

**'HYBRID INVENTIVENESS': CARYL PHILLIPS' POETICS OF  
DISPLACEMENT**

**A Thesis  
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## ABSTRACT

### **“Hybrid Inventiveness”: Caryl Phillips’ Poetics of Displacement**

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This dissertation is an exploration of the poetics of displacement in the fiction of the Black British-cum - Caribbean novelist, Caryl Phillips. It charts the evolution of his formal strategies across his oeuvre, from the relatively conventional forms and narrative techniques of his first two novels to the increasingly innovative and experimental later fictions that exhibit a postmodernist formal sensibility in their metafictional revision and interrogation of literary and historical representations of Black and Jewish diasporic subjects. The dissertation focuses on Phillips’ stylistic penchant for decentred, pastiche-laden polyphonic narratives that revise, rearticulate and re-inscribe certain formal devices and genres in order to privilege displacement and dislocation. In tracing the transgressive practices of his fiction and travel writing, I argue that Phillips’ work effects a hybrid inventiveness that draws on intertextuality, travel narrative, and various genres of life writing to imaginatively represent the diasporic condition in terms of nomadism, ontological instability, and serial transformations. “Hybrid Inventiveness” argues that Phillips’ approach to form is consonant with contemporary postmodernist and postcolonial theorizing of the crisis of the subject in the contexts of diaspora and globalization. In fact, Phillips

conflates postmodernist decentring of stable identities with postcolonial concerns of race, empire, marginality, and contested histories; hence, the creative synthesis of disparate aesthetic strategies, literary genres and traditions that reflect the diverse cultural encounters engendered by the syncretic encounters and transformative processes of diaspora. Phillips' repeated engagement with certain genres - such as travel narratives, English canonical texts that explore the issue of the racial Other and the colonial encounter, colonialist histories, postcolonial Caribbean fictions, black autobiographies, captivity narratives, Holocaust memoirs, and the plantation novel - allows him to imaginatively interrogate received histories, foreground the politics and poetics of memory, and inscribe the displacement of diaspora as the constitutive condition of contemporary experience and narrative.

"Hybrid Inventiveness" contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on Phillips' work, by locating his formal innovations within the paradigm of Black Atlantic and postcolonial cross-cultural hybridity. It builds on the work of scholars such as Bénédicte Ledent, Evelyn O'Callaghan, and other, by extending their insights on Phillips' use of dialogism and intertextuality via analysis of his narratological schema, his use of focalization, contrapuntal orchestration, and his genealogical tropes.

**Key words: Joan Miller Powell, Caryl Phillips, Black British writing, hybridity, poetics, diaspora, displacement, dialogism, intertextuality**