. “Mungo is a ruined archive” (3), it is stated; his memory has been wrecked by the traumatic experiences he has been through, symbolized in the branding of Thistlewood’s initials upon his forehead: “Captain Thistlewood had pressed a hot

38 David Dabydeen, Hogarth’s Blacks, 110. Dabydeen argues that Hogarth must have been informed by friends involved in the colonial trade that pregnant slaves were particularly in demand and costly (108).
iron on his forehead, the shock of pain erasing the memory of Africa which returned only in occasional glimpes and fragments of voices” (152–53). In his persistent attempts to re-create his past, Mungo is therefore paradoxically dependent on visual or textual documents to stoke his memory. It is no accident in this context that he starts to collect and meticulously arrange newspaper clippings about black “morals and manners” in his “Perseus Collection,” with which he identifies synecdochically: “I have rebelled, stabbed, poisoned, raped, absconded, and sought escape by killing myself and my offsprings. In return I have been strangled, flogged to death, roasted alive, blown away and lynched” (243–44).

Stepping up from the level of character to that of the author, we encounter a somewhat similar situation. As with Mungo, David Dabydeen obviously does not have access to any ‘authentic’ personal memories of Atlantic slavery, albeit for different reasons. As he puts it,

I am very conscious that I am not a slave or a cane cutter. I do not know the weight of a cutlass, I hope I never do, I lead a comfortable life. So […] I have tended to write about the past through the gateway of paintings using somebody else’s painting as a way of connecting up with the past.39

Dabydeen’s treatment of the sources he uses is as ambivalent as that of his protagonist. He establishes a critical dialogue with the paintings he writes back to, especially when confronting the reductive ideological employment of black characters, where he imagines liberating, alternative fictions that transform the original configurations of meaning in fresh ways. His ekphrasitic strategy is thus to employ the images to inspire carnivalesque subversions and metaphoric transpositions, quite unlike Christoph Georg Lichtenberg’s Commentaries, for instance, which argue for an absolutely truthful transcription of Hogarth’s images.40 As such, however, they remain the inspirational foil both for the narrative and for the mode of narration. This peculiar cohabitation of


40 “Was der Künstler da gezeichnet hat, müsste nun auch so gesagt werden, wie Er es vielleicht würde gesagt haben, wenn er die Feder so hätte führen können, wie er den Grabstichel geführt hat” [What the artist drew, should be put in words the very way He would have put it, if he could have worked the pen in they way he could work the graver]. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Schriften und Briefe (Munich: Hanser, 1972), vol. 3: 661.
subversive destabilization and homage will be examined more closely in the following.

*Writing back to visual characters: Africans in the art of William Hogarth, Enoch Seeman and Joshua Reynolds*

Most of the fictional characters in *A Harlot’s Progress* establish some sort of dialogue with persons who are depicted in surviving manifest images by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painters. Exceptions are Pringle and Thistlewood, whose names, as already noted, evoke written testimonies, and the African villagers who Mungo remembers in his dreams and stories. Mungo, Moll, Sampson Gideon, Lady Montague, the laundrywoman Betty, Magistrate Gonson and others, however, are based on characters in Hogarth’s prints and other paintings. Again, the visual models are not appropriated in a one-to-one relationship, serving instead as starting-points for free imaginative transformation. This is probably most obvious in the case of the Jewish doctor Sampson Gideon, whose characterization derives from melding Hogarth’s Jewish merchant in Plate II with the charlatans in Plate V. Dabydeen goes further than this by lending Gideon a personality that flatly contradicts Hogarth’s ideological employment of Jew and physician. While Hogarth was obviously appealing to contemporary stereotypes and populist xenophobia by caricaturing the assimilated Jew and the French Catholic Misaubin, both of whom violate the Anglican Moll, Dabydeen, in a process of inversion, instead stylizes Gideon as a messianic figure, caring for the victims of exploitation and destitution such as London’s prostitutes, and sacrificing himself for the victims of Atlantic slavery as surgeon on a slaver. As always, however, a sense of ambivalence is retained – ultimately, we cannot tell whether Gideon is indeed a selfless benefactor of the poor or a cold-blooded murderer. As Mungo reflects,

> Is Mr Gideon more than me? I ask whether he is no more than me, proud and false and of bad faith. He makes his cures like I make my book but for what use? My book lies. The whores die. (257).

The novel hardly ever proposes any valid, alternative accounts. Instead of claiming ‘truth’, it continually contradicts itself, sheds doubt on its own narrative postulations, and suggests an inevitable plurality of meaning. The nar-

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41 In *Hogarth, Walpole and Commercial Britain*, Dabydeen interprets Moll as a *Britannia*-figure, who stands allegorically for the religious, political and economic corruption of Britain.
ratives it comes up with thus place themselves beside, yet never above, the versions of Hogarth and other painters.

A number of other visual representations of black people in eighteenth-century art have gone into the making of the fictional character and intermittent narrator Mungo. There are three images in particular: Sir Joshua Reynolds’ “A Young Black” (c.1770; Fig. 4); a portrait of “Lady Mary Churchill, Duchess of Montague (1689–1751), with Charles, her page” (Fig. 2), attributed to Enoch Seeman and probably painted in the 1720s; and, last but not least, William Hogarth’s depiction of the boy-slave in the second plate of his “Harlot’s Progress” (Figs. 1b and 1i).

In the composition of this last image, the little black boy at the very right does not feature as much more than an exotic decoration among a number of other colonial details, most notably a pet monkey to his left. As always in Hogarth, however, there is significance in these details – in this specific frame, reflecting back on the rich Jew whose apartment they ‘decorate’ and exploiting a stereotype of the day. As Dabydeen notes,

The situation of the Jew and his Christian mistress in Plate 2 of *A Harlot’s Progress* is an immediately recognisable one to the spectator accustomed to reading saucy literature about English courtesans bubbling their Jewish keepers. There was a popular belief that Jews were licentious creatures much addicted to patronage of Christian whores whom they attracted by their commercial wealth, although there was an anti-semitic law expressly prohibiting such contact.  

This commercial wealth, in turn, more often than not originated in colonial trade, which, after the bursting of the South Sea bubble in 1720, had become highly questionable for the English. The Jew therefore represents both financial corruption and sexual perversion, facts hinted at not only by his ill-fitting English wig but poignantly in the figure of the black boy. His eclectic outfit clearly points to the Jew’s association with the dirty colonial trade. In strong resemblance to Hogarth’s styling of the black boy, Dabydeen’s Mungo is “to be remodelled into a fantastic land creature, part Indian (his turban), part English coxcomb (his suit), part Chinese (his slippers), with a small Arabian scimitar strapped to his side” (207). In turn, the Jew’s unbridled sexuality is evoked though the pairing-up of the houseboy with the monkey. Their heads

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43 Hogarth tackles this in his early print *The South Sea Scheme* (1721), which according to Dabydeen satirizes sexual corruption, social and spiritual confusion and economic exploitation as the consequences of unrestricted stock market speculations (see David Dabydeen, *Hogarth, Walpole and Commercial Britain*, 21–40).
are similarly draped in white cloth, and they face each other with the same surprised expression. Quite evidently, then, Hogarth is declaring the close association between animal and human being, in which the black boy serves as the ‘link’ between lecherous Jew and monkey.

Allusions to stereotypes of sexual amorality, however, are not an obligatory feature of depiction of black people in eighteenth-century England, as can be seen in the genre of portrait painting. A typical example of this genre is Seeman’s portrait of Lady Mary Churchill (Fig. 2). This corresponds closely to the passage in the novel where Mungo describes the fictional Lady Montague: “She had on blue clothes, ruffled like waves of the sea […] Imagine skin of bleached sugar, bales of cotton her breasts, veins of gold running along her arms” (184). Also, Mungo himself was approximately the age of the young black man in the painting, 16 or 17 years, all of which indicates that the novel is indeed writing back to this very image. The black slave in Seeman’s picture was long thought to be Ignatio Sancho (who was briefly in the service of the Montagues); but the painting is probably too early for Sancho to be present in it. Rather, it depicts a different servant, called Charles, about whom little is known. Still, as Reyahn King notes,

references to him in the family’s cash books provide a few details to add to the picture. Like Sancho, he was fortunate in finding himself with the Montague family for he was paid wages like an ordinary servant rather than a slave, and care was taken to ensure he was educated, nursed when he was ill and above all, well clothed in fine livery or exotic outfits.44

The historical John, 2nd Duke of Montague (who, in contrast to his fictional counterpart, himself owned a number of Caribbean plantations) was famous for his humanistic ‘experiments’ with African slaves.45 The introduction of Charles into Seeman’s picture, however, clearly belies this humanism. While the satire found in Hogarth’s print is lacking, here, too, the young black is not much more than an accessory. Lady Montague assumes centre-stage, while he

45 Montague for instance financed the education of the Jamaican slave Francis Williams at Cambridge, whose Latin odes baffled the English public. David Hume, of course, was not impressed; alluding to Williams, he wrote: “In Jamaica indeed they talk of one negro as a man of learning; but ‘tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly”; Gentleman’s Magazine 1 (1771): 595.
is positioned much lower and cramped towards the left margin. He is dressed in conspicuously expensive livery, but his face, by contrast, almost melts into the dark background. As a matter of fact, his darkness seems to serve mainly to highlight the pure, aristocratic whiteness of Lady Montague’s skin. Commenting on the portrait, Reyahn King writes: “Black People like Charles served in art and in life as exotic accessories reflecting the status, elegance and wealth of their owners.” As such, Charles’s humanity is not worth much more than the black boy’s in Hogarth’s print; he is little more than a childlike pet. Indeed, as the comparison with a painting like William Wissing’s “Mary of Modena” (Fig. 3) illustrates, black slaves, sheep or dogs were interchangeable in the portrait genre of the eighteenth century. Typically, “the superior white (superior in social and human terms) is surrounded by inferior creatures, the black and the dog, who share more or less the same status.” Rather than serving as a character in his own right, Charles is thus characteristically employed as a tame animal whose utter dependency and devotion merely contrast with and reinforce the display of power, grandeur and beauty of the white owner.

The most famous English portrait painter of the eighteenth century was arguably Sir Joshua Reynolds. He is mentioned in the novel (218-20) when Mungo meets a proud “Reynolds Black” who featured in a specific family portrait. Reynolds’s use of black characters in such portraits in fact seldom differs greatly from Seeman’s in his portrait of Lady Montague – with one notable exception. The explicit mention of “Sir Joshua’s genius” (220) is sufficient reason to argue that Dabydeen is also writing back to the most famous depiction of a black person by Reynolds, his unfinished “A Young Black” (Fig. 4), even though the mnemonic reference is not so clearly and unambiguously marked as the evocations of Hogarth and Seeman elsewhere. The young man depicted in Reynolds’s study was long taken to be Frances Barber, Samuel Johnson’s famous servant; however, as recent research has shown, the portrait is more likely to be simply modelled on one of Reynolds’s own servants.

Reynolds was one of the first artists to challenge Edmund Burke’s oft-cited contention that black, not least in terms of colour of skin, was “terrible in its own nature.” Arguing for cultural relativism, he instead claimed that

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47 David Dabydeen, Hogarth’s Blacks, 26.
48 Burke quotes a lecture of the famous physician William Cheselden, who reports of a young man who gained his eyesight in a successful operation: “upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight. The horror, in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association.” Edmund Burke, “A
custom alone determines our preference of the colour of the Europeans to the Aethiopians, and they, for the same reason, prefer their own colour to ours. I suppose no body will doubt, if one of their Painters was to paint the Goddess of Beauty, but that he would represent her black, with thick lips, flat nose, and woolly hair; and, it seems to me, he would act very unnaturally if he did not [...].

Indeed, one may see the “Young Black” as a conscious effort by Reynolds to sustain this argument through his own version of an African God of Beauty with “thick lips, flat nose, and woolly hair.” In contrast to the other two images discussed earlier, here the black man is centre-stage; the perspective adopted compels the viewer to look up at him, who, in turn, has his gaze fixed heroically on some point in the far distance. The resulting effect of sublime beauty is further sustained by the dark and thunderous background, evoking both nobility and solitary grace. But Reynolds’s portrait is in danger of falling into another trap of Western imperialist thinking. By highlighting the black man’s sublime character, he is not far from exposing him as just another example of ‘otherness’ à la the ‘noble savage’.

Reynolds’s intentions may have been the best, but his painterly appeal to ‘natural’ nobility in the black man puts him in uncanny propinquity to Hogarth and Seeman’s appeals to stereotypes of sexual amorality and a childlike, tame-pet sensibility. All three attributions have one thing in common: to the Western viewer, the black character is kept within the realm of the exotic, at a safe distance from what is taken to be ‘ordinary’ life. It is thus possible to project all sorts of fears and desires onto this ‘Other’ without ever having to acknowledge him in any way as a real part of English society or, worse, as an equal partner in society.

Dabydeen’s Mungo is keen on revising the repressive attributions implied in the images that he writes back to. He not only refutes the attempts by Pringle and the abolitionists to channel his tales into the generic conventions of the popular slave narrative, but also resists the stereotyping of his alleged character by eighteenth-century artists. As he puts it, he desires to come across as simply a common human being, “for that is what a Negro is, ordinary man and woman, deserving of the ordinary human feeling that yet

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50 "Happy the lonely savage," purports a poem by John Winstanley dating to the year 1732, thus the very year in which also Hogarth’s “A Harlot’s Progress” saw the light of day, “who is untainted by “Wisdom / Numberless Woes, nor polish’d into Torment”; Gentleman’s Magazine 2 (1732): 718.

creates and recreates glimpses of new worlds” (273). Again, however, Mungo does not propose any authoritative alternative that might help him escape the process of ‘othering’; his autobiographical accounts do not supply any valid description of what could be deemed an ‘authentic’ black identity. Instead, his self-image keeps slipping in the numerous contradictory versions of his past. Mungo thus not only robs the heteronomous attributions of all credibility, he also undermines the validity of his own accounts. Just as the images of Hogarth, Seeman and Reynolds merely invent his character to serve their ideological ends, Mungo constantly re-invents or revises his past and identity, so that no single legitimate version remains standing.

This is probably best illustrated by looking at a specific example in the novel, the most signal being the various accounts in which Mungo claims to remember the origin of the “TT”-mark on his forehead. While it is likely that this was indeed done at the hands of Thomas Thistlewood and is a sign of his ‘domestication’ as an object of paedophilic pleasure (152–53), a number of other attributions destabilize this version, so that none of the tales can claim any truth in the end. Thus, the mark alternatively also represents the headman’s punishment for Mungo’s breaking of the village food taboo (19 and 59), a birthmark signalling his noble Greek origins (33), and a very common mark of ritual initiation (66). What is striking here is the fact that the narrative re-inventions of Mungo’s character again seem to be writing both back to and from the images just looked at, with Mungo playing with the stereotypes of identity evoked by Seeman, Hogarth, and Reynolds – tame (Seeman), perverted (Hogarth), noble (Reynolds), or just plain ordinary. In a palimpsestic manner, the novel thus manages to avoid pinning down Mungo’s narrative, which is never safe from being told again in yet another layer of narration. At the same time, it remains imaginatively rooted in the manifest sources it writes back to. This principle also applies to the visual inspiration behind narrative structure.

Appropriations of visual structure: circularity in Hogarth and Paul Klee’s “Carpet of Memory”

The ideals of realist narration are not quite Mungo’s forte: “I care not for this business of writing, the necessity of plot and verisimilitude. In any case I am an African, and beyond the recall of exactitudes” (148). In *A Harlot’s Progress*, the characteristics of the straightforward testimonial account as Thomas Pringle propagates them (“He wants a sober testimony” 5), in a clear-cut chronological arrangement (“’A beginning, a middle, and end,’ is what he demands” 275), are largely suspended. The premisses of linearity and clarity are undercut by a circular structure full of temporal aporias, thematic doublings and narrative ambivalences. One of a number of a-chronologies is
Sampson Gideon’s departure from Mungo’s life at the end of the narrative, only to reappear as surgeon on the very ship that took Mungo from Africa in the first place. In Mungo’s accounts, there is no clear distinction between past, present and future. This also shows in the — real or invented — ghosts of the past (in the guise of Manu, Ellar, Rima, Kaka and others), who are constant presences in his dreams and projections. As already indicated, the resulting circularity is further complicated by the almost endlessly layering of the narrative through Mungo’s generation of ever-new and contradictory tales. This process of multiple ‘overdubbing’ produces a curious palimpsest in which no single layer can be pinpointed as ‘original’ or ‘authentic’.

It is highly probable that the structural design of the novel as it presents itself owes much to philosophies rooted in Guyanese experience that contradict Western notions of linearity and logic. First in line here would be Amerindian traditions, which are mentioned paratextually in the “Acknowledgements,” where Dabydeen expresses his thanks to “Wilson Harris, George Simon and Pauline Melville for reminding me of Amerindian myth.” Indeed, many of Mungo’s memories of his native Africa are strongly reminiscent of elements of Wai Wai or Macusi mythology. The narrative structure, it can be argued, accordingly replicates an “absence of recognition of boundaries” typical of the thought and behaviour of these tribes which, according to Dabydeen, have not yet been sufficiently accounted for in the reception of Caribbean writing. This is all the more striking as their philosophy seems particularly suited to the questioning of Western logocentrism: “their sense of time is not linear and periodic but circular and continuous. They are postmodern in the movements of their own lives.” Such conceptual convergences with Amerindian notions of time and space are supplemented with philosophical notions rooted in Guyana within the South Asian population, such as “yogic philosophy[,] which speaks of seamlessness [and] contradicts the Afro-Caribbean search for specific roots and origins.”

Non-linear conceptions of reality are in fact essential to a better understanding of the ideology of viewing or ‘reading’ the images Dabydeen conjures up in his novel. Thus, Hogarth’s “A Harlot’s Progress” may be contemplated with a special eye to its structural circularity and almost infinite com-

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51 Cf., for instance, the legend according to which Mungo’s people were once saved by shooting arrows to the moon (Harlot’s Progress, 32–33), a legend very much reminiscent of Pauline Melville’s novel The Ventriloquist’s Tale (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), in which the story turns on a myth explaining the origin of suffering and death.


53 Dabydeen, “Teaching West Indian Literature in Britain,” 147.
plexity, which in turn is replicated in the narrative design. In an interview, Dabydeen comments on the structural relations between Hogarth’s prints and his novel:

Hogarth is endlessly creative. Within one frame of a picture you get stories that multiply and teem, and other stories; every detail triggers off a story that then connects up to another detail, which then connects up to another story. So, really, you can spend quite a lot of time reading Hogarth. It seems to be some kind of social realism, but then it can be endlessly complicated in terms of being a narrative that changes upon itself, turns upon itself, sets up other narratives, etc., within the one frame. So what I tried to do in *A Harlot’s Progress* was also to destroy the surface realism of a story by complicating it, by making it almost unreadable – in a sense replicating what Hogarth was doing in terms of endless, complex narratives.54

Dabydeen is referring here not so much to the ‘density’ of visually coded representations implying the necessarily infinite reception of an image in general, as indicating the multitude of illustrative details in Hogarth’s prints. Every person represented, every decorative element in the spatial organization, every picture, trophy, book or pamphlet triggers a meaningful digression in itself that may be linked up with Moll’s “Progress” in numerous ways. Thus, the superficially obvious reading of Moll’s descent as a simple moralizing tale starts to crumble the more intimately the viewer becomes absorbed in the images, the more the story is destabilized in the vicinity of alternative, digressive readings. One alternative reading of the progress has already been proposed by paying closer attention to seemingly marginal characters such as Charteris, Gonson, or the pregnant black slave woman in Plate IV. This slight shift of focus enables a perception of Hogarth’s cycle as a social critique of the financial and sexual exploitation of the underprivileged in a thoroughly capitalist system, or, in Dabydeen’s words, of “relentless, circular economic progress.”

The thematic evocation of an endless circle of exploitation indeed mirrors the structural arrangement of the engravings. As Dabydeen explains, “It can be said that the *Harlot’s Progress* has a circular structure, with Plate 1 and Plate 6 joined together, the beginning anticipating the end, the end repeating the beginning.”55 A number of details in Plate VI refer back to Plate I – one

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instance not mentioned by Dabydeen is the striking visual similarity between
the rendering of the young prostitute who contemplates Moll in her coffin and
the depiction of Moll in Plate 1, with regard to both their bodily posture and
their faces in profile. Without a doubt, in Moll she is witnessing her own fate,
already foreshadowed in Plate 1 by the wooden box with Moll’s initials (later
replaced by her coffin) and the strangled goose next to it. Such figures of
doubling are in fact pervasive: note, for instance, how the arrangement of
Charteris in Plate 1 and the undertaker in Plate VI correspond (both are posi-
tioned on the right margin against the backdrop of a wooden door or window-
frame, and their facial features are quite similar), or the coincidental presence
of a clergyman in both plates. It is perfectly clear that Moll’s death will do
nothing to stop the cycle of financial and sexual greed; this much is indicated
in the erotic obeisance the undertaker pays to the sleeve of the prostitute next
to him; it is even more pronounced in the smutty business between the clergy-
man and his neighbour, which again refers us back to Charteris’ auto-eroti-
cism in Plate 1. This way, the wordplay of “Progress” – in an Enlightenment
sense – in the title is deeply ironic, in that any signs of social or spiritual
amelioration are stifled by the dire sociopolitical conditions. In “A Harlot’s
Progress,” “the end is prefigured in the beginning, the future contained in the
past.”56 It is this relentless sense of the interchangeability of past, present and
future already perceivable in Hogarth that has been taken up and further
dramatized by Dabydeen in the structural disposition of his novel.

While the design of A Harlot’s Progress is clearly indebted to the inspira-
tional dialogue with Hogarth’s images, I would venture to propose that the
ekphrasis of Dabydeen’s novel extends beyond the evocation of Hogarth and
other painters concerned with the representation of slaves and slavery at large.
Especially with regard to the formal arrangement of the novel and its multiple
layers of narration, it may be assumed that Dabyeen has had recourse to the
visual art of the twentieth century. His specific approach of appropriating
visual fragments of memory in a number of older paintings and engravings so
that they serve as points of departure for a purely subjective process of
mnemonic transformation is in fact reminiscent of strategies to be found in
Expressionist art. The Swiss painter Paul Klee, in this context, may serve to
further illustrate Dabydeen’s particular poetics of memory. Dabydeen refers
to Klee, who has been partly associated with the Blaue Reiter movement, as
the “greatest painter ever, in terms of an enormous, complex vision of his own
life, of the world.” What fascinates him most about Klee, he states in an inter-
view, is that

56 Dabydeen, Hogarth’s Blacks, 108.
he can invest a small, flat piece of paper or canvas with a kind of depth you believe is impossible. What I find absolutely fascinating is the way he layers images upon images upon images. It becomes like a palimpsest. And how he could do that with a piece of paper, I just find stunning – I remember leaving the Paul Klee museum and thinking, “If I could write as Paul Klee paints, then I would be a great writer.” If you could find a form of writing which is layered, endlessly layered, and yet have a kind of narrative thread, or a set of discernible, readable stories, then that would be a triumph.57

What sounds rather abstract in this context will certainly become clearer if we turn to the example of a specific work by Klee – the “Carpet of Memory [Teppich der Erinnerung]” (1914, Fig. 5), which, perhaps not incidentally, used to be on permanent exhibition in the very museum in Bern that Dabydeen refers to in the above statement.58

Klee painted this image shortly after he returned from a journey to Tunisia in 1914 in the company of August Macke and Louis Moillet. The trip was a very important one in Klee’s biography as an artist, since it was here that he developed the formal technique of expressively representing landscapes which was to become a crucial characteristic of his artistic vision. As his landscape watercolours such as “Motif from Hammamet” and other paintings testify, he largely experimented with a “graphic scaffolding indebted to Analytical Cubism joining squares of translucent colour” to convey his immediate optical impressions in an expressive form. What is crucial for the present context is the fact that the watercolour paintings that evolved from this process served as the basic imaginative foundation of the “Carpet of Memory.” In this oil painting, Klee attempted a retrospective view of the Tunisian journey in a representation that is no longer painted ‘after nature’ but tries to render the configuration of his impressions as recollected. The painting ‘from memory’ now blurs personal reminiscences with the manifest images that resulted from the journey. In contrast to the watercolours, in the “Carpet of Memory,” as Anne Temkin puts it, “the colors and lines sink and float in a deep, amorphous space, formed by a thick ground of tan plaster applied on muslin”59 (cf. Fig. 5). The impression of an almost bottomless depth results from the mul-

58 In 2005, the works of Paul Klee moved from the Kunstmuseum Bern to the newly built Zentrum Paul Klee.
tiple layering of semi-transparent, similar motifs strongly reminiscent of the forms and colours used in the watercolours; the visual effect of this arrangement is fittingly associated by Dabydeen with a painterly palimpsest.

The philosophy involved in this formal approach is largely indebted to Klee’s attempt to supplement the manifestly visible components of retrospective perception in his earlier pictures with intimately subjective associations. Anne Temkin thus appropriately observes that

Klee’s work acknowledged that the act of “seeing” not only consists of immediate optical sensations, but also involves associations of feelings, things, and events that have long since filtered, unnamed, into our imagination. Carpet of Memory refuses to fix visual experience in a single time or space, or in a single scene or idea.60

The parallels between Klee’s painterly approach to memory and Dabydeen’s mnemonic design in A Harlot’s Progress are not difficult to discern. Dabydeen, like Klee, employs older manifestly visual, yet also textual sources without giving them a fixed attribution to a single space or time. In Dabydeen’s view, it seems to be a fundamental right of artistic writing to disavow repressive ideological determinations by freely reformulating them in alternative ways and contexts which eventually overlap in multiple layers of narration. These reformulations, in turn, owe their justification to nothing but the individual, creative imagination of the artist. By taking the original material and weaving it into a “Carpet of Memory” among a number of alternative and even contradictory narrative threads, Dabydeen effectively shifts the meaning of the original representations into the realm of the personal, in which any claim to objective legitimacy no longer need to be negotiated.

This mnemonic strategy, of course, raises issues concerning the social responsibility a writer does or does not have when it comes to the literary evocation of Atlantic slavery. Especially with regard to histories of immense suffering and injustice, sole recourse to the realm of the individual imagination seems to be problematic; it certainly collides with demands for ethical commitment and ‘authentic’ representation that does historical ‘justice’ to the victims. Before addressing the problematic intersections of the ethical and the aesthetic in Dabydeen’s writing, however, I wish to turn to one last painting featured prominently in the novel’s mnemonic design: J.M.W. Turner’s “Slaver Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhon Coming on” (Fig. 6), also called “Slave Ship,” and first exhibited in 1840.

Appropriations of visual effects: J.M.W. Turner’s “Slave Ship” and the aestheticization of suffering

Turner’s “Slave Ship,” not surprisingly, is involved in the novel’s dialogic imagination where the two chapters about Mungo’s passage on Thistlewood’s slave ship are concerned. The marking of the mnemonic reference to the painting is here performed by taking a detour via Dabydeen’s own 1994 poem “Turner.” In *Turner*, the ekphrastic dialogue with the painting is unmistakable. The immediate reference to Turner’s “Slave Ship” is not only established in the title of both the poem and the book of poetry containing it, but is also explicated in a foreword in which Dabydeen himself comments on his ekphrastic goal; finally, the painting itself is reproduced in the volume. This, initially, seems to be of little relevance to *A Harlot’s Progress*; however, it is indeed relevant. Those parts of the novel concerned with Mungo’s passage deliberately draw upon the earlier poem and may be seen as a narrative adaptation of “Turner” within the larger narrative frame of *A Harlot’s Progress*.

A number of arguments may be offered here. The personage in Mungo’s (imaginary) African village partly overlaps with that of the drowned slaves in “Turner.” In both the novel and the poem, the village’s spiritual leader is called “Manu”; moreover, the speaker of the poem invents two sisters who bear the names “Rima” and “Ellar” (“Two sisters I will make in Manu’s memory, / Lead both to riches and to barrenness, / One and the same pathway Manu prophesied” 33), characters who, not incidentally, also feature in the novel. And last but not least, the two slave-ship captains Thomas Thistlewood and Turner are strikingly similar. This is particularly true for the rendering of the deeply schizophrenic nature of both men, oscillating between their enlightened teaching of white Anglican culture and their brutal paedophilic actions. It is written about Captain Turner in the poem: “He whispered eloquently / Into our ears as we wriggled beneath him, / Breathless with pain, wanting to remove his hook / Implanted in our flesh. The more we struggled / Ungratefully, the more steadfast his resolve / To teach us words.”61 I therefore assume that Turner’s painting “Slave Ship,” as the imaginative foil to Dabydeen’s “Turner,” is also consciously anchored in the mnemonic design of *A Harlot’s Progress*. In the following, I wish to offer further evidence by retracing the novel’s dialogic engagement with the ambivalent aesthetic effect of the image.

Both in “Turner” and in *A Harlot’s Progress*, the dialogue with Turner’s “Slave Ship” is rooted in an engagement with the image itself as well as with older ekphrastic texts written in reaction to Turner’s art. Tobias Döring, in his analysis of the poem, makes this quite clear:

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Turner is directed both towards an image and to the dominant ekphrastic monument that canonized its power. It is precisely because ‘The Slave Ship’ has for so long been textualized and inscribed with ideological positions that it offers such a profound challenge for contemporary image writing.62

The paramount “ekphrastic monument,” in this case, is John Ruskin’s famous commentary on Turner’s “Slave Ship” in the first edition of Modern Painters in 1843. The art critic, who himself owned the painting for twenty-eight years, devoted a lengthy passage to it, in which he remarks in conclusion:

I believe, if I were reduced to rest Turner’s immortality upon any single work, I should choose this. Its daring composition, ideal in the highest sense of the word, is based on the purest truth, and wrought out with the concentrated knowledge of a life. Its colour is absolutely perfect, not one false or morbid hue in any part or line, and so modulated that every square inch of canvas is a perfect composition; […] and the whole picture dedicated to the most sublime of subjects and impressions […] – the power, majesty, and dreadfulness of the open, deep, illimitable sea.63

Ruskin’s celebration of the image as an “ideal,” “true” and “sublime” representation refers exclusively to the rendering of the sea; the actual content of the painting – the drowning of shackled slaves – is relegated to a footnote: “She is a slaver, throwing her slaves overboard. The near sea is encumbered with corpses. J.R.” The marginal note, Dabydeen writes in his introduction to “Turner,” “reads like an afterthought, something tossed overboard” (ix). Suspiciously, however, this reduction of the image to a sublime representation of a tremendous seascape clearly contradicts one of Ruskin’s diary entries a few days before his father gave him the painting as a present for the success of Modern Painters on New Year’s Day, 1844. Here, Ruskin proves to be clearly irritated by the metaphysical force of the image and notes: “Suspense about the Slaver. My heart is all eyes on fish now [cf. Fig. 6, bottom right] – it knew something of other kind of eyes once, and of slavery, too, in its way. Its slavery now is colder like being bound to the dead.”64

The ambivalence of these two responses to the “Slave Ship” may be seen as representative, and even constitutive, of the uncanny force of the painting.

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62 Tobias Döring, Caribbean Passages, 147.
It seems to result from a strangely coincident evocation of both ideal and sublime beauty inherent in its composition – publicly attested by Ruskin in his commentary – and of the horror implied in the rendering of the Africans’ suffering, which Ruskin would only admit in private. It is precisely the power of this ambivalent simultaneity of visual effects that Dabydeen tries to replicate in some passages of *A Harlot’s Progress*. Thus, introducing a reading from his novel shortly after its publication in spring 1999, he formulated his creative goal thus:

I was exploring the idea whether or how you could aestheticise suffering. It has not really been a question for Caribbean writers so far. [...] this is a passage which was my attempt to explore the possibilities of aestheticising suffering in relation to the slave barracoons and slave ships.

The section from *A Harlot’s Progress* referred to here concerns the events on Thistlewood’s slave ship (96–102). The following excerpt from the novel may give an impression of how Dabydeen conceives of this literary programme of “aestheticising suffering” in relation to Atlantic slavery. It renders Mungo’s observation during the Middle Passage of a slave whom he believes to be able to identify as the beggar “Kaka,” one of the villagers. In the end, it remains unclear whether we are reliving a ‘real-life’ experience or just one of Mungo’s nightmares:

Kaka’s head is a palette of colours. Before, his head shone monotonously like a constant sun, tiring to look at, but Captain Thistlewood had banged his fist into it, obliterating the light. In place of an ordinary roundness, his head is indented in places, small pockets bearing unfamiliar liquids – raven-black, the pink of coral, rouge of crab-back – bubbling up through hidden spaces. Rubies of congealed blood hang from his ears. Here and there, glimpses of clean white bone exposed by the Captain’s cuff subdue the viewer’s eye, necessary foil to the decorative richness which threatens to overwhelm. Ellar, unable to face him, lest he is an illusion of beauty, turns to Manu for guidance. (97)

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65 Ruskin was increasingly tormented by the painting’s contents. Eventually, he tried to sell it at Christie’s, but interestingly enough did not find a buyer. Only three years after that, 28 years after he had acquired the “Slave Ship,” did he manage to sell it to an American. See Paul Gilroy, “Art of Darkness: Black Art and the Problem of Belonging to England,” 83.

The narrative dramatization of an aesthetic effect in this passage corresponds notably to Ruskin’s description of Turner’s “Slave Ship.” Ruskin, in his description in *Modern Painters*, writes:

The whole surface of the sea included in the picture is divided into two ridges of enormous swell, not high, nor local, but of a low, broad heaving of the whole ocean, like the lifting of its bosom by deep-drawn breath after the torture of the storm. Between these two ridges the fire of the sunset falls along through the sea, dyeing it with an awful, but glorious light, the intense lurid splendour which burns like gold, and bathes like blood. […] Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers gather cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood […].

A comparison of these two descriptive excerpts reveals how Dabydeen appropriates a number of the mechanisms of aesthetic stylization employed by Turner and evoked in the observations by Ruskin. Both Dabydeen’s and Ruskin’s texts concentrate on the aesthetic power of colours (“raven-black,” “pink,” “rouge,” “clean white of bone,” vs. “gold,” “purple and blue”), whose affective force results from their association with an overpowering sense of violence. Not accidentally, then, in both cases the dominant use of red is linked metaphorically or literally with blood (“lines of blood” vs. Dabydeen’s “congealed rubies of blood”). At the same time, Dabydeen’s subversive engagement with Ruskin’s and Turner’s model becomes apparent. In the novel, it is no longer the turbulent seascape in the approaching typhoon that is at the heart of the aestheticizing representation; in a drastic turning of the gaze, it is, rather, the African presence in “Slave Ship” that immediately confronts the ‘viewing’ reader – precisely the thing that Ruskin is careful to ignore in his ekphrastic description. In Turner’s painting, the aestheticizing effects first of all concern the sea overwhelmed by the violence of the storm (after all, one of the most common topoi of the sublime), and only in a secondary step of metaphoric association will the tortured sea comment on the torture and violation of the Africans. Dabydeen dramatically radicalizes Turner by eliminating the metaphoric step from tortured seascape to the plight of the Africans. Here, the raging elements are replaced by the angry fist of the captain, and the scene of violence is the bodyscape of the slave. The uncanny coexistence of aesthetic

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67 Ruskin, quoted from Dinah Birch, *Ruskin on Turner*, 47.
68 Tobias Döring thus places his analysis of Dabydeen’s ekphrasis in “Turner” under the heading “Turning the Colonial Gaze”; Döring, *Caribbean Passages*, 137–69.
beauty and plain horror, which already characterizes the strangely affecting power of Turner’s “Slave Ship,” is thus even more immediately disturbing in the novel. The image of Ellar, unable to face Kaka “lest he is an illusion of beauty” for the sheer “decorative richness” of his suffering, expresses quite well the way in which readers face Dabydeen’s evocations of Atlantic slavery in *A Harlot’s Progress*.

The effect of aestheticizing suffering, however, as Edmund Burke implies in his *Philosophical Enquiry* (which was to become the theoretical foundation of later probings into the sublime in Romantic art and literature), does not only result in feelings of overpowering fear and apprehension. Referring to the example of a London earthquake contemplated from a safe distance, Burke posits that such events, when observed from a position of personal safety (a position usually also occupied when reading or contemplating art), inevitably trigger a sensation of secret pleasure in the face of destruction.  

This complicity between apprehensiveness and arousal is a response viewers of the “Slave Ship” also face: “while you stand back and are morally outraged, it triggers off a surreptitious excitement.” Dabydeen goes even further than this, claiming that Turner himself, when painting his “Slave Ship,” must also have derived a secret pleasure from the suffering that he depicted. In his “Preface” to *Turner*, he argues: “The intensity of Turner’s painting is such that I believe the artist in private must have savoured the sadism he publicly denounced” (x). What, then, is the role of such forbidden erotic pleasure in the mnemonic design of the novel?

In Dabydeen’s understanding of art, it is in fact precisely such instances of pleasure and jouissance that are crucially important in ekphrastic engagement. His dialogue with Turner’s “Slave Ship” is to be conceived of less as technical equivalence than as an expressionist, as it were, artistic affinity:

> It is more an artistic correspondence rather than a technical parallel between the work of art as a poem and the work of art as a painting. In other words, you really have to sense, or intuit, the passion behind the

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71 Indeed, there is a continuing critical battle regarding whether Turner, as Albert Boime (in “Turner’s Slave Ship, the Victim of Empire,” in *Turner Studies* 10.1 [1990]: 34–43) argues, for example, employed the Atlantic slave trade in a sensationalist way, or whether his well-known liberal opinions were genuine. This view is held by John McCobrey, for instance, in “Turner’s Slave Ship: Abolition, Ruskin and Reception,” *Word and Image* 14.4 (1998): 319–53.
laying down of a paint rather than the technique of actually laying down the paint. If you can sense that passion or intuit that passion, then in some ways you have to try to convey that on the page as a writer.72

While Dabydeen thus notes that passages of his novel are meant to aestheti-cize the sufferings and horror of the Middle Passage, he does so by taking into account and accepting the latent erotic appeal involved in this project. Considering the immediate poetic associations of the aesthetic, the erotic, and Black Atlantic suffering, it is important at this stage to turn to issues concern-ing the ethics and political stance of Dabydeen’s mnemonic art.

The politics of memory: empowering the individual

Dabydeen’s poetics of memory is, if anything, provocative, given the discus-sion by, for instance, Theodor W. Adorno, George Steiner and Günther And-ers of what is possible and permissible in writing about inhumanity and suffering. The celebration of the literary text as a work of art beyond all socio-historical negotiability is, however, something that lies at the heart of Daby-deen’s writing. If we are to believe his contextual commentaries, he denies outright any ethical or political responsibility as a writer, insisting instead on an absolutely unrestricted imaginative dialogue with mental or manifest mnemonic resources. As I will show, A Harlot’s Progress is a highly self-conscious work of art which does very little to conceal the imaginative pres-ence of David Dabydeen as its author; rather, it marks itself as his very own individual creative mnemonic achievement, influenced largely by his own disposition and the pleasures he himself takes in writing. The liberation of the arts from all surrounding social discourses, however, is itself a highly ideo-logical move which is neither unethical nor apolitical per se. In the following discussion, I hope to shed some light on the functional potentiality attributed to the arts in connection with Black Atlantic memory in A Harlot’s Progress.

The autonomy of art in the
“Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination”

Walter Benjamin’s warning that “what draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about”73 is, as I

argued earlier, of particular relevance both to the literature dealing with Atlantic slavery and to literature about the Holocaust. The explosiveness of the topic is essentially rooted in the fear of trivializing the pain and suffering of the victims in fictional accounts of their brutalized lives. By referring to Adorno’s warning of a “dreary metaphysics that affirms the horror” in such literature, I already outlined the essential dilemma that writing about suffering faces – as Adorno puts it,

The so-called artistic rendering of the naked pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts, contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. [...] The aesthetic stylistic principle [...] make[s] the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, some of its horror removed.74

Dabydeen issues an open challenge to Adorno’s view. By elevating the “aesthetic stylistic principle” to a literary programme in his writing about Atlantic slavery and the sufferings it involved, he overturns the philosopher’s argument. Moreover, he does so very consciously. Dabydeen is not only aware of the critical discourse about writing after Auschwitz; he also associates the situation of Jewish writers facing the Holocaust with the situation of Caribbean artists writing back to the historical upheaval of the Atlantic slave trade and West Indian slavery. Thus he comments on his attempts to ‘aestheticize’ the suffering of African victims of the Middle Passage in A Harlot’s Progress:

It has more been an issue that Jewish writers are faced with writing the holocaust, Paul Celan or Jewish musicians like Schönberg. And of course there is a whole debate about all that that brings Adorno in, as to whether there can be poetry after Auschwitz.75

Adorno’s ethical scruples about the forbidden consequences of making ‘sense’ of the suffering by rendering it accessible to the ‘senses’, however, are not at all shared by Dabydeen: “So I thought I do this, I try it out.”

Dabydeen’s conception of art, then – unlike that of Caryl Phillips, who sees his writing as rooted in an inextricable unity of ethics, politics and aesthetics – champions the realm of the aesthetic over any political and ethical claims. It sees the arts as an initially autonomous, self-justifying domain. A number of contextual comments by the writer could be brought in to sustain

this. It is particularly instructive here to focus once more on the issue of surreptitious eroticism involved in the evocation of the suffering of African slaves. I asked Dabydeen in an interview whether, if he could state that Turner felt and expressed a secret erotic fascination when painting his “Slave Ship,” his own novel would not also be guilty of such an erotic undercurrent. To this Dabydeen replied:

of course, when I write about slavery, it arouses me, it must arouse me, that’s the fact why I bother to write. All subjects have the potential to arouse you. […] But what matters is the writing itself. When you come to sit down and write, it’s not to put in blocks and dams and canals and fences, you know, fences in your imagination. When you come to write, the motivation no longer matters, because you are now writing. You have been motivated sufficiently to come to the page. And the responsibility – if you have a responsibility – is to write beautifully. That’s the only responsibility that a writer has. To use words in a way that startle, and disturb, and move people.76

The uncanny affective force of Dabydeen’s writing, which accordingly tackles the issues of horror and suffering by measuring them with the very tool – aesthetics – specific to the arts, relies on the filtering-out of allegedly restrictive processes of regulation from outside. Dabydeen sees such processes – appeals for ethical restraint, for instance, or political ‘correctness’ – as “fences in the imagination” that are merely there to be overcome. “Reinventing the frames [of Hogarth and Turner],” he argues elsewhere, is above all to be seen as part of an “act of literary joy and a literary exercise, the jouissance of the literary exercise.”77 The term jouissance, of course, is Roland Barthes’, and very consciously employed in this context: “The pleasure of the text,” Barthes writes in his book by this title, “does not prefer one ideology to another. […] What is overcome, split, is the moral unity that society demands of every human product”; or else, put more drastically: “The text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father.”78 Ethics, morals or politics and their influence on literature are thus (to stay with Barthes) perceived to be doxa; they all suggest and demand the possibility of finally encircling and delimiting meaning in a process of rational

77 Dabydeen, in Lars Eckstein et al., “Literary Missions and Global Ethic,” 446.
negotiation and of remaining devoted to something like a larger, communal or historical truthfulness located outside the realm of art.

In the case of David Dabydeen, the call for a liberation of the text from these *doxa* is perhaps better understood if linked up with Wilson Harris’s notion of the “unfinished genesis of the imagination,” a concept brought up repeatedly by Dabydeen in essays and interviews. To surrender historical material to the free play of the imagination, in this light, indeed implies the bracketing-off of all non-aesthetic criteria. For Dabydeen, this constitutes the only way of recovering potentialities from the past that would be wholly inaccessible to ‘politically correct’ ways of writing. He argues:

> if you are to remember the past, and you are only to remember it within the framework of suffering, or the framework of grievances, then you are not really remembering the past. The potential that the past has – even though it might have been an aborted potential – for throwing up a bewildering array of stories which deny and transcend that suffering and those grievances, that’s the potential I really want to get to. That is something that I learned from Wilson Harris […], who talks about the “unfinished genesis of the imagination.” In other words, there is no one particular point of departure; but even if there was, if you revisit that point through memory, you can choose through your imaginative penetration of the material: you can remember it in a different way, even though it never happened like that. You can remember its potential for happening like something else.

This power of the imagination to come up with *alternative*, different and deferring versions of the past is what is celebrated in *A Harlot’s Progress*. On the level of character, this has already been illustrated by Mungo’s multiple inventions of his life and identity. On the authorial level, this applies in a very similar way. Dabydeen, by means of the “imaginative penetration of the material” he chooses as his “point of departure” – the images of Hogarth or Turner, the texts of Prince, Equiano or Thistlewood – likewise comes up with a number of “different ways” to recount the past. To speak in metaphoric terms in-

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79 “We need a narrative that helps us to sense the partiality of linear progression and brings home to us in genuine stages of creativity (rather than purely intellectual experimentation) the simultaneity of the past, present, and the future in the unfinished genesis of the imagination.” Wilson Harris, “Creoleness: The Crossroads of Civilization?,” in *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London & New York: Routledge, 1999): 244.

debted to Paul Klee: Dabydeen weaves his very own “Carpet of Memory” by subjecting the material to an intensely personal process of creative refiguration. In this “Carpet,” any sense of historical linearity or singularity of meaning is effectively dissolved in plural, palimpsestic layers of narration.

Dabydeen, in this respect, self-reflexively reveals his imaginative presence in the narrative refiguration of the material he draws on. This is first of all indicated by the confusing interplay of types of speech, forms of focalization, and different levels of narrative consciousness within A Harlot’s Progress. Throughout the novel, first-person narration by Mungo suddenly shifts to the third person, which in turn may be focalized either externally, variably (e.g., through Mungo and Pringle), or internally (through the eyes of Mungo). The passages in the third person usually appear in Standard English, while most first-person passages – if not all – are reminiscent of a creole (e.g., with regard to the omission of the ‘s’-suffix in third-person singulars or the use of the present tense when referring to past events). All this hints at a creative authority beyond the character’s horizons of consciousness, an authority that replicates Mungo’s transformative employment of memory on a superior narrative level.

That there are striking correspondences between this narrative authority and David Dabydeen as a writer is indeed fairly obvious, and is revealed both in contextual comments and in the mnemonic design of the novel itself. Of interest here are the striking fictive associations of the actual thematic content of the novel, the rewriting of Black Atlantic slavery – Mungo, after all, is an African – with the author’s biographical and intellectual interest in South Asian contexts. Thus Dabydeen explains in an interview that the African villagers haunting Mungo’s dreams are in fact largely built on some of his Indo-Caribbean acquaintances in Guyana.81 Moreover, the African life-world that Mungo remembers and dreams is not at all oriented towards an African model as such, but consists of a hybrid mélange of African, Amerindian, and (especially) Indian–Hindu elements. The name of the African shaman “Manu,” for instance, is modelled on the equivalent to the “Noah” equivalent in Hindu mythology, as Dabydeen notes with regard to the poem “Turner.”82 He thereby works quite consciously with alienating effects that imply dismissal of any

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81 “though they are set in the 18th century, [they] are really contemporary people that I know. Ellar and all those people are based on people I know who are now living in the Caribbean”; Dabydeen, in Lars Eckstein, “Getting Back to the Idea of Art as Art: An Interview with David Dabydeen,” 31.

82 See Chelva Kanaganayakam, “David Dabydeen,” 28. Kanaganayakam and Dabydeen discuss the (eventually negated) design of an idyllic African landscape in “Turner,” which is largely oriented not to an African, but to a rural Indian model.
claim to ‘authenticity’, in favour of his own imagination and highly personal associations. “This is another aspect about creolization: I don’t want to be ‘authentic’ about the African experience, nor do I want to be ‘authentic’ about the Indian experience, because I am neither; but I am both in a kind of ghostly way.”

Just as with the ‘aestheticization’ of Black Atlantic suffering, this integrative yoking-together of various cultural traditions can be extremely provocative. The most extreme instance in the novel arguably occurs when Dabydeen provides the slaves on Thistlewood’s ship with a language that consists essentially of a mélange of Hindi and Sanskrit. The following excerpt from the novel almost immediately follows upon the passage quoted earlier with regard to the issue of ‘aestheticising suffering’ in dialogue with Turner’s “Slave Ship”:

And the smells and tastes of our village so revive our senses that speech returns, not the grunting of whiteman, but in the melody of our own language. ‘Bal pa sanje aru prapa sen na rahol,’ Ellar says, addressing the whole group. [...] Manu, as if obliged by his profession to announce the future, disagrees partially with Ellar. ‘Ji na bap apha ladu deen,’ he tells them, giving credence to her advice and yet offering an alternative vision of survival. The villagers, invited to give their views, engage in agitated conversation. ‘Jaray na aswan daru sen apanjat,’ Kaka shouts above the din, stilling them by the force of their words. [...] ‘Hare da hare da jara,’ he admonishes, with the eloquence of the gods. (98–99)

Again, Dabydeen is quite aware of the ethical and political problems involved in such an association of entirely different cultural traditions and histories, especially in a context foregrounding the collective suffering endured during the African slave trade. For Dabydeen, however, literature is not the realm where such ethical or political inhibitions are to be considered; rather, it is an autonomous space where experiments in transculturality can and must be staged. This notion of transcultural writing again accords closely with the aesthetic philosophy of Wilson Harris, who repeatedly insists on the impor-

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84 “It’s the inventiveness that matters,” Dabydeen insists. “I meet some black guy who says to me ‘How come you put Manu in there? Are you blotting out my African teachers?’ And I say, ‘No, man, it’s just there as a way of exploring the possibilities of being together’.” Dabydeen, in Kwame Dawes, “Interview with David Dabydeen,” 216.
tance of a phenomenological “cross-culturality,” by which he means the inter-
dependence of all living matter, a deeper understanding of which may eventu-
ally be approached through the powers of the imagination:

It would seem to me that the apparent void of history that haunts the 
black man may never be compensated until an act of imagination 
opens gateways between civilisations, between technological and spiri-
tual apprehensions, between racial possessions and dispossession.85

In the light of Harris’s argument, Dabydeen’s art would appear to be less un-
ethical in scope than at first sight, and despite (or perhaps because of) the fact 
that it places the generative power of the aesthetic imagination above moral 
and political restraints, it is certainly not apolitical.

Creative amnesia and the transfigurative 
force of individual memory

In order to differentiate the ideologies obtaining within the traditions of black 
music, Paul Gilroy distinguishes two fundamental approaches, which he 
labels “the politics of fulfilment” and “the politics of transfiguration.” The 
first, Gilroy argues, “is mostly content to play occidental rationality at its own 
game […] The politics of transfiguration,” however, “strives in pursuit of the 
sublime, struggling to repeat the unrepresentable.”86 If Gilroy’s terms were to 
be extended to include mnemonic fictions, the ideology of A Harlot’s Pro-
gress would certainly have to be rated among the latter politics of transfigura-
In contrast to Caryl Phillips’s Cambridge, it manifests itself precisely in 
a conscious refusal of “occidental rationality,” in that it delights in plural, 
contradictory configurations of the past which escape any attempts at commu-
nicative negotiations of finite meaning. The figure of a constant ‘repetition’ of 
the “unrepresentable,” as Gilroy puts it, in continually evolving imaginative 
configurations is of particular relevance in this context: it points to the fact 
that, despite its literary jouissance, the novel is nevertheless concerned with 
the original trauma of Atlantic slavery.

On the level of character, the experience of trauma pervades the narrative, 
even though it can be assumed that it is never directly articulated. Mungo’s 
constant, almost obsessive return to the erasure of his village community and 
his experiences during the Middle Passage establish manifest versions of an –

85 Wilson Harris, “History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guyanas,” in 
Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, 166.

86 Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cam-
unspeakable – traumatic inscription. On the level of the author, in turn, the
dimension of trauma is not to be found in an immediate personal experience,
but is, rather, to be conceived of in a larger historical context. Dabydeen is
certainly part of the Caribbean–European life-world, which has emerged from
a history of wholesale violence and brutalization and continues to bear the
social consequences of these traumatic inscriptions. Thus, Édouard Glissant
asks, in a note “concerning history and neurosis”:

Would it be ridiculous to consider our lived history as a steadily
advancing neurosis? To see the Slave Trade as a traumatic shock, our
relocation (in the new land) as a repressive phase, slavery as the period
of latency, “emancipation” in 1848 as reactivation, our everyday fan-
tasies as symptoms […]?87

To conceive of *A Harlot’s Progress* on this basis as both a serious drama-
tization of such traumatic inscriptions and as a celebration of the aesthetic that
refutes ethical or political attributions of responsibility should not be seen as
contradictory. Traumatic experiences, as was pointed out in the first part of
this study, are in fact characteristically placed outside of all possibilities of
rational negotiation to start with. Trauma, as Aleida Assmann puts it, implies
the “impossibility of narration,”88 in that it is impossible to ‘make sense’ of
the experiences; the events experienced refuse their retrospective integration
into a symbolic configuration. This, I think, is crucial to an understanding of
Dabydeen’s narrative politics. The unspeakable traumas of Atlantic slavery
may be relieved of their oppressive force – this much the mnemonic design of
*A Harlot’s Progress* implies – if they are confronted by alternative versions of
this past which evolve from the free play of the imagination. In this constant
process of narrative re-vision, literature offers something like ‘therapeutic’
potential.

The ‘therapeutic’ potential of the arts, in my reading of Dabydeen’s
mnemonics, will only unfold if it rises above all restrictions of the individual
mind from without, by rejecting social norms and censorship in favour of the
immediate *jouissance* of writing; any claims for an ethically ‘adequate’, poli-
tically ‘correct’, and negotiable memory are thus initially seen as *doxa*. It is in
this context that Dabydeen’s statement that “memory, the recovery of history

87 Édouard Glissant, “The Quarrel with History,” in Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse:*
*Selected Essays*, sel. & tr. J. Michael Dash (1989; Charlottesville: UP of Virginia,

88 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen
are now oppressive in Black writing” makes better sense.⁸⁹ Instead of attempts of a ‘truthful’ recovery of history, Dabydeen champions what he calls the politics of “creative amnesia,” a term indebted to Derek Walcott. By creative amnesia, Dabydeen refers to a state of complete forgetfulness – a condition oblivious to all historical, ethical or political discourses of memory – which can be achieved through the process of creative writing. This state is not conceived of as extending beyond the realm of the artistic, and will thus always be temporary in nature; the social realities and consequences of a traumatic history will continue to matter (“It is a desire, because you are still being determined by the Columbian legacies; and you can’t be post-Columbian, because the contours of your life are still being shaped by what happened in the past; and you can’t be non-Columbian”). Still, this temporary state harbours massive transfigurative potential in the individual perception of the past:

Creative amnesia means the desire to forget […]. It is a sense of restlessness in yourself, of knowing that you never know what you are at any one stage. Therefore it is best just to envelope yourself in a kind of total forgetfulness out of which something might emerge.⁹⁰

In *A Harlot’s Progress*, the liberating potential of creative amnesia is first of all dramatized on the level of character, as Mungo’s tales about his childhood and youth testify. His memories revolve obsessively around the raid on his village, from which he claims to have been the only survivor, as well as around the physical inscription on his forehead, which appears to symbolize the trauma of the Middle Passage. In the repeated return to these thematic complexes in continually new, conflicting configurations of events, Mungo hardly seems to remember the – unspeakable, as it were – trauma itself; rather, what he essentially does is to remember “its potential for happening like something else.” The palimpsestic versions of his past evolving from the “unfinished genesis of the imagination” are constituted in a forgetfulness about the original trauma by surrounding what is unconceivable with a multiplicity of alternative configurations of meaning. Which narrative refiguration of the past specifically manifests itself, in this context, obviously has to do with Mungo’s momentary disposition in his post-traumatic state. What he refers to as “the effects of intense loneliness and loss of memory” results in a number of ambivalent sentiments such as “self-pity” and “self-loathing” (45),

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which are in turn largely responsible for the guise of the stories he churns out. If Mungo tries to make sense of the mark on his forehead by explaining it as a sign of evil for trespassing against the gods of his tribe — which, then, makes him accountable for the erasure of his village by the traders as an instance of divine punishment — momentary dispositions of self-loathing are certainly pertinent to the weaving of this narrative thread. Self-pity and loneliness may largely have to do with the story explaining the sign as a *peia* and thus marking him off as the singular descendant of Greek invaders and the inheritor of their exceptional wisdom. And even if it is most plausible that the sign indeed derives from Thistlewood’s branding iron, this tale is likely not to refer immediately to the original trauma, either. Rather, it is covered up, as it were, by a brilliant array of equally valid alternatives. These, at last, seem to free Mungo from the affective force of trauma. It is only by banning of the ghosts of the past through alternative narrative configurations — in acts of *creative forgetting* — that Mungo is eventually able to make his peace with them, even if their haunting can never be fully kept at bay. Thus the novel closes:

> there are some women — Ellar in particular — who no matter how strong the poison, secure the grave, will break out, torch the katran bush, blow with disobedient angel breath, fan the flames, that not even God’s flood can drown them out, for when the water ebbs, there is smoke still, the first smouldering thing that arise is the spirit of Ellar. (278)

The therapeutic potential of storytelling as illustrated by referring to the intermittent narrator and protagonist Mungo may be similarly applied to the overall mnemonic design of *A Harlot’s Progress*. To make this a bit clearer, it is helpful to turn briefly to Hayden White’s essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artefact,” which of course does not immediately refer to the fictionalization of the past in literary texts, but to the historiographical “emplotment” of events. Nevertheless, White’s argument does apply well to the present context, in that it offers a conceptual step from the psychology of individual trauma to the broader social relevance of narrative and writing. In his essay, White points to the parallel treatment of traumatic occurrences in psychotherapy and historiography. For a traumatized patient, White argues, certain events gain an overpowering meaning which can neither be accepted nor refused. This is not something unconscious, without the patient’s knowledge of the traumatizing facts:

> On the contrary, he knows them all too well. He knows them so well, in fact, that he lives with them constantly and in such a way as to make it impossible for him to see any other facts except through the colora-
tion that the set of events in question gives to his perception of the world […] long after they should have become “past history.”

Psychotherapy cannot confront such “overemplotments,” then, by displaying “the ‘real facts’ of the matter, the ‘truth’ against the ‘fantasy’,” nor by offering the patient a psychoanalytical meta-discourse about the origins of the suffering. What is needed, instead, is “to get the patient to re-emploi his whole life in such a way to change the meaning of those events for him and their significance for the economy of the whole set of events that make up his life.” Only on this basis, White claims, might we “say that the events are detraumatized by being removed from the plot-structure in which they have a dominant place and inserted in another in which they have a subordinate or simply ordinary function as elements of a life shared with all other men.”

White’s central argument here is that historiography performs very much in this manner with respect to the confrontation of collective traumas. Historiographic writings also ‘re-familiarize’ incomprehensible historical upheavals; their therapeutic potential shows precisely in their ability to integrate mysteriously looming and threatening past events into a plot-structure which is familiar within the cultural environment of a certain readership.

For the novelist, whose stories can open themselves to the free play of the imagination, this therapeutic potential, it may be argued, is still larger than for the historian, whose histories are confined by the unspoken laws of his or her trade. By consciously transcending the historian’s compulsion to provide, wherever possible, rational and truthful accounts of the past, and to do so, wherever possible, in chronological order with a singular, logical narrative thread, Dabydeen tries to replace the established inscriptions of Atlantic slavery in our collective and cultural memories. He even relies on the dismantling as doxa of what the historian would still subscribe to, and the celebration of the aesthetic as the sole responsibility of a writer. By refusing to consider and make sense of trauma in all but the aesthetic domain, Dabydeen destabilizes all received and socially sanctioned notions of the traumatic inscriptions of Black Atlantic slavery. It is certainly not fortuitous that Dabydeen should tackle particularly those visual manifestations of memory that have occupied a dominant place in English art history. A Harlot’s Progress writes back to the very icons of English painting – J.M.W. Turner, Sir Joshua Reynolds, William Hogarth – who are rooted, like few others, in the cultural memory of the anglophone world. The heteronomous inventions of black

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characters expressed in their visual representations – be it the sublime victim in Turner, or the alternately lusting, tame, or noble savage – are subverted in the novel. In uninhibited imaginative play with the semantic configurations of his models, Dabydeen re-tells the represented characters and events in new ways and contexts in a vertiginous, circular structure in which no one invention retains full validity. This narrative strategy, of course, applies just as well to the intertextual references established in *A Harlot’s Progress* – for instance, with regard to the refiguration of sexual violence in Thistlewood’s diaries or the generic make-up of the slave narrative. The linear, pragmatic restraints in Mary Prince’s or Olaudah Equiano’s texts which suffocate any attempts at an expressive evocation of trauma, are indeed overthrown in a disrespectful, carnivalesque play of the imagination.

In the sense-making of the novel, the mnemonic potential of the historical sources is forced into vertical and diagonal dialogue with a multiplicity of modified narratives (cf. the “matrix of dialogic relations within narrative texts” in Part One). In this dialogue with alternative “emplotments” of semantic configurations, finally, the mnemonic potential of the sources loses its repressive power; their meaning, instead, is constantly questioned. As a result, all claims to authority – both in the configuration of the original texts and images, and in Mungo’s multiple narratives – dissolve into a carnivalesque plurality of meaning. The novel’s paramount ideological strategy, then, is to be seen in the effective diffusion of oppressive meaning, an ideology which, for Dabydeen, has a transfigurative potential to be found solely in the arts. At the end of the day, this potential, he argues, is a deeply redemptive one: “I keep using the word transfiguration, I keep using the word redemption [...] you have to deal with the sociological. But I only try to deal with it so as to transcend it.”92 The price it pays, of course, is the sacrifice of all rational negotiability of the text outside of the aesthetic domain, in favour of a radical individualization of memory.

It is important to note, by way of conclusion, that Dabydeen’s mnemonic design is not to be simply accommodated under the aegis of postmodernism, even if terms such as diffusion and delegitimization seem to invite one to do so. After all, Dabydeen’s art owes much to a decidedly historical predicament: the trauma of Black Atlantic slavery and its reverberations in the individual and collective psyche. While his writing refuses to take historical responsibility and relishes jouissance, this is not to be seen as an ahistorical enterprise as such, but as something rooted in a specific view of the role of art when it comes to tackling such historical traumas. Rather than engaging in

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harmless intertextual playfulness, Dabydeen’s transfigurative mnemonic approach challenges the reader in his fundamental securities by trying “[t]o use words in a way that startle, and disturb, and move people,” thus remaining true to what could be called an ‘expressionist’ poetics and politics. Above all, however, the diffusion of oppressive meaning in *A Harlot’s Progress* has in fact little to do with the evaporation of meaning propagated by some postmodern philosophies. Dabydeen himself writes that the “problem with postmodernist theories is that they tend to dismiss ‘presence’ as a kind of metaphysical conceit and valorize ‘absence’, ‘aporia’ and ‘kenosis’”93; he is thus fully in agreement with his older West Indian co-artists Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris, who similarly reject the validity of postmodernist criticism for most Caribbean writing.94 The appropriation of major painters from the sacred halls of the Western cultural Olympus and the carnivalesque diffusion of their mnemonic configurations in continually evolving tales are instead to be seen as the conquest of a subversive presence; it is immediately directed at a Western readership which is still cocooned in eurocentric securities and can afford to ignore what it considers to be marginal spheres of existence. “Although the novel is set in the 18th century,” Dabydeen thus argues, “its concerns are very contemporary in terms of the relationship between the present Caribbean and Britain, which is a relationship between the obscure and the centre.”95

Dabydeen’s politics of memory is closer to being ‘aestheticist’ than postmodernist. For Dabydeen, artistic creativity alone offers a space for ‘creative amnesia’, an amnesia which, at the end of the day, proves to be functional with regard to the vertiginous alternative emplotment of repressive histories. The arts are by no means intended here to serve as a substitute for political or social action. Dabydeen is careful to stress that “it doesn’t mean […] an abandonment of social and political responsibility […]. So you will still write political tracts, you will still be a Paki at a bus stop in England […] – you don’t get away from these things.” Yet he continues: “But I think in art any-

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93 David Dabydeen, “Teaching West Indian Literature in Britain,” 138.
94 Walcott is rather blunt about poststructuralist thought in particular: “It convinces one that Onan was a Frenchman, but no amount of masturbation can induce the Muse.” Derek Walcott, “Caligula’s Horse,” in *After Europe*, ed. Steven Slemon & Helen Tiffin (Sydney & Aarhus: Dangaroo, 1989): 140. Harris holds that “the post-modernists have discarded depth,” a depth that in fact matters: “I am convinced that there is a tradition in depth which returns, which nourishes us even though it appears to have vanished, and that it creates a fiction in the ways in which the creative imagination comes into dialogue with clues of revisionary moment.” Wilson Harris, “Literacy and the Imagination: A Talk,” 86.
way, I want to explore the possibilities of a total freedom from the social being.\(^{96}\)

The longing for profound creative amnesia within the secure domain of the arts, however, will never be fully gratified. Thus, the novel constitutes itself in constant, uninhibited imaginative transformations of Turner, Hogarth, and others; yet, at the very same time, the creative imagination still engages in intimate dialogue with the structures and representational techniques of these artists. While Dabydeen’s mnemonic design destabilizes and subverts its sources, it remains fundamentally indebted to their structural complexity and aesthetic power, and partly also honours their ideological heritage. To quote a passage from his own “Preface” to the poem “Turner,” Dabydeen’s art is “forever stained by Turner’s [and, by extension, Hogarth’s] language and imagery.”\(^{97}\) Hence the novel expresses not only liberation from overpowering artistic assertions of the centre, but also an ambivalent fascination with their genius. As a result, *A Harlot’s Progress* in fact remains very much haunted, just like its protagonist, by the ghosts of the past.

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\(^{96}\) Dabydeen in Kwame Dawes, “Interview with David Dabydeen,” 207–208.

\(^{97}\) Dabydeen, *Turner*, x.
Fig. 1a. William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress* (1732), Plate I. Engraving, ca. 31 x 38 ins. British Museum. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

Fig. 1b. William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate II.
Fig. 1c. William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate III.

Fig. 1d. William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate IV.
Fig. 1e. William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate V.

Fig. 1f. William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate VI.
Fig. 1g. Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate IV. Detail.

Fig. 1h. Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate II. Detail.

Fig. 1i. Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate II. Detail.
Fig. 2. Enoch Seeman (attrib.), *Lady Mary Churchill, Duchess of Montague (1689–1751), with Charles, her page (c. 1725)*.
Oil on canvas, 142.5 x 114.3 cm. Boughton House.

Fig. 3. William Wissing, *Mary of Modena (c. 1685)*.
Oil on canvas, 120.6 x 97.8 cm. National Portrait Gallery.
Fig. 4. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *A Young Black* (c. 1770). Oil on canvas, 78.7 x 65 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.
Fig. 5. Paul Klee, *Carpet of Memory* [*Teppich der Erinnerung*] (1914). Oil over linen with chalk and oil ground, mounted on cardboard, 37.8/37.5 x 49.3/50.3 cm. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2006.
Fig. 6. J.M.W. Turner, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhon [sic] Coming On* (1840).
Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm.
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Now he heard the griot muttering his prophetic song
of sorrow that would be the past. It was a note, long-drawn
and endless in its winding like the brown river’s tongue
– Derek Walcott, *Omeros*

*Beloved*, published in 1987, is the highly acclaimed fifth novel of
the most successful African-American writer of our times; it was
awarded the Pulitzer in 1988, and played a major role in the awarding
of the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison in 1993. So much has been written about
*Beloved* in recent years that a word of justification seems necessary for why
yet another investigation should be added to the flood of critical literature on
the novel. It is important to note in this context that despite the sheer amount
of critical attention, one crucial aspect of Morrison’s poetic scope has not
been sufficiently considered: namely, the “aural” musicality of *Beloved.*
While *Jazz* (1992), her next novel, as well as her third novel *Song of Solomon*
(1977) – not least because of the programmatic titles – have been associated
with musical forms of expression, this has generally not been the case with
*Beloved.* This is all the more surprising as the mnemonic design of Mor-
rison’s intimate fictional evocation of Black Atlantic slavery is rooted in a
dialogue with a decidedly African-American musical tradition. *Beloved* is a

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1 Morrison characterizes her art as “aural literature – A-U-R-A-L – work because I
do hear it”; in Christina Davis, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” in *Conversations*
230.

2 A fine exception to this is the work of Alan Rice, who analyzes the cultural
validity of jazz in *Beloved* by focusing on Paul D’s chain-gang experience. See Rice,
“It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing: Jazz’s Many Uses for Toni Morris-
on,” in *Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renais-
perfect example of a jazz-text, as both its story and narrative discourse are largely musical in scope. As such, its predominant mnemonic strategies differ from those of Cambridge and A Harlot’s Progress. Morrison’s musical poetic presents us with a challenging contrast to Caryl Phillips’s montage of older texts and Dabydeen’s dialogic employment of manifest images. It is not only with regard to the poetics of memory, however, that Morrison treads a third path. Her politics of memory, too, differ from Phillips’s endeavour to democratize a cultural memory shared by the descendants of victims and perpetrators alike, and Dabydeen’s radical individualization of memory and celebration of the subjective artistic imagination. With Beloved, Morrison creates a mnemonic design that instead favours a collective cultivation of memory.

Born Cloe Anthony Wofford in 1931, Toni Morrison grew up in the American Midwest. Both her generational and her sociohistorical background thus differ considerably from that of her younger British colleagues. Her place of birth, Lorrain, Ohio, and the black community she grew up with have always been a major point of reference in her literary work. Morrison particularly emphasizes the special form of communal solidarity, “both support system and a hammer,” which flourished in the rural black working-class milieu of the North, largely untouched by the Southern plantocracies and the urban black ghettos. Within this black community, her childhood was shaped by a number of converging influences. The African-American oral tradition, in the form of folk- and trickster tales, but also of ghost stories passed on by the old to the young, was as important as the written tradition; her family held the Anglo-American classics in high esteem, along with the European tradition from Dickens to Tolstoy. What is more, music played a crucial role in Morrison’s socialization. Almost all of her mother’s family were musicians (her grandfather made his money as a violinist, her mother for some time accompanied silent movies on the piano), and “music was everywhere and all around,” as Morrison puts it. “My mother sang opera,” she remembers of her childhood days, “she sang sentimental Victorian songs, she sang arias from Carmen, she sang jazz, and she sang blues, she sang what Ella Fitzgerald sang, she sang ‘Ave Maria’.” While Morrison refers to the fact that she grew up in the company of highly skilled musicians, she also notes: “highly skilled,

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meaning most of them couldn’t read music but they could play everything they heard … instantly.”\(^6\)

Morrison studied English at Howard and later Cornell, where she completed her master’s degree with a dissertation on William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. What followed were teaching engagements at Texas Southern, later again at Howard, until, at an informal writers’ workshop, she came up with the script of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, which was eventually published in 1969. At that time, Morrison was already thirty-eight, divorced with children, and had taken on a new job as an editor for Random House in New York, in the course of which she took an important part in bringing to the light of day the writings of a younger generation of African-American writers such as Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara and Angela Davis. After the increasing success of her novels, Morrison also started teaching again, in particular at Princeton, and gave up her job at Random House in 1985. Her academic career has resulted in a number of publications, the most noteworthy of which is her 1992 essay *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.\(^7\) In an argument reminiscent of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, she calls for a fundamental revaluation of canonized US-American writers from Poe and Melville to Twain and Hemingway. These writers, she claims, have done much to establish an ‘Africanist’, as she calls it, discourse, which manifests itself in either the meaningful evasion or the fetishizing of the presence of Africans in America. As such, she argues, they are merely employed as a backdrop on which to project the fear and desires of white America. Morrison’s own fictional work, in this context, is to be read in the light of an implicit criticism of the heteronomous assertions of blackness in the literary canon, as attempts at an autonomous location of black America.

In her novels, the importance of the black community, the combination of oral and written narrative traditions, and the omnipresence of music are to be seen as the crucial elements of her thematic and stylistic approach and the creation of her unique ‘sound’. In her debut *The Bluest Eye*, as well as in *Sula* (1974), Morrison focuses particularly on the opportunities and restrictions of life in a black Midwestern community. *The Bluest Eye* is written most explicitly against the overpowering aesthetic ideals of the white cultural machine – the novel’s protagonist, Polly Breedlove, who is pregnant by her own father and consequently shunned by the community, desperately longs for Shirley Temple’s blue eyes. *Sula*, which stages the lifelong ambivalent friendship of two women, picks up a number of the thematic configurations of the earlier

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novel, and again questions hypocritical, patriarchal moral standards. Above all, though, it continues to engage with the black community at large, whose self-imposed codes establish a communal dynamic and coherence, while preventing any coming to terms with difference and otherness.

The next two novels, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Tar Baby* (1981), betray an increasing thematic and stylistic involvement with the African-American oral tradition. This is particularly visible in *Tar Baby*, which writes back to the configuration of a popular trickster tale. Unlike the earlier novels, *Tar Baby* concentrates on the singular, almost dramatic setting of a small Caribbean island which hosts four central characters: a rich white North American couple; Jadine, a young African-American woman who has been acculturated in France at their expense; and the poor black renegade Son. The thematic parallel to the trickster tale is hard to miss. Jadine can be aligned with the Tar Baby, a white doll covered in black tar from the outside by the white farmer; she is laid out as a trap for the trickster Brer Rabbit, whose role in the novel is played by Son.

*Song of Solomon*, by contrast, pursues more resolutely Morrison’s preoccupation with the black community in the USA; this time, however, she picks a narrative format that is more epic in scope than before and presents a complex plot covering three generations of black community life. The protagonist of this *Bildungsroman*, Milkman Dead, sets out to track back through the traces of his family history in a journey which – in a subversion of the typical African-American story of emancipation – takes him from the North into the deep South. The novel’s leitmotif is once again rooted in folk orality: namely, the legend of the ‘flying Africans’, evoking African slaves that returned back across the Atlantic by magically acquiring the ability to fly. Beyond such references to the oral tradition, the novel features stylistic patterns indicating a dialogic engagement with manifestations of African-American music.8

With *Jazz* (1991), this dialogue with black music is finally firmly established as a central characteristics of Morrison’s art; Morrison herself describes the novel as anchored in a “notion of jazz as a demanding, improvisational art form,” written as a “love song of a book talking to the reader.”9 These com-

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ments are of particular interest in our context, since the novels published under the titles *Beloved* and *Jazz* evolved from a single project that eventually grew so large that Morrison’s editor insisted on publishing *Beloved* first as a separate volume. *Jazz* and *Beloved* are both inspired by historical documents. In the case of the latter, Morrison came across a newspaper clipping on the Garner Fugitive Slave case in the course of her editorial work for the *Black Book* at Random House.10 The story of Margaret Garner, who killed her own infant child to save it from being returned to slavery, will be discussed in closer detail a little further on. *Jazz*, in turn, was inspired by a photograph by James Van der Zee, who in the *Harlem Book of the Dead*11 collected images of deceased Harlem blacks and supplemented them with a brief account of their lives. The image that affected Morrison most depicts a beautiful young woman who was shot down by her lover at a party, yet who let him get away by meeting all inquiries with the answer “I’ll tell you tomorrow. I’ll tell you tomorrow.” It is only in the combination of the Garner case and this image that Morrison felt the impulse to a new project, as she explains in a conversation with Gloria Naylor; Morrison consequently insists on the continuity governing this project:12

> I just imagined the life of a dead girl which was the girl that Margaret Garner killed. […] I just imagined her remembering what happened to her, being someplace else and returning, knowing what happened to her […] and the questions that she has in this situation, which is 1851 [sic], and then extend her life, you know, her quest, all the way through as long as I care to go, into the twenties where it switches to this other girl. Therefore I have a New York uptown-Harlem milieu in which to put this love story, but Beloved will be there also.13

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10 The *Black Book* is an eclectic collection of numerous documents of African-American history; Morrison was the advisory in-house editor. See Middleton A. Harris, with Morris Levitt, Roger Furman & Ernest Smith, *The Black Book*, preface by Toni Morrison (New York: Random House, 1974).


12 This continuity not only matters with regard to the story, but also with regard to the musicalization of both novels, as I hope to show in the course of this discussion. The musical scope of the narrative has been largely acknowledged for *Jazz*, yet hardly for *Beloved*.

Retrospectively, Morrison’s breath lasted even longer than the evocation of the 1920s as depicted in *Jazz*. With *Paradise* (1998), she closes the *Beloved* trilogy by taking the issues of the black community, female solidarity, unconditional love and ancestral heritage right into the 1970s. *Love* (2003), finally, depicts a small black community in an Atlantic seaside town featuring a once-famous resort run by the late entrepreneur and patriarch Cosy. In her most recent novel to date, Morrison weaves a dense tale about three generations of love and betrayal surrounding Cosy, who himself remains in the shadows. In the present study, however, I wish to focus exclusively on the novel *Beloved*, in which Morrison deals most explicitly with the inscriptions of the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery in the memory of literature.

The complex narrative of *Beloved* begins in the year 1873, shortly after the abolition of slavery in the USA, in a black community in the rural outskirts of Cincinnati just north of the Ohio river, which demarcated the free North from the slaveholding South. Here, in a house on “Bluestone Road,” number 124, we learn that Denver’s grandmother, Baby Suggs, had died years before; also, her two older brothers, Burglar and Howard, have long fled the house, which is obviously haunted by a ghost-baby. This changes with the arrival of Paul D, an old friend of Seth’s, who succeeds in driving out the ghost. Paul D moves in with the two women and begins a love-relationship with Sethe. Through their detailed mutual recollections of the past, Morrison establishes a second setting south of the Ohio river: a small plantation bearing the euphemistic name “Sweet Home.” The occurrences there in Sethe and Paul D’s younger years, and the suffering entailed by these events, crop up successively in fragmentary, hesitant sequences of remembrance.

In the unfolding tale of Sweet Home, the slaves Paul D, his brothers Paul F and Paul A, the halfbreed American Indian Sixo, Halle and his mother, Bady Suggs, are granted a great amount of liberty. Their master, Garner, held himself to be an “enlightened” slave owner and thus allowed them to organize the field work and household themselves, even allowing them to carry weapons. The “Sweet Home men,” as they call themselves, are joined by the youthful Sethe, who is soon courted by every single one of them. Sethe eventually chooses Halle, whose dedication to his mother she admires – Halle manages to buy Baby Suggs’ freedom by doing extra labour on weekends. A radical change of luck occurs, however, when Garner dies and his wife falls irreversibly ill; Mrs. Garner brings in a man the slaves come to call “Schoolteacher” to administer the estate along with his two nephews. This man successively takes away all the liberties granted by their late master, robbing the slaves of their self-esteem. Schoolteacher plainly personifies a (para)scientific racism – for instance, having his nephews list the animal vs. human characteristics of Sethe’s physiognomy. Consequently, the slaves plan to flee north
together to meet up with Baby Suggs, who took up residence in a house on the outskirts of Cincinnati after Halle bought her freedom. Before their plan can succeed, however, havoc breaks out: Halle is driven mad by secretly witnessing how his pregnant wife is sexually abused by Schoolteacher and his nephews, and thus fails to turn up at the meeting point. Sending her children ahead, Sethe returns to look for him and is captured together with Paul D, Sixo and Paul A. After a cruel whipping, she desperately flees by herself to be with her children; Sixo is burnt alive before the eyes of Paul D, who is given the ‘bit’, sold, and, after attacking his new owner, imprisoned in the deep South.

In their intimate companionship, Paul D and Sethe eventually manage to speak about the occurrences after their separation at Sweet Home. Paul D’s story is an account of his experiences on a Georgia chain gang; he eventually manages to escape, into an extended, restless odyssey through numerous states until he finally arrives at Bluestone Road 124. Sethe’s account begins with her flight north, during which she gives birth to her daughter Denver on shore of the Ohio river. An important role is played here by a young, impoverished white girl by the name of Amy Denver, who acts as midwife to Sethe and gives her the strength to continue her journey. What follows are twenty-eight happy days for Sethe in the bosom of her family and the black community where her mother-in-law had settled; Baby Suggs herself has risen to be the popular spiritual centre of the community and regularly preaches in a nearby clearing. Again, however, a catastrophe approaches in the guise of Schoolteacher, who comes riding down Bluestone Road to reclaim his ‘property’ in the name of the Fugitive Slave Act. In a momentary fit, Sethe gathers her children and tries to kill them in order to save them from the degradations of slavery; while Denver, her youngest, can be saved at the last moment, Sethe cuts her two-year-old daughter’s throat with a handsaw.

After spending time in prison, Sethe returns to Bluestone Road 124 and eventually leads a secluded life with Denver. The community turns away from the family, Baby Suggs dies in seclusion and Sethe’s older children flee the

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14 A metal face mask that presses on the tongue, usually fitted to slaves as a punishment for eating cane in the fields.

15 The Fugitive Slave Act established an amendment to the 1793 legal arrangement regarding fugitive slaves. “Under this law, any person – black or white – could be deputized to help capture and return a runaway slave. Refusing to help recapture the fugitive would result in imprisonment and fine. And the only testimony allowed was the testimony of the person who claimed to own the alleged fugitive.” Charles Johnson, Patricia Smith and the WGBH Research Team, *Africans in America: America’s Journey through Slavery* (San Diego CA: Harvest, 1998): 388. See also Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law* (Chapel Hill: U of Carolina P, 1968).
spooked house. Only some twenty years after the killing can Paul D’s arrival give new hope for a tolerable future – instead, however, the past seems to return in the form of a mysterious child-woman in her twenties. The eerie girl calls herself “Beloved,” in accordance with the inscription on the gravestone of Sethe’s dead infant daughter. Her entry into the novel’s configuration triggers a number of complex relations. Beloved and Paul D are instantly involved in a bitter battle for Sethe’s attention; Beloved succeeds, step by step, in driving Paul D out of the house, not least by uncannily seducing him against his will. Denver is convinced she has regained her lost sister; thus she tries to gain her full trust in order to be able to protect her from another act of violence on the part of her mother. Beloved’s attention, however, is set entirely on Sethe, whose story she seems to be familiar with in surprising detail. Sethe herself finally gives in to the belief that her lost daughter has come back to her; after Paul D leaves the women (he falls out with Sethe when she confesses the murder of her child), she gives up work and focuses all her attention on Beloved, whose desire for unlimited devotion grows ever more demanding. In the end, it is Denver who frees herself from Beloved’s spell and ventures forth into the community to take up work in place of her mother. The community, in turn, starts to take an interest in Paul D, Denver and Sethe’s fate. The novel ends with a communal event during which a number of women exorcize Beloved by means of a collective ritual chant. Beloved, who is big with child at this stage, disappears without a trace, while Sethe, Denver and Paul D come together again for a common future.

No other issue has been so vigorously argued in the critical reception of the novel as the ‘true’ nature of the mysterious character Beloved. Three major lines of interpretation can be distinguished. First of all, it is not far-fetched to hold Beloved to be Sethe’s murdered daughter who returns from “another place” to the world of the living in uncannily manifest guise; such a reading is sustained by Denver and Sethe’s reception of Beloved, as well as by Beloved’s uncanny familiarity with songs Sethe sang to her infant children or with earrings Sethe wore at that time. And, of course, a jagged scar on Beloved’s throat does much to authorize this version.

A second way of reading Beloved is triggered by the fact that her memories of “another place,” which Denver and Sethe unquestioningly take to be
some realm of limbo between the worlds of the living and the dead, in fact include references to a very real slave ship. Her scar, here, could be explained as deriving from the iron collar she wore during the Middle Passage. Her highly cryptic, fragmented recollections give a twisted impression of how she went through the torments of the Atlantic crossing, during which her own mother chose to commit suicide by jumping overboard. Beloved, in this reading, cannot be Sethe’s daughter, then, but has to be some other girl; individual interpretations go as far as to claim that instead of being Sethe’s daughter, Beloved in fact embodies Sethe’s African mother, from whom she was separated as a child.  

A third version, finally, argues strictly against all metaphysical implications. Elizabeth B. House, for instance, holds Beloved to be a young woman who has been hidden away and sexually exploited for years by a sadistic white farmer. Such an explanation is based on good evidence in the novel as well. As Stamp Paid, a member of the community who helped Sethe on her flight across the Ohio river, recounts: “Was a girl locked up in the house with a whiteman over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that’s her.”

But the problems do not go away if one opts for one reading of Beloved and ignores the others. In fact, the text authorizes all of them without offering clear signs of preference. The multiple façades of Beloved as a character and the resulting openness of textual meaning seem to be carefully crafted. As Morrison herself comments: “When you see Beloved towards the end, you don’t know; she is either a ghost who has been exorcised or she’s a real person pregnant by Paul D, who runs away”; moreover, the equally valid asso-

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17 Jennifer L. Holden–Kirwan emphasizes that Sethe grew up in the care of another African woman and has no memories of her real mother while she was still alive: Beloved, who embodies her mother in younger years, lost her own mother – Sethe’s grandmother – in turn, who committed suicide by jumping overboard the slave ship that brought them to the Americas. In Sethe (who resembles her own grandmother), Holden–Kirwan claims, Beloved believes to have recovered her own lost mother. Holden–Kirwan, “Looking Into the Self that Is No Self: An Examination of Subjectivity in Beloved,” *African American Review* 32.3 (1998): 415–26.


20 Morrison, in *Angels Carabi*, “Toni Morrison,” 43. Morrison hints at a possible connection between Beloved and the character Wild in *Jazz*, a crazy woman who lives in the woods of Virginia.
ciation of Beloved’s fate with the experience of death and the experience of the Middle Passage is in itself meaningful:

She is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like this in the text. She is also another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship. She speaks the language, a traumatized language, of her own experience, which blends beautifully in her questions and answers, and her preoccupations, with those of Denver and Sethe. […] Both things are possible, and there’s evidence in the text so that both things could be approached, because the language of both experiences – death and middle passage – is the same.21

Beloved thus works on several planes and fulfils several functions in the narrative context, one of which is to embody not only an individual fate but also the collective suffering of enslavement and the Middle Passage. Sally Keenan, for instance, argues that “the figure of Beloved […] is not only the lost daughter, but she is also all the dead victims of slavery, reaching out to the living, demanding to be remembered,”22 an argument sustained by the novel’s dedication to “Sixty Million and more”; a number that refers to the African victims of the slave trade, as Morrison has explained in interviews.23 Also crucial is the fact that Beloved acts as a catalyst. Through her sheer presence, her constant hunger for tales, and the “profound satisfaction she got from storytelling” (58), she brings the inhabitants of Bluestone Road 124 to face their own past, and to try and articulate this in a narrative format that can be shared with others.

23 “Some historians told me 200 million died. The smallest number I got from anybody was 60 million.” Toni Morrison in Bonnie Angelo, “The Pain of Being Black: An Interview with Toni Morrison,” in Conversations with Toni Morrison, ed. Taylor–Guthrie, 257. Such absolute figures are difficult to evaluate for the sheer lack of data and secure methods of investigation, and should therefore be treated with caution.
The poetics of memory: the art of musicalization

In what kind of larger mnemonic design, however, are the character’s “re-memories” (95) embedded? In the following, I wish to tackle this question by first looking at possible mnemonic references of the novel to various written texts. Even if such relations cannot be denied, however, the actually marked field of reference in which Morrison positions *Beloved* is musical in nature. The musical memory of the novel will therefore lie at the heart of the analyses in this chapter, with regard both to thematization and to dramatizations of African-American musical traditions from their beginnings in work songs, spirituals and blues all the way to modern styles of jazz.

*Exposition: of writing and not writing back to the Garner case, slave narratives, and the Euro-American literary tradition*

The intertextual relations of *Beloved* have been a widely discussed issue in the critical reception of the novel. It is in three areas specifically that references to other texts or genres have been located and analysed. First, what is at stake here is the novel’s relation to documents testifying to the historical case of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner. Unlike all the other intertextualities in the novel, Morrison’s recourse to these documents (at least one of them) is clearly marked, in that a newspaper clipping about the infanticide committed by Sethe features in the narrative framework. Secondly, the novel has been read in relation to slave narratives. Here, however, things are less straightforward. Much has been made of statements by Morrison in her essay “The Site of Memory,” in which she links *Beloved* to the tradition of African-American autobiography, but it is very difficult to discern any discrete references to slave narratives in the novel. Thirdly, *Beloved* has inspired a number of readings which see the novel as being in close dialogue with various novels in the Euro-American literary tradition. But it is doubtful that such relations are intentional.

Morrison’s peculiar approach to the handling of written sources may be best illustrated with reference to the Garner fugitive slave case.24 The histor-

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cal episode can be reconstructed as follows from a number of newspaper reports, from abolitionist tracts, and from a number of biographical and autobiographical accounts. In the winter of 1856, Margaret Garner, a young Kentucky slave “about five feet high, showing one fourth or one third white blood [with] bright and intelligent eyes,” her husband Simon Garner, Jr., her four children, Simon’s parents and nine other slaves fled north across the frozen Ohio river on a horse sledge. In Ohio, the Garner family went into hiding in downtown Cincinnati in the house of a relative. Here they were tracked down by slave catchers just a few hours after their arrival. Confronted with an impending return to slavery, Margaret Garner cut the throat of her three-year-old daughter with a kitchen knife, and tried in vain to kill her other children. Garner was put on trial for murder, yet was never convicted. Ironically, the very man she wanted to save her children from saved her for the sake of profit by selling her down the river. Sources yield little and contradictory information about her subsequent fate. According to Levi Coffin, she jumped into the Ohio river with her youngest child on her transport back south, but was hauled out, while her daughter drowned. Apparently, Margaret Garner died on a Mississippi plantation in 1858.

It is immediately apparent that Morrison greatly transformed the historical sources to suit her narrative design. The historical Margaret Garner and her husband lived on different, neighbouring plantations; in Morrison’s version, these are unified to form the setting of “Sweet Home.” In the novel, the slaves escape not in winter, but in summer; it is not a matter of hours until the slave catchers arrive in Cincinnati, but of twenty-eight days; the showdown is set on

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27 Different accounts give different views of how the other people around Margaret Garner reacted to her deed: Some documents claim that all four adults were present at the site of murder and started to scream when she attacked her daughter; others such as Levi Coffin claim that the men were actually fighting off the slave catchers with guns in other parts of the house at this time. The document Morrison used for the *Black Book* claims that Margaret Garner’s mother in law “neither discouraged nor encouraged her daughter in law, – for under similar circumstances she would have probably done the same.” See Catherine Gunther Kodat, “A Postmodern *Absalom, Absalom!*, a Modern *Beloved*,” 191.
the rural outskirts of the city and not in the centre. And, in particular, Margaret Garner’s story after her trial has very little to do with the fictional events spun around Sethe.

Morrison repeatedly points out that the Garner case served merely as an inspirational point of departure:

I’m not interested in real-life people as subjects for fiction. If I write about somebody who’s an historical figure like Margaret Garner, I don’t really know anything about her. What I knew came from reading two interviews with her. […] if I had known all there was to know about her I never would have written it. It would have been finished, there would have been no place for me there.28

It is for this reason, then, Morrison argues, that she consciously refused to fully research the historical Garner case. In a representative statement, she speaks of “this story I came across about this woman called Margaret Garner who had escaped from Kentucky, I think, into Cincinnati [who] was a kind of cause célèbre in 1855 or ’56,” about which she had found “an article in a magazine of the period”: “I did a lot of research about everything else in the book – Cincinnati, about the abolitionists, about the underground railroad – but I refused to find out anything else about Margaret Garner.”29

Morrison’s alleged ignorance about the exact details of the Garner case, however – note the vagueness of her choice of words in “I think, into Cincinnati,” “in 1855 or ’56,” “an article,” not two or indeed several – is questionable if one compares it with other contextual evidence. In another interview, for instance, Morrison shows that she is fact intimately familiar with the details, such as the exact locations involved (“Boon County”), the intricate legal manoeuvres of the abolitionists, and Margaret Garner’s fate after her trial:

Well, she wasn’t tried for killing her child. She was tried for a real crime, which was running away – although the abolitionists were trying very hard to get her tried for murder because they wanted the Fugitive Slave Law to be unconstitutional. […] But they went all back to Boone County and apparently the man who took them back – the man she was going to kill herself and her children to get away from – he sold her down river, which was as bad as was being separated from each other. But apparently the boat hit a sandbar or something, and she fell or jumped with her daughter, her baby, in the water […] but they

rescued her and I guess she went on down to New Orleans, and I don’t
know what happened after that.30

It has to be assumed, then, that Morrison studied the available sources much
more thoroughly than she is willing to publicly admit. Why, then, the demon-
strative display of lack of interest in the diverse historical accounts and the
emphasis on her own imaginative presence in the novel’s fictional design?31

Morrison clearly distrusts the written documents of slavery. Such docu-
ments may either be benevolent, such as the writings of white abolitionist, or
openly racist, such as the tracts of their opponents. In both cases, however,
they are inevitably structured and manipulated by power relations reflecting
decidedly white interests. This much is reflected in the narrative itself, when
Stamp Paid hands to Paul D a newspaper clipping which shows an image of
Sethe and her youngest daughter in prison:

The print meant nothing to him [Paul D] so he didn’t even glance at it.
[...] Because there was no way in hell a black face could appear in a
newspaper if the story was about something anybody wanted to hear.
A whip of fear broke through the heart chambers as soon as you saw a
Negro’s face in a paper since the face was not there because the person
had a healthy baby, or outran a street mob. Nor was it because the
person had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or
whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated, since that could
hardly qualify as news in a paper. It would have to be something out of
the ordinary – something whitepeople would find interesting, truly
different, worth a few minutes of teeth sucking if not gasps. And it
must have been hard to find news about Negroes worth the breath
catch of a white citizen of Cincinnati. (155–56)

30 Morrison, in Marsha Darling, “In the Realm of Responsibility: An Interview with
Toni Morrison,” 251.

31 In the meantime, Morrison’s position has called forth an alternative book-length
version of the Garner case in the guise of a documentary novel by Steven Weisen-
burger. In his preface, Weisenburger notes: “The following chapters tell the historical
narrative that Toni Morrison’s novelistic genius set aside. Being bound by the rules of
evidence, my book does not have the novel’s imaginative freedom, and keeps to the
Garner’s story, with its dramatic fugitive slave trial, their return to the South, and tragic
finale. Unlike Beloved, these chapters do not lead to happy endings.” Modern Medea:
A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South (New York: Hill &
Wang, 1998): 11. Weisenburger’s bibliography provides an extensive listing of the
available sources regarding Margaret Garner’s life.
The authority of white testimony in the quest for a truthful and emotionally resonant evaluation of slavery is undermined in this passage, which echoes Morrison’s public dismissal of the selective, sensationalist, and heteronomous discourse in which written testimonies seem to be rooted:

while you can’t really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There’s a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways, and the job of recovery is ours.32

While Morrison acknowledges the Garner case and – in a somewhat limited fashion – its written sources as an inspirational point of departure, she is very careful to simultaneously question their value and to position the mnemonic design of *Beloved* in a realm outside of the tradition of such writing.

Morrison’s perception of a sense of “obfuscation, distortion and erasure” in the written testimonies of slavery, however, is not restricted to documents written by white observers, but extends to the testimonial accounts of black authors. In the critical reception of *Beloved*, it has been repeatedly stated that the novel must be read in close intertextual dialogue with nineteenth-century slave narratives – not an unreasonable requirement when one considers the thematic and temporal scope of *Beloved*. What comes to mind particularly is the classic *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, whose author, Harriet Jacobs, hid away in a small wooden shack for seven years to escape the sexual predations of her notoriously inhuman owner.33 All the same, while Caryl Phillips and David Dabydeen in *Cambridge and A Harlot’s Progress* immediately inscribe the slave narrative in the mnemonic framework of their novels through strategies of extensive quotation or thematization, such discrete references are missing in *Beloved*. Even if Morrison claims the slave narrative to be a “part of my own literary heritage,”34 she is as suspicious of their limitations as she is of the reports of white observers of slavery. This is particularly the case when it comes to the expressive potential of black autobiography, which she

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sees as being suffocated in the pragmatic constraints exerted by censorship, either by the writers themselves or at hands of their editors. Thus, Morrison answers the question whether she had immersed herself in nineteenth-century slave narratives in her research for *Beloved* by stating:

> I wouldn’t read them for information because I knew that they have been authenticated by white patrons, that they couldn’t say everything they wanted to say because they couldn’t alienate their audience; they had to be quiet about certain things.\(^{35}\)

Again, when Morrison admits to writing back to the tradition of the slave narrative, she does so by carefully placing her novel in a different narrative realm. Rather than evoking what is present in the older narratives, she tries to uncover a form of expression that gives voice to what had been silenced: “My job is to rip away that veil over ‘proceedings too terrible to relate’,” she claims, “the matrix of the work I do is the wish to extend, fill in and complement slave autobiographical narratives. But only the matrix.”\(^{36}\)

What are the gaps and fissures of the written testimonies to be filled with? Morrison emphasizes the importance of personal memories and the individual imagination. On the one hand, memory and imagination rely on primary experience; on the other, they also rely on experiences with and of other people. In “The Site of Memory,” Morrison comments on the imaginative process:

> whenever I have tried to speculate on [my father’s and my grandmother’s] interior life and match it to my own I have been overwhelmed every time by their richness compared to my own. Like Frederick Douglass talking about his grandmother, and James Baldwin talking about his father, and Simone de Beauvoir talking about her mother, these people are my access to me, they are my entrance into my own interior life […] I acknowledge [the images that float around] them as my route to an exploration of an interior life that was not written.\(^{37}\)

Even if Morrison gives priority to the reconstruction of experience within the unwritten world of her own family history in this comment, her illustration of the imaginative process with similar instances in the writing of Frederick Douglass, Simone de Beauvoir and James Baldwin testifies to the fact that the creative imagination fundamentally relies on the confrontation with secondary


\(^{36}\) Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” 302 and 305.

\(^{37}\) Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” 303.
experiences expressed by other writers in other texts. It is therefore highly probable that Beloved bears a relationship to a number of other texts which may have served as an inspirational foil in writing her novel. In the critical reception, such relations have been perceived as residing in dialogue with nineteenth-century American writers, both black and white; first and foremost, however, they have been detected in the novel’s dialogue with European and American modernists.

Yet here, too, such relations are marked neither textually nor contextually. It is thus legitimate to assume that Beloved indeed relates intertextually to Hawthorne, Faulkner or Woolf, yet it is hardly possible to consider them as intentional references within the mnemonic design of the novel. On the contrary, Morrison goes out of her way to play down the importance of her predecessors in the Western literary tradition. With regard to William Faulkner, she states, after reading from Beloved as a work in progress: “I’m not sure he had any effect on my work,” adding a little later: “It was important to me as a writer to try to make the book irrevocably black.”

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38 Linden Peach, for instance, reads Beloved in dialogue with the works of African American women writers such as Frances Harper’s Iola Leroy; or Shadows Uplifted (1892), Anna Julia Cooper’s Voices from the South: By a Black Woman of the South (1892) and Pauline Hopkins’ Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life in the North and South (1900); Peach, “The Middle Passage: Beloved,” in Toni Morrison (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000): 102–25. Other critics have investigated affinities with Mark Twain and Nathaniel Hawthorne: for instance, in Richard C. Moreland, “‘He wants to put his story next to hers’: Putting Twain’s Story Next to Hers in Morrison’s Beloved,” as well as Caroline M. Woidat, “Talking Back to Schoolteacher: Morrison’s Confrontation with Hawthorne in Beloved,” in Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches, ed. Nancy J. Peterson (Baltimore MD & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997): 155–80, and 181–200.

39 Above all, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf are centre-stage here, not in the least because Morrison’s 1955 master’s thesis at Cornell University dealt with “Virginia Woolf’s and William Faulkner’s Treatment of the Alienated.” Two representative volumes of criticism investigating intertextual relations to Faulkner and Woolf are Lisa Williams, The Artist as Outsider in the Novels of Toni Morrison and Virginia Woolf (Westport CT & London: Greenwood, 2000), and Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned, ed. Kolmerten, Ross & Wittenberg. The parallels between Morrison’s art and that of her predecessors are often located in the features of certain characters; moreover, a frequent argument refers to the ‘modernist’ quality of style. The results are in fact often convincing and sustain the assumption that Morrison is indebted to the likes of Faulkner and Woolf, even if the references are never explicit or clearly marked.

understanding (which she is careful not to place above the understanding of other African-American writers), this resolutely ‘black’ aesthetic is only to be achieved by ignoring the Western literary tradition – indeed, by rejecting the entire legacy of written texts.

Morrison herself gives two reasons why she avoids or conceals all intertextual references to written material (to which her art certainly owes more than she is willing to admit). First, she holds that textual references function as a higher ground to which her readers may be tempted to retreat; “name dropping, lists, literary references, unless oblique and based on written folklore,” she claims, prevent them from surrendering imaginatively to the performativity of her narration:

> Literary references in the hands of writers I love can be extremely revealing, but they can also supply a comfort I don’t want the reader to have because I want him to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would. I want to subvert his traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination.

Secondly, Morrison believes that the culture from which and for which she writes simply cannot be adequately captured within the conventions of the Western literary tradition. “In the Third World cosmology as I perceive it,” she puts it, “reality is not already constituted by my literary predecessors in Western culture.” Rather, she claims, what is necessary in order to come to terms with African-American reality are references to typically ‘black’ modes of cultural expression. These Morrison characterizes in the following way:

> If my work is faithfully to reflect the aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture, it must make conscious use of the characteristics of its art forms and translate them into print: antiphony, the group nature of art, its functionality, its improvisational nature, its relationship to audience performance, the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions.

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41 Morrison acknowledges that “there are eminent and powerful, intelligent and gifted black writers who not only recognize Western literature as part of their own heritage but who have employed it to such an advantage that it illuminates both cultures”; “Memory, Creation and Writing,” *Thought* 59 (1984): 389.
42 Toni Morrison, “Memory, Creation and Writing,” 387.
43 “Memory, Creation and Writing,” 388.
44 “Memory, Creation and Writing,” 388–89.
One can hardly overlook the fact that what Morrison posits here as the essential characteristics of a ‘black’ aesthetic reads very much like a description of the essential qualities of African-American music, and of jazz in particular.

And indeed, Morrison is careful to point out that an approach to the mnemonic structure of *Beloved* is to be pursued in the dialogue with oral traditions and musical manifestations of African-American culture. Thus she notes, demonstratively irritated about a large part of the reception of her novels:

I am not like James Joyce, I am not like Thomas Hardy, I am not like Faulkner. I am not like in that sense. [...] I know that my effort is to be like something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music.45

It is this dialogue between *Beloved* and musical forms and traditions that I wish to trace now. The next section will take a look at the figural and narratorial thematization of music. The different narrative contexts in which music is either talked about, listened to or made will provide an entrée into the meanings and functions attributed to musical expressions within the narrative framework. Such thematizations, of course, also serve to mark dramatized references to oral and musical forms, which can be traced on the level both of story and of discourse. With regard to the story, it is possible to discern relationships between individual characters and specific oral and musical styles and traditions which, taken together, constitute the musical material that has gone into the making of modern jazz. On the level of discourse, finally, I wish to show how Morrison engages with the formal, expressive, and performative potential of African-American music. This involves a reading of *Beloved* alongside John Coltrane’s famous 1964 recording of *A Love Supreme*.46 Even though Coltrane’s art seems particularly appropriate for a comparative analysis in this context, what is at stake is a more global, general correspondence,47 one that reveals *Beloved* to be a jazz-text par excellence.

45 Morrison in Nelly McKay, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Taylor–Guthrie, 152. The claim for the uniqueness of one’s own art is, of course, a rather common postulation among writers, and a certain ‘anxiety of influence’ may be at stake here, not least since some of the parallels to the writing of Faulkner and others which have been uncovered in secondary literature do not seem altogether implausible. However, I prefer to read Morrison’s statements as contextual markings that try to play down the often over-emphasized intertextual readings of her work and instead hint at the musical quality of her work.


47 This is especially true in contrast to literary works such as Michael S. Harper’s volume of poetry *Dear John, Dear Coltrane* (1970; Urbana & Chicago: U of Illinois P,
Thematizations of African-American music

Music – particularly vocal music – is omnipresent in Beloved. Almost all of the characters in the novel are associated with it at one stage or the other. Sethe’s memories of her childhood are framed in the context of song and dance (30–31, 62); at Sweet Home, there is always music around, from Halle’s tunes (224) to Sixo’s song at his execution (225–26); Denver sings at school (120), Paul D sings the blues (39–41, 71, 108–109, 263), Sethe for her children, Beloved to herself (88–89), Baby Suggs with the community (88–89), and the community eventually for Denver and Sethe (259–61). The evocation of music in these various narrative contexts reveals several different functional aspects of musical performance. In the following, I wish to outline some of these by picking out a few of the narrative situations in which music occurs.

The first passage in Beloved in which music is explicit appears in the context of Sethe’s flight across the Ohio river. In the last stage of her pregnancy and completely worn out (“Nothing was alive in her but her nipples and the little antelope” 30), Sethe suddenly remembers her childhood in the American South:

“Well, at least I don’t have to take another step.” A dying thought if ever there was one, and she waited for the little antelope to protest, and why she thought of an antelope Sethe could not imagine because she had never seen one. She guessed it must have been an invention held on to from before Sweet Home, when she was very young. Of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?) she remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother […]. Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma’ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shape and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like the one in her stomach. (30–31)

This passage is significant in that it points to the continuity of musical expression in the historical context of African enslavement, the Middle Passage and the enforced acculturation in the New World. This is especially relevant insasmuch as the use of African languages was forbidden and punished on plantations in the Americas; inevitably, therefore, African dialects did not make it into the second generation of slaves, unlike African musical tradi-

1985), which establishes explicit intermedial dialogues with very specific tunes by Coltrane and other artists.
tions. The loss of language as opposed to the survival of music and dance is made poignantly clear in a scene where Sethe remembers Nan, who nursed her in the absence of her mother,

who used different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she knew so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma’am spoke, and which would never come back. (62)

Music and dance could survive mainly because they were often perceived by the planters to be innocent diversions with little subversive potential.48 It is precisely here, then, that a part of the African culture and value-system could be kept alive and transmitted. This much shows in the fact that, to this day, basic features of African-American music – especially its complex polyrhythmic patterns, forms of artistic interaction, improvisational techniques, timbre, and aspects of the harmonic and melodic designs – are rooted in the traditions of African cultures.49 This continuity in the field of musical expression, denied to language, is underlined in the novel by the fact that Sethe not only consciously remembers the African chants and dances of her childhood but intuitively associates them with the movements of her unborn child Denver (“the little antelope”). It is thus that Morrison establishes an unbroken connection of past, present and future which is rooted in music, from Sethe’s African ancestors to Denver, who embodies the hope for a better future.

In pointing to the continuity of African forms of expression, it is important to note that African-American music was never ‘purely’ African from its very beginnings; on the contrary, it has been involved in a complex and enduring process of creolization which united African, Western, and Oriental elements. The rhythmic complexity of African music, for instance, had been initially dramatically reduced in this process, while the European diatonic scales and Western harmonies were accordingly reduced to better accommodate the largely pentatonic structure of African melody and its limited harmonic


49 Cf. the still seminal study by Gunther Schuller, Early Jazz: Its Roots and Early Development (1968; New York & Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986): 3–62. For a long time, jazz researchers assumed that the harmonic and melodic features of jazz were wholly rooted in the European musical tradition; Schuller revises this assumption by proving that the early jazz and blues harmonies and melodies resulted from a creolization of European and African styles.
range.\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, European instruments and particularly the English language became an important part of the blues, spirituals and, later, jazz. African-American music is thus essentially a hybrid rooted in constant cultural exchange and appropriation. More often than not, Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry aptly describes the processes of adapting and transforming European and other forms, styles and content to African-American needs and ends in the colonial power-game.\textsuperscript{51} As an ‘impure’ art-form, African-American music thus permits the subversion of essentialist traditions.

The subversive potential of music in the face of colonial oppression is evoked in, for instance, Paul D’s blues as well as the sermon chants of Baby Suggs, which are specifically designed to match the needs of the black community. The most drastic refusal of colonial discourse, however, is enacted by Sixo in the face of the manichaean ideology of Schoolteacher.\textsuperscript{52} This is most evident in the narrative sequence where Paul D remembers the circumstances of Sixo’s execution:

Sixo turns and grabs the mouth of the nearest pointing rifle. He begins to sing. Two others shove Paul D and tie him to a tree. Schoolteacher is saying: “Alive. Alive. I want him alive.” Sixo swings and cracks the ribs of one, but with bound hands cannot get the weapon in position to use it in any other way. All the whitemen have to do is wait. For his song perhaps to end? Five guns trained on him while they listen. Paul D cannot see them when they step away from the lamplight. Finally one of them hits Sixo in the head with his rifle, and when he comes to, a hickory fire is in front of him and he is tied at the waist to a tree. Schoolteacher has changed his mind: “This one will never be suitable.” The song must have convinced him. (225–26)

\textsuperscript{50} Gunther Schuller, \textit{Early Jazz}, 6–26, 38–54.


\textsuperscript{52} The central clash between the ideologies of Schoolteacher and Sixo occurs when Sixo is accused of stealing a shoat: When confronted by Schoolteacher, Sixo claims to have eaten the shoat merely to strengthen his physical powers which in turn merely benefitted the person who owned them, Schoolteacher. Thus claiming that no theft had in fact occurred, Sixo effectually subverts his master’s purely economic logic and turns it against him. “Clever, but Schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (190).
The subversive employment of music, here, is manifested in the radical objection to the discourse of colonial exploitation. Sixo’s song has such an alienating and confusing impact on Schoolteacher and his men that they are convinced that Sixo can no longer be profitably used as a valuable commodity on the plantation. Thus, Sixo eventually triumphs over the economic logic of slavery—even if he tragically pays for his refusal with death.

A similarly thorough denial of the colonial system, however, is not possible in the same way for the African-American slaves as it is for Sixo, whose Native Indian background provides him with a language he may retreat to (“he stopped speaking English because there was no future in it” 25). For Paul D, Sethe or Baby Suggs, the refusal of the colonizer’s language would imply silence; they must instead appropriate and transform the English language in such a way that it can render their personal experiences and enable autonomous expression. Again, music is of fundamental importance here. The embedding of the English language in the rhythms, repetitive figures and inherited patterns of styles such as the blues and spirituals uncovers an expressive potential that would be denied in mere narrative speech. The memory of personal suffering, in particular, is often restricted to musical expression in Beloved. This appears most explicitly in a brief passage in which Paul D tries to tell Sethe about his past. To Sethe’s question “You want to tell me about it?” he replies: “I don’t know. I never have talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul” (71).

In such contexts, music (and dance) are associated with an identity-giving, redemptive potential. Music thus functions as the counterbalance to one of the central motifs of the novel, which is the fragmentation of self in the heteronomous attributions of colonial discourse. Sethe, for instance, perceives herself as compartmentalized (“Will he [Paul D] do it in sections? First her face, then her hands, her thighs, her feet, her back? And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?” 272), and Paul D’s identity is commodified and defined by others: “Paul D hears the men talking and for the first time learns his worth […] which is to say he learns his price. The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future” (226). The overdetermination and fetishization of the black body is shown not to be restricted to Southern racists, as is implied by the wooden figure of a kneeling “blackboy” in the house of the abolitionists Mr and Mrs Bodwin. His “eyes bulging like moons,” the “hair […] a cluster of raised, widely spaced dots made of nail heads,” “his mouth, wide as a cup,” and a sign on the socket saying “‘At Yo Service’” (255) make it quite clear that, even here, coloureds are reduced to stereotypes.

In the framework of the novel, it is particularly Baby Suggs who fights the psychological damage of these heteronomous inscriptions. In her sermons,
she tries to redeem the members of the black community from their trauma by gathering together the individual parts of their fragmented bodyscapes – “flesh,” “skin,” “eyes,” “hands,” “mouth,” “neck,” “heart” (88) – and teaching them to love their bodies again for their own sake. All this is again performed in the context of music, and relies on the typical call-and-response pattern of the African American sermonizing tradition. Not surprisingly, then, at the end of Baby’s sermon, the bodily harmony regained in terms of a physical and psychological wholeness of the community is in striking accord with the musicality of their voices:

Saying no more, [Baby Suggs] stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh. (89)

As Morrison comments in an interview, on the role of African-American music,

for some black people jazz meant claiming their own bodies. You can imagine what that must have meant for some people whose bodies had been owned, who had been slaves as children, or who remembered their parents being slaves. Blues and jazz represented ownership of one’s own emotions.53

It is particularly within the community, then, that Morrison locates the functionality of African-American music. This shows in Baby Sugg’s prayers in the clearing, yet it is most explicitly conveyed in the final scene where thirty community women succeed in driving out Beloved from Bluestone Road:

They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning there was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like. […] For Sethe it was as if the clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (259–61)

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This passage from the closing pages of the novel may be read as an implicit literary programme that strongly emphasises the role of African-American music in the mnemonic framework of *Beloved*. It once more takes up and inscribes those functional aspects of music that I have already addressed in other contexts. The statement “In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning there was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like,” in an ironic subversion of John 1:1, confirms the *continuity* of musical expression in the African-American world. It refers less to metaphysical implications than to concrete historical conditions, simply suggesting that the – English – word, here, is younger than the sound-patterns of music which originated in African culture. As forms of expression handed down by generations and firmly rooted in the black community, they thus offer a *subversive* as well as an *expressive* potential which enables individuals to appropriate the English language and transform it according to their needs. It is the “sound that [breaks] the back of words,” meaning that only through the familiarity and security of oral performance can hitherto unspeakable occurrences be articulated. The *redemptive* potential of music is again stressed by the fact that Sethe and Denver are eventually redeemed from Beloved – who of course embodies part of Sethe’s unresolved and repressive past – by the sheer force of collective sound. The role of the community is particularly important here, as the musical force relies on vocal polyphony, on the layering of “voice upon voice upon voice.” And music and sound are established as an important force for social cohesion, uniting a heterogeneous cast of characters, Christian and non-Christian, old and young, in song (“they all knew what that sound sounded like”). The lack of social cohesion, it must be remembered, triggers the central catastrophe of the novel, in that the proud and envious villagers fail to warn the inhabitants of Bluestone Road 124 of Schoolteacher’s arrival.

This presence in the novel of music as an index of communal values invites further illustration of the varieties of African-American music Morrison evokes. *Beloved* dramatizes, namely, a number of distinct musical styles that are embedded in its mnemonic matrix by their association with certain representative characters surrounding Sethe and Denver: Beloved, Baby Suggs, Paul D, and the white girl, Amy Denver.
Dramatizations of musical styles on the story-level: folklore and sermon, blues and song

It is with Beloved that Morrison primarily establishes a narrative dialogue with the tradition of oral storytelling and its interactive, performative scope. Placing African and African-American oral traditions in the context of musical performance here is no empty exercise. European, monologically oriented narrative styles differ from the narrative processes of African and African-American storytelling. On the one hand, the latter are often embedded in musical performance or are commented on through songs; on the other hand, they unfold in performative situations in intimate dialogue with a present audience, and are thus very reminiscent of musical forms of expression. Gerhard Putschögl argues:

In the sense of a common denominator of basic structure, communicative, performative, creative, expressive, idiomatic and rhythmic characteristics establish [a] continuity within black oral culture. Thus, because of convergences with regard to the above criteria, the steps from speech to song, from vocal to instrumental expression are without any transition.

A central feature of this “continuum of black cultural expression,” as Houston A. Baker phrases it, is the call-and-response scheme, which the novelist Gayl Jones defines thus:

an antiphonal back-and-forth pattern which exists in many African American oral traditional forms, from sermon to interjective folk tale to blues, jazz and spirituals and so on. […] In oral storytelling the listeners may interject their commentary in a modified call-and-response pattern derived from African musical tradition.

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54 “The oral song (or other narrative) is the result of interaction between the singer, the present audience, and the singer’s memories of songs sung. In working with this interaction, the bard is original and creative on rather different grounds from those as the writer”; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London & New York: Methuen, 1982): 146.


On this basis, the tradition of storytelling performatively defies closure, in that its structural make-up inevitably invites the input of the community and effects the continual adaptation of the narrative material to the momentary disposition of its audience.

The character Beloved evokes myths and tales from both the African and the African-American oral tradition. The figure of the spirit child, for instance, which returns from the realm of the ancestors and ghosts to the realm of the living to haunt its parents, is an established part of the oral mythology and narrative culture of the Yoruba, but also in African-American folktales, as Trudier Harris explains, “a ghost might occasionally appear among the living – to indicate that all is well, to teach a lesson, or to guide the living to some good fortune.” Such ghost stories, according to Morrison, were always around in her childhood, and she is careful to point out that they were not told and understood as gothic or fantasy tales, but seen as part of everyday life. Whether Morrison refers to specific ghost stories in Beloved, apart from evoking a more general generic context, is ultimately difficult to determine. It is, however, possible that (to give just one example) a narrative of the Gullah about “Daid Aaron” plays a role here – one of the few tales in which a dead person returns to the world of the living to take up residence with his former relatives. Since Aaron, not long deceased, already suspects his (ex-)wife of engaging with new suitors for the place he just vacated, he returns to take up residence with her. The widow finally manages to send Aaron back into his rightful grave by making one of her suitors fiddle a fast tune – Aaron dances more and more wildly, until he starts to crack and literally fall apart: “De fiddleh play mo’ loud. An’ crickety-crack, down an’ back, de dead man go hoppin’, an’ de dry bone a-droppin’, disaway, dataway, dem pieces keep poppin’. ” This may correspond to one of the scenes in the novel where Beloved envisions her own dissolution: “This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once” (133).

58 Ben Okri, for instance, based his Booker-Prize winning novel The Famished Road (1991; London: Vintage, 1992) on this mythological tradition. Here, a “spirit child” functions as protagonist and narrator.


61 The tale of “Daid Aaron” has been recorded “as told by Sarah Rutledge and Epsie Megett” in The Book of Negro Folklore, ed. Langston Hughes & Arna Wendell Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958): 175–78. See also Trudier Harris, Fictions and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison, 156.

62 “Daid Aaron,” 177.
While the communicative, musically oriented call-and-response pattern is of fundamental importance in the performance of such folktales, this is just as true with regard to the sermon tradition in Afro-Christian churches: “In the sermonic tradition,” Gayl Jones writes, “the preacher calls in fixed or improvised refrains, while the congregation responds, in either fixed and formulaic or spontaneous words and phrases.”63 The phrasing of the preacher’s calls is in itself melodic and organized in specific repetitive and rhythmic structures, and thus deeply musical in nature. The character in the configuration of Beloved who immediately embodies the tradition of Afro-Christian music is Baby Suggs, with her “authority in the pulpit, her dance in the clearing, her powerful Call” (177).

Baby Suggs’s calls in the clearing (88–89) largely comply with the central characteristics of sermonizing as Gerhard Putschögl describes them in a study of John Coltrane and the African-American oral tradition: Putschögl points at a “B[lack] E[nglish] rhythmic structure and sounding,” a “gradual intensification” of the expressive effect which is achieved by a “rhythmical phrasing suggestive of a metrical pattern,” and the use of sounding devices which eventually give way to a chanted performance (the “sermon chant”).64 All these are rhetorical and musical techniques that can be detected in the following excerpt from Baby Suggs’s call:

in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands […]. (88)

Moreover, Baby Suggs’s call closes with a sudden turn to music and dance: “Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say, while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music” (89). The sudden shift from preaching to dance and song is typical of the sermon, which resists structural closure.65

By means of the communal songs, Baby Suggs is thus further associated with the spiritual and gospel traditions – vocal forms that are partly based on

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63 Gayl Jones, Liberating Voices, 197.
64 Gerhard Putschögl, John Coltrane und die afroamerikanische Oraltradition, 77.
65 As Gerhard Putschögl comments, “despite a certain given, abstract formal scheme and certain conventions of behaviour, the actual performance of the sermon is open in several respects. Spontaneous events which may influence the course of a sermon could for instance be a sudden interruption by dance and singing.” Putschögl, John Coltrane und die afroamerikanische Oraltradition, 77.
the harmonic material of Western hymns, yet have come to be typically ‘black’ forms of expression through their adaptation to the specific patterns of interaction and intonation typical of the African-American oral tradition. Spirituals have long suffered from allegations that they express resignation, a willingness to postpone all hope of social redemption to the afterlife. These allegations, however, neglect the fact that the selective approach to the biblical material and the performative mingling of its content with African rituals and structures in fact also harbours a subversive and ultimately identity-giving potential. Eugene Genovese, for instance, argues:

The folk dynamic in the historical development of Afro-American Christianity saved the slaves from the disaster that some historians erroneously think they suffered – that of being suspended between a lost African culture and a forbidden European one. It enabled them to retain enough of Africa to help them create an appropriate form for the new content they were forging and to contribute to the mainstream of American national culture while shaping an autonomous identity.

The hybrid mixture of Christian content with African structures and communicative forms did in fact alienate large parts of Anglo-Christian America. It is no accident, therefore, that the sermons and chants were more often than not conducted late at night, wherever possible in secluded spots, and Morrison aptly chooses a forest clearing as the setting for Baby Suggs’s redemptive song.

Given that, through Baby Suggs, the Afro-Christian tradition of sermonizing and spiritual is inscribed in the mnemonic framework of Beloved, her counterpart would be Paul D (the “singing man”), who embodies the secular tradition of African-American music, of work songs and the larger heritage of the blues. More precisely, other than the classic blues that arose later in urban black theatres and minstrel shows, and became popular with artists such as Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith, Paul D prefigures the earlier tradi-

66 “The Christian Negro’s music became an expression to ‘cross Jordan’ and ‘see his Lord.’ He no longer wished to return to Africa. […] It took the slave’s mind off Africa, or material freedom, and proposed that if the black man wished to escape the filthy paternalism and cruelty of slavery, he wait, at last, until he died, when he could be transported peacefully and majestically to the promised land.” Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Blues People: Negro Music in White America (New York: William Morrow/Quill, 1963): 39.


tion of the country or Southern blues. The country blues emerged in the rural South as a synthesis of ballad-type songs, work songs and field hollers, and are traditionally performed by men. The singer accompanies himself on a simple folk instrument, usually a fiddle, a banjo, or later a guitar. In contrast to the classic blues, the country blues were perceived less as individualist artistic expressions than as firmly rooted in the rural black community, in which the music served as an "expression of a society, not necessarily the achievement of art and artifice."^69

In terms of the connections between literary expression and the blues, the latter may influence the writer in "theme, mood, or structure."^70 While the structural adaptation of musical styles will be discussed later, it should be mentioned here that, on the story-level, it soon becomes apparent how Paul D perfectly embodies both the thematic core of the blues and a blues feeling. Thematically, Paul D is associated with the blues, in that his experience of slavery and the chain gang in the deep South, and his escape, his restless wandering, his temporary refuge with women whom he feels compelled to leave again, all prefigure blues topos.^71 The blues mood, here, in contrast to the tradition of Afro-Christian music, stems from a refusal to seek refuge in religion from secular problems and pain. "Unlike sacred music," the poet and novelist Sherley Anne Williams notes,

the blues deals with a world where the inability to solve a problem does not mean that one can transcend it. The internal strategy of the blues is action, rather than contemplation, for the song itself is the creation of reflection. [...] the blues singer strives to create an atmosphere in which analysis can take place. This necessary analytical distance is achieved through the use of verbal and musical irony seldom found in the singing of the spirituals or the gospels.72

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^69 Thus, it is to be seen as "a functional aspect of the culture of the people from where it stems, and it reflects their visions and their values." Frank Tirro, *Jazz: A History* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1993): 56.


^71 Some thematic parallels to Paul D’s story can for instance be traced in the ballad of “Ol ‘Riley,” which was widely popular first as a work song and later in several blues versions. The story is about the old man Riley who escapes from a prison camp after he learns of the death of his wife. The old dog “Rattler” is set on his traces, yet never catches up with Riley on his long flight. See Arrigo Polillo, *Jazz*, 26–27.

As such, the typical melancholic thrust of the blues does not express the passive, resigned character that some critics attribute to it. This is first of all due to the ambiguous textual phrasings, which more often than not hide a coded message underneath a seemingly 'innocent' surface which may be implicitly sexual or subversive. Secondly, the verbalization of individual suffering and pain in a communal call-and-response situation has secular redemptive potential: “Personal feelings are verbalized and serve to call community attention to one’s predicaments and misfortune. The expression of criticism and complaint, the verbalization of these plights, provides the needed catharsis – an antidote to the problem.”

Paul D’s tunes (39–40, 263) clearly refer to the blues legacy and its functionality. The introductory lines of a “song he knew from Georgia,” for instance,

Lay my head on the railroad line,
Train come along, pacify my mind (40)

reproduce one of the most common motifs in the blues, which was made famous by Robert M. Jones’s composition “Trouble in Mind.” The tune was first recorded by Bertha “Chippie” Hill in 1926, together with Jones on piano and Louis Armstrong on trumpet, featuring the verse “I’ll gonna lay my head / On a lonesome railroad line / And let the two nineteen pacify my mind.” The partly self-ironical (Chippie Hill, a few lines later, sings: “But when I hear the whistle, Lord, I’m gonna pull it back”), partly painfully serious performance is typical of the blues mood, as Ralph Ellison points out in a well-known statement:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism.

Ellison’s description of the blues aptly matches both Paul D’s song and actions. Closing down “a generous part of his head” after the brutalizing experiences in the Georgia prison camp, and “operating on the part that helped

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74 Okeh 8273, reissued Folkways FP 59. The theme can be found already in some of the earliest documents of African-American music: for instance, in Leroy “Lasses” White’s *Nigger Blues* (1913): “I’m gonna lay my head / Down on some railroad line / Let the Santa Fe / Try to pacify my mind.”
him walk, eat, sleep, sing.” he keeps the unspeakable part of his experiences safely locked away in a metaphorical tobacco box. Cathartic expression of the unspeakable pains comes only in music, in the blues and its predecessor, the collective work song. This is put forth in Paul D’s experiences on the Georgia chain gang, where the men survive by singing their lives in the typical call-and-response patterns rooted in West African field songs. The gang leader, called Hi Man, here comes forth with an improvised, rhythmical verse which is answered in chorus by the rest of the gang:

With a sledge hammer in his hands and Hi Man’s lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves and had seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. (108)

Having commented on the novel’s association with the oral traditions of African and African-American storytelling, Afro-Christian styles and the heritage of the blues, it is important to note that music is not the exclusive privilege of the African-American community in Beloved. This is shown in the important appearance of Amy Denver, who brings in a decidedly Anglo-American element of musical fashion: Amy, a young, poor “whitegirl” on her way to Boston, crosses Sethe’s path on the southern shore of the Ohio river. It is with Amy’s help that Sethe eventually finds the strength to continue her flight; Amy massages Sethe’s swollen feet, soothes her back, with its brutal inscriptions from Schoolteacher’s whip, and assists her in giving birth to Denver. Amy accompanies her “repair work” (80) with humming and song. Three stanzas of one of her tunes are quoted in the narrative framework:

“When the busy day is done
And my wary little one
Rocketh gently to and fro;
When the night winds softly blow,
And the crickets in the glen
Chirp and Chirp and Chirp again;
Where ’pon the haunted green
Fairies dance around their queen,

76 For an exhaustive interpretation of this scene, see Alan Rice, “It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing.”
This song is not a fictional composition by Morrison, but quotes – literally, with minimal changes in punctuation – the first, second and fourth stanzas of a poem by the St. Louis journalist Eugene Field titled “Lady Button Eyes.” The sheer otherness of Field’s poem when compared to Baby Suggs’ sermon or Paul D’s blues is immediately obvious here – the use of stylized Standard English collides with the Black English of the blues and the hollers, the strictly trochaic tetrameters clash with the polyrhythmic off-beat phrasings of the work songs and sermon chants, the rigidly rhyming, regular ten-line stanzas contradict the continuous play with formal conventions and the improvisational variations found in gospel, spiritual and the blues.

Nevertheless, it makes little sense to assume that the extensive reproduction of Amy’s song merely serves to highlight the oppositionality of white/literary and black/oral musical forms. It is apparent that the (anachronistic) reference to Eugene Field and the literary character of the poem are effectively concealed. First of all, the piece is placed in a performative context, in that Amy sings it to soothe the suffering Sethe (“her slow-moving eyes pale in the sun that lit her hair, she sang”); secondly, in the fictional framework, the song is transposed into the oral tradition. After the first stanza, Amy briefly interrupts her performance to point out: “That’s my mama’s song. She taught me it.” Overall, her song appears in a positive light: it has a harmonizing effect in the careful intercultural encounter between Sethe and Amy, thus hinting at the chance of a fruitful and peaceful exchange between black and white. The relation of mother and child which features in Amy’s song, but also the soothing force of the singing itself, clearly appeals to Sethe; she preserves the memory of Amy Denver (and of her song) in the name that she gives to her own child – Denver – and thus integrates it into the African-American context of her family history.

It is much more plausible, then, that with the character Amy Denver Morrison symbolically acknowledges manifestations of the Western tradition as legitimate predecessors of modern African-American music next to African recitals, spirituals and the blues. What is at stake here is not so much an opposition of styles as the constantly integrative, adaptive power of African-American musical culture. “The spirituals, play and work songs, cakewalks and hoe-downs, and the blues,” Sherley Anne Williams is careful to point out, “are the first recorded artefacts to grow out of the complex relationship be-

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tween Africans and Europeans on the North American continent”; moreover, the further development of these forms is indebted to a process of creolization: “Afro-American oral tradition, of which these lyric forms are part, combines with [traditions] rooted more in the literate cultures of the West than in the oral traditions, either indigenous or transplanted, of the New World.”

It can thus be stated that Toni Morrison more or less comprehensively anchors the oral and musical material which has gone into the making of modern jazz in the immediate configuration around the central characters Sethe and Denver. With Beloved and Baby Suggs, Paul D and Amy Denver, she evokes the major African and African American modes of performance and sets them into a complex dialogue with elements of Western music. She symbolically accounts for how African recitals, spirituals, sermons and blues, in a hybrid mélange and with continually evolving references to Western, African or Oriental sounds, eventually brought forth the variants of jazz in New Orleans and Chicago, Kansas and New York during the twentieth century. Both the styles of modern jazz and the narrative refiguration of oral and musical styles in Beloved are thus fundamentally grounded in the memory of earlier musical expression; and in a very similar way, they recompose, modify and transform the original material they evoke into continually developing musical or literary designs. Jazz relies on the transformation of older riffs in new musical contexts, just as Morrison’s dialogue with older manifestations of the African-American oral tradition results in newness: “more often than not, she transforms historical folk materials,” as Trudier Harris notes. “[Morrison] takes fictional license in making lore into something that has never circulated in any folk community.” Morrison’s essential parallel in the discursive composition of her novel, then, is also African American music. In the following section, I wish to discuss the kind of jazz-aesthetic model Morrison tends towards in the musicalization of Beloved.

**Discursive dramatizations of music: arrangement, expressiveness and performativity in Beloved and A Love Supreme**

In an interview with Paul Gilroy shortly after the publication of Beloved, Morrison claims that

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78 Sherley Anne Williams, “The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry,” 123.
79 “Riff: a repeated musical phrase, usually short, used as a background for a soloist or a theme for a final chorus. Also, an instrumental blues melody.” Frank Tirro, Jazz: A History, 172.
80 Trudier Harris, Fictions and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison, 7–8.
Black Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art, above all in the music. That was functional … My parallel is always the music, because all of the strategies of the art are there. […] The power of the word is not music, but in terms of aesthetics, the music is the mirror that gives me the necessary clarity […] 81

In another statement, Morrison further comments on what she refers to as the “aural” quality of Beloved: “the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner ear or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can.” 82 A paradox seems to be implied here: on the one hand, Morrison demands that narrative language acquire a decidedly musical quality; on the other, she makes it quite clear that words and music will never fully converge. “The power of the word is not music,” Morrison states; and indeed, language always carries a ‘surplus’ of meaning compared to musical expression, because it inevitably signifies. Stefan Richter notes:

in order to organise its sounds in a musical fashion, [literature] has to use the denotative meaning of its material, which it can hardly escape […]. The sounds of language assembled in literature always assemble around ‘meaning’. Literature may choose to take up jazz in the denotative meaning and thus draw attention the ‘jazz content’ of its material. This is what we are generally presented as jazz literature: Texts that deal with jazz, its musicians, its typical situations. Texts that employ jazz-aesthetic principles without ever denoting ‘jazz’, in contrast, are rare and above all hardly ever noticed as ‘jazz-texts’. 83

Beloved is such a jazz-text. It not only denotes a variety of musical forms and styles that have gone into the making of modern jazz; more than that, the novel is organized according to what Richter calls “jazz-aesthetic principles.” While fully aware of the ultimate difference between words and music, Morrison nevertheless designs Beloved by adhering as far as possible to the aesthetic scope of African-American musical expression.

In trying to describe and make sense of Morrison’s discursive engagement with musical styles in *Beloved*, it is best to do so against the background of a specific example from the world of jazz. The choice of such an example can be facilitated by applying certain criteria. Morrison propagates a decidedly ‘black’ aesthetic which positions itself confidently in the traditions of oral storytelling, the blues and spirituals, and at the same time transforms older models into new configurations and contexts. This does not apply so much to the earliest forms of jazz and swing, which were considered less as manifestations of art than as popular entertainment. Especially what has since come to be known as “swing” was strongly influenced by the financial necessity to adapt to the tastes of largely white audiences that exclusively enjoyed dance tunes. Only a few black artists, among them Duke Ellington and Count Basie, were able to transcend these constraints to some extent. It was only with the advent of bebop in the 1940s that a rediscovery of the complex polyrhythmic phrasings of the African tradition, and an emphasis on the blues idiom fundamentally strengthened the expressive potential of African-American music with regard to the aspect of entertainment, thus offering an aesthetic scope that corresponds to Morrison’s mnemonic art.\(^4\) However, the bebop musicians for quite some time cultivated an exclusive, avant-gardist aura which kept them aloof from large parts of the black community. This was no longer the case twenty years later with regard to what came to be known as “free jazz,” which benefited from all of the artistic novelties of bebop and, engaging with the community, was strongly influenced by political issues such as black emancipation and anticolonial discourse. Many of the characteristics of Morrison’s narrative art – the explicit articulation from and for the black community, conscious engagement with older traditions of black expression, the thrust towards aesthetic innovation – are most likely to be encountered here: “The sounds of John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders,” Kimberly Benston holds in an essay on the “Late [post-1962] Coltrane,” “— having extended and mastered the contributions of bebop – opened the floodgates of passion, anger, pain, and love, and aroused that fury for liberty which is the essence of the new black art.”\(^5\)

\(^4\) “Musically, bebop was particularly in accordance with the newly growing self-assuredness of African America since it – contrary to all interpretations that stress its alleged European compositions – forcibly emphasized precisely those African elements of jazz that had been pushed aside in the swing era: rhythmic complexity and blues feeling.” Ekkehard Jost, *Sozialgeschichte des Jazz in den USA* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1982): 90 (tr. L.E.).

\(^5\) Kimberly W. Benston, “Late Coltrane: A Re-Membering of Orpheus,” in *Chant*
For a comparative reading with *Beloved*, I propose to select, from among these musicians and their works, Morrison’s coeval John Coltrane, along with his album *A Love Supreme* (recorded on 9 December 1964), which is a four-part suite featuring the titles “Acknowledgement,” “Resolution,” “Pursuance,” and “Psalm.” This, of course, is a somewhat arbitrary choice and needs to be seen as representative of a broader generic relationship between the novel and jazz. Still, there is a certain logic involved in the particular association of Coltrane’s “Classic Quartet” – John Coltrane, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Garrison, bass; McCoy Tyner, piano; Elvin Jones, drums – and this album with Morrison’s narrative style.

To start with, Coltrane’s quartet, just as Morrison, explicitly engages in musical dialogue with aspects of African and African-American folklore, with the traditions of Afro-Christian sermonizing and song, with the heritage of the blues, and with Western, Oriental and other forms of music. Ashley Kahn writes:

*A Love Supreme* blended it all into a mix that exposed the quartet’s roots and influences: the propulsive, elevating effect of African polyrhythms. The lugubrious tempos of modal jazz. The wistful keening of Far Eastern folk music. [...] The familiar feel of the blues. The orgasmic release of gospel.86

The fundamental interest in African folklore can be traced in the drumming of Elvin Jones, whose polyrhythmic play was influenced, like that of few others in his time, by African models,87 all the members of the quartet were immersed in the Afro-Christian musical tradition,88 and it is this tradition –

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87 Already in 1957, claims Jones, “I began to pursue African traditional music. The quest led me to pygmies and Dogon. There is a lot of music in the Belgian Congo, and these were tremendous sources of inspiration.” Elvin Jones in Mike Joyce, “Elvin Jones: Interview,” *Cadence* (February 1981): 9.

88 Elvin Jones emphasizes with regard to the spiritual aspect of *A Love Supreme*: “We had all been brought up in families that were hardworking and churchgoing, and the music was a continuation of our upbringing.” Elvin Jones, “Foreword: ‘Always a Spiritual Experience’,” in Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme*, x. Gerhard Putschögl, in a detailed sociological and musicological study, even identifies the influences of Afro-Christian music as the key to an understanding of Coltrane’s choral and solo arrangements (*John Coltrane und die afroamerikanische Oraltradition*).
always in interchange with the blues tradition — that shaped the work of the four artists; and last but not least, Coltrane’s musical compositions perfectly embody the continuous adaptation of European or other influences.

The specific recording of A Love Supreme, further, lends itself to an intermedial reading against Beloved, since it itself already negotiates words and music. Thus, in the last part of the suite, “Psalm,” Coltrane ‘reads’ a spiritual poem titled “A Love Supreme” (which was later reproduced on the album cover) on the saxophone. He thereby immediately engages in the project of translating verbal language and its emotional substance into instrumental music. As Coltrane spells it out in the liner notes: “The fourth and last part is a musical narration of the theme, ‘A LOVE SUPREME’ which is written in the context.” But there is also the reverse movement from sound to language. In the first part of the suite, “Acknowledgement,” Coltrane suddenly takes up the famous four-note blues riff which Garrison first introduced on bass, exhaustively exploring it in various modulations on sax, verbally: 19 times in all he chants the basic theme with the words “a love supreme,” the importance of which was later highlighted by overdubbing the vocal track in several layers of sound.

Which essential characteristics of the African-American jazz aesthetic, then, does Morrison’s Beloved share with interpretations such as A Love Supreme by Coltrane’s quartet, whose art Toni Morrison explicitly associates with the typical ‘black’ idiom she wishes to reflect in her own work? What are the discursive reverberations of music she is referring to in the following?

89 The saxophonist Branford Marsalis holds that “the thing about Coltrane’s later Impulse work is, if you do not have a good understanding of the blues, you cannot play those pieces. And I don’t mean the twelve bar blues, I mean the representation of what the blues is, all of this stuff that goes into growing up in a black neighborhood.” Marsalis, in an interview with Ashley Kahn on 1 November 2001, quoted in Ashley Kahn, A Love Supreme, 12–13.

90 This could be demonstrated by help of the countless musical versions and takes of the waltz “My Favourite Things,” which became Coltrane’s hymn. The waltz is entirely appropriated into the antiphonic aesthetics of jazz and illustrates like no other piece the steady development of Coltrane’s œuvre from harmony-based to modal and eventually free play and collective improvisation. See Lewis Porter, John Coltrane, His Life and Works (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998) and John Coltrane, My Favorite Things (Atlantic SD 1361).

91 Liner notes to John Coltrane, A Love Supreme (Impulse AS-77).

92 “It is not a question of a black style, but it is a question of a variety of styles, and hanging on to whatever that ineffable quality is that is curiously black. The only analogy that I have for it is in music. John Coltrane does not sound like Louis Arm-
I don’t imitate it, but I am informed by it. Sometimes I hear blues, sometimes spirituals and jazz and I have appropriated it. I’ve tried to reconstruct the texture of it in my writing – certain kinds of repetition – its profound simplicity.93

I wish to address these issues by concentrating in turn on questions of formal arrangement, on expressive qualities of sound, and on Morrison’s engagement with the performativity of jazz music.

A sequence in Beloved that is particularly helpful in illustrating a jazz-aesthetic momentum sets in immediately after Paul D leaves Sethe, Denver and Beloved as a result of Sethe’s revelation of her murder. In the following passages, Morrison evokes the memories and thoughts of the three women left in Bluestone Road 124 (200–17): “Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house,” Morrison introduces the sequence, “were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (199). Using A Love Supreme as an aesthetic foil, it is possible to indicate the specific musical structures that have been employed in the arrangement of Sethe, Denver and Beloved’s voices. This is particularly the case if we read the sequence from Beloved against the third and fourth parts of Coltrane’s suite, “Pursuance” and “Psalm,” which were recorded in a single take.

“Pursuance” sets in with a ninety-second solo exposition by Elvin Jones, which eventually gives way to Coltrane’s sounding of the main theme: a stark and simple blues riff in a minor key. Invariably on the basis of Jones’ polyrhythmic foundation, the theme is first explored in an improvisational flight by McCoy Tyner on piano, then by Coltrane on saxophone, each in his own personal style. Coltrane’s last re-phrasing of the theme blends in with a drum roll which, instead of leading to closure, fades away to reveal yet a third exploration, this time by Jimmy Garrison on solo bass. Garrison’s lyrical contemplation eventually blends in with the polyphonic, lyrical fourth part of the suite, “Psalm,” which is characterized by a largely free-play call-and-response dialogue between the musicians. “Psalm”, in fact, reveals little structure at all: no metrical consistency, no time signature to speak of – completely, purely rubato. And purely emotional.94

The parallels with the formal arrangement of the sequence from Beloved are fairly obvious. In Morrison’s text, we also encounter a fundamental riff or theme, which is varied, rephrased and explored exhaustively in the mnemonic strong, and no one ever confuses one for the other, no one ever questions if they are black.” Morrison, in Nelly McKay, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” 153.

94 Ashley Kahn, A Love Supreme, 122.
solo excursions of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved. The core of the theme here consists of the phrase

“Beloved. She is mine.”

This is first introduced in Sethe’s speech, where she sets out with the words “Beloved, she my daughter. She mine” (200). What follows is a rhapsodic, associative explanation of this statement that reaches down into various layers of her personal memory; the essence of the basic riff, in this context, resurfaces in certain variations – “Beloved. Because you are mine and I have to show you these things” (201); “when I tell you you mine, I also mean I’m yours. I wouldn’t draw breath without my children” (203) – and in true jazz fashion, Sethe closes her solo flight by returning to a phrasing of the riff in “She came back to me, my daughter, and she is mine” (204).

The next voice is Denver’s. She starts out with a variation – “Beloved is my sister” (205), and takes her turn in an extensive improvisational exploration of this motif. The flight of Denver’s thoughts and evaluations considers the varied theme in new contexts (“Once to see Grandma Baby put down next to Beloved, she’s my sister” 205), stays with and revolves around them, and finally restates the fundamental riff. Thus, she ends: “And I do. Love her. I do. She played with me and always came to be with me whenever I needed her. She’s mine, Beloved. She’s mine” (209).

Finally, the third voice at Bluestone Road 124, Beloved, enters. She similarly sets out with a variation of the theme: “I am Beloved and she is mine” (210). The fairly cryptic and associative reminiscences that follow unfold a tentative, idiosyncratic rhythm and phrasing with growing intensity: for instance, through certain increasingly intersecting lyrical phrases such as “a hot thing” (quite similar to Jimmy Garrison’s solo, which intersperses modifications of the four-note “a love supreme” riff established in the first part of the suite):

Sethe sees me see her an I see the smile her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me doing it at last a hot thing now we can join a hot thing. (213)

In a subsequent section, the fragmentary style and dragging rhythm are abandoned and Beloved’s solo, as if in conclusion, gathers speed again until she closes by restating: “I will not lose her again. She is mine” (214).

After the solo excursions of the three women at 124, the narrative moves on to a passage which eventually unites all three voices and their characteristics in a polyphonic, collective chorus. The narrative text, here, faces its own medial boundaries in the evocation of a truly musical quality: Werner Wolf points out that
music does not only consist of one sequence of sound, but often of several simultaneous sequences, while a work of (narrative) literature is made of one linear sequence of words only. Notably in its polyphonic form […] music may, on the level of the signifiers, convey several layers of completely different information simultaneously and throughout a whole composition. A similar kind of ‘pluridimensionality’ or ‘spatialization’ can never be fully attained in verbal art.95

Still, even if a polyphonic effect cannot be immediately conveyed in writing, it may indeed be ‘suggested’, as it were, by narrative means. Morrison succeeds in doing so by initially establishing a call-and-response pattern involving the by now familiar voices and phrases of the three women. First, a duet between Sethe and Beloved sets in, which takes up lines and motifs that have already been heard in their solo flights:

You are back. You are back.
Will we smile at me?
Can’t you see I’m smiling?
I love you face. (215)

This duet, in turn, gives way to another call-and-response dialogue between Denver and Beloved:

Don’t fall asleep when she braids your hair.
She is the laugh, I am the laughter.
I watch the house; I watch the yard.
She left me.
Daddy is coming for us.
A hot thing. (216)

The phrases and phrasings then start to blend into each other. In place of the measured call-and-response, there is collective, intuitive interaction between the voices. The individual voices start to sound together in anaphoric convergence, and eventually seem to blend entirely in the collective incantation of the basic riff:

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me

I have found you again; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine. (216)

The interaction of the characters – very similar to that of the musicians around Coltrane in “Psalm” – is largely free, yet at the same time strikingly lyrical and emotionally coherent. Even though Sethe, Denver and Beloved seem to be lost in their personal thoughts, their voices still come together and resonate as a poetic whole. And as if to sustain this statement, the sequence finally fades out after an unmistakably polyphonic, collective sounding of the common theme:

I waited for you
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine. (217)

The impression of polyphony generated in this final part retrospectively places the earlier solo flights in the context of the collective presence of Bluestone Road 124. It is in this way that Beloved accounts for and engages with the tension typifying African-American music, which constitutes itself in steady conflict, as Morrison puts it, between “tradition and communal values” and the always given “occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions.” As Ralph Ellison writes,

true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment (as distinct from uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a chain in the link of tradition.

In this context, the uniqueness of the individual voices in jazz is particularly important. On the one hand, each voice interacts dialogically with other voices in choral phrasings, call-and-response patterns and collective improvisation, yet at the same time it adamantly preserves its own unique style. The effortlessness and inventive lucidity of McCoy Tyner’s solo flight in “Pur-

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96 Toni Morrison, “Memory, Creation and Writing,” 389.
suance,” for instance, differs from John Coltrane’s often explosive, much more emotional agitation or from the warm, meditative contemplation of Jimmy Garrison. In a very similar way Sethe, Denver and Beloved’s idiolects stand out from their common chorus.

Sethe’s voice feels closer to both the hoarse timbre of Coltrane’s horn and the warmth of Garrison’s bass than to the lucidity in Tyner’s handling of the piano. Her voice (together with the blues idiom of Paul D) is most indebted to a spoken creole, as is seen in the frequent omission of verbs and a tendency towards the simple present tense:

Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don’t have to explain a thing. I didn’t have the time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she back now. (200)

The oral, musical aura of this passage results from the rhythmical accentuation of certain sounds – note, for instance, how the word “she,” which is first sounded in the opening riff, rhythmically structures the statements that follow. It can also be assumed that the choice of diction and punctuation here is carefully thought through,98 producing variations of longer, floating phrases with sudden, exclamatory stops (for instance, in “Quick”). Such instances of sound and phrasing produce the impression of an effortless, resonating vocal presence which lies at the heart of Morrison’s aesthetic design.99

Denver’s solo excursion in turn shares the improvisational effortlessness that is also pervasive in Sethe’s speech; however, her style and sound differ considerably from her mother’s.

Beloved, she is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother’s milk. The first thing I heard after not hearing anything was

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98 Morrison argues that in her writing, the words are carefully chosen and assembled in a way “that makes them spoken, heard.” Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” 228.

99 With regard to the second part of the Beloved-trilogy, Jazz, Morrison stresses the importance of uniting compositional eloquence and inventive ease in her writing. She speaks of her attempts “to blend which is contrived and artificial with improvisation. I thought of myself as like the jazz musician: someone who practices and practices and practices in order to be able to invent and to make his art look effortlessness and graceful.” Morrison, in Elissa Schappell, “Toni Morrison: The Art of Fiction,” 111.
the sound of her crawling up the stairs. She was my secret company
until Paul D came. He threw her out. (205)

Denver’s phrases are by and large complete and lucid, her sound appears
younger and more factual (and thus rather reminiscent of McCoy Tyner’s
style).

Beloved’s speech, finally, is unique. Her expression verges painfully on the
unspeakable; her idiom reflects “a traumatized language.” The denotative
reference of her fragmentary, associatively assembled phrases is no longer
lucid in the way Denver’s explorations are, but conjure up distorted and
blurred, almost surreal images:

I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves
she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills
the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are
in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate
from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I
want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it
too a hot thing (210)

The phrase “how can I say things that are pictures” suggests that Beloved’s
obsessive memories are mere fragments – bits and pieces of torn images, here
apparently of her own mother, who chose to commit suicide during their Mid-
dle Passage – that resist all attempts at narrative configuration. The traumatic
inscriptions are obviously too terrible to relate; their emplotment is bound to
fail. What is left to Beloved, then, is to try and voice the individual images
themselves as they float up in her memory, a painful and hesitant endeavour
that keeps running up against impotent silence. Phrases such as the repeated
interjection “a hot thing,” which no longer seem to connote anything in par-
ticular, yet remain pure, emotionally loaded sound, illustrate this. In the strug-
gle for ultimate possibilities of expression, Morrison’s language, dismissing
denotative logic and narrative cohesion, thus tends towards music in its most
extreme moments of manifestation.

The word’s tendency to music, explains Kimberly Benston in “Late Col-
trane,” is in fact to be seen as a central characteristic of the continuum of
African-American oral expression. According to Benston, the dialogic en-
gagement of literature with the performance of musicians like Coltrane is
rooted in

100 Morrison, in Marsha Darling, “In the Realm of Responsibility: An Interview
with Toni Morrison,” 247.
a notion that black language leads toward music, that it passes into music when it attains the maximal pitch of its being. [It] strives to escape from the linear, logically determined bonds of denotative speech into what the poet imagines as the spontaneities and freedoms of musical form.101

The last seconds of Coltrane’s solo in “Pursuance,” in which he desperately attempts to reach beyond the limitations of his horn’s registers, or the solo passages in “Acknowledgement” and “Resolution” which are curiously suspended between painful dissonance and ecstatic brilliance, again provide jazz-aesthetic examples that shed some light on Beloved. The expression of an excess of love, of love “too thick” (152), in Sethe’s excursions, as well as the expression of torment and trauma in Beloved’s solo, just as Coltrane’s explorations in A Love Supreme, try to transcend the frontiers of emotional expressiveness. It is thus that “unspeakable thoughts” are not “unspoken” in the sense of ‘remaining silent’, as the introduction to the sequence from Beloved discussed here initially seems to imply. On the contrary, in a second implication of “unspoken” they are, rather, ‘spoken loose’, phrased and sounded in a sublime gesture of liberation. Again, this sublimity of expression can only be generated against the background of the polyphonic and polyrhythmic collective; only by virtue of the sustenance provided by the other voices in the group, yet also because of their sanctioning power, which always compels the soloist to rejoin the chorus, can the liberation of voices succeed.

The immediacy and spontaneity of improvisational expression confer on the text a pronouncedly performative quality. Not only do the women at 124 Bluestone Road communicate with each other in call-and-response sequences (at another point in the novel, for instance, it is said about the relation between Denver and Beloved that “the monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved’s interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved” 78), they also communicate with an external audience. Note again, for instance, the onset of Sethe’s solo exploration: “Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me […].” The imperative “See” stresses the fact that what is to be found here is a call to an audience which may not be physically present (as in a studio recording such as A Love Supreme) but is, rather, ‘implied’. The expression of individual experience will only lead to a cathartic effect if it resonates and finds a response in communal experience. When, at the end of the novel, Paul D “wants to put his story next to hers [Sethe’s]” (273), this illustrates the dialogic nature of the jazz aesthetic, in which each solo call demands a reply.

The aesthetics of blues and jazz consequently resist structural and expressive closure; instead, the participation of the audience is encouraged, even demanded. In order to maintain the dialogue with the audience, a jazz piece—literary as well as musical—never fully explains itself. Music and literature in the African-American tradition, Morrison claims, simultaneously suggest certain patterns of meaning and hold back from divulging them, thus creating interpretative spaces in which the audience may and must step in:

I want to break away from certain assumptions that are inherent in the conception of the novel form to make a truly aural novel, in which there are so many places and spaces for the reader to work in and participate. […] I try to provide every opportunity for that kind of stimulation, so that the narrative is only one part of what happens, in the same way as what happens when you’re listening to music […]

Indeed, the composition of *Beloved*, by means of the fragmentary, hesitant unfolding of the protagonists’ stories, continually forces the reader to engage actively in the interpretation of textual meaning, which of course never fully reveals itself. The mysterious being and presence of Beloved and her accordingly mysterious disappearance at the end of the tale provide a highly dissonant ending which symbolizes this denial of closure. The narrator no longer provides any sense of secure guidance; his or her authority, as it were, loses itself in the performativity and immediacy of the text, which immerses the reader in the communal voices and their often painful stories. Just as the characters try to make sense of their personal memories and those of their companions, the audience takes an active part in this process, bringing its own experiences to bear on the process of reception. “The text,” Morrison argues, “if it is to take improvisation and audience participation into account, cannot

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102 “Music makes you hungry for more of it. It never gives you the whole number. It slaps and it embraces, it slaps and it embraces. The literature ought to do the same thing.” Morrison, in Paul Gilroy, “Living Memory: A Meeting with Toni Morrison,” 181.


104 “Black writers,” Toni Morrison explains again with reference to music, “have a quality of hunger and disturbance that never ends. Classical music satisfies and closes. Black music does not do that. Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you.” Morrison, in Nelly McKay, “An Interview with Toni Morrison,” 153. It should be pointed out here that Morrison, of course, polarizes strongly, and that ‘classical’, notated music may well also resist structural closure.
be the authority,“105 and she further characterizes the aesthetic effect of *Beloved*:

I wanted the compelling confusion of being there as the characters are; suddenly, without comfort and succor from the ‘author,’ […]. There is just a little music, each other and the urgency of what is at stake. Which is all they had. For that work, the work of language is to get out of the way.106

In the presence of the written word, which in turn refers to other texts and contexts, Morrison perceives a familiar discursive frame that provides a deceptive sense of security. In order to engage and immerse the reader, language must therefore step out from the page, “get out of the way” – by blending into music. Verbal speech, in *Beloved*, discursively invokes the arrangement, the expressive qualities, and performative spontaneity of jazz as embodied in the work of such artists as John Coltrane.

The politics of memory: empowering the collective

What political statement is entailed in the musicalization of *Beloved*? If the novel self-assuredly and self-consciously relies on a largely musical mnemonic structure, it is to the quality of the resource it writes back to – the ethical and political potential of the tradition of spirituals and blues, and the jazz styles that grew out of them – that we have to turn for the ideological positioning of the novel’s aesthetic and poetic scope. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy points to two essential cultural implications of black music. First, he notes that the religious as well as secular manifestations of black musical expression establish an important communicative space of mutual cultural exchange; black music represents an “identity-giving model of democracy / community” that has become the valuable intersubjective resource that I call the ethics of antiphony.107 This “ethics of antiphony” relies on the absence of closure in black music, which encourages the pervasive integration of other cultural manifestations of art, but also, and above all, the egalitarian participation of its audience. By offering musical spaces of identification, it works towards communal cohesion and identity, in a process rooted in the “experience of performance with which to focus the pivotal ethical relationship between performer and crowd, participant and community.”

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A second important function of black music supplements what Gilroy calls the ethics of antiphony:

But this music and its broken rhythm of life are important for another reason. The love stories they enclose are a place in which the black vernacular has been able to preserve and cultivate both the distinctive rapport with the presence of death which derives from slavery and a related ontological state that I want to call the condition of pain.\(^{108}\)

Black music, apart from being a democratic, integrative force for communal cohesion, is thus relevant in that it provides a creative outlet for the suffering inherent in histories of slavery and brutalization. Music, this much Gilroy’s statement implies, has to do with remembrance; more than this, in the context of the African diaspora, it is in fact one of the most important manifestations of cultural memory, even if the instrumental expression of a John Coltrane hardly denotes a specific historical instance and the vocal arts of the blues at first sight seldom immediately denote the Atlantic slave trade or American slavery.\(^{109}\) Gilroy’s understanding of the “condition of pain,” rather, involves a more global form of reference, encoded in an expressive quality that evokes a dimension of suffering rooted in a more or less collective historical experience. To see black music, as well as ‘musicalized’ black writing, as a mnemonic space opening up to the sublimation of slavery and suffering, however, does not go uncontested in critical debate, as I will indicate briefly before shedding some light, by way of conclusion, on the “ethics of antiphony” in Morrison’s art – not, however, without submitting to scrutiny her somewhat exclusive perspective on identity and collective ‘black’ memory.

The “condition of pain” in black music and writing

In its critical reception, Toni Morrison’s Beloved has been almost unanimously celebrated as a milestone in the literary evocation of African-American history – with one notable exception. Stanley Crouch published a harsh critique of the novel titled “Aunt Medea” shortly after its publication in 1987.\(^{110}\) Crouch’s views matter in this context, since he is not only a musician and novelist but, apart from having established himself as a leading literary critic, has also become one of America’s leading and most controversial voices.

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\(^{108}\) Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 203–204.

\(^{109}\) Billie Holiday’s rendering of “Strange Fruit” is certainly the most famous exception in this context.

in the jazz business. Together with the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, to whom he serves as a mentor and political voice, he came to dominate the mainstream jazz scene over the course of the 1990s, propagating the respectability and universal value of what he calls “Great American Music,” not least by establishing a rather rigid canon of what is in fact to be considered ‘great’. As the representative figures in the neoconservative or ‘traditionalist’ movement, and above all as the artistic directors of the popular jazz series at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York, Marsalis and Crouch have exerted an immense influence on the public perception and dissemination of contemporary jazz music. All this did not come about without an acrimonious ideological battle over the true nature of the art, and in the end it drove a wedge between those artists who, for Marsalis and Crouch, ‘honour’ their idea of the ‘great’ tradition and those who prefer to play in ‘disrespectful’ styles.\textsuperscript{111}

What is it, then, that displeases Crouch about Morrison’s \textit{Beloved}, whose musical scope he explicitly acknowledges (“Morrison, unlike Alice Walker, has real talent, an ability to organize her novel in a musical structure, deftly using images as motifs”? Crouch expresses discomfort, if not annoyance, with literature and music that are openly constituted via the experience of suffering. The evocation and dramatization of the suffering resulting from the brutalities of slavery and racism, for Crouch, are not only counterproductive with regard to the achievements of black America, but are to be seen in the light of a commercial industry that markets guilt. Thus, in Crouch’s eyes, Black Studies departments are simply profiting from a phony literary fashion, a fashion that has manifested itself at its most absurd in feminist attacks by black women against brutalization by their own menfolk. “Toni Morrison,” he claims, “gained more from these changes in literary fashion than anybody else.”\textsuperscript{112} The main charge Crouch levels against Morrison’s \textit{Beloved}, in this context, is that the novel revels in the stereotypes of a victim mentality and patterns of social conditioning in order to explain the plight of its characters. Much is made of Morrison’s dedication of \textit{Beloved} to “Sixty Million and more,” a number that, according to Crouch, is not accidentally some ten times larger than that of the victims of the Jewish Holocaust. His final verdict:

\textsuperscript{111} For the detailed positions of Marsalis and Crouch, for background information to the emotionally loaded debate between traditionalists and their opponents on the programme of the “Jazz at the Lincoln Centre” series, and for a variety of statements by contemporary jazz artist on the furore, see Christian Broecking, \textit{Der Marsalis-Faktor: Gespräche über afroamerikanische Kultur in den neunziger Jahren} (Waa-kirchen: Oreos, 1995).

\textsuperscript{112} Stanley Crouch, “Aunt Medea,” 204.
Beloved, above all, is a blackface holocaust novel. It seems to have been written in order to enter American slavery into the big-time martyr ratings contest, a contest usually won by references to, and works about, the experiences of Jews at the hands of Nazis.113

Crouch’s unvarnished allegations, of course, did not go unchallenged for long. Among the foremost defenders of Morrison is Paul Gilroy, who refuses outright to “accept that this is either Morrison’s intention or the inevitable effect of her moving excursion into the relationship between terror and memory, sublimity and the possible desire to forget the unforgettable.”114 He stresses that it is precisely in the rapprochement between discourses of the Jewish Holocaust and the terror of the Atlantic slave trade that it might, one day, be possible to gain a deeper knowledge of the workings of modern racism and the complicity of humanist ideology with historical brutalization and genocide. Indeed, Crouch’s critique of Morrison is rooted in a dubious neglect, if not denial, of the traumatic dimension of the African-American experience. This unwillingness to accept the legitimate presence of trauma and suffering in art as well as history surfaces, for instance, in his dismissal of James Baldwin’s creative achievement as a phony luxuriating in self-attributed martyrdom:

According to Baldwin, those who had suffered most knew life best; […] with Baldwin the claim to martyrdom, real or merely asserted, began to take on value. […] Blessed be the victims, the new catechism taught, for their suffering has illumined them, and they shall lead us to the light, even as they provide magnets for our guilt.115

It is very much open to doubt that Baldwin’s art aims at anything like the evocation of guilt. Crouch’s dismissal of Baldwin’s musically structured writing, which goes hand in hand with the dismissal of politically engaged manifestations of such styles as free jazz, reveals, rather, an unwillingness or inability to integrate the more sordid details of the African American past into art and life in order not to spoil some misconceived notion of the ‘respecatability’ of African-American artistic and social achievement. Crouch’s argument comes surprisingly close to that of Theodor W. Adorno, whose understanding of jazz is, of course, rudimentary compared to that of Crouch, and who tried to dismiss it as a popular form of music inferior to the autonomous art of the European avant-garde he championed. “Jazz is bad,” Adorno was

114 Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 217.
still able to claim in the 1950s, “because it enjoys the traces of what has been done to the negroes.”

Gilroy and others turn this argument on its head, stressing instead the special relevance of confronting historical trauma and the attempts to push back the limits to expressing human suffering. Aleida Assmann, in this context, has coined the term “victims’ memory” (Verlierergedächtnis), which she employs to refer to a specific manifestation of collective memory that differs significantly from the memories of “winners,” “losers” and “perpetrators.”

The memory of victims, which is constituted as the trace of “the historical trauma of communal victimization,” is seen in a very different light from Crouch’s polemic against sentimentality and martyrdom. It is a necessary and positive stage in dealing with and overcoming collective trauma:

The victims’ memory has a lot in common with the losers’ memory, yet today it is no longer necessarily dominated by antipathies and revenge. It moreover may have a restitutional character, as the example of African American literature testifies, where we are presently experiencing the development of an entirely new use of memory to overcome the paralysing effect of trauma.

Toni Morrison’s Beloved serves as a perfect example of Assmann’s argument. Morrison herself constantly stresses the importance of engaging with the memory of the victims of African-American history, and of doing so by finding modes of expression that perform the crucial confrontation with the horrors and injustices of history in a way that makes the historical suffering an accessible and bearable part of identity:

I think that Afro-Americans in rushing away from slavery, which was important to do – it meant rushing out of bondage into freedom – also rushed away from the slaves because it was painful to dwell there, and they may have been abandoned some responsibilities in doing so. It was a double-edged sword, if you understand me. There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for

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116 Adorno, in a dialogue with the German jazz critic Joachim Berendt in the Merkur in 1953. Quoted from Christian Broecking, Der Marsalis-Faktor: Gespräche über afroamerikanische Kultur in den neunziger Jahren, 63 (tr. L.E.).

It is in this context that the musicalization of the mnemonic design of Morrison’s fiction comes into its own. The placement of the novel in the domain of African-American music is the key to overcoming the speechlessness of trauma and to engaging in constructive dialogue with painful chapters of the past. The broken beats of the blues, spirituals and jazz that the novel takes up are so much part of everyday black life that they establish a secure foundation for the exploration of suffering and pain. In the expressive tradition of African-American music, in the security of its off-beat phrasings, history becomes graspable without being destructive, and its stories thus become speakable. James Baldwin, whom Crouch rejects so violently, formulates it as follows:

Music is our witness and our ally. The beat is the confession which recognises, changes and conquers time. Then, history becomes a garment we can wear and share, and not a cloak in which to hide, and time becomes a friend.

And again, it is in the typical tension between individual voice and chorus in the jazz aesthetic that the “condition of pain” involved in the diasporic Black Atlantic experience can be fully expressed. On the firm basis of a collective of voices, encouraging and sustaining individual explorations of the abysses of human experience yet at the same time insisting on the soloist’s re-integration into the common chorus, assurance can be found that memory is not self-destructive, and that trauma can be overcome.

The “ethics of antiphony” fully realised?

On the exclusiveness of collective memory

A lucid instance of theory directly addressing the close association between trauma, healing, and the musicality of Toni Morrison’s art can be found in Homi Bhabha’s work, which, ironically enough, is often criticized for a lack of historical grounding and ethical implication. Bhabha perceives the im-

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provisational mode of precisely the sequence in *Beloved* I have read against Coltrane’s suite (even if he uses an analogy from classical rather than jazz music). In his “Introduction” to *The Location of Culture*, he comments on “those intriguing chapters which lay over each other, where Sethe, Beloved and Denver perform a fugue-like ceremony of claiming and naming through intersecting and interstitial subjectivities”:

‘Beloved, she my daughter’; ‘Beloved is my sister’; ‘I am Beloved and she is mine.’ The women speak in tongues, from a space ‘in-between each other’ which is communal space. They explore an ‘interpersonal’ reality: a social reality that appears to convey the rhythm and the improvisation of those chapters, but it is impossible not to see in them the healing of history, a community reclaimed in the making of a name. 121

When Bhabha stresses the importance of an “‘interpersonal’ reality” and “communal space” in Morrison’s musical narrative sequence, this links up closely with the paramount importance of community in black music. As the Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite points out, “community” (in an imaginary as well as material sense) should be a fundamental part of every narrative jazz aesthetic:

The ‘jazz novel’, in the normal course of things, will hardly be an ‘epic’. Dealing with a specific, clearly defined, folk-type community, it will try to express the essence of this community through its form. It will absorb its rhythms from the people of this community; and its concern will be with the community as a whole, its characters taking their place in that community, of which they are felt and seen to be an integral part. 122

This applies well to *Beloved*: the solo excursions of the individual voices with their individual rhythms, tempi, timbres and sounds – be it those of Sethe, Denver, Beloved or Paul D – always rely on the polyrhythmic and polyphonic variety of the community, which both enable and sanction their mnemonic flights. At the same time, as already suggested, the characters’ calls in a jazz-aesthetic text are not directed only at other fictional characters, but reach beyond the narrative framework itself; the performative quality of the text encourages and demands the immediate response of its audience. The implica-

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tions of the term ‘community’ thus extend beyond the immanent configuration of the novel, gaining a metaphoric quality that embraces the participating readers and listeners. On the one hand, then, Beloved initially accounts for the democratic openness of musical art and the “ethics of antiphony”; on the other, it is also true that the particular conception of Beloved presupposes that not every reader is automatically meant to become part of the ‘extended’ call-and-response dialogue; Morrison seems to have a particular community in mind when it comes to the mnemonic design of her writing.

In interviews and essays, Morrison repeatedly and clearly defines the group of people she writes for. She sees her audience primarily in the communities of the African diaspora, which she refers as “tribe” or “village”:

I write what I have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe. Peasant literature for my people, which is necessary and legitimate but which also allows me to get in touch with all sorts of people.

Even if “all sorts of” other people are thus not explicitly excluded, her focus remains ethnically defined, and primarily addresses a specifically ‘black’ audience. This may perhaps better understood in the light of the typical relationships between jazz or blues artists and their audiences. As Sherley Anne Williams explains, such relations are based on the assumption that both share a comparable social and political reality. In a blues poem or narrative, the speaker makes the same assumption about his audience that a blues singer makes: both poet (singer) and audience share the same reality. […] The particularized, individual experience rooted in a common reality is the primary thematic characteristic of all blues songs no matter what their structure.123

Accordingly, Morrison positions her literary work in precisely that group which has constituted itself historically in the diasporic experience of the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery. The antiphonal structure and openness of her tales open up a forum for this group, fostering the intersubjective exchange of experiences and providing opportunities for the analysis of historical and current conditions. Again, the parallel Morrison draws is with her conception of African American music:

There is a confrontation between old values of the tribes and new urban values. It’s confusing. There has to be a mode to do what the music did for blacks, what we used to be able to do with each other in private and in that civilization that existed underneath the white civilization. I think this accounts for the address of my books. […] The music kept us alive, but it’s not enough anymore. My people are being devoured.124

That music has lost its elementary functional role in the black communities has, for Morrison, to do with processes of globalization and commercialization (“new urban values”) on the music market. These developments have diluted and spread ‘black’ music in a way that it has lost much of its communal value: “That music is no longer exclusively ours,” she claims, so “another form has to take its place, and it seems to me that the novel is needed […] now in a way that it was not needed before.”125

This statement is essential to an understanding of the ideological scope of Morrison’s mnemonic choices. It illuminates her decision to preserve and remember the traditions of African-American music in the medium of narrative fiction. It also explains her irritable denial of any intertextual impact of Western written traditions on her art, from the slave narratives to the novels of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, even if she in fact does owe something to these latter writers. Her statements suggest that her attitude needs to be seen in the light of her anxiety not to be appropriated into the larger context of Western literary discourse, in which the specifics of her African-American aesthetic would lose their contours, and in which her art would lose its functional relevance for the black community. If her work is to remain true to the engagement with what Assmann calls the victims’ memory of those who continue to experience the backlash of historical trauma, it is paramount for Morrison to remain true to a specifically ‘black’ aesthetic and politics.

However legitimate Morrison’s ideological scheme may seem at first sight, her rhetoric is far from unproblematic. The choice of vocabulary such as “my people” or “tribe” suggests clear-cut collective identities where matters are much more complex than that. Such terms are in fact highly deceptive, polarizing as they do a (rural) black ‘in-group’ against an ominous out-group uniting all those who are ‘Other’ in an ideologically driven paradigm that hardly accounts for either biological or cultural ‘in-betweenness’. As such,

Morrison’s rhetoric does not accord with notions of identity-formation, forged by postcolonial criticism, that underscore the inevitable hybridity of identity. In the writings of Homi Bhabha, Wilson Harris, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and others, it has been made quite clear that both individual and collective designs of identity are always plural in nature and rooted in transcultural processes of exchange. Further, Morrison’s exclusivist rhetoric defies the philosophy, as stated by some of the foremost African-American critics, of the very African-American musical tradition she writes back to. Cornel West, for instance, insists on the fact that jazz itself resists the conception of fixed and exclusive identities. In *Race Matters*, he employs jazz as an ethical metaphor, as a “mode of being in the world, an improvisational mode of protean, fluid, and flexible dispositions toward reality suspicious of ‘either/or’ viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements, or supremacist ideologies.” West argues that jazz is ultimately to be seen as a democratic and immanently trans-ethnic force:

> As with a soloist in a jazz quartet, quintet or band, individuality is promoted in order to sustain and increase the creative tension with the group – a tension that yields higher levels of performance to achieve the aim of the collective project. This kind of critical and democratic sensibility flies in the face of any policing of borders and boundaries of “blackness,” “maleness,” “femaleness,” or “whiteness.”

West’s argument is well attested by such musicians as John Coltrane, whose art manifested itself and developed by means of the continual innovative integration of foreign influences and structures. The fluid and democratic styles of jazz, and the identity-giving relationship between the artist and his or her audience, should thus work in an integrative rather than exclusionary fashion. In the last analysis, it is only on the premisses of anti-essentialist openness that the ethics of antiphony comes into its own.

One has to be very careful, however, not to confuse Toni Morrison’s defensive rhetoric with the actual mnemonic structures and strategies in her fiction. Here, things are not quite so essentialist as the contextual statements would suggest. This is particularly obvious in the integration into *Beloved*’s antiphonal structure of the character Amy Denver, who clearly works against binary tendencies in the narrative framework. Amy not only questions the reduction of black and white to the categories of victim and perpetrator on the level of configuration; above all, Amy and her song for Sethe, which is given ample narrative space, imply that the mnemonic framework acknowledges the hybrid character of jazz-aesthetic compositions. The integration of Amy’s

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tune alongside the evocations of oral storytelling, Afro-Christian music and the blues hints at the fact that Morrison holds out some hope of a fruitful exchange of cultural memory and vision. It also remains true, however, that this interpretation of Amy’s rather brief appearance heaps quite a load on her narrow shoulders. The court is still out on whether Morrison makes full use of the transcultural potential inherent in the African-American musical tradition, or holds back in favour of reworking what she sees as a specifically ‘black’ trauma in order to ‘re-member’ history for a specifically ‘black’ collective and thereby to furnish the latter with a heightened sense of identity.
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Conclusion

LITERARY MEMORY – as the narrative design of Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Toni Morrison's novels testifies – unfolds in an intricate process of mutual exchange between specific poetic approaches (the *ars* of mnemonic writing), and a decidedly political programme (the *vis* of memory). The realm of literature inherently provides *lieu de mémoire* that allows writers to engage with personal experiences and memories, as well as with the mnemonic potential of other texts, images or music, and to create new significances. Literary memory is thus to be read as a complex space in which historical occurrences and their representations are both inscribed and preserved, transformed or dispersed within the dynamic of continually evolving strategies of mnemonic reference. Such references are not to be seen as ideologically detached, but as always expressive of political engagement with the memories of other people and their textual, visual or musical manifestations. The various guises in which personal memories are staged, as well as the specific strategies of preserving, subverting or diffusing earlier mnemonic material in new literary contexts, inevitably bear an ideological coloration. Literary memory is everything but the representation of an autonomous artistic realm detached from social processes of memory and forgetting. On the contrary, a writer’s mnemonic strategies are to be conceived of as attempts to restructure and refigure in fiction very real historical experiences in alternative visions of human existence that constantly align themselves or critically engage with social manifestations of memory. They are thus expressive of a political thrust that may vary considerably in extent according to the manner in which the writer envisions the social role and potentiality of mnemonic literature.

In the preceding chapters, I commenced with an investigation of testimonial accounts – texts that perform as reports of personal, first-hand experience. By focusing on the slave narrative in general and on Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* specifically, it was possible to conclude that such texts can be fully verified neither as historically ‘true’ in terms of the narrated content
nor as ‘truthful’ with regard to the rendering of the emotional impact on the witness. Rather, the performance of Equiano and others must be seen in the light of a fragile balancing act between certain pragmatic constraints (for instance, the confrontation of derogatory stereotypes of the African character in the English public, or adaptation to the taste of prospective readerships) and certain expressive needs (especially concerning personal suffering). With testimonies on the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery, this balance was more often than not compromised by pragmatic goals, so that the expression of suffering and trauma was allocated very little explicit narrative space; the expressive dimension of the slave narrative can often only be sensed in the silences, gaps and fissures of the text.

Even in the light of doubts about the full degree of truth and truthfulness in slave narratives, however, their mnemonic figurations of the Black Atlantic are still of paramount importance for investigations of the history and meaning of slavery today. The testimonies’ legitimacy resides in the very act of testifying itself, in the often desperate, calculated performance of authenticity and credibility in the face of hostile public discourses, as well as in the act of engaging with personal trauma. It is this quality that sets them apart from ordinary historiographic representations, which, in turn, are themselves anything but objective. Thus, Paul Gilroy writes in Against Race:

in an unprecedented situation in which ambivalence reigns and general rules of ethical conduct are difficult to frame, this legacy of bearing witness should not be spurned as a distraction from the laborious tasks of documentation and historical reconstruction. It is far better to make this dubious testimony our compass and try to seek our bearings in the words of witnesses than to vainly try to orient ourselves with the unreliable charts supplied by covertly race-coded liberal or even socialist humanisms [...].

The three novels I addressed in detail – Caryl Phillips’s Cambridge, David Dabydeen’s A Harlot’s Progress, and Toni Morrison’s Beloved – engage fully with the legacy of the slave narrative. Proceeding in entirely different ways, they all find ways of exploring the fissures and gaps in the older texts, and to articulate some of their silences.

Caryl Phillips chooses a mnemonic design that relies on the creative montage of older texts. He shapes two narrative voices from a seemingly inexhaustible wealth of bits and pieces of testimonial accounts by eighteenth-

century black writers and by British travellers and planters in the Caribbean in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, thereby managing to recall to the attention of today’s readership entire textual discourses that have long been relegated to the archives. Phillips’s mnemonic approach, however, is not content with merely reintegrating the older writings into the “working memory” of Black Atlantic societies; what is at stake, rather, is the exposure of their ideological masquerades. By dialogically juxtaposing the accounts of the protagonists Emily and Cambridge, and, by extension, the source-texts that their voices are composed of, all of the voices in Cambridge confront their ‘Other’. In this fashion, the slaves’ narratives are revealed as indebted to the colonizer’s discourse in several ways; conversely, in the light of these black testimonies, the implicit or explicit racism of Western travelogues and historiography is made unmistakably clear. In the negotiation of oppositional voices performed by his readers, Phillips plumbs the silences of the slave narratives. In this confrontation with the racist attitudes of the travellers and planters, the suffering of slavery that is hardly ever articulated – neither in the originals nor in the fictional voice of Cambridge – eventually become palpable. The political thrust of Phillips’s mnemonic design, then, is rooted in what Aleida Assmann refers to as ‘cultural memory’. The novel calls for a democratic and egalitarian renegotiation of the memories of all parties involved in the making of the Black Atlantic, and emphasizes the need for a transcultural sense of historical responsibility.

David Dabydeen, by contrast, has a completely different view of the role and potential of literature when it comes to confronting the trauma of Black Atlantic history. He also departs from the slave narrative in the mnemonic design of his version of A Harlot’s Progress. Unlike Phillips, however, Dabydeen reveals the shackled nature of black autobiography by dramatizing the ambivalence and plurality of personal memory. The linearity and single-mindedness that characterized the performances of Olaudah Equiano or Mary Prince are replaced by a multiplicity of circular, contradictory narrative versions of the past. While the slave narrative serves as the basic generic frame of reference, the actual mnemonic structure of the novel is visual in nature. The delineation of most of the characters as well as the palimpsestic, circular structure and the aesthetic amplitude of parts of the narrative relate to Dabydeen’s interpretation of a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings and prints. The novelist inscribes in the memory of literature a visual tradition of rendering slavery and the slave trade, ranging from William Hogarth to Joshua Reynolds and J.M.W. Turner. The stereotypical representations of black people here – as animal or tame accessories of rich Britons, as noble savages or sublime victims – become dispersed in Dabydeen’s fictional design, lost in the carnivalesque multiplicity of contradictory narrative inven-
tions and versions. Through its playful subversion and diffusion of repressive representations of blackness, the novel generates a liberating, transfigurative momentum. For Dabydeen, literary creativity yields a mnemonic space in which, by means of the “unfinished genesis of the imagination” and disrespectful transformations of older mnemonic material, the traumatic, paralyzing force of history may be overcome. In order for this to happen, however, it is essential that the individual imagination be free of all restrictions. The redemptive potential of the arts, for Dabydeen, comes fully into its own only when it focuses on the aesthetic, while ethical restraint or political correctness are perceived as doxa blocking the imaginative release. The mnemonic design of Dabydeen’s fiction is dedicated exclusively to the individual memory and imagination of the writer, and is not a vehicle of responsibility for cultural or historical collectivity.

In Beloved, Toni Morrison takes a third pathway to narrative remembrance of Black Atlantic history. Morrison also claims that the slave narrative is to be seen as the “matrix” that her work evolves from. At the same time, she is more hesitant than Phillips or Dabydeen about evoking the testimonies of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince or Harriet Jacob, which she perceives to be manipulated by the abolitionists and dominant public taste. It is accordingly difficult to discern mnemonic reference to them; in fact, Morrison is keen to avoid everything that would position her work in a pre-existing tradition of writing. Instead, she anchors her art in oral and musical forms of expression, which she maintains best suit a decidedly ‘black’ aesthetic. Not only are song and music explicitly thematized throughout the novel, in the immediate configuration around Sethe and Denver; Morrison also evokes and quotes from specific oral and musical styles such as folklore, sermons and spirituals, blues and work songs, and ultimately also manifestations of Euro-American music. The discursive make-up of the novel has a jazz-aesthetic compass. The narrative arrangement of voices, their expressiveness, and the performative invitation of responses by an implied audience are clearly reminiscent of the musical explorations of jazz artists such as John Coltrane. While the written testimonies of black people underwent severe distortion by Western discourses, Morrison sees the traditions of African-American music as succeeding in appropriating Euro-American styles without compromise, not least because they were securely preserved within black communities. It is within this tradition that the ‘condition of pain’ characterizing the Black Atlantic experience can be adequately expressed. Further, the dramatization of the antiphonal structures of black music serves to integrate the community into the artistic process, inviting interchange with her self-identifying readership, which Morrison locates within the black diaspora. It is the collective memory of this specific group that Morrison wishes to empower in her mnemonic
design, by taking recourse to what she conceives of as typically ‘black’ modes of expression.

While my readings of the poetics and politics of memory in the three novels have associated text-montage with cultural manifestations of social memory, visual mnemonic structures with individual anamnesis, and the musicalization of fiction with collective re-membering, it should be clear that such relations are not generalizable. References to a certain medium such as literary texts or music are in themselves not necessarily evocative of a certain political tendency – cultural or collective memory, for instance. What matters, rather, is the specific ideological stance of a writer with respect to whatever mnemonic resource he or she is writing back to. As I have shown, the same material may be appropriated in very different ways: Caryl Phillips refers to Olaudah Equiano by participating in and initially preserving his *Interesting Narrative* in the fictional context, while Dabydeen employs the same source in a dialogue that aims straightway at carnivalesque subversion and diffusion. It is only in the light of these fundamentally different approaches that the contrary philosophies of these writers with regard to social manifestations of memory begin to make sense. Similarly, to give just one further example, it is conceivable that a narrative dialogue with styles of African-American music might well lend much greater emphasis to the immanently transcultural and transethnic potential of jazz than does Morrison’s mnemonic design; Jackie Kay’s explorations of the spaces in between ethnic, cultural and sexual roles come to mind here.2

Thus, in order to obtain a differentiated picture of how the Black Atlantic is inscribed in the memory of literature in all its many facets, the specific mnemonic strategies of a broader range of writers than those I have examined in depth here remain to be analysed. However, I hope at the very least to have indicated, through the examination of novels by Phillips, Dabydeen and Morrison, how diverse the specific techniques of mnemonic writing can be, and how differentiated literature’s potential to challenge social processes of memory and forgetting. This is especially true for the writer’s awareness (or denial) of aesthetic, ethical, or political responsibility toward the individual, to ethnic or other collectives, or to the transcultural space of the Black Atlantic at large. The positions and positioning of Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Toni Morrison could not, in fact, be more fundamentally different in this respect. The memory of literature, then, most certainly does more than revel

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in “mourning,” as Pierre Nora would have it. As Paul Gilroy observes, of the cultures of memory in the African diaspora,

Their plurality and regionality valorize something more than a protracted condition of social mourning over the ruptures of exile, loss, brutality, and forced separation. They highlight a more indeterminate [...] mood in which natal alienation and cultural estrangement are capable of conferring insight and creating pleasure, as well as precipitating anxiety about the coherence of the nation and the stability of its imaginary ethnic core.³

Which of the political agendas indicated above are specifically empowered by the narratives will differ from novel to novel. In Phillips’s Cambridge, it is certainly the promotion of a deeper and essentially more democratic insight into the heritage of Atlantic slavery, and the call for a transcultural responsibility for the present and future. Dabydeen’s A Harlot’s Progress, by contrast, focuses on the transfiguration of trauma in the aesthetic pleasure involved in the act of mnemonic creativity. Morrison, finally, attempts above all to give identity and stability to the ethnic core of an imagined black community. What is certain is that the literature of the Black Atlantic serves as a crucial lieu de mémoire, hosting vivid, innovative, and controversial fictional designs that align in complex ways with social dimensions of remembrance and amnesia. Indeed, should the end of memory be near, then certainly not here.

³ Paul Gilroy, Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line, 128–29 (my emphasis).
Appendix
Source Passages Adapted in Cambridge

List of Mnemonic Sources


Bayley, F.W.N. *Four Years’ Residence in the West Indies* (London: William Kidd, 1830).


Flannigan, Mrs. *Antigua and the Antiguans: A Full Account of the Colony and Its Inhabitants from the Time of the Caribs to the Present Day. Interspersed with Anecdotes and Legends. Also, an Impartial view of Slavery and the Free Labour System.*


Moreton, J.B. Manners and Customs in the West India Islands (1790; London, 1793).


Source Passages Adapted in Cambridge

PART I

We are now got on board, heartily fatigued, yet not likely to sleep (Schaw, 18/ Cambridge, 7)

My country, I have no more pride but that I belong to thee, and can write my name in the muster-roll of mankind, an Englishman. If thou wert ten times
more cloudy, and rainy, and bleak, I should still prefer thy clouds and thy storms to the spicy gardens of the Orient. (Coleridge, 311/ Cambridge, 8)

Sea Terms. – Windward, from whence the wind blows; leeward, to which it blows; starbord, the right of the stern; larboard, the left; starboard helm, when you go to the left; but when to the right, instead of larboard helm, helm a-port […] the tiller, the handle of the rudder; the capstan, the weighter of the anchor; the buntlines, the ropes which move the body of the sail, the bunt being the body; the bowlines, those which spread out the sails, and make them swell. (Lewis, 18/ Cambridge, 8–9)

Sick to death! My temples throbbing, my head burning, my limbs freezing, my mouth all fever, my stomach all nausea, my mind all disgust. (Lewis, 20/ Cambridge, 9)

A few moments however settled us once more, and quietness wou’d again have restored us to rest, had not the Cock, as harbinger of day, repeatedly told us it was morning. (Schaw, 24/ Cambridge, 9)

I prevailed on Mrs Miller to get up and give us a dish of Tea, this she actually tried, but was not able to stand on her feet, as she was now really sick […] when fortunately I bethought me of Robert, my brother’s Indian servant. (Schaw, 25/ Cambridge, 9)

Yet the Capt is every moment congratulating us on the smoothness of our Vessel, which he declares is so soft in her Motion, that one may play bowls on the deck. However as I am like to beat out my teeth every time I try to drink, and often after all not being able to bring the cup to such a direction as to obtain my desire (Schaw, 27/ Cambridge, 10)

Sea Terms. – Ratlines, the rope ladders by which the sailors climb the shrouds; the companion, the cabin-head; reefs, the divisions by which the sails are contracted; stunsails, additional sails, spread for the purpose of catching all the wind possible; the fore-mast, main-mast, mizen-mast; fore, the head; aft, the stern […] to belay a rope, to fasten it. (Lewis, 26/ Cambridge, 10)

I am quite distressed to see him in such a plight, and can discover nothing to give him relief. I have exhausted all my physic and cookery to no purpose, poor soul, nothing sits on his stomach, nor can he rest a moment thro’ the Night, but bounces in and out of his cot, every quarter of an hour (Schaw, 31–32/ Cambridge, 10)

The captain snuffed out one of the candles and both being tied to the table, could not relight it with the other: so the steward came to do it: when a sudden heel of the ship made him extinguish the second candle […] and thus we were all left in the dark. Then the intolerable noise! the cracking of bulkheads! the
sawing of ropes! the screeching of the tiller! the trampling of the sailors! the clattering of the crockery! Everything above deck and below deck in motion at once! Chairs, writing-desks, books, boxes, bundles, fire-irons and fenders, flying to one end of the room (Lewis, 20–21/ Cambridge, 11).

The sea was running mountain high, and the waves so outrageous, that they came aboard like a deluge; and rushing from side to side of the Vessel, generally made their way into the Cabin, and from thence into the state room. (Schaw, 45/ Cambridge, 12)

Yesterday we had the satisfaction of falling in with the trade wind, and now we are proceeding both rapidly and steadily. (Lewis, 29/ Cambridge, 14)

[W]e have no more wind than is necessary to swell our sails and bear us along, and this, they assure us, is the reason we feel it so rough (Schaw, 32/ Cambridge, 14).

We caught a dolphin, but not with the spear: he gorged a line which was fastened to the stern, and baited with salt pork; but being a very large and strong fish, his efforts to escape were so powerful, that it was feared that he would break the line, and a grainse (as the dolphin-spear is technically called) was thrown at him (Lewis, 34/ Cambridge, 14).

The weather is so excessively close and sultry (Lewis, 42/ Cambridge, 15)

We have now thrown off our ship-dress and wear muslin Jackets and chip hats: that however is not so wonderful, as our lying under a single Holland sheet, and even that too much. (Schaw, 69/ Cambridge, 15).

Every thing flatters us with the hope of Land (Schaw, 73/ Cambridge, 16).

Our captain is quite out of patience with the tortoise pace of our progress; for my part I care very little about it. […] to reach which, peaceably and harmlessly, is the only business of life. (Lewis, 45/ Cambridge, 16).

A black pilot came on board yesterday, in a canoe hollowed out of the cotton-tree; and when it returned for him this morning, it brought us a water melon. I never met with a worse article in my life […] it had such a kind of Shylocky taste of raw flesh about it (Lewis, 52/ Cambridge, 17).

I write now on land, but my head is so giddy, that I can’t believe I am yet on shore, nor can I stand more than I did on Shipboard; every thing seems to move in the same manner it did there. They tell me however, I will get the better of this in twenty four hours. (Schaw, 78/ Cambridge, 18)

“Sangree da kill de captain,

“Oh lor, he must die;

“New rum kill de sailor,
“Oh lor, he must die;
“Hard work kill de nigger,
“Oh lor, he must die,” &c. (Bayley, 358/ Cambridge, 20)

We landed by a boat from one of the ships nearest the town, but had a third voyage to make, which was on the back of Negroes, and tho’ there was not a breath of wind, we were much wet and incommoded by the surge. (Schaw, 121/ Cambridge, 20)

A negro girl presented us with a glass of what they call Sangarie, which is composed of Madeira, water, sugar and lime juice, a most refreshing drink. (Schaw, 78–79/ Cambridge, 20–21)

No lady ever goes without a gentleman to attend her; their carriages are light and airy; this of Mr Halliday’s was drawn by English horses, which is a very needless piece of expense; as they have strong horses from New England, and most beautiful creatures from the Spanish main. Their Wagons which are large and heavy, are drawn by mules […] with very thin clothed drivers, nothing on their bodies, and little any where, which deserves the name of clothing. The women too, I mean the black women, wear little or no clothing, nothing on their bodies, and they are hardly prevailed on to wear a petty coat. (Schaw, 87/ Cambridge, 21)

There were three things against which I was particularly cautioned, and which three things I was determined not to do: to take exercise after ten in the day; to be exposed to the dews after sun-down; and to sleep at a Jamaica boarding house. (Lewis, 63/ Cambridge, 22)

Just as we got in the lane, a number of pigs run out at a door, and after that a parcel of monkeys. This not a little surprised me, but when I found out what I took for monkeys were negro children, naked as they were born. (Schaw, 78/ Cambridge, 22–23)

Armed with their massive clubs and sharp spears, at the end of which was inserted a fish-bone […] (Flannigan, vol. 1/ Cambridge, 24)

The character of the Caribs presents little of what is interesting to the imagination; ferocious, superstitious, and revengeful, they looked upon all strangers as enemies; and, in return, were dreaded as such by the inhabitants of the other islands; still they are represented as being, generally, peaceable and friendly to one another. They ever retained a high sense of equality and independence. Accustomed to be absolute masters of their own conduct, they scorned to follow the orders of others; and having never known control, they would not submit to correction. […] While the Carib roamed in this native wilds, his reason was but little exercised, and consequently, his intellectual powers were very limited […] but the inventions and improvements of
civilized life, with all the arts and manufactures of the Spaniards, they regarded with apathy. [...] they carried home, and either slaughtered them for the grand feast, or kept them until they became sufficiently plump for eating [...] Happy for us is it that we live in an age when Paganism, with all its accompanying horrors, has given place to the doctrines of Christianity – when this land, so beautified by the hands of Nature, is freed from those barbarous wars, those soul-sickening feasts of human flesh, which once polluted it! (Flannigan, vol. 1, 338-41/ Cambridge, 24–25)

But improvement had been progressive and by that time the representative planter’s residence had come to be an imposing structure. Wherever possible, it stood in a commanding position, frequently facing the sea. Almost invariably it was set some distance back from the road and was approached by an avenue of cedars, palmettos, coconut trees. It was built of wood, stood clear of the ground on stone supports, and was one story in height. (Ragatz, 5-6/ Cambridge, 26)

The entrance let into a central hall, on either side of which were bedrooms. At the farther end was the entry to a wide and spacious piazza running nearly the length of the house. (Ragatz, 6/ Cambridge, 27)

We have had a sound sleep in an excellent bed chamber, in which were two beds covered with thin lawn curtains, which here are called musquetoe Nets, but we have found it so cool, that we occupied but one bed. A single very fine Holland sheet was all our covering, but we found laid by the side of the beds, quilts, in case we chused them, which by four in the morning we found to be absolutely necessary. (Schaw, 86/ Cambridge, 28)

The interiors were plain. The rooms were seldom ceiled and beams protruded. The hall was furnished with a sofa or two, colloquially known as “cots,” and a few prints of and maps adorned the walls. (Ragatz, 6/ Cambridge, 29)

Each chamber contained a bed [...] as well as a set of drawers and a number of rockers. (Ragatz, 6/ Cambridge, 29)

The cool veranda was habitually occupied during the waking hours. Comfortable lounges, a backgammon board, chessmen, and a spy-glass to turn on passing ships or horsemen could usually be found. [...] Windows were equipped with Venetian blinds to permit the free circulation of air, which buried the occupant of a residence in restful semi-darkness. Porkers and poultry were wont to seek relief from the sweltering heat in the shady retreat beneath the house. Culinary operations were performed in a detached building. Servants occupied their own quarters or drowsed about on the hall floor so as to be at their master’s call. The negro village, sugar plant, and sundry workshops were situated at the rear. (Ragatz, 6/ Cambridge, 29-30)
Such loads of all sorts of high, rich, and seasoned things, and really gallons of
wine and mixed liquors as they drink! [...] a dish of tea, another of coffee, a
bumper of claret, another large one hock-negus, then Madeira, sangree, were
all to be followed (Nugent, 57/ Cambridge, 31)

Land and sea turtle, quails, snipes, plovers and pigeons and doves of all de-
scriptions. [...] excellent pork, barbicated pigs, pepperpots, with numberless
excellent dishes, from the ordinary fare (Lewis, 92/ Cambridge, 31)
The luxurious menu was in sharp contrast to the service. Dishes were placed
upon the table higgedly-piggedly; silver flagons and costly salvers kept inti-
mate company with coarse earthenware. The able butler alone was privileged
to wear shoes and stockings. His assistants, generally one for every dinner,
were barefooted and but half-clothed; while the meal was in progress, they
alternately passed the dishes and drove away swarms of hungry flies with
slow rhythmic motions of great palm-leaf fans. (Ragatz, 8/ Cambridge, 32)
An important part of the former’s duties was to take care of estate negroes.
(Ragatz, 17/ Cambridge, 33)
By far the most common disease of the negro, are slight disorders of the
stomach: before the canes are ripe, but when they are old enough to be full of
sweet juice and palatable enough, the negroes are fond of them [...] they
relish them as a change (Carmichael, vol. 1, 207/ Cambridge, 33)
A small insect, which is called a chegoe, or, as the negroes express it, “jigger,” gets into their feet; and if not extracted in time, makes its nest and
breeds in the flesh. The dirty and indolent beings I am now describing allow
these insects to breed so fast, and remain until they attain such size, that it is
impossible for them to be taken out; and the consequence is, they feed upon
the flesh, until the feet are in such a state, that they are often obliged to suffer
amputation as far as the knee. (Flannigan, vol. 2, 103/ Cambridge, 34)
Monday morning is always a great day for the sick; all lazy or ill-disposed
negroes come into the hospital at least once a week, and sometimes oftener
[...] with their heads tied up, their eyes half shut, dragging one leg after the
other, and groaning as if they were in agony; [...] “Misses, my kin (skin) da
hurt me-me bad too much – my eye turn in me head:” this is followed by
another long an grievous howl. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 204/ Cambridge, 34)
[...] if except castor oil, which some of them like so much, that they will steal
it to fry fish and plantains with it (Carmichael, vol. 1, 204/ Cambridge, 34)
They are a muscular, robust set of people; I never saw any of them injured by
heat [...] and look miserable on a chilly day, when they cover themselves
with woollen dress, and come to their masters for a glass of rum [...] Negroes
are very erect, very well formed. Their bodies are uncontrolled by tight clothes in infancy and childhood, and probably to this may be attributed their being so much freer of deformities than the population of Britain. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 106/ Cambridge, 34–35)

The prospect of easy wealth attracted many quacks and persons not qualified by education and training to the islands; licensing systems were therefore commonly only adopted during the eighteenth century. (Ragatz, 18/ Cambridge, 35)

While Mr. Wilberforce is lamenting their hard fate in being subject to a master, their greatest fear is the not having a master whom they know; and that to be told by the negroes of another estate that “they belong to no massa,” is one of the most contemptuous reproaches that can be cast upon them. (Lewis, 66/ Cambridge, 37)

Many negroes […] have refused freedom when offered to them; “What for me want free? me have good massa, good country, plenty to eat, and when me sick, doctor physic me; me no want free at all.” (Coleridge, 290/ Cambridge, 37)

We have not for some years imported, neither is it ever likely to take place, that we should have a fresh supply of slaves thus brought into the British colonies. The old Africans are daily wearing out and dropping into the grave (Roughley, 76–77/ Cambridge, 38)

The negroes are indefatigable talkers, at all times, and all seasons. Whether in joy or grief, they ever find full employment for that little member, the tongue. I have often thought two persons were conversing, but upon inquiry, have found it to be only one. (Flannigan, vol. 2, 112/ Cambridge, 38)

The Creole negroes speak a dialect bad enough, but the Africans’ is almost unintelligible. (Flannigan, vol. 2, 151/ Cambridge, 38–39)

I could comprehend little or nothing of what they said; for although it was English, it was so uncouth a jargon, that to one unaccustomed to hear it, it was almost unintelligible as if they had spoken in their native tongues. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 5/ Cambridge, 39)

Negroes will steal, cheat and deceive in every possible way […] what is worse, they invariably get into a passion if you refuse to let them take the book and swear to the truth of what you know to be false. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 263/ Cambridge, 39)

In my evening’s drive I met the negroes, returning from the mountains, with baskets of provisions sufficient to last them for the week. By law they are only allowed every other Saturday for the purpose of cultivating their own
grounds, which, indeed, is sufficient; but by giving to them every alternate Saturday into the bargain, it enables them to perform the task with so much ease […] It is also advisable for them to bring home only a week’s provision at a time, rather than a fortnight’s; for they are so thoughtless and improvident, that, when they find themselves in possession of a larger supply than is requisite for their immediate occasions, they will sell half to the wandering haggler, or at Savanna la Mar, in exchange for spirits; and then, at the end of the week, they find themselves entirely unprovided with food, and come to beg a supply from the master’s storehouse. (Lewis, 77/ Cambridge, 40)

The most important personage in the slave-production of an estate is the head driver. He is seen carrying with him the emblems of his rank and dignity, a polished staff or wand, with prongy crooks on it to lean on […] The great gang is comprised of the most powerful field-negros, and is always under his charge. […] He should, in my judgement, be an athletic man […] if possible a native or Creole of the island, long used to field work, and marked for his sobriety, readiness and putting his work well out of his hands. […] He should be respectful to white people; suffering no freedoms from those under him, by conversation or trifling peril conduct. It is rare, indeed, to find this mass of perfection in a negro. (Roughley, 79–82/ Cambridge, 40–41)

Alas! my friend, tho’ children of the Sun, they are mortals, and as such must have their share of failings. (Schaw, 112/ Cambridge, 41)

I never witnessed on stage a scene so picturesque as a negro village. […] Each house is surrounded by a separate garden, and the whole village is intersected by lanes, bordered with all kinds of sweet-smelling plants; but not such gardens as those belonging to our English cottages, where a few cabbages and carrots just peep up and grovel upon the earth between hedges, in square narrow beds, and where the tallest tree is a gooseberry bush: the vegetables of the negroes are all cultivated in their provision grounds; these form their kitchen gardens, and these are all for ornament or luxury, and are filled with profusion of oranges, shaddocks, coconuts, and peppers of all descriptions. (Lewis, 95/ Cambridge, 42)

If I were […] asked whether I would choose to enter life anew as an English labourer or a Jamaica negro, I should have no hesitation in preferring the latter. (Lewis, 90/ Cambridge, 42)

To me they appeared to be movements entirely dictated by the caprice of the moment; but I am told that there is a regular figure, and that the least mistake, or a single false step, is immediately noticed by the rest. […] I am told, that they have dances which not only represent courtship and marriage, but being brought to bed. Their music consisted of nothing but gambys (Eboe drums),
Shaky-shekies, and Kitty-katties: the latter is nothing but a flat piece of board beat upon with two sticks, and the former is a bladder with a parcel of pebbles in it. But the principal part of the music to which they dance is vocal; one girl generally singing two lines by herself, and being answered by a chorus. To make out either the rhyme of the air, or the meaning of the words was out of the question. (Lewis, 74/ Cambridge, 43)

They often have tum-tum – made of plantains boiled quite soft, and beat in a wooden mortar, – it is eaten like a potatoe pudding. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 183/ Cambridge, 44)

They keep the head of the hog, and dress it in the following manner: – The head and feet being cleaned, and made quite white, they are boiled until soft in strong salt and water, or if not near, in sea water. The meat is then picked off the head, and, being cut up in small pieces, it is placed, along with the feet, in a deep vessel, and when cold, immersed in water well salted, lime juice sufficient to acidulate it, and plenty of country peppers. It is eaten cold; and the sauce, with a bit of cassada cake or farine soaked in it, is liked by everyone. The dish is well known in the West Indies by the name of souse, and is a favourite of all. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 184/ Cambridge, 44)

[T]here was not one of them drunk; except indeed, one person, and that was an old woman, who sang, and shouted, and tossed herself about in an elbow chair, till she tumbled it over, and rolled about the room in a manner which shocked the delicacy of even the least prudish part of the company. (Lewis, 75/ Cambridge, 44–45)

The best mode of destroying rats here is with terriers; but those imported from England soon grow useless, being blinded by the sun, while their puppies, born in Jamaica, are provided by nature with a protecting film over their eyes, which effectually secures them against incurring that calamity. (Lewis, 146/ Cambridge, 45)

The rain has brought forth the fire-flies, and in the evening the hedges are all brilliant with their numbers. In the day they seem to be torpid beetles of a dull reddish colour, but at night they become of a shining purple. The fire proceeds from two small spots in the back part of the head. It is yellow in the light, and requires motion to throw out its radiance in perfection […] it becomes more brilliant than any emerald, and when on the wing, it seems entirely composed of the most beautiful coloured fire. (Lewis, 148–49/ Cambridge, 45–46)

Few books were read in the colonies and book shops were quite unknown. A indifferent assortment of printed matter […] Each island boasted at least two weekly newspapers […] All were small four page affairs, abominably printed on low grade, semiporous paper. […] Half of the columns were filled with
advertisements, notably those of merchants listing new goods in stock or shortly due and those of planters, offering rewards for the return of fugitive slaves. Foreign news was copied verbatim from the British and American publications with little use of credit lines. The West Indian press abounded with vitriolic attacks on the trend of local politics and equally burning replies, both indulging freely in personalities and bristling with scathing epithets. One sheet served as the administration organ, its rival as that of the opposition. (Ragatz, 23/ Cambridge, 47)

They have a most agreeable forenoon drink, they call Beveridge, which is made from the water of the Cocoa nut, fresh lime juice and sirup from the boiler, which, though sweet has still the flavour of the cane. This the men mix with a portion of rum; the ladies never do. This is presented in a crystal cup, with a cover which some have of silver. Along with this is brought baskets of fruit, and you may eat as much as you please of it, because (according to their maxim) fruit can never hurt. I am sure it never hurts me. […] They have various breads, ham, eggs, and indeed what you please, but the best breakfast bread is the Casada cakes, which they send up buttered. They are made from a root which is said to be poison. Before it goes thro’ the various operations of drying, pounding and baking, […] that I can eat it without fear, but with pleasure. They drink only green Tea and that remarkably fine; their Coffee […] are uncommonly good. […] The drink I have seen everywhere is Punch, Madeira, Port and Claret […] Bristol beer and porter you can constantly find (Schaw, 98–100/ Cambridge, 48)

This word at home is the common expression of the West India settlers. Unlike the inhabitants of the French colonies, they look upon the island in which they reside as a place to which they are, as it were, exiled for a certain period; as a place containing their properties, and, therefore, of the greatest consequence to them; but very few of them expect to die on those properties. […] nearly all look forward to spending the last days in the land of their birth. (Bayley, 292/ Cambridge, 49–50)

Places of honour and trust came to be held by mediocre men; multiple office holding became common and was carried out to extravagant lengths. The lamentable outcome was that in many cases the legislatures, courts, and administrations failed to function properly and that the machinery of the representative system actually broke down. […] professional men of low caliber, little education, mean abilities, and small proprietary interest (Ragatz, 44–45/ Cambridge, 50)

Inheritance and the custom of borrowing heavily in the mother country with the trans-Atlantic real-estate as security played important roles in the creation of an absentee landlord class. (Ragatz, 43/ Cambridge, 51)
In the upper ranks, they become indolent and inactive, regardless of everything but eating, drinking, and indulging themselves. (Nugent, 131/ Cambridge, 51)

Those persons seeking employment who did reach the Caribbean were generally the very dregs of England, Scotland, and Ireland. (Ragatz, 8/ Cambridge, 51)

Instead, the islands became […] the dumping-ground for the riffraff of the parent country (Ragatz, 3/ Cambridge, 52)

The white man in tropical America was out of his habitat. Constant association with an inferior subject race blunted his moral fibre and he suffered marked demoralization. His transitory residence and the continued importation of Africans debased life. (Ragatz, 5/ Cambridge, 52)

The West Indian Negro had all the characteristics of his race. He stole, he lied, he was simple, suspicious, inefficient, irresponsible, lazy, superstitious and loose in his sexual relations. (Ragatz, 27/ Cambridge, 52)

Miscegenation, so contrary to Anglo-Saxon nature, resulted in the rapid rise of a race of human hybrids. (Ragatz, 5/ Cambridge, 52)

Although, as before remarked, the negroes were only considered as beasts of burden, their polished and urban white masters had no objection to making them the partners of their illicit intercourse; and then, casting aside all natural affections, doomed their unoffending children, the issue of such unions, to a state of degradation. […] The girls, as they approached womanhood, became themselves the mistresses of the white men, or in the West Indian term, housekeepers, while the males were content to drag their existence much in the same way as a tolerated spaniel, which at one moment is noticed by a gracious nod, and allowed to lick the feet of its master, while at the next is kicked out of the apartment, or spurned from the pathway. (Flannigan, Vol 2, 177–78/ Cambridge, 52)

These women soon grow fat on the bread of prostitution […] when their bodies are diseased, and their constitutions weakened by dissipation and excess […] then their sources of support fail, and the dreadful curse of poverty falls hard and heavy upon the inflections of decrepit age. (Bayley, 405/ Cambridge, 53)

The offspring of a white man and a black woman is a mulatto; the mulatto and black produce a sambo; from the mulatto and white comes the quadroon; from the the quadroon and white the mustee; the child of a mustee by a white man is called musteefino; while the children of a mustefino are free by law,
and rank as white persons to all intents and purposes. (Lewis, 94/ Cambridge, 53)

The hospital has been crowded, since my arrival, with patients who have nothing the matter with them. On Wednesday there were about thirty invalids, of whom only four were cases at all serious; the rest had “a lilly pain here, Massa,” or a “a bad pain me know nowhere, Massa,” and evidently only came to the hospital to sit idle, or chat away the time with their friends. (Lewis, 106/ Cambridge, 54)

The most general of negro infirmities appears to be that of lameness. It is chiefly occasioned by the *chiga*, a diminuitive fly which works itself into the feet to lay its eggs, and, if it be not carefully extracted in time, the flesh around it corrupts, and a sore ensues not easily to be cured. [...]. The negroes are all provided with knives for the purpose of extracting them: but as no pain is felt till the sore is produced, their extreme laziness frequently makes them neglect that precaution, till all kinds of dirt getting into the wound, increases the difficulty of a cure; and sometimes the consequence is lameness for life. (Lewis, 176–76/ Cambridge, 54)

In any bodily pain it is not possible to be more cowardly than the negro; and I have heard strong men, while tears were running down their cheeks, scream and roar as if a limb was amputating, although the doctor was only applying a poultice to a whitelow on the finger. I suppose, therefore, that dread of the pain of some unknown mode of treatment makes them conceal their real disease, and name some other, of which they know the cure to be unattended with bodily suffering or a long restraint. (Lewis, 177–78/ Cambridge, 54–55)

[Edward] Long says: “There have seldom been wanting some who were equally respectable for their learning, piety, and exemplary good behaviour; others have been detestable for their addiction to lewedness, drinking, gambling, and iniquity, having no controul, but their own sense of the dignity of their function, and the censures of the governor ...” Some were “much better qualified to be retailers of saltfish or boatswains to privateers, than ministers of the Gospel.” (Ragatz, 19/ Cambridge, 55)

“The planters seem to have no religion at all.” Tithes were customarily paid in kind. This practice served to discourage churchmen, as produce of an inferior sort was given to them, and with fluctuating values, their incomes varied considerably from year to year. (Ragatz, 20–21/ Cambridge, 55)

Up to the closing seventeen hundreds, the spiritual welfare of the negro received but scant attention. The Established Church did nothing for him. (Ragatz, 28/ Cambridge, 55)
They forget that they are speaking to a people emerging only from a savage state; and that the emotions and feelings of an untutored savage, are not the same as the emotion and feeling of a civilized being, whose passions and emotions are artificially controlled. They know not the quickly passing of a negro; and when they see him shed tears at the history and the sufferings of our Saviour […] (Carmichael, vol. 1, 232–33)

So-called “deficiency laws” were generally adopted during the early eighteenth century in an attempt to increase the white element in the isles. These required the maintenance of a number of Caucasians proportionate to the black population on each estate under penalty of an annual fine for each one short. […] Thus, in Antigua, before 1750, all slave owners were obliged to employ one white man for every thirty negroes […] But such efforts proved abortive. In consequence of the stigma attached to the labor in the tropics, desirable individuals could seldom be induced to emigrate. […] They were rarely qualified for any type of plantation work nor were they welcome additions to society. They were “carpenters” who had never handled a tool, “bricklayers” who scarcely knew a brick from a stone, and “bookkeepers” who were unlettered and without more than the most elementary knowledge of numbers. (Ragatz, 8/ Cambridge, 58–59)

The exploiting British […] stood in constant apprehension of servile revolt. Over a dozen outbreaks occurred […] This danger was met by organizing militias under the command of the governors. All whites between the ages of sixteen and sixty, clergymen alone excepted, were obliged to serve in them. Forces were assembled once a month for drill, maneuvers extending over several days were held annually and martial law was almost invariably proclaimed for the holiday season during which large bands of negroes congregated for merry-making. (Ragatz, 31/ Cambridge, 62)

The negro, on whom the labor system of the sugar islands rested, was the second great element in tropical American society. Slaves were of two kinds, imported and of local origin. So long as the former predominated, any advance in the station of the colonial peoples and the general elevation of West Indian civilization were equally impossible. Various tribal stocks were represented, some superior and some inferior, some suited for one kind of work and some for another, yet under the uniform conditions of bondage in a new world, differences tended to disappear and a single type, the creole black, developed. In contact with whites from his birth and knowing no other life than serving them, speaking, too, a jargon based on English, he was more tractable than the African, could perform his duties more intelligently, and was less discordant socially. (Ragatz, 25/ Cambridge, 63)
The Africans, torn from their native country and all their former connexions, made to work beneath a boiling sun harder than they were ever accustomed to, beaten for the slightest fault, and scorned as the meanest reptile, could form, it is to be supposed, no very favourable opinion of their masters. Memory would at times transport them home; again, in fancy, would they roam their native wilds, or with their well-known companions would rouse the tawny lion from his lair, or chase the fleet-footed antelope. Once more would the song be heard, once more, in imagination, would they join the festive dance beneath the spreading branches of some noble mimosa; but in the midst of this joyous scene, the voice of the overseer would be heard, or the crack of the driver’s whip dissolve their airy castles, and they would return to despondency and despair. Ignorant of the God that made them, and of the mild doctrines of Christianity, no wonder the dark spirit of revenge took possession of their breasts. (Flannigan, vol. 2, 46/ Cambridge, 63–64)

Only about half the negroes on a given sugar estate engaged in field work; the others were craftsmen, herders, domestics, watchmen, nurses, aged individuals, or young children. Agricultural labours were divided into three groups, the big, the second and the small gangs. The first include the able-bodied men and women. In crop time they cut and ground the canes and boiled down the juice. At other seasons, the land was cleared and hoed as well as planted by them. The second gang was made up of boys and girls, convalescents, and pregnant females; these weeded the canes and performed other light tasks. (Ragatz, 25–26/ Cambridge, 64)

This gang, composed of a mixture of able men and women [...] digging cane-holes [...] cutting and trying canes and tops in crop time [...] The second gang should be composed of people who are thought to be of rather weakly habits, mothers of sucking children [...] cleaning grass pieces [...] and such work requiring no great strength. (Roughley, 99–102/ Cambridge, 64)

Picaninnies hoeing the garden or cutting grass for the stock [...] held by a trustworthy old woman. (Ragatz, 26/ Cambridge, 64)

The first gang is summoned to the labours of the field, either by a bell or the blowing of a conch-shell, just before sun-rise. They bring with them, besides their hoes and bills, provisions for breakfast; they are attended by a white person, and a black superintendent, called driver. As soon as the list is called over, and the names of the absentees noted, they proceed with their work till eight or nine o’clock, when they sit down in the shade to breakfast, which is in the mean time prepared by a certain number of women, whose sole employment consists in acting as cooks for the rest. Boiled yams, eddoes, ocra, calaloue, and plantains, seasoned with salt and cayenne pepper, generally compose this meal. Most often absentees by this time make their appearance, and
are sometimes punished for their indolence, by a few stripes of the driver’s whip; but of late years a very slight excuse is generally admitted. (Edwards, 419/ Cambridge, 64–65)

[also in Robert Renny: “The first gang is summoned to the labours of the field a little before sun-rise, by the blowing of a conch-shell. They bring with them, besides their hoes and bills, provisions for their breakfast, and are attended by a white person, and a black superintendent, who is called the driver. The list is called over, and the names of the absentees noted; after which, they commence their labour, and continue to work, till eight or nine o’clock, when they sit down and in the shade for breakfast, which has been in the meantime prepared by a certain number of women, whose sole employment is to cook. This meal consist of boiled yams, eddoes, ocra, calalue, and plantains, or as many of these vegetables as can be easily procured; and the whole, when seasoned with salt, and cayenne pepper, is a very agreeable and wholesome breakfast. In the meantime, the absentees generally arrive, when they are punished by a certain number of lashes from the driver’s whip” (Renny, 177/ Cambridge, 64–65)]

Every field negro has two pounds of excellent salt fish served out weekly, and head people have four pounds. A pound and a half is allowed for every child, from the day of its birth until twelve years of age, when full allowance is given. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 161/ Cambridge, 65)

It is nothing uncommon for negro men at work alone, to pull off their shirt, and hide it under a bush. The rain quickly runs off their skins, which are oily; and as soon as it is fair, they are dry again, and then the shirt is put on dry and comfortable. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 151/ Cambridge, 65)

The gentlemen negroes present also a most dandiful appearance. […] To these specified articles of dress, must be added broad-brimmed heats, silk umbrellas (Flannigan, vol. 2, 128/ Cambridge, 66)

Their houses are built in various ways, some of stone, cemented and white-washed […] They thatch them neatly with migass. […] but the best room is often boarded […] Among others they have besteads with moskito curtains, their bedding being for the most part a bag filled with the dried plantain leaf. This I have myself slept upon, and used in my own family, and have found it a very comfortable bed indeed. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 128–29/ Cambridge, 67)

One woman held up her little naked black child to me, grinning from ear to ear: – “Look, Massa, look here! Him nice little neger for Massa!” (Lewis, 60/ Cambridge, 67)
His wife told me that she had fifteen children [...] and explained that she had “twelve whole children and three half ones;” by which she meant miscarriages. (Lewis, 98/ Cambridge, 68)

“Massa,” he answered, “that one belly-woman going to sell provisions at the Bay.” [...] given in their names as being then labouring under “The pleasing punishment which women bear;” and who, in consequence, were discharged from all severe labour. (Lewis, 108/ Cambridge 68)

I really believe that the negresses can produce children at pleasure; and where they are barren, it is just as hens will frequently not lay eggs on shipboard, because they do not like their situation. (Lewis, 76/ Cambridge, 68)

There is one peculiar trait in the characteristics of negroes, which I must not omit to notice, and which appears to be very inconsistent with the other features of their character. It is, that there is not any circumstances which provokes a negro so much as saying any thing disrespectful, with regard to his mother. However trifling the remark may be, the negro becomes instantly enraged, and nothing can induce him to forgive those who so offended. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 206–207/ Cambridge, 69)

Old negroes rarely ever live alone, and are never at loss for someone to cook for them. [...] Should they be so infirm as no longer to be able to work their own provision grounds, they get some of the young people to do this; whom they pay for their trouble, not in money, but in a given portion of their grounds. [...] Such people are always treated with much kindness, and they are often employed in getting rice, oatmeal or plantain from the plantain walk; or something to make them comfortable in their old age. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 191–92/ Cambridge, 69)

The negroes are always buried in their gardens, and many strange and fantastical ceremonies are observed on the occasion. If the corpse be that of a grown person, they consult it as to which way it pleases to be carried; and they make attempts upon various roads without success, before they hit upon the right one. Till that is accomplished, they stagger under the weight of the coffin, struggle against its force, which draws them in a different direction from that into which they had setteld to go; and sometimes in the contest the corpse and the coffin jump off the shoulders of the bearers. [...] As the negroes are very superstitious, and very much afraid of ghosts (whom they call duppy), I rather wonder at their choosing to have their dead buried in the gardens; but I understand their argument to be, that they need only fear the duppies of the enemies, but have nothing to apprehend from those after death, who loved them in their lifetime; but the duppies of their anniversaries are very alarming beings, equally powerful by day as by night [...] The Africans (as is well
known) generally believe, that there is a life beyond this world, and that they shall enjoy it by returning to their own country. (Lewis, 88–89/ Cambridge, 69–70)

And were you slave or free in Africa? “Me one free man, dey take me carry me in a coast of Guinea, sell me a Buckra capin, me very glad to go wid dem.” (Carmichael, vol. 1, 317/ Cambridge, 70)

How old were you when you came to the West Indies? “One big man […] Africa one very bad country, dey go vorck poor slave to death; noting for yam, only whip, whip me constant” (Carmichael, vol. 1, 315/ Cambridge, 70)

“[…] dey teke me, carry me in a coast of Guinea, sell me a Buckra captain, me very glad to leave wid dem.” But had you no friends you were sorry to leave in Africa? (Carmichael, vol. 1, 316/ Cambridge, 70)

“I’d like to see England […]; me like to see English cold” (Carmichael, vol. 1, 320/ Cambridge, 70)

There is ice, – do you know what ice is? – “Yes misses, English water” (Carmichael, vol. 1, 321/ Cambridge, 70)

If me want to go in a Ebo
Me can’t go there!
Since them tief me from a Guinea,
Me can’t go there!
If me want to go in a Congo
Me can’t go there!
Since them tief me from my tatta
Me can’t go there!
If me want to go in a Kingstown
Me can’t go there!
Since massa go in a England
Me can’t go there! (Moreton, 153/ Cambridge, 71)

There is an Eboe carpenter named Strap, who was lately sick and in great danger, and whom I nursed with particular care. The poor fellow thinks that he never can express his gratitude sufficiently; and whenever he meets me in the public road, or in the streets of Savannah la Mar, he rushes toward the carriage, roars […] “Oh, massa, massa! God bless you, massa! Me quite, quite glad to see you come back, my own massa!” And then he bursts into a roar of laughter so wild and so loud, that the passers-by cannot help stopping to stare and laugh too. (Lewis, 155–56/ Cambridge, 71)

He found means to have him surprised, and on examination there was found upon him a bag containing a great variety of strange materials for incanta-
tions; such as thunder-stones, cats’ ears, the feet of various animals, human hair, fish bones, the teeth of alligators, etc. […] having seen him exercise his magical arts, and, in particular, to having sold such and such slave medicines and charms to deliver them from their enemies (Lewis, 86/ Cambridge, 74)

Soon after my arrival at Cornwall, I asked my attorney whether a clever-looking brown woman, who seemed to have great authority in the house, belonged to me? – No; she was a free woman. – Was she in my service, then? – No; she was not in my service. I began to grow impatient. – “But what does she do at Cornwall? Of what use is she in the house?” – “Why sir, as to the use … of no great use, sir;” and then, after a pause, he added in a lower voice, “It is the custom, sir, in this country, for unmarried men to have housekeepers, and Nancy is mine.” (Lewis, 142/ Cambridge, 75)

This phenomenon arose chiefly from his transitory residence there. Comparatively few wives were brought out and concubinage was universal. The highest aim of a colored girl of tolerable person was to become the mistress of a planter, overseer, bookkeeper, merchant, or soldier. Mothers sought such uniforms for their daughters. The position assured them lives of ease, marked prestige in their own circle (Ragatz, 33/ Cambridge, 75)

Children born of slave mothers followed their status. The artisan class was largely recruited from their ranks. They were, however, frequently manumitted by their fathers. […] private acts of the island legislature were required to secure their recognition as full heirs of British subjects. The steady growth of a hybrid people, but partially free and suffering numerous disabilities, holding itself above the blacks, yet not granted equality with the whites, portended evil. (Ragatz, 33–34/ Cambridge, 75–76)

The young black wenches lay themselves out for white lovers, in which they are but too successful. This prevents their marrying with their natural mates, and hence a spurious and degenerate breed, neither so fit for the field, nor indeed any work, as the true bred Negro. Besides these wrenches become licentious and insolent past all bearing, and as even a mulattoe child interrupts their pleasures and is troublesome, they have certain herbs and medicines, that free them from such an incumbrance, but which seldom fails to cut short their own lives, as well as that of their offspring. (Schaw, 112–13/ Cambridge, 76)

The shaddock contains generally thirty-two seeds, two of which only will reproduce shaddocks; and these two it is impossible to distinguish: the rest will yield, some sweet oranges, other bitter ones, others again forbidden fruit; but until the trees actually are in bearing, no one can guess what the fruit is likely to prove; and even then, the seeds which produce shaddocks, although taken from a tree remarkable for the excellence of its fruit, will frequently
yield only such as are scarcely eatable. So also the varieties of the mango are infinite: the fruit of no two trees resembling each other; and the seeds of the very finest mango (although sown and cultivated with the utmost care) seldom affording any thing at all like the parent stock. The first two mangoes which I tasted were nothing but turpentine and sugar; the third was very delicious; and yet I was told that it was by no means of a superior quality. (Lewis, 174/ Cambridge, 81)

I saw the whole process of sugarmaking this morning. The ripe canes are brought in bundles to the mill, where the cleanest of the women are appointed, one to put them in the machine, and another to draw them out after the juice has been extracted, when she throws them into an opening in the floor close to her; another band of negroes collects them below, when under the name of thrash, they are carried away to serve for fuel. The juice, which is itself at first of a pale ash-colour, gushes out in the streams, quite white with foam, and passes through a wooden gutter into the boiling-house, where it is received into the siphon or “cock copper” […] When little but the impure scum on the surface remains to be drawn off, the first gutter communicating with the copper is stopped, and the grosser parts are obliged to find a new course through another gutter, which conveys them to the distillery, where, being mixed with the molasses, or treacle, they are manufactured into rum. From the second copper they are transmitted into the first, and thence into two others, and in these four latter basins the scum is removed with skimmers pierced with holes, till it becomes sufficiently free from impurities to be skipped off; that is, to be again ladled out of the coppers and spread into the coolers, where it is left to granulate. The sugar is then formed, and it is removed into the curing house, where it is put into hogsheds, and left to settle for a certain time, during which those parts which are too poor and too liquid to granulate, drip from the casks into vessels placed beneath them; these drippings are the molasses, which, being carried into the distillery, and mixed with the coarser scum formerly mentioned, form that mixture from which the spirituous liquor of sugar is afterwards produced by fermentation: when but once distilled, it is called “low wine;” and it is not after it has gone through a second distillation, that it acquires the name of rum. The “thrash” used for fuel consists of the empty canes, that which is employed for fodder and for thatching is furnished by the superabundant cane tops, after so many have been set apart as are required for planting. After these original plants have been cut, their roots throw up suckers, which, in time, become canes, and are called ratoons: they are far inferior in juice to the planted canes; but then, on the other hand, they require much less weeding, and spare the negroes the only laborious part of the business of sugar making, the digging of holes for the plants; therefore, although an acre of ratoons will produce but one hogshed of sugar, while an
acre of plants will produce two, the superiority of the ratooned piece is very great, insomuch as the saving of time and labour will enable the proprietor to cultivate five acres of ratoons in the same time with one of plants. Unluckily, after three of these crops, or five at the utmost, in general the ratoons are totally exhausted, and you are obliged to have recourse to fresh plants. Last night a poor man […] was brought into hospital, having missed a step in the boiling house, and plunged his foot into the siphon; fortunately, the fire had not long been kindled, and though the liquor was strong enough to scald him (Lewis, 79–81/ Cambridge, 82–84)

The cisterns in which the water for family use is kept are extremely well calculated to preserve it cool and fresh a great while, and what they use for drinking and table passes thro’ a filtering stone into a lead or Marble reservoir, by which means it becomes more lucid and pure than any water I ever saw. This is placed in some shaded corner, and is generally so cold, that it makes one’s teeth chatter. It is presented to you in a Cocoa nut shell ornamented with Silver, at the end of a hickory handle. This is lest the breath of the Servant who passes it should contaminate its purity. (Schaw, 110–11/ Cambridge, 84–85)

It appears that nothing could afford so much relief to the negroes, under the existing system of Jamaica, as the substituting the labour of animals for that of slaves in agriculture, where-ever such a measure is practicable. […] but the only result had been the creating of very considerable additional expense in the purchase of ploughs, oxen, and farming implements; […] and still more the obstinacy […] was not overcome; they broke plough after plough, and ruined beast after beast, till the attempt was abandoned is despair. […] and such of the ploughs as were of cast-iron could not be repaired when once broken […] They [three bulls] were taken all possible care of, houses appropriated to shelter them from the sun and rain, and, in short, no means of preserving their health was neglected. Yet, shortly after their arrival in Jamaica, they evidently began to decline; their blood was converted into urine; […] and at the end of a fortnight not one was in existence, two having died upon the same day. (Lewis, 272–73/ Cambridge, 85)

Last night the negroes of Friendship took it into their ingenious heads to pay me a compliment of an extremely inconvenient nature. They thought, that it would be highly proper to treat me with a nightly serenade just by way of showing their enjoyment on my return; and accordingly a large body of them arrived at my doors, dressed out in their best clothes, and accompanied with drums, rattles, and their whole orchestra of abominable instruments, determined to pass the whole night in singing and dancing under my window. (Lewis, 297/ Cambridge, 87)
Through the open windows of my apartments, a rich flood of sunshine pours in, and plays upon the floor in many a fanciful checker. […] The breeze is as gentle as an infant’s sigh (Flannigan, vol. 1, 252/ Cambridge, 95)

Nothing but the moral superiority of the whites can possibly keep in subjection the physical superiority of the blacks; for if the negroes were as well informed as the whites, it is not all the troops and ships in the West Indies that could ensure their servitude for a day. (Coleridge, 306/ Cambridge, 97)

The Obeah of the negro is nothing more or less a belief in witchcraft; and this operates upon them in such a degree, as not unfrequently to produce death. There is not perhaps a single West Indian estate, upon which there is not one or more Obeah men or women; the negroes know who they are, but it is very difficult for white people to find out who they are. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 253/ Cambridge, 98)

Thus, from a small beginning – from a few black slaves gathered together by night beneath the roof of a white man – this society has spread far and wide, like some huge wave, until it now boasts a vast increase of number, of every variety of shade, from the ruddy son of Britain, down to the jetty offspring of Africa’s soil. (Flannigan, vol. 1, 248/ Cambridge, 98)

The few females we passed were engaged in washing by the river side […] The appearance of these women was disgusting: […] without one exception, the arms were drawn out of the sleeves, which, with the body of the grown, hung down as useless appendages; while from the waist upwards, all was in a state of nudity (Carmichael, vol. 1, 10/ Cambridge, 101)

[T]o imbibe the heat of the glaring sun (Flannigan, vol. 2, 143/ Cambridge, 102)

Love of finery was universal. “Home” styles were closely followed; Paris creations, often imported by way of Martinique, had a strong hold on the hearts of fair residents. […] Such common adoption of apparel fashioned for temperate climes naturally resulted in considerable discomfort. “One may see men loaded and half melting under a ponderous coat and waistcoat, richly bedaubed with gold lace or embroidery on a hot day, scarcely able to bear them …” writes [Edward] Long. […] “Our English belles … do not scruple to wear the thickest winter silks and satins; and are sometimes ready to sink under the weight of rich gold or silver brockades […]” […] Similarly, military officers were attired in gorgeous, lace-decorated uniforms and Saxon plumes while ordinary soldiers wore the regulation woollen scarlet. (Ragatz, 13/ Cambridge, 103)
The houses are generally built of wood, painted of a white or light stone colour [...]. The greater number have covered galleries running along the sides or fronts of them, in which the good people love to assemble in the cool of the evening, and while away the hours in converse sweet [...] as to what is passing in their little colony. Some of these dwellings are very commodious, and make a good appearance, particularly when shaded by a few beautiful trees, or standing, as many of them do, in a small garden. [...] In different parts of the town are numbers of shops, of about six or eight feet square, in which varieties of trade are carried on. [...] Next these small shops, come the stores of the retail provision dealers, which are upon a larger scale, and of course better supplied with goods. The next grade of these places of merchandise are, the merchant’s stores or warehouses, with their attached lumber yards. (Flannigan, vol. 1, 203–205/ Cambridge, 102–103)

In this goal [...] the females are separated from the men, and the debtors from the felons. (Flannigan, vol. 1, 239/ Cambridge, 103)

Then there are the grog-shops. [...] the crowds of negroes, with their gleaming eyes and glittering teeth, presenting the appearance of so many attending demons; the groups of white soldiers or sailors, looking more pallid in the flickering lamp-light, and greedily quaffing the deleterious fluid, which, sooner of later, preys upon their very vitals – and then the various sounds of cursing and quarrelling, idiotic laughter, discordant singing, and incoherent talking, as the miserable frequenters arrive at the different stages of intoxication. (Flannigan, vol. 1, 205/ Cambridge, 103)

The towns men’s slaves were employed as servants, porters, and artisans. Among the last were carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons. They and the carriers were, for the most part, hired out by their owners but not infrequently were allowed to seek employment by themselves and paid their masters specified sums per day or week. (Ragatz, 25/ Cambridge, 104)

The trial appeared to be conducted with all possible justice and propriety; the jury consisted of nine respectable persons; the bench of three magistrates, and a senior one to preside. There were no lawyers employed on either side; consequently no appeals to the passions [...] no artful cross-examinings (Lewis, 150/ Cambridge, 106)

I always remarked that where there were the greatest number of falsehoods, they were the most vehemently desirous to kiss the book: their disregard of an oath is most shocking (Carmichael, vol. 1, 85–86/ Cambridge, 106)

She was condemned to die on Thursday next, the day after tomorrow: she heard the sentence pronounced without the least emotion (Lewis, 150/ Cambridge, 106–107)
There are not a few at this moment in these lamentable circumstances, who were kindly benevolent owners of negroes, and whose people, though of course no longer belonging to them, taking provisions from their own grounds to their old Misses. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 66/ Cambridge, 108)

“I’m going to carry dem to my old misses, she be very kind to me when I was her nigger; my misses knowed better times, but bad times now misses, bad times – misses had plenty niggers, and her husband, and fine pic-a-ninnies; but dem bad times come, and so you see dem sell one, two, three, – I no know many nigger, till massa die. […] so we just go now and den and see misses, and gie her some yam, or some plantain, or any little ting just to help her.”
(Carmichael, vol. 1, 67/ Cambridge, 109)

The Carnation tree, or as they call it the doble day is a most glorious plant; it does not grow above ten feet high, so it can be numbered among Shrubs. The leaf is dark green […] The colours are sometimes dark rich Crimson spotted or speckled with white, sometimes in purple in the same manner. […] Another is the passion flower, which grows in every hedge and twines around every tree. […] The fruit and the flower ornament the bush jointly. (Shaw, 102/ Cambridge, 109)

I had given the most positive orders that no person whatever should presume to strike a negro, or give him abusive language, or, however great the offence might be, should inflict any punishment, except by the sole direction of the trustee himself. Yet, although I had already discharged one book-keeper on this account, this evening another of them had a dispute in the boiling-house with an African named Frank, because a pool of water was not removed fast enough; upon which he called him a rascal, sluiced him with the dirty water, and finally knocked him down with the broom. The African came to me instantly; four eye-witnesses, who were examined separately, proved the truth of his ill-usage; and I immediately discharged the book-keeper, who had contented himself with simply denying the blow having been given by him: but I told him that I could not possibly allow his single unsupported denial to outweigh five concordant witnesses to the assertion; and that, if he grounded his claim to being believed me rely upon his having a white skin, that claim would not be admitted […] I was kept awake the greatest part of the night by the songs and rejoicings of the negroes, at their triumph over the offending book-keeper. (Lewis, 162–63/ Cambridge, 111)

Many of the guests brought their servants with them, and there was therefore an immense concourse of them, of all descriptions: some with livery, and some without; some with shoes, but generally without; some wore white jackets […]; there was no arrangement, co-operation, or agreement among the
Appendix

servants, save only in one thing, and that was in stealing (Carmichael, vol. 1, 35/ *Cambridge*, 114)

I had heard, and all have heard, West India planters spoken of as a peculiar race of men; imperious, – unpolished, – men who had raised themselves from poverty to affluence, and who reclined in the lap of luxury in tropical case, – each, a bashaw lording it over the creatures of his little community. [...] The planters [...] are hard-working men; up before sunrise, and often the first in the field of a morning, and generally the last there at night. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 16–17/ *Cambridge*, 114)

Many a long corck of approved brand is drawn, and the “rosy red” *Vin de Bordeaux* is poured into the tendered crystal; and many a bottle of champagne, or “Tennent’s pale ale,” is unwired, uncorcked, and its creamy excellence effused for them. Nor is the tongue idle; well-seasoned jests a brilliant repartees abound; news is discussed, wit flies like arrows, and many a rosy face grows more roseate, and many laughing becomes part dewy before they part. (Flannigan, vol. 1, 206/ *Cambridge*, 115)

The ladies did not remain long at the table, but soon retired to the drawing-room; but there, nothing like conversation took place (Carmichael, vol. 1, 39/ *Cambridge*, 115)

The duties of a planter’s wife are most arduous; distant from markets, and all the few comforts that a small West India town even affords, she must continue to live upon the stock raised on the property, or absolutely go without. [...] Then she has to listen to all the stories of the people on the estate, – young, old, and middle aged: [...] The negro children must be daily watched; she must [...] reward the good, and admonish the bad (Carmichael, vol. 1, 21/ *Cambridge*, 115–16)

I need scarcely say that those ladies who have young children, have still more to do; and in their personal attention towards their offspring during infancy, they are the most anxious and affectionate of parents, always suckling their children, and generally to a longer period than is usual in England; and never for any party of pleasure, trusting their infant to the hands of others. Their conduct in this respect is most exemplary, and very different from our fashionable mothers in Britain, who either stint their infant of its natural support, or abandon it to a mercenary nurse. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 24/ *Cambridge*, 116)

Some few families have tried a governess, but it has been found not to answer; for they almost invariably marry soon after coming out – so that at present there is really no alternative, excepting that of sending the children to
Europe, or leaving them to grow up totally ignorant. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 26/ Cambridge, 116)

Managers upon small estates, and overseers, are much to be pitied, for they have not the means to enable them to make any woman decently comfortable. [...] Managers upon small estates, have seldom a salary that exceeds 180l. or 200l. sterling per annum. They have a house, – unfurnished – two servants, and a boy – they have also of course that rum, sugar and salt fish they require from the estate. (Carmichael, vol. 1, 60–61/ Cambridge, 116)

PART II

Pardon the liberty in troubling you with this few lines but as (Cugoano, xxi/ Cambridge, 133)

The first Christian visitors found them a simple, harmless people – but the cursed avidity for wealth urged these first visitors (and all the succeeding ones) to such acts of deception – and even wanton cruelty – that the poor ignorant Natives soon learnt to turn the knavish and diabolical arts – which they too soon imbibed – upon their teachers. (Sancho, 137/ Cambridge, 133)

In Africa, the poor wretched natives – blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil – are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing; – the Christians’ abominable Traffic for slaves – and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty Kings – encouraged by their Christian customers – who carry them strong liquors, to enflame their national madness – and powder and bad fire arms, to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping. (Sancho, 138/ Cambridge, 134)

Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth in every part – to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love, society, and mutual dependence: – the enlightened Christian should diffuse the Riches of the Gospel of peace, with the commodities of his respective land – Commerce attended with strict honesty, and with Religion for its companion, would be a blessing to every shore it touched at. (Sancho, 138/ Cambridge, 134)

But I must own, to the shame of my own countrymen, that I was first kid-napped and betrayed by some of my own complexion (Cugoano, 12/ Cambridge, 134–35)

When I left my dear mother I had a large quantity of gold about me, as is the custom of our country, it was made into rings, and they were linked into one another, and formed a kind of chain, and so put round my neck, and arms and
legs, and a large piece hanging at one ear almost in the shape of a pear. I
found this all troublesome, and was glad when my new master took it from
me. (Gronniosaw, 34/ Cambridge, 135)

I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in
my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that with the
loathsomeness of the stench and crying together [...] I was not able to eat, nor
had the least desire to taste anything. (Equiano, 56/ Cambridge, 137)

Two of the white men offered me eatables, and on my refusing to eat [...] flogged me severely. (Equiano, 56/ Cambridge, 138)

It was almost a constant practice with our clerks, and other whites, to
commit violent depredations on the chastity of the female slaves [...] to the
disgrace, not of Christians only, but of men. [...] as if it were no crime in the
whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue [...] though the most aban-
doned woman of her species. (Equiano, 104/ Cambridge, 138)

At last all my companions were distributed different ways, and only myself
was left. I was now exceedingly miserable [...] and wishing for death (Equi-
ano, 62/ Cambridge, 139)

By this time however I could smatter a little imperfect English (Equiano, 64/
Cambridge, 140)

A faithful friend; who [...] discovered a mind superior to prejudice; and
who was not ashamed to notice, to associate with, and to be the friend and
instructor of one who was ignorant, a stranger, of a different complexion, and
a slave! (Equiano, 65/ Cambridge, 140)

The ship had a very long passage; and on that account we had very short
allowance of provisions [...] In our extremities the captain and people told me
in jest they would kill and eat me. (Equiano, 64/ Cambridge, 140)

And when I refused to answer to my new name, which at first I did, it
 gained me many a cuff (Equiano, 64/ Cambridge, 140)

One white man in particular I saw [...] flogged so unmercifully with a large
rope near the foremast, that he died in the consequence of it; and they tossed
him over the side as they would have done a brute. (Equiano, 57/ Cambridge,
141)

Every heart gladdened on our reaching the shore (Equiano, 67/ Cambridge,
141)

Frank [Francis Barber] has carried the empire of Cupid farther than most man
(Boswell, 181/ Cambridge, 145)
The lower class of women in England, are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention (Long, 68/ Cambridge, 145).

[The sierra Leone project would eventually end] the unnatural connection between black persons and white; the disagreeable consequences of which make their appearances but too frequently in our streets (Pugh, 46/ Cambridge, 145).

To be sold, a handsome Negro boy, Twelve Years of Age who reads very well. – Any person, who may have a Mind to the said Boy, is desired to apply before the 25th Inst. (Felix Farlow’s Bristol Journal, 22/ Cambridge, 148)

[Ran away from her owner] has a large scar on her breast, occasioned by a burn, with a toe cut off each foot (Daily Advertiser [1790], Cambridge, 137/ 148)

Ran away from his Master, an Negro Boy, under 5 feet high, about 16 years Old, named Charles, he is very ill made, being remarkably bow legged, hollow Backed, and Pot-bellied; he had when he went away a Coarse dark brown Linen Frock, a thickset Waistcoat, very dirty Leather Breeches, and on his Head an Old velvet Jockey Cap. (Daily Advertiser [1768], 24/ Cambridge, 149)

He further proposes to open a School, for all such of his Complexion as are desirous of being acquainted with the Knowledge of the Christian Religion and the Laws of Civilization. (Cugoano, xiii/ Cambridge, 149)

However this might be, this minion, somewhat spoiled by indulgence and flattery, forgetting that he was a chance child, thrown by fortune upon the precarious bounty of strangers, began to assume unbecoming airs, and vain-gloriously boasted of being the son of an African prince. (Angelo, 227/ Cambridge, 151–52)

My dear wife and I were now both unemployed, we could get nothing to do. The winter proved remarkably severe, and we were reduced to the greatest distress imaginable. – I was always very shy of asking for any thing; I could never beg; neither did I chuse to make known our wants to any person, for fear of offending, as we were entire strangers; but our last bit of bread was gone, and I was obliged to think of something to do for our support (Gronniosaw, 49/ Cambridge, 152).

[We lost one of our little girls, who died of a fever; this circumstance occasioned us new troubles, for the Baptist minister refused to bury her because she had never been baptized […] – At length I resolved to dig a grave in the garden behind the house, and bury her there; when the parson of the parish sent for me to tell me he would bury the child, but did not chuse to read the
burial service on her. I told him I did not mind whether he would or not, as the child could not hear it. (Gronniosaw, 52/ Cambridge, 153)

I never knew how to set a proper value on money, if I had but a little meat and drink to supply the present necessaries of life, I never wished for more; and when I had any I always gave it if ever I saw an object in distress (Gronniosaw, 43/ Cambridge, 154)

At the sight of this land of bondage, a fresh horror ran through all my frame [...] My former slavery now rose in dreadful review to my mind, and displayed nothing but misery, stripes, and chains; and, in the first paroxism of my grief, I called upon God’s thunder and his avenging power to direct the stroke of death to me rather than permit me to become a slave, and be sold from lord to lord. (Equiano, 98/ Cambridge, 155–56)

They also styled me the black Christian (Equiano, 92/ Cambridge, 161)

[See in the 17th chapter of the Acts, verse 26,] “God hath made of one blood all the nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Equiano, 332, 54, as well as in Cugoano/ Cambridge, 167)

PART III

In the year 1820–30, another murder was committed, the details of which are as follows: – A person of the name of Brown was living as overseer upon an estate called Big Deurs, now in possession of Messrs. Manning and Anderson. The negroes upon this property had been for a long time in the habit of pilfering, and in many instances Mr. Brown had discovered the offenders, which caused him to be disliked, and determined one among them, more heartless perhaps, than the rest, to undertake his destruction. On Christmas day, Mr. Brown rode to La Roche’s, a neighbouring estate, and upon his return in the evening, between the hours of six and seven, he met with his untimely death. The slave to whom Mr. Brown had rendered himself particularly obnoxious was named Cambridge, and this man had long lain in wait for an opportunity of completing his crime, and for the purpose had sharpened an old copper skimmer, (used in boiling sugar,) which he thought would prove an effective weapon.

Mr. Brown, like too many other white men in this island, carried on an armour with a woman belonging to the property, named Christiana, and it was the first intention of Cambridge to murder her as well as the overseer, supposing it was through her communications that so many discoveries of thefts had been made. On the Christmas day, Cambridge dressed himself in his best suit, and proceeded with many of his fellow slaves to the Methodist chapel at
Parkham, intending upon his return to waylay and murder her, who also visited the same place of worship. In pursuance of his plan, he hurried out of the chapel immediately after the service, and took up his stand in a part of the road which he knew Christiana must pass. After waiting in vain for a long time, a group of negroes at length hastened by, when Cambridge, whose stock of patience was exhausted, joined them, and asked if they knew where Christiana was? In answer to his query, they informed him that she had visited a neighbouring estate, and after remaining there for a short time had proceeded home by another path. Thus thwarted in his views of obtaining revenge, his designs upon Mr. Brown gained double hold of him; and hastening home, he disrobed himself, put on his working dress, and first thing telling his wife, “That he has lost one opportunity, but he would take good care he did not lose the next,” quitted the house, taking the old copper skimmer with him.

It was a beautiful evening; the moon shone in all her splendour, and every star twinkled in the heavens glittered around the murderer’s step. Oh, that such dreadful thoughts should have possessed that man’s mind in the midst of such a lovely scene upon the evening of that very same day when he proclaimed “Good will towards man!” But alas!

“Nor grateful evening mild, or silent night,  
 nor walk by moon  
Or glittering starlight,”

had an effect upon his hardened heart –

“His soul was dark within
He lived but in the sound  
Of shamelessness and sin.”

Many a minute stole away, and Cambridge (who had concealed himself in a cane piece, bordering the road his intended victim must necessarily pass) kept his fatal stand. Not a sound was heard, save the evening breeze as it whispered among the long leaves of the sugar cane, or the occasional croaking of some night reptile. At length, the tread of a horse’s foot was heard, and warned the murderer to be upon his guard. Unconscious of the dreadful fate hanging over him, Mr. Brown rode slowly on, accompanied by a black boy, when, as he was passing between two cane pieces, just where the cane grew thick and high, with one bound the murderer was upon him. A heavy blow from the sharpened skimmer upon his head, stunned him; and ere a prayer could rise to his lips, his soul flew to meet his God, as his murderer was left standing alone, with the stain of human blood upon him.* [Footnote: *The
negroes say that no grass has ever grown in the spot where the blood has dropt since the time of the murder.

The boy who accompanied his unfortunate master was the nephew of the culprit; but as he was unperceived by Cambridge, he was able to make his escape into the cane-field, where he remained an unknown observer of the event. As soon as the murderer had quitted the spot, the boy hastened to the overseer’s house (not far distant) and related to the inmates the fate of his master, and the name of his destroyer. An immediate alarm was given, and, guided by the boy, they quickly discovered the unfortunate overseer, bereft of his life, and proceeded in quest of Cambridge, whom they found in his hut, with blood-stained garments still upon him, an in the act of washing his unhallowed hands.

After a coroner’s inquest upon the body, and a verdict (according to the circumstances of the case) returned, Cambridge was conveyed to the capital, where he took his trial for murderer. He was found guilty, and condemned to hanging; and to make this punishment more impressive to others, he was ordered to be carried to Osborn’s Pasture, in the vicinity of the spot where the murder was committed, and there to be hung and gibbeted.

Long did his whitened bones glisten in the moonbeams; and as the wind shook the chains which held the body, many little negro who has strayed that way in search of guavas, fled from the spot, for fear of the dead man’s jumby. (Flannigan, vol. 2, 89–92/ Cambridge, 171–74)


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Acknowledgements

This book is based on a doctoral dissertation submitted at the University of Tübingen in July 2003 under the title “Der ‘Black Atlantic’ im Gedächtnis der Literatur: Zur Poetik und Politik narrativer Erinnerungsverfahren bei Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen und Toni Morrison.” My foremost thanks goes to Professor Gerhard Stilz, who managed to hook me up to literature in the first place. He supervised, nourished and encouraged this endeavour from the beginning in his unrelentingly critical and generous way. Financially, I am indebted to the Landesgraduiertenförderung (Grafög) Baden–Württemberg for a two-year scholarship, and to the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) for allowing me to carry out research in London and New York. I am very grateful to Günter Leypoldt for his informed comments on the final stages of the German manuscript, as well to Professors Jürgen Brummack, Bernd Engler and Horst Tonn for their critical evaluations of my thesis.

The revised English version in its present form owes much to the proofreading skills of Kylie Crane and Eva Rettner. I am, further, obliged to the Menil Collection in Houston for allowing me to reproduce a detail from Sir Joshua Reynolds’ “A Young Black” (1770?, oil on canvas, 78.7 x 65 cm) in the montage illustrating the cover of this book. The images inside are reproduced by courtesy of the British Museum, Boughton House, the National Portrait Gallery, the Menil Collection, the Paul Klee Stiftung and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents for their continuing support, and, above all, Djaynab Tékété, for all that she is.