In a creative piece of writing entitled “Rude Am I in My Speech”, Caryl Phillips stated: “My father is no Othello” (Phillips 2011b, 190). In so doing, the difficult-to-be-labelled author drew an eerie parallel-ism between his father and a Shakespearean character: in the first place, it is grounded on what Frantz Fanon described as “epidermal racial schema” (Fanon [1952] 2008, 92) because both his father and Othello share the same skin colour, which defines them beforehand’ as “extravagant and wheeling stranger” (Oth., 1.1.135); in the second place, it connects Phillips with drama, the first genre he undertook at the dawn of his career.

According to Bénédicte Ledent, his early plays can be viewed as ‘threshold texts’ for his later writings (Ledent 2015, 85): and yet, Phillips's scholarship mainly focuses on either his novels or non-fiction works. Carla Tempestoso’s Il teatro di Caryl Phillips seeks to fill this void by analysing, in the light of the Postcolonial Studies, the three stage plays performed and published between 1981 and 1984: Strange Fruit (1981), Where There is Darkness (1982), and The Shelter (1984). The volume consists of an introduction, three chapters and an afterword by Bruna Mancini.
In the introduction, Tempestoso, following Ledent’s insight, outlines the commonalities of Phillips’s plays and novels: as many second-generation writers, his oeuvre is moulded upon the themes of belonging, displacement, homelessness (12). Mindful of Phillips’s biography, she briefly relates them to his ‘assimilation fatigue’ (Phillips 2011a, 15): he was born in St. Kitts in 1958, brought up in England and, in 1978, he moved to the USA, where he now teaches Literatures in English at Yale University. Tempestoso describes these journeys as both physical and metaphorical: Phillips did not just move from one place to the other but, in the process, he had to go through the prejudices of the “European tribe” as well (13). Consequently, he often felt – just as Hanif Kureishi – “pretty out of place” (Kureishi 1986, 17); by writing, he was able to free himself from a fixed concept of ‘belonging’ and give birth to an ‘itinerant identity’ (14). The adjective ‘itinerant’ calls into question the idea of movement, which is at the core of this monograph because, through the lens of the Postcolonial Studies, Tempestoso analyses how Phillips’s “diasporic wanderers” are affected by – and affect in return – Eurocentric spaces and places.

Chapter 1 – Multiple Identities in Transnational Spaces – consists of a theoretical discussion on the very concept of ‘identity’: according to Tempestoso, as migrations have redefined humanity as a whole, Postcolonial Studies and its ‘progeny’ (e.g. Diaspora Studies, Migration Studies, Transnational Studies) should take an intersectional approach to the analysis of the Twenty-first-century migrant experience (22). In an attempt to do so and highlight what she otherwise calls ‘in-between spaces’ (31), Tempestoso interweaves postcolonial voices, such as those of Bill Ashcroft, Homi Bhabha, and Stuart Hall. She specifically deals with the topographical dimension of their writings: for instance, by taking her cue from Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, Tempestoso states that the so-called ‘Third Space’ – “which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process” (Bhabha [1994] 2004, 54) – aims at re-enhancing one’s own agency, thus reassessing our understanding of race as a Derridean *pharmakon* (Bassi 2016, 75). In the case of Caryl Phillips, the Third Space – complex, fluid, interstitial – is represented by the Atlantic Ocean, being a site which carries no connotations of either colour or race (Mancini 2014, 3): thus, he turns upside down the common idea of belonging as land-based, in favour of the water-based counterpart. Tempestoso is aware of the side effects of such a choice: by looking at both Phillips’s life and writing, she points out how the feeling of physical, psychological, and cultural displacement has massively influenced his *Dasein*, his being-in-the-world (44).

Following these theoretical underpinnings, Chapter 2 – Identities and Belonging in Caryl Phillips’s Theatrical World – is centred on the genesis of Phillips’s early writing: from his experience as stagehand in Edinburgh to the creative process itself. Beyond its unquestiona-
ble therapeutic effect, the act of writing turns out to be a way of negotiating his identity and becoming visible among the white British writers (80). Furthermore, thanks to her research period at Yale University (USA), where she met Phillips, Tempestoso offers invaluable information regarding genre classification: for example, she makes reference to the existence of another stage play – Rough Crossings (2007) – which the author himself refused to consider so, as it is a ‘commissioned adaptation’ of Simon Schama’s novel (71).

The Shakespearean parallelism, which opened the review, is extensively explored in this chapter, through Phillips’s collection of essays The European Tribe (1987) – specifically, “In the Ghetto” relates how the tragedy of Othello affected him while in Venice (De Chiara 1996, 179) – and the novel The Nature of Blood (1997), which “interweaves the fictional story of Othello and the true history of Venetian Jews” (Bassi 2011, 243). Moreover, Tempestoso highlights the importance of both the paratextual apparatus and the intertextual references, be they direct or indirect, to Othello, The Merchant of Venice, and The Tempest: for instance, in Strange Fruit, a non-white man defines himself as an “old black ram” (Oth., 1.1.89); in The Shelter, the black man and the white woman who inhabit a deserted island remind us of Caliban and Miranda in The Tempest.

Chapter 3 – Literary Displacements on Stage – is devoted to the analytical analysis of each and every stage play. With regard to Strange Fruit, Tempestoso at first puts the stress on the title: it refers back to a song of the same name which, as Phillips himself remarks, “made reference to racially motivated violence in the American South” (Philips 2011a, 99). In her view, besides the racial matrix, to mention the so-called ‘strange fruits’ is to hint at the exoticisation and alienation of Phillips’s non-white characters in the white Western society (102). She then pinpoints the characters’ naming procedure: the quality of “singular referring terms” (Casagranda 2013, 12) is lost because Phillips chose common names (e.g. “Mother”); however, according to Tempestoso, this allows the reader to better identify with the dramatis personae, as if they were archetypes (103).

One of the major themes, which Tempestoso is keen on analysing, is the communication between second-generation and third-generation migrants, which creates a powerful connection with the following play, namely Where There is Darkness. Whereas she previously focussed on either paratextual elements or naming procedures, here Tempestoso offers a geocritical analysis of the setting: on the one hand, there is the conservatory, which represents the unheimlich; on the other hand, the house as the place of security (121).

The aforementioned dialectic replicates the margin-centre relationship and implies a meditation upon the post-migration stress and psychological disorders a person can develop. This issue led Tempestoso to The Shelter, the last of Phillips’s plays: by using Frantz Fanon’s
theory of the white gaze and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), she focuses her attention on the spatial dynamics interracial relationships are exposed to.

Bruna Mancini’s afterword, *Spaces of Memory, Identity, and Rebirth in Caryl Phillips’s Theatre*, offers a literary-geography-oriented insight into the world of Caryl Phillips. She defines him as a cartographer because, in his entire oeuvre, he re-writes spaces and places, thus redefining power relations (151). By leveraging her experience as the Italian translator of *The Shelter*, Mancini identifies the stage as an inter-ethnic laboratory, a Third Space, where Phillips’s characters can acknowledge their past, master their wounds, and reshape the white space they inhabit (152).

Overall, Carla Tempestoso’s *Il teatro di Caryl Phillips* breaks new ground and adds significantly to the current scholarship on Phillips. Through the lens of the Postcolonial Studies, Tempestoso is able to characterise his three plays as a long continuum, rich in similarities, which redeems the “queer migrant” – i.e. the non-European, non-white, and non-Christian migrant (Chambers 2020, 18) – from any subaltern position.

Nevertheless, what the monograph lacks, and it could be the starting point for future research, is a textual analysis of Phillips’s stage plays in the light of the Performance Studies: along with the drama text, the representation of the dramatic fiction could be an inviting field to be investigated, by looking at both its performances – recorded, ongoing, or upcoming – and at the dynamic relationship among sourcer (e.g. author), producers (e.g. directors, designers, technicians), performers, and spectators (Schechner 2020, 60).

**Bibliography**


